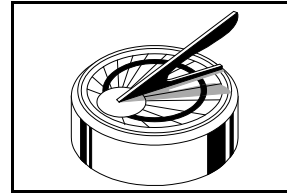


GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS QUARTERLY

10201 YUMA COURT
P.O. BOX 1586
MANASSAS, VA 20108
703-369-5017



Fall 2004

VOLUME EIGHTEEN, NUMBER FOUR

<http://www.giftedpress.com>

LIFETIME SUBSCRIPTION: \$22.00

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Web Link: <http://www.nea.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>. I urge you to read it to learn about the sharp decline in the reading of novels, short stories, poetry and plays. Literary reading declined from 1982 to 2002 by 10% - 56.9% to 46.7% of the adult population. Although children were not included in this survey, their literary reading habits have most likely decreased. This report contains other information about artistic performance and museum visits which I will discuss in future issues. What can educators do to stop this decline in reading literary works? Clearly, all of us must do our part to improve the quality and quantity of reading among all students. Beginning in the early 1980s, Gifted Education Press started publishing many books on teaching the humanities with emphasis on great literature. But in the last ten years, interest in these books has faded, probably because of increasing emphasis on high stakes testing, teaching for the test, teaching for minimum competencies, and severe budget cuts in gifted programs. Now, it is "crisis time" for the arts and humanities. Please send me your ideas and methods for teaching gifted students to read the classics of American, English and world literature.

During the spring and summer of 2004, we have been placing previous issues (back to 1991 so far) of *Gifted Education Press Quarterly* on the *GEPQ* Web Site. This sizable online collection is an excellent historical resource. Please use these back issues to review topics such as parent advocacy, acceleration, multiple intelligences, social-emotional development, cooperative learning, inclusion, coercive-egalitarianism, and constant budget crises in the gifted field. In re-reading articles from past years, I have been impressed with the authors' ideas and the quality of their writing.

I am happy to include articles in the current issue by the following individuals: Penny Choice writes about the current state of gifted education in Illinois. Although her ideas were originally addressed to individuals in her home state, they apply to teachers, parents and students in all states. Before retiring in June 2004, she was Coordinator for Gifted Education and Fine Arts for The Regional Office of Education in Grayslake, Illinois. Joanna Staudinger, who has Bachelors and Masters degrees in music education, provides extensive recommendations to teachers for developing gifted students' musical interests and music appreciation. Currently, she works as a private music teacher. Mark Wood, a teacher of the gifted in the Downingtown, Pennsylvania Area School District, writes about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on educating the gifted. He is the author of *Beyond Classroom Enrichment* (2004, GEP), a detailed guide for teaching gifted students a variety of subjects including chess and website development. Michael Walters completes this issue with a tribute to the great science fiction writer and Renaissance man, Isaac Asimov.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEH) issued an alarming report in early July 2004 entitled, *Reading At Risk*. This report, based upon surveying 17,000 adults in 2002, is available at the following

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher giftedpress@comcast.net

The Forgotten Children: An Open Letter to Gifted Children and their Parents

**By Penny Choice Coordinator for Gifted Education and Fine Arts
Lake County Regional Office of Education Grayslake, Illinois**

To gifted children everywhere and their parents: I am very concerned about meeting the challenge of gifted learners in today's public education. I have been in the field of education for many years, and since 1980, I have dedicated my career to supporting gifted children, their education and their growth. I have had the joyous opportunity to work with hundreds of gifted children through several years of their education, and many of my students still keep in touch. This year I will be retiring from public education and I am here to tell you that we, in gifted education, have failed you. Sadly, you have become the "forgotten children" in public education.

We, gifted education specialists, have worked for all these years to try and create an appropriate education for you. We have tried to communicate with the public at-large to help them understand your specific learning needs. We have written books and articles; we have devoted time to national and state organizations; we have dialogued with our local districts – and we have, unfortunately, made little progress.

Now we have the federal law called No Child Left Behind Act. Some have called it the All Smart Children Get Left Behind Act because its focus is on what is called minimum competency – the least children have to know to get by. It is a law that punishes schools and teachers for their students who cannot pass the tests at a minimum level. It has sent districts into a tailspin with fear in their hearts as they scramble to jump the hurdles set by the federal government. Since this law was passed, gifted services all over the country have changed, sometimes even disappearing. This year we have had devastating consequences in Illinois, my home state.

Last May 2003, Governor Blagojevich created a bigger problem in Illinois for gifted students and their families by eliminating Article 14A from the Illinois School Code. This was the only educational protection under the law specifically for gifted children. Before its elimination, it provided:

- A state definition of gifted and talented children
- For the establishment of an Advisory Council of Gifted Education at the State Board of Education
- The requirement for school districts to provide a comprehensive plan for Gifted Education programs and services
- Dollars for gifted program funding
- For educational service centers to provide staff development and support for teachers and students, including the state-approved Gifted Institute training
- For staff at the Illinois State Board of Education to assist in planning, operating and evaluating gifted education programs.

That's all gone now.

