GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS QUARTERLY

What are some of the characteristics of an effective curriculum for the gifted? The concept of differentiated instruction has become one of the primary factors in gifted education through the writings of Virgil Ward from the 1960s through 1980s (e.g., **Differential Education for the Gifted**, 1980), and extensive teacher training across the nation by such individuals as Susan Weinbrenner and Carol Tomlinson. Teachers are using cluster grouping, a concept-based curriculum, discovery learning, procedures for developing advanced thinking abilities and many other approaches because of the work of these individuals. Another characteristic of an effective GT curriculum is to concentrate on multiple intelligences as developed by Howard Gardner (e.g., **Frames of Mind**, 1983). Although the eight intelligences proposed by Gardner are an excellent framework for identifying and educating gifted students, there is unfortunately still much wariness about applying these ideas in the gifted field. There are many reasons for this reticence – among them are entrenched adherence to current intelligence tests, pressures from parents and politicians to mainly emphasize verbal and mathematical abilities, and economic factors involved in expanding gifted programs. Considerable progress needs to be made in the thinking of educators and parents before the full potential of MI theory can be effectively applied to gifted education. A third area that needs more extensive development is a unified science, technology and humanities curriculum. The use of historical time lines, generalizing the scientific method of thinking to all areas of study, ethical analysis of all subjects including science, and interweaving subjects into a unified whole would advance gifted education far beyond its present state. Jerome Bruner's ideas (e.g., **On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand**, 1964) are relevant to this pursuit.

In the first article, Donna Ford and Gilman Whiting make important recommendations for nondiscriminatory assessment of minority children. This is the first in a series of three by these authors on this topic. Their analysis represents an important step in identifying minority students for gifted education. The authors are on the faculty of Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. Donna Ford holds the Betts Chair of Education and Human Development in Peabody's Special Education Department. Gilman Whiting is Director of Undergraduate Studies and Senior Lecturer, African American and Diaspora Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, and Human Organization and Development. Alicia Cotabish, a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock, makes detailed recommendations for managing successful gifted programs in small school districts. She coordinates the Arkansas Evaluation Initiative (AEI) in Gifted Education where she has managed several program evaluation institutes for over 200 district gifted program administrators. Sarah Bender summarizes some of the research on gifted students' learning and psychological problems. She is an undergraduate at Idaho State University and plans to pursue graduate studies in developmental cognitive neuroscience. In celebration of the recent PBS performance of **Bleak House** by Charles Dickens, Michael Walters concludes with a tribute to this great author.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D.   Publisher

Under-Representation of Diverse Students in Gifted Education: Recommendations for Non-Discriminatory Assessment (Part 1)

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Intelligence tests were first introduced at the turn of the 20th century, and since that time, educators, psychologists and other professionals have waged battles over the issue of biases in traditional psychometric tests (Dent, 1996; Ford, 2004; Gould, 1991). Specifically, the testing of intelligence among culturally diverse groups, particularly African Americans, has had a consistent history of tension – misunderstanding, controversy, misuse, and even abuse. "Criticisms have ranged from moral indictments against labeling individuals, to cultural bias, and even to accusations of flagrant abuse of test scores." (Groth-Marnat, 2003, p. 129).

With our nation's growing interest in accountability, high-stakes testing is prominent. Not surprisingly, schools are the primary users of intelligence tests; tests are used extensively for placement and programming decisions in special education and gifted education. It is believed that intelligence tests provide valuable information about an individual's cognitive strengths and weaknesses, his/her potential for achieving academically, and the need for specialized educational services.

Despite their popularity and widespread use, there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the use – and usefulness – of intelligences tests for making decisions about culturally diverse students. Specifically, several major criticisms are that: (1) traditional intelligence tests have an inherent bias toward emphasizing convergent, analytical, and scientific modes of thought; (2) intelligence tests measure a limited range of cognitive abilities and do not (cannot) measure the entire range of abilities that make up intelligence (Groth-Marnat, 2003; Sternberg, 2000); (3) traditional intelligence tests do not adequately measure many cognitive abilities that contemporary theories and research specify as important in understanding learning and problem solving (Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001, p. 1); (4) intelligence tests are limited in their ability to make long-term predictions (Groth-Marnat, 2003); (5) intelligence tests are not measures of innate fixed ability, and their use in classifying students without other information is questionable; (6) traditional intelligence tests may not be appropriate to use with culturally diverse students; and (7) traditional intelligence tests may not be appropriate to use with linguistically diverse students. While many contemporary test developers attempt to address the potential cultural nuances within their respective instruments, but allocate a small section in their test manuals to discuss the challenges in using their instrument for assessing individuals of diverse cultures (Esters, Ittenback, & Han, 1997). Thus, those administering, interpreting and using tests may not be adequately prepared to use them in equitable ways.

There is a legacy of research and theories, as well as opinions that are critical of the practice of using traditional intelligence tests with both linguistically and culturally diverse populations. In the debates, particularly of those who oppose the use of tests with diverse groups, the central focus is on the issue of fairness and the discriminatory or disparate impact of standardized tests. Opponents often argue that such tests contribute to the under-representation of diverse students in gifted education and their over-representation in special education. Nonetheless, the educational community's reliance on intelligence tests has not diminished; rather, testing is flourishing as evident by the number of school districts that require students to pass proficiency or achievement tests, and the importance placed on tests in federal legislation, such as No Child Left Behind. Given this obvious commitment to testing, no time is better than now to find ways to increase the educational and diagnostic usefulness of tests. One such recommendation is that of non-discriminatory or non-biased assessment[1] approaches. In this article, we present the first of a three-part series on non-discriminatory assessment. In this article, we present an overview of nondiscriminatory assessment; in part two, we share principles and guidelines for assessing diverse gifted students in nondiscriminatory ways; in part three, we discuss alternative assessments, primarily non-verbal measures. One premise permeates this three-part series – nondiscriminatory assessment holds much promise for increasing the representation of diverse students in gifted education.

Assessment: An Overview

Professionals and lay-persons alike often use the terms 'testing' and 'assessment' interchangeably. We contend that the two terms and their purposes are not synonymous. Assessment is a broad, comprehensive process of which testing is but one component. Specifically, ". . .assessment is a process through which information reflecting the behavior, performance, or functions of an individual is collected, analyzed, interpreted and summarized, usually in response to a specific request or referral." (Dent, 1996, p. 104). Assessment involves gathering a variety of information from many sources to create a comprehensive profile of the individual based on the data. Such comprehensiveness makes it possible for educators to diagnose needs, strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, to prescribe appropriate educational services.

