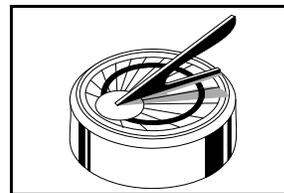


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At the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, it is important to examine different options for gifted education in order to provide the best possible programs. Clearly most school districts cannot or will not provide challenging and comprehensive gifted programs, usually because of budget constraints and/or restrictions related to No Child Left Behind and other federal mandates. Based on my recent review of hundreds of school district web sites, it is impossible to tell whether about two-thirds have any special programs for advanced students. Concerned educators and parents should look at the total picture of gifted children's academic needs involving both in- and out-of-school opportunities. Some examples are summer enrichment programs, special classes sponsored by local and state gifted organizations, mentoring by experts, apprenticeships, concerts, plays, art exhibits, museum displays, historical sites, and continuing enrichment experiences in the home. In many instances, what parents do in their homes to provide stimulating educational experiences might be more important than what occurs in public school programs. Maybe this is why many parents are homeschooling their gifted children rather than allowing them to remain in academically restrictive classrooms.

Regardless of where or how a gifted child receives a challenging education, it is still necessary to make certain that fundamental subjects are being taught such as: ● Humanities education which stresses an interdisciplinary approach to teaching history-politics, literature, poetry, biography, principles of grammar and clear essay writing, philosophy and foreign languages. ● Performing and visual arts programs offering art history courses and opportunities to learn a musical instrument, paint, act, and dance. ● Science, mathematics and technology education stressing major principles, concepts and accomplishments of twentieth and twenty-first century mathematicians, physicists,

chemists, biologists, geologists and engineers. Such a challenging gifted education curriculum might seem archaic and mundane in today's "wired" world. But it has the power to help gifted students to think more clearly, understand their roots, be more critical of what they read and listen to, and become more independent and thoughtful citizens.

Professors Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis have significantly influenced the gifted field through their Enrichment Triad and Schoolwide Enrichment models. In addition, they have provided a strong foundation for gifted education in the United States through The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, and their training of undergraduate and graduate students. I urge all educators and parents to closely study their work. Renzulli and Reis are currently designing the Renzulli Learning System, a Web based resource for providing a systematic and challenging education which is designed for public schools and the home. Their article and the accompanying diagram provide an overview of this system. Dr. Searetha Smith-Collins is the author of **The Road to Wisdom, Plain and Simple: Shaping Intelligence – Black Style** (2005). She is currently an educational consultant with over 35 years of experience as a chief academic officer, executive director, principal, and teacher in school districts in Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Washington State. Her article on gifted African American students reflects her advocacy for students who show unique gifted and talented potential, as well as providing relevant curriculum and programs for all students. The excellent article by Eugene and Diana Avergon discusses some important features of a visual arts activity for the gifted. Dr. Michael Walters talks about Stephen King's book, **On Writing** (2000), which contains many good ideas for becoming an effective writer.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher

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A Technology Based Resource for Challenging Gifted and Talented Students

**Joseph S. Renzulli
Sally M. Reis
The University of Connecticut**

“Differentiation” is the contemporary buzzword in curriculum and instruction, but the reality is that most teachers simply do not have the time necessary to do it well, especially when it comes to finding advanced level resources for gifted students. Remarkable advances in instructional communication technology (ICT) have now made it possible to provide high levels of enrichment services to students who have access to a computer and the internet. The Renzulli Learning System (RLS) is an internet based enrichment program that is built on a high-end learning theory that focuses on the development of creative productivity through the *application* of knowledge rather than the mere acquisition and storage of knowledge. The system, which is sponsored by the University of Connecticut Research and Development Corporation, is based on more than 30 years of research dealing with student strength assessment and advanced level learning guided by the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977).

The Renzulli Learning System goes beyond the popular “Worksheets-on-line” or courses on-line that, by and large, have been early applications of ICT in most school situations. These early applications have been based on the same pedagogy that is regularly practiced in most traditional teaching situations, thereby minimizing the role of the Internet to a gigantic encyclopedia rather than a source of information for first-hand investigative and creative endeavors.

The Renzulli Learning System is a comprehensive program that begins by providing a computer-generated profile of each student’s academic strengths, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. A search engine then *matches* internet resources to the student’s profile from fourteen carefully screened data-bases that are categorized by subject area, grade level, state curricular standards, and degree of complexity. A management system called the Wizard Project Maker guides students in the *application* of knowledge to teacher or student selected assignments, independent research studies, or creative projects that individuals or small groups would like to pursue. Students and teachers can evaluate the quality of students’ products using a rubric called The Student Product Assessment Form. Students can rate each site visited, conduct a self-assessment of what they have gained from the site, and place resources in their own Total Talent Portfolio for future use. RLS also includes a curriculum acceleration management system for high achieving students based on the many years of research and widespread use of a curricular modification process called Curriculum Compacting. Students and teachers can use the RLS anytime and anywhere where there is Internet access.

Teacher functions allow downloading of hundreds of reproducible creativity and critical thinking activities as well as numerous off-line resources for lesson planning and curricular integration. Management functions allow teachers to group students by interests and learning styles. The management tools also allow teachers to place teacher-selected resources in individual, whole class, or selected students’ portfolios for classroom or special project use. Teachers can oversee all students’ activity including where and when students have been on-line using the RLS, projects or assignments underway or completed, and areas where curriculum has been compacted. The system can be used at home and during summer, and parents can view their own son or daughter’s work on the system. The principal or designated project manager can also examine all activity taking place in a given building or program. This feature allows for accountability, system assessment, and guidance in staff development and program planning needs.

Persons interested in examining the Renzulli Learning System can tour the website at www.renzullilearning.com and further descriptive information can be obtained at info@renzullilearning.com. The RLS is being widely used by school systems throughout the U. S. and in other countries. A home-school and individual use version will be available in 2008.

