

Teaching **for high potential**

Fantasy and Science Fiction: New Worlds for Gifted Minds!

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How many of the following are you familiar with: *Harry Potter*, *the Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Eragon*, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*? As an educator of the gifted, odds are that you have encountered most, if not all of these literary titles while glancing across your students' desks in recent years. Long assumed to be favorites of the gifted, fantasy and science fiction literature now account for 10% of fiction book sales nationwide (Hartwell, 1996, p. 304), and researchers estimate that nearly half of the highly gifted enjoy these genres (Lovecky, 1994). This revelation is nothing new however, considering that Terman noticed a link between giftedness and interest in scientific stories or folk tales in the 1940's (Link, 1984, p. 16), and the *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking* awards extra points to students who integrate fantastic elements into their pictorial answers (Torrance, 1974). Research literature is also flooded with anecdotal reports of gifted children clinging to their favorite fantasy and science fiction titles, such as Gross's (2000) description of a gifted child who taught himself to read by age 3, completed C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* series by 4, and fought at age 5 to reclaim his copy of *The Hobbit* from a kindergarten teacher who confiscated it over worries that it might give him nightmares. What is it about these stories that so captivates the minds of our gifted students? One possible explanation originates in Dabrowski's theory of overexcitabilities; part of which claims that gifted individuals experience higher levels of intellectual, imaginal, and emotional stimulation (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984) all found in heavy doses in fantasy and science fiction novels. If this is the case, what lessons can educators of the gifted apply to their own teaching styles and classrooms as a result?

Dabrowski's Theory

Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902-1980) survived two World Wars and 18 months in communist imprisonment, feats that led him to question the influential differences between moral and immoral individuals. After decades of psychological evaluations with gifted children, he devised a theory linking advanced moral/emotional growth potential to the appearance of "overexcitabilities" (or literally translated "supersensitivities") within five domains: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984). According to Dabrowski's theory, these overexcitabilities not only hint at advanced moral/emotional growth capacity, but also exist in higher proportion among gifted individuals. Three of these, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional, have been shown to occur in high rates within gifted populations and also may help to explain the reported links between gifted children and fantasy/science fiction literature (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984). Lengthy novels, multi-book series, moral quandaries, complex character back-stories, scientific discussion, and real-world historical references are commonly occurring elements of these genres. Imaginationally, these non-reality based fiction genres create entire worlds to explore, far beyond the experiences of daily life. It is not uncommon, for instance, for these novels to include multi-page maps to help readers visualize the fictional continents, planets, or galaxies where the tale unfolds. Emotionally, intense dramas of character tension, struggles of good versus evil and meaningful questions as to humanity's place in the universe dominate these stories. Invested readers may feel bittersweet joy if a hero sacrifices himself to save his friends, or feel stunned and

relieved when time travel results in the character's rescue. If gifted children possess an increased capacity for intellectual, imaginal, and emotional potential, it is no wonder why they find enjoyment in these remarkable genres. Fantasy and science fiction each stretch readers' creativity as they encounter the unusual and unexpected. This conclusion begs two pertinent questions: (a) What lessons can classroom teachers take from such an understanding? and (b) How can they best direct these interests for positive academic and affective results?

Embrace Creative Depth

If imaginal creativity captivates our gifted students, educators should develop performance tasks commensurate to their interests and abilities. Students who read science fiction might enjoy being given

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the geological and atmospheric details of a fictional planet and apply science to design organisms that could flourish there. Students who enjoy fantasy and classical mythology might similarly enjoy the challenge of identifying five modern cultural values and composing original fables illustrating these ideas. Fantasy and science fiction reward creativity and imagination, and educators should strive to do the same. Classroom projects should not just involve creative aspects, they should *require* them. The "mile wide and surface deep" criticism of modern education provides a serious challenge. Teachers should respond by encouraging students to dig deeply and show their full potential, using every ounce of creativity they possess.

Aim to Motivate

Cognitive science teaches us that students are best equipped to master knowledge in which they demonstrate an interest (Caine & Caine, 1995), yet how many educators administer interest inventories before beginning to teach classroom lessons? If we hope to engage our students' minds on a deep and meaningful level, it would be wise to teach to their interests in a manner they do not often receive in traditional classrooms. Doing so draws on prior knowledge, increases the complexity of their conceptual understandings, and encourages students to take a leading role in their own educational process. The classic adage "Give a man a fish..." encapsulates this value perfectly, and if educators seek to empower students to direct their own learning processes they would be wise to heed its lessons. Some gifted students may be motivated more by mystery than science fiction or by music rather than fantasy. If so, ask them to write a short mystery or musical to be performed for the class revolving around a recent lesson. In addition to positive effects on motivation, linking classroom studies to personal interests will also help your students with long-term recall as well (Naceur & Schiefele, 2005).

Encourage Affective Discussion

Educators and counselors have found that discussion of affective issues can often be drawn from popular literature and films. This lends particular credence to claims by Black (2003) that fantasy and science fiction literature can be "a valuable tool for meeting the needs to (a) engage gifted imaginations, (b) help the gifted to understand better their personal needs and conflicts, and (c) provide them the tools to reason through deeper meanings of the universe" (p. 47). Educators of the gifted should use these books and films as stepping stones to deeper discussion, relating textual or cinematic moments to the actual

social and emotional experiences of gifted children. Fantasy and science fiction routinely pose questions related to identity, talent, morality, and peer relations. Teachers should not shy away from exploring these topics. For example, a teacher may wish to discuss Harry Potter with her class as a means of subtly initiating a discussion on individuality and "feeling different," or might choose to use Luke Skywalker as an example of a hero who never gave up or surrendered to adversity. Using popular stories and imagery as a starting point for serious conversation often relieves pressure and makes students feel interested and relaxed, and is a great way to foster meaningful classroom discussions.

