



# The Application of an Individual Professional Development Plan to Gifted Education

by *Frances A. Karnes and Elizabeth Shaunessy*

Research indicates that ongoing, high-quality staff development is essential to achieving significant standards-based reform (Sparks, 2002). Currently, the majority of teachers do not regularly participate in staff development practices in the United States (Richardson, 2002). Staff development decisions have traditionally been made by school administrators to meet the needs of students and to address school, district, and national goals in gifted education. In this model, teachers have been sideline observers with little or no participation in the planning of these professional development efforts. While this paradigm is cost- and time-efficient, this one-size-fits-all approach to staff development fails to address the learning needs of each teacher in a district (Richardson).

Recently, however, the concept of individual professional development plans has emerged as a way to involve teachers in the decision making and goal setting of professional development (Collins, 1997; Guskey, 1999; Richardson, 2001, 2002; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). This model gives teachers the opportunity to learn more about the needs of their students, their own learning needs, and how these align with district goals and national standards. Teachers reflect about how students learn and teach in their classes based on student grades, attitudes, or other information. Educators then formulate questions they would like to pursue, develop an individual learning plan centered on their guiding questions, execute the learning plan, document accomplishments, assess the effectiveness of the plan, reflect on their learning process, and repeat the process (see Figure 1 on pp. 62–63).

Such individualized professional development plans allow educators to set their own goals and increase the likelihood that intended results will be achieved (National Staff Development Council, 2002). Rather than a single event, long-term professional development supports ongoing change and challenges teachers to be lifelong learners, designing plans with specific purposes aimed at intended learning (Wetherill, Burton, Calhoun, & Thomas, 2001/2002).

Many districts are beginning to recognize that all teachers can benefit from designing individual professional development plans (Richardson, 2002). District leaders encourage the professional growth of their teachers through these plans that link “individual learning with school goals and schoolwide learning with district goals” (p. 1). Furthermore, several districts that have required individual professional development plans for their teachers have received the U.S. Department of Education’s Model Professional Development Awards for their outstanding staff development activities. All teachers, regardless of subject area or grade level, can grow professionally through this process and can positively affect student learning, including teachers who already demonstrate excellence in their teaching.

## Components of the Professional Development Plan

The individually developed learning plan has implications for professional development in gifted education. Using information about the performance of gifted children, attitudes of gifted children and their parents, and classroom practices can help teachers identify potential areas of professional growth.

Based on this information, teachers can address learning goals in the development of their individualized professional development plans.

The components of a professional development plan in gifted education should have the following characteristics: personal information and professional responsibilities, a goal statement of the plan along, objectives, activities, the intended impact on the students, a timeline, and a means for evaluation. The relationship to district and state goals for the gifted should also be specified.

The individual completing a professional development plan in gifted education should state what the proposed results would be. Sharing the information with an appropriate audience is the last step of the process.

### Ways to Accomplish the Plan

There are many ways to accomplish an individual professional development plan beyond the traditional staff development. Karnes and Lewis (1996) suggested the use of specific videotapes with brief descriptions of each. Videos provide easy access to professionals in the field of gifted education without the high cost of transportation, consultant fees, lodging, and food.

Shaunessy and Karnes (2002) offered ideas for additional professional development standards beyond those set forth by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). One of these standards focuses on the ease of access to professional literature. They presented a broad list of journals in the field, along with a basic listing of professional books, including those for regular education teachers working with the gifted and those in specialized programs.

A variety of collaborative efforts between teachers has also shown positive learning results for teachers and stu-

dents. Collins (1997) recommended two types of collegial learning activities: peer coaching and joint work. In peer coaching, teachers observe other teachers in order to reinforce prior training in a specific methodology or strategy. The shared experience extends the training through "application and analysis in the classroom" (Collins, p. 95). The process is experimental, allowing a safe environment and attitude toward trial and error, which is expected in the learning phase of a new practice. Research indicates that teachers involved in peer coaching are able to transfer and apply new skills to a variety of educational situations and retain skills and new knowledge longer than those not involved in such collaboration. Similarly, joint work between educators allows for collaboration at a deeper level; teachers share in "multiple aspects of teaching, such as planning, problem solving, curriculum development, and assessment of student progress" (Collins, p. 104).

Study groups are another option for executing professional development plans with shared goals (Murphy, 1992). Educators work in groups of six or less to discuss central issues, plan units, research learning methods, voice concerns, and learn from each other.

Mentoring also offers educators a vehicle to achieving their professional development goals. A successful mentorship program paired practicing scientists and mathematicians with secondary science and math teachers, resulting in improved teaching skills, increased teacher self-respect, and increased motivation among participating teachers (Miller, 1989). Similar efforts have also been undertaken within the schools between master teachers and novice teachers (Rice, 1987). As in the peer coaching method, teachers observe each other teaching, have time to reflect on the targeted skill, and have the opportunity to reinforce new concepts and sharpen skills.