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[1]A more complete discussion of nondiscriminatory assessment can be found in Joseph and Ford (2006) and Ford (2004).

Testing refers to the administration of a test in a systematic, prescribed manner. Tests, therefore, are <u>one</u> component of the assessment process. "A **test** is a standardized procedure for sampling behavior and describing behavior according to categories or scores. . . ." (Gregory, 2004, p. 30). In reality, a test is a limited sample of behavior:

"For example, the purpose of the vocabulary test is not to determine the examinee's entire word stock by requesting definitions of a very small but carefully selected sample of words. Whether the examinee can define the particular 35 words from a vocabulary subtest is of little direct consequence, but the indirect meaning of such results is of great importance because it signals the examinee's general knowledge of vocabulary." (Gregory, 2004, p. 31)

An implicit assumption of tests is that they measure individual differences in traits or characteristics that exist in all people, but in varying amounts. Therefore, the purpose of testing is to estimate the amount of that characteristic within an individual. However, due to their limited scope, two cautions must be noted about tests: (1) testing is imprecise; every test score reflects some degree of measurement error, and it is important to make the error as small as possible in order to increase precision and inferences drawn from the scores; and (2) educators must avoid reifying the characteristics being measured (Gould, 1991). In essence, test scores do not represent a 'thing' with physical reality; they portray an abstraction that is considered useful in predicting behaviors (e.g., grades in school).

Although assessment is broad and comprehensive, concerted efforts must still focus on potentially unfair or discriminatory instruments, policies and procedures. Nondiscriminatory assessment is not a search for an unbiased test only, but rather a process that ensures that every individual is evaluated in the least discriminatory manner possible. "Nondiscriminatory assessment is not a single procedure or test, but a wide range of approaches that collectively seek to uncover as fairly as possible relevant information and data upon which decisions regarding individuals can be equitably based." (Ortiz, 2002, p. 1321).

Features of Nondiscriminatory Assessment

"Nondiscriminatory assessment is much more than considering which instruments should be used and which should not be used. It is more than simply eliminating tests that may contain bias." (Ortiz 2002, p. 1321)

Although educators must strive to conduct completely non-discriminatory assessment, some scholars contend that, "completely unbiased assessment is an illusion, because it is impossible to eliminate every single instance of bias or every potentially discriminatory aspect of assessment." (Ortiz, 2002, p. 1321). Nondiscriminatory assessment is concerned with fairness in all aspects of evaluating individuals. It includes selecting the least biased instruments, seeking to avoid confirmatory biases (having preconceived notions or stereotypes

about diverse individuals), and ensuring that policies and procedures are fair or nondiscriminatory. "Nondiscriminatory assessment is a collection of approaches, each designed to systematically reduce bias with the broader framework." (p. 1324). Ortiz (2002) developed one possible framework for non-discriminatory assessment that is guided by several promising procedures and recommendations:

Assess and evaluate the learning ecology. Non-discriminatory assessment begins with directing initial assessment efforts toward exploration of the extrinsic causes that might be related to performance. Hypotheses should be developed around a student's unique experiential background within the context of the learning environment. When assessment is conducted on culturally or linguistically diverse students, factors associated with culture and experiences can affect (adversely) test performance.

Assess and evaluate language proficiency. An evaluation of a student's language proficiency provides the required context within which poor test scores (and academic performance) can be properly evaluated, and forms the basis for the development of instructional interventions that are linguistically appropriate.

Assess and evaluate opportunity for learning. The school setting provides the most significant context for formal learning. The curriculum, personnel, policies, and instructional setting must be evaluated to determine whether diverse students have been provided with adequate "opportunity to learn." Data can be collected from evaluations of the classroom environment and teaching methods, direct observation of students' academic performance, review of educational records and progress reports, attendance records, review of the content and level of the curriculum, analysis of match between the students' needs and the curriculum, match between students' language and language of instruction, cultural relevance of the curriculum, teaching strategies and styles, teacher attitudes and expectations, interviews with students and their families, peer relationships and pressures, and more.

Assess and evaluate educationally relevant cultural and linguistic factors. Learning takes place not only in school, but in the broader scope of a student's social and cultural milieu. With diverse individuals, it is important to assess and evaluate these milieu and their influences on school learning, language development, and educational process. Language assessments, observations of the individual, home visits, and interviews with family members can shed light on these factors.

Evaluate, revise, and re-test hypotheses. All reasonable and viable factors that could be related to a student's test performance should be evaluated and ruled out. Data to test hypotheses should be collected and used to revise original hypotheses. All efforts must be made to reduce or eliminate potentially discriminatory attributions regarding diverse students' test performance.

Determine the need for and language of assessments. When a student is not proficient in English, his/her test performance may be significantly affected. Thus, these students should be assessed in their primary language or native mode of

communication; and they should be evaluated by an assessor who possesses knowledge regarding the factors relevant to the students' unique experiences and how they may affect learning and development.

Reduce bias in traditional testing practices. This may be accomplished by administering tests in non-discriminatory manner or modifying the testing process in a way that is less discriminatory initially. Some suggestions include bilingual administration of the test, extending or eliminating time constraints when appropriate, accepting alternative response formats (e.g., gestures, in a different language, additional probing and querying of incorrect responses, etc.). Like Ortiz (2002), we recognize that these changes and others should not compromise the standardization of the tests.

Utilize authentic and alternative assessment procedures. Non-standardized assessment instruments and strategies can provide valuable information about students. Curriculum-based assessment, performance-based assessments, portfolio assessments, non-verbal reasoning tests, and metacognitive awareness inventories (e.g., Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) should be included in the assessment process. Additionally, observing the strategies that students are using while completing items on tests may provide insights as to how they are reasoning about information. The data derived from these types of assessment procedures provide the evaluator with an opportunity to view performance through a qualitative lens. Every effort must be made to avoid using single scores, avoid interpreting only results from quantitative sources of data, and unduly favoring certain data over other data, as this can lead to discriminatory inferences and outcomes (Ortiz, 2002).

