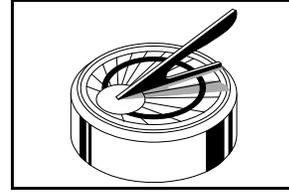


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Greetings and Happy New Year! An example of the present crisis in gifted education is shown by funding problems in Michigan where the governor and legislature slashed the gifted budget for 2003-04 by 95% from \$4.8 million to \$250,000 (Judy Putnam, Kalamazoo Gazette, Oct. 21, 2003). Each of 57 intermediate school districts previously received \$10,000 but now this amount has dropped to \$877 apiece. State funding for the Kalamazoo Public Schools' advanced programs dropped from \$25,000 to \$1,275, while Portage schools declined from \$21,000 to \$1,040. The Michigan politicians who destroyed gifted funding just don't get the point. At the expense of serving those students who will make the most significant contributions to society, they have done what is politically expedient by concentrating state funding on developing minimum competencies.

When I read a book such as **A Short History of Nearly Everything** (2003) by Bill Bryson, I wonder if educators of the gifted are doing enough to gain support from politicians and the general public. Bryson has written an engaging description of scientific research and discovery from the Renaissance to modern times. He not only describes the major developments in astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, meteorology, oceanography, and biology, but he provides numerous fascinating accounts of scientific geniuses. How can educators of the gifted convey to citizens and politicians the importance of developing and nurturing future outstanding scientists and thinkers?

In this issue, Dr. John Feldhusen asks whether programs for the gifted are indeed necessary for their education and development. We welcome responses to his article that we will publish in the future. Ms. Joy Baytops, doctoral student at The College of William and Mary, discusses the use of performance based and dynamic assessment in identifying minority and low-income students for gifted programs. Her past experiences include serving as an Executive Director of a Governor's School, State K-12 Gifted Program Specialist, and Grant Coordinator at The College of William and Mary (Javits Grant focus: At-risk Gifted). Ms. Vanna Donoyan, a teacher of the gifted in Rhode Island, describes how she successfully used various differentiation techniques in a fifth grade standards-based social studies lesson. This article is the result of a 3-year Rhode Island Department of Education grant, *Crossing Boundaries*, which provided professional development to teachers. Professor Colleen Willard-Holt of Pennsylvania State University-Harrisburg examines the interview responses of teachers who were students in elementary and secondary gifted programs. Dr. Michael Walters closes with comments on the work of the literary genius – J.R.R. Tolkien.

**Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher**

## **Do The Gifted Need Gifted Education?**

**By John F. Feldhusen    Purdue University  
Distinguished Professor Emeritus**

It is a paradox that all the information gathered in the identification of gifted students reveals superior achievement and performance in school and in general. Here, for example, is one list often used in the identification process:

Is extremely precocious

Learns faster and earlier than others

Has an advanced vocabulary

Has an outstanding memory

Learns very easily without help

Comfortable with abstract ideas

Sees cause-and-effect

Sees patterns and relationships

Prefers challenging and complex tasks

Is curious about many things

Has high energy level (Winebrenner, 2001)

Clearly a child who exhibits all or most of these characteristics is doing well in school and shows little need for enriched or enhanced instruction. He or she seems to be using resources in school and elsewhere to pursue an active regimen of learning and to be highly motivated to learn in spite of what professionals in gifted education see as weaknesses in the regular school program and the student's need for some form of enhanced or supplemental instruction. The paradox then is that the identification process so far has revealed a student who seems to be faring extremely well in the regular school programs and yet the gifted program beckons with the message that it has something the student "needs" to enhance his educational progress. But, we may ask, is there some risk that the gifted program will divert the student from the learning activities and curriculum in which he has been doing admirably well?

In addition, as a part of an identification process we are advised to get achievement test scores and they all turn out to be at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile level or higher. Finally we get an IQ and it is 137. The conclusion drawn then is that this student is "gifted" and really needs to be enrolled in a special program. If the student has done so well in the current program, has a high IQ, and has such excellent learning characteristics, the critic again and wisely asks, "Why is a special program needed?" Well, comes the reply she is bored in school, not challenged, and confronted by curriculum far below her current achievement levels. She needs curriculum and instruction that is also more cognitively oriented and requires a lot of thinking.

So one logical solution seems to be obvious; move her to a higher grade level and hopefully a higher level of curricula. But, of course, the curriculum in a higher grade may still not be cognitively challenging. Thus, a special curriculum may be called for, focusing on more intellectual and abstract aspects of a subject and more thinking or cognitively oriented activities such as analysis, reasoning, and creative thinking (Van Tassel-Baska, 2000).

However, as critics we may also argue that exercising the cognitive functions of analysis, reasoning, and/or creative thinking are as much functions of the student as the curriculum, and a "gifted" student might be expected to exercise her procedural or cognitive skills as she approaches daily learning activities at home and in school, especially in discussions with peers, teachers, parents and other adults as well as regular responses in reading. Meanwhile she is also hopefully amassing a large declarative knowledge base, so essential in all cognitive activities. In short the argument is that "truly gifted" students are cognitively active and oriented, regardless of the classroom curriculum.