Keep a Broad Perspective

The Greeks had Odysseus, the Romans had Aeneas, and the Anglo-Saxons had King Arthur. What mythological figures do our modern day American students have to teach them the values of right and wrong? Although he has been an American icon for nearly 70 years, we hardly seem to give Batman the credit he's due! Although I do not recommend reading comic books to your gifted students, the lesson within holds true: educational opportunities often lie in unexpected places. Traditionalists may scoff at the notion of finding academic and emotional value in Batman tales, but could a creative instructor find opportunities to link such stories to actual educational objectives? The answer is almost surely yes. Through keeping a broad educational perspective, everyday experiences can become hidden treasures for the creative teacher in search of new instructional approaches. With this understanding, teachers of the gifted should renew their dedication to using whatever means necessary to ensure productive classroom learning. If your students are fans of science fiction, archaeology, jazz music, or fantasy, each provides a unique and enriched opportunity in which meaningful learning can take place. Valuing these opportunities not only affirms the worth of the subjects themselves, but also communicates to students that their personal interests are valid and worthwhile. Regardless of age, that is a message we would all be glad to hear.

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Recommendations for Further Reading

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The information contained in this article aligns with the following NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards: Curriculum Instruction (2.0, and 5.0) and Socio-Emotional Guidance and Counseling (4.0). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit www.nagc.org.

Art Across the Curriculum: Language Arts

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Recess had just ended, and Mr. Lopez's fourth graders excitedly came into the room talking with one another. Damien suddenly noticed that the print Mr. Lopez kept on the easel had been changed. "Guess what, everyone! We have a new painting today!" he announced. Everyone settled into their seats and read the prompt Mr. Lopez had written on the board for their afternoon writing: "Take a few minutes to observe Edvard Munch's The Scream. Describe the emotion expressed in the painting using at least three adjectives and two adverbs. Explain how Munch's use of color and texture expresses the emotion."

Arts Integration

As demonstrated by the scenario above, integrating art into the classroom encompasses more than the physical production of pieces. According to Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), the visual arts not only instruct students in the process of creating art, but also teach students about visual interpretation, reinforce critical-thinking skills, and provide opportunities for creative expression.

Teachers can enhance learning in any subject area through careful integration of the fine arts into the curriculum. This integration should provide a deep understanding that is rooted in the core content of both areas making it more than craft projects to supplement the curriculum. When multi-disciplines are honored in the curriculum, gifted learners relish opportunities to make deep, intellectual connections leading toward richer understanding.

Art and Language Arts

The process of creating is fundamental to both writing and art production. Just as students use the mechanics of grammar and spelling to form sentences in their writing, they use the motor skills of drawing, sculpting, or painting and the rules of perspective to create artwork. In both writing and the fine arts, the final product is more than strings of words and sentences or the lines and colors on a page.

The process of creating, critiquing, and appreciating the final artwork is parallel to analyzing and enjoying a finished piece of writing. Common to both art and reading is the identification of subject, setting, and characterization. Higher-level processes such as inferring, evaluating, and critically analyzing can extend the learning of the young artist and reader. These strategies can be used as discussion topics in class, writing prompts for independent work, or as

extension activities outside of the regular curriculum.

Writing

Art prints of any size can be used as interesting writing prompts for students to improve descriptive and elaborative writing. For example, students could be asked to name as many adjectives as they can that begin with the letter "b" to describe the artwork. Along with increasing students' flexibility in thinking, this activity also reinforces the objective of observing characteristics of artwork. For creative writing, students could be asked to write a narrative about the artist who created the painting or the subject of the painting.

The following integrated lesson of Japanese art and poetry demonstrates the parallel processes of creating. After viewing traditional Sumi-e paintings, the class discusses the aesthetics of Japanese painting, including simplicity of line and color and elegance of technique. Then students practice creating lines in the Japanese style using India



"Haiku Sumi-e Tree"
By Chad, 3rd Grade

ink or black paint and thick brushes. Then the students create an original painting of a simple subject from nature. Using the same elegant choice in words as they did in lines, students then write a Haiku poem describing their painting.

Reading

Picture books can be used to introduce art concepts, just as art prints can be used to introduce literary elements. For example, Eric Carle's books for primary grades are a great introduction to collages. There are parallels between elements of art compositions and parts of a story, such as landscape and setting, subjects and characters, and focal point and main idea. For example, a painting such as Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) could be used to teach about characters and setting in a story. Gifted students particularly are able to make these types of connections between reading and art.

Art prints also are excellent for practicing the skill of inferring. A unit integrating the theme of discrimination and the artwork of Norman Rockwell illustrates the connec-

tions between inferring in art and reading. To introduce the unit, the teacher guides a discussion about *The Problem We All Live With* (1964), leading students to infer the discrimination faced by the young girl in the painting. After reflecting with the students on the process of making inferences, the teacher reads Robert Coles's *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (1995) as the students make inferences during the reading. Students then individually reflect on discrimination faced in today's society and, in the style of Norman Rockwell, create their own *Saturday Evening Post* cover to illustrate it.

Deepening Understanding

Arts can be integrated effectively with language arts to enhance student learning in both disciplines. Gifted learners enjoy the connections they can draw between artwork and literature on a conceptual level. They benefit from the parallel processes of creating art and writing. These connections can be broadened by incorporating meaningful learning that integrates art across all disciplines.

Resources

- American Gothic* at the Art Institute in Chicago <http://www.artic.edu/aic/>
- Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) through the Getty Education Institute for the Arts <http://www.getty.edu/education/>
- Edvard Munch <http://www.edvard-munch.com/>
- Eric Carle <http://www.eric-carle.com/>
- Grant Wood <http://www.grantwoodstudio.org/>
- Haiku <http://www.poetryteachers.com/>
- Norman Rockwell <http://www.normanrockwell.com/>
- Sumi-e Painting <http://www.silverdragonstudio.com/sumi-e/>
- The Ruby Bridges Foundation <http://www.rubybridges.org/>

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iMATHination

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Mathematics and Beauty: *Aesthetic Approaches to Teaching Children* (Sinclair, 2006) has quickly become one of my favorites. In her book, she discusses the importance of encouraging our students to act as mathematicians and to view their work in ways they value and find pleasurable and satisfying. In support of her work she includes the following quotation.

Instead of starting with mathematical ideas, and then applying them we should start with problems or tasks, and as a result of working on these problems the children would be left with a residue of mathematics... that mathematics is what you have left over after you have worked on problems.