Evaluate and interpret all data within the context of the learning ecology. "All data collected over the course of nondiscriminatory assessment should be evaluated in an integrated manner, utilizing information obtained about students' unique experiences and background as the appropriate context." (Ortiz, 2002, p. 1332)

Link assessment to intervention. Testing and assessment are not interventions. Assessment – even the most comprehensive assessment and the most nondiscriminatory assessment – is of little value unless it can be used to target or develop intervention options. It should be noted that there is inadequate data to suggest that many standardized intelligence tests have treatment utility (Braden, 1997, Sternberg, 2000), and this is a consideration that must be addressed as it contributes, in part, to the overall validity of an instrument (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999).

Intervene by providing opportunities for learning and appropriate instruction. Vygotsky (1978) defined intelligence as the zone of proximal development, which is considered to be what a student can accomplish if provided appropriate mediational or "cultural" tools. Many educators today use the term 'scaffolding' when they refer to providing appropriate types of assistance to students. When diverse students score low, it may be necessary to scaffold their learning by modifying instructional programs and providing students with test-taking skills, language-based skills, opportunities to receive corrective feedback and practice, and other relevant interventions. These students may not have been provided with opportunities to perform cognitive/academic tasks, such as inductive and deductive reasoning tasks, etc. They may need opportunities to be exposed to tasks that demand these ways of thinking and to have particular ways of thinking modeled for them through, for example, teacher vocalizations of thought processes while solving problems. For instance, most of us learned to solve verbal analogies by being provided with demonstrations of solving these types of analogies. Thus, providing insufficient opportunities to learn and providing inappropriate instruction can be considered biased educational practices (Canter, 1997), and one creates bias when he/she excludes individuals from receiving opportunities. Assessment must also consider the extent to which students have not had an equal opportunity to learn because of inadequate schooling, poor instruction, and learning experiences (Skiba et al., 2002).

The above recommendations reinforce the importance of educators going beyond tests (or testing) to consider all components of the assessment process. However, within the context of testing, one component that is often overlooked and perhaps not emphasized as well in training programs that offer assessment courses is being keen observers of the strategies students use while attempting to solve test items (e.g., Kaufman, 1994). Some alternative intelligence measures, for instance, are including a checklist, for the evaluator to complete, on a range of possible observed strategies that students applied while solving problems (e.g., Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System, Naglieri & Das, 1997). Most importantly, the overall recommendation is that the performance of diverse individuals must include considerations of culture – language proficiency, cultural background, communication and values, social exposure, and level of acculturation.

Culturally competent assessment is much more than ensuring that tests are unbiased. Rather, "culturally competent assessment represents a commitment to data collection… . [and] assists in identifying and eliminating sources of bias throughout the educational process ." (Skiba, Knestling, & Bush, 2002, p. 62).

Summary and Conclusions

Tests are used extensively, and sometimes exclusively, to screen, identify, and place students in gifted education classes and services (Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted and The National Association for Gifted Children, 2003). And despite cautions against the exclusive use of tests for identifying gifted students (e.g., NAGC, 1997; Ford, 1996, 2004), many districts are using one test and strict cutoff scores to identify gifted students, according to data collected from state departments of education (Council of State Directors, 2003). The implications of using (a) one test, (b) strict cutoff scores, or (c) tests only for identification and placement decisions will not be repeated here. We do believe, however, that the practice is indefensible and serves to keep gifted education programs very much racially segregated.

In addition to these concerns, other issues must be considered when students are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Given the persistent under-representation of diverse students in gifted education, educators and those who administer, interpret, and use tests must consider how and the extent to which tests are contributing to the under-representation of diverse students in gifted education. One question worth considering is: *If diverse students consistently perform poorly on a test or tests, why do we continue to use the test(s)?* As discussed throughout this article, educators must carefully consider the tests and the policies and procedures they employ. We propose that non-discriminatory assessment, as described herein, holds much promise for increasing the representation of diverse students in gifted education. To address the issue of diverse students being under-represented in gifted education, educators must carefully select tests and instruments.

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An Administrator's Guide to Growing a Small District Gifted Program:
A Tactical Pursuit to Build Program Support from the Inside Out

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My placement as a gifted administrator in a small district was nothing spectacular. In fact, the events that led up to my placement are quite commonplace. Many similar program administrators did not intend to enter the field of gifted education; they fell into the position by happenstance. It was November and school had begun. Although it was three months into the school year, I decided to go back to work after having a baby. I applied to a small school district with the average daily membership of 760 in rural Arkansas for the position of first grade teacher – a position I was qualified for. By the time the interview was finished, I was hired to be the Title I Math Coordinator. A week later, I was also told to be the K-12 Gifted and Talented Coordinator and teacher. This responsibility was in addition to my responsibilities as the Title I Math Coordinator. In a matter of minutes I had more responsibility than I had bargained for. I was immediately told that an annual Gifted and Talented report was overdue, needed to be completed, and sent to the Arkansas Department of Education. In addition, gifted students had not been served since the previous school year. The district had been looking for someone certified to teach gifted students but was unable to hire anyone. I was told to make the best of the situation and that my responsibility to the gifted program would be short-lived.

Although that first year was overwhelming, it was a pivotal point in my career. I took over the program when it was at an all-time low – few students or teachers had faith or interest. Because the position of Gifted and Talented Coordinator had a history of high turnover, everyone viewed me as a temporary fixture. I really had my work cut out for me. In addition, other unexpected challenges accompanied me that year. Three months into the job, the gifted program was monitored by the Arkansas Department of Education, an occurrence that happens every three years. Furthermore, I had no gifted training and couldn't imagine going back to college with a four month-old at home. Nevertheless, I endured that year and learned much more than I could have ever imagined. I served as the Gifted and Talented Administrator and teacher for the program for three years and, with the help from countless school personnel, built an award-winning program.

The commonalities among small school district program administrators are compelling. Many are faced with daunting responsibilities non-existent in larger districts. Gifted Program Administrators from small districts wear many hats and are expected to perform feats well beyond the scope of many program administrators. Moreover, they are often expected to perform dual roles, one being a teacher of the gifted and the other being an administrator of gifted programs. Beyond the administrative hurdles, there are many alluring qualities to being a gifted administrator in a small district. Most of these professional educators serve students on multiple campuses. Because of this "small school" quality, gifted personnel efforts are clearly evident and profound. These administrators and teachers often serve the same children from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Because these programs are usually under the direction of one person, they are manageable, are considered to be a "prize" within the small community, and offer a personal approach to teaching gifted students. Although there are many appealing qualities, there are also limitations to address in order maximize the growth. To build support, the administrator must lead by example and be an effective artist of communication and tactical planning.

