ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN JOURNAL

2010 FOCUS ON

Gifted Advocacy

I. The Need

II. Personal Stories

III. Subjects and Strategies

IV. The Power of Creativity

V. Alternative Schools

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IAGC JOURNAL FOCUS: ADVOCACY

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Joan Franklin Smutny

"It is my belief that giftedness exists in the heart and soul."
Annemarie Roeper

The above quote by Annemarie Roeper goes to the heart of advocacy, because what we do when we support our children's gifts is empower them to grow and evolve from the *inside*. Any environment that shackles gifted students' natural growth and ability not only hampers learning but negates their inner life, the place where they aspire, imagine, and take their first risks as learners. The message of school and society is one they quickly learn: don't be yourself. Doubts rise to the surface. They question themselves more and wonder what they did wrong. Without strong advocacy at home or school, some of these children drift so far away from their natural interests and motivations that they remember them only as old dreams to be outgrown. Advocacy, therefore, is not only a struggle for the mind, but also for the heart and soul that guide them into adulthood.

Every service provided for gifted learners has come from advocacy of one kind or the other. It may look to the outside world as though gifted children excel on their own, but we know from our own experiences in the field that they grow and advance because someone noticed them. Someone reached out. Someone acted on their behalf. Great pioneer thinkers whose stories we read or hear in interviews almost always include at least one advocate who stepped in at the right moment.

The history of gifted education reads like a history of advocacy and it continues today only because people continue to struggle for its existence and they do so at all levels of our society. A study of underserved gifted populations in U.S. cities stimulates new initiatives in several states. Parents in a rural community present the needs of their children to a school board. Teachers in second and third grade form a cluster group of gifted students and share the responsibility for creating alternative assignments. Universities partner with schools to design after-school programs for advanced students. Associations watch the legislators and call out the troops when new bills arrive. Meanwhile, in a science lab, a teacher aids a gifted child in defining the parameters of her research project on the hooded chameleon. All are instances of advocacy.

This issue of the Journal draws together a wide range of research and practical experience from some of the best thinkers in the field, providing helpful guidance for readers who seek real solutions for gifted learners. As teachers, parents, scholars, and administrators, they bring the fruits of their experiences in all kinds of situations--the strategies they've discovered and used successfully, their own personal stories, the teaching practices they've found most helpful for gifted children, the creative powers they've unleashed in the home or classroom, the wisdom and guidance that have made them stronger parents, and the benefits they've seen in alternative schools and programs. If you are a teacher, an administrator, or parent wondering what else you can do to make gifted education a reality in your school, district, or home, you have some well trodden paths before you. Try them out. See what works for you and the children who need your help.

As the authors in this issue would attest, there are hurdles still to face, obstacles to overcome. Many more gifted children and young people walk among us and they are waiting--in our classrooms, our neighborhoods and our homes--eager for the assistance that so rarely comes. Those of us who advocate for better services in our districts and states continue to hear stories of struggle and frustration in every kind of school. With budget cuts slashing whatever meager funds once supported gifted education, these are difficult times to advocate for the needs of our children. Yet is in times like these, that we can most benefit from sharing the best of our knowledge, research, and experience with each other. I earnestly hope that this issue will give you hope and inspire new solutions for the gifted learners in your life.

As we move forward into 2010, we advocates can take heart from the wise counsel of Theodore Roosevelt, who simply said:

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

Founder and Director of the Center for Gifted at National-Louis University, **JOAN FRANKLIN SMUTNY** has designed programs for thousands of gifted children from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. She has authored, co-authored and edited many books on gifted education, most recently *Acceleration for Gifted learners, K-5 (2007), Igniting Creativity in Gifted Learners, K-6* (2009), and *Differentiating for the Young Child: Teaching Strategies Across the Content Areas, PreK-3* (Revised, 2010).

ADVOCACY

By Elaine Wiener

Advocate: to speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly.

Advocacy: the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending.

(The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd edition unabridged)

Advocacy. The minute we use that hundred dollar word, our minds fill with politics or legal matters.

At this very second, gifted education is courageously embroiled at our state levels with subtle and tactful and frustrating advocacy with legislators. However, perhaps we can leave that battle there with those who are equipped to do such work and address the concept of advocacy as it directly affects children.

Every time a teacher supports a child or encourages a child or influences a child or simply pats a child on the back, that teacher is that child's advocate. As we know, advocacy shows up in the highest levels of the most sophisticated politics, but it also shows up in something as mundane as teaching every day rules in every day classrooms. Little every day stories bring this to mind.

Of all the levels of advocating for children, the lowest level has to be yard duty. Yet there is a fascination to the process of watching children break rules when they play. It was fascinating to stand by silently during a game; immediately everyone stopped breaking the rules. When asked why they stopped, children always said that they knew they were doing wrong. And when asked why they broke the rules all the while knowing that was inappropriate, very few children could answer. The head down in shame was a drama in itself. Supporting children when they do wrong is a very high level of advocating for children as you gear them to do right.

The rest of the time when walking by an infraction, it was easy to say, "Ah, you know better" or "Re-think what thou art doing, dear ones!" The beauty of the whole picture was that immediately they reverted to correct behavior. A little reminder goes a long way on the yard...and in life. A little advocating, a little support, a little loving. (Do you think that's what our politicians are missing?)

The most repeated breach was bouncing a ball against the wall that chipped the paint on that very wall. The children all knew why it was not beneficial to all to bounce a ball against the wall. It had become a sermon, memorized by every child on that campus. Every teacher only had to slowly ease toward the wall to have children scurry away.

But one day, one student--a defiant child, alone in his entitlement--bounced that ball, did not withdraw as I approached, and glared at me waiting. I asked him why he was behaving as he was because I stated that I knew that he knew better. He said to me,

"I did it yesterday, and you didn't tell me to stop!" (Gasp! I hadn't noticed.)

I replied, "And what did that mean to you?"

"It meant that I could do it!" What a glare was on his face.

"Hmmmmm," I responded with a puzzled look.

"So you can do anything you want to do at any time as long as no one tells you no directly to your face."

"Right," he growled!

It was so obvious. He needed a conscience! He needed an advocate. He needed...everything. What followed is too long a story for now, but that child was bright and turned out to be gifted. What he needed was a little love, an advocate, AND *self-* discipline. (Aha! That's what our politicians need: love and SELF-discipline. They don't need any more advocates!)

Now this doesn't mean that children who are not gifted don't need advocates. And it doesn't mean that every belligerent child is gifted. But it does mean that *all* children need advocates, and some of us specifically advocate for gifted children.

There are so many temptations in childhood, and the world is so full of No's even in the middle of all this advocating. The world is also full of No's! for those of us in gifted education: legislative No's! to such a relatively small amount of money needed, No! to wanting our children to have a differentiated curriculum in districts that believe in the same curriculum for all, and mean spirited No's! on the part of people who resent innovation and feel diminished when others are creative.

Notice how advocacy at the political level sneaked in as we were speaking of advocating for children in daily examples. It is almost impossible to separate these two areas. Despite understanding all that, I sometimes tire of the battle to advocate for gifted education. It's a deep hole that never seems to fill.

An unexpected cure to my malaise was a lunch I attended not too long ago with my older daughter and her sixth grade teacher. They howled and they laughed as they reminisced. The projects, the science, the 50 specimen report, and the higher level thinking that Dr. Julia Rappaport made available in her classroom was just as alive in that recent conversation as it was when it occurred 37 years before. And the light in their eyes, teacher and student, reminded me that all the politics and all the maneuvering needed to make a program work were worth the effort.

With this fresh check with reality, it is now easier to look at the behind the scenes work by teachers and parents. Perhaps if we had a better understanding of exactly what and how advocacy is relevant to each of us, we would elevate it to a place of honor instead of an act of drudgery.

Dr. Sandra Kaplan, Professor of Clinical Education at the University of Southern California, has a unique thought

about advocacy for gifted children (Kaplan, 2009).

She believes that "after years of analyzing the advocacy efforts on behalf of the gifted, the answers to these questions seem evident: the real basis of support for gifted education is dependent on educators rather than rhetoric, on educators rather than dollars, on educators rather than legislation. There is no intent to minimize the importance of economic, social, or academic support for gifted education. The intent is to underscore the fact that the only stable support for gifted students might be educators."

Teachers of the gifted are very knowledgeable about their students, but knowing how to advocate for such students involves a different kind of knowledge—-a political knowledge. It means speaking in private and in public to parents, to other teachers, and to administrators. If a teacher has the language fluency, polish, and is self-assured, that advocacy can be carried to the state legislature. It means joining adjunct organizations, it means being a leader, and above all it means being so tactful that one stands up for gifted education without seeming superior and without threatening any one else's ego--especially administrators in school districts who don't care about gifted education but think they know everything about it. It's a balancing act--like that fiddler on the roof.

Now we all know that there are very effective people who advocate for gifted. But as time passes on, the experienced ones are retiring, the supervisory positions in gifted education are diminishing, and their replacements will have to come out of our classrooms...which is where today's leaders in gifted education originally started themselves.

To aid all those brave teachers IN classrooms and administrators and parents who are also valuable advocates, here is a very large, but only partial, list of advocacy sites managed by extremely experienced educators who never seem to give up.

Welcome to the Gifted Development Center

Davidson Institute ~ Programs & Scholarships

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT)

Counseling the Gifted: Establishing identity; finding self

SENG: Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted

http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/

http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/e542.html

http://www.txgifted.org/files/pdf/Supporting%20Gifted%20Education%20Through%20Advocacy.pdf

http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=538

http://www.agateny.com/

http://themorechild.com/

http://www.dukegiftedletter.com

http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=34

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0NQM/is_2_44/ai_n13783930/

And, of course, Googling "advocacy" will also bring up many sites.

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THE CRITICAL NEED FOR ADVOCACY FOR GIFTED EDUCATION USING EVIDENCE FROM BRAIN RESEARCH

By Barbara Clark

In the best of times, groups concerned with educating gifted children and youth at every level – local, state, and national – have seen the need to organize to provide advocacy for meeting the educational needs of these students. In the early 1990s the National Association for Gifted Children began Advocacy Conferences inviting representatives from state organizations to come together in Washington to learn how to best gain support from state and national lawmakers. Many state organizations that support gifted students hold at least one of their Board meetings each year in their state capital, discussing their advocacy plans and calling on state representatives for support. If they expect to have access to necessary resources, teachers of gifted students must be masters of communication, regularly informing their district administrators of the needs of these special children.

Now, in a time of severe fiscal restraint, advocacy has become far more difficult, but even more vitally necessary. Fortunately, there are data from the neurosciences that give new evidence of the critical need for gifted education. When combined with professional research, personal experiences, and long-standing useful strategies, the available data build an even more powerful case for the need for gifted education. All the relevant strands of knowledge and research offer compelling evidence that gifted education is a critical initiative in the positive development of gifted children.

PRINCIPLE #1 Plasticity, The Brain's Demand for Appropriate Nurture

"The brain, with its complex architecture and limitless potential, is a highly plastic, constantly changing entity that is powerfully shaped by our experiences in childhood and throughout life." Marian Diamond, Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley (Diamond & Hopson, 1998, p.2)

Plasticity is the term used by neuroscientists for the recognition of constant progress and growth or regress and loss of function found in the development of the brain. Without appropriate stimulation provided by challenging learning opportunities, the development of the brain will not progress, but rather regress, a prospect no society should ever allow. "Maintaining" any level of development is not possible. Challenging learning experiences are essential to the very existence of high levels of intelligence and thought. The advanced level of complexity, depth of understanding, accelerated processing, and resulting advanced knowledge base commonly found in gifted children are caused by changes in the brain. These common characteristics of gifted learners, coupled with our understanding of the dynamic nature of the brain, render it essential that the curriculum for gifted learners be designed to match their specific level of development. The curriculum must continue to be differentiated. Complexity in the content and concepts, faster pacing, and the opportunity for more advanced material are vital, lest the gifted learner regress from lack of challenge.

The concept of brain plasticity challenges many of the present assumptions about organizing educational programs and learning experiences. Neither the speed with which a child can learn nor the level at which the learning should be presented can be assumed by knowledge of the child's age. Gifted learners are often 2 to 4 years beyond the concepts and informational base provided to their age peers. A curriculum structured only by age, without consideration of a child's skills and mastery levels, will often result in gifted children being asked to relearn what they already know, tutor other children, or repeat the same type or level of academic tasks, all in the effort to fill classroom time. Such strategies will not provide the challenge the brain needs to progress to the higher levels of the learner's potential. Continuous progress, not regress, must be the concern of all who work with all children, including gifted children.

PRINCIPLE #2 The brain organizes powerful learning by integrating all areas of brain function for optimal efficiency and retention.

Another important consideration is the fact that the major function of the brain is associative; that is, a high functioning brain is always integrating, combining, and synthesizing various modalities and areas of specialization. The associative nature of the brain can be seen in brain scans taken with a multitude of instruments not available only a few decades ago. As the technology has improved, enhanced understanding of brain function has given a clearer picture of how best to provide for learning. The opportunity to integrate ideas and build new concepts from information across disciplines and through time allows use of this brain principle and is essential for the gifted learner.

Through appropriate stimulation, the brain becomes more effective and efficient in functioning. Integrating the brain's areas of function in the learning process supports the higher brain efficiency of gifted learners. If optimal learning is the goal, the brain's use of integration requires a challenging curriculum, to maximize integration of content and processes.

Combining the functioning of the physical and motor areas of the brain with the cognitive, affective, and intuitive areas makes lessons more interesting, more understandable, and far more easily remembered. The highly developing brain responds positively to novelty, to the unexpected, and to discrepant information. Students taught using the integration of brain functions are more creative, try more unusual solutions, and engage in more alternative and high-level cognitive activities. They tend to initiate more learning activities, are more positive and enthusiastic about their learning, and are more highly motivated. Students experiencing integrative strategies for learning have also been found to be more independent and responsible, understand more deeply, and retain information and concepts more effectively. These outcomes can be accomplished with learning strategies that engage all of the senses and that integrate all areas of brain function, including the physical, the emotional/social, the intuitive, and cognitive, in both linear and spatial-cognitive modes.

Teachers of gifted learners need to establish a climate that provides and encourages choice, with access to a wide range of materials from many disciplines and eras. In this type of learning environment, students can become acquainted with a large variety of ideas at many levels and incorporate visual and verbal modes. Gifted students should be encouraged to produce materials for evaluation that show the integration of ideas, materials, and processes across disciplines, time, and grade levels. We can only attain this level of brain compatibility if school districts are willing to support gifted education.

PRINCIPLE #3 Appropriate stimulation increases the number of glial cells in the brain and the speed of the exchange of energy from cell to cell.

As the number of connections between the cells (i.e., the synapse) and the size of the synaptic contacts between brain cells increase, communication within the system becomes faster paced and more complex. By increasing the speed of this synaptic exchange from one cell to another, we also increase the speed of thought and learning. The pace of thought and learning accelerates for gifted learners, and the level of comprehension is advanced. An extraordinary quantity of information and an unusual retentiveness is evident.

As the speed of learning increases, gifted students often require acceleration in their instruction and advanced and sophisticated materials from which to learn. These students often develop high levels of language and verbal ability, and heightened visual and spatial acuity. The repetition of activities too often found in the normal classroom creates a habit of automatic responses without thought. Such repetition shuts down the thought processes in the cortex of the brain, resulting in boredom. In contrast, acceleration allows learning to progress.

Pace of instruction can be accelerated by early entrance to any level of schooling such as kindergarten or college; by pre-testing a lesson or unit, teaching only what has not yet been learned; and by compacting content to avoid relearning material already mastered. Self-paced programs of instruction, or other means of tailoring the pace of learning to the student, are essential components of progress. Allowing gifted students to

work with intellectual peers, including adults, will also accelerate learning. Other students may also benefit from enhanced interaction with gifted students and their areas of expertise.

No matter how the acceleration of the curriculum is accomplished, students will move through core curriculum in less time than is typical. Gifted students regress unless they have access to advanced and/or unusual subject matter, materials, and processes; and new and challenging information. Acceleration of instruction and/or curriculum is a core need of gifted learners and should be a focus of persistent and informed advocacy.

PRINCIPLE #4 As the brain becomes more effective and more efficient, more use is made of the activity of the prefrontal cortex of the brain.

High levels of intuitive processing, one of the most powerful, yet least understood areas of human functioning, are another attribute of the gifted brain. According to neurobiologists, humans are the only life form with a brain housing intuitive functions (the prefrontal). This quality of intuition is species specific. Without the hunches, insights, and imagination of the intuitive processes our lives and those of our children would be diminished; with them, we are vastly enriched. Gifted children intuit easily and naturally. By supporting and encouraging them to share and expand their use of this valuable intellectual tool, we may realize more of the unlimited potential of the human brain/mind. When experiences with the intuitive processes are included in curriculum design, students' skills increase in multiple areas, including future planning, insightful thinking, the use of intuitive experiences, and levels of creativity.

To bring the intuitive function into your classroom:

- Develop a responsive learning environment with multiple levels of materials, flexibility, and self-direction;
- Model the valuing and use of intuition;
- Provide experiences in which the child can demonstrate evidence of intuitive processing;
- Use imagery, fantasy, and visualization to support learning experiences;
- Use "what if" and open-ended, future thinking strategies
- Encourage the use of creative thinking.

High levels of intuitive processing, one of the most powerful, yet least known areas of human functioning, are strong attributes of the gifted brain.

> The Concept of the Brain's Unlimited Potential
>
> "An animal is only as smart as it needs to be…nature programs parts of the brain to sharpen up when – and only when – experience demands it." Richard Cross, Ph.D., University of California, Davis (Diamond & Hopson, 1998, p. 29)

The principles from the brain research mentioned above are only some of the valuable resources now available from the neurosciences to help educators and parents of gifted children provide more powerful advocacy for gifted education. If we are to appropriately challenge those children in our care and allow them to optimize their potential, we must eagerly assimilate new data and stretch our understanding. What is optimal can only be glimpsed, but to realize these possibilities is a demonstrably critical element of advocacy for gifted education.

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ADVOCACY IS BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

By Sally Y. Walker

When I first found out that I "had to" contact legislators, I felt like I'd rather eat raw worms. How do you talk to "those people"? They see so many individuals and groups, all with agendas and needs. Why would my call/visit/letter/fax make a difference? Is it really important? Do I *HAVE* to? Such were the doubts I entertained about my efforts at advocacy, and their potential for efficacy.

Little did I realize that we advocate every day. Every time we make a decision and ask for what we want, we advocate for ourselves. When we request a kind of food, a type of car, a new piece of apparel, we are asking for what we want or need. When we request a specific teacher for a child, when we ask that the teacher recognize the child's special interest or ability, or when we question the appropriateness of the standard curriculum, we are advocating for students. Such activity can be relatively easy or, at times, difficult and contentious. But I now understand that every voice counts, and even one person's story may move mountains.

Advocacy is really all about relationships—about developing a common bond, exploring an interest, or sharing a passion. It is most effective when it touches the heart as well as the mind. For a parent interacting with a child's classroom teacher, it's about getting to know him/her on a positive footing before you ask for special accommodations for your child.

I remember one such example from my teaching experience. On the first day of school, a parent brought me a cappuccino and a croissant, explaining that she wanted me to have a great beginning of the year. I still, many years later, recall her kindness. This parent also volunteered, as she was able. She read to students, shelved books in the library, and copied materials for other classrooms. Little did I realize that she was getting to know the curriculum, what was going on in the classroom, as well as getting to know other staff members who might teach her child in later years. We had short chats about her child and his interests and needs. We laughed together at the children's cute remarks and commiserated at children's difficulties and struggles. I know that this parent recognized the difficulties teachers face and the lack of time and support that most educators confront. She also had the ear of teachers when it came to advocating for her child.

There are, of course, many creative, non-intrusive options for parents seeking to raise awareness as advocates in their children's schools. Another parent I know felt strongly about the lack of differentiation in her child's classroom. She was employed outside the home and did not have time to volunteer in her child's school. This mom knew that professional development in gifted education was lacking in her child's school. However, she felt confident that the teachers would be willing to accommodate the needs of gifted students once they understood how to go about it. As a first step toward this goal, she gave her child's teacher the gift of a day at the IAGC Convention. She was convinced that this opportunity would provide the teacher with the knowledge and incentive to change some things for the gifted children in her classroom. This parent was an effective advocate not only for her child, but for all the other children in her child's classroom.

Moving beyond the classroom, parents and educators need to advocate at the district level, by informing administrators of the need for gifted programming, or by working on committees to make sure that the needs of gifted are not overlooked. Federal initiatives may not specifically delineate gifted education as a component part of a comprehensive curriculum, but there are places where gifted education can be applied.

A perfect example is the RtI (Response to Intervention) Model. Developed originally for general education and supported by special education, it employs a model of differentiation for different tiers of needs in students. This model is a perfect reflection of what can be done for the gifted population, just as for the special education population. Tier 1 is appropriate for most of the students. Within Tier 1 differentiation must occur. The more Tier 1 is differentiated, the better suited it is to students' needs. It follows then that fewer students will need the special accommodations of Tier 2. Tier 2 is for those students for whom the regular curriculum is not working (who need more experiences to reinforce the information) or for the gifted population (who need less repetition, more depth, more complexity, and a faster pace of curriculum).

Tier 3 (the point of the triangle) is for those students who have profound needs, such as an IEP in special education or a GEP (Gifted Education Plan) for the very gifted. In their GEP they might have acceleration recommended, a telescoped curriculum (covering 2 years of material in 1 year), dual enrollment, work with a mentor, or another form of advanced work. Tier 3 is for a very few children with profound needs. Advocates are needed to find lines of opportunity for gifted programming within accepted, regular education initiatives and use those initiatives to advocate for the needs of the gifted students.

For gifted programs to exist, survive, and thrive, there must be district support in both staffing and budget. Start at the top with the school board. Get to know your school board members. These are the folks who develop and sustain policy for the entire district. In consultation with the superintendent, they set budget priorities and parameters.

In general, school board members are elected representatives dedicated to community service. Their time commitment is substantial and admirable—with no pay, little recognition, and, very often, a lot of grief. They are almost always caring and capable people. But they are also individuals with favorite causes and probably selective gaps in knowledge. In working with school boards, do your research: Know the members' backgrounds and their individual strengths and weaknesses. Chat with board members over a

cup of coffee. Give them articles or research briefs supportive of gifted education. Attend school board meetings, even when gifted education is not a critical issue, or even on the agenda. Support local general education initiatives that positively impact all children. Vote for candidates who will support your point of view.

Do you realize that there is no law in the state of Illinois that guarantees or safeguards gifted education? Do you know that it is a year-to-year, touch-and-go battle to get funding through the Illinois legislature? Do you realize that school districts all around the state are slowly, quietly dismantling their gifted programs, teacher by teacher, class by class?

In 2003 the gifted categorical grant was eliminated, and the funds were rolled into the general education fund. This meant that districts were no longer required to fill out the gifted grant and that gifted funds could be used at the district's discretion. The money might be allocated to patch the roof or to fix a pothole in the playground.

At this same time, legislators also eliminated the gifted language in the school code—a devastating blow to gifted education in Illinois. In 2005 new language was reinstated. But minus funding, districts are not required to provide gifted education. Also, once the gifted grant was eliminated in Illinois, all requirements for record keeping of gifted programming were also dropped. (The gifted grant had required that districts report how many children were being served by the gifted program, at what grade levels there were services, and which content area(s) included programming. Districts also needed to report how many teachers were trained with specialized courses to teach gifted education classes in their district.) There is currently no state requirement for training teachers who teach gifted students. There are no records or data in Illinois on school districts that have gifted programs or on the kinds of programs available.

Advocacy at the state level is sorely needed. Legislators must recognize that gifted children have needs as profound as the children at the other end of the learning continuum. Boredom and relearning information already mastered may cause students to become "mental dropouts", with attendant behavioral problems or an increase in negative study habits. Extrapolating from their less than optimal classroom experiences, our gifted students might come to assume that all learning is easy. They will be robbed of opportunities to exercise persistence and resilience—qualities so demonstrably requisite for a successful life. They may never learn how to chunk assignments or how to manage time effectively. With no challenges, no opportunities to struggle with new information and difficult concepts, gifted students are cheated of an appropriate education.

There are also gifted students with special needs. Often the gift masks the disability and/or the disability masks the gift. These children may seem "average." So, often, neither the gift nor the disability is addressed. These students need two strands of intervention. Quite often they get neither. Advocacy for these children is essential if they are to have an appropriate education. So the question arises: Don't all these talented young people have the right to an education commensurate with their abilities? Don't all children?

If we are to advocate effectively for all these extraordinary students, we must reach out to as many educational stakeholders as possible. We've previously explored opportunities at the district level. Also, if possible, get to know your elected legislators, especially those on the K–12 education and/or budget committees. Offer to meet with them in their home offices. Don't be disappointed if at first you meet with an aide. These assistants often play major roles in developing and supporting legislation. \

When meeting with a legislator or staff person, introduce yourself and any other advocates with you. Be sure to explain why you are there. Be concise and clear. Review your points in fifteen minutes or less, support your viewpoint with printed material (articles, research), and summarize your points. Thank the legislator for his/her time and for the opportunity to present your information. Follow up with a thank you note and a review of what was discussed. Be sure to respond to any requests or questions from the legislator. Stay in touch. Request that you be on the office's email or mailing list for any educational issues.

Many times new advocates feel intimidated when asked to speak with legislators or testify at a legislative hearing. Remember that legislators are elected by YOU. They represent you, and their job is to reflect your wishes. This is the backbone of the democratic process. Legislators need to hear from parents, educators, and students that funding for gifted education is critical if we are to have viable gifted programming in schools.

As a nation, we cannot keep a competitive edge if we persistently ignore our gifted children. Most local schools in Illinois do not have the funds and resources needed to provide appropriate gifted education programming. Letters, phone calls, faxes and testimony at hearings bring the plight of gifted students to the forefront of political discourse and raise collective awareness. Personal reminiscences, children's quotes, and even one child's story can inform legislators and touch their hearts.

Numbers count. Because legislators are accountable to voters, they often decide their vote on an issue based on the number of constituents who call or write—who advocate. It is imperative, then, that you urge others who share your views to contact their legislators. Demonstrable public support enhances the chances of passing effective legislation. The best way to make the contact is always in person. If a face-to-face is not possible, write a letter or send a fax.

Email messages tend to be the least effective means of getting your message across. Congressional offices are deluged with so many email messages that they may not be able to read and respond personally to each message. Because email doesn't come on letterhead, messages that should carry weight, like those from statewide gifted education associations, aren't easily distinguishable. Letters on letterhead are more unique and thus more likely to be noticed. Emails can certainly be an effective way to communicate with staff, but not with elected officials.

While awareness is the important first step of effective

advocacy, we mustn't stop there. The push for a line item for gifted funding in the state education budget is critical. It will not magically appear; it will require persistence and dedication in our role as advocates. At the time funding was eliminated in 2003, gifted education was budgeted at $19 million. We need to restore funding to this level if gifted children in Illinois are to have learning opportunities appropriate to their academic needs.

The process of advocacy might seem daunting at first. But speaking up for our neglected gifted population is exciting and rewarding work—and very needed. And don't forget: When it comes to advocating for gifted students and programming, recruit others to speak up with you. Remember, numbers count!

Also, be sure to join the Illinois Association for Gifted Children. Get your name on the email list to ensure that you will continue to be informed of the latest initiatives and dates. Visit the IAGC website, www.iagcgifted.org , for up-to-date information.

For the past three years, IAGC has sponsored Springfield Day. Held in April, it is a special day for parents, educators and gifted students from across the state to visit the Capitol and meet with legislators. Students get to see and be part of the legislative process in action. We have had 1000 gifted students and supporters all wearing yellow t-shirts meet on the Capitol lawn. Legislators have listened to our pleas and have been able to allocate a small amount of funding for professional development in gifted education for teachers. Support has grown.

In any and all ways that you can, please help to keep the pressure on. Continue to lobby legislators, to push for reinstatement of full funding. Gifted children in Illinois deserve an appropriate education, and we owe them nothing less.

SALLY Y. WALKER is the Executive Director of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children. She is the author of the *Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids*, which won two national awards. She has also co-authored *Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom*, *Making Memories, A Parent Portfolio*, and *Acceleration for Gifted Learners, K-5*.

WHY DO ILLINOIS SCHOOLS NEED GIFTED PROGRAMS?

By Cathy Greene

Education Week is an educational newspaper. Its primary mission is to," raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education." Each year they publish "Quality Counts," an annual report on state-level efforts to improve public education.

I recently spent some time studying the 2009 report and its comparison of Illinois programs to those of other states. You can imagine my surprise when I found that Illinois received a D+ in the area of K-12 achievement.

Several factors are used to determine *Education Week's* Quality Counts K-12 achievement grade. The study compares student proficiency on the NAEP test (National Assessment of Education Progress) in the areas of Reading and Mathematics. It considers the percentage of students proficient in these two content areas at the fourth and eighth grade levels. Any change that has occurred over the last four years is factored in. The researchers ask, "Has this state progressed? Are more students proficient in the areas of reading and mathematics?" They look at what is happening with students of poverty, specifically if the scores of this group of students are improving. In other words, "Is Illinois narrowing the poverty achievement gap?"

The next step is analysis of a specific area entitled "Achieving Excellence." Researchers examine both the percentage of eighth grade students scoring at the advanced level on the NAEP test and the percentage of change in that statistic over the last four years. They go on to look at high school graduation rates and high test scores (3 or above) on Advanced Placement Tests. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, the results for Illinois are an abysmal D+.

Why do we need to re-establish gifted programs and services at previous levels of funding and frequency in Illinois? The answer is obvious: because what we are currently doing in this state is not working, and it is starting to show in lower student achievement levels. Six years ago, the allocation in the Illinois State Board of Education Budget for Gifted Education plummeted from 19 million dollars to zero. Since then, advocates for gifted education have battled annually, garnering one million, then three million, then seven million dollars, only to return to the zero dollar status once again this year.

Faced with the reality of our students' low academic performance in comparison with other states, we simply must speak up for these young people. We must petition school officials, legislators, and the Governor to work with our state gifted organization to develop a plan to raise achievement levels. By working together, we can assist school superintendents in their efforts to meet federal requirements and, even more importantly, ensure that Illinois students make the grade when compared with students in any state.

As an individual, what can you do? As a first step, give this article to your school superintendent and your local legislator and say, "I've read this, and I think it's time for us to work together to bring about a positive change for Illinois students. I know it won't be simple, but these statistics prove how desperately is the need to improve things for our students."

Next, ask your legislator to support specific funding for gifted education in order to facilitate an increase in the percentage of students working at advanced levels. Ask that your school superintendent support an endorsement in gifted education, so that your teachers can receive adequate training and in-service for their work with advanced students. Assure the superintendent that members of IAGC look forward to working with them to raise the grade of Illinois students.

CATHY GREENE served as Director of Elementary and Gifted Education for the McLean County Unit District No 5. Upon her retirement, she became the Coordinator of the Illinois State University / McLean County Unit 5 Professional Development Program. She now works as an independent Educational Consultant specializing in gifted education and Mentoring and New Teacher Induction supports.

STATE ACHIEVEMENT INDEX	**Grade**	**IL D+**
	Total Score	69.1
Achievement Level		
NAEP Mathematics Percentage Proficient	4th grade	36.3
	8th grade	30.80%
NAEP Reading Percentage Proficient	4th grade	32.20%
	8th grade	29.80%
NAEP Math Score Change 2003-2007	4th grade	+4.4
	8th grade	+3.3
NAEP Reading Score Change 2003-2007	4th grade	+3.1
	8th grade	-3.6
POVERTY GAP		
	Reading 4th Grade NAEP Scale Score	28
National School Lunch Program Non-Eligible vs. Eligible	Math 8th Grade NAEP Scale Score	29.9
	Reading 4th Grade NAEP Scale Score	-6.9
Poverty Gap Change 2003 to 2007 (negative value = narrowing gap)	Math 8th Grade NAEP Scale Score	-4.1
ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE		
NAEP Math 2007 Percent Advanced	8th grade	7.0%
NAEP Math Percent Advanced Change 2003 to 2007	8th grade	1.1%
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION		
	2004	75.7%
Graduation Rates (All Students, Public Schools)	Change 2000 to 2004	+2.0%
ADVANCED PLACEMENT		
High Test Scores (3 or Above Per 100 Students in Grades 11 and 12 (Public Schools)	2007	18.7
	Change 2000 to 2007	+6.3

IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL COME: ADVANCING GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS THROUGH ADVOCACY

By Stephen T. Schroth, Jason A. Helfer, Victoria M. Romano, Daniel O. Gonshorek, and Christopher E. Johnson

Introduction

Education is the best avenue to improve the quality of one's future life. While this axiom is almost universally accepted, access to education that can affect this change remains problematic for many Latino students, especially those who live in abject poverty. Teachers, counselors, and employers often perceive English-language learners as less intelligent than native English speakers, even if the student in question is gifted. Gifted, impoverished Latino children often face a dilemma not of their own making. Attempts to address their giftedness often ignore their English-language learner status; attempts to address their English-language acquisition needs often ignore their giftedness. This paradox, affecting those who depend the most on school to deliver better economic horizons, stifles and hinders many students' development.

The recent national focus on closing the achievement gap between prosperous groups and students of color often ignores gifted Latino students, forcing them to endure curriculum designed for students with serious remediation

needs. Unless remedied, this situation seriously jeopardizes these students' future, which also puts our nation at risk. Advocating for better educational opportunities for these children (and devising and delivering effective instructional options) is one solution to this dilemma.

Intense levels of advocacy are often required to ensure appropriate educational experiences for our gifted students. Teachers, parents, and other interested parties must advocate for, and sometimes insist upon, instructional experiences that enrich, inspire, and motivate the gifted children they serve (Callahan, 2001; Schroth, 2007a; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). Recent emphasis upon basic skills of literacy and numeracy, however well intended, have been especially harmful to gifted and talented children of color, students from low-SES backgrounds, and English language learners, since too much focus is placed upon what students cannot do rather than upon what they can accomplish (Schroth & Helfer, 2008a; Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth & Jarvis, 2006). This reductive emphasis must change.

Advocacy's role within public education may be understood in a variety of ways. Some teachers and administrators may advocate for a position in the abstract, such as the need for a particular curricular focus or instructional approach that will benefit children in a particular way, while others may construct and deliver a program that demonstrates the need for that specific program for children and the community in which they live. In either context, advocacy contains two essential elements. First, advocacy centers on the individual or individuals advocating for a certain position or program. Second, advocacy depends upon the substance and quality undergirding that program or position. These elements both assume that core aspects of a given program or position emphasize and promote appropriate experiences for gifted children. This paper will examine the two positions and present a program that, through the work of community members, parents, administrators, teachers, and children, serves as a model of advocacy for gifted education services.

While much of education's current focus deals with standards, assessment, and prescriptive remedies, some envision a better world, a world obtainable through better teaching. Maxine Greene believes that, "in many respects, teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers—of expectations, of boredom, of predefinition. To teach, at least in one dimension, is to provide persons with the knacks and know-how they need in order to teach themselves" (Greene, 1995, p. 14).

Using a combination of sources from general, multicultural, gifted, and bilingual education, a remedy can be fashioned combining exemplary instruction and social justice for gifted Latino learners. Specifically, curriculum for these students must be concept-based, rich in discussion, and ratchet upward to allow for students' ascending levels of intellectual demand. Ideally, such curriculum will also allow exploration of *both* their own culture and those of others present in their community through projects that emulate those of the disciplines studied. Finally, curriculum must empower students, and assist them to notice and perceive society's "obstacles to becoming" (Greene, 1988, p.13; Schroth & Helfer, 2009). This paper will set forth the underlying principles for Project MUSEUM LA (Monitoring Understanding of Spanish/English Users to Maximize Language Acquisition), emphasizing a combination of best practices from general, gifted, and multicultural education, as well as the crucial role advocacy plays in transforming such goals from dreams into reality.

Context of Curriculum

It is six o'clock in the morning in the City of Bell, California. Despite the early hour, Florence Avenue, a major thoroughfare, is crowded with cars, many containing three or four passengers. These cars, carrying many of the janitors, gardeners, and day laborers of Los Angeles County, speed to the destinations that allow Bell's parents to provide food and shelter for their families. Several blocks away, groups of students huddle in front of Corona Avenue Elementary School (Corona). Despite the early hour, they have been dropped off at school because their parents must go to work. These students stand facing the bars that guard Corona from intruders, waiting patiently until the plant manager unlocks the gate, admonishes the children for arriving early, and allows them to walk to the lunch area, where they will be served breakfast. At the back of the school another group gathers, waiting for another gate to be unlocked. These are the teachers, arriving early, despite the fact that their contract does not require their presence before 7:15 a.m. They come for their students.

Among the teachers waiting at the gate will be Karen Hare, the gifted coordinator at Corona and teacher of a fourth and fifth grade class that serves 34 students. Mrs. Hare has been the gifted coordinator at Corona for over 15 years, and has successfully thwarted various principals who wanted to eliminate the gifted program as "elitist"—despite the irony that anything associated with Corona could be so termed.

Corona, built in 1926 to serve 450 students, has a current enrollment of over 2400 students in grades K through 5. Of these, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), of which Corona is part, has identified slightly over 100 as gifted. Because of overcrowding, the school operates on a "year-round" schedule, dividing students into three "tracks," designated "A," "B," and "C." Two tracks are in session at any given time, with the school day extended by 40 minutes per day and the school year shortened to 163 days. All of the students in Mrs. Hare's B-track class are so identified, as are approximately 80 percent of those in her colleague Evangelina Cervantes' class. Miss Cervantes also teaches a fourth and fifth grade class, hers being placed on C-track. Karen Kainuma, a first grade B-track teacher at Corona, has a heterogeneous class of twenty students.

All of the students in the three teachers' classes are Latino, and over 90 percent speak Spanish at home. The City of Bell has one of the lowest family per capita incomes in the United States, with each family living on approximately $9500.00 per year. Despite the inherent economic challenges,

many of the children have stay-at-home mothers, and the vast majority comes from two-parent households. Levels of parental education are quite low, with many parents having only two or three years of formal education. While few of the parents are documented residents of the United States, almost all of the students are United States citizens, having been born in California.

LAUSD, like California as a whole, rigorously supports use of the California Content Standards for all subject matter taught in its classrooms. As do all LAUSD schools, Corona uses the scripted Open Court Reading ("OCR") reading program and Harcourt math. These programs are used in carefully delineated periods during the morning session of school.

Mrs. Hare's and Miss Cervantes's classes use the Junior Great Books program. All three classes are part of a collaborative effort with The J. Paul Getty Museum of Art. As the result of a program initiated by the lead author, Mrs. Hare's students have been to the Getty Museum multiple times since their enrollment in the first grade. These programs have been vital to Corona's success, leading to recognition of teaching excellence for the Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP).

Why was Corona successful when many other schools were less able to serve Latino gifted students? How were the Corona teachers able to receive additional funding and join forces with partners like the Getty when others were not? What can teachers and parents at other schools do to emulate Corona's success? The answer to all of these questions is *advocacy*. Continually assessing the needs of students served and then finding appropriate instructional solutions—and publicizing the success the school has—is a wonderful and helpful way to achieve better levels of service for gifted students.

Purpose of Schools

Society's conceptualization of its schools largely determines their purpose. Are schools chiefly concerned with the inculcation of a certain set of skills? Should schools prepare the next generation of workers for their posts? Do schools have an obligation to address equitable issues affecting society as a whole? Adler writes that schools must create "trained intelligence, in followers as well as leaders . . . . Human resources are the nation's greatest potential riches. To squander them is to impoverish our future" (Adler, 1982, pp. 78-79).

Almost all schools take seriously their charge to assist all learners. Different philosophies, however, lead to manifestly varied modes of assistance, in both conception and implementation. Many states, in response to a federal effort to address issues of equity, have instituted programs of testing to assure accountability of schools and students (Linn, 2000; Schroth & Helfer, 2009). Such accountability programs often have dire consequences for poorly prepared students. In Florida, for example, twenty years of high school competency tests resulted in first-time African American and Latino pass rates that lagged behind those of Caucasian students by twenty and ten percentiles respectively in the years when those pass rates were the most closely aligned (Linn, 2000; Schroth, 1989). More recent developments in schools include "(a) an emphasis on the development and use of ambitious content standards as the basis of assessment and accountability, (b) the dual emphasis on setting demanding performance standards and on the inclusion of all students, and (c) the attachment of high-stakes accountability mechanisms for schools, teachers, and, sometimes, students" (Linn, 2000, p. 8).

Both students and teachers may suffer negative effects of this relentless emphasis on standards. Gifted learners' struggles in such an atmosphere have been documented (Callahan, 2001; Schroth, 2007b; Tomlinson et al., 2006). Less emphasized, but equally important, is the challenge such tests place on teachers who seek to equip all students to surpass and transcend societal norms and restrictions (Greene, 1988; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). One of the silent victims of accountability is "the rebellious teacher, the 'reflective practioner,' [who] is asked to tamp down dissonant conceptions of what education might be and perhaps ought to be in a chaotic, uncertain time" (Greene, 1988, p. 14).

Unfortunately, the rebellious teacher is often the only type of practioner who can "arouse young persons to go in search of their own" freedom (Greene, 1988, p. 14). All children, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds, need teachers who ensure that students see their own cultures represented in the classroom, which implicitly validates their worth as individuals within the educational system (Banks, 1999). The rebellious teacher often concludes that the current emphasis on accountability debilitates diverse learners, insofar that it denies them the opportunity to study the writings and actions of those who are of the same ethnic group as the students themselves (Banks, 1999; Ford & Harris, 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2006). This repudiation of their culture diminishes motivation and diminishes self-esteem (Frasier & Passow, 1994; Kameenui & Carmine, 1998; Schroth & Helfer, 2008b). Corona's students are still acquiring English. Students who do not speak the societal language face many difficulties in schools (Lossey, 1995; Valdes, 1998). Indeed, English is one of the "most powerful means of inclusion into or exclusion from further education, employment or social position" (Valdes, 1998, p. 15).

The rebellious teacher requires the means to obey both state and district standards, while simultaneously addressing the needs of his or her students. In addressing these needs, the teachers at Corona realized that their role went beyond merely teaching literacy and numeracy skills—it also involved tending the students' sense of well being (Fullan, 2007).

