IS IT A CHEETAH?
Supportive Environments for Gifted Learners
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I recently had the good fortune to make a trip to South Africa where we took several safari rides in Kruger National Park. Kruger covers an immense area of land where the animals reign supreme and people must keep their distance. The most exhilarating and memorable animal sighting for me was of two young male cheetahs sunning themselves on a fallen tree. They remained there for some time; one eventually stretched and jumped over to the nearby tree stump. Our driver told us that this was a supreme treat because cheetahs rarely show themselves at such close range and for such an extended time as did our two cheetahs. They are the fastest animals on earth, able to reach speeds of 70 mph when given the space to run free.

I immediately flashed on Stephanie Tolan’s classic piece, “Is It A Cheetah?” Translation: Is a highly gifted child still gifted if he or she is held back by the environment—in school or out—and not allowed to “run” at optimal speed?

My good fortune continued because that is the focus of this issue: How can we provide environments that support and encourage gifted learners to move unrestricted toward their dreams and goals? In this issue we include several approaches to the topic. But Tolan’s cheetah metaphor is so powerful in discussing learning environments for gifted learners that we are starting this issue of the GEC with her article. Tolan applies the cheetah metaphor specifically to highly gifted learners, but I hope she doesn’t mind having it extended to gifted children in general—especially those currently receiving most or all of their instruction in heterogeneous classrooms. Thank you, Stephanie, not only for writing such a stellar piece, but also for being so generous in allowing it to be reprinted freely. It is still as fresh and meaningful as when first created some 15+ years ago.

Learning begins at home so the environment parents provide is vital. Our regular parent columnist, Jim Webb and Janet Gore, stress this fact, as does Robin Schader, in her feature article entitled, “Parents as “Opportunity Makers”: Providing A Supportive Environment For Gifted Learners.” Schader identifies several elements she considers significant when parents are developing learning environments for their gifted children:

• interest
• work involved
• enjoyment
• effort and time
• “zone” of learning

From there we look at environment from the standpoint of social and emotional comfort and encouragement. Often referring to school situations, psychologist Dan Peters focuses on gifted kids and bullying. He notes that, “their personality characteristics often make them vulnerable and targets for bullies. Gifted children often act different from the norm. They often stand out because of an advanced, adult-like vocabulary or a sophisticated sense of humor that is beyond their peers.”

Peters specifies elements to look for when recognizing bullying and then shares strategies to deal with them. Of special note is that he provides separate suggestions to the various stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Addressing the realm of cognitive learning in the classroom, Bertie Kingore recommends “Enhancing Academic Rigor Through Tiered Learning Stations in K-8 Classrooms.” It is imperative that gifted learners have choices when engaging in their classroom activities; tiered learning stations permit the flexibility needed to provide those choices and to support high-level thinking. Kingore comments, “To be appropriate for advanced and gifted students, the tiered tasks at stations must emphasize objectives that are integral to the curriculum and rigorous enough to elicit beyond grade-level responses.”

Dr. Kingore includes specific information and illustrations for teachers in setting up tiered learning stations. This includes strategies for student self-reflection with emphasis on how students can extend their own learning within an activity. Tiered learning stations seem especially important for heterogeneous classrooms where most gifted students spend their elementary years.

Another classroom environment to consider is setting up the classroom as a studio rather than as a traditional learning environment with seats in rows and an emphasis on whole-class activities. Dan Nelson says this is particularly important in the arts. In his article, “Classroom as Studio: Organized Chaos & Creative Production,” Nelson says, “In the creative world, there are two distinct spaces: the studio and the showroom. Both spaces are critical to the creative process, but they are very different from each other in structure.” Nelson uses two programs at his high school—one taught by a gifted visual arts teacher, and the digital photography class he teaches—as illustrations of both the advantages and disadvantages of the studio. I would venture that it could be (should be) used at least part of the time in academic classes as well. Who would argue that a history or math class cannot be creative?

And finally—though perhaps it should be firstly—we look at enhancing learning environments for young gifted learners at school, focusing on PreK–2 children. Joan Franklin Smutny has long been an advocate for the youngest learners in school systems—who often get overlooked since many school districts don’t begin addressing the needs of gifted learners until third or fourth grade. Her article, “Creative Learning Environments for Young Gifted Children,” contains myriad recommendations and strategies to provide supportive environments for young learners. She addresses both the physical space of the classroom and the social and emotional comfort of the children, and she also recommends using biographies, community resources, child-friendly institutions, and local cultural programs to extend the learning environments for gifted children.

My adventure with two cheetahs sitting on a fallen tree trunk re-energized me in my thinking about the needs of gifted learners, especially as pertaining to the types of environments they need for optimal achievement. Thank you to all contributors to this issue in making it a focus for all readers. —Margaret Gosfield, Acquisitions Editor
I like a teacher who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework.

—Edith Ann (Lily Tomlin)

Not too long ago I was taking my kids on a hike at the Santa Rosa Plateau which is at the southern end of the Santa Ana Mountains in southwest Riverside County, California. We are fortunate to live only minutes away from this ecological reserve and there was a particular trail we’d decided to tackle which meant we had to walk the beginning of another trail first. As young gifted children have a tendency to do, they immediately started noticing things, stopping here and there to observe some insects scurrying about, to discuss a pile of, uh, droppings, and to place bets on how long it would take them to run to the top of the first hill. And as moms have a tendency to do, I started to feel as if they were dilly-dallying and prompted them to hurry up so we could get started on our “planned” adventure.

In that moment, just as it might on some occasions happen within classrooms, I was so focused on what we’d planned to do that I forgot the entire point of why we were going hiking in the first place. I mean for goodness sake, what were my kids thinking, stopping to learn and get excited about what was right there in the dirt at their feet when I had a previous agenda in mind? The audacity. How easy it is as an adult to forget that learning is about the journey and not the end result. And that to create a truly successful learning environment, learning itself needs to be viewed as a lifelong process filled with spontaneous moments—not one that can be all neatly bound up and planned, or that can start when you get to the planned trail or when some random bell rings.

In the scheme of things, school has very little to do with learning. And before you get your knickers in a bind, hear me out. Learning (I’m using a bit of Wikipedia here) is about acquiring new or modifying existing knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, or preferences, and synthesizing different types of information. Learning is an ability possessed by humans, animals and yes, even some machines.

Learning begins before we’re born and it occurs in context, with new knowledge building upon what we’ve already learned and know. As humans, we can learn from education, personal development, schooling, training, really from anything. Like my experience going hiking, as a society we often get overly focused on believing that learning happens only when it’s a planned learning activity or only during school hours. But an active child learns behaviors and skills and acquires knowledge years before school even begins, and often learning occurs at willy-nilly times, unplanned, when we least expect it.

A poor school experience or unhealthy learning environment can do worse than not teach; it can dampen the desire to ever learn.

However, a rich learning experience can be created at school, or anywhere, when effort is made to develop a situation that can suit each child’s uniqueness. A great learning environment is one that excites and stimulates and engenders passion for something that is meaningful to that child. But all too often with the economic and emotional constraints and the demands within the current educational system, we end up squashing a child’s love of learning rather than stimulating it; we approach school as if it is the only learning vehicle rather than a small piece of the big continuous pie of life.

We have lots of tips and tools and resources in this issue of the GEC that will help you create an awesome learning environment, whether at home, school, or elsewhere. From Web Watch we have myriad websites and tools that will speak to a huge variety of types of learners; and the information in Administrator Talk will help you to understand what elements you really need to stimulate gifted students’ learning. Tech Tools for Today’s Teachers and Technology at Home and School bring some new aspects into the possibilities for children and students to utilize video-creation in their life learning adventure. And no conversation on learning environments would be complete without the discussion on the importance of the home environment in supporting a child’s social and emotional needs so check out the Parent Column.