A by-product of this law included a yearly collection of statistics about school districts which included how many gifted children were being served in Illinois: By grade, content area served, amount of staff development training each year, and other pertinent data. After last year's data collection, that information currently is no longer available. In our data-driven world, this action has far-reaching consequences. As a result of the state's action, no more information can be gathered about gifted children because the vehicle for collecting data through the state grant is gone.

The money that used to be allocated for gifted education has been shifted into a fund to be used at the discretion of each individual district. However, this year over 80% of Illinois School districts are in deficit spending and school boards are slashing programs right and left in order to meet financial goals. Gifted education is no longer mandated – therefore it is frequently one of the first programs to be eliminated. Unfortunately, this situation is being repeated all over our country, wherever gifted education is not considered part of special education law. States continue to eliminate services for gifted children, training for teachers, and districts are returning gifted specialists to the regular classroom.

In public education, educators still have sympathy for the struggling student. They want to help strugglers succeed. Special education is mandated nationally. The national mandate for Special Education happened because these parents were organized. They lobbied for their children and were "squeaky wheels". They were not regarded as pushy parents (as gifted parents often are treated); they saw their children's needs and asked to have them met.

Education has traditionally focused on the average student – that's where the age appropriate curriculum lies and the state standards are based here. Remember, No Child Left Behind's requirements are for all students to be at least average. In the No Child Left Behind Act, education is asked to look at achievement in several sub-groups: by gender, English Language Learners, the culturally diverse, those in Special Education, etc. But educators have not been asked to look at data on gifted students.

These gifted children are the forgotten children. Too few educators care (look at how services for these children are disappearing around our country). Some educators actively dislike students identified as gifted (ask a gifted child to share some of their experiences with negative teachers – they can give you concrete examples). And many educators buy into the myths that have surrounded these children like a dark cloud.

As a result, many gifted children come to school every day with thoughts that can be very damaging to them. For many years gifted children have told me that school is really easy. That is damaging because school is not supposed to be so easy that there is little or no challenge for a child. Somewhere along the line the idea that school is easy may create serious problems later – when the gifted child finally gets to a level in education where he or she has to struggle, academically, using advanced organizational and study skills. Sometimes that happens in high school, sometimes in college or even graduate school. The important question is, how will a child know HOW to struggle with new material if he or she has had no opportunity to learn the skills to do so? That's not fair, and we in education have failed gifted children if we do not give them the skills they need to be successful.

And then there's the "B" word: Boring! Gifted children have been telling me for 25 years that school is boring! They say that they already know most, if not all, that is being taught in the school year. And they say that anything they do not know, they learn very quickly, and have to spend hour after hour each school day waiting to learn something new, while the other children catch up. They tell me that much of the school year is spent in review, in drill and in practice on concepts they have already mastered. In the classroom, teachers sometimes express displeasure when gifted children have already mastered the grade level curriculum. Children in the regular classroom often tease gifted children and make them "stand out" because they are "the smart children." Also, opportunities for differentiation at an appropriate readiness level are few.

The final crushing blow beats upon me like a hammer more and more frequently, now, as parents and their children increasingly contact me to let me know that public school is not the place to go for their learning. This is heartbreaking, because the research indicates that all children start school wanting to learn. Many learn all too quickly that schools may destroy that love of learning at an early age. My grandson, in second grade, decided that he wasn't learning in school, and school has never been the same for him since. He hates school now – and he is only in fourth grade!

Educators in the field of gifted education know this situation is a common one, and we have been working tirelessly for years to support appropriate education for gifted children.

But, as mentioned earlier, there are powerful myths surrounding the gifted – myths that have been difficult, if not impossible to dispel.

The biggest and most powerful myth is that gifted children can "make it on their own, that they don't need any help." This point of view has been around for many years (as long as I have been around) and yet I heard that same message repeated by legislators at the Illinois state level just recently! It is obvious that we have made no progress – people still believe gifted children don't need any help in school, or opportunities to

struggle with new material, or encouragement and support for doing so.

That myth is at the root of the State of Illinois' decision to remove all the language supporting gifted education from the school law in 2003. This elimination of funding has caused a decrease in gifted services. Gifted education teachers are being reassigned into regular education classrooms, and teachers and administrators are no longer being trained to provide an appropriate education for gifted children. In some places AP and honors programs are even in jeopardy.

This brings me to the second prevailing myth: That the regular classroom is all any student needs for an appropriate education. Today's classroom is incredibly diverse: Advanced, average, and struggling learners are placed together in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers are stretched to the limit to provide for an increasing diversity of students who differ, radically, in readiness, interests and learning styles. Classroom teachers do not have the time or the training to differentiate for each learner in the classroom. Often they recruit gifted children to help teach those who struggle. Teaching others is a good thing, but it doesn't provide gifted children with an opportunity to learn new material at their readiness level.

Another myth is that the general population somehow believes that children are gifted in everything – every content area, every skill level. If they are not "gifted across the board" they must not be gifted! This is very sad, because it assumes that gifted children are, like Mary Poppins, "perfect in every way." Gifted children are human – we do some things well, like all humans, and we need to work on others. No one can do everything well! That attitude also helps feed the next myth.

