

Contents

- 3 **Introduction: If You're Thinking Smart, Read This First**
Carol L. Schlichter & W. Ross Palmer

PART I: THEORY AND RESEARCH

- 13 **Chapter 1**
Cultivating New Talents: A Way to Reach the Educationally Deprived
Calvin W. Taylor
- 21 **Chapter 2**
Talents Unlimited: Implementing the Multiple Talent Approach in
Mainstream and Gifted Programs
Carol L. Schlichter
- 45 **Chapter 3**
Teaching HOTS in the Middle and High School: A District-Level
Initiative in Developing Higher Order Thinking Skills
W. Donald Crump, Carol L. Schlichter, & B. E. Palk
- 63 **Chapter 4**
Talents Unlimited: Reflections, Directions, Projections
Brenda Haskew

PART II: CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

- 85 **Chapter 5**
Help Students Become Active Thinkers: It's Never Too Early to Start
Carol L. Schlichter
- 95 **Chapter 6**
Extending Talents Unlimited to Secondary Schools
Carol L. Schlichter, Deborah Hobbs, & W. Donald Crump
- 103 **Chapter 7**
Using the "Write" Talent: Talents Unlimited and the Writing Process
Deborah Hobbs
- 119 **Chapter 8**
Using the Talents Unlimited Model in Enrichment Programs
Sally M. Reis & Terry Jordan

141 **Chapter 9**
The Effects of the Talents Unlimited Model on Students' Creative Productivity
Jane L. Newman

159 **Chapter 10**
Talents Unlimited: An Inservice Education Model for Teaching Thinking Skills
Carol L. Schlichter

PART III: EVALUATION

171 **Chapter 11**
Research and Evaluation Related to the Talents Unlimited Model: Review and Recommendations
Brad S. Chissom & James E. McLean

199 **Chapter 12**
Evaluating Student Talent Development in the Classroom: Strategies for the Classroom Teacher
Sara C. Waldrop

PART IV: COMMENCEMENT

217 **Chapter 13**
New Directions in Developing Human Talents: An Interview with Calvin W. Taylor
Calvin W. Taylor & W. Ross Palmer

Introduction

IF YOU'RE THINKING SMART, READ THIS FIRST

Carol L. Schlichter & W. Ross Palmer

Good teachers have always known that students possess a variety of ways of expressing their “smarts.” Some students, for example, excel in traditional “lesson learning.” Other students, who may not be top *academic* achievers, may express their talents through creating new ideas, through making sound judgments, through effective planning of projects, through predicting causes and effects of events and circumstances, and through communicating via verbal and/or non-verbal language.

While good teachers have known that students have multiple abilities, the nurturing of a wider range of student talents has almost always been a challenge. Teachers have used intuition, trial and error, as well as ideas gleaned from professional sources to attempt to meet this challenge. Rarely, it seems, have teachers used a systematic model for identifying and developing multiple talents.

Talents Unlimited is such a model.

WHAT IS TALENTS UNLIMITED?

Talents Unlimited, (TU), is a staff development model for training both regular classroom teachers and specialists in gifted education in the development of students’ creative and critical thinking skills (or talents). This classroom-based research model originated in Mobile, Alabama, and is based on Calvin W. Taylor’s multiple talent theory (see Chapters 1 and 13), which proposes that students possess talents or “smarts” in creative or productive thinking, decision making, planning, forecasting, and communication, as well as in the traditional academic talent. Building on the work of leaders such as Thurstone, Guilford, Torrance, and others, Taylor concluded that nearly all students could be successful in school if teachers nurtured their inborn creativity while adding to their knowledge.

The original research on the effectiveness of **Talents Unlimited** in training teachers to identify and nurture students’ multiple talents was conducted from

Introduction

1971-1974. The results of this initial research effort in terms of students' increased ability to use different types of thinking to process information as well as student gains in traditional academic skills and in self esteem supported multiple talent theory. Eventually, events led to the validation of **Talents Unlimited** and an invitation to join the National Diffusion Network for exemplary educational projects sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education.

For more than 20 years of research, development, and diffusion, **Talents Unlimited** has been used to help teachers systematically and effectively identify and develop the multiple talent potentials they intuitively sense are present in the students they teach. Key elements of the TU model include a detailed, competency-based workshop used to provide initial training to classroom teachers and a structured technical assistance and monitoring procedure designed to provide the coaching and follow-through assistance needed to ensure successful implementation of this talent development program.

The longevity and success of **Talents Unlimited** may be attributed, at least in part, to the dynamic nature of its development. As trained teachers across the nation implement the model in their classrooms, new understandings emerge about the nature of student talents. Further, new questions about improved strategies for developing student talents emerge, and these questions lead to additional implementation research on all three model components: (a) teacher training, (b) student instruction, and (c) evaluation. This loop of feedback and classroom research has resulted in continuous development and refinement of **Talents Unlimited** and, in 1991, led to the most recent revision along with subsequent incorporation of the elementary (Grades K-6) TU model, **Talents Unlimited, Inc.**, and the secondary model (Grades 7-12), **Talents Unlimited to the Secondary Power (TU²)**.

WHY A PRIMER?

Webster defines a primer as a small introductory book on a subject. Since the TU model is dynamic, there can be no such thing as a definitive work on the model. Thus, the goal of this primer is to describe and elaborate the basic components of the **Talents Unlimited** model, including attention to its history and the underlying theory, and to detail some of the applications of the model to varying populations and programs.

Although this is an introductory work, a large body of literature on the TU model presently exists. Research documents as well as descriptive pieces represent the more than 20 years of **Talents'** history. (Reference lists at the end of various chapters provide information on other sources of literature

1 CULTIVATING NEW TALENTS: A WAY TO REACH THE EDUCATIONALLY DEPRIVED¹

Calvin W. Taylor

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FROM MOUNTAINSIDE TO VALLEY FLOOR

In a mining region near Salt Lake City, large and efficient mills have been built in order to process raw materials from which valuable metals can be extracted. Rocks and boulders from the mountainside are ground in successive steps until, with the addition of water, they are turned into a stream of fine silt. Next, the stream is processed to yield copper, the metal initially sought.

At that point, the procedure used to end. But now, modern mining engineers are alert to any discoveries through basic research of the existence of new and sometimes rare and precious metals. The mining specialists immediately try to identify each newly discovered metal in the residual stream that was once poured off as a mere waste product. If a new metal is present, they try to find ways of adding other processes in order to develop this additional metal out of the total potential in the stream—continuing at the same time, of course, to extract copper.

As they look backward over the years, the Utah miners realize that they have dumped onto the valley floor waste products that may contain metals of a larger total value than the ones already extracted.

MULTIPLE TALENTS

Is our educational system “dumping” valuable human resources? Is it as efficient as it could be in identifying and developing known talents? Is it alert to discover new talents, new resources?

The term “gifted” is one traditionally used to describe high scorers on an intelligence test (or the closely related academically talented). For the students so identified, educators have set up special classes for which the curricula and the teaching methods have been designed specifically to nurture this general type of talent. And yet, the term “gifted” is in fact an adjective that can be used to cover eight to ten other broad or general high level talents

¹ The ideas developed herein are emphasized at the University of Utah Creativity Workshops which the author directs each June.