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Hero of Giftedness



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A period of reflection and contemplation might help gifted students, their parents and teachers to prepare for the 2012-13 school year. Certain thinkers and philosophers can sustain this reflective attitude in a relaxing and yet informative manner. The first individual that gifted secondary students should read is the great French nobleman and essayist, Michel de Montaigne (1533-92). He was a remarkable individual who decided to write short works on various topics including the power of the imagination, on the education of children, on friendship, and on books. At 38 years, he isolated himself from family and friends by working in his Tower of the Château. His essays are a delightful combination of philosophical contemplation, anecdotes, discussions of daily life, and quotations. As the originator of the essay format, he was a master at engaging the reader in seeking answers to metaphysical and practical questions. He expressed the importance of studying philosophy as follows:

“The mind that harbours philosophy should, by its soundness, make the body sound also. It should make its tranquility and joy shine forth; it should mould the outward bearing to its shape, and arm it therefore with a gracious pride, with an active and sprightly bearing, with a happy and gracious countenance. The most manifest sign of wisdom is a constant happiness; its state is like that of things above the moon: always serene. . . .” (Montaigne, *On the Education of Children*, 1580). He also believed that the goal of education is to “seek virtue and embrace wisdom” rather than just becoming a learned person. “We ought to find out not who understands *most* but who understands *best*. We work merely to fill the memory, leaving the understanding and the sense of right and wrong empty.” Two excellent books that discuss his life and times are: *The Consolations of Philosophy* (2000) by Alain de Botton and *How to Live: Or A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (2011) by Sarah Bakewell.

The authors and their articles in this issue are:

● Stephen Schroeder-Davis writes about some factors that impede the development of intellectual students in the public schools (Part 1). Stephen is a Curriculum Coordinator for the Elk River Public Schools in Minnesota and also an adjunct professor of education for the University of Saint Mary's Minneapolis campus. He writes, presents, and consults on issues relating to gifted education, with a focus on affective issues, advocacy, and anti-intellectualism, a topic that has intrigued him for most of his adult life.

● Searetha Smith-Collins' article is on applying the Response to Intervention (RtI) Model to educating gifted students. She is owner of SEA-S Consultants in Washington, DC, specializing in education strategies for K-12 education, professional organizations, and the business industry. She has experience as a teacher, principal, reading specialist, curriculum director, and chief academic officer. Searetha is a popular speaker, presenter, and author of many journal articles and reports, including her newly released book, *An Agenda for Equity: Responding to the Needs of Diverse Learners* (2012), and *The Road to Wisdom, Plain and Simple: Shaping Intelligence-Black Style* (2005).

● Jerry Flack presents his excellent discussion of biographies for gifted students in Part 2, which is concerned with collective biographies included in series. Jerry is the gifted field's “go to” person for expert information on children's literature.

● Letters to the Editor are from Shlomit Rachmel and Hanna David regarding Hanna's previous article on ethical issues.

● Harry Roman and Michael Walters conclude with separate essays on the great science fiction and imaginative writer, Ray Bradbury. Harry is our authority on STEM and engineering education, and Mike specializes in teaching the humanities to the gifted.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher

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Why Don't Our Schools Graduate More Intellectuals?

Stephen Schroeder-Davis Elk River Public Schools, Minnesota

"Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that '*my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.*'"

-- Isaac Asimov

"Those unmindful when they hear,
for all they make of their intelligence,
may be regarded as the walking dead."

Heraclitus (Greek Thinker, c. 535 – c. 475 BCE)

The title of this article asserts a concern I believe to be valid, though I cannot prove it to be fact, as there is no way to quantify the number of intellectuals that actually graduate from high schools. Even if such a number somehow could be accurately measured, there would be no means of knowing what percentage of a student's intellectual orientation derived from (or perhaps, *despite*) a typical high school education. In this article, I will discuss the following primary factors, which I believe undermine, perhaps fatally, the habits of mind that create and sustain an intellectual:

1. Popular culture and the media
2. Denialism
3. The way America "does school"
4. Attacks on aptitude

High schools graduate thousands of very intelligent, highly skilled students every year, but an intelligent person is not necessarily an intellectual. In his masterful *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Hofstadter (1963) drew this distinction between intelligence and the intellect: "Intelligence works within the framework of limited but clearly stated goals . . . [while the intellect] examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines" (p. 25). Hofstadter went on to observe:

In our education it has never been doubted that . . . the development of intelligence is a goal of central importance . . . but the extent to which education should foster intellect has been a matter of the most heated controversy, and the opponents of intellect in most spheres have exercised preponderant power. (p. 25)

Embracing Intelligence, Resenting Intellect

Hofstadter (1963) provided a seminal explanation of this strange polarity:

Resentment and suspicion of the intellect has implications for school and peer cultures, as both seem to embrace intelligence, but not intellect; academic adequacy, but not academic excellence. This is because of the crucial difference between 'intelligence . . . an excellence of mind that is employed within a fairly narrow, immediate, and predictable range . . . and intellect . . . the critical, creative, and contemplative side of the mind'" (p. 25).

I would add to Hofstadter's distinction that intelligence is a *capacity* (typically measured by IQ), while intellectualism is an *orientation*, a devotion to and enjoyment of the life of the mind. *Intellectualism.Org*, for example, defines intellectualism as, ". . . basing our actions and beliefs on logic, reason, and the scientific process." The intellectuals I know abhor censorship, doctrine, dogma, and authoritarianism, while embracing multiple perspectives, discussions based on facts and logic, and diverse—even contrary—opinions, so long as facts and logic are the arbiters of "truth."

The need for intellectuals is perhaps more urgent now than when Hofstadter wrote nearly 50 years ago, due to the changes we have experienced in the last half-century, such as the proliferation and immediacy of information, a commensurate expansion of popular culture as represented, promoted, and sometimes created by the media, and our increased capacity to kill our species and destroy the planet.

George Orwell versus Aldous Huxley

In 1985, Neil Postman wrote an astonishingly prescient book entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, in which he posits that our fear of political totalitarianism—as depicted, for example, in George Orwell's 1984—may

have so preoccupied us that we were unmindful of a competing threat, pathological placidity, which Aldous Huxley elucidated in *A Brave New World*. Postman framed the two threats in his introduction to *Amusing Ourselves to Death*:

In 1984, . . . people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we desire will ruin us. This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right. (p.vii - viii)

Postman and Huxley's concerns may have been justified. Postman (1985) had this to say about the nature of reading in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: "The reader must come armed, in a serious state of intellectual readiness. This is not easy because he comes to the text alone. In reading, one's responses are isolated, one's intellect thrown back on its own resources" (p. 50). But consider our burgeoning aliteracy, as documented in a 2007 research report funded by the National Endowment for the Arts entitled, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence*:

- Nearly half of all Americans ages 18 to 24 read no books for pleasure.
- Less than one-third of 13-year-olds are daily readers.
- The percentage of 17-year-olds who read nothing at all for pleasure has doubled over a 20-year period.
- Americans between 15 and 34 years of age devote less leisure time than older age groups to reading anything at all.
- 15- to 24-year-olds spend only 7–10 minutes per day on voluntary reading—about 60% less time than the average American.
- Little more than one-third of high school seniors now read proficiently.

In addition to his concerns about reading, Postman (1985) espoused this view of television:

[It] is not that television is entertaining but that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience . . . The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining. (p. 87)

And more fundamentally:

Our culture's adjustment to the epistemology of television is by now all but complete; we have so thoroughly accepted its definitions of truth, knowledge and reality that irrelevance seems to us to be filled with import, and incoherence seems eminently sane. (p. 80)

In June of 2009, Nielsen released a report entitled, *How Teens Use Media: A Nielsen Report on the Myths and Realities of teen Media Trends*, which stated the "average" teen watched television for 3 hours and 20 minutes each day, an increase of 6% over the previous 5 years. Comparing the amount of time it appears young people spend reading and watching TV, it is clear teens spend substantially more time watching TV than they do reading.

