

# GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS QUARTERLY

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In a recent CNN blog (October 3, 2012), Dr. Lorelle Espinosa discussed the low education levels of Hispanic students in science, mathematics, engineering and technology (STEM) areas. She is a senior research analyst at Abt Associates, and the title of her article is *My View: Help Young Latinos Succeed in STEM Fields*. With all of the present concern in identifying and educating these students for gifted programs, it is important to determine how the problem affects this ethnic group and the nation's educational system. Dr. Espinosa discusses some statistics which demonstrate the pressing need for upgrading the STEM levels of Hispanic students from elementary school through college. For example, they composed only 6% of the STEM workers in 2009, are less likely to complete a STEM major college degree than other ethnic groups, and have fewer available public school resources in science and technology areas. What should educators of the gifted do to improve the identification of Hispanic students who show high achievement potential? First, they can upgrade their information resources regarding the meaning and importance of STEM education. One of my authors, Harry T. Roman, has made important inroads in reaching this goal through his books, *STEM Education for Gifted Students* (2011) and *STEM Robotics in the Gifted Classroom* (2012). As a retired engineer, Harry provides teachers and students with many practical exercises for improving their STEM knowledge. He also works with teachers and presents science lessons to gifted students.

One of the best resources for helping teachers to identify and educate Hispanic students is a new book by Joan Smutny and associates – Kathryn P. Haydon, Olivia Bolaños and Gina Estrada Danley – *Discovering and Developing Talents in Spanish-Speaking Students* (Corwin, 2012). The authors first describe the seriousness of the problem of educating this ethnic group by discussing high school dropout, college completion and poverty statistics. In later chapters they emphasize the cultural and language strengths of young Hispanic students and their parents, and how teachers of the gifted can capitalize upon these strengths to improve academic admission to gifted programs.

The authors present many examples of how to effectively use current gifted identification and education techniques with these students (e.g., looking for creative positives and using interest inventories, applying different techniques for developing their strengths and talents, and offering challenging differentiation options with advanced English Language Learners). This book fills an important need in the gifted field by showing how parents and teachers can work together to improve the identification and education of gifted Hispanic students.

## Articles in this Issue:

- Jim Delisle critiques the current definition of giftedness espoused by the National Association for Gifted Children. Jim has been a staunch advocate for gifted children over many decades. Through his extensive books, articles and columns, he has played a key role in improving academic and social-emotional programs for the gifted throughout the United States and overseas. I first read Jim's critique in *Outlook* (Sept.-Oct. 2012), a publication of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted & Talented. Betty Johnson, the Editor of this fine newsletter, kindly helped me to contact Jim and transfer a copy of the article to *GEPQ*. I agree with Jim's assessment of this convoluted definition, and believe it is destructive to the gifted education field. Furthermore, as a member of NAGC, I don't recall being asked to cast a ballot on this matter. Do you?
- Sanford Aranoff addresses an important issue regarding how university professors could help to improve the education of high school students by serving as substitute teachers. He discusses many topics that have direct bearing on challenging the reasoning skills of gifted students.
- Jerry Flack presents an informative article on books that gifted students can use to study different religions, and includes a wide range of resources written for children and teenagers.
- Michael Walters discusses Ernest Hemingway's ideas on what it takes to be a good writer.
- The book review and letter are a tribute to Jacques Barzun.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher

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## A Defining Moment

James R. Delisle

In celebration of his daughter's wedding, Robert Frost composed a poem, "The Master Speed," which begins:

*No speed of wind or water rushing by  
But you have speed far greater. You can climb  
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,  
And back through history up the stream of time...*

In reading this poem, I was touched not only by a parent's love for his child, but with the many life situations in which Frost's words ring true. It's not a stretch, from my view, to apply these eloquent images to the situation of gifted children seeking outlets for their innate abilities to see more vivid hues, to hear more subtle sounds, and to experience life in a higher key than others. These inborn traits of gifted children—as natural to them as their eye color—are what make a gifted child...well, gifted.

Which is why I am so disturbed with the new definition of giftedness adopted recently by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). Calling it "a bold step" in her 2011 Presidential address to NAGC, Dr. Paula Olszewski-Kubilius presented this new definition:

*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).*

This definition continues on for two more paragraphs—for a total of 224 words. As it proceeds, it grows ever-more convoluted, even referring readers to a Position Paper that explains in further detail the rationale behind this new brand of giftedness.

How and why am I disturbed with this definition? Let me elaborate.

**Its length.** Any definition that is 224 words long is far too lengthy for its own good. And when four separate parenthetical explanations are needed to refine it, it's obvious that this definition was written by a committee of people—a Task Force, in this case—who, apparently, couldn't agree on common, concise language. A definition of *anything* that takes three paragraphs to explain is trying simply to justify its relevance. Precision, not scattershot, is needed when something is defined.

**Its practical limitations.** In justifying this new definition, Olszewski-Kubilius states that our field needs to "consider making talent development, rather than giftedness, the major unifying concept of our field and, most importantly, the basis of our practice." (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2011, p. 2) Such a stance is justified, she explains further, because gifted child advocates' efforts have been marginalized by their focusing on gifted *children* rather than gifted *curriculum*. It is her contention—and the underpinning of this new definition—that giftedness is not a set of personal, innate traits but rather, the expression of particular talents in music, math or any other "structured area of activity" referred to in the definition.

I find this approach to giftedness both utilitarian and selfish. By making the main job of gifted child educators to be talent developers, we are likely to put ourselves out of business—after all, aren't *all* teachers developers of their students' talents? Our field's uniqueness lies not in the curriculum we offer our students nor the educational methods we use to develop their talents; rather, our field's focus since it began a century ago has been to recognize the unique cognitive and affective facets of a gifted child's life and then finesse school experiences to enhance these traits. By removing these cognitive and psychological aspects from the core of our definition, we are neglecting the very reasons our field of study came to exist initially. That is both shortsighted and rude.

**Its theoretical limitations.** In 1982, gifted legend Annemarie Roeper used her decades'-long experiences with gifted individuals to arrive at this definition of giftedness: *Giftedness is a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences.* (Roeper, 1982)

And in 1991, a group of gifted educators, counselors and researchers—The Columbus Group-- came to see giftedness in the following way:

*Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order to develop optimally.* (Columbus Group, 1991)

Whether you prefer either of these definitions or the new NAGC conception of giftedness is irrelevant. What is relevant is that an entire body of literature exists on gifted individuals that defines them from a psychological, rather than an educational, viewpoint. However, this entire body of literature is missing in the new NAGC definition. I'm not sure why this glaring omission was not obvious to its creators, but the new NAGC definition of giftedness has given short shrift to a profoundly important aspect of giftedness.