Gifted education is elitist! It creates a select group that others may not access. We never say that appropriate training in athletics is elitist and shouldn't exist. Tell the football coach that training is elitist. Tell the volleyball coach, the basketball coach, or anyone else who works with talented potential in sports and see the response. We never assume that training in music, or art, or languages, or anything that encourages the development of any talent is elitist. Yet people continue to assume that providing appropriate training for gifted students is something that is wrong, and creates bad behavior and difficult children.

But wait, there's more! There are many who assume that gifted education is appropriate for all children. That assumes that all children are exactly alike. There's not a whole lot of logic in that assumption. **Another myth is the assumption that gifted children need to "get along" with others so they need to be in school only with their age peers.** As adults, we know very well that we "get along" best with people who are most like us, regardless of age, those who understand our wants and needs, and with whom we can communicate effectively. Why, then, do we assume differently of our children? Of course, we can all

learn proper manners in dealing with a variety of people, but the people we choose to spend our time with are people like ourselves, those with whom we feel comfortable. Children should have that option, too.

The last myth I want to discuss is one that has plagued gifted education from its inception: That all children are gifted.

Yes, of course, every child is special, and has abilities that are valued. But we are not all talented or able, all in the same way at the same level. We all do not learn at the same pace, or depth, or level of complexity. We do not all have the same interests, or readiness levels, or learning styles. It is unfortunate that the word historically chosen for these children is “gifted” because it carries such negative “baggage” with it. In fact, some districts even change the name: Advanced learners, academically talented, bright students, etc. But changing a name doesn’t change who you are – and these myths have definitely affected gifted education.

So, what to do? We adults have failed you. We love you, but we have failed. So now it is time that you and your parents must take charge of your education. You need to stand up for yourselves, side by side, parents and students together. It’s time for education to take notice of the forgotten children. So here it is: You have some rights – and some responsibilities.

In 1993, Carol Morreale created a document called “Rights of Students” for the Illinois Association for Gifted Children. I would like to paraphrase that document.

Students, you have the right to:

- Stretch your mind with curriculum that is challenging for you and makes you think. This does not happen when you know all the answers.
- Have opportunities in school to work at a level that requires study, organization, and personal risk – so you are as ready for the real-world experience as your age peers, who have, by the way, been developing these very skills during their entire school career because the curriculum is appropriate for them.
- Be with people who think, feel, and respond more like you, at least part of the school day. That means the right to be grouped with your intellectual peers for part of the time, not only with your age peers.
- Learn early that you are not (as many gifted children think) weird, or different, but normal and valued for whom you are. In fact, some adults actually want to “fix” gifted children – to make them just like all the other children. When I worked in school districts as a gifted coordinator I was frequently called upon by teachers and administrators to “fix” their children who were demonstrating gifted behaviors.
- Not have to wait in school to learn something new – to be able to move on when you “get it,” and finally,
- Continue to experience the love of learning as intensely as you choose!

Those are the rights of gifted students. Those are the rights of all students. Stand up for them! But along with those rights,

you and your parents also have some responsibilities. Sally Yahnke Walker created a wonderful book, **The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids** (2002). Here are some of her suggestions:

- Get actively involved in supporting your child’s education. All children deserve to develop their full potential. Help districts understand what that means for gifted children. Work with other parents and children to bring awareness and commitment to providing an appropriate education for gifted children. The law calls for a “Free and Appropriate Education” (FAPE). Make sure that districts know what that looks like for gifted children.

- Be an advocate, not an adversary. Plead the case in your district and in Springfield for appropriate education for gifted children. Remember, many teachers have had little or no training in working with gifted children. There are six steps to becoming an advocate for your child:

1. Gather all the information you can
2. Find your allies, there is power in teamwork
3. Understand the process of the law
4. Document, document, document
5. Find solutions
6. Be persistent – don’t give up – be the “squeaky wheel.”

- Make connections:

1. Know that there are at least 165,000 children identified in Illinois (this is old data but it is the last we have); there are over 2.5 million gifted children in U.S.
2. Join or create a parent support group; bring your children onboard
3. Join the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (www.iagcgifted.org) and the National Association for Gifted Children (www.nagc.org)
4. Be a visible, patient, pleasant presence in schools. When your child says she needs a challenge, help the teacher understand what that means. Stand together with other parents so that the district won’t blame you for being a problem
5. Understand that more than half of the gifted programs in local districts exist because of active parents
6. Begin with the teacher first.
7. Work with the coordinator or gifted education specialist if the district has one
8. Be a presence at school board meetings
9. Promote funding for gifted education and wording in the law. Special Education already has that. Contact your legislators. Get to know them, personally. Give your children a voice, too.
10. Stay current in the research. Get on the Internet and network! Children, get involved too!

Encourage gifted children to challenge themselves by struggling with difficult academic material. They may get easy grades in school by not risking and stretching their minds but that attitude

won't help them in the long run. It's wonderful to get "A's" but for an "A" to be meaningful, it should represent effort and growth. To learn the same life skills that other children learn, gifted children have to work at a pace, depth, and complexity which challenges them.

