

# Celebrate Creativity!

A Newsletter of NAGC's Creativity Network

## The View from the Chair

I find myself wondering where the time has gone as we approach another annual NAGC Convention and the end of my term as chair of the Creativity Network. While I have a list of goals that will go unfulfilled, there have been significant accomplishments, such as welcoming new voices to our newsletter, new presenters to Creativity Network and Creativity Night sessions at Convention, and new leaders in the Network. The greatest labor of my term was fighting to maintain the vision of this Network (previously called a Division) as a place where individuals from all sorts of occupations come together because of their passionate interest in creativity. NAGC considered multiple models for re-organization including organizing by job role rather than those passionate interests for specific areas of the field of gifted education. Some of us wish to be political advocates for gifted children; others wish to research the nature of giftedness or the social and emotional needs of gifted children and adults. Many of us wish to serve gifted students in our local communities the best that we can in any role that we can. We need to maintain all of those passions to meet those goals.

In addition to endorsing the name change from "Division" to "Network" I suggested and fought for the creation of a Network Communications Committee. I felt that even those of us who have committed to leadership roles in NAGC need help communicating with each other. Many of us are over-extended just trying to keep our own Networks running and were not networking with each other. I kept thinking if those of us at the heart of the organization didn't know what was happening in other Divisions, how could we expect the NAGC membership at large to be informed? We were also missing out on opportunities for

different Divisions to work together to share their expertise to do more to advance the field of gifted education. I am happy to see evidence of the renewed spirit of collaboration that has brought Networks together to create new events at this year's Convention. We still need to address the issue that the majority of NAGC members and first-time Convention attendees do not know what Networks are and do not join them.

That's where we need your help to define a new course that will better meet your needs as you serve gifted and creative children. What I can offer you is a testimonial of how my life has been enriched by active Network membership. NAGC has been a source of great energy for me, and it has allowed me to make friends across the country. One example of one of my "electronic friends" is our newsletter editor James Kaufman. He stepped up to be newsletter editor because he was unable to attend the Minneapolis convention but wanted to play a role in the Network. He in turn has brought a new circle of colleagues into our network. The layout of this issue and the last was achieved through the help of his current and former graduate students. He has made this issue and last year's possible because I never would have gotten it done on my own.

James and I have never met face to face and yet have shared stories of the challenges of raising young children as we've explained why we each needed another week or two to pull things together. James lives in California. He is a university professor and a researcher in creativity who has worked collaboratively with Robert Sternberg and other autograph-worthy people. I'm a gifted education coordinator for a small two-school district in Virginia who was "just a teacher" when I started to increase my involvement in NAGC. Throughout my time in the organization I've been fighting for NAGC to be more responsive to the needs of K-12 educators. I still don't think we're there. We need to communicate what James and other people in the university community know about the field of gifted education and creativity to those of us working with gifted and creative children every day.

I am excited to welcome our Chair Elect, Nan Hathaway, not just to relieve burdens from my shoulders, but because I have gotten to know what a wonderful and energetic person she is through our work together. She has been "learning the ropes" of making the final selections from wonderful proposals (always more than we have slots) and moving from the role of Creativity Night presenter to event coordinator. Nan's first initiative will be to establish a Creativity Network "blog" to help us to make more real-time connections. You'll receive an e-mail once the site is up and running.

So how can you help strengthen our Network? Let us know you're out there. Send an e-mail ([kkendall@lexedu.org](mailto:kkendall@lexedu.org)) to let us know what you would like as a return on the investment of your membership dues. How can WE, as Creativity Network members, serve each other better? Offer up some ideas of how to serve creative children better in schools. Volunteer to help decorate the room for Creativity Night or simply make a point to bring a friend when you attend. Send in a review or a thank you message for the best sessions you attend at Convention this year. We would like to let our presenters know that their efforts have made a difference to you.

If you cannot attend Convention try to get your district to pay for the recordings of the sessions so that you can use the ideas for staff development. Help us create electronic communications that are truly useful to you in your work with gifted children. Share your research interests and findings with a broader audience than mandated doctoral committees and university colleagues.

I know this Network has a world of creative ideas. Let's make a renewed pledge to share them.

Creatively yours,

Kevin Kendall  
Chair, Creativity Network 2006-2008



Kevin Kendall—Chair, Creativity Network 2006-2008

NAGC: National Association of Gifted Children

### Special points of interest:

- Beautiful Minds
- Unjournaling
- Alien Math
- Teaching Creativity
- Elephant Gift

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## Welcome Nan Hathaway



Please welcome Nan Hathaway as the incoming chair of the NAGC Creativity Network. Nan holds a Masters Degree in Gifted Education and was named 2008 Independent School Art Educator of the Year by the Colorado Art Education Association. She is employed as the fine arts focus teacher at Rocky Mountain School for the Gifted and Creative in Boulder Colorado. Nan is a regular presenter, on topics of art education and creativity, at local, state and national professional conferences for both art education and

gifted education. Nan's articles about art education and Teaching for Artistic Behavior have appeared in *SchoolArts*, *Arts and Activities*, *Collage* and various NAGC network newsletters.