**Its contextual focus.** The domain-specific nature of the new NAGC definition presupposes that students are gifted in math or science or soccer or art. An overall ability to think in deeper or more complex ways *apart from a specific domain* does not constitute giftedness. Using this new NAGC view, giftedness lies in *something you do* as opposed to being *someone you are*. 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.

Using this logic and applying it to other populations of children with special needs, we would have to agree to believe that an individual with a cognitive disability does not have this disability all of the time, only in select circumstances. Or, we would have to compartmentalize blindness or deafness to restricted areas of a child's existence—no one could *possibly* be blind all of the time, could they? The absurdity of this on again/off again disability condition is equally valid in discussing giftedness. Whether a child chooses to perform to an exceptionally high level in math, science, soccer or art, or to keep these abilities latent or minimally expressed, is a personal choice; however, such a lack of outstanding performance does not detract from the fact that a child with a measured IQ of 145 is *qualitatively different* from his or her classmates whose IQs hover near 100. For NAGC to adopt a definition of giftedness that dismisses and ignores the reality of innate intellectual differences in deference to a performance-based definition shows me that the Association itself—The National Association for *Gifted Children*-- has become an anachronism. Let's just rename the Organization for what it truly is: “The National Association for Talent Development” and dismiss giftedness altogether.

**Where's the transparency?** At first, I thought it was me. When this new definition was presented at the 2011 Annual NAGC Conference as a *fait accompli*, I thought I had really missed the boat. Where were all the discussions with the NAGC membership about the implications of this change? What forums did I miss where the Task Force's varied ideas were presented? Indeed, who *were* these Task Force members and on what basis were they selected to participate in this important undertaking?

Apparently, I am not alone in asking these questions, for if I missed the boat along the way, so had countless other colleagues whose concerns and questions are similar to mine.

To say I am disappointed in the direction that our Association has taken away from giftedness and towards talent development is an understatement. To say that I am puzzled by the secrecy of this policy decision that *has been adopted as NAGC's official definition of giftedness by the NAGC Board of Directors* would be equally as understated. And to know that a small group of individuals can decide for our entire field how to define the very population that countless thousands of us are advocating for daily is a collective slap in the face—to us and the gifted children about whom we care-- that must not be ignored.

*No speed of wind or water rushing by*

*But you have speed far greater.*

Robert Frost's words again, and they must now apply to us, for if you agree that gifted children are more than the sum total of their academic, athletic or artistic talents alone, you must raise your voice loudly and clearly in protest. Do not let a small group of individuals change the focus of our field without your input.

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*(Jim Delisle was the keynoter at the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented [MCGT] Annual Conference on November 10, 2012 at the University of St. Thomas' Minneapolis campus. He has been a teacher, counselor, parent and advocate for gifted children for more than three decades. The views expressed in this article are presented with the hope that the rights of gifted children will be reinforced and their sanctity be preserved. He believes the article presents information parents and gifted/talented educators need to hear. Written recently, it is on Hoagies' Gifted Education Page, [www.hoagiesgifted.org/](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/). The article was reprinted, with the permission of the author.)*

## Professors Substituting In High School

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### I. Introduction

When I was in high school taking geometry, the teacher said we should not read ahead in the book. I, being a “good student,” did what I was told. The teacher also said that I was very “analytical.” I took this to mean that I should accept what was told, without being too analytical and questioning. This teacher did not distinguish gifted students (like me) from others.

Now suppose the teacher were absent for a day, and a substitute teacher replaced her. Let us suppose this sub was a university mathematics professor. Professors often have a day or so a week when they do not lecture, freeing them for possible substitute teaching.

This sub in the geometry class would follow the teacher’s lesson plans. He would also tell the students that mathematics starts with arbitrary statements.<sup>1</sup> Say what you want as long as you do not contradict yourself. He would say students need to understand these initial arbitrary statements (axioms and postulates), and the logical conclusions. They need to question why things are done this way, to help them understand things better. At all times, we need to know what the goals are, and to keep our focus on the goals.

Such a sub would find the students alive, interested, and appreciative. They would feel encouraged to think more independently, and to experience more joy in the learning.

Now consider what happens when the teacher returns. She asks the class how the day went. They tell her that the sub was a mathematics professor, and they really liked him. They tell the teacher that the sub said to ask questions, and to read ahead to see the goals.

The teacher would be dismayed. In one day, the sub overturned her approach. The teacher would feel the students might not respect her as much, and it would be harder to control the class. This creates fear and anxiety if the professor should return.

The teacher would take action to prevent the sub from being in her classroom again. She files a complaint with the principal, making false statements to anger the principal so that he would not permit the sub to return. Since the sub comes only occasionally as needed, the principal does not feel the need to discuss this with the sub. The sub is in the dark, never knowing why the school does not call him. Actually, sometimes the sub does know, as I will discuss later.

The result is that teachers and administration are satisfied. The school is running smoothly without anyone getting upset. This satisfies the primary goal of most organizations, which is smooth running. This leaves the various people working there satisfied with their job performances. I will give many more examples below of schools not letting subs teach so that they personally can be satisfied. It is just that students miss out, and it looks like schools do not really care about them.

## II. The Teacher is Central

The idea is that the teacher is the central authority of the material taught, and the methodology concerning how to teach this material. *Truth is what the teacher said.*

This is not good for the students, especially the gifted students. This school has failed in its primary goal of encouraging students to learn and understand the material, and how to think independently and rationally.

This false attitude that students absorb infects all of our society. One can give many examples in science where people strongly accept certain scientific statements merely because some people said so, without any correct personal understanding. This is evident in politics, where “intelligent” people strongly defend the ideas and statements of their party, without examining how these fit in with the primary goal of our country, which is to have a safe, secure, and prosperous country. People talk about jobs when the primary goal is not jobs but national prosperity. This erroneous and irrational thinking<sup>2</sup> is a consequence of schools stressing order rather than correct and critical understanding.

