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

"Truth is the daughter of time." – Roman
Saying
"Rule your mind or it will rule you." – Horace

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For your summer reading and enlightenment, I highly recommend the following book by Mark Edmundson — *Why Read?* (2004, Bloomsbury). He is a Professor of English at the University of Virginia, and a genius at teaching great literature to college and high school students. His main thesis is that literature teachers should encourage students to learn about how the works of William Carlos Williams, Henry James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, William Shakespeare, and Homer, etc. can help them to live better lives. He does not like literary theories, particularly of the Marxist variety, because they detract from learning about the ideas expressed by these great authors. I have highlighted so many of Edmundson's sentences that my Kindle version of the book almost looks like one long string of yellow-ized words. This is because I like what he says, and respect his insights into teaching today's cable-vision generation.

Two other good books for vacation reading are:

● *The Universe Within: Discovering the Common History of Rocks, Planets, and People* by Neil Shubin (2013, Pantheon Books). The author is a biology professor and associate academic dean at the University of Chicago. He writes clearly and interestingly about how scientific research in such areas as paleontology and astronomy can help to explain our planet's development and relation to the universe.

● *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II* by Denise Kiernan (2013, Touchstone). Thousands of women were recruited from across the South to work at the secret uranium enrichment complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Their contribution to the war effort was crucial in producing the final knockout weapon — the Atomic Bomb.

I also recommend that you carefully study the current debate over the revised definition of giftedness developed by the National Association for Gifted Children:

(<http://www.nagc.org/WhatIsGiftedness.aspx>).

I agree with Jim Delisle that this definition should have been reviewed, discussed and approved or disapproved by the entire NAGC membership rather than by a special committee and the

board of directors. The lopsided emphasis upon talent development is cause for confusion among parents and educators as to whether highly capable students assessed by traditional assessments will be ignored in future efforts to provide special academic programs. The logic of this revised definition escapes me. The gifted field has been involved in intensive political and educational battles for many decades related to identifying and educating these highly capable students in verbal, mathematical and other academic areas. Why the sudden turn towards talent development? For many decades, there have also been numerous organizations that have successfully promoted talent development in the public schools. Such areas as music education, band and orchestra performance, theater and drama, and artistic production have been strongly supported by local, state and national organizations composed of teachers, parents and professors. What will the National Association for Gifted Children add to these and other talent development programs that have not already been provided?

This issue contains the following excellent articles and commentaries:

● Joann DiGennaro, President of Center for Excellence in Education discusses the need for more rigorous educational programs for high ability students in the United States. Through her leadership, CEE has offered outstanding programs for high ability students in mathematics and science.

<http://www.cee.org/>

● Suki Wessling has written a fascinating article on the current debate over defining giftedness. She is particularly concerned with homeschooling the gifted. <http://www.SukiWessling.com>

● Hanna David describes the advanced mental development of a child from an Ultra-Orthodox home in Israel.

● Kristie Speirs Neumeister comments on Jim Delisle's critique of the new NAGC definition of giftedness, and he gives a counter-response.

● Michael Walters concludes with a tribute to the original hero for American inventiveness and entrepreneurship — Thomas Edison.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher

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The Forgotten Gifted Child

**Joann DiGennaro, President
Center for Excellence in Education**

In an increasingly competitive global economy, it is apparent that America's future rests on nurturing its most talented, innovative thinkers. Yet on many levels—financially, legislatively, academically and socially—those children who are most capable of providing new ideas and intelligent leadership are being forgotten, ignored, and in some cases, even reviled and bullied.

This is in stark contrast to what many top students experience overseas. As President of the Center for Excellence in Education (CEE), an organization that I founded nearly 30 years ago with Admiral H.G. Rickover, father of the nuclear Navy, I have traveled the globe speaking with government officials, educators and some of the world's brightest students. Many of these students have taken part in the Center's signature program, the Research Science Institute (RSI), a six-week summer enrichment program in critical science, technology, engineering and math subjects (STEM), done in conjunction with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I have found that in many cases, the commitment, respect and resources devoted to high-achieving students abroad, even in developing countries, far exceeds what is done here.

For instance, China has invested millions in brand-new laboratories, enhanced teacher training and other initiatives at the secondary school level to prepare students for science and technology careers. It has paid off: According to Amber Winkler, Vice President for Research at the Fordham Institute, the "Chinese readily accept that some students and some teachers will perform at higher standards than others. They don't condemn or begrudge those individuals. They don't think that recognizing a handful of exceptional teachers kills collaboration for the entire group. They aren't overly enamored with equity at the expense of common sense. Rather, they admire and respect the standouts."

India, too, is focusing on improving education, ramping up its investment to \$44 billion in 2008 from \$11 billion in the late 1980s. While only about a third of the country's students finish in high school today, the World Bank estimates that in five years, nearly half will.

The Indian government is committed to enrolling 40 million students in college by 2020 and conferring 8 million bachelor's degrees, or four times as many as the United States. The country already confers more bachelor's degrees than the United States. Meanwhile, more than half of American college students drop out before they receive a degree.

Other countries have awakened to the fact that education is the key to competitiveness and they are willing to sacrifice to invest in its youth. Although the U.S. spends more per pupil than any other country in the world, it is far down the list of developed nations in terms of expenditure per pupil as a percentage of GDP per capita; a measure of the value people place on education. According to the World Bank, on the secondary school level, in 2009 the U.S. spent 25.2% of GDP per capita. But the same year, Cyprus spent 40.7%, Portugal 38.8%, Finland 36.1%, Sweden 33.2% ; Denmark 32.9%; Latvia 32.3%; France 29.3%; Argentina 27.1%, and Italy 26.5%. However, no nation surpasses the U.S. in private philanthropy augmenting government expenditures.

Lost Momentum

While other countries are concentrating on developing their most academically talented to become future leaders, innovators and scientists, America seems to be turning away from supporting meritocracy. It wasn't this way a generation or two ago. Indeed, the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957 stirred U.S. fears of falling behind, leading to a new emphasis on gifted education, particularly in math and the so-called "hard" sciences. A year after the spiky satellite took to the skies, the federal government passed its first large-scale initiative in gifted education, the National Defense Education Act. The legislation provided funds for a host of programs aimed at identifying and supporting talented students from kindergarten through college, including specialized high schools, acceleration initiatives, and talent searches. Over four years, more than \$1 billion was channeled into 40,000 loans, 40,000 scholarships, and 1,500 graduate fellowships, primarily to academic achievers in STEM subjects.

Yet the momentum, which helped channel great numbers of Boomers into STEM careers throughout the 1960s and 1970s, did not last. While the Office of the Gifted and Talented at the U.S. Office of Education was finally given official status in 1974, the next year, when Public Law 94-142 was established to help children with special education needs, the gifted and talented were not included. That situation was somewhat rectified by the passage of the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act in 1988, the

only federal program dedicated specifically to gifted and talented students, which underwrote research, demonstration projects and other strategies to help schools support these students, though it did not fund local gifted education programs themselves. The Young Scholars Program, funded by the National Science Foundation specifically for academic achievers in K-12 education, was defunded and dropped in 1996.

In 2001, the Javits Act was expanded as part of the No Child Left Behind Act to include competitive grants to school districts and state agencies to enhance gifted programs, with certain restrictions. The amount appropriated to fund these initiatives was never very impressive, reaching just over \$11 million at its peak a decade ago. However, even that modest sum became a target of federal belt-tightening in a worsening economy. Funding fell from \$9.6 million in 2006 to \$7.46 million in 2010. Last year, the Javits Act was completely defunded.

