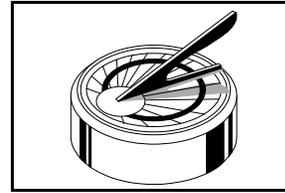


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With the opening of the fall semester, I wish all of you a productive 2002-03 school year. Clearly, this is a very different beginning for students and teachers than in previous years. The nation will be involved in extensive 9/11 commemoration ceremonies, and the War on Terrorism might result in a military confrontation with Iraq in the next few months. The current emphasis of many public education institutions appears to be on trimming special programs and demonstrating student progress through constant, repetitious testing. What can we in the gifted field do to prevent the decline of gifted programs in the current atmosphere of shrinking budgets and changing national priorities? Step one is to question the roots of gifted education, and ask how these programs can become essential to the overall educational enterprise.

The high ability, curiosity and sensibility levels of gifted students are the educational reasons for providing differentiated programs. Educators must demonstrate that they can harness these characteristics in an effective manner to achieve the maximum educational development of gifted students. Obviously, watered-down enrichment programs will not be of much help. But programs that harness their high levels of curiosity can benefit everyone – gifted students, teachers, parents and school districts. Gifted students who are provided with the opportunity to study subjects in great detail, and who can identify the major factors and ideas that distinguish the United States from other countries will be an asset to their schools, community and the nation. Their in-depth study of history (beginning in the elementary grades) should concentrate on the distinctive features of our society and government. The resilience and self-correcting nature of American democracy are historical facts that have helped us to overcome such catastrophes as the Civil War, World War II, the Vietnamese War, and the violent explosion of bigotry in the 1960s. Programs for the gifted should emphasize these facts on a daily basis. Biographies such as **John Adams** (2001) by David McCullough can be used to show how Adam's resilience and ability to learn from mistakes were the keys to his and the nation's political greatness.

I am honored to present an article by Carol Horn on techniques for improving the academic performance of gifted minority students. Ms. Horn is the Coordinator of the Gifted and Talented Program in the Fairfax County, Virginia Public Schools, one of the largest and most rigorous public school programs for the gifted in the United States. Andrew Flaxman, Director of Educate Yourself for Tomorrow, discusses the importance of humanities education for gifted students, while Beth Wright, a homeschooling parent, writes about performing arts programs for the gifted. Michael Walters presents an essay on the importance of using biographies to teach the gifted.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher

RAISING EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDREN FROM POVERTY **BY CAROL HORN FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Can school be structured in such a way that all students are held to high expectations? What are the critical elements of a school environment that enables students to find meaning and relevance through challenging and engaging learning experiences? These are just a few of the essential questions that must be answered if we intend to embed high expectations, relevant learning experiences, and a respect for differences in the total learning environment so that all the students will benefit from a dynamic and rigorous curriculum that matches their educational needs.

Though all children need learning experiences that prepare them to succeed in a complex and competitive world, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage in such experiences unless they are created by the school. Without formal education, individuals are trained and influenced by the customs and traditions of the cultural group into which they are born (Dewey, 1916). Thus, schools can be powerful agents of change when they provide a context in which students are able to escape the limitations of their home life and develop potential that might not be realized without the opportunities that a school can provide. Deborah Meier's work in Harlem is an excellent example of the transformative nature of an education that inspires students to invent theories, think critically and reflect on their own ideas as well as the ideas of others (Meier, 1995). Her work provides compelling and convincing evidence that schools can create environments that allow all students to transcend prescribed limitations and that every child has the capacity to think and generate new insights and ideas when given the right catalyst.

Learning Environment

A safe and democratic learning environment in which respect and responsibility extend beyond staying out of trouble and obeying school rules is a critical component for developing a school atmosphere that nurtures student thinking and cognitive growth. One disadvantage of the direct instruction and extrinsic reward approach that is often used with economically disadvantaged students, is that the students are manipulated and controlled by those in authority. When the authority is removed they lack not only the necessary skills needed to make their own decisions, but also an understanding of the concepts and ideas that they are expected to embrace. When the school and classroom community are built using a total collaborative effort, students create their own rules and limits, identify issues and problems they want to pursue, and work together on projects that accept and encourage diverse ideas and multiple modes of learning (Beane, 1997). A collaborative effort between two local schools and a community center allowed a group of fourth through sixth graders to design and paint a mural on the walls of a local community center. The students not only learned the art

of graphic design, they also learned the importance of collaboration and compromise as they worked together to design and agree on a mural that reflected their interests and ideas. Cooperation and communication, two important characteristics for future success, were nurtured and cultivated throughout the enterprise.

Building on Student Strengths and Interests

Each student has a unique profile of strengths that they can learn to use not only to their advantage, but to help and assist others. A curriculum that is extended and enriched with engaging activities can build on these strengths and transport student learning beyond prescribed formats in ways that are designed to endure.

Giving students choices and allowing them to pursue learning that connects to personal interests as well as their life beyond the classroom are critical motivators for learning that extends beyond the classroom door. Once students are engaged in learning that is meaningful, relevant, and challenging, they are more likely to continue the learning process both in and out of school. In a recent study of the rainforests, a fifth grade student wrote, *at first I thought that the rainforests were dangerous places and that the animals in the rainforest eat people. But they don't . . . I learned that animals eat plants and other animals in the rainforest. . . later, as he became fascinated with pictures of rainforest people that he found in old National Geographic Magazines at the library, he wrote, I also thought that there were not any people in the rainforest. But I learned there are tribes of people and their kids don't have to go to school—now I want to find out why.* The pictures were the hook, and this student wanted to learn about the children of the rainforest. Choice and ownership lit the spark of intrinsic motivation as he discovered one aspect of a topic that he wanted to learn more about.