Gifted children have the opportunity to thrive when they are in an active learning environment. Active learning involves the learner taking control of the learning experience (vs. being spoon fed information). Children need to understand what they already know and understand, and what areas they still need to tackle, and what they can do with their learning once they have it. They need to be able to follow their interests and passions in free flowing ways where they become an active participant in their own education, learning to invest in themselves and their future. When you turn kids loose on a hiking trail, some will run, some will sit quietly and watch the shadows, some will listen to the birds or write a story about trees, while another will follow after a line of ants to see where they’ve come from or where they’re going.

Successful active learning situations are more apt to accommodate different learning styles while promoting motivation and personal achievement and need to allow for individual choices and each child’s unique attributes and interests. As Beth Littrell says it this issue’s RTI2 column, “It’s never enough to leave no child behind. In the twenty-first century, we must create environments and pedagogies in which every child forging ahead.”

This, then, is the goal: to create an inspiring educational foundation where a child’s passion builds upon itself so that the child grows into an adult who has a lifelong love of learning.

—Karen Daniels, Managing Editor
CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES

2012

MAY 4–5, 2012
Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education
Wyndham Gardens, Exton, PA
www.giftedpage.org

MAY 5, 2012
Florida Association of the Gifted
Osprey, FL
www.flagifted.org

JUNE 10–14, 2012
Hormel Foundation Gifted and Talented Education Symposium
Riverland Community College, Austin, MN
www.austin.k12.mn.us

JUNE 29–JULY 3, 2012
Profoundly Gifted Retreat
Glyn Eyrie Castle, Colorado Springs, CO
www.pgr.shuttlepod.org

JULY 8–13, 2012
Confratute: The Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development
Storrs, CN
www.gifted.uconn.edu/confratute

JULY 9–12, 2012
Israel Center for Excellence through Education
Jerusalem, Israel
www.jerusalem.icieconference.net

JULY 13–14, 2012
Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted
Milwaukee, WI
www.sengifted.org

JULY 16–17, 2012
Institute for Teachers of Gifted Youth
Vermillion, SD

JULY 19–21, 2012
International Dabrowski Congress
Denver, CO
www.dabrowski9.weebly.com

JULY 22–27, 2012
Gifted and Talented Edufest
Boise State University, Boise, ID
www.edufest.org

JULY 25–27, 2012
California Association for the Gifted Teacher Institute
Santa Barbara, CA
www.cagifted.org

SEPTEMBER 23–24
South Dakota Association for Gifted Children
Best Western Ramkota Inn, Pierre, SD
www.sd-agc.org

SEPTEMBER 26–28
Mississippi Association for Gifted Children
MSU Riley Center, Meridian, MS
http://magcweb.org

SEPTEMBER 27–28, 2012
Alabama Association for Gifted Children
McWane Science Center, Birmingham, AL
www.alabamagifted.org

OCTOBER 5–7, 2012
Beyond IQ (BlQ) West Coast
Tentative, location to be announced, USA

OCTOBER 7–9, 2012
Kansas Association for Gifted, Talented and Creative
Overland Park Marriott, Overland Park, KS
lgtc.org

OCTOBER 11–12, 2012
Wisconsin Association for Talented & Gifted
Blue Harbor Resort, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
www.watg.org

OCTOBER 15–16, 2012
Iowa Talented and Gifted Association
Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines, IA
www.iowatag.org

OCTOBER 21–22, 2012
Virginia Conference on Gifted Education
Wyndham Virginia Crossings, Richmond, VA
www.vagifted.org

NOVEMBER 15–18, 2012
National Association for Gifted Children
Denver, CO
www.nagc.org

NOVEMBER 28–30, 2012
Texas Association for The Gifted And Talented
Dallas, TX
www.txgifted.org

2013

FEBRUARY 15–17, 2013
California Association for the Gifted
Anaheim Marriott, Anaheim, CA
www.cagifted.org

CAG TEACHER INSTITUTE & SUMMER DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL:
July 25-27, 2012
Santa Barbara, CA

August 8-10, 2012
Oceanside, CA

For details and registration information, visit
www.cagifted.org

UPCOMING ISSUES OF THE GIFTED EDUCATION COMMUNICATOR
Summer - Identifying Gifted Learners
Fall - Interdisciplinary Studies: Social Studies
Winter - Twice-Exceptional Gifted Learners

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Gifted children are born with a “need to know” and a “rage to learn.” Naturally curious and observant, they soak in knowledge and information as though they were large sponges. They ask questions until parents’ ears are tired. Knowing this, it seems that creating the right environment for learning would be pretty easy—just be available, be ready to answer lots of questions, keep lots of books around, visit the library for more books, and provide many new experiences—all the while enjoying their eagerness. These kinds of activities support the intellectual side of gifted children. But what about the social and emotional side of being gifted? Because they feel “different” and are seen by others as “different,” gifted children often need additional guidance and support in areas like making friends, accepting differences, understanding feelings, tolerance for others, self-regulation and communication skills. These are all areas where parents play a particularly important role.

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) recognized the importance of parents in its 2010 formal statement on “Redefining Giftedness for a New Century” (www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=6404), where it also noted that “Various factors can either enhance or inhibit the development and expression of abilities,” and “Some gifted individuals with exceptional aptitude may not demonstrate outstanding levels of achievement due to environmental circumstances such as limited opportunities to learn as a result of poverty, discrimination, or cultural barriers; due to physical or learning disabilities; or due to motivational or emotional problems.” Most of these circumstances are outside of schools’ influence and are factors that parents are left to deal with.

Though we acknowledge the importance of appropriate school experiences for gifted children, in our experience, we have found that parents have more influence on the long-term positive outcome of their children than do schools or teachers. Strong support from home can often mitigate a less-than-ideal school situation for a gifted child. The classic work *Cradles of Eminence* (Goertzel, Goertzel, Goertzel, & Hansen, 2004) documents the importance of parents in fostering the love of learning through books in the home, conversations, ideas, and strong parental involvement.

Even when they are socially rejected at school, gifted children can be fully accepted and appreciated at home. Bored and distracted at school, they can still maintain their curiosity and excitement for learning in activities outside of the school environment. Meanwhile, parents can advocate for more appropriate educational experiences at school and recognize good teaching wherever it is occurring.

Parents know their children best. They have known them from birth. They know the child’s interests and preferred learning style and can help the child explore those interests. They know the child’s strong and weak areas and can offer support for both. They can find great books to read, museums to visit, music and art lessons, chess clubs, Scouts, new hobbies of all kinds, and possible mentors. They can help their child manage perfectionist tendencies and other behaviors that may get in the way of learning. They can help their child learn and practice social skills and make friends. They can help gifted children understand that they don’t need to be gifted in every area.

When a gifted third grader was despondent because she was doing poorly in math, her mother helped her master the times tables, practicing at home with flash cards every night, keeping it upbeat, making it a game.

Although we don’t want parents to hover at school in ways that intrude on teachers and school administrators, we do believe that parents can best model the importance of learning if they are actively involved with the educational process and are aware of educational
options. They can monitor progress. Is the child learning new material? Does she enjoy school? Do her classes offer the right amount of challenge? Do assignments require the child to “stretch” and learn new skills? Parents will benefit from looking at Dr. Donald Treffinger’s “25 Tough Questions that Are More Important than ‘Is My Child in the Gifted Program?’” (www.creativelearning.com/talent-development/dear-school-people.html).

Sometimes gifted students perform poorly in school. In her book Ten Things Not to Say to Your Gifted Child (2011), Nancy Heilbronner cautions parents not to say, “You’re gifted; this should be easy for you!” because it criticizes the child unnecessarily. Instead, she says, look for the reasons the child is underachieving. Is there an undiagnosed learning disability? Is the child simply not interested in the topic at hand? Is the child purposely underachieving in order to fit in with others in the class? Is perfectionism or fear of failure an issue? Sometimes things are so easy for gifted children that the first time they encounter a task or subject that is truly difficult for them, they stop trying and say to themselves, “I can’t do this. I’m not smart after all.” Learn what is behind the difficulty; then do what you can to help the child succeed.