Finally, thank educators who support an appropriate education for you. Teach those who don't understand. Commit to a challenging education for all students. Don't let any child get left behind – or left out! All children have the right to struggle and grow at least one year for every year spent in school.

Gifted education specialists so far have been unable to make our voices heard. We take one step forward and at least two steps back. We don't seem to have the power to change your education. We need your help.

For an appropriate education for gifted children, it is going to take all of us working together. We cannot do it alone.

Stand up! Parents join hands with your children and gifted advocates wherever they are. Don't let these children be "The Forgotten Children" any longer.

Together we CAN make a difference.



Helping Gifted Students with Music

By J.L. Staudinger

Gifted Educator -- East Central Kansas Cooperative in Education Baldwin City, Kansas and Music Educator -- Carnegie Arts, Leavenworth, Kansas

In my experience in the general music education classroom, it is often the most gifted children who make teaching a class of diverse students very challenging. Many reasons play into this scenario. During my teaching years I have observed gifted students absorbed with facets of their being other than music to the point that they could not focus on the music lesson. They often have self-esteem that needs continual coddling. They often require special attention. Sometimes they are far beyond where the other students are in terms of understanding the musical language. As revealed in **The Gifted Child, The Family, and the Community** by Miller, et al (American Association for Gifted Children, 1981), and based on a study of 32 children parentally assessed to be gifted, the following statement sheds light on some preoccupations of gifted children:

“Ego and personality problems concerned nearly 44 percent of the children. These problems involved self-reliance, feelings of belonging, sense of personal freedom, and withdrawal tendencies. Nine children in this group also indicated a low sense of personal worth. All these findings can be intensely ego-destructive and are demanding of attention.” (p. 29)

The distractions from the gifted child's ability to focus on the task at hand, in this case a music lesson, disrupt their own learning of integral steps pertaining to developing a musical vocabulary and set of skills. If a general music class is the only musical exposure the gifted child is obtaining, they may truly miss out on musical development. They can also disrupt the learning of others around them. How, then, can one nurture their apparent need for individualized instruction while addressing the

needs of the rest of the students in the music class? Such is the puzzle that music teachers face.

The title of a well-respected music education resource, **Making Each Minute Count** by Cheryl Lavender (Jenson Publications, 1991), accurately describes the quest music teachers discover when approaching their jobs. Exposing all children to positive musical experiences in a way that accounts for their individuality, while only seeing them about an hour each week is the challenge that makes teaching general music elusive. What makes it even more elusive is considering the child who is not willing, or not able, to follow the structured plan or the outlined method of transmitting information to young minds. Often such a child is gifted. As noted in **TIPS: Teaching Music to Special Learners** (MENC, 1988):

“Gifted and talented children are not included under the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), but they frequently need a “special” education because they do not always respond to normal teaching methods. They are the students whom teachers hope to find in a music class so they can nurture and develop their unique gifts and talents.” (p.17)

Yet as a general music teacher charged with instructing the entire student body, it is often difficult to accept the challenges presented by gifted students as anything other than behavior distractions. Unfortunately, seeing it this way represents a missed opportunity to nurture future musicians and/or patrons of the arts. However, if the gifted student is receiving musical

exposure within the gifted education classes, they begin music on “a positive note.” In addition, they positively influence the other students around them who may not be classified as gifted.

Gifted education teachers, then, hold a key to positively impacting the entire music program in a school. Fortunately, they do not have to accept the inverse responsibility; that is, they are not to be “blamed” if a school has a less than stellar music program. Nevertheless, seeing gifted education as an opportunity for musical growth can have a wide possibility for positive effects on an entire student body and an entire music program.

I recall a certain second grade student (we’ll call her Annabelle) who was extremely bright. Everyone seemed to know her. She was engaging and somewhat entertaining. Even the principal admitted she was a favorite. While I certainly acknowledged that she was a very unique child with a lot of capabilities, I found her to be the biggest nuisance in music class I could have ever imagined. If the lesson did not revolve around her and her silliness, she would find other ways (usually demanding negative attention) to divert the class to her agenda. The other students were missing out on music lessons that had been very successful with other classes. They were missing out because of Annabelle. They were missing out because Annabelle was gifted.

I approached the situation as a behavior issue and placed her on a behavior contract. But deep down inside I knew that Annabelle was simply expressing her gifted nature. She was receiving no other music exposure other than in music class, although she was a part of the gifted education program. I was trapped, in a way, by the often-assumed position that gifted children might be labeled as troublemakers or suspected of having ADHD. Annabelle’s fifty minutes in my general music class were either not challenging her or they weren’t holding her attention because music was something with which she was not comfortable.

At the same time, another student who was creating musical instruments in the gifted classroom posed no problem at all and contributed quite well to the music lessons. She shared with the class information about various composers they had discussed or musical experiences they’d had within their gifted classes. Therefore, my feeling that exposure to music outside the music classroom helps quell the need for independence and individualism in music proved to be true, at least with this particular student. She positively influenced the class and was not at all disruptive. I only wish that it was not purely in hindsight that I made this correlation. I should have, and would have, gone immediately to the gifted education teachers and asked that they begin doing some sort of musical activities with Annabelle. Instead Annabelle received her usual quota of checkmarks and denied recess time, and I often dreaded when her class came to music.