## Encouraging creative exploration: Independent Learning from Duke TIP

**"One element of encouraging creative exploration is allowing students to have choices."**

You're a scientist, following in the footsteps of Charles Darwin. You're walking on a beautiful, uninhabited tropical island, much like the Galapagos Islands. During your walk, you discover a new, never-before-seen critter.

What does the creature look like? Describe it, using vivid adjectives and action verbs. Draw it. Using principles of genetics, think about its population variation. Use the knowledge you have about phenotypes, genotypes, Punnett squares and Mendelian genetics to convey the organism born from your creativity.

Intrigued? Just imagine a gifted student working on this assignment – his or her creativity is the only limit.

Creative exercises such as this one come from the Duke Talent Identification Program's (TIP) Independent Learning Program, which provides differentiated instructional options for academically gifted fourth through 12th grade students. Independent Learning courses are based on the curriculum principles of state and national standards.

Independent Learning courses can help gifted students hone their creativity and are effective at accelerating and deepening regular curricula, as an enrichment opportunity at home or in school or as an option for students who are homeschooled.

The Independent Learning Program offers students the opportunity to pursue accelerated or enrichment studies adapted to

their readiness levels, learning style and interest areas. Because the courses are self-paced, they provide students with the opportunity to investigate particular areas of interest in detail, explore their creativity or accelerate through sections where they already possess the knowledge and skill.

Courses are developed by a staff of experienced teachers and curriculum writers and offer students the ability to tailor the course timeframe to their individual needs. Students can take courses in a variety of subjects, from geometry to Greek mythology.

One element of encouraging creative exploration is allowing students to have choices. The Independent Learning Program allows students creative freedom and choice. Each course offers a range of student choice and, at the same time, requires mastery of rigorous content and skill objectives.

The example above comes from *Foundations of Modern Biology: Genetics, Evolution, and Ethics*, a seventh- through 10<sup>th</sup>-grade course. In addition to applying genetic principals to a creative exercise of designing an organism, later in the course, the student imagines him or herself as a newspaper editor who must argue against proposed eugenics measures in an editorial.

In *The Writer's Journey, Volume 1*, for sixth through eighth graders, students choose their own topics and use techniques, such as webbing, free writing and brainstorming,

to devise their own dialogues, allegories, narratives, definition essays, and comparison essays.

With emphasis on curriculum and testing, it's hard for creativity to flourish in today's classroom. Gifted students often pay the price, as they can't choose their own topics or their own assignments. Outside learning, such as Duke TIP's Independent Learning, can enable gifted students to hone their creativity and accelerate their learning.

Visit [http://www.tip.duke.edu/independent\\_learning/all\\_products.html](http://www.tip.duke.edu/independent_learning/all_products.html) to learn more.

**About Duke TIP and Independent Learning:** Because anyone can participate in Duke TIP's Independent Learning, it can be a useful tool for teachers or parents who want to offer creative-learning opportunities to their students. Students and parents can work with school or district officials to arrange recognition for coursework. In addition, classroom teachers can assign Independent Learning materials as part of curriculum compacting or independent-study options.

Duke TIP is the U.S.'s largest non-profit, educational organization that identifies and serves the educational needs of academically gifted youth. Through identification, recognition, challenging educational programs, information, advocacy and research, Duke TIP provides resources to gifted students, their parents, educators and schools for the development of the students' educational potential.

## Introducing Beautiful Minds by Scott Barry Kaufman

What is giftedness? This question is complicated for many reasons. Semantically, the label "gifted" is loaded with implications. Giving a child the label of "gifted" implies that the child received a gift from god, delivered at birth.

Culturally, conceptions of giftedness vary from one culture to another. Each society decides what talents and skills they will value and educate. And from a measurement perspective, how can we capture a gift in one moment in time, and use that snapshot to make a prediction about that individual's future? Can we do that? And if

we *can* construct tests that help us to predict the future of children in a probabilistic fashion, *should* we do so?

These questions, among many others relating to intelligence and creativity in society, are discussed and evaluated in my new blog for *Psychology Today* called *Beautiful Minds*.

In my posts, I try to stand back and look at the nature, development, and role of talent and high ability in lifetime creative achievement and expertise acquisition. I also explore the limits of human potential—how

we can overcome the many obstacles in one's way, and even use such obstacles to advantage.

