



Early Childhood Network Newsletter

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News from the Early Childhood Network Chair

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Welcome to May, everyone. Or, as Carol Tieso expressed in a recent email, “hope springs eternal!” That certainly is true up here in Minneapolis!

I have exciting news to share in two areas. Our membership count was at 164 back in November but is now at 292! Thank you all for supporting our network. I have included notes from our Business Meeting at NAGC. As always, please let us know if you have any ideas, thoughts or concerns.

Secondly, the proposal review process for New Orleans is complete! Thank you to everyone who submitted proposals. We have exciting pre-conference sessions for Wednesday and Thursday and Super Sessions on Sunday scheduled, as well as 19 regular sessions. There will also be very interesting poster sessions for display. We can't wait to share them with you!

A reminder to members whose proposals were accepted...are you interested in applying for a Membership Attendance Grant?

Our article this month comes from Dr. Joy Lawson Davis, Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Dr. Davis is the author of “Bright, Talented, & Black,” an important and insightful book for parents and teachers of minority children. Her article is especially timely as we head to New Orleans!

It's always good talking with you!

Barb

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Chair: Barbara Dullaghan

Chair Elect: Ellen Honeck

Newsletter Editor: Denise Drain

Notes from Early Childhood Business Meeting NAGC, Atlanta, Nov. 13, 2010

INTRODUCTIONS - 13 members in attendance. *Early Childhood Network* has a strong position statement (<http://nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1696>) and our membership covers Pre-K through grade 3.

The new **MEMBERSHIP** model is now a reality. All NAGC members receive membership in three networks for free. They may join additional networks. For an additional \$25, members may join ALL networks for one year!

We presently have 164 members but expect that to grow after the conference numbers are included. NAGC suggests that this will be a great way to build membership in our network; however, members will be expecting benefits.

Our **BUDGET** is linked to membership. We do have money available for ideas, including the following which were discussed:

Membership Attendance Grants of \$500 each will be available to EC members who submit a proposal to our network for NAGC 2011 and are accepted. Each awardee must submit an article for our newsletter about the presentation after the conference .

NAGC 2011-Idea to offer a sort of Collaboration Café on Thursday for attendees to have the opportunity to sit down in small groups with Early Childhood experts. We would cap the attendance and offer 6-8 experts. Everyone was very excited about this idea. We will contact NAGC to see if it will fit into the schedule and submit a proposal, if it fits.

Offer parent or Head Start teachers scholarships.

Meeting attendees brainstormed what other benefits members might want: publication? Webinar? Blog? Social networking? (EC could get our own Facebook page but we will have to

check with NAGC)

Our **NEWSLETTER** continues to be published by Denise Drain. Thank you! As always, we are looking for articles, lessons or reflections on teaching young children. This is not a sophisticated publication so members should not be intimidated! It could be a short article or idea. Please send submissions to Barb or Denise (denisedrain@hotmail.com)

The review process for next year's **PROGRAM** is starting soon. Next year's theme will be "21st Century Skills." Proposals will be due at the end of January and reviewers will have 2-3 weeks to review, score and send them into Ellen, the Program Chair. Thank you to the eight people who have signed up to review! Your input will definitely help in the process.

Other **BRAINSTORMING** ideas were:

- Team with *Creativity Network* in New Orleans
- Upload short videos of teachers in action
- Use Survey Monkey as an evaluative tool next year
- Offer a program after a short business meeting

One **IDEA** that seemed to catch fire at the Network Meeting was to encourage every attendee in New Orleans to bring at least one book to support literacy in the state. Details will be released as we get closer to the conference.

Thank you to all who were able to attend. I know that a few people contacted me and were unable to attend because they were presenting during that time. We will do our best next year to make sure that doesn't happen!

