

An Overview of Talents Unlimited

Edmund L. Barbieri

In 1927, C. Spearman proposed that intelligence is essentially defined by a general or "g" factor that permeates performance on all tasks of intelligence. L. L. Thurstone, who broke away from Spearman's "g" theory, hypothesized that the intellect is made up of a number of diverse "primary mental abilities." Using factor analysis, he proposed that intelligence comprises roughly seven abilities: verbal comprehension, verbal fluency, number, spatial visualization, memory, reasoning, and perceptual speed. Continuing in Thurstone's tradition, J. P. Guilford developed his three-dimensional "structure of the intellect." Guilford at first posited 120 mental factors and more recently increased these factors to 150.

Calvin Taylor, working with Thurstone, completed his dissertation, *Fluency in Writing*, in 1947. His was the first factor analytic study to go beyond answer sheet-only responses. He introduced two new factors: ideational fluency and expressional fluency. Later Taylor isolated nearly 40 verbal communication abilities.

Unlike Guilford, Taylor shied away from complexity and looked for a simpler model of intelligence. Taylor chose to focus on five major abilities, or talents, in addition to academic ability. The five talents—productive thinking, communication, forecasting, decision making, and planning—are viewed as vehicles to assist students in using knowledge (i.e., academic talent) to create new solutions to problems.

In 1971, Taylor's theories were put into practice by a group of teachers headed by Carol Schlichter in the Mobile (Alabama) County Public Schools. The Talents Unlimited program was developed in Mobile with funds from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and field-tested from June 1971–June 1974. The project was nationally validated and is now one of the most widely disseminated programs within the U.S. Government's National Diffusion Network. The Talents Unlimited national headquarters is located in Mobile, now under the direction of Deborah Hobbs.

Talents Unlimited proponents believe that by nurturing students' abilities in the five Talent areas, their academic proficiencies will improve along with chances for future success. Brief explanations of the Talents follow:

1. *Productive thinking* is the ability to generate many, varied, and unusual ideas and then to add on to those ideas to improve them.
2. *Communication* is the ability to convey needs, feelings, and ideas effectively to others. The related skills of communication are: description, comparison, empathy, nonverbal communication, and the networking of ideas.
3. *Forecasting* is looking into the future to predict things that might happen or looking into the past to consider what might have happened. Forecasting involves predicting both cause and effect relationships.
4. *Decision making* is a factor in everyone's life. Some decisions are of a split-second nature, while others are long range. Four steps are helpful in training students to make good decisions:
 - Have them think of many possible things they could do.
 - Ask them to think more carefully about each of these things.
 - Let them choose one.
 - Have them give many, varied reasons for their choices.
5. *Effective planning* involves:
 - deciding what is going to be planned,
 - listing all the resources needed,
 - telling, in order, the steps taken to complete the plan,
 - describing any problems that might come up during implementation.

Currently, there are over 20,000 trained Talents teachers in the 1,500 adoption sites throughout 49 states. Additional adoption sites can be found in Canada, Mexico, Columbia, Greece, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Egypt. Over a million students have had Talents teaching for at least one year, and there are approximately 80 nationally certified Talents trainers.

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schedules vary widely, the frequency and regularity of planned thinking skills activities also varied widely. For both middle school and high school teachers, however, integrating thinking skills into the curriculum fostered better student performance.

Pre- and post-test scores of middle and high school students on the *Criterion Referenced Tests of Talents* (1974) yielded statistically significant increases on 11 of the 14 comparisons. These results document the substantial impact of the Talents Unlimited program on improving higher-order thinking skills among middle school and high school students.

Success in Secondary Schools

After more than a decade of success at the elementary level, Talents Unlimited is proving itself at the secondary level as well. Successful implementation of the model in school districts in Las Cruces, Benton, and Vestavia Hills now offers convincing evidence that development of thinking skills can be combined with academic content across the secondary curriculum. □

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