Approaching mathematical instruction in this way allows our students to do much more than learn how to apply mathematical methods in solving problems with known solutions. They become practicing mathematicians, solving problems within a relevant contextual framework that leads to layered, rich, and deep understanding of the concepts involved. Rather than working day after day on problems that are constructed to emphasize clarity and consistency, students learn how to cope with the uncertainty and ambiguity they encounter when faced with a problem-solving situation. Rather than formulating and solving problems, most mathematics textbook problems provide students opportunities to rework problems someone else has framed for them. In the video, *Let Us Teach Guessing*, Polya (1966) talks about these kinds of problems as uninteresting; the mathematics is all done and finding the solution is simply a matter of applying rules and procedures to replicate someone else's work. In contrast, Brown (1993) views mathematical problem solving as a condition that involves ambiguity and doubt; a process that provides challenge where students must be persistent in their search for a solution. With this approach, learning mathematics becomes more than simply learning rules and rhymes presented through direct instruction (Sinclair, 2006).

As an example, Sinclair (2006) tells us about the work of Zoe. The task she presented her students was to develop a classification system for polygons. Zoe's approach was based on symmetry; either the polygon had a line of symmetry or it did not. A group of her classmates choose a different approach based on the number of sides of a polygon. Each system was mathematically appealing and relevant to the students involved. When asked which system of classification was "better" Zoe responded, "You can't really say that one is better, they are just different" (Sinclair, p. 5). When pushed further Zoe admitted that she found her system more interesting than simply counting the number of sides. She could have picked a different basis for classification but her choice involved a concept she found appealing. In defense of her approach she discussed the binary nature of her system in contrast to the infinite number of categories possible when classifying by number of sides. A great deal of mathematical thinking was involved in analyzing and defending her choice over other methods chosen by her classmates. Zoe is developing the habits of mind needed to be a mathematician.

How can we create these kinds of situations for our students? I suggest the use of literature and non-fiction writing found in everyday newspapers and magazines. There are a number of great books out there to begin with such as Enzensberger's (1997) *The Number Devil*; Peterson and Henderson's (2000) *Math Trek: Adventures in the Math Zone*; Pappas's (1997) *The Adventures of Penrose the Mathematical Cat*; or, Neuschwander and Geehan's (2003) *Sir Cumference and the Sword in the Cone*. My current favorite is *Conned Again, Watson: Cautionary Tales of Logic, Math, and Probability* by Bruce, (2001). Each of the 12 chapters presents a different case solved by Sherlock Holmes using mathematics, yet the mathematics is not explicitly presented but rather left for the reader to explore. In Chapter 7, "Three Cases of Unfair Preferment", Holmes and Watson encounter several situations where an understanding of probability is necessary to solve the case. One of these situations involves a game in which three fair coins are tossed in succession. The objective is to choose one of the eight sequences that are possible. You win if your choice

occurs before that of your opponent. Bruce describes the conditions under which the game is played and Watson concludes that the game is fair only to later have Holmes point out the error in his thinking.

There are several ways I might use this chapter in my classroom. One would be to read the text to the student up to the point where Watson presents his theory and then ask the students to agree or disagree and defend their position before reading further. Another might be to read the chapter in its entirety and then ask the students to create similar cases to share with their classmates. Yet a third option would involve asking students to search current news articles for similar problems. The emphasis for students becomes the finding and solving good problems and then presenting and defending their solution(s). This provides them opportunities to engage in mathematical processes rather than just replicating the work of others. I cannot think of a better way to instill a deep, rich appreciation for the power of mathematics in our students.

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Technology Untangled

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That was Then; This is Now: Sputnik at 50 and the Google Lunar X Prize

That Was Then...

October 4, 2007, marked the 50th anniversary of the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union. This event was not only a technological marvel and milestone in science, but Sputnik also represents a watershed in the history of gifted education. In a single moment, a chord of fear was struck in the hearts of Americans. No longer was the U.S. the leader in intellectual innovations. Our sense of pride was crushed because the greatest minds of the enemy had outperformed us. The educational community responded with what Tannenbaum (1979) referred to as a "total talent mobilization" of the best and brightest students. As a result, gifted students were identified and acceleration, grouping, and telescoping opportunities were instituted in schools where programming had not previously existed. Gifted students were expected to excel in higher-level content and rapidly advance to more difficult course work to "fulfill their potential, and submit their abilities for service to the nation" (Tannenbaum, 1979, p. 12).

50 years later, the Soviet Union no longer exists and many of the gifted programs inspired by Sputnik have long since fizzled. Just as in the pre-Sputnik era, despite the dedicated work within the field of gifted education, little attention and resources are being devoted to identifying and providing services for the gifted. However, we may be on the brink of what could be a new Sputnik for the 21st century.

This Is Now...

Google has teamed with the X Prize Foundation to sponsor a global race to the moon. While it has been over 30 years since anyone has explored the moon and it may be another decade before any government agency decides to return, the Google Lunar X Prize, will award up to \$30 million to any non-government team that is able to land a craft on the moon and can complete the mission goals. The grand prize of \$20 million will be awarded to the first team to successfully soft land a craft that is capable of roving at least 500 meters and transmitting a Mooncast back to Earth. A Mooncast consists of a high-resolution panoramic photograph taken from the surface of the Moon, a self-portrait of the rover on the surface, HD video, and a transmission of a cached set of data loaded before the launch. In order to win the prize, the mission must be accomplished before December 31, 2012.

An additional \$5 million in bonus prizes may be awarded if additional goals are accomplished such as traveling more than 5 kilometers, photographing any Apollo mission artifacts, surviving a frigid lunar night (approximately 14.5 days), or discovering ice or water. Not to dissuade other teams from pursuing the goal, the second team to accomplish the primary goals of the mission will receive \$5 million.

While it is highly unlikely that a group of your current students will win the prize, this event can serve as a catalyst to motivate your students to pursue careers in the areas of science, technology, and math. To help capture the attention of your students, use the Google Moon tool to see photographs from the Apollo lunar missions and the locations from which they were taken. Also, when planning any study of space, do not overlook the wealth of free educational resources available from NASA. They have developed a curriculum unit entitled, "Exploring the Moon," designed to promote problem solving, communication skills, and teamwork. Finally, not to be missed is a new feature embedded in the latest edition of Google Earth called Sky. This function allows you to explore the heavens using the same interface as Google Earth. You can search for specific stars, planets, constellations and galaxies, or you can fly through space. Additional content, such as the Hubble Showcase and the User's Guide to Galaxies, is available via the dynamic layers.