One of my university students was arguing with me about a test problem. He insisted he was right, and could not accept my pointing out his errors. He finally demanded to see the answer key. I told him that there is no answer key. A high school teacher has 150 students, and must grade tests using answer keys. Professors have 30 or so students in a class and examine each problem in detail. The fact that he demanded an answer key is evidence of the belief that what the teacher says is the truth. Never mind the contradiction that he rejected what I, his teacher, said. This illogic is profound and disturbing.

## III. Professors in the Classroom

In today’s society, professors do not enter the classroom. The closest is when professors lecture to teachers. However, it is rare for a professor to spend a day or so as a substitute teacher. When a professor subs in a school, the professor acquires deep insights into students’ thinking. These insights, along with observing other teachers that are frequently part of the sub’s day, are of enormous benefit to the professor teaching his university students. The benefits of a professor subbing are mutual, both for the professor and for the students.

If subbing is so very mutually beneficial, why are there so few professors subbing in high schools and middle schools? There are several explanations.

One thing is the attitude of teachers who object to professors.

Another problem is state regulations. We need to remove state-mandated hurdles that a sub must overcome such as taking an examination and applying for a license. I suggest that state legislators change the law so that a professor who is actively teaching at a university, and has a Ph.D. degree, should be able to teach as a substitute teacher in schools without applying for a license. If the state feels it needs the money, then let the professor get the license without taking the examination. I do not recommend this. In my case, it took a year to get my teaching license after I passed the examination, and then only when my Congressman intervened. Instead, an active teaching professor should be able to sub in high schools without the need for a license.

If the laws were changed, obviating the need for a license, then schools would be able to contact university chairpersons of mathematics, science, English, and such, asking for subs.

Another reason for the paucity of professors in classrooms is the attitude of professors. While in graduate school working on my Ph.D. thesis, I received an offer to teach in a high school. I discussed this with my professors. They strongly discouraged me, saying teaching is a distraction from research. I declined the offer. I regret this decision for it would have taught me early on many things that I learned later on. My professors did not understand the importance of teaching both for the goal of advancing research, as well as for the benefits of the students, our country’s future.

Professors can bring another benefit to schools. Teachers are very lax with their attendance, as they get their full pay as long as they do not exceed the accepted number of absences. This behavior has a negative effect on students. Since students note that teachers are frequently absent, they feel that they (once they are in college) can also be absent frequently. Professors often complain about student absenteeism. Here is what one professor emailed me:

“Class discussions and activities are a significant part of the course content. Students are expected to make a significant effort to attend all classes. A consistent lack of attendance will result in a significant reduction of the grade for the class. I do not excuse absences for any reason. Specifically, the reduction in grade is as follows:

“Beyond 5 absences - 2 point reduction from final grade for each missed class.

“Beyond 10 absences - 20 point reduction of final grade.”

If teachers felt that a professor might be their sub, they may think twice about being absent.

Finally, professors in the classroom would help to address the problem mentioned by Stephen Schroeder-Davis,<sup>3</sup> namely, the paucity of intellectuals that graduate from our schools. He states, “...intellectualism is an orientation, a devotion to and enjoyment of the life of the mind.” A professor is devoted to the enjoyment of the life of the mind. The presence of professors would help students and teachers understand more and appreciate the enjoyment of the life of the mind. The professor would help students and teachers to get out of the rut of just doing what has to be done, but to learn to think more deeply and broadly.

#### **IV. My Personal Experiences Subbing**

Here are some things that happened to me.

In one school, a student said to me in class that the teacher disagreed with me, and said I would not sub there anymore. At the time I did not pay attention to this remark, and did not question the principal. I just never was called there again.

Once I was a sub for a health class in a middle school. The topic was HIV, and the stress was on the use of condoms. I said that condoms are only 99% effective. This means that if 100 couples have sex, where one person is infected, and all use condoms, one person will get HIV.<sup>4</sup> I said the way to be 100% sure of not getting HIV is not to have sex until marriage, when both can be thoroughly examined before. The principal did not like what I said, and indicated I cannot sub there again. This is because I said something the teacher did not think of. At the time, I did not understand the negative reactions of teachers to professors. I thought it was because I discussed sex in a manner they did not approve. This was not true as nothing is wrong from suggesting abstinence.

I was a sub for a class of special education students. There were three students in the class. I followed the teacher’s lesson plans, and made sure the students properly understood the material, giving them the individual attention they needed. The students really liked and respected me, saying hello enthusiastically when passing in the halls. Later on, a vice-principal called me, and read me a complaint by the teacher. It was long and detailed, and false. The vice-principal accepted my denial. However, we must try to understand what motivated this teacher to write such a long detailed, false report. If this teacher is capable of such behavior, we wonder what values she inculcates into students. This is evidence of teachers discouraging professors.

One day I was a sub for a physics teacher. I explained to the class the physics of riding a bicycle.<sup>5</sup> Angular momentum keeps the bicycle upright. Students clapped their hands in appreciation of my explanation. Later on, I was a home instructor for a student in this teacher’s physics class. While discussing with the teacher what I was to teach, I asked her what she thought about angular momentum. She said she did not understand it yet refused to let me explain it to her. One morning, as I came to the school, the administrator in charge of subs told me that the science chairperson said I was not to sub in any science class. I unsuccessfully tried to get an explanation. This is another example of how teachers are primarily interested in order, not helping students understand and think.

One physics teacher was honest with me. He said that I knew much more than he did, but he felt bad when the students told him what I said in class.

Here is an interesting story. I was a sub for an English teacher in a middle school. The assignment was for students to read ballads. Four students at a time would stand in front of the class, reading the ballads. For the first period, another teacher ran the class,

while I observed. I noticed that students were nervous before standing in front of the class. The rest of the day, I taught them alone. When I am in a classroom as a substitute teacher, I read the lesson plans to the students. I then go to each student and discuss their work. The fact that they have to explain their work to me helps motivate them. I give each student individual attention. I explained to these students (who were to read ballads) their goals, which is to speak clearly and loudly so that all the students can understand, and to focus on properly communicating. This time the students were happy and enthusiastic, not at all nervous like the first period class. *My explanation of their wonderful behavior is that I fully explained the goals to them.*

The teacher, seeing how happy the students were with me, a professor, was dismayed. She filed false charges with the principal, who without discussing the charges with me, said I was not to sub in that school again. What is sad is that the teacher never understood the true reason the young students reacted so very well to my presence. In this case, she could not say it is because I knew more of the subject than she did, as the physics teachers felt. The students knew more of the subject than I did, and I told them so.