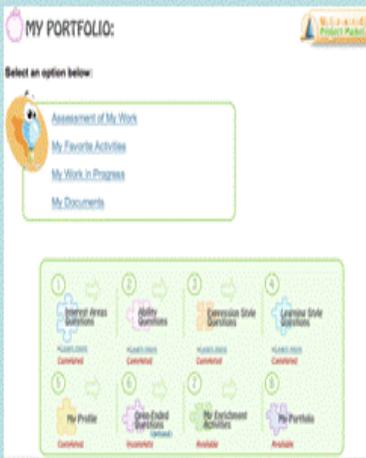
Renzulli, J. S. (1977). *The Enrichment Triad Model: A guide for developing defensible programs for the gifted and talented*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.

Renzulli Learning

System Overview At-A-Glance



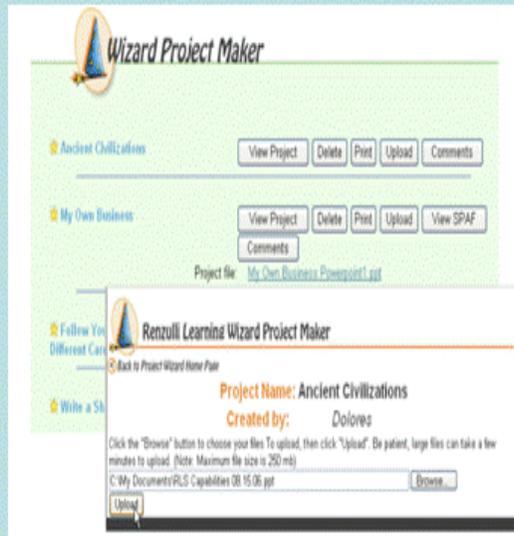
Individualized Strength Assessment



Total Talent Portfolio



Resource Matching With Search Engine And Data Bases



Application of Resources to Class Work And Projects

- Reproducible Activities
- Teacher Monitoring Tools
- Lesson Plans & Learning Maps
- Grouping By Interest Areas, etc.
- Teacher Favorites Portfolio
- Curricular Related "Push -Ins"
- Built-In Assessment Tools
- Parent Review Access
- 24/7/365 Usage
- Staff Development Tutorials
- Built In Accountability and Staff Development for Teachers

The Unserved, Under-Served, and Inappropriately Served: Educating Gifted and Talented Minority Students

Searetha Smith-Collins, Ed.D. Washington, D.C.

“ . . .All students, not just a select group, can learn and learn well. Talent is not something to be found in the few; it is to be developed in the many.” Lorin W. Anderson (2007) commenting on Benjamin S. Bloom’s work.

In the Summer 2007 issue of *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*, Donna Y. Ford discussed the importance of cultural diversity training for educators as one key to opening gifted education doors. Ford (2007) expressed the conviction that teachers are ill prepared to be culturally competent; thus they are not likely to be effective in the recruitment and retention of culturally diverse students in gifted education. In addition, she said that Sternberg (2007) “. . .called for educators to be more proactive in understanding and making identification and placement decisions, placing culture at the forefront of our thinking and decisions.” Sternberg (2007) further shared the understanding of how “. . .culture does indeed affect what is valued as gifted and/or intelligence, how gifts and talents manifest themselves differently across cultures, and how our assessments and the referral process ought to be culturally sensitive.” Understanding the cultural context and experiences that children bring to the classroom holds the key to sharpening one’s vision for seeing capabilities and potentialities of students. Understanding the relationships of students to their cultural and historical perspectives, their socialization processes and family, community traditions, and society can shed a spotlight on how to nurture and develop intelligence and gifts of students who are under-served, under-represented, waiting to be discovered as a gifted leader, and/or academically, intellectually, artistically, creatively, or kinesthetically gifted.

There is an old saying that I remember hearing, “No one sends a child on a difficult errand and gets angry if she/he does not perform well” (Ashanti). These profound words of wisdom bring to mind one of the educational challenges of the last decades: How can we effectively identify, develop, serve, and educate gifted and talented students of color, students of poverty, and those with ability and language differences? As a teacher, principal, and academic leader in several school districts, those same words of wisdom spurred me to understand that children who come from diverse backgrounds must be nurtured, developed, and aided in their ability to gain confidence and demonstrate the thinking, performance, and behaviors expected of them in formal schooling. Very often, there is dissonance between cultural ways of knowing and what is expected in schools. In other words, many students may show gifts and talents in their home or natural environments, yet at the same time, they can be labeled as under-achieving and under-performing in the public school setting. Therefore, they may or may not show potential for high ability “school” thinking, general knowledge, or performance. Thus, the problem of

identifying and educating gifted and talented diverse learners becomes the challenge that persists today.

Currently, schools are not only finding it difficult to serve gifted and talented students appropriately, but they also are finding it difficult to know how to develop academic proficiency of different groups of students including special education, English as a Second Language learners, and those who come from various racial, ethnic, and/or lower socio-economic backgrounds. A great deal of time and effort has been spent developing curriculum standards of learning for all, aligning curriculum and assessments, focusing on inequities, and trying to increase academic rigor and ways to intervene in learning so that no child is left behind peers. Much of this activity has been at the expense of responding to the needs of students who are proficient and beyond, and for those who sit in classrooms waiting for others to catch up. These are students who demonstrate proficiency and advanced abilities on screening, standardized high stakes tests and other measures. These are students who have learning needs that require above and beyond the norm of what is presented in most public school classrooms. They are among the unserved, the under-served, and the inappropriately served gifted and talented students who exist in many of our public schools throughout the nation. These are the learners who are capable of helping America meet the global competitive edge by the very nature of their natural and developed intellectual, talented, and/or creative abilities.

The Challenge

For the last couple of decades, efforts have been dedicated to closing persistent gaps in opportunity, achievement, attainment, and progress. We know that we are working against inequalities across classrooms and schools in such areas as: (1) school readiness and preparedness; (2) curriculum and course offerings; (3) teacher quality; (4) family income and access to resources; (5) teacher quality; (6) the degree of quality in school experiences based on poverty level of student populations; and (7) issues related to race, ethnicity, language and gender. We know that these and other inequities affect who has opportunities to participate, prosper, and engage in what is considered the “good life” and the American Experience. Schools that serve academically under-performing students have the challenge of knowing how to marry basic knowledge with creativity, rigor, and in-depth, high-level content and knowledge.