While the world has changed dramatically over the past 50 years, the pendulum of education reform seems to have swung back to a pre-Sputnik era. In the age of NCLB, little attention is being paid to our talented youth. In a globalized world that has become increasingly "flat" (Friedman, 2007), we should consider what the reaction will be if a group does win the Google Lunar X Prize particularly if this group is not from the U.S. What will this mean for the American education system? Will this be a sign, as Sputnik was, that we are not adequately preparing our youth to participate and compete on a global level? Could this be a rebirth of the golden age of gifted education?

A generation of bright young people was inspired by the launch of Sputnik and the future of what could be. Certainly, most of us in gifted education know the story of Homer Hickam and the "rocket boys" who were roused by the launch of Sputnik. Now, with the Google Lunar X Prize, we may be inspiring a new generation to gaze up into the October sky and discover a whole new future.

For more information visit:

Google Lunar X Prize at <http://www.google-lunarxprize.org/>

Google Moon at <http://www.google.com/moon>

Google Earth / Sky at <http://earth.google.com/sky/skyedu.html>

NASA's "Exploring the Moon" Educator's Guide at <http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/topnav/materials/listbytype/Exploring.the.Moon.html>

Brian Housand at <http://brianhousand.googlepages.com>

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Books, Books, and More Books

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Picture Books in Secondary Schools

Picture books in the secondary classroom? You bet! That is what Books, Books, and More Books is all about. We began this column because of the expressed interest of secondary teachers on how we could effectively use picture books in high school classrooms. We find that the sophistication of this genre of literature in both text and illustration amazes both students and teachers. "The syntax, the use of sophisticated vocabulary, and quite often the complexity of plot surprise and amaze students thus making this genre an excellent vehicle for literary analysis. (Seney, THP Summer 2007)"

Uses of this genre show that it is, indeed, a very rich resource for the creative teacher. Reported uses of "kiddy lit" are to model analysis of literature with the literary elements of plot, characters, setting, theme, and style; as an introduction to a unit of study; as simply a fun read-aloud; as models for effective writing in terms of voice, mood, vocabulary, and audience; and one of my favorite uses as a means to integrate the arts into the curriculum. This brings us to our books for today.

The three books are *You Can't Take a Balloon into the Metropolitan Museum* (1998, Dial Books); *You Can't Take a Balloon into the National Gallery* (2000, Dial Books) and *You Can't Take a Balloon into the Museum of Fine Arts* (2002, Dial Books). All three are written and illustrated by the sister team of Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman and Robin Preiss Glasser. I first discovered Glasser as the "stand-in" illustrator for Judith Viorst's third "Alexander" book, *Alexander, Who's Not (Do you hear me? I mean it!) Going to Move* (1995, Atheneum Books). Glasser took over as Viorst's illustrator after the death of Viorst's long time collaborator, Ray Cruz. By the way, you can get all three of the Alexander books (And you should!) bound together in *Absolutely Positively Alexander: The Complete Stories* (1997, Atheneum Books). These are great stories for read-aloud. My favorite is *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (1972, Atheneum Books). This delightful story provides excellent "therapy" on those days when nobody, students and/or teachers, really want to work. I kept a copy in the chalkboard tray next to my classroom door, so it was readily available if either I or a student was having a bad day. Even my graduate students demanded it as our class starter read-aloud on many occasions. Really, a truly wonderful little book!

I have long delighted in *You Can't Take a Balloon into the Metropolitan Museum* (1998, Dial Books). I have used and touted this book in several of my graduate and undergraduate classes as an excellent and very creative example of a textless book AND as a great way to integrate art, art history, and art appreciation into the classroom. So I was pleased when I found the second and third books in the series in 2000 and 2002. Because of limited space, we will look at my favorite, *National Gallery*.

Weitzman and Glasser have created a visual tale of a young girl who with her grandmother and her little brother visits the National Gallery in Washington D.C. Since she has visited a museum before, the girl knows that her balloon will not be allowed in the museum. But no problem! She will just ask someone at the door to watch this balloon, which, by the way is orange. The color of the balloon provides a very nice contrast in the illustrations.

A young lady photographer near the entrance offers to take care of the balloon. Then through a quick sequence of events, a "gimmick" that becomes a special feature of this book, the balloon gets away and is off on a great adventure through Washington D.C. with our photographer hot in pursuit. Inside the National Gallery, the girl, her brother, and her grandmother view great works of art that are paralleled to the chase outside. This was the genius of the first book and an approach that is really quite wonderful.

Then through another quick sequence of events, the photographer is joined in her balloon chase by a television news crew. The sights of the National Mall are wonderfully presented and in some cases toured, such as the trip up the 898 stairs of the Washington Monument only to have the balloon fly off to join some wonderful kites being flown on the Mall. But the sisters have added something new and really quite fun in this book

as they explore and extend their version of the textless genre. They have added sketches and drawings of 32 famous American heroes and historical characters throughout the book. So part of the fun of this book is to find and identify these individuals. An identification list is provided, but with the titillating note that the list is not meant to be comprehensive. So there may be more characters to search for. This is taking Where's Elmo to a new and fun level. On the front end-page there is a wonderful "map" of the Mall identifying the buildings from the Capitol Building to the Lincoln Memorial, worth taking on your next trip to Washington D.C.

There are many vignettes throughout the book and while it is difficult to select one, I believe that my favorite is on page 31. The balloon has made it into the House of Representatives where a legislative debate is going on. In the meantime the girl, her grandmother, and her brother are looking at George Bellows' *Both Members of the Club*, which depicts two wrestlers in the ring. The action in the House parallels this picture. A pretty good and humorous comment, if you ask me!

This is one of those books that you have to keep coming back to. Each time, you will find something that was missed before. At this point, I have located almost all of the 32 characters. The sisters have really extended and expanded the concept that they introduced in their first book. There is a wonderful surprise ending of who actually catches and returns the balloon. You will have to look for yourself to find out, but I am sure that you will be pleased and tickled with Weitzman and Glasser's wonderful sense of humor.

You Can't Take a Balloon into the National Gallery is sure to delight you and your students. You can easily integrate discussions on the various pieces of art depicted throughout the book, which are identified in a glossary. These discussions could easily lead into researching the painting, the author, and its social and/or political comment. Again, the use of all three of these delightful books is only limited by your imagination. One of my graduate students used these books to collaborate with the art teacher in her school. The results, both graphically and in writing, were amazing.