In addition to student interests, real world concerns and problems that connect to students' lives provide students with an opportunity to research information, consider multiple perspectives, reflect on possibilities, and pose solutions as they gain knowledge and search for answers. By connecting the curriculum to issues and concerns that have meaning for them, students learn to actively seek solutions that may have long-term effects on their lives (Beane, 1997). In one sixth grade class, a discussion of an article titled, *Can Kids Keep Other Kids from Smoking?* led to an extensive anti-smoking campaign in which the students shared the knowledge and insights they learned with their younger peers. The students wrote letters to the principal requesting permission to initiate a campaign, and then created speeches, plays, posters, and buttons to persuade younger students not to smoke. Throughout the learning process,

students made connections and considered possibilities they were not aware of before and strengthened their own resolve not to smoke.

Social/Emotional Support

For students who live in poverty, social and emotional support becomes a very complex process. Their disengagement from school is often the result of low teacher expectation and an academic labeling that narrows their options and eliminates opportunities (Dei, George, J., J. Mazzuca, E. McIsaac, and J. Zine 1997). They are also vulnerable to the effects of peer pressure and may fear isolation from friends and family if they place too much emphasis on school. Low achievement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and it must be changed in two directions. Not only must teachers believe that such students can work at higher levels, but the students also must believe they can do the work. This becomes possible when the curricula are organized around meaningful learning experiences that challenge students to think and apply new knowledge on increasingly higher levels. While studying ecosystems, a fifth grader asked, "What is this word ecology?" The sound of it fascinated her although she had no idea what it meant. Later, after further reading and research, she wrote, *I learned how humans, plants, animals and other physical elements are connected in an interdependent web. Ecosystems are connected to one another on various levels and some of these connections are very complex and difficult to detect or even imagine...I have learned so much about ecology that I think I would like to become an ecologist...* Learning experiences that pave the way for an upward spiral of learning increase self-efficacy and promote continuous growth.

Integrated Curriculum

A curriculum that allows students to become co-owners of the learning process has a lasting impact on students' lives. Problem-centered themes, that have been identified and chosen by students, also provide opportunities for them to explore knowledge in an integrated approach that builds multiple levels of understanding. When students have the opportunity to delve deeper into subject matter, they discover new insights and are motivated to further investigate the implications of their findings. Through a study of ecosystems and endangered species, a young student learned that snow leopards were an indicator species (their own well being reflects the environment around them), and she began to wonder how the extinction of the snow leopard would affect its surrounding ecosystem. She explored with other students what it meant to be endangered, the long and short-term consequences of extinction, and the effectiveness of laws and education. By sharing information and reflecting on ideas as they learn, students begin to examine their own ideas in a much broader context. When learning is organized through an integrated curriculum, students are able to create connections, bridge gaps, and apply learning in a context that has meaning, relevance, and lasting value.

Real-world Learning Experiences

All students need the freedom and encouragement to discover and explore deeper understandings and applications of knowledge through investigations that allow them to learn the habits of mind and tools of inquiry that are required of an expert. Because they lack basic skills, children from poverty are often limited to a prescribed format with limited opportunities to learn from practitioners in the field. When these students are afforded opportunities to engage in real-world learning experiences, motivation increases and their world-view is enriched and extended. In order to make a study of the interdependence of different systems more relevant to students' lives, a teacher had her sixth grade students explore their connection to a bay through a study of its watershed. Each student learned his/her watershed address and the impact of that connection on the health of the bay. A guest speaker from a water management bureau explained how the shape and area of drainage were important considerations when studying a watershed. His presentation provided the students with an excellent opportunity to ask questions and learn about watersheds and water management from an expert in the field.

Later, this study of the bay and its watershed culminated in a field trip to a research center where the students replicated the work of scientists. They conducted tests to determine the quality of the water and observed the many different kinds of plants and animal life as they explored the connections between biotic and abiotic elements of this rich environment. While some students created graphs and charts to illustrate their observations, others analyzed and interpreted the data in order to assess the health of the bay. Over time, the students began to understand the bay as a dynamic system with many complex interdependent elements. Real world learning experiences provided them with multiple opportunities to develop and strengthen their knowledge, understanding, and skills in work that was challenging to their minds and meaningful to their lives.

A Global Perspective

As we evolve into a diverse global society, curriculum needs to incorporate and address the changing, varied perspectives that are an integral part of a global society. By focusing on concerns, news items, and important events that address global issues (i.e. economic survival, political decision-making, and human rights) students learn to challenge and discuss alternatives to mainstream ideologies and seek solutions that are in alignment with a more inclusive pluralistic view of society.

When multi-cultural learning activities are integrated throughout the curriculum, students have the opportunity to connect new knowledge to their own life experiences. Poems, stories, and plays that contain dialect, relevant role models, and varying cultural life styles may be used to add relevancy. Often, Black History Week or Hispanic Week is the only time that children of color see their reflections in the lives of leaders and exemplary role models. By integrating poets, authors, inventors, scientists,

mathematicians, world leaders, and others of color who have made significant contributions to society into the entire learning experience, their self-worth is increased and the possibilities for the future are enhanced. It is important that students see their reflections in leaders who have made significant contributions to the world. When students are given the opportunity to study a diverse group of leaders who have changed the world for the better, they are able to recognize that the traits and characteristics these people possess cross all the lines of color, class, and culture.

In addition, as students advance in their knowledge, skill, and understanding of the world in which they live, they need opportunities to observe and interact with role models and mentors, especially those from familiar backgrounds. This allows them to see the numerous opportunities that are available to them as they pursue their areas of strength. A study of people from many cultures as well as interaction and mentoring by diverse professionals must be an integral part of a curriculum that fosters a global perspective (Banks, 1994).