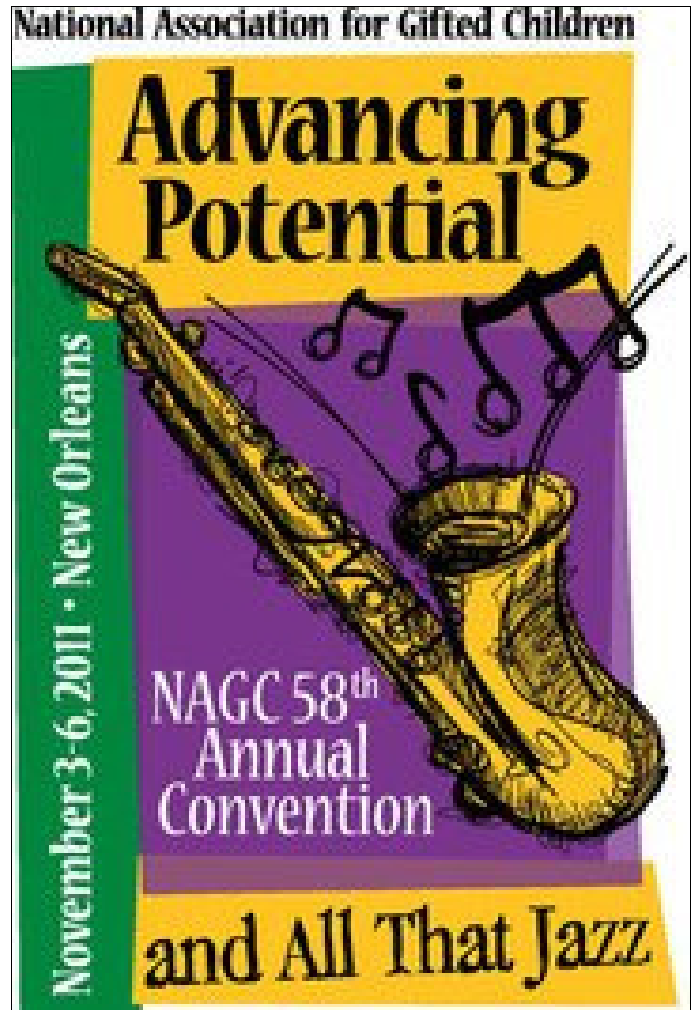




PARENTING FOR HIGH POTENTIAL

PHP is the publication designed for parents who want to make a difference in their children's lives, who want to develop their children's gifts and talents, and who want to help them develop their potential to the fullest.

When you renew your membership to NAGC, you may choose PHP as your publication. (<http://www.nagc.org/membershipcategories.aspx>)



The 2011 NAGC Annual Convention

<http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=2692>
OR

Like Us on Facebook!

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/NAGC-2011-Convention-New-Orleans-La/174579399259450>

Apply for a

\$500 grant

to help with NAGC Conference Expenses!
Look for more information in the near future.

Early and sustained access to high-end curriculum: Preparing more African American gifted learners for the future

By Joy Lawson Davis

Introduction

Nationwide, there are policy makers, leaders in gifted and general education, families, politicians and scholars who continue to have discussions related to the issue of under-representation of African American children and other minority groups in gifted programs. The data is clear. African American students represent 18% of the general school aged population in America, however they still only represent 8% of those students identified as gifted who are served in gifted education programs in schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). These numbers are unacceptable. Identification is a 'hot topic' during most of these discussions. Less frequently discussed are curriculum and instructional methodologies and teacher beliefs and dispositions towards students.

As the general education landscape is increasingly layered with topics related to the achievement gap and how educators can better prepare all students to be their best, perhaps at this juncture, we should be having more conversations about instruction that will improve educational outcomes for all and less about formal identification. Tragically, most Black students have traditionally been relegated to instructional environments where basic skills, low expectations and remedial instruction are the norm.

This has come about over generations of historical discriminatory practices in schools across America. As a result, the achievement gap between Black and White students continues to widen. Focusing on new identification methodologies in gifted education without simultaneously focusing on changing instruction has left us in a quandary.

As we turn our attention to teaching and learning practices with traditionally under-served groups (including African American students) in gifted education, we should look more closely at findings of at least four specific Javits grants over the past ten years that have yielded very successful results in these areas. This article will provide a 'bird's eye view' what those grant projects have in common and how they can serve to inform us as we develop innovative and visionary instructional programs that will simultaneously increase achievement for all students and better prepare high potential African American learners for success in the future.