As a subject matter, art, even as defined by content standards, allows rebellious teachers and their charges the possibility of transformation (Greene, 1988; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). An appreciation of and exposure to art is certainly something that all students benefit from, and this is especially true for underserved gifted learners. As a result, the Corona teachers sought ways to expose their students to art in meaningful, critical, and empowering ways.

Art allows the learner to "envisage things as if they

could be otherwise [and posits] alternatives to mere passivity" (Greene, 1988, p. 16). A curriculum can be crafted that explores art in a manner appropriate for learner needs, while also being true to the discipline's finer tenets. The curriculum must balance assessment with assignments and tasks that are appropriate and designed to build student performance. Students learn best when they are provided with a moderate challenge (Bruner, 1963; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999). When tasks are too difficult for a learner, he/she feels threatened and, as a self-protection mechanism, will not persist with thinking or problem solving (Bruner, 1963; Smidt, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999). Conversely, tasks that are too simple also suppress thinking and problem solving. Rather than learning, the student drifts through school unchallenged by and indifferent to the learning process (Smidt, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999). Consequently, to effectively maximize educational opportunities, we must study and understand the learning process itself.

Process of Learning

Constructivism, the belief that, "each of us makes sense of our world by synthesizing new experiences into what we have previously come to understand," has become increasingly popular as a model that schools use to structure educational experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p. 4). Such an approach has a certain meretricious appeal to anyone, especially an experienced learner. Constructivism basically maintains that a learner approaches new information, sorts through it, compares it with what he or she has learned before, and ultimately adjusts this new insight to fit in with his or her world view.

Without doubt, many constructivist practices, such as an emphasis on using primary resources, encouraging student autonomy, using open-ended questions, and getting elaboration of student answers, are valuable strategies that all teachers should employ (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Instructional styles that favor constructivist practices have become the preferred method in many districts and some states. At times, this preference favors style over results. Some question the necessity, and indeed the value, of having learners work through all, or even most, ideas with a good measure of autonomy to achieve understanding (Perkins, 1992). Time is a scarce resource in education; its use must be marshaled efficiently to achieve the optimal outcome.

Perkins suggests that schools must stop worrying about the styles used and instead concentrate on achieving *retention*, *understanding*, and *active use of knowledge* among their students (Perkins, 1992). Retention involves the acquisition of organized knowledge in the mind and the ability to recall that knowledge. Understanding affects the development of intellectual skills and processes, a means of using the knowledge learned or accessed. Active use of knowledge establishes enlarged understanding of ideas and values. Focusing on these goals rather than arguing about learning styles will better assure student progress (Perkins, 1992).

The attainment of such goals will occur only in a situation where all players—including students, teachers, and administrators—see "conspicuous gains" at "minimally increased costs" (Perkins, 1999, p. 164). In other words, schools need to see a great deal of achievement quickly. Perkins deems this arrangement one of recognizing *cognitive economy*, that is, making use of any and all effective teaching strategies to create an environment of excitement, passion, and motivation (Perkins, 1999). Schools need a variety of strategies to achieve success. In essence, schools and teachers must focus on the interaction between *the child*, *the curriculum*, and *learning*. Emphasizing these elements will result in a confluence of factors that will boost student success.

Several conditions are necessary for this interaction to occur. First, the child must feel safe, loved, valued, and respected by those who comprise his or her learning community (Delpit, 2007; Tomlinson et al., 2006). Children must feel accepted and appreciated if they are to willingly engage in experiences that take place in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 2008; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). Second, that which is studied in the classroom must be real and relevant to the child (Bruner, 1963; Schroth, 2007b; Tomlinson, 2003). This relevance pertains not only to the discipline studied, but also its connection to the child's life and prior experiences (Ford, 2003; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007; Renzulli & Reis, 2008; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). Finally, instructional activities must be chosen and sequenced so that student learning is maximized (Bruner, 1963; Renzulli & Reis, 2003; Sternberg, 2005; Tomlinson, 2003). Schools must use all research-based strategies, methods, and approaches necessary to reach their students. Although no two learners might be exactly the same, clear instruction, opportunities to practice and ponder, and necessary support will improve the performance of the most students. Interrelating the child, curriculum, and learning bolsters and intensifies the learning experience.

These strategies fit nicely with classic concepts of learning theory, such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The ZPD is the distance between a child's independent problem-solving level and that same child's level of potential development at problem solving under an adult's guidance (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Under this model, teachers ascertain what a student's independent problem-solving level is, and then provide that student with the supports and structures necessary for him or her to work at the next level. For example, a student working on a problem must expect to do most of the work (Perkins, 1992). Expert teachers do not help a great deal, but remain accessible, in the background of the learning experience, while allowing the student to manage as much as possible on his/her own (Perkins, 1992; Smutny & von Fremd; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007). When a student's attempts go askew, expert teachers raise questions rather than helping the student directly (Perkins, 1992; Renzulli & Reis, 2008; Tomlinson, 2003). The expert teacher will ask the student to explain how

they progressed through a particular step of a problem, how an answer was arrived at, or how one answer deviates from another attempt (Adler, 1982/1998; Perkins, 1992). The truly exemplary practioner even manages to use this situation to transition the student from an extrinsic to an intrinsic motivational source. Rather than praise the student for getting the correct solution *after* it is solved, the expert teacher discusses how difficult the problem is *before* it is tackled (Perkins, 1992; Tomlinson, 1999).

Research in Action

Adler (1982/1998) believed, correctly, that, "teaching at its best is only an aid to learning, but that aid is most needed by those who are least adept at learning" (p. 50). Unfortunately, much instruction is focused on what is convenient for the teacher, consistent with district whims, or of interest to those who set policy (Callahan, 2001; Schroth, 2007b; Tomlinson et al., 2006). The time has come "to develop curricula that match the learners' needs, rather than curricula that reflect teachers' interests and skills" (Callahan, 2001, p. 153). Teacher reluctance to use appropriate learning strategies stems, not from mendacity or malfeasance but, most often, from a lack of understanding about the implications learning theory has for classroom practices (Renzulli & Reis, 2008; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2007; Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). Leaders of learning communities must therefore be prepared to present and explain such developments and their relevance in the clear manner that is necessary (Perkins, 1992).

An example of how cognitive research affects practice can be found in studies related to individuals who witness accidents (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000). Such a subject is explored, of course, not because of a keen interest in auto safety, but to examine the implications for learning, specifically the distinction between *encoding, storage,* and *retrieval* (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000).

Encoding refers to those changes that occur within the cognitive systems that allow subsequent recall or recognition; as a result of encoding, some record of the event remains in memory (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000). Storage allows future recall to take place, as it allows whatever change or modification that has taken place within the system to be retained without deletion or modification of the extent that would prohibit or preclude retrieval of the necessary information (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000). Finally, retrieval allows the use of information stored to construct a new piece of cognitive activity—an act the layperson might refer to as *remembering* (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000).

Studies of accident witnesses have provided valuable insights into the workings of the human memory. Simply put, people who witness accidents do not remember them very well, even though what they have seen is important and they want to remember it as best as possible (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000). People often have poor memories of familiar objects, such as the eight main features of a penny (i.e., direction the head faces, location of writing, etc.) (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000).

With such problems recalling every day items, it is not surprising people have difficulty encoding information to which they are exposed briefly, such as an accident or, alas, many lessons (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000). Factors leading to good encoding include a system that allows the learner to classify information, much as books are entered into libraries. Patrons need *both* the right information (the contents of the book or encoding) *and* access to the information (access to the book or retrieval). Encoding into the human memory system is most efficient when laid down as a record with as much richness and elaboration as possible (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000). Passage of time, mood, and misinformation are all factors that affect the storage of material (Smyth, Collins, Morris, & Levy, 1994/2000).

Implications for instruction are clear. Teachers must present information to students with clarity, in a cogent and compelling manner. Teachers should introduce mental models that allow students to organize and segregate information learned. Material deemed important must be reviewed on a timely basis, to circumvent memory loss that occurs over time. Finally, teachers must assess and address student misconceptions about material learned to prevent misinformation from interfering with the learning process. Such steps would ensure that gains made in cognitive studies are incorporated into the classroom. In doing so, administrators may have to address certain teacher misconceptions about learning. The goal must focus on continual improvement and use of all relevant information that will enhance student learning.

Curriculum for Corona

Curriculum for Corona needed to address several issues. First, the curriculum had to facilitate student understanding of the key concepts and principles of a discipline (Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien, & Burns, 2002). Second, the curriculum needed to offer an *ascending level of intellectual demand* (AILD), so that more able learners could perform work adjusted in depth, breadth, abstraction, pace, complexity, and sophistication. It also had to offer resources to better meet their learning needs (Tomlinson, Kaplan, Renzulli, Purcell, Leppien, & Burns, 2002). A third curriculum requisite was to address the students' sometimes diverging needs of learning the importance of their own culture, while also honoring their vigorous desire to be seen as Americans (Banks, 1999). Fourth, the curriculum had to support the students' acquisition of English, which could vary dramatically at unexpected moments. Finally, the curriculum was required to provide students with the mental models necessary for future success.

English Language Acquisition

Specifically, the three goals of English-language learning involve (a) using English to communicate in social settings, (b) using English to achieve academically in all content areas, and (c) using English in socially and culturally

appropriate ways (Valdes, 1998). Great diversity exists among the people commonly called *Latino* (Lossey, 1995). Some speak Spanish before learning English, some do not speak Spanish at all, and others learn the two languages more or less simultaneously (Lossey, 1995). Some have parents literate in Spanish, while some do not. Some have attended school only in the United States, some have gone to school in Mexico as well, and some have never formally attended school (Lossey, 1995).

Language and cultural issues combine to create a situation that sometimes confuses teachers. For example, one study found that Latino kindergartners in mainstream classrooms "did not respond to teacher questions approximately 50% of the time whereas Anglo American kindergartners failed to respond only 15% of the time, even though teachers asked nearly the same number of questions of their Latino students as they did of their Anglo American students" (Lossey, p. 293). Older Latino students may embrace their newly acquired English skills in ways that disconcert the classroom teacher, who expects students to have adopted a more sophisticated demeanor by later grades (Laosa, 1977). Teachers must be able to assess student language levels and needs and adjust accordingly.

Many teachers view language-minority students as simply low-performing native-English speakers (Kameenui & Carmine, 1998). As a result, the materials English language learners deal with are often diluted, and these students must contend with information well below their comprehension level (Kameenui & Carmine, 1998). This decision to adulterate materials prevents English language learners from grappling with abstraction and complexity in the manner of experts (Tomlinson, et al., 2002). Such a determination is especially damaging to gifted learners, since it precludes them from engaging in the "more elaborate, more complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, problems, and themes that integrate knowledge with and across systems of thought" (Passow, 1981, p. 6). The ability to interact with rich and complex materials, and the chance to discuss and grapple with their sophistication, is especially important for gifted learners from non-English speaking homes.

Art Education

One teaches to address many rationales. Greene (1995) observed that, "to teach, at least in one dimension, is to provide persons with the knacks and know-how they need in order to teach themselves" (p. 14). Teachers must strive to enable their disciples to "put into practice in their own fashion what they need to join a game, shape a sonnet, or devise a chemical test" (Greene, 1995, p. 14). When designing curriculum, teachers should appreciate that basic structures in thought match intrinsic structures of knowledge in a discipline (Bruner, 1960). Fundamental concepts taught should be those with the greatest potential for generalization across fields of inquiry (Bruner, 1960). Art, focused as it is on the quest for meaning, inquiry, and life-centered problems, can be "organized in terms of concepts drawn from practice, art history, and art criticism" (Burton, 1993, p. 23). The goals of this sort of art education, commonly known as discipline-based arts education (DBAE), are that (a) students acquire the rudiments of artistic practice, (b) students are engaged in viewing and discussing works of art, and (c) the process of viewing and discussion opens up connections of a broader scope that flow into other curricular areas such as language or social studies (Burton, 1993). This focus provides learners with the mental models *and* the expert orientation so vital to future success (Perkins, 1999: Tomlinson, et al., 2002).

In practice, works of art are realized in experience (Greene, 2001). This consciousness of qualities is awakened through dialogue with others about works of art (Greene, 2001). Qualities one may become cognizant of include texture, force, quickness, and buoyancy—aspects in a work of art that we relate to our own experience (Greene, 2001). Awareness of art is thus both a collective *and* an individual understanding. The ideas and thoughts of others may assist the individual to achieve a greater level of comprehension, yet the ultimate insight remains his or her personal epiphany. Much of the work deals with the association of language with certain human concepts, conceptions, and constructs. To explore art is to explore language. As such, teachers dealing with second-language learners must use tools, methods, and strategies that will awaken awareness of language and its interconnections with the world of the mind.

Discussion

In all too many classrooms, a *discussion* resembles a pop quiz delivered orally, a free-ranging "rap" session, or an exercise students engage in alone. A true academic discussion is none of these things. In their truest sense, Socratic discussions are a "conversation, conducted in an orderly manner by the teacher who acts as leader or moderator of the discussion" (Adler, 1984, p. 17). Since a seminar is an ideal way for a teacher to assess student knowledge and understanding, Adler (1984) suggested that under ideal conditions, the seminar would have *two* trained, adult leaders, one to lead the discussion and the other to listen. Questions should be asked in an open-ended manner about ideas and issues raised by good books and works of art (Adler, 1984). Students should sit around a table or in a grouping where all can face each other and hear and see the discussion taking place (Adler, 1984). A leader should *not* merely seek to reveal his or her superior knowledge of the particular work, as this is merely a didactic teacher pretending to be a seminar leader (Adler, 1984). Such a disclosure can occur without the time and organization necessary for a discussion.

Discussions, when conducted in an effective manner, allow, "access to empowering forms of knowledge that enable creative life and thought, and access to a social dialogue that enables democratic communication and participation" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 85). These are requirements for democratic life (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Imagination enables us to realize that there is always more in a student's experience than we can predict (Greene, 1995). Discussions are concerned not with endings, but with beginnings (Greene, 1995). Similarly, schools must focus on actions, not

behaviors—especially actions that "signify moving into a future seen from the vantage point of the actor or agent" (Greene, 1995, p. 15). Discussions allow students, even the very young ones, to examine, ponder, and play with ideas. Such activities are vitally important to both the student's development and that of our nation.

Project MUSEUM LA

During the last decade, Los Angeles County has debuted new or renovated facilities for most of its major cultural centers. The J. Paul Getty Museum of Art moved to a billion-dollar building overlooking the Pacific. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles opened a new cathedral, which abuts the Los Angeles Philharmonic's new, Frank Gehry-designed, Disney Concert Hall. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art has declared its intention to rebuild its home, and several new museums, including those honoring the area's Latino and Asian populations, have opened. Since first-rate areas of study should delve into areas to which there are no settled answers (Adler, 1984), this recent construction suggests a fertile sphere of questions. Do Los Angeles's cultural institutions adequately represent the culture of the citizens of the County? If so, how is this accomplished? If not, what else is needed, either in terms of new institutions or modifications of existing entities? Can cultural institutions represent all groups living in a region? Should they?

Planning for this unit combined best practices from general and gifted curriculum with special accommodations for the needs of second language learners, in this case Latinos. Flexibility of approach and fidelity to learning standards were the dual goals of the unit. It was vital that students ponder the concepts of *migration*, *social justice, culture,* and *change*. A comprehensive set of activities and projects was planned and implemented by Mrs. Hare.

It is not especially important, at least to these authors, what specific form the final product of each exploration takes. The unit provides, with some detail, projects that may indeed be successful with the students. For this project, for example, students engaged in guided investigations that examined the *aesthetic, experiential, foundational, logical/quantitative,* and *narrative* aspects of various buildings. Each was designed to build on certain student learning styles, with aesthetic, foundational, and narrative building on students' analytic strengths, while experiential allowed practical explorations, and logical/qualitative more creative investigations. The projects pursued, however, must vary depending upon student interest and determinations and teacher assessment of needs. Students who determine, for example, that Los Angeles County's cultural institutions do *not* adequately reflect its population will pursue different activities than those who are convinced they do. Knowledge and skills delineated in the California content standards were taught with integrity and consistency. Accommodations were made, however, so that the rebellious teacher could negotiate between commitment to her students and responsibility to the standards.

One working with a different group of students, in a different community, would of course alter the unit to reflect the unique tensions, strengths, needs, and realities of that group. Curriculum, even standards-based, cannot ignore the learners for whom it is written. They are the reason it exists. Bright, passionate, and caring individuals may disagree with some of the choices made in this unit. One could note, for example, that Neutra, Wright, and Williams are from different ethnic backgrounds than the students who study them. A choice was made that determined that three architects from relatively humble backgrounds who struggled to pursue their muse in Los Angeles—one facing severe racial prejudice—had more to teach the students and more connections to them than other, wealthier, alternatives. Such choices are the ultimate purview of the teacher and, so long as they are reasoned and intentional, they are acceptable.

Students benefited from this curriculum in several ways. Students took four trips annually to the Getty Museum for several years, gaining a familiarity and comfort with that institution that would not have come in other ways. Students also became passionately involved in their guided investigations, making their own decisions about the adequacy of cultural institutions in Los Angeles County, conclusions that were their own.

In a way that was unanticipated by their teachers, for example, the Corona students determined that they very much liked the cultural institutions, appreciating that the people who built and maintained them were attempting to bring important concepts and culture to the population. The students did notice, however, that few of the exhibits represented them or their culture. Their solution to this underrepresentation was to work with a first-grade class to create portraits of members of their community—bakers, shopkeepers, parents—and then to appear before the Bell City Council to advocate for a place to exhibit this artwork. Their quest was successful, and the portraits were shown in the City Hall Building for several months. In addition to learning about art, the students thus also learned the importance of advocating for their own needs and desires.

Advocacy Lessons

The Corona teachers learned several lessons that transfer to any situation in which teachers, parents, or administrators are advocating for gifted students. First, it is imperative to have a clear vision both of children's basic academic needs, as well as their potential. While the Corona students certainly had English language development needs, they also were precocious learners who needed to learn ideas of great consequence as well. Second, teachers must seek out and find opportunities for their students that will significantly extend their learning. The partnership with the Getty was achieved by grant-writing, sweat equity, and hard work, and it provided significant benefits for the Corona students. Third, work done by the students must be publicized to all interested parties, including parents, administrators, central office staff, and the media. A sense of excitement builds around programs that are working, and as more advocates come on board, the chance the initiative can be sustained increases.

Finally, allowing the students to produce a tangible end

product has great benefits for building palpable excitement for the project, as well as impressing outsiders. The Corona students worked during their recess and lunch periods on their tasks, which resulted in fantastic finished projects, such as a scale model of a proposed building and a report on the Los Angeles County demographics. Once a program is successful, even in pilot form, it tends to generate excitement, support, and funding. Advocates for gifted education must remember to promote their hard work, especially in these economically uncertain times.

Conclusion

The learning needs of gifted students, especially those from diverse backgrounds, can be met through curriculum that both challenges and supports them. Art, with its intensely personal character and inherently abstract nature, is ideally suited to explorations that develop conceptual underpinnings and present problems requiring complex reasoning. Assessment of student performance must be continual and used to modify instruction to fully meet student needs for both support and challenge.

The project proposed relates to the students' own culture, and also to the culture of the metropolitan area in which they live. The problem-based structure of the unit will ensure active participation of students and teacher, empowering and motivating both. Opportunities abound for students to gain understanding regarding the various workings and processes professionals use when making similar decisions and choices. The unit honors other American ethnic groups, such as Asians and African Americans, who may not be present in the students' community, but with whom they will interact later in life. Most importantly, the unit created dealt with the students' sometimes-diverging needs to learn the importance of their own culture while also honoring their ardent desire to be seen as Americans. Such curricular initiatives effectively enhance and celebrate the multicultural richness of our national essence, while also meeting the learning needs of so many gifted young people. After all, programs that recognize and validate student interests create the strongest advocacy of all.

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GT ADVOCACY: TODAY'S GRASSROOT CHALLENGES: THREE COLORADO PERSPECTIVES

With three views from three unique perspectives as parents, professionals, and advocates, Colorado offers its take on advocacy in action, merging parents, teachers, and students as responsible emissaries in promoting and applying best practice in gifted education.

1. An Example of How to Advocate for Children of Color in the Gifted Community

By Jenna Lin

It is a well-known fact that minorities are over-represented in the special education community and under-represented in the gifted community. Therefore, parents of gifted black/Latino children, particularly of male minority children, often have to be extra attentive to their children's situation and must advocate for their gifted children more intensively. It is even more crucial for parents of minority children to familiarize themselves with characteristics of gifted children, available services for advanced learners, and strategies on how to advocate for their gifted children. These parents also need to become very involved with their children's schools. A good first step is to join a parent volunteer organization that supports the needs of advanced learners. Participants in such groups are usually well informed about current practices in gifted education and well-equipped to share their knowledge with other minority parents.

Recognizing the characteristics of gifted in one's own child is necessary in case the child's abilities are overlooked or misinterpreted by the teachers. Many families, including my own, have witnessed firsthand how teachers often mischaracterize behaviors of gifted in minority children as hyperactivity. In the fourth grade, my son developed a habit of fidgeting with his pencil (twirling it) and occasionally standing at his seat and then sitting down. Due to this annoying behavior, his teachers asked the school psychologist to evaluate my son and determine if he had Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), so the school could provide special education services for him.

Knowing that black boys are too often incorrectly given the label of ADHD, due to poor classroom behavior, I went to talk to my son's homeroom teacher. I wanted to learn about my son's poor behavior so I could later deal with him accordingly. However, I was unpleasantly surprised to discover that his behavior was hardly unruly. Not only did his teacher NOT feel his classroom behavior was poor--in her words his behavior was not bad enough to merit even a gentle verbal "stop"--his teacher also recognized that my son's annoying mannerisms were only manifested when he was bored. I was stunned that she didn't consider that since he only demonstrated minor annoying behaviors when he was bored, a solution would be to challenge him. Therefore, I suggested to his teacher that additional challenging work and/or a gentle verbal "stop messing with the pencil" would suffice in ceasing his annoying behaviors. I also let her know that I hadn't observed such behavior at home or at church. But if his behavior didn't change at school, I would discipline him at home and correct the behaviors themselves. Unfortunately, although my son did cease his annoying habits, I still eventually had to intervene personally to find challenging work for my son to keep his mind engaged. His elementary teachers had little faith in his maturity and never recognized that he could and would do more when challenged. Nevertheless, because I recognized my son's abilities, I provided him with more challenging assignments, and I sought help outside of his school to address his needs.

It was during this time I discovered that knowing what services are available is often difficult but crucial when advocating for one's child. My son and his twin sister were in fourth grade at this time. They were three years advanced in mathematics, but were only allowed to attend the fifth grade math class. They were bored in the classroom and were not learning any new material. It was by chance that my son happened to befriend a Chinese fourth grader who happened to be attending the fifth grade advanced math class conducted by the building GT teacher. My son told me he wished he were in the class with his best friend (I hoped his desire stemmed from noble motives, but of course not. He wanted to be with his best friend). Excited to find out about a possibly challenging class for my children, I went to the GT teacher and asked what we could do so that my children could join the advanced fifth grade math class. I explained that the pace of the traditional 5th grade math class was excruciatingly slow and that my kids were not learning any new material. Unfortunately, this GT teacher was not helpful and denied my children access to her class. She claimed that she couldn't allow them to advance that far ahead; she said, "If they were to take the advanced fifth grade class as fourth graders, what would we do with them next year when they were in fifth grade?" She reiterated the fact that there would be no services for them during the following year.

Nevertheless, I knew that this statement was not accurate, since my son's friend was in fourth grade, and they would have to provide services of some sort for him the following year. Also, I never understood the logic that allows students to "be bored in the present time to prevent them from being bored in the future." Therefore, I was determined to find out what the GT teacher planned on doing for the little Chinese boy. I decided that, if I had to do so, I would provide those same services for my children without her assistance. I would do for my children what I had done for myself in high school,

where I learned early on not to trust my counselor's advice about what classes to take. She would only recommend mediocre classes for me, even though I had been identified as gifted. Therefore, I did as my mother taught me: Find out what the smart, white kids are doing and do likewise. I did ask what classes the advanced, white kids were taking and enrolled in them. I also found out about college representative's visits and learned from them about the need to take advanced exams, such as SAT and ACT. Later, in college, I discovered that this pattern of self-advocacy was common practice among my fellow gifted black students.

So I translated this methodology into a way to meet the needs of my children. I asked the parent of the little Chinese boy what her son was going to do for his math class the following year, since he was currently in the advanced fifth grade math class. I discovered that highly advanced students were allowed to take an exam at the middle school and, upon passing, were allowed to take the advanced sixth grade math class, pre-algebra, at the middle school.

With my newfound knowledge, I went to the middle school and decided to advocate for my children there. I asked the school math coordinator, who also happened to be the district math coordinator, to administer the exam to my children so they could be considered for the advanced sixth grade math class. Meanwhile, I supplemented my children's schoolwork at home and sent "homework" to school for them to complete during their math class. Luckily, I happened to have previously worked with the math coordinator, so he knew I was capable of determining the readiness of my children for the advanced class. That made my job of advocating for them much easier. He was very willing to administer the exam to my children, but there was still some red tape blocking our way. According to district policy, a teacher at the elementary school had to "recommend" that my children take the exam.

As one could guess, I had a difficult time getting a letter from my son's teacher, who was still convinced that he needed special services, despite the fact that the school psychologist had determined he did not have ADHD. I gently but firmly reminded the teacher that I was only asking for the opportunity for my children to be tested, that I was merely asking for the opportunity for them to demonstrate their abilities. I felt I had to make a deal with this teacher. I promised that if they failed the exam, I would quietly leave things alone. If they passed, then it was evidence they needed a more advanced placement. Her first reaction was silence, so I reiterated that I was just asking her to allow the schools to determine if he qualified for the advanced math class. After much hesitation—and upon realizing that I was probably not going to leave her alone until she signed the letter—she finally gave my son the necessary recommendation. Both of my children passed the exam and took the advanced sixth grade math class as fifth graders. After months of effort, they were finally on a track that suited their needs and abilities.

After that incident, I had less need to advocate for my children in mathematics. But I still had to remain active in knowing what options were available. We encountered another wrench in the works when they entered 7th grade. I discovered that although our middle school offered ninth grade algebra to the sixth graders, they could not offer any classes beyond geometry. Therefore, they wouldn't allow the seventh graders to take geometry in seventh grade. Instead, the school offered a review/preview class during 7th grade, where they reviewed algebra and were introduced to geometry and algebra two. This policy impeded the students on the super advanced track and essentially slowed them down for a year.

My twins were absolutely bored in this class, and when I couldn't get the school to allow them to take geometry in 7th grade, I taught them geometry at home. I did a bit more investigating and discovered that some of the other middle schools in our district didn't have such restrictions on their students, since they were adjacent to high schools. Due to the close proximity, advanced middle school students in those schools could walk over to the neighboring high school for their math classes and could therefore advance to any appropriate level. Again, with this newfound knowledge, I encouraged our middle school to arrange for my kids to take their math classes at our high school, so long as I provided the transportation. Since then, fortunately, our middle school has made this option easier for incoming sixth graders.

During their elementary and middle school years, when I was advocating most forcefully for my twins and trying to get an appropriate academic placement for them, I had little idea what the future held for my children in the high school. My motto was always, "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it!" I was pleasantly surprised to discover that their high school offered wonderful services for students advanced in mathematics. The twins were able to take advantage of many wonderful, college-level classes and obtain quite a bit of college credit before graduating from high school. They had the privilege of taking three years of calculus, differential equations, and linear algebra/AP Statistics. They performed well in all classes, did extremely well on their AP exams, and were dual enrolled in a local university for the more advanced classes. These classes helped them and their friend (my son's best friend from fourth grade) get accepted into MIT.

Also, after having learned so much about the school system, I was better equipped to advocate for my other children. I found it much easier to convince the schools to allow my third child to follow the same path in mathematics as her siblings (at her request). She is currently taking her third year of calculus, as well as differential equations, during her junior year in high school. Additionally, the middle school allowed my third child to take orchestra classes at the middle school while she was still in elementary school. By the time my fourth child needed supplemental services, I had gained much more confidence in knowing that his academic needs could be met.

Much of my success in advocating and my growing confidence were due to the fact that I had developed a positive relationship with the schools. I also had valuable support from our local volunteer organization, which advocates for the needs of gifted and advanced learners. I not only enjoyed the support of many educators, but I also understood better how my district operated and gained a number of new friends. Positive relationships blossomed as I became involved in the schools, volunteering whenever I could, and making sure that

the tone and nature of my interactions were positive. I tried to support teachers as much as possible, offering my professional expertise when appropriate. I once helped our new, elementary GT teacher (the not so helpful one moved to another school) by doing pullouts for the advanced math students when she wasn't able to meet with them. I worked mostly with the primary grade students. Our half-time GT teacher simply had no time for that degree of outreach. Since my third child was in the primary grade at the time and in need of advanced math work, I was particularly motivated to help the teacher. I also visited another elementary school, where I talked to the gifted students about careers in the mathematical sciences. I made this presentation at the request of a GT teacher in our district. She needed some positive role models of black mathematicians for her advanced math students, and I was glad to help encourage them.

In addition to volunteering at the schools, I joined and volunteered for an active parent volunteer organization, a local affiliate of the NAGC. Several members of this group were parents of graduates from our district. These parents had gained invaluable knowledge and wisdom in the process of advocating for their children, and I learned much from their experiences. Through my work with this organization, I established a good rapport with many administrators in our district and with several educators in other districts. These relationships allowed me to advocate for other advanced black children, in our district and in others. For example, I was able to help three very gifted boys who participated in my math and science summer day camps get accepted into gifted schools/programs, where they most definitely belonged.

I have learned a lot over the last eleven-plus years and am now using this knowledge to advocate for my two younger children. Having seen the success of advocacy for my oldest children, who are now juniors at MIT, I am glad I struggled to demand that the school meet my kids' needs, and I will continue the struggle for the ones still at home.

JENNA LIN is the president of the Cherry Creek Association for Gifted and Talented, a board member of the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented, and founder and director of Math Pioneers. She recently became a board member of Shades of Blue.

2. Can You Hear Me Now? Self-Advocacy Tips for Students and Parents

By Valerie James

It is no surprise, and certainly not uncommon knowledge, that students of color are over-represented in special education classes and under-represented in gifted education classes. There are many reasons for these placement anomalies. Educational traditions are a primary causal factor in terms of the under-representation of students of color in gifted education classes. Historically speaking, our nation's schools have fallen short of providing high expectations, access, opportunities, and rigor for students of color.

The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences provides the following information pertaining to the number of gifted and talented students in public elementary and secondary schools for 2006.

Total # of Gifted and Talented Students	3,236,990
# of Identified Males	1,579,000
# of Identified Females	1,657990
# of Identified White Students	2,191,210
# of Identified Black Students	296, 150
# of Identified Hispanic Students	414,060
# of Identified Asian Pacific Islander Students	304,220
# of Identified American Indian/Alaska Native	31,360

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_053.asp

As one reflects on these numbers, do questions of under-representation arise?

Teachers generally identify students using test scores as the primary determinant of whether or not a student will be identified as gifted. Because of this narrow practice, many who should be identified as gifted are not, especially students of color. Consequently, many students receive inappropriate programming, which can lead to denied opportunities, less access, and a lack of instructional rigor. Such denial can have long term devastating effects. Students who aren't challenged with rigorous, relevant content often mask their dissatisfaction by acting inappropriately in class, becoming emotionally detached from school and peers, not learning *how* to learn, and so on. Gifted students of color face the additional challenge of being taught by teachers unable or unwilling to implement culturally relevant pedagogy, which has proven to be beneficial for students of all cultural and racial heritages.

Instead of focusing on teacher identification, let's take a look at how students and parents can advocate for identification and programming.

The following suggestions may be helpful for students and parents as they develop a plan to advocate for gifted identification and programming.

Students:

- A common concern for gifted children is being unchallenged in school. If you have already mastered the content being covered in class, ask your parents to help you find a way to demonstrate to the teacher that you have mastered the content.
- Ask your parents to be present when you speak to your teachers.
- If your parents don't feel comfortable approaching the teacher with you, ask their help in developing a plan for you to meet with your teacher without their presence.

- Ask the teacher to allow you to engage in alternative, in-depth tasks that will provide more challenge for you. Not only will you develop enhanced understanding of the content, but you will also learn perseverance.
- Consider an alternative task that connects curricular content with a social action project. This will not only help you to engage and become more motivated with the curriculum, but you will probably find completing the social action project to be very rewarding.
- There is strength and comfort in numbers. Students connect with others who share similar interests. Talk and share experiences with intellectual peers. Doing so will alleviate feelings of isolation and will help you to feel valued and validated from peers, parents and teachers.
- All students want to be a part of the classroom community and want to fit in. As a gifted student, you may be reluctant to share your frustrations and concerns with your parents and teachers, because you fear that your concerns will be viewed as complaints rather than as legitimate concerns.
  + If you are having trouble in school, communicate with your parents. This can be a great way to start problem solving. Share your concerns in a factual and precise manner, which will help to convince your parents of your seriousness of purpose.
  + If possible, offer suggestions for problem solving as well. No one knows you better than you know yourself; your parents are a close second. You may have some great suggestions that your parents haven't considered.

When talking with parents and teachers, remember to the three P's – positive, persistent and proactive.

When considering the important role that parents play in their child's achievement, Ford and Harris state, " … seldom addressed, is the reality that many (perhaps most) families do not know how to be involved. They may lack the cultural capital, the educational experiences, and the sense of empowerment so important to creating family-school partnerships."

Parents:

- Talk with your child about their comfort level in school. Communicate. Find out through conversation whether or not your child feels challenged.
- Ask your child when and how they are being stretched in their thinking during their school day. It is important to realize that if gifted students aren't being challenged, they are not learning how to persevere and develop stamina to complete a difficult task. Not being challenged can have detrimental effects on your child's self-esteem.
- Understand the identification process used in your child's school district. Help your child's teacher to see your child as more than a test score. Offer evidence to the teacher that will show your child as gifted not only in traditional academics, but in areas of creativity, leadership and performance as well.
- If possible, visit your child's class while they are still in elementary school. If this isn't possible, be proactive in communicating with your child's teacher. No matter your child's grade level, don't wait for the teacher to contact you.
- Do your research! Understand your state's standards and benchmarks so that you are informed regarding the minimum standards of proficiency at their grade level. (Remember, standards do not equate with the ceiling of essential understandings for students). Understand how to interpret standardized test scores. Most states will have information on test results available on the state's Department of Education website.
- Read, read, read! Reading is crucial for your children, and it is crucial for you as parents. Many parents of color are aware of the rich, historic contributions made by their ancestors, but some are not. Understanding and knowing those important contributions are a source of knowledge and pride. Traditionally, historic and significant contributions of people of color have been vastly overlooked in our classrooms. Sharing this information with your child can instill in them a love of independent learning that can translate to the classroom.
- Be persistent. Your child will benefit from learning how to self-advocate, but often they lack the experience of knowing how to do it. Be a role model for them in this regard. Before conferring with the teacher, prepare. Be sure to communicate positives in your conversation, as well as concerns. Share your child's interests with the teacher. Explain how you know which concepts are of interest. This process helps the teacher better understand your child and his/her learning style.

Sometimes it's hard to find our voice, but doing so is an important life skill. Your child will self-advocate more positively and productively if you help them learn how to structure their conversations. What an opportunity for you to connect with your child, while also staying informed and partnering with your child's teachers. Advocacy is certainly one of the methods most effective in achieving deserved identification and programming for gifted students of color.

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3. Advocacy: Making a Difference Over the Long Run

By Julie Gonzales

Where to begin? Thirty-five years have passed since the first of my four exceptionally able and talented children entered an educational world unsure of potential and unable to respond with any confidence to their unique needs. Questions related to identifiable differences and needs, obvious to the parent, addressed to the teacher, achieved little response or acknowledgement of responsibility from those most responsible for instruction and learning. Today, I remain measurably sensitive to the continued frustrations and concerns of parents encountering similar scenarios regarding their children's academic needs in a school setting. Up-front connections and support for parents are not only imperative but positive, preventative strategies. They promote informed constituents and community support for gifted education programming, regardless of the limited circumstances. The more parents know about restricted funds, declining budgets, and limited staffing, the more they will speak out on behalf of equitable funding for these exceptional children.

My journey as a parent, advocate, and professional in the field of gifted education involved many twists and turns, many challenges and opportunities, subsequent growth in purpose and outcomes—all taking my own sense of responsibility to broader levels of involvement and constructively complex outcomes. I would never have predicted my life as an adult and parent taking this direction. Frustration and disappointment drove me to find answers where other parents and teachers had not. My style of learning and acting instinctively compelled me to involve others. I refused to accept current policy and professional attitudes that seemed misguided or uninformed. I sought local experts, state leaders and national networks to find reliable resources and support for gifted learners, their parents and their teachers. Answers did not come easily or quickly.

Along the way I found opportunities to generate ideas, connections, programs, support systems, and leadership. I celebrate serendipity, happy accidents and discoveries, opening doors, creating dynamic and real world learning, and providing untold possibilities for young gifted minds to grasp and to grow. As sure as serendipity and happy accidents arise, a lifetime of collegial friendships (teachers and parents, researchers and administrators, legislators and community leaders) remain reliably constant, with people who understand and recognize the unique needs and exceptional potential gifted children bring to this world. Incrementally, one step at a time, one individual at a time, we each grasp the moment in conversation to further the understanding and complexities of giftedness.

[Special recognition is extended to the recent collaboration of energetic parents and professional leaders in the field who created and produced the *NAGC Mile Marker Series: Your Road Map for Supporting Gifted Children* (CD-ROM), Fall, 2008, with the technical staff assistance and support of the National Association for Gifted Children and members of NAGC's Parent Advisory Committee, Parent/Community Network and *Parenting for High Potential* Advisory Board.]

Advocacy is not the final outcome. Advocacy is the beginning to change. Advocacy maintains constancy of effort and attention to the issue at hand. Advocacy is not momentary, and it is not one-dimensional. Advocacy is not directed to or about just one individual, one circumstance. Advocacy has multiple layers, complex implications, and broad-based issues involving many individuals. Educational advocacy leads us to questions, pursuit of the fundamentals of education, facts and figures, measures of academic growth, proven positive environments for learning, research-based understandings, what works, what is not working, attitudes about school, political arenas, pivotal conversations, debate and determined steadfastness on issues that matter to us personally, professionally, and politically.

Effective advocacy requires listening, learning, calculated timing, artful communication, story-telling, visual representations, real-world experiences, student voices, time with the obstinate, convincing the defiant, taking initiative to create and celebrate examples of success, equitable access, accountability, political savvy, and outcomes that recognize, nurture and celebrate potential.

Effective advocacy relies on many of the characteristics we often describe as strengths of gifted behaviors, except now in "adult strength": acquiring information quickly, intrinsically motivated, inclined to solving problems, emphasizing equity, seeking to organize people and things, having high expectations of self and others, intensely concentrated, highly energetic, sensitive and empathetic, independent, and (hopefully) bearing a strong sense of humor (Seagoe, 1974).

Consider Costa and Kallick's (2000) *Habits of Mind* series: "choosing to employ patterns of intellectual behaviors, perceiving opportunities…and appropriateness of employing [this] pattern…and constantly striving to reflect on and improve performance of this pattern of intellectual behavior." This includes the following: persisting; managing impulsivity; listening to others with understanding and empathy; thinking flexibly; thinking about our thinking; striving for accuracy and precision; questioning and posing problems; applying past knowledge to new situations; thinking and communicating with clarity and precision; gathering data through all senses; creating, imagining and innovating; responding with wonderment and awe; taking responsible risks; finding humor; thinking independently; and learning continuously.

We adults, whether parents, educators, advocates or all of the above, should never forget that there are children

watching, listening, and mimicking our behaviors, our words, our attitudes, our generalizations, and our conduct toward those who disagree with us. The back and forth of misleading exaggerations, defensiveness, finger-pointing, negativity, and power plays stray far from the many productive collaborative examples of people working together on shared goals.

Returning to the basics, all of this experience—thousands of meetings, reams of note-taking, re-writing agendas, connecting with the gatekeepers, and developing respectful communication avenues at all levels of policy and practice—provides countless scenarios for engaging in productive discourse and positive change:

+ Developing ready access to reliable information and resources offers a baseline for common understandings between parents and teachers, administrators and specialists, and the public at large. (See NAGC Mile Marker Series for sample handbooks and brochures and some translated documents. These are great templates for creating your own version!)
+ Listening: Efforts to ease the stress and strain of misinformation may come more easily by beginning with a listening ear (both sides) and a bit of chocolate. There is great truth in recognizing different miles walked in different moccasins. Perspectives are often limited to personal experiences, insufficient and sometimes inaccurate information, and emotional ties to professional and parental responsibilities and turf. "Time out" to share opposing viewpoints is a respectful way to begin the conversation.
+ Parents of gifted children can apply and share their energy and research skills by creating informative websites and newsletters, updated with current events for students, parents and educators; gifted education handbooks; and local informational brochures. Documents translated into the second languages of a specific local population brings outreach opportunities to a broader base of parents and teachers.
+ GT students spending the day shadowing a legislator can leave a powerful impression and a lasting connection for lawmakers considering program budget cuts and lost potential. Sophisticated discourse with middle and high school advanced debaters who have researched proposed bills and who willingly relate tough family dinnertime discussions on such topics as water rights and renewable energy development present relevant examples to those who define the limits and laws of the land.
+ A simple phone call to a classroom teacher or a frustrated parent from a district level GT advocate may break communication barriers and offer feasible options addressing the student's specific academic and/or social and emotional needs. Rather than focusing on the disagreements among the adults, attention is directed toward the student, his/her interests and strengths, and steps to provide appropriately rigorous learning experiences daily and over time. The common ground for both sides is academic growth, development of a strong work ethic, and celebrating excellence with high potential students.
+ Professional experts (often parents of students in the school) willing to mentor share stories demonstrating their competence and specialized knowledge, as well as describe to students from kindergarten through high school what it takes to become the "expert." Presentations at local career fairs and in classrooms forge great connections for enhancing interest and promoting real world outcomes for young minds.
+ Collaborative voices bring strong communicators and effective strategists together to address issues of critical importance to a school, district, state, or national educational effort. This may involve long-term commitment, willing leadership, and/or coordinated outreach to business, industry, education, and the future of the community. (Example, Colorado White Paper: *STEMming the Tide: A Colorado Response to the National Crisis in STEM Education*, http://coloradogifted.org/information/white-paper.html)
+ Providing critical information regarding state law, rules for administration, and contact information to local and regional GT coordinators encourages community understanding, accountability and support for gifted education throughout the state (http://coloradogifted.org/resources/gifted-advocacy.html)
+ Other concepts to consider: Grab a metaphor ("Grassroots Gifted") and plant the "garden" with ideas and practical approaches. Build accurate talking points and use them repeatedly. Invite influential community leaders to testify and support your efforts. Volunteer on community projects and committees with generic purpose (where others can learn the importance of potential and how to grow it). Respect and respond in a timely manner—not to late, not too early and not too much. Finally, find fitting quotes for the purpose in mind, such as…

"We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."

