

Conceptual Foundations

NEWSLETTER fall 2016

GIFTED
WHEN?
HOW?
WHY?



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

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“It is important that we know where we come from, because if you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong.” ~ Terry Pratchett, *I Shall Wear Midnight*

At this time of the year, each year, we are happy to publish an honoring issue.

This time, I am in the pleasant position to edit an issue in which we honor the gifted field itself!

We challenged Conceptual-Foundations-presenters from the past years to accept and write a short passage of 500 words, answering the following questions:

- What were pivotal experiences leading to your interest in gifted education?
- What were significant influences on the development of your involvement in the field? (experiences, theories, readings)
- What advice would you give to young professionals interested in gifted education?

Enjoy!

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

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Welcome to our Fall edition of the Conceptual Foundations Network newsletter. As always, I must thank Danae Deligeorge, our wonderful newsletter editor, for putting this issue together. Thanks also to those of you who responded to Danae's call to submit a response to questions about your experience in the field of gifted education. These questions were based on the interview protocol that has been developed for the Legacy Archive Project of the CF Network. We will be asking these and other questions of individuals nominated for their significant contributions to our field. Each of us has an important role to play in preserving the history of our field and we are delighted that several of you have shared your personal legacies. I hope you will become a part of the CF Legacy Archive Project, either by nominating someone you admire or by volunteering to conduct an interview. Be on the lookout for more information about how you can participate. The CF Legacy Archive Project Committee will have a special session to introduce the project at the conference in Orlando. Please join us to learn more on Saturday, 11/5 at 2:30 in Fiesta 10.

There will be many CF Network presentations for you to enjoy at the conference. Stephen Schroth, our CF Chair-Elect, did a wonderful job selecting an interesting assortment of sessions. For the first time, CF is sponsoring combined sessions, allowing us to accept many more of your high-quality proposals than we have been able to in the past. Don't forget to check out the posters in the Exhibit Hall on Friday and Saturday during the convention. Posters are a great way to share your research or practice with others at a time when so few concurrent sessions are available. The Network's Signature Session will be considering the future of our field from various perspectives on Friday, 11/4 at 9:15 in Yucatan 1-2. **The CF Business Meeting is on Saturday morning at 9:15 in Cancun. Please come to share your ideas!**

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

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Entering gifted child education through the back door

Jim Delisle

It didn't take me long to determine, as a kid, that I wanted to become a teacher. It happened in first grade when Sister Patricia Ann pulled me aside and asked me to help kids who couldn't tell time, a skill I had mastered down to the second!! My career direction seldom wavered and, sure enough, I earned my Bachelor's degree in elementary and special education, focused on students who struggled to learn.

My first years of teaching were as a K-6 educator of kids with learning and behavioral issues, and it was in that classroom that I found Matt, a 5th grader with a strong personality, a lousy attitude about school (and me), and something I didn't expect: strong academic and intellectual skills. It took me a while to recognize these latter attributes--more than one year, in fact--but once I did, I realized that if I was ever to reach Matt, I would have to make curriculum personal, focusing on high-level content that was meaningful to him. I could write a book on my many foibles along the way, but suffice it to say that after another year of working with Matt, I realized I needed more specialized training in reaching these kids--"I think they are called gifted," I recall telling a colleague. Thus, I began my Ph.D. in gifted child education, focusing on smart kids who didn't perform well in school. Almost 40 years later, I'm still working with kids like these, and still making occasional foibles in my efforts to help.

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The biggest influences on my life were two people I never met: Leta Stetter Hollingworth, a now well-known advocate of gifted children from the 1930s, and James Mehorter, a doctoral student colleague of my advisor, Joe Renzulli. Jim's dissertation, "Self and Society", was an independent study curriculum for gifted high school students that used bibliotherapy and music to address issues of intellectual, social and emotional importance. Later, I became familiar with the work (and lives) of people like George and Annemarie Roeper, my "gifted grandparents", and Joanne Rand Whitmore whose 1980 book, "Giftedness, conflict and underachievement" remains the best volume yet on ways to address struggling students in a respectful manner. These are the heroes of my professional life and I hope each day that I teach (I still instruct gifted 9th graders every month in South Carolina) that my work is an adequate reflection of their brilliance and compassion.