Thus, we may conclude that the major approach to educational services for the gifted and talented is simply to make sure that they are receiving instruction at a level commensurate with their current achievement or readiness levels à la the Vygotsky paradigm (1978) and dispense with the concept of acceleration (Feldhusen, Van Winkle and Ehle, 1996). Our great primogenitor, Lewis Terman, was advanced from first to third grade during his first year in school. Benjamin Franklin moved from the first to the third year of grammar school. The majority of the Terman youth who were highly successful as adults had been grade advanced during their schooling years. Thus, we may argue that the essential ingredient of gifted education is to let motivated youth fly or soar to levels of education commensurate with their precocity, as suggested by *The Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth* (Stanley & Benbow, 1986).

Above all, we expect gifted and talented individuals to go on to high level expertise and/or creative achievement in adulthood (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). We are reminded by Lubart (2003) and Sternberg & Lubart (1995) of the critical need of the gifted and talented for a large crystallized knowledge base as a basic component of creative achievement.

Unquestionably personality factors are important, particularly as they relate to motivation to learn and achieve (Simonton, 1999), but above all it may be the striving, the setting of lofty goals and the years of practice and hard work that ultimately evolve into the highest levels of expertise and creative achievement (Ericsson, 1996), particularly if the times, the zeitgeist, the intellectual and cultural climate, are open and supportive as they were for Einstein (Levinson, 2003) and Franklin (Isaacson, 2003).

### **Concluding Questions**

Will a gifted program enhance participants' potential to achieve at very high levels? If they are already doing extremely well in school is there any need for enrichment or supplemental instruction? Do we have solid evidence that placement in a special program of "gifted" education will help youth attain the highest levels of expertise and creative achievement? Is there some risk that placement of youth in a gifted program will divert their attention and efforts from productive learning activities and result in diminution of their potential for the highest levels of achievement? These are questions we must address as we go forward in this field called "gifted education."

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## **Identifying Culturally Diverse and Low Income Gifted Students: Identification Protocols with Promise**

**By Joy L. Baytops The College of William and Mary (Doctoral Candidate)**

Identifying giftedness in children from cultural groups outside of the mainstream (e.g, white, middle class) is a continuing challenge to the field of gifted education. For at least the last three decades, nationwide attention has been devoted to this problem by a number of well-respected scholars. Furthermore, the only federal funding ever received by this field through the Jacob Javits Act (Elementary and Secondary Act of 1988) has been provided to fund research and demonstration projects specifically targeting (giving highest priority) these students. Yet, even with scholarly research and federal funding, the problem of the exclusive nature of gifted education still plagues us. This exclusive nature of the field has earned it increasing criticism among others within the educational community (Gallagher, 2000).

Given the inexact nature of assessing the combination of intellectual, academic and psycho-social variables that intersect to create the giftedness construct, there appears to be a lack of consensus within the field as to a definition of a giftedness construct that would meet the needs of all student groups (Gallagher, 2000; Gagne, 1995). As a result, students of some cultural minority groups (primarily African American, Hispanic, and Native American) and low income backgrounds are continuously underrepresented in gifted education programs (Borland & Wright, 1994; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson & Avery, 2002). While the field still lacks a commonly definitive protocol for assessing the giftedness construct in all students, a review of research literature citing empirical studies in gifted education identification, revealed some promising practices that should contribute greatly to more equitably identifying and serving these students.

### **Criteria for Literature Search**

To conduct an examination of the literature, the ERIC and PsycINFO databases were searched using keywords that included but were not limited to: *culturally diverse gifted; minority gifted; economically disadvantaged gifted; African-American gifted; and identifying giftedness in black students*. Other criteria examining the best practices in identifying culturally diverse and low income gifted students included: 1) the inclusion of subjects in K-12 schools; 2) studies which involved the design of a new protocol for identifying gifted African-American and/or economically disadvantaged students; 3) studies that validated the use of culturally appropriate practices; and 4) studies providing outcomes that measured some degree of change in performance of students as a result of participation in pilot or transitional enrichment programs.

### **Breadth and Scope of the Research Literature**

Although this issue is one of significance to the field, an analysis (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997) revealed between the years of 1966 and 1996 (three decades) a meager 8% of the total articles found in the ERIC database focused on gifted minority students (minority being used interchangeably with culturally diverse and with specific ethnic group titles). Specifically, within the five major journals in gifted education (*Gifted Child Quarterly, Gifted Child Today, Journal for the Education of the Gifted, Roeper Review and Gifted Child International*) only 2.1% of articles published during this same time period were devoted to the topic of the under representation of culturally diverse students in gifted education (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997). This minimalist approach to addressing a very grave concern speaks to the field's efforts to address this issue. Of the articles located, those included in this analysis present some very powerful evidence of the possibilities and promise of specifically designed protocols for the identification of culturally diverse and low income gifted students.

Common trends across the studies reviewed indicated some consistency in practices that could lend a great deal of support to addressing the challenge of identifying a more representative student population for gifted programs. Four of the six studies involved the use of primarily non-traditional assessment practices. Among the specific practices were the use of 'experimenter-designed' performance based and dynamic assessment tools (Borland & Wright, 1994; Feiring, Louis, Ukeje, Lewis, & Leong, 1997; Scott, Deuel, Jean-Francois & Urbano, 1996; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002). Such assessments are noted in the literature as being especially appropriate for determining learning potential in culturally diverse populations by tapping into their fluid intelligence (Borland & Wright, 1994; VanTassel-Baska, 2002).

