The admonition that we should be preparing our students for the 21st century is everywhere. There are numerous books, blogs, and content resources promoting and espousing the virtues of 21st century learning. If one examines the titles and descriptions of presentations at any gifted or general education conference, reference to 21st century learning is prevalent. Most of us in gifted education have regularly advocated for teaching 21st century skills. However, we have been living in the 21st century for 13 years now, and if we are only now preparing our students to be 21st century learners, we’re showing up to the party very late. In fact, as the class of 2013 graduated from high school, consider that this group of students was always 21st century learners regardless of what they were learning or how they were learning it; they entered kindergarten in the fall of 2000. So, maybe it is time to stop talking about the 21st century and start talking about the future.

The idea of preparing students for their future is certainly not a novel idea. Indeed the opening quote from John Dewey in the 20th century emphasizes this. In many circles, there is an impassioned call for STEM education and an increasing vocalization for the integration of the arts into a movement called STEAM. Yet, even these ideas are not new and can trace their origins back at least 30 years. In 1983, the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology published a report entitled, Educating Americans for the 21st Century: A Plan of Action for Improving Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education for All American Elementary and Secondary Students So that their Achievement is the Best in the World by 1995. This publication outlined many of the same initiatives and programs that we are arguing for three decades later. The executive summary chided, “America must not become an industrial dinosaur. We must not provide our children a 1960s education for a 21st century world.” Yet, some might argue that is exactly what we have done. It is time that the field of gifted education begins to re-envision itself not for the 21st century, but for the future that our students will live in.

You may remember, or have seen reruns of The Jetsons cartoon. It originally aired in primetime from 1962 to 1963, and was set in a futuristic utopia of the year 2062. While we may not have flying cars, or robot maids, we do have access to many technologies that are even more advanced.

continued on page 18
One of my friends posted something on Facebook recently that made me stop and think. The image in the post was that the current date was one of those set in Marty McFly’s DeLorean time machine from the movie Back to the Future Part 2. Though I couldn’t confirm the date via an Internet search, the quick reference made me wonder…if Marty traveled from his 1985 high school to a 21st century high school, would there be many differences?

In nearly every professional development session that I’ve attended lately, people are eager to talk about 21st century skills and dispositions. This got me to thinking: What does it mean that something is considered a 21st century skill? Is it content or skills that we’d never taught prior to January 1, 2000? And, being that we’ve been in the 21st century for 13 years and about 150 days at the printing of this issue, have we completely revolutionized education through the teaching of 21st century skills in that time?

In pondering a topic that might be used to tie together the articles and columns in the summer issue of Teaching for High Potential, I decided to invite the authors to respond to the following question: ‘What makes education today different (or prepares children for the 21st Century) more than education did in the past?’

In the feature article of this issue, The 21st Century is SO Yesterday, Brian Housand wrestles with the question and posits several suggestions for how the goals of education can change to prepare learners for the future, rather than for today (or yesterday!). Hunter Stickland’s article provides a glimpse at how one of the 21st century skills—creativity—can be embedded into the teaching of English. Our science and secondary experts would seem to agree with Housand that educating students for the future must involve posing problems and teaching students how to solve them as both Scientifically Speaking and A Secondary Look focus on Problem-Based Learning. In Primary Place, our early childhood experts encourage us to be sure our students embark on life with a sense of wonder and curiosity. In School Spotlight, we are treated to a look at two charter schools whose methods provide stimulating ideas for meeting the challenge of educating learners in the 21st century. With its regular columnist writing the feature piece for this issue, guest columnist Janine Firmender gives us a look at the versatile tool Educreations in Technology Untangled. And, finally, Curriculum Connection provides an overview of how 21st century skills can become enmeshed in how we teach on a day-to-day basis.

Though you don’t have a DeLorean of your own, think of this issue as an invitation to bring your curriculum ‘back to the future’ in order to meet the demands your students will face in their future. Thank you, fellow time travelers! THP

Write for THP

Do you have practical classroom applications of current research, theory, and best practices in the field of gifted education? Are you proud of the innovative way you address the needs of gifted students in your school or classroom? Have you created a successful lesson or unit plan that aligns with the revised NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards? If so, we want to hear from you! Send manuscripts to: Jeff Danielian, Editor, THP at jdanielian@nagc.org.

For more details.

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Two public schools in Illinois have gifted programs that are prime examples of what it means to prepare students for the 21st century, although they reach this goal in different ways.

In 2008 Iles School leaders made the decision to pursue International Baccalaureate authorization because they feel the program meets the needs of gifted students. Sandy Bauer, IB Coordinator, says the emphasis on inquiry and global citizenship through research is far superior to reading out of textbooks and completing worksheets or teacher-assigned reports. Since it is predicted that Mandarin Chinese will be an important language for the 21st century, all students at Iles are instructed in Chinese language and culture. Students use technology to explore real-world problems beginning in first-grade and are taught to be effective communicators in both written and oral presentations.

The curriculum at Iles is rigorous and leads students to critical, innovative, and creative thinking. All students are instructed in math and reading one grade above their grade placement. The fourth grade is run as an economic and governmental system. Students are given “class cash” and money in a checkbook each month. They must accurately maintain their money and write monthly checks to pay for their desk, electricity, and taxes. They can be fined for not making payments on time and for such things as talking or late papers. Students make money at the monthly Market Day where their creatively produced products are sold to other students who purchase them using their own class money. Projects like this help to build a sense of community and encourage independent accountability and creative thinking. Parent Elizabeth Sharp says Iles students interact with the class material in a way that also teaches them how to study and learn independently—skills that will serve the students throughout their lives. After school, students can take advantage of activities like Lego League, Chess Club, and Scholastic Bowl.

When asked, ‘How does your school prepare you to be a 21st century learner?’ Sierra Buske, a 6th grade student, said that her school teaches her to be curious. Molly Harms, another Iles student, said they learn to use technology and how to be global citizens. The program at Iles, like its students, is ever evolving and always open to change.