We really would like to know how you are using children's literature in your classroom and if you are not using this rich resource, I encourage you to investigate how you can enhance your instruction and your gifted students' learning by bringing this highly creative genre of literature into your classroom.

The Arts: Minds in Motion

By Gail N. Herman, Garrett College
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Finding and Encouraging Music Potential through the 'MusicLink'

There are many ways to encourage, find, and develop musical talent. One is to work one-on-one with a student and another is to work within a class structure. This column highlights a program that can do both.

The Arts Division of the National Association for Gifted Children strives to help teachers find the research, resources, and ideas needed to encourage and develop the talents of their students. Music teachers, classroom teachers, and other adults often find students who have exceptional potential but have no chance to study music intensively in order to further develop that talent. Luckily teachers, church choir leaders, community leaders, and even parents can now ask for help from a foundation called MusicLink. According to their website,

MusicLink® Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides long-term musical training and opportunities to promising students in financial need across the country. Nominated students who meet MusicLink eligibility criteria are linked with professional music teachers who provide ongoing partial to full scholarship lessons for as long as the child wishes to learn.

Now that's a dream come true! Over 2,800 students have been "linked" with special teachers, music camps, and other chances to further develop their musical skills and talent. And it all happened because of the generosity of teachers who have volunteered over 200,000 hours; businesses that have assisted MusicLink in obtaining instruments, discounts, and lessons; and corporations and other foundations such as the Jack Kent Cook Foundation that have donated money to assist MusicLink in the organization and administration of this worthy program. The fourth reason MusicLink is so successful is because of its Executive Director, Dr. Joanne Haroutounian, former Chair of the Arts Division of the National Association for Gifted Children. Haroutounian is the author of *Kindling the Spark: Recognizing and Developing Musical Talent*, published by Oxford University Press in 2002.

Haroutounian first envisioned MusicLink while she was researching and writing her dissertation on talent identification and development. During that period she came across a single meaningful sentence. It mentioned that the easiest way to develop talent was to connect a musically talented student with a private teacher and sit back and see what happens. Haroutounian said, "When I read that, I said to myself, 'I can do this!'" And so she did. Her mission became helping children with musical potential to receive "opportunities to nurture this musical promise to its fullest extent." Musical talent can be recognized for its own worth. Some students show their intelligence through music, not linguistic talent.

Success stories about musical promise come from 40 different states and include students who are academically gifted, blind, autistic, dyslexic, have Asperger's Syndrome, or come from low-income families. One autistic child was paired with a music teacher who had an interest in teaching autistic children. Two months were spent just helping and teaching the child to sit on the piano bench. The child's mother said, "You are the first person I've ever heard him speak to." This student learned to play piano! The program is inclusive. Haroutounian says, "Homeless students share that same drive and desire to have music in their lives." The process to obtain support from MusicLink is as follows:

1. A student is nominated from a school, church, community program, or student's family
2. The student must show "promise"
3. MusicLink, links the promising student with a music teacher or a musician

Financial need is determined by eligibility for the free/reduced school lunch program or financial equivalency for home-schooled children. To learn how to bring MusicLink to your community, to participate in MusicLink, or nominate students go to the website at www.musiclinkfoundation.org.

AVAILABLE FROM NAGC.ORG

Teachers can find a wealth of authoritative and helpful resources on the NAGC website.

Go to www.nagc.org to find:

- *NAGC Pre-K-12 Gifted Program Standards*
- *Connecting for High Potential*
- Information on Hot Topics
- Gifted Advocacy Materials
- Gifted in the News
- Books on Best Practices
- Competitions for Students

For your Students' Parents you'll find material and information on:

- Understanding your Gifted Child
- Supplemental and Summer Programs in the Resource Directory
- Social and Emotional Issues
- Formal and Informal Assessments

And more...

Differentiation in the English Literature Classroom through Highly Moral Literature

By Scott Peters, Purdue University

The current state of education for many gifted and talented students involves many of them spending the school day in a standard general education classroom. In fact, it is not uncommon for the ability level in a typical classroom to range from conventional special education students upwards through those in the gifted range. This situation has led to sometimes vague and nearly always clichéd practices of differentiation. While ideal in nature, wide ranging differentiation for the kinds of abilities mentioned above is often a daunting task. Teachers already have to remediate materials, which is difficult enough without having to accelerate and enrich them as well. In addition, some topics or materials are simply not well-suited to such differentiation and leave the teacher with little to work with and the student with even less to learn with. English literature curriculum for a given grade level serves as an excellent venue to differentiate activities for mainstreamed gifted students because it tends to be standardized within a state or district.

Issues embedded in the Classics

In addition to the required grade level classics, young adult (YA) novels have become a staple of the American English classroom. Such books cover student-friendly topics at an accessible level, albeit often at a level beneath that of a gifted student in the regular classroom. Instead of simply abandoning YA books and programs such as Accelerated Reader, teachers can employ specific selections dealing with highly moral topics, or direct gifted students towards addressing highly moral issues in their literature selections. The reason this can work so well is that young adult novels tend to address issues involving moral or ethical dilemmas such as a character doing what is right versus what is popular, choosing friends, death of a family member, racism, honesty, family relationships, law, religion, violence, and much more. While these topics are popular because of the text-to-self connections they can create with all students, they can also serve as a means by which gifted students can investigate and question these issues beyond the scope of curriculum written for their age peers. For many schools, programs such as Accelerated Reader are required for all students regardless of ability level. This being

the case, there are ways that educators can alter or add to such programs to make them beneficial to gifted and talented students.

These investigative methods can be applied to the "classic" or classroom canon novel as well. Books such as *Julius Caesar*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *1984* present highly moral issues that are open game for gifted students, mainly because gifted students tend to be more emotionally sensitive, have a greater degree of empathy, a strong sense of justice, and greater interest in wide-ranging social issues (Davis & Rimm, 2004).

Updating Common Practice

In many cases, students are required to read a variety of the classics in order to pass a given grade. It must be noted that students must also read a book regardless of the match between interest, ability level, and level of emotional readiness. When a book is already chosen for the student, the teacher can direct the student's study toward higher-order issues including those dealing with moral and ethical concerns. An example is warranted to better illustrate this concept of using highly moral literature with young adults.