When parents have concerns, they should meet with their child’s teacher to discuss progress and determine what changes can be made. Perhaps you can request acceleration or a differentiated curriculum—lessons that better match the child’s ability and achievement level—or another of the many educational options for gifted children (Rogers, 2002). Because classroom teachers often lack training in gifted education, it can be difficult to convince them of the need for increased challenge. They may say, “We can’t let him move ahead in math because then what would we do with him next year?” or, “We don’t believe in skipping grades here; we think it harms social development.” In such situations, parents need to be strong in supporting their child’s needs. Parent advocacy brought about change in the special education field, and parent advocacy is what will bring about change for gifted students.

Because they often are so different from their age mates, gifted children encounter both peers and adults who do not accept or appreciate their unusual interests or behaviors. In these situations, parents can provide a good listening ear for children’s complaints of unjust treatment, and perhaps role-play with the child, helping the child see things from the other person’s viewpoint. Parents can help the child accept feeling different without feeling unacceptable.

In A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007), we emphasize that gifted children need their home to be a “safe haven” where they will be accepted, where a key adult (or two) believes in them, where they can ask questions, show their intensities, and freely explore their interests, abilities, and passions. Steven Spielberg’s mother knew that he was teased and tormented by other students in high school. She negotiated a deal with him that if he attended school for a certain number of days, he could skip now and then to make short films with friends using the family’s 8mm movie camera. School was not comfortable, but at home he was loved, accepted, understood, supported, and appreciated; he could be himself and follow his passion.

We should love our children every day for who they are—for their own unique self, and not for their top grades. We should be cognizant of areas for growth outside of academics. Carol Dweck (2007) has made a compelling case that we can best help our children by emphasizing their mindset toward persistence and resilience, rather than emphasizing their intelligence or ability. Sometimes gifted students perform poorly in school simply because it doesn’t interest them.

To create the best learning environment for your child, it helps to first become educated about the characteristics and traits of gifted children in general. Parents need to understand concepts like overexcitabilities, asynchronous development, level of giftedness in various areas, and introversion/extroversion. This means that parents may need to read books or attend classes on parenting gifted children, and perhaps attend local, state, or national gifted conferences. Learning more about gifted children will help parents create a learning environment tailored to their child’s individual interests and abilities so that they are working with, rather than against, their child.

Regardless of what happens at school, parents of gifted children must be involved in their child’s growth and development. They should accept the challenge of first understanding, then guiding and supporting their children’s interests, talents, abilities, and intensities. They are responsible for helping to find the best possible academic learning environment, as well as the child’s social and emotional learning environment. We believe parents can be extremely important in creating the best learning environments from the options available.

REFERENCES

JANET L. GORE, M.A., M.Ed., has over thirty years experience in gifted education as a teacher, administrator, counselor, policy maker, and parent. For three years she was the State Director of Gifted Education in Arizona and served on the Board of Directors of the Arizona Association for Gifted and Talented. She is co-author of two major award-winning books—Grandparents’ Guide to Gifted Children and A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children.

JAMES T. WEBB, Ph.D., the founder of SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted Children), has been recognized as one of the 25 most influential psychologists nationally on gifted education. The lead author of five books and several DVDs about gifted children, Dr. Webb served on the Board of Directors for the National Association for Gifted Children. In 2010 he received the prestigious Ruth A. Martinson Past- Presidents’ Award from the California Association for the Gifted.
Those of us who have taught for more than 30 minutes know the importance of a stimulating learning environment, be it for any classification of students. Some students enter the classroom already “pumped,” as the saying goes; they are eager to learn. Some are tired and/or bored with life. Still others may have experienced an altercation before school that day with a parent, caregiver, bus driver, or another student, and may be angry with anyone and everyone they encounter that day. Quite possibly, moreover, each of these students may be gifted.

On the receiving end is the classroom teacher, whose responsibility is to create an appropriate learning environment that can stimulate gifted youngsters, a task that sounds simple but is anything but! We must remember that while they are gifted, these students are also individuals with multiple facets—their nationality, language, family structure, economic status, parental dispositions regarding education in general and their children’s giftedness in particular. Often, parents of gifted students don’t fully understand what “giftedness” means, but as they do not want to appear ignorant, they don’t communicate their uncertainty with the teacher. Regrettably, these parents often remain uninformed about their child’s learning capacity, putting their son or daughter at risk of not fulfilling his or her potential.

WHAT DOES STIMULATE GIFTED STUDENTS’ LEARNING?

Given the multi-cultural composition of America’s schools today, what must an appropriate learning setting for gifted students include? First, both teacher and students must develop high performance expectations. Curriculum specialist Carol Ann Tomlinson recommends a “defined structure with clear processes and expectations, including enough flexibility to accommodate students’ needs.” What many gifted students consider “close enough” is not acceptable performance, yet many of them coast through school, performing far below their potential. This situation is critical at best.

Second, gifted students come to school with ample potential to learn and must be challenged appropriately in order to become a creative producer throughout their lives. Challenging gifted students meaningfully is the teacher’s responsibility, and responding to the challenge intelligently is each student’s role. To that end researchers have found that the academic level students achieve by Grade 8 has a more powerful impact on college and career readiness and success than anything that happens in high school, says Steve Kappler, Vice President of ACT, Inc., the Iowa-based college-entrance-exam company. The importance of gifted students’ meeting the challenge posed by their teachers cannot be overestimated.

Gifted students also need to engage their rich minds so they can think deeply about real-world problems. These students are typically curious, so advanced-level questioning skills are a must for them to learn and use. Within our “hurry-up” society, however, which moves at the speed of light, or so it seems at times, gifted students are often satisfied with answers they think of quickly but that might lack substance. Amplifying a response is unnecessary, they think. These students are caught between time, thanks to social networking, which is more important to students than almost anything else, and quality of their response, which they believe is sufficient even when it is not.

A fourth condition for stimulating gifted students’ performance is experimenting with ideas in the classroom and/or in labs; a must for most gifted youngsters. Again, however, time is their primary concern. The functions of postulating, predicting, risk-taking, and comparing results by using several variables our gifted students often consider wasted time. Hence, these “high fliers,” as I refer to our brightest students, tend to rush through an experiment, thereby missing the value of both the process and the product.

Teachers need to instill in their gifted students the critical requirements of employing correct sequence in conducting experiments; performing the experiment a second time, replacing the primary variable used originally with a new variable; comparing the outcomes; and discussing what was learned through this process. The mental discipline required for valid experimenting leads to new knowledge, the key component of a defensible learning environment for gifted students of just about any age.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO “WHAT IF . . .?”

Vital to learning within any subject area, the “what if . . .?” question inviting creative thought has disappeared from the classrooms of too many schools across America. Why? I submit that this critical question, designed to pique students’ curiosity and engender valuable hypotheses, does precisely the opposite. The teacher’s asking leading questions for students to ponder possibilities requires time, the commodity that today’s students prize above all else, given the social network that envelops them 24/7 and the lure of which takes precedence for many gifted students over classroom learning. What’s more, our students seem to be hurrying through their class work, racing to finish assignments in record time. The finer aspects of learning, which require ample time to process, are giving way to a much quicker pace than ever before.

The learning that should be taking place in America’s classrooms barely matters, it seems. What counts, apparently, is the amount of material fed to the students within minimal time, regardless of whether or how much these students grasp and understand it. Furthermore, what’s taught so harrriedly is akin to a broad brush as are both high-level discussions and in-class applications.

Tomlinson’s position is to “consider what good quality will look like; communicate the process of how to do the task well” (2011). What education in America has devolved to is minimalist education, which America simply cannot afford. Achieving high-quality work requires time, as it always has.

Asking “what if . . .?” is one of the specific teacher skills that helps create learning environments for gifted students. Highly-effective teachers of gifted students connect disparate topics and invite the viewpoints of individuals with varying backgrounds. These teachers are confident in their own style and genuinely enjoy gifted students. They also acknowledge students’ individual mind styles by which gifted students pursue their goals and objectives. Students’ individual abilities are valued and their questions encouraged.