At Renaissance Gifted Academy, Director Michele Beach believes they prepare students to be 21st century learners and leaders through self-directed learning. Students at Renaissance are encouraged to be reflective, make choices, pursue interests, follow through on projects and activities, and direct their own learning. In grades 1-5, teaching takes a thematic, inter-disciplinary approach. Extensions and connections are made that stimulate creative and critical thinking. Teachers encourage risk-taking and curiosity. After school, students can participate in Chess Club, Lego League, Science Olympiad and Quiz Bowl.

The two secondary schools in the program provide an atmosphere that fosters a quest for lifelong learning, integrity of self, and responsibility for society. Their vertical curriculum begins with rapid mastery of basic skills and literal content, and moves on to the higher-thinking skills of critical analysis and creativity. Students can participate in a continuum of services like Math League, Scholastic Bowl, Chess, and Science Olympiad. Parent Sarah Berg believes that the Academy provides challenging work, good classroom discussion, and opportunities for technology-based learning, all under the guidance of caring and supportive teachers who motivate and provide opportunities for leadership.

Both Iles School and Renaissance Academy are helping gifted students build the foundations and skills needed for leadership roles in our changing world.
The Time Trilogy Literature Program

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”
— T.S. Eliot

I have always enjoyed a good time travel story. The mere possibility of being able to travel through time, catching glimpses of the future and potentially altering the past, has fascinated me from a young age. Most of my exposure to writing within this genre was offered far away from any classroom. What a joy it was for me then, upon opening the pages of the *The Time Trilogy* (Royal Fireworks Press, 2012) by Michael Clay Thompson, to find a comprehensive literature program that I wish was available when I was a student. Thompson’s direction and clarity, written from a practitioner’s perspective, leaves all other reading programs in the dust, or in this case, in the past. The author suggests early on that “this program is a magic synergy of book, student, and teacher.” I could not agree more.


In each of the works, Thompson annotates the text with what he calls “Language Illustrations.” Much like visual illustrations found in texts, these “illustrations” provide a moment to reflect upon the written word from another perspective. It works! Thompson explores poetic techniques, analyses of grammar, definitions of vocabulary, and information regarding writing strategies and styles, hallmarks of other Thompson curricular materials. He notes that this series is, “not a place to teach the principles of grammar and poetics, but rather a place to take pleasure in them.” While I agree that these offerings are not intended to “teach” the myriad skills related to language study, a lot of learning occurs as the illustrations offer time to reflect on the written word.

The three novels are intended to be read in a particular order; as direction and activities found in the Teacher Manual build upon each other. In this way, students can analyze themes and characters, styles, and vocabulary across all three works, uncovering the interrelationships that exist between them. I had actually never thought of *A Christmas Carol* as a time travel story. Arranging the work in this way provides for rich reading experiences for the teacher and the students. Each title also presents author information in the context of historical and cultural facts. Additionally, the books are also set in great text, font, and spacing in a size that makes them easy to handle and read.

The 110-page Teacher Manual covers all that the educator needs to know about and work with when using the selected texts. Thompson presents his premise—that students need to experience literature as literature—in a conversational and suggestive tone. The reader has a chance to soak in the purpose, much like the students will do with the work at hand. The bulk of the manual offers a program strategy to be used by the teacher through a four-level process. Each novel receives its own set of directions, suggested activities, and explanation.

During the first level, Preparing, Thompson suggests pre-study activities that include research about the author, time period, and culture as well as a study of pertinent vocabulary. He offers a great list of words common to all three novels.

The second level, Reading, utilizes identified quotes as the jumping off point for discussions. There are no comprehension questions, quizzes, handouts, or worksheets. The goal is for the reading to be natural and fluid. Thompson offers advice for homework, pacing, and monitoring and most importantly, explanations of the language illustrations.

The third level, Creative Thinking, looks at the reading from a divergent thinking perspective. Thompson presents a fantastic progression through the novels of creative questioning intended to spark student thought in a meaningful way. My favorite, found after the last novel is read, is “Scrooge, Hank, and The Time Traveler have dinner together and discuss what it is like to go through time. What do they say?”

The last level, Writing, suggests instructional techniques and prompts to use when practicing and completing written *Modern Language Association* (MLA) papers. Thompson provides some excellent examples too.

The past, we know. The future, we do not. The present, experienced through reflection and projection, offers pause for decision making and understanding. *The Time Trilogy* provides a fresh and interesting look at sharing three classics with students. For me it is as if I have explored these texts for the first time. I wish the same for you and your students.
Curriculum for the 21st Century: Making the Connection in the Gifted Classroom

We are more than 13 years into the 21st century, and yet we are still reading about how we need to address 21st century skills in our classrooms. What's going on? Do our curricular standards, skills emphasis, and programs and services do all they can to help our gifted and talented students prepare for the future?

The State of Curricular Standards in the United States

Curricular standards are currently focused on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) movement (and most recently, the Next Generation Science Standards). There are 46 states and 2 territories committed to implementing CCSS in their schools. The major shifts in English Language Arts and Literacy in Science, Social Studies, and Technical Subjects (ELA/Literacy) and Math call for teachers to recognize student learning differences and incorporate rigorous content through high-order thinking skills (www.corestandards.org). This is a significant step forward from the early part of this century where standards “tend(ed) to repeat the same topics from grade to grade and omit some of the more challenging academic content” (Education Week, 2001, p. 33).

The rigorous nature of the new standards holds promise for all students, but does not fully address the needs of advanced students. The authors of CCSS state, “The Standards do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the Standards prior to the end of high school” (English Language Arts Standards, p. 6). It will still be the responsibility of gifted and talented facilitators and teachers to advocate for and attend to the needs of gifted and talented students.

Why the Emphasis on 21st Century Skills?

The 21st century skills movement, owing its beginning to partnerships between education and business leaders as they voiced concerns about preparing children for college and career, presents pedagogy that has been a part of gifted and talented education for some time. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.p21.org) is now a national organization that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. The organization has as its aim to best prepare students for the challenges of the future. The Partnership believes that to succeed in 21st century colleges and careers, students need to be able to be able to embrace the 4Cs.

