

SCOPE

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STUDIES
NETWORK

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

From the Editor

A New Year, A New Perspective. How can we form a **global perspective** as teachers, students, and learners? In the Winter/Spring 2011 edition, we will address this question about how to gain perspective on events in the world around us and in our lives. Dean Vesperman, a veteran teacher who has spent many summers teaching gifted students at Johns Hopkins' University's Center for Talented Youth (JHU-CTY), will share his advice for conducting in-depth current events and news article analysis with your students. This summer, SCOPE will have a special edition about addressing the needs of **Gifted Girls**; if you have any suggested books or articles on this topic, **please send those to Leighann.Pennington@gmail.com.**

Finally, in this edition, one gifted girl, Vivian Herscovitz, shares the insights and perspective on life she gained through reading *The Art of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama. I hope her thoughts will inspire you to start an informal book club with your students which will lead to mutually rewarding discussions.

-Leighann Pennington, Editor

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**NAGC Curriculum Network
2011
Network Leadership**

**Network Chair: Sally Dobyns
Convention Program Chairs: Christine
Briggs and Carol Ann Williams
Newsletter Editor: Leighann Pennington
Layout Editor: Brianna Pennington**

Get to Know Your Curriculum Studies Chair!



Dr. Sally Dobyns is the Director of the Center for Gifted Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where she is a Professor of Curriculum and Instruction.

She is also the Coordinator of the M.Ed. Program in Gifted Education.

Sally has been an active member of NAGC for many years.

In 2000, Sally won an award for Excellence in Teaching.

She has many fresh ideas for the future of the Curriculum Studies network to enliven our study of how to teach so that our students truly learn.

Applying the Inquiry Process to the Study of Current Events

by Dean Vesperman

Why Study Current Events?

Every summer I work for Johns Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth (CTY), a summer program for gifted and talented fifth and sixth graders. I teach an introductory course to geopolitics. An important goal of the class is to improve student's knowledge of current global events through the daily reading and discussions of articles from the international section of the *New York Times*. The importance of this goal is that many students, gifted or otherwise, have minimal knowledge of current events, geopolitics, and international relations. This gap in knowledge is a challenge for students and teachers when trying to reach a deeper understanding: "One of the most significant challenges confronting instructors who teach international politics survey courses is the coverage of current events issues and how to stimulate student interest about the issues" (Chernotsky, 1988). Current events education allows educators to challenge students to think critically about the world in which they live and gain an understanding of geopolitics.

"Current events education allows educators to challenge students to think critically about the world in which they live and gain an understanding of geopolitics."

Geopolitics and Applying the Inquiry Process to Current Events

A larger understanding of geopolitics will aid students in learning how to see and interpret biases that exist within the news, including various individuals, groups, governments, etc. that are involved with a particular event. Lastly, current events education can aid teachers in helping students acquire, use, and master critical thinking skills, as well as become informed, engaged, and inquisitive students (Feldman, 2004).

To resolve the aforementioned problem, students should be immersed into an inquiry process in current events similar to what William Sandoval (2003) described for science education. He proposed an inquiry-based system in which students ask questions, generate and interpret the meaning of data, and form conclusions about what they read in the news. Students must also learn to be able to explain and predict the future actions of individuals, groups, states, and international organizations, similar to what foreign policy analysts do (Sandoval, 2003). Therefore, students are taught how to analyze the actions of individuals, groups, states, and international organizations they gain from reading newspaper articles.



Steps of the News Analysis Process

Every morning in class, the students select an article to read and analyze from the *New York Times* International section. As students read the news, they practice news analysis. News analysis is built around Joseph Renzulli's (1986) enrichment triad which calls for students to investigate real world problems, create solutions, and analyze the effectiveness of those solutions in small collaborative groups or as a whole class.

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I usually provide 45 minutes to an hour for students to read and analyze the article they selected. To conduct news analysis, students are broken into pairs who choose the article that they wish to analyze. Students begin the process of news analysis by collecting basic information from the article they chose. The basic facts that students initially collect include: “who” is involved and “when” and “where” did the events covered in the news occur. Students tend to struggle with collecting data on the idea of “who” is involved in the event, because they tend to believe that the “who” in each situation can only be individuals, instead of groups, states, or international organizations. “When” and “where” are easier for students to collect; however, it is important to stress that students organize their “when” events in chronological order.



After collecting the basic data from the article, students then begin work on their comprehension and the application of the data they collected. Students use the basic data collected to write out three-sentence summaries of the events in the article. As they write these summaries, students gain an understanding of the roles that various actors played in the article’s events. They begin to develop relationships between the data collected, such as temporal-causal, spatial, and part-whole relationships. I call this part of the analysis “How and What Happened?”