Early and sustained access to high-end learning works~

Project UStars examined the use of a comprehensive model for identification and service delivery, which included a tool designed to recognize gifted characteristics in student participants. This **project** (awarded to research scientists at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) was designed to recognize talent potential in underrepresented populations and enhance their academic programming through a literacy-based science program. Providing teacher training in gifted characteristics and the use of higher level literary analysis and science exploration skills enabled UStars teachers to see gifted behaviors

emerge in students while being exposed to the specialized curriculum. Since the conclusion of the program, Project U-STARS PLUS has been adopted in five states across the country and successfully improved gifted services for early elementary students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Coleman & Coltrane-Shah, 2004).

Project Breakthrough, an award granted to the South Carolina Department of Education, demonstrated the importance of exposure to high-level curriculum for identified 'at-risk' learners. The project's participants were students and teachers from three schools (majority of students in the participating schools were low income African American). Project goals were - to improve the student performance in the core content areas and to enable the identification of more low-income African American students as gifted. The result of the three year project was a threefold increase in the identified gifted population; overall increase in achievement levels of participating students; and attitudinal shifts demonstrated by teachers as they discussed the training and experiences with students after using high level curriculum (Swanson, 2006). In post implementation interviews, teachers commented that students' abilities to make connections, analyze, and retain information were greatly improved over previous responses to instruction. The study revealed that project students rose to the challenge of the higher-level curriculum, thus, achievement increased in the content areas covered by the project units (Swanson, 2006).

Project Athena, another three-year project, was awarded to The College of William & Mary. It was designed to assess a nontraditional identification protocol for identifying low income learners for gifted programs

and the effects of high-level content-based curriculum on the achievement of diverse learners of varied ability levels. Among the study participants were 2,770 students attending Title I schools across three states. 53.5% of the participating students were from culturally diverse groups-including African American students (Bracken, VanTassel-Baska, Brown & Feng, 2007). As a result of the project, Athena identified nearly twice as many Title I students as gifted as compared to participating districts' identification procedures. Athena's curriculum, while designed for gifted learners, also yielded higher educational outcomes for all learners in the participating districts over the three year period (Bracken et al, 2007).

Most recently and perhaps with the most impressive findings, **Project Bright IDEA**, has demonstrated that when all students are exposed to 'gifted methodologies' the result is a shift in teaching and learning and thus, in the entire schooling experience. Project Bright IDEA was developed by a team of researchers and scholars from Duke University and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The premise behind Bright *IDEA* (*IDEA* is an acronym for Interest Development Early Abilities) is that gifted instructional methods have the potential to alter the quality of instruction for all students, thus allowing students in regular classroom settings to have the benefit of being exposed to learning experiences traditionally taught only in gifted education classes. The Project model was implemented in 11 North Carolina districts, with high free and reduced lunch populations (some as high as 90%) that are also culturally diverse (majority African American, Hispanic and other children of color).

The model included intensive teacher training and implementation of the gifted methodologies with students in grades K-2 (North Carolina Department of Education, 2011).

The grant findings indicate an increased level of achievement of the 10,000 students in the treatment group as compared to students with similar demographics in non-treatment groups. Additionally, findings report that teacher dispositions, behaviors and attitudes toward the low income diverse population of students to be dramatically changed. Finally, an increase in the number of students identified as gifted after participating in Bright IDEA classes substantially exceeds that of students who did not participate in the project (Jackson, 2011).