Preparing Today’s Gifted and Talented Students

NAGC estimates that there are approximately 3 to 5 million academically gifted children in grades K-12 in the U.S.—approximately 6-10% of the population. Students receive a range of services, from accommodation in the regular classroom, part-time assignment to both regular and special classes, enrichment pull-outs, full-time grouping with students of similar abilities, and acceleration. Even within these settings, students today may not develop the skills needed to succeed in college and career settings. According to the MetLife Teacher Survey (2012), teachers, parents, students and Fortune 1000 executives reported that the critical components of being college and career-ready focus more on higher-order thinking and performance skills than knowledge of challenging content. What can we do to help make that much-needed connection between the standards, skills, and needs of gifted and talented students?

The 4Cs and GT: Making the Curriculum Connection

In order to promote 21st century skills, we need to explicitly and deliberately embed those skills in our curriculum. The following provides some practical ways of incorporating them in the classroom.

Fostering Communication. Teachers need to use metacognitive and higher-level thinking strategies in the content areas. Students can be encouraged to “think about their continued on page 6
own thinking” and reflect on their answers throughout the learning process. Creating questions to foster the communication of this kind of thinking can be challenging. A great application made for smartphones can put some of those challenging questions right at your fingertips! The app “Stick Pick” (stickpickapp.blogspot.com) can be used to customize questions for individual students in the class. Each time you ask students a question, the Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy question stems will be displayed on your smartphone or iPad.

**Promoting Collaboration.** Working in groups with other gifted students and mentors can help students’ self-confidence and academic growth (Brody, 2004). One grouping idea, which also can be fun, is to use the strategy of “Snowballing.” Students start off working in pairs to discuss a particular topic. They then move their chairs to work with another pair, then with another group of four to form eight, and so on. The grouping ends with all students in one big group. This can be used as a way to build classroom understandings around a central concept, or even when building academic vocabulary.

**Encouraging Critical Thinking.** Differentiated curriculum should encourage student engagement, enhanced reasoning skills, and improved habits of mind (VanTassel-Baska, Avery, Little, & Hughes, 2000). In CCSS there has been a shift from persuasive writing to argumentative writing. This requires students to prepare evidence-based arguments that go beyond the appeal to emotions. One way to encourage critical thinking while teaching argumentative writing is through using the wonderful book: *Teaching Argument Writing, Grades 6-12* by George Hillcocks, Jr. This is a great resource for lessons and gives many examples of ways to support critical thinking through writing.

**Engaging Creativity.** Environments that support creativity allow for problem-based learning as well as independent play (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Even within a standards-based environment, creativity can be engaged and allowed to flourish. The resource book *Igniting Creativity in Gifted Learners, K-6* edited by Joan Smutny and Sarah von Fremd is a great place to start to look for ways to engage creativity in the classroom.

Encouraging 21st century skills will require connecting what we know about best practices in curriculum, assessment, and the nature and needs of our students. Without this connection, the emphasis on 21st century skills will be a superficial one that will sacrifice long-term gains for the appearance of short-term progress. THP

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![Online Master of Education in Academically or Intellectually Gifted](image)

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An interesting question was posed by our guest editor for this issue of THP: Does education today prepare our students better than the system did in the past? In this column we’ll consider this idea and discuss a resource for use by primary grade teachers of the gifted.

The one-room schoolhouse of Laura Ingalls Wilder (one of us lives in Minnesota!) is frequently mentioned as the birthplace of differentiated instruction. If primary students showed mastery of a concept, they were moved ahead to the curriculum of their older classmates. Yet, today we have many schools around the country that struggle with how to differentiate and accelerate to best meet the needs of advanced learners.

Today’s primary classroom is a very busy place with high expectations and a great deal of accountability for both student and teacher performance. However, with the bustle of the modern-day classroom, we may have forgotten a very simple idea that is also from the era of the one-room schoolhouse: children should be given the time to explore and develop a sense of awe and wonder in our world. With such fast-paced lives, our students may need to be encouraged not just to “stop and smell the flowers” but to wonder about how they got there, what they’re made of, how they’re pollinated, and so on. Even as adults, we should make time to wonder about and explore the questions to which we may never find answers.

In 1989, Dr. Sandra Kaplan identified the five most important teacher competencies, one of which was the ability of teachers to “stimulate awe and wonder” in their students. (Smutney, 2003). In reviewing state standards, Heard and McDonough, authors of A Place for Wonder: Reading and Writing Nonfiction in the Primary Grades, noticed that some goals set forth by standards do not always translate easily into testable material. The following sample of state standard goals exemplifies this disconnect:

- Stimulate curiosity
- Learn through inquiry
- Learn through observation
- Gather data through senses
- Stimulate imagination and creativity
- Respond with wonderment and awe
- Find or determine answers to questions derived from curiosity about everyday experiences
- Recognize and solve problems through observation and active exploration

Developing curiosity is important enough to include in our curricular and state standards, but how do classroom teachers really meet the standards? Heard and McDonough share their experiences as primary teachers using practical strategies to create classroom environments where students’ questions and observations are part of daily work. They also present ideas for planning a nonfiction reading and writing unit of study that culminates in student-created nonfiction texts. Think of the motivation involved in writing about something one is so interested in learning!

The first chapter in Heard and McDonough’s book, “Creating a Wonder World,” provides tips for setting up the classroom environment. Here are a few of their suggestions:

- Include a center in your classroom where students can write down things they wonder about and talk about a few during classroom meetings.
- Create Wonder Boxes to hold items students have found as they have been exploring the natural world. This is one idea the authors use to encourage students to think and to organize their wonders.
- Use the classroom window as a center to observe and record the changes outside in the natural world.

So, does education today prepare our students better than in the past? There are so many areas in which education has improved. Teachers of today, however, may need to make deliberate efforts to ensure that students can find excitement in their lives. With the same passion for students and learning as the teachers of long ago, today’s teachers will find ways to open the eyes of students to the wonders of the world. THP

References
Fostering Creativity in Gifted and Talented Youth in the English Classroom

Let’s face it, many students cringe at the mere mention of language arts and literature. Unfortunately, the image of a crazed English teacher with a red pen stabbing student work to death and then handing blood-red term papers back to trembling students who dared to have a grammar mistake in their papers does not do much to help the image of the subject of English in the minds of students. It also does not help that some teachers are too scared to “have fun” in the classroom and do anything beyond the traditional assessments like essays and multiple choice tests.