With no federal law mandating or funding gifted education, states have had to find their own ways. Predictably, the results have been uneven. Just 26 states require some sort of programs for gifted and talented students, and of these, only six provide funding for these programs, according to a report by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). The same report showed that 12 states do nothing to monitor or audit what local schools do for high achievers.

Another worrisome fact from the report: only six states require all teachers to have training in gifted and talented education. Concerned about the quality of teacher training, particularly in underserved rural and urban areas, CEE recently rolled out the Teacher Enrichment Program. Using public/private partnerships, the program offers teachers a clearinghouse of science resources with content from more than 1,000 STEM sites; a blog; roundtables; a lab bench with cost-effective activities; and a Bite of Science, an informal dinner where teachers listen to and interact with researchers from industry, academia and government. The Bite of Science events are limited to about 25 teachers to maximize personal interactions; even so, since each teacher impacts an average of 137 students a year, at each event, the education of an estimated 3,425 students a year is enriched. Launched this fall, Bite of Science dinners have been held in Virginia, Indiana and Illinois and will be launched in California and Texas in Spring 2013. By leveraging the power of teacher training, the education of some 71,925 students will be enhanced throughout 2013.

While public/private partnerships can make a difference in the education of gifted students, schools also need to do more. It will not be easy. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 26 states will spend less per student than in 2013 than they did in 2012, while 35 are still spending less per pupil than they did before the recession, adjusted for inflation.

However, spending only shows part of the picture. Nationwide, the percentage of public high schools that offer Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses is abysmally low—just slightly more than a third, according to the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center. Yet the wealthiest and most densely populated states aren't necessarily the ones with the highest concentration of these schools. Rather, it is the ones with the most commitment to improving education—and Arkansas leads the way at 84.2%

Talent Wasted

Although many assume that intellectually advanced children need little help or guidance, often the opposite is the case. Peer groups place much emphasis on blending in, yet gifted students inevitably stand out due to their extensive vocabulary, easy grasp of complex concepts, highly developed ethical sense, creativity and curiosity. Sometimes seen as teachers' pets, gifted children are often lightning rods for their peers' criticisms; some react by trying to hide their talents or deliberately fail in order to fit in. If they are also bored by the curriculum, gifted students may disengage or give up. Although estimates of how many gifted students drop out vary widely, in 1995, psychologist Sylvia Rimm suggested that as many as one out of five high school dropouts come from the gifted population.

Furthermore, gifted children are often more sensitive to outside stimuli, and may have problems with processing the many levels of experience they are taking in. This can lead to asynchronous development, according to Polish psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski, French psychologist Jean Charles Terrasier and others, which means that while they may be years ahead of their fellow students in terms of intellectual understanding, they may mature more slowly in others; Albert Einstein, for instance, did not speak until the age of four.

Moreover, the advanced ethical sense that many gifted students possess can also make them seem self-righteous or opinionated to their peers. "If we view giftedness only within a competitive framework, then the most gifted among us are certainly the most cursed, because they cannot fit into society as it currently is, nor can they succeed by its standards," writes psychologist Linda Kreger Silverman, Director of the Gifted Development Center at the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development. More interested in

broad issues of fairness than winning at all costs, they are likely to be seen by others as “defective,” she writes, because they cannot ignore “power plays and moral infractions.”

All of these factors—along with simple peer envy of the child’s intellectual gifts-- isolate the gifted child. In 2006, Purdue University researcher Jean Sunde Peterson found that by eighth grade, two-thirds of the 432 gifted students she studied had become the victims of bullying, such as name-calling, teasing and even acts of violence: "Many are intense, sensitive and stressed by their own and others' high expectations, and their ability, interests and behavior may make them vulnerable," she wrote. "Additionally, social justice issues are very important to them, and they struggle to make sense of cruelty and aggression. Perfectionists may become even more self-critical, trying to avoid mistakes that might draw attention to themselves." Responses to the bullying ranged from depression and rage to school absenteeism.

America cannot afford to lose its most intelligent students to these difficulties, which is why it is so important to nurture gifted students by putting them in contact with their academic peers, even for short periods. Many times over the years, I have heard RSI students express their joy at finally being in a setting where they finally feel like they belong--not just academically, but also socially. This bond, which the Center encourages and reinforces through frequent reunions, holiday parties and an online social network, inspires alumni to self-identify as “Rickoids” years after their high school summer experience is over and they have reached the pinnacles of their professions. Clearly, meeting others who are literally like-minded at a pivotal time in their young lives has a profoundly positive and lasting impact.

Given the potential and vulnerabilities of gifted students, it is critical for educators to provide them with the mental and social stimulation they need. While exam, charter and magnet schools serve an important role in providing this help, they do not serve everyone who needs them. Therefore, all schools need to take the initiative to find out what practices serving the gifted work best for their budgets and student populations, whether they are accelerated or differentiated classes for high-achieving students, flexible groupings for certain courses, or simply after-school programs like science fairs. Much can be done by enlisting parental and corporate support; and schools should certainly encourage the same booster spirit for chess club competitions that they do for football games.

There is certainly a thirst for such challenges, and independently run programs can do much to supplement what happens in the classroom. The USA Biology Olympiad that CEE sponsors in partnership with Purdue University routinely attracts more than 10,000 students a year who voluntarily compete by taking an exam. The top scorers are rewarded with the chance to learn more through intensive mentoring; then they compete against the best STEM students in the world. Since the program was launched a decade ago, Team USA has brought home medals every year, demonstrating how motivating goal-oriented competitions can be when high achievers are given appropriate attention and support. Indeed, it has been so successful that CEE recently partnered with the American Association of Physics Teachers to sponsor the USA Physics Olympiad beginning in 2013.

Gifted students must be afforded an educational environment that allows them to develop their talents fully. Underwritten by corporations, foundations, government grants and private donations, CEE provides all of its programs at no cost to participants—and this is important to ensure diversity and universal access. In a time of diminished public funding for education, it may be that the private sector will need to do more to ensure a workforce that is intellectually sophisticated enough to keep their industries competitive. Certainly, educators, parents and others concerned with the gifted should be alert and open to every cost-effective opportunity to enrich these children’s educations and to nourish their social development. We cannot afford to squander their gifts and the significant contribution they can make to the STEM workforce.

Divorcing the G-Word: A Parent’s Suggestion for Defining Giftedness

Suki Wessling

The term “gifted” has never been without controversy. The federal government and most school districts have used the definition from the 1972 Marland Report for 40 years, despite constant debate over whether it promotes a view of giftedness that benefits gifted children (Reis & Renzulli, 2009). More recently, further pressure has been applied to how we “officially” view giftedness due to the implementation of No Child Left Behind in our public schools, which emphasized bringing up the test scores on the low end while de-emphasizing serving the needs of the high end. Even more recently, budget woes have affected gifted education disproportionately, leading proponents of gifted education fighting for a few dollars to spend when the population they serve has

grown. In this article, I try to bring in the perspective of parents, who often get lost in these arguments over how to best serve their children.

The words we use to label ourselves have everything to do with how we define ourselves, and how we hope others will see us. Historically, labeling words have been used to hurt groups of people—think the N-word or the Q-word. Groups occasionally do try to take those words back, and sometimes they (arguably) succeed. But in any case, a label has its history and carries its baggage in every utterance. What you call people defines what you think of them, and what they call themselves defines what they think of themselves.