These issues, like the label giftedness, are complex and deserve a complex treatment with open discussion.

I hope you will join me on my quest.

*Beautiful Minds* can be found at: <http://blogs.psychologytoday.com/blog/beautiful-minds>

## E. Paul Torrance Award and Creativity Night

Each year the Creative Network presents its Torrance Award to a current or long-term researcher in creativity. Recent recipients of the award include Jerry Flack, Jonathan Plucker, Joe Renzulli, and Robert Sternberg. The award is presented at the Creativity Network's signature Convention event.

**Creativity Night, which will be held this year from 7:30-9:15 p.m. on October 31st.** Creativity Night is held in a large hotel ballroom with 20 to 30 stations that participants can browse among over the course of the evening. Participants receive

a program and select three stations that they wish to visit and spend 20 to 30 minutes with each presenter.

### CREATIVITY NIGHT PRESENTERS STILL NEEDED

For those of you who would be interested in presenting your creative ideas to your peers, it's an excellent way to make your first NAGC presentation in an informal, high-energy setting. Your primary audience will be classroom teachers. You just need to guide the participants through some of your "greatest hits" lessons in creativity.

You can apply creativity to any subject and interdisciplinary ideas would be great. We still need a few more presenters to make a successful event. Please e-mail Kevin Kendall, [kkendall@lexedu.org](mailto:kkendall@lexedu.org) for details on submitting a proposal.

The deadline for submissions has been EXTENDED TO OCTOBER 1, 2008.

## Unjournaling: Daily Writing Exercises that are Not Personal, Not Introspective, and Not Boring! by Dawn Diprince and Cheryl Thurston

Many people find creative writing to be an intimidating process. What could be more difficult than sharing your heart and soul with a class or group?

Unjournaling is written for people of all ages, and it is the perfect tool to engage your students with creative writing in a classroom setting. The two hundred writing prompts in this book will challenge your students to become better thinkers and writers. Here are a few examples of creative writing prompts that your students will "dive" into.

How many different ways can you say that precipitation fell - without actually using the words "Precipitation fell"?

The answer is mouthwash. What is the question? Write five possible questions for that answer (Try for originality - something more than "What can I use to freshen my breath?")

Bippity-boppity-boo! Create your own fairy godmother. What does she look like? What does she have to offer you? Explain how she helps you. Describe her personality.

Describe something bland in one sentence that really makes a reader feel how bland it is.

Unjournaling includes exercises that teach literary terms like alliteration, rhyme, cliché, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia. Students will have the opportunity to update the classic Cinderella story in a 21st century setting, write a paragraph about Thanksgiving (that does not use the letter t), and even invent a new word. For writers who are stumped by these exercises, the authors provide an "answer key" with examples of how writers of all ages have tackled these creative writing prompts. While the exercises are incredibly creative, they are linked by an educational intent that will appeal to gifted and high-ability learners. As a college instructor, I look forward to using Unjournaling with my composition and creative writing classes in the near future.

## What is Mensa?

The Mensa Research Journal republishes articles on intelligence (however defined), giftedness, creativity and similar subjects from peer-reviewed journals. One issue of MRJ each year is devoted to articles that have won the Mensa Foundation's Awards for Excellence in Research. (Ten \$500 awards each year.)

Go to [www.mensa.org](http://www.mensa.org), click on Programs at the top, then on Excellence in Research on the left, then on How To Submit on the left.

To learn more about the Mensa Research Journal, click on Publications at the top of the screen.

You need not be a Mensan for any of this.

**"CREATIVITY NIGHT PRESENTERS STILL NEEDED"**

**"Unjournaling includes exercises that teach literary terms like alliteration, rhyme, cliché, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia."**

## Teaching Creativity as a Classroom Priority: Four Teachers' Stories and Beliefs that Support it

by Dr. Cindy Shepardson

Despite a commitment to the importance of creativity in education, it is often the case that teachers have limited knowledge of creativity and how to provide for its development in the classroom (Dawson, 1997). Students who express their creativity can be difficult to work with—which may also help to explain why creativity is not often encouraged by many teachers (Dettmer, 1981; Strom & Strom, 2002; Westby & Dawson, 1995). Teachers who *do* deliberately choose to facilitate the creative learning of their students may do so in a less than supportive school environment (Cole, Sugiyoka, & Yamagata-Lynch, 1999). However, there are teachers who both believe in the importance of creative development and who, actively and by choice, create classrooms where creativity is valued, explicitly developed, expressed, and celebrated (see Shepardson, 2005; 2006). Since it seemed that there were so many deterrents to teaching for creativity, I wondered what was behind teachers' decisions to promote creative learning and their persistence in the face of many potential inhibiting factors. In this study I examined the beliefs of four teachers who deliberately chose to teach for creativity in their classrooms and who could document practices intended to facilitate such development on the part of their students. I focused on three major questions:

*What is the "narrative landscape" of the teacher who deliberately promotes student creativity?*

*What beliefs are associated with a teacher's intent and practice of teaching for creativity?*

*To what experiences might these beliefs be attributed?*

Using an explanatory narrative design (Polkinghorne, 1988) involved seeking to "construct a narrative account" that tied together and ordered events so as to make apparent possible causes of those events—creating a *causal pathway*. I worked with four teachers (Leeza [all names are pseudonyms], who taught third grade; Andrew, who taught in a multi-age school K-5; Dari, who ran an elementary gifted and talented program; and Keeley, who was a teacher educator in a small, rural college at the time of the study and previously taught elementary school and in special education programs). They all indicated that teaching for creativity was a deliberate choice they had made, and they were able to provide specific examples of classroom practices that: valued and supported student creativity (skills, processes, work styles, or attitudes); created opportunities for student creativity in areas of their interest and across disciplines; and, supported a climate conducive to creative expression and productivity. Over the course of one semester, I gathered data from these teachers using creativity autobiographies, journals, and stories collected for a 30-day sequence, videotaped classroom activities along with stimulated recall (Bloom, 1954; Calderhead, 1981), and electronically supported conversations. From these data, I sought to identify issues, themes, clusters of key concepts that might form the basis of the "explanatory narratives" of the teachers' efforts to teach for creativity in their students.

*"Teachers for Creativity are Also Creative Teachers"*

### Conclusions

My conclusions and recommendations are exploratory in nature; read them with the understanding that "narrative research does not produce conclusions of certainty" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 175), but that they provide open-ended possibilities for continuing investigation. The following four general conclusions emerged from my analysis of the data.

#### *Teachers for Creativity are Also Creative Teachers*

Starko (2001) distinguished between teachers for creativity and creative teachers, based on who is being creative during a particular activity. Teaching for creativity focuses on promoting the creativity of students, whereby creative teaching focuses on the teacher's creativity. The participants in this study displayed qualities of both teachers for creativity and creative teachers. They displayed a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, were persistent in engaging in reflection and focusing on self-improvement, encouraged an environment of curiosity, modeled flexibility, fostered their own creativity as a precursor to fostering that of their students, and maintained a disposition toward originality and risk-taking.

#### *Teaching for Creativity is a Calling and is Intrinsically Motivated*

Based on the work of Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997), who distinguished among jobs, careers, and callings, participants in this study saw their work as a calling. "People with callings find their work inseparable from their life...

work inseparable from their life... [and] for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual" (Wrzesniewski, et al., p. 22). Study participants consistently expressed the inseparable nature of what they *do* and who they *are*. For them, teaching is an intrinsically motivated activity, involving interest and enjoyment, feelings of autonomy, competence, task involvement, preference for complexity and challenge, and self-determination.

#### *Teaching for Creativity May Emerge from Some Tension or Disturbance*

Each participant shared some experience(s), from recollections as a child in school, or as an older student or teacher, that caused them frustration—enough to move them to change what they were doing and to look for alternative means of dealing with the situation more satisfactorily. Those tensions and frustrations seemed to propel them in the direction of teaching for creativity. A recent study by Beghetto (2006) found similar results suggesting that "individuals committed to promoting creativity are driven by their own past experiences with creativity diminishing environments" (p. 149).

#### *Beliefs of Teachers for Creativity Support Practices that are Humanistic, Constructivist, and Emancipatory*

The participants were more student-centered than teacher- or subject-centered in their approach to teaching. They placed high priorities on both the short-term and long-term academic, social, and emotional needs of their students, and sought to transfer much of the ownership for learning over to the students. They encouraged the students to

engage in making independent decisions, and in doing so, participants portrayed themselves as *humanistic*, which Friedman, (1995) described as stressing both the importance of the individual and the creation of an atmosphere that meets students' needs. They were *constructivist*, characterized by Brooks and Brooks (1999) as encouraging and accepting student autonomy and initiative, allowing student responses to drive lessons and determine instructional strategies and content, encouraging inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions, engaging students in experiences that might engender controversy, allowing wait time after posing questions, and nurturing students' curiosity. They were *emancipatory* (Fletcher, 2000; O'Loughlin, 1992), emphasizing student autonomy and authenticity. The participants recognized the pressure of helping students attain the mandated curriculum, and they took a difficult stand by placing students' needs, ideas, and interests first, and making creative thinking and the creative process priorities in their classrooms—as a means of teaching content. The participants emphasized creative and independent thinking as essential goals for their students, providing for student choice and giving students ownership over their own learning as much as possible. O'Loughlin (1992) stated that, "The most fundamental building block in a pedagogy of ownership is acknowledgement of the life experiences and voices of our students" (p. 338).