But where did the love of literature and creativity go in English classes? Why are English courses no longer an outlet for creative expression? Is it not the English classroom where adventure can be had and students can let go and pursue creative expression in numerous ways? Looking back, most English teachers would probably say that the desire to explore through reading and writing influenced their decision to teach English. An English classroom that fosters creativity in gifted and talented students is one that will enrich students’ creative and expressive desires.

If you decide that you want to have a creatively focused classroom, then the question becomes, “How do I do it, and how do I get my students to be creative too?” First, a clarification must be made. No matter the individual, student or teacher, creativity is a trait that can be developed by all.

What is it that gifted and talented students really want out of the classroom experience? They want a chance to show what they can do. They do not want an easy A or to not have to try, but they do want to be challenged and pushed to excel and exceed expectations. That being said, we cannot simply demand that students be creative. Although there may be exceptions, we can’t simply walk into our classrooms and say, “Alright students, today you must be creative. You have 90 minutes!” Gary Davis believes that creativity comes through the hard work of training and problem solving, but not due to the demands of the teacher on his students (2003). Derek Jensen described it by explaining that we cannot demand creativity, but should allow our students the opportunity to use their own abilities to see things in new and different ways (2004). The learning environments we create in our classrooms should permit creativity to flourish in our students. As Davis contends, creativity absolutely can be taught. It is up to us to model and foster creativity in our students beginning on the first day of school. So where do we start?

Ask about their Creativity

My first suggestion may be deceptively simple. Ask your students in the first few days of class what being creative means to them. Ask them about their creative interests and what creative pursuits they have outside of school. You will be surprised at how many students have authored short stories and books on their weekends or are storytellers at their summer camps. Then ask them what it means to be creative in an English classroom, and how creativity relates to literature, reading, and writing. Finally, ask your students what they would enjoy doing creatively in your classroom (ignore any comments on creative dreaming in naps, etc.), and then you have a starting point. Students’ ideas may range from creating a class newspaper to producing a poetry slam. In this particular case, the students had indicated a desire to write short stories and we used that as a foundation to develop an outlet for their own expression. Once students have offered their suggestions for creative application, you can begin to plan how to integrate content and embed technology accordingly.

Start with the Literature

In most secondary school English classrooms, curriculum units are based around a major piece of literature and activities and assessments follow suit. Some of the literature we choose to teach from the canon is not the best choice for every student in our class. Therefore, whenever possible, we should base units of curriculum on literature that matches our students’ interests, and then allow our enthusiasm to infect our students and perhaps help them bridge into more canonical literature.

The example provided below which focuses on the Arthurian Tradition, challenged me to rethink how I used literature with my students. I wanted to have fun with this unit because the topic was something I loved. Also, I knew that with proper instruction all of my students could be creative and possibly even enjoy what they were doing. Finally, I hoped that my passion for the topic could foster this creativity on the part of my students.

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Hunter is a first year teacher at Oconee County High School and teaches British Literature and Composition to seniors.
The Role of Interest

I taught a medieval literature unit based on The Arthurian Tradition in literature to two classes of tenth graders. These classes were predominantly made up of boys who had indicated in an early survey that they enjoyed action, adventure, and “stuff” that is generally “not boring!” In addition, my own passion for medieval English literature led me to this choice for all of us. As I planned this unit and the different assessment possibilities, my subconscious screamed for me to do something creative and fun.

The unit started with the literature, and we read a wide range of texts in a variety of genres covering the basics of the Arthurian tradition, but otherwise it was all from their imaginations.

Transacting with the Text

The end result of the Arthurian unit included student products based on what Louise Rosenblatt (2005) called an amazing “transaction” with the text. She compares this transaction to an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg is the public understanding of the text, and everything underneath the water is the personal understanding that a student gets out of a piece of literature based on his or her transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 2005). She explains that students make a transaction with the literature they are reading by bringing their history, culture, understanding, and attitudes to the text as they read it. In return, the literature gives each student something personal, real, and amazing.

We transacted with the text both as a class and individually, and were then able to really devote ourselves to the work we were doing in class.

Through this, I was able to see their personalities in their writing, and they got to invest in their work and explore their own self-perceptions. Stotsky discusses this personal out-pouring and suggests that the environment that best creates this opportunity for students is one that is open and non-judgmental allowing students to explore themselves in a reflective manner (Hillocks, 2007).

Student Products

There was a minimum requirement of two typed pages for this assignment, but I did not get one short story that was fewer than four pages. Many students even went home over the weekend and wrote another short story for extra credit. Their infusion of the elements of the Arthurian Tradition in literature allowed me to determine their understanding of the literature we had been studying. Though they got a grade on a page for doing their work, they also gained a sense of creative consciousness because of the open-ended nature of this process.

Aside from short stories, there are many products that this form of open-ended teaching can yield. Students with a passion for drama can be invited to write plays, and witty students might try writing monologues. Publication of the student products on a website or on YouTube allows students to collaborate with others as well as gain feedback on their work. When teachers invite students to have a little fun with their learning, students demonstrate their knowledge of content and often create products that exceed our expectations.

Concluding Thoughts

So what does this mean for the gifted students in our English classes? It means that there is no such thing as “I can’t be creative.” It means that any teacher who wishes to foster creativity in his or her classroom can build a creative environment to motivate student productivity. It also means that all of us who secretly believe we are not creative people (and therefore cannot teach our gifted students anything about creativity) can change what we believe. I encourage all of us with a passion for language arts and literature to take a chance and model creativity in our classrooms and provide the environment our gifted students crave. Fitzgerald and Hemingway did not need someone to tell them to sit down and write creatively, but offering an outlet for creativity to your students may help develop the pen of the next great writer. "I can't be creative." It means that any teacher who wishes to foster creativity in his or her classroom can build a creative environment to motivate student productivity. It also means that all of us who secretly believe we are not creative people (and therefore cannot teach our gifted students anything about creativity) can change what we believe. I encourage all of us with a passion for language arts and literature to take a chance and model creativity in our classrooms and provide the environment our gifted students crave. Fitzgerald and Hemingway did not need someone to tell them to sit down and write creatively, but offering an outlet for creativity to your students may help develop the pen of the next great writer. THP

References

**Pelican Cove**

In Pelican Cove, each of these brightly colored water birds has a unique request for where they want to roost. Your job each round is to make as many of them happy as possible! Think fast before the sand runs out on the timer! This game easily scales up or down in difficulty as there are five levels of request cards.