Which brings me to the G-word—Gifted. Though it doesn't have the horrible historic context of other labels, parents find themselves discussing over and over this word that has such an impact on our children. Many of us refuse to use the word because of the implications we fear it has, the baggage we know it carries. Even though Gifted is the word of choice—students are educated in "gifted and talented" programs; the education they get is influenced by "gifted children" associations, and those of us who homeschool call ourselves "gifted homeschoolers"—many parents simply hate the word. Not only does it have all its baggage, but the fact is, this term has been used in two very different ways throughout its history.

These words were spoken by Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, the head of the [National Association for Gifted Children](#):

"I suggest that we take a bold step and consider making talent development, rather than giftedness, the major unifying concept of our field and most importantly, the basis for our practice." ([link](#)) (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2012).

To people who don't know anything about gifted education, this might sound completely reasonable. But to those of us raising children and trying to find appropriate ways to educate them, these are fighting words, and responses erupted around the Web. (This response on the Gifted Parenting Support blog is a representative one ([link](#)) (Conrad, 2011).

Olszewski-Kubilius distinguished the term "talent development" from "gifted," but in popular usage, this distinction is not so clear. In short, there are two ways that most people understand the G-word, and these two ways make all the difference to parents.

G-word #1: Achievement

The new vision of the NAGC is that we support the "achievement model" of giftedness. Gifted students are the high achievers: the ones who get good grades, who win contests, who get into regional youth orchestras, who get the attention. What these students have in common is their achievement, and under this understanding of the G-word, it doesn't matter what their area of achievement is. A gifted violinist is gifted whether she can do math or not; a gifted mathematician is gifted but only because he's getting the high scores and winning competitions; a gifted athlete is gifted only when she is winning races or scoring in every game. In this version of the G-word, the day you stop achieving is the day you cease being gifted, and it's also the day that any special support dematerializes. When you're gifted, you get into a special class and get specially challenging work; when you fall out of gifted, you just go back to some version of normal.

The achievement model fits well with the adoption by many schools of approaches derived from Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Whether intended by Gardner or not, these approaches often result in de-emphasis of an intellectual definition of giftedness in favor of a system which rewards demonstrated talents in a variety of areas.

A good example of a gifted child under the achievement model was the young Tiger Woods, who racked up several "youngest ever" awards in his early golf career while also attending Stanford University on scholarship (Woods, 2012).

The administrators and educators who use the achievement version of the G-word want to put money where it benefits students who are achieving. They want to have a competition program for students who test well in math, for example, or special support for the gifted violinist who comes from a low-income home. They tend to say things like, "We should support gifted math and science students because they will be important to our national economy in the future."

The parents who use this version of the G-word are focused on having their students' success recognized and having appropriately challenging opportunities for them. Parents who subscribe to this meaning would be very unlikely to use the label for their underachieving child who spends all of math class doodling robots and futuristic inventions.

G-word #2: Potential

The other model of giftedness focuses on a description of children as learners, and also as social and emotional beings. This model of giftedness depends somewhat on IQ tests, because they have been the only tool that can quantify it. The other reliable tool, by the way, is parents, who are 95% successful at predicting which of their children is gifted regardless of achievement (Silverman, 2009). "Potential" acknowledges that these students are often not high achievers; in fact, the higher the IQ, the more unusual the students may be, and the harder it is for them to be a high-achieving student in a normal school situation. These students might be high achievers someday, but under the potential model of giftedness, children are gifted whether or not they end up achieving. Under this model of giftedness, a person "is" this way and does not simply fall in and out of giftedness depending on recognized achievements.

Gifted in this model describes a developmental pattern that is simply different than the norm. School curriculum is written with "typical" development in mind. For example, preschool curriculum focuses on social learning, since that's what most preschoolers do. Gifted preschoolers, however, are more likely to be interested in numbers, machines, or reading than they are in social development. It's common for parents of a gifted preschooler to be informed that there is something "wrong" developmentally with their children because they aren't playing in the "normal" way. But in the arc of their lives, it becomes clear that their development as preschoolers was completely "normal"—for a gifted child who is wired differently.

A good example of a child with gifted potential was the young Thomas Edison, who was a sickly child and poor student and ended up being homeschooled by his mother (National Park Service, 2012).

Administrators and educators using this model of giftedness in their decision-making are more likely to focus on identifying gifted students—especially the ones who become invisible in school because they aren't high achievers—and offering them appropriate social and intellectual opportunities in their education. This means that they will inevitably choose to spend some of the money on students who do not seem to be doing much with their lives: the dreamers, the wild students, the misfits, and the students who also have learning disabilities. It also means that they will have to exclude some high achievers from their pool of students who get gifted services. A straight-A student who doesn't test as "gifted enough" won't get into the special program, whereas the ne'er-do-well child who can't seem to remember how to tie his shoes gets in.

Parents who use the potential version of the G-word often come into it not because they notice unusual achievement in their children. They come to gifted because their children have unusual needs that they need to understand. Often, preschool teachers have told them that their children need to be "diagnosed." When their children enter school already reading or doing math, they often hear they are pushy parents and that the other students will "catch up." When their children start to develop stomachaches at the thought of going to school and being bullied because of how different they are, the parents are told that their students should just toughen up.

So which definition of the G-word is the *right* one?

G-achievement proponents have a point: We are investing public money in students. If we are going to create special programs for certain students, this should be seen as an investment. And investments should be made for a reason. The reason to invest in high-achievers is obvious: they are the students who seem like they are going to add the most to our economy as well as our artistic and intellectual traditions.

G-potential proponents have a point, too: Education is not there to fuel our national economy. Education is there to serve the needs of students. We didn't create the Americans with Disabilities Act and decide to educate all children regardless of their disability because we thought it would fuel our economy—we did it because every child deserves to get an education. And G-potential students deserve to get the education that is best suited to them.

As for the economic advantage argument, proponents of G-potential point out that it's impossible to know whether that dreamy gifted child who isn't an achiever will be the next John Doe or the next Steve Jobs. Investing in nurturing these children would pay off because more of them, with appropriate support, will become productive members of society.

It seems clear to me that this disagreement about the use of the word really has only one solution: We need to find a new word for one of these meanings. Given the heavy baggage and complex history of this word, it's unlikely that our culture will ever move past the confusion that it creates.

I am willing to stick my neck out and say that I think that we G-potential proponents need to jump ship. We need to find a word that defines what our students are, what our concerns about them are, what our hopes for them are, and we need to let the achievement camp take the G-word away. We need to let them make the argument that high achievement needs to be encouraged in whatever way makes sense for encouraging high achievement.

In some ways, this wouldn't be a big change. Many of our G-potential students will be served by the services set up for G-achievement, and that will continue to work well in their favor. Some gifted students are early high achievers, and they need support. And non-high-IQ high achievers also benefit from the availability of achievement-based services.

Other things, however, would change dramatically.

"All children are gifted"

One of the things that G-potential parents hate to deal with is the statement, "All children are gifted." This statement is true enough when used in a general context. All children have their gifts, and all children deserve to have their gifts encouraged and developed. But of course, the reason G-potential parents hate to hear this statement is that it implies that by calling their students "gifted," they are saying that other students don't have gifts.

If G-potential is changed to a different term, this entire argument can be refocused where it needs to be. Gifted programs, as encouraged by the NAGC, would focus on talent development. And thus any child who shows a talent would be eligible for support. We wouldn't have to defend the existence of gifted programs, because they would serve students who had demonstrated achievement (i.e. gifts) in some area. Parents of students who hadn't achieved some benchmark really wouldn't have cause to complain. They could coach their students intensively to try to get them to meet the benchmark with no negative consequences to the program since it would serve recognized achievement, not gifted-potential. A good example of this sort of coaching was recently profiled in [the New York Times piece about the race to get students into New York's public gifted programs](#) (Phillips, 2012).