Web-based and online courses are another venue for teachers to accomplish professional development goals. Professional organizations, educational institutions, and state agencies are increasing their professional development opportunities in widely accessible electronic classrooms, replete with visuals, discussion groups, and tutorials (Apple Learning Professional Development, 2002; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002; Council for Exceptional Children, 2002; iEARN, 2002; Tapped In, 2002).

Colleges and universities also offer several formats for professional development activities. Web-based courses, classes, seminars, lectures, professional conferences, and university faculty consultants are ideal ways to maximize a district's access to resources at a local university or college.

### Incentives

Dettmer and Landrum (1998) offered many ideas for incentives to participate in staff development, and some have direct application to the creation, implementation, and evaluation of an annual plan in gifted education. School personnel should be given choices of incentives such as graduate credit, increments on a salary schedule, in-service equivalency credit, a sabbatical, a stipend, release time from professional responsibilities, certification renewal, a substitute to fulfill professional responsibilities while they are engaged in the implementation of the plan. Points should be applied for each incentive to be accrued and awarded over time.

An individual professional development plan is a tool that fosters specialized learning for educators. Results-based staff development that is framed around the personal learning goals of each district educator increases the likelihood that teachers will investi-

## Individual Professional Development Plan

gate topics that reflect their student's needs and will have application in the classroom. Individualized learning plans create authentic learning opportunities tailored to the unique needs of each educator, rather than a one-size-fits-all plan for everyone on staff. Proponents of gifted education can use this tool as a means of assisting educators in identifying their needs in terms of educating gifted students within their classes. Data-driven, teacher-selected, goal-oriented individual professional learning plans can ultimately have a significant impact on the learning of gifted students. **GCT**

## References

- Apple Learning Professional Development. (2002). *Online courses*. Retrieved May 13, 2004, from <http://ali.apple.com/nshelp/welcome.htm>
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2002). *Professional development online*. Retrieved on May 13, 2004, from <http://www.ascd.org/trainingopportunities/pdonline.html>
- Collins, D. (1997). *Achieving your vision of professional development*. Greensboro: SERVE, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
- Council for Exceptional Children. (2002). *Professional development training & events*. Retrieved May 13, 2004, from <http://www.cec.sped.org/pd>
- Dettmer, P., & Landrum, M. (1998). *Staff development: The key to effective gifted education programs*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Guskey, T. R. (1999). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- iEARN. (2002). *Online teacher training to integrate an iEARN collaborative project into your classroom*. Retrieved May 13, 2004, from <http://www.iearn.org/professional/online.html>

### Figure 1 Individual Professional Development Plan in Gifted Education

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (school/home) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher in Regular Classroom \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher in Specialized Program \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Counselor \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Curriculum Developer \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_ Area(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator \_\_\_\_\_ Area(s) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. How did you identify your goal in gifted education?

*I recognized that my students may have some weaknesses in leadership based on their classroom actions and their performance on the LSI.*

#### 2. How does your goal relate to improving student achievement?

*Students can gain self-confidence, organizational skills, and improved communication skills through the development of leadership skills.*

#### 3. How does your goal relate to district goals for gifted education?

*In order to become more skilled in communication and to develop personal learning habits to promote lifelong learning, leadership skills were selected as a targeted area for use in all subject areas. Furthermore, the district goal of promoting student service to the community is one aspect of leadership development through leadership plans designed by each student.*

#### 4. How does your goal relate to the gifted education goals (outcomes) of the student?

*Students involved in leadership development gain knowledge in interpersonal skills, communication skills, organizational skills, and intrapersonal skills, each of which is critical to the development of the student as an independent, lifelong learner.*

#### Accomplishments

#### 5. What data/product will you submit to indicate what has been accomplished?

*Comparison of pre and post LSI results, anecdotal records from observations, student products (to include leadership plans, pictures of students executing leadership plans in their school, community, or religious affiliation), comments from parents, and student reflections about their growth as leaders.*

#### 6. When will you present this information to an appropriate audience and in what format?

*Results will be shared with school faculty, the PTA, local newspapers (student work, not personally identifiable information). I will also generate an article about my experience to share with other educators and submit to a publication targeting teachers of my grade level and subject.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Objective	Activities	How will this impact student learning?	Timeline	Evaluation
1. Measure student knowledge of leadership skills.	Use a preassessment, such as The Leadership Skills Inventory (LSI; Karnes & Chauvin, 1999b).	Will allow the teacher to evaluate students' skill levels and design appropriate instruction based on the diagnosis from the LSI.	Quarter 1	Students self-score the LSI and teacher makes instructional decisions based on the pretest results.
2. Note student performance in leadership skills.	Observation	Note how students manifest leadership skills in daily classroom situations to supplement data from LSI.	Quarter 1	Teacher compares observation notes with results from LSI to generate appropriate lessons and activities for students to develop leadership skills.
3. Based on results of preassessment and observation, research how to address student needs.	Consult <i>The Leadership Development Program</i> (Karnes & Chauvin, 2000a) and professional journals and texts pertaining to educating gifted children, specifically in leadership skills. Attend conferences and workshops to learn more about facilitating leadership skills in my teaching.		Quarter 2	Teacher locates relevant research from most current literature in leadership and gifted education.
4. Develop lessons that incorporate ideas from research related to student needs.	Review literature findings and student data to formulate appropriate activities for leadership development.	Students will receive instruction based on research-based practices. Lessons will not duplicate what students' already know; lessons will address areas of needed development.	Quarter 2–3	Lessons show evidence of suggestions from research and are based on student data from LSI observations.
5. Measure student knowledge of leadership skills.	Use postassessment (LSI).	To establish the effectiveness of the intervention.	Quarter 3	LSI is again used so that consistency in measurement is used.
6. Evaluate areas of progress, where additional efforts need to be concentrated.	Compare preassessment with postassessment results. Conduct observations of leadership skills evidenced by students.	New lessons can be generated that will continue to focus on skill weaknesses based on data from LSI.	Quarter 4	New lessons include careful consideration of second LSI administration and student performance.