## **V. The Correct Goals**

We see how people fail to focus on the proper goals. When teachers are focused on the goal of helping students learn, and not on the secondary goal of order in the classroom, think what happens when a gifted student is present. The teacher will strive to help this student do his very best, realizing that the future of our country and the world is primarily determined by the gifted. Likewise, we must encourage gifted teachers, whether they are subs or full-time teachers. We must rejoice in encouraging the great gifts the gifted bring to all of us, and not feel slighted in any way. Teachers and administrators must accept the reality that gifted people, whether students or teachers, will do things differently and in unexpected ways. Teachers must stop fighting the reality that the gifted are smarter than they are, but this does not in any way diminish their worth and the value of their contributions to education.

## **VI. Lessons Learned from Being a Sub**

I discussed above the importance of professors subbing in high school for the benefit the professor can derive. Here are some things I learned from subbing in schools.

The other day I subbed for a mathematics teacher. Her lesson plans were to check their homework, and then to pass out worksheets for them to work on. The subject was solving equations involving rational expressions. I walked down the aisles looking at their homework. Most did nice neat work. Some crowded their work on the problem sheet. I told them the importance of neatness in mathematics, working one step at a time, showing all the steps. Some apologized for not bringing in their homework or not doing it. One problem had  $x - 2$  in the denominator. The solution was  $x = 2$ . Most, but not all, correctly stated that there was no valid solution. This past semester I added a clause to the syllabus saying homework is mandatory which gives me the right to fail a student who does not do any work. This I learned from subbing.

I observed a teacher who walked across the room, looking at students' work and making notes in his grade book. My new insight is to check their homework at the start of the class, giving them a 0, 1, or 2. Grade 1 is if they did not try part of the work. I would then also check if they have the book. Of course, I would continue collecting the homework and making comments on it. This way if a student does not do homework, we would immediately be aware of it. This would encourage them to do more homework.

Here is another insight. Some students said they did not know how to do a problem. I asked the class if anyone did. When another student explained it, the other student said she now understood it. Sometimes students argue with me about a problem. In this case, I'll ask the class. This is a good lesson, to help reduce confrontation.

During class while the students are working, I walk around. I asked some students if they were bored. Some emphatically said yes. I then explained the ideas behind the work. They responded and rewarded me with great big smiles.

In one class in middle school, students were working on a project. They filled the board with text and numbers. Then they took pictures of the board with their iPad. This is an interesting idea for me to take pictures of the board.

## VII. Other Lessons Learned

Here are excerpts from a Letter to the Editor of the New Jersey Star Ledger discussing a novel point dealing with student dissatisfaction with mathematics. What is well known is the lack of preparation of high school graduates in mathematics. In spite of satisfying the formal requirements, students may lack necessary understanding, leading to a lack of motivation.

Iris Leopold, Livingston, wrote this. The Letter is entitled, "N.J. schools must focus on basics."

"I taught mathematics for 30 years at a high-achieving suburban high school, 18 of which as the department supervisor, and for the past nine years I have taught at the college level.

"I believe a primary reason students do not succeed at college is they lack basic knowledge. I do not refer to the quadratic formula. The basics are:

- Consistent attendance to class
- Doing homework and other assignments
- Responsibility to ask questions and to obtain help when needed

"Without these basics, the best teachers cannot meet students' needs."

What I got out of this letter is that we have to teach our students this basic knowledge along with the mathematics. Students need to know that when we demand consistent classroom attendance, or demand students ask questions and try to obtain help, we are merely instructing them on basics that they should have already learned and understood.

I found this point very interesting. Not only do schools fail to properly prepare students for college mathematics, but also they fail to properly teach basic knowledge on how to study. This means we professors have to work on this basic knowledge along with working on bringing them up to speed in mathematics.

Another point is that schools do not actively encourage asking questions. Here is where the professor in the high school classroom may make a major contribution, as professors usually encourage questions.

Here is another way professors can benefit from being a sub. Schools have mandatory training for new subs. This consists of a meeting that lasts a few hours. The speakers are skilled educators who pass on their knowledge and experience to the new subs. Such meetings can only help professors, as both the professor and the sub need to know how best to deal with students. For example, one lesson I learned was the suggestion that the sub try to be in the middle of the room. Professors tend to be in the front, primarily because this is where the computers containing the material students see on the projection screen. What we professors need to do is to make an effort to walk away from the front as much as possible in order to mingle with the students.

## VIII. Conclusion

We as a society need to work together to make radical changes that will permit university Ph.D. professors to teach on occasional days as substitutes. We need to change state laws to facilitate this. We need to encourage high school and middle school administrators and teachers to willingly accept professors as subs, and not to be upset or nervous when the professor tells students different things.

We need to change the attitude of universities regarding professors teaching as subs, for the teaching experience will benefit both the professor's university teaching as well as the professor's research. Once the professor has to explain ideas to high school students, this can lead to simple ways to explain the ideas. The professor will then think of better ways to explain his research which may lead to new ideas.

Had Albert Einstein taught his ideas about relativity to high school students, much of the confusion that has reigned for almost a century would not be present.<sup>6</sup> For example, Einstein based his Special Theory of Relativity on the postulate that light travels at a constant speed in all inertial systems. If he were talking to students, he would have to explain what light is. We know from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Maxwell equations that light is a consequence of these equations, and so the postulate should be that equations of physics,

such as Maxwell equations, are valid in all inertial systems.<sup>7</sup> This is simpler to understand and less arbitrary sounding. Some people imagine what would happen if the speed of light were not constant, because a constant speed sounds arbitrary. However, it is more difficult to imagine if the laws of physics, such as the Maxwell equations, were not valid in different frames of reference.

A substitute teacher does not always lecture as does a university professor. Often the assignment is for students to work on their own with the sub monitoring their activity. This gives the sub the opportunity to discuss with individual students various ideas, to clarify the work they are doing, and to answer any questions they may have. Once students realize the sub is a professor, they come forth with very many questions, keeping the sub busy and on his toes! This is very rewarding for both the students and the professor.

Finally, I hope that this article will contribute to better teaching in our schools and universities!

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<sup>1</sup>**Teaching and Helping Students Think and Do Better**, S. Aranoff (2007),  
**Finite and Infinite Mathematics**, Sanford Aranoff (2011).

<sup>2</sup>**Rational Thinking, Government Policies, Science, and Living**, S. Aranoff (2010).

<sup>3</sup>**Gifted Education Press Quarterly**, *Why Don't Our Schools Graduate More Intellectuals?* Stephen Schroeder-Davis, p. 2, 26, Fall (2012).