Other non-traditional practices and measurements reviewed were specifically designed cultural assessment tools such as the System of Multicultural, Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) and tools to measure non-verbal, problem solving and perceptual relations skills (Mathew, Golin, Moore & Baker, 1992; Robinson, Bradley & Stanley, 1990). Other practices included providing for a transitional enrichment program, increasing access to advanced academic programming to help potentially gifted students develop their latent abilities (Borland & Wright, 1994; Robinson et al, 1990), the use of individually administered assessments (Borland & Wright, 1994; Feiring et al, 1997; VanTassel-Baska et al, 2002) and early identification of giftedness in culturally diverse populations (Borland & Wright, 1994; Feiring et al, 1997; Scott et al, 1994; and VanTassel-Baska et al., 2002).

Three of the seven studies examined the measurement of specific cognitive abilities rather than general intellectual abilities as a method of increasing the numbers of culturally diverse gifted students served in gifted education programs (Borland & Wright, 1994; Robinson et al, 1990; and VanTassel-Baska et al., 2002). The trend to measure specific abilities is consistent with the movement in gifted education towards the use of a talent development model (Gagne, 1995). Use of the talent development model will enable educators to focus attention on specific outcomes of the inherent or environmentally nurtured gifts of students, regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic background (Gagne, 1995).

Most of the researchers in this review noted the time and labor intensive nature of practices recommended in their studies. Among the practices described are the use of experimenter-developed instruments, inclusion of parent and teacher nomination tools, multiple stages of assessment, and the use of multiple assessment instruments within one specific protocol (Borland et al, 1994; Feiring et al, 1994; Matthew et al, 1992 and VanTassel-Baska et al, 2002).

### **Specific empirically supported practices**

Empirical support was provided for a number of the practices mentioned. Based on the results of the studies, the following was determined:

- Experimenter-designed performance based, dynamic assessments in at least three of the studies yielded an increased percentage of identified students than were previously identified by the school division involved in the study. Of a pool of 100 culturally diverse, low income students attending school in a high risk environment (e.g., poverty, violence, drugs, etc.), Borland & Wright (1994) identified a commonly cited incidence of 5% as gifted, all of whom were later chosen to attend a highly selective school for gifted students in New York City.
- Feiring et al (1997) had similar results with the use of a uniquely designed Gifted Screening tool which measured cognitive ability of kindergarten students who had previously not been screened or identified for gifted education services. Their study resulted in a 10% increase in identification of minority gifted students as compared to the identified population in participating schools in Newark, New Jersey during the previous school year.
- Similar results were yielded by Scott et al (1996) in their administration of a modified cognitive abilities test normally utilized for diagnosis of learning disabilities. Subjects in the Scott study received significantly different scores on five of twelve indicators outperforming 81% of previously identified gifted students on the same indicators.
- In a very extensive, labor intensive study in the state of South Carolina, VanTassel-Baska et al (2002) developed and field tested a series of performance based tasks in an effort to modify the state's identification protocol for gifted students. As a result, 28% of students in the field test scored in the range of 80<sup>th</sup> %ile or higher. Of the higher performing students, 11.6% were African American and 14.9% were low income. (As a result of this study and subsequent work with the state of South Carolina, identification protocols and program services have since been significantly modified resulting in more enhanced services for the state of South Carolina, but also for gifted students in Greenville, South Carolina, in particular (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, Brown, Baytops, Henshon, 2002).

The results of these studies are encouraging to the field's efforts to improve the manner in which cultural minorities and low income students are identified for gifted education programs. The labor intensive nature of developing protocols such as those mentioned here indicates a need for additional federal and state funding to support gifted education. In addition to funding, perhaps consideration should be given to establishing school-university collaboratives that can address this issue through a pooling of the resources of K-12 and higher education on a consistent basis.

One final caveat, however, is warranted here. Scholars and practitioners in the field of gifted education are urged to set aside any differences of theory and opinion about 'who' is gifted by accepting the identification dilemma as the most critical challenge facing the field today. Given the impending diversity of America's cultural landscape, this acceptance would enable the nurturance of a multitude of gifted individuals across

populations who truly represent contemporary America. Accepting this challenge and placing it as 'a priori' on the field's agenda may contribute to gifted education finally receiving the respect and recognition from others it has been seeking for decades. Otherwise, the field of gifted education will continue to position itself for accusations of inherent inequities and elitism that are clearly detrimental to our nation's nurturance of its best and brightest across all populations.

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**Naturally...Students Will Learn**

**By Vanna Donoyan**

**Coventry Public Schools    Coventry, Rhode Island**

The standards movement is causing teachers to rethink how they teach and students learn. As a teacher of the gifted, I was concerned about the challenge level as well as the critical and creative opportunities standards would offer my students. Were the standards simply goals that were weighty for some students and easy hauls for others? How was I to help the students move their own learning forward in a standards-based classroom? Differentiation held the key.