Capturing the goal of adequately and competitively preparing students to master the same high-level curriculum that is offered in high performing districts, schools, and countries continues to elude most educators. Teachers and students struggle with placement in advanced classes, and exposure to high-level content that is often out of the reach of many students. Gaps in skills, prerequisite experiences, development and in-depth knowledge often interfere with acceleration and progress. The problem does not lie in students not being capable – it is instead that many have not had sequential, powerful in- and out-of-school learning and teaching experiences overtime that provide the academic preparation needed in high-level, rigorous classes and programs. As indicated earlier in the Ashanti saying, “No one sends a child on a difficult errand and gets angry if she/he does not perform well.” If we as educators and families want to see under-served, and under-represented students perform well on evaluation and identification measures, and thrive in gifted and talented program placements, we must adequately prepare them socially, emotionally, academically, and spiritually in the expected skills needed to succeed in various education environments.

First, it should be acknowledged that there are ranges of abilities in every classroom, and it is necessary to examine ways to meet the developmental needs of all learners. Although some agree that the ranges of abilities exist, they deny that students with high abilities need to have special program placements. In fact, proponents of heterogeneous grouping often adhere to the idea that all students should have access to the general classroom experience with a mixture of all levels of learners. In theory, this idea has merit when one thinks about the real world and how people function in heterogeneous environments. However, presently there is a large gap between common practice and vision, especially for those who are most capable of functioning or moving forward to perform at higher levels. One must take a closer look at students who require intervention and acceleration, those who demonstrate preparedness. We must analyze the range of students who may be on the cusp of high achievement, and with support could thrive and survive in more challenging programs – those who have the potential to be identified in the gifted/talented realm.

Also, it should be recognized that there are students who are capable far beyond most, and who deserve the appropriate concern, learning and teaching environment that can facilitate their needs for exceedingly high-level thinking, content, and performance. Although intentions were rightfully to provide academic proficiency of standards for all learners, perhaps in our haste to respond to federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), we may have overlooked some important steps. As a result, we may be contributing to increased inequities in the education of our most potentially high performing and most able students. There is a realization that currently most teachers practice a one-size fits all curriculum and instructional classroom program, or there is the tendency to spend the bulk of the

classroom time on behavior management and low-level skills acquisition for students with special needs.

Second, we cannot just thrust students in an environment of high rigor and challenge, if we have not provided the broad base of foundational knowledge and skills necessary to build and support increased rigor and participation in advanced learning situations. In the effort to expand and broaden the range, we must increase and accumulate supports needed to ensure that knowledge and foundational skills are in place. We must determine and provide what is needed in- and out-of-school for all students to succeed and the implications for those needs. We must determine what is necessary to prepare students for advanced courses and learning, and decide what assistance is needed for teachers, students, and families. For curriculum and instruction, we must investigate what is needed from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 to develop and prepare students for increased rigor and challenge, what modifications and resources are needed in the curriculum and programs, and how we prepare teachers and students to do this high level work across the grades and across school levels.

Third, we must guide or build on the work of parents and guardians, and be especially helpful to those who may not have the common knowledge or educational experiences to know how to help their children. We should help those parents who do not know or understand school information and processes concerning how to develop and support under-served students. Most problematic, we must close the gap between have and have-not experiences in society and schooling to ensure that regardless of family and address, children have the opportunity to be developed beginning at birth and throughout childhood. We should ask ourselves: How do we create a rigorous education to ensure that students have the same kinds of access and success in the various programs and experiences offered in high quality, challenging, caring, competitive schools?

These tasks are especially taxing because not all students start out of the gate with the same advantages. Pre-school and kindergarten are indeed where the achievement gap begins. We know that in some instances, schools located in the most challenging neighborhoods are helping students to “catch-up” with peers. However, for the most part, it has been documented that most students become further and further behind as they progress through under-performing schools, often resulting in students’ decisions to drop-out, tune-out, and/or act-out. Today we have the most lucrative opportunities of our times. Technology, information, and knowledge sources are infused in every aspect of life. Most people are only limited by their own preparedness and capabilities, and by their effort, perseverance, imagination, and creativity. By developing the best-of-the-best, the brightest-of-the-bright, the most dedicated-of-the-dedicated, the most willing-of-the-willing, and the diamonds in the rough – those with potential can begin to explore and develop the comprehensive academic and developmental planning required to meet the needs of all gifted and talented learners, as well as

others.

Wisdom and Revelations: Accumulated Knowledge and Enlightenment

There is an old African proverb that says, “The environment is the beginning of success” (Swahili). These words of wisdom, combined with the Ashanti saying, “No one sends a child on a difficult errand and gets angry if she/he does not perform well,” provide a rear-view mirror insight into some of the dynamics for helping students-of-color and others to be better prepared to achieve at higher levels throughout their schooling experience. What happened to the wisdom of the past that guided behavior, thinking and actions throughout life? What does the future hold for the current and next generations of children, especially if educational gaps in opportunities, progress, and attainment are allowed to widen and continue? What happened to the rich heritage that promoted excellence, achievement, and confidence, and how can recovery of certain experiences contribute to making children’s lives better? Lorin W. Anderson (2007) reminds us of the implications of Benjamin S. Bloom’s theory by stating “. . . that the initial characteristics (or gifts) of the individuals would not by themselves enable extraordinary levels of accomplishment unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturing, and training.”

Some people have memories of hearing the old saying, “Education works for those who work for an education.” Such words of wisdom have great significance for linking the past to demonstrate, nourish, and foster developed intelligence and genius. Perhaps one of the causes of today’s dilemma with academic and intellectual under-development and performance has something to do with the portrayal and expectations of what is published in the media. As one reads or listens to the many reports on the ‘academic achievement gap’ and the underachievement of different groups of students, it sometimes appears that the concerns might be a self-fulfilling prophecy – whereby, when people are inundated with negative feedback, they often under-perform and believe that they cannot do better. Some of the reasons and causes for current dilemmas in education are related to conditions in society; yet other dynamics are related to cultural, social, economic, political, and racial conditions that affect males, females, children and families. Often these conditions are more pronounced for people-of-color and those in the lower socioeconomic levels. In the end, the question must be asked: Who is ultimately accountable and responsible for a change in these conditions? Unfortunately, many have come to believe and expect that children of poverty and African American children, in general, cannot achieve at high levels, and this attitude is played out in classrooms and schools across the nation.