So yeah, I entered gifted child education through the back door, as I assume many of us did. My advice to newcomers to this field? No matter how many degrees you earn, books you write, or professional development sessions you lead, make sure that you keep one foot in the door of the place that brought you where you are today: the elementary or secondary classroom that is filled with gifted kids who need your attention, support and guidance.

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Improving access and equity

Joy Lawson Davis

What were pivotal experiences leading to your interest in gifted education?

My first job was as an elementary art teacher in a small rural district. When the state department requested that all districts develop programs for gifted and talented students, my principal asked me to be our district's representative at a training session and begin the process of program development. I was always

concerned that there were a number of students whose intellect and creativity were not sufficiently challenged in their classrooms, so this was a great opportunity to make a difference for them. My first introduction to the field was as a participant in a special conference at The College of William and Mary. There, I met Dr. Joyce Van Tassel Baska and later took a graduate course with her as the professor. Later, I applied for and was accepted into her first cohort in the Master's Degree program in Gifted Education at William & Mary.

What were significant influences on the development of your involvement in the field?

The primary influence was Joyce's passion and commitment to the field. In particular, her interest in developing program models to meet the needs of at-risk gifted students was evident and very appealing to me. Through my graduate studies, I learned of the ground-breaking work of Mary Frasier and Alexinia Baldwin. Later, I learned about Barbara Shade. Knowing that these Black female scholars had been successful in the field was very encouraging to me. Other work

of scholars like Asa Hilliard, Robert Sternberg, Joseph Renzulli gave me new insight into more equitable ways that we could measure intelligence and talent and the problems inherent in traditional, more biased practices. But the consistent force was Joyce who kept me focused on building my career. Later, it was Drs James Patton, Margaret Dabney, Donna Ford and Tarek Grantham who all nurtured my passion and scholarship.

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What advice would you give to young professionals interested in gifted education?

I would advise that they find a mentor whose work they admire who can help expand your network. This can be a lonely field at times, particularly when you are seeking “same race” role models whose interest is in EQUITY in our field. Be persistent, be willing to take risks, publish and be open to opportunities to help others. Be ready to serve the field. Service takes many forms in our field. Advocacy is service work. You must be willing to carve out time for service to help move the field forward. I have given over a great deal of my life to eradicating underrepresentation in gifted education. The battle is not over, but finally, we are beginning to see some progress. More national attention is coming to this egregious problem. As a result, the general public is becoming more knowledgeable. That to me, is progress. As a nation, we need to embrace and nurture the giftedness within all communities. I feel fortunate to be able to help districts and state organizations face the issues head on and begin to change, improving access and equity, one student, one district at a time.

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Why I Became Involved in Gifted Education

Tom Shaff

My interest in gifted education began when my older son qualified for the GT magnet in St Paul Public Schools. We had no idea what it meant and less than a day to decide. We found a teacher (Richard Cash) who was kind enough to explain the program. Sure, why not?

That same year I attended a meeting of the district's gifted advisory council. I listened to Karen Rogers explain Renzulli's idea that giftedness is a broad, socially determined construct. I had to know more, so I joined. I served for eight years. The experience was a fascinating education in gifted policy and school politics. Our younger son also qualified for the magnet school. However, he preferred his neighborhood school's seasoned GT specialist. He was fortunate to have her K-6. He and three of his classmates were among the top ten graduates in their high schools. I learned firsthand the power of a qualified GT teacher to change lives.

The district offered me a place in a Gifted, Creative and Talented Master's program cosponsored by the University of St Thomas. And the district paid half my tuition!

Shortly after I started the program my wife and I were strolling up Summit Avenue toward our favorite coffee shop. I was really excited about what I was learning. She kept smiling like she knew some secret. Finally, I asked her what was so funny and she replied, "Why can't you see that you're one of them?"

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My interest was fueled by lots of well-respected researchers, a terrific curriculum model and intelligence theory brought to life.

I felt like I won the lottery to study under Karen Westberg, Jann Leppien and Karen Rogers at St. Thomas. But the best part was learning the Parallel Curriculum from Jann. I liked it so much I applied it to instructional software I designed at work.