Every year thousands of students read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* sometime between seventh and tenth grade. If *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an Accelerated Reader book, the student will need to remember key facts in order to pass a computerized test. These facts focus on basic comprehension without much attention to in-depth understanding or higher-order thinking skills. Rather than simply leave gifted students at this basic level, teachers can engage them with additional activities.

Activities Related to Differentiation

Such activities can range from more in-depth questioning, allowing for extra credit or alternative assessment presentations on highly moral issues such as racism, or encourage the student to take on an assignment of interest in place of a final unit paper. An example of such a differentiated activity could involve a gifted student being encouraged to develop a project connecting

a young adult Accelerated Reader novel to a more classical one instead of writing a more traditional essay. Similarly, the student could be allowed to write a paper or create an alternative project such as a lesson on a more personalized or obscure interpretation of the book. In both of these instances, the student is allowed to choose the texts involved as well as the medium through which to demonstrate deeper understanding in addition to basic comprehension.

The point with these strategies is not simply to create more work, but to create more interesting and challenging work. Students can also expand on an area of interest while at the same time covering required topics or assignments. A student might address the moral issue of racism present in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by entering a writing competition in prose or poetry. Writing competitions are one medium that is starting to gain popularity as a means of motivating middle and high school students. Being able to see one's work in print is a powerful experience for any student.

Creating a cluster of more advanced students is also an option for the general education classroom. Students can discuss some of the larger issues in depth and engage in more in-depth exploration of a book beyond that of the general curriculum. While some students might be reading *Bucking the Sarge*, a teacher might make a cluster of gifted students who can select a more advanced book such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. This book has a number of topics for students to investigate as a group including things as close to some of them as education and honesty.

Huckleberry Finn is one of the most morally involved characters in all of world literature. This familiar 13-year-old boy deals with family struggles, honesty, right versus wrong, and issues of race. Today's students might not recognize the issues faced by Huckleberry as similar to their own. After such a classic novel is read, most students will be required to write an essay on some aspect of the book. Rather than dwelling on another person's literary interpretation of some aspect of the story, gifted students could be allowed to address the complexities of the human factor in a highly moral issue. For example, rather than being handed a teacher-made topic such as the Duke and the King as a metaphor for 19th century carpetbaggers (a typical interpretation) to write about, gifted students can be encouraged to examine the relationship between Huck and his various forms of family. This can be developed into a critical analysis based on primary and secondary

sources, or can be presented as a debate topic or other creative medium.

Differences in interpretations can in and of themselves serve as topics of interest in almost all novels and stories. The fact that books such as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are controversial can serve as a topic for gifted student to investigate. Not only does such a topic allow for greater enrichment and depth in a topic, but some authors even advocate for moral and character education through such topics and activities (Bohlin, 2004; Lamme, Krogh, & Yachmetz, 1992; Mills, 1987, 1988). While moral education is another issue altogether, being able to externalize some of these major issues for investigation can benefit the student long after the class is over. Small bits of encouragement and specialized direction on the part of the teacher can turn seemingly mundane and unenlightened activities into real learning for the gifted student in the regular classroom. Not only does such an idea allow for growth in a mainstreamed setting, but it does so with minimal additional work on the part of the instructor.

One of the best places to start implementing differentiation strategies such as those proposed here is by always having alternate assessments available to interested students and by always allowing for students to incorporate their interests into as many assignments and activities as possible. This can start out as small as having students work in reading circles grouped by book of interest once every few weeks, or become as large as having students develop their own final assessment project including grading guidelines. Many highly moral topics are well-suited for such strategies because such topics are inherently applicable to many students' lives.

An option for allowing for student choice in assessment options could include a three-choice system. The first choice is the most standard for education and reaches out to those students who are good at research papers and for whom alternate assessment options would not be of much interest. This option works well for those students who are good at school. The second option involves non-traditional assessment such as a presentation, debate, or creative media to be used in place of a more traditional paper. In this case the instructor still lays out the guidelines, but the student comes up with exactly what type of project will be used to demonstrate comprehension and understanding. The third option is the most open and as such requires the most work from the student. However, this work is a tradeoff for almost complete student con-

trol. One veteran Golden Apple award winning teacher termed this option Something More Important to You (SMITY). In this case, the student is allowed to propose nearly anything as a final assessment option. A formal proposal must be presented to the instructor that includes exactly what will be done and how the project is to be assessed. This final option is ideal for gifted students because it goes much more in depth into a topic than does writing a paper or presenting a PowerPoint. This kind of depth and focus is ideal for highly moral topics due to their depth and complexity.

Differentiation is a complex strategy with great potential to increase student learning. To keep from becoming overwhelmed by the idea of differentiating for 30 ability levels in every class, middle and high school teachers can begin by incorporating small strategies, such as those proposed by highly moral literature, into existing lessons and assignments. This strategy creates an additional level of depth to traditional lesson and assignments while also including opportunities for student choice and interest.

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The information contained in this article aligns with the following NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Program Standards: Curriculum Instruction (2.0, 3.0, and 5.0) and Socio-Emotional Guidance and Counseling (4.0). For a complete copy of the Standards, visit www.nagc.org.

Resources for Teachers

Convention CD-ROM

Even if you were at the November NAGC Annual Convention, it is likely you were not able to go to

all the sessions in which you were interested. Now you can download individual sessions for just \$16 to \$20 per session. This is a valuable, yet affordable, professional development tool. To see the sessions available and to download, go to <http://www.prolibraries.com/nagc>.



Alternative Assessment with Gifted and Talented Children

edited by Joyce VanTassel-Baska

Do you know the latest assessment tools to use with gifted

children? This recently published book will bring you up-to-date. This is the second in The Critical Issues in Equity and Excellence in Gifted Education Series. The first book, *Serving Gifted Learners Beyond the Traditional Classroom: A Guide to Alternative Programs and Services*, is also available in the NAGC Bookstore.

Member price: \$31.45

Non-member price: \$34.95

Differentiated Instructional Strategies: One Size Doesn't Fit All

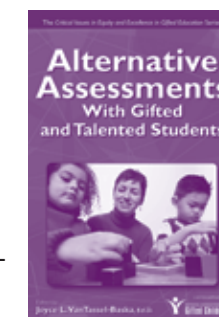
by Gayle H. Gregory and Carolyn Chapman

Differentiating in the classroom is not easy to do. This book puts together a strategy you can follow to meet the needs of all your students and is filled with practical techniques and processes you can use.