In an ideal situation, the gifted education teacher can be a great resource for alleviating possible problems that gifted children may bring to the general music class. Hence, the gifted education teachers can help solve one of music teachers’ greatest

struggles. My hope is that gifted education teachers would understand the scenarios I have described. A request such as this one that I am making should not be viewed as the gifted education teacher doing the music teacher’s job. Rather it should be viewed as both the gifted education teacher and the music teacher accepting the notion that gifted students often are able to make or break a lesson in class and that in embracing education as a whole, nurturing the gifted students in the arts will positively affect other students, the lessons at hand, and the learning environment in general.

How should a gifted teacher go about giving meaningful, musical experiences to gifted children within their rooms? Some gifted education teachers are musicians themselves and may not have any problem creating lessons that encourage musical growth. But for those who do not have a strong music background, it could be a more daunting task—even scary. Perhaps gifted education teachers can take comfort in the fact that exposing their students to music is so entirely necessary that it doesn’t matter if they are expert musicians, as long as they are making a real effort to include music in their curriculum. The alternative should be enough to motivate any hesitant teacher, as the AAGC 1981 publication points out:

“Studies of gifted children continually indicated that this group has problems that require assistance. A gifted child, like any other, can flounder in a morass of failure, frustration, and maladjustment. He or she can be left rudderless, restless, and unfulfilled, his or her great gifts lost to society.” (p.30)

The publication goes on to say that, “There is . . . ample evidence that many eminent persons and their gifts would have been lost to us without the supportive intervention of a concerned mentor.” (p. 30) I’m sure I do not stand alone as a music teacher when I implore gifted education teachers to assist in such mentoring concerned with music.

Many books intended for parents of children and gifted children encourage nurturing in and through music. (Smutny, 1989, p. 56; Luey, 2003, pp. 2-3) If experts in the field of gifted education encourage parents to incorporate music into their children’s lives, why shouldn’t gifted teachers do the same? As stated by J.F. Smutny, et al in **Your Gifted Child: How to Recognize and Develop Special Talents in Your Child from Birth to Age Seven** (1989), “Good, harmonious music in the home lays the groundwork for a firm footing in music.” (p. 22) I believe that good, harmonious music and musical experiences in a gifted class would lay the groundwork for a positive experience in music class.

In **Gifted Children: Myths and Realities** (1996) by Ellen Winner, the author seeks to dispel the myth that gifted children definitely and inevitably become eminent adults. She states:

“Gifted children are typically seen not only as creative children but also as future creative and eminent adults. But many gifted children, especially prodigies, burn out, while others move on to

other areas of interest. Some, while extremely successful, never do anything genuinely creative. Only a very few of the gifted become eminent adult creators.” (p.11)

Assuming Winner is accurate in her assessment, it would make sense to assume that gifted education is about preparing exceptional minds to cope with daily life. The enrichment music offers to one’s life is a reason to pursue music, even if only at a very surface level. Music, then, is a gift to be offered to gifted students. Enabling gifted students to learn how to put music into their lives is a duty that could be wonderfully fulfilled in gifted education.

Because music is an area in which some gifted children excel (and for some it may be the only area where they excel exceptionally), one could make the assumption that gifted education classes are not appropriate venues for such a specialized branch of giftedness. That is, it could be assumed that only a fraction of gifted students truly need musical nurturing because only a fraction of gifted students are truly gifted musically. This assumption discredits music as a worthy area of study for those who aren’t prodigies or musical geniuses. Again, the focus is on embracing education as a whole and preparing the gifted student for music class to the benefit of all involved in the learning community. As pointed out in **The Psychology and Education of Gifted Children** (Vernon, et al, 1977):

“Gifted pupils who do not show exceptional talents in any of (the arts) should still be encouraged to spend some time on them, since they help to enhance cultured leisure pursuits. . . In music, appreciation and understanding of many types of music—classical, modern, jazz and pop—may be of more value to larger numbers than the acquisition of formal techniques such as sight reading. . . . Drama and/or the art of movement should again be thought of, not for showing off to adult audiences, but as using the voice and body as media of communication of ideas and feelings.

“There are great many aids in (the arts)—films, filmstrips, plays, concerts, exhibitions and other displays. Also, of course, there is ample literature on (the arts) themselves, and in the form of biographies.” (pp. 190-191)

Gifted education classes do not have to become band rooms or even host performances of music. Even a small amount of musical exposure can do wonders for creating a more musical student. The authors of **The Psychology and Education of Gifted Children** (Vernon, et al, 1977), in speaking about arts education, go on to say, “Music is one of the best developed areas in many secondary (and some elementary) schools, though they tend to over-emphasize performance at the expense of appreciation, or composition, of music.” (p. 51) Gifted education teachers can simply include music in their lessons to help prepare their students for music class, not necessarily incorporate playing instruments or singing.