—- *Ronald Edmonds, 1974*

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THE GIFTED PICKLE: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

By Janet Willner Myers

One of the books I saved when I retired recently from 40 years in elementary education was a collection of poems entitled: *Reflections on the Gift of Watermelon Pickle...and Other Modern Verse.* Hence, you can see what inspired the title of this article. While holding the old but treasured book in my hand, I began reflecting on my experience with gifted education as a student, as a parent, and as a teacher of gifted students.

I grew up in Southern California during the '50's and '60's. Capable students like me were guided into a college prep course of study. Last year I had the good fortune to visit one of my high school teachers. His first year of teaching intersected with my senior year in high school. As we reminisced, he remarked on how extraordinarily bright my classmates had been. Back then, bright students were not officially labeled "gifted," but I imagine many of my friends were. Of the dozen high school girl friends I still see often, eleven of us not only graduated from college, but all of us also hold advanced degrees. And I think I may be in the running for the elder poster girl for continuing education as I just completed a doctorate in educational leadership at the age of 67!

I decided to become a teacher when I was in elementary school. Because I found all academic disciplines exciting, I became an elementary teacher so that I could teach all the subjects. I cannot remember a day…well, maybe there were a few…that I did not love being a teacher. What a blessing to have selected a career that I found endlessly challenging and for which I had the ability to succeed. I like to think I stimulated my students with higher thinking skills and broadened their interests. Last week I met with the CEO of our local bank, a young man in his early 40's. I had been both his fourth and fifth grade teacher. It was gratifying that he recalled many activities that he felt enriched those years: stamp collecting, needle point, map skills, math games, vocabulary, and literature studies.

I did not get formally involved in gifted education, however, until my sons were tested and qualified for our county's pullout gifted program. One year, while they were still in elementary school, I took a leave of absence from teaching. I began to volunteer at their school and helped out in their gifted classes. Their gifted teacher was moving out of state at the end of that year, and I was encouraged to apply for her position. A year later, I was a teacher of the gifted in a sixth grade center.

These first reflections about gifted education…as a student, as a mother, and as a teacher…presented no pickles. Those memories are happy ones. I had always loved school, which no doubt contributed to my decision to become a teacher. My family moved to a suburb of Los Angeles when I was in the sixth grade. I grew up there, and that was the educational environment that influenced my intellectual development and prepared me for a successful college experience at a state university. After graduation with a BA in history and a year of graduate work in elementary education, I returned to my home school district where I started teaching fifth grade. I remained there for three years before setting out to see more of the world as a teacher in a DOD school in Japan. Again, I landed in a great school, had wonderful students and colleagues, and I was able to travel extensively. And most significantly, I chanced to meet Prince Charming in the guise of an Air Force captain on leave from Vietnam. After he completed his tour of duty and we had both returned to the United States, we married and moved back to his home town in Florida. I continued to teach while he attended Law School. Once he was established in his career, we wanted to become parents. We were blessed with two beautiful sons. The elder was bright and conscientious. He was always successful in school, took piano lessons, and excelled in sports. He followed in the tradition of his grandfather and father and became an Eagle Scout. Our younger son did all that his elder brother did…and more. He was a National Merit scholar and completed the International Baccalaureate Program at the college prep magnet school that both boys attended. We were very proud of our sons. I have to admit that at times I felt a bit smug that we seemed to have avoided that birth order tendency for the second child to be less achievement- oriented than the first born.

Being a teacher of the gifted in a sixth grade center was a wonderful opportunity. The district had a well-delineated gifted curriculum that aimed at providing enrichment in five areas: Social Processes, Critical Appreciation, Creative Expression, Scientific Approach, and Research Methods. I was on my own, however, to locate and often purchase materials to accomplish these goals, but I relished that challenge. Eventually I did encounter some pickles that confronted a teacher of the gifted in a sixth grade center. The students who attended the sixth grade center were bused in from all over the district, in response to the desegregation agreement. So, although some of my students had been classmates in their home school, everyone was new to this school, which they only attended while they were in sixth grade. It was a bit of a shock to realize that some of my students did not relish being there. Not only had they left their home neighborhood, many quickly learned that being in the gifted class was no longer considered cool. In elementary school, being in gifted was the bee's knees. A gifted student got to miss regular class, go on lots of field trips, play fun learning games, and generally be the envy of everyone else. But when my students encountered the anti-intellectual bias that is an undercurrent in American culture, some decided that being smart and singled out for special attention in the middle school years was a burden.

I was also faced with new classroom realities. It was a shock to me that some of my students did not love being in gifted class. Furthermore, I found that I did not feel the same

bond with my gifted students that I had had with my former home room students. The latter spent everyday with me, whereas the gifted students and I were only together one day a week. And then there was that preteen attitude! Almost every day someone would complain, "This is boring!" Yikes! My class…boring? My rejoinder became, "Only boring people get bored!" That remark really did not address the ambivalence the students were feeling, but it made me feel good to say it.

Seriously, being labeled "gifted" is a primary pickle. It just is not cool. In elementary school, it is thrilling to be in the gifted class, but sooner or later, the rosy glow fades. Gifted students may be called nerdy or geeky. In the malaise of being a teenager, when feeling accepted is so important, no one wants to feel ostracized for a personal characteristic. Most young people want to fit in, not stick out.

Even though I did not carry the gifted label during my school days, I remember a fateful day in my senior year of high school when my sense of self was challenged. It was during passing period and a bunch of us were gabbing in front of our lockers. In response to something I said, one of the guys looked over at me and remarked, "Janet, you're too smart!" OUCH. Argumentativeness was prized in my family, so I was slow to appreciate that a bright, assertive girl might not win a lot of social points. That very day I changed my *modus operandi*. I decided to experiment with a dumb blond image and assumed the role of class clown in some of my classes. I am still embarrassed to remember how rude I was to my teachers during that phase. Fortunately, I reverted to my old "damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead" academic persona when I got to college.

While I completed the coursework required to obtain my gifted certification, I explored the challenges that gifted girls encounter. Both boys and girls encounter the previously mentioned anti-intellectual undercurrent in American society. But girls may also find difficulty in reconciling what society deems as being feminine with their intellectual prowess. Young women who attended all-girls schools are more often spared this dilemma.

The plight of the gifted female has ameliorated since I did my research. It is less true than it once was that a bright young woman feels she has to choose between being smart and being popular. And, although gender roles have blurred in recent decades, and professional and career opportunities for women more closely parallel those of men, there still is a double standard women face. It is not uncommon for women in executive positions to be criticized either for being too assertive and, therefore, too masculine, or being too accommodating and, therefore, too feminine.

Another pickle in growing up gifted can be that an abundance of praise is showered upon the child. Excessive praise may have undesirable outcomes. Since many gifted children are spontaneous readers, they are raved about whereever they go…at grandma's, at school, at other kids' houses. During the early years in school, they accomplish learning tasks more quickly than other students and do them easily. Most of the curriculum of the primary grades is aimed at learning to read. In that regard, gifted students have it made. But this can be a problem in two ways. First, gifted students do not have to put forth much effort to achieve success and praise. Because they have often already mastered what is being taught, they may not develop step by step study skills. They are not used to *working* at learning.

At some point, however, even gifted students encounter academic material that is new and challenging. Some panic. It can be very uncomfortable not to know how to do something when every day of your life you have been praised for being so smart. All students need to appreciate that learning is a process, and after a few days of practice, a new concept or skill will be mastered. Gifted students also have to learn to have confidence in their ability to master unfamiliar material. When gifted students fail to make the transition from "already knowing" to "learning how to learn," achievement may decline. A gifted child may be unaccustomed to putting forth much effort to complete school work and may not be motivated to do so. This lackadaisical attitude that some gifted students develop confounds their teachers and parents.

There is a long history of illustrious and creative people—Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, and Winston Churchill, for example—having trouble in school. The list I consulted of prominent people who had problems in school only contained the names of men. In my own experience, boys *are* much more likely to fall into the category of underachieving gifted students. What aspect of gender roles may incline boys to be less successful in school?

As previously mentioned, many gifted students are expected to "learn" material that they have previously mastered. Cutting to the chase, gifted students are subjected to what some feel is tedious busy work. Girls are more likely to be socialized as people pleasers and most take the "kill and drill" work in their stride. It may be that society engenders in boys a greater sense of independence, and some develop little tolerance for tasks that they deem are unworthy of their effort. While girls tend to achieve more academically than boys in elementary and secondary school, the gender dichotomy in achievement abates in college, and boys tend to excel.

The second negative aspect of excessive praise may be an addiction to it. Gifted students expect to be successful and set high standards of performance for themselves. How many times have we heard of someone being traumatized for getting their first B? This can seem somewhat humorous, but trying to live up to unrealistically high standards can causes a great deal of anxiety. I have had to deal with this in my own life, as a teacher, and as a parent.

My second position as a teacher of the gifted was in a regular elementary school. My students ranged from first to fifth grade. For the first time in my teaching career I taught students younger than fourth grade. I had a lot to learn about what was appropriate for the younger students. This was a challenge for me and no doubt for the younger students. Since getting admitted to gifted status was a somewhat convoluted process in my school district, it was rare that a student became eligible before entering second grade.

One day I stood before my class of primary students,

outlining what we were going to do that day. I rattled off quite a long list of learning activities. The hustle and bustle began as the students started to pursue the numerous activities. Suddenly I felt a tug at my hem of my skirt. I had just gotten a new student who had been identified in kindergarten. She was looking up at me and said, "But, Mrs. Myers, I don't know how to read." Gulp. "Right," I replied. I did a quick refocus and pretended I knew what to do to meet her educational needs. Ah ha! She could work cooperatively with another student! Fortunately for both of us, a couple of months later she was reading very capably and our jolly learning ventures continued more appropriately.

Less humorously, this feeling of inadequacy did confound many of my younger students. Because I was more accustomed to working with older students, my expectations for the younger ones were probably more challenging than any tasks they had previously experienced in their short lives. I became accustomed to seeing tears well up in their eyes. "No, no, no," I learned to caution. "We can do this! Let's back up and think things through." I began to develop a series of mantras that we stopped to chant when the going got tough. Some of the chants went like this:

Do we have to do everything perfectly?

No, we don't have to do everything perfectly every time.

Is it OK to make mistakes when we are learning something new?

Yes, it is OK to make mistakes.

Are we capable learners?

Yes, we are capable learners but we don't know everything.

This was my way of counteracting the negative aspects of effusive praise in early years which lead to a feeling of high anxiety whenever a new challenge was encountered. My goal was to toughen up these little geniuses and to teach them that learning was a process to be worked through.

Unfortunately I had to learn this at a much more serious level as a mom. My younger son, as I have previously mentioned, was an extremely high-achieving student. His accomplishments were legendary in our neighborhood. In his junior year of high school, he was number one in his class when his high school was listed as the number one high school in American in a national magazine. What mother would not take pride in that? But in his senior year, he experienced difficulty in his calculus class, and it seemed that he was going to get a C on his report card. This was very troubling for a straight A student with his eye on some very prestigious scholarships. One day I found him writhing on the floor in agony. He said that his life was over and that I would not love him any more now that he did not get all A's. At the time I thought he was kidding, but it did not turn out to be the least bit funny. The anxiety he felt over his difficulties with calculus lead him into deep depression. He did not attend school for several weeks. With much support from his teachers and counselors, he did finish the year, graduate from high school, and go on to college. In a few weeks, however, he dropped out of college. The school psychologist convinced him to seek counseling. It took over ten years for him to graduate from college as his feelings of anxiety often overwhelmed him. Setting unrealistic expectations for himself is still a problem, and he has yet to find a productive way to channel his many outstanding talents and abilities.

Mental health issues confront people of every level of society. I battled anxiety and depression in my mid-twenties when I found myself in a difficult teaching situation. Nausea and insomnia caused me to lose a great deal of weight and at midyear I requested a leave of absence. Fortunately, I gained insight into the unreasonably high expectations I burdened myself with, and within a year I had regained my equilibrium and self-confidence. I could conclude that the difficulties my son and I encountered were largely genetic. But unfortunately, my son is not the only gifted young person I know who has encountered very serious mental health issues. While the staff at my son's high school could not have been more supportive, they did admit that it was not unusual for a few students each year to "hit the wall". The son of my best friend was also a National Merit scholar. He enrolled one of our nation's most esteemed universities. He, too, dropped out after a few weeks feeling totally despondent. He spent a year on the couch and in counseling and fortunately returned to college and is a successful scientist today.

At the depths of our self-doubt, anxiety, and depression, both of these boys and I contemplated suicide. When life is good, it is hard to imagine feeling such pain that ending life seems to be a desirable solution. Unfortunately, I am acquainted with many other families who have an intellectually gifted member who has serious mental health issues or is unable to find a productive role in society.

Does being labeled "gifted" add to the complexity of finding out who you are and how to be successful in the world? In many states, the gifted programs are less formalized than they are in Florida. Students are encouraged to participate in enrichment programs for the talented with less stringent entrance requirements. I pursued this notion with some leaders of gifted education in my state. Do we have to label our intellectually bright children as "gifted?" After all, people exhibit gifts in many areas of endeavor. I was assured that the rigors of our eligibility requirements were necessary to make sure the exceptional student education funding was reserved for high IQ students so that they would be afforded the opportunity for an appropriately differentiated curriculum. It was pointed out that the procedures made sure the funds could not be channeled towards someone else's definition of giftedness…such as prowess on the athletic field. Hmmm???? I was not then nor am I now convinced that labeling a child "gifted" is a prerequisite for funding an appropriate learning program. I continue to worry that this label may contribute to setting unrealistic expectations for success that may have harmful consequences.

Fortunately gifted education does not only present pickles. Growing up gifted has many obvious advantages and pleasures. My family experienced many academic and personal achievements that we savor. There is one aspect of gifted education that benefited us greatly. It was not at all a

pickle…more of a unique wrinkle. Many of the students I had in my gifted classes at the sixth grade center eventually became classmates of my sons at the college prep magnet high school they all attended. Some of my former students teased my sons about the "corny" Spanish songs I made them sing in my class. In response to this good natured teasing—perhaps a most unique form of teenage rebellion—my sons wanted nothing to do with Spanish and chose to study German as their foreign language. A few years later we had the opportunity to host a foreign student, and we chose a young man from Hanover, Germany so that the boys could practice their language skills. Greater proficiency with German did not occur, as our guest was determined to perfect his fluency with English. But this beautiful and brilliant young man was a perfect match for us and we for him. We still frequently talk on the phone. I refer to him as my third son. I enjoy a rapport with him that is companionable and often beyond what I encounter with my own sons. Both he and my elder son are successful lawyers. The boys manage to cross the Atlantic one way or the other almost every year as their brotherly affection is great. Once again, truth is stranger than fiction. Who could predict such a wonderful consequence from singing "*Alla en el rancho grande?"*

During one of the last courses in my doctoral studies, I attended a Saturday seminar on leadership. The president of the university and the dean of the school of education—both women—spoke about their leadership styles, their visions for their respective roles, and their personal goals and career experiences. For weeks after that class, I indulged in a personal pickle of self pity. I had not set high enough goals for myself. I had so much potential that I had not cultivated. I had wasted my talent. Yada, yada. Finally I snapped out of this unproductive "slough of Despond" when I acknowledged that I was discounting how much I loved being a teacher. I could probably have been a professor or a college administrator, but I never tired of being an elementary educator. The personal satisfaction one gets from a career needs to be considered when making choices and setting goals. It is appropriate that gifted students are encouraged to achieve academic success, apply to the best colleges, and prepare for prestigious careers. Somewhere in their striving, I hope they are also encouraged to factor in the personal gratification they are likely to receive from the choices they make.

My personal reflections on gifted education have included the many pleasures and positive aspects as well as the pickles I have encountered. As educators and parents and grandparents of gifted children, we all reflect on how to encourage and guide these special children. As leaders, we need to inform ourselves about what programs and policies are in their best interests and endeavor to see that they are carried out in our homes and schools. During the many years I reflected on the emotional problems my son and I encountered, I mused over two troubling pickles. First, I did not see the breakdowns coming. And, second, and more troubling, I have never thought of any significant thing I would have done differently in my own life or in being a

Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle Received From a Friend Called Felicity

During that summer
When unicorns were still possible;
When the purpose of knees
Was to be skinned;
When shiny horse chestnuts
(Hollowed out
Filled with straw
Crammed with tobacco
Stolen from Butts
In family ashtrays)
Were puffed in green lizard silence
While straddling thick branches
Far above and away
From the softening effects
Of civilization;

During that summer—
Which may never have been at all;
But which has become more real
Than the one that was—
Watermelons ruled,
Thick pink imperial slices
Melting frigidly on sun-parched tongues
Dribbling from chins;
Leaving the best part,
The black bullet seeds,
To be spit out in rapid fire
Against the wall
Against the wind
Against each other;

And when the ammunition was spent,
There was always another bite:
It was a summer of limitless bites,
Of hungers quickly felt
And quickly forgotten
With the next careless gorging.

The bites are fewer now,
Each one is savored lingeringly,
Swallowed reluctantly.

But in a jar put up by Felicity,
The summer which may be never was
Has been captured and preserved
And when we unscrew the lid
And slice off a piece
And let it linger on our tongue:
Unicorns become possible again.

John Tobias

parent. I am, however, encouraged by several current realities. In recent decades, the stigma for getting mental health counseling has lessened. The daughter of the friend I previously mentioned has already provided professional counseling for her gifted eight-year-old to help him deal with his anxieties. The many ads on television for medications that treat depression provide information that help is available and that depression occurs in many people's lives.

Lately the media has been kinder to intellectually gifted youth. I was enlightened and amused to read not too long ago in an entertainment magazine that being a geek was *in!* They listed such stars as Topher Grace and Tobey Maguire as geeks and very hot properties. The mega-hit *High School Musical* trilogy spotlights the theme of respecting diverse talents in yourself and in others. One of the characters, called a brainiac, is extolled for being a brain *and* a cool dancer. Perhaps the world is a bit kinder and gentler place to be a gifted child today? That would make our task of guiding and educating them easier, but when they find themselves in a pickle, they will continue to need our support and counsel. In sharing my reflections, my hope is that others may benefit from my observations by pondering the nuances presented in the pickles and pleasures I have experienced in gifted education.

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ADVOCACY: ACTIVELY SUPPORTING YOUR GIFTED CHILD OR STUDENT

By Kathryn P. Haydon

Raising a gifted child is no small task, and we are often instructed to "advocate" for our own children and for the cause of gifted children. We want to do this because we desire that our children have every opportunity to grow, learn, and develop to their full potential. But what does "advocacy" actually mean, and what are we to do about it as parents?

One definition of advocacy is "the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support." The words *advocate* and *advocacy* tend to evoke images of negotiating, demonstrating, writing newspaper editorials, and, in general, working to change the ways in which authority figures (or the public) interact with a particular group or view a certain issue.

Looking with a slightly different perspective at the definition of the term "advocacy," we might instead focus on the words "active support," which yields a significantly different perspective and begs a slightly different question: How do we *actively support* our gifted children?

Recently, I had a small lettuce plant in my garden that wasn't growing heartily. Examining the situation, I realized that the irrigation hose was bypassing that particular plant. I easily realigned the hose, but a few days later noticed that the little lettuce plant was looking even worse. "Maybe it is lacking nutrients," were my thoughts as I mixed some organic amendments into the soil. Well, a week later that sweet little lettuce plant still looked scrawny and crumpled, but it was hanging on. I'd already tried more water and nutrients, so I reasoned that maybe it could use more sun. It seemed like an impossible task to create more sunshine, until I realized that another quickly-growing plant had sprung up in the garden and was shading my little lettuce from getting its full share of the warm, daily sunshine. I promptly trimmed the errant plant, plucked the crinkled leaves from my lettuce, and a week later was in my kitchen making a salad for four.

It is well known and accepted that plants need plenty of sunshine, water, and nutritional soil to grow healthy and strong. In my case, there were a number of factors affecting the lettuce's stunted growth. I addressed all possible areas over time and eventually had a healthy lettuce. Similarly, children are expected to thrive in three different facets of their lives: school, home, and extracurricular. To advocate for our children, we must "actively support" them in all three areas, just as I advocated for my head of lettuce throughout its growth.

Valuing, Recognizing, and Supporting Child Interests

In my opinion, advocacy, or *active support*, begins at home and intertwines with and extends to school and extracurricular experiences. When a child is a tiny baby, its mother knows how to respond to its every need. Obviously, this parental wisdom continues to be relevant even when a child reaches school age. You, as a parent, know your child better than anyone does. You are the utmost authority on your child. Of course, you are open to input or suggestions. But more often than not, parents are the first adults to identify their children as gifted or talented.

Because the vast majority of school settings are not designed with gifted children in mind—especially in light of current policies concentrated on standardized testing and allocating resources for slow learners—it is your mandate to support your gifted child as much as possible. As earlier noted, this support begins at home.

One concept that has recently garnered attention in the field of gifted education is that of identifying children's interests and supporting them in multiple environments (at home, school, and outside of school). Del Siegle's article "The Importance of Recognizing Students' Interests" in the June 2009 edition of *Parenting for High Potential* is a timely exploration of this topic. He states, "Parents should not underestimate the important role they play in exposing their children to a variety of learning experiences or the importance of recognizing and encouraging their children's interests when they surface. However, parents and teachers sometimes focus on children's weaknesses, rather than their strengths and interests. . . Gifted education is about finding students' strengths and developing them." (PHP June 2009: 1)

The way very young gifted children learn is naturally interest-based. Take young Daniel, for example. When Daniel was not yet 2 years old, his daddy was preparing to sing Handel's *Messiah* in a choir concert. While listening to the CD of the music he was to sing, Daniel asked for him to put the "Halleluiah Chorus" on repeat time after time. He loved this piece of music! Finally, Daniel's daddy gave him the CD to play by himself in the CD player in his room. Daniel first figured out how to advance the disc so that the "Halleluiah Chorus" would play. He soon learned that the track he wanted was number 21, and every time the disc went into the play, he would punch the advance button through the numbers until it reached 21.

One day, the family purchased a new washing machine with the digital time counter located in front. When Daniel noticed the washing machine, he pointed at the 21 (minutes left in the cycle) and exclaimed, "Mommy, it is Halleluiah!!!!" From that moment on, Daniel looked for the number 21 everywhere. He especially began to watch the digital clock and was absolutely giddy with excitement any time it was 21 minutes after the hour.

Daniel's interest started with "Halleluiah Chorus" and became the number 21. You might think to yourself, "The number 21? What could he possibly learn from that?" Well, because he watched the clock, he quickly learned all of the numbers through 59. He developed a concept of time, a fascination with time, and learned how to tell time. His mother, a former second grade teacher, seized upon this opportune moment to buy him a plastic learning clock from a teacher's store which he took to immediately. He had an analog clock in his room, his own little plastic clock, and he learned to tell time on both at age 2. Daniel also looked for 21 in books. He learned that pages of books have numbers, and if it is long enough, there is a number 21. He was so interested in page numbers, that he even learned how to look at a short table of contents in his *Frog and Toad* books, select the particular story he wanted to read, and locate the page for his parents. This high interest in numbers provided a foundation for learning numbers everywhere and of all sorts, counting 21 things, doing 21 jumps, and even moving on to 3-digit numbers by the age of 3.

Daniel's parents recognized his interest (first *Halleluiah,* then 21), provided him with materials and opportunities to support his interest (clocks, opportunities with numbers), and rejoiced with Daniel each time he saw the number 21 because it made him light up with excitement and joy in learning. What if every child – and every gifted child - got this invaluable *active support* at home, throughout his life? Wouldn't it be wonderful to watch our children learn, driven by wonder and a true love of learning?

The Home-School Connection

In the autumn of his third year, Daniel went to preschool. He still enjoyed numbers, but now his most exciting interest was writing letters and spelling words. He was typically gifted and not one to follow the crowd or conform right away to school customs and procedures. Without knowing the Daniel's background, strengths, and interests, the teachers might have tended to think of him as an obstinate child unwilling to participate in group activities. The parents spoke with the teachers about Daniel's self-directed learning and his preference at this young age for one-on-one interactions with adults and children. They also shared Daniel's particular interests, so that teachers might leverage them to draw Daniel into the learning process. The parents report that the teachers have responded supportively and that Daniel is thriving in preschool.

But, you ask, what about older children? What about my bright but underachieving fourth-grader? Del Siegel writes in his excellent article, ". . .We have found that we were best able to improve students' grades when we increased the perceived meaningfulness of school. We did this by identifying students' interests and connecting these interests to their school experiences, as well as by determining what students valued and connecting those things to their school experiences." (PHP June 2009:1)

Recently, I talked with a parent of a child who exemplifies characteristics of a highly gifted child. By 18 months, this child had memorized the names of over 25 species of birds from an Audubon bird guide, loved books, and was very sensitive to the natural world around her. School had been a joy until about 3rd grade, when the mother no longer heard eager reports about the day's work. Now, as a 5th-grader, the student is struggling to complete and turn in homework, and exhibits a lack of confidence in her intellectual ability, other than reading. Although testing in the highest percentile on state tests and achieving high grades on classroom math tests, she has a hard time completing homework, which the teacher admitted is usually a repetition of the day's classroom work.

This student came to me at Ignite Creative Learning Studio this fall, and I noted that she gravitated to high-level, spatial-reasoning, problem-solving activities. Thereafter, I gave her the opportunity to explore AIMS (Activities Integrating Math and Science) investigations, which lead to the discovery of mathematical microworlds, patterns, and algebraic concepts. We also studied fractals and explored ideas such as the Googolplex challenge from Ed and Luke Zaccaro's *Twenty-Five Real-Life Math Investigations that Will Astound Teachers and Students*. Finally, we found another highly gifted child with similar interests to participate in this work. This young student immediately responded to the individual and

partner work we were doing together. She never grumbled about coming to Ignite and, in fact, looked forward to the discoveries that we were making each week. We talked a bit about Albert Einstein's school experiences (See *Odd Boy Out* by Don Brown) and about being gifted and what it means. Just by pinpointing her interests, providing her the opportunity to use and enjoy them, and rejoicing in her discoveries and talents, this child was transformed before my eyes.

The child about whom I write is creatively gifted. Her particular school setting rewards skill-based learning: learn a skill and prove that you know it. This child is highly gifted in pattern discovery and divergent thinking. After years of placement in a rote setting and no identification as gifted (she did not qualify for GATE because she didn't pass the non-verbal identification test), this very smart and capable child has developed a negative self-image, mainly because her talents are neither recognized nor rewarded within the system. She is smart enough to get by without extra attention from overworked teachers with large classes and, with her exceptional marks on standardized tests, doesn't appear to need anything more. But increasingly, the child was tuning out her learning environment, taking refuge in books, secure in the knowledge that she *had* been called a "gifted reader" repeatedly throughout her life. "Well," she seemed to reason, "I may not be good at school, but I am good at reading and I learn more from my book than from my teachers. Thus, I will read."

We did speak with the classroom teacher and the principal, who came up with an opportunity to put this child's skills to use outside the classroom with other students. The classroom teacher, however, was not open to making a significant adjustment to the child's needs and learning style. We knew from this conversation that we would have to address the core of the problem at home and outside school hours, at least this year. Next year we can try again with a new teacher and a new perspective.

For the home *active support* piece, we discovered that the child needs more one-on-one time with his individual parents. This is a busy, multiple-child household, and the parents are making a concerted effort to provide the child with one-on-one experiences that tap into the child's interests (especially science and how the world works). She also seems to need a quiet space to be alone at times, which has been arranged, as well as a friend to keep her on task while completing her homework.

What You Can Do

As you explore ways to actively support your gifted child, here are some points to keep in mind:

1. Work to understand your child. Read books about gifted children and identify where your child fails to match up with various descriptions of gifted children. Is she creatively gifted? A high achiever? A perfectionist or an underachiever?
2. Develop a portfolio of your child's strengths and interests. This helps you to see his or her talents and strengths accurately and gives you tangible evidence to present to others when exploring extracurricular opportunities for your child, both at home and in the community.
3. Use your knowledge of your child's interests and strengths to help choose the home and extracurricular activities in which he or she is involved. Does your child love to write? Find a creative writing class or a writing mentor. Does she love science? Enroll her in an outside science class or find a scientist or science teacher to be a mentor. Perhaps there is a local museum that would welcome volunteers. Don't make your tennis-loving child play soccer because you were the greatest soccer player in your high school; let him follow his own passions and develop his own identity.
4. Think about the patterns, activities, culture, and set-up of your home. Does your child have a special, quiet place to be creative, or a desk or table for doing artwork or writing? Does he or she get adequate one-on-one time with you or your spouse (or a grandparent or aunt or uncle)? Are there any available books or materials to further support the activities your child loves doing at home?
5. Understand the needs of gifted students, and how your child's needs fit within these characteristics.
6. Create collaborative working relationships with your child's teachers from day one. Try to meet with them before school starts. Volunteer in the classroom to witness firsthand how the class is run and how your child responds. Don't be afraid to talk to the teacher.

Whether your child is thriving, or not, always keep in mind the idea of advocacy as *active support* at home, school, and through extracurricular activities. Think about gardening, and how you might address various factors – the light, water intake, or soil nutrients – in order to improve a plant's growing conditions. Finally, love your child and enjoy his or her ever-changing interests. Your *active support* of these interests is an exciting adventure that can bring freshness and joy to the family dynamic, and provide new opportunities for mutual exploration.

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ADVOCACY 'ROUND THE BEND

By David Zethmayr and Christine E. Zethmayr

For this year's zeitschrift, we take up advocacy for the gifted. That is, the young, identified gifted. Indeed, those advocating for the gifted labor like Sisyphus. You know him well: the rock punishment. Roll the rock nearly to the top of the hill and it slips out of your grasp.

"A program for gifted? We don't even have budget for essentials." What are these essentials of education that can't be cut? Is there some CYA-certified list for success, to preserve us while we whittle "non-essentials" to save money? Did the antique Greeks put music among their essentials simply because they had no laptops?

Cut the music program to save money. Cut the art program to save money. Cut the gifted program to save money. Cut the only bright spot in a day of frustrated disjointedness for a gifted, different-acting, misunderstood, soon-to-be adult. That student is part of a small enough minority to ignore without political fallout, and he'll be out of school soon enough.

Ah, but cut extramural sports? Tell me: what would happen if the schools in a community cut basketball or football (except within gym class)? Of course, it's an almost unimaginable thought, but indulge me; carry the idea through to its inevitable conclusion. Not a week would go by without parents organizing to keep the sports program going. Why? The answer might lie in sheer numbers: The participation of so many more kids—athletes, cheerleaders, marching band, fans, the school newspaper, radio, TV—likely results in a proportionately greater awareness and investment by the community at large. But when is too much literally too much? Isn't it time for us to think about shifting the "playing field," in terms of competition for educational resources?

Those of us fortunate enough to have come through a school with an active music program, gifted or not, feel at a deep level how much it enhanced our learning. I come from a highly unusual grade-school-high-school complex, a place where support for music has been a stable community value for generations, where music is accepted as an essential of education. Both private teachers and school faculty provide a valuable network of mentorship for young students. But if school arts funding were cut for even a year or two, how many years would it take to rebuild it?

Here are a few relevant and challenging questions for education policy makers to consider: What is your test for the value of a particular program to a learning community? Can it be as simple as counting participants, or identifying populations to target, or populations to devalue? On whose behalf are you forming policy? For constituents, as countable voting blocs, or for the community as a whole? Thinking holistically is not nearly as easy as counting votes. But it's the difference between a near-term bottom line and a long-range future.

Now, I'm not claiming that setting priorities is easy. If it were, maybe I'd try it instead of programming, math, music, storytelling and writing. If you are in a policymaking position and have achieved a holistic vision for your learning community beyond "constituencies," you have a huge leadership task before you that is worth the investment of a liftime. What are you saving it for, anyway—the Big One? Here's the Big One: to turn people's attention outward from their narrow interests and entertainment boxes, out towards the unpredictable marvels they might see and come to cherish in the rest of—what? Their community?

But that, of course, rests on whether a "their community" can be seen. Does it even exist? This is a real concern when people are in the midst of profound change. People in fear have difficulty seeing community.

Real communities have always had a mixed sort of existence anyway. At one extreme, there are people nominally "in" a community who never see beyond themselves. And then there are leaders who seem to be among a very few blessed with a community vision. It is the faithfulness of that small number that educates and actually creates community.

"Advocating for" is the definitive theme here. But let me suggest that "advocating with" is even more important. When we speak up for students, and for them, they need to see that we're really doing it—effectively advocating for their best possible learning environment.

However, there's an effect that can make it difficult for them to see our efforts. When you lose on a funding or policy issue, when the rock once again escapes Sisyphus and rolls back down the hill of Hades, it is emotionally difficult to explain the defeat. And, understandably, sharing your disappointment with those you are bound to protect often engenders a kind of anger that weakens and demoralizes. Perhaps, however, sharing a defeat is more deeply edifying than the exhilaration of a rare triumph.

If our children watch us persevere through multiple setbacks, they may finally learn what perseverance is and how it deepens us. Is there a more important lesson? (Naming two would be a good exercise.) But when we hide defeat from them, who will give the lesson? In any case, they are watching us—we have no choice about that. The only choice we have is what we do.

And what can we do? My wife Christine will offer suggestions in a section to follow.

Regretfully, I can't claim full membership in the small virtual NGO, "Advocates for the Gifted Sans Frontieres." However, I have standing enough to urge at least one idea: Triumphs need not be large, nor widely recognized.

My own gifted children each experienced a different mix of home-schooling, and sometimes endured deeply disheartening episodes with the same public school establishment that could never figure out what to do with their father. Each of their five stories was different, with differing degrees of pain. Joan Franklin Smutny, now an old friend, was a new friend in that era, and a crucial assurance of hope to the

shaky morale of a young, angry, often hopeless parent.

Since becoming a certified teacher or a public figure in education was not my path, my advocacy for the gifted has been more diffuse, haphazard, anecdotal, and above all, late—late, since my encounters of the advocacy kind have been mostly with gifted adults who never had advocates during their years of official "education." My interventions have been small; the influence on the great education machine, nil.

Nil so far, that is. However, I have in mind a significant change in primary math education that I'm beginning to pursue. You can use the Grabmonster(TM) books on the simplest math in the world, free for the downloading at http://yyGrams.com, and use disappearance calculus to improve the math curriculum.

My interventions for gifted individuals have been small, but priceless and meaningful to me. I remember so vividly the pair of brothers from Thailand who visited one day in my Center for Gifted summer class. They came with apparently no English at all, but with a fund of energetic, electrifying curiosity. The quickest language-independent activity at hand was a copy of one of the Bekuzzles(TM) I had invented during that year. It was called "Find the Hat:" nine square cards in two identical sets, rubber-stamped in four pairs with animals—giraffe, gorilla, whatever I found at the craft store—and the odd card with my drawing of a safari-style pith-helmet. I seated the boys opposite each other at the end of a table, stood a large book up, open, between them, then put one set of cards, jumbled, before one boy. In sight of both, I assembled the other set into a solid square, quickly slid the square "behind" the book-wall for the one, "in front of" the book for the other, then stepped back to watch. The lightning exchange of question-and-answer soon gathered a crowd of home-field spectators. As quickly as each boy found the hat, they exchanged roles and began another round, teaching us all a rare and valuable lesson about language.

Another dynamic interaction involved a long-haired, "angry-rock" musician, who tentatively joined the a cappella choir I directed at his church. He told me, "People pay me to scream at them." I didn't learn until some years later how doubtful of acceptance he had been, what courage it had taken to persist, and how delicate my task. I knew, of course, that he was not reading the music, relying rather on a gifted but half-trained ear and a well-cultivated memory. He knew, of course, that I knew, and that made the situation all the more nuanced. But he persevered, and it became a great, quiet triumph for the both of us as his gift flowered. However, almost no one else understood either his risk or his achievement.

And then there was the crypto-gifted gypsy, who invented a successful, tire repair system. He was no great reader—he couldn't read at all, in fact. He depended on his daughter for any reading he found essential. His giftedness moved in quite another direction. Like many U.S. gypsies, he made a living spreading tar on roofs and driveways. Yet that activity set sparked his imagination, which led to his invention. He knew he needed a patent. Like many budding inventors, he didn't know exactly what a patent is, nor did he understand anything about the essential transaction between a patent petitioner and a government. But he, his daughter, and I persevered through three very difficult meetings, discussing those very essentials, before agreeing that his essential part in the process involved full disclosure. Only then was he able to trust me enough to make that full disclosure, although I was his consultant! When his patent was granted, the triumph was quiet and gratifying, but not widely known.

There's a phrase in a half-remembered hymn that can help us survive and persevere during our more stressful or under-appreciated moments of advocacy: "counting gain but loss." I take it to mean, "Don't worry about looking back to measure success, because there's always more struggle ahead, and it is the struggle itself that is finally the gain."

This is the final note I want to sound: You can't score or grade yourself anyway, you "Advocats Sans Frontieres." The changes you seek require individual leaps of consciousness by the hundreds before comparatively few policy changes can ever occur. In the long run, your task of advocacy boils down to simple, faithful, persistent example, rather than brilliant publicity. The long run is the only run that counts. Your steady, firm example of speaking up and speaking out, persistently, faithfully, for the real needs of children, is what changes hearts.

Never mind the minds. The minds change later. Like any good and genuine leader, the heart lets the mind assume it is doing the leading. The task is so much bigger than even your strongest efforts, that any present-time evaluation you try to do will inevitably be a distortion in the wrong direction, the direction of despair and cynicism. Take Winston Churchill's banner: "Never, never, never give up!" And I dare to add, "You don't know enough!"

David Zathmayr

Another View from the Back Seat

David and I are distinctly different in our approaches to advocacy. He has devoted his life to the gifted people he has met in every part of that life. He is spontaneous, creative, gifted himself and disorganized. I am organized in spite of the chaos that has been my life, at the cost of spontaneity and creativity. So, I have the degrees in education and business administration. My giftedness has been in practical survival on the fringes of society, rather than in the development of that society's institutions. I spent two years in Appalachia during the 1972 recession as a teacher's aid in a regional child development center for multiply-handicapped preschool kids. I got a seat on the 50 yard line of economics vs. advocacy.

I learned there that "Who's more at risk?" and "Who is more valuable?" is a divisive model that produces a no-win situation for everyone. There has to be another way to conceive of the problem that does not pit one deserving kid against all the others. Otherwise, we all lose.

Being married to David has exposed me to more issues in mathematics and computer software design than I would ever have wanted. It has led me down some interesting black rabbit holes I would never have otherwise investigated. Eric Raymond's *Cathedral and the Bazaar* (1999) was a game changer for software that also characterized the crest of the wave that was sweeping the beach of our homes, jobs, schools and philanthropically-dependent institutions. I realized that

my corporate-structured mindset had become obsolete. The supports for the cumbersome structures represented by my initials, B.S. in Ed., and M.B.A., had rotted away with the end of the millennium. Most of the world still runs on Windows, but the future belongs to Open Source Software.

Since I've been in Juneau County, Wisconsin, I've been attending the Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club, not because I am either but rather because I am married to a gifted person who invents something all the time. Every month I sit on the 50 yard line of innovation vs. stagnation with my degrees and my life experience with differently gifted people who cannot find a way to "make it" in the culture I inherited from the 1950's. Juneau County is sparsely populated and underdeveloped, making the quorum of gifted students a *minyan* of one. It is a crucible for finding out what works in adverse conditions. Now that the economy has gone out with the hand basket, the native rural culture is hunkering down to its traditional subsistence roots.

Our global economy is going around an epochal bend that will impact our century-old, centrally-planned educational systems and the philanthropic systems that have augmented them. Even when the current recession fades back into another jobless recovery, corporations will not be hiring full time workers with health care, educational benefits and 401K's. The new jobs will not pay enough to cover huge student loans, private health insurance and living expenses. The cathedrals will be abandoned for the chaos and squalor of the bazaar. Our gifted children will be socially networked on line with gifted children all over the world and when they travel it will be to visit them on other continents, not just downstate. They will be creating their own self-employment, seeking out needed resources and support for basic human needs and their life's work.

Their world shares music, movies and culture below the copyright controlled radar. They spend hours developing things that are given away to further their culture. Their encyclopedia is free, on line, not sold door-to-door. The goods and services we imagine they will supply and use are already irrelevant to them. Our ideas about how to support our gifted children have been conditioned by the America we have known from 1960-2000 and are not sustainable or scalable to the global village.

The non-profit models that depend on volunteers and donations are suffering in the current recession and are being cut back. Studies are showing that people are putting their resources into networks of friends and neighbors. When the recovery begins to dawn, the projections are not for a post-World War II euphoria that will lift all boats on a rising tide, but rather for an uneven distribution of success and growth with deep pockets of shipwrecked populations.

In this new world, the medieval cathedral builders who spent their lives designing more and more efficient and effective ways to support gifted children will be giving the gifted kids the chance to design their own support systems that do so in ways they find useful. We end up giving up our position as chairman to become coach. The bazaar is a chaos of small, bright ideas, some substantial, some ephemeral, put together by young garage bands of kids using the waste and the resources ignored by the cathedral builders.

David Bornstein's *How to Change the World*_(2007) discusses the development of Ashoka, a social entrepreneurial network that has been linked with micro credit, health and education reform and rural electrification in the developing world. Now, it has developed a template, Youth Ventures®, that can be used to give gifted kids a leg up and teach them how to lift their differently-gifted peers at the same time. They do not need to squabble over who is more deserving. They can figure out how they can all get the support they know how to use, with the help of what Youth Ventures calls "allies." These helpers do none of the work, make none of the decisions, fund none of the projects. They are disinterested parties whose job it is to supply help that is requested.