### Implications

This study created a portrait of four teachers who made the decision to teach for creativity, and who continue to make their own learning and growth a priority in order to help their students. The stories, the findings, and the rec-

ommendations that resulted from them aim to make visible the challenges, processes, and struggles of teaching for creativity in a world of conformity, as well as highlighting the potential successes, celebrations and *ahas* inherent in its pursuit. What implications might we suggest for practitioners, school administrators, teacher educators, or researchers?

#### *Provide Creative Space*

In many ways, creativity has not only been seen as a low priority on school systems' lists of curriculum mandates, but it is often suffocated by good intentions to do what is best for students. Maybe this is because creativity is so easily undermined and that the climate that supports its development is one that must be deliberately fashioned by teachers for whom creativity becomes a priority. Creativity, to flourish and grow, needs some *creative space* (i.e., time, awareness, opportunity, acceptance and support) within individuals and within society and its institutions—beginning with our schools and teacher education programs.

#### *Space within the school system.*

Schools and school systems often promote a culture of conformity that does not traditionally support teacher or student creativity. Those who are creative and who promote creativity in others often feel isolated and out of place. Teachers for creativity, being creative teachers and creative people themselves, need to find creative space in their schools. Today's overemphasis on, and overuse of, standardized teaching and assessment creates significant challenges in teaching for creativity. There is a need to allow for more student choice; allow students to think, rework, and refine their work; emphasize self-

-evaluation; and, provide opportunities for students to produce original, inventive, and creative work. Participants in this study promoted creativity in their students because of their personal courage and conviction. Consider how many other children could have this opportunity if schools provided creative space within their walls.

*Space within the classroom.* The participants involved in this study demonstrated that teaching for creativity within the constraints placed on them by their school systems and the standards movement was possible—that they could teach content and promote creativity simultaneously! To support those teachers who may make the deliberate decision to teach for creativity at some time in the future, and for those already committed, I proposed a "Manifesto for Teachers," similar to Torrance's "Manifesto for Children" (see Torrance & Sisk, 1997) in support of teachers' efforts to provide students with the best opportunities to develop as creative people, creative learners, and creative producers.

#### *The Manifesto for Teachers*

Make efforts to get in touch with your own creativity and expressions—continue to practice and model creative behaviors.

Teach and apply process methods and tools that foster "deliberate creativity." Find others who support your creative efforts and learn from each other—learn from mistakes as well as successes. Persist in your desire for intellec-

-tual risk taking and your preference for maintaining an accommodation attitude—welcoming ideas that challenge your beliefs. Take as much time as you need to do your best—seeking depth in your work. Reflect, reflect, reflect and don't be afraid to let your critical consciousness guide you. Free yourself from attitudes of conformity. Teach and encourage your students to do all of these things as well. Learn and grow with your students in community.

#### *Space within teacher preparation programs.*

None of the study participants revealed that teacher preparation programs either taught or promoted creativity, or emphasized the importance of teaching for student creativity. In fact, teacher education classes often modeled only traditional teaching methods and goals. Teacher preparation programs, at the very least, should discuss the characteristics of creative behavior and teach prospective teachers how to help their students use these behaviors for creative productivity.

#### *Complexity as a Classroom Preference*

Part of teaching for creativity, as revealed by study participants, was the encouragement and expectation of independent thinking and decision making on the part of students, and enabling them to move out of their comfort zones. Students in participants' classrooms were challenged to find answers to problems and situations that arose and were not just provided with models or answers, but instead given time to think, create their own responses, and act on their own thinking.

includes

### *Valuing Teacher Stories in Educational Research*

Teachers' stories told in their own words "have [the] power to open up conversations at several levels: pedagogical, professional, and epistemological" (Frederick, 1990, p. 7). Teacher stories and narratives are an important means of gathering important data about teaching and learning. Participants in this study attested to their own growth as teachers over the course of participating in this study.

### *Understand Creative Styles*

Reflections of study participants indicated that they were drawn or propelled to creativity and teaching for creativity by some of life's experiences. The question remains as to whether these particular teachers were actually drawn into teaching for creativity or did they already have a natural inclination toward creativity and a particular creativity style. It may be fruitful, for example, to conduct research in which we look specifically at preferred styles (e.g., Selby, Trefinger, Isaksen, & Lauer, 2004) of teachers for creativity. Are they developers or explorers as designated by VIEW? Studies of style differences might provide insights into ways to promote more widespread teaching for creativity in classrooms. If we can develop students' creativity, can we also develop the attitudes, desires, and skills to teach for creativity on the part of the nation's teachers?