For those children who do express interest and acumen in music and the arts, the guide published by the American Association for Gifted Children (Miller, et al, 1981) gives the following advice, “The child interested in music and art should certainly participate as a performer or spectator in concerts, theater performances, puppet shows, or cultural festivals in the community.” (pp. 127-128) Again, in embracing music as a part of their curriculum gifted education teachers should examine students individually but acknowledge the fact that music is an integral part of learning. They should also accept that gifted students need exposure to music in the gifted education class to have a more successful learning experience in the music room. The results will benefit the gifted students as well as others around them.

The following list of ideas is intended to guide the gifted educator in preparing the gifted child for a positive experience in music class. I have elaborated only slightly within each category, but would encourage any gifted education teacher using this list to expand it as far as their own creative limits will take them.

-Take field trips to hear live musical performances. Many professional symphonies and universities provide free concerts for students. Check into it. Call the organizations and ask them. Some states also have free ticket programs whereby the teacher writes a proposal and is then given free concert tickets for students. Attendance at live music events does not have to be expensive. If your district is stingy with field trip opportunities, then simply announce free concert events and encourage students to attend them with their families.

-Listen to music in class and talk about it. Especially if you are doing group building, having students share music that they like is a great way of really getting to know one another. It is also a great way for students to discover new and different music other than what they know from their own experiences.

-Create artwork inspired by music. In embracing education as a whole, we should not compartmentalize our subject areas any more than we have to. The arts are inter-related and can therefore be easily integrated.

-Write about music that you hear. Simply play a small bit of a work of music and have the students do creative or analytical writing pertaining to what they hear. There is no right or wrong—just music!

-Create musical instruments from household materials (there are a lot of resources available to guide this process). In my experience, students become extremely proud when they create an instrument on their own. It not only encourages personal thought and planning, it educates about the many aspects that go into creating and maintaining real musical instruments. In our increasingly multicultural society, it can also point to the many and various types of music that exist in our world.

-Find out who wrote the music to a favorite movie soundtrack. Children need to know that the music they know and love was written by people who are not all that different from them. These people grew up, went to school, learned about the world, and learned about music. Music should not be presented as

some esoteric, elitist phenomenon reserved for the Mozart-like geniuses and child prodigies. Bring it close to home—help children discover the people behind the music.

-Compare movie soundtracks. Students will gain an appreciation for the music in movies if they begin to understand how closely and carefully it is woven in with the script and scenes. Discuss the differences in, say, a fast, Disney animal song and a slow, sad song from a realistic film. What kinds of scenes go with the music? How does the audience feel about what they see and how does what they hear enhance that?

-Discuss the use of music in a cartoon, show, or film. As with comparing movie music, students can also discover the use of music in other forms of media.

-Have students say the text of a song without its tune. Considering the words of a song is very different when it is taken out of context. Discuss these differences. How does music change the way a song is delivered? Is it easier to deliver a text when you're singing it or saying it?

-Encourage private lessons. Get to know music teachers in your area and attend recitals that your students give. Ask them about their lessons.

-Encourage participation in ensembles. Attend the concerts of the ensembles in which your students participate. Engage them in a dialogue about the music they play or sing.

-When discussing literature or visual art, find the historical musical counterpart. (What music was popular when this book was written? This painting was painted?) Even at the college level, instructors continue to strive to allow studies of the humanities and history to embrace music. As Donna B. Levene says in her preface of Music Through Children's Literature (Teacher Ideas Press, 1993), "Both music and books should be integral parts of a child's life. Presenting them in tandem will bring us closer to "heightened speech." (viii) The "heightened speech" she refers to derives from a description of music by American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein.

-Approach music as a language. In the book Music Therapy in Special Education by Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins (Magnamusic-Baton, 1983), the authors describe music as a language:

"Music is a language, and for children it can be a stimulating language, a consoling language. It can encourage, hearten, delight, and speak to the inmost part of the child. It can ask stimulating questions and give satisfying answers. It can activate and then support the activity it has evoked. The right music, perceptively used, can lift the (child) out of the confines of his pathology and place him on a plane of experience and response where (there is considerable freedom from) intellectual or emotional dysfunction." (pp. 238-239)

-Have students interview a musician within the school or community. Professional musicians are eager to be a part of music education rhetoric, especially if approached by a child.

-Have students interview their music teacher. Music teachers are musicians too!

-Sing—(singing isn't just for music class). If you're uncomfortable with singing, invite someone in who isn't. Many

students are willing to sing for others if asked. Treat it as a normal attempt at a normal activity (i.e., Do we snicker and get embarrassed when someone runs across the room? Neither should we when someone sings).

-If a student plays an instrument, invite them to play for your gifted class. As my experiences have shown me, even beginners are eager to share what they've learned on their instruments.

-Have students decide what songs/music they would use if a movie were derived from a favorite book or piece of literature. Evaluating and selecting music appropriate for a theme or occasion teaches students to consider it as meaningful and more than just a background effect.

-Have the students talk about their favorite songs and musicians and why they are their favorites. You'll find that many students choose to like a certain musician simply because their friends do (and this is a normal part of growing up). Encouraging them to find their own musical tastes is an important part of building self-esteem and independence.