Member price: \$30.55

Non-member price: \$33.95

To order the above books, go to <http://www.nagc.org> and click on "Online Store."



The Curriculum Connection

By Jennifer Beasley, University of Virginia
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Preassessing Prior Knowledge: Mind the Gap!

This August I attended the World Conference for Gifted and Talented Children at the University of Warwick, England. It was a unique experience to spend several days in the company of educators from 69 countries united in discussion about meeting the needs of gifted and talented children. I had very little experience with attending conferences of this magnitude, much less being so far away from my home. I took full advantage by making sure I spent a least a couple of days in London.



Traveling around London required knowledge of the London Underground, which is one of the city's most convenient public transportation options. Each time I got on and off of "the Tube," an automated voice kept reminding me to "Mind the Gap!" For a long time, I wasn't sure what this meant. Finally I realized that the voice was alerting me to the gap that was formed between the rail car and the platform.

At times the gap was quite large and I had to hop from door to platform. After a time, the message became redundant to me. I thought to myself, "Why do they need to keep reminding me to 'mind the gap'?"

Back at the conference at the University of Warwick, I devoted much of my time attending sessions on curriculum for the gifted. I was fascinated to hear about the different ways teachers were meeting the needs of their students. Teachers were reporting success integrating a wide variety of curricular models in their classrooms. It was during one particular session that I was reminded of the lesson I had learned during my trips along the London Tube. In the session a group of researchers were reporting the results of using a particular curricular model. They had confessed that one unit hadn't resulted in the achievement scores they had predicted. One of the reasons they cited was that many students didn't have familiarity or experience with the unit topic and it had resulted in decreased student achievement as compared to other topics. It occurred to me that perhaps someone should have warned, "Mind the Gap!" before proceeding with the unit. In this case, the gap between what we are teaching and the prior knowledge and skills students bring with them into the unit.

Preassessments Pave the Way to Success

Gifted students are diverse in the ways they approach problems, produce work, and even collaborate. They bring into classrooms a wide variety of experiences and background knowledge. Although students may be identified as gifted and talented, it does not necessarily follow that they are gifted in all subjects. So how do we, as teachers, "mind the gap" by understanding the needs to be addressed prior to instruction? Effective educators adopt the philosophy that assessment is a part of an instructional cycle, where information is used to provide feedback on the effectiveness of instruction and to plan the next stage of instruction (Callahan, in press). A teacher uses one type of formative assessment, the preassessment, to adjust – or inform, ongoing instruction and learning. Formative assessments can be given throughout the learning activity as a way to measure students' understanding. It serves the same purpose as the announcement on the Tube to "Mind the Gap!" It is a way for me as a teacher to keep where my students are on my mind at all times.

Signposts along the Way

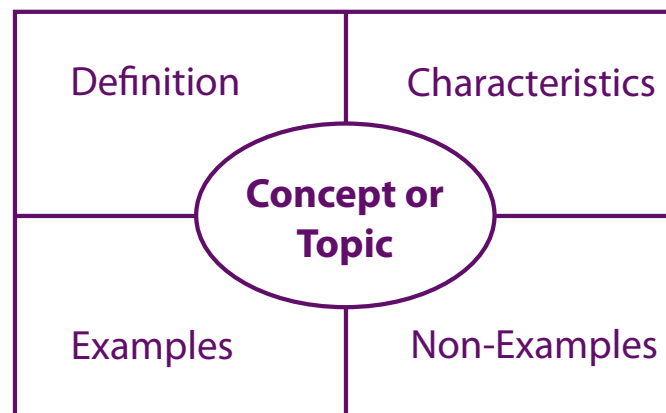
Assessing students during a lesson or unit doesn't necessarily mean a lengthy drawn out test or quiz. There are some assessments that can be low prep and easily incorporated into our daily routines. To get you started, here are two that have been helpful to me:

The 3-2-1 Card

The 3-2-1 Card was originally introduced to me through Carol Tomlinson's (2003) work on differentiation. This can be used as an ongoing assessment during the instructional cycle. Students are given an index card at the end of the lesson and asked to provide: 3 things they learned from today's lesson, 2 questions they still have, and 1 thing they would like to learn more about. These cards can be collected at the end of the lesson as their "ticket to leave" while the teacher compiles the information and uses the assessment to plan the next learning experience.

The Frayer Diagram

The Frayer Diagram (below) was designed by Frederick Frayer who believed that learners develop their understanding of concepts by studying them in a relational manner. Before beginning a unit or lesson, you can have students fold their paper into four sections. Have them put the topic or concept you will be discussing in the center and then let them fill out the four components of the diagram. This is a quick way to



get an idea of what students know already about the topic and to gauge their understanding of how the concept or topic relates to prior knowledge.

Just like the alerts on the London Tube, we need, always, to be reminded about where students are in respect to our learning goals. Now, as I teach, I keep a note on my planner that reminds me to "Mind the Gap!"

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Happily Ever After...

By Bob Schultz, University of Toledo
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People only see what they are prepared to see.

—Walt Whitman

The above quotation from a prolific and forward-thinking writer quickly details the seeming lack of adult (both educators and parents) awareness related to the social/emotional needs of gifted children and adolescents. In the spirit of Whitman's statement, this column offers an opportunity to experience life through the eyes of "Elle" a seventh grader, related to her intense questioning about and need to make a difference in the world. Here's Elle's story (the vignette was compiled and written by the author and approved by Elle, whose name has been changed for use in this column):

The many sights of protesters on television appall Elle. She knows from first-hand experience (the anti-war rally she attended in New York City) that many people are only taking part in activities to blow off some steam, or get out of something in their lives. Few really believe in what they are doing.

When Elle thinks about outcomes, there are always shades of gray leading down so many different paths. Even within the ranks of the rally, there were people fighting and yelling at one another—all in the name of peace. Wasn't this an oxymoron? And, why didn't others see the convoluted nature of the message and their actions?

To Elle, the sense of passion is missing from so many of her friends, family, and community members. Everywhere she turns, people are quick to judge and condemn based on what they see on television, but don't have any deep sense of what is going on. For that matter, Elle is really wondering why she is so committed to specific issues when all her friends are only concerned if their allowance is trimmed, or they cannot go out because their parents think a shift from Yellow to Orange on the terror alert system means the kids should stay home. Don't they get it? This is about life and death.