In 2005 I began studying four gifted high school seniors. I interviewed them many times over ten years. Their insights led to my intense focus on the transition from gifted adolescence to talented adulthood.

I went to Iowa for my doctorate and met Dave Lohman whose papers I had read for years. I took his course, Human Abilities, before he retired. Each week we wrote ourselves out onto a theoretical limb not to exceed three single-spaced pages. When people talk of the impact of a caring adult on a child, consider the effect is just as powerful on an adult. At the time I was 57, living 285 miles from home, and it was tough. Then I read this comment in the margin of one of those papers, “Keep your focus, you’ll be unstoppable.” Wow, and thanks!

Giving advice is tough, but two points stand out.

Intelligence is a broad construct and foundational to reasoning *and* navigating messy non-cognitive social situations. Take the long view; go beyond K-12. We know so little about how gifted emerging adults achieve identity, autonomy, and retain self-perception of high ability while becoming independent. That’s why I’m doing this.

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Mind your P's: Find Passion in the Process **Yee Han Chu**

Like many others, I did not discover the field of gifted education until I had children of my own whose high-spirited nature often left me exhausted and in search of answers. When my eldest started public school I thought I would finally find someone to help. I remember vividly my surprise when my daughter brought home a picture book rather than a simple chapter book that she could already read. Her teacher only allowed her to select books from the “grade-appropriate” section of the library. Formal public education, at first impression, did not provide the safe haven for my daughter’s intellectually curious ways that I expected.

This event felt more than peculiar to me. It felt wrong. I am a social worker. Respect for diversity is an expression of my profession’s core value of respecting the dignity and worth of each individual. Diversity is not just a superficial expression of our mannerisms and habits, but a deeply saturated way of thinking and making meaning of our world. Couldn’t school officials see that not all children learn in the same way and at the same pace? Shouldn’t schools be the protectors of intellectual diversity?

And so my journey began into the worlds of gifted education and general education as I tried to make sense of what I perceived as the inherent irony of public school behaviors as both creator and constrainer of intellectual diversity. As a cultural outsider, I knew I needed to understand both fields’ histories and ideological cores before forming opinions of my own. What began as curiosity by taking on-line courses in gifted education matured into earning a doctorate in education studying gifted education.

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I learned from many. James Gallagher wrote succinctly and insightfully, helping me to understand educational policies as predictions of human behavior. His work introduced me to the values of excellence and equity that underscore the tension between gifted education and general education. John Gardner delivered a meaning of excellence that captured both my mind and my heart and raised concern with equality in its extremist form. He wrote with a voice of reason and temperance that modelled the best in educational leadership. Craig Howley, Aimee Howley, and Edwina Pendarvis brought a critical lens to my understanding of educational reform, helping me to see that excellence and equity are complementary, not competing values that drive good practice. Too often, unfortunately, one value is cultivated at the expense of the other.

Seeking to impact the lives of high-ability students? Be the creative person you want your students to be. As UCLA basketball coach John Wooden taught his players: When you focus on the *process*, the end will take care of itself.

Patience. Complex problems are hard to solve. Commit the time to understanding it first.

Persistence. Whether you call it task commitment or grit, persistence is essential to professional and personal success. Focus on what you need to do for today.

Pathways. There is more than one way to get to where you want to go. Be willing to take a risk when a chance opportunity arises.

Persuasiveness. A good idea is a persuasive idea. Remember to address your idea's intellectual and emotional properties.

Possibilities. Important contributions bridge uncommon ideas and will have the effect of appealing to the broadest audience. Don't be afraid to learn something new and be vulnerable.

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Credibility leads to respect

Jean Peterson

What were pivotal experiences leading to your interest in gifted education?

Bright, complicated relatives and students in my high school writing and literature classes fueled my interest in gifted kids. However, I did not have pertinent coursework until midlife. I was content in classroom teaching. My approach was usually open-ended and reflected my liberal-arts education. I encouraged students to consider psychological,

sociological, anthropological, historical, economic and theological aspects of required and self-selected reading. The most able students responded particularly well, including those who underachieved elsewhere. The latter, especially, intrigued me.