THE TEACHER OF GIFTED STUDENTS: SKILLS AND DISPOSITIONS

Teachers with advanced training in teaching gifted students are often excellent, inspirational mentors who may have exposure to various languages, always a bonus for teaching gifted students. Further, these teachers understand the value of originality, risk-taking, and stimulating their students to pursue meaningful challenges on their own while stretching their knowledge beyond curriculum requirements. These teachers help students make extraordinary connections that often lead to new vistas of thought and understanding of their world. These teachers are not fearful of always needing the “right answer”; they enjoy learning along with their gifted students.

Teachers with a solid knowledge of gifted students know these students benefit from learning and using creative problem solving when studying substantive issues. Acting like the practicing professional is critical to their learning at every age. These students learn to appreciate highly-intelligent teachers who themselves are risk-takers, self-confident and fair in the sense that only exceptionally-bright and/or talented students understand and genuinely respect. Gifted teachers see gifted students as individuals capable of more than what many other teachers recognize.

Young adolescence is a time of exploration and wonder, so the middle grades are a critical time for students to begin considering their life beyond high school, says Patti Kinney, Associate Director of middle-level services for NASSP. “Effective middle-grade schools help students understand their potential and give them multiple opportunities to explore the future through a variety of experiences, support, and guidance,” she asserts. This efficacy becomes the foundation for gifted student success in the higher grades.

Gifted students must take stock of their own intelligence and apply it consistently by accepting challenges requiring them to use their natural mental acumen. For middle schoolers, standing out as particularly bright is anathema to them; as administrators and teachers we need to be adept at maintaining a middle-of-the-road position that not only supports these highly-intelligent students but also helps them make the best use of their talents. High school is generally somewhat less contentious for gifted students who have “survived” middle school with only a modicum of early-teen “bruises.”

Creating challenging learning environments in which gifted students can thrive requires that administrators support the teachers of gifted to raise the bar of expectation with regard to student accomplishment. Innovative settings that provide gifted students with both individual opportunities to expand well beyond the prescribed curriculum and to gain access to world-class lessons of genuine significance are key to making new and unusual connections that our gifted students need to experience as a matter of course and frequently.

Gifted students who experience the benefit of learning environments that stimulate their intellect, cause them to pose thought-provoking questions, and afford appropriate time to ponder multiple possibilities in solving real-life problems benefit exponentially from these high-level approaches to learning.

REFERENCES


CAROLYN R. COOPER, Ph.D., is a retired assistant superintendent and served as the specialist in gifted education with the Maryland State Department of Education for several years. Also a seasoned district-level coordinator of gifted education in several school districts throughout America, she was active for many years in the National Association for Gifted Children as well as in state and regional organizations advocating for and supporting gifted and talented students.
It’s a tough time to raise, teach or be a highly gifted child. As the term “gifted” and the unusual intellectual capacity to which that term refers become more and more politically incorrect, the educational establishment changes terminology and focus.

Gifedness, a global, integrative mental capacity, may be dismissed, replaced by fragmented “talents” which seem less threatening and theoretically easier for schools to deal with. Instead of an internal developmental reality that affects every aspect of a child’s life, “intellectual talent” is more and more perceived as synonymous with (and limited to) academic achievement. Cheetah

The child who does well in school, gets good grades, wins awards, and “performs” beyond the norms for his or her age, is considered talented. The child who does not, no matter what his innate intellectual capacities or developmental level, is less and less likely to be identified, less and less likely to be served.

A cheetah metaphor can help us see the problem with achievement-oriented thinking. The cheetah is the fastest animal on earth. When we think of cheetahs we are likely to think first of their speed. It’s flashy. It is impressive. It’s unique. And it makes identification incredibly easy. Since cheetahs are the only animals that can run 70 mph, if you clock an animal running 70 mph, It’s a cheetah!
But cheetahs are not always running. In fact, they are able to maintain top speed only for a limited time, after which they need a considerable period of rest.

It's not difficult to identify a cheetah when it isn't running, provided we know its other characteristics. It is gold with black spots, like a leopard, but it also has unique black “tear marks” beneath its eyes. Its head is small, its body lean, its legs unusually long—all bodily characteristics critical to a runner. And the cheetah is the only member of the cat family that has non-retractable claws. Other cats retract their claws to keep them sharp, like carving knives kept in a sheath—the cheetah's claws are designed not for cutting but for traction. This is an animal biologically designed to run.

Its chief food is the antelope, itself a prodigious runner. The antelope is not large or heavy, so the cheetah does not need strength and bulk to overpower it. Only speed. On the open plains of its natural habitat the cheetah is capable of catching an antelope simply by running it down. Its eyes. Its head is small, its body lean, its legs unusually long—all bodily characteristics critical to a runner. And the cheetah is the only member of the cat family that has non-retractable claws. Other cats retract their claws to keep them sharp, like carving knives kept in a sheath—the cheetah's claws are designed not for cutting but for traction. This is an animal biologically designed to run.

While body design in nature is utilitarian, it also creates a powerful internal drive. The cheetah needs to run!

Despite design and need however, certain conditions are necessary if it is to attain its famous 70 mph top speed. It must be fully grown. It must be healthy, fit and rested. It must have plenty of room to run. Besides that, it is best motivated to run all out when it is hungry and there are antelopes to chase.

If a cheetah is confined to a 10 X 12 foot cage, though it may pace or fling itself against the bars in restless frustration, it won’t run 70 mph.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah has only 20 mph rabbits to chase for food, it won't run 70 mph while hunting. If it did, it would flash past its prey and go hungry! Though it might well run on its own for exercise, recreation, fulfillment of its internal drive, when given only rabbits to eat the hunting cheetah will run only fast enough to catch a rabbit.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah is fed Zoo Chow it may not run at all.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah is sick or if its legs have been broken, it won't even walk.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

And finally, if the cheetah is only six weeks old, it can't yet run 70 mph.

IS IT, THEN, ONLY A "POTENTIAL" CHEETAH?

Baby Cheetah A school system that defines giftedness (or talent) as behavior, achievement and performance is as compromised in its ability to recognize its highly gifted students and to give them what they need as a zoo would be to recognize and provide for its cheetahs if it looked only for speed. When a cheetah does run 70 mph it isn't a particularly “achieving” cheetah. Though it is doing what no other cat can do, it is behaving normally for a cheetah.

To lions, tigers, leopards—to any of the other big cats—the cheetah's biological attributes would seem to be deformities. Far from the “best cat,” the cheetah would seem to be barely a cat at all. It is not heavy enough to bring down a wildebeest; its non-retractable claws cannot be kept sharp enough to tear the wildebeest's thick hide. Given the cheetah's tendency to activity, cats who spend most of their time sleeping in the sun might well label the cheetah hyperactive.

Like cheetahs, highly gifted children can be easy to identify. If a child teaches herself Greek at age five, reads at the eighth grade level at age six or does algebra in second grade we can safely assume that child is a highly gifted child. Though the world may see these activities as “achievements,” she is not an “achieving” child so much as a child who is operating normally according to her own biological design, her innate mental capacity. Such a child has clearly been given room to “run” and something to run for. She is healthy and fit and has not had her capacities crippled. It doesn't take great knowledge about the characteristics of highly gifted children to recognize this child.

However, schools are to extraordinarily intelligent children what zoos are to cheetahs. Many schools provide a 10 x 12 foot cage, giving the unusual mind no room to get up to speed. Many highly gifted children sit in the classroom the way big cats sit in their cages, dull-eyed and silent. Some, unable to resist the urge from inside even though they can't exercise it, pace the bars, snarl and lash out at their keepers, or throw themselves against the bars until they do themselves damage.