Sometimes, we see an occasional movie, or read and hear about students of color, or those who come from low socio-economic environments who demonstrate “extraordinary” high performance and achievement in school. This theme is also

played out in theatrics about high achieving and isolated schools influenced by “miraculous” educators who overcome challenges and responsibly educate under-served and inappropriately served students. Some of these educational heroes “miraculously” produce high performance levels, and to their surprise, with structure, dedication, care, and appropriate teaching, many students demonstrate outcomes that propel them into categories of gifted, talented, and ready for college. This depiction of “miraculously” educating children from low-income families and African Americans, in particular, is not consistent with the historical record of educational and academic accomplishments made against all odds. Most Americans, prior to the 1990s have strong recollections of successful, educated, highly-gifted people who evolved from impoverished backgrounds and inferior educational conditions and schools – with hard work, competent teachers, persistence, dedication, will, and the watchful eye of educators and families. During those times, students rose to the occasion and served as some of our nation’s and the world’s most influential leaders and people.

Another old African saying comes to mind, “You make a new arrow by comparing it to the old” (Twi). Everyone has cultural experiences – many intertwined with American culture that provide the underpinnings for child and adult development, and success in life. For example, in African American culture in the past, youth from all income levels achieved in significant numbers. Parents expected them to achieve. Grandparents expected them to achieve. Teachers and principals saw to it that they achieved, and life and cultural experiences supported their efforts to achieve. Families had stories and language from oral traditions that children heard from the beginning and that made them believe they would and could achieve. We have a body of research and data which seem to say that these very significant support systems that propelled African American children and others in the past are missing today. How did significant numbers of children in the past generally demonstrate intellectualism and a well-prepared mind? Many current day students and young adults are examples of students of excellence; however, over the past few decades, far more American, and many more African American children in particular, are not able to demonstrate minimum competencies in reading, language, and writing, geography, mathematics, science, or technology. In addition, many high school graduates do not have practical knowledge and skills related to academic, vocational and technical fields, or preparation for careers, adult roles and life.

Creating Conditions for Thinking and Intelligence to Flourish

In the past in American society, parents, extended family, educators, and community members generally took on the responsibility of fortifying children with common sense, nourishment, love, care, support, drive, and commitment to see to it that they “got some learning and book sense.” Schools, churches, family, and community had an impact on the academic

performance, behavior, and motivation of children. This is especially significant for low-income and African American children who are in the category of under-represented gifted students. It was difficult to “get by” in many of those past schools and communities that provided warmth, structure, and communal protection, all of which were necessary ingredients for young people to succeed. In general, the purpose of education and schooling was clear to everyone. It was necessary for teachers to be immersed in subject matter knowledge and understanding about their students and communities that surrounded them. Teachers did not have to be guided by mounds and mounds of standards and assessments that caused the majority of time to be spent on “teaching to a test.” As a matter of participating in those classes and being taught the curriculum at each grade level, most students had the ability to be successful in courses and on expected tests.

Everyone knew and expected that children would be taught the appropriate behavior and content in schools. Sometimes, this was accomplished with and without the help of family. Parents took responsibility for food, care, health, values, emotional and physical development, nurture, character, discipline and standards for home and school. Self-responsibility, independence, and appropriate behavior were expected and enforced by everyone. Educators took responsibility for instruction at each school level, extra-curricular activities, and the development, educational progress, and reporting of academic and social development to parents. Most students took responsibility for being accountable to their parents, guardians, extended caregivers, relatives, teachers and principals by attending school, studying, working hard, and showing determination to earn good grades and high school diplomas. Children were taught and expected to show respect for teachers, ministers, elders, and adults in general. Adults, extended family and care givers were expected to be responsible for the children in their care.

Students, who were academically advanced, as well as others, were expected to reach high standards. What is most interesting is that some of the most intelligent, gifted and multiply talented people in American history through the 1980s were products of those social and educational times. Often these people lived in poverty and had few advantages; however they had the will and determination to succeed. For those who were advantaged and could afford it, and many others who worked and/or were lucky enough to have the support of parents, friends, relatives, and community, there was no question that getting a good high school education and going to college were the next natural steps for developing knowledge and future success. Others who could not afford post-secondary education were prepared in high school for a job or vocation that provided a way of living and obtaining a productive life. Education was very purposeful, and socialization and schooling were interwoven with the development of the mind, heart, body, and spirit.

These were times when African Americans and others made

some of the most positive economic and educational gains in modern history. Contrasted with today, although there have been modest gains over the last two years, “. . . According to the most recent statistics, the nationwide college graduation rate for Black students stands at an appallingly low rate of 43 percent.” (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007). During the 1960s and 70s, as a result of the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans made significant economic and educational achievement and progress, as well as hard fought, significant, uncompromising advantages and opportunities. During the 1980s and 90s, a change occurred in direction from past traditions and practices in education, cultural values and traditions, family, and American life. Some might say, “We threw the baby out with the bath water.” Education became experimental rather than strategic. For the first time in history, the development of children was often left to the responsibility of others rather than of parents. Many middle-class families and educators and other professionals moved away from central communities for various reasons. Vast educational wastelands, dilapidated school structures, neglect, lack of focus and attention paid to students, and the quality of teachers became important needs in urban cities. School programs and practices often were based on hunches and trial and error in many public schools, especially in the inner cities. As a result, many of our most vulnerable, capable, under-served and under-represented children are trapped in under-performing schools. Others are enrolled in isolated private or advantaged schools without the proper confidence and support needed to excel to their highest capabilities.