## Individual Professional Development Plan

- Karnes, F. A., & Chauvin, J. C. (2000a). *The leadership development program*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Karnes, F. A., & Chauvin, J. C. (2000b). *The leadership skills inventory*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Karnes, F. A., & Lewis, J. (1996). Staff development through videotapes in gifted education, *Roeper Review*, 19, 106–107.
- Miller, L. (1989). Mentorships and the perceived educational payoffs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70, 465–467.
- Murphy, C. (1992). Study groups foster schoolwide learning. *Educational Leadership*, 50(3), 71–74.
- National Staff Development Council. (2002). *Create your own learning plan: By your own design* [Computer software]. Columbus, OH: Eisenhower National Clearinghouse.
- Rice, K. (1987). *Empowering teachers: A search for professional autonomy*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service Number ED282845)
- Richardson, J. (2001, December/January). Support system: School improvement plans work best when staff learning is included. [Electronic version]. *Tools for Schools*. Retrieved May 13, 2004, from <http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/tools/tools12-00rich.cfm>
- Richardson, J. (2002, February/March). Reach for the stars: Individual learning plans allow teachers to take charge of their own learning. *Tools for Schools*, 1–2.
- Shaunessy, E. & Karnes, F. A. (2002). Expanding the national professional development standards in gifted education. *Gifted Education Communicator*, 33(1), 28–29, 36.
- Sparks, D. (2002). Dreaming all that we might realize [Electronic version]. *ENC Focus*, 9(1). Retrieved May 13, 2004, from <http://www.enc.org/features/focus/archive/pd/document.shtml?input=FOC-002595-index,00.shtml>
- Sparks, D., & Hirsh, S. (1997). *A new vision for staff development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tapped In. (2002). *Tapped In calendar*. Retrieved May 12, 2004, from <http://ti2.sri.com/tappedin/do/CalendarAction?>
- Wetherill, K., Burton, G., Calhoun, D., & Thomas, C. (2001/2002). Redefining professional career development in the twenty-first century: A systemic approach. *High School Journal*, 85(2), 54–66.
- Staton, J. (1988). Dialogue journals in the classroom context. In J. Staton, R. W. Shuy, J. K. Peyton, & L. Reed (Eds.), *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social, and cognitive views* (pp. 33–51). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Tinberg, H. (1999). Writing in a safe place: The reflective journal and the returning student. In S. Gardner & T. Fulwiler (Eds.), *The journal book for teachers of at risk college writers* (pp. 35–41). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Tyree, O. (2003). *Diary of a groupie*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

## Appendix Additional Young Adult Literature to Support Males and Journaling

*continued from page 25*

- Roth, S. L. (1990). *Marco Polo: His notebook*. New York: Doubleday.
- Schuler, P. (2002). Perfectionism in gifted children and adolescents. In M. Neihart, S. M. Reis, N. M. Robinson, & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (pp. 71–79). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Silverman, L. K. (2002). Asynchronous development. In M. Neihart, S. M. Reis, N. M. Robinson, & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (pp. 31–37). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Sommers, C. H. (2000). *The war against boys: How misguided feminism is harming our young men*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Staton, J., Shuy, R. W., Peyton, J. K., & Reed, L. (Eds.). (1988). *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social, and cognitive views*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Anderson, J. (1987). *Joshua's westward journey*. New York: Morrow.
- Cummings, P. (1992). *Petey Moroni's Camp Runamok diary*. New York: Bradbury.
- Denenberg, B. (1999). *My name is America: The journal of Ben Uchida: Citizen 13559, Mirror Lake Internment Camp*. New York: Scholastic.
- Murphy, J. (1993) *The boys' war: Confederate and Union soldiers talk about the Civil War*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Platt, R. (1999). *Castle diary: The journal of Tobias Burgess, page*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Roehm, M., & Monson-Burton, M. (Eds.). (1998). *Boys know it all: Wise thoughts and wacky ideas from guys like you!* Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words.
- Roth, S. L. (1990). *Marco Polo: His notebook*. New York: Doubleday.