### *Study Creative Teachers as Teachers for Creativity*

One of the conclusions, or stated likelihoods, suggested in this study was that teachers for creativity are creative teachers. The question remains as to whether the opposite is true. Are creative

teachers also teachers for creativity? Are teachers who are concerned with their own creativity also teachers who focus on nurturing their students' creativity? Much remains to be learned about these relationships.

### *Impact on Students in Creative Settings if Subsequently Placed in Traditional Settings*

Future research might investigate the impact upon students of moving from classrooms in which teachers promote creativity to more traditional classrooms. Will the students' creativity be resilient, or will the impact be confusing or conflict-producing?

**“Are teachers who are concerned with their own creativity also teachers who focus on nurturing their students' creativity?”**

## **The Elephant Gift: How to Reach a Creative, At-Risk Gifted Child by Gae Anderson-Miller**

I am elitist when it comes to fighting for the personal needs of gifted children. My soapbox approach to helping at risk creatively gifted children originates from experiences with them in the classroom. The term “gift” has a positive tone to it, like when someone gets a puppy for Christmas. But, if the gift is something not quite as cute, say, if it were an elephant, it is not as appealing. It would be a lot harder to feed and clean up after and certainly hard to cuddle after a hard day at school.

In what ways can we reach the exceptionally creative, at risk, gifted child? The key is to find specific ways to reach them, on their terms. Many gifted programs do not meet the needs of this population, but a few teachers, who are not afraid to be advocates for these non teacher-pleasers, can make a tremendous difference. These teachers have an intrinsic sense that enables them to identify and reach these atypical, creative students.

The few stories I would like to share happened somewhere between 20 and 30 years ago. My first experience with an at risk creative student began with a student named “Tom.” I first saw this tall, lean boy at a suburban elementary school as he fumbled outside his locker, in an effort to hide something from me as I walked by. When I stopped to ask how he was doing, he replied “I’m not doing anything!” and acted even more nervous. My instincts told me to stay by his side and investigate further. When he realized that I was not going to go away because of his attempts to “dis” me, he blurted out, “I want to annihilate this place!”

When I looked into his locker, I saw something that shocked me. Peering in to his private space I recognized a contraption with wires, batteries and some putty-like material. “Tom, is this supposed to be a bomb?” I asked. “Don’t tell Mr. (the principal), he hates me!” was his reply. Listening to the quality of this 6<sup>th</sup> grader’s discussion and his articulate description of why school was intolerable for him, I gleaned that Tom was very possibly gifted. I convinced him that I had to take his invention out of the building, and after making sure there was no triggering device, carefully placed it in my cart. I told Tom I would talk to him later and took it out to my car.

When I entered the faculty room during lunchtime, I mentioned I had met Tom and asked if any of the other teachers knew of him. The vocal eruptions of angst against Tom fueled my passion to help this creative, but troubled student, who was soon to fail 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Determined to have him evaluated for the gifted program, I hoped that I would have the opportunity to work with him in class.

Tom’s family was temporarily homeless, and his mom signed the evaluation paperwork from their current home, the family car. We found that his full scale score on the WISC intelligence test was a 147 which legitimized my instincts. Although not a perfect program for him, he was now eligible to attend the pullout gifted classes and have an IEP.

**“The vocal eruptions of angst against Tom fueled my passion to help this creative, but troubled student, who was soon to fail 6<sup>th</sup> grade.”**

Tom was upset that he had to attend class with a “bunch of nerds” but soon became interested during a lesson about the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island (TMI). When provided the general details, Tom became incensed about the lack of responsibility of the workers at the site. His rage against a school system that didn’t meet his needs transformed to positive action. He was desperate to learn more about the details of the event and particularly those who caused this spectacular accident. Tom spent countless hours researching the incident. He then built to scale, a six-foot replica of the entire TMI complex and intricately labeled it. Using a pointer, Tom described the complicated science behind the cause of the accident and presented his model and findings to the students in other gifted classes so they could learn about this historical mistake. The principal, who no longer saw Tom as an adversary, scheduled Tom to demonstrate his research at other schools. When the requests for him to speak surpassed available time; Tom made tape recordings to accompany his model, so he could share his disdain for the lack of proper equipment, planning and obvious risk to the local community, especially the nearby school playground. For the first time in Tom’s educational career, he began to get positive instead of negative attention. Tom’s grades dramatically improved, and every year after that, his performance continued to skyrocket. Tom graduated high school with a four year scholarship to Purdue. A happy adult, he is now working in Silicon Valley in California.