Higher Level Thinking Skills

When higher-level thinking skills are embedded in the total school experience, students learn to apply and use these skills in other areas of their lives as well. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to receive more of a rote learning and skills-based approach, which does little or nothing to stimulate creative and critical thinking. Critical and creating thinking skills can be nurtured through problem-solving and problem-posing activities that challenge students to question the answers, formulate their own ideas, and seek solutions that are not ordinarily considered. Thinking, reasoning, reflecting, discussing, and applying new ideas are essential characteristics of a climate of learning that encourages students to think on a higher level, challenge existing ideas, and entertain new possibilities for the future. Four instructional strategies that promote and nurture a thinking classroom are problem-centered learning, debates, Socratic seminars, and independent research. Conversation and collaboration are key elements, for it is through an exchange of ideas that new thinking evolves. When students learn to test their beliefs by immersing them in a more objective reality, they identify the elements that survive and adapt or release those that do not.

When a sixth grade student learned that oil spills were a major threat to sea otters, she decided to find out why and researched changes in their population over time. She learned that the oil ruins their fur and endangers their survival. She created graphs to illustrate how their numbers had been declining but were now starting to increase again and then searched for reasons to explain why. In her journal she wrote, *I am beginning to realize that in order to be sure that they will survive, we have to understand these animals, educate others, and think of ways to protect them.* During her class presentation, she taught her peers about these fascinating animals and used a model of their habitat to demonstrate the devastating effects that oil spills have on the

sea otter population. Another sixth grade student used a US Atlas and a graph to determine if nuclear power plants caused cancer. He made a graph of all the cancer victims and the number of nuclear power plants. Surprisingly, Illinois had the highest number of nuclear power plants but had one of the lowest cancer rates. He then discovered a chart in a chemistry book that showed that only .15% of the radiation we receive every year comes from nuclear power plants. He decided that such a low value couldn't have an effect so he concluded that nuclear power plants do not have an effect on cancer rates. Numbers and percentages became relevant and important as he learned to interpret their significance in order to enhance his understanding of the facts.

Student debates provide another excellent opportunity for students to think critically about a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from gun control to diplomatic immunity to school uniforms. Thinking and reflecting become important components as students explore issues from opposing sides, identify key aspects, and create speeches to persuade the audience that their argument is the stronger one. The debate format provides a flexible framework for differentiating the instruction in order to meet a specific learner's needs. While advanced learners are developing sophisticated reasoning skills, other students are learning persuasive writing and speaking skills, and strugglers learn to create a strong opinion statement backed by research. All students have the opportunity to participate in an engaging process that stimulates lively and good-natured competition and encourages individual growth. Debates are engaging, have a real world connection, provide time for interaction and planning, and teach children to value and defend their ideas. Children from a low socioeconomic background need opportunities to debate and explore the issues that may significantly impact their lives and their futures. Debates provide a forum that is safe and engaging, while giving them the opportunity to practice the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that they need to develop so that their voices will be heard.

Another instructional strategy that improves literacy and challenges students to think and apply knowledge on a higher level is the Socratic Seminar. A thoughtful dialogue that fosters reflective and critical thinking, the seminar stimulates lively discussions of a wide variety of texts, promotes rigorous thinking, and a deeper understanding of ideas, issues, and values (Lambright, 1995). Teachers who use the Socratic method provide their students a unique opportunity to learn from and with each other. A careful selection of historical documents, literature, and current events is used to initiate lively discussions that challenge students to think critically and synthesize their own ideas. For example, a recent seminar discussion of *Through My Eyes* (1999) by Ruby Bridges allowed fourth grade students to explore the civil rights movement from the perspective of a child, close to their own age. With the courage and the support of a loving mom, Ruby changed history in a way that impacted their own classroom. In their initial response to the written selection the students included such thoughts as, "I

liked how Ruby kept her chin up...she was a brave little girl.” “Everybody is made of the same skin and bones but we may be different colors or believe in different things. We should be treated equally.” The initial responses allowed students to reflect on the text and make connections to prior knowledge as they began to build their own understandings of the writing. During the seminar discussion, students shared and debated different viewpoints, supported their opinions with clear reasoning and evidence, considered alternative views, and identified areas of agreement and disagreement. Through this dynamic conversation, they constructed knowledge, increased understandings, and expanded their thinking in new and meaningful ways. As they began to understand the challenges and hardships that Ruby endured as the first black child to enroll and attend a previously all white school, they gained a new appreciation of the broader issues of civil rights and what equal opportunity for all citizen really means. The students also discussed how the racial and ethnic make up of their class would be different today if it had not been for people like Ruby; and how fortunate they are to live in a time when they can all work and learn together.

Independent research provides meaningful learning and varying degrees of freedom within a flexible framework that is not always available to economically disadvantaged students. Opportunities to engage in independent, in-depth research, allow students to discover a wide range of topics and endless possibilities that connect to personal interests and encourage enquiring minds. As they search for knowledge and solutions about topics that are connected to real world issues and relevant concerns, students learn to seek information using myriad resources. They also learn and practice investigative and formal research techniques that train them to develop highly abstract ideas, use inductive thinking, see connections, and solve problems. As they learn to organize, apply, and evaluate the information and data that they collect, they are able to create products and presentations that apply what they have learned in a meaningful way. In order to strengthen and refine their thinking, research, and communication skills, students need ongoing opportunities to explore areas of interest and share what

they learn with others. Learning preferences, interests, and ability levels are considered and addressed as students gain an understanding of a topic from many different sources, formulate their own opinions on the topic and become personally involved in a quest for knowledge.

A Final Note

As educators, we can create environments that inspire all students to reach new heights. By encouraging students to question the answers, reflect on their own thinking, develop problem solving skills, pursue independent research, and seek multiple connections, schools can raise expectations for all students in ways that will motivate, challenge, and endure.