The critical discovery of the new social entrepreneurial movement is that the young people of the community are the most effective leaders in causing change in the way things are done. They must be empowered to set up their own kinds of organizations to solve the problems they identify in their own terms. Philanthropy will not die in this recession, but it will become much less rule-bound and far more savvy about effectiveness. Ashoka Fellowships and Youth Ventures are chalking up a track record for templates that work across cultures and around the world. Advocacy would be clueless if it did not include them in its toolkit.

These organizations have very good on-line resources. Begin with info@youthventures.org.

Christine E. Zethmayr

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EMERGENCE OF THE GIFTED CHILD: COPING STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

By Tara R. Lenga

Introduction

Navigating the day-to-day challenges of raising and educating gifted children should not feel like rocket science. A parent's or educator's greatest challenge may arise when a child's ever-increasing need for learning is combined with his or her emotional intensity. Useful strategies can be put into action to reduce the related stresses that delay the joy that comes from cultivating and enriching even our youngest emerging minds.

Developing an age-appropriate foundation for learning is a common strategy, but not a simple task when applying it to the very young and gifted. By taking a whole, seemingly difficult concept and breaking it down into smaller, more manageable parts, one can successfully build a foundation for continued learning even at this very young and tender age. A *pacing* approach allows the young and gifted child to assimilate newly acquired, complex information without overloading his or her mind. In other words, it helps to reduce and remove the complication of intense emotion that a child often experiences during a learning process.

There is no need to squash the enthusiasm of learning, due to perceived age constraints.

I have become passionate about finding, incorporating, and sharing strategies that are helpful within the developmental framework of preschool-aged gifted children. While raising my own gifted child, I discovered ample literature describing the characteristics that were being observed. There were many broad suggestions for pre-adolescent children and teenagers, yet only limited, difficult-to-find information applicable to toddlers and children of preschool age.

As a Strategy Consultant for families for over 15 years, I have had the opportunity to specialize in the development and implementation of strategies for children with various levels of learning ability. Although I have obtained my degree in early Child Development and completed my Masters in Art Therapy, I was not formally introduced to the realm of gifted children until my first daughter was born.

Over time, I noticed that the principles and strategies applied in my professional experiences were in large part useful with the gifted child. Recognizing and understanding gifted characteristics early will allow one to take certain steps to help reduce frustrations and other intense emotions that preschool-aged gifted children often feel when confronted with change.

Personal Journey

With hindsight, I now realize that there were early signs indicating the emergence of a gifted child in my family. Even by my daughter's first birthday, I noticed that she was interpreting the world around her differently from her peers. Her intensity, her need for interpretation, even her ability and approach to processing information were all different. I did not, however, truly understand what I was noticing until she was formally identified as gifted a few years later. It is my hope that the description of our personal journey will help you to successfully navigate your own early stages of gifted development.

By eighteen months, my daughter had developed her first fascination, which was *Thomas the Tank Engine*. She would sit and play with her trains for hours. She would also study the Thomas shopping catalogues that would come in the mail. By her second birthday, it was becoming increasingly clear that her long-term memory skills had become extraordinary. From then on, she continued to do things that made her stand out from her peers, such as:

- she bit off the top of a triangle-shaped pizza slice and declared that she had made a trapezoid.
- she asked for a particular song in the car by its track number, as well as rattled off, in order, the titles on her favorite CDs.
- she exhibited her good sense of direction and awareness of the rules of the road, becoming a miniature backseat driver.

Her intellectual growth was all at once both amazing and exhausting. She had an intense need to understand what she did not yet understand and her ability to retain information was seemingly immeasurable.

As I had done as a private strategy consultant for families of children with various learning disabilities, I began to apply the same coping strategies into our own daily lives. By creating an atmosphere that nurtured and supported my daughter's unique and ever-emerging needs, I was teaching her how to navigate in an environment that was becoming less accommodating of her accelerated development. These skills were introduced in small, incremental components that I like to call "Baby Steps." These Baby Steps were slowly incorporated into her daily activities and helped lay the groundwork for future, smoother transitions.

The earlier in a child's life that Baby Steps are introduced, the less anxiety the gifted child feels with each new encounter—be it social, emotional, or scholastic. I am a true proponent of this Baby Steps model. Whether it is adjusting a particular behavior or teaching something new, the process of breaking a concept down into smaller, more manageable parts helps reduce the frustrations that many of our gifted children experience. This holds especially true for emotionally sensitive children. It also allows for the child to redirect an intense focus on something more controllable in size than the larger whole.

By my daughter's third birthday, she had become increasingly linear in her thinking: Things had to be factual in their meaning and she was unable to see the humor when the context changed. Perfectionism was starting to take a serious

hold on our lives and we privately acknowledged that she had some remarkable abilities that needed further understanding.

Finding information on school-aged gifted children was not difficult. There were some good resources identifying gifted characteristics (e.g. Alvino, 1985), looking at social/emotional issues (e.g. Delisle 2002, Silverman 1993, Webb 2007), and on modifications to school environments for the school-aged child, adolescent and teenager (e.g. Winebrenner, 2001). Finding information on gifted preschoolers, however, was very difficult, especially coping strategies. Few resources were available (e.g. Alvino, 1989). The difficulty was in the reliability of identifying a child as gifted before six years of age, as outlined by gifted-talented professionals in a Davidson Institute for Talent Development article (2004). This has resulted in too little information on appropriate coping strategies for young gifted learners, strategies that both parents and educators need to understand.

Perhaps if there were more resources focused on the preschool population, some of their counter-productive behaviors would not be as pronounced later on. Uninhibited learning would be a lot more fun if parents and educators could put some coping strategies in place before our gifted children enter school.

The academic in me started collecting and arranging information from my undergraduate and graduate studies, and from my new research into academic literature on gifted children. This, combined with my consulting and personal experiences, brought me to a comfortable place, allowing me to successfully develop appropriate coping strategies for gifted preschool-aged children.

Coping With Perfectionism

When preschool-aged toddlers are increasingly thinking in rigid ways, the familiar "one-track mind," what coping skills can parents and educators learn and impart to help them through this frustrating phase of development? Pointing out our own imperfections is always a great way to introduce the valuable lesson that even the greatest role models are not perfect. Additionally, by incorporating specific skills, we are teaching these children to become more flexible, which will enable them to better enjoy their youth.

Desensitizing a Behavior

At eighteen months, when my daughter discovered *Thomas* trains, she was very clear on which characters were and were not trains. There were helicopters, tractors and, of course, *Bertie the Bus*. On her train-table, *Bertie the Bus* was not allowed to ride the railroad tracks. He was a bus, not a train, and if she found him on those tracks, she would become very aggravated.

Even at this early age, it was important to desensitize her to this inflexible way of thinking. Yes, it is true, a bus should not be riding the rails. Yet, it is also true that *Bertie the Bus* was just a toy. I felt she could not begin to successfully use her imagination if she did not allow herself to stretch the truth through play. Therefore, while trying to respect her understanding of the different modes of transportation, *Bertie the Bus* would purposefully find himself relocated to places a bus would not ordinarily be found. It did upset her at first, but eventually the strategy bore fruit as she came to appreciate the amusement odd locations could bring. Although this strategy – intentionally upsetting the child – may seem inappropriate, such strategies merely help reduce perpetuating behaviors that could become more intense in the future and interrupt the flow of learning. Being able to see the humor in something is an important gift you can give to any child.

Finding Parts to Make the Whole

As part of a child's overall development, there are a number of complex developmental stages that are necessary. Fine motor skills are one such area. Within the stages of motor skill development also lies the developmental stages for drawing (Kellogg and O'Dell, 1967). As children grow and gain strength and confidence, they learn to better represent on paper what they perceive (Kellogg and O'Dell, 1967). The fine motor skills of gifted preschoolers often develop slower than their comprehension. The National Association of Gifted Children defines this imbalance as asynchrony, which "describes disparate rates of intellectual, emotional, and physical rates of growth or development often displayed by gifted children." As gifted children gain more ground in their intellectual abilities, asynchrony becomes increasingly apparent. Children may show great frustration when they are physically unable to complete a drawing task, that they know intellectually how to complete.

When my daughter wanted to learn to print her name using a Magnadoodle, she would begin to print her name and then erase it after the first or second letter – every time. It appeared as though she was quitting or giving up, that she was not following through with finishing a task. I soon realized, however, that she was trying to get it to look "just right." How would she ever finish printing her name if she was never satisfied with the first few letters?

Art Therapy teaches that the individual components of a picture may be just as important as the order in which one draws them. Yet those individual components cannot be drawn unless one is given the opportunity to see and practice them, as discussed by Silver (1978) in her book, *Developing Cognitive and Creative Skills Through Art*. Following this philosophy, I began to teach my daughter the individual "parts" of her name.

By helping my daughter break down the letters of her name into smaller parts, she was able to concentrate on the individual components that made up each letter. This strategy resulted in her successful formation of the entire letter. After she mastered one segment of a letter, the next segment was then added with the goal of stringing them all together to form the complete letter. This approach of "small parts make up the whole" worked very well for this exercise.

Encouraging Creativity

Perfectionism and its tendency to stifle childhood creativity prove the on-going need to break down those

mental barriers that prevent creativity from flourishing. For many of our young gifted children, once they master a template or design, they will not reproduce it in any other way. As creative as this tried-and-true design may be, using it exclusively does not foster the development of creativity. One of many examples that I have is the construction of a castle out of blocks my daughter would build. Every castle constructed had to be the same size, with the same arrangement of colored blocks – only four spires of the same shape, just two windows, and only one door.

It was not fancy, but she loved it, and it was identical every time. Should I encourage her to try a new design knowing that it might become "traumatic?" Should I use an approach that might be intentionally upsetting? Yes, although I knew that it needed to be done in a careful, slow, and respectful manner. Not only did I feel that she needed the practice of getting upset and working through her discomfort, but she also needed to work on altering her ideas and expanding her self-imposed limitations. The strategy was to come up with various adventures that would take place at her castle – requiring the castle design to be modified within the framework of the adventure.

In one adventure, horses needed to *enter* the castle. How was that going to happen with one door that was only big enough for a little toy person? After brainstorming some possible solutions, appropriate modifications were then made to accommodate the horse entering the castle.

By following this strategy, just one piece of this favorite castle design changed: a long, triangular block, creating a ramp to accommodate the horse replaced the square door block. It is much easier to tolerate one small change than to force the issue of an entirely new castle design. Encouraging change is so very important to the overall development of our gifted children.

Simplify Complicated Concepts

Asynchronous Development also occurs when children are driven to learn something new, but do not possess the necessary vocabulary or life experiences to fully comprehend the new concept. One approach is to hold off exploring new and more advanced ideas until they are older. While this approach seems logical, presenting things in an age-appropriate verbal and emotional format not only helps satisfy their insatiable appetite to learn, but also broadens their horizons. Even the most difficult of concepts can be broken down into smaller, more manageable parts.

A Passion For Flags

At two-and-a-half years old, my daughter developed a passion for national flags from around the world. She loved their colors and different patterns. Already understanding the concept of the globe and the continents containing different countries, she had an established foundation on which to build. I could have just taken a book on flags out of the library and looked at the pictures with her. Instead, I seized the opportunity to turn this new fascination into a tangible activity. I purchased a sticker book of world flags and a set of flash cards. Planning to put one flag sticker on each card, I looked through the sticker book to decide how to maximize the learning potential from this new-found interest.

I felt the best approach was to create that first group of flash cards, using flags that initially sparked her interest. This helped to establish a format for introducing new countries. Then I began building on this foundation by adding countries whose flags looked different from each other. Although the flag emblems themselves were not "simple," the approach to simplifying this activity into manageable parts was what I was striving to achieve. For this stage of "simplifying a complicated concept," I was taking those flags with varying attributes to make them as visually distinctive as possible.

The next step was to add countries that were different from one another, but had visually identifiable shapes such as flowers, triangles, and circles. Shapes are an easily understood concept for children. And so it went. If I had chosen countries that had similar, simpler attributes, her level of frustration would have increased and stopped her from proceeding.

This excitement and fascination with flags lasted about six months before her interest waned. Can she remember all the different flags today? Some, but not all. Is that important? No. It interested her at the time and gave her a challenge that she apparently needed. It is important, though, to know when to stop. Preventing our children from burning out is an important responsibility we, as parents and educators, need to be aware of to ensure their continued interest in learning.

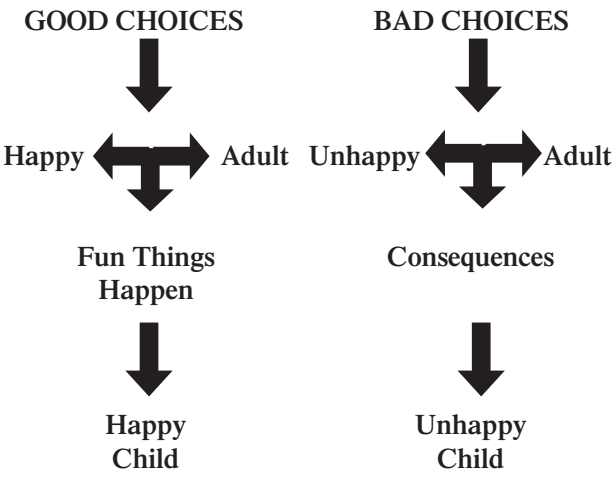
Tower Math

A second example of simplification involves basic math. Children like to label things so why should math concepts be any different? While looking for things to keep my daughter challenged in those early preschool years, I found educational computer games useful. Like most new learners of math, she began addition and subtraction of numbers in a typical horizontal display. But as the challenge increased and the numbers reached two digits, she had to stack vertically – one set above another.

Although we needed to work in columns, the *concept* of a column was still unfamiliar to her. Relating this concept to something that she could understand would make it easier for her to grasp this new display of numbers. It was then that I coined the term "Tower Math." She knew that towers were built by vertically stacking blocks, so it helped her to see the numbers as individual columns, or tall towers.

A Consequence Tree

My final example of simplifying complicated concepts involves a dilemma: what do you do when you have a young child who clearly understands good and bad choices regarding personal behavior, but still does not quite understand the concept of cause and effect? Why, when our children do something that leads to a consequence, do they feel that we, their stanch supporters, created the "bad" situation?



When there is difficulty making the connection between behavioral choices and their results, a visual reminder or cue can be quite useful. A diagram like the one below can assist in mapping out your child's choices and where those choices lead.

Routines: Empowerment to Handle Change

If we as adults went through our day not knowing what was going to happen next, we would probably find it unsettling. That is why most of us tend to use some form of a calendar to navigate through our daily activities. What happens for that young preschooler who has a mature understanding of time, routines, and schedules and yet is simultaneously a rigid, linear-thinking perfectionist?

We can help our children become better empowered about their daily activities over which they generally have little control, while teaching them strategies to cope with change. By reinforcing, in a visual format, the outline of a daily plan, we can create a template that will diminish their anxieties over the unknown.

Using this approach, I devised a pictorial magnetic calendar that portrayed upcoming activities. I used magnets because they can be moved around. This is a key component to using the coping strategy because it shows the child that scheduled events can be moved, and that although time is constant, activities within a time frame are changeable. These visual cues provide reference and, like a security blanket, comfort the child trying to understand the order of his or her day.

The remainder of this strategy deals with preventing a meltdown. We all dread telling our rigid thinkers that some part of their day is going to change because we know that we will be the ones who have caused the end of the world, right then and there! Adults may not like change, but we have learned the tools to handle it. Our coping skills have been developed and refined throughout our lives and we accept, for the most part, that things do not go according to plan. Coping strategies continue to be refined through our teenage years. What happens, however, for the child whom we know is still a very linear thinker? Disaster? Not necessarily.

One of the many lessons we have had to learn is that we are our children's primary advocates – for everything. We are their provider, protector, and promoter. So, what can we do to make life seem less traumatic for them?

For starters, avoid giving *excessive* notice of an event that has been added to their typical routine, like a play date or special event. Excessive notice leaves too many hours or days open for factors to change. Ideally, wait until the morning of the event. Then, reinforce, remind, repeat, and reiterate:

+ *Reinforce* frequently that there are factors that could change. For example, if you have a special activity scheduled:
  - o "What could be some reasons our special event might get cancelled?"
  - o "Let's hope that none of those happen, but how will we feel if we have to cancel?"
  - o "How could we handle it?"
+ *Remind* your child about change every chance an opportunity presents itself. As you know, gifted children are often highly emotional. Helping them not only to acknowledge their disappointment but also find appropriate ways to express their emotions is an important part of the process. Having a backup plan to offset disappointment can also give your child something to look forward to and help during a transition from disappointment to cheerfulness.
+ *Repeat, Repeat, Repeat!* Practicing helps to ingrain the process into a child's own mind. Strengthening "habits of mind" will help children stretch beyond linear thinking.
+ *Reiterate:* Think of alternate ways to present the previous three strategies (reinforcement, reminding, and repetition) in different situations and environments. Doing this will help children learn how to generalize and empower themselves, stay in control, and develop a formula for coping with change.

Pace the Acquisition of New Information

Pacing the acquisition of new information ties in with the concept, "less is more." I am a firm believer that this concept can be successfully applied in many different circumstances related to teaching our gifted children. Lying in an attempt to avoid a question is, of course, never advisable and will only lead to a violation of trust. Minimizing or "pacing" the delivery of information, however, is a useful tool and is not the same as lying. Just because a concept can be intellectually understood does not mean that our children can handle the exposure emotionally. By controlling the rate at which they acquire new information, we are giving them time to learn how to absorb and integrate that information at a manageable pace.

Because of their heightened sensitivities, need for routine, and insatiable appetite for knowledge, it becomes a huge responsibility and, I believe, necessity for parents and educators to predetermine when and what their gifted children learn. They may want to learn about Egyptian history at age four, but that does not mean that we should teach them about

mummification and all that this process entails. They are not emotionally ready to handle the concepts of death and autopsies.

Even if we think that our gifted children are mature for their age, we must constantly remind ourselves that they are still children. Paying attention to every minute detail and understanding those details may be a double-edged sword, because gifted children may end up perseverating over those same details. To foster or enable worried, anxious behaviors would not be wise or fair. Pacing the acquisition of new information, slowly and methodically, enables these children to appreciate and internalize the individual components that will eventually make up the whole and better enjoy the process of learning.

Although young gifted children have the ability to note details and acquire information, they do not have the ability to filter or prioritize what they are learning. This gives us the opportunity to apply a "less is more" approach.

For example, at one point we had two separate and exciting upcoming family events: a new pregnancy and a wedding. The baby was due in six months and the wedding was in eighteen months. Both couples wanted to share their news with my daughter, but I felt that sharing the news of both events simultaneously would not be respecting her need to process new and exciting information at a slower pace. To have six months of "Where do babies come from?" was not going to be the most productive situation. Nor would eighteen months of: "Can I wear my flower girl's dress now?"

Deciding what information to share, when to share it, and in what quantity, I not only controlled the input, but also the output. Since we lived out of town, we were not going to see the pregnancy for another two months. We held back that news until a few days prior to our visit, when we were ready for the pregnancy news to be shared by phone.

Why not wait until we saw the pregnancy in person? By discussing the pregnancy a day or two before our visit, we gave my daughter just enough time to process this piece of verbal information first, to ask questions, to look at her baby book with us, and to talk about a special gift that we could bring. Sometimes, when we can break apart the aural from the visual, we can reduce the over-stimulation caused by too much information all at once .

After the baby was born, my daughter was able to see and enjoy her personal visit because she was not overwhelmed by the newness. The second upcoming event, the wedding, was still eleven months away and therefore a relatively intangible concept for a young child. As a result, we followed the same steps as with the new baby and held back the exciting news until the appropriate time.

This approach created an environment that allowed for the absorption of knowledge to occur at a pace that was not too overwhelming. By respecting my daughter's limitations, she had time to question, ponder and get truly excited as she acquired and processed each new piece of information.

Conclusion

The strategies described in this article can be applied to almost any situation that fosters the intellectual growth and development of gifted children, while still respecting them emotionally. When practicing these strategies, try to apply them consistently every day and remember that they may differ from child to child. Trust your instincts because you know your children better than anyone. Remember that you are not alone. Be proactive and access the accumulated knowledge of parents, educators, and professionals, as well as other appropriate resources. Build a foundation that supports you and your children. Be mindful, however, that these strategies do not have to be followed to the letter. Think of them as a guide, and feel free to be creative in their application to each new situation.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR AS FORMS OF SELF-ADVOCACY

By Jerry Flack

"My mother told me if I wanted to be a soldier,
I would become a general;
If I wanted to be a monk,
I would become Pope;
I wanted to be an artist,
so I became Picasso."
Pablo Picasso

Introduction

Pablo Picasso's self-assessment may carry with it the impression of a braggadocio, but upon close inspection, his words offer parents, teachers, and mentors of gifted and talented youths a fresh insight into just how broadly the theme of advocacy may be interpreted. It is generally the role of adults to advocate for both individual precocious youth and for gifted and talented students as a whole. But why, one might well ask, should advocacy be so limited? Even kindergarten students should be listened to when they say, "I am bored." When objectively questioned and listened to, such precocious youths are not only helping parents and educators with the identification process of gifted and talented students, they are also providing valuable clues as to appropriate curriculum and intervention strategies. These children have – unknowingly – become vital self- advocates.

The most important words in this article are defined as follows in the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*.

Advocacy: "The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support."

Autobiography: "The biography of a person written by that person."

Memoir: "An account of the personal experiences of an author."

Self: "The essential qualities distinguishing one person from another; individuality."

"One's consciousness of one's own being or identity."

The purpose of this writing is to suggest memoir and autobiography for gifted and talented students as a means to advocating services for themselves. When adults listen to the voices of gifted youth, prompted by autobiographical activities, much can be learned. True, when some children utter those grating words, "I am bored," they may simply be exhibiting a youthful disposition toward laziness. But, just as frequently, "I am bored" may be construed as a plea of self-advocacy for learning activities commensurate with the speaker's gifts and talents.

Besides playing a vital role in self-advocacy, autobiography resources and student activities provide gifted youths with exciting human stories as well as models of good writing and storytelling. Autobiography resources, quotations, and activities offer even young gifted youths with opportunities for self-reflection. Through autobiographies, gifted students come to appreciate what they have in common with other students as well as recognize that their differences contribute to the great diversity of a strong and vibrant society. Further, autobiographical projects provoke creative responses in gifted students of all ages. As contemporary gifted and talented students prepare to achieve and succeed in the larger world, their parents and teachers want them to be as well armed as possible. Autobiography, in its various forms, may be one of the best tools to share with gifted students in preparing them to meet the innumerable challenges and opportunities they will encounter throughout their lives.

The Autobiography Classroom

Regardless of the age of the gifted students, K-12 "Autobiography Classrooms" should be inviting. Individual memoirs, collective autobiographies, and classroom sets of books such as the Meet The Author series should be present along with poster images of famous writers of memoir, journals, and diaries (e.g., Anne Frank). Media specialists are particularly helpful in creating temporary classroom libraries of both classic and new memoirs. Autobiography quotations should appear on colorful banners. Art supplies and writing tools should be easily accessible, as should electronic resources and pertinent web addresses to accompany many of the activities that follow. One example: A growing number of writers and authors of children's and young adult literature such as Patricia Polacco and Jan Brett have created top-notch web sites filled with autobiographical information.

Copies of the student "I" Q Examination should be ready for immediate student engagement. Project descriptions with accompanying directions and procedures described in this article should be available as student handouts. Supportive tools such as maps, atlases, and geographical terms should be plentiful and accessible for students who want to begin creating their own Autobiographical Maps. Similarly, unique ABC books may be displayed as models for those students who want to start fashioning their very own Autobiographical Alphabet Books. Sample time lines also inspire students who wish to create their own

Autobiographical Time Lines. Students should create colorful portfolios inclusive of the many autobiographical projects they complete. An exhibition area may contain autobiographical projects (on temporary loan) completed by former students. Creative teachers will no doubt think of countless additional ways and means to enhance the vibrant atmosphere of the "Autobiographical Classroom."

One final point: From the very first steps of the project, teachers need to accentuate the positive. They must always affirm and welcome creativity and innovation. It is vital to ensure that students continually plan, execute, and produce ALL autobiographical projects with an eye toward success and self-appreciation. All students' ABC lists, for example, should highlight personal assets and virtues. Self-criticism must always be discouraged. Autobiographical advocacy inherently needs to underscore positivism. Optimism, hope, joy, and personal dreams for bright futures should be foremost.

Autobiographical Quotations

One of the best places to begin any study of autobiography and memoir is with quotations. Books of quotations and websites both provide many choice commentaries on the benefits of this genre. The following samples may be shared with students as classroom placards or via other creative outlets. The search for self-thoughts can be extended to students' searches as well. One task for maturing, gifted students is to find quotations that truly "speak" to them and to share these new quotations with their peers, along with life facts about the cited authors.

"Autobiography: The next thing like living one's life over again."

Benjamin Franklin

"Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest."

Georgia O'Keeffe

"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the places and moments that take our breath away."

Anon.

"Not all who wander are lost."

J.R.R. Tolkien

"Be content with what you have;
Rejoice in the way things are.
When you realize there is nothing lacking,
The whole world belongs to you."

Lao Tzu

"I don't think my sports accomplishments are going to make my trip to Heaven any easier."

Lance Armstrong

"The fruit of Silence is Prayer
The fruit of Prayer is Faith
The fruit of Faith is Love
The fruit of Love is Service
The fruit of Service is Peace"

Printed on Mother Teresa's business cards

"Good friends are like stars. You don't always see them, but you know they are always there."

Anon.

"The giant oak is an acorn that held its ground."

Anon.

"When we are facing in the right direction, all we have to do is keep walking."

Buddhist Proverb

"Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old."

Franz Kafka

"Sail away from the safe harbor. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Mark Twain

"Each of us has a spark of life inside us, and our highest endeavor ought to be to set off that spark in one another."

Kenny Ausbel

"Our opinions of people depend less upon what we see in them than upon what they make us see in ourselves."

Sara Grand

Autobiographical Resources

Encounters with exemplary titles from the autobiography genre will positively impact gifted, talented, and creative students. Autobiographical literature such as the glorious autobiography *Ashley Bryan: Words to My Life's Song* yield fresh insights about the craft of writing and provide examples of how good writers and artists weave their own life stories into fine writing and images.

Bryan, Ashley. *Ashley Bryan: Words to My Life's Song*. New York: Atheneum, 2009.

"I cannot remember a time when I have not been drawing and painting."

Ashley Bryan is one of the most distinguished and beloved artists and book illustrators living and working today. He begins his remarkable autobiography with a family photograph taken when he was very young. He notes that although he was but a toddler at the time, the picture is incomplete in that it does not show him holding a crayon or paintbrush. He quickly fast-forwards to his life today on Little Cranberry Island just off the Maine Coast. He invites readers

to come with him on a walk around his island home as he simultaneously sketches its beauty and shares his life story.

Bryan was born the second of six children brought up in a small apartment in the Bronx in New York City during the Great Depression. The apartment, though small, was never without light, color, beauty, and music. His mother potted flowers wherever there was sunlight, and she made crepe paper flowers in brilliant colors for shaded areas. His mother also sang all day long. "Your mother must think she is a bird," he recalls his father saying. His father also contributed to the natural beauty of Bryan's childhood home. The senior Bryan loved birds and lined their apartment home with cages of beautiful, singing birds, such as canaries, warblers, parakeets, and finches. The Bryan family may have been poor, but their children grew up in a stimulating, sensory environment of color, sound, beauty, and joy.

Both of young Ashley's parents recognized his early love and talent for drawing and painting and at a tender age made room for a special desk for their son where he could work on his artistic projects and store his crucial art supplies. The senior Bryans also took advantage of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA), at a time in which the government paid artists and musicians to teach free classes to impart valuable talent skills for all youths.

Bryan's parents were first-generation Americans, having been born in Antigua in the British West Indies. Shortly after their marriage, they moved to New York City. The prevailing prejudice of the time against blacks initially kept Ashley's father at work in menial tasks, but, in due course, he made his way into the field for which he had been trained. He became a printer, and his new work provided a special asset for his gifted son. Father was able to bring home leftover paper from printing jobs for his son's art projects. In due course, as the Depression ended, the senior Bryan was able to set up his own printing business and bring home even more supplies for Ashley's ongoing work.

Bryan's early education was vibrant and rich in opportunities despite the prevailing prejudice against blacks during his youth. He published his first book, an ABC volume, in kindergarten. He attended a public school with children representing a wealth of languages, race, ethnicity, and culture. He began to understand the richness of cultural diversity, as he interacted with other children from Black, Irish, Italian, German, Polish, and Jewish homes. Moreover, his teachers believed in the memorization, practice, and performance of poetry. Every school day would begin with poetry recitation, a love for which he still cherishes.

The faith and beauty of churches became another early influence on Ashley Bryan's life. His family became the first black family to join the German-English St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Bronx. He admired the beauty of the church and was especially proud of being honored yearly for his perfect attendance. Young Ashley particularly loved the church's magnificent stained glass windows. He is still a member of the church, although he now lives far from Fulton Avenue in the Bronx. Following a terrible fire at the church in 1994, he was commissioned to replace one of the church's beautiful stained glass windows. His glorious replacement window portrays a Black Jesus rising from the tomb. The original windows had portrayed Christian scenes with only Caucasian figures.

The artist's memoirs of the beautiful glass windows of his boyhood home church prove to be a perfect segue to his parallel writing introducing readers to his island home and his artist's studio as they are today. He shows eager children the blue and green sea glass that he finds washed ashore, as well as his original stained glass creations. As Bryan narrates his life story, the photographic images of Bill McGuinness capture the beauty of a lighthouse, ocean waves, rocky beaches, and gulls in free flight.

This unique two-tiered autobiography continues along parallel past and current avenues. Handsome color photographs aid Bryan in introducing his contemporary life in the present tense, while, side-by-side, he relates his growth from a boy to early manhood. The ingenious, dual memoir is both stunningly beautiful and highly original in scope.

At the age of sixteen, Ashley Bryan graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx. Racial prejudice once again became a factor during this period of his life. Although he could not find a scholarship to further his education because he was black, his parents advised him not to give up the pursuit of his dreams. He applied to the post-graduate program at the Cooper Union School of Art in 1940. Entrance was based on a "blind" judging of works of art in the fields of drawing, architecture, and sculpture. Evaluators saw only the works of young artists, not the color of their skin. In the fall of 1940, Ashley Bryan became the sole black student at Cooper Union. He loved his classes in such diverse arts as sculpture, calligraphy, book illustration, and painting.

Bryan is an especially versatile artist. One of his many collections reveals the artistic, home-made toys, crafted from found objects, he made as a child. Depression-era children from large and poor families received few, if any, store-bought toys. Creative children such as Ashley Bryan made their own. Ashley's brightly-colored kites were rich in design and highly coveted by other children, who wanted to buy them. Bryan says with pride, "Soon we had an additional source of family income."

Bryan's boyhood penchant for using found materials has remained an integral part of his artistic process. He blissfully shares with readers both his techniques and finished products of puppets, dolls, masks, and stained glass panels, crafted from such found items as blue and green sea glass. He remarks:

> *I have always sought to create something useful, something beautiful, with objects that have been cast-off, disregarded.*

His magnificent sea glass panels of people, birds, and animals are masterfully highlighted when placed against black, opaque backgrounds.

Two years after his entrance to art studies at Cooper

Union, Bryan was drafted into the racially segregated army when he was just nineteen years old. But, even war could not keep the young artist from sketching and drawing. When not on military duty in Scotland, he attended the Glasgow School of Art. He even kept a sketch pad and art supplies in his regulation gas mask. He survived the beaches of Normandy, France, on D-Day of 1944, and by 1946 he was back home completing his studies at Cooper Union. That same year he received a scholarship to the newly opened Skowhegan School of Painting in Maine. He still explored new art techniques, such as the art of painting frescoes. But he also fell in love with the magnificent scenery of the state of Maine.

Having survived the most devastating war in history, Ashley Bryan's interest for once went beyond art. He enrolled at Columbia University as a philosophy major. There were tough questions for which he sought answers. "Why does Man, knowing the overwhelming tragedies of war, choose war?"

Following the completion of his undergraduate studies, Bryan made us of the GI Bill of the Department of Veterans' Affairs to continue his art studies in France. Later, a Fulbright scholarship permitted him to study art in Germany.

Beginning in 1953, Bryan began a series of teaching jobs sharing art with both children and adults. But, one condition remained. He always reserved the summer months for creating art on the Maine Coast.

In 1962, Ashley Bryan completed his first book, a collection of illustrated African Stories, for Atheneum. In turn, his publishing success led to a teaching position at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. As his teaching and publishing careers flourished, Ashley was able to explore his parents' homeland of Antigua where he was immediately drawn to the lush beauty of tropical landscapes. His increased income made it possible for him to send his parents home, to retire in the beloved land of their birth. Although he loves the beauty of Antigua, his heart has led him to return to the Cranberry Isles of Maine where he continues even today to live, paint, and create books of wonder for children.

Ashley Bryan concludes his splendid autobiography with a saying of the Ashanti Peoples of Africa:

> *This is my story. Whether it be bitter or whether it be sweet, take some of it elsewhere and let the rest come back to me*.

One of the colorful features of Ashley Bryan's autobiography is a montage of book covers of his most celebrated books, including the following:

Ashley Bryan's ABC of African American Poetry (Atheneum, 1997)

Beautiful Blackbird (Atheneum, 2003).

Let it Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals (Atheneum, 2007).

Ashley Bryan's colorful autobiography introduces talented readers to a novel way of sharing a personal story. A day trip around his island home serves as the backdrop for recalling his entire life story. The merging of photography with the author's paintings, stained glass creations, and other artworks is most impressive. Both Bryan's writing format and the artistic integration of photography with other art forms may well serve imaginative youths as examples as they begin their own creative memoirs

Additional Resources

There are many additional collective and individual autobiographies available that are both informative and serve as models of the art and words of memoirs. The leading expert in the history and development of children's literature today is Leonard S. Marcus, who presents the self-told stories of numerous writers and illustrators in such books as *A Caldecott Celebration: Seven Artists and Theirs Paths to the Caldecott Medal* (Walker, 2008) and *Side By Side: Five Favorite Picture Book Teams Go to Work* (Walker, 2001). The former title includes self-portraits by Chris Van Allsburg, Maurice Sendak, and David Wiesner, while the latter focuses upon insightful self-revelations of collaborators, such as Joanna Cole and Bruce Degen of "The Magic School Bus" fame and African-American creators Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney.

Eric Carle shares his rich and full life with both words and glorious artwork in his memoir, *The Art of Eric Carle* (Philomel Books, 1996). Tomie dePaola has written numerous memoirs including *Why?* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2007), his recent illustrated account of growing up during World War II. Poet Lee Bennett Hopkins has written at least two accounts of his life and work. *The Writing Bug* (Richard C. Owens, 1993) is Hopkins' contribution to the excellent Meet the Author series. *Been to Yesterdays: Poems of A Life* (Boyds Mill Press, 1995) is an outstanding memoir composed entirely in verse. Two-time Newbery Medal author, Lois Lowry's *Looking Back: A Book of Memories* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998) is still another commendable autobiography.

Of course, libraries are filled with classic memoirs and autobiographies by Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, Anne Frank, Beryl Markham, Russell Baker, and Bill Peet, to name but a few. Surely, one Illinois name to add to any new list of fine writers of memoir is Barack Obama. Nikki Grimes notes in her admirable juvenile biography, *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope* (Simon & Schuster, 2008) that her primary source was the subject's own memoir, *Dreams from My Father* (Three Rivers Press, 2004).

Autobiography Activities

The student autobiography activities shared here may be adapted to best suit the needs of talented students of all ages and grades. Autobiographical Paper Dolls and Me Bags may seem best suited for use with primary-age students, but the same kinds of personal information can be shared by older students through the use of individual collages, for example. Conversely, the "I" Q Examination may contain questions

and prompts best suited to students in the middle-grades, yet teachers in primary classrooms can extract from the same activity excerpts such as "Favorites" (#10) that can easily be answered by young gifted learners. The activities, taken as a whole, allow students alternatives that best suit their learning-style preferences, unique gifts, and personal interests. Choice is the key word. No student should be expected to complete every activity. Moreover, all of the activities should be viewed as creative documentation of self-advocacy.

"I" Q Examination

"You are unique and so am I. If you do not fulfill that uniqueness, it is lost to the world. No matter how uncomfortable it may be, you must pay your debt to the life that has been permitted you. And do it with as much courage as possible."

Martha Graham

Martha Graham was a great and innovative American dancer and choreographer. Her advice to fulfill one's uniqueness should be an imperative in the education of gifted youths. These same students, however, need to inventory their talents, interests, desires, hopes, and dreams in order to best recognize and develop their particular gifts. One stimulating tool for doing just that is to ask students to complete an "I" Q Examination early on in their autobiographical studies. Teachers, mentors, and parents will want to vary the questions and prompts to best suit the age of participating gifted youths. The following prompts and questions, written in language directly for immediate student use, are simply beginning points that can be adapted and greatly enhanced by creative mentors.

An "I" Q Examination

The purpose of this fun and insightful examination is to help you note facts, subjects, hobbies, interests, favorites, and additional things that will help you focus on the real "I" person that you are. There is no time limit and you need not answer every question or prompt. Enjoy taking time to reflect upon your unique and personal "I" quotient. As you complete this particular exam, your answers may well provide you with valuable personal resource data that will help you engage in stimulating autobiographical activities and projects.

1. List three to five words that best describe you (e.g., creative).
2. Name three hobbies that you enjoy.
3. What is your favorite school subject?
4. Name three to five people whom you admire.
5. List three careers that you might enjoy.
6. List five positive values (e.g., patriotism, honesty, kindness) that you most prize and admire.
7. List three or more school and/or community extra-curricular activities (e.g., 4-H, drama, soccer, scouting) that you enjoy.
8. What is the title of your favorite book?
9. What would you do if you could have one more hour each day?
10. List your top ten favorites:
    Color
    Holiday
    Sport
    Movie
    Clothing Item
    Food
    Season
    Leisure Activity
    Place to Celebrate
    (Quiet) Place to Contemplate
11. List three to five things you would like to do to make school more meaningful and enjoyable.
12. What skills, subjects, or disciplines would you most enjoy teaching to others?
13. Name your favorite board or electronic game.
14. List three to five places in the world that you would like to visit.
15. Name your favorite sound (e.g., church bells).
16. Name your favorite smell (e.g., pizza).
17. What is your favorite shape (e.g., star)?
18. Wish upon a star. What is your wish?
19. Describe the best day in school you have ever experienced. What made it special?
20. ABC Adjectives. Quickly write down the 26 letters of the alphabet with a line or open space following each letter. Try a quick and fun ABC brainstorming exercise. Use POSITIVE words that best describe you, your gifts, and your interests. Feel free to skip letters and complete your "ABC Adjectives" in any order you choose. Stuck for a particular letter? Ask a friend, parent, or teacher to help you think of an attribute that begins with "P" (for example) that well describes you. You may be pleasantly surprised and enjoy hearing the impressions others have of you.

    Ready! Set! Go!
    A. Ambitious
    B. Bold
    C. Curious
    D. Dramatic
    E. Energetic
    F. Fair to Others
    G. Generous
    H. _____
    I. _____
    J. _____

Continue your ABC Adjectives through the remainder of the alphabet concluding with the letter Z.

When you have completed your personal "I" Q Exam, consider sharing it with one or more classmates. It will be fun to note how your peers generated totally different answers to the same, identical questions. Most importantly, place your completed "I" Q results as the beginning point in your

Autobiographical Profile or Portfolio. Return to it often to remind yourself of the things you enjoy doing and learning, your special virtues as a person, and your future dreams and aspirations. You are indeed unique and you owe it to yourself and to the world to make the most of all the talents, values, and loves you embrace.

Autobiographical Verse

Personalized Poems

Personalized poems represent a quick way for students to begin thinking autobiographically and making positive self-statements. The resultant poems are acrostics. Students simply write their names vertically down the margin of a piece of paper. Each line of their poems begins with a word or statement about one of their positive attributes or interests the spelling of which corresponds with the letter of the line. Ariel, a talented young woman, might begin her poem this way:

Accomplished painter
Resourceful student
Inquisitive and probing
Electric and energetic
Lover of fine music

Of course, Ariel can complete her brief autobiographical verse statement by similarly building upon her middle and family names. She can then illustrate her personalized poem, the result becoming an attractive autobiographical poster.

I Am Poems

I Am Poems are simple, straight-forward, and invite gifted students to celebrate and share their gifts and talents. The formula can vary tremendously due to the fill-in-the-blanks choices that teachers provide. Here is one brief example of an "I Am" template for creative student autobiographical verse.

I am (add your name).
I am (add three words that describe you).
In this world, I (complete the sentence).
I dream about (complete the sentence).
I see beauty in (complete the sentence).
I care about (complete the sentence).
I am (add three words that describe you).
I am (repeat your name).

Cinquainography

Cinquainography is yet another form of autobiographical poetry. The common form of the cinquain is utilized to write autobiographical verse. Here is the format and two examples.

1st line....first name.
2nd line...two words associated with self.
3rd line...three participles or "ing" words of positive descriptors.
4th line...four more "ing" words celebrating individual virtues, interests, and
characteristics.
5th line.. nickname or last name.

Julianne
Gifted Girl
Painting, Piano Playing, Coin Collecting
Learning, Wishing, Dreaming, Growing
"Jules"

Aaron
Great Guy
Goal Tending, Rocket Building, Wrestling, Reading
Internet Surfing, Book Illustrating, Dancing, Youth Leading
Washington

The formats of all three of the verse rubrics are most versatile. First, they may be used as autobiography prompts for gifted students, but young poets can use the same formats to enliven biography in such disciplines as literature, art, science, and history. Students can imagine how Katherine Paterson might compose a Personalized Poem or envision how Georgia O'Keeffe or Marie Curie might have completed "I Am" poems. A history student's inspired Cinquainography verse about Abraham Lincoln may sum up his great deeds.