People are dying in Iraq every day; and here, at home, we are constantly bombarded with messages such as, "Go about life normally;" blitzkrieg-like hype for the latest video game; or, news of an impending economic meltdown due to a slowing economy. Thousands are losing their jobs and lack health insurance; but, television assails us with advertisements driving the want and need to buy, buy, buy. Maybe Elle is just "too intense" as her Aunt and many other relatives always tell her Mom.

Elle wondered about the situation in Iraq. How did the soldiers feel? What about their families? How about Iraqi citizens? Could they really be that "controlled" that they see any outsider as an invader? How could they not know that we were there trying to help? And, back here at home, so many of her friends were now ignoring Elle completely. She didn't really have a choice; her parents insisted she take part in the New York rally. But, why was Elle now being shunned in her own town?

It was all so frustrating. Elle felt she needed to support the troops, but also knew the needs of Americans living in inner cities and without health care should be the main focus for America. After all, shouldn't we take care of our own before becoming the World's protector and police force?

And, what about the government constantly cutting taxes? How could this be a good thing when so many people were losing their jobs, health care was becoming too expensive for most families to get on their own, and police and fire departments in local towns were laying off? Why does Elle feel a sense of emptiness inside?

Background Considerations

Elle was identified as gifted/talented in third grade, but her deep sense of caring for others isn't supported by the school district's service options. With parental help, Elle worked in the local community to develop a resource center for needy families. There are clothing items, hygiene supplies, a lending library, and monthly meetings promoting connections between community service organizations, local businesses, and interested community members to help the community become more caring about its members.

Elle has a wide base of friends and was considered outgoing by many peers. She has a strong work ethic and is quite articulate, which has led to her receipt of several scholarships and awards for her community involvement efforts.

Your Turn

Now that you've experienced a bit of life through Elle's eyes, take a turn at focusing on more than the academic side of education. The following questions are provided as a scaffold for you to gain some awareness about the affective side of learning and life that are so often overlooked in favor of standards, textbooks, and exams:

1. What social/emotional tendencies does Elle exhibit?
2. How would you counsel Elle about her deep feelings? About her views of the future? What could/should she do to feel better about herself and the situation?
3. What insights could you provide about Elle's sense of emptiness?
4. Based on your experiences, how reflective of gifted children is Elle? Which characteristics and tendencies do you find in your work with gifted individuals?
5. How can you address some of the social/emotional intensities as an advocate for giftedness and gifted individuals?

Awareness of the cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling), and psychomotor (motion) sides of life is an important precept to healthy growth. As educators, we must focus on the care and psychological feeding of the gifted children in our care, even when these opportunities present themselves for only brief bursts (in most cases) in our weekly lives.

Resources

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From the Editor's Desk

It is an exciting time to be involved in the field of gifted education! The recent record-breaking NAGC convention in Minneapolis serves as such a strong motivator to me, as I am sure it does for others who attended. Perhaps it was your first convention and you left with a feeling of excitement, ready to return to your school and share all that you learned. If it was a return trip for you, then I know you were able to craft your experience from the myriad presentations, keynotes, poster sessions, and workshops. If you are a board member or other leader within the association then I am confident you felt proud and ready to take the field into the future. Whatever your involvement, you were there, sharing ideas with friends and colleagues. And if by chance you could not make it to this year's convention, it was evident you were there in the discussions of others. That is the beauty of the annual NAGC convention: there are opportunities for everyone involved.

It is an exciting time to be involved in the field of gifted education! When NAGC President Del Siegle asks us to "stand up for gifted education," we should. And in standing up for the field we carry with us a wealth of resources provided by researchers, educators, and professionals in the field. Resources such as those found in the pages of *Teaching for High Potential*. In this, our fourth issue together, my column appears at the end, allowing the articles to speak for themselves. Bess Wilson, our cartoonist, teamed with Jill Adelson to provide a push for infusing the arts into the regular curriculum, and presented strategies that are practical and useful. Alex Pagnani offered science fiction reading as a way to stimulate creativity and imagination in our most highly able students, so let us get out there and encourage this genre. Scott Peters showed us that there is more embedded within the classics to pull from than the common essay type and comprehension questioning. And, as always, our columnists provided an over-arching perspective from a variety of topic areas. They too, have grown accustomed to the THP format and are feeling right at home. That is the beauty of a publication such as this: there are opportunities for every reader.

It is an exciting time to be involved in the field of gifted education! During my exhaustive adventures at the convention this year, I had the opportunity to sit down with some of the leaders in the field in an interview type setting. Although I am more comfortable sitting around a table with a cup of coffee, and not under the brightness of lights, the sessions went very well. I wish to personally thank Sylvia Rimm, Joe Renzulli, François Gagne, Jim Gallagher, Alexinia Baldwin, and Nancy Robinson for taking time out of their busy schedules to share their perspectives with me on the past, present, and future of the field. Our goal is to make these recordings available on the NAGC website in the near future. I mention this to you because this project further solidified my feeling that it is an exciting time to be involved in the field of gifted education. While each eminent individual's entry to the field differed in original purpose, their perspectives on the current state of the field as well as hopes for the future were in sync with each other and to the mission of NAGC. That is the beauty of gifted education: there are opportunities for every student and for every teacher.

I hope that you enjoy this issue. Be sure to visit the website for additional information and links related to the articles and columns in this issue. Check back also for new and updated content you'll find interesting and useful. As always, I welcome your comments, suggestions, opinions, and ideas.

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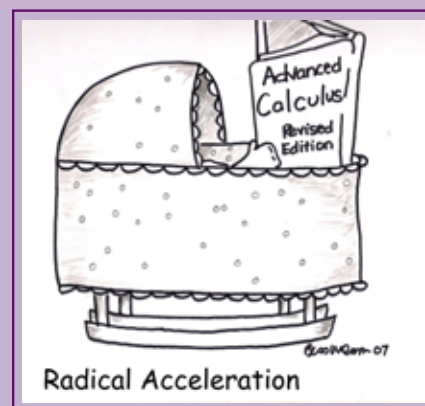
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Smart Cookies

by Bess Wilson



Radical Acceleration