If readers will allow "reading" to represent "intellectualism" and "television" to represent "entertainment" (knowing reality is more complicated), the quantitative data bear out the Postman/Huxley fear of a culture seduced away from intellectual growth and toward intellectual passivity and indolence. The following statistic should be disconcerting, even for "American Idol" fans: According to Nielson ratings, "American Idol" and "Survivor" occupied the top 11 spots in the last decade's television viewing. The lone news show in the top 125 ("60 Minutes") achieved a ranking of only 116th. I would contend that a culture with declining literacy and increasing devotion to television—especially non-scripted, "reality" television—comes disturbingly close to the Postman/Huxley concern that "what we desire will ruin us." This is not a climate in which young intellectuals will thrive.

Denialism

The neologism above is the title of a book by Michael Specter (2009), the subtitle of which is, *How Irrational Thinking Hinders Scientific Progress, Harms the Planet, and Threatens Our Lives*. According to Specter, "Denialists . . . replace the rigorous open-minded skepticism of science with the inflexible certainty of ideological commitment" (pp. 2-3). According to Specter, denialists are at war with science, consistently demonizing or disregarding scientists, the scientific method, and findings derived from scientific inquiry. Examples include those who believe global warming is a "hoax," that childhood vaccinations are the cause of autism (or asthma, or diabetes) and that "intelligent design" and evolution are equally viable scientific theories.

Denialists endanger both themselves and those who actually believe in science. Specter offered the following examples of this endangerment: In 1996, Maine led the nation in child immunization, with a compliance rate of 89%, but by 2007, the rate had fallen to 72.9%. In Ohio, religious and philosophical exemptions for vaccines increased from 335 in 1998 to 1,186 in 2008, and the number

of kindergarteners entering California schools without inoculations has more than doubled from 1997 to 2008. Decreasing rates of immunization threaten “herd immunity,” as reflected, for example, in increasing rates of measles in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, after the disease had been virtually eradicated.

The denialist positions described above have been repeatedly and elegantly disproven, but intellectuals who have factually refuted denialists’ arguments have made few inroads in, for example, science education. On page 1 of the introduction to the “State of State Science Standards” report (January 2012, Fordham Foundation) problem number one is “an undermining of Darwin”:

The attack on evolution is unabated [since 2000], and Darwin’s critics have evolved a more-subtle, more dangerous approach. A decade ago, the anti-evolution movement...argued vigorously for explicit teaching of the evidence for intelligent design. The claim now is that evidence against “Darwinism” exists, that curriculum makers should include it as an exercise in critical thinking, and that “freedom of speech” or “fairness” requires that they do so. The hidden agenda is to introduce doubt—any possible doubt—about evolution at the critical early stage of introduction to the relevant science.

It is difficult for young intellectuals to thrive in a culture that embraces irrational beliefs even in the face of science and logic.

Denialism and the Leaders of the Republican Party: Anti-intellectualism and Public Policy

Regardless of one’s political party affiliation, it should be self-evident that presidential nominees should be intellectuals rather than the embodiment of Asimov’s concern that “*my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.*” Sadly, intellectualism does not appear to be necessary to be considered a presidential candidate, as evidenced by the individuals below:

- Governor Richard Perry on evolution: “It’s a theory that’s out there. It’s got some gaps in it. In Texas we teach both Creationism and evolution.” (*USA Today*, August 18, 2011, and in numerous interviews and speeches)
- Michelle Bachman on global warming: “Carbon Dioxide is portrayed as harmful. But there isn’t even one study that can be produced that shows that carbon dioxide is a harmful gas.” (statement made on Earth Day, April 22, 2009 on the house floor)
- Rick Santorum on higher education: “I understand why Barack Obama wants to send every kid to college, because of their indoctrination mills; absolutely ... the indoctrination that is going on at the university level is a harm to our country. Sixty-two percent of kids who go into college with a faith commitment leave without it.” (Glen Beck interview, February 23, 2012)

The statements above reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of science (Perry), a variation of the “fallacy of the stolen concept” (Bachman referring to scientific studies to support her anti-scientific bias), and in Santorum, both a classic example of anti-intellectualism (higher education as an “indoctrination mill.” Really?), and fabrication, as no one knows how he arrived at the 62% figure. Politicians of all parties may make mistakes and/or hold views not in agreement with mainstream science, but current Republican orthodoxy regarding multiple crucial issues are profoundly anti-intellectual and potentially harmful to the entire electorate, not to mention the planet. It should be an embarrassment to the Republican Party and the electorate that “top tier” presidential candidates in 2012 are as ignorant as the quotes above demonstrate.

The Way America “Does School”

A typical public K-12 American education is so compromised by structural defects—the triumph of “equity” over excellence, and reforms that champion (grade-level) “proficiency”—it’s a wonder our teachers accomplish as much as they do. The following are but three examples of these self-imposed limitations.

Due to *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and the way our nation delivers *content* “standards,” the nation’s teachers are required to get all students, in all subjects, to (an arbitrary) level of proficiency by the same time every year. This absurd requirement presents several problems, foremost among them that teachers are delivering “standards” to a decidedly non-standardized population. Most schools track students using age-based “norms,” which is as inefficient as it is arbitrary. Imagine if you adjusted your car seat to the “average” American’s height and expected everyone who got in your car to be in his or her “zone of proximal comfort.”

The analogy is as ridiculous as the reality, and yet we are stuck with “norm” based education so long as NCLB testing and *content* standards are required. Further, and most problematic, American standardized tests almost never get beyond the analysis level (as that would be expensive and time consuming to assess) and so rarely engage the *intellect*. In fact, the most frequently tested skills on most standardized tests are simply memory and comprehension.

Readers will note I italicized *content* in the preceding paragraph, as it is my belief that the emphasis on content standards is inadequate to prepare our students for their futures. If we must have standards, I believe they should require students to

demonstrate *understanding* rather than mere knowledge, because understanding *presumes* knowledge, while knowledge does not imply understanding. Many authors (e.g., Socrates, Aristotle, Dewey, Wiggins, McTighe, and virtually the entire author field in gifted education) have stressed the importance of teaching for understanding, so the concept is hardly new; it's just more urgent now than ever before.

A second example of problems inherent in how America "does school" is related to funding and focus. Given that rewards, punishments, and sanctions are based on the percentages of students reaching "proficiency," it's no wonder students already proficient are often ignored and even allowed to regress. This is painfully obvious to those who work in gifted programs and provide differentiation workshops for teachers, and is supported by two studies from the Fordham Foundation. The first, "High Achieving Students in the ERA of NCLB" (2008), found that in states with accountability systems (i.e., standards), performance growth for students in the lowest 10% outpaced that of students in the top 10% in reading (grade 4) and math (grade 8), as evidenced by the 2000 through 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress assessment results. The same report surveyed teachers, who predictably stated that academically struggling students were the "top priority" in their schools (60%), and that academically struggling students were most likely to "receive one-on-one attention" (80%). Note that "academically struggling" *always* means "struggling to achieve standards" and *never* means "struggling to learn *something new*."

The second study, "Do High Flyers Maintain Their Altitude?" (2011) reports that Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests indicate up to 40% of "high flyers" did not "maintain altitude" and became "descenders." While there are many reasons for this, the nation's devotion to students achieving below proficiency is surely one.

The nation's priorities are further reflected in funding. As I write this, *not one federal dollar* is specifically targeted for gifted students since the Jacob Javits' funding was zeroed out last year. When virtually the entire national K-12 education focus is remediation, there is little room for the development of intellect, which requires more than multiple-choice questions to thrive.

The third example of the orientation away from intellectualism is the Response to Intervention (RtI) instructional movement. As part of the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), RtI was designed to replace the discrepancy model of special education, which requires that students be two grade levels behind their peers before they can qualify for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) through special education. The RtI model offers instead "universal" screening, followed by a tiered intervention system: Tier 1 is intended to meet the needs of about 80% of students in a regular classroom, primarily via differentiation. Students "at risk for poor learning outcomes" (i.e., those not among the 80% who are "proficient") are given real-time support during the school day via "targeted interventions." The few remaining students still at risk for "poor learning outcomes" (generally 5% or less) are provided "intense interventions."