Even open and enlightened schools are likely to create an environment that, like the cheetah enclosures in enlightened zoos, allow some moderate running, but no room for the growing cheetah to develop the necessary muscles and stamina to become a 70 mph runner. Children in cages or enclosures, no matter how bright, are unlikely to appear highly gifted; kept from exercising their minds for too long, these children may never be able to reach the level of mental functioning they were designed for.
A zoo, however much room it provides for its cheetahs, does not feed them antelope, challenging them either to run full out or go hungry. Schools similarly provide too little challenge for the development of extraordinary minds. Even a gifted program may provide only the intellectual equivalent of 20 mph rabbits (while sometimes labeling children suspected of extreme intelligence “underachievers” for NOT putting on top speed to catch those rabbits!) Without special programming, schools provide the academic equivalent of Zoo Chow, food that requires no effort whatsoever. Some children refuse to take in such uninteresting, dead nourishment at all.

To develop not just the physical ability but also the strategy to catch antelope in the wild, a cheetah must have antelopes to chase, room to chase them and a cheetah role model to show them how to do it. Without instruction and practice they are unlikely to be able to learn essential survival skills.

A recent nature documentary about cheetahs in lion country showed a curious fact of life in the wild. Lions kill cheetah cubs. They don’t eat them, they just kill them. In fact, they appear to work rather hard to find them in order to kill them (though cheetahs can’t possibly threaten the continued survival of lions). Is this maliciousness? Recreation? No one knows. We only know that lions do it. Cheetah mothers must hide their dens and go to great efforts to protect their cubs, coming and going from the den under deep cover or only in the dead of night or when lions are far away. Highly gifted children and their families often feel like cheetahs in lion country.

In some schools brilliant children are asked to do what they were never designed to do (like cheetahs asked to tear open a wildebeest hide with their claws—after all, the lions can do it!) while the attributes that are a natural aspect of unusual mental capacity—intensity, passion, high energy, independence, moral reasoning, curiosity, humor, unusual interests and insistence on truth and accuracy—are considered problems that need fixing.

Brilliant children may feel surrounded by lions who make fun of or shun them for their differences, who may even break their legs or drug them to keep them moving more slowly, in time with the lions’ pace. Is it any wonder they would try to escape; would put on a lion suit to keep from being noticed; would fight back?

This metaphor, like any metaphor, eventually breaks down. Highly gifted children don’t have body markings and non-tractable claws by which to be identified when not performing. Furthermore, the cheetah’s ability to run 70 mph is a single trait readily measured. Highly gifted children are very different from each other so there is no single ability to look for even when they are performing; besides that, a child’s greatest gifts could be outside the academic world’s definition of achievement and so go unrecognized altogether. While this truth can save some children from being wantonly killed by marauding lions, it also keeps them from being recognized for what they are—children with deep and powerful innate differences as all-encompassing as the differences between cheetahs and other big cats.

That they may not be instantly recognizable does not mean that there is no means of identifying them. It means that more time and effort are required to do it. Educators can learn the attributes of unusual intelligence and observe closely enough to see those attributes in individual children. They can recognize not only that highly gifted children can do many things other children cannot, but that there are tasks other children can do that the highly gifted cannot.

Every organism has an internal drive to fulfill its biological design. The same is true for unusually bright children. From time to time the bars need be removed, the enclosures broadened. Zoo Chow, easy and cheap as it is, must give way, at least some of the time, to lively, challenging mental prey.

More than this, schools need to believe that it is important to make the effort, that these children not only have the needs of all other children to be protected and properly cared for, but that they have as much right as others to have their needs met.

Biodiversity is a fundamental principle of life on our planet. It allows life to adapt to change. In our culture highly gifted children, like cheetahs, are endangered. Like cheetahs, they are here for a reason; they fill a particular niche in the design of life. Zoos, whatever their limitations, may be critical to the continued survival of cheetahs; many are doing their best to offer their captives what they will need eventually to survive in the wild. Schools can do the same for their highly gifted children.

Unless we make a commitment to saving these children, we will continue to lose them and whatever unique benefit their existence might provide for the human species of which they are an essential part.

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Children thrive when parents are willing to explore, adapt, and be flexible in providing educational experiences that are appropriately challenging. However, it’s often difficult to understand what the words “appropriately challenging” mean in individual cases. Since the kind of learning that ultimately leads to the development of expertise usually begins in an atmosphere of fun and exploration, parents are in a prime position to fan the tiny sparks of “Wow, what’s that?” or “Oh my gosh, how was that made?” or “Would you look at that…isn’t it incredible?” into more substantial flames of interest. The key is for parents to discover what it means to be an effective “opportunity maker.”

Let’s look at a bundle of six statements about learning followed by some ideas about how they can impact your parenting.

- Good learning takes place when you are interested in the topic (you pay attention and focus).
- Becoming good at something worthwhile requires work (not necessarily repetition, but deliberate practice).
- Work can be enjoyable (fun).
- Fun isn’t the same as easy (in fact, you aren’t getting better at something if it’s easy).
- When you enjoy something you will work longer and harder (putting forth more effort and spending more time).
- The “zone” of good learning is slightly uncomfortable (there’s a feeling of tension). These statements can be conceptualized in an illustration of Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (see figure 1). Although Vygotsky’s work was directed towards teaching and scaffolding, I have interpreted his work for parents who are interested in a pragmatic approach to learning.

Here is a short overview:

Each of us has different zones in which we learn, and they vary from topic to topic. Optimal learning takes place in the zone between the green and red bars. Until a child is stretched above the green line, the task at hand is so easy it doesn’t require the brain’s full attention. That means fresh learning is not taking place. When the brain isn’t engaged, it will “check out,” wandering, easily becoming bored, or uninterested. Likewise, a child presented with a task that’s too difficult will “check out,” but for a contrasting reason—his or her brain hasn’t built the capacity, prior knowledge, or experience to put the information into a useful context; in other words, to learn from it.

The area between the bars represents the zone where optimal learning takes place. That’s what we are aiming for. Think of a recursive learning spiral going from bottom to top. One can gently enter the zone, intrigued or enticed by a mother, father, teacher, coach, or knowledgeable friend who introduces a new concept or skill. The child may feel uncertain, not knowing if he or she will be successful, and may resist exposing a chance of failure. But, with encouragement and help that child can begin to stretch, trying the new information. With time (which can be very short, especially with gifted children in their high-ability, high-interest areas), the child becomes better and better, finally able to do the task independently. Then it’s time to re-enter the zone, adding more learning, and stretching once again into the unfamiliar.

What’s confusing is that learners outside the bars (in the areas of “too simple” or “too difficult”) may actually exhibit the same behaviors. Think of how you might act if you were through-and-through bored in a lecture. Would you fidget, doodle, become disruptive, leave the room, or “go to the Baha-
mas” in your mind? Now imagine what would happen if you found yourself in an afternoon talk with a lecturer who spoke in a foreign language about an obscure subject you knew nothing about. It’s likely you would behave much as you would in the simple, un-stimulating talk. How would someone watching or working with you know the difference?

The art is in finding the balance between too difficult and too simple. I call it the Goldilocks Dilemma, for while we don’t want to push too hard, we do want our children to be engaged and involved in learning.

The Goldilocks Dilemma—Finding “just right.” When is it too much, or not enough? How can parents find a zone of “just right?” The answer is to keep trying. As the mom of a young, talented musician, I often felt myself morphing into a classic “pushy mom.” My daughter had many ways to avoid the work of practice. Sometimes she would read books—occupying her mind, while simultaneously playing notes with her fingers in a way that mimicked practice but wasn’t really (this brings up the subject of deliberate or deep practice in contrast to mere repetition—which is another topic for good discussion). Once when I knew a major competition date was approaching and I was concerned about her readiness, I went wild with worry. I tried all sorts of “tricks” to manipulate her into paying attention to her practice while also trying to maintain an air of ease. When I finally crossed the line into active, intrusive “management,” my daughter snapped, argued, cried, and finally went on strike.