Larger involvement in the field was by invitation. Gifted-education leaders in my home district, aware of my children and assuming I'd be interested, asked me to lead an initiative to add elementary gifted-education programming. We began an advocacy group, interacted regularly with experts, and had success. A few years later I was put on a committee to establish a program in the district where I taught. Out-of-state field trips informed us about the field. I was then invited to lead a large high school program in my home district.

My daughter was involved in stimulating activities and advanced classes and saw no need to participate formally in the program at her high school. Her perception that it fed arrogance prompted me to create a multi-faceted program, with several of the 25 rigorous options open to anyone. My liberal arts instincts helped me arrange science-, writing-, career-, and arts-oriented activities, unusual classes at noon, and after-school lectures, most of these led by community volunteers and intended to broaden perspectives. Small-group discussion about non-academic development was the most popular option, with 100 involved annually. When my husband's career required relocation, I applied what group members had taught me about themselves to doctoral work in counselor education, with my research and clinical work focused on gifted kids and their families.

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What were significant influences on the development of your involvement in the field?

I wrote some practice-based articles while still in the classroom and wrote more during graduate school. My first two *Talk with Teens* books, based on the small-group option, were published before I finished. I soon published articles from my master's thesis (school-files patterns of gifted achievers and underachievers) and doctoral dissertation (impact of cultural values on referrals for gifted-education programs). Journal editors Larry Coleman and Tracy Cross influenced my development as an academic and in the field, since they embraced my unorthodox directions, teaching background, and qualitative and longitudinal research methods. I was attending NAGC basically alone, and they were among individuals interested in social and emotional development who helped me feel connected. Colangelo, Kerr, Whitmore, Silverman, Piechowski, and Hébert were also influential.

What advice would you give to young professionals interested in gifted education?

I routinely tell aspiring academics to focus first on reading and publishing, building a foundation—and presenting research-generated insights at conferences. We need brave thinkers and explorers in the field, willing to do the labor associated with *building* theory, doing high-quality work, and crossing disciplines to generate new directions. Credibility leads to respect. Visibility and networking, by themselves, are not enough. Teachers and administrators should attend conference sessions, engage others, learn from them, and contribute insights and ideas formally and informally.

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cha·os the·o·ry

Erin Miller

cha·os the·o·ry

noun

1. the branch of mathematics that deals with complex systems whose behavior is highly sensitive to slight changes in conditions, so that small alterations can give rise to strikingly great consequences.

Life is a complex system. Are there really pivotal experiences? Or do they just seem pivotal in retrospect? My parents read to me and I naturally picked up reading by the time I was 3. Literature, mathematics, science, social studies; it all comes more naturally to me. I was not interested in gifted education, gifted education was interested in me. My teachers read Annemarie Roeper and worked to understand me.

I wanted to be a journalist, but my college journalism advisor told me that my talents would be wasted and I needed to go into the sciences because there were too few women. The professors in the physics and engineering classes were unattractive. (I was 18, give me a break please.) So I decided that pre-med with a psychology major would be more fun. I married young and took a year off after graduation from college. I happened to get a job working with a child with what was then known as Asperger's disorder. He was highly intelligent and interesting. So among my applications to graduate school I also applied to the Educational Psychology-Gifted program at the University of Virginia. I narrowed my choices down to a clinical psychology program in Texas studying schizophrenia and UVA. I weighed the pros and cons and chose the UVA program.

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Carolyn Callahan and Carol Tomlinson work in the highest levels of scholarship and application in the field of gifted education. They had a phenomenal influence on my development as both a scholar and a college professor and continue to influence me. I regard the work of Robert Sternberg on both intelligence and creativity very highly. I value my relationships with Kathi Kearney, Cheryl Ackerman, Michelle Kane, and Abbey Cash who supported me in the Conceptual Foundations Network. Late night bar talk with members of my “cohort” such as; Trudy Clemons Cherasaro, Andrea Esperat Lien, Jennifer Beasley, Marla Capper, Matt McBee, Scott Peters, Michael Matthews, and others were important.