In today's coercively egalitarian educational climate, "poor learning outcomes" is implicitly understood to refer to students operating below proficiency on standards, below grade level. Students at risk for "poor learning outcomes" because of *intellectual starvation* were, of course, not part of this calculus. Evidence of this omission includes:

- A word search of the National RtI database using the search terms "gifted education," and then "high achiever" both yielded the search engine response, "There is no item available for given search criteria." The key words "special education," on the other hand, yielded 39 hits and three extensive bibliographies.
- Two of the bestselling books on RtI, *Enhancing RtI* (2010), and *Pyramid Response to Intervention* (2009), do not reference "gifted," "enrichment," or "extension," although RtI proponents claim universality in terms of assessments and interventions.
- A survey of State Departments in the book, *Serving Gifted Students within an RtI Framework* (2012) revealed that of the 31 states responding, only 10 explicitly include gifted students as part of their RtI vision. Four of those responding indicated their definition of "universal" was so comprehensive that gifted students could be assumed to be included. Granting that, and further, assuming hypothetically that the 19 non-responding states *did include* gifted students explicitly, we are still left with 17 states responding that their RtI model excludes gifted students. Seventeen of 51 respondents (Washington, D.C. was also surveyed) is far from "universal."

Consider the implications for a culture where a "universal" assessment tool systematically omits the nation's most proficient students and devotes virtually all its resources to students who are not yet proficient, and the abandonment of the intellect becomes clear.

Attacks on Aptitude

The fourth and last anti-intellectualism marker is what I previously called “Coercive Egalitarianism 2.0” (see *Understanding Our Gifted*, Summer 2011). In short, a branch of popular literature has lately renewed the assertion that aptitude is not a factor in talent development, but rather the distinguishing factor that separates skill levels is the amount of practice undertaken by individuals. In other words, we are all equally gifted (which, of course, eliminates our field and the children to whom we are devoted).

The assertion that talent is the exclusive function of practice, and the often misleading suppositions and faulty reasoning upon which many of its arguments rest, is perhaps best exemplified by a section of Malcolm Gladwell’s popular book, *Outliers*, in which the author refers to the Beatles and their “Hamburg crucible.” The “Hamburg crucible” as described by Gladwell, is simply the fact that between 1960 and 1962, the Beatles made five trips to Germany, playing for 8 hours a night, 7 nights a week, for weeks at a time, thereby performing live together over a thousand times in 2 years. Gladwell quotes Beatles’ biographer Phillip Norman: “. . . when they came back, they sounded like no one else. It was the making of them” (p. 50).

The Hamburg crucible was offered as evidence of the “10,000 hour rule,” a concept suggested by studies based on the work of psychologist K. Andres Ericsson (1991), who examined the performance of violinists at Berlin’s elite Academy of Music. Ericsson found the distinguishing factor separating the ultimate excellence of Academy students’ performance was not the initial skill level of the student but the amount of time spent in intense, focused, deliberate practice. Students who practiced in this manner for approximately 10,000 hours, over many years, became the best musicians, regardless of their entry level ability, and those who did not practice as much or as intensely progressed the least, again, irrespective of their initial ability. Gladwell concluded, “The Beatles would not have become the Beatles without Hamburg” (p. 50).

Gladwell’s writing and reasoning nicely illustrate some of the aforementioned erroneous assumptions and faulty reasoning that underlie contemporary attacks on aptitude. First, calling the Beatles’ experience in Hamburg a “crucible” imparts profundity and gravitas to what is actually a rather mundane assertion: The Beatles improved because they practiced a lot. Further, Gladwell omitted reference to dozens of bands that were doing the same thing at the same time and did not revolutionize popular music. Ever hear of Rory and the Hurricanes? They were the headliners in Hamburg *for whom the Beatles opened*. Let me be clear: The Beatles’ experience in Hamburg was, in fact, integral to their development, perhaps even a “game changer,” but those hours of practice would not have resulted in the Beatles’ legacy had they not been profoundly gifted as well, a factor to which Gladwell gives but a passing nod.

Perhaps more important, however, is Gladwell’s use of Ericsson’s violinists. Note the following quote from *Outliers* in reference to Ericsson’s study:

The striking thing about Ericsson’s study is that he and his colleagues couldn’t find any ‘naturals,’ musicians who floated effortlessly to the top while practicing a fraction of the time their peers did. Nor could they find any “grinds,” people who worked harder than everyone else, yet just didn’t have what it takes to break the top ranks. Their research suggests that *once a musician has enough ability* [emphasis added] to get into a top music school, the thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works. That’s it. (p. 39)

Let’s deconstruct this paragraph: Ericsson’s study found that *all things being equal*—remember, all of the violinists in the study were in an *elite* school of music and so had already been screened for extremely high aptitude—those (elite) students who work harder will outperform those (elite) students who don’t. *Well, yes. Obviously.* Note further the disclaimers Gladwell includes: The researchers “couldn’t find any ‘naturals,’ musicians who floated effortlessly to the top while practicing a fraction of the time their peers did; nor could they find any ‘grinds,’ people who worked harder than everyone else, yet just didn’t have what it takes to break the top ranks.” Once a violinist (or athlete, dancer, scholar) gets to the elite level, *no one* is good enough to “float effortlessly to the top,” nor could they work “harder than everyone else . . . and not have what it takes to break into the top ranks,” as they are *already* in the top ranks.

If Gladwell’s attempts to sacrifice giftedness on the altar of effort were an anomaly, it would be less troubling, but in the last few years, an entire publishing industry has been established in what appears to be a concerted effort to replace the importance of intellect with that of effort (or practice, ignition, persistence, etc.).

In the next issue, I will examine – and refute – authors who offer “evidence” of the “Genius in All of Us,” (to quote one book title) and then suggest some ideas I believe could promote desperately needed intellectualism in our schools.

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Response to Intervention (RtI): How Does Gifted Education Fit?

Hide and Seek

Searetha Smith-Collins, Ed.D.

Hide and Seek Shadow

I walked with my shadow,
I ran with my shadow,
I danced with my shadow
I did.
Then a cloud came over
And the sun went under
And my shadow stopped playing and hid.
Author Unknown

Most everyone is familiar with the children's whimsical game, "Hide and Seek" Tag. A person is chosen as "IT" and stays at a location that is designated as "home Base. The person hides their eyes without peeking, and starts counting backwards at a designated number such as 30, 29, 28, etc. The other children hide somewhere within the area of base. When the counter gets to one, he or she shouts, "Ready or not, here I come?" The hidden players run out of their hiding places trying not to be tagged before reaching home base.

Like the game Hide and Seek, children enter public schools with the declaration, "Ready or not, here I come!" Over the past decades, gifted education has been an "understated" issue in the priorities of the educational reform agenda. School improvement efforts have garnered the appearance that proficient and advanced students are left to "fend for themselves" while underperforming peers catch up. Of course this is not the intent. However, perceptions tend to reflect a bit of reality. Kathi Kearney (1996) expresses the concern in the following way:

"Gifted children, especially those who are economically disadvantaged and those who are highly gifted, are particularly at risk as the political and ideological winds of the 1990s shift and converge. This is the only group of exceptional children with no protection under federal statute for a 'free and appropriate public education.'"

An enduring question is: How can educators and communities identify the most powerful supports and techniques for developing opportunities for all children? They are confronted by several seek and find dilemmas: (1) A student may not have been given the confidence to foster the motivation to take on more challenge; (2) There may be a lack of general exposure to school-related knowledge; (3) A student may have the inability to read or write at the level of proficiency for coursework; or (4) All of this may be compounded by obstacles stimulated by the lack of high quality schooling experiences. Certainly new and recuperative approaches are needed, especially when one considers that many highly capable students are counted out of the picture.

Promising Possibilities

Response to Intervention (RtI), the popular classroom improvement process, seeks to respond to a host of challenges associated with managing the learning process for all students. Unfortunately, a glaring omission has been a lack of attention paid to gifted and talented students. A direct relationship between RtI and gifted education exists when it comes to: (1) acquiring accurate identification and diagnosis of needs; (2) providing high quality instruction, interventions, and progress monitoring matched to individual student needs; and (3) determining the right course of action for developing students' full capacity.

A critical question surfaces, "How can teachers work effectively with gifted students within the context of varied areas of giftedness in the general classroom?" The question is particularly important when trying to address diversity in learning. The express aim of RtI is to reduce referrals for special education services through well-designed instruction and intensified interventions in general education. In addition, the goal is to distinguish between students who perform poorly in school due to factors such as inadequate prior instruction versus students who have a learning disability (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005).