1-5 players • 30 min • 8 & up

**What They’ll Learn:**
- Solving for Multiple Unknowns
- Decision Hierarchy • Symbolic Algebra

**Katachi**

Walk tiles back toward your corner by matching color, shape or size. The first player to stack three shape tiles on top of their corner tile and one on the adjacent tile wins!

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**What They’ll Learn:**
- Sequencing • Visual Mapping
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2-4 players • 30 min • 6 & up

What They’ll Learn:
- Angles & Early Geometry
- Science of Reflection

Fourmation™

An amazing new game that elegantly combines math with strategy. The object is to connect four zones in a row with your colored markers by using the number cards in your hand. Outnumber all other players in a contested zone to put it back under your control and complete the winning “fourmation”!

2-4 players • 20-30 min • 8 & up

What They’ll Learn:
- Quick Math • Tactical Positioning
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Highlighting the Worth of Gifted Education

While NAGC’s main purpose is and always will be advocacy for gifted children, we recognize that appropriate educational programs, services and policies for gifted and talented children cannot be built upon a weak base of general education.

Ultimately, NAGC will be more effective in its advocacy efforts if it can influence general education policies and practices. As classroom teachers, gifted coordinators, and advocates, we have a better chance of ensuring that gifted programs persist, despite the vagaries of budgets and local finances, if they are rightly seen as contributing to the overall quality of education in this country and as offering viable solutions to major educational problems that schools and districts face.

I spent the last year investigating gifted programs across the country that successfully meet the needs of a wide range of gifted students including the highly gifted, low-income gifted children, and culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students. I found a number of exemplary programs including the Academically Talented Youth Program in Michigan, the DaVinci School in Hall County, Georgia, Project Excite at Northwestern University, the Mentor Connection program at the University of Connecticut, the Young Scholars Program in Fairfax County Schools, Virginia, and the SETSWAS program in District 46 in Elgin, Illinois. These programs offer innovative approaches to identification and program design, primarily focused on developing the talents of students who have traditionally been under-identified and under-served by gifted programs. These programs are just a sampling of the many more wonderful programs that exist out there.

It’s important for NAGC to put a stake in the ground on our views regarding important national education issues. So last spring, I enlisted a group of leaders in our field to guide the NAGC Board of Directors in identifying current national education issues that are most important for NAGC to take a position on. Below are the four priorities identified by this group. Over the next year, NAGC experts and volunteer leaders will develop position papers on these four issues. These will be developed in accordance with existing NAGC policies and procedures for position statements. They will be posted on the NAGC website, serving as another important resource for advocates of services and programs for high-ability learners as we continue to make our case and contribute to the broader education dialogue.

The Common Core State Standards

While most agree that these are higher level than existing state standards, they should be viewed as providing important pathways for greater differentiation in task demands for gifted learners. At the same time, we need to stress that they are not sufficient for gifted students, and educators will need to know how to translate them into sufficiently challenging activities for gifted children and facilitate gifted children meeting them at accelerated rates.

Assessment of Learning

Accountability paradigms need to include growth models that are responsive to all learners, including gifted learners. All LEAs should assess individual student growth in core content areas and report aggregated and disaggregated data, including for gifted students, annually. The content and scaling of assessment instruments needs to be able to evaluate and measure above grade-level learning and achievement.

Achievement and Excellence Gaps

We must close opportunity gaps for low income and culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students with increased emphasis on broad approaches to the identification and support of these students. Specifically, we should emphasize equity and access to enrichment and advanced learning opportunities as early as possible, in preschool and the early elementary school, particularly in literacy and STEM areas.

Teacher Preparation and Accountability

The definition of a “high quality” educator must include competence in gifted education methods and talent development including providing challenging and above grade level content and instruction that results in appropriate levels of yearly growth for gifted students. The definition also must include cultural competency, including identifying and supporting diverse gifted students and providing a truly multi-cultural curriculum to all students.

Through my research and the subsequent identification of priorities, I have a renewed sense of how much the field of gifted education has to offer general education. Our practices increase student engagement and motivation, our program designs close achievement gaps, and our school designs prepare students with 21st century skills. We have always been leaders in the use of new technologies, individualization and personalization of learning, problem-based learning, and distance education—all major topics within current national discussions about education and school reform. It is time to share the value of what we, as a field, are worth.
Civil Rights and Gifted Education: Addressing Inequality

This year has been very significant in the history of our nation’s Civil Rights Movement. April marked the 45th year of the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led the nation’s movement for equal rights for all citizens during the 1950s and 1960s. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the desegregation of the University of Alabama, which is hosting a series of commemorative events including a reminder of the day in 1963 when Alabama Governor George Wallace stood with armed guards at one of the buildings on campus forbidding Black students to enter the university.

In March, I was invited to speak at the University of Alabama as part of the commemoration. My lecture was the first in a series of events scheduled by the university administration to mark the struggle and the eventual entry and admission of the first two African American students to attend the university in 1963—Vivian Malone and James Hood. As the James P. Curtis distinguished lecturer, I shared with faculty and students my views of the recent progress made in gifted education entitling my speech, Culturally Diverse Gifted Learners Coming out from Under. The tone of the speech was optimistic, yet realistic as we continue to address disparities in some of our nation’s schools where low income and culturally diverse learners, in particular African American students, are less likely to be identified as gifted and have equitable access to programs for gifted and advanced learners.

The reception by the faculty, the Dean, and the student body was quite affirming. I came away from the two-day visit more committed than ever to engaging with like-minded, like-spirited individuals who believe that as a community of scholars in gifted education, our work is not complete until we can ensure that all highly able, highly creative, and highly spiritual children and youth have full access to rigorous programming.

In sharing this experience, my hope is that we can learn from the Civil Rights Movement. The courage demonstrated by the first two students admitted to the University of Alabama, and of so many others after them, was remarkable. Those students knew they were just as capable as any other student attending the university and that they deserved an opportunity to be admitted and to pursue their dreams.