<sup>4</sup>**Finite and Infinite Mathematics**, *Ibid*, p. 159.

<sup>5</sup>**Teaching and Helping Students Think and Do Better**, *Ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup>"The Aura of Einstein and General Relativity," *philica.com*, article number 192, Aranoff, S. (2010).

<sup>7</sup>"Basic Assumptions and Black Holes," Sanford Aranoff, *Physics Essays*, **22**, 559 (2009).

## Learning about Faith

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*There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords, at will....This Power is God.* Percy Bysshe Shelley

### Introduction

Many years ago in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, I presented an evening workshop for parents and teachers about the importance and usage of biography at home and in the school curriculum for gifted and talented students. At the end of my presentation, I asked for questions from the audience. The first parent who spoke asked me if I could recommend a good biography for middle-school readers about Jesus Christ. I was embarrassed that I had no real answer or advice for the parent. The best recommendation that I could then suggest was a brief profile of Jesus of Nazareth that was included in Simon Boughton's biographical dictionary *Great Lives* (Grisewood & Dempsey, 1988), a work so broad in scope as to also include Elvis Presley, Al Capone, and Jane Austen.

Ever since that occasion, I have been eager to locate books dealing with the world's religions. Today, excellent biographies of Jesus Christ and many other founders, prophets, and disciples of the world's best-known faiths do exist. This particular manuscript focuses exclusively upon print resources, but readers eager to find additional information to pursue their studies about world religions will find a wealth of information on the Internet.

There are many advantages to studies of religion and of the books noted herein. Most of these resources emphasize what the world's great faiths have in common and de-emphasize their differences. Accuracy, respect, and tolerance are prime features of these sources. A study of world religions accentuates history for at least the past four thousand years. Inquiries about differing faiths provide gifted students with opportunities to greatly increase their word knowledge; opportunities abound to learn new vocabulary

such as *Diwali*, *shofar*, and *muezzin*. These readings also have the potential to greatly enlarge students' awareness of world geography. Where, for example, is Mecca?

I compose these words with genuine caution. Few things in life equal the depths of feelings billions of people on earth have for their respective faiths. Every attempt has been made to be fair, ecumenical, and inclusive. Even so, it should be noted that this article is not intended to be encyclopedic. Gaps exist even in discussions of the religions that are noted. In discussions of Christianity, for example, there is insufficient space to examine the religion's largest branches: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant. Further, denominations within these branches such as the Amish and Latter Day Saints are not explored. Similarly, there is no attempt to discuss differences in the branches of Judaism that include Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform beliefs and practices. These omissions should not be considered as slights. Hopefully, parents and educators will help students locate research tools that will make up for such lapses. I further ask for patience with spelling variations. Should the joyous winter holiday of the Jewish faith be spelled "Hanukkah," "Hanukah," "Chanukkah," or yet another variant? I do not pretend to be an expert on world religions. All errors of word usage, spelling, or interpretation are entirely my responsibility.

### **World Religions**

Steckel, Richard, & Steckel, Michelle. *Faith: Five Religions and What They Share*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press, 2012.

Richard and Michelle Steckel begin their exploration of faith with both definitions and questions that youthful readers have in common. "Faith is what is in our hearts and minds" is one of many definitions. Questions young believers ask may be "Where do we come from?" and "Where do we go when we die?" Once such meaningful questions have been posed, the authors circle back to their defined focus: "Faith helps provide answers" to these and still more questions such as "Why do bad things happen?"

The authors of *Faith* acknowledge that there are twenty-two major religions in the world and many smaller ones, but this easy-reading volume explores five of the world's widely practiced faiths: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. A helpful chart cites the estimated number of followers of these religions and the places (e.g., Asia, Worldwide) where most of their devout worshippers live.

The profiles of these five religions encompass the history, founders, spiritual leaders, tenets, and the place of children in worship. Religious conflicts, past and present, are not ignored but the primary focus of the text and illustrations represent what these five faiths have in common. The featured faiths are universal in that they all have spiritual leaders, sacred texts, special clothing, holy symbols, particular places of worship, plus similar rituals or acts of worship that involve the use of incense, candles, codes for prayers, the use of water, charity, and the cherishing of children.

*Faith* is an outstanding example of a photographic essay. The user-friendly text is greatly enhanced by superb photographs of children practicing key elements of their particular faiths. In comprehensive end matter, the authors note that the children featured throughout this beautiful book are from Belize, Cuba, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam. Additional features include a glossary, index, and five recommended practices by parents and teachers to promote tolerance and understanding.

Hitchcock, Susan Tyler, & Esposito, John L., eds. *Geography of Religion: Where God Lives, Where Pilgrims Walk*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.

Hitchcock and Esposito, both renowned religious scholars, highlight the same five great religions as Richard and Michele Steckel do in *Five Religions and What They Share*. Here, the editors present the religions in the best-known chronology of their founding: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (as opposed to the alphabetical ordering utilized in *Faith*). An even more significant difference is that *Geography of Religion* goes into far greater depth in its descriptions of these five great religions. Here is an omnibus book of world religions written for high school and adult readers.

Maps are utilized to note the founding sites of each of the five featured religions and visually chart how and when each of the religions spread around the world. In addition to its maps, *Geography of Religion* is filled with the National Geographic's exceptional travel and cultural photography. Religious art and architecture are highlighted as are two-hundred magnificent color photographs of adherents to these five faiths as they worship, make pilgrimages, and participate in holy days. With a length of over four hundred pages, the editors are able to include substantial passages of sacred texts of each faith plus guest essays by followers and experts of

the five religions who explain what being devout means to them and how they build their lives upon the spiritual rock of their faith. A dedicated follower of Judaism explains why Jews have been called “The People of the Book” by charting the daily prayers, readings, and rituals of worship that he exercises faithfully from waking until going to sleep. A Tibetan refugee describe how a visit to her school in India by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, when she was just a young child, helped her find the insight and courage to become a Buddhist nun.

The end matter of this sumptuous book includes “Milestones of Faith through the Ages,” individual glossaries for each of the five featured religions, suggested additional readings, and a comprehensive index.

Butler, Laura. *A Faith Like Mine: A Celebration of the World’s Religions Seen through the Eyes of Children*. New York: DK, 2005.