Nurturance and support of young children and youth, and the health and well being of families are at the backbone of developing intelligent thinking and behavior. If we look at some of the past practices that supported the development of students who display high intellect and other gifts, we can find possible solutions to underachievement and performance concerns that exist today. Throughout the past, there was a natural desire to learn and excel, shaped by many forms of development and enrichment throughout childhood and adult life. All in all, the quest for education provided a means to an end – to increase economic well being and status in society. There were common vision, values, beliefs, work ethic, and continuous individual and collective efforts. Now, we find many who are void of common vision, beliefs, and continuous individual or collective accomplishment – including ensuring the strength, art and skill of educators who are the professionals charged with extending the reach of intellectual development and actions. Several African proverbs come to mind to make the point more clearly: “A child brought up where there is always dancing cannot fail to dance” (Nyanja); “The environment is the beginning of success” (Swahili); “A traveling baby tied on the back of her mother does not know that trekking is tiresome” (Igbo); “A person lays the bait before they pull out the big fish” (Mende); “Early knowledge is better than ‘had I known’ ”(Mamprussi); “Talkin’[ing] [a]’bout fire doesn’t boil the pot” (African American); “Tomorrow is pregnant, who knows what it will

deliver” (Tshi); “An appetite comes by tasting” (Ugandan).

Educating the Intellect

In his book, *Developing Talent in Young People* (1985), Benjamin S. Bloom addressed the following question: How is it that some people reach the highest level of elegance in a specific talent or endeavor, or the highest level of accomplishment in a specific field such as an accomplished scientist, artist, orator, dancer, singer, playwright, or a Nobel Peace prize winner, Olympic swimmer, concert pianist, chess player, an outstanding master teacher, distinguished technologist, or a golfer such as Tiger Woods? Theories and processes concerning learning, performance and mastery suggested by Benjamin Bloom (1985) provide some understanding about how to help people reach their highest capabilities under various conditions. Bloom (1985, pp. 507-549) implied that the importance of learning or mastery is the result of the quality of an individual’s *experiences*, *resources* and *time on task*. These factors are significant, especially as they relate to assistance, commitment, training, encouragement, practice and education that must begin in the formative years and beyond. This idea is evident in the wisdom of the African saying, “A child brought up where there is always dancing cannot fail to dance.”

The first essential factor that influences learning and high performance centers around individual *experiences*, which refers to the knowledge and understandings gained from the way one engages in everyday life or occurrences. Other experiential factors refer to active involvement or exposure that leads to knowledge, skill, and understanding. Family, individual, environmental or societal obstacles may prevent a child from attaining optimal intellectual, academic, social, or talent development, therefore restricting or masking gifted and talent potential or abilities. Students need extensive experiences that develop a repertoire of vocabulary words and meanings, concepts, and general knowledge and understandings. Also, youth must be exposed to various learning environments in- and out-of-school to stimulate the intellect. They must receive help to provide focus on purposeful, challenging work and activities that help navigate beyond normal limits. These notions have implications for gifted and talented students who attend schools where teachers do not provide the highest level of opportunity, knowledge, or learning conditions that lead to the appropriate continuum of development. There are implications for schools and classrooms where students have capabilities for performing at higher levels, but must idle their motor and wait for others to catch up and gain knowledge that they have already mastered. I am not advocating for segregated classes; however, I am advocating for making certain that students are adequately placed where they can be appropriately served in a challenging learning environment with teachers who have the sophistication, in-depth content knowledge, and skills to teach them effectively. This means that if we are going to advocate for current educational models for gifted and talented students, then teacher preparation and professional development must include

mandatory courses on how to effectively teach differentiated, relevant subjects by utilizing culturally responsive, appropriate curriculum, programs, and resources for advanced/gifted learners.

Critical experiences must be developed and reinforced in the home or wherever students spend out-of-school time. Families and communities must provide ways to shape and reinforce behavior, self-management, intelligence, and support for education, which are grounded and motivated by a culture of love, care, and concern from family, neighbors and community. Family and significant others must strive to help meet the challenges to acquire mastery of literacy in real-life circumstances and advancement in multiple settings. They must help students clearly view and practice strengths, weaknesses and gifts and talents that matter most for a successful existence. A rear view look at some of the past African American cultural and socialization patterns and experiences that propelled students to high level functioning are:

1. Parents, teachers and community members insisted that children learn demanding information and skills that they knew were needed for future success.
2. Mental, verbal, and reading skills were reinforced through choral readings of songs from hymnals in church schools and at religious and community events. Speeches, poetry and prose were memorized and recited, and helped develop confidence, memory, and public speaking skills.
3. Standards for mathematics and literacy were clear to teachers, parents and students. Teachers were taught how to competently teach students those standards.
4. Geography was reinforced by families spending time “going for a ride” and locating and naming waterways, landforms, cities, towns, landmarks, etc.
5. Children had structure that shaped behavior and choices in the home, at school, and in the community. There were many opportunities for physical activity through neighborhood or safe haven play areas.
6. Choir and band, art and academic clubs such as forensics, journalism, chess, athletics, and Junior Achievement were available as extra-curricular activities that held student interest and expanded the application of classroom experiences (Smith-Collins, 2005).

Bloom (1985) also alluded to another critical factor that inspires intelligence and mastery of learning, which is the notion that exposure to a broad range of *resources* facilitates a child’s development and increased skill attainment. *Resources* refers to access to things and opportunities that are considered first priority, such as outdoor activities, playgrounds, tennis courts, income, wholesome nutrition, healthy lifestyles, textbooks, digital tools, science laboratories, advanced placement courses, possessions, property, teaching materials, educational toys and games, committed adults, a home, good school facilities, and enrichment opportunities (e.g., music lessons and summer camp). Often under-served students live and go to school in

places where resources are limited. Often schools, teachers, or parents do not have the wherewithal to provide competitive learning environments or experiences that prepare students for academic rigor. Providing balanced access to developmentally appropriate resources helps to prepare capable students for identification and placement in gifted and talented programs. If students have rich experiences utilizing rich resources, and use them in conjunction with rich experiences that involve building on the skills they already possess, then they will be more prepared to perform at high levels in all settings. To the contrary, many disadvantaged students often spend an inordinate amount of time “hanging out,” endlessly shooting basketballs, viewing television, playing video games, and viewing or listening to BET and MTV music videos. What is missing is an early, prolonged, and rich exposure to academic experiences using rich resources that provide expansive vocabulary and literary skills, analytical thinking and background knowledge, information, and understandings that are expected in the classroom.