Today in gifted education, we are having a similar struggle. Today the players are culturally diverse gifted children and those who are in poverty fighting for access to gifted education and advanced learner programs. In order to win this battle and eradicate under-representation in gifted education once and for all, we must be courageous and stand up for what we believe is right. Just as it was a moral imperative to force Governor Wallace to move away from those doors in Alabama 50 years ago, it is also a moral imperative that we work to open doors in gifted education today! If we want equitable access to gifted programs, those of us with the skills and information to make a difference must be generous in sharing information and persistent in addressing the issues.

Today, a magnificent tower stands on the University of Alabama campus to mark the place where protesters stood to keep Black students off campus. Today the tower stands in recognition of the students’ courage and the success of their actions and those of supporters from all ethnic backgrounds who believed that Malone and Hood had a right to attend the University of Alabama in 1963.

We need more advocates for full equity and access in gifted education to help ‘open the doors’ so that all children who are capable and in need of gifted education services from every community and ethnic group can have access to enrichment and challenge with intellectual peers as they prepare to reach their highest potential.

A FEW TIPS TO HELP ‘OPEN THE DOORS’

− Commit yourself to educating families of all backgrounds about our field, teach them the language and help them understand the needs of their gifted learners so they can partner with educators in providing appropriate support and challenge for all advanced students.

− Share information about gifted education, enrichment programs, and advanced learner options with a wider audience; take the information to public gatherings to share with the community.

− Talk with elected officials and candidates about equity issues in education programs and services to ensure that they understand the needs of all children and the importance of fully funding services for gifted students in every community.

www.nagc.org

Summer 2013 | Teaching for High Potential 13
The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.p21.org) offers 4Cs of learning and innovation skills in which all students should be regularly engaged: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. The newly released Next Generation Science Standards (www.nextgenscience.org) also emphasize these important skills. Many educational programs speak of these skill areas, but fall short in actually improving students’ talents in them, especially for the gifted. In order for gifted students to grow, they should be routinely challenged in the 4Cs. What can teachers do in science education to challenge gifted students with the 4Cs?

Problem-Based learning (PBL) science units are one of the best means of promoting student growth in these skills. PBL is an instructional strategy within which science content is reorganized to put the learning in the hands of the students. In PBL science units, students are first given a complex yet incomplete real-world problem based on the content they are expected to learn. However, instead of being passive consumers of that content, students are in the driver’s seat of their own learning. The teacher acts as a metacognitive coach—using questioning to guide student thinking, but the students have to determine what they need to do to solve aspects of the problem.

**Problem Based Learning Process**

Once students review the problem statement, the class completes a Need to Know Board. I like to turn a bulletin board into a large chart with four columns in which the students determine what they know, what they need to find out, how they will find out, and, later, what they learned. The bulletin board can be updated throughout the unit. Teachers with multiple classes can do this on an interactive board and save each as an individual file.

Students work in small, collaborative groups or “research teams” on the next several steps. They must determine what aspects of the problem to focus on answering, hone these to specific questions, and then conduct research to find solutions. The research may involve finding multiple quality sources online and in the library, interviewing an expert, or scientific experimentation. The latter should be the ultimate focus in science, with each group designing and conducting several experiments.

The 4Cs should be immediately visible. A good PBL problem statement will contain many facets and lines of potential research. Students must communicate with the class to complete the Need to Know Board, then collabo-

**PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING STEPS**

1. Read the **problem statement**
2. Complete a **Need to Know Board** to determine what is known, what needs to be learned, how it can be learned, and—later—what was learned about each aspect of the problem statement

In Small groups of students:

3. **Identify questions** within the problem statement that the group finds important
4. **Revise those broad questions to specific, testable questions**
5. **Determine the best means to answer those questions**: conducting fair experiments, critically reviewing existing research, seeking experts, or other means
6. **Conduct the research**: follow the scientific method for experiments
7. **Report** results to the class and update the Need to Know Board
8. **Whole class discussion**: synthesizing results and evaluating the fairness of experiments
9. **Repeat** steps 3-9 as needed
10. **Present** overall findings and potential solutions to aspects of the problem to an audience

continued on page 15
rate and critically evaluate the problem statement within their
groups to determine what aspects of the problem they see as
most important on which to work. Determining how to go about
finding answers can require creativity, including in experimental
design. The groups’ ultimate, potential solutions require cre-
ative thinking and, again, students need to communicate with
the class regarding their findings. These should be updated on
the Need to Know Board.

Most importantly, the class discussion should focus on criti-
cal evaluation of the fairness—or control of the variables—in the
student-designed experiments. Students will often design experi-
ments that are not fair, such as using containers with different vol-
umes of water to dissolve the same amount of sugar. Students in
PBL should be allowed to make mistakes and the teacher should
model questioning to help the class become better critical think-
ers. PBL steps are repeated and multiple units should be used
each year to promote student growth in the 4Cs over time.

Finally, after several phases of experimentation and before a
pre-determined deadline, students must present their findings to
the class and possibly other audiences as well. I like to model
my students’ approach after a scientific conference where teams
present their findings and their suggestions for solving aspects
of the problem using a poster, presentation software, or other
means of sharing with the audience—another chance to let the
4Cs shine! THP
With 72 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute and viewed worldwide, the social sharing of videos and information is not a new phenomenon for today's talented students. Many students have uploaded videos to share with others via YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites. Although I don't claim to know how much of this digital video is educationally relevant, teachers may be able to tap into gifted students' interest in creating digital content to engage them in developing their creativity, analysis, and communication skills, among others.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has identified critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity as skills needed in an increasingly complex world. Students must be able to analyze situations, explain their reasoning, and critique the ideas of others across content areas. There are many strategies to help students develop these skills, including embedding new technology into the classroom.