Me Bags

Give students brown paper bags (e.g., grocery bags) and ask them each to use crayons and colored markers to create a self-portrait on the blank side of the bag (the side free of advertising). Next, ask students to select and put into their own personalized Me Bags at least five to ten objects that reveal positive and interesting things about themselves. Me Bag items will vary greatly depending on the age of the students. If students need prompting, the following are typical items they might consider putting in their Me Bags (or backpacks):

awards and certificates
photographs of family and pets
favorite puzzles, games, or toys
CDs
favorite comic strips and cartoons
sports letters or medals
cards and letters from friends and relatives
baseball cards
television guides with favorite shows highlighted
vacation photographs
newspaper and magazine photos of favorite celebrities
homework assignments adorned with A+ grades

Me Bag items become important props as students share a self-portrait of themselves in a brief "show and tell"-type of sharing with peers. Students reveal what is special and

autobiographical in nature about each item in their Me Bag. Incidentally, the use of props from their Me Bags greatly reduces student anxiety during personal sharing with others.

Be sure to give students of all ages lots of encouragement during this activity. Salute their confidence in noting and revealing unique things about themselves. Tell students just how special their contributions are to all. It is vital that risk-taking is applauded and that diversity is encouraged and celebrated. Give lots of generous and heartfelt praise to each student who completes this assignment.

Paper Doll Autobiographies

Paper Doll Autobiographies can be enjoyed by students of all ages. These creations give students an opportunity to examine their own lives in a highly visual, fun, and non-threatening manner. Using long sheets (4-6 feet, lengthwise; 2-3 feet in width) of newsprint or bulletin board paper, students briefly work in pairs, tracing each other's body outlines on the long sheets of paper. Each student lies down on the paper while a partner traces the outline; then the roles are reversed and the procedure is duplicated. Students subsequently personalize their silhouettes with drawings, words, meaningful symbols (e.g., a cross, a Star of David), stickers, pasted pictures cut from magazines, and other creative artifacts that represent personal likes, preferences, goals and aspirations. When the silhouettes are filled in, students cut them away from the rest of the paper and end up with life-size Autobiographical Paper Dolls. They have fashioned self-created posters of themselves that make colorful and artistic autobiographical statements.

There are all kinds of variations on this autobiographical project. An elementary school teacher in Michigan asks students to omit their names from the front of the paper dolls and sign their names on the doll backs. The teacher then uses the student creations to decorate her classroom for the school's parent open house. She invites parents to walk around the newly created "autobiographical art museum" that her classroom has become and challenges them to use the visual clues to identify their own child's creation.

An Arkansas educator is equally inventive with Paper Doll Autobiographies. She gives the students double-thick paper so that the completed paper dolls will have separate front and back pieces. The students creatively decorate the front of the paper doll as described above. Students then cut through the double thickness of paper. With the assistance of classroom helpers, the students use a paper punch to make evenly-spaced holes around the outside edges of their dolls. Using yarn, the students sew the front and backs of their dolls together. When the sewing is nearly finished, the students stuff their dolls with tissue paper. The sewing is then completed resulting in three-dimensional Autobiographical Paper Dolls. The newly created soft sculptures dramatically enhance the appearance of the classroom. But the teacher offers an added surprise. She asks her students to secretly bring to school a blouse, sweater, thin jacket or other recognizable item of clothing that is fitted on each respective doll. At parent conference time, she places each three-dimensional doll – complete with a personal item of clothing –seated in the desk of its creator. As parents arrive for conferences, the first thing they see is a classroom filled with life-size autobiographical paper dolls, each one a dramatic statement of its creator's individuality and uniqueness. At the end of the autobiography unit of study, all of her students have a personalized, soft sculpture to decorate their homes or, perhaps, share with grandparents as a surprise gift.

I Am An American: Autobiographical Flags

Create artistic designs based upon students' personalization of American (and other) flags. Students' Autobiographical Flags need not be exact replicas of the current flag of the United States of America – which was designed by a 16-year-old, gifted, Ohio youth. (He received a "B - " grade for his class project!) Creating a field of 50 stars, for example, would be well beyond the artistic sophistication, fine motor skills, and tactile dexterity of primary-age students. Moreover, the American flag has changed many times since the first American flag was purportedly sewn by Betsy Ross. Indeed, the design of the U.S. flag has been changed 26 times.

Begin this project by sharing picture-book biographies of Betsy Ross, Francis Hopkinson, Frances Scott Key, and other great Americans who created or celebrated flags for both the American Revolution and subsequent official national flags. Also, bring into the classroom books about flags from other nations, the Olympic flag, military, school, sports, and college flags, etc. The autobiographical flag project provides students with the opportunity to learn more about the history, customs, and culture of people all around the globe.

Several excellent books for teacher and student use during the creation of Autobiographical Flags include:

Cohan, George M. *Norman Rockwell: You're a Grand Old Flag*. Illus. by Norman Rockwell. New York: Atheneum Books, 2008.

Crampton, William G. *Eyewitness: Flag*. New York: Dorling Kindersley (DK) Eyewitness Books, 2000.

Landau, Elaine. *The American Flag*. New York: Children's Press, 2008.

Taylor, Lonn. *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Making of an American Icon*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.

Teachers may pose questions, such as, "What is the history of flags?" "Which is the world's oldest known flag?" "How have diverse institutions employed creativity to fashion unique flags that carry powerful visual messages?" The red, white, and blue of the French and American national flags have inspired many people around the world to associate those colors as symbols of liberty. The five interlocking circles of the Olympic flag represent the world's five largest, inhabited continents, as well as the five virtues of passion, faith, victory, work ethic, and sportsmanship. At least one of

the colors of the Olympic flag, including its white background and interconnected circle colors of red, yellow, green, blue, and black, may be found in the flags of every nation of the world.

Students' own Autobiographical Flags do not have to be exact duplicates of the current U.S. flag. The key factor is that if the theme "I Am an American" is the autobiographical prompt given or suggested, students' flags should include a field of stars surrounded by several stripes. The flags need not absolutely be red, white, and blue, but symbolically the flag should give the appearance of being an artistic interpretation of the "Stars and Stripes."

Mixed media may be used including colored pencils and markers, crayons, poster paint, rubber stamps (e.g., stars) and ink pads, pastels, gummed or adhesive stamps, stickers, digital art, and found materials like buttons and scraps of cloth. Any style or combination of styles may be utilized from collage to cartoon art to caricatures or quilt designs. Sample drawings include postage-stamp-size self-portraits of students as they are now and as they hope to be in the future. The size of autobiographical flags can vary greatly. A class project might cover an entire bulletin board, for example, while individual flags can be fashioned by using poster board or construction paper.

Students' flags are unique visual statements of what they believe to be their talents, their goals, and their wishes and dreams for the future. Teachers may ask: "What does it mean to each student to be an American?" "What are students currently doing to be loyal Americans?" "How do students want to develop their gifts and talents to better serve their homeland as they grow and mature?" "What contributions to their nation do students wish to make as adults?"

Pictures and symbols such as soccer balls, paintbrushes, computers, and scientific equipment may be used along with self-portraits, especially in the field of stars. In the stripes portion of autobiographical flags, students may combine their own words and images to reveal what they are doing now to help their country, as well as how they plan to patriotically use their gifts in the future. Examples:

I work hard to keep America green and beautiful. I never walk by a piece of trash. I pick up litter others have carelessly discarded. I practice keeping America beautiful.

When I grow up I want to be a millionaire so that I can give lots of money to help find a cure for cancer.

I want to someday be a fine swimmer so I can represent America in the Summer Olympic Games.

Closely related to autobiographical flags are student-generated personal crests and coats of arms.

My Favorite Things

Music lovers will greatly enjoy the opportunity to participate in autobiographical song writing. Because of the repeated viewings of Richard Rodgers and Hammerstein II's musical, *The Sound of Music*, nearly all students will be familiar with the song "My Favorite Things." As a tuneful reminder, teachers can use the scene selection menu of the movie CD to recapture the magic of Julie Andrews teaching the song to the von Trapp Family children. Also, Renee Graef's picture book, *My Favorite Things* (HarperCollins, 2001), is a great classroom resource. Explain to students that they are going to "borrow" Richard Rodgers's wonderful music, but they are going to replace Oscar Hammerstein II as Rodgers's collaborator and create their own brand new autobiographical lyrics to personalize "My Favorite Things."

The first thing students need to do is to brainstorm a huge list of their favorite things on large sheets of poster paper. Teachers can quickly write lists of all of the favorite things students cite. Next, introduce students to meter, or the syllabication as found in poetry. Ask students to listen again to Rodgers and Hammerstein's song. How many beats or syllables are found in each line? (There are 11 syllables in the first two lines of each stanza, and 10 counts or beats in the last two lines of each stanza.) Facilitators may need to also remind students of the simple rhyme scheme found in "My Favorite Things." The refrain from the song, which begins with "When the dog bites, when the bee stings" may be kept, or students can compose a new refrain.

Once students know how many syllables each line of the stanzas in the song require, they are ready to return to the terrific resource bank of favorites they brainstormed earlier and begin to choose and combine favorites that are aesthetically pleasing to the ear and which meet the meter or syllabication requirements of each stanza. The following stanzas represent one classroom's new autobiographical lyrics for Richard Rodgers's famed song.

"My Favorite Things"

Pizzas and puppies and my special kitty
Swimming and playing and trips to the city,
Candy and toys and all that Santa brings,
These are a few of my favorite things.

(When the dog bites....)
Refrain

Bonfires and hot-dogs and marshmallows, too,
Red woolen sweaters and ice skates brand new,
Tulips in springtime and kites with their strings,
These are a few of my favorite things,

(When the dog bites....)
Refrain

Magazine puzzles and newspaper comics,
Billy's bad jokes and Miss Nielsen's hysterics,
All of the laughter that Camp Sunshine brings,
These are a few of my favorite things.

(When the dog bites....)
Refrain

The "My Favorite Things" autobiographical activity may be adapted in countless ways. Once students have completed a practice set of lyrics as a classroom of composers, they can work individually or in pairs or teams to create further personal adapted lyrics. One set of lyrics may reveal all their favorite things. An even more individualized version can feature all the things they like about themselves. This activity is a real self-esteem builder! Students can also create wonderful presents for mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, grandparents, and friends by writing personalized songs. Teachers use "My Favorite Things" song-writing near Mother's Day and Father's Day and can help students write "My Favorite Things" lyrics about their mothers and fathers and all the great things their parents do for them. More than a few moms and dads have been deeply touched by these lovely, personalized songs created by their children.

Self-Awareness Maps

Self-Awareness Maps offer gifted students opportunities to inventory their personal qualities, gifts, and talents. The author has used Self-Awareness Maps as icebreakers in classes of graduate degree candidates and with K-12 students. Regardless of age, participants always enjoy them. Begin by displaying and examining a variety of different kinds of maps: road maps, treasure maps, historical maps, and hand-drawn directions to someone's house. Talk about the things found in maps, such as direction indicators, legends, and landmark notations. Brainstorm a list of map terms such as canyon, creek, gulf, island, river, route, tributary, and valley. Then, ask students to create autobiographical maps. Do they have mountains of opportunities awaiting them? Are there rivers of strong ambition flowing through their lives? Are there some islands of self-doubt or fear? How about a stream of inspiration? What nouns, verbs or adjectives might describe some of the major highways in their lives? What words would be appropriate names for some of the pathways or quiet, back roads in their existence? The creation of Self-Awareness Maps is fun and often stimulates insight for the autobiographical cartographers. Sharing the maps with others is a dynamic lead-in to discussions about similarities and differences of interests, talents, experiences, and goals.

A particularly fine resource to stimulate students' thinking about self-awareness maps is *My Map Book* (HarperCollins, 1995) by Sara Fanelli. Fanelli uses child-like drawings to create multi-colored and delightful maps of her neighborhood, her bedroom, her day, her family tree, and best of all, her heart.

Self-Portraits

Budding young artists can create their own artistic Self-Portraits. Begin by sharing the art of numerous artists. Two resources especially stand out. The great Mexican painter Frida Kahlo perhaps created more self-portraits than any other artist in history. Carmen T. Bernier-Grand's *Frida: Long Live Life!* (Marshall Cavendish Children, 2007) explores the artist's courageous life and presents many of her most notable self-portraits. Kahlo's seeming equanimity in the face of physical and emotional adversity provides important lessons for students about courage, bravery, and the indomitability of the human spirit.

Yet another resource for students is the collection of self-portraits to be found in *Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits of Fourteen Artists* (Children's Book Press, 1997), which is edited by Harriet Rohmer. The book has at least three special merits. First, the fourteen artists represent very diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Second, students will marvel at the many different creative approaches and media used by young artists in creating their self-portraits. Finally, *Just Like Me* presents fascinating verbal passages by each artist, as well as the fourteen superb self-portraits.

Encourage young artists of all ages to use any artistic style (e.g., caricature), format (e.g., watercolors), or varied media to draw, paint, or even sculpt their very own self-portraits. Be sure to plan a special classroom or library exhibition of completed Autobiographical Self-Portraits.

Autobiographical Time Lines

Learning how to read time lines is an essential social studies research skill. One way of developing familiarity and understanding of time lines — especially with younger students — is to engage them in completing personal examples. Direct students to tape several pieces of paper together to form scrolls. Students should place line markers on their scrolls representing the number of years they have lived. Next comes a bit of research. Of course, they remember what happened last week, but not the events which occurred in the first few years of their lives. Did Moms or Dads keep baby books that record the ages at which they learned to speak, crawl, and walk? What pranks did they pull during their "terrible twos"? How old were students when they learned to ride a tricycle? What nursery schools did they attend? Who were their first teachers? What did their first report cards reveal? Each student's chronology will be unique because each youth has a special life story. Autobiographical Time Lines should be filled with symbolic words, facts, drawings, and even photographs of the students. Autobiographical Time Lines are fun for students of all grade levels to produce. Be sure to remind students to save and to safely store such creations. They will one day want to share these creative artifacts with their own children.

Autobiographical Alphabet Books

Students can appreciate their own strengths, talents and interests when they create Autobiographical Alphabet Books that celebrate their uniqueness. Share outstanding classic and brand new examples of quality ABC volumes such as Graeme Base's *Animalia* (Harry N. Abrams, 1986) and Brad Herzog's *Amazing Moments: A Sports Alphabet* (Sleeping Bear, 2009) with students. Professional examples model both the structure and creativity appropriate for students in their own works. Invite students to engage in ABC brainstorming. Encourage them to think of things that describe their likes, personal history, joys, desires, and future dreams (the spelling of which

cover the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet). Students can return to the ABC portion of their "I" Q Examinations for ABC-oriented ideas. Illustrated dictionaries and thesauri can further aid students in finding words for tough letters such as "Q" and "X".

The copy for a student's first page might read:

I am Anna, and I was born in Aurora, Arizona.

Anna's next page might reveal information about her favorite sport, basketball, and/or "Bernie," her pet Basset Hound.

Youthful creators may use newspaper cuttings, magazine pictures, crayon drawings, online clip art, and a wealth of additional media to illustrate each page of their Autobiographical Alphabet Books. One variation is an ABC Sketchbook. At their leisure, students can sketch 26 pages of themselves and the things they love to do. Again, the letters can be approached randomly. That is, the first sketch Andy might complete may be one of essential hockey equipment for the letter "H" that represents his favorite sport. Later, Andy may create a sketch of himself reading a book for the letter "R." And, yes, stick figures are perfectly appropriate for the sketches by primary-age students.

A final word, a caution that reveals just how delicate a flower is true creativity: The word "Book" seems perfectly innocent for this ABC autobiography activity. But, one creative California teacher deliberately left out the truthfully limiting word "Book" and changed her prompt to students as follows: "Please use the ABCs in any manner to highlight your many talents, interests, and accomplishments." Creativity flourished as students created and shared with their classmates such unique products as 26 alphabetized fortune cookies, an alphabetical board game similar to Monopoly, and one oral history utilizing both the Latin ABCs and the American Sign Language Manual Alphabet.

A Day In The Life

Ask gifted students this question: "What is the most important day in your life, but the one about which you know the least?" Of course, the answer is the day each was born. A Day In The Life is a fun, challenging, and relevant project. The task is for students to find out everything they can about the days on which they were born. Youths who are going to take autobiography seriously need to learn at least a little about the world as it was on the days of their birth. This project serves as a terrific research project that uses both print and online resources.

Any number of Internet web pages provides vast amounts of data about the news and events on any given day of any year. These research tools can be located using search terms such as "On This Day" and "This Day In History." However, online sources do not provide the local and regional information that students may want to know, such as the names of regional politicians, local weather reports, and the titles of movies that were playing in their hometown cinemas the days they were born. For this latter information, local newspapers on microfilm or in electronic formats at the local library are a treasure trove. Periodicals such as *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Seventeen* are also filled with valuable information about people, news, and style. Many libraries also have reference books, such as "A Book of Days" (several reference companies produce such a volume and titles will vary) that will provide information about every day of the year, including February 29, throughout recorded history. These volumes also provide fascinating information such as the names of famous painters, composers, pop celebrities, writers, and political leaders who were born on any given day in history.

Some of the questions or prompts teachers can offer to aid students successfully research the days and dates of their birth include the following:

What headlines dominated the news?
What were the best-selling stocks in the stock market?
Who was President? Governor? Mayor?
What were the weather conditions?
What were the best-selling movies, books, songs?
What was the average cost of an apartment rental?
How much did a new car cost?
Choose five items from the grocery store ads and list their prices.
What projections were included in the horoscope column?
Was any special sports season in progress? (World Series, Super Bowl)
What was the most exciting thing in the California news
What great historical events in history occurred on the day of the year you were born?
What famous people were born throughout history on the day of the year you were born?

Of course, students can practice interviewing skills with this project. What questions can students ask their mothers, fathers, and grandparents about their recollections of the days they were born?

Once completed, A Day In The Life is a project students will want to share with their families and keep in a very safe and special place for future generations as well.

That's My Life

That's My Life is a fun autobiographical activity to use in the early fall months of the school year, when television networks debut new series. Television guides and the entertainment pages in newspapers typically contain reviews of new offerings. The focal point of such reviews is a synopsis of each new show's basic premise plus a description of the major character(s). Read one or two sample reviews to students. Invite them to pretend that a major television network has decided to create a new television series based on their lives. Through the medium of a television review, students are able to reveal a great deal of information about themselves, their interests, their goals, and perhaps even some

of their pet peeves. The fantasy nature of the assignment tends to free the imagination. Knowing that, in fact, their lives are not really going to be featured on television on a weekly basis appears to give students license to go all out in telling their personal stories. Students love this alternative to the typical first-week-of-school autobiographical essay, "How I Spent My Summer Vacation." A sample of one "That's My Life" review follows:

Sue is the new and dynamic CBS series debuting this Wednesday evening in prime time. Both kids and adults are going to love this new series about the hazards and delights of growing up in a small American city. The title character seems to be a fairly typical teen at first glance. She loves pizza, pop music, and consults her horoscope on a daily basis. She likes school because it is a place to be with her friends, but she is also an honor student and captain of the varsity soccer team. It does not take long, however, for viewers to realize that Sue is no ordinary young woman. In the very first episode of *Sue*, all the treasury funds of her high school's Spanish Language Club are found to be missing. If you think the amateur detective who comes forward to solve the case is Sue, go straight to the head of the class. You are right. The title character Sue is a super sleuth. She not only loves mysteries, she knows how to solve them. If the excitement and fun of the premier episode of *Sue* is a promise of more great programs to come, this comedy/drama is going to be the new season's biggest hit series.

Writing An Autobiography

The culminating autobiographical adventure asks students to write their own autobiographies. Elementary and middle school students have not lived long lives, but they have experienced interesting ones and each student has a personal story he or she can share.

Students who have participated in any of the preceding activities will be primed to write their autobiographies and will probably have little trouble beginning this task. Even so, it may be helpful to provide students with a basic outline to follow in collecting data, outlining and organizing information, and telling their life stories. One possible outline to share with students follows. Obviously, teachers and parents may add or delete chapters as seem appropriate, based upon factors such as age and circumstances. Teachers working with younger children will most likely want to involve parents in helping young, gifted students write their autobiographies. From their own memories and experiences, and through the use of baby books, parents will be able to help students with the earliest chapters in their memoirs. Parents will also be especially helpful in locating and sharing photographs of themselves to fully illustrate complete profiles.

An Autobiography Outline

Chapter 1
Family name, history, and background
Information about parents

Chapter 2
I join the family: when and where?

Chapter 3
The Early Years: Part 1:
My first toys, first words, first steps, first teeth, first punishment!

Chapter 4
The Early Years: Part II:
Favorite toys or games, pets, nursery school, special birthdays

Chapter 5
Kindergarten days:
Most memorable kindergarten experience
My kindergarten teacher was _____.

Chapter 6
The Primary Grades:
Teachers, friends, school plays, report cards
Cub Scouts, Brownies, T-Ball

Chapter 7
Middle Grades:
New friends, favorite classes, learning to play the flute,
soccer, starting ballet lessons.

Chapter 8
My Family;
Parents, siblings, cousins, grandparents
The homes and places where I have lived
Family trips and reunions
Family traditions I like

Chapter 9
My Friends:
My favorite things to do with peers
Things that we share

Chapter 10
Accomplishments:
The proudest moment of my life
The neatest thing I have done.
Awards I have won.

Chapter 11
My Future Plans:
Education, career, travel, and family desires.

Random Autobiographical Activities

In addition to the preceding autobiographically-inspired activities and projects, ranging from personalized ABC books to complete autobiographies, innumerable additional activities may be offered as affirmative student challenges to engage their gifts and talents. The following is a cursory list of additional student opportunities.

Invite students to create laminated, autobiographical bookmarks.

Encourage the design of postage stamps to honor student achievements.

Have students create sketches of coins or paper currency that

feature a self-portrait.

Ask students to draw or paint heraldry shields that pay homage to their talents.

Challenge students to make a list of 25 daydreams of future activities they wish to pursue.

Provide this prompt: Focus on the future. *Time Magazine* has placed a portrait of you on its cover as "The Person of the Year." What accomplishment(s) earned you such a prize?

Conclusion

Autobiography provides today's gifted students with numerous positive opportunities. Published memoirs, such as *Ashley Bryan: Words to My Life's Song,* inspire young people, while also serving as models of creative production. Such works function as both entertainment and as model memoirs. The writer's recollection of his life's most formative moments, as well as the questions he asks and answers, may inspire our student writers to consider similar inquiries. The examples of blending visual and textual formats in a coherent life narrative may motivate prospective, young memoirists to both show and tell the stories of their own lives.

Autobiographical reading, research, writing, speaking, and art activities lead students of all ages to a better understandings of and appreciation for their own special gifts. Autobiography also awakens and reminds students of the commitments their gifts entail. Perhaps most importantly, student autobiographical projects ensure the value of students' self-advocacy in the totality of the critical identification, programming, and evaluation equation. Finally, autobiography for students should always be a leading cause for celebration. "This is exciting!" replaces, "I'm bored." Student autobiography happily and hopefully honors the grand diversity of humanity, even within the microcosm of a single classroom. Imagine what it can achieve on the school, state, national, and international stage!

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HEROIC ADVOCACY FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

By Maurice D. Fisher and Michael E. Walters

Clearly, there are many ways to become effective advocates for gifted education such as, lobbying school board members and state legislators, informing citizens about the importance of providing the best educational opportunities for gifted children, and electing political candidates who will support these programs in the public schools. We also recommend another approach which draws on the biographies of individuals who have achieved the highest levels of success in the humanities, science, medicine, technology, music, the visual and performing arts, public affairs and business. By studying and discussing the lives of these individuals, gifted child advocates will have an additional resource for convincing parents, teachers and politicians about the importance of maintaining and developing gifted education programs.

We have called these individuals "Heroes of Giftedness" and have published a book with this title (Maurice and Eugenia Fisher, Editors, 2009). Twelve educators of the gifted, including Maurice Fisher, Michael Walters, Harry Roman, Joan Smutny, Carol Horn, Stephen Schroth, Jason Helfer, Daniel Gonshorek, Eugene and Diana Avergon, Ross Butchart, and Dorothy Massalski, have written brief essays about the lives and accomplishments of 65 outstanding individuals. The essays concentrate upon their early education and some of the factors that have catapulted them to success.

Why not use information about these and similar heroes in discussions with school board members, politicians and various parent and educator organizations? By learning about the lives and accomplishments of the following individuals, they will see that gifted education programs are not an extra frill, primarily designed to placate aggressive parents: Ben Carson-neurosurgeon, Plácido Domingo-opera tenor, Brian Greene-physicist, Walter Alvarez-geologist, Neil Armstrong-astronaut, Stephen Hawking-physicist, Oliver Sacks-neurologist, Annie Dillard-nature writer and novelist, Gabriel Garcia Márquez-novelist, N. Scott Momaday-author, Mary Oliver-poet, Judith Jamison-dancer, and Wynton Marsalis-musician. Instead, such programs are a valuable means for developing the abilities of children who could also become great artists, scientists, and inventors. To show the importance of using biographical information about highly gifted people, we have included excerpts from the *Heroes of Giftedness* (2009) book regarding the lives and accomplishments of Ben Carson, Plácido Domingo, and Brian Greene. First, Dr. Ben Carson's life story shows how a child raised in a single-parent home located in the inner city was challenged by his mother, older brother, and teacher-mentors to expand his scientific knowledge. Second, the life story of Plácido Domingo demonstrates how a talented child growing up in a highly musical family was encouraged by his parents, other relatives and musical-mentors to become a great opera singer. Now, he is an international operatic virtuoso, and an operatic producer and director. Third, Brian

Greene's life history demonstrates how teacher-mentors struggled to expand the abilities of an exceptionally gifted young mathematician. Greene is now a Professor of Mathematics and Physics at Columbia University. He is the author of two exceptional books on modern physics – *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (2003) and *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality* (2004).

The following is a more detailed discussion of these Heroes of Giftedness written for the informational needs of advocates and supporters of the gifted education field. Use this information in a manner that will help to convince policy-makers that special programs for the gifted can produce many unexpected benefits for their community, state and nation.

Ben Carson, MD – Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University Medical Center

His Life story is an inspiration for all gifted students who are facing serious economic problems and racial discrimination. Carson has presented a detailed account of his early life in the Detroit and Boston inner cities where he and his brother were raised by a strict and loving mother (*Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*, Zondervan, 1996). His most recent book discusses the role of risk in making decisions about such matters as one's professional career, personal faith, health problems, and educational planning (*Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk*, Zondervan, 2008). In this book, he explains how he uses basic questions to conduct a Best/Worst Analysis (B/WA) of whether to proceed with difficult surgical procedures and other life choices. He has used this process to successfully perform a hemispherectomy (removal of part of the brain) to stop epileptic seizures in a 13 year old girl. Carson has also used his risk analysis process to determine whether to separate 7 month old twin boys who were conjoined at the back of their heads. Based on this B/W analysis, Carson and a team of seventy other doctors, nurses, and technicians conducted a successful separation of the Binder twins. Carson writes:

"I agree with Teddy Roosevelt, who once declared, 'Far better is it to dare mighty things than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much.' His words resonate with me because all my life I've observed two groups of people who have made serious life-impacting mistakes in their approaches to risk.

"First are those people who sadly are so afraid to take any risk that they never actually manage to do anything of true significance in their lives. Second are those individuals who take all the wrong risks and tragically end up hurting or destroying themselves or others in the process. Lives are ruined either way, and both groups fail to reach their potential. They never discover or enjoy the true purpose for which God placed them on earth." (from *Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk*, 2008, p. 66)

"As boys, whenever my brother, Curtis, or I offered our mother an excuse for failing to accomplish something—whenever we complained about some seemingly insurmountable problem, whenever we grew weary or discouraged by some obstacle in the road of life, or especially whenever we whined about anything—she always offered the same response. She would get a puzzled look on her face and ask, 'Do you have a brain?'

"The implication was crystal clear: If you have a brain, use it! It's all you need to overcome any problem!" (from *Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk*, 2008, p. 234)

Discussion of *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* (1996) by Ben Carson with Cecil Murphey.

As a world renowned neurosurgeon, Ben Carson is known for his leadership in conducting difficult brain operations on children. His most notable accomplishment occurred when he led a team of 70 individuals in successfully completing the separation of 7 month old babies joined at the head. This autobiography would be particularly inspiring to minority children because the author grew up in the Black inner cities of Detroit and Boston. (Most of his public schooling occurred in Detroit except for two years in Boston's schools.) Carson describes difficult years in elementary school until the school nurse identified his vision problems in the middle of the fifth grade. After being fitted with glasses, his performance in the upper elementary grades improved until he progressed to the top of his class in junior high and high school.

The major positive forces in his young life were his mother and older brother, Curtis, who later became an engineer. Mrs. Carson was determined that her sons would perform well in public school, attend college, and be successful in life. In addition, she instilled ethical principles in Ben and Curtis through her religious teachings and their involvement in a church. She organized their life outside of school so that study and reading took precedence over everything else including television. As a single parent, she was under serious economic and psychological pressures. In this regard, Carson says that she would leave home (after placing her children in the care of neighbors) for weeks at a time to "visit friends." But years later he found out that she voluntarily entered a mental institution during these periods to receive psychiatric treatment. Mrs. Carson did not want to expose the children to her mental problems — instead, she provided them with a stable home environment which eventually involved reclaiming a small house that she had rented to another family in order to pay the mortgage.

This combination of a strong-willed mother, bright children, and concerned educators produced amazing results. Ben increased his awareness of what could be accomplished by applying his analytic and fine motor skills to the medical field. He became a high academic performer in junior high school and high school, graduated near the top of his class, and was Colonel of the city of Detroit ROTC high school brigade. At the final ROTC ceremony during his senior year, General William Westmoreland and two Congressional Medal of Honor winners attended and talked with Ben. Later

he was offered a full scholarship to West Point. But he was not interested in a military career – instead, he set his sights on attending medical school and becoming a psychiatrist. Yale University offered him a 90 percent academic scholarship where he successfully competed against some of the best pre-med students in the country. After finishing his undergraduate work at Yale, he was accepted at the University of Michigan Medical School. His interests turned to neurosurgery and upon completion of his four years of medical school, he went to Johns Hopkins University for his internship and five years of residency training as a neurosurgeon. He is currently Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and has a worldwide reputation in this field.

What does Ben Carson say about his achievements? What factors does he consider as being most important for determining his success? First, he attributes his initial success in public school to the goals set by his mother and her determined support. Second, he developed an attitude that stressed never giving up one's goals and always aiming toward the highest levels of accomplishment. Third, his religious training and principles have guided him through many stressful experiences including battles with bigots and internal battles with anger and aggression. Fourth, he says that one must engage in detailed in-depth learning in order to acquire the information and knowledge that will lead to success. He learned this rule in secondary school, and applied it successfully at Yale and the University of Michigan Medical School where he studied about twelve hours a day during his second year. Fifth, he attributes much of his success as a neurosurgeon to his extraordinary eye-hand coordination and ability to think of objects in three dimensions. (He first discovered this ability when he played table soccer, "fussball," with classmates at Yale.) This unique ability has enabled him to accurately perceive brain structures during surgery.

Teachers, students, parents, and counselors should read this book and use it as an inspirational resource for study in the medical sciences. Besides providing details of the operation that separated the Siamese twins, the book contains the stories of many other surgical patients. Carson ends his book with the "Think Big" keys to success which emphasize talent development, learning the importance of time, hope, honesty, insight, being nice to people, knowledge, books, in-depth learning, and God.

Plácido Domingo – Genius of Opera Performance and Humanitarian

He was born on January 21, 1941 in Madrid, Spain. At the age of eight he lived in Mexico where his family had a zarzuela theatre which is similar to the American vaudeville and the British variety hall formats. One of his first performances was a minor role in the original Mexican production of *My Fair Lady*. As a young adult in Mexico, he participated in a variety of musical entertainment venues. His parents' company also included performances by the young Domingo in *The Merry Widow* by Lehar. In the late 1950s, he even sang backup vocals for César Costa's rock-and-roll band, and later played piano for a ballet company and a cultural program on Mexican television.

In 1962 he signed a brief contract with the Israel National Opera which was extended for two and one-half years. This exposure brought him to the attention of the New York City Opera and the Metropolitan Opera. At one of the Metropolitan's performances, the famous singer Franco Corelli was unable to perform in Celia's *Adriana Lecouvreur*; therefore Domingo was his substitute. One of his co-singers at this performance was the Prima Diva, Renata Tebaldi. His career took off and he premiered with some of the world's leading operatic companies, e.g., the Vienna State Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, La Scala (Milan), the San Francisco Opera, and the Royal Opera House (London). Domingo holds an unusual honor; he received the longest ovation on an opera stage which included 101 curtain calls over a period of 81 minutes. This was for his leading role performance in Verdi's Otello in July 1991 at the Vienna State Opera. Domingo has won many Grammy awards for his opera recordings including Verdi's *Aida* (1971) and Puccini's *La Bohème* (1974). Currently, he is director of the Washington National Opera and the Los Angeles Opera.

In the 1980s he made his mark beyond the realm of opera. He recorded a duet, "Perhaps Love," with the American country-folk singer John Denver. Six years later he and Denver joined Julie Andrews in an Emmy winning show from Salzburg, Austria – *The Sound of Christmas*.

As a citizen of New York City, I (Michael Walters) have had numerous opportunities to experience Plácido Domingo's performances at Lincoln Center. Among his achievements are the dramatic qualities and presence that he brings to his roles. Those which I have witnessed have been: Wagner's *Parsifal*, Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*, and Alfano's *Cyrano De Bergerac*. I have also benefited from many of his performances on the Public Broadcasting System, (e.g., *The Three Tenors Concert* for the 1990 Soccer World Cup in Rome). This concert included two other great singers, José Carreras and Luciano Pavarotti.

Domingo's humanitarian concerts and charities also mark his genius. In 1985, Mexico City was devastated by an earthquake. He returned to the city of his youth and personally labored to rescue survivors. This tragedy was personal, as among the victims were his uncle, aunt, nephew and nephew's son. The original reason for *The Three Tenors Concert* was to raise funds for the José Carreras International Leukemia Foundation. Carreras has survived a bout with this disease and he continues to give performances. After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, Domingo gave a gala benefit concert to help rebuild the city. In 2007 he performed in Athens, Greece for the victims of the genocide in Darfur, Sudan – an event sponsored by Doctors without Borders. Plácido Domingo's career and humanitarian work are examples of an extraordinary Hero of Giftedness.

Brian Greene, Ph.D. – Professor of Mathematics and Physics at Columbia University

As a sixth grade elementary school student, Greene's teacher gave him a note to take to professors at Columbia University. The note requested that he should be tutored in advanced mathematics because his elementary school teachers could not instruct such a mathematically precocious student. His teachers did the right thing by accelerating him to a higher level of education at his young age! Greene was tutored in mathematics at Columbia until he graduated from Stuyvesant High School. Then, he attended Harvard University and received an undergraduate degree from this institution in 1984. His Ph.D. degree in physics was from Oxford University in 1987 where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He has applied his mathematical abilities to the development of String Theory – the study of the smallest particles that compose physical matter. Strings are posited to be tiny strands of vibrating energy of different sizes and shapes. The successful demonstration of this theory through empirical research would lead to the unification of all areas of physics, but with strange predictions such as parallel universes and eleven dimensions of space-time. This "theory of everything" would eventually unify Einstein's Theory of Relativity with Quantum Mechanics.

Greene's skill at explaining complicated concepts in physics has resulted in his writing two popular books (see the Resources section) for the layman who is curious about science. These books discuss in a non-technical manner the major concepts of modern physics, (e.g., Newton's Laws of Motion, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, the Big Bang, Symmetry, Inflationary Cosmology, and String Theory). In 2003 he presented some of these complicated ideas on the PBS NOVA series entitled, *The Elegant Universe*. This three-hour documentary is a fascinating overview of physics enhanced by sophisticated graphics, and by Greene's relaxed and humorous approach to teaching. In an article (*Put a Little Science in Your Life*, June 1, 2008) in the OP-ED section of The New York Times, Greene said that schools are doing a poor job of teaching about how science is related to students' lives. He argued that teachers must make students aware of some of the basic questions addressed by scientific research: Where did the universe come from? How did life originate? How does the brain give rise to consciousness? Imparting the spirit of science is just as important as teaching the underlying mathematics and mechanics of conducting research. Students who are gifted in science and mathematics should read Greene's books and follow his inspirational search for basic knowledge about the construction of the universe. He writes:

"But here's the thing. The reason science really matters runs deeper still. Science is a way of life. Science is a perspective. Science is the process that takes us from confusion to understanding in a manner that's precise, predictive and reliable — a transformation, for those lucky enough to experience it, that is empowering and emotional. To be able to think through and grasp explanations — for everything from why the sky is blue to how life formed on earth — not because they are declared dogma but rather because they reveal patterns confirmed by experiment and observation, is one of the most precious of human experiences." *(*Brian Greene from *The New York Times*, OP-ED Section, June 1, 2008)

"Space and time capture the imagination like no other scientific subject. For good reason. They form the arena of reality, the very fabric of the cosmos. Our entire existence–everything we do, think, and experience–takes place in some region of space during some interval of time. Yet science is still struggling to understand what space and time actually are. Are they real physical entities or simply useful ideas? If they're real, are they fundamental or do they emerge from more basic constituents? What does it mean for space to be empty? Does time have a beginning? Does it have an arrow flowing inexorably from past to future as common experience would indicate? Can we manipulate space and time? In this book, we follow 300 years of passionate scientific investigation seeking answers, or at least glimpses of answers, to such basic but deep questions about the nature of the universe." (from *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality*, 2004, Preface, p. ix)

Storytelling

The storytelling aspect of discussing Heroes of Giftedness is important because it appeals to our basic interest in hearing about people's lives. In this case, we are talking about real-life people discussed by gifted advocates in a clear and precise manner. Most of the Heroes covered in our book have had fascinating experiences related to developing their skills and abilities. This is particularly true of their early lives when they began to show gifted characteristics. For example, teacher or parent advocates can tell the fascinating story of Joshua Bell (classical music violinist): he first demonstrated his interest in music during his preschool years when he constructed and played a rubber band device for plucking songs that he heard his mother play on the piano. Another example is Judith Jamison who, as a young girl, attended specialized dance schools where she was mentored by expert instructors. And then there were the two young technology wizards, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, who produced innovative computers in the Jobs family's Mountain View, California garage. These types of stories should emphasize the personal aspects of emerging giftedness rather than standardized test results. Advocates can use them in a storytelling manner to stress important milestones in outstanding people's lives.

Obviously, storytelling is a skill which improves with practice and performance, but it will eventually pay off enormously when used in a creative manner to advocate for gifted education programs. This technique, used in conjunction with studying and reading about Heroes of Giftedness, can be particularly effective when trying to convince obdurate teachers and principals about the necessity of providing advanced academic programs for the gifted. Some of the most admired leaders have been highly skilled orators and storytellers (e.g., Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill used their talents to convince citizens to support them on difficult national and international issues). Regarding

the importance of oratorical skills, Churchill said:

> "If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time." (1919) (from *Churchill by Himself*, 2008, p. 57)

The mental development of one of the greatest Heroes of Giftedness of all time, Abraham Lincoln, gives teacher and parent advocates an informative and inspirational story of how a wise parent can effectively deal with a child who clearly has characteristics of early giftedness – high levels of curiosity, a strong desire for independent learning, and a passion for reading. The Lincoln scholar, William Lee Miller, has described the relationship between Lincoln and his devoted stepmother, Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln, as follows:

"She saw that she and he were on the same wavelength: 'His mind & mine—what little I had—seemed to run together—move in the same channel.' She gave one of the best of the many pictures of her stepson as a diligent reader and careful student with an excellent memory, studying and studying and studying, all on his own, until he got something straight. Although she was herself illiterate, she clearly encouraged this unusual new son. Still, Abraham's stepmother was, by her own modest admission, not equipped to be a mentor to this unusual boy. Her contribution seems to have been her recognition that he *was* unusual, and the emotional sustenance she gave him. She would be enormously important to the young boy, but more as one who provided support for the boy's own course than as one offering guidance in charting it.

"If the face-to-face human surroundings of Lincoln's youth were as severely limited as he said and implied they were, where did young Lincoln's ideas of worthy life purposes come from? The first answer is the same as the answer about his education in general: he taught himself. He 'picked up' (the phrase he uses twice) whatever education he had, 'from time to time,' 'somehow.' But we might give another answer, or the same answer in another way: the printing press. He was not really alone, because of all those voices that spoke to him, all the figures and ideals he read about, on the printed page." (from William Lee Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography*, Vintage Books, 2002, p. 59)

Advocates should use this story to convince teachers, administrators and school board members of the moral and ethical need for gifted education programs. Lincoln made the following comment regarding giftedness: "Towering genius disdains a beaten path." (1837) (from *Abraham Lincoln: Quotes, Quips, and Speeches*, 2009, p. 28)

Conclusion

The study of Heroes of Giftedness by parent and teacher advocates is an effective morale booster because it demonstrates that the end results of gifted education can help to produce individuals who make enormous contributions to intellectual and creative areas. What teachers would not be proud to know that they played a vital role in educating an internationally recognized scientist, mathematician, author, musician or artist? They would then be assured that their educational efforts were not in vain because they were instrumental in their gifted student's academic success.

What are some of the lessons learned as a result of studying about Carson, Domingo, Greene, and other Heroes of Giftedness? These principles should be used by advocates who want to convince citizens of the importance of gifted education. Here are examples gleaned from our investigations of extraordinary lives:

- ***Parents and teachers should design rigorous humanities and science lessons and educational experiences for all gifted children.*** This principle can be implemented by teaching about the great thinkers, creators and innovators who made paradigm shifts in knowledge, (e.g., Darwin and Einstein). Darwin was able, through his extensive observations of nature and thousands of collected specimens, to create a whole new concept about the process of biological change. Einstein, by means of thought experiments, combined mathematical, physical science, and philosophical concepts into a revolutionary theory of matter and motion.

- ***Structure in both the school and the gifted child's personal environment (e.g., the home, religious-cultural institutions, public libraries and bookstores) is essential during the early learning years for developing academic interests and abilities.*** For example, it can be in the form of setting up strict schedules for doing homework, reading and preparing for tests. Consistency in dealing with problems such as excessive TV watching should be a high priority. Museum and library visits, artistic performances, and other enrichment activities are necessary on a weekly basis.

- ***Teachers should reinforce a positive attitude toward learning by presenting challenging lessons based upon such theorists as Jean Piaget and Benjamin Bloom.*** They must also identify the gifted child's specific interests and provide many opportunities for exploring these interests. For example, the Barnes & Noble and Borders bookstores are an excellent resource for stimulating gifted students' curiosity and instinct for learning.