Before a Gifted Program Administrator can build support, there must be a sound, rigorous program in place which must: (1) address state standards; (2) have an acceptable identification process that aggressively identifies under-represented groups; and (3) offer curriculum options deemed appropriate for talented learners. It is not until this fundamental groundwork is laid that a sustainable, sound program will emerge and have potential to grow in support. Building support of a program requires many hands and resources in addition to organization and strong leadership. From first hand experience, I have found these seedlings in the following building support principles:

1. Build respect for the district's gifted program through communication
2. Build key relationships within and outside the district
3. Be resourceful
4. Visualize the program's destiny through goal setting and act accordingly

5. Lead by example

Principle 1: Build Respect for the District's Gifted Program Through Communication

I have always worked under the assumption that building respect for a gifted program requires aggressive communication with key individuals. It is important as an administrator of a gifted program to have an accurate perception of the program's image. To promote better communication with these key individuals, the process begins with evaluating stakeholders' perceptions. These stakeholders include parents, teachers, gifted students, administrators, community members and other interested individuals. After surveying them, the gifted administrator should disseminate findings and act upon them to improve program services. This act reinforces stakeholders' perceptions of feeling valued as partners in the district's gifted program.

Equally as important, it is vital for administrators of gifted programs to extend communication efforts beyond stakeholders. Administrators must "advertise" the good qualities of their programs. You, as the administrator and teacher, should not be hesitant in letting others know about the program. Ultimately, this will lead to increased referrals for screening, identification, and awareness of options. It is also important to showcase student work regularly. Place articles showcasing student achievements and other favorable happenings in the local and school newspapers. To keep district administrators informed, I often forwarded articles about gifted students to my building administrator and superintendent. I regularly placed information about gifted program events in teachers' boxes. It is essential to share information about the program with other teachers, parents and personnel in the district. Other awareness efforts could include entering student work in contests, fairs and exhibits. My experience was that students feed upon each other's experiences. If one student has been successful, other students are more willing to give time and effort to a project. I encourage Gifted Program Administrators to apply for mini grants, awards and other recognition opportunities that highlight student and gifted personnel achievements. As the administrator, I sought out opportunities to nominate my gifted students for awards. Even if they did not win, I recognized them as the district's nominee for the award at our local-level awards ceremony. If there are minimal opportunities, make additional opportunities.

A multitude of opportunities are often offered through state gifted organizations. In Arkansas, as in many states, the state gifted and talented organization displays a student showcase during the annual state conference. All schools are encouraged to participate and the display is a splendid celebration of student creativity. In addition, teachers have the opportunity to submit curriculum samples in hopes to be recognized with a Curriculum Award. One of the greatest recognition opportunities offered by the Arkansas state organization is the ACT 56 Award, presented by the Governor's Advisory Council for Gifted Education. Districts are encouraged to apply for the prestigious award which is given in three district-size categories. A $3000 check accompanies the award. These types of opportunities not only provide recognition for students and teachers, but also offer an opportunity to highlight the district, including the superintendent, further advantaging the gifted program. In addition, participating in these types of activities provide a noninvasive way to draw attention to gifted programs in an effort to gain support of local school board members, the superintendent and other key district stakeholders.

From previous experience, I found it is not only important to increase communication efforts but to assess the effectiveness of communication efforts. An easy way to do this is to keep a communication log of correspondence to track contact with those who significantly impact student learning. My contacts included parents, other teachers, counselors, and administrators. The communication log served a dual role in that it aided me to be a reflective practitioner in the art of communication, and it provided me with a visual record to identify strengths and weaknesses in my communication efforts. In addition, the log served as important program documentation. I could easily recall contacts made to stakeholders (and defend myself, if need be). A paper trail can serve multiple purposes and is an invaluable tool.

Principle 2: Build Key Relationships Within and Outside the District

Building key relationships within and outside the district are vital to the success of small gifted programs. In districts where administrators also serve as teachers of the gifted, program success is often dependent upon public support. Small district administrators are the solo voice of their program. With this in mind, they need to involve others to help build capacity. The best way to initiate involvement is to create enthusiasm about the program. Everyone wants to be a part of something exciting and enthusiasm creates this atmosphere. It is important to involve key personnel in student activities, field trips and program options. When planning exciting activities, ask school board members or building administrators to serve as chaperones. Recruiting efforts should include classroom teachers and parents and extend to the community. During my time as a Gifted Program Administrator and teacher, I had the opportunity to take gifted students on several out-of-town trips. I made a point to invite school board members, teachers and parents. In doing so, there was increased support for the program. District personnel were involved on all occasions. In one instance, there were several classroom teachers involved in helping me coordinate a major field trip. The trip was coincidentally scheduled during the time of the space shuttle Columbia disaster. Because our field trip destination was in the vicinity of Kennedy Space Center, I felt compelled to take students to NASA to lay a memorial wreath. Since this was not a scheduled stop, the addition of this portion of the trip required us to leave a day earlier than planned. By calling upon local merchants for donations, several classroom teachers helped raise money for food and supplies for the additional leg of the trip. Overall, there were around twenty-five donations made by businesses. The trip was a great success

and can be attributed to the efforts of these classroom teachers' support for the gifted program.

If your district's gifted students actively participate in academic competitions, don't be hesitant to ask individuals to moderate and help facilitate these activities. There is no possible way I could have successfully organized my district's quiz bowl, spelling bees and chess tournaments without the volunteer efforts of other teachers. I called upon the district's speech teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, the elementary building principal and a paraprofessional on several occasions. As a result of their participation, they became actively involved and felt as though they had a stake in the program. I can't stress enough that there is strength in numbers. Together we became team players, increasing the capacity to offer opportunities to our district's gifted students.