Nature vs. nurture

Although "nature vs. nurture" has been pretty much done in by modern brain research, it's instructive to look at G-potential vs. G-achievement as a skewed version of nature vs. nurture. G-achievement argues that giftedness is as giftedness does; if a child doesn't *act* gifted, then a child isn't. G-achievement is sort of like the nurture argument: You become gifted because you had a deep interest and you worked so hard. (See *Outliers* and *The Genius in All of Us*.)

G-potential, on the other hand, focuses on a state of being separate from achievement or external behavior, a sort of modernized "nature" argument. Though psychologists who study giftedness tend to believe that it's a very complex interaction of genes and environment, the field as a whole is likely to see giftedness as inseparable from the person both by life circumstances and age. Gifted babies grow into gifted children who become—and remain—gifted adults. You will see this point of view stated implicitly or explicitly by many who research gifted children. (See *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* and *Living with Intensity*. Webb et al, 2007 and 2005.)

If we separate the actual terminology from the two ways of viewing "giftedness," we come to a sort of agreement: G-achievement people are high achievers, and it's true that in order to become a high achiever of any sort, you've most likely worked really hard. Our premier athletes like Tiger Woods weren't only born with the bodies required for their sports—they also worked hard to get to the top of their fields (Shenk, 2010). Though Edison was a poor student (G-potential), he spent countless hours thinking about and

developing his inventions (G-achievement). G-potential is taken out of the equation. Who cares whether Edison was born that way or worked really hard? We're talking about achievement and nothing else.

G-potential is now left with looking at the other pieces of the puzzle—I would argue, the most interesting pieces. *Why* are some children born more alert and inquisitive? Why does their language development stray so far from the norm? Why do they develop analytical abilities, such as understanding the rules of sorting and pattern-making, so much earlier? Why are they more likely to be sensitive to noise or other physical stimuli? Why is there a high inheritability component in these families with children following parents in unusual development? How much of how these students develop is due to the way they're being raised? What can we do to help these children lead successful lives?

These are all fascinating questions that get shouted down by people who just want to focus on recognized geniuses who achieved greatness. If you take achievement out of the question altogether, you can start to look at who these people are and why their lives take the paths they do.

Giftedness as a value judgment vs. giftedness as an exceptionality

Another thing that G-potential parents find difficult is the assumption, when they use the G-word, that they are saying that their children are "better" than other students. I love the title of [Laughing at Chaos's](#) Jen Merrill's new book: *[If this is a gift, can I send it back?](#)* (Merrill, 2012). How many parents have had the experience in which another parent thought we were bragging about our students when in fact we were complaining miserably? Every time I read someone making comments about how parents of gifted students are bragging, I wish I could go back in time and leave them in charge of my toddler for an hour. There was no bragging involved. When I started using the G-word, it was as a diagnostic tool to help us understand why our lives were so difficult, not bragging!

G-achievement is brag-worthy: Your child is first violin in the state orchestra. Your child is the star of the track team. Your child is on the debate team that placed nationally. Your child was a finalist in the Google Science Fair. If we separate G-potential from G-achievement, it actually makes the bragging easier. Instead of the complex question of what made your child that way, you can simply say, "My child worked really, really hard to achieve this goal and I'm proud of her." In other words, here's proof that I have the right to call my child gifted.

The G-potential camp, freed from the value-judgment aspect of the word gifted, can focus instead on what's really important to them—the fact that these children are unusual learners and need special accommodations just like any other child with special needs. Need would not be based on achievement at all. So in the case of the gifted violinist, if she is having trouble taking notes in class because she has dysgraphia (common with G-potential children), she can get special help for that even though she's a high achiever in another area. And in the case of the wild-child boy who shows significant psychomotor overexcitability (another common characteristic of G-potential students), he can be placed with teachers who have training in how to handle the physical outbursts that accompany his learning, even as his intellectual needs are being met.

G-potential as a special need

A therapist told me, when my daughter was quite young, that I should describe her as a child with special needs. It's hard to say, "I have students with special needs" when your child functions so well in comparison with other students with special needs. My older child's special needs, for example, were largely worked out in a typical classroom with an understanding teacher, and as he has grown, I no longer feel the need to educate his teachers. If I am looking for a good teacher for him, I simply look for a teacher armed with sensitivity and understanding. My younger child was more clearly a child with special needs. She could not function in a classroom without specialized support, but given that her particular special need was not defined as a deficit because she performs well on standardized tests, the system isn't set up for her.

G-potential separated from G-achievement would allow us to view G-potential students as needing specialized support. Just as educators are trained in the needs of students with autism or dyslexia, the needs of G-potential could be taken care of through existing mechanisms. In school, students with special needs get a team that creates an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which details their special needs and how those needs will be met. The team continues to advocate for the child as s/he grows and the

needs change. G-potential students could come to each new classroom armed with an IEP and official recognition of how to meet those needs.

For many G-potential students, the needs will change dramatically as they age. Very young G-potential students often have unusual social or emotional needs that they are more equipped to handle as they mature. Their intellectual needs, however, will intensify. An excellent kindergarten teacher can keep many gifted students busy. By second or third grade when the class is still on basic math and reading comprehension, they will likely need actual accommodation for their advanced intellectual skills. And by middle school, when typical students generally show slow intellectual and fast social growth, G-potential students are going to need more and more educational opportunities that are different from the norm (Willis, 2009). By high school, many G-potential students need to have opportunities to attend their local community college or appropriate online education, the sort of flexibility that few general-education high schools currently offer. Some percentage of G-potential students benefit from skipping high school altogether.

An IEP-like process would therefore adapt throughout the changing child's educational life, accommodating needs and encouraging appropriate education without reference to actual achievement. Future valedictorians may still be in school, sufficiently challenged by high school classes. G-potential students, however, might be excelling in classes at a community college on their subjects of interest such as astronomy or classical literature, when they would have been earning C's in a typical high school environment.

But what label should we use?

If not gifted, what? The reason so many people who hate the G-word stick with it is that there is nothing out there to replace it. But I think that separating out G-achievement—ceding ground on the G-word altogether—makes this easier. “Gifted” would continue to exist, and there would continue to be significant overlap between the two groups. But lower-achieving G-potential students would share a label with higher-achieving G-potential students that describes their needs more precisely.

Some suggestions I've seen:

Non-neurotypical

This term has some compelling attributes. It contains no value judgment, just a description of what's happening. The students are neurologically different, just like autistic students or students with dyslexia. In fact, the term non-neurotypical clearly includes those students as well. Presently, a good amount of G-potential students are helped using the same interventions and therapies used with other non-neurotypical students, and may even share diagnoses like Sensory Processing Disorder or Autism. This vocabulary change would acknowledge the overlap. On the other hand, non-neurotypical is perhaps too general a word, since it could include many students who don't share g-potential students' intellectual needs.

Intellectually or academically accelerated

I have run across people using terms like this, and have used them myself. They also do away with the value judgment aspect of “gifted,” and speak more specifically to what is different about the children in question. However, they don't address the special needs aspect, which is necessary in order to argue for special accommodations in school.

Asynchronous learners

This term gets much closer to what G-potential needs to address—that these students have actual deficits even though they may be as highly accomplished according to traditional school measures. An asynchronous learner may have delayed social/emotional development and advanced analytical skill, such as the preschoolers who are more interested in learning about machines than making friends. *Asynchronous learners* again makes sense in elementary school, when the school administration may be leery of letting students advance to higher grades because of their social development, even though they have mastered the curriculum in their current grade. And *asynchronous learners* is a very acceptable term for students who can't handle the boredom and repetition of high school math but excel when given the chance to study astrophysics at the local community college.