- ***A culture of learning should be established at a young age in the school and home.*** It should be reinforced by well-read teachers in subject areas and by mentors who are the best available experts in subjects that match the gifted child's interests and abilities. (A writers-and-artists-in-residence program would be an excellent means for enriching gifted students' sensibilities.) Teachers and mentors should be curious and highly motivated in striving for advanced knowledge in different fields including the humanities and literature.

- ***Both teachers and parents should be strong advocates for gifted children.*** They must be willing to "step up to the plate" when it comes to advocating for proper resources and educational opportunities. An effective advocate for gifted education benefits the entire society.

Advocacy for gifted children has never been an easy task. We hope our recommendations will assist in supporting

and producing meaningful programs in these difficult times. May the Heroes of Giftedness be an inspiration for achieving your formidable goals!

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FINDING A VOICE: TEACHING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ADVOCACY IN THE SCIENCE CLASSROOM

By Joy Casad

For too many years, science has been seen as an isolated endeavor, a sterile subject carried out by eggheads in a box-like laboratory somewhere far from the community and the students, who discover research findings only in textbooks. The abyss between sociology and the so-called hard sciences has been so great, that a scientist of one type will not even bother to research the work of scientists in other fields. But this attitude divorces the authenticity of science from the realities of political influences and social perspective. In fact, science is as much a social construct as any other subject in the field of humanities. Furthermore, the implications of science and scientific endeavors (which originate from societal trends and policies) reflect on the community and society at large. This science-to-society connection is a demonstrable and undeniable force in the course of history. It represents the classical "art imitating life" relationship; but in this case, science imitates life, which imitates science, and so forth.

Students can be taught to understand the true relationships between science, politics, social values, and culture. In so doing, they learn the empowerment of the scientific fields; the delicate balance between this power and the powerless (who are necessarily created in the wake of its knowledge); and the place in history of various trends in philosophy, ideals, and even cultural definitions of love and morality. And they will realize that, just as scientific knowledge has shaped culture and history, science has also been directed and shaped by culture and social milieu. As this pattern emerges, students are more likely to view themselves as agents of change, however they decide to direct their lives. Those who choose to pursue scientific fields will take with them the social responsibility that allows them to change their own communities.

Paulo Freire (1972), the Brazilian revolutionary educator, would call this type of teaching dialogue "liberatory pedagogy." Its strength lies in the liberation of the student, the ongoing learning of the teacher, and the outcome of action.

Traditional teaching is more correctly called indoctrination. True and authentic teaching is humanistic, personal, and transforming. How can transformational pedagogy be applied in today's standards-based, concept-driven schools? Practically speaking, the answer lies in the relevance and delivery of each lesson, with attention to the specific needs of the students, and with a core community context. As with anything, it depends on the audience.

Gifted students, who are extraordinarily sensitive to social and cultural injustices, benefit greatly from the responsibility and freedom of liberatory pedagogy. Because these students are able to analyze the complexity of the interaction between science and society, there is a greater chance of successful outcomes, as defined by their long-term ability and willingness to transform their own communities. Additionally, students can be encouraged to implement plans for sharing knowledge and for aiding communities as part of their project. Some pertinent, representative interdisciplinary issues include environmental justice, history and science, science and religion, and political influence on science.

Environmental justice is a theme easily adapted to the students' community. Some examples of an environmental justice investigation would be: Students, using maps of the neighborhoods within their city or county, obtain soil samples, water run-off, or tap water samples, then test them for heavy metals (such as lead, mercury, and arsenic). Other chemical tests of interest can also be carried out, such as testing for organic esters or acrylamides (cancer causing agents). These require more sophisticated methods of chemical analysis.

Then, students map out the green, or natural, areas in each neighborhood (in urban settings, this is extremely relevant) and create maps showing the toxic presence in schools, parks, greenery, or any other relevant residential or public buildings. Using that data, the students do a demographic study of each neighborhood, carefully including the ethnic and economic makeup of each community. What do they notice? Are communities of color routinely higher in lead and mercury? Are schools frequently the site of chemical contamination? Is the tap water safe to drink, and is this consistent in every neighborhood? Are there safe areas of natural beauty in that neighborhood? What types of historical evidence can they find to expand their analysis? This line of inquiry will broaden an environmental science class to include sociology, history, and culture.

Intergenerational human studies involving science, education, and policy also invite students to become agents of change in their communities. The emphasis of these studies should be to try to draw broad, relevant relationships between disciplines. For example, recent studies in neuroscience have shown that memory and learning are affected by the density of the urban environment to which an individual has been exposed immediately preceding the cognitive event or assessment (Science Daily, 2008). Can you imagine some of the ways that this relationship could be explored in a science classroom where the emphasis is on advocacy and social justice?

Another relevant study in this line of inquiry could be the impact of historical texts on the implementation of practices in medicine or criminal justice. Do students know that until recently (the 1980s), small children and babies were believed not to feel pain and were routinely operated on with absolutely no anesthesia? This once-routine procedure would now be considered brutally cruel. Students can evaluate the science and policy which impelled that surprisingly recent transition. Does the particular history of medical policy contribute to an overall lack of mental health or a distrust of science in the community today?

The impact of scientific findings in the criminal justice system is also widespread. Students can become aware of the social implications of technologies used in forensic science, profiling, database mining, and other tools for criminalistics, some of which are inherently unfair to minority peoples. How does current practice help or hinder equality? Has the justice system used bias to enhance efficiency? Students can evaluate how speaking poor English or being a foreigner can affect the outcome for a defendant seeking to obtain justice through habeas corpus. How does a lack of economic resources affect the ability of an individual to obtain the rights to which he or she is entitled under the law?

Students who are interested in forensics might consider DNA evidence, which has been used recently to acquit over 200 improperly imprisoned individuals incarcerated on eyewitness accounts (Finkelstein, 2009). Students could study the ability of individuals to remember events, facial features, and other arbitrary details which are now being shown to be malleable and, all too often, incorrect. Then, students would evaluate the criminal justice system as a means to an end. Does the outcome of a trial really assume the great responsibility of justice, or is it merely a well-waxed system of efficiency and reward? Perhaps it is somewhere in between. How can our understanding of science make it more effective and fair?

Various tangential research studies regarding science and society could follow, depending on the maturity of your gifted scholars. Students might want to study the cultural and religious influences on the practice of genital mutilation permitted presently in parts of Africa, or the prophylactic treatment of female prostitutes to prevent the spread of HIV in India (Deodhar, 2003). They may be inspired to study the science behind World War II, whether the focus is Nazi experimentation and death camps, or the role that science and policy in the United States played in the creation and deployment of nuclear arms. They can investigate the social racism which led to pseudo-scientific study supporting eugenics, a "study" which helped to delay emancipation and freedom in this country for almost three centuries (Grant, 2007). A more recent case study is the Tuskeegee Syphilis study, a shameful medical trial stretching from 1932 to 1972 (Harrison, 2001).

These difficult subjects will leave the students with the power of a global perspective. Although their fresh insights may leave the students slightly wounded, they will feel more empowered to engage their communities in the process of healing. Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1974) said "Look to the past and lose one eye. Don't look back, and you will lose both." By

educating children to look to the past before implementing plans for the future, we will ensure that future generations will not be blind.

In keeping with our theme of local community involvement, students could also investigate the prevalence of mental illness as it relates to urban life, the effect of environmental legislation on local economies, or the relationship between nutrition and educational attainment. All of these ideas are genuine, scientific, and sophisticated, while also serving to broaden the scope of scientific study to include a culture of community advocacy. The students become the scientists. The community replaces the laboratory. The student-scientists become the voice and the arbitrators of the community and are empowered to change circumstances which would previously have gone unnoticed. Students will, sooner than later, become the advocates of their own futures, the initiators of reform at all levels. The learning will be deeper and more profound than the outcomes of traditional laboratory exercises. The teacher is merely the instrument of dialogue and materials, the catalyst for these events. His/her goal is to open eyes, to initiate conversation, and to learn along with the students as they conspire, direct, lead, and evaluate their own scientific studies. A divorce between science and society? It becomes unheard of, if we train a generation of young minds to investigate social concerns through the lenses of science. It is a vision of science which, I think, would make Freire proud.

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SENSORIAL WRITING AND SYNESTHESIA: MERGING THE SENSES TO CREATE BETTER WRITERS

By Jo Sullivan

The literature professor at NSU who altered the way I saw myself as a writer and an instructor of writing walked into the classroom one morning carrying his familiar distressed brown leather briefcase. He wasn't a good professor. His tendency was to drone on in a monotone that managed to be both boring and arrogant at the same time. But today he had look of amazement on his face as he stopped in the middle of the room, held up a magazine he'd removed from the case and proceeded to enthusiastically share with us the reason for his amazement. "Research psychologists," he began, "have discovered there are some people with more than five senses, or rather, a blending of some or all of those five senses." He continued with his monologue and as he progressed, my interest became more intense. He described people with **synesthesia**, or **synesthetes**, as being capable of seeing units of time in color, texture and geometric shapes. That's when I really began listening. Days of the week, he continued, had their own color, months of the year might have the feel of corduroy or the sound of rain on a tin roof.

Here then was the moment of self-discovery that altered my path. My very own "Eureka!" I realized that not everyone knew that Tuesday is yellow with a bit of white at the edges. As my professor continued, obviously enthralled with this new discovery, I was overwhelmed. Of course September is pale lavender with the texture of dotted swiss. Doesn't everyone understand that? Doesn't the sound of a tenor saxophone send bolts of sharp yellow lightning through everyone's minds eye? I had stopped listening at this point and couldn't wait for class to end so that I could: 1. Snatch the magazine from his papery hands and 2. Begin my own research into this heretofore unknown *thing* with which I was apparently gifted. I didn't grab the magazine and run when the class finally ended but drove back to Tulsa instead. Even though my mind was racing, it was the slowest 45 minutes of my life.

Arriving home, I tossed my overloaded backpack aside and logged on to my computer. I typed "synesthesia" in the search toolbar. My first hit, even without the European spelling, came from the University of Waterloo in Canada:

"What is Synaesthesia?"

"Synaesthesia is a condition in which ordinary stimuli lead to extraordinary experiences. There are many types of synaesthesia. Some synaesthetes have conscious experiences of vivid colors when listening to music or hearing other types of sounds. Other synaesthetes experience strong tactile sensations (itching, tingling) when hearing noises such as

those emitted by a vacuum cleaner. The most common type of synaesthesia is letter/digit color synaesthesia. For people who experience this type of synaesthesia, seeing, hearing, or even thinking about a letter or digit can elicit a visual experience of a highly specific color. It is estimated that 1 person out of every 2000 people experiences some form of synaesthesia." (http://www.synaesthesia.uwaterloo.ca/).

The college site requested volunteers for their ongoing research projects. So, volunteer I did and discovered that I was, indeed a synesthete. My world as a writer and educator had changed forever. The frustration I sometimes felt when a student "just didn't get it" disappeared, and in it's place came a determination to teach creative and technical writing to children in a way that would access all of their senses.

The methodology I used and documented eventually became *From Brain to Paper: A Writing Program for Children of All Ages.* The objective behind this program was to foster a child's creative thinking, technical skills, and self-esteem through journaling and insight through poetry, while always being aware of sensorial interpretations. Although there are no sure-fire ways to teach writing skills, whether creative or technical, to *anyone*, this approach attempted to introduce to teachers and parents a few ideas to help children who struggle with writing, while still encouraging their love of writing.

In order to write creatively, one needs to be able to think creatively. So we begin with introducing the child to his own creativity. In most cases, children who have trouble putting their thoughts on paper do not think they have a creative bone in their bodies. In this program I offered ideas on how to dispel those self-defeating impulses and teach the child to explore his own creative psyche. It is with practice that anything becomes second nature. So it is with writing. Once the child has learned the necessary skills for writing, whether creatively or technically, he will flourish in his academic life.

Examples of exercises within the program include:

+ **Warming up the apprehensive child:**
  Many children are uncomfortable with their first foray into writing imaginatively. It often helps to warm a child to the idea of putting pencil or pen to paper and doing whatever comes naturally. Allowing him to draw squiggles, doodles, or whatever feels right enables a freedom of expression on paper that, perhaps, he has never felt before.

+ **Introduce the journal:**
  Offer the child his own journal to decorate however he wishes, whether he uses crayons, markers, or even pictures from magazines to glue as a collage. It is his to make his own. Your job is to encourage him to express why he chose to decorate it as he did. This "back and forth" can lead to some amazing verbal storytelling.

+ **Warm up drawing:**
  Encourage doodling, scribbling, and just playing around with color and paper. I will often employ instrumental music during this exercise and suggest that the child draw the sounds of the music.
  The point of this exercise is to establish a freedom within the child when it comes to expressing himself on paper. Make sure that you do not judge the work or find pictures in it that he may not have anticipated. Simply saying, "Tell me about this," is sufficient. By always asking open-ended questions, you are freeing the child to use his imagination. Inspirational and creative telling and writing almost always follow.

+ **Finding the concrete in the abstract**:
  Another way to employ doodles to precipitate creative writing is to allow the child to free draw with no intent other than the enjoyment of the process. After he feels that he has completed the task, ask him to find pictures within his scribbling. He will be using his imagination and creativity to find things in his art that he may not have even meant to put there. It is important to stay away from phrases like, "That looks like…", or "Oh, I know what that is." These types of verbal interactions can actually lessen the child's ability to imagine for himself.

+ **Telling the story:**
  At this point the child may begin talking about the story within the pictures within the doodles! If he does not start spontaneously, a little prompting is just fine. Just asking him to tell you about the pictures may get him started on a real story. Once this process has begun, you may occasionally (and gently) read what has been written and again ask open-ended questions. Often, a deepening of the story will then occur.

For me, these tactics were the beginning of a new way of writing instruction that included almost complete immersion in the five senses of the student. As the program evolved, so did my manner of instruction. I realized that in order to vividly express a feeling, thought, or an emotion of any type, one must be able to understand and use both similes and metaphors. This concept does not come easily for very young children, but by kindergarten any child can, through dictation, compare and contrast just about anything. The easiest way to begin with a very young writer is to use color and fruit similes. For example: Red like the cherry. Continue with these:

+ Blue like _____

+ Yellow like _____

+ Green like_____

+ Brown like_____

Once the child has grasped the concept of the simile, encourage him to continue by providing the sentence without the corresponding comparison:

+ My bike is as shiny as_____

+ A bear roars like a_____

+ My basketball is round like a_____

+ The giraffe's neck is long like a_____

+ The moon shines as bright as_____

+ The sun is hot like_____

+ My kite flies as high as_____

From here the integration of the five senses would come into play with the writing of sensorial poetry. The introduction of "smelling jars", which, in my case, are film containers which hold cotton balls, each soaked with a different essence flavoring, such as lemon zest or almond, as well as items from nature such as cedar, flowers, or even tap water. One container is passed around the circle and each child takes a bit of a sniff and describes what he smells in the form of a simile. An example of the lemon zest might be, "This smells like a sunny day."

I want to offer some examples of sensorial, poems that my second-grade students have written. Much of the following came from students who struggled to put onto paper that which blossomed from their imaginations:

Sense and Similes (Emotion Poetry):

Jenga (my cat)
Jenga is black like soft silk
Jenga sounds like jingle bells ringing
Jenga tastes like cherry cheesecake
Jenga smells like fresh baked cookies
Jenga feels like a big hug from Amy
Jenga moves like a flower swaying in the wind
~Sarah

Love
Love sounds like robins in a sunny meadow
Love smells like crisp chocolate chip cookies
Love tastes like toasty pastries in a bakery
Love looks like a blanket of white snow
Love feels like a warm fleece blanket
~Beau

Fear
Fear is a color like lightening
Fear feels like goosebumps
Fear moves swiftly like flowing water
Fear looks like sharp teeth
Fear tastes like metal
~Taylor

And finally, I want to leave you with this poem from one of the first students with whom I used this methodology. She graduated from high school last year and is now a freshman at the University of Tulsa. She came to me recently and told me that I was the reason she was a writer. This is what teachers live for:

Happiness
Happiness looks like ordering a big cheese pizza on a Friday night and curling up with a blanket and watching a movie-
Happiness feels like floating on the inside part of a hot air balloon, the part inside that holds the air-
Happiness smells like the autumn breeze that floats through the air after it rains-
Happiness sounds like all the small animals that live in Africa making their yelps at the same time-
Happiness tastes like the hot summer spices that float through the air in India.
~Caitlyn

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PROMOTING THE CHILD WITH TECHNOLOGY TALENT

By Diane Witt

"It is not our abilities that show who we truly are, it is our choices."
Professor Dumbledore to Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (J.K. Rowling,1999)

You couldn't help but notice them. A group of students from Mrs. Rogerís gifted class were anxiously waiting for their new club to begin. This new after-school club focused on the online multiplayer game, World of Warcraft, a massively multiplayer, online, role-playing game that connects students with each other in a virtual world. It was the first club of its kind in their school, and these young gamers could hardly wait to begin.

Mrs. Roger was also breaking new ground. Since so many students and staff were interested in technology and gaming, the school was looking into the best way to align the curriculum with World of Warcraft for using gaming in schools.

Technologically advanced children can possess strengths and talents outside the traditional realm of giftedness. They can also be gifted in other areas that nurture their strong aptitude for the subject. Technology, as an ever-changing form of expression, frees them to focus on interest-driven topics that can open doors to a number of career options.

The ubiquitous Google, for instance, is a technology corporation well known for attracting the brightest students. The company's hiring process has seven stages and can last

months. Special events include code jams—collegial gatherings that attract math majors and engineers who write and design unbreakable codes.

During recent years, a talent pool of students with impressive computer skills has emerged and moved into today's job market. Many have taught themselves programming language, learned Web design, and started their own businesses. These highly talented students talk about the computer as though it were a close friend. School systems across the country are bursting with technologically fluent young people, many of whom have their own "super computer" at home. They understand the cultural and mechanical contexts of technology, and some have even built their own systems. Not only can these students make things happen, they understand why and how they happen. Their enthusiasm is catching, and they are eager to demonstrate their competence when given the opportunity.

Digital technologies have shaped the formative years of this generation of children. It was there when they were born. For many of them, story time at the computer replaced the storybook. Technology is simply part of everyday life.

Prensky (2001) defines a generation of digital natives—parents more connected to technology than any before them, using cell phones, e-mail and chat rooms with ease. This generation was raised differently from their ancestors. Their understanding and passion for technology have made them pioneers in the marketing of new ideas and products, as they are the first to shop online, use auction sites like eBay to buy and sell, and set up online personal payment systems, like PayPal, to make purchases. Recently, next-generation technologies have spurred dramatic innovations in social connectivity, with networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter.

Schools are also creating more options for connecting and collaborating, making learning easier for students who understand and embrace technology as a fundamental tool of life. Collaborative computer applications empower educators worldwide to create Web sites and learning platforms for their students. Moodle, which allows teachers to deliver assignments and quizzes to students, is one such open source system.

Collaboration also extends to studying. Quizlet helps students to create study groups whose members can track progress, share materials and create personalized study materials. Quizlet modernizes the flash card approach to studying, which provides an interactive study experience for individual students, working independently. Programs are available for eighth graders through college-level students, and topics cover a wide range of subjects, including languages, math, science, history, geography, social studies, and the arts.

Interest in the computer can take root at a young age. Children are fascinated by what it can do, and their interest continues to grow with exposure. Though still unable to read, most toddlers know how to turn it on and how to handle a mouse, a skill they pick up while playing games, sitting on mom or dad's lap. For those children with an exceptional aptitude for technology, their skills and interests exceed those of their peers, and their passion is real and compelling.

Riley, a five year old, had computer skills that were mostly self-taught. Since the age of three, he had used the mouse and keyboard appropriately and independently. He knew the proper use of common keys, including backspace, enter, and the space bar. Once Riley was introduced to the "real" computer, he wanted nothing more to do with age-appropriate computer toys or other adaptive devices made for young children. He wanted to use his parents' laptop. As a preschooler, he mostly used voice-prompt programs and software tailored to non-reading children. However, his parents believe his computer use is greatly advancing his academic readiness. In fact, one of the first words Riley could read was "print," because it was a prompt for one of his favorite online games.

Riley is among a growing number of preschoolers that enjoy time spent with the computer. As of 2006, 43 percent of children between the ages of four and six used the computer several times a week. During a typical day, 26 percent use the computer for at least 50 minutes, and 13 percent use a computer on a daily basis (Rideout & Hamel, 2006). Coupled with parental involvement, this support and interest can improve a child's comprehension, cognitive skills, and vocabulary skills during story time (Rideout & Hamel, 2006). A parent's involvement in this emerging interest can certainly help to motivate and prepare their child for later experiences at school.

Smutny (2000) looked at characteristics of young, gifted children and identified a number of traits correlative with a young child's interest in computers. Young gifted children have an extensive vocabulary. They are curious about many things and are able to solve problems in ways different from their peers. They are fast learners and often prefer to work alone. Their attention spans increase when they are involved with a topic they enjoy, and their good memories make them observant of things around them. They also have a long attention span, which enables them to wrestle with difficult tasks and to demonstrate the determination to see things through. They are creative, enthusiastic, and able to absorb information in one hearing.

These four-, five- and six-year-olds love the computer and may exhibit common behaviors. Mom and Dad are usually the first to recognize these skills.

1) They may be self-taught readers.
2) They are curious about how things work.
3) They are good problem solvers.
4) They may ask to play computer games.
5) If given direction, they are able to proceed and often like to work alone.
6) They understand symbols.
7) They have long attention spans.
8) They have good memories.
9) They enjoy playing games and puzzles.
10) They are always ready to move on to the next step.

11) They are able to see patterns and sequencing.

Parents of these children are first generation "digital natives" who grew up with the Internet. They have a better idea of what it means to be online, and they understand the opportunities and worries associated with that knowledge. These parents are the first responders to their child's emerging ability. Since many of these behaviors will be recognized before a child begins school, parents need to know how to protect their children, by carefully monitoring their computer time at home, as well as how to encourage them to pursue their new-found interest. Parents have challenges on two fronts. The first is at home, and the second is at school, but steps can be taken to make it easier in both environments.

Partnering With Your Computer-Loving Preschooler at Home

1. Web sites and software:

Search for software that is animated, colorful, and that engages children through games and varied activities. Look for open-ended software designed for discovery. Such products offer children new opportunities to explore subjects at greater depth and on different levels. Success should come quickly, making it easier for them to get excited about what comes next.

2. Choosing the right computer game:

There are lots of different software choices for games. Linda Lewis, chair of the Free Library of Philadelphia's Electronic Resource Committee, assists in the selection of games to be made available for library patrons. She suggests that parents, when selecting for their children, choose kid- and user-friendly games that are easy to understand. More skill-driven games, like The Reader Rabbit Series and the Jumpstart Products, are easy to navigate and are adaptable to all skill levels. She also suggests that parents preview games, to ensure that the game is appropriate and meets their expectations. (Gough, 2009)

3. Time on the computer:

Those children who enjoy what the computer has to offer soon identify it as an activity of choice. They will ask to play, and, once familiar with certain games, will continue playing on their own. While they may beg for more time, the National Institute on Media and the Family recommends that parents restrict television and screen time to no more than two hours a day. Given the children's intense interest and lengthy attention span, it will be challenging to divert their attention to other activities. In these cases, a timer could help.

4. Trying to find a balance:

Young children with emerging computer interest are excited about this new tool that opens all kind of doors to exciting activities, color, animation, and sounds. It is better than television, because it engages them. This new activity can easily incite intense negotiations, as children enthusiastically plead their case for longer periods of computer/play time. Their interest is as real as their persistence, but young users' attention still needs to be redirected to other subjects, once the parent-dictated period of screen time has elapsed. Computer interest should be acknowledged and supported, but it should always be just one part of days filled with peer playtime and physical activity.

5. Following their interests:

Playgroups are a wonderful opportunity for mothers to get together and allow their children to interact. It can also be a perfect time to add computer games. Mothers participating in these groups soon recognize whose children are interested in various topics, whether music, sports, or computers. In a small group of children, computer time can even help teach social skills, like sharing and taking turns.

6. Setting a good example:

Since more and more young children are spending time in front of the computer, it is never too early to practice safety. Locate a table that is large enough to hold one adult and the rest of the children involved in the group. Try to find chairs strong enough to support children's upper and lower backs, yet small enough for their feet to touch the floor. Make sure to position the monitor about two feet away from the child's face. In some cases, you may need to place a pillow on the chair seat. As children become more adept at using the mouse, encourage them to keep their arm relaxed, wrist straight, and not apply too much pressure to the mouse.

Sharing Your Child's Computer Interest With Educators

1. Partnering with your child's classroom:

Having a gifted child demands a lot of energy and engagement, as many of their developing interests are not the same as their peers. Meet with your child's teacher to discuss his/her challenges and successes. Find out if you can volunteer in the classroom. Inform the teacher of your desire to help with special projects. Indicate your particular strengths, so the teacher will know how to best use your help.

2. Home to school transition:

If your child has been involved in playgroups that reinforce their strengths, ask the teacher if you can continue those activities as enrichment. During computer play, keep the children engaged, and talk about the games as they participate. After checking with the teacher, see if you can create a database of software and games that could be purchased at a later date.

3. Become active in your community:

Become aware of activities at your child's school and in the greater community. School web sites and newspapers are good resources. Even if your child is still very young, attend school board meetings or offer to coach a team. Teachers are always planning events. Find out how your own skills will promote the school in your community.

4. Obstacles to getting involved:

These young children have boundless energy and often need less sleep. They catch on to things faster and are often misunderstood by teachers and friends.

Not everyone understands giftedness or gifted children. So parental involvement in the school is important, as a powerful tool of advocacy—a positive investment in a child's learning. Your availability to the teacher and community is a

proactive expression of your commitment and genuine interest. Your positive presence in the school will surely enhance the quality of your child's education and add to the understanding of their unique needs.

These early skills soon give way to other abilities associated with the computer, some of them evident by the age of seven. One such case was a little boy named Chris. He was enrolled in the school's gifted program as a second grader. After his first experience with a computer, there was no stopping his interest. He loved games and would spend hours reading everything he could. He had even written his first computer program. In ensuing years, he taught himself how to navigate computer networks and eventually faced the dilemma of whether or not to log into restricted, corporate Web sites. By 15, he was working in security, and today he continues to pursue his interests in information technology. (Schwartau, 2001)

Girls, often underrepresented in the area of technology, also demonstrate these skills. Ellen was 13 when I met her. She was failing at everything in her school, had no friends, and was in a situation where success was not possible. I met with her on several occasions. Finally one day, I asked her what she really liked. She told me she loved technology and computers. From that time on, changes were made to accommodate her learning style. I worked with the school to set up a non-traditional plan for her. This plan included part-time classes at her school, plus distance learning classes through Duke's CTY Program and Stanford's EPGY Program. In addition, she selected some independent studies and integrated all of her studies with technology. Our plan proved successful. Once she was allowed to self-pace through her studies, she turned everything around. Her parents sent her to a private school and she eventually graduated from Brown with a four-year degree at age 19.

Digital learning has empowered students with the tools they need to gain more information, communicate more widely, and solve problems in the world around them. They understand digital media, process information with ease, and produce and create their own content. Today's students spend most of their time online. They study, plan outings, and connect with their friends. Everything they do with their cell-phones, iPods, laptops and blackberries connects them with each other in a world they easily understand.

These children have certain common characteristics recognized by gifted teachers, regular classroom teachers and technology teachers:

+ They are technologically fluent. They are at ease with the computer and know how to navigate it in order to get what they need. They are equally at ease with other new tools that come on the market.
+ They understand how the computer works. These students are often classroom technicians.
+ Many of these students perceive their relationship with technology as more fulfilling than time with their peers.
+ They have a great passion about what they know of technology and eagerly share their information with others.
+ Some of these students also have strengths in math and music.
+ They demonstrate entrepreneurship.
+ They can find creative ways to use the computer if given the time -- sometimes not to their advantage.
+ They take a leadership role in projects related to technology.
+ They don't understand why some people "don't get it."

There are a number of venues that represent good learning choices for these students. Remember that they stand on the threshold of a still emerging, developing market. These technologically fluent students often have interests that transcend opportunities available in their hometowns, making it difficult for them to find local mentors relevant to their needs.

Telementoring, or mentoring through the Internet, overcomes this obstacle by providing students with an exciting, new learning option. Students are connected with a telementor--someone with the expertise to extend a student's knowledge in a subject. These telementors partner with the student to increase career skills, or to assist on projects, giving students the opportunity to learn more about their interests and potentials.

Online classes, digital charter schools, and virtual schools have removed barriers for students, offering learning opportunities well beyond the four walls of a traditional classroom. They have also created options for students where gifted services aren't available. Self-directed, self-motivated students do well in these environments. There are a number of online options now available to gifted students who prefer the flexibility of learning online:

+ Center for Talented Youth (Duke University) in Durham, NC

This program includes courses ranging from economics to the physical sciences. The classes are self-paced and are delivered through CD-Rom or the Internet. They also offer an international component with summer school options for younger students. A fee is required.

+ Education Program for Gifted Youth Online High School (Stanford University) in Palo Alto, CA

This program for gifted students is fully accredited and grants diplomas. It provides coursework for gifted students in the U.S. and internationally. Classes are delivered through the Internet for students with a wide range of interests. It is a tuition program.

+ Independent Study High School (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) at Lincoln, NB

The program offers advanced placement and a college prep core of coursework designed for average to high ability students. Adults proctor the exams, but certificated teachers evaluate and grade the work. There

is a fee for coursework.

+ Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy in Iowa City, IA

This program offers advanced placement courses for Iowa students. The courses are fully subsidized, with APEX Learning providing the coursework. Students pay to take the AP exam and work with mentors, who students in their progress. There is a fee for coursework.

+ University of Missouri Distance and Independent Study Program in Columbia, MO

The program at MU high school offers courses ranging from mathematics to Advanced Placement. It has an enrollment of more than eight thousand and also offers a number of courses for gifted students. Classes are student centered, self-paced and include faculty computer-evaluated lessons. There is a fee for coursework.

+ Virtual High School in Maynard, MA

This program offers classes for students at the national and international level. Schools pay a membership fee to release a teacher one period per day to teach a course for VHS. Classes are offered for students in grades 9-12. They also offer classes for middle school gifted and talented students.

Advocates for gifted technology students can make a difference in how these students see and plan for their futures. Even as their teachers support and encourage these talented young people, the students themselves must also be given a voice as to how to reach their goals and envision their lives. The teacher, to be effective, must:

+ Understand the student's capabilities when it comes to technology.

+ Use the technology standards as a way to assess their skill levels.

+ Be willing to discuss their use of applications with other teachers.

+ Share ways they integrate technology and integrate their assignments with other teachers.

+ Discover ways to supplement interests, using enrichment, virtual mentorships, or competitions.

+ Collaborate with school personnel to promote student abilities and increase awareness of students with needs beyond the scope of the regular classroom.

+ Become a resource for staff members with questions about advanced computer abilities.

Technology is redefining talent, and our current economy of knowledge workers is being changed. This new age consists of emerging creators who see the world through a different lens. It is an ideal environment for the gifted student who uses technology as a springboard for ideas. Promoting this talent empowers students to direct their own interests and passions to a larger world outside the traditional classroom.

Siegle (2004) has expanded upon the notion of ideal instruction to include a specific population of technology-talented individuals. Educating these students will require schools to provide an advanced level of education. Like any students with gifts, technology-gifted students should be recognized and nurtured. They may require outside assistance—someone with extensive technological expertise or a mentor. With recognition and support, talents of technologically gifted students can grow and prosper.

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GIFTED EDUCATION TIME TRAVEL

By Elaine Wiener

Ellen Summers, in her article, "A Brief History of the Education of the Gifted Child," starts our journey with these words:

"From the earliest periods of recorded history, recognition has been granted to those of exceptional ability, notably youngsters who are cited in the Bible as 'extolling the saintly wisdom of prophets and learned elders from whom the masses sought guidance in interpreting divine will.' (Deuteronomy 17.11). The wisdom of Solomon is widely known, as well as several examples of gifted youngsters in the Old Testament, who rose to leadership by dint of their judgment and ability to influence others."

From that fetching beginning, she guides us through history from biblical (and before) times to modern times. In succinct, compact little paragraphs written with seductively simple style, this "Brief History of the Education of the Gifted Child" reads as though the information is totally new. Print it, and send it to everyone you know. It is one of my favorites of all of the articles I've read about gifted education because of the thumbnail perspective. It's something you can put in your back pocket. It's like a gifted education blankee.

With such inspiration in hand, I have been propelled into my own search for the oldest of the classics in gifted education. I present some of them to you with reverence for the authors who have given us our foundation.

Children Above 180 IQ
By Leta Hollingworth
1942 (1997 reprint), Ayer Company Publishers
hardcover, 332 pp
ISBN:0-4-06467-5

Of course we must start this treasury of classics with Leta Hollingworth. It is the bible of gifted literature. It is our heirloom.

Leta Hollingworth's goal was to identify highly gifted children so they could "escape the 'special problems' of general conduct which the most intelligent children face:

1) to find enough hard and interesting work at school
2) to suffer fools gladly
3) to keep from getting negativistic toward authority
4) to keep from becoming hermits
5) to avoid the formation of habits of extreme chicanery."

Just those five points written so long ago immediately show the *depth* of her thinking.

Her attitudes toward educating the whole gifted child also show the *width* of her thinking.

Read anything and everything related to Leta Hollingworth.

The Gifted Child
Edited by Paul Witty
(1951) D.C.Heath and Company Boston
hardcover, 338 pp.

It is amazing, and perhaps discouraging, that long ago we knew so much that we seem to re-learn over and over. The truth is that the world of giftedness has to be re-discovered with each generation because we seem to allow our truths from the past to fade so that we can re-discover them in the future… and act as though it were all new information.

A visit to old books with the old wisdoms would be a more respectful ritual.

Paul Witty's collection of the best information about gifted is the treasure of all treasures.

There are fifteen chapters on the most important thinkers of past days, including an annotated bibliography that is worth the whole book. Their opinions continue to be relevant today.

Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
Edited by Benjamin S. Bloom
(1956) David McKay Company, Inc.
paperback, 207 pp.

Although this is a taxonomy of behavioral objectives, not gifted education objectives, so many of us were trained in this thinking that it is surely the foundation for all other objectives in our field.

"Bloom's Taxonomy" is an icon and should be in every library.

Education for the Gifted
The Fifty-seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education
Edited by Nelson B. Henry
(1958) University of Chicago Press
hardcover, 420 pp.

This yearbook specializes in gifted education. Chapter VII delves into very specific and insightful aspects of Leadership. "Leadership is often mistakenly identified solely with being the chairman of the homeroom, chairman of a committee, captain of a team, or president of a student council. These can be more accurately described as 'headship' positions in a group than as leadership." (P.134) You will find heavy duty figures in our field who were, indeed, leaders: Robert J. Havighurst, John Hersey, A. Harry Passow, Ruth Strang, Abraham J. Tannenbaum, Lewis M. Terman, Paul Witty.

Your Gifted Child: A Guide for Parents
By Florence N. Brumbaugh and Bernard Roshco

(1959) Henry Holt and Company
hardcover, 182 pp.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number:
59-5759Library of Congress

This is the easiest book to read. The content has all the depth and information one could want, but the writing style is such a gift that this book can be read in one sitting. The check lists are right on target: Is Your Child Gifted? Are You a Gifted Parent? You could read many volumes and never find such clear information.

Practical Programs for the Gifted
By Jack Kough
(1960) Science Research Associate, Inc.
hardcover, 191 pp.

Oh yum!!!This book has lists. I love lists. Lists get to the point. Lists don't suffer from an over abundance of language. And these lists don't suffer from a modern need to limit vocabulary—commonly known as dumbing down. You'll want to make wall charts of the characteristics of each item on the following lists:

Scientific ability, creative ability, artistic talent, writing talent, dramatic talent, musical talent, mechanical talent, physical skills, all kinds of handicapped characteristics, and lists of questions to address creating gifted programs.

There is a list of gifted programs around the country and details of those programs in the 60's that could make us aware of what *was* in order to have perspective on what *is*. My favorite list is that of the consultants of the era. The names sparkle with history. The book ends with a list of gifted associations.

Education of the Gifted
By Merle R. Sumption and Evelyn M. Luecking
(1960) The Ronald Press Company
hardcover, 499 pp.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-7767

This book was written for those preparing to teach—a book for inservice. It is thorough, well written, and covers everything: the nature of giftedness, historical overview, identification, research, guidance, administration, organization and practice, teachers, preschool, elementary, secondary, and college programs. The chapter on the role of the community, I thought, was unique. Administrators should own this book to be educated themselves.

Helping Your Gifted Child
By Ruth Strang
(1960) E. P.Dutton & Co., Inc.
hardcover, 270 pp.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-5974

Ruth Strang is one of gifted education's icons. In addition to her reputation is her ability to write with such a natural flair. Style is no substitute for substance, but when you have style AND substance, you have a book that is read and reread over the years.

Chapter 1: Is Your Child Gifted? So thorough. Even a section called pseudo Giftedness, describing children who are highly verbal but not gifted. Chapter 2: What It Takes to Make a Gifted Child. Chapters 3, 4, and 5: Preschool through adolescence. Chapter 6: Problems of Gifted Children. Chapter 7: Your Responsibility For the Best Development of All Children.

Best of all, 22 pages of books for gifted children. That is a keeper!

Stretching Their Minds
By Benjamin Fine
(1964) E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc.
hardcover, 255 pp.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 63-20848

This whole book is the story of the Sands Point Country Day School. It's a walk through the days and stories in the school, and while you are walking through you learn about gifted education including subjects, characteristics, and teaching philosophy. It is an easy way to learn about giftedness with Benjamin Fine, another icon of gifted education, as your guide.

Teaching the Gifted Child
By James J. Gallagher
(1964, 1975, 1985 with Shelagh Gallagher)
Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
hardcover '64, 431 pp.
ISBN 0-205-04689-4

There are many important books in gifted education, but if only one book could exist, it would have to be James Gallagher's text book, *Teaching the Gifted Child.* The book is still being used, and Dr. Gallagher is going strong, often being honored in gifted education. Although this is a text on giftedness, it has a wider scope and encompasses broader readings. The bibliographies and readings of special interests are treasures of information.

Psychology and Education of the Gifted
Edited by Walter B. Barbe and Joseph S. Renzulli
(1965, 1975) Irvington Publishers, Inc.
hardcover, 481 pp.
ISBN 0-470-04775-5

If you never read a word in this book you could learn from the references. However, you will want to read it because it is a group of articles that are surely handpicked. Introduction to the Study of Gifted is covered by Lewis M. Terman, Abraham J. Tannenbaum, Paul Witty, E. Paul Torrance, J.W. Getzels and P.W. Jackson, and Virgil S. Ward. You feel like you are standing in a group of great old movie stars; these names are that charismatic! The rest of the book

involves more starlit names: Part ll is Characteristics of the Gifted and Creative; Part lll is Identification and Measurement of Giftedness; Part lV is Developing and Encouraging Giftedness; Part V is Teaching the Gifted.

Education of the Intellectually Gifted
By Milton J. Gold
(1965) Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc.
hardcover, 472 pp.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 65-21168

This is another textbook, and so it is difficult to justify so many books with the same information. Yet they are all excellent books and deserve to be read. I do like the quotes at the beginning of each chapter in *Education of the Intellectually Gifted*, and the summaries at the end of each chapter reinforced all that was read.

"The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative."—John Dewey.

Guiding the Gifted Child
By George I. Thomas and Joseph Crescimbeni
(1966) Random House
paperback, 206 pp.

This little paperback has some unique characteristics not found in other books about giftedness. One of them is a list of reasons that gifted children are not identified:

1. Teachers continue to think in terms of stereotypes. (Sometimes gifted children are very ordinary and people don't recognize that.) 2. Cumulative records have not been adequately kept. 3. Teachers have not been able to abstract or interpret data included on permanent records. 4. Teachers do not see the value of standardized tests. 5.Too much emphasis is placed on a single testscore. 6. Too much emphasis has been placed upon teacher marks. 7. Too much emphasis has been placed on grade norms. 8. Poor readers have been designated as slow learners. 9. Teachers have failed to look for giftedness among disadvantaged children. 10. Teacher prejudice may deter the recognition of talent. 1l. Gifted pupils who are disciplinary problems may not be recognized. 12. Teachers fail to recognize emotionally disturbed children. 13. Socially immature pupils may not be recognized. 14. A lack of enthusiasm for learning can be serious. 15. Pupil mobility can prevent the recognition of talent. 16. Teachers do not know many children as boys and girls. 17. Teachers need help in establishing a criterion for making judgments.

The Gifted and the Talented: Their Education and Development
The Seventy-eighth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education
Edited by A. Harry Passow
(1979) The University of Chicago Press
hardcover, 473 pp.
ISSN 0077-5762

This yearbook again collects wonderful names in gifted education. Section One addresses the study and education of the gifted and talented; Section Two describes educational policies, programs, and practices; Section Three informs us of policies and practices for special populations; Section Four is a look around and a look ahead by Harry Passow. A wonderful index and a list of publications end this collection.

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ADVOCACY H.E.L.P.

By John Kauffman and Scott Rich

"It takes courage to be creative. Just as soon as you have a new idea, you are a minority of one."
E. Paul Torrance

It is well agreed that the development of intellectual potential in the next generation of students is necessary to remain competitive in the world of tomorrow. Our top students generally do not perform as well as their international counterparts. Yet, while our public education system continues to stress proficiency, equity and excellence seem to be further neglected. The opportunity for all students to succeed and the assurance that school systems produce enough skilled students to keep society functioning are political issues that have long affected the education of the gifted, as chronicled in this report issued by The National Society for the Study of Education in 1950:

"Society is injudicious in the extreme to neglect those children who possess the potentialities of high-quality leadership. Special education of the gifted is not only justified but is demanded by lessons of history. The lack of interest in classrooms manifested by many gifted children has misled the teacher in many cases and caused her to regard them as dull or slow-learning individuals. Attitudes growing out of frustration have caused gifted children to be classified as delinquents and social maladjusted cases. There is need for careful systematic identification in all schools. Daydreaming on the part of a child, although considered a symptom of maladjustment, is really a tension reducing mechanism. Likewise, aggressiveness, lying, and stealing are attempts to reduce tension. Furthermore, in so far as a study of children will help,

it is far wiser to prevent problems from becoming acute than to introduce clinical aid and other external correctives into the educational program after the problem child has become a truant or delinquent. Equality of opportunity demands that each child be given the type of education which best meets his needs and capacities. This principle is violated when a gifted child is forced to accept an education which does not take into consideration his superior ability and give him an opportunity to develop it. The administration should be responsible for instructing the principal and teachers that pupils should never be threatened with transfer to a special class. The plans of the administrator must include provisions for parent education so that the program becomes one of teamwork toward common goals. It is the legal responsibility of the state and the local district to furnish this program. If the responsibility of the state and local district is interpreted as merely permissive, there may be neglect and denial of opportunity to many children unless vigorous leadership is supplemented with adequate financial support."