I also encourage program administrators to invite other classroom teachers to help with exciting projects that highlight their individual talents. For example, I once asked a talented fourth-grade teacher to facilitate an art project with my elementary gifted students. The project involved painting a creative mural on the wall in the GT classroom. Knowing that my art skills were limited to drawing stick people, I bartered for her services. I offered to teach her math class (something I knew about) in exchange for her art services. With the building principal's approval, I went to the teacher's classroom several times over the course of two weeks to teach math while she went to my classroom to paint with my gifted elementary students. The project was a huge success! The mural was spectacular and the students had a great time creating something that would be enjoyed by many for years to come.

It is equally important to involve the community of a small district. Small communities are relatively close knit and can be a program's greatest supporter. When facilitating student projects, fundraising or advocating for student programs, small communities often rise to support programs. This is particularly true when the community feels involved and informed. Involving community members can generate program support, and can often lead to individuals donating hours, business goods, and services to support gifted students. During my tenure as program administrator, I made a point to keep the local community informed of program happenings. These involvement efforts included close contact with two local businesses in town, a bank and a store that served the entire community. I often posted announcements in these locations and had a working relationship with each. I shared the program's mission and garnered support from both businesses. The bank often donated savings bonds to the winners of district academic competitions, and the store agreed to supply pizza for a reduced price when used to raise money for student activities. The working relationship between these two businesses benefited the gifted program countless times and spilled over to the community at-large. Through this experience I am reminded that the community is not an entity, rather many individuals. The collective whole is a key ingredient to building program support for gifted programs.

Principle 3: Be Resourceful

To have greater student impact, the administrator in a small school district must be resourceful. Resources may seem nonexistent at times, but many can be found in professional organizations and through committee involvement within and outside the district. When seeking outside resources, search for common interests at educational cooperative meetings, professional development training, student competitions, and organization meetings. Inevitably, someone with the skills and/ or resources will be present and, most likely, be willing to help. Utilizing these resourceful people can provide unlimited opportunities for students. It is equally important to return the favor and be available to others as a resource.

To have greater teacher impact, the program administrator must be a resource to district staff, mainly other classroom teachers and counselors in the district. For example, I provided district-wide gifted education staff development to classroom teachers. By volunteering to present at annual professional development days, I was embedded as a resource in the district's professional development offerings. Superintendents are usually eager to welcome and utilize "free," quality staff development. In Arkansas, districts are required to provide teachers with 60 hours of professional development each year. Annually, I asked my superintendent if I could offer staff development during one of the required professional development days. He was more than happy to allow me to do this. The golden opportunity allowed me to have the undivided attention of those who interacted most with the district's gifted students, the classroom teachers and counselors. I presented sessions on the nature and needs of gifted students and differentiating instruction for them. In addition, I was able to inform others about the district's identification process and advocate on behalf of gifted students.

Extending an invitation to be a resource to others in the district also encourages collegial bonding between co-workers. Collaboration can be a great benefit to all involved. Examples of collaboration include brainstorming ideas for differentiating instruction for gifted children in the regular classroom setting, and developing extension activities for existing curriculum. Benefits of collaboration include gaining insight into gifted students' behaviors, curriculum offerings in the regular classroom and a flourishing professional relationship with colleagues. Beyond your own district, going the extra mile to be a resource to other districts offers additional rewards. The potential student impact and benefits are limitless. Services are often returned by the recipient district administrators; thus, creating a win-win situation for all involved.

In addition to providing these services, a persistent administrator plans ahead to address potential resource obstacles. When the success or failure of an outcome hinges upon the availability of additional resources beyond the means of a small district,

administrators need to think outside of the box to acquire these resources. This can usually be accomplished by building a network outside the district. Some of the best networking relationships can be established with other districts. Combining forces with larger districts can provide great benefits to the small district gifted program. Larger and more affluent districts often host college recruiting fairs, career fairs and other educational activities beyond the financial means of small districts. Collaboration between large and small districts can develop into a healthy relationship that benefits the small gifted program. For example, in a large neighboring town adjacent to the small district in which I worked, there were bountiful opportunities for gifted students. After befriending the Gifted Program Administrator in the larger district, I asked if my gifted high school students could participate in the larger districts' college fair and career fair. This administrator was glad to extend an invitation to us. There was virtually no cost to either side involved other than the bus transportation. Gifted students benefitted greatly from the exposure.

In addition to networking with other school districts, colleges are eager to form relationships and partnerships. College student volunteers are frequently available. Undergraduates majoring in education are usually more than willing to provide a variety of services in an attempt to gain experience in a school setting. They often volunteer to tutor students and work in after school programs. Our small district alone often had 20 to 30 undergraduates at a time. These student volunteers are usually anxious to work with special populations including gifted students. Arrangements can also be formed between a gifted program and college professors. Professors often require education majors to log hours on a school campus, and this arrangement can result in huge rewards for gifted students. College students can be an invaluable resource to gifted students. Like all students, the gifted are heavily influenced by these young adults. College students can provide one-on-one mentoring experiences and inspire them to pursue higher educational goals.

Principle 4: Visualize the Program's Destiny Through Goal Setting and Act Accordingly

To promote progress within a gifted program, the administrator must scrutinize current practices and be willing to embrace change. Out of this reflective process, reasonable goals should be established. Goal setting requires an analysis of a program's strengths and weaknesses, formatting a "doable" plan of action, setting a reasonable timeline and following through with a plan-of-action. The initial act of establishing goals for a gifted program requires an informed assessment of the program. I often performed this assessment by administering surveys to stakeholders and obtaining feedback from the district's gifted program advisory council. I listed goals that were reasonable, attainable through the means of the district, and reflective of the program's vision. When establishing goals, I asked myself, "Are my program goals aligned with the district's mission and vision? Are there adequate resources available to meet the goals? How

will I know when these goals are met? Am I going to give an assessment or feedback to monitor progress toward the goals? What length of time will it take to meet these goals?" All of these things must be considered if there is to be marked progress in attaining program goals. I caution anyone being too ambitious in the beginning stages of goal setting. As the old saying goes, "Do it right the first time." Goal setting requires careful consideration including reasonable timelines to avoid the risk of immediate failure. It is better to do a "little" well than to do "a lot" with little to show for the effort. From first-hand experience, I can attest that setting unrealistic goals leads to discouragement. I often encouraged myself along the way by noting that any effort to improve the program was better than no effort at all. I can honestly say that everyone will encounter a few difficulties. The process is about "monitoring and adjusting" to meet the established program goals.