My hunch for finding an appropriate term would be to build on the word “asynchronous” because it gets to the heart of what those interested in G-potential have uncovered in their research. The problems that G-potential students suffer are not necessarily due to the level of academic achievement they attain, but they are due to the mismatch between their analytical faculties and other aspects of their development. The few highly gifted students who are globally gifted and able to negotiate social situations equal to their intellectual abilities are only “asynchronous” due to their physical age. But most other G-potential students suffer real consequences of their asynchronies. These consequences include:

Social/emotional asynchrony and impairment

Children with the heightened sensitivities that often accompany G-potential are often unable to perform socially in any way parallel with their analytical/academic abilities.

Uneven intellectual/academic development

Children with highly advanced skills in one area often show average or even below average skills in others.

Asynchronous physical and intellectual development

It's very common that younger G-potential children with advanced verbal skills are frustrated and hampered by their undeveloped physical skills, such as children who read and analyze at a college level, but have trouble writing by hand with the speed and accuracy even of students their chronological age.

Asynchronous development with accompanying exceptionalities

A verbally gifted child with dyslexia often shows, for much of her earlier education, as a verbally average child. Seen through traditional diagnostic criteria, children are not “impaired” unless they show less than average achievement. But twice-exceptionality under a G-potential definition would show up as a deficit needing remediation.

How to divorce ourselves from “gifted”

I am not a psychologist, and don't claim to know the best answer to the question of what makes a G-potential child. But in following the above line of reasoning, I think that proponents of separating G-potential from G-achievement should consider a term like *asynchronous development syndrome*. Such a term avoids the major pitfalls of “gifted”:

- It is not a value judgment
- It does not rest on any definition of achievement
- It allows for achievement, either advanced or average, in some areas while allowing for accompanying deficits in other areas
- It can be proven diagnostically
- It does not fall victim to culturally preconceived notions of “smart students”
- It allows for people of all ages—even as adults, G-potential humans distinguish themselves in certain ways

As a parent who writes about giftedness, the merry-go-round effect of debates about this word exhausts me. The copious energy spent by our community of parents, teachers, administrators, caregivers, and researchers on debating this word should be diverted to more noble pursuits...like solving the very real problems faced by our students.

At some point, we have to give up or give in. Giving in as the NAGC has proposed to do, I believe, is unacceptable. We have too many examples of the suffering, lost productivity, and misled lives of the asynchronous gifted to justify not sticking our heads in the sand because of our fear of being branded elitists.

Our goal is to understand and serve the needs of these children we in the gifted community call gifted. They aren't always the students that people out in the general population call gifted. They are our non-neurotypical, academically accelerated, asynchronous developers. They are our preschoolers who read obsessively about Medieval history, our third-graders who stare dreamily out the window while math covers subjects they mastered three years earlier, our young teens who start to dumb themselves down to fit in, our older teens who drop out of high school because no one has noticed that their low grades don't reflect inability to learn.

It's a hard thing to say, but I think it's time to call the lawyers and settle this once and for all. "Gifted" gets the math contests, "asynchronous" gets the twice-exceptional. Gifted gets the spelling bee, asynchronous gets the special accommodations for advanced readers with dysgraphia. Gifted gets the glory, and (though asynchronous high achievers get to share in the glory, too) asynchronous gets the comfort of knowing that our students' needs are being served. Right now, it might feel like too big a change just to solve our little problems. But down the road, I think we'll look back and wonder, *What took us so long?*

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Abraham-Itzl from Jerusalem: A Meeting with a Gifted Ultra-Orthodox Boy
Hanna David
Tel Aviv University

This article presents a counseling session with an Ultra-Orthodox boy during which a picture of extraordinary abilities in mathematics and language, high interest in history and art, as well as emotional development typically consisting to a much older age have been revealed. In spite of the fact that the boy went to a Yiddish Cheder on a regular basis and Yiddish was also the language spoken in his home, his Hebrew was excellent, and he had some knowledge of English, French and German, languages he

had never been exposed to. The boy was a candidate to participate in the special class for gifted children, opened in one of the Chabad "Talmud Torah" schools in a medium-size Israeli town. As Ultra-Orthodox schools do not participate in the Israeli public identification for giftedness examinations, discussing this case study is of special importance: it is the first time a description of a highly gifted Ultra-Orthodox child is described in the professional literature, and it allows a glimpse of a private institute serving a very intelligent population that is eager for knowledge but cannot obtain it by using public resources.

All personal details have been changed in order to keep the privacy of the child and his family intact.

Introduction

Most enrichment programs for the gifted in Israel are aimed at both students learning in secular education as well as in the state-religious systems (Special programs for gifted children, 2010). The centers where these programs are operated (Enrichment centers for the gifted, 2013) usually serve a mixed population spread in some cases, in many towns, villages or Kibbutzim. However, as Ultra-Orthodox schools do not participate in the Israeli public identification for giftedness examinations, their students are not enrolled in these programs. Hence, there is hardly any data about gifted children from this sector.

Until last year I was convinced that the reason for this situation is the decision of policy makers in the Ultra-Orthodox sector to not have their children participate in enrichment programs initiated and financed by the Israeli Ministry of Education. But in July 2011 Ms. Nechama Rosenberg, had initiated the opening of a gifted class in a Talmud Torah Chabad located in a medium-size town in Israel. (A gifted class was originally opened in a Talmud Torah Chabad in 2010.) In 2010-11 she invited me to help her screen candidates for the 2011-12 school year. I asked Ms. Rosenberg why the students learning in Chabad schools did not participate in the general screening process offered to all other Israeli children free of charge. The answer was that time and again Chabad educators tried to persuade the Israeli Ministry of Education to allow a professional in the area of giftedness who would be accepted by Chabad as an authority in Halacha, or Jewish Law. This person would read the giftedness examinations in order to make sure they included no content that conflicted with religious standards. But there was no positive answer to their request. Without the needed religious approval of a person who is, of course, qualified both as a professional in the area of giftedness and a religious authority, Ultra-Orthodox children are not allowed (according to the strict Jewish law) to take the giftedness examinations.

The gifted class initiated by Ms. Rosenberg for Ultra-Orthodox students was the only one in Israel, so it included students from a variety of places. The students – as well as the parents – made huge efforts to have their children participate once a week in an 8-hour school day instead of their regular class. They also had a large amount of money to pay the main teacher whose round trip took almost six hours to teach six hours. While the salaries of the teachers of all other enrichment programs are covered mainly by the government, and the local municipality contributes its part as well, this program received no public support. As in the Ultra-Orthodox sector, the average family is much larger than in the general population, and the average income is considerably lower. The dedication of the educational team and the children's parents are highly noticeable.

The boys accepted to this gifted program, operating once a week, belonged to various Chabad schools. I will hereby describe one of the candidates for the program: the 9-year old Abraham-Itzl who studied in a Yiddish Cheder where no "core subjects" such as language, mathematics and English, were studied at all (the exact nature of these subjects for school as well as pre-school children are specified in The Dovrat Report, 2005).

The meeting with Abraham-Itzl

Abraham-Itzl arrived at my office five minutes before the appointed time, accompanied by his grandmother. They came from Jerusalem by public transportation; it took them about an hour and a half – so such precision should be admired. Unlike most parents of boys interested in this class, who tried to get as much information about it during the telephone call aimed at setting the time of the meeting, Abraham-Itzl's mother called, introduced herself and accepted my first suggested time for the meeting without any further questions. It was a clear sign that the family was very interested in the enrichment program and was happy for the opportunity their son had to attend it.