While there has been great advancement in the furtherance of gifted education programs and services since this report was published, it is a strong reminder that efficacious advocacy for gifted education remains as critical today as it was 60 years ago. Gifted learners of today have exceptional strengths and innate capabilities significantly beyond their age peers. These children require differentiated programs and experiences in order to be challenged. A commitment to gifted advocacy at the local, state, and national level is necessary to ensure gifted learners reach their full potential.

What is advocacy as it pertains to the gifted learner? Many perceive advocacy as a political process by which individuals and small groups plead their causes to government officials and policy makers. However, advocacy may be as simple as parents, teachers, and administrators effectively communicating a child's educational needs. Nurturing of giftedness in a child requires a cooperative relationship between home and school, characterized by the sharing of ideas and observations about the child involved.

The acronym H.E.L.P., or Honor Each Learner's Potential, stands as a reflection and consideration of what advocacy might involve. Applying the H.E.L.P. strategy to gifted learning allows parents, teachers, and administrators to understand, participate in, and account for the implementation and growth of program plans to identify and serve gifted children.

During a recent discussion with a gifted advocate regarding how results from the Figural Edition and Verbal Edition of the Torrance Tests varied for students, several points were identified during periodic classroom visits. It was discovered that there were marked differences in the creative performances of the children from fall to spring, with creativity much more evident in the fall. By spring time, the creativity seemed nearly gone. No students went outside the lines or outside the box. Few made connections from one picture to another. Hardly any had ideas different from others. It seemed that nearly all the children had their creativity stuffed away, awaiting instructions for letting it loose. The advocate was concerned that the creativity had completely gone, but held out hope that the passion for creativity among children remains an incredible drive and motivation.

How do these points fit into advocacy H.E.L.P.? The advocate was able to assist teachers in identifying each child's creative gifts. The identification of creativity enabled them to develop creativity further by including a creative strand in each lesson plan across curricular lines. Torrance and Safter published a book on "The Incubation Model for Instruction" to display lesson plans at several different instructional levels with concrete skills, objectives, standards, and creative descriptors from the Torrance tests. Honoring each student's gifts, each student's creativity enabled the teachers to assist in maintaining creative skills and constructs while developing their reading and math skills — in kindergarten and each grade thereafter. However, without honoring their special gifts, creativity is often suppressed and the joy of learning lost for many promising students.

How might we further advocate for each learner's potential?

1. Identify what the gifts may be.

2. Locate lessons which take into account the children's gifts and enable them to be further developed. E. Paul Torrance always suggested that we should identify our gifts and pursue them with intensity - not identify our weaknesses and dislikes and have them force fed to us.

3. If we review "The Manifesto for Children" by Torrance, we can see the emphasis on doing what we love, going our own way (considering different learning styles), staying away from the games/rules/regulations others impose on us. Instead of "feeding the children the fish" of a single way to problem solving, teach them to find their own solutions and become successful fishers for knowledge in their own right.

4. Assist children and their parents through special programs for them, allowing the children to grow into their gifts, enabling them to find and pursue their interests, giving them guidance when needed.

5. Visit classrooms as appropriate and learn what goes on there, verifying what the children say at home about their various settings.

6. Volunteer to help in the classrooms on special occasions and on various field trips when possible.

7. Be the visitor and "email" buddy of the teachers, learning how well the children are doing and learning how to help (Honoring Each Learner's Potential) outside school and the usual learning setting.

8. Enable children to pursue their interests (not ours), showing that their interests, pursuits, and developments are important.

9. Work with children in a positive, encouraging manner.

Advocating for appropriate education of gifted children requires diplomacy and skill. Effective H.E.L.P. advocacy places emphasis on allowing gifted children to develop their

own potential and promoting the benefits that gifted education has upon the community. As community members may view gifted programs as elitist, they should be reminded that gifted children learn differently and therefore have their own educational needs. Appropriate education for all students offers incalculable benefits to society, both short and long term. A gifted curriculum is not designed to give talented students an advantage, but to provide an equal opportunity to develop their skill and potential for success.

Ultimately, parents can be the most effective advocates for their gifted child's education. Participation in gifted advocacy groups can influence local, state, and federal legislation, directly impacting a gifted child's education. They also provide valuable information about gifted programs, scholarships, and networking opportunities. Advocacy groups give the individual advocate a unified group for voicing concerns and sharing problem solving strategies. The implementation of H.E.L.P. by parents will engage their gifted child, enhance their development, and encourage new opportunities to explore their surroundings.

Every child in the public school system deserves to receive an appropriate, engaging, and challenging education. Many schools do indeed provide appropriate services for gifted children; yet, so many others have much work to do. Without appropriate services in place, many children may be at risk of underdevelopment, never reaching their full potential. Thomas Edison's mother withdrew him from school when his classroom daydreaming led a schoolmaster to call him "addled." How many other young Edisons have been dismissed as unintelligent?

The recognition that gifted children require an education specifically tailored for their learning requirements necessitates responsible action. The surest path to high self-esteem is to be successful at something perceived to be difficult. Each time a gifted student's struggle for opportunity is compromised, the opportunity for him/her to build self-confidence is stolen. To the degree that gifted learners are different from their peers, it is imperative to advocate for a different set of interventions to adequately accommodate their needs and concerns. Our advocacy is an example to our own children of the value we place upon their education and of our commitment to make a difference.

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MOVING FORWARD WITH CREATIVITY

By Pamela Walker Hart

Genuine advocacy always moves beyond the evaluating, debating, and pleading stages of words voicing pie-in-the-sky hopes, wishes, and demands. Effective advocacy is a process of responding appropriately to the never-static life and learning situations we face daily as parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. We may not always agree on the actions we need to accomplish, but most would concur children are best served by individualized instruction that expands their freedom to learn at their own pace, participate productively, and excel.

The formulation of a single, overarching goal to describe the big-picture vision is certainly beneficial, but it's only one facet of effective advocacy. We must also specify the smaller, intermediate objectives and the individual steps required to move us closer to our final goal. Results-oriented advocacy is rooted in on-going realistic assessments of where we are, where we want to be, and how we plan to get there. Seasoned advocates discovered early on that shotgun approaches rarely produce significant, long-lasting results. They learned to avoid the tempting, but non-productive, "I want it all and I want it now" position by keeping two questions foremost in thought: "What needs to happen here as a first step?" "What can I individually do to help this happen sooner rather than later?"

We enable ourselves to connect gifted and talented children with available home, school, and community resources--and advocate for additional opportunities--by enlarging our knowledge base and remaining current concerning learning styles, intelligence types, differentiated

instructional strategies, etc. If our advocacy efforts meet resistance, we must refuse to become frustrated, overwhelmed, or paralyzed. Rather than giving in and giving up, because the need seems so great and our step(s) so small, we pause, re-group, re-energize, and resolve to move forward.

Achieving Balance

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant.
We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."
Albert Einstein

Encounters with out-of-balance circumstances occur on many fronts. Ever-expanding electronic media frontiers and information access avenues often perpetuate unrealistic expectations of immediate gratification. There are many dismayed, exhausted parents struggling with children described as hyper-active, hyper-talkative, always on-the-go, never settling, and never calm. These mothers and fathers often feel frustrated or angered by the too-much or too-little classifications that confine learning opportunities for their children. In many communities, over-burdened education professionals and uninformed or absent parenting practices run the risk of engendering expansion of the *it's-all-about-me* syndrome.

Persuading program managers to initiate or expand funding allocations for gifted and talented programs is never an easily achieved goal. Accomplishment becomes even more challenging during periods of restricted or reduced funding levels.

Frequently, the rationale for the chronic lack of funding is that gifted children will adapt and make it on their own. Too often, the gatekeepers of funding position gifted program requests at the bottom of the pile. After other pieces of the available funds have been allocated, little or nothing remains for gifted programming.

Although insufficient funding level--or flawed ability classifications--are legitimate advocacy action areas, we must not allow the parameters of gifted education to be defined by these too-common limitations. Few endorse monetary abundance--or insufficiency--as a precise predictor of individual levels of character, accomplishment, or happiness. We all know of situations in which superlative accomplishment has shattered prior labels of inability.

While some students are able to survive less-than-optimum childhood learning situations, others are less successful. The system proves too daunting, and they wind up slipping through the cracks of frustration and boredom. As adults, mentors, and advocates, we simply cannot accept learning environments in which the gifted and talented languish, especially when our intent is to help them thrive.

ADVOCACY ~ Form and Function

"It is the pervading law of all things . . . that form ever follows function."
Louis Henri Sullivan, America's First Modern Architect

When deciding how to appropriately support gifted children, it is helpful to remember that the form--or type--of advocacy in which we participate is inescapably connected to the function--or purpose--of what we are doing. In these harsh economic times, the difficult circumstances of individuals, institutions, and municipalities call for fresh approaches in our work as advocates.

Creativity, as a platform for advocacy, offers many advantages in support of programming for gifted and talented--not the least of which is that creativity helps us circumvent the pitfalls of confrontational, prejudicial, and exclusionary approaches. An emphasis on creativity presents the opportunity to optimize gifted and talented education in ways that are less likely to be perceived as elitist.

When we maintain our advocacy focus on creativity as an appropriate response to the unique learning requirements of *every* child, it becomes easier to convince parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders to join with us. With their support, we can work together to construct and implement learning opportunities which engage *each* child in creative thinking-doing processes.

CREATIVITY as an Expression of Advocacy

"Rather than designing forms that follow a frozen, modernist understanding of human function,
why not invent forms that drive and evolve better ways of human functions?"
Curt Cloninger, Web Designer, Artist, Author

Creativity is an especially appropriate expression of advocacy for gifted and talented children, because an increase of creativity in the classroom expands individualized instruction and offers enlarged opportunities for *every* child to excel. Creative learning experiences encourage teachers to partner with individual students in order to adapt and modify routine classroom procedures. Flexibility in the pace of instruction becomes the accepted norm. Assignments emphasizing creativity will still incorporate specific knowledge objectives, but their design allows and encourages attainment of learning goals in ways that do *not* limit children to simplistic or minimal achievement levels.

With the assignment of creative projects, students agree to accept responsibility for the contribution of ideas, research of resource materials, and use of a variety of learning methods, even as they gain proficiency in the subject matter. To keep students properly on track, teachers retain supervisory oversight of individual learning progress, as well as veto authority. Learning contracts--signed by the student, parent, and teacher--promote successful outcomes by stipulating specific, essential objectives and timelines. Progress is encouraged and monitored in diverse ways, including daily observation of student activity, discussions with students, and periodic written progress reports.

Moving forward with a creative project assignment, each child is encouraged to push beyond the edges of

expectation. Children are challenged to enlarge their learning experience--to step out of old learning-box confines into new, unforeseen learning-discovery realms. When they do, learning becomes for them an everyday, lifelong process of creative thinking and doing.

The POWER of Creativity

"Creativity is a type of learning process
where the teacher and pupil are located in the same individual."
Arthur Koestler

As we learn more of creativity--what it is and how it works--we more fully sense its power and import. This enhanced understanding prepares us to more persuasively share our knowledge and enthusiasm with learners, parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders, and others. Together, we craft ways to expand individualized learning opportunities through the use of creative project assignments. Insight as to how creativity works--the way to focus on an idea, gather information, master techniques, and produce results--provides the confidence we need to motivate allies and support learners when they are involved in the creative thinking-doing processes.

Historically, creativity has been considered a perplexing situation. However, during the past several decades, researchers have systematically studied a wide variety of subjects--scientists, artists, mathematicians, entire societies, etc.--and have contributed significantly to our understanding about what happens during creativity. A review of several recurring topics in creativity research literature draws attention to current knowledge and clarifies misconceptions.

MYTHS about Creativity

While intelligence certainly supports creative potential, intelligence--or the ability to deal with or process large amounts of information--is *not* synonymous with creativity. Creativity moves beyond the information-processing phase to the synthesis stage, which involves sifting through data, perception, and material to arrive at *new* and *useful* combinations. This synthesizing nature of creativity was acknowledged by Einstein when he called his own work "combinatory play." End products which come out of creative synthesis range from practical problem-solving devices, theories, or insights to literary, performing, and visual works of art.

Creativity is *not* a characteristic possessed only by geniuses endowed with superhuman talents. While the "creative genius" myth may boost the self-confidence of individuals who consider themselves to be among the chosen few, it tends to undermine the self-assurance of those convinced that the genius gene somehow passed them by. The supposition that creativity is a rare or special power actually negates any reasonable expectation that perseverance or education can enable one to join the creative elite. Since each person is assumed either to have creativity-talent-intelligence or *not*, then why should one bother to exert effort, especially if it delivers only a slightly higher level of mediocrity (Florida 2002, Boden 2004)?

ESSENTIALS of Creativity

Creativity thrives when it is regarded as something which springs from ordinary abilities and practiced expertise, as something to which each can aspire. Creative capacity is inherent to some degree in each of us, since creativity springs from normal, everyday abilities. As we develop and enlarge our common abilities to notice, remember, see, speak, hear, understand language, and recognize analogies or similarities, we also enable our creativity. When we exert individual effort to discover and release our own unique ideas, we become increasingly skilled in creative synthesis (Florida 2002; Boden 2004). It takes perseverance and practice, but bit-by-tiny-bit, each can individually gain the confidence required to reveal inherent creativity.

The *knowing* aspect of creativity is described in the first two Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary entries as "**1.** the state or quality of being creative. **2.** the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc." This *knowing* aspect of creativity encompasses being familiar with, appreciating, recognizing, comprehending, discerning, understanding, and valuing creativity. Synonyms include originality, progressiveness, imagination, inspiration, ingenuity, inventiveness, resourcefulness, and vision.

Genuine creativity moves beyond the *knowing* aspect to incorporate the crucial *doing* capacity, a component inclusive of performing, accomplishing, acting, carrying out, completing, achieving, making or executing action required for creative accomplishment. This *doing* dimension of creativity is revealed in the third and final Random House Dictionary entry, which defines creativity as "the process [or course of action] by which one utilizes creative ability." Action words associated with the verb *create* imply the *doing* part of creativity: to cause to come into being, to perform for the first time; to make; to give rise to; to bring about; to arrange; to do something constructive.

The PROCESS of Creativity

"Things won are done. Joy's soul lies in the doing."
William Shakespeare

Creativity encompasses not only the *ability to be* inventive, imaginative, and quick-witted, but also the *authority to produce* a new and different result. Therefore, we realize the essence of creativity *only* as we move beyond a static state of being to become fully involved in the action--or *doing*--of creativity. Authentic creativity preserves the critical connection between *knowing* and *doing*. The creative process is a thinking-and-doing circumstance, not just contemplating or talking. Genuine creativity involves *doing* the work of transforming in-the-head visions, goals, and ideas into in-the-world outcomes and accomplishments.

STAGES of Creativity

A life inspired waters its way over around and through
Rock filled spaces and other hard places.

Different creativity types--including technological or inventive, economic or entrepreneurial, artistic or cultural, etc.--although seemingly dissimilar, are actually deeply interrelated. Researchers have discovered that most creative people approach problems in similar ways (Florida 2002).

The common thinking-doing experiences of creativity are characterized as intention, immersion, incubation, illumination, verification, revision, communication, and validation. Although these stages are listed sequentially, creativity is actually more cyclical, due to the rapid pace of the thinking-doing processes. Familiarity with each Creative Process Stage increases confidence by providing insight as to what is likely to take place.

• 1st Stage INTENTION

Creativity starts with the intent to do a specific something. Good--even great--ideas are always available when we pay attention to our thought. We notice ideas most easily when we quiet the outside, in-the-world noise, because we don't want external sounds to obscure the thoughts within. We need to concentrate and listen to the quiet inside and dismiss the destructive, distracting stuff trying to interrupt our contemplation. We squeeze out noisy negativity by re-focusing thought on affirming, constructive words that come as our own thoughts. A variety of good--even great--ideas will come to us as we are calm and ready to welcome them.

When something of interest arrives at the door of thought, we eagerly respond by opting to work with it at that moment. Other ideas will appear later, but for now we focus our full attention on this one *best* idea. We begin to wonder about this idea and what we might be able to do with it as inspiration. Consciousness entertains a vision, a vague picture of where we might be able to travel using this bit of an idea as our stimulus. We have attained intention. The best intention idea is of enormous interest to us, as it enlarges our enthusiasm and propels us forward.

• 2nd Stage IMMERSION

In this stage, we immerse our thoughts and actions in and around the intention idea we selected, beginning to do the work of turning our idea into an actuality. Since the choice is meaningful, the project takes form. Because there is a vested interested in moving forward, we readily initiate the work of accomplishing research, learning skills, and practicing techniques!

Fear of failure or embarrassment won't immobilize us because we know the absolutely only way to avoid making mistakes is never to actually do anything. We might be able to exist or vegetate that way, but a constructive life requires more--actually doing or creating something. We manage the fear of mistakes by recognizing them as routine occurrences--the possible outcomes or new ideas or innovation. With a total engagement in the process of doing-discovery, we mentally travel to new, creative places, with ongoing, open-ended projects expanding our intent idea. Imagination flows through playful experimentation with new techniques, materials, combinations, and media. During our doing-discovery work sessions, each mistake teaches and informs us, and we joyfully embrace our new-found knowledge--our discovery--as we adjust what we will do and then try again.

• 3rd Stage INCUBATION & 4th Stage ILLUMINATION

Incubation is considered the most puzzling stage in the creative cycle. It takes place as a result of conscious and subconscious ponderings concerning the project. The sustained immersion of conscious effort in and around the intention idea also involves our intuitive, subconscious thoughts. We continue to mentally ask of ourselves, "What if . . . ?" and "Why?" when unusual or unexpected ideas come to thought. We stay in the game and give each proposal a try. We try new activities that relate to our intention idea and are always on the lookout for the next piece for our puzzle.

Illumination is the split second when light breaks through the darkness of chaos and confusion. We perceive a new way for pieces of the puzzle to work together as a whole. An innovative synthesis is envisioned! Up to now, we've understood lots--and have continued to learn more--about what was *not* the solution to our search. All the while, we were becoming more convinced our discovery of the crucial missing component was drawing closer. We consciously prepare for the arrival of illuminating moments by actively pursuing an intention idea, relentlessly researching the topic, and persistently putting into practice skills associated with the focus area. We keep on keeping on because of our vested interest in the results. We grow consistently more confident in the eventual arrival of our 'Eureka' moment, and we know it when the light finally shines!

• 5th Stage VERIFICATION & 6th Stage REVISION

Verification determines if an idea functions as anticipated. Revision corrects difficulties and defects. The often tedious work carried out during verification and revision actually takes place concurrently with the other stages of creativity. Through on-going verification, we ensure that our creative project continues to progress as intended. Revision occurs each time an adjustment is required to keep us moving in the direction of our objective.

The Verification and Revision Stages require a capacity to continually return to the creative project with an unflagging sense of adventure, fearlessness, and persistence. This underscores the importance of selecting a creative project intention idea of high interest and meaning to us. Whenever fear and negativity come to thought--as they frequently do--it is helpful to remember that a successful conclusion to the project is contingent upon our willingness to continue a verification and revision conversation with the work in progress.

The idea--or combination of ideas--needed to solve our current dilemma may arrive at the door of thought at any moment. Our task is to stay engaged with the work in progress--even when others might opt for the easier path of running away to start something different; something new; something

less confusing, complicated, or intimidating.

The challenge is to keep on keeping on, bolstering our confidence by rejecting each self-defeating suggestion, so that thought remains open to the arrival of constructive ideas. Doing-discovery continues in a variety of ways. We respond to productive ideas that come to thought by making use of them as a deeper immersion in our project. Ultimately, the obstacles disappear, and we discover a creation honest, unique, and wholly our own.

• 7th Stage COMMUNICATION & 6th Stage VALIDATION

Arrival at the Communication and Validation Stages signals that our creative project is coming to a conclusion. It is important to remember that the primary objectives of the Communication and Validation Stages were being achieved as we enlarged our knowledge and expanded our expertise in something of interest and meaning. Nevertheless, it is still important to share the results of our creative labors with others receptive to the process.

More often than not, the creative project has involved extensive investments of thought, time, effort, etc. Some find it difficult to appropriately evaluate their current work and bring it to conclusion. They may need a reminder that through sharing this project with others the creator becomes free to move forward with a different, interesting, and meaningful project idea. Perhaps that next creative journey will explore a different aspect of the project being concluded. Or, maybe an entirely new direction will be chosen.

Sometimes the reticence to share with others stems from shyness or fear of ridicule. Or, there may be reluctance to share the results of creativity due to hyper-perfectionism, or to feelings of disappointment if the project did not work out as planned. Feedback from respected and informed mentors, peers, friends, etc., can help restore an impartial point of view. As doing-it-now creatives, we always consider the source, should criticism come our way. If the nay-saying words come from misinformed or envious others, we acknowledge it courteously--as we disregard the comments and move on to more constructive considerations.

Outwitting Nay-sayers

Outwitted

He drew a circle that shut me out —
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.
Edwin Markham

Moving forward with creativity as an expression of our advocacy allows us to outwit opposition by drawing our circle larger, as we confidently join with parents, education professionals, and community leaders. Creativity supports the fundamental values of individualism and equal opportunity, circumventing elitist scenarios bent on stifling the energies of universal learning.

When faced with precarious situations, we can impart a balanced perspective. We can campaign for implementation of instructional practices emphasizing the individual accomplishments of *every* child. We can recommend creative project assignments, which would restore the instructional focus on *each* child's preferred learning style(s). Moving forward with creativity as an expression of our advocacy, we acknowledge and affirm the individual freedom for *each* to be the best s/he can be.

Creative FREEDOM ~ to Be and to Do

Consider the free verse poem below in terms of creative freedom. Contemplate how a small spark of an idea can ignite newness of thought; how a vague mental picture can be developed and encouraged to grow; how--when we give our inspiring thought permission to expand--unique and very special results can emerge.

Freedom

Before freedom was a march, it was a walk. Before it was a walk, it was a series of small steps. Steps taken by individuals in their own homes, their own neighborhoods, and their own communities.

Before a step was taken. Before the action began or a word was spoken, individuals--many of them--began to think about life with the freedom to be and to do.

That was where it began. Where it always begins. Even though we are frequently not aware of it, a thought--an idea--always gives birth to the word we utter, the action we take.

The first step taken towards freedom is always a mental one. It happens in our thought. It is a refusing--in one's own thought --to define the self as a less-than or a have-not somebody.

Quietly--in our own thoughts about our self--we begin to practice the talk-and-walk of freedom. First we find freedom in our own thought. Then we learn how to speak the words and take the steps that will help us gain greater freedom in our daily life experiences.

Freedom gained by any group--gender, ethnic, religious, national--never starts as a grand group march, nor is it won by a single group action. Always, freedom begins with and is brought forth by the consistent, steadfast efforts of individuals.

We do it--you and me. We listen to the sound of freedom in our own thought. Then we are able to speak the honest, heartfelt words and to follow through with the step-by-step work

We are the ones who do it. We move freedom forward from *idea* to actuality. We feel the forward motion of freedom. We watch the outcome of freedom in our own life and in the lives of those around us.

Because we have experienced a measure of freedom in our life, we could never

tolerate a return to some before-freedom-existence. That is why we make the conscious choice to preserve the victories of freedom we have won and lived.

We accept our responsibility to individually move freedom forward--in our thoughts, with our words, and by our deeds. We do it for our self and for those around us. Step-by-step and stride-by-stride.

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CLOSING THE CREATIVITY GAP: TEACHING ALL THE SKILLS WE NEED

By Garnet Millar and Christine Dahl

It's been a long day, and you find yourself staring at that empty water bottle. What should you do with it? Recycle it. Throw it in the trash. You know the answer because you've learned the answer.

But what COULD you do with it?

This is a different question, one that challenges your ingenuity, imagination, and problem-solving skills. Take a few minutes and think of as many ways to use that empty water bottle as you can. Don't evaluate your ideas. Let them all come. Now you're being creative.

Did you come up with three ideas, or 12, or 42? The more ideas you have, the more fluent you are. Did you reuse the bottle as a container or did you find new ways for it to work--like becoming a treat-dispensing puzzle for your pet? If so, you're showing flexibility. Did a few of your ideas go way beyond the essential "bottleness" of the object, transforming it into something entirely different--a doll or a musical instrument or a centerpiece? Then you're being original.

The little exercise you just did may seem trivial--you'll probably recycle the bottle after all--but it illustrates something important about your intelligence. You know things and you have creative ideas. And to get the most out of your world, you need both.

Think of all the machines you use every day--your car, cell phone, refrigerator, toilet, spoon. Someone's creativity made them possible. How about medicine, science, business and the arts? Our lives have been preserved, explained and enriched by creative people. And the great challenges of today require us to be more creative than ever.

How ironic that just as our need for creativity has never been greater, we choose to de-emphasize it in our schools. Our concern has been directed at minimum standards of knowledge and rote skills --things that are easy to test. What many don't realize, though, is that we have tests for creativity as well--and these tests turn out to be good predictors of what kind of citizens our kids become.

It all started in 1957, when a little beeping earth orbiter--Russia's Sputnik I--challenged Americans to put a person on the moon. We pressed our education system to turn out more scientists and engineers, developing new curricula and intelligence tests. At the University of Minnesota, Dr. E. Paul Torrance saw that something was missing. Nobody was teaching or testing for creativity. And in 1958 he and his graduate students devised a battery of tests to measure creative potential in students, the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT). You took part of one test when you brainstormed about the water bottle and measured your fluency, flexibility and originality.

What Torrance realized is that intelligence goes beyond simple learned behavior, or convergent thinking. A creative person can revise what is known and explore the unknown in order to construct new meaning. The TTCT accurately measures this kind of divergent thinking. It is the most researched creativity test--used in over 2,000 studies--and has been translated into more than 50 languages. A recent follow-up of students who took the TTCT in 1958–62 showed that those who scored high continued to be creative as adults--50 years later!

You don't have to be a genius to be creative. We're all born inquisitive, and that's the first requirement. Rudyard Kipling said, "I have six friends who taught me all I know: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How." Asking questions-

-the right questions--is vital to solving problems creatively. Providing a nurturing environment that encourages good questions opens the window to effective, meaningful learning. Parents and teachers can support divergent thinking in children, and provide opportunities to practice the creative skills that will solve problems today and in the future.

A few existing programs attack problem solving head-on. Each year approximately 250,000 students in the United States, Canada, and other countries participate in the Future Problem Solving Program. Teams use a six-step process to address complex scientific and social problems of the future, like food distribution, orphaned children, sensory overload, and emergency planning. They work on three practice problems at school in preparation for competitions at the local, regional, and international level. Said one competitor, "It has given me ... a thoughtful, productive outlet for the frustrations I sometimes feel as a young person drowning in the policies of a distant government or out-of-reach adults." The program also has a writing contest, where students are asked to imagine the world in 20 years, and a locally oriented Community Problem Solving division.

Teachers have initiated programs of their own. One teacher we know has her students keep an "I Wonder" book. Students write two questions each day. By the end of the year, everyone has an intellectual diary showing inquiring minds in action. Some of these questions may have been answered; others might lead to new areas of interest. By practicing the skill of questioning, these kids are preparing to become lifelong learners and effective problem solvers.

A Call to Action

It's time to make creative skills part of everyone's education, and parents and teachers can make a difference. Talk to school officials--principals, superintendents and state educators--about including creativity programs and testing at your school.

Today's world could use a few more good ideas. Let's nurture the skills we need to find them.

CHRISTINE DAHL is a "Torrance Kid" who was assessed as an elementary school student by Dr. E. Paul Torrance while she attended grades 3-6 from 1958 to 1961 at University Elementary School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Today, fifty years later, she is a successful music teacher and a well known pianist. She has created audience participation games for student recitals that encourage active, creative listening. Also, Christine writes the musical annotations for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and edits their program magazine.

GARNET MILLAR is now the principal investigator of the Torrance Longitudinal study of Creative Behaviour. He just completed the 50-year follow-up. Garnet is a school psychologist in private practice living in Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada. He collaborated with Dr. E. Paul Torrance at the University of Georgia for 25 years.

IDEAS FOR TEACHERS
THE POWER OF CREATIVITY: LESSONS FROM RESEARCH

By Christine Dahl and Garnet Millar

Psychologist E. Paul Torrance once stated that it takes 75 years for an idea to be fully accepted by society. He was referring to his pioneering research in creativity at the University of Minnesota in the late 1950s. This article examines Torrance's concept of creativity and explains why the skills of creativity should be part of every child's education, at home, and in school. We discuss the differences between intelligence and creativity; how to recognize and measure creative skills; how to encourage and deliberately teach for creative thinking; and we end with key messages for creative living. Research gathered over the past 50 years reveals the power of creativity.

Dr. E. Paul Torrance became the director of the Bureau of Educational Research at the University of Minnesota in 1958, shortly after the Soviet Union had launched its Sputnik satellites. The Cold War was raging and suddenly the West could no longer count on scientific superiority. In response, the United States mobilized education professionals to identify and develop a new generation of scientifically talented youth.

The Torrance Creativity Tests

"Whenever one is faced with a problem for which he has no practiced or learned solution, some degree of creativity is required," said Torrance. Being creative involves self-discovery, self-discipline, and imagination. In his formal definition, Torrance outlined the creative process as:

+ Sensing difficulties, problems, missing elements, something askew,
+ Making guesses and formulating hypotheses about these deficiencies,
+ Evaluating and testing these guesses and hypotheses,
+ Possibly revising and retesting them, and
+ Communicating the results.

Strikingly, this mirrors precisely what scientists and engineers do. Identifying and developing creative individuals would clearly be critical to America's Cold War education mission.

With this in mind, Torrance and his graduate students devised a battery of tests — the Torrance Tests of Creative

Thinking (TTCT) — to measure the skills of creative production and behavior. The TTCT differs markedly from typical intelligence (I.Q.) and proficiency tests, where memory and perceptual skills — convergent thoughts — point to single correct answers. Torrance's tests measure divergent thinking, the ability to find multiple solutions to a problem. In addition to quantifying the skills involved in producing and refining ideas — fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration — the tests take into account creative strengths (illustrated below) that enrich creative production.

The Torrance creativity tests are divided into verbal and figural components. For a more detailed description of the TTCT, see Appendix 1.

The TTCT is the most researched creativity test in the world. It is translated into more than 50 languages and has been used in over 2000 studies. Students who took the TTCT in 1958–62 have been followed over the past 50 years in a longitudinal study. Significantly, those who scored highest when they first took the test show the most creative achievements as adults. Researchers call this phenomenon "predictive validity" — proof that the TTCT measures what it says it does.

The convergent thinking measured by intelligence and proficiency tests and the divergent thinking measured by the TTCT are distinct and complementary. Intelligence tests easily identify individuals who conform to accepted standards of knowledge, but they may miss a person with speculative, innovative, or inventive answers. In today's world, we need knowledgeable people who can also "think outside the box" — who can revise what is known, explore the unknown, and construct new meanings.

Creativity for All

Most people say, "Me creative? No way! I've never produced a great piece of art, composed music, written a novel, or invented anything worth mentioning." The notion that creativity is only for a gifted few is a myth that needs to be dispelled. The truth is that creativity is not just for geniuses. Creativity is for everyone and is critical to solving problems.

Psychologists talk about small "c" creativity and big "C" creativity. Many people are adaptively creative (small "c") in their daily activities at home, school, work, and in personal interactions; some people make innovative creative contributions (big "C") that are world-influencing. The skills of creativity can be developed and nurtured. The first step is to jumpstart your brain. Here are a few exercises for you to try:

Ideational Fluency — "Exercise Your Brain"

+ How many yellow (or green) vegetables can you name in 30 seconds?
+ Count backward from 100 by 6s without making a mistake
+ Visualize a golf (or tennis or other) game you've just played. Can you remember each shot and the course hazards you needed to consider?

Keep an Open Mind

Listen to different kinds of music, even those you don't like. Creative people embrace diversity, and different kinds of music stimulate different parts of the brain. We may even come to appreciate the musical groups that our children (or parents) enjoy!

Keep a Record of Questions

As you incubate on ideas and problems, questions arise that need to be examined. These questions will come to you at different times and situations — while taking a walk, driving in a car, having coffee with friends, and so on. Record them or "trap" them in a notebook.

Teaching the Skills of Creativity

Writers such as Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence, have examined an array of academic studies that attempt to measure how much I.Q. accounts for career success. What do you think these studies found? Surprisingly, I.Q. accounts for only 4–10% of career success. We propose that a person's C.Q. — Creativity Quotient — has a potentially greater impact. While it is important to teach and assess basic literacy, (i.e. reading, writing and mathematics), it is equally important to teach skills needed to confront problems or issues that have more than one solution. The convergent thinking of traditional education preserves knowledge, but divergent thinking allows us to extend that knowledge into the unknown. Isn't it time to teach all the skills we need?

Questioning is Key

Finding answers creatively always involves asking good questions. We are all naturally inquisitive, but a person's inquisitiveness can be encouraged or squelched. Children who are "seen but not heard" or who remain inert recipients of lectured material at school or in front of a television are being cheated out of their full potential. Caregivers and teachers need to encourage, model, and value divergent thinking and provide opportunities to practice it. "I have six friends who taught me all I know," said Rudyard Kipling, "Who, What, Where, When, Why and How." These questions can open the door to effective, meaningful learning. Beyond Kipling's questions, we suggest a few more that call for creative skills:

+ What's wrong or missing? What should change? What don't I know?

+ How might things turn out? What might influence the outcome?
+ Where else would this work? When?
+ Is this the only answer? What are the alternatives?
+ Where do my answers lead me? What new questions do they raise?

One elementary school teacher we know has learned much about the nature of questioning by having her students maintain an "I Wonder" book. She requires each child to produce two questions each day. They do this in their best handwriting and date the entry. After a year, the children have accumulated an array of inquiry — some of it stunning in quality and originality. Imagine keeping "I Wonder" books for a child's entire school life. What an interesting intellectual autobiography that would make! Other strategies to develop child/student questioning skills are found in the resources listed at the end of this article.

Periodic evaluation of student progress — report cards — should reflect not only what a child has learned but how he/she has learned it. And mastery of questioning skills can be an important indicator of success. Here are some ideas of how to rate a student's growth as an effective questioner:

+ (Name) manages information by asking meaningful questions: 1 2 3 4 5
+ (Name) problem-finds or formulates questions before seeking solutions: 1 2 3 4 5
+ (Name) uses questions to broaden and/or deepen areas of interest: 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers interested in incorporating creativity skills in their classrooms should know about some excellent existing programs:

Future Problem Solving

In 1974, Dr. E. Paul Torrance initiated Future Problem Solving (FPS) as a way of helping capable students think more creatively and productively about critical issues. The program annually involves 250,000 school children from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, and the United States. Teams of four students — from grades 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12 — use a six-step problem-solving process to address complex real-world problems. They complete two practice problems at school with their coaches in preparation for competitions at the local, regional or international level. (Students in grades K–3 can participate without competing.) Topics for 2009–10 include Sensory Overload, Invasive Species, Orphaned Children, and Food Distribution. Student solutions are evaluated by FSP judges and winners are invited to advance.

FPS also sponsors a Community Problem Solving Division, where students apply the problem-solving process they have learned to issues in their own communities. Winners can participate in the International FPS Conference. A wide range of problems and solutions have been explored, from cleaning up hazardous waste in Utah to sending 2,000 children's books from New York to a library in Fiji.

FPS's Scenario Writing Contest challenges students to write short stories that look at least 20 years into the future. As in other competitive events, students compete in grade levels.

Participants in the FPS program often consider it a highlight of their school experience. Said one student, "[FPS] has given me an opportunity to voice opinions creatively and constructively and [is] a thoughtful, productive outlet for the frustrations I sometimes feel as a young person drowning in the policies of a distant government or out-of-reach adults."

For more information about Future Problem Solving, visit www.fpspi.org.

Torrance Legacy Creative Writing Awards

Teachers can involve students in a creative writing experience where the student work is evaluated in terms of creative skills. The Torrance Legacy Creative Writing Awards accept original poetry and stories from students in grades 4–5, grades 6–8, and grades 9–12. Prizes are offered (monetary and books) and winning entries are published, bound, and presented to the young poets and authors at a national convention. More information on this creative writing program is posted at www.ststesting.com/cw.html.

The Torrance Legacy Creative Writing Awards are co-sponsored by Scholastic Testing Service, Inc., the Center for Gifted at National-Louis University, the National Association of Gifted Children–Creativity Division (NAGC-Creativity Division), and the Torrance Center for Creativity and Talent Development at the University of Georgia.

Making the Case for Creativity

Change challenges all of us to be creative. And fundamental change challenges us fundamentally. As the world transitions from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, we need to instil the skills of creativity in our future citizens and leaders. Dr. Indira Samarasekera said as much when she recently addressed the Inspiring Education conference in the Canadian province of Alberta. A well-known metallurgical engineer by training and president of the University of Alberta, Dr. Samarasekera pointed to the emergence of the economies of China and India — and their hundreds of millions of people under the age of 25 — as a profound challenge to Canada and America in the next 20 years. Creativity, she stressed, will be essential to every successful country in the 21st century — and good education will be key to maximizing that success. Teachers must value creativity and model it to their students, be open to "weirdness, eccentricity and differentness," make experiential learning as important as formal classroom instruction, and learn new skills themselves. She ended her presentation by saying that we need to invent better ways to "opt students in" to the learning/discovery and meaning-making process and measure the skills of creativity along the way.

Key Messages for Creative Living

In his long-term longitudinal study of students given the TTCT in 1958–62, E. Paul Torrance noticed that certain forces

or influences support or hinder creative achievement. Finding a mentor or teacher helps, as does falling in love with a life's work early. Well-rounded people, it turns out, are not necessarily the most creative. Torrance incorporated these and other findings from his 22-year follow-up into the Manifesto

for Children, affirmations for creative kids.

Torrance developed the concept of "Beyonders" after analyzing his longitudinal study data at 30 years. Beyonders are people whose creative achievements as adults go beyond expectations. As in the Manifesto for Children, Torrance identified traits and characteristics of Beyonders and created a poster — the Manifesto for Adults — to illustrate his findings.

Teachers' Call to Action

The time has come to teach and measure the skills of creativity in our schools. Talk with local school officials — superintendents and directors of curriculum — about creative programs and activities. Request that the curriculum and student assessment areas of departments of education make creative skills and activities important learner outcomes. Bring your own creativity to the classroom by modeling creative behavior and expecting your students to do likewise.

How much longer do we need to wait for creativity to be to be accepted, embraced and taught in our homes and schools? By taking action ourselves we will prepare our students to live in the Creative Society of the 21st century. They will learn to:

+ Plan systematically
+ Analyze critically
+ Work collaboratively
+ Communicate clearly
+ Design repeatedly
+ Learn continually, and
+ Think creatively.

RESOURCES

Tests and Books

Himsl, R. & Millar, G. W. (1994). *Measure of questioning skills*. Bensenville, IL: Scholastic Testing Service, Inc.

Millar, G. W. (1994). *Developing student questioning skills: A handbook of tips and strategies for teachers.* Bensenville, IL: Scholastic Testing Service, Inc.

Millar, G. W. (2004). *The making of a beyonder: Ways to nurture your creative achievement and spirit*. Bensenville, IL: Scholastic Testing Service, Inc.

Millar, G. W. (2010). *The power of creativity: Results of the fifty-year follow-up to the Torrance longitudinal study of creative behaviour.* Bensenville, IL: Scholastic Testing Service, Inc. (in press).

Program for Schools

Future Problem Solving International, Inc., 2015 Grant Place, Melbourne, FL 32901, phone: 800-256-1499, fax: 321-768-0097 www.fpspi.org

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Appendix 1: *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*

Table 1. Description of the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)*: Verbal

Name of Test and Subtests	*Description*	*Rationale*	*Creative Factors*
Activity 1 – *Ask and Guess*	This activity requires the person to ask questions from drawings on the page	The *Asking* activity reveals the person's ability to sense what a person is unable to find out by looking at the picture and to ask questions that will enable a person to fill in the gaps in one's knowledge. Curiosity is the indispensable element of inquiry and scientific creativity	• Fluency–relevant responses • Flexibility–different categories/shifts in thinking • Originality–uncommon , original responses
Activities 2/3– *Guessing Causes* and *Guessing Consequences*	These activities require the person to make guesses and consequences of happenings related to a drawing on the page	The *Guessing Causes* and *Guessing Consequences* activities are designed to reveal the person's ability to formulate cause and effect	
Activity 4– *Product Improvement Activity*	The person thinks of as many possible ways to change a toy animal to make it more fun to play with	This activity taps the person's ability to develop and play with ideas	• Fluency • Flexibility • Originality
Activity 5– *Unusual Uses Activities*	The person devises as many uses as possible for objects, such as tin cans or cardboard	This activity is a test of the ability to free a person's mind of a well-established set	• Fluency • Flexibility • Originality
Activity 6– *Just Suppose Activity*	The person predicts possible outcomes and consequences of an improbable situation	This activity is a test for the ability to "play with" ideas and consequences, and often is an indication of degree of fantasy	• Fluency • Flexibility • Originality

Table 2. Description of the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)*: Figural

Name of Test and Subtests	*Description*	*Rationale*	*Creative Factors*
Activity 1 – *Picture Construction*	The person constructs a picture using a pear shape or jelly bean shape as a stimulus on the page. The shape must be an integral part of the composition	This activity gets at the tendency toward finding a purpose for something that has no definite purpose and to elaborate it so that a clear purpose emerges	• Originality • Abstractness of titles • Elaboration • Checklist of creative strengths
Activities 2– *Picture Completion*	This activity requires that a person use ten incomplete figures to make, and to name(label), an object or picture	This activity calls into play the need to structure, integrate, and present an object, scene or situation	• Fluency • Originality • Abstractness of titles • Elaboration • Resistance to premature closure • Checklist of creative strengths
Activity 3– *Lines and Circles* (repeated figures)	This activity consists of three pages of lines or circles and the person is to make objects or pictures using the lines or circles as a part of their picture. They are to add titles/names at the	This activity requires an ability to return to the same stimulus again and again, perceiving it differently each time, disrupting structure to create something new	• Fluency • Originality • Elaboration • Checklist of creative strengths

UNIVERSITY SCHOOL – AN ADVOCACY SYSTEM FOR GIFTED EDUCATION

By Patricia Hollingsworth, Gina Lewis, and Debra Price

From its inception in 1982, the mission of University School has been to serve as an advocate for gifted students, their teachers, and their parents. This mission goes far beyond the students at the school. This service has been demonstrated at the local, regional, national, and international levels. The purpose is to provide a system of support for those interested in gifted education and to serve as an advocate for the best possible learning experiences and environments for gifted students.