The third critical factor suggested by Bloom that affects learning and mastery is focused time or sustained practice. Time is viewed as a matter of how one arranges events for experiences or certain sustained tasks. In the infinite wisdom of an old African saying, we can find similar intelligence in the simple words, “Time is a tutor.” The quality of one’s experiences, access to rich resources, concentrated practice, and how one spends the volume of time account for a great deal of preparation and readiness for tasks. In order for under-served students to gain the necessary skills, confidence and demonstrate high level ability to master advanced content, concepts, and processes, we must all ask ourselves the following questions: How are we as individuals and as a society contributing to the lack of ability and achievement, drive, self-responsibility, attitudes, values, and discipline necessary to succeed at high levels? How do we condone practices that do not develop strong socialization practices and academic background preparation for our most academically able and gifted students? We must also ask ourselves whether we have provided the appropriate experiences, resources and focused time on task, and encouraged a joy for learning that prepares students for the difficult task of learning to one’s fullest ability? Do we as educators, families, and students regard education and learning as a serious mission? Remember the words of wisdom, “No one sends a child on a difficult errand and gets angry if she does not perform well” (Ashanti).

Conclusion

I realize that in this fast-paced, technological, global, changing society and world, we cannot backtrack, nor would we want to return to the past. By having a rear-view mirror perspective as a backdrop to developing current and future skills for under-represented students, as well as others, we can learn and apply lessons that are applicable to the present and unknown future of students. The American journey has left a strong legacy of

wisdom, much of which has and continues to apply to survival for now and many generations to come. We are avenues to helping students, families, and educators fill gaps and strive for the highest educational and goals. This is no easy task because the gaps in our collective and sometimes individual progress are large and persistent. Educational and life goals must become conscience-driven, purposeful, and accomplished. We must all revisit and take on the legacy of strengthening and recasting the present so that we can help our youth demonstrate their gifts and talents. We must help the current generation to create bridges that lead to discovery, and pathways that provide access to valuing intelligence and academic adventures as well as leadership, and creative and humanistic preparation. We must help students express themselves as gifted and talented individuals who will contribute positively to collective advancement, enjoyment, well-being, and survival for now and the remainder of the 21st century. These gifts and talents can come from the spectrum of students who make up today’s classrooms, but only if there is a realization that they exist and are allowed to flourish as a critical component of the education agenda.

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The Quality of Visual Arts Activity in a Gifted Learning Environment

Eugene Avergon Diana Avergon
Art by Choice Books Fletcher, North Carolina

What comes to mind when addressing the meaning of quality in a learning environment? Perhaps one thinks of excellence or a high standard. These certainly do describe quality, but in working in the visual arts, one can take this word “quality” adventurously further. Becoming fully engaged in each of those individual areas which make up the total activity can be put forward. How does this apply to a gifted student in a visual arts setting? A high level of involvement in each aspect of an art experience brings the gifted student closer to getting in touch with the whole. This full engagement can support the young artist in getting a feel for the essence of, the scope of a visual art activity and his/her role in it. An awareness develops for the quality of the whole experience.

This article will discuss a range of components that a gifted student will optimally go through in a visual arts activity. Several well known artists and their relevant experiences will be mentioned. Pertinent student anecdotes (ages ranging from 12-17) come from classes taught at Loyola Academy (Wilmette, Illinois) and at a public painting workshop, all led by Eugene Avergon.

Quality in an Arts Activity

To become fully engaged in an activity means that one needs to be abundantly occupied with, involved in, and essentially bonded with that activity. How might a student in a gifted learning environment experience this full engagement? Five areas that the young artist can experience are put forth. These components might occur sequentially or simultaneously. Each area is creative. Each contributes to the quality of the whole activity.

1. The Role of Research
2. Choosing Subject Matter, Media and Style
3. Creating
4. Reflecting upon What has Occurred up to Now
5. Getting Involved with Exhibiting and Audience Participation

The Role of Research

Finding out about or delving into a subject/area can be an exciting process, a bit like treasure hunting. Artists, their works and their styles can reveal fascinating finds for the gifted student. When a student has an affinity with a certain subject matter, he/she is more likely to seek out an artist who deals with that subject matter and what that artist has to say. This connection can encourage a young artist to choose a particular

vehicle for self expression. The feeling life of the student is paramount here. Lowenfeld speaks to this point:

“An illustration might be a student who is trying to express in paint certain resentment against an apathetic society, but it just does not seem to take form. How have others painted anger? Some paint with gory details like Goya, some with distorted symbols like Picasso, some with heavy and bold lines like Roualt, and some with only form and color. The student’s frame of reference is thus expanded and the history of art is put into a meaningful context.”¹

Research also has to do with looking at one’s environment – inner and outer. The young artist might discover that he/she is drawn to specific images/colors such as sunsets, eagles or variations of blue. He/she might find that one or more of these preferences could work well to express a point of view or feeling.

Mentors are sometimes discovered in the research process. This topic has been discussed in a previous article (2006): “. . . The study of a painting movement puts one in touch with its artists. An artist, even if many times removed, can serve as a mentor on the basis of intellectual parallelism. Intellectual parallelism can be described as one person working in a parallel way to another person, from recent or past history. Unlike copying, which is rote, it is the study of the form and content of another’s work through emulation of the mentor’s characteristic style, and finding one’s own style in the encounter. Mentors can provide a powerful incentive for carrying forward one’s own work.”²

Twentieth Century sculptor Isamu Noguchi studied with his mentor Brancusi in Paris. Along with being inspired to work in direct, abstract and elegant forms, Noguchi learned something else. Brancusi proved to be a powerful example of how to work in the moment. Noguchi was shown that creating is all about being aware of the artist’s potential being realized in the here and how.³

Alexander Calder did much research leading him to his works before he became an artist. The engineer in him would follow the thread of thought to the practical and the doable. He enjoyed working with the sphere and the circle. As an engineer, he knew how things moved, rested and balanced. This left him the freedom to design his mobiles and stabiles intuitively.⁴

Research can assist in pointing the way to subject matter, media and style. It can also illuminate other paths along the way.