I began my differentiation work by collaborating with a 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom teacher. We poured over antiquated objectives relating to Colonial America. Originally this unit listed 51 objectives (90% rested at the knowledge and comprehension level of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Thinking). Enrichment objectives were simply extra comprehension questions at the end of each chapter review.

From 51 concrete thinking objectives we sculptured a multi-disciplinary, standards-based unit that allowed for differentiation and enrichment opportunities for a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class of 26 students. In the beginning it seemed like a monumental task. Where would we start? What do we really want the students to understand? How can we design meaningful lessons and manage it all?

Together we identified patterns throughout the unit that became “*The 7 Big Ideas.*” These ideas embraced social studies, applied learning, math, and English language arts standards. We were determined to provide students the opportunity to learn facts while synthesizing and

applying the information. As a result of these ideas, we wanted our students to begin to view past events and ideas as a foundation for educated citizenship.

Thus the “*The 7 Big Ideas*” emerged as:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how colonists used geography, natural resources, and the environment to survive. This includes comparing and contrasting to present day shelters, settlements, and living conditions;
2. Students will compare and contrast gender roles of the colonial times with those today with an emphasis on the choices people make as a reflection of their society’s mores;
3. Students will identify how religion and traditions form a foundation in the development of a community;
4. After researching important colonial figures, children will relate them to present day leaders who demonstrate similar qualities and talents;
5. Children will be able to justify to their classmates through debate and discussion the relationship between climate, environment, economics, and politics;
6. Children will analyze the reasons why people move, how ethnicity influences the area and the impact this has on current inhabitants;
7. Students will comprehend that the colonies could not survive economically without forced labor and that the morality of the period allowed slavery to continue.

With the big ideas on paper, we proceeded to pre-assess the children. Our intent was to gather data regarding the children’s readiness levels. What was their level of prior knowledge about Colonial America? We felt catapulting into new ideas rather than a review of the mastered concepts would pique the children’s interest.

The actual pre-assessment took the form of a letter from a young man traveling to the colonies from England. The letter, which was addressed to his family, recounted his life thus far in the colonies. However, key vocabulary was blanked out. A word bank was also provided for all the children. The results of the pre-assessment indicated that three-quarters of the class possessed a satisfactory understanding of colonial times. As the regular classroom teacher reviewed the pre-assessment with 20 students, I reviewed the assessment with 6 children who required direct instruction. The small group setting allowed each child to receive personalized instruction. We poured over pictures about the colonies and brochures from Plymouth Plantations that fueled their questions and sparked discussions. The accommodations for this small group offered a learning environment that met their needs. After three meetings, they were ready to join the learning community empowered with basic knowledge about Colonial America.

The results of the pre-assessment guided us in mapping educational opportunities, which provided for maximum growth in learning for all students. Next, we chose to differentiate the Colonial America unit. Differentiated resources and product choice would help the students amass knowledge and demonstrate to us their comprehension as well as their application of the content. Based on student data derived from a learner profile (Purcell and Renzulli, 1998), we identified the groups of students who preferred to learn content by:

- reading the social studies text
- watching videos
- reading historical fiction (at varied reading levels)
- using the Internet and reference books

Further analysis of the learner profiles helped us address various learning styles and interests. We designed activities that appealed to all learners’ strengths and talents. Each child in the class brought to the unit his/her natural talent and strength. Students’ talents fused into individual, small group and whole class success including self-confidence and learning. Product choice allowed for students’ autonomy.

Some children were visibly nervous regarding the open-endedness of some activities. They were surprised to learn that everyone had a chance to learn in a different way and in various locations. Groups began to form based on learning preferences. One group quietly sat on the desks and watched a video, while six students huddled around the two computer screens. Four students remained at their desks reading the social studies textbook aloud. Later, I asked them why they chose the text over all the other resources. They replied, “because we didn’t want to miss the stuff you’d test us on.”

“Suppose there was no usual test,” I continued, “Would you change your mind about investigating another source?”  
“No, we have to read this book. It’s the social studies book!” they gasped.

A cohort of 4 children ventured beyond the classroom walls into the library. They began searching the card catalogue and reference shelves in earnest. The school librarian commented that she was amazed at their enthusiasm and independent learning.

The rubrics which they helped design offered them direction. Once they relaxed and focused more on the process of learning rather than what to do to get a good grade, dynamic conversations and activities began to emerge. We allowed for differentiation in the content of historical information, in the process by which the students amassed the knowledge and in the manner they demonstrated their understanding, i.e., products.

As teachers, we wanted to balance students' choices with challenges that reached beyond their comfort level. With standards in one hand and student data in the other, we drove on an uncharted road. What we witnessed was astonishing student driven learning. The meaningfulness of the activities, the connection to their lives, and the novelty and exploratory nature of the differentiated unit led to exciting observations. We noted 4 differences in our student's learning and behaviors.

**First, given the risk free and enriched classroom environment to explore their natural thinking capabilities, the students synthesized their own learning.** We supported their adventure into learning by remaining flexible. The students were fully aware of our expectations and outcomes via discussions about the standards and rubrics. As teachers, we witnessed students moving from concrete facts to abstract connections. The children's conversations were relevant and alive with facts, vocabulary and concepts we knew they could only have amassed by comprehending the facts. The children would brainstorm ideas speaking in rich vocabulary. The usage of terms such as climate concerns, environment, natural resources and land use were overheard as the children started to compare and contrast present day shelters to colonial settlements. They would speak of the difficulties the colonists endured, the hardships, and the weather conditions that probably led to why many did not survive. The students' were making sense of history!