Educreations is a free iPad app and web-based program (www.educreations.com) that is, in its simplest form, an Interactive White Board (IWB) teachers can display in the classroom using a projector, without the need for an actual IWB. Through the basic interface (see screenshot), teachers can draw diagrams and import pictures for analysis or have students demonstrate how to solve problems. However, by setting up the screen and pressing “record,” the Educreations app goes farther. It allows users to digitally record audio and capture a dynamic screen, creating a video that can be shared with others via a designated URL or saved privately in an Educreations account. Students could use the app to create a video product explaining the results of some of their recent research to share the outcome with an audience beyond the classroom. Students could also demonstrate a concept or share an explanation with other students in small-group problem solving sessions. Multiple students could collaborate to create a video with pictures and a timeline to explain how specific events in history may have led to conflicts and/or resolutions. Students can also unleash their creativity to make original products for display and discussion. Explaining their thinking while demonstrating how they solved a problem, or critiquing the argument another student recorded when discussing results of a science observation will help build new skills.

To create a “lesson” or video using the Educreations iPad app, launch the app, after downloading it for free from the App Store. By tapping the “My Lessons” icon at the top of the screen, new lessons can be created. Teachers and students can then begin capturing the lesson by tapping the “record” icon in the top right of the screen.

The app may be useful for teachers as well. Teachers could use student-generated videos as a means to assess students’ understanding of a particular concept or to gain insight into how a student approaches a problem. For example, as groups of students work collaboratively to solve non-routine problems in mathematics, they can capture their responses using the Educreations iPad app to record their written work, verbal explanations, and collaborative efforts. Once each group saves and uploads their videos, the teacher can review the mathematical discussions for each group. Teachers may also create videos to explain concepts discussed in class for students who were absent or to share students’ explanations with parents.

Educreations is not the only app of its kind available. There are several other IWB-like apps that allow users to capture and share user-generated video including ShowMe (www.showme.com) and Explain Everything (www.explaineverything.com) among others. Explain Everything allows you to save and export the video instead of having to store it in an online account, which may be an attractive option for teachers, although there are fees associated with it. Educreations and ShowMe are both free. Each of the apps has unique features, so you’ll want to try them out and select the one that best fits your needs and the needs of your students. THP
In my last column for *Teaching for High Potential* (Spring 2013), I began with the above quotation from T.S. Eliot and explored ways to teach high-ability students to encourage the use of new voices. I suggested problem solving and Problem-Based Learning as essentials in our classrooms, and stressed that they should be used regularly. Unfortunately, I ran out of space before I was able to finish my thoughts! So, I am continuing where I left off, hoping that you will find the next strategy interesting and relevant to your situation.

The previous column questioned our classrooms’ commitment to rigor. Here, I suggest we use constructivist teaching strategies, which include students as active participants in learning, to ensure that high-ability students learn something new every day. Indeed, problem solving and Problem-Based Learning are strategies that depend on students engaging in solutions to essential problems. They focus on 21st century skills of critical and creative thinking, often focusing on life skills in the scenarios presented. Further, technology is often used as an essential part of the solution to the problem, and students are frequently allowed to choose the platform for presenting the solution. These are constructivist strategies that meet the needs of high-ability students.

Another constructivist strategy that intrigues me because of its potential for challenging high-ability students is Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS). Because we know that high-ability students can process information efficiently, our challenge is to provide strategies in our curriculum for them to use the higher levels of critical thought on a regular basis. VTS is such a strategy that focuses on images and asks students three catalytic questions: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find? These rather simple questions turn the discussion over to students to engage in careful observation and quality analysis. Additionally, question two, “What do you see that makes you say that?” directly requires the student to find and report evidence for what he/she has stated, again asking for careful observation that rests on facts and not opinion. In the third question, the focus is to complete the analysis, possibly synthesizing information from other sources in concluding thoughts or raising new issues found in the image.

VTS is certainly a strategy that focuses on problem solving, and it presents the opportunity for active engagement in issues portrayed in the picture viewed. In a similar way to other problem-solving activities, learning can be accomplished individually, in small groups, or as a whole-class activity. Class begins with a picture that just appears in the classroom—on the board, on a handout, or in a digital method. These images can become regular parts of the class—always appearing and used for regular curricular activities. VTS can definitely inspire interdisciplinary study, especially if students are encouraged to reach as far as the evidence allows them to go. I can discuss a picture that is primarily scientific and use the strategy in a science class or in conjunction with literature. Visual Thinking Strategy can be used to encourage students to create, encouraging next year’s “voice.”

In my first column for *Teaching for High Potential*, I offered “Dixon’s Top Ten” and the first item on my list stated, My number 1 is quite simple: Do Not Over Teach. These kids are together for a reason—they are smart. They know material and learn it quickly. They do the academic side of school well, for the most part. It is so wonderful to learn from students, and I did that constantly. Think about how to present material that challenges and encourages their participation and then celebrate the intellectual atmosphere (a rarity in most classrooms) in your classroom!

Both problem solving and Visual Thinking Strategy accomplish the goal of not over-teaching. They also support our goal of challenge and change for high-ability students in the 21st century by raising the ceiling through rigorous and challenging curriculum presented in ways that show understanding of our students’ needs.
than those predicted. Today’s youth have grown up in a world with access to unprecedented amounts of information and media thanks to Google and YouTube. We are living lives that are constantly connected to others through our digital devices and social networks like Facebook and Twitter, and many children are learning to navigate an iPad before they are learning to walk. Technology is advancing at an almost unbelievable rate and forever altering the ways that we access information and interact with one another. As a result and perhaps for the first time, we are attempting to prepare a generation of students for a future that we truly cannot envision.

Mark Twain once said, “There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations.” It is in that spirit that I have given some of the concepts of gifted education and 21st century learning a “turn” to see what new combinations might emerge. These “new directions” are not necessarily “new” ideas; however, they represent a set of dispositions that could be helpful for our students to fully realize their potential. That being said, I invite you to gaze into this kaleidoscope to glimpse a guide for how to educate students for their future.

Engaging Curiosity

One of the traits that is typically included on any list of characteristics of giftedness is curiosity. This is typically demonstrated by the incessant questioning of young children to develop an understanding of the world around them. Unfortunately, this innate curiosity is often squelched by an educational system that seems focused on indoctrinating students to become rule followers and better test takers. Yet, the concept of intellectual curiosity can be traced back to some of the earliest and greatest teachers including Socrates. In a meta-analysis conducted in 2011, von Stumm, Hell, and Camorro-Premuzic concluded that while intelligence is the single most powerful predictor of an individual’s academic success, effort combined with intellectual curiosity rival that of intelligence alone. They suggested that having a “hungry mind” is a previously underestimated factor related to students’ academic achievement. Perhaps, it is exactly this type of childhood innocence and curiosity that can help propel gifted students to be those who solve, rather than those who create the problems of the future.