This is an important first step in addressing effective learning in the general classroom, especially in light of the research of Dix and Schafer (1996) that indicated two to five percent of the gifted population will have disabilities and two to five percent of students with disabilities will be gifted. Also, data from the U.S. Department of Education (2008) indicates that African American students make up approximately 40% of students placed in special education, yet they comprise only 17% of U.S. public school students. Clearly, this is significant to statistics that point out that African American and Latino males are over-represented and often mis-identified as special education students.

In contrast, African American students, for example, remain poorly represented, accounting for only 3 percent of students placed in gifted and talented programs (Ford 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The sad results of these statistics have far-reaching consequences. For example, large numbers of black students end up in the criminal justice and prison system in this nation, and for many, under-developed gifts and talents were applied to non-productive behaviors and negative outcomes.

Starting in the general education classroom as the first point of contact, RtI can help reveal a deeper level of knowledge detailing how to: (1) better understand gifted and talented students; (2) apply appropriate, instructional strategies and support in an inclusive classroom; and (3) determine the worthiness of evidenced-based instruction and interventions for evaluating a child's growth potential or behavior advancement.

Designing a Framework for RtI/Gifted/Talented (GT)

An RtI/GT framework provides a plan for identifying and meeting curriculum needs, using various levels of instructional intensities, supports, and formats as a springboard for providing a range of accommodations for differing abilities. Using a multi-tiered problem-solving model, initially all students would be placed in Tier One (the lowest level of gifted specified environment).

Tier One: Universal Interventions (Proficient, Advanced, Gifted, and Gifted Potential)

Tier One provides high, quality academic instruction and behavior supports for all students in the general classroom. Students receive instruction, interventions and monitoring of core learning standards and curriculum. This could involve evidenced-based core and enriched reading, mathematics, and writing, supplemental programs, coaches, mentors, instructional assistants, counselors, volunteers, or reorganizing school, time, or group structures (i.e., non-graded school).

Support for a pre-referral process, and accommodations for differentiated instruction are provided initially in the general classroom, with the support of specialists such as a gifted education or speech/language teachers. General education teachers require development and knowledge of how to pre-assess mastered knowledge, using such tools as a checklist, teacher observation, discussion, a writing sample, etc. to eliminate redundant lessons on curriculum benchmarks.

Once a teacher determines who has mastery based on at least 90% mastery of a topic or skill, students become eligible for accommodations, such as using alternative activities, multiple supplementary resources, higher order-thinking tasks, self-directed related interest activities, and independent study/projects beyond the core subject matter. After pre-assessment, curriculum compacting (compressing or acceleration of the core curriculum) should be tailored for specific gaps, deficiencies and individual

strengths. If students “test out” of certain topics or components, they should focus only on what is needed to allow more rapid acceleration through a subject or course. Assistance should be provided for learning and understanding academic language and expectations, confidence building, culturally-sensitive strategies and support for transitioning between the home, school, and determining how to solve academic school and life problems.

Tier Two: Targeted Interventions (Advanced, Gifted, Gifted Potential)

Tier Two provides targeted, specific differentiated instruction and preventative, recuperative interventions based on diagnostic assessment of need. Students should be evaluated for above grade level mastery of core curriculum, advanced concepts and thinking. Some lag behind, others quickly exceed grade level peers or need more intense interventions and support by a gifted education specialist. Curriculum compacting is a must for Tier Two students, including pre-assessment of mastered core curriculum and pacing adjustments and requirements.

Other intervention techniques could involve alternative programs, additional diagnostic assessment by specialists, or skill specific targeted instruction by a math or reading specialist. Also, these alternatives could be used: extended day homework assistance, virtual learning, counseling or behavior/intervention specialists, ELL teachers, or workforce coaches in specialized areas of talents or gifts.

Tier Two is applicable to the top 25% and probably another 5-10% of the students who are considered as more highly capable or who have “gifted potential.” Although they can function in heterogeneous and peer groupings in general classrooms, they need additional experiences in advanced thinking and problem solving with peers and high functioning adults.

Also, Tier Two is appropriate for students who are considered “mediocre smart” who have great potential, but require conscientious hard work and effort to achieve academically. Attention must be paid to the reasonableness of workload when selecting intervention options, especially in relation to pace, compacting, class loads, balancing Honors, Advanced Placement (AP) or pre International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, etc.

Teachers, parent/guardians, or students themselves can make referrals for additional services. Child Find and Talent Development Teams should prepare a collaborative Gifted Education Learning Plan (GELP). Consideration should be given to students who are motivated to attend class, have the potential to engage as independent learners, are flexible in their understanding of topics, and who are willing to develop special interests in and out-of-school.

Tier Three: Intensive Interventions (Highly Gifted/Talented Learners)

Tier Three provides the most intensive, individualized interventions for students who do not sufficiently respond to previously prescribed interventions. An Intervention Team should determine a continuous progress personalized plan based on assessments administered by psychologists. Questions regarding intervening factors should be individually, diagnostically fine-tuned, answered, and ruled out as reasons for concern. Measures and consideration for accommodations and modifications should be designed around a gifted education referral for special services. Students may require co-teaching models, clustering, language or special education assessment to determine if an interfering disability is suspected, or a more intense learning setting is needed (such as a pullout program taught by a gifted education specialist or placement in a mathematics, engineering, science and technology focused school).

Tier Three should be designed to acknowledge students who live up to the highest degree of rigor, depth, breadth and acceleration beyond the common core curriculum. These students should have the highest level of cognitive ability, leadership, and achievement in academic or creative fields. Instructional options can include individualized or groups of 1-2 students who have common needs. Educational options include AP and IB courses, dual enrollment, early school or college entry, specialized school and work environments, credit by examination where a student tests for college credits upon entry, career-related research and study, projects in conjunction with outstanding teachers, professors, professionals, mentors, leaders, and any combination of interventions mentioned in Tiers One and Two. Tier Three also can address the need for intensive special education services matched to gifted characteristics.

Parents and students should be involved in the Tier Three process through collaborative development of an Individual Learning Plan (GELP). Since gifted students are diverse within their giftedness, there is caution to not overload students, when using curriculum

compacting or compression strategies, grade skipping, acceleration, rapid progressing through grade levels and multiple courses, or providing non-graded structures, etc. All of these methods must be manageable for both teachers and individual students.

Learning Disability or Gifted

We have established that RtI must be expanded to understanding the needs of struggling learners who have advanced abilities and needs. Also, we have established that difficulties arise in acknowledging and understanding specific needs beyond gifted academic capabilities. This is particularly pertinent to the over-identification in special education, and the under identification of giftedness or potential, and understanding how to help all gifted students extend their reach, including those with disabilities. Webb, et al. (2006, p. 16), identified gifted behaviors that are often mistaken for behavioral disorders more than 25 percent of the time, including ADHD (approximately 34 percent of the time), Asperger's Disorder (76 percent), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (67 percent), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Bipolar Disorder (96 percent).

By integrating RtI with gifted education, teachers should be able to more accurately provide students with appropriate diagnoses, especially when students have challenges that internally mask or hide their giftedness or potential, often referred to as "twice exceptionality" (Fertig, 2006). Additionally, students-of-color, especially males, can be considered what I am calling "**Thrice Exceptional**," which accounts for three times the need for an accurate diagnosis and intervention response. African American males, in particular, are susceptible to this misdiagnosis of learning abilities.

Growing Up African, Male, and Gifted

Seldom do we hear or read much to inform our knowledge of gifted African American males. Even more disturbing are the alarming rates of the absence of black males in gifted and advanced classes and programs. According to every reporting system, African American males are underperforming and failing in academics, self-concept, and any measure associated with positive academic expectations and behaviors. They are the most suspended, the most failed, retained in grade level, disciplined for not adjusting to social and behavior expectations, truant, the most likely recipients of disproportional treatment than their peers, and least high school and college completers.

One must delve underneath the exterior mask to understand the true hopes, aspirations, capacities, driving forces and potentialities of African American males. Sometimes, black youth display a "tough" exterior that seems confrontational, aloof.