When the students began to compare and contrast gender roles between colonial times and present times, we heard the most heated conversations. They were asked to complete a chart of five males and five females that they admire (at least seven must be well-known people.) Based on prior knowledge or research the children would list each person's occupation/vocation, what the individual is most noted for, and why the child selected him or her. Children were also asked to brainstorm personal goals, occupation, and future plans. We discussed heroic qualities and career preparations as opposed to gender defined roles. When they were asked to research the chores the colonial men and women were expected to perform, we heard comments such as, "That's not right, why did she have to do that? Why were the men the only ones allowed?"

Charts were set up around the room and the children would list the colonial chores by gender. When asked to choose a chore or craft to demonstrate to the class, one young lady stated, "I don't want to churn butter, I want to chop down the trees for logs!"

We asked them to present the chore along with a flow chart identifying each step. These 10 and 11-year-olds were drawing from their own lives and connecting to the past. Their natural talents led them to choose chores that required kinesthetic ability or visual/artistic talent. We observed children connecting and demonstrating their understanding of the topics within the range of their talents. Their classmates were astonished at the rail fence, patterned quilt, drip candles, cornbread, and whittled figurines their peers produced.

We created a way to learn that Tomlinson (1999) refers to as, "both capturing students' attention and leading to understanding. Organizing a class for effective activity and exploration becomes the highest priority."

**Secondly, the children were on task 100% of the time.** Even those student's who generally were unmotivated came to life. We gave them an opportunity to shine based on their strengths. The special education children were offered modifications, which escalated their learning. They worked along side their classmates in cooperative groups and produced marvelous diagrams and oral presentations. Their faces were aglow with pride in their ownership of learning. One particular child, diagnosed with a verbal expressive disability, kept pace with the group by questioning why things were being done, organizing project components and directing the presentation. Her intuition about organizing an aesthetic presentation made her the natural director of the activity. She knew she was an integral part of the group and found a niche in the learning process. A multiple-choice test would never have allowed us the honor of witnessing her unique talents as she used them in meeting the standards in a cooperative project.

**The average performance gains were most impressive.** Throughout the unit, the motivation of all the students exploded. We attributed this to the tremendous increase in the challenge level. Specifically, meaningfulness of the topic, relevancy to their life, rigor of the intellectual pursuit, and the novelty of the activities all played a role in challenging the standards by differentiating the curriculum. This led to many students exceeding standards because now they could demonstrate how "smart" they really are.

An "ah ha" moment arrived when the children researched a historical colonial figure. Suddenly, Ben Franklin, Anne Hutchinson, Benjamin Banneker, Roger Williams and Lord Baltimore came to life, as did the students' learning and motivation. After a "Guess Who Am I" presentation, the children mingled about, admiring their homemade costumes. A linguistically talented student, Alex, shouted, "Hey Roger, why are you talking to Thomas Hooker? You guys don't get along!" It was then that we realized that the children had reached a new and deeper sense of understanding about the content. The regular classroom teacher and I stared at each other; we had not planned

this dialogue.

Unhurriedly, the children began to separate themselves into groups, with the “Rhode Islanders” Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams huddling away from a Pennsylvania contingent led by Ben Franklin. William Penn and Peter Minuit ambled around the room until Peter shrugged his shoulders and gasped, “We belong in our own group, Mrs. D, because we both had to deal with the Duke of York.” I merely nodded and was overwhelmed by this interaction prompted by student choice and initiative. The children had naturally selected their own group. We were convinced that differentiation allowed for this application of knowledge toward meeting the standards.

**Finally, the gifted learners found enormous social acceptance in the cooperative groups.** One of the academically advanced students was finally accepted into a group of learners. She no longer stood as the resident know-it-all, but as a team member in the community of learners. IQ’s no longer deter-mined “smartness.” Rather the students’ reliance on each other’s natural talents led to a system where everyone was smart at something. This was powerful. Everyone was showing gains in learning and meeting the standards.

Normally, they would have been assessed with a photocopied multiple-choice test. We chose to assess the students’ growth in a culminating project, A Colonial Museum. The students demonstrated their understanding of Colonial America by recreating authentic products as if they were colonists. An outside audience of parents and the school community were invited to view the museum. As the regular classroom teacher and I toured the museum, a rubric was completed to assess the big ideas. The displayed products were outstanding, but we were interested to know if the students could identify how their project compared to and contrasted with the present.

Differentiation served as the catalyst which escalated the children’s learning beyond the standards and our expectations. At the culmination of this six-week unit, they met and exceeded the social studies, applied learning, math, and English language arts standards in a manner that fit their learning styles and abilities, while maximizing their learning. According to Tomlinson differentiated instruction is:

- Proactive;
- More qualitative than quantitative ;
- Aimed at offering multiple approaches to content, process, and product;
- Student-centered ; and
- A blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction.

We accompanied our students on the road to learning, powered by their unique learning capabilities and guided by the standards. I question whether the gains in student achievements (based on pre- and post-test results) would have garnered the same remarkable results had the students merely followed the textbook and answered the end of chapter questions.