Choosing Subject Matter, Media and Style

As young adults are seeking their own identity, subject matter necessarily needs to be personalized. It needs to come from them. Subject matter can be cast in broad headings to include those personal concerns such as feelings, interests and emotions, awareness of self in relationship to family, friends and others, school and academic life (related subjects), the natural world, design and tech related pursuits. Self motivation and meaningful expression can become core ideals in the selection of subject matter.

Media and style are choices that can be made along the way to fit with one's desired subject matter. Here the gifted student can build on and extend enthusiasm about mastering specific components of a domain. He/she might have an internal monologue: "The technical skill of Persian miniatures fascinates me. I am precise and have a proficiency for detailed work. I am drawn to geometric design. Painting in this style in acrylics or tempera might challenge or advance my skills."

Media is often determined by subject matter as well as by familiarity with material and technique and the desire to work with them. Intention to master a domain plays a key role. P, a gifted student, was well grounded in many fields, but his interest in art was most expressive. His fascination with Cubism led him to research the 20th Century Cubistic Parisian painters Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay-Terk. One of P's early works was a Cubistic transparent painting which was to be a reflection of himself in a window. He broke the reflection up and overlaid it onto an architectural image. He integrated one image with another in the same style. Why Cubism? P grasped the tenet of this style and the characteristics that generated a Cubistic image. This painting style was very suitable to his way of looking at things from many sides. P discovered a visual language that expressed multiple viewpoints and they resonated with him. He worked far into the style.

Identifying styles can become evident early on through the art images that one has encountered. Ellen Winner discusses style sensitivity regarding ten-year olds. "...style sensitivity reflects an ability to detect recurrent patterns or textures."⁵ In our example of Persian miniatures, a student might combine what was learned about these works with his/her predilection for painting, perhaps geometric shapes. The young artist's piece might show a precision in painting combined with small, jewel like, detailed areas. The subject matter could be that of geometric shapes.

Creating

A word now can be said about creating and favorable conditions that set it forth. Much has been written about environments in which creativity thrives. In a large part, it has to do with making a space whereby students can focus on the activity and be free of

judgment of work in progress. This sets a safe environment for creating.

Students need a safe creating environment where disturbance constraints and time constraints are lessened. Ebbs and flows of lively activity and humor interspersed with quiet times should be respected. The suspension of the judgment process during these sessions helps to promote the creative learning experience and nurtures creative expression.

The act of creating can be moved along when the student reaches for an understanding of specific media and when he/she can reference specific artists and works of art with similar intentions. The process, then, is often the motivator that keeps the artist interested in creating. Here a mentor can play a large part. Encouragement from the teacher in a non-judgmental setting affects the flow in a positive way. Naturally occurring reflectiveness often emerges, strengthening both the artist and the work.

Contemporary dancer and choreographer Twyla Tharp speaks to her greatest reward of creating – that she gets to do it. She mentions that she enjoys the process of creating dance much as a painter who likes the act of putting paint on canvas.⁶ She also makes a recommendation for placing a "spine" in the act of creating a piece. The "spine" is one's first strong idea. "...the toehold that gets you started. . .the statement which you make to yourself outlining your intentions for the work."⁷

How does creativity affect the artist? How does it affect the art activity? "It is probably best to think of creativity as a continual process for which the best preparation is creativity itself. In fact, there is real joy in discovery [research, subject matter, media, style, the act of creating, reflection, exhibiting] which not only is its own reward but provides the urge for continuing exploration and discovery."⁸

The various aspects that might affect creativity are seemingly holographic (each aspect containing the whole). Each component that affects creative flow appears to be creative in and of itself.

Reflecting upon What has Occurred up to Now

At the end of a class or work session, a discerning look at the work in progress can reveal insights into the path that it is taking. This sequencing will help keep the creative flow intact during work sessions. Julia Cameron speaks of the bogging down of creative flow if the critique portion comes during the creating time: "Instead of creating freely and allowing errors to reveal themselves later as insights, we often get mired in getting the details right. We correct our originality into a uniformity that lacks passion and spontaneity."⁹

A good look at the piece can lead the viewer into deciding on a course correction where the piece might be going astray. The

young artist might decide to “rework a color here,” or “emphasize a technique there.” The work of art can then flow in the direction that he/she feels the piece is going in. This can be done non-judgmentally and resonate with the process of discovery. Perhaps “. . .adding a black line around some of my images will enhance the dynamic quality that I envision for the piece.”

Once the young artist has determined that the piece is finished, a reflection time is often well received. One’s teacher and perhaps peers might act as a sounding board during the session. Here the student can look at the choices made and discuss the outcomes. Reflection validates the self in the work because it is an act of gentle observation without judgment. It can reveal the choices that one has made and it can show how the work of art responded to those choices. This session, then, ideally will be gentle, introspective, illuminating and perhaps humorous. The young artist should come away with more of a sense of self as opposed to feeling diminished by the experience.

Questions might be prompts to get a session started. Students might enjoy being involved in generating such questions as:

1. What subject matter did I choose?
2. Why did I choose to work in this style?
3. Who or what were my influences/mentors?
4. What does my subject/style reveal about me?
5. Why did I choose to work in this media? Did it work for me?
6. Do the colors bring out the mood that I had in mind for the piece?
7. What stands out in my piece when looking at it in terms of the principles of design – rhythm, balance, harmony, emphasis, subordination, contrast and unity?
8. Did the piece flow as I had envisioned, or did it take on a life of its own?
9. Does it seem finished?
10. Could I follow up this work with other variations?
11. Would I work this way again?