*A Faith Like Mine* is an examination of religions of the world that is best suited to middle-grade readers. Butler features six world religions that include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. Together, the author states, these six dominant faiths account for 3.5 billion worshippers globally. She provides an informative map that allows readers to discover the geographical regions of the world where the six dominant religions that she highlights flourish. Butler also briefly notes other vital religions around the world that include the faiths of Baha’i, Jainism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. She briefly recognizes additional belief systems from the ancient past (e.g., Egypt) to the present (e.g., Native American).

The subtitle points to one of the virtues of this study. The featured religions are described by young people who devoutly practice the six key faiths. The young narrators share with readers the essential tenets of their creeds, places of worship, sacred texts, festivals, and holy days. Frequent sidebars highlight spiritual customs and rites of passage (e.g., Bat Mitzvah and Bar Mitzvah in Judaism) as practiced in these six religions. The young authors share information that will appeal to all readers. How are weddings celebrated in different religions? How do young people learn how to honor their particular faiths through worship? How do boys and girls and men and women worship and celebrate holy days in different religions around the world?

The voices of youths are complemented with a wealth of vivid photographs that include close-up portraits of the narrators plus multicolored images of people of all ages and stations of each religion participating in the very specific dress, holy activities, and joyous and sacred celebrations described. *A Faith Like Mine* includes resources for further independent study as well as a comprehensive glossary and index.

### Individual Religions

The British-based global publisher Dorling Kindersley (DK) is noteworthy for at least two reasons. Firstly, DK Eyewitness Books are exemplary models of informative text complemented by superb photography. Secondly, the 130 (and ever-growing) volumes of DK Eyewitness Books constitute one of the largest and most diverse nonfiction libraries for juveniles to be found anywhere. High-interest Eyewitness Books for youths include:

Charing, Douglas. *Judaism* (2003). Highlighted below.

Langley, Myrtle. *Religion* (2005).

Stone, Caroline. *Islam* (2005).

Tubb, Jonathan. *Bible Lands* (2000).

Wilkinson, Philip. *Buddhism* (2003).

Wilkinson, Philip & Tambini, Michael. *Christianity* (2006).

Additionally, DK is the publisher of Philip Wilkinson’s *Illustrated Dictionary of Religions: Figures, Festivals and Beliefs of the World’s Religions* (1999), *The Life of Jesus* (2003) by Sally Grindley, and Laura Butler’s *A Faith Like Mine* (2005).

Two subjects fully occupy the first half of Douglas Charing's *Judaism* – history and persecution. The Jewish faith originated in the Middle East at least 4,000 years ago. Abraham is believed to be the first Jew and Judaism gave birth to two other major religions of the world, Christianity and Islam. Throughout history, Judaism and Jews have greatly influenced world events and the faith has spread throughout the world. One exceptional example: The Pagoda Synagogue (Kaifeng) was built in China in 1163 by Jewish silk merchants from Persia. Tragically, Jews have been among the most victimized of all of God's peoples. Greek, Roman, and Persian empires in ancient times destroyed holy temples and massacred the faithful. During the Middle Ages, Judaism flourished in Amsterdam, but in European nations such as Spain and Portugal, Jews had to pay special taxes and live in segregated communities. Later, pogroms in Russia brought about both deaths and forced relocations of Jews. Of course, the most unspeakable occurrence of religious persecution and genocide ever known was the Nazi-conducted Holocaust that reached its apex of horror in the World War II years of 1939-1945.

Despite a history of persecution, Jews have made immense contributions in such diverse fields as physics, medicine, politics, diplomacy, aviation and the arts. *Judaism* emphasizes that being a devout follower involves much more than daily prayer and weekly worship. Being Jewish is a way of life. Charing's vibrant words and handsome photography detail the importance of synagogues, prayers, sacred books, family and religious values (especially justice, charity, and education), dietary laws, Jewish artifacts and symbols (e.g., the Menorah and the Star of David, six-pointed star), holy days plus the Hebrew calendar and language. The chapter "Through a Jewish Lifetime" outlines the key life events of Jews from birth to their Bar or Bat Mitzvahs, to Jewish weddings, and ultimately death customs.

*Judaism* is not a massive in-depth examination of one of the world's oldest religions, but it does provide a welcome and illuminating introduction to this great and enduring faith.

### **Biographies of Spiritual Leaders**

Fortunately, since the time frame of the parent question cited in the introduction, many biographies of religious leaders including Jesus have been published. The author and illustrator who has contributed the most to biographies of spiritual and historical leaders is Demi whose picture book biographies are extraordinarily beautiful. Demi has written and illustrated biographies of both religious and historical persons that include the Buddha and Tutankhamun from ancient times to more recent spiritual leaders such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and the present Dalai Lama. One of the special virtues of Demi's biographies is her inclusion of many Asian figures who may have previously been unknown to juvenile readers in the Western world. Below is a partial listing of the biographical subjects Demi has profiled plus a review of her biography of Jesus.

Demi's subjects: Tutankhamun, Buddha, Alexander the Great, Mary, Lao Tzu, Saint Nicholas, Muhammad, Rumi: Whirling Dervish, Joan of Arc, Marco Polo, Columbus, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and the Dalai Lama.

Demi. *Jesus*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2005.

Demi's text is inspired by passages taken from the King James version of the Holy Bible. In keeping with tradition, the direct words of Jesus are highlighted through the use of red ink. Demi shares the complete story of Christ from The Annunciation through the Nativity to His childhood and baptism, the miracles He performed, His teachings, the Transfiguration, His entry into Jerusalem, and the key events of His Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension.

The artist's signature style of paintings highlighted with diminutive figures, a palette featuring the colors of precious jewels, intricate borders, and the lavish use of gold paint perfectly complement the textual reverence. Each scene from Christ's life appears to be a singular work of religious art that is framed with a border of designs inspired by the art of the Middle East 2,000 years ago. Demi's *Jesus* is so impressive that it received a papal blessing from Pope John Paul II which is included within the book. In addition to Demi's exquisite biographies of religious figures such as Jesus, Muhammad, and Buddha, Henry Whitbread's *The Lives of The Great Spiritual Leaders* (Thames & Hudson, 2011) offers detailed verbal and visual profiles of twenty devout historical figures beginning with Moses and concluding with tributes to Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama.

### **Holy Days and Celebrations**

Most of the world's religions feature both high holy days as well as celebrations in which the faithful participate. The differences between holy observances and festivals are significant within each religion. For example, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are Jewish

high holy days whereas Hanukkah is a festival that celebrates an important historical event in Jewish history that occurred almost two thousand years ago.