Principle 5: Lead by Example

There is no end to what influence strong leadership can have on creating support for a gifted program. Strong leaders lead by example. Based on my personal observations, the most successful leaders of gifted programs often take the road less traveled and aggressively seek out opportunities for students. These professional leaders are good at conveying student needs and addressing those needs to district stakeholders. Their leadership position within the district is one of earned respect. Most often, their influence is not overbearing and is reserved for tactical purposes. When necessary, they use their influence to promote internal program changes that benefit their students.

Staff development is an ongoing effort for the effective gifted leader in an administrative position. These educators keep abreast of the most up-to-date practices in the field. They are aware of current administrative and legal issues in gifted education and in general education. They are risk-takers. When their own success falls short, these gifted program leaders exemplify failure in a positive manner and are a source of encouragement to others. You will find them presenting professional development workshops within their district, education co-ops, and at state-level conferences. In addition, they are not apprehensive about sharing experiences and insights in district and organizational newsletters.

Upon closer inspection, common patterns emerge. Most often, these educators are regarded as district gems. Their tenacious efforts are recognized and their services are valued. Their strategic efforts to "sow seeds" through aggressive communication and building key relationships yields support for their gifted programs. Providing appropriate services and varied opportunities for talented learners is of utmost concern and is the rationale that drives their decision-making. Their recognition of others as support partners increases the success of their program. They are quick to give credit to others for their invaluable help and celebrate the success of the program as a team victory. Viewing themselves as a public relations person, these leaders guard their program's reputation and seldom publicly express

discontent. They cross boundaries to provide students with opportunities often found only in larger schools and communities. They are keenly aware of their students' ambitions and seek the necessary resources to support their aspirations. They are the movers and shakers and the "dream makers!"

Summary and Conclusion

Building support for a small district gifted program is manageable and feasible. Once a sound foundation is established, the five principles for building support can be an effective way to expand capacity. These support principles rely on developing respect for the gifted program by communicating with stakeholders, establishing key relation-ships through involvement, creating contacts through networking, setting and attaining program goals, and guiding the program as a strong leader. Demonstrating these principles requires intensive efforts to build capacity from the inside out; administrators of gifted programs must be proactive advocates for their programs. Building support for small gifted programs does not produce instant results; rather it is methodical, thoughtful and designed to have a lasting impact. As a result of supportive infrastructure, gifted students in small districts are

given additional opportunities to succeed and to be as academically competitive as students in larger districts. The potential impact is profound and lasting.

My time as an administrator in a small gifted program and teacher was the happiest of all my teaching years. I absolutely loved what I did, the people with whom I worked and the students I served; although, it was the most challenging job of my teaching career. There was much required, yet seeing the fruits of my labor encouraged me. Shortly after I began my career with the school district, I was inspired to pursue graduate studies in gifted education. After three years, I left to take a position as the Javits Grant Coordinator for the Arkansas Evaluation Initiative in Gifted Education (AEI), a federally-funded project aimed at building capacity in gifted program evaluation across the state. I now have the privilege of working with 200 Gifted Program Administrators, five higher education institutions and eight education co-operatives around the state. Another component of the grant allows me to peer-coach thirty Gifted Program Administrators. During peer-coaching, I often call upon my past experiences and have discovered that we have something in common – we are brimming with rich experiences that allow us to be a resource to each other. I am now convinced that to serve as a Gifted Program Administrator and teacher in a small district is to answer a higher calling. ✈ ✈ ✈

Struggles of Gifted Children in School: Possible Negative Outcomes

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The concept of equal educational opportunity for all children has become, in many cases, identical education for all children. In a school system designed to reach the at-grade level learner, or even the below-level learner, the high-ability learner is virtually ignored. A study by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT) found that in elementary classrooms across the United States, high-ability students received the same type of instruction and material at the same pace as their classmates, more than 80% of the time (Reis, 1994). These high IQ or gifted students often find themselves unchallenged, underachieving, and even exhibiting depression, anger, or other difficulties.

Although many readers are aware of these concerns, I have attempted to highlight certain problematic areas using current research. Many relevant studies exist, but due to limited space, I will emphasize key findings in each area. Four issues pertaining to gifted students will be covered: (1) behaviors leading to misdiagnosed psychopathologies; (2) an overview of gifted children's self-concept and emotional traits; (3) an examination of under-identification and underachievement; and

(4) the incidence of high school attrition. I will also make brief suggestions for intervention and support.

Pathologizing Bright Children

Janos and Robinson (as cited in Winner,1996) found that an estimated 20-25% of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties, a rate two times higher than found in the school-age population at large. These difficulties, as well as the intense, sensitive nature of gifted children, can manifest themselves as negative behaviors that counselors and school psychologists misinterpret at times as psychopathologies. A few of the most commonly misdiagnosed are Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Mood Disorders such as depression and Bipolar Disorder (Webb, 2000, 2001). A lack of understanding of certain social and emotional traits commonly seen in gifted children can result in inadequate or incorrect intervention.

Gifted children often exhibit impatience and high motor activity, as well as the sensitivity and emotional intensity mentioned

earlier that taken together are easily mistaken for ADHD. Typically, children with ADHD exhibit similar impulsivity behaviors and inattentiveness in most or all situations, whereas gifted children may only exhibit them in situations where they are bored or feel misunderstood (Webb, 2000, 2001).

Little training for school personnel exists to discern between ADHD and giftedness. Hartnett, Nelson, and Rinn (2004) conducted the following study to examine this issue. Forty-four first year graduate students enrolled in a school counseling program were equally divided at random into two groups. Each group then received an identical vignette about a hypothetical seven-year-old boy exhibiting a high activity level, messy work habits, restlessness, and a poor attention span. The first group received researcher-constructed Form A, asking how they would explain the boy's behavior, while the second group received researcher-constructed Form B, asking if they would attribute the boy's behavior to ADHD or to his being gifted. With the non-specific prompt given in Form A, 77% of the participants listed ADHD as a possible diagnosis, and none suggested a diagnosis of giftedness. Given Form B's specific prompts, 46% of the participants gave giftedness as a potential diagnosis. The results indicate that with the suggestion of the possibility of giftedness, a counselor may be more likely to differentiate between the presentations of ADHD and giftedness.