At that point, I was sure that I had done grave harm to our relationship and to her love of the piano. But then a valued mentor put it into perspective. She told me not to agonize—for if one didn’t cross the line once in awhile, he or she wouldn’t know where the line was! However, she noted, once you realize you’ve stepped over, gone too far, it’s important to acknowledge and back up quickly. That, she said, is a hallmark of good parenting. Trying new approaches, accepting mistakes, admitting when one is wrong, as well as changing course when needed, are basic tenets for talent development.

“Just right” is subjective, which means that until a child can feel the zone on his or her own, parents need to build awareness of the clues that indicate when a particular child is in or out of the zone. In poker, those clues are called “tells”—changes in behavior or attitude and they provide an advantage to the player who can observe and understand another player’s tell. That skill is worthwhile for parents of bright children to cultivate.

Butterflies. Years ago, I was fortunate enough to take a class on creativity from Grammy-award winning singer, composer, performer Bobby McFerrin. He talked about dealing with performance stress and recalled his own bouts with stage fright—the almost paralyzing rush of panic just prior to going on stage. He tried to eliminate the “anxiety butterflies” entirely, but found that when he walked onstage in a totally calm state,
his performances were rather ho-hum. He wasn’t as engaged in what he was doing, the spark wasn’t there, and he didn’t get the buzz of success. Then he recognized the power of getting those butterflies to fly in formation. ‘That’s the trick,’ he explained. Learn to recognize the uncomfortable feeling of anxiety but don’t strive to completely eliminate it. Instead learn how to keep your “butterflies in formation” and not let them overwhelm you.

You can learn to recognize and contain your jitters if you try something new on a regular basis. Take that risk, and challenge yourself to move up into the learning zone. If we shrink back from trying, if we let inertia take hold of our minds and bodies, then our chances of finding satisfaction and fulfillment in creative achievement are unlikely. That’s a strong message for parents to model for their children.

Encourage curiosity. People who are curious (no matter what their age) are interested in the world around them and they are interesting to be with. These are qualities that parents can easily model and practice on a daily basis with the aid of a simple notebook (paper or electronic) and a calendar. Make it a habit to record the intriguing questions that pop up during the day for you and your child. Then follow the threads of curiosity (not worrying if it turns out to be short-lived) and look for answers. There’s nothing like the sheer joy of discovery!

Partner in learning. Often we concentrate on offering opportunities such as music, sports, dance, gymnastics, or extra languages for our child, but forget the advantages of learning something with our child. When we make time to go together to a special museum exhibit on fashion, listen together to an archeologist talk about recent excavations, or take a mini-class together on dissecting a squid, we not only show a willingness to learn about all sorts of topics, we also build a bank of shared experiences. And, as a partner in learning, we not only see first-hand how our child is responding to different types of situations, we have on-the-spot opportunities to salt the conversation with “interesting” stories about famous people who took risks, or learned from failure, or bounced back from defeat.

A young adult subject in one of my research studies admiringly called her parents “opportunity makers.” She told me how they kept the learning alive in their house by making it a habit to talk about upcoming local events at the dinner table. For example, her mother might have said, “I noticed that Lisa See is speaking Thursday night about her books ‘Shanghai Girls’ and ‘Dreams of Joy.’ I’m really interested in hearing her and learning more about the Angel Island Immigration Station and what it meant to be a Chinese ‘paper child.’ I’ve put it on the calendar. Does anyone want to go with me?”

Note that the mother asked if others wanted to go—but, whether or not anyone joins her, she will make it a point to go. And she will report back, with shining eyes, about the wonderful experience. In this way she’s serving as a role model by learning new things, staying open and eager, keeping the light in her own eyes, and she’s acting as a “partner in learning,” as she’s openly inviting others to join her to discover new information. This mother is not just offering an opportunity. She is a participant in the opportunity.

Shared events like these are the basis for meaningful conversations that offer parents insight into how their children are interpreting the world around them.

Have fun. John Medina, author of Brain Rules, talks about how his mother carefully used his interests as learning opportunities.

If I was interested in dinosaurs, she’d fill a whole room with dinosaurs. She was a fourth-grade teacher, so she had manipulatives and posters and toys. She’d cook dinosaur food. She even taught me how to make ugly noises with my armpits. My mother! Because she thought it sounded like dinosaurs. They’re air breathing, and their cranial vaults might have made sounds like that. Isn’t it great? When I was sick of dinosaurs, down they’d come. And my mother would wait, lurking like the most wonderful vulture you’ll ever want, watching for my next interest. This happened for years until I got the message. Learning is everything. When you are curious, you become fearless. You don’t care what’s out there. You just want to know.

If we’re really good at the job of parenting, we can’t even dream of the ways our children can, and will, contribute to our world. Recent articles about the business and the current unemployment climate describe the pace of change as truly breathtaking. A technology company CEO stated just this week, “You’re not going to get a job that’s assembly and filing and coding.” There are plenty of opportunities, he explained, but they will go to those who are “edgy and supercreative.” This certainly poses a challenge—for how can we guide our children if we don’t know what we’re guiding toward? While the path ahead may not be clear, what we can do is help young people experience the excitement of discovery and learning, and the thrill of success after a struggle, while honing personal skills to overcome frustrations and setbacks. Those are the qualities that set achievers apart.

REFERENCES
Benefits of Keeping a “Question Book”

Keeping a “Question Book” has several benefits. First, gifted children’s questions can come fast, furiously, and at inopportune times such as when the phone rings, when you’re just heading out the door for an appointment, or as a stall tactic before turning off the lights at bedtime. By using the notebook, you’ll be better able to control the timing while simultaneously validating the importance of your child’s inquiry with a response of “Now that’s a good question. Let’s write that on the list and we’ll check it out tomorrow.” The key point is that you can’t neglect or forget the follow-up. It’s essential to set times when you mutually consult the list, choose one of the questions, and confer about how to find answers. Once the notebook becomes second nature, parents can include discussion about forming good questions as the start of interesting investigations.

Never underestimate the power of the magic words, “Well, let’s find out!” The “Question List” also works as an excellent discussion and planning document. During the week you can say something about setting aside time for investigation (an hour? two or three?) and ask what your child would like to choose from the list. Begin the planning process by wondering how it would be best to find information that would answer the question—Online? In person? An experiment? Through an interview? A combination? Is it a simple question, quickly answered, or will it take more in-depth probing? If so, it’s time to start talking about a plan and set some dates.

If you’re at a stage where curiosity is dormant, try some spontaneous local investigations to prime the thinking—discover a museum that’s off the beaten track, or find an unusual local business. It can also be fun to search a large grocery store, looking at a specific product like milk. Check out the different types of packages (including cans and powdered), take home enough for a taste test, and then make a visit to a dairy. Spinning off ideas like these can heighten your child’s observational powers, as well as add tremendously to his or her information bank.

A wall calendar is a handy helper for translating those questions into action. Although retro, a shared wall calendar is a strong visual aid for reasonable planning and time-management. The calendar makes it possible to point out upcoming events and build anticipation, as well as pursue valued interests. We mounted an 18” x 24” monthly calendar on the wall and tied colored pens to long ribbons attached on an upper corner. Each person’s events were noted by a specific color, and events or opportunities for the whole family were written in black.

—Prepared by Robin Schader

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We help children, adolescents, and families realize their potential.
Michael is 12 and in the 6th grade at his public middle school. He had a difficult time socially in elementary school. He never really fit in with his peers and was known as “smarty pants.” He always answered questions first, and exuberantly asked his teacher questions. Not being that good at sports, Michael was always picked last during games at recess. Michael was looking forward to a new start in middle school where he would meet new people from different schools who didn’t know about his reputation.

Michael had no idea that things could be worse in middle school. Short and thin, he started getting teased the first day, being called “four eyes,” “nerd,” and “dork” as he walked down the hall with his big backpack. Large 7th and 8th graders pushed him in the hall and laughed at him when he stumbled to keep his balance. While Michael used to find some solace in his classes by connecting with his teachers, he was confused by some of his new teachers’ negative reactions to him. For example, although getting an A+ in his English class, publicly humiliated him by calling on him when she felt he wasn’t paying attention. She would say things like, “You think you’re so smart that you don’t need to pay attention like everyone else.”