As a teacher, I have so much more to learn. I am convinced that in order to meet standards we must offer our students differentiated learning opportunities that help to balance the learning objectives while maximizing their learning. It just seems like the natural thing to do.

#### **References:**

Purcell, J. & Renzulli, J. (1998). *Total Talent Portfolio*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.

Tomlinson, C.A. (1999). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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A special thanks to Jeanne Purcell, Ph.D., of the Connecticut State Department of Education as my mentor during this project.

#### **Excerpt from the Pre-assessment:**

Underlined words were omitted from the text and provided to the students in a word bank:

Dear Family,

I know it has been a long time since I have written you. As you know, my ship sailed many months. The New World has grown considerably since the first Mayflower voyage. The colonies number 13 now. They are referred to as the New England, Middle, and Southern colonies. There are many slaves in the Southern colonies because of the large plantations that need their labor. These slaves come from Africa...

**Culminating Project Rubric**

Joint effort of the students of Ms. McD's and Mrs. D's class.

**Research Report:**

**Depth of research --**

- No evidence of research \_\_\_\_\_
- Little evidence of research \_\_\_\_\_
- More research was necessary \_\_\_\_\_
- Satisfactory level of research \_\_\_\_\_
- Topic was thoroughly researched \_\_\_\_\_

**Visuals:**

- Carefully prepared            Yes   No   Almost   Skilled
- You explained the visual    Yes   No   Almost   Skilled

**Project:**

- Clearly, the student's work was --
- Carefully prepared            Yes   No   Almost   Skilled
- Authenticity attempted      Yes   No   Almost   Skilled

**Presentation:**

- Verbal communication      Yes   No   Almost   Skilled
- Eye contact with audience   Yes   No   Almost   Skilled
- Good Voice quality          Yes   No   Almost   Skilled

**Child's name** \_\_\_\_\_

- Achieved performance standards with honors \_\_\_\_\_
  - Achieved performance standards \_\_\_\_\_
  - Almost achieved performance standards \_\_\_\_\_
  - Showed little evidence of achievement \_\_\_\_\_
- 

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

**Did you demonstrate or mention in your report --**

- How the colonists used natural resources for their needs? How does this compare to present-day use of material in meeting our needs?
- Who usually made or performed your chore/activity during colonial times? How has that work changed over time and who performs this work today?
- Who was an important historical colonial figure and is there anyone who presently demonstrates similar qualities? Who are they and what qualities do they share? What contributions did they or do they make?
- In which colony would one most likely find your product? Explain how the environment influenced your product. In what ways did your product influence the economics of the colonies? Give examples of a present day product that is influenced by its environment and describe its importance to the economics of the area.

- Would you consider your product “ethnic”? Why? Do you consider any products today as ethnic? Name a few and explain why.



**Looking Back: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly about Gifted Programming**

**By Colleen Willard-Holt Pennsylvania State University**

**Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**

Recently I had the opportunity to interview 18 female teachers, some of whom had been identified as gifted when they were in school and some of whom I identified as gifted when they were students in my graduate education courses. The teachers varied in their years of experience and teaching credentials, and all are presently teaching in regular education settings. Their reflections on their own experiences in gifted programs, viewed through the lenses of trained educators, may provide insights on experiences which were particularly beneficial, as well as on practices to be discouraged.

The teachers’ experiences in gifted programs had varied greatly, as shown by the terms used by them to describe their programs (Figure 1). In their interviews, the teachers elaborated upon these responses. All names are pseudonyms.

**Figure 1**

***Terms used to Describe Gifted Programs***

<u>Elementary Programs</u>	<u>Secondary Programs</u>
Wonderful	Lacking
Fun	Ok
Got a lot out of it	Waste of time
Loved it	Wonderful opportunity
Frustrating	Rigorous
Not individualized	Challenging
Hated pull-out	Rewarded with more work
Remember a lot of it	Awful
Not interesting	Only for rich kids
Extra experiences	Did my best work
Don’t remember much	Enjoyed the higher academic level
Liked it at first; it became a farce	Teachers didn’t teach us
Great	Loved it

***The Good***

Many of the teachers remembered their programs fondly, particularly at the elementary level:

Lisa: “Even as early as second grade I remember what we did; we made fossils, we created cookbooks. In fourth grade we did a huge mythology unit and created a Greek newspaper. We had to do ads and we had to write stories and things like that. We did an Ellis Island unit that was awesome. We actually did a dramatization of going through Ellis Island. Our teacher was one of the guards there and he stole all my money -- I couldn’t do anything about it. Then I got deported and it was like... I mean it actually had people in tears over it, and really sunk in, really what it was about. We wrote and produced our own TV show. Lots of things. I remember all those things. I don't remember much from the regular class.”

Bridget: “It was mostly creativity. Extensions, like if we were learning about a war in social studies class, we would do some type of production about the war in gifted class. So there was always a relation to what we were learning about...”

Pam: "From kindergarten to third grade we did a lot of fun stuff. It was an enrichment program and we got to learn foreign languages. We got to go on field trips to museums and all these extra places. It was a lot of fun and I really got a lot out of it. We did experiments all the time and hands-on stuff like that."