Often they become frustrated and under-perform to the point that they just give up on school. Some frequently display a facade to project the message that they are not interested in academic pursuits or school. To the contrary the façade is a survival skill that delivers the message that they are in control of and have the ability to navigate their cultural life and in and out-of-school environments.

These are important cultural competency issues for students of color, especially African American and Latino males. It is important to emphasize that not all low-income students of color fall victim to these descriptions. The reality is that there are probably more who succeed than the media allow us to be aware of. Often images of black males (portrayed in popular media) who are intellectual are characterized as "nerds" who are unpopular, awkward misfits. These depictions discourage children who are trying to fit in with peers.

Perhaps a starting point for understanding the uniqueness of these students is to recognize the relationship of race, poverty and culture, and how it creates contingencies for people of color. For example, in a study of an African American male gifted student, Barnes (2011) found that social skills and self-concept were the strongest observable areas indicative of success in gifted classes. Academic proficiency was the least area noted as having a strong correlation with the success of the student who was the subject of the study.

Kunjufu (2005, p.4) described behaviors and strengths of black males that are frequently considered characteristics of giftedness, but often problematic for African American males:

1. Keen power of observation
2. Sense of the significant
3. Willingness to examine the unusual
4. Questioning attitude

5. Intellectual curiosity
6. Inquisitive mind
7. Creative and inventive
8. High energy levels
9. Need for freedom of movement
10. Versatility, diversity of interests, abilities, and hobbies.

For African American males, these qualities are often misinterpreted as disobedience, disrespect, arrogance, defiance, hyperactivity, unruliness and other behavior issues leading to discipline and special education referrals. Many African American males live in a female-dominated world, including school, and many are searching for male roles models as they try to make the transition into the world of academics and school. At the same time they are establishing their manhood and cultural stance as “cool” and “hip.” Black males, who do not have access to positive males in their life, often are not afforded opportunities to positively work out energy, aggression, and feelings and emotions as males, which are often toyed with through non-academic and academic competitive and other team, sports, athletic, and outdoor activities, debate and chess clubs, relationships with athletic coaches, roughhousing with one another, hands-on spatial activities, vocational/technical courses, etc.

This leads to the next dilemma. How do we help African American males, and other non-represented gifted students score better on achievement and intelligence tests? This is all dependent on the right in and out-of-school structures, the right academic settings, curriculum, and socio-economic class connections, the right experiences, resources and tools, the right connections to adults who are caring and culturally connected, the right societal focuses on the fight against poverty and attention to human and civil rights, and the room to maneuver during very difficult times and transitions. Certainly, progress has been made, but there is room for African American students to shore up confidence, coping skills, self-esteem, resiliency, and environmental switching skills to help make connections to what it means to be successful learners and workers in varied, competitive environments and settings.

Riding the Waves of School Reform

“A voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes, but in *having new eyes.*” Marcel Proust (1871-1922)

To Isolate or Not Isolate: That is Still the Question. Advanced/gifted programs seem to be caught between the budget knife and philosophical shifts in education. The end result is that gifted students have fewer and fewer opportunities to receive an appropriate or focused education. This occurs despite clear evidence of academic and social gains of carefully designed homogeneous groupings for gifted students (Holloway, 2003). The role of RtI becomes clearer in this regard—it is a way of operating as a conduit for developing a game plan for including and effectively addressing the education of gifted/talented students. If developed as a manageable, coherent process, RtI processes should help eliminate the guesswork that takes place in the current educational reform movement.

Most disconcerting are the decisions and methods that are proving risky for many learners, including the gifted/talented. It is feasible to think that the RtI process can remove some of the challenges of current school reform trends, and provide clearer definitions on issues such as how to address standards and “rigor” and help students meet rigorous academic requirements. “Rigor” implies the degree of severity or difficulty and intensity of depth and breadth needed to convey deepened knowledge and understanding.

RtI can help balance the philosophy of inclusion and gifted students. Gifted students are often taught in heterogeneous (mixed ability) classrooms, so as not to segregate or isolate learners. The idea follows that this will help all students achieve through group performances and projects, interpersonal and cooperative team interaction, and social development. Although the notion is well-intentioned, and while there are times that gifted students can spend in general education classrooms, the spectrum of gifted ability levels and depth of learning often outpace students and some teachers in general abilities.

It is quite a stretch for general education teachers, when trying to fill in gaps and provide background skills needed for unprepared students. Chances of increased attention can be brought to students who are appropriately ready for the “actual” rigor of advanced courses and exams. I must pause to clarify that ***I am not advocating tracking or limited access*** to advanced courses and opportunities for students. We have already identified the errors of that pathway. ***Rather I am advocating—that all students deserve the benefit of high-level content, teaching, learning, and high-level development and performance.***

Highly advanced learners need highly-qualified teachers who know how to effectively accommodate and extend learning appropriately. The truth is there are not a great number of teachers who are prepared to teach the most highly gifted and talented students. With the accurate development and time to perfect RtI/GT processes, teachers can broaden, accelerate, and apply high-level considerations, theory, and techniques in ways that will benefit all students. Improving the current state of public education and “deciding how to educate gifted students ...is a moral and educational equity issue involving affording the best education to students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, or socio-economic background” (Barnes, 2011).

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Collective Biographies, Part II

Jerry Flack University of Colorado

“All knowledge is biography”
William Butler Yeats

“Biography is the only true history.”
Thomas Carlyle

Part I of this tribute to the nonfiction genre of collective biographies explored exemplary single volumes. Here, the review and analysis of collective biographies includes critical annotations of equally fine models found within especially distinguished series, an honor roll of further remarkable collective biographies, home and school extensions for advanced students utilizing this genre, exemplary print and online resources, and a vital rationale for “read aloud” opportunities for parents, teachers, and mentors of gifted and talented students from all age groups.

Collective Biography Series

Extraordinary Americans...

In addition to stand-alone collective biography trade books such as Jonah Winter’s *Peaceful Heroes* and Kadir Nelson’s *We Are the Ship*, numerous series feature outstanding collective biographies that are particularly welcome in classrooms. The **Extraordinary Americans Series** from school publisher Walch is comprehensive and well designed for immediate and effective teacher usage. Each book in the 11-volume series profiles 16 exceptional subjects who share a selected commonality. Further, each title in the series begins with the words *16 Extraordinary...* and then goes on to identify and share the personal stories of the target population of each book in the series. This fine series continues to grow. One recent volume pays tribute to *16 Extraordinary Multiracial Americans*. This latest series entry profiles President Barack Obama, Apolo Ohno, and Lani Guinier plus 13 more wonderful multiracial American stories. Other population segments highlighted in the series are *African Americans*, *Hispanic Americans*, *Asian Americans*, *Native Americans*, *American Entrepreneurs*, *Young Americans*, and *American Women*. Recent volumes star *16 More African Americans* and *16 More Hispanic Americans*.

The volume, *16 Extraordinary Americans with Disabilities* (2010) by Nancy Lobb may have special appeal for gifted readers on at least two counts. First, the 16 heroes of this fine series volume would today be labeled “Twice Exceptional.” From John Wesley Powell to Heather Whitestone, each of the subjects was or is a great American, but each subject was successful despite staggeringly prohibitive odds. Second, each subject is a stunning role model for ALL gifted students.

One September 17, 1994, host Regis Philbin announced “Miss America 1995 is Heather Whitestone,” but Miss Alabama was the only person in the audience of thousands who did not hear of her triumph. Heather Whitestone became the first Miss America in the 75 years of the beauty and scholarship pageant to have a disability. Heather is profoundly deaf. During her year as Miss America, Heather Whitestone developed a remarkable program that she presented all across the nation. Her **Stars Program** represented the five points of a star: a positive attitude, a goal, willingness to work hard, a realistic view of your problem, and creating a support team.

This same upbeat message is seen in every one of the 16 profiles found in *16 Extraordinary Americans with Disabilities*. For example, John Wesley Powell was severely injured in the Civil War Battle of Shiloh. His wounds resulted in the amputation of his right arm, yet Powell did not let such a disability discourage him or prevent him from making history. Powell became the first Anglo-American to explore and map the entire Colorado River and the Grand Canyon.