Michael began to have trouble falling asleep and woke up in the middle of the night worrying about what was going to happen the next day at school. He started to get stomachaches before school and telling his parents he didn’t want to go to school anymore. When asked why, he burst into tears saying, “Why does everyone hate me? I don’t understand what I did to deserve this. Nobody likes me, not even my teachers. Why can’t people just accept me for who I am?”

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying can take several different forms. The most obvious bullying is physical aggression. However, bullying behavior also
includes name-calling, threatening, intimidation, and more subtle forms of cyber-bullying through e-mails, texts, and chat rooms. In a study of gifted children who were bullied, Peterson and Ray (2006) found that quiet desperation, a sense of helplessness and worthlessness were commonly reported experiences of the children they studied.

**WHY ARE GIFTED KIDS AT RISK FOR BEING BULLIED?**

While gifted children exhibit advanced abilities in a number of areas, their personality characteristics often make them vulnerable and targets for bullies. Gifted children often act different from the norm. They often stand out because of an advanced, adult-like vocabulary or sophisticated sense of humor that is beyond their peers. They often don’t want to “play the game” related to social hierarchies and peer acceptance, and further, many gifted kids don’t know how to play this game even if they wanted to. Another characteristic that can make gifted children targets is their strong sense of justice and fairness, which may result in calling peers out in public situations or making a big deal out of something that is not a big deal to others. Related to this, gifted children often do not back down when they believe they are right or things are not the way they think they are supposed to be.

**WHO GETS BULLIED?**

Both boys and girls get bullied. Kids as young as pre-school age all the way through college get bullied. However, bullying tends to spike at the end of elementary school through middle school, then decline in high school. This is not to say that bullying does not occur outside of these time periods; however, it appears that bullying starts as social awareness and sophistication come into play in 4th and 5th grades and dominates in middle school. For some, bullying tends to decline in high school when there are more options for peer group affiliation such as band, drama, and other various clubs, which may act as a buffer.

The higher the intelligence a child possesses, the more different the child is from everyone else. The more different they are from the norm, the more vulnerable they are to being bullied. Further, often the higher the IQ, the more intense (even if it is a quiet intensity) and sensitive they are to their own experiences and to the behavior and feelings of others. Together, high IQ and sensitivities play a significant role in the subjective experience of the victim.

**DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT**

Bullying, particularly chronic bullying, can have serious developmental implications. Being picked on, demeaned, and embarrassed negatively affects a child’s self-perception and self-worth, and erodes self-confidence in one’s abilities. Imagine going to school every day and being publicly humiliated for who you are and how you act. Further, being physically bullied negatively impacts a child’s sense of personal safety in the world and in relationships. How can one feel safe if one is worried about being humiliated, pushed, punched, or slammed into a locker?

Being bullied also contributes to underachievement. When one is picked on for who one is—quirky, brainy, weird—it is natural to try to not be those things if one can help it. Further, when children are preoccupied with being picked on and humiliated, they may not be able to focus on learning, as attention is turned to safety and survival. Finally, and as a result of all of the above, being bullied is often a precipitant to anxiety and depression.

**CLINICAL SIGNS**

Symptoms of anxiety and depression often result from being bullied. Bullied children may experience fear in and out of school and worry that something bad is going to happen to them. They often feel helpless that they cannot do anything about their situation, and feel hopeless that things will not change.

In chronic and severe cases, gifted children who are bullied experience symptoms associated with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Chronically bullied children often turn inward, isolate, or shut down. They may exhibit more emotional meltdowns, or changes in mood than is normal for that child. They may exhibit apathy and emotional numbing. With the increase in anxiety, avoidance of school and social situations often emerges. Nightmares and other sleep disturbances often occur as well. Finally, “paranoia” may result, in that a gifted bullied child, due to prior experiences and extreme sensitivity, anticipates being mistreated by others even when others do not readily observe it.

Michael’s parents were concerned about him. He seemed to have lost his excitement for learning and sharing information with them. Michael walked with his head down, and complained of always being tired. His parents often found him sitting and staring with a blank look on his face. He still did his schoolwork, but didn’t seem to care about the quality, which was not like him. Once energetic, Michael was now usually quiet and withdrawn. His parents didn’t know what to do. They spoke with his teachers who said they didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary and that he was doing fine in their classes. They talked to the school counselor who said she would look into it, but they had not heard back from her. They knew something was wrong, but what could they do? How could they help him?

**WHAT WE CAN DO**

Gifted children who are bullied often feel alone, confused, and defenseless. First and foremost, these children need to feel heard and validated for their experiences. They often feel invisible. Dismissing or minimizing their experiences often results in even more helplessness and hopelessness. Gifted children need to have the experience of being liked and valued by someone other than their families. They need to have their strengths highlighted to remind them that they are good at something and that they matter.

Most of the time, interventions for bullying need to be multi-faceted and include several people. The following are suggestions for people who play different roles in a child’s life, including the child themselves:

**Bullied children.** You must tell someone what is happening even if you don’t think it will help. Tell your parents. Tell your teacher. Talk to the school counselor. Try walking away from, and avoiding bullies if possible. When you are bullied, try not to let them see they are getting to you. This is very hard, yet bullies want to get a reaction. Do your best to find at least one person who is nice to you and stay with that person. Spend more time with a teacher or counselor you trust. Be strong, and remember you are a good person with talents who has a lot to offer.
Parents. Recognize when your child is acting differently than usual. Continue to investigate what is happening even if others tell you everything is fine. Listen to your child and validate his experience. Let his teachers know something is, or might be, happening at school. Talk to the school counselor about your concerns, as this will allow more eyes to be on your child. If your child is showing signs of depression or anxiety mentioned above, seek professional help. Early intervention is very important.

Teachers. Be aware that bullying is common and that gifted children are susceptible due to their unique characteristics. Set a classroom expectation of respect for all students. Infuse curriculum and discussions about bullying—what it is, and how to deal with it if it occurs. Make it clear that bullying is not tolerated. Watch for subtle bullying behavior such as teasing and ostracizing. Notice who has power in the classroom, and who is alone. Work with school counselors and administrators to address bullying situations and support children who are victimized.

Counselors and psychologists. Validate the child’s experience. Teach the child tools for dealing with their particular situation, including basic and more sophisticated social skills. Help them to understand the impact of their behavior on others. What might they be doing that is eliciting negative attention? Teach them to be assertive and advocate for themselves. Practice role-playing different scenarios. Instill hope. Help them find meaning and purpose. Help them identify safe people and places. Be a consistent, kind, and compassionate presence in their life.

Parents often need assistance too. Guide parents in supporting their child through a difficult time. Parents will feel helpless too. Give them suggestions and reassure them. Help them navigate the school system by suggesting who to talk to.

When at all possible, provide a positive and healthy peer, or peer group, for the bullied child. Organized, and semi-structured counseling groups often provide a place for children to talk about their experiences and get feedback and validation from others. A useful resource is The Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens by Jean Peterson.

Administrators. Implement a no tolerance policy for bullying behavior. Keep track of not only who is bullied, but also who does the bullying. Keep eyes on the bullied and the bullies. Establish a school culture of caring and compassion.

Michael’s parents took him to see a child psychologist who worked with gifted children. Michael appreciated having someone other than his parents listen to his experiences. He learned about how his giftedness made him stand out to others, and while not an excuse for being mistreated, there were things he could do to avoid negative feedback. Michael and his psychologist practiced different responses to different situations; Michael agreed to try them and report back as to how they worked. Michael’s parents received guidance regarding how they should talk to school personnel, so they could better understand Michael’s experiences. A school staff person was identified as Michael’s “go to” person.