When Abraham-Itzl entered my clinic, he opened his eyes widely, seeing all the books around (about 1,000). Without my saying a word Abraham-Itzl started telling me how much he loved reading, and that actually he read everything he could put his hands on. At this moment I felt like challenging him, and asked: "Even if it is volumes of German plays?" showing him the 6 red volumes of "Brecht Werke" placed on one of the upper shelves. Without getting confused he answered, that as learning in a Yiddish Cheder, and knowing Hebrew as well (excellent Hebrew, by the way...), he knew it would not be difficult for him to learn German. But "at present, I know only a few words. May I ask you what is JAWOHL?" It appeared that he read this word in a book by Erich Kästner

translated into Hebrew. The translator did not translate it but rather left it in Hebrew transcription, but Abraham-Itzl understood it had to do with approval, both from the context and because "JA" is similar to the Yiddish word "Yo," meaning "Yes." At this moment I already decided that he was admitted to the program, but we continued our conversation for more than the 25 minutes allocated for it. It was almost impossible to finish our meeting even after 40 minutes...

Abraham-Itzl told me he knew people who liked reading plays, and also knew people who could read German – "mostly older people." Nevertheless he himself would, maybe, learn German as well, after he learned English and French. He started making a comparison between French and German – in Israel, French was for many years the second foreign language taught in schools, but German was banned because of the holocaust, in spite of the fact that it was the language of many holocaust survivors. He also mentioned that French was not close to Yiddish while Yiddish was very similar to old German. When I mentioned writing a paper about Yiddish in the Responsa literature more than 30 years ago (David-Ehrenstein, 1981), he asked me to send him a copy of it!

Abraham-Itzl moved quickly to his next topic: Rashi (the great Jewish religious scholar). He did not remember the German name of the geographic region where Rashi had resided, *Elsaß*, but once I told him he thanked me immediately. When he was searching for the name, I used the term "It is on the tip of our tongue," and he instantly understood this phrase though he had probably never heard it in his Yiddish neighborhood, let alone read it. He just understood it from the context! He knew that it was of the time when this region belonged to France and was called Lorraine. (In Hebrew we use the German pronunciation for the German name and the French one or the French one.) He also told me about the prolific grapevines in this region, as was the situation in the time of Rashi who grew his own grapes. He also knew France has an excellent reputation as a producer of wines up to now.

In addition to the wide knowledge and extreme curiosity, Abraham-Itzl showed extraordinary skills in mathematical understanding. When I started explaining to him, at his request, who I was and my task in the enrichment program, he managed to describe in a very creative way, the term "exponential scale." This was in spite of the fact that he did not learn any mathematics in school. Apparently, before meeting me he did some "homework," and understood that giftedness had to do with IQ. He assumed, wrongly, that I measure the IQ of children coming to me, and concluded that "IQ is measured in a scale similar to the Richer (magnitude) **scale**. As in the Richter scale, '1' means a very mild earthquake and '2' means a much more massive one." Though this explanation is incorrect as related to IQ differences, he did understand and described correctly the exponential increase of the Richter scale. Never before, in my 30 years experience, did I meet a child who did not learn any formal math – not even the 4 elementary operations – with such extremely high mathematical ability. While many adults do not understand the meaning of "The difference between 1 and 2 on the Richter scale is much smaller than that between 4 and 5," he did. In most cases, in order to prove mathematical abilities, some basic knowledge is needed in number theory or in Euclidian geometry taught in most Israeli kindergartens (by introducing geometrical 2-dimensional shapes and objects, such as balls and cubes), but this is not the case in the Yiddish Ultra-Orthodox education. Abraham-Itzl learned everything by himself.

Though Abraham-Itzl's conception of the Richter scale was incorrect, it showed an exceptional level of creative thinking, and the ability to make an analogy from the known to the unknown. During the meeting there were a few more times when Abraham-Itzl's lack of knowledge, combined with his enormous wish to learn and reason from the known to the unknown, resulted in incorrect conclusions. For example, when I told Abraham-Itzl he was meeting with me to make sure he was a good candidate for the enrichment program (in Hebrew: Tochnit HA'ASHARA), he concluded that it had to do with prisoners (in Hebrew: ASIRIM) who are taught in prison things they did not learn while being on the outside. (Israeli prisons are known for their variety of educational programs, and the Chabad movement had been sending youngsters to teach prisoners for almost 50 years.) At this point I wanted to discover if Abraham-Itzl was willing to change his opinions, even those he believed to be facts. I told him that most prisoners had a bad education and they were in need of the basics – sometimes they were illiterate. In the enrichment program on the other hand, I told him some of the things taught are never introduced in the regular school program, and even for those that are – the way they are taught in the enrichment program was different. The instructional level was high, the pace was quick and the students liked challenges. Abraham-Itzl was willing to part with his original idea and promptly accepted this new information.

As we went on I discovered that Abraham-Itzl had a unique social-emotional ability. He realized he had to inform me about his high achievements in school, but he managed to do it just by stating the facts, without any boasting or self-praising. Though he was only nine he had successfully finished grade 6. He described his educational path in a few words, "I started going to the Cheder at age 3, as usual, but when I was 4 and could already read, I started school." Before I had time to say anything, he added, "I do not wish to seem proud." When I nodded my head he just told me, in plain language with no superlatives, what he learned and what achievements he had in each school subject. It is not very easy, even for much older people, to be "just modest enough." Abraham-Itzl managed to do that.

Another aspect of the Abraham-Itzl's high social abilities was revealed later when I was talking with his grandmother in his presence. He interrupted us during the conversation but did that delicately without raising his voice or showing any other kind of aggression. When later I kept on speaking with her, he did not interrupt us again – though he did want to ask questions and maybe add some remarks, as was obvious to me whenever I glanced at him during my conversation with his grandmother.

I wanted Abraham-Itzl to know what to expect from the program. In order to tell him about it, I had to ask him to stop speaking for a while and listen to me. When I mentioned that the daily "dose" of Talmud was four hours, he stopped me and said, "We call it GEMARA." I explained to him that as we were still hoping to get the support of the Ministry of Education, we had better to use the Hebrew term "Talmud" which is familiar to secular Jews rather than the Aramaic word, "GEMARA," and thus maybe appear more 'friendly' to the policy makers or the persons in charge of the budget. He understood this instantly, and asked if "Talmud" was a subject of study by non-religious Jews as well. When I said it was, he seemed happy, hoping that by changing the name of the main subject it had better prospects to be considered legitimate. This was a very tough political situation for a 9-year old child to understand. However, he not only understood the problem but also accepted it with good spirit.

The other class I told Abraham-Itzl about was "The Desert Tabernacle (Mishkan) and its Vessels" class taught in the 2010-11 school year, and admitted I did not know specifically what was to be taught instead of it in the next year. In any case it would be music, arts or science. He was excited by all of these possibilities. He wanted to learn about the Mishkan and its Vessels, and combine theoretical learning with the practical work of preparing a wooden model of the Desert Tabernacle and metal models of its vessels. He said he also loved music – he played the violin though never received any music lessons. Science seemed to be a real passion for him, though after saying it he "corrected" himself by saying that "of course, I want to be a great Rabbi (GADOL BA'TORAH)." I mentioned Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe or just the Rebbe in this context: Abraham-Itzl knew he had attended the Sorbonne. I told Abraham-Itzl that the Rebbe studies a few subjects, and added that once a person has an education he can choose whether to work in the profession he had acquired or not, but this option does not exist for the unlearned.