Similar heroic lives profiled are those of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the first Chief Executive who was unable to walk due to a tragic bout with polio. The same grit and force of character propelled Walt Disney, Cher, and Whoopi Goldberg to motion picture fame and accomplishments despite the fact that they all suffered from severe learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Marlee Matlin remains the youngest woman ever to win the Academy Award for Best Actress and the only winner who is profoundly deaf. Ray

Charles, Roy Campanella, and paraplegic mountain climber Mark Wellman are among the other great Americans with disabilities that students meet in this high-interest book.

Each profile in the entire Walch **Extraordinary Americans Series** concludes with questions (and answers) that probe what students have learned in their encounters with great subjects, recommended student activities, subject-related vocabulary, and a complete bibliography.

Parents and educators who want to know more about this outstanding series may contact Walch Publishing, 40 Walch Drive, Portland, Maine 04104-0658, or phone toll-free 1-800-558-2846. See also the Walch web site www.walch.com.

...And What the Neighbors Thought!

Kathleen Krull is one of the most prolific and distinguished biographers in all of children's literature. She has written life stories of such diverse subjects as Pocahontas, Albert Einstein, L. Frank Baum, Sigmund Freud, Kubla Khan, Ted Geisel ("Dr. Seuss"), Marie Curie, Hillary Rodham Clinton, the Kennedy Brothers, and Houdini. Krull's most famous and celebrated biographies, however, are her fascinating collective biographies contained in the **Lives of ...Series** (Harcourt) that are superbly illustrated by her collaborator, Kathryn Hewitt. Hewitt's delightful watercolor and colored pencil drawings are often dubbed by readers as the "Big Head" books due to the artist's use of out-sized caricatures of the top-most features of famous personalities in diverse fields. The **Lives of...Series** is equally distinguished by the funny and slightly irreverent subtitles of each entry that conclude with "...and What the Neighbors Thought." Two examples:

Lives of the Artists: Masterpieces, Messes (and What the Neighbors Thought).

Lives of the Presidents: Fame, Shame (and What the Neighbors Thought).

Krull's subtitles are a sure clue to readers that here are biographical profiles that are going to be full of choice gossip and good humor. The series began in the 1990s, but continues today with the 2010 entry: *Lives of the Pirates: Swashbucklers, Scoundrels (Neighbors Beware!)* plus 2011 updates of *Lives of the Writers* and *Lives of the Presidents*. Titles in this collective biography series include:

Lives of the Musicians

Lives of Extraordinary Women

Lives of the Athletes

Lives of the Writers

Lives of the Artists

Lives of the Presidents

Lives of the Athletes: Thrills, Spills (and What the Neighbors Thought) celebrates 12 of the world's most famous athletes of the 20th century, including champions from sports as diverse as surfing, figure skating, track and field, swimming, tennis, volleyball and the martial arts. Flo Hyman was more than a foot taller than her classmates in school and was, to her embarrassment, called the Jolly Green Giant. Still, her mother encouraged her. "Either you benefit from being tall or you hide." Ultimately, Hyman guided the U.S. volleyball team to its first-ever Olympic Medal, the silver at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Games. Besides volleyball, Hyman was a passionate reader of historical romance novels. She would indulge herself by purchasing five or more titles at a time on a book store shopping trip.

Despite a childhood bout of polio that caused doctors to tell Wilma Rudolph that she would never walk, she became the fastest woman in the world and the first woman ever to win three gold medals in a single Olympic year.

When figure skater Sonja Henie was only 11 years old, she competed in her first Olympic Games. She finished in last place. But, she persevered and placed first in the next three consecutive Winter Games (1928, 1932, 1936), becoming her sport's only three-time Olympic champion. Moving from sports to movies and ice shows, Henie earned a cool \$50 million. Making adjustments for inflation, Krull estimates that Henie could be said to be the richest athlete of all time.

Duke Kahanamoku competed in swimming and water polo events in the Olympic Games from 1912 through 1932. Although a world champion swimmer, the great Hawaiian athlete is most famous for introducing surfing to the rest of the world. He was so gifted at the sport that he could cruise waves 30 feet high.

In a one-man show of sheer brilliance and determination, college football (University of Illinois) player Red Grange scored four touchdowns in the first twelve minutes of a game against an undefeated Michigan Wolverines team in 1924.

Additional champions in *Lives of the Athletes* include Jim Thorpe, Babe Ruth, Bruce Lee, Gertrude Ederle, Babe Didrikson Zaharias, Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, Sir Edmund Hillary, Maureen Connolly, Arthur Ashe, Pele, and Roberto Clemente.

Always a scholar as well as a superb storyteller, Krull provides fact-filled highlights (“Athleticisms”) to each athlete’s profile plus a lengthy bibliography that will assist readers in finding more detailed biographies of all her subjects.

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Collective Biography Activities and Extensions

Individual biographies. The most obvious extension of a classroom study of collective biographies is for students to move from reading capsule profiles to full-length life stories of notable people such as Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Marie Curie, Annie Oakley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jackie Robinson, Cesar Chavez, and countless others. Collective biography profiles serve as a catalyst to provoke the curiosity and desire of students to want to read one or more complete individual biographies of celebrated lives. Indeed, one of the benefits of reading collective biographies is that they may introduce students to heroes of whom they may have previously had little background knowledge. One example: Edmund Hillary's 1953 conquest of Mt. Everest is highlighted in John Cleare's *Epic Climbs*. The profile is fascinating, but brief. A gifted reader may thus be inspired to read Alexa Johnston's *Reaching the Summit: Edmund Hillary's Life of Adventure* (Dorling Kindersley, 2005), a thorough and engrossing story of Hillary's truly remarkable life. The same holds true for more familiar biographical subjects. Students who read about Mark Twain in Kathleen Krull's *Lives of the Writers* may well want to learn more about the life of the creator of Tom Sawyer by reading Newbery medalist Sid Fleischman's much more comprehensive biography, *The Trouble Begins at 8: A Life of Mark Twain in the Wild, Wild West* (Greenwillow Books, 2008).

Comparisons. Readers of collective biographies may also compare and contrast how the life of a single biographical subject is treated in separate collective biographies. For example, they may compare and contrast how the life of Franklin D. Roosevelt is

portrayed in Kathleen Krull's *Lives of the Presidents* side-by-side with the depiction of FDR in Nancy Lobb's *16 Extraordinary Americans with Disabilities*. Similarly, compare and contrast the presentation of the life of Annie Oakley in Sue Macy's *Wheels of Change* with Jonah Winter's capsule biography of the same subject in *Wild Women of the Wild West*.

Read alouds. A special bonus of collective biographies is their potential for read alouds in classrooms. Renowned literacy expert Dr. Barbara Swaby outlines the merits of read alouds regardless of the age and abilities of gifted students.

- * They provide a model for reading with all areas of prosody: expression, smoothness, pacing, phrasing and volume.
- * They provide opportunities for students who have not been read to regularly during their young years to experience the joy of reading.
- * They provide an opportunity for students weak in decoding skills to be exposed to and to internalize content.
- * They provide prior knowledge that is mandatory for the building of comprehension.
- * They provide students the opportunity to hear a variety of syntactic models prior to having to read those models.
- * They allow students to observe how mature readers apply repair strategies as they read.
- * They allow students who are limited by their weak decoding skills to develop comprehension skills via the skillful questioning and discussion techniques of the teacher.
- * They allow all students to join in on literacy conversations regardless of level of performance in reading.
- * Everyone wins: Those who know a lot about the content get to share: Those who do not, get to learn. (Swaby, 2011)

It is not just young readers who profit from read alouds. Indeed, it is the experience of this author that even university graduate students enjoy and benefit from a well-chosen and well-read oral presentations of literature in the classroom, especially as class openers or closing notes. Further, both this author and his colleagues often open keynote speeches at professional meetings with well-chosen and relevant passages from both fact and fiction and prose and poetry works of note.

Many of the profiles found within collective biographies are short and therefore compatible for use as read aloud opportunities. Jonah Winters' *Peaceful Heroes* and *Wild Women of the Wild West* plus any of the volumes in Kathleen Krull's "**Lives of...**" series are perfect examples. Teachers and parents can share profiles as read alouds with talented youths. Older gifted students can orally share short profiles with younger gifted students. Several students can select favorite profiles from collective biographies such as Krull's *Lives of the Artists: Masterpieces, Messes (and What the Neighbors Thought)*, rehearse, and present a readers' theatre experience that may be shared with multiple audiences. Moreover, teachers and parents can connect read alouds with special events and celebrations. Selections from Louis Haber's *Black Pioneers of Science and Invention* can highlight Black History Month while Jonah Winter's *Wild Women of the Wild West* can be shared in salute to Women's History Month.