Many at risk creatively gifted students are not as fortunate as Tom. “Rick” , manifested a strong sense of perfectionism. If he did not believe he could achieve a task in perfect fashion, he would not try it at all. Rick was quickly labeled an underachieving gifted student. Underachievement is a complicated characteristic of some gifted youngsters, and it is difficult to recognize, treat, or reverse. I recently received a call from Rick’s mother. She wanted me to know that her son’s experience as a member of our Olympics of the Mind Team (OM) had made him very happy, the happiest she had ever seen him. Sadly, she also wanted to let me know that, at the age of 24, he had taken his life. She knew that I tried to keep him on task by in school by rewarding him with challenging, creative activities in problem solving. Unfortunately, he did not believe that he could succeed on a daily basis and failed to graduate from high school. His future then became one missed opportunity after another. Some gifted children are labeled profoundly gifted.-bright beyond our ability to measure their talents. I first learned about a little first grader named “Billie” as I was observing her class as the school’s principal.

**“Tom graduated high school with a four year scholarship to Purdue. A happy adult, he is now working in Silicon Valley in California.”**

**“Underachievement is a complicated characteristic of some gifted youngsters, and it is difficult to recognize,” treat, or reverse. “**

Billie heard her teacher recite the rhyme, “Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon.” As an avid fan of space discovery, she could not help but boldly interrupt with the question, “My dad and I learned about the tiles on the space shuttle when it came back, and I was wondering, about that cow...what happens to the cow in re-entry??” She could not imagine anything but a “super-crisp” cow after traveling back into the atmosphere. Her teacher, who had no training in the nature and needs of the gifted, responded, “Billie, sit down and act like a first grader!” The vocal disapproval by her teacher embarrassed Billie. As the others laughed at her, she felt like she was ‘retarded’ and squirmed back behind the students seated on the floor and finally disappeared under a corner table. She would not soon offer such an insightful question in this class. She desperately needed an advocate. “Matt”, a second grader, was given the Structure of the Intellect Assessment, which measures 180 different ways of thinking. His scores on scientific thinking and creative problem solving ranged at the middle school level, yet he was not able to meet the second grade reading expectations and was placed in an LD classroom. Because of his high scores on scientific reasoning and problem solving, Matt was allowed to attend classes in the gifted program, on a provisional basis. He energetically began the opening activity of his first class, a contest to build the tallest structure using toothpicks and marshmallows.

While most students were building cube-like structures and talking about forts, Matt was building an equilateral geodesic dome and quoting Buckminster Fuller (inventor of such domes). Slowly, the other students gravitated toward Matt to learn more about the soundness of his structure. Matt succeeded that year because his teachers couched his reading assignments through the lens of scientific discoveries. His schoolwork improved and he became the leader of his school’s OM team and that won the state competition, by creating a home-made robot that picked up a glass of water and broke a balloon while navigating through a maze.

If you are a teacher of the gifted, or a regular education teacher, who can recognize and actually LIKE the way bright, creative students operate, please, fight for them, become their advocate. Try to identify those students who you know are bright, exhibit creative ideas (however atypical) but may mask their abilities. Give them a reason to participate in challenging, learning situations. Discover their passions and areas of potential. You just may be the one who can turn that elephant into a cuddly little puppy who will eventually lead a productive, happy life.

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## Alien Math by Nick Bollow, Rita Berg, and Marya Tyler

Would you like to go on an intergalactic adventure? In *Alien Math*, students crash into a planet, meet aliens with humanoid characteristics, visit an intergalactic restaurant, take an interplanetary survey, visit an intergalactic mall, write a spacelog of the trip, ride on a subterranean hover module, converse with creatures who are able to read your mind, and dine at an alien restaurant.

Planet Earth is under threat of being demolished to make way for an intergalactic highway, and young mathematicians must prove that intelligent life exists there. Students will become fluent in base 6, base 2, and base 16 (the computer bases) while attaining a better understanding of our own base 10 number system. *Alien Math* adheres to the standards formulated by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Students will enjoy this intergalactic adventure, especially the daily starlogs and the humorous storyline.

*Alien Math* is a creative adventure through the world of mathematics, space travel, and the world of the imagination. I enjoyed reading this book for the narrative alone. It is difficult to resist the opportunity to fly on a spacecraft, explore an unidentified planet, or have a conversation with an alien. The book begins with a wild scenario, "Just passed the Andromeda Galaxy and I'm losing fuel at an astounding rate. No choice but to land on that uncharted planet - if I'm lucky. Here goes . . . fasten hatches . . . rework configurations . . . contact starbase . . . fasten harness . . . (undo harness, use restroom) . . . redo harness . . . prepare to crash" (p. 1) and it takes readers on an exciting adventure that is filled with great illustrations. Young mathematicians will enjoy the many adventures and comic scenes that are contained within this book.