-Play music when students enter the class to set the mood for the day. Use it strategically in your lessons.

-You may wish to consult the following books arranged in order starting with the most recent publication dates:

Supporting Musical Development in the Early Years

(2002) by Linda Pound and Chris Harrison. Open University Press.

Good Music, Brighter Children: Simple and Practical Ideas to Help Transform Your Child's Life Through the Power of Music (2002) by Sharlene Habermeyer. Prima Publishing.

Prelude to Music Education (2002) by Joanne H. Erwin, et al. Prentice Hall.

The I Can't Sing Book: For Grownups Who Can't Carry a Tune in Paper. . .but Want to Do Music with Young Children (1998) by Jackie Silberg. Gryphon House.

Raising Musical Kids: Great Ideas to Help Your Child Develop a Love for Music (1995) by Patrick Kavanaugh. Vine Books.

Artstarts: Drama, Music, Movement, Puppetry, and Storytelling Activities (1994) by Martha Brady and Patsy T. Gleason. Teacher Ideas Press.

Music: A Way of Life for the Young Child (4th Edition) (1991) by Kathleen M. Bayless and Marjorie E. Ramsey. Merrill Publishing Company.

Integrating Music Into the Classroom (1985) by William M. Anderson. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Music In Our Lives: The Early Years (1979) by Dorothy T. McDonald. National Association For Education.

Don't forget that your music teacher is an excellent resource for helping you to build your gifted education music lessons, or using music in your gifted education lessons. Best wishes! Your music teachers will appreciate your efforts.

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The Gifted Child Left Behind

By Mark M. Wood

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The new national emphasis on proficient student achievement has been detrimental to gifted education across the nation. Gifted students have had a remarkable decrease in achievement gains since the law was implemented. Curriculum resources have been shifted away from the high achieving students in order to improve non-proficient performance. The focus on standardized testing has narrowed the scope of instruction in order to master cognitive skills and has reduced creative thinking. There has been a remarkable decrease in student motivation by requiring all students to be proficient in one set of standards without regard to individualized learning. Overall, the trend is bleak, even for the most advanced schools with exceptional programs.

The "No Child Left Behind" Act focuses on proficiency rather than academic growth (Tomlinson, 2002). Studies have shown that gifted children have had lower achievement gains than low achieving students. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an Illinois statewide test showed that the average score increase in the bottom ten percentile of students was 1.7%. The average increase in the top ten percentile of students was only 0.3% (Golden, 2003). For example, in Fairview Elementary School in North Carolina, the lowest group to demonstrate achievement gains was the gifted group. There was no incentive or penalty for top student performance, as long as all students were proficient. Generally, school personnel do not pay attention to gifted students because they are not held accountable for their progress.

Funding resources have been reduced in many gifted programs. For example, California has reduced gifted funding 18% statewide. These funds have been reallocated to help students who are below the proficiency level. Regular classroom gifted programming is a common cost cutting practice. Regular classroom enrichment saves funding by requiring the classroom teacher to provide the enrichment. According to Delcourt, Loyd, Cornel and Goldberg (1994), there is a significant difference in achievement between pullout gifted programs and integrated programs. Although it is essential to correlate the regular classroom curriculum with the gifted program, total inclusion is not sufficient to meet a gifted child's needs. These major funding cuts almost always lower gifted achievement.

Little or no emphasis is given to staffing gifted programs. Monetary awards have increased for schools with high proficient test scores. Gifted students who are already proficient do not significantly increase a school-wide achievement profile. Therefore, less emphasis is given to the gifted, and staffing funds are allocated to programs that can significantly affect scores. Many learning support classes have additional paraprofessional assistants to implement individualized instruction. Because of the lack of much needed funds, gifted classes have higher teacher-student ratios and little if any paraprofessional support. Yet gifted programming is one of the few subject areas where the teachers need to create as well as teach an individualized curriculum without textbook support. School district administrators consider the time needed to work on advanced individualized correlated curriculum “expendable” and it is often an item cut in a budget crisis.

Standardized tests used as a sole measure of achievement have caused a decrease in a balanced curricular program. The tests have driven instructional practices to focus on test mastery and cognitive development and thus to ignore the affective areas of education found in the arts. According to Howard Gardner (1993), there are at least seven types of intelligence. Only two intelligences, Linguistic and Logical-Mathematical are measured by standardized tests. Yet these two intelligences make up more than 90% of the modern educational curriculum today. A generic score tells nothing about the merits of a teacher’s instruction or a teacher’s goals and tells nothing about how high a child can soar, merely whether he or she can get off the ground (Delisle 1997). Grade level achievement tests fail to reveal growth for students who are already performing at the 97-99th percentile and above. (Brand, Lange, & Winebrenner 2003) Many gifted programs stress spatial, musical, and interpersonal goals and develop an individualized learning curriculum that is often overlooked in other areas of the curriculum. Techniques of creative problem solving and hands-on project development are decreased in order to make time for test practice. The remedial testing emphasis has decreased the resources for gifted identification.