Patti: [In the primary grades] "I remember making an Aztec warrior, and we learned about the cultures of the Aztecs and the different Indians. We even had computers down there at that time. We'd do different programs on the computers and normal students, they didn't get the experience with that because computers were not that common. I can tell you about the sixth grade program and that's why I was disappointed to [move]. They actually took the kids out and they did different stuff such as photography, field experiences. They went out and they camped, and just basically learned different things about the land, how to live off the land, and different aspects of our ecosystem... Fifth through 8th grade we created our own restaurants and stuff, and figured out how we could advertise to make this thing get off the ground. Fifth through 8th grade I had this really good teacher for enrichment as we called it, and she spent time with analogies. We had to create myths, and just basic brain teaser puzzles..."

Stacy: "The gifted classes? Actually that's when I did my best work. Unfortunately, I don't really remember a lot though. But I do remember that's when I did my best work. If you went back to my report cards when I was just in average classes they were like C's and D's, but then when I got into higher level classes they were like A's and B's."

The teachers recalled the intellectual challenge and the chance to exercise their creativity. A number of the elementary programs apparently focused on teaching thinking skills in isolation, as was common in the late 1980's. Bridget's program was the only one mentioned which assiduously attempted to link with the regular curriculum. Jo and Jen described high quality secondary programs:

Jo: "Well, I was in advanced English from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and then I was put in advanced placement for 12<sup>th</sup> grade. To tell you the truth I loved it. And everybody else hated it. But I loved it because it was basically intense writing study, and it was also intense around literature background and vocabulary. So it really prepared me not only for the SATs, but also to write papers for pretty much anything."

Jen: "I enjoyed it. It gave me an opportunity to try new things and experience a higher academic level than I was experiencing in regular classes."

In all, 13 of the 18 teachers made positive comments about their gifted programs. However, not everything was so rosy.

### *The Bad*

There were certain aspects of gifted programming that the teachers recalled with shudders. The initial selection process was traumatic for some:

Bridget: "I was pulled into a room and I had to take a test. I had to put puzzles together and I don't remember now what the name of the test was. But I knew at the time that it was the school psychologist. I knew that word. [I thought], 'Oh my gosh, I'm being taken to this room.'"

Linda: "They tested me really early. It was in the summer between my kindergarten and first grade year. All I remember was it was really hot and they wanted to stuff me in a little closet with somebody I didn't know. I was very irate because nobody would tell me what this test was for, only that it was really important. So I decided that it wasn't as important as they thought, and I tried to answer everything exactly the opposite of what the instructor or the psychologist told me to do. I ended up in LD for about two weeks, and they quickly decided that wasn't really the place for me. My second grade teacher fought and fought and fought to have me retested, and I guess they retested me in fourth or fifth grade finally. She had to fight that long. So I kind of felt like the group had already been established and it was kind of odd to just come in what seemed like that late in the game. My brother had already been part of this before I got there so it was not only that the teachers gave me a hard time for being gifted. The gifted kids gave me a hard time because I was 'late gifted.' So it was an interesting experience."

It appears that no one realized the importance of explaining the reason for the testing to these two girls. Had they been in-formed, the experience may not have been so disturbing, and Linda may not have spent so much time in an inappropriate placement. Even worse, Stacy had the experience of being accelerated, then put back with age peers, then accelerated again:

Stacy: "When I was in third grade, and I was eighteen months younger than the oldest kid in class, they had held me back because I was only 7. I was tested and I was found to be gifted. I was bored. But they did put me back in second grade and then as I got older I was in all the gifted classes. I remember that...I guess my parents now say that they wish they never did it because the only thing that it did was it hurt me psychologically..."

Years later, Stacy still struggled with the confused messages she had received. Another bad experience associated with gifted programs was that of being pulled out. Bridget and Heather vividly recalled their distaste for the process:

Bridget: "Even though I knew I was being pulled out for a good reason, I didn't like being pulled out at all. So I don't know if it affected what I did there and how hard I tried. I just didn't like it. When that teacher came into my classroom and said it's time to leave I just hated it...I don't know if maybe I just didn't want to be different than everybody else, or if I was worried about what they thought, what the rest of the students thought about... 'Oh well, she must think she's all this if she gets to go to that special class.' I just think I was worried about what everyone else thought about what we were doing over there. There was never a time to share what we did in gifted class with the rest of our peers, and so they never knew what we were doing. It was like a big secret."

Heather: "I remember specifically in fifth grade, and we were taken out of our class every Wednesday, and we had to go to this... We were in this classroom with this other teacher all day long, and I hated it because on that day of the week nobody wanted to sit with you at lunch, nobody wanted to play with you outside. Everybody teased you because you were so smart. In fifth grade it was kind of like cool to be not so smart I guess. It was just a lot of stress and it wasn't a very good teacher. Eventually I dropped out of that."

Such problems might be averted if an adult takes the time to explain the gifted program to classmates, and to talk to the gifted students about how to deal with classmates who teased them. While Bridget and Heather felt ostracized, Linda didn't like the work that she encountered in the gifted program:

Linda: "There was nothing individualized. I remember doing sections on architecture and underwater archeology and all this stuff, and that was not at all what my interest was. It was really frustrating to have to sit through that because that's what everybody else was doing... I mean it was challenging, but it wasn't interesting."