As we think about ways that we might engage students’ curiosity, consider one of the more interesting benefits that Google offers its employees. For up to 20% of the workweek, Google provides the time, space, and resources for employees to investigate, research, and develop something of personal interest. What would school look like for our students if we offered them this same benefit? Rather than force feed students curriculum or devote a day to test preparation, we could create an environment for gifted students to develop their talents and interests. While devoting a full day every week to this endeavor might not be realistic, we could easily provide a concerted effort to promote the development of curiosity in our students. One current technology resource to support this is Wonderopolis, which can be found at the website www.wonderopolis.org (National Center for Family Literacy, 2013). Every day this website offers a new wonder of the day and includes many of the types of questions that gifted kids often ask, providing background information and extension activities related to the topic. While this website can serve as a spark to further student investigation, we should also encourage our gifted students to develop their own wonders of the day to share with their classmates and with authentic audiences.

Engineering Serendipity

Chance is a concept or trait that plays a role in the Tannenbaum and Gagné conception of giftedness. However, consistently being able to find oneself in the right place at the right time and interacting with the right people is not necessarily something that is accidental. Instead, these “chance” encounters are often the result of careful planning and engineering.

As I think about finding oneself in the right place at the right time, I am reminded of the Wayne Gretzky quote, “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck will be.” For gifted students to fully achieve their potential, perhaps we should help them develop strategies not only for goal setting, but also for creating an awareness of where their puck will be. Angela Housand has begun referring to this intentional professional goal setting as “future-casting” and is currently developing a series of activities for gifted students so they can become the hero of their own story.

As teachers of the gifted, we can better help our students to engineer serendipity by encouraging them to surround themselves with like-minded peers who share common interests. In the 20th Century, consider the cultural impact of the creative enclaves such as Paris in the 1920s or Silicon Valley in the 1970s and 1980s. Life in the age of the Internet and so-
cial media has created opportunities for individuals to meet and interact with others who share common interests regardless of geography. We must help gifted students to responsibly utilize social networks to construct their own Professional Learning Networks. However, we cannot assume that they will naturally understand how to do this. Instead, we should provide instruction and the opportunity to begin to learn digital citizenship in environments designed for use in education settings like Edmodo (www.edmodo.com). Edmodo is a system that allows students and teachers to interact with one another through a safeguarded Internet environment that includes discussion boards, messaging, file sharing capability, and so on. Additionally, we should encourage students to access and share ideas through tools like Twitter and blogs. We must help to transform students from simply being consumers of information to being responsible producers and contributors so that they may begin to engineer their own chance encounters with others who are making a difference.

Understanding Design

Much of the use of computers in school through the 1990s and 2000s has focused on teaching students how to use a particular set of tools or piece of software. However because technology is developing at such a rapid rate this is no longer the most effective use of either the technology or the instructional time. Instead, we should begin developing in our students an understanding of design and how things are purposefully organized. It is inevitable that programs, tools, and interfaces will change; with the introduction of every new operating system or version of an application, something changes in the environment. However, if we had a deeper understanding of how and why things are designed, the period of transition and adaptability would shrink over time.

In A Whole New Mind, Daniel Pink makes a case that design is one of the essential skills for the 21st century. However, examples of the intentional teaching of design are scant. To help our students develop an understanding of design, we might invest time in teaching visual literacy skills alongside more traditional literacy skills. This might resemble the use and creation of infographics, which are graphics designed to show large amounts of information quickly and easily. Examples of infographics include charts and tables or even a map of the bus lines in a city. We might also help students understand why websites have a particular form and function and that information is nearly always organized in a similar manner. In much the same way that we have taught how an informational book is designed, we should also be sure to teach how the Internet is designed. By realizing that nearly everything is designed with a purpose, one can begin to decode and better understand how to utilize any tool or piece of information.

Constructing Synthesis

Life in the 21st century is often one that is overloaded with information and external stimuli. We are constantly surrounded by multiple information devices that beg for our attention. At any given moment of the day, we are almost always within arms reach of a device capable of connecting to the Internet. We are living in a time where students can access information anywhere and anytime with their “digital information devices” (DIDs), and if your students can Google the answer, then you may be asking the wrong type of questions.

Gifted educators have long prized the higher-order thinking promoted by Bloom’s Taxonomy. Synthesis and evaluation have long been held up as a goal for teaching and learning. Interestingly, in the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy published in 2001 two things happened. First, nouns were changed to verbs, and second, synthesis was exchanged for create. At first glance, this might not seem like an equivalent trade. However, Apple founder Steve Jobs effectively described the relationship in a Wired magazine interview. “Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things” (Wolf, 1996). Interestingly, in Five Minds for the Future, Howard Gardner outlines the importance of being able to synthesize. In this age of information, we have to be able to wade through the flood to avoid being overwhelmed. We need to be able to not only understand information, but to evaluate it as well. In traditional literacy environments, information typically comes from a single source such as a textbook, but the Internet and other media confronts students with volumes of disparate information and requires them to connect and synthesize to construct their own meaning. To be successful in these environments we must help students to develop a set of new literacies to make sense of the vast amounts of information that they encounter.

Conclusion

In the 1970 book Future Shock, Alvin Toffler wrote that “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Indeed, perhaps this is the real goal of education. We simply need to develop in our students the ability to learn for themselves. As teachers, our time with our students is often dependent on the length of the school year. As students grow older and the world advances, new content will be created, new discoveries unearthed, and new technologies developed. Much of the content that we teach our students today may become history by the time that they reach our ages. However, one thing that may not change is “GT” or “good teaching.” Noam Chomsky famously sums it up this way “That’s good teaching. It doesn’t matter what you cover; it matters how much you develop the capacity to discover” (Chomsky, 2003). Maybe that is what it is all about regardless of what you call it or what century it is. THP
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