Timelines. Sue Macy makes use of parallel timelines of the invention and developments in the history of the bicycle and the emancipation and ever changing rights of women in *Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom*. Again, Kathleen Krull's *Lives of the Writers: Comedies, Tragedies (and What the Neighbors Thought)* can serve as a fine resource. Krull's profiles include many of the world's greatest writers from Shakespeare to Emily Dickinson to Louisa May Alcott to Langston Hughes and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Writers communicate. Encourage advanced readers to create parallel timelines of the lives of Krull's great writers with the media each used based upon the inventions, growth, and development of communication tools available within the spans of their lifetimes from quill pens to the latest digital technology.

Maps. Jonah Winter's *Peaceful Heroes* acknowledges and salutes humanitarians from around the world and throughout at least two thousand years. Some of his subjects include Jesus of Nazareth, Mahatma Gandhi, Clara Barton, Corrie Ten Bloom, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Students can use a blank world map and geography research skills in order to place all the subjects of this superb collective biography at the locations where they spent the major portions of their lives or had the greatest nonviolent impact. Google and other online resource tools may be especially helpful to beginning map makers or biographical cartographers.

Meeting of the Minds. Steve Allen's innovative television series "Meeting of the Minds" first appeared in 1978. It was essentially a biographical talk show. Actors representing some of history's greatest figures dressed in period costumes and exchanged ideas on the past, present, and even the future. Allen served as the moderator. Time periods and geographical origins were insignificant. For example, in one program Allen's "guests" were Attila the Hun, Emily Dickinson, Galileo, and Charles Darwin. Students who have learned about the unique lives of many of the individuals noted in the collective biographies cited herein can develop their own classroom presentations or versions of "Meeting of the Minds." A brand new student-produced sample gathering of special guests might include Jane Hart or another of the courageous women profiled in *Almost Astronauts*. Hart might be joined by Babe Ruth from *The Greatest Moments in Sports*, Clara Barton from *Peaceful Heroes*, and mountain climbing guide Tenzing Norgay introduced to

young readers in Epic Climbs. Further, invite creative students to cultivate a similar exchange of ideas of biographical subjects from a single volume. For example, how might Ray Charles, Walt Disney, John Wesley Powell, and Whoopi Goldberg discuss their lives as profiled in Nancy Lobb's 16 Extraordinary Americans with Disabilities?

Journals. Based upon first reading collective biographies and then moving on to individual biographies, ask students to create a series of journal entries fascinating subjects might have kept. Hawaii's legendary Olympic gold medal swimmer Duke Kahanamoku helped to make surfing a world-wide phenomenon. He is featured in both Kathleen Krull and Kathryn Hewitt's collective biography, *Lives of the Athletes* as well as in the individual biography, *Surfer of the Century* (Lee & Low Books, 2007) written by Ellie Crowe and illustrated by Richard Waldrep. Invite students to create a journal this superb athlete might have kept, especially noting his most heroic moments.

Imaginary emails. Polly Pry was an ace reporter for the Denver Post in the 1890s and Annie Oakley was perhaps the best sharpshooter in the world during the same era. Both women are profiled in Jonah Winter's *Wild Women of the Wild West*. After students have read about these remarkable women, invite them to pretend that email communication existed during the final decade of the 19th Century. Students should prepare an imagined email dialogue between these two great women that answer questions students would genuinely like to know about the lives of the correspondents.

Birthday presents. Ask readers to describe appropriate birthday presents for particularly interesting biographical subjects such as Brandi Chastain and Michael Phelps, both of whom are highlighted in Len Berman's collective biography, *The Greatest Moments in Sports*. In an earlier era, what might have been an appropriate birthday gift for Mark Twain (*Lives of the Writers*) as a 10-year-old boy? Urge students to draw sketches of the proposed gifts.

Cartoons. Call upon artistically talented youths to draw caricatures of a person whose life experiences they find interesting. Students can fashion a single cartoon or a comic strip about a young Robert Kennedy who is featured in Kathleen Krull's *The Brothers Kennedy*. In particular, see the collection of graphic novels about biographical subjects such as Harry Houdini, Leroy "Satchel" Paige, and Henry David Thoreau in a terrific new series produced by The Center for Cartoon Studies at White River Junction in Vermont. One recent title from the Center is *Amelia Earhart: This Broad Ocean* by Sarah Stewart Taylor.

Scrapbooks. Suggest to students that they prepare a scrapbook of drawings, newspaper clippings, handwritten notes, etc. (all of which they create) about the life of a chosen biographical subject such as Olympic figure skater Sonja Henie who is featured in numerous collective biographies about sports. Encourage would-be scrapbook creators to examine the scrapbook appearance of the illustrations that make Sue Macy's collective biography, *Wheels of Change*, so much fun to read.

Online explorations. Many of the authors and illustrators cited in this two-part manuscript have extensive and exciting Internet Web Pages. Both Kathleen Krull and Kadir Nelson have dynamite sites: www.kathleenkrull.com and www.kadirnelson.com. Additional writers and illustrators can be searched through the following link: www.authortracker.com.

Collective biographies sum up the lives of people from the distant past to the immediate present plus implications for the future, especially for young gifted readers. Two final quotations pay homage to this wonderful genre.

"A life recorded is a life twice lived." Dora Flack

"Read no history: nothing but biography, for that is life without theory." Benjamin Disraeli

Reference

Swaby, B. (2011). Personal correspondence, October 28.



**Letter and Response to *Ethical Issues in Educating and Counseling the Gifted* by Hanna David
Tel Aviv University, Israel. From the Summer 2012 Issue of *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*.**

Dear Dr. Fisher,

I was surprised to read in your latest issue an article by Dr. Hanna David discussing ethical issues in identifying and nurturing gifted students in Israel, which was based on assumptions and on sporadic cases and not on facts. The article is one sided, full of inaccuracies and does not reflect the policies and practices of identifying and nurturing gifted students by the Ministry of Education. For instance, the area of giftedness does have legal constraints and rules which are specified by the Director General of the Ministry of Education and was revised in 2010.

Furthermore, the policies of the Division for Gifted and Outstanding Students are designed together with a steering committee, comprised of experts from the major academic institutions in Israel and professionals from the field, including experts in psychometrics (Professor Baruch Nevo), in counseling (Professor Zipi Shechtman), and in various curricular areas. Furthermore, every gifted program has a psychologist or a counselor on staff who specializes in working with gifted students and their family.

Best wishes,

Shlomit Rachmel
Director of the Division for Gifted and Outstanding Students
The Ministry of Education
Jerusalem, Israel

Response from Dr. Hanna David

Dear Dr. Fisher,

I have read Ms. Rachmel's letter, referring to my article: "Ethical Issues in Educating and Counseling the Gifted" and I fully agree with the facts described in it.

However, in spite of my efforts, I have not been successful in determining what these facts about procedures and regulations of the Division for Gifted and Outstanding Students have to do with the subject of my article. As I have explicitly stated, ethical problems in educating and counseling the gifted are in the attitude and behavior of parents, teachers, head-teachers, counselors, and the media. There is no reference in my article to the ethical situation either in the 5 Israeli elementary schools that have classes for gifted students, or in the 50+ enrichment programs for the gifted, offering special activities for the gifted once a week.

It is possible, though, that an ethical code for educating and counseling the gifted does exist, as it does in psychology, social work and counseling. If it does, I have never heard of it, in spite of working in the area of giftedness for more than 20 years. But the existence or non-existence of an ethical code has nothing to do with the violations of ethics I have described in my article by parents and professionals.

Furthermore, if there is an ethical code, even if there are specific restrictions and procedures, these violations are to be judged much more strictly. They are made in most cases against children who would have been identified as gifted in every other country except in Israel. In Israel the definition of giftedness is geographically dependent. Thus it is very common that a boy would be identified as "non-gifted" because of "failing" in the giftedness examinations but would have been defined as gifted had he lived in another place, was born a year earlier or year later, or belonged to the other sex. Here is just one example of the verbal understanding result of the WISC-IV of a 9-year old: The child "failed" the giftedness examinations, and when his mother wrote to the Division for Gifted and Outstanding Students asking for the opportunity to take the examination again on the next year, she received a negative answer. He obtained 19 on all three sub-tests: Similarities, Vocabulary, and Understanding.