Motivation has decreased among students and teachers because of a “one size fits all” approach to learning. Able students have to spend hours taking tests to prove they already know the material they have learned. Classroom teachers have eliminated many motivational projects because time did not allow for “extra” activities. Creative components of the curriculum are often replaced with test preparation activities. Students report that they do not have to work as hard on regular assignments because grades are not affected by effort. They are already proficient or advanced in a subject area and individual assignments do not affect their achievement reports. Many pressured educators are overworked by the extra emphasis on assessments and do not feel appreciated by school systems that do not adequately measure learning.

The answer to this dilemma is simple: (1) **Hold educators accountable** for the true achievement of all students by focusing on intellectual growth, not proficiency; (2) **Provide funding for hands-on creative problem solving projects** that demonstrate growth in all areas of intelligence and eliminate wasted funds used for standardized testing; and (3) **Develop a balanced curriculum that is individualized and fair** to all students and let the teachers teach. They are the professionals and best know how to motivate and meet the needs of their students. Gifted students are the future leaders of society. They deserve the best educational resources that money can buy.

Is your gifted program at risk? I developed a survey (pp. 11-12) that provides an analysis of the major signs of a gifted programming crisis. Take this informational survey below and send the results to mwood199@comcast.net. The results will be tabulated and reported.

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Summary Table: The Gifted Child Left Behind Rating Scale

| <u>Points</u> | <u>Good Ratings</u> | <u>Points</u> | <u>Crisis Ratings</u> |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0-4 | A highly respected and supported model program with a solid foundation. Lucky you! | 15-19 | A program with some signs of crisis. All administrative action should be monitored closely. |
| 5-9 | A secure solid program with support and no concerns. | 20-24 | An at-risk program with major signs of crisis. Major changes are needed immediately. |
| 10-14 | An average program with support and no serious concerns. | 25 + | A program with severe signs of crisis and possible elimination. Staff development is needed desperately. |

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Isaac Asimov (1920-92): Soul Mate of the Gifted

By Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“That robot gives me the willies anyway – too damned inquisitive!” p. 60, **I, Robot** by Isaac Asimov (originally published in 1950, reissued in 1991, Bantam).

“How did you learn all this, Isaac?” “From you, Pappa,” I said. “From me? I don’t know any of this.” “You didn’t have to, Pappa,” I said. “You valued learning and you taught me to value it. Once I learned to value it, the rest came without trouble.” p. 28, **It’s Been a Good Life** by Isaac Asimov (2002, Prometheus Books).

This summer, one of the biggest film successes was **I, Robot**. It starred and was produced by Will Smith, a highly gifted actor and individual who took off from work for a year to study the Greek philosophers. I was stimulated to re-read Asimov’s **I, Robot** and his memoir, **It’s Been a Good Life**, edited in a single volume by his wife, Janet Jeppson Asimov.

Asimov’s memoir is a splendid book for all gifted students to read. They will discover that a high psychometric test level alone does not create giftedness. Rather it is this level combined with Sensibility that is the engine for giftedness. Asimov was a generalist but he was not merely a polymath. His interests and knowledge were always contextual and interrelated. As he mentions when he read Alexander Dumas’s **The Three Musketeers** (as a teenager), he realized that in order to understand this book he had to learn more about French culture and history. Asimov was “the greatest explainer of the age” (Carl Sagan, **Webster’s Dictionary of American Writers**, 2004, Barnes & Noble). He wrote hundreds of books explaining (in layman terms) scientific concepts in fields such as chemistry, physics, astronomy and biology. These books were written on all levels from elementary school through college.

Asimov had a Ph.D. in chemistry from Columbia University and taught at Boston University where he was a noted teacher and lecturer. His interests included annotations of major works of the human imagination -- among them Byron’s **Don Juan**, Shakespeare, and Swift’s **Gulliver’s Travels**. He also wrote a thorough annotation of the Bible. These annotations were not only based upon his brilliant academic research but were written in a lively literary style. They displayed his research competence, contextual knowledge and literary skills.

It is amazing how an individual with Asimov’s intellectual ability was so thoroughly grounded in popular culture, e.g., one of his favorite writers was the British woman mystery writer, Agatha Christie. He also wrote books on jokes and limericks. His last book written when he was very ill was, **Asimov Laughs Again** (1992).

Asimov was world famous for his science fiction writing, and most gifted students like these types of stories. His two famous sagas were the **Robot** and **Foundation** series. The unique aspect that he brought to science fiction was that the genre should be idea driven and not mere fantasy. It is noteworthy that although **I, Robot** was written over 50 years ago, a contemporary African-American actor-producer, Will Smith, discovered the importance of the book for today’s society and discerned how it would appeal to a mass audience.

Asimov’s death was tragic. In a manner similar to Arthur Ashe, he suffered from AIDS because of infected blood transfusions received during heart bypass surgery. The theme of his memoir is that he felt his life had been a good one. In the Prologue, Janet Jeppson Asimov says, “Human life is, or should be, an adventure in self-discovery, learning what talents one has and using them successfully.” (p. 7) Knowledge, reading, writing and thinking are ingredients of the good life. They are also the elements of the sensibility of all gifted individuals. For Isaac Asimov, giftedness was a mandate for the advancement of humankind.