The “Why?” Stage and the Rational Actor Theory

The final step in the news analysis process is to analyze the actions of the various individuals, groups, states, or international organizations involved; this is called the ‘why’ stage. Through this process, I teach the students the “rational actor theory” of international relations. In this theory, actors (individuals, groups, states, or international organizations) have goals that are discernible, and therefore these goals can be analyzed. The key to this theory is that while actions may seem irrational to us as readers, if we view the situation from the goals or perspectives of the actor, actions are rational. A perfect example is North Korea, because to many people, the actions of Kim Jong-Il may seem irrational or even evil. However, if you consider that the goal of Mr. Kim is to remain in power and possibly continue the dynasty started by his father Kim il-Sung, then using nuclear weapons to blackmail oil and food from South Korea, Japan, and the United States is very rational.

Students then use this theory to analyze the actions of all actors in a situation to determine their goals and the purposes of the actions they took. They collaboratively begin their analysis with the aid of the teacher or teaching assistant. Students may not have enough prior knowledge to conduct the analysis without extra resources, using additional texts, the *Economist*, and the Internet. As teachers, we may also fill in some gaps in knowledge the students need to conduct their analysis.

After a break, one pair of students presents an article to the class. The rest of the class then take notes during the presentation, ask questions of the students presenting, and my teaching assistant or I provide historical background for the students when needed, through the early parts of the presentation. The class then discusses the theories the presenters put forth using the rational actor theory. The students consider whether or not the theory was valid, provide additional information from their analysis or prior knowledge, and eventually decide whether to accept or discard the theories presented.

Students are assessed on:

- their level of effort in data collection,
- noting important relationships between facts presented,
- their ability to summarize what they had read,
- the theories they presented to class, and
- their ability to evaluate their own/or others opinions.

However, these are not summative assessments, but formative assessments necessary to determine mastery of the aforementioned skills, and which will shape future instruction.

In Conclusion: The inquiry and news analysis processes are important, because these processes aid the student by bringing the process of critical thinking into conscious awareness. In other words, students become aware of the parts of thinking (Cyboran, 2005).

“Students participate in authentic practices in which they are able to develop analytical skills in a safe, collaborative environment where the goal is not the ‘right’ answer, but a willingness to take risks. .”

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Students participate in authentic practices in which they are able to develop analytical skills in a safe, collaborative environment where the goal is not the 'right' answer, but a willingness to take risks. Teachers may want to develop a graphic organizer that would help students with data collection. I have found that a graphic organizer allows the student to focus more on higher-level critical thinking and less on the task of data collection. It is also important to provide sufficient scaffolding as students conduct higher-level analysis, with the aid of the teacher. Otherwise students might not complete news analysis or become unwilling to take risks.

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Introduction to Vivian's Thoughts

As a teacher of gifted students, you may find yourself asking: What is emotional intelligence and how can I address this during the school day? How can I work with a child who cares about existential issues and the world at large? In English class, students wrote essays about an abstract theme, such as love, happiness, hope, and justice. One seventh grade student, Vivian, wanted to write about LIFE, as a larger theme, as well as happiness. Her life experiences inspired her to take the assignment to a deeper level. Working with such a student is both rewarding and challenging.

When talking with Vivian I often think about how she is an authentic example of Gardner's interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence; she's a thoughtful and creative gifted girl who is also sensitive to her peers and her essential self. While writing and journaling can help us get to know our students and their thoughts, an informal book club is another worthy option that can truly change people, including you as a teacher and person, as well. Vivian read *The Art of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama and she is eager to share with you how reading and analyzing this book changed her life.

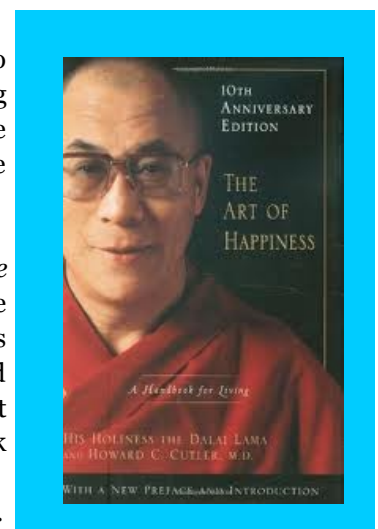
My Path to Happiness by Vivian Herscovitz

"Dance as though no one is watching you. Love as though you have never been hurt before. Sing as though no one can hear you. Live as if though heaven is on earth." ~Souza

To me, the quote above is special and represents the theme of happiness, because it says to me: do what you want to do, by yourself or in public—don't be afraid. Don't let one thing or person bring you down, just keep on going. Be yourself, just express who you are. More importantly, just live your life as if nothing and no one can stop you. I learned to live the meaning of this quote through reading *The Art of Happiness* and looking back on my life.

Happiness is the hardest component of life to find and keep. When I read the book, *The Art of Happiness* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, M.D., one of the most inspiring quotes I found is: "the very motion of our life is towards happiness," says the Dalai Lama. In the book, the author shows many ways to become happy through hard times. "But it's not fair," is a well-known comment that children say when they don't get what they want. The book explains why we feel this way, just as children do. The book helps the reader understand how life actually is and how to deal with that.