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September Birthdays to Remember: Seiji Ozawa—Conductor, Christa McAuliff—Astronaut, Richard Wright—Author, Grandma Moses—Painter, Elizabeth I—Queen of England, Agatha Christie—Author, Greta Garbo—Actress, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton—Musician, Upton Sinclair—Author, Stephen King—Author, H.G. Wells—Author, Andrea Bocelli—Opera Singer, Ray Charles—Soul Singer, F. Scott Fitzgerald—Author, Glenn Gould—Concert Pianist, Dmitri Shostakovich—Composer, William Faulkner—Author, George Gershwin—Composer, T.S. Eliot—Poet, Al Capp—Cartoonist, Miguel de Cervantes—Author, Truman Capote—Author, Buddy Rich—Drummer, Peter Sellers—Comedian, Sid Caesar—Comedian, Roger Maris—Baseball Player, Arnold Palmer—Golfer, Mel Torme—Singer, Lauren Bacall—Actress.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMANITIES IN CONFRONTING EVIL IN THE WORLD TODAY
BY ANDREW FLAXMAN EDUCATE YOURSELF FOR TOMORROW
WEST BARRINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

How do we respond to the appalling terrorist activities and threats that have become part of our daily news? A proper study of the humanities will give us the necessary wisdom and strength to confront this evil. For example, one message from history that we should take to heart is how Abraham Lincoln was able to confront the evil of slavery. In his message to Congress on December 1, 1862 amidst political and military setbacks and pressing questions about the Union and slavery he said: "The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." Disenthrall is a word we do not use much anymore, but it means to free ourselves from bondage. Lincoln meant that we have to re-think to save ourselves. The word repent also means to re-think. It is in our awakened thinking capacities that we can find the wisdom that is needed to confront and transform evil and save our country.

Now that we are confronted by people who are willing to die for their ideology which includes hatred, killing and the destruction of freedom, we must develop the courage and wisdom to respond. Violence in response to ignorance will only bring on more violence. The study of Liberal Arts will reward a sensitive student with insights about what it takes to re-think so that we can overcome fear and transform evil in the world. One of the great humanists of the 20th century, Gandhi, instructed us well with the idea that to change the world you need to change yourself first.

A good place to start this self-transformation through the study of Liberal Arts is our great heritage from ancient Greece. For hundreds of years, from all over the ancient world, kings and commoners traveled to Delphi to ask the Oracle of Apollo about the right course of action — whether to make war or seek peace, whether to marry one person or another. They brought rich offerings to the god and were sent on their way by the priests with riddling answers.

And yet, over the entrance to the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi was the admonition: "Know Thyself!" This ancient wisdom suggested that the true oracle lies within. The answers to the great human questions, public and private, are found not outside us but only through an inner journey of the seeking spirit. The crucial importance of developing self-knowledge can best be understood in the words of another ancient piece of wisdom: The Hebraic Talmud says, "We do not see things the way they are, we see things the way we are." In other words, we grind the lenses with which we see the world.

What exactly is the SELF? Civilized people today generally see themselves in a physical and psychological- religious dimension but remain unconscious of any further aspect of their being. The

question is how do we develop deeper insights so that we can acknowledge and integrate intuition, imagination and inspiration into our conscious everyday lives?

Development of such self-knowledge requires being able to learn to have an "open eye". This is what liberal arts education should teach but most often does not. The word "Liberal" has the same root as "Liberate." Liberal Arts should be the study of what leads to freedom, as in "The truth shall set you free." The proper study of the humanities should help free one from traditional programming and help us to become more autonomous and creative.

The conventional approach to the Humanities too often has consisted in rote teaching, memory training and problem solving. Opening the "inner eye" requires experiencing the "I" as an integrated whole, an ego (Latin for "I") that balances thinking, feeling, and willing. Increased mastery of this integrative process leads to the ability to distinguish between true intuition and mere whim; between inspiration and empty abstract thought; between creative imagination and disconnected fantasy.

Such personal development goes against the present flow of conventional Western thought. For 500 years, Western civilization has developed itself through the exploration and conquest of the "outer" world. This progress seems to have come from a scientific materialistic philosophy. The world viewed with this attitude appears separated from our inner being. And yet, if one looks more deeply — imagination, inspiration, and intuition — all spiritual, integrative processes, are at the core of our scientific and cultural discoveries. Einstein, to take one example, has said that he valued his ability to speculate and fantasize above his mathematical skill. The "new physics" is based on doing away with the old attitude that "I am here and it's out there." The observed, say the new physicists studying sub-atomic phenomena, is always changed by the observer.

Yet so much of the way we think and live is structured in dualism (binary thinking), the commonplace way of thinking in terms of either/or, bad/good, inner/outer. Whether our faith is in science, progress, God, human nature or government, our outlook is often confined to dualities. Only enhanced self-knowledge enables us to transcend the temporary illusion of duality and one-sided materialism. An experience of opening the "I" breaks through to the integration of head, heart and creativity that is the core of all reality — the "patterns of organic energy" with which the Zen masters of ancient China were concerned.

To satisfy the universal need for inner direction, many are turning toward gurus, cult figures, drugs and pseudo-Christianity (close-mindedness, intolerance, hatred and violence in the name of Christianity). People who choose to neglect their own self-development through self-knowledge can become attracted to

and become locked into unhealthy, unfree solutions for their doubts, illnesses, insecurities and dissatisfactions. This danger of turning to authoritarianism and violence is with us today when we are so fearful of terrorism.

Where do we find constructive help in this difficult journey into ourselves? We can turn to the great artists, writers, thinkers, statesmen and scientists throughout history who have communicated their heightened sense of awareness through their work. They have tried to awaken us to a higher view of ourselves through artistic forms and significant deeds. Their examples can make clear to us that we have more than just five senses. We can go beyond our material senses to deeper levels of cognition. We all have dormant organs of finer perception which have always been cultivated by leading Human Beings throughout history. If we can understand and absorb their insights, we can ourselves participate more completely in the great creative force that drives humankind forward and upward.