It appears that Linda participated in a one-size-fits-all gifted program, which did not meet her needs. While experiences like these were bad, some of what these teachers encountered was even worse – just plain ugly.

### *The Ugly*

One woman who had not been identified as gifted in school reflected on the accessibility of the gifted program and high level classes in general:

Charlotte: "My parents got divorced when I was fourteen which is right when you're hitting high school. My mom said she's afraid that school districts often overlook people for programs such as those because too many things are overpowering the person, the child, at the time so that the giftedness or a little more intelligence isn't shining through...My public school teachers didn't encourage anything. I would take in my writing and they would almost tell me to slow down, stop. Poetry shouldn't take up your world, but then [with] the teen angst and the whole divorce situation, I was writing a lot. But the AP courses were for the kids who were rich and were going off to... My guidance counselor actually said to me, 'you're just going to [a community college], right?' And I said, 'Yeah that's all we can afford.' So that was the plan and they didn't put any extra time... and AP tests you have to pay to take..."

In that school district at that time it appears that intelligence was thought to be related to social class, and Charlotte simply didn't qualify on that criterion. Other women felt that their teachers punished them for being identified as gifted:

Linda: "[The teachers] used to get really irate with us. 'Oh yeah, that's right, you have to leave this afternoon -- you're gifted.' ... I know that one teacher in particular didn't really care for that and wouldn't give us the assignments for the afternoon." Kelly: "Unfortunately we had some teachers who felt that, 'If you're in a level 5 class I don't need to teach you. You can figure this out by yourself.'"

Sharon: "It was good to be with my peers, but sometimes it was annoying to seemingly get 'rewarded' for success in school with more HOMEWORK."

Pam: "High school was just pretty much a joke. I remember especially my twelfth grade cultures class ... We did nothing, we did absolutely nothing. Our teacher would just sit up there and talk about, you know, the sports teams at our high school and stuff, and he favored those kids and that sort of thing... It was a waste of time."

It is appalling that some teachers use students' giftedness against them, even going so far as excusing themselves from teaching these students. Whether the teachers meant to embarrass or demean these students is unknown, but it was still a painful memory 10 to 20 years later. Pam went on to describe the damage that she thought had been done by the lack of challenge in high school:

“I really feel bad that the time in high school hurt me. I really needed that time to keep developing my intelligence and it was just kind of like a holding pond. And so I feel like I can bring that out in myself. I also think it's harder for me now to draw on some of my strengths...”

Therefore, bad or inappropriate experiences in gifted programs were recalled just as vividly, if not more so, as were good ones. These bad experiences were perceived to have ongoing negative effects.

***Discussion and Recommendations***

The teachers who were interviewed were quite candid in their assessments of their gifted programs. Those programs perceived by these teachers as challenging or representing new areas of exploration, whether at the elementary or secondary level, were universally considered worthwhile. Some teachers mentioned wanting to give their students experiences similar to those they remembered, so that a new generation might reap the seeds sown long ago. On the other hand, programs that were not well organized or were perceived as only busywork or fun and games were considered wastes of time, and participants often dropped out of them. Although it's not surprising that gifted students would “see through” feeble attempts at gifted programming, the extent to which they connected the program activities with helping or harming their future success was particularly telling.

Given the small, rather homogeneous sample, all conclusions and recommendations must be interpreted with caution, pending further research. However, the following recommendations based on these interviews bear consideration:

- Explain why the student is being tested for a gifted program, and how the program might be of benefit.
- If students are to be pulled out of their regular classroom, explain to regular class peers why the student is being pulled out and the type of work that might be done in the gifted program.
- Make sure the work done in the program is both challenging and interesting to the student. Show how the work applies to current or future work in the regular curriculum.
- Negotiate with regular classroom teachers an equitable policy for making up missed work.
- Seek gifted students among all ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and make programming available without discrimination.

These interviews provided an interesting perspective on gifted programs as seen retrospectively through the lenses of trained teachers. They were unanimous in their opinion that good gifted programs can have beneficial and lasting effects, and that harmful experiences likewise have long-term consequences. Educators would do well to remember Maya's final wistful comment:

Maya: “I don't think I went through a very good gifted program, so I think that definitely schools should improve that. Because I feel like... not that it was wasted, not that my intelligence was wasted, but I didn't get to use it as much as I would have liked.”



**A Holiday Treat from a Gifted Storyteller, J.R.R. Tolkien**

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

This month (December 2003) the last part of the trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, will be released in movie theaters across the United States. The author of this trilogy which the films were based upon, J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973), is another exemplar of the role of sensibility in giftedness. Tolkien was a genius, an expression of a unique form of artistic and scientific giftedness. The sensibility of giftedness that he expresses is seen in his ability to function on more than one level of human creativity. He was one of the great linguistic scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who invented a unique literary language derived from Anglo Saxon myths and fairy tales. He was keenly interested in the etymology of words. At the same time, he was also one of the great storytellers of the English language. One of his friends and colleagues, C.S. Lewis, was also a gifted scholar and storyteller who encouraged Tolkien. Both the films and his books are holiday treats for children, young and old.