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My life experience has changed my outlook on life in good and bad ways. At times, I've felt happy and even joyful. When I was only seven years old, I had to move from Florida to Brazil. When we moved, I was unhappy, because I had no friends and I had never been to such a strange place in my life. In the past, I'd heard my parents speak about the United States, and being only seven, I had hope my parents regretted going back to Brazil and wanted to go back to the United States. Days passed, then days became weeks and weeks became months. Soon school started and we were still living in Brazil.



At first I absolutely despised Brazil, but then I started making friends and actually adapting to the changes. I began to love living in Brazil. On my tenth birthday, I was going to throw a major party for my birthday. The thing that most touched my heart was not the presents, not the delicious cake, or even that my grandparents had come, but that my neighbors in Florida had sent me a present. It was the third present I had received from them. The present did not matter. I cared about who sent it to me. A few years later, I would return to the United States, this time to California, and start all over again. Once again, I met new friends, but I never forget the ones I made in the many different places I have lived.

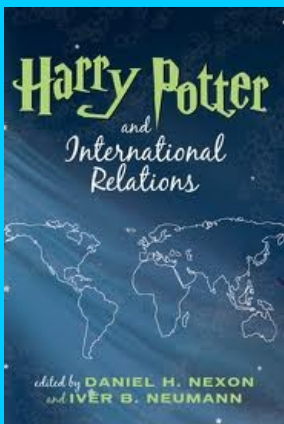
Love, happiness, and hope became my motto through these many changes. Through these past experiences, as I learned these concepts, I have learned

to face change. I have changed languages and places too many times in my life. If we understand these three main branches of life (love, happiness, and hope), then life itself will become easier and simpler for some people. Life is made up of the messy bits; if we don't have the patience to gain the basic understanding of life, then life will feel difficult and confusing. Basically, you have to live with what you have and transform sad moments into learning experiences.

"Being happy doesn't mean that everything is perfect. It means to look beyond imperfection," as the saying goes. In the meantime, I dance, I sing, I love, and I live with all my heart. I read the book *The Art of Happiness* because I felt so lonely in Brazil because I had no friends and the only people I knew lived in another city or another county. I would recommend this book to both adults and students of all age groups. The book is useful for whoever is feeling down. *The Art of Happiness* is also a guideline to the path of purifying your soul. I have started and continued this journey and now I always know that's how life is. I definitely recommend this book for whoever and everyone.

"Love, happiness, and hope became my motto through these many changes. Through these past experiences, as I learned these concepts, I have learned to face change."

Dean Recommends the Following Books for Teachers of Current Events



***Harry Potter and International Relations* edited by Iver B. Neumann and Daniel H. Nexon.**

A collection of work by over a dozen international scholars. One positive review noted: "This accessible and original volume will challenge both Harry Potter fans and students of world politics to think more deeply and critically about different forms of engagement between popular culture and world politics. Drawing on "enjoyable evidence" from the Harry Potter universe, this diverse yet coherent collection of essays draws on one of western culture's quintessential commercial mega-texts to demonstrate that our understanding of world politics can be significantly and agreeably expanded by delving into the riches of popular culture."

-Jutta Weldes, University of Bristol

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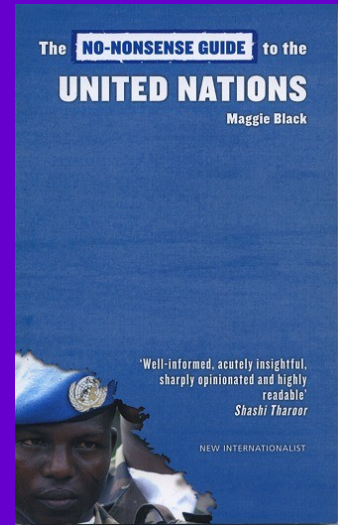
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The No-Nonsense Guide to the United Nations by Maggie Black. This book addresses the questions about what is the United Nations and its parts and who does it affect? A great way to start learning about this complex organization that is such a huge player on the world's stage of international relations.

The Editor Recommends

The New York Times Upfront magazine. The website includes many useful resources for teachers and some free articles and digital issues you can access online. The reading level is high school, but I have used many of the articles with middle school students.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/index.asp>



Ted.com: This amazing website includes videos, none longer than 20 minutes, with people who have done amazing things in their field. There is also a grant for people who want to change the world and they talk about their ideas. This website can provide insights into the discipline for students, a chance to find an expert role model in their area of interest, or just a chance to explore many areas of interest.



Meet the Author:

Dean Vesperman has been a teacher for eleven and a half years at St. Joseph High School and Interparish Junior High School. In the summer, he also teaches at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth (JHU-CTY) for the last ten years. Dean holds degrees in History and International Relations from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, a Master's of Education in Education from Cardinal Stritch University, and is currently working on a doctorate of education in curriculum and instruction at Indiana University.

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