So often what we search for is to be found right in front of our noses. It is the same with life itself. It's like a game of hide-and-seek that we play with the self we know and the self we are trying to find. And the method that we can use is also right before us in our own great culture and tradition. It is only a matter of learning how to "see better" as the loyal Earl of Kent implores Shakespeare's King Lear. Wonderfully, the hidden dimensions of the I, the SELF, can be discovered through literature, art and music.

To those who do not understand the spiritual dimensions of "Know Thyself!" self-knowledge appears to be narcissism. To those who have had this inner-experience, it is a path to community service. It is the goal of true education to cultivate that which is the best within each of us.

The new curriculum at many universities includes selections from non-Western, female and minority sources. The changes reflect the recognition that the traditional approach to the Humanities has great limitations. However, in spite of good intentions, the quest for universal relevance in education will continue to go astray so long as Humanities advocates do not realize that higher education must be founded on the conscious development of these dormant cognitive organs leading to a deeper understanding of the human condition. The development of the whole Human Being — no matter what the sex, color or race — must be fostered.

No unifying theme has been consciously applied to our secularized education, and the Liberal Arts curriculum has become over-specialized and over-intellectualized at the expense of an education of the heart and the will. Of course, revision of the traditional core curriculum of the Humanities is not a recent phenomenon. At the very onset of our modern curriculum development, Amos Comenius (1592-1670), the great Moravian educator responsible for many aspects of modern education, saw the potential pitfalls that have come to be. For those who are unfamiliar with Comenius, his book, **The Visible World in Pictures** (1658), was the first textbook in which pictures were

as important as the text. He was determined to translate into reason what previously had existed as tradition. In *The Temple of Pansophia*, he wrote that he wished to construct a temple of Wisdom that would serve as a sacred edifice for education similar to the Temple of Solomon. His temple was to house a school of universal wisdom, a workshop for attaining all of the skills necessary for life and the future.

Comenius advocated a comprehensive education taught in the vernacular. He promoted the establishment of many more schools and universities. He was asked to design the curriculum for the recently established Harvard College, but instead chose to organize Sweden's educational system. He pioneered the use of academic specialization but warned that if the spiritual focus were not emphasized, educational unity would be lost. We have arrived at that point today. Instead of being equal to the task of combating terrorism, the humanities seems weak and impractical. We know more and more about less and less. Without any unifying principals with which to appreciate the value of Liberal Arts and to relate it to our lives, education is bereft of wisdom.

The proper study of the Humanities should include:

An understanding of the importance of love in education, and the development of human relationships based on such an attitude. This is especially important as we confront the teaching of hate in education in many schools throughout the world, and even in this country.

Recognition of the ever-changing ways we view ourselves and the world we live in — the evolution of individual human consciousness.

An appreciation of the growth of personal freedom as it has evolved in the Western Tradition. This is one of the aspects which so frightens religious fundamentalists of all stripes.

An emphasis on the potential for self-development and self-transformation inherent in each individual. This slumbering power in each of us is crucial if we are to successfully overcome the power of hatred and ignorance.

An awareness of how each subject relates to the experience of "I AM" as the balanced center of thinking, feeling and willing.

A sense of integrating the whole as well as clearly distinguishing the parts of each subject.

An exploration of the creative and artistic elements in our lives and in civilization in addition to the factual and intellectual elements.

Before the gifted student studies the Humanities, it is important to mention that certain positive mental and psychological attitudes are necessary for this type of self-education and training for heightened self-awareness. These are as follows:

Moments of inner tranquility are required, that state of being where you are at peace with yourself. A sincere student must learn to practice stepping aside from the turmoil of daily life with its incessant distractions. These moments of inner

tranquility should be taken as a starting point for self-education. To some extent, thoughtful contemplation and objectivity are possible only at these selected disciplined times.

It is essential that one learn to know one’s feeling and then be able to become dispassionate. This putting aside of one’s likes and dislikes and seeking to examine what is, not what gratifies, leads to a state of objective awareness quite different from the familiar personal and subjective condition.

This conscious objectivity allows us to see things from different points of view and enables us to see some truth, purpose and meaning even in attitudes and behavior we otherwise might find totally abhorrent. This ability does not make us lose our sense of judicious discrimination – on the contrary, it enhances this sense and our understanding of the world.

By withholding and suspending judgement we keep our mind open to new discoveries. As soon as we judge, we limit our curiosity and thought.

We are thus able to understand how often we have “thrown out the baby with the bath water.” Disagreements, prejudice and criticism often lead us to miss crucial insights that can enrich our lives.

True open-mindedness and thoughtful objectivity leads to “learned ignorance” which overcomes intellectual arrogance and false pride. The more we learn, the more we understand how much we do not know.

We desperately need this wisdom because we are at a crossroad in civilization. Will the terrorist threat wake us up to our hidden strengths, or will we fall back to blind retribution and counter-violence. We can increasingly harden ourselves and isolate ourselves from the universe and each other — through extreme forms of materialism and escapist religion and spirituality. Or we can learn from the best of civilization by studying and applying the great lessons of the past. We can become a part of the evolution of humankind towards a future of freedom and love.

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PERFORMING ARTS INSTRUCTION FOR EXCEPTIONALLY AND PROFOUNDLY GIFTED CHILDREN
BY BETH WRIGHT NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

What special considerations do parents and educators need to make when planning performing arts instruction for exceptionally and profoundly gifted (hereafter referred to as eg/pg) children? Such children are marked by specific traits, about which parents and educators must be familiar in order to properly accommodate this special population.