Exhibiting idealism, sensitivity, and intense power struggles with parents or teachers can be mistaken for Oppositional Defiant Disorder in gifted children. A "strong-willed" child who constantly questions authority comes across as pathologically defiant and angry. Another misdiagnosis in gifted children is that of Mood Disorders, in particular Bipolar Disorder. Gifted traits that are mistaken for these disorders include extreme mood swings, acute empathy for the suffering of others, feelings of aloneness and alienation, self-criticism, and sensitivity to rejection (Webb, 2000, 2001). It is critical for school psychologists and counselors to become aware of the specific socio-emotional traits gifted children often exhibit, to ensure that correct intervention and support is given.

Self-Concept among Gifted Children

Gifted children encounter barriers to a healthy self-concept often linked to frustration and anxiety due to their lack of an appropriately differentiated education. Although studies by Richards, Encel, and Shute (2003) show gifted children have a stronger self-concept under ideal circumstances than non-gifted children, Hotulainen and Schofield (2003) found that gifted children's Global Self-Worth was only minimally correlated to their Scholastic Competence (0.15; Range = 0.0 to 1.0) and Behavioral Conduct (0.08; Range = 0.0 to 1.0). Studies of non-gifted children indicate significantly higher correlations between Scholastic Competence and Global Self-worth, ranging from 0.46 to 0.64 (Range = 0.0 to 1.0). This may indicate that, for gifted students, school is of relatively little importance and essentially valueless to their sense of self-worth.

Unfortunately, many teachers of gifted children do not have adequate training in understanding and challenging the above types of students, and wish only for them to "fit in." One adolescent, Rachel, with a measured IQ of 145, received an individual education plan (IEP) to address her learning needs after a diagnosis of severe depression. One part of Rachel's IEP was a behavior checklist to help her conform. "Don't talk so much in class; keep it to a sound bite. Don't be so aggressive. Don't answer all the questions. Don't discuss things so much. Tone it down. Don't challenge the status quo."(Davidson & Davidson, 2004, p. 11). These are familiar words to many gifted children, who struggle to find their voice in a world that wants to keep them quiet.

Under-Identification and Underachievement

A teacher may have in her mind a pre-conceived notion of what a gifted student acts like. Many times, however, the best students in class are not the gifted children. Jacobs' study (as cited in Gross, 1999) found that unless teachers receive specific training on how to identify a gifted child, they are more likely to misidentify a cooperative, verbally articulate child who seeks teacher approval for one of high intelligence. Furthermore, studies by Ciha et al. (as cited in Gross, 1999) show that children identified for gifted programs only by teacher nomination (excluding nomination by IQ or achievement tests or other methods) are more likely to come from Caucasian middle-class or higher-class families.

Groups of children under-identified may include the economically disadvantaged, minorities, physically or learning disabled, and girls (Idaho Best Practices Manual, 1994). Minority students in particular are severely under-represented by 50-70% in gifted programs (Naglieri, 2003). Several issues are at the root of this problem, according to current research. Teacher referral bias, the requirement by many school districts that students complete assessments in English, and the culture bias of many standardized tests all appear to contribute to the issue.

What is the most culture-fair method of assessing racially and linguistically diverse children for inclusion in gifted programs? Several options are available. For example, according to Naglieri (2003), non-verbal intelligence and ability tests can be administered, including Raven's Progressive Matrices, the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (KBIT-II), and the performance subscales of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV). Other options include the use of parent referrals, peer referrals, and portfolios of work in the student's native language. One caveat with any standardized intelligence or ability test administered applies to the examiner; a knowledgeable diagnostician will interpret scores comprehensively, taking into account all information collected during an assessment.

Another question that arises for gifted educators is how best to teach these high-ability minority students. De Wet (2005) suggests the following Best Practices: (1) use the student's

creative and problem-solving strengths; (2) cluster information, enabling students to determine connections among ideas and skills; (3) use instructional examples relevant to the student's culture and experience; and (4) use community members and parents as mentors and resources.

Gifted girls begin around third grade to downplay their intelligence and abilities in an effort to conform to society's standards. In addition, girls who appear too smart tend to be rejected by peers of both sexes. Peers see gifted boys as creative, smart, and funny while gifted girls are perceived as aloof, bossy, and self-absorbed (Winner, 1996).

Reis and McCoach's study (as cited in Reis and Renzulli, 2004) found that the issue of underachievement is one of the most pervasive problems now affecting gifted students. Highly intelligent students who are required to work at the same level and pace as their age-mates, when often they can grasp concepts years ahead, are at great risk of losing interest in school and falling short of their potential.

In particular, one problematic area of underachievement is that of gifted children who feel acutely uncomfortable with the differences between themselves and the other children, and quickly adjust to conform to the social and behavioral norms of their age group. One five-and-a-half year old boy entered kindergarten reading at a fourth grade level, but soon began imitating his classmates and only chose picture books or easy readers from the school library (Gross, 1999). Under-identified and underachieving gifted students need special attention to ensure their success in school.

Attrition in Gifted High School Students

When the situation of underachievement goes unresolved, according to Reis and Renzulli (2004, p. 122), ". . . .the pattern . . .is difficult to reverse and often persists into adulthood." The most frustrated gifted students, thinking school has nothing to offer, will drop out altogether.

An extensive study conducted by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT) examined gifted high school dropouts and their reasons for attrition (Renzulli & Park, 2002). These students had participated in their school district's gifted program or had enrolled in three or more advanced or accelerated English, science, math, or social studies classes. The study found that among the gifted males, 49% stated they left because they were failing school, and 37.4% stated they left because they did not like school. The gifted females answered similarly, with 29.1% leaving because of failing school, and 35.5% leaving because they did not like school. Both males and females gave more than one reason for their attrition. The answer of "failing school," even among students in gifted programs, indicates the pattern of underachievement had begun some time before the actual dropout event. We can only speculate as to whether these students continued on to college at

some point. Given their unsuccessful high school experiences, it is highly improbable they attempted higher education.

Proposed Intervention and Support

The issues surrounding how to fulfill the potential of gifted children are complex. They include: (1) general education teachers' level of knowledge regarding gifted students; (2) various educational options for gifted children; and (3) emotional support and intervention. Examining these problematic areas and arriving at possible solutions will lead to long-term improvements in the quality of a gifted child's education and self-concept.

