

Interview with Maurice Fisher, Ph.D. Publisher

Gifted Education Press and *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*

1. Maurice, you continue to publish *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*. When did you first get started?

I started in the spring of 1987 – twenty-two years ago. This was during a period when I was working with local gifted program coordinators in Pennsylvania to develop standards for gifted education in this state. I was also working with the gifted coordinator (James LoGiudice) in the Bucks County, Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit on books that teachers could use for differentiated humanities programs. I also saw a need for publishing articles that would address such issues as humanities education for gifted students, designing stimulating content in various subject areas, educating young gifted children and encouraging parents of gifted children to be effective advocates in the public schools.

My thinking about educating gifted students was strongly influenced by my doctoral dissertation advisor, Professor Virgil S. Ward of the University of Virginia, who believed that education programs for the gifted should be based upon rigorous pedagogical and developmental theories. He was one of the originators (along with Professor Harry Passow of Teachers College, Columbia University) of the term, “Differentiated Instruction.”

All of these factors convinced me to start *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*. Today, it has an online subscriber list of about 15,000, which I believe is the largest number of subscribers of any periodical in the gifted field. Educators and parents who wish to subscribe to the current and future issues should contact me at: gifted@giftededpress.com.

2. Tell us about your most recent issue. Who is writing what?

Constant Contact (an emailing service) sent the Summer 2009 issue to online subscribers on May 21, 2009. It included the following articles:

- **Gifted Education in China: A Transition toward Student-Centered Instruction**

Stephen T. Schroth Jason A. Helfer Diana L. Beck Katherine M. Latshaw & Zachary A. Bahr
Educational Studies Department Knox College Galesburg, Illinois

Dr. Schroth and his colleagues traveled to China in the fall of 2008 to observe how gifted students were educated there, and to provide recommendations for improving the education of these students. The article provides a detailed history of gifted education in this nation, and shows how differentiated concepts developed in the United States can be applied to Chinese schools.

- **Parent/School Communication in Gifted Education**

Kai Brunkalla & Dawn Brunkalla Walsh University North Canton, Ohio

The authors conducted a survey of Ohio school districts to determine how they informed parents about gifted education programs. The most important findings were that Ohio school districts were doing a good job in informing parents about identification and selection procedures, but they needed to provide more information about how parents can provide their children with stimulating educational opportunities in the home. This is an important article because Ohio has been one of the key gifted education states for many years.

- **N. Scott Momaday: Native American Creative Writer, Artist and Activist**

Dorothy Clare Massalski University of Arizona Tucson, Arizona

Ms. Massalaski has written a very informative essay about the life and achievements of the Pulitzer Prize winner, N. Scott Momaday. It was originally included in the most recent book published by Gifted Education Press, **Heroes of Giftedness** (2009). Her essay shows teachers of the gifted how they can use information from Native American cultures to stimulate their students' creative writing skills. Ms. Massalaski was a former student in Dr. Momaday's courses and she has studied Native American cultures for many years.

- **Little Dorrit (1857): A Novel for Gifted Students**

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

Dr. Walters has written many articles on the humanities and literature since I started publishing ***Gifted Education Press Quarterly*** in 1987. He is particularly concerned with teaching gifted students about the great English writers such as Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare. His essay on **Little Dorrit** discusses how this novel can help gifted students to better understand current economic, political and social problems.

3. What other topics need to be examined and explored in gifted education?

I would like to see more discussion and application of the following topics and welcome related articles for publication in ***Gifted Education Press Quarterly***.

- **Teaching Ethics to Gifted Students** – As part of a comprehensive, humanities based curriculum, the study of ethics should begin at the primary level and continue through high school. I would include the formal study of ethical concepts from the great philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Kant. In addition, current viewpoints on ethical issues related to the

environment, health, international relations, economics and politics should be an important part of ethical education for gifted students. They are our future leaders in business, science, the arts and politics. Their education in ethical issues should have a very high priority in order to prevent future economic disasters such as the one we are currently experiencing.