Recent neurological research points to radical differences in the brains of exceptionally gifted children. In his paper, *The Gifted Brain*, Australian researcher, John Geake quotes Alexander, O’Boyle, and Benbow as saying, “...gifted subjects may have an unusually rapid and high level development of interhemispheric interactions...the area where structural and functional development are most closely related are the frontal lobes-gifted adolescents [13 years old] and college students [20 years old] have a similar level of brain maturation in these regions.” (Geake, 2000).

Gifted education researchers and advocates have bemoaned the shortcomings of gifted education instruction in most schools. Pull-outs, special classes, accommodations within grade level, and other half-hearted attempts at educating our country’s brightest have failed to meet the needs of eg/pg children. These children are as different from mildly and moderately gifted children as the profoundly retarded are from the mildly retarded (Silverman, 2002).

What type of educational approach do the experts recommend? An individualized curriculum that accommodates asynchrony (a trait common to eg/pg children, described as varying levels of

proficiency and ability that may result in uneven academic and social development), and the child’s specific strengths and weaknesses is touted as the best for our ablest learners. Tutorials, mentorships, and curricula tailored to meet the individual child’s needs all benefit eg/pg children most. But, how can parents and educators translate such advice to performing arts instruction?

There are three key issues that are crucial to the successful integration of gifted education theory in arts instruction: affective, cognitive, and instructional. Through understanding these issues, parents and teachers may better help the eg/pg child maximize his performing arts potential and achieve his dreams.

Affective Issues Are Paramount

Affective, or emotional issues reign supreme in the life of eg/pg children. Sometimes described as “skinless,” most eg/pg people seem to feel things more intensely. An unusual insight into moral issues, an ability to empathize with others, and a high regard for beauty all combine to make eg/pg children highly sensitive.

Such sensitivity may also work against them when they intuitively understand what “perfect” should look like. Perfectionism, the double edged sword of giftedness, drives the eg/pg child to achieve, yet torments him when he doesn’t. Leading to feelings of failure, this inner locus of control may actually hold the child back when he doesn’t believe himself capable of attainment of the ideal. As one mother puts it, “They may see nothing between perfect and awful; the phrase, ‘I’ll

never get it' is a major part of their vocabularies..." (private communication, 2002).

The eg/pg child does so many things well, and with such little effort, that pushing through such inner conflict in order to persevere may prove too daunting. Parents and educators should teach eg/pg children that small "failures" are part of the process and perseverance produces big rewards. Sometimes it helps for the child to witness a parent or other mentor struggling with a new task, stumbling and falling a bit while on the front end of the learning curve. Avoiding condescension, the adult can gently teach the child that everyone struggles with something, and there is no shame in not knowing how, not being perfect, or not achieving the first time around!

Researchers have given a name to one of the most pronounced affective aspects of high-level giftedness. Originally theorized by the Polish psychiatrist/psychologist, Kazimierz Dabrowski and later modified by Michael Piechowski, PhD, overexcitabilities are a set of five functions the eg/pg child has to a pronounced degree. (Lind, 2000) Called overexcitabilities because they describe categories of stimuli that provoke disproportionate responses from eg/pg people, these categories include:

- C Psychomotor: high energy, rapid speech, constant movement
- C Sensual: sensitivity to sights, smells, tastes, textures, sounds, etc...
- C Intellectual: inquisitive, voracious reading, theoretical thinking
- C Imaginational: inventive, dreamy, metaphorical, creative
- C Emotional: highly sensitive, intuitive, empathetic

How do these oversensitivities affect training in the performing arts? Highly imaginative cognitively advanced children may need to "see" themselves creating beauty with their music or dance. They may feel like failures when their practice sessions are "ugly" or awkward. These young musicians and dancers are quite likely to hold to an image of perfection derived from the work of more accomplished artists. In holding themselves to such exacting standards, they create inner conflict and angst.

The eg/pg theater student may strive to understand and internalize a play's character and, thus, give it life. Without the proper coaching from a sensitive theater teacher or director, the student may feel a sense of vagueness, a colorless recitation when portraying a character's role that leaves the student feeling disconnected from the character's true nature. Such disconnection may elicit feelings of failure in the gifted theater student. Due to these subtle complexities, eg/pg child performers may be unsatisfied with their work, even when everyone praises and adores their accomplishments. (Sand, 2000).

These children are often driven to excel. Many work tirelessly to master a domain, and parents may be hard pressed to keep up with them. (Sand, 2000). Intensity is a characteristic closely

associated with very high IQ, and eg/pg children may throw themselves into a production or program wholeheartedly. They can become deeply frustrated when directors or other participants do not share their pursuit of excellence.

One mom says, "Our twelve-year-old profoundly gifted daughter is an actress. She has developed not only her 'chops,' but also a sense of responsibility to each production. As a result, she was extremely troubled when she landed in a youth production whose director was far too casual, missing appointments, rushing through rehearsals, and treating the production as 'just a kid's show.' Two weeks into rehearsals, after great soul-searching, for the first time ever, she decided to drop out of the show."

How can parents and teachers shore up the child's flagging spirits? Adults need to allay the child's sense of distress and encourage him to persevere. Of course, eg/pg children have an aversion to bribery, so parents and teachers will need to avoid ploys and bribes as motivators. Instead, a simple acknowledgement of the child's dilemma serves as a validation of the importance of the child's work. Beyond understanding, the savvy parent or educator will need to strive to give the child whatever instruction is needed in order to help the child reach his internal ideal.

My very visual-spatial daughter, now nine, began taking ballet lessons in September. She started with a ballet I class in order to learn the five basic positions, the correct posture, and foundational ballet terminology. Within two months she was begging me to teach her how to execute more advanced movements such as turns and leaps. While she did not yet possess the muscle memory for correct body placement for such turns, she intellectually grasped the sequential movements needed for execution. After I showed her how to do the turns, she spent a day practicing. Within a short time she was crying with frustration. She had seen the older dancers in their rehearsals and knew that her pirouettes did not look like theirs.