The gifted student can then be more aware of how his/her work might relate to that of peers or of other artists. An understanding of art education standards and outcomes can be broadened. The emphasis always remains as that of each student reflecting upon their work. Crammond emphasizes the importance of self evaluation: “. . .when students learn to evaluate their own products by their own criteria, they become less dependent upon external evaluations for determining the quality of their work. This is especially important when students are developing creative products. The inaccuracy of judging creative work, especially groundbreaking creative work, is evident when we examine the literature on the lives of creative individuals and see how many of them had their work judged poorly during their lifetimes by experts in the field.”¹⁰

M was a 17 year old student in a gifted classroom setting. As a personality she could be both emotive and reserved. In her visual

arts class, she chose a theme that used sculpture and new materials for making a personal statement. She wanted to show emotion and she had a high level of exuberance. Work started as a three-dimensional assemblage, using an old bottle form and plastic mesh that was tightly woven and came in different colors. She wrapped, crushed and arranged the forms to look like a frozen champagne bottle, exploding after the cork popped. This became her icon – the release of exuberance. She chose biographical emotion. M’s reflection upon her personal style motivated her to continue to develop large assemblage paintings, using this as a recurrent thematic “spine” underlying the work.

Getting Involved with Audience Participation

Young artists know that art has an arena and an audience. Many schools involve their students in regional or farther-ranging art exhibitions. Most of these competitions are juried. Crammond speaks of competitive programs as being challenges for gifted art students.¹¹ Getting involved in exhibits and becoming aware of audience participation also offers challenges and further insight into the whole. It deepens the investment in the piece because the work takes on new meaning – “not just for myself, but for others to view and appreciate.”

Abstract Expressionist painter Mark Rothko was especially interested in the ways in which his “color fields” engaged the viewer. When his contemporary Morris Graves viewed the color fields, they were experienced as an expansion of the breath, “. . . something to inhale. . .one breathed differently in front of them.”¹²

For the gifted student, becoming involved with the hanging of one’s piece in an exhibit catapults him/her into becoming a spokesperson for the piece in its new socially exposed context. One cares, one looks, one notices the greater surround. One makes visual associations of one’s painting next to another’s, or in relationship to the show as a whole. One hears broader feedback and sometimes gains new insights from the experience. In getting involved with audience participation, one might become an ambassador for one’s own piece, the exhibit and the space.

W participated in a modular mural painting workshop. Each painter was given a square foot stretched canvas on which to paint an interpretation on a theme – Traversing our Mountains. W’s idea was to paint an indigenous black snake in composition on a tree branch. He enthusiastically executed his painting in a naturalistic style. Upon completion, as the mural canvases were being collected and placed together to form the whole mural, W was very interested. At the unveiling of the mural at a local enterprise, W attended and brought friends. He explained the mural process to them. In weeks to follow W made regular visits to the mural site, bringing friends to view it. When the mural was temporarily moved to another location, W questioned where it was. He tracked when it would return to the original site. W

was invested in a social as well as an artistic way with his painting, and its context within the mural and its setting.

Conclusion

The quality of an art experience revolves around recognizing one's self as the creator throughout. Do I recall myself as an artist in the various stages of the activity? What have I found out about myself as an artist? Being fully engaged deals with the forms that one makes as well as an awareness of the self in the midst of the activity. This quality of experience is supportive both of the art and its maker. By extension, looking at total engagement and how it enhances the quality of a learning experience can be considered in other subject areas. These ideas can be productively applied to other areas of gifted students' curricula.

Notes

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Stephen King's Advice to Gifted Writers

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

"I would argue that the paragraph, not the sentence, is the basic unit of writing – the place where coherence begins and words stand a chance of becoming more than mere words. . . ." From **On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft** (2000, p. 134) by Stephen King.

The title of this book is significant because it is a blend of personal memoir, humor and meditations on the craft of being a creative writer. The emphasis on writing as a craft and not a mere array of intellectual skills is an important insight that King makes. He came from a single parent and working class background. His grandfather and uncle were skilled carpenters, and he learned very early that good "work" was the result of knowing one's craft. King constantly stresses that one cannot be an accomplished writer without being a dedicated reader. The beginning writer is also a "sorcerer's apprentice"; sorcerers are experienced writers who influence one's skills, style and themes. As a teenager, he was an apprentice in the field of popular culture (e.g., movies and television shows of the late 1950s and 1960s), and he was particularly impressed by the science fiction and horror films of the period such as Roger Corman's Edgar Allan Poe series ("Poepictures," p. 46) featuring Vincent Price. Controversial horror comics (Tales from the Crypt) also had a lasting impact upon him. It is important for gifted students to understand how creative writers construct their work from the artifacts of popular culture. As demonstrated in **On Writing**, King's reconstruction of these elements into art is based on his unique literary talent.

King's memoir is a record of transcendence over adversity. For example, when he was a toddler his father deserted him, his older brother and mother. In high school the advisor to the National Honor Society vetoed his placement in this program on the grounds that the society ". . . did not need 'boys of his type.'" (p. 54). In college his teachers were concerned with the offbeat and idiosyncratic subjects of his imagination. Before he became famous he worked at menial jobs and was a high school English teacher. When he became a best selling author, he suffered from alcohol and drug abuse until his friends and family confronted him about his addictions. He then went through personal rehabilitation which has had a lasting impact. In 1999, while walking on a Maine road, he was the victim of an accident by a pickup truck resulting in many serious injuries. He had numerous operations which caused intense levels of pain. **On Writing** was completed as he was recovering his physical and mental health.

One of King's major approaches to writing is that the plot should not be the major thrust of story telling. The plot develops from the narrative situation and the moral and mental responses of his characters. King describes this in the following way: "I lean more heavily

on intuition, and have been able to do that because my books tend to be based on situation rather than story.” (p. 164). This summer various Borders and Barnes and Noble bookstores have included **On Writing** as recommended reading for secondary level students. At the end of his book, King includes his personal reading list – one that should be of particular interest to gifted students. King clearly illustrates that they need to have outstanding mentors to help them become excellent creative writers.



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