- **Intensive Training in Logical and Clear Thinking** – Again, the education of gifted students must be permeated from the early grades through high school with formal training in logic as practiced by analytic philosophers. This training combined with the analysis of media propaganda must prepare them to detect logical fallacies and meaningless nonsense perpetrated by the media and politicians. The amount of information that bombards the average American on a daily basis is overwhelming. Gifted students need to be carefully taught to separate the wheat from the chaff through using clear analytical thinking.

- **Biographical Studies of Gifted Individuals** – By reading and being taught about outstanding individuals in different fields of study, gifted children can be inspired to use these individuals as role models and mentors. The study of the lives of individuals such as Ben Carson and Wynton Marsalis would be particularly inspiring for gifted minority students. I recently published a book that discusses the lives and work of many highly gifted individuals who are excellent examples of mentors and role models: **Heroes of Giftedness** (2009, Gifted Education Press).

- **Challenging Content in All Subject Areas** – My original intention in publishing books for teachers of the gifted was to provide them with specific ideas for teaching the humanities – e.g., literature, history, philosophy and language. The gifted field has experienced about twenty years of advances in the design of differentiated curriculum models. But the question that I continue to ask is: What should gifted students be taught with these models? What specific content should we develop for the differentiated classroom? I still believe that an in-depth humanities curriculum emphasizing the interrelations between different subjects is the best approach for educating gifted students. Rigorous instruction in mathematics and science should be an integral part of this type of curriculum. Are public schools capable of designing and implementing a rigorous humanities curriculum? It is difficult to achieve this level of differentiated instruction because the “teaching for the test” mentality currently dominates public education.

4. I understand that you also have several books about gifted education. What are some of their names and what are some of the topics?

Yes, Gifted Education Press has published many books for teaching gifted students which can be ordered directly from GEP or through Amazon.com. The most recently published books are:

Heroes of Giftedness: An Inspirational Guide for Gifted Students and Their Teachers -- Presenting the Personal Heroes of Twelve Experts on Gifted Education (2009) by Maurice D. Fisher and Eugenia M. Fisher, Editors

This book contains the biographies and inspirational stories of sixty-five highly gifted individuals from the sciences, technology and invention areas, medicine and biology, literature and poetry, music, art and the media. These are the personal heroes of twelve GEP authors who are from different areas of gifted education and have various professional careers, i.e., teachers, artists, curriculum specialists, professors, coordinators, environmental engineers, and educational psychologists. They are Eugene and Diana Avergon, Ross Butchart, Daniel Gonshorek, Jason Helfer, Carol Horn, Dorothy Massalski, Harry Roman, Stephen Schroth, Joan Smutny, Michael Walters, and myself.

These authors and I believe that biographical essays provide both teachers and students with a fascinating opportunity to study *giftedness in action*. Our primary assumption is that reading and studying about outstanding achievers will inspire, motivate and strengthen gifted students' desire to excel in their specific areas of interest. This is particularly important for gifted minority children who may not have enough home and personal support to pursue their academic interests.

The book can be used by teachers to discuss the lives and achievements of such individuals as Wynton Marsalis in music, Eleanor Baum in engineering, Annie Dillard in nature writing and literature, and Ken Burns in documentary film production. By learning about these and many other outstanding people, gifted students can improve their understanding of different types of careers. They might then focus upon specific career areas for additional research and study. Some of the other highly gifted individuals discussed in **Heroes of Giftedness** are Neil Armstrong, Bill Gates, Derek Cabrera, Ben Carson, Jane Goodall, Rita Dove, Joshua Bell, Plácido Domingo, Deborah Butterfield and Gustavo Dudamel.

I am pleased to present the following statement about this book from Joan Smutny:

“Heroes of Giftedness: An Inspirational Guide (2009) is an exciting new edition to gifted education literature. It well fulfills its purpose in the inspiring, exhilarating accounts of famous individuals and their contribution to the world. Gifted students, teachers, and parents will benefit hugely from these biographies of great men and women who overcame personal and professional challenges to move forward in their fields. The book is a singular compilation of biographies and offers many inside perspectives and anecdotal perceptions of heroes representing science, engineering, and inventing; medicine and biology; literature and poetry; art, dance, and the media. Role models abound. Gifted children and the adults who work with them will benefit from this compilation of heroes who are persons and distinct imparters to humanity. Maurice Fisher has done something wonderful for all of us in gifted education. We

look forward to further editions.” **Joan Smutny, Director The Center for Gifted National-Louis University**