With occasional instruction from me, Scarlet learned to feel her body in space as it turned. She taught herself to sense a correct placement for her ribcage, her head, and her shoulders. She "felt" it when she was leaning too far back. She worked a little each day to achieve the mastery of the turn, and within a week was performing serviceable pirouettes similar to those taught to level III students. By January, Scarlet was taking the ballet III class, her technique almost indistinguishable from that of the students who have been dancing for three years.

Accelerate, Accelerate, Accelerate

Educating eg/pg children is a process fraught with complexities at every turn. Parents and teachers alike shudder at the thought of acceleration. Concerns about social fit, academic holes in skill mastery, and scheduling conflicts arise any time acceleration is suggested. Yet, research proves again and again the value of acceleration for eg/pg children (Gross, 1994).

The eg/pg child may have unusual expectations regarding the level of depth and intention required of him. One of the hallmarks of the exceptionally and profoundly gifted child is a propensity toward creating elaborate mental scenarios for all interactions requiring the creation and development of plot and relationships for characters. When integrated in a classroom of less gifted students, the eg/pg child may expect to bring such complexities to the fore, and find himself thwarted by the other children's inability to engage in the dynamic.

The highly focused eg/pg child may find himself frustrated with age-segregated drama classes. An older class may be the perfect fit for a child who wants to engage in meaningful theater work. Classes for children two to eight years older will not only provide intellectual stimulation, but dedicated students who match the intensity and intention of the younger eg/pg child.

Last fall, my middle son, Antony, at age eleven, began taking a weekly theater/voice class for 9-12 year-olds. Within several weeks he came home from class depressed and frustrated. After one month, he came home each week crying. The other students often talked, laughed, and played with one another during class. Antony found their boisterous behavior disconcerting as he envisioned serious theater instruction and meaningful student interaction as the purpose for attending. He wanted to get down to the business of acting.

Thankfully, both his theater and voice teachers saw that he was more serious and focused than the first-level students, and they promoted him to the next level. Surrounded by students as old as fourteen, Antony began to enjoy his class. Finding his talents and intention matched by those of some other students, Antony brought his considerable ability to focus to bear on his problem of singing off-key. Within a month he had trained his ear to "hear" the notes properly and he then began working on finer aspects of singing such as volume and enunciation. Now, four months later, the class is working on two plays and is learning how to harmonize.

One mother of a profoundly gifted twelve-year-old, now an honors university sophomore, says that she has found boredom and frustration to be the two primary obstacles to her son's success with his instrument, the violin. A well-chosen acceleration may salvage a frustrated gifted child's momentum. Without such intervention, many eg/pg children lose interest in the craft and never try again.

Choosing the Right Instructor

Performing arts instruction must meet the eg/pg child's cognitive-ability level. Finding such instruction can be tricky for subjects that involve sequential repetitive skill mastery. Since music, voice, and dance instruction is best presented in a manner that trains the student to develop muscle memory, repetition is necessary. How can a teacher meet the eg/pg child's need for intellectual challenge while simultaneously ensuring that proper technique is acquired?

The famous violin pedagogue, Dorothy DeLay, teacher to such virtuoso performers as Itzhak Perlman, Midori, and Sarah Chang, instinctively adopted a teaching technique that brought out each student's personal best. Writing about DeLay's remarkable legacy, Barbara Sand describes a pedagogy perfectly tailored to the needs of eg/pg children, "DeLay is basically in the business of teaching her pupils how to think, and to trust their ability to do so effectively. This is a much more difficult undertaking than telling them to copy what she does, or to repeat a passage over and over until it – at least in theory – gets better." (Sand, 2000).

In her book, Teaching Genius: Dorothy DeLay and the Making of a Musician, Sand writes, "To DeLay, learning and thinking are inextricably connected, and the core of her philosophy lies in continually challenging her students to look for their own answers. This requires tremendous imagination on the part of a teacher, because what may serve as a catalyst to understanding for one student may be a turn-off for another." (Sand, 2000)

Professional instruction may be found through a conservatory, a performing arts school, a local college or university, and even private instruction. Some parents look for teachers who are, themselves, eg/pg (DeLay's IQ is reported to be 180, as measured by the Stanford Binet L-M, making her profoundly gifted). Sometimes professional concert performers have a facility with teaching and may demonstrate their highly professional standards by accepting only very talented students. One particularly frustrated mother found the perfect violin teacher, a Julliard graduate and recorded international concert violinist, for her profoundly gifted eleven-year-old son through a recommendation from a university music department. In months, the young man accomplished more with his new teacher than he had in six years with previous teachers.

Describing the frustrating job of finding appropriate instruction for her son, she said, "My son couldn't stand repetitive drills. He would not do what previous instructors asked him to do because they would not explain why it was important and how it fit with the gestalt of playing the instrument. Granted, at eleven, he is older now and able to tolerate more than when he was four, but the approach he requires from a teacher is basically the same."

She continues, "His teacher understands how he learns, how he needs to see for himself that something is necessary before he will make the changes that she has requested, that it does, indeed, make it easier to play. She is empathetic to those needs and is patient when working with them. She gives him a variety of material to work on that achieves the same goal. She points out how the patterns of scales will show up time and again in works he will play and to know those patterns by heart will make sight reading so much easier. He now works on his scales regularly because he has seen this to be true." (private communication, 2001).

We learned the importance of finding the right instructor through hardship. Octavian began taking classical guitar lessons when he

was twelve. His teacher, a local musician and college guitar instructor, came highly recommended. His reputation as an amazing musician convinced me of his ability as an instructor and I eagerly signed Octavian up for his first month's lessons.