During the meeting Abraham-Itzl revealed more areas of interest. He was fascinated by one of the abstract paintings hanging on the wall, and showed his grandmother and me the figures he found in it. For a person who neither studied art nor visited any art exhibitions, the ability to derive so much pleasure from viewing an abstract painting is quite rare. In addition to curiosity and interest, it also indicates a highly developed esthetic sense and ability to see beauty which may not even be evident to a person who has received modern art education.

Towards the end of the meeting Abraham-Itzl started talking about Michaelangelo who had been left-handed. He asked me if the painter of the painting he liked so much was left-handed as well, and started a discussion about the right and the left lobes of the brain. "Lobe" in Hebrew is a 2- syllable word ("U-NA"). The accent is on the second, but when Abraham-Itzl pronounced it with the accent on the first syllable for the second time, I corrected him. The grandmother interrupted by saying that he had never heard this word. This was already quite clear to me, but when and where he had read about the two lobes remained unclear.

At the end of the meeting Abraham-Itzl asked for my fax number so he could send me his picture. Though his parents used the internet for their daily needs, he did not even think he could ask to use it as well, knowing that young children do not have access to the internet because it might interfere with their education or even worse – expose them to contents their parents wanted to avoid. I did not know if keeping in touch with me was acceptable by the educational standards Abraham-Itzl had been raised, so I had no idea whether he would make use of my fax number. However, I did know that he was longing for a connection with anybody who would answer his various intellectual and emotional needs. It was clear that his present school could supply neither, and his immediate neighborhood had difficulties understanding them.

In Summa:

It was the first time I met a child where Hebrew was neither the only language spoken at home nor the one in school except for when used in Torah or Mishnah classes. But his general knowledge, highly dependent on language, was high enough to pass any examination for identifying the gifted. Abraham-Itzl seemed to pick up easily so much knowledge in many areas, internalize it and make it a part of his own self.

Unlike the case studies I usually write, this one does not have a psychological intervention. The aim of this article is to present the readers with the fact that gifted Ultra-Orthodox children are there – children whose parents wish they had an opportunity to offer them special education for the gifted, and the children themselves yearn for it. This article offers the readers a glimpse into one

single private class initiated for this aim. Unfortunately, government agencies have not made the effort to obtain the necessary support so that all children from all other sectors are offered appropriate public education resources.

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Comments Regarding Dr. Jim Delisle's Critique (A Defining Moment, *GEPQ*, Winter 2013 issue) of the NAGC Definition of Giftedness

By Dr. Kristie Speirs Neumeister Associate Professor Ball State University

I wish to respond to Dr. Delisle's critique ("A Defining Moment") of the new NAGC definition of giftedness. In 2010 NAGC adopted a new definition of giftedness, the product of a year's work from a task force selected primarily for their diversity of thought and representation within the field. Dr. Delisle presents five points of dissent regarding the new definition, including the following: length, practical limitations, theoretical limitations, contextual focus, and lack of transparency. As a member the NAGC Task Force who assisted in the construction of the definition, as well as an active member of the field of gifted education, I would like to offer my comments regarding these points.

Length: Dr. Delisle felt the NAGC definition was too lengthy. He quoted the definition as: "*Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g. mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g. painting, dance, sports)*" and then stated: "Any definition that is 224 words long is far too lengthy for its own good." This quoted definition, however, is only 59 words, not 224. NAGC does elaborate on the above definition, but the part quoted by Dr. Delisle is the core definition. At only 59 words, it packs both substance and the ability to be operationalized by educators in the field. The remaining four parenthetical explanations are not needed to refine the definition, as Dr. Delisle states, but rather to offer extended commentary for those interested in a more complex understanding of giftedness.

Practical and Theoretical Limitations: Dr. Delisle stated that the NAGC definition implies that "giftedness is not a set of personal, innate traits but rather, the expression of particular talents." He continues to argue that the definition ignores the cognitive and psychological aspects of giftedness. These statements, however, are not accurate reflections of the definition proposed by NAGC. The very first sentence of the NAGC definition reads "*Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn).*" The word aptitude is defined as natural

ability (Merriam-Webster). The fact that the word aptitude is included at the front of the definition is indicative of NAGC's support of this position regarding the conception of giftedness; however, NAGC is not limited by this perspective alone. The second half of the definition reflects an equally viable conception of giftedness as defined through outstanding levels of competence. These twin notions capture fundamental differences in Western and Eastern notions of intelligence; Western perspectives tend to emphasize intelligence as a fixed ability whereas Eastern perspectives tend to emphasize intelligence as malleable (the harder you work, the smarter you will become.)¹ It is essential that NAGC embraces both perspectives as each has much to offer our field; the innate perspective acknowledges that gifted students are cognitively and psychologically distinct from typical students through their exceptional capacity for reasoning and learning, and the talent development perspective emphasizes the need for parents and educators to facilitate experiences that cultivate this innate ability, as well as an attitude within the child that hard work leads to success, in order to actualize the child's potential. Rather than having "theoretical and practical limitations" this definition embraces different theoretical perspectives, yet is practical enough to be operationalized by educators and policy makers advocating on behalf of gifted students.

Contextual Focus. Dr. Delisle argues against the NAGC's definition for its emphasis on domain specificity. He stated, "In this new world of domain-specific giftedness, then, people are gifted only part of the time—the times when they are "acting" that way." Again, this statement is not reflective of the true meaning of the NAGC definition. The definition states that individuals can be gifted in "one or more domains." This phrase incorporates both domain specificity as well as those who are gifted in the general intellectual sense-or as Dr. Delisle refers to them as individuals who are able to "think in deeper or more complex ways apart from a specific domain." Rather than omitting these learners from the definition of giftedness as Dr. Delisle suggested, the new definition is broader to include those who truly do have exceptional ability only in select domains as well as those who are gifted in the general intellectual sense. This broader definition has positive implications for educational practice, as it will allow those with ability in only one area, such as math or language arts, to receive services in that specific area rather than being denied services because they do not qualify for a gifted program designed only for students with general intellectual ability.

Transparency. Dr. Delisle's final point of contention regarding the NAGC definition was the fact that the membership did not have an opportunity to comment on the definition before it was adopted by the organization. As a point of clarification, the definition was brought before the NAGC Board of Directors for approval. The Board reviewed and approved the definition in 2010. As the Board of Directors is elected to represent the membership, this process did ensure transparency as well as validation of the ideas reflected in the new definition.

As a member of the task force charged with the task of redefining gifted education, I can attest to the amount of time and intellectual energy that was devoted to this process. I welcome discussion of the ideas presented within the definition, as I believe discussion can only help refine our understanding of gifted children. However, I would hope these discussions could be held with respect to the individuals who have dedicated their time and intellectual energy to contribute to our field.

¹These perspectives are summarized by Carol Dweck in her 2006 book, *Mindset*.

Response from Dr. Jim Delisle Distinguished Professor of Education (Retired) Kent State University

I always find article rebuttals curious. For the most part, their authors go point-by-point explaining how and why the writer of the article prompting the rebuttal is wrong on...well, everything. Too, the rebuttal itself is often defensive in tone and the language used just shy of demeaning. Errors of logic or interpretation are pointed out by the "rebutter" and the conclusion is always the same: you are wrong and I am right.