The first such issue lies with teacher education. An NRCGT study found that less than half of the several thousand elementary teachers surveyed had ever received any instruction in how to teach gifted students (Reis, 1994). At the minimum, current teachers should attend in-service training in identifying gifted children and learn strategies for expanding the curriculum for these students. College students currently in teacher education programs should be required to take at least one class covering the specific traits and needs of gifted children, as is the requirement regarding disabled children. Implementing these strategies would begin to address the lack of teachers' knowledge in the area of gifted children.

Many alternative educational options for gifted children exist; however, what works for one child might not work for another. Many school districts' gifted programs in elementary and middle school consist of "pull-out" classes that are typically enrichment and/or creativity and critical thinking activities. These classes are often only an hour or two a week. Although a positive experience for some gifted students, the program can cause students to feel even more frustrated during the remaining thirty hours a week of school.

Some gifted children need to accelerate one or more grades. Often met with opposition, this option causes parents and educators concern that the child's social and emotional needs will not be met among older classmates. However, the benefits of learning with intellectual peers far outweigh any issues of age difference. Neihart et al. (as cited in Reis and Renzulli, 2004) found that accelerated students felt less pressure to conform among their intellectual peers and more freedom to pursue academics.

Another existing alternative is curriculum compacting, or "telescoping." Students pre-test on a subject, and move ahead to concepts that are more difficult if they pass the test. Commonly seen in high school, curriculum compacting can be used within the elementary and middle school classroom as well. Students successfully demonstrating mastery of a concept before doing any of the reinforcing exercises use their free time to work on additional subject-related supplemental activities, self-directed units of study, or small group projects (Winebrenner, 1992).

Assigning a mentor to the gifted student can be very beneficial. Gifted students have one of the most valuable experiences of their school career with mentoring. A well-chosen mentor provides them with knowledge, inspiration, new insights, encouragement, and self-confidence. This mentor can be an expert in a field the student has interest in, a community member, or another teacher. A good match should be willing to share their particular interests, time, skills, and talents.

In addition to academic intercession, gifted children benefit from interventions such as stress-management techniques and/or counseling services to address frustration, anxiety, or low self-confidence they may be experiencing (Renzulli & Park, 2002). As a part of the gifted student's education plan, time can be set aside, perhaps thirty minutes a week, for talking informally with the school counselor or psychologist.

Emotional and intellectual support are critical for exceptional children who struggle to be understood, who think and feel in ways others may not. Acceptance and encouragement contribute more effectively than any other strategy to the well-being and success of these students. Gifted children have the right to live up to their potential, however high that may be, and they deserve to have their educational needs met. With parents and educators working together, the gifted child has a fighting chance of receiving a fulfilling and challenging education.

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Letter from Sherwin B. Nuland, MD Regarding the Article by Michael Walters on Moses Maimonides (Winter 2006 Issue)

Dear Dr. Fisher – It was thoughtful of you to send me the issue of *Gifted Education Press Quarterly* with the Walter's article. And I'm gratified for your kind words on my writing. May your important work continue with success. Sincerely, Sherwin Nuland –

Dr. Nuland is the author of such widely read books as **Doctors: The Biography of Medicine** (1988, Vintage), **How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter** (1995, Vintage), **How We Live** (1997, Knopf), and **Maimonides** (2005, Schocken).

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We would like to thank Professor Joseph Renzulli, Director of the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, for listing the following article from *GEPQ* (Fall 2005 issue) on the Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development web site:
Growing Young Gifted Authors in An Inner City School by Bobbi Murphy   Huntsville, Alabama City Schools   See the following web link to read this article: www.gifted.uconn.edu/nviews/webnews.html

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Blue Lotus Films has made an excellent video of an outstanding arts program in the San Francisco School District, **Every Child Is An Artist**. See the following web link to view this film: www.bluelotusfilms.net/films.html

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Charles Dickens (1812-70), Our Contemporary

by Michael E. Walters

Center For the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

"Jarndyce and Jarndyce has passed into a joke. That is the only good that has ever come of it. It has been death to many, but it is a joke in the profession. Every master in Chancery has had a reference out of it. Every Chancellor was 'in it,' for somebody or other, when he was counsel at the bar. . . ." (**Bleak House**, 1853; Chapter 1: In Chancery)

For the gifted student, Dickens' concerns, his human insights and writing are contemporaneous with the social and psychological reality of today's society. His major concern, not only in **Bleak House** (1853) but throughout his work, is the impact of economics upon human conduct. He was writing at the same time as Marx and Engels. While their thrust was political-economic, his was moral. Dickens understood that the moral and intellectual sensibility of the individual was just as important as a society's economic system. It is important for gifted students to understand the difference between Marx's totalitarianism and the humanism of the reformer, Dickens. For him, a just society can only be produced by compassion and respect for one's fellow citizens. Revolution leads to a new ruling class, but it is only by democratic and humanistic reforms that there can be social change and improvement.

He was a political scientist as well as a great writer. His description and analysis of his era's legal system have a resonance for our own legal system, which has become an end-game for maneuvering and scheming. Today's legal procedures have developed an essential component: Almost our entire society is locked into the mandates and paper work of lawyers, regulators, and bureaucrats. In **Bleak House** gifted students will be stunned by the similarities between Dickens' Chancery and today's dysfunctional legal system. It is important to examine how due process in our society has become an end-game for contesting law firms.

On a literary level, his greatest achievement is to show how the social system impacts upon our private lives and moral choices. Every character in **Bleak House** has been influenced by Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Their emotions and cognition revolve around this case as the Moon revolves around the Earth. Dickens' usage of language is contemporary with our own linguistic forms. He writes poetic prose with realistic and concrete descriptions to focus upon social reality. The following description of the interaction between Chancery and the weather is a good example of Dickens' sarcasm and linguistic genius. "The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery." (Chapter 1: In Chancery)

One of the most wonderful aspects of Dickens' writings is how he sees the humanity of all his characters, even though they may be villains in their conduct toward others. His concern is with the sin, not the sinner. An example is the following description of one of the main characters in **Bleak House** – Sir Leicester Dedlock, a landed gentleman aristocrat: "He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man." (Chapter 2: In Fashion)

The idea of Charles Dickens as our contemporary will enable gifted students to understand that all great art is related to the present. A good definition of a *classic* and excellence in art is that the work is always relevant.