My advice: You need to love it, because it is a minority aspect of educational psychology. Be able to market yourself as something more than just an expert in gifted education if you would like a tenure-track academic position. Get involved and make friends. If you are young, either choose a drink that you like and order it with confidence or drink club soda. Don't be unpleasant because gifted education is a small domain. We get enough resistance from outside to tolerate it in another scholar. Be excellent to each other and...party on dudes.

Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989)

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Commentary

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

How I got into the field

My entry into gifted education came through the students I taught for over six years at the high school level. I was fortunate to be able to work with honors and Advanced Placement classes and to have the same students across years, thus seeing their academic and intellectual skills develop over time. As a group, they challenged me to find new techniques and strategies to meet their needs. They led me to design new curriculum to ensure that they were sufficiently challenged, and they excited me to try innovative approaches to teaching that might enhance their learning. Intuitively, I knew that they were capable of doing much more and learning much more than what was provided by the basic curriculum. Based on my work with them, I became the first coordinator of gifted education in my district, a large inner city system.

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Influences in my life

Teachers like Mr. Lawniczak in junior high language arts provided an excitement about learning I had never discovered before nor would experience again before college. My beloved professors Dr. Wheelock in classics and Dr. Schoelton in English both exuded passion for their subject and great humility in the face of all that needed to be known and learned. Dr. Wheelock often commented on his laboring in the classical vineyards as a “field hand” of no importance, yet his introductory college text on Latin is still in print and in its ninth edition. He was a scholar of the first rank, a graduate of Harvard, and the most enthusiastic teacher I ever encountered for all things Roman and Greek. Dr. Schoelton was given the nickname “shaky Schoelton” because he could not stop his hands from moving, a vestige of his time as a soldier in World War II. Yet he was luminous and transfixed in his discussion of John Donne and the other metaphysical poets, weaving their secular appetites with their spiritual ecstasies like no other professor of English literature. He made poetry the study of all that was meaningful in life, a tableland where cognition and emotion met. I was entranced and hooked thereafter on English poets of any age. These teachers opened up the world of learning for me, and I gratefully walked through it.

I have been most fortunate across my professional life to have had attention and real support from luminaries in gifted education, individuals who made time for me and provided opportunities, even though I was no one’s graduate student. Julian Stanley graciously invited me into his world of the talent search and opened doors to allow me to establish the model at Northwestern University. Jim Gallagher asked me to teach a class for him at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill the summer after my daughter was born, encouraging my pursuit of a career in higher education as he had before at different junctures of my earlier work in the field. His firm grasp of issues, his Irish wit and humor, and his vision for what gifted education needs have been major inspirations in all professional settings in which I have worked. A. Harry Passow became my informal mentor, most especially in how to behave like a “*mensch*” and pursue charity and excellence in tandem, as he did so well in his life. John Feldhusen became my friend and colleague over many years, sharing his thoughts and insights with me. He was a gentle and powerful model for how to be both a teacher and a scholar in higher education at the highest level of excellence.

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Advice

Find good collaborators.

I have learned that no one individual can accomplish much at the institutional levels of society alone. A cadre of caring colleagues must combine their efforts to make good things happen. I have been most fortunate in finding the right people at the right time for the tasks that needed doing. Collaboration is just as necessary for affective support as for cognitive and academic skills in accomplishing hard challenges.

Understand yourself

Knowing strengths and liabilities of your skill set and your personality are important aspects of having a successful career. Use the tools you have acquired and work them regularly until they are honed.

Set goals for “five-year” periods

Beginning a new enterprise requires upfront sustained energy. Try to ascertain what you are trying to accomplish and then give yourself the time necessary to do it. In higher education, writing for publication, researching, teaching new courses all are academic tasks that require such energy. In K-12 education, developing a gifted program, providing professional development to teachers, and working with gifted students directly all constitute the same type of challenges. In each of these endeavors, set outcomes for success that match the time needed to accomplish the tasks at a high level.

Love what you do.

You are likely to be successful in this field if you give yourself to it every day and truly enjoy the work. You also need to be cognizant that the work is always greater than you are in respect to scope and need for effort. Yet the love for what you are doing keeps you going in the face of different kinds of obstacles.

Conceptual Foundations Sessions NAGC 2015

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Thank You