Due to the lack of an ethical code or to not implementing the existing code, the children identified as "non-gifted" are negatively affected twice: the first time by not being accepted in the program in spite of their exceptional abilities, and the second – by being exposed to reactions of educators and counselors who tend to share with the suffering child their concern about that fact.

As for the "sporadic facts" in my article: I have been working in the field of giftedness for a long time, including 3 years in *The Young Persons' Institute for the Promotion of Creativity and Excellence* in Tel Aviv, not only the largest institute in Israel but one of the largest in the world. During these years I have been exposed to data concerning many thousands of children; my findings are based

on these data as well as on the hundreds of communications I receive every year from parents of the gifted who were neglected by the system.

And last but not least: though unrelated to my article, the issue of counselors working in the gifted programs brought up by Ms. Rachmel requires a response. I do not know any of these counselors, and have no information regarding the instructions they receive from Ms. Rachmel or elsewhere. However, if one of their goals is helping the participating children to be satisfied in these programs, I am puzzled by the situation regarding the high non-participation and dropout rates of these programs. As I have already shown, in some of the gifted classes operating 6-days a week, less than 50% of the children invited actually participate. In the enrichment programs, the dropout rate is quite high and increases every year. For example: in my hometown, Rishon Leziyon, about 200 grade 3 students participate in the classes operating once a week for the gifted, but more than 80% of them drop out by grade 9.

Sincerely,
Dr. Hanna David

Remembering Ray (Bradbury)
Harry T. Roman
Distinguished Technology Educator

With the increasing use of whole body art and the colorful depictions on flesh proudly displayed by men and women alike, I cannot help but think of Ray.

I have many things to thank my best friend Lou for, but introducing me to Ray Bradbury was a big one, when during the summer of 1964 he told me about *The Illustrated Man* (1951), a book on his summer high school reading list, and soon to be on mine as well. Over the many years since, Ray has been a favorite author – one who defied specific pigeonholing...i.e., science fiction, fantasy, horror, social commentary...etc. Early in his career he did read science fiction icons like Heinlein, Clarke, Van Vogt and Sturgeon; names very familiar to me. Ray walked a unique literary path fashioned from his own feelings, experiences and observations, as it should be for any writer.

Ray and I shared a love of libraries, and I would suspect old used book stores too. I could hear the books “spookily” whispering to me – to look inside the colorful bindings and catch a glimpse of something new and exciting.....a kind of intellectual bazaar. Probably Ray did likewise; putting many books into the library as well, enriching the stock, increasing the siren call and whispers. Somewhere in the fantasy corner of my mind, I imagine an impish Ray Bradbury dressed in unfamiliar garb and chapeau, manning the special requests desk of some intergalactic library, perhaps far out in the Andromeda galaxy. Smiling, he might press some unusual book in your hands, urging you to read and return it in a couple of light years or two, so others can enjoy it. It wouldn't be noticed until you were jetting across the cosmos to another planet that he was the author of the book proffered.

I still like to read his stories on a summer night, preferably when the air is electrified and actively rumbling. It seems like a delightful Greek chorus to what he has to say. *Dandelion Wine* (1957) is a remembered blending of childhood experiences, making me see my own youthful exuberance and fears once more. The chills still run down my spine as I remember his short story *The Veldt* (1951). *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) is another one that haunts me to this day. Strangely, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), his signature piece, did nothing for me – perhaps being too close in time to the classics of Huxley (*Brave New World*, 1932) and Orwell (*Nineteen Eight-Four*, 1949)....summer reading lists again. *Green Shadows and White Whales* (1992) was so enjoyable, somehow reminding me of the playful John Wayne classic, *The Quiet Man* (1952), both being set in Ireland with a cast of amazingly colorful characters.

I always think of Ray conjoined with Rod Serling, guys who could window you into a situation and squeeze gallons of your emotions out, leaving you thinking, “What the hell just happened?” Both dispensed powerful doses of passion, morality, irony, fantasy, suspense and horror. Who could resist such writing, especially the young mind, hungry for variety and excitement! How many young folks today read Ray? Shouldn't he be what Gifted and Talented teachers recommend? I certainly think so. He brings creative writing to towering heights, establishing a high water mark to exceed. Get him into the hands of your creative students. Soak their minds in this pool of exciting, deep and often roiling water. Watch out for those riptides and cross currents!

Explore Ray and his extensive body of work. Celebrate the man and his rich imagination. Discover how his works influenced several generations of writers, scientists, and engineers. He is forever green and relevant. There is never enough time to read everything, but always enough time to reread a favorite Bradbury work. Thanks Ray.

Why Ray Bradbury Matters: A Tribute to His life and Creativity (1920-2012)

Michael E. Walters

Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

Ray Bradbury's immediate family had a major impact on his development as a writer. His mother was an enthusiastic admirer of the cinema who transmitted this enthusiasm to her child. When he was about three years old, she took him to see such classic silent films as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Three years later he saw another Lon Chaney classic with his older brother, *The Phantom of the Opera*. In subsequent years Bradbury became a major screenwriter. Among his famous screenplays was the film adaptation (1956) of *Moby Dick*, directed by John Huston and starring Orson Welles and Gregory Peck. One of the most important mentors was his aunt Neva. She encouraged his creativity and guided him to read such books as *The Oz Series*. A female ancestor on his father's side was a victim of the Salem Witch Trials. This gave Bradbury a concern for human rights, which is the theme of *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). He was a native of Waukegan, Illinois – a city that combined an urban industrial setting with a Midwest natural environment. As a youth, Bradbury was influenced by traveling carnivals and fairs, as well as public libraries that served as important resources for his development. He had varied educational experiences because his family moved several times.

It is significant to revisit novels that made an impact upon your personal development, and give new aspects to your present enrichment. Recently I reread Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. It was stunning to see how insightful his writing was and how important it is for the reader to interact with the printed word. He was keenly aware that the decline of reading would lead to totalitarianism. In his dystopian book, the role of memory had been lost to the human experience. The only socially significant event was constant media stimulation of the senses. The corollary to this loss of intellectual memory is the inability to construct knowledge and understanding.

“. . . It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, or trade journals." (*Fahrenheit 451*, Simon & Schuster, p. 55).

When you realize that Bradbury published this book in 1953, it is incredible that fifty-nine years ago he rang the warning bells about the decline of literacy and the emergence of a culture dominated by mass media.

“. . . I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these." (*Fahrenheit 451*, Simon & Schuster, p. 56).

It is understandable why Aldous Huxley, the author of *Brave New World* (1932), was an admirer of Bradbury's early writings. Another early admirer was Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), the great Renaissance scholar. He appreciated the defense of real human literacy and devotion to intellectual thought.

So Ray Bradbury matters as a writer and a social thinker because he was a prognosticator of the human condition through his books and essays. We needed him in the 1950s when mass media started to become predominant, and now he must be reread. As Bradbury emphasized in *Fahrenheit 451*, it is important to sustain the memory of great books and ideas. At the end of this novel, the former book burner, Guy Montag, joins a wandering band of scholars whose purpose is to memorize their favorite writers, e.g., Shakespeare, the Bible, Plato, Thomas Jefferson, and Mr. Lincoln.

Bradbury is usually considered to be a science fiction writer, but when we go back and reread him, we find that he was more than that. His writings included insights into sociology, anthropology, mass communication, and literature. Also, he matters in other literary genres. For example, his novel-memoir, *Dandelion Wine* (1957), captured the positive need for understanding nostalgia as a way to appreciate certain aspects of American life. His book on creative writing, *Zen and the Art of Writing* (1990), is a major contribution to the creativity field.

Recently I had personal experiences that demonstrate how Ray Bradbury matters within a week of his death. I was reading his books in a deli, and the waitresses commented about how much they loved his writings. During that whole week when he had died, people from different areas of society told me how much they appreciated his works. Gifted students especially need to know and experience Ray Bradbury.

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