Preparing high ability Black students for success in the future

All of the projects noted above have five key features in common: *teachers are trained to use gifted education methodologies with ALL students; students are expected to meet the curriculum goals of producing at higher levels of understanding (more critical thinking, creative thinking, metacognitive/reflective thinking, abstract language than in traditional K-3 classrooms); achievement for all students increases after use of the gifted methodologies in classrooms; increased numbers of low income, culturally diverse students (including African American) are identified for gifted programs over time, and teacher attitudes, dispositions, expectations are notably changed after training and interaction with ALL students using gifted methodologies.*

In this century, we need schools to prepare students to think, not ‘dumb-down’ the curriculum, we need schools to expect that Black students have the potential to excel, and to have teachers who will teach with those high expectations in mind at all times. In essence, what has happened through these programs is that we have evidence that all children can learn at higher levels early (including African American children) and as a result, more African American students can be better prepared for high expectations in the 21st century. Black students with high potential deserve to be treated as others are treated- as though they are smart, able to think critically, analyze, problem-solve, and are just as gifted as others.

In my recently released book, *Bright, Talented and Black: A guide for Families of African American Gifted Learners*, I share with families and educators the challenges that black gifted student face each day in our schools (Davis, 2010). Being in schools where teachers have low expectations is destroying the hopes, dreams, and potential of thousands of students on a daily basis. Classrooms where students are not required to do anything except learn basic skills and regurgitate information are setting students up- not for the future, but for failure.

The projects summarized in this article provide strong evidence that early and sustained access to high-end curriculum works and that it can be effectively administered to large groups of students by well-trained teachers with high expectations. These types of experiences will better prepare high potential Black students (and all participating in these programs) for high-level learning opportunities in Honors, Advanced Placement, and other more rigorous

courses offered in middle school, high school, and college. Without these early experiences, unfortunately, untold numbers of Black students with high potential will be not be prepared for challenging and rigorous coursework, and may never reach their full potential. These students deserve opportunities to demonstrate their genius, engaging them in stimulating, engaging them in experiences beginning with early childhood provide just the chance that so many of them are waiting for.

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- Dr. Joy Davis is Assistant Professor of Education at University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She is also a Gifted and Diversity Consultant at Creating Positive Futures. Her latest book, *Bright, Talented, & Black: A Guide for Families of African American Gifted Learners* is available from [NAGC](http://www.nagc.org) and Great Potential Press. She is a long-time member of National Association for Gifted Children and can be reached at: jld6639@louisiana.edu.



Language Arts Lesson: Signs

Level: Kindergarten

Focus: Language Arts

Materials: Drawing paper and crayons or markers; Pictures of signs for students to identify.

Characteristics of the gifted to target: Application of Knowledge; Creative/Productive Thinking

Relate to prior experience: Ask students where they have seen signs. Lead a discussion of signs they have seen on their way to school, near their home, etc. Show Students pictures of a few signs that will be familiar to them and ask them to identify what the mean is of each sign. Ask questions such as “What did they look like?” or “What do we need signs to do for us?” “Where do you see signs in the classroom?” “In the school?” Can you think of other kinds of signs? (signs of fall, signs of a cold, signs that someone has been there.)

Explore—Using the Senses: Where should there be a sign that there is not one? What would it look like?

Analyze and attach meaning: Tell or read the story of the Three Little Pigs. What signs might there have been in the story? Where might the pigs have needed a sign? What sign would they need? What would it look like? What kind of sign might other characters in the story have needed?

Think (critical and creative): Create a sign that would be needed in the story of the Three Little Pigs. OR Create a new sign that your school needs. OR Create a sign for your classroom. Make your sign creative and colorful. Present your sign to your classmates and explain its meaning.

Evaluate: Look for creativity and critical thinking.

Mission of the Early Childhood Network

The Network's mission is to maintain and promote an attitude of inquiry and to disseminate information in the areas of early childhood gifted:

- 1) identification and assessment (establish a rationale that supports early identification of giftedness; establish a resource guide to instruments and procedures for early identification; develop suggestions for the use of assessment information in effective educational planning);
- 2) curricula and programs (develop criteria for appropriate curricula and/or programs; identify appropriate curriculum materials; identify program models, implementation strategies, evaluation methods; design staff development materials and methodologies);
- 3) research (create a solid research base; design and implement studies that address current needs in the area of early childhood gifted children); and 4) parenting (facilitate and support parent networks and advocacy groups; develop materials for effective parenting of early childhood gifted children).