Quickly, we found his personality and style to be incompatible with Octavian's. Not only was he too dry, but he could not seem to grasp the fact that Octavian needed something more stimulating than the simple little exercises given him. Within two weeks my son no longer wanted to continue his lessons. By month's end, we decided to terminate the association.

In spite of telling the instructor about Octavian's academic acceleration, he did not seem to understand that happy-face stickers applied to my son's completed weekly practice sheets only demoralized Octavian. The eg/pg child's aversion to coercion and bribery was clearly evidenced by Octavian's distress.

Within the year, Octavian began taking private lessons with the classical guitar instructor at the College of William and Mary. As a matriculating student, Octavian was required to practice daily, attend master classes and local classical guitar concerts, and gain the mastery of specific songs in his college level repertoire. The instructor introduced music theory immediately. He expected Octavian to begin reading music with no delay.

Octavian blossomed into a competent—indeed, inspired musician almost overnight. Within a month he was able to read simple music and within three he could sight read almost anything haltingly. The addition of music theory to the physical repetition of daily practice challenged Octavian intellectually.

At some point in the evolution of their instruction, some eg/pg gifted children may face the crucial nexus point of choosing between two teachers within a certain discipline. Many choose the instructor who is exacting, demanding, challenging, or especially thorough. One mom tells, "Zoe, an eleven-year-old profoundly gifted singer, reported that an acquaintance had switched music teachers in disgust. The child had told Zoe that all she wanted to do was sing and the discarded teacher 'wasted' lesson time on 'boring stuff' like preventive medicine (how to keep the voice healthy and avoid polyps), vocal production, and anatomy. Zoe was stunned – she sees all that 'boring stuff' as crucial information for a serious singer." (private communication, 2002).

Parents have reported their children abandoning beloved teachers who showered them with praise to work with task-masters intent upon achievement of skill mastery, flawless technical execution, and contemplation of the subtleties of theory and interpretation. Really good instructors recognize when a student is ready to move on to a more skilled instructor, and may assist the family in finding a new teacher.

The switch to more technically challenging instructors may require greater sacrifices of parents, both in time and money.

Juggling schedules to accommodate frequent practices, concerts, competitions, auditions, and rehearsals is only part of the sacrifice parents will make for their child. Financially, these needs can become overwhelming. Costumes, performance fees, new instruments, travel expenses, tuition, and other costs tax family budgets when gifted children become immersed in the pursuit of a craft. (Sloane, 1985).

In spite of such challenges, families find their lives enriched by their commitment to the child's discipline. Once again, the nature vs. nurture dialectic requires parents and educators to find ways to facilitate the appropriate instruction of the performing eg/pg child while respecting the child's learning style and personality.

Conclusion

These children possess amazing gifts and abilities. Those gifts and abilities provide the blueprint for their future successes. It is our job, as parents and teachers, to help them fashion for themselves the tools they need to realize their goals and maximize their potential. We can only do this if we understand their needs and strive to meet those needs.

Utilizing solid gifted education research, some of which has existed since the 1920's, parents and teachers can deal with the affective, cognitive, and instructional issues of education for eg/pg children. Applying this advice to performing arts instruction, we find a myriad of ways to facilitate the dreams of eg/pg children poised to achieve. With the right instructor to show them how to attain their goals and a supportive family environment, nothing can stop these amazing kids from achieving.

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The Re-Invention of the Educational Wheel by Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“...there is nothing so interesting to people as other people. This interest is in part curiosity, but fundamentally it grows out of the conviction that personality is the most important thing in the world and, puzzling though it must be, we must try to understand it. In our endeavor to do this, we find ourselves following trails in the biographies that we read – seeking to understand the qualities that have made a human being feel, suffer, and act, triumph or fail, in the drama of human existence.” (**Modern Biography** by Hyde and Garrett, 1945).

One of the phenomena that any teacher experiences is the fact that educational theories are constantly being recycled. Most of the time, the exponents of a new educational theory lack an awareness that their concept is a “dumbed-down” version of the original theory. Recently, I found an old textbook that was used in the New York School System. The book is, **Modern Biography** by Marietta Hyde and Zuleime Garrett (Harcourt, Brace & Co.). It was originally published in 1926, and Garrett revised it in 1945. The book is a collection of short selections from biographies of noteworthy persons from various disciplines. The range of these subjects are from literature (Mark Twain and Clifton Fadiman), the sciences and technology (the Wright brothers, George Washington Carver, Madam Curie and Louis Pasteur), and political leaders (Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill).

To gifted students, biographies are integral to their sensibilities. “Thus, what is acquired by reading may be integrated into definite thought and action patterns and interests, ambitions, and appreciations may be developed – appreciations of the oneness of all humanity.” (p. 3). One of the major concepts in gifted education is learning through mental processing tasks. However, processing is based on rigorous content – not just factual content but the emotions that gifted individuals use when processing information and ideas. One of the educational buzz-words in teacher training is the importance of “doing research.” Yet, research can be retroactive as well as being based on making new discoveries. One of the great leaps in human thought took place during the Renaissance, which was the re-discovery and application of the lost wisdom of the past – i.e., Greek and Latin thinkers. As an example, Shakespeare’s tragedies (e.g., Julius Caesar) had their basis in Plutarch’s **Parallel Lives** (75 A.C.E.).

At the end of each biographical selection in this book, there are a series of questions described as Trails to Follow. Some examples of these Trails following the Mark Twain selection are: Mark Twain’s ideas about literary composition, his humor, his cynicism, and Mark Twain and his Mother. The students write reports on these themes and then they collaborate in a general discussion. The period of the 1920s through the 1940s were very productive for the public schools. Among the obvious readers of **Modern Biography** would have been students who were gifted in the sciences and social leadership. Not a bad legacy to be re-examined and understood.