Find Us on the Web at:  
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## Book Reviews

### Creativity, Mental Illness, and Crime

Russell Eisenman's book, *Creativity, Mental Illness and Crime* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2007) has 3 chapters directly related to creativity. They are chapter 1 "Creativity in Prisoners: Conduct Disorders and Psychotics," chapter 11 "Creativity and Impulsivity: The Deviance Perspective," and chapter 12 "Clinical Approaches to Creativity: Mental Illness and Deviance." Other chapters deal with such things as academic achievement, sex education, the death penalty, drug usage, mistreating the mentally ill in prison, and more.

### Living with Intensity

Gifted children and adults are often misunderstood. Their excitement is viewed as excessive, their high energy as hyperactivity, their persistence as nagging, their imagination as not paying attention, their passion as being disruptive, their strong emotions and sensitivity as immaturity, and their creativity and self-directedness as oppositional. The editors of - and contributors to - *Living With Intensity* describe these overexcitabilities and provide strategies and approaches for helping children and adults who are experiencing them. All contributors have expertise in and provide essential information about Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration. So, the book is solidly grounded in theory and research yet also has a clear emphasis on practical methods for nurturing sensitivity, intensity, perfectionism, and much more.

Edited by Susan Daniels and Michael Piechowski and published by Great Potential Press, this is one book that educators, parents, counselors, graduate students, and other educational specialists with expertise in

giftedness and creativity will want to have in their library. The book will surely be a resource to the field for years to come.

### Seize the Story: A Handbook for Teens Who Like to Write

by Victoria Hanley

Do you have a story in your heart that you want to share with the world? If so, what's holding you back? What's stopping you from turning that inner experience into a book that other people will enjoy reading?

Victoria Hanley's *Seize the Story* is an amazing book about creative writing for teenagers and young adults who are developing voices and visions. In the first chapter, Hanley teaches writers to free their imaginations with just ten minutes of freewriting a day. Many writers complete terrible first drafts; don't be discouraged if your first draft is subpar. Hanley advises that writers "not beat yourself up if your first draft doesn't match up to your inner vision" (p. 16).

In chapter 2, Hanley discusses crafting great characters who will lead you into the heart of the story. Your characters will always be imaginary yet will have a definite presence. She describes how to create characters through style, voice, and names. With select details, characters will step off the page and into the imaginations of readers. In order for your characters to be real, they must act in a realistic way and have a driving motivation. Most importantly, write about characters who matter to you.

In chapter 3, Hanley encourages teenagers to begin writing their stories. Many writers begin "in medias res" or right in the middle of the action, beginning with an event that throws your characters' lives into chaos and disaster. The next chapter includes helpful hints about creating settings. Settings always have a place, time, and mood. You must create a suspension of disbelief: readers must believe in your story even though they know it isn't true. Every place you visit has the potential to be a great setting.

In chapter 6, Hanley describes how dialogue reveals character and relationships, enhances tension and moves the plot. Dialogue is meaningful conversation that drives the story forward. It is best to use simple dialogue, and Hanley emphasizes, "When characters speak up, they enliven a story" (p. 101). This chapter is particularly helpful because Hanley shows typical mistakes that writers make and how to write more exciting dialogue that will drive the plot.

In chapter 7, Hanley provides helpful examples that demonstrate the difference between showing and telling. In telling, the writer gives the information in narrative form: showing is when the action unravels before the reader's eyes.

In chapter 10, Hanley provides helpful advice about polishing your writing. It is necessary to get critiques on your work, since you cannot read it objectively. Yet it is important to remember your story belongs to you, and to consider the source of any criticism before you take it.

It's important to make sure your sentences are not cluttered, and your word choice is strong. She encourages writers to use the active rather than passive voice, and provides examples showing why the active voice is more effective. In chapter 11, Hanley provides a helpful analysis of the narrative point of view, including examples of first person, second person, and third person viewpoints. Hanley explains the advantages and disadvantages of each point of view. Choosing a point of view is important: it will determine the tone and feel of the entire story.

In chapter 13, Hanley interviews notable writers like T.A. Barron, Carolyn Meyer, Denise Vega, and Joan Bauer who provide insights about writing that any teenager will enjoy listening to. In the final chapter, Hanley provides a self-interview in which she answers questions young writers typically have. *Seize the Story* is the perfect gift for young writers. Victoria Hanley's passion and understanding of adolescence makes this an invaluable resource not only for young writers but for all writers.