Deborah Heiligman is the author of National Geographic's valuable **Holidays Around the World series** that includes volumes which celebrate both sacred and secular occasions. Hallmarks of this excellent series include brilliantly colorful photographic essays, child-friendly texts that provide an introduction to each observance, and a focus upon children around the world observing the varied holy days and holidays.

*Celebrate Ramadan & Eid Al-Fitr with Praying, Fasting, and Charity* (Islam, see below).

*Celebrate Diwali with Sweets, Lights, and Fireworks* (Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains).

*Celebrate Hanukkah with Lights, Latkes, and Dreidels* (Judaism).

*Celebrate Passover with Matzah, Maror, and Memories* (Judaism).

*Celebrate Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur with Honey, Prayers, and the Shofar* (Judaism).

*Celebrate Easter with Colored Eggs, Flowers, and Prayer* (Christianity).

*Celebrate Christmas with Carols, Presents, and Peace* (Christianity).

Heiligman, Deborah. *Celebrate Ramadan & Eid Al-Fitr with Praying, Fasting, and Charity*. **Holidays Around the World series**. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006. Ramadan is the most important holiday or observance of Muslims around the world. It is a month-long commemoration that focuses upon fasting, prayer, and charity. Followers of Islam adhere to a lunar calendar and the ninth month is the occasion in which the prophet Muhammad received the words of Allah (God) that became the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an. The crescent moon of the ninth month signals the time to begin the celebration of Ramadan. Because all healthy adults are expected to fast for this holy month, families eat just two meals daily, sahur before dawn and iftar after sunset. During Ramadan, Muslims pray, study the Qur'an, and contemplate the teachings of Muhammad. Much time is spent in mosques where Muslims request forgiveness of sins from Allah. A special aspect of Ramadan is charity. Food and money for life's necessities are given by the most advantaged Muslims to the poor. The end of Ramadan occurs when Muslims see a new crescent moon and acknowledge the beginning of a new month called Shawwal. The end of Ramadan signals a time, often three days, of great and joyous celebration known as Eid al-Fitr. Celebrants visit and share meals with family and friends, wear new clothing, and present gifts, especially to children.

*Celebrate Ramadan & Eid Al-Fitr* contains superior photographs of children around the globe that complement the informative text. Heiligman's end matter is noteworthy. She includes a recipe for the holiday food Fatima's Fingers, special print and online resources, a thorough glossary and a world map noting the geographic origins of the book's photos. A final scholarly essay by Nequin Yavari, a Columbia University professor of religion, serves as documentation of the accuracy of the author's text.

### Conclusion

Hitchcock and Esposito's *Geography of Religion: Where God Lives, Where Pilgrims Walk* (2006, see above) begins and ends with eloquent words written by two Nobel laureates, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu (writing with his daughter, Mpho A. Tutu) and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In their introduction and epilogue, both great peace makers emphasize a common but profound theme: knowledge and understanding of faith leads to tolerance, and that tolerance leads to universal harmony. Hopefully, the resources highlighted in this article will lead gifted readers to seek knowledge, develop tolerance, and live within the peace and harmony of mutual respect.

## Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961): Literacy for the Gifted

Michael E. Walters

Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“This is the prose that I have been working for all my life [*The Old Man and the Sea*] that should read easily and simply and seem short and yet have all the dimensions of the visible world and the world of a man’s spirit. It is as good prose as I can write as of now.” Hemingway to Charles Scribner, 1951. From *Ernest Hemingway on Writing* by Larry W. Phillips, Editor (Scribner, 2004, p. 34).

The term literacy has a different meaning for gifted students since it became a code word for achievement on standardized tests. For them it means the ability to read and write sustained, lengthy fiction and expository essays. Their literacy is better served by reading novels such as *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) by Hemingway – a book that is among the greatest novels written in the English language. This is not a matter of opinion or mere personal taste because the book can be linguistically analyzed to show gifted students the art of writing exquisite prose. Gifted individuals are not just smarter or more talented than ordinary students. What is needed in gifted literacy is to understand their sensibility to the arts, music, literature, philosophy, mathematics and science.

In contrast, test-taking literacy is based upon formats that produce fragmented achievement skills. This leads to frustration among advanced students who want to learn about literature and great writing through intensive reading, reflection, and practicing the literary arts. The type of literacy that appeals to these students stimulates their creative imagination and analytical thinking skills, and goes far beyond the multiple-choice designs of state mandated tests.

Hemingway believed that a writer does his best writing about what he knows. For him, it was a Cuban fisherman’s environment. During part of Hemingway’s life, he lived in Cuba and Key West where he constantly engaged in deep sea fishing. Veracity in his writing was not only related to character development but the weather, the sun, the sea, the shark, and the sea gull. Another proof of his compositional abilities is that translating his works into another language produces the same high level of excellent writing. He constructed his sentences as not only based on flows of thought but also on the clear development of his paragraphs and main theme. For example, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, all of his writing concentrated on the idea that the struggle to achieve a purpose gives dignity to life.

Hemingway was a life-long reader and he clearly demonstrated that a good writer is also a good reader. Among his literary advice was his response to the writers who influenced him (see p. 92 of *Ernest Hemingway on Writing*, 1984, where he recommends the works of Tolstoi, Stendhal, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling and many other literary geniuses). When he was a young writer residing in Paris during the 1920s, he was constantly going to Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company Bookstore. Besides re-reading his favorite authors, he interacted with contemporary writers, e.g., James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Wherever Hemingway went, he took books with him. At the same time that he recorded his personal experiences in Cuba, Spain, and Africa, he filtered these experiences through the authors he was reading at the time.

Hemingway was always thinking about the writing craft even while he was involved in other activities such as watching bull fights and hunting. His books on bull fighting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) and on wild game hunting, *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), have a constant flow of meditations on writing and writers. Several years ago, I was a guest a William Carlos Williams’ son in Rutherford, New Jersey. (William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) was an innovative poet who also lived in this city.) He related an incident to me about when his father and Hemingway were hiking in northern Spain. Hemingway spotted the decaying corpse of a dead animal, and took detailed notes about it. When Williams asked Hemingway why he was doing this, the writer said he needed to accurately describe this scene of a decomposing animal. This illustrates Hemingway’s commitment to accurately observing and writing about nature, which contributed to the greatness of his work.