I'm afraid that Kristi Spiers Neumeister's reaction to my article, "A Defining Moment," pretty much follows this rebuttal boilerplate: according to her, I misinterpret the length of the new NAGC definition of giftedness, I state incorrectly that aptitude is not a part of the gifted equation, and my criticisms of the lack of transparency about the definition's adoption are simply off base. If I chose to, I could counter Neumeister's claims with my own reactions to her commentary, setting up a kind

of linguistic ping-pong match that does little more than have both of us dig in our heels even harder that *our* position is the *right* position.

I won't go there, for the issue is bigger than whether Neumeister or I is the greater convincer. Instead, let me state my main argument about the adoption of this new definition of giftedness in one short phrase: it is premature. Since the Task Force that arrived at this definition was formed in 2008, including the views of 15 individuals with broad background in the gifted child education field--no one argues with their credentials--that gave the Task Force members plenty of time to share some drafts of their thoughts with the NAGC members before this definition was adopted in 2010. Questions that I have about the exclusion of any mention about a gifted child's emotional development in this definition, or the overemphasis on talent development that seems to pervade this new view of giftedness, are probably not concerns unique to me. Indeed, if they were, why has this new definition caused such a controversy by many who have read it? All of this brouhaha could have been prevented by simply communicating the Task Force's proposed definition with NAGC members prior to its adoption. Apparently, Neumeister believes such a courtesy was unnecessary, as she states that "the Board (of Directors of NAGC) reviewed and approved the definition in 2010. As the Board of Directors is elected to represent the membership, this process did ensure transparency as well as validation of the ideas reflected in the new definition."

Well, I certainly disagree that this process was transparent, and I'm unclear what Neumeister means when she writes about the "validation of ideas" contained in this definition. What I do believe is this: when a group of 30 or so people presumes that, in deference to their credentials and hard work, they speak for an entire body of the thousands of educators, advocates and parents who constitute the core of NAGC membership, they are being dismissive of the individuals they presumably represent. The reconceptualization of our field's entire premise--"Who is a gifted child?"--is a pretty big deal, wouldn't you say? To not open up this new view of giftedness for public discussion by NAGC members was either wrong, shortsighted or both. It's time to correct a bad decision.

As a NAGC member for more than 30 years, as well as a member of the NAGC Board of Directors for 9 years, I am calling on the Association's Executive Committee to rescind this new definition of giftedness until such time that it can be examined by the people whom it impacts most: the NAGC members at large and those gifted children on whose behalf they advocate. It will do no harm to return to the previous definition until such time that this new one can be judged on its merits.

Perhaps NAGC members will, by and large, embrace this new definition. Or maybe they won't. Or maybe most folks simply don't care one way or the other. But we'll never know until we ask, will we?

Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931), Progenitor of STEAM Education for the Gifted

Michael E. Walters

Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

"THOMAS ALVA EDISON is the patron saint of electric light, electric power, and music-on-demand, the grandfather of the Wired World, great-grandfather of iPod Nation. He was the person who flipped the switch. Before Edison, darkness. After Edison, media-saturated modernity." *The Wizard of Menlo Park* by Randall Stross (p. 1, Three Rivers Press, 2007).

My ongoing admiration for Thomas Alva Edison was recently rekindled when Turner Classic Movies had an entire night of movies concerning Edison's life. The first film starred Mickey Rooney and was about his youth in Port Huron, Michigan. *Young Tom Edison* (1940) is one of the best representations of a gifted teenager. Although no specific gifted education programs were available in Port Huron, there were abundant daily experiences that served to stimulate a young gifted person. Some of Edison's mentors were telegraph operators who allowed him to express his giftedness through learning to operate telegraph keys. He also worked on science experiments in his house, and in a baggage and mail car set aside for this purpose by a train conductor. The second film was *Edison, the Man* (1940) starring Spencer Tracy. It emphasized how Edison perfected the light bulb, and also showed the collaborative aspect of his laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey where he directed a team of gifted individuals who worked together in synergy. They included technical experts, craftsmen, draftsmen, mechanics and tool specialists. Time Home Entertainment Inc. publishes wonderful magazines dealing with current and historical individuals, including a biographical description of Edison's life,

work and legacy. The title of this special edition is **Thomas Edison: His Electrifying Life** (2013). Gifted students will relate to this exceptional combination of print and visual materials.

The United States House of Representatives recently passed House Resolution 51. It concentrates upon adding the arts to STEM education. The House has also formed a bipartisan caucus to promote STEAM education in the United States, i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics. The arts component is not just confined to the fine arts, but also includes applied arts and the humanities. By combining these areas of knowledge into a unified program, the gifted student's sensibility will be expanded in both STEM areas and the arts.

One of my colleagues at Gifted Education Press, Harry Roman, has written a book entitled **STEAM Education for Gifted Students** (2013). His credentials for this book are both significant and basic. He is a retired engineer, an original inventor as indicated by his twelve patents, and one of the leading technology educators in the nation. He has been honored by organizations in the engineering and technology fields for his educational pursuits. Presently he is a consultant at the Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, New Jersey. Every educator of the gifted should be aware of Harry Roman's contributions since he is among the significant theorists and practitioners of American education.

The subtitle of **The Wizard of Menlo Park** (2007, Three Rivers Press) is: **How Thomas Alva Edison Invented the Modern World**. The author, Randall Stross, has also written books on the lives of such contemporary American innovators such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. In his book on Edison, Stross shows how he was the original wizard of electronic media. "Tech journalist Stross paints Edison, inventor of the phonograph, as the great-grandpa of the iPod, at the forefront of the merger between pop culture and technology." *Newsday*.

Edison's three main inventions were the progenitors of our current electronic media environment. His first great invention was the phonograph (1877-88). The major commercial value of this invention was when it became an instrument for transmitting the human voice and music. His second great innovation was an electric light bulb suitable for everyday use in the home, office and factory (1879) and related technology for producing an electrical grid. This accomplishment was figuratively biblical, as he brought widespread illumination to the United States and the world. When he first illuminated downtown New York City (1882), it was a similar moment for American technology as the Walk on the Moon. Edison's third innovative splendor was his development of the motion picture camera and projector (1889-96), resulting in one of the greatest contributions to popular entertainment – the American cinema.

The period of Edison's creative and productive work was an amazing era in American innovative power and achievements. From the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century, the United States gave the world such innovators as Robert Fulton (steamboat), Samuel B. Morse (telegraph), Cyrus West Field (transatlantic cable), Cyrus McCormick (agriculture reaper), telephone (Alexander Graham Bell), Isaac Merritt Singer (sewing machine), the Wright brothers (air flight), and Henry Ford (assembly line). These innovators not only enriched the world but made the United States a major economic force. We can continue this legacy through educational endeavors such as STEAM, and being guided by individuals like Harry Roman and publications such as **Gifted Education Press Quarterly**. We must also continue the inspiration, legacy and dynamics of Thomas Alva Edison.

Please see information on all of the books published by Gifted Education Press: <http://amzn.to/HAoYg5>
(They can be ordered through Amazon.com.) Click the Link: [Now Order Selected Versions in PDF Format by Using PayPal](#)

1. **STEAM Education for Gifted Students! Upper Elementary Through Secondary Levels: Combining Communication and Language Arts with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics** (ISBN 0910609624) by Harry T. Roman. COST: \$22.00 Including P&H. <http://amzn.to/UJ20Kb>
2. **STEM Robotics in the Gifted Classroom: Meet ROBO-MAN! Upper Elementary through Secondary Levels** (ISBN 0-910609-61-6) by Harry T. Roman. COST: \$22.00 Including P&H. <http://bit.ly/GSwhit>
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