Energizing Your Gifted Students’ Creative Thinking & Imagination: Using Design Principles, Team Activities, and Invention Strategies —A Complete Lesson Guide for Upper Elementary and Middle School Levels (2009) by Harry T. Roman Technology/Engineering Educator East Orange, New Jersey

This book is dedicated to helping teachers of the gifted and talented to foster and apply the natural enthusiasm of their children for solving practical and real world problems. Imagination and creative thought is a natural part of this process, a process that begins with asking high quality questions about any problem being considered. Ideally, this book will help gifted students become masters at using engineering and design principles in their everyday life in school or at home.

Written by a research and design engineer, the chapters contain basic and descriptive information, and provide many opportunities for students to engage in solving problems and completing design challenges. Working from the premise that invention is a multi-disciplinary, as well as multi-dimensional activity, the author challenges teachers and students to view problem solving as an integrated learning experience. This is augmented with copious appended materials and references for additional reading and contemplation.

The lessons cover such topics as: Our Dynamic Brains, Creativity – The Natural Human Tendency, What Thomas Edison Teaches Us, Creativity in Your Classroom, Real World Problem Solving, The Underground Museum Challenge, An Invention Passion Activity, and Technology and Music.

The entire book is infused with the 36-years of inventive experiences of the author in designing first-of-a-kind equipment and systems for everyday use in industry. The author is well-known and extensively published in the educational literature; having published 24 teacher resource books and several hundred articles and professional papers including 4 new mathematical card games to improve student skills. He has worked with local schools in his state (New Jersey) for over 30 years, bringing his work-a-day world and experiences directly into the classroom. That classroom application philosophy and experience is evident throughout this book.

Some of our other current books are:

Golden Quills: Creative Thinking and Writing Lessons for Middle-School Gifted Students (2008) by R. E. Myers, Ed.D. Creative Learning Consultant Healdsburg, California. Contains Twenty-Seven Challenging Lessons for Stimulating Creative Learning in Language Arts. The author, who

received his doctorate under Professor E. Paul Torrance, has designed many creative thinking programs and activities.

Solar Power, Fuel Cells, Wind Power and Other Important Environmental Studies for Upper Elementary and Middle School Gifted Students and Their Teachers: A Technology, Problem-Solving and Invention Guide (2008) by Harry T. Roman Technology and Engineering Educator East Orange, New Jersey. Perfect for use in Tech Ed, pre-engineering and environmental courses and study units.

SNIBBLES: REALLY Creative Problem Solving Lessons and Mind-Stimulating Exercises for Gifted Students and Their Teachers, Ages 5 through Really Old! (2005) by Judy Micheletti Teacher of Gifted Students Berwick, Pennsylvania. Contains over 75 stimulating and fascinating exercises based on using ordinary objects found in the school and home. Micheletti is a highly experienced teacher of the gifted who is a middle school gifted program facilitator and regional coordinator of Odyssey of the Mind.

I have also published science and mathematics books such as:

Physics Laboratory Experiments for the Gifted: Middle and High School (2005) by Raja Almukahhal, Ph.D. Physicist and Director Math & Science Learning Center Fall Church, Virginia

Essential Chemistry for Gifted Students: Preparation for High School Chemistry, Grades 4 - 8 (2003) by Francis T. Sganga Chemistry Educator Volusia County, Florida

Essential Mathematics for Gifted Students: Preparation for Algebra, Grades 4 – 8 (2002) by Francis T. Sganga Mathematics Educator Volusia County, Florida

5. Do you have a web site? What might be found on it?

Readers can obtain more information about our books and periodicals by clicking the following link: www.giftededpress.com. This web site has details about our current and previously published books. They can also find information about the current and previous issues of **Gifted Education Press Quarterly** and **Gifted Education News-Page**.

Contact me at gifted@giftededpress.com for a complimentary subscription to **Gifted Education Press Quarterly**.

I appreciate your interviewing me, and respect your efforts to inform educators and parents about current work in the gifted education field.

May 29, 2009