Hemingway always captured the sense of place in his novels whether it was the Upper Peninsula of Michigan during his teenage years, Spain during the Spanish Civil War, and Italy in World War II. The literacy that he displays to gifted students involves art, truth and wisdom. In today’s youth culture, an internet game about bull fighting might appeal to the gifted. However, Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon* gives them an understanding of what bull fighting means to Spanish culture, the spectators, and toreadors. Another example is that *The Old Man and the Sea* places the reader in the fisherman’s position by making one live through his struggles with the sea, the fish, and the sharks.

The following quotes are also from *Ernest Hemingway on Writing* by Larry W. Phillips, Editor (Scribner, 2004) –

“All my life I’ve looked at words as though I were seeing them for the first time. . .” Hemingway to Mary Welsh, 1945. p. 7.

“...After you learn to write your whole object is to convey everything, every sensation, sight, feeling, place and emotion to the reader....” Ernest Hemingway. p. 51.

### **Tribute to the Great Cultural Historian Jacques Barzun who died at 104 Years in October 2012 Review of His Last Major Book – *Gifted Education News-Page*, December 2002**

#### **From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present – 500 Years of Western Cultural Life (2000) by Jacques Barzun New York: HarperCollins.**

The author is a noted cultural historian with a long and illustrious career as a Professor of History and Dean of Faculties at Columbia University. He has written an extraordinary description and analysis of the rise and decline of Western civilization during the last five centuries. Barzun (1907- ) says that he started collecting materials for this book in the 1920s (p. x) when he began studying different historical periods and individuals. Each part of this book covers roughly 125 years of history by discussing the major religious, political, social, literary and scientific occurrences of the period. Barzun also includes many quotations and detailed discussions of individuals who influenced each period. His depth of understanding of the ideas and contributions of these individuals makes this a very informative book. Historical events “come alive” because they are anchored in the life histories of these thinkers and doers.

Barzun discusses many historical themes in each part of his book such as emancipation, primitivism, individualism, reductivism, secularism and relativism. Two of the most over-riding themes are: (1) ideas have important consequences upon individuals and nations; and (2) individuals can have a significant impact on the course of history. What would the world be like today if Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Albert Einstein had never existed?

Barzun’s extensive knowledge of Western civilization is all-encompassing, and is based upon several decades of careful study and writing. Clearly his well-reasoned statements about modern society must be taken seriously by all educated individuals concerned with the drift of modern culture and politics. In this regard, his use of the word “decadence” refers to the following:

“But why should the story come to an end? It doesn’t, of course, in the literal sense of stoppage or total ruin. All that is meant by Decadence is ‘falling off.’ It implies in those who live in such a time no loss of energy or talent or moral sense. On the contrary, it is a very active time, full of deep concerns, but peculiarly restless, for it sees no clear lines of advance. The loss it faces is that of Possibility. The forms of art as of life seem exhausted, the stages of development have been run through. Institutions function painfully. Repetition and frustration are the intolerable result. Boredom and fatigue are great historical forces.

“It will be asked, how does the historian know when Decadence sets in? By the open confessions of malaise, by the search in all directions for a new faith or faiths. Dozens of cults have latterly arisen in the Christian West: Buddhism, Islam, Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, Dr. Moon’s Unification Church, and a larger collection of others, some dedicated to group suicide. To secular minds, the old ideals look outworn or hopeless and practical aims are made into creeds sustained by violent acts: fighting nuclear power, global warming, and abortion, saving from use the environment with its fauna and flora (‘Bring back the wolf!’), promoting organic against processed foods, and proclaiming disaffection from science and technology. The Impulse to PRIMITIVISM animates all these negatives.” (pp. xvi-xvii).

*From Dawn to Decadence* should be read in small segments rather than digested in a few intellectually gluttonous meals. Gifted students will learn more from this book by reading each part, and reflecting upon and discussing the meaning of Barzun’s presentation. For example, *Part I: From Luther’s Ninety-five Theses to Boyle’s “Invisible College,”* should be studied in a deliberate manner, section-by-section. They will learn about the Protestant Reformation and its impact upon the growth of primitivism and individualism. Major figures such as Martin Luther, Erasmus and John Calvin are discussed in relation to these themes. Gifted Students will also see that “good letters” also paralleled the Reformation in the form of Humanism, the study of ancient history, literature, language and philosophy as a means of increasing scholars’ understanding of the human condition. Barzun discusses the

Italian poet, Petrarch (1304-74), and the founder of the Florentine Academy, Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), as among the best examples of the Humanist mind. **Part I** includes a chapter (**The "Artist" is Born**) on the development of art and architecture during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In addition, Barzun has chapters (called "Cross-Sections") on Madrid around 1540 and Venice around 1650 to show the reader how life and ideas functioned during a particular time and place. Gifted students can learn a great deal from these "Cross-Sections" about how all levels of society lived and thought. The chapters on these cities are a wonderful pedagogic method for comparing societies of 350 or more years ago with modern Western society.

In a time when the United States and other nations are being threatened by Islamist religious extremists, it is important to teach gifted students about the historical foundations of Western civilization. This is not simply an exercise in current "standards of learning" or high stakes assessment. Our very existence depends upon whether gifted students can understand the roots of society, free of cultural relativism and political correctness. Barzun's book will provide them with a clear discussion of the origins and importance of Western civilization. Maurice D. Fisher

**What factors in your background have contributed to your giftedness as a major cultural historian? How?**  
**(From *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*, Summer 2001)**

I recently asked Professor Jacques Barzun this question to gain some understanding concerning the development of a great writer and educator. He has been a Professor of History, Dean of Faculties and Provost at Columbia University. His most recent book, *From Dawn to Decadence* (2000, HarperCollins), was published at the age of 92. He has published twelve previous books on topics concerned with art, music, literature and the intellectual condition of American and Western society. M. Fisher

"I think the answer to your question is: the lucky accident of being born to a family whose long tradition was intellectual and artistic, coupled with early education in a French lycée. As a small child I believed that making books or works of art was for adults the equivalent of play for children – the only thing worth doing – and when I was about eight, in the fourth grade, I wrote without any prompting a History of France some ten pages long; it went no farther than the point covered in class. I was playing adult well ahead of time. What the lycée provided in those years was a thorough grounding in reading, writing, history, and elementary math – the basics that have been lost in all the schools of the Western world. My schooling before the great decline was another piece of good fortune, and I may say that I owe whatever I have done that has proved useful to a pair of circumstances not of my own making."

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