Advocacy Through Gifted Education Publications and Information

University School teachers and administrators wrote and illustrated the ten-book SAILS Curriculum, which is an interdisciplinary active learning series of humanities books. The SAILS books have been widely used in the United States and also purchased by the Department of Defense for use in their schools abroad. Some large school systems, such as Miami/Dade County in Florida, use the SAILS books with all their gifted students.

Additional books written by teachers and administrators include *Smart Art, Kinetic Kaleidoscope***,** and *Active Learning.* Teachers have also written chapters in the following books: *Underserved Gifted Populations, Creative Intelligence, Test Critiques, Designing and Developing Programs for Gifted Students, So You Want to Start a Gifted School, The Young Gifted Child, and the Encyclopedia of Giftedness.*

Teachers and administrators have had their articles published in periodicals such as *Roeper Review, Understanding Our Gifted, Gifted Child Today, Illinois Association for Gifted Children Journal,* and *Education Week.* The focus of these articles is on curriculum and instruction that best serve gifted students.

The University School state and national publication, the *Network News Quarterly,* has provided information for gifted parents and teachers for decades. This publication includes information about teaching and parenting gifted students and events for students, such as the Winter Drama Festival and Creative Producers International.

The school's website, www.uschool.utulsa.edu, provides worldwide information about our school, the curriculum, and our publication. We are often contacted by people who want further information, guidance, or advice. The site is one dimension of the system of information we provide for parents and teachers of the gifted.

Advocacy Through Local, National, and International Presentations

During the past 25 years, presenting at local, state, national, and international conferences has been an important aspect of University School's gifted education advocacy. For each of those years, teachers and administrators have given both national and state presentations that advocate for the needs of the gifted. Similar presentations have also been given in Canada, Mexico, the Netherlands, China, and Vietnam. Sharing with fellow professionals in these multiple venues helps to further awareness of the needs and challenges of gifted students.

Advocacy Through Leadership in Gifted Organizations

1. National Association for Gifted Children

Since 1986, our administrators and teachers have been active participants in the National Association for Gifted Children, with many of our staff serving on its board of directors, as division/network chairs, and on a wide variety of special committees. Currently, several University School teachers serve on the Special Schools and Programs Network of NAGC. Every autumn, teachers and administrators attend and present at this convention. Upon returning from the NAGC conference, new ideas, research, and training are shared with the rest of the staff.

2. Oklahoma Association for Gifted, Creative, and Talented

In order to remain current with the latest research in gifted education, University School teachers attend the state convention OAGCT (Oklahoma Association for Gifted, Creative, and Talented) every spring. In addition, all teachers are required to submit proposals of their best practices, and many of our educators are regularly chosen as presenters. Throughout the years, University School staff members have given extensive service to our state gifted organization by serving on the board of directors, planning and executing the annual convention, and hosting meetings and sessions. The school has also provided gifted education services to various local school districts in the form of presentations, tours, and consultations.

3. Northeast Coalition for Gifted Education

In 2008 a group of gifted education teachers and administrators from the area of northeast Oklahoma came together to form the Northeast Coalition for Gifted Education. This organization was formed in order to offer more opportunity for support, communication, and education than is currently available at the state level. University School administrators have been leaders in establishing this grassroots organization, by regularly attending and hosting meetings for this regional coalition.

Advocacy Through Direct Services to Teachers

University School has served, both internally and externally, as an advocate for teachers of the gifted since

1982. Internally, teachers receive specific gifted education training and first-hand experience teaching gifted students full-time every day. External service occurs with collaboration and support of local gifted teachers and programs in the area. Further service for teachers of the gifted is extended at state and national levels through regular convention attendance and presentations. Additionally, during a six-year period funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Javits grants, University School teachers served other teachers in gifted education by providing direct training and practice in our school with the specific curriculum developed and used by University School teachers. Currently, as part of our efforts to support and educate professionals in gifted education throughout the state, teachers and administrators at University School are participating in the aforementioned regional coalition of gifted educators in the northeast sector of Oklahoma.

University School teachers are specifically trained in gifted education through weekly staff development meetings. Additionally, an intense week of training occurs prior to the beginning of the school year. During these meetings, we share best practices, latest research, and current trends in gifted education. All teachers receive training in behavioral management programs focusing specifically on the gifted student. Attendance at seminars and conferences relevant to gifted education is encouraged throughout the year and during summers. Most recently, University School has been sending teachers to Confratute at the University of Connecticut for further training in gifted education practices. Once they have attended one of these conferences, teachers return to school and train other staff members. University School promotes a strong emphasis on communication, and teachers regularly share best practices and latest research in gifted education.

1. Teachers Involved in Javits Grants

The SAILS (Students Active Interdisciplinary Learning Series) Program, sponsored by two U.S. Department of Education Javits grants, was created by University School. This six-year program trained teachers to use active interdisciplinary learning as a way to develop the potential of economically disadvantaged gifted students. At first, teachers were skeptical that elementary students could learn and understand such advanced and complex concepts. However, as the program took hold, the results quickly affirmed its effectiveness.

During the six years' duration of SAILS, 70 teachers of the gifted and their students attended summer school programs in which teachers were trained and students were taught using the SAILS curriculum, an initiative created specifically for gifted students. This effort resulted in 180 in-service presentations in Oklahoma reaching approximately 3,000 educators. Eight presentations were made at state conventions, reaching approximately 500 educators, while three summer institutes attracted another estimated 300. The teachers all received books and videos on the SAILS curriculum, which continues to be used nationwide.

2. University Level Teaching

The University School director, in addition to her school responsibilities, has served for ten years as an adjunct gifted education instructor for The University of Tulsa. She has taught the introductory class "Gifted, Creative, and Talented" and "Curriculum Implementation for the Gifted." Her graduate students return to their school districts not only to teach gifted students and direct gifted programs, but also to advocate for gifted education students throughout Oklahoma.

Several other University School teachers have also served as adjunct professors in the Department of Education at The University of Tulsa as well, teaching science, mathematics, and language arts methods to undergraduates. This outreach to pre-service teachers-in-training provides especially rewarding opportunities for our University teachers in their roles as advocates for gifted education.

3. University of Tulsa Practicum Students

University School resides on the main campus of The University of Tulsa. Students who attend the university and major in education or psychology regularly observe and practice with University School teachers.

4. Sharing Best Practices

Our teachers share their best practices with local, national, and international audiences. Local teachers visit the school to observe teachers working with students. Our visitors observe classrooms, talk with teachers, and meet with administrators. Everyone at the school is open to new ideas, willing and eager to both share and learn.

Advocacy Through Direct Services to Students

1. Public School Students

For 10 years, University School was involved in Javits and other grants providing summer classes at The University of Tulsa for underserved gifted students. Advanced and complex material from the SAILS Curriculum was presented through active learning methods. The students found this approach to learning exciting and appealing. Their courses included a variety of hands-on science, drama, art, music, math, and language experiences focused directly on developing their specific gifts and talents. In addition to the summer classes, year-round follow-up activities, such as the Winter Drama Festival and the Creative Producers' Convention, reinforced the active learning methodology.

2. University School Students

For 28 years, the school has served as a laboratory for maximizing the potential of gifted students from ages 3 through 8th grade. The purpose of the school is to find the elements that best develop the gifts and talents of our students. When we find better ways, we adopt them. When we see curriculum working well, we continue to use it. Our teachers are educated and trained to work with gifted students.

3. Drama Festival

Active interdisciplinary learning addresses the multiple, varied, and unusual learning styles of our students. Each year, every class from kindergarten through 8th grade creates an original play (based on historical facts) for public performance. Students from other schools in the region are also invited to create original plays for performance at our annual Winter Drama Festival. This yearly outreach of University School encourages and rewards creative learning experiences for gifted students from many area schools. In March, the Winter Drama Festival will celebrate its 25th year of serving gifted students in our community. It is an optimal time for communication, connections, and collaboration among teachers, administrators, and students involved in gifted education.

4. Creative Producers International

This spring we celebrate the 24th year of our annual school celebration of creativity, complete with a new title: the Creative Producers International. Students display research projects, paintings, and other original creations for an audience of parents, other relatives, peers, and alumni. Each year, students select their own topics, then write a paper, craft a display, and/or create a painting related to their chosen theme. Parents, university students, teachers, and others also create displays of art and artifacts from countries around the world.

5. Challenging Curriculum: Learning to Work Hard

It is imperative that gifted students learn to work hard. Just because so many academic activities come easily to them, they should not be encouraged to assume that everything will be so. Both research and experience teach us that in order to gain confidence, one must learn to expend effort and overcome adversity. We provide students with a variety of opportunities to exercise such qualities. For example, even our preschool students are gently required to learn appropriate pencil grip and to form letters correctly. Providing students with this kind of gentle challenge continues during the preschool years, and by the spring semester of kindergarten, most of the students are able to write short paragraphs independently.

All students from 3-year-olds through 8th grade learn both Spanish and Chinese. Students receive this early ear training as a first step in helping them learn additional languages in later years. In addition, all students have science, art, music, and physical activity every week.

6. Differentiated Curriculum

University School seeks to match work to a student's ability level. For example, students from age four through 8th grade take Kumon mathematics. Kumon is a totally individualized and self-paced mathematics program that begins by teaching students how to form numerals and extends through and beyond college calculus. Kumon, based on speed and accuracy, allows students to move through the material at their own pace. In a class of 20 students, each will be working on mathematics material that is just right for them. Kumon allows students who put out effort to move rapidly through the material.

In another example, the early writing program, called Word Works, teaches children first to recognize and write words that are important to them. By preserving their lists of words in personal folders, they are implicitly selecting their own content. Soon they are writing short sentences, again using their own content. By the end of kindergarten, most students are writing short paragraphs on topics of their own choosing. Thus, by developing a vested interest in what he or she is writing, each child is more motivated to write.

Advocacy Through Direct Services to Parents

Parenting gifted children can be very challenging. These children very often have advanced vocabularies and high verbal and reasoning abilities. Because they can seem like small adults, parents may have a difficult time setting appropriate limits. Early in its history, University School recognized this challenge and began to provide training opportunities for its parents through the Parent and Teacher Institute.

1. Parent and Teacher Institute

In 1986, the school held its first convention for parents and teachers. Two local doctors from the University of Oklahoma Tulsa Medical College were its keynote speakers. Since that time, the school has held a convention each year, bringing new research, support, and information about gifted children to parents and teachers in Tulsa and northeastern Oklahoma. Speakers for the convention have included local area doctors, psychologists, and professors as well as nationally known gifted education researchers and parenting experts such as Dr. Sylvia Rimm, Jim Fay, Dr. Charles Fay Dr. Foster W. Cline, Arlene DeVries, and Dr. Daniel Weinberger.

2. Parenting Classes

In 1990 the school began to realize that the information from the Parent and Teacher Institute, while certainly of value to parents, was not enough. To enhance the quality of its parental support, it added concepts from Jim Fay's parenting philosophy of Love and Logic to University School and Tulsa area parent training. This information was formalized in 2000 by the establishment of a six-session parenting course.

All parents new to University School are enrolled in the course, which is taught by the school's assistant directors. The information is designed to educate parents about behaviors and characteristics common to gifted children and to give parents effective tools for dealing with those behaviors and characteristics. Some of the topics covered in the parenting class are underachievement, hypersensitivity, perfectionism, natural consequences, competition, and respect.

University School – an Advocacy System for Gifted Education

Serving as an advocate for gifted students, their teachers, and their parents since 1982, the University School has provided service at local, regional, national, and international levels. Creating a system of support for gifted children and all who work with them has been a labor of love for this unique school.

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DEBRA PRICE is Assistant Director of Administration and Coordinator of Admissions at University School.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF ADVOCACY: ONE SCHOOL'S PERSPECTIVE

By Ellen I. Honeck

It began with a vision: a vision to create a home for young gifted children, where they would be safe, challenged, and encouraged. In 1984, a young doctoral student started a program for preschool gifted students. Parents of these young gifted students were starved for a person and a place that understood their exceptional children.

They were also enamored of the fact that this young doctoral student understood the unique needs of the students. Norma Lu Hafenstein's vision, to provide a home where gifted children flourish, grew from a small summer program into the Ricks Center for Gifted Children, a school that serves approximately 250 students, ages three to fourteen years old. For many years now, gifted children have found this to be a place where teachers challenge their thinking, peers understand their jokes, and parents are encouraged to learn about and foster their exceptional gifts. Over the course of the last twenty-five years, the Ricks Center for Gifted Children has become a beloved institution, understanding and advocating for gifted children and families.

Advocacy takes many forms within the Ricks Center, both internally and externally. Internal advocacy exists within the school and includes the teachers, parents, and the larger university community in which it exists. External advocacy occurs at the local, state, national, and international level. In order to sustain the school's mission and vision, faculty and staff advocate vigorously for it, in many venues. This article will focus on internal and external advocacy and what has been learned during the long and stellar history of the Ricks Center for Gifted Children.

Internal advocacy at the Ricks Center begins with its programming. Designed specifically for gifted children, it is based on an innovative curricular approach utilizing an integrated curriculum model. Founder Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein developed this unique model, which affirms both general content and critical affective characteristics of gifted learners. Other integral elements of the program include an early childhood identification protocol, a four-quadrant assessment model, team-teaching, and integrated specialist teachers.

The curriculum and instruction are designed to address the whole child, including his or her emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, physical, and social needs. This differentiated educational model is tailored to each student, in the context of a community built around an authentic, intellectual peer group. As gifted children in the initial group participated in the innovative programming, other practitioners in the field of gifted education began to recognize its positive impact. Today, this curricular model is nationally recognized for its

success in combining thematic and integrated concepts.

Development of such a unique program requires intense professional development. In order to meet the needs of gifted students, the faculty and staff must understand the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted children. Professional development and training are key elements in the successful fulfillment of the school's mission. Teachers understand the purpose and importance of using innovative, targeted approaches with unique learners. They are easily able to discuss and advocate for the varied learning needs of gifted students. These educators are firmly committed and dedicated to the school's philosophy and have a finely tuned understanding of the needs of gifted students, without which the program would falter.

Committees, including teachers and administrators, create a professional development agenda providing a variety of targeted learning experiences for the faculty and staff of the Ricks Center. Content of professional development includes general background knowledge related to the construct of giftedness; philosophical understandings of the school, curriculum instruction, and assessment; and continued exposure to new research in gifted education, general education, and all pertinent discipline content domains.

While the day-to-day curriculum relies on the focus and passion of the educators, parental support is critical for optimal efficacy. Parent education is a crucial component of the school, facilitating an understanding of giftedness and of the school's specific curricular and instructional model. The overarching focus of parent education is on the role of gifted education in meeting the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted individuals. Because parents serve as ambassadors for giftedness in the larger community, as well as personal advocates for their own gifted child, it is crucially important to educate and empower them.

The Family School Organization (FSO), along with administration, hosts a variety of parent education events, all of which provide opportunities to engage in topics on a wide variety of issues related to parenting gifted children. Subjects include such focus areas as psychological aspects of giftedness; implementing an integrated curriculum model; parenting a gifted child; and general, topical parenting questions viewed through the lens of gifted characteristics. Parents are an important part of the Ricks Center and act as advocates for gifted education both within the school and in the larger community.

The Ricks Center for Gifted Children is a part of the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. University-level advocacy consists of maintaining a strong presence within the university community and providing options for university staff and faculty to participate in educational opportunities and events hosted by the Ricks Center. A mutual desire to create and foster an understanding of the critical nature of gifted education is the foundation of a positive and synergistic relationship between the two schools: Ricks Center's practice and implementation complements and concretes the University's research and theory. Combining research and practice creates an opportunity for dynamic growth within both institutions. The underlying support from the University has helped the Ricks Center grow into an internationally recognized program of exceptional quality.

While internal advocacy is critical in terms of understanding gifted children, external advocacy is equally important, as it informs the larger population. External advocates include administrators, teachers, and parents, all serving as conduits of information regarding the critical nature and needs of education for the gifted. These advocates are also expert resources concerning the various components of best practices.

Throughout its twenty-five years of practice and service, the school has expanded its vision, having grown to include multiple levels of advocacy and outreach. This expansion has heightened its reputation and credibility, which, in turn, further enhance the scope of its advocacy efforts at local-, state-, national-, and international-level conferences. The focus of this outreach consists of multiple topics, including young gifted children, programming for gifted children, and education of gifted children (preschool through eighth grade), as well as the joys and challenges inherent in the process.

The most common type of external advocacy is communication with parents or caregivers of gifted children. The admissions office within the school is often the first point of contact for discussions related to the needs of these students. As parents explore schooling options, search for answers, and attempt to meet the needs of their children, the Ricks Center is happy to provide them with accurate and meaningful information pertaining to the development of the young gifted child. The oft-asked question "How do I know if my child is gifted?" has been the catalyst for many cathartic conversations. Parents appreciate clear and knowledgeable explanations of gifted characteristics, of learning differences, and of the school's mission.

In 1997, through a generous gift from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Institute for the Development of Gifted Education was established. The Institute has three main focus areas: curriculum development, research and research publication, and outreach in gifted education. In conjunction with the Ricks Center for Gifted Children, the Institute is able to use these three focus areas as a platform for advocacy within the fields of both gifted and general education.

One aspect of the Institute's outreach is its presence at state, national, and international gifted conferences. Collaboration with colleagues in varied settings encourages teachers to view gifted education through multiple lenses and to collect new techniques and ideas. Currently, the staff at the Institute shares responsibilities with the Ricks Center, enabling them to more aptly facilitate the dissemination of information of both research and practical application.

The Institute also advocates for gifted education through its publications. Curriculum units developed by classroom teachers at the Ricks Center serve as a model of high-level, integrated curriculum for school practitioners and university faculty members all over the world. This

programming is suitable for children ages three to eighth grade, with topics ranging from Dinosaurs to Architecture. Its design addresses the interest levels of gifted students of various ages. The Institute's research publications bring together experts in the field of gifted education to focus on specific, current topics, such as young gifted children or creativity.

During the fall of 2009, the Institute for the Development of Gifted Education hosted its first conference at the University of Denver. *Greatest Potential, Greatest Need: A Conference on the Highly Gifted* brought together participants from across the country. Keynote speakers addressed current issues related to the needs of highly gifted students and adults. This critical form of advocacy was designed specifically to address the needs of those who already have extensive experience and education in the field of gifted education. Too often, these accomplished educators find they have few opportunities for continued professional growth. This first annual conference provided them a rare opportunity to collaborate with each other and experts within the field.

Faculty and staff of the Ricks Center and Institute are encouraged to attend and present at various conferences. Due to the restraints of teaching schedules, local conferences are often the easiest to attend and actually provide the most connectivity with other educators within the state. Additionally, faculty and staff who present at national and international conferences, learn more about gifted practices around the world. These conferences represent one of the few opportunities for teachers to network with like-minded professionals from a rich variety of cultural and geographical environments.

The Ricks Center for Gifted Children has built a positive reputation for its commitment to disseminating information regarding best teaching practices for gifted children. Many educators visit the campus to discuss program elements that might be adapted to their own classrooms. These educators— from across the country and around the world— have come to understand more about the model program offered by the school. These collegial relationships create a supportive atmosphere that encourages and fosters creative thinking and the exploration and development of new ideas and curriculum related to the field of gifted education. During the course of a visit, educators spend time in classrooms and with faculty members to see first hand how the needs of gifted learners are effectively met, what the process of curriculum development is all about, how students are identified and admitted, what assessment models work best, and how to go about educating parents.

When one considers the illustrious, twenty-five year narrative of the Ricks Center and its impact on students, families, and educators, one conclusion is inescapable: While significant progress has been made since that first group of preschoolers and their parents met Dr. Hafenstein, there is still a great deal of work to be done within the field of gifted education. Moving forward into the next quarter-century, advocacy and outreach will continue to play a critical role in our work, as policy makers, practitioners, and researchers struggle to meet the ever-increasing educational demands of this unique population. Proponents of gifted education must continue to support the larger field of general education and its comprehensive program. Although advocating for gifted children is often challenging and frustrating, the need remains critical. We educators have a collective voice. If we use it, intelligently and persistently, we will make a difference.

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EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING THE NEEDS OF GIFTED LEARNERS AND LEADING THE CHANGE PROCESS

By Susan Rhodes

The productive advocacy efforts that I have been involved in have contained two essential components: effective communication and leading stakeholders successfully through the change process. For sixteen years I have been involved in gifted education in a public school district with 15,000 students Pre-K through grade twelve. My responsibilities have included assignments as gifted coordinator and gifted resource teacher. Currently I am in my seventh year as the principal of a gifted magnet school serving the needs of 360 students in grades one through six.

In trying to find a "focus" for this article, I compared the characteristics of gifted learners and high achievers. I imagine that most of you can recall passionate conversations with fellow gifted education advocates concerning the many program needs and instructional possibilities for gifted students. Such conversations often reflect a shared knowledge of the characteristics of gifted learners. Advocates for these students enjoy exploring multiple perspectives and generating complex ideas. Many times over the years, I have had the experience of translating these conversations to groups of decision makers, and, of course, experience teaches valuable lessons.

To ensure that your message is "heard," I would suggest beginning the advocacy process by making an informal

assessment of your decision makers. Do they include high achievers, gifted learners, or a wide mix? This informal assessment is critical, as it will determine the words you use and the eventual efficacy of the message.

In advocating for the needs of gifted children through the years, it has been helpful for me to try to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the relevant decision makers. My experience shows that when a decision-making group is comprised mainly of "high achievers," it is difficult for them to understand the needs of gifted learners. This group can be easily offended if you use language suggesting that gifted learners are "bored" in the current classroom setting, or that they are not being appropriately challenged. However, the same message may actually be *heard* if you are able to reach agreement concerning the rights of all students.

The late Carol J. Morreale was extremely effective in communicating the needs of gifted learners and in eliminating the elitist tone so often *heard* by decision makers when we advocate for gifted children. To begin building a foundation including all stakeholders, you might want to initiate your advocacy with her words: "*All students need and deserve an equal opportunity to stretch their minds to understand new and difficult curriculum content in order to maximize their potential and demand the use of higher level thinking.* Gifted students need modifications in the standard curriculum in order to make it more intellectually demanding. They particularly need a quicker pace, a greater depth, and more abstract processes. All students need a level of content slightly beyond their grasp, so they will apply higher level thinking."

Basically we want all children to be able to go to school every day with an opportunity to learn. Unfortunately, this very simple concept quickly becomes complicated—especially when we start to define in more detail what this would look like for each student. Along the way, we decide that some students need differentiated instruction. Discussions take place as to how to provide this instruction, until someone uses the dreaded "G" word. Then, suddenly, our very basic statement of need gets lost in the whole process of identification.

The challenge is to urge our group of gifted advocates and decision makers to focus on specific goals in meeting the needs of gifted children and to develop a time line to reach those goals. This must be done while simultaneously formulating the right message for effective communication with the larger group of decision makers. If the group is largely comprised of high achievers, advocates will need to choose words that resonate with this group—words that they will *hear*.

The needs of gifted children are more likely to be affirmed if the conversations include asking for appropriate opportunities for our children to learn something new each day at school, for activities making good use of our children's time, and for providing experiences that enhance the self-esteem of these children. We need credible assessment data indicating that these children are making appropriate growth during each school year. Advocates should maintain the focus on the child's needs and stay away from the "G" word, so as to avoid debating whether or not the child is "gifted." Over the years, I've observed too much energy expended on attempts to define an individual's "giftedness," at the expense of developing a meaningful learning experience for that child

Unfortunately, in the age of "No Child Left Behind," the conversations we need concerning appropriate growth for gifted children are not always taking place. More often than not, gifted children have already met a prescribed, mediocre standard. The perception is that these students do not need a "Tier I" or "Tier II" intervention. Many times, the false conclusion—drawn from well-intentioned "high achievers"—is that classroom instruction is meeting the needs of gifted children. The current practice in many schools is to review assessment data merely to identify which students are likely to meet the state standards. These students are placed in the "green" category.

Subsequently, conversations often shift to a focus on what types of interventions are available for those students identified as barely meeting or not likely to meet the standards. These are the students that comprise the "yellow" and "red" categories. In schools struggling to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), despite pressures to the contrary, advocates for gifted education should always ask how much time and what resources are allocated for differentiating the needs of students within the "green" category. These students include those who are both meeting and exceeding the state standards. The regular classroom instruction is very appropriate for *most* of these students.

However, it is highly likely that there are also students in this green category who have already demonstrated that they exceed the state standards. These students need their instructional differentiation to move in the opposite direction from the red and yellow groups. They also most likely should have access to a pullout program, participate in ability grouping, develop a learning contract for independent projects, or be accelerated in a particular area of strength. These students require fewer repetitions; they could use time more productively in exploring new concepts. We should also expect and demand that this group of learners be exposed to new concepts daily. Their school time should not be squandered, with little or no challenge, sitting, waiting for their peers to catch up. To my mind, "elitism" is more likely to result from a lack of intellectual rigor than from having appropriate assignments and the expectation of regular classroom engagement, like every other student.

In developing strong gifted education programs, advocates must be patient, persistent, and calculating. Advocates need to work together collectively and strategically. Their focus should include long-term goals, not merely short-term victories designed only for the span of a particular school year.

In thinking about making programmatic changes for gifted students, it has been useful for me to work from a framework that outlines the necessary steps, moving the stakeholders throughout the "change" process. As the gifted coordinator, I met with groups of very dedicated parents and teachers, as well as the elementary principal, to develop a well-researched proposal to establish a gifted magnet school. For several years prior to developing this proposal, we maintained a comprehensive program of professional development with both teachers and principals throughout the district. It

emphasized meeting the needs of gifted students within the regular classroom. As the gifted coordinator, I communicated annually both the strengths and the weaknesses of the current offerings for gifted students.

By the time we presented our proposal for a gifted magnet school to the district's decision makers, many of our teachers had acquired an understanding of the unique needs of gifted education. Several teachers already had experienced trying to meet the needs of gifted children within the classroom, and these teachers knew that, despite their best efforts, not all of the children's needs were being met. It was difficult to challenge these students every day, all day. These educators became natural advocates for gifted children, and especially those identified and invited to attend the gifted magnet school. Through both training and observation, the teachers understood that it was in the best interests of these students to be with their intellectual peers on a daily basis.

Prior to making changes in a school setting, stakeholders need pertinent information to convince them of the need for change. In our district, this happened through informed conversations about needs of gifted students with gifted resource teachers assigned to their school buildings and through professional development workshops. Once educators became aware of basic premises in gifted education and dedicated themselves to meeting the needs of gifted children, supports for their planning and preparation were put in place. Gifted resource teachers assisted with curriculum ideas for classroom teachers, in addition to facilitating pullout programs. It gradually became obvious that these options weren't sufficient to meet the needs of gifted students. A setting in which they could be challenged all day, every day, would be more appropriate. Our teachers' union agreed to contract modifications requiring all teachers at the gifted school to have graduate training in gifted education, as well as experience in differentiating curriculum for gifted learners.

This is the tenth year of existence for our gifted magnet school for grades one through five. It is our first year including grade six, and our plans include adding grades seven and eight over the next two years. In the early years, we had so many questions about how much to accelerate the reading and math curriculum and how to appropriately place children. We still have our share of questions and challenges. Of course, the focus of our inquiries shifts as we gain more experience. I think we are more comfortable with our pacing. We still seek more support for gifted children from low, socio-economic families and for those who are multi-exceptional. We are learning about the needs of gifted middle school students in an elementary setting, greatly relying on the knowledge gained at the annual IAGC conference and on our networking with other educators of gifted children.

Even though we have a program that continues to grow in numbers, it is a challenge not to become complacent in our advocacy efforts. These efforts continue, as does our commitment to appropriate professional development for new teachers and administrators. We persist in educating new school board members and/or new central office administrators concerning the needs of our students. Unfortunately, large numbers of our educators who had received gifted education professional development, NCLB and RtI are now retiring, so the need for increased in-service of our new classroom teachers in gifted education is immediate.

Sadly, with the pressure of making AYP, teachers at many of our district schools are even more reluctant to suggest to parents that their child attend a gifted magnet school. We still labor under a misguided policy mandating that state test scores of special education students be back to the home school, but not the scores of gifted students. If those scores were returned to the home schools, couldn't we make better decisions about what placement is truly best for the individual student, without compromising the aggregate test scores of that school? Perhaps this is one more issue to add to the IAGC advocacy "To Do" list.

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INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AND GIFTED LEARNERS: AN ALTERNATIVE OPTION FOR QUALITY IN EDUCATION

By Jennifer Golwitzer

Introduction

The first day of kindergarten is often filled with mixed emotions of joy, excitement, and great sadness as parents say goodbye to the days of their children being infants and toddlers and usher in a new era of the school-age years. Choosing an educational institution that will be the best fit to nurture their children through those early years of growth and development is not an easy task, because there are many factors to consider before making such an important and often times difficult choice.

Steps in Making an Informed Decision

1. Considering the children's needs and best interests.

The first and foremost concern of parents when choosing a school for their children should always be the fit of that school to the children's needs and interests. Although the statement itself is glaringly obvious and supremely logical, in practice it remains elusive, since a school may meet some of the children's needs, but might not be the best fit for other,

perhaps more important, academic or social considerations. In addition, parents may want their children to attend a certain school that works well for them, although it might not be the best place for their children. Parents should always base this critical choice on the ability of the school to address the learning needs of their children. Are their children auditory, visual, or bodily-kinesthetic learners? What are their academic strengths? In what areas do they need improvement? Can the school provide a healthy social and learning environment for their children? Choosing the wrong school environment is, at the least, counter-productive. A non-nurturing placement is not only detrimental to the learning process, but can sow the seeds of long-term, negative behaviors and attitudes.

Joan Franklin Smutny's work has become a guide for educating young, gifted children. She states that children who are gifted learners need to be identified early in their lives in order to make the most of their abilities and to encourage a positive self concept—which does not mean thinking that they are always proficient at every task, but, rather, that they have something valuable to contribute to the learning process. Smutny's research has found that children who are in educational settings not suited to their needs often become bored, which, she says, "…is a low-grade level of 'angry.'" To prevent this boredom and negativity from taking root in their children's thought, parents must understandingly embrace their responsibility for choosing the right schools for their children (Smutny, et. al., 1997).

2. Meeting educational objectives for the children.

Once parents feel that they know and understand their children as learners, they should begin thinking about and evaluating how well the schools in question will be able to address the educational objectives they are working to achieve. Before visiting their top schools of interest, parents should prepare. They need to know what will qualify the institutions they have chosen as potential matches for their children—an inquiry requiring careful, thoughtful research and reflection. Making a checklist of potential matches is a good starting point. Data collection for every school guarantees that the information will be more objective and less biased.

3. Learn about the school.

After collecting preliminary data about schools of interest through informal conversations with parents who have children enrolled in the school, on-line research, etc., parents will naturally narrow their search to those schools capable of meeting the specific needs of both children and parents. Calling a potential school to ask general questions about their programs is perfectly appropriate. One-on-one communication provides an opportunity for parents to better understand the school and to get to know faculty and staff. Each step in the process increases familiarity, which makes the eventual choice less overwhelming and intimidating.

4. Visiting the school.

A thorough visitation should then take place to facilitate the process of choosing a school that will help the children maximize their learning potentials. Independent School Management, an organization focused on helping independent schools and interested parents, recommends that parents ask specific questions of the schools they are researching. The first priority of any prospective client should be to discern the quality and commitment of the faculty. Dedicated and knowledgeable teachers create successful educational programs. The schools should have faculty who are experienced and who have opportunities for professional development. The second element of interest pertains to class size. Low student-teacher ratios equal more individual attention for students. Lastly, find out how students feel about the level of challenge they receive, how parents are treated as members of the school community, and how well, or if, the school supports a climate of achievement.

Parents should require evidence of academic excellence directly related to rigorous and differentiated programming in any school they consider. This type of information is relatively easy to find and is often published or promoted by schools--in the forms of completed assignments posted on walls or lists of projects students have been engaged in over the course of a regular school year (Independent School Management, 2006). If possible, seize any opportunity to engage students in conversation. Informal chats with children invariably yield valuable insights concerning the quality of the education they receive at school.

If parents find themselves genuinely interested in a school, their curiosity should take them one step further, to questions of long-term outcomes. How well do the school's "graduates" perform acadmically in later grades, high school, or even college? Have students from this school achieved significant academic honors or distinctions? (Independent School Management, 2006). Any school unable to produce such evidence should come under serious scrutiny and be considered for immediate disqualification from the process.

Making the Choice

After visiting the school site, applying to a set of schools in some cases, and perhaps being accepted to a school or schools, make the final choice carefully, with the best interest of the children in mind, focusing directly on the children's learning needs.

After the Decision is Made

Once a choice has been made and the children have started school, parents have a continued obligation to stay involved in the life and activities of the classroom and/or school itself. Parental involvement is multi-faceted. It provides a strong indicator to children that their parents are interested in what is happening in their lives and that they are willing to take an active role in their academic and social development. If children receive a strong message that school is important, they will more likely follow the educational path to its natural completion, either to the end of the twelfth grade or in the pursuit of college degrees or other types of advanced training. Parental involvement also provides chances for instructive interactions with other members of the school community, from administrative staff, to faculty, to fellow parents, and even to other children attending the school.

Even more important than working and volunteering at the school, the most crucial responsibility of parents is to build

working relationships with their children's teachers—the people on the front lines of the learning experience. The relationship should be built on mutual trust and respect. This partnership assumes that all the grownups in that school are there because they love children and want what is best for them. There are obvious benefits to forming parent-teacher partnerships, not least of which is presenting a united front in solving problems and resolving conflicts. Children know when the adults in their lives are taking active roles in working together for their success and happiness.

Independent Schools

Independent schools play a unique role in any educational system. They meet the needs of a variety of learners and parents who are looking for "something different" in the educational journey. In fact, Independent School Management has found that many parents choose independent schools for specific and distinct reasons. First, parents want their children to be safe. Second, they also want them to grow to be confident and curious learners, to explore their world in an environment that encourages investigation and active involvement. Third, they seek high quality academics to provide rigor and high levels of challenge for their children. Lastly, they are in search of an environment that will provide strong character development—a place in which their children will learn to form friendships. They want excellent teachers, who understand diversity in skills and perspectives, and who will nurture their children and show them to be the important and exceptional creatures they are (Independent School Management, 2006).

There are many independent schools from which to choose and all are designed to reach specific populations of people, including those who have strong abilities in certain areas or specific learning needs. However, it is the responsibility of parents to research and find the school that is the best fit for their children, whether it is an independent, parochial, or public institution.

Independent schools are often an appropriate choice for gifted children because they more often offer programs that have been cut in other academic institutions (due to a variety of reasons, including budget, policy, and personnel constraints). Some states and schools have been forced to go so far as to cut funding for previously successful programs designed to meet the special educational needs of gifted children.

Ann Sheldon, Executive Director of the Ohio Association for Gifted Children, addressed the Ohio House Finance and Appropriations Committee in July of 2009 to ask that budget cuts not be made to gifted education programs alone because it would simply be an unbalanced and unfair practice to all of the children who qualify to receive special education services as gifted children. Sheldon went on to state that some gang members, as well as other prison inmates, are actually gifted learners who slipped through the cracks of the educational system when they were young, because there were no programs available to meet their needs (Sheldon, 2009).

While it is unlikely that underserved gifted children will become members or leaders of gangs or that they will eventually end up being incarcerated, the point is clear; gifted children deserve and need to be challenged in order to keep their minds sharp and focused on positive areas of life. To abolish funding and/or programs is an affront to the children who need or would benefit from those services. When they are able to provide appropriate activities and curricular challenges for gifted children, schools are better equipped to work with parents to help children choose constructive paths for their lives. Young children depend on the proper guidance of adults to lead them toward good choices and positive relationships.

Sadly, there are other important school programs on the cutting block. Fine arts, such as music and art, actually provide valuable outlets for children to express natural curiosity and talent, and are not simply throw away curricular pieces, as they have come to be defined in some educational systems. If and when those programs no longer exist, the children who once benefited from them will be robbed of unique experiences, such as public speaking, giving group presentations and performances to large crowds, or learning to see the world through someone else's eyes. As a result of these types of program cuts, some children purposefully disengage from learning, because they do not find its relevance in their lives. The disciplines that hold the most pleasure or meaning for them have been taken away, for reasons completely obscure or inexplicable.

What Does the Research Indicate?

Howard Gardner. Howard Gardner developed the Multiple Intelligences Theory as a result of long-term observation and study of human behavior. He began his years of research as a student at Harvard College, eventually becoming a professor in Harvard University's Education Department (Smith, 2008). He argues that, in order for meaningful learning to take place, several basic educational needs must be met. He also states that intelligence is not one single piece, but is a compilation of many pieces working together to create something beautiful. Each person has a unique structure for intelligence, and, therefore, offers something different to the world.

While people generally tend to have stronger tendencies toward certain "intelligences," most people have a deep need to access most, if not all, of those outlined in Gardner's work. Many independent schools are still fortunate enough to be able to offer activities that speak to various "intelligences" because their philosophies and values naturally embrace Gardner's research. One independent school that serves children from kindergarten through eighth grade goes beyond offering weekly music and visual arts classes to providing all of its students the opportunity to experience drama classes, choir beginning in the fourth grade, and dance. Branching out to other areas of the arts provides the students the opportunity to learn about and experience many applicable life skills while strengthening their ability to stand in front of large groups of people to speak openly about a given topic with ease, as well as to be able to state their opinions with confidence.

By virtue of being academically focused institutions, the vast majority of schools address the linguistic, logical-mathematical, and naturalist intelligences outlined by Howard Gardner to some degree because those areas are considered the

"core curriculum". While these are all areas of great value, defining certain parameters of success, they are not the only pieces to the puzzle of thought. If the other intelligences are never acknowledged or developed, children who do not feel as confident in their reading or writing skills, mathematical reasoning, or scientific understanding simply shut down intellectually. Even students who do feel strong connections to those areas often need more creative outlets.

Due to ever-shrinking budgets, shifting priorities, and changing values, a growing number of schools are struggling to address the interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, spatial, or bodily-kinesthetic intelligences in their curricula. Some schools are even being forced to cut the most fundamental of programs involving movement, such as physical education, because the funding is gone.

One school district in particular was forced to cut all "non-academic" programs, including music, art, and physical education, because there were simply no monies available to provide those services. That plan worked for a few years, but it eventually faltered when students, teachers, parents, and administrators alike realized the need for the programs they had been forced to cut. Not only were children less engaged in school during the years of having little or no fine and practical arts, but they were also spending less time in school period.

Carol Ann Tomlinson. Carol Ann Tomlinson, a well-respected researcher who developed the concept of differentiated instruction, has proved that meeting children at their current levels of interest, abilities, and academic achievement also enhances their enthusiasm for the programs already offered in their schools. She advocates for small group, whole group, and individual instruction, depending upon the situation and needs of the children in the classroom at the time. Some of Tomlinson's ideas and philosophies are impractical, given our present educational climate, since other priorities take precedence over being able to work with small groups or individuals.

Of course, money is not the only villain in school cutbacks and downsizing. Time is also a ruling factor in most classrooms. However, Tomlinson argues that strong leadership, plus administrators with clear vision, can move schools toward an effective differentiated curriculum. With smaller class sizes and less "red tape," independent schools, in scores of cases, find it easier to design and implement curricula for all types of learning abilities, including those students with special needs.

Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy is a framework for questioning students. It outlines in clear terms various levels of difficulty and challenge for performance and thinking. The levels provide a structure for students and teachers to think about what is being learned and to plan engaging and challenging projects for all students. Requiring students to work at consistently high levels not only ensures more and better outcomes, but challenges students to think differently about what they have learned. Many times, independent schools consistently work at the higher levels of the taxonomy because of their heightened expectations and persistent attention to children's needs.

Various independent schools are able to continue offering research-based strategies from respected people like Smutny, Gardner, Tomlinson, and Bloom because they have the freedom and ability to meet the needs of differing learners with a high level of autonomy, while continuing to meet high standards and benchmarks set out by a variety of organizations, such as state departments of public instruction, local school districts, or standardized assessments for college admissions.

Conclusion

Children deserve the best and finest of all we have to offer, and the adults—the advocates for their lives—must help. They must find and publicize credible research describing the nature, qualities, and needs of gifted students. Parents can help by selecting a school that will appropriately challenge, engage, and nurture their children, and by choosing to take an active role in their children's educational lives. The school works as the third and final piece to the puzzle and should provide appropriate support and guidance for their students throughout the educational journey.

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Responsibility for nurturing, encouraging, and supporting the full development of potential in children and youth is accepted and shared by their families, educators, and communities. Individuals value themselves and their accomplishments. Their contributions are celebrated by society.

Goals

- *To promote advocacy efforts that benefit gifted and talented children by establishing an effective political network.*
- *To develop standards of quality for what teachers and other professionals need to know about educating children with gifts and talents.*
- *To develop standards to evaluate the appropriateness of programs and services which affect the lives of children with gifts and talents.*
- *To foster professional growth of educators by providing opportunities to learn about standards of quality for understanding and teaching children with gifts and talents.*
- *To network with others by disseminating news and information to educators and parents through regular communication in the form of a newsletter, journal and the Internet.*
- *To work cooperatively with the Illinois State Board of Education, universities, and other organizations that serve children with gifts and talents.*

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