SUMMARY

Bullying is all too common and gifted children, due to their characteristics, appear to be easy targets. Being bullied has a negative impact on children’s personal, emotional, academic, and behavioral development. Gifted children who are bullied need support in being resilient. While trying to find meaning and purpose in their lives, they ultimately need to survive and persevere. Often they have to wait to get older—wait for their “peers” to mature and be less invested in teasing and bullying. A successful intervention depends on the nature and severity of bullying and the impact on the child. An intervention can range from giving a child strategies, talking to teachers and administrators, to changing schools where they are better understood or don’t have the history of their reputation. In extreme situations, gifted children may have to be “unschooled” in order to recover from being misunderstood and mistreated, and regain their emotional health.

Despite counseling, and attempted school interventions, Michael continued to get bullied, humiliated, and ostracized. He was handling it better now that he had strategies, yet still experienced frequent sadness, and felt as though he didn’t have much to offer, as he was internalizing the names he was regularly called. After a difficult process that included both him and his parents, it was decided that he would transfer to a school where he knew only a few other kids, and where there may be more opportunities for him to engage with other gifted students, and have a fresh start. Now in 7th grade, Michael reports having real friends and feels that he belongs. His confidence is returning and his energy for life and learning is back. When asked what he would tell other gifted kids who are being bullied, he responded, “Remember you are a good person. Don’t let them destroy who you are. You will make it through—sometimes it is just really hard and painful.”

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR TEENS


REFERENCES


DR. DAN PETERS, licensed psychologist, is Co-Founder and Clinical Director of the Summit Center, specializing in the assessment and treatment of gifted, talented, and creative individuals and families. He is also Co-Director of Camp Summit for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative. Dr. Peters speaks regularly at state and national conferences on a variety of gifted issues. He consults with GATE and Special Education Departments, and trains and consults with teachers and parents about understanding, teaching, and raising gifted children. Dr. Peters serves on the Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) Editorial Board and is Associate Chair of the National Association of Gifted Children’s (NAGC) Assessments of Giftedness Special Interest Group.
When educators enhance rigor in learning environments, they are more likely to get the higher achievement they envision. Gifted students deserve a rigorous learning environment in which they are expected to engage in high-level learning processes, supported so they can learn beyond grade-level concepts and skills, and required to produce high-end products that evidence relevant, sophisticated content. Incorporating tiered learning stations as a differentiation strategy promotes opportunities for gifted students to experience continuous learning in high-level learning cultures.

Rigor is concerned with quality not quantity. Effective tiered stations include a selection of learning tasks incorporating targeted concepts and skills at varying levels of complexity so gifted students can select higher-level tasks rather than continue practicing levels they have already mastered. The teacher provides variations of learning tasks at each station that adapt to students’ diverse skill levels and ensure that all students experience continuous learning of essential academic content at their optimum learning levels.

Tiered learning stations are an effective flexible grouping application requiring a minimum of classroom space when teachers creatively use corners and crannies to make room for learning stations. Counter tops, the tops of book shelves, and extended windowsill areas become standing stations when teachers post a sign with the name of the station, place activities along the area, and students stand to complete learning tasks.
Inasmuch as teachers frequently feel overwhelmed by tiering, they may hesitate to develop tiered learning stations. Instead of spending the many hours typically required to prepare and decorate centers, teachers benefit from learning stations that minimize preparation while accelerating advanced students’ minds into a high gear for learning. An Error Analysis Station is an example of a tiered learning station that teachers can implement in minimum time.

To be appropriate for advanced and gifted students, the tiered tasks at stations must emphasize objectives that are integral to the curriculum and rigorous enough to elicit beyond grade-level responses. Learning is not maximized when stations are simply convenient places to send students to keep them busy or involve them in peer tutoring. At tiered learning stations, the provided learning experiences should promote students’ high-level thinking, responsibility, autonomy, organization, and decision-making skills as students are actively engaged in problem-solving tasks.

In high-level learning cultures, there are numerous ways tiered learning stations can be used to promote academic rigor for advanced and gifted learners. The following suggestions are intended to be generalizable and apply to multiple grade levels, different content areas, and a variety of topics.

• While all students benefit from a variety of group interactions, ensure some opportunities for advanced learners to work together at the same learning station to promote greater complexity and depth as they pursue advanced levels of information.
• Provide learning experiences at different levels of complexity that enable gifted students to extend targeted concepts and skills rather than engage in redundant work. Review and assess learning tasks to be certain they represent the intended degree of challenge and interaction.
• Include beyond-grade-level resources as well as the means for advanced students to search out higher-level resources for themselves. An ample variety of nonfiction materials at a station enables gifted students to extend their learning and satisfy their voracious appetites for specific information. However, when appropriate, students enhance autonomy and research skills when they conduct their own search to secure the advanced resources needed for learning extensions.
• Offer more than one high-end product choice so students can select their best way to demonstrate learning. Choice empowers students as active participants in their learning and increases their motivation to excel as they perceive more application to their lives. It is another way to honor interests and learning profiles.
• Initiate inquiry learning by empowering students to self-select a related topic they want to investigate in depth during learning station times. Inquiry is not merely a novel way of repackaging subject-specific content. Rather, it is a way for students to develop productive habits of mind as they use a range of subject-specific knowledge, concepts, and skills in order to expand understanding of trans-disciplinary themes.
• Use contracts to ensure that gifted students experience independence in pace and level of differentiated learning experiences. Contracts should enable advanced students to choose the sequence in which they complete stations, manage the length of time they require at a


station to complete quality work, participate in assessing the merits of their work, and even determine a specialization for extended study. Contracts are an effective management tool enabling advanced students to benefit from challenge and replacement tasks beyond the core curriculum. Additionally, contracts provide a realistic means for teachers to facilitate the planning, goal setting, record keeping, and assessments necessary to expedite students’ achievement.

Unfortunately, it is true that some gifted students have developed an attitude that quick and easy-to-do is more attractive than learning experiences that challenge and require depth in thinking and process. Preplan how to respond if gifted students frequently select tiered tasks that are too easy relative to the students’ learning capabilities.

• Communicate with students that any choice is acceptable sometimes, but they learn more when they strive for challenge most of the time. Discuss how people develop negative habits of mind if no struggle or persistence is required when learning
• Help gifted students understand how this work is relevant to their lives and how their efforts result in higher learning and personal accomplishments.
• Elicit students’ perceptions by requiring them to write a response explaining why they chose the task. Briefly meet with each student to discuss the response and motivate appropriate future action.
• Contract with the student and specify which tasks or range of tasks to select from when working at the station. Limit the choices to those most applicable to that student’s readiness and need for challenge.
• To continuously document students’ ownership of their own learning progress, ensure that learning station times incorporate techniques to promote students’ responsibility for record keeping and self-management. Empower students to review their work, assess its strengths, and determine potential areas or skills for growth and development.
• Post a chart clarifying the positive learning behaviors that are expected when students work independently, such as self-management, peer interactions, effort, content depth, time management, and self-assessment. Require students to ponder how their behaviors in learning situations approximate those posted expectations.
• Provide a rubric that defines the degrees of quality for products from required learning tasks. For gifted students, the rubric should specify beyond grade-level content, process, and product attributes rather than only grade-level mastery expectations.
• Implement a process that requires students to complete station-based learning by self-assessing the quality of their accomplishments and setting goals for continued learning. A log is a simple tool for organizing self-assessment and goal setting.
• Challenge students to go beyond the minimum requirements of a learning task and make connections that increase its relevancy to their lives. The template Reflective Thinking is one example of a simple assessment tool that guides gifted learners to analyze how they extended the learning challenge and enhanced the complexity and depth of their work. As another example,

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### LEARNING STATION CONTRACT

DATE INITIATED __________ DATE DUE __________

DATE COMPLETED __________

I have selected these ________________ additional stations and tasks to complete.

SPECIALIZATION. I want to spend more time at the ________________ station.

I will use these resources:

My finished product will be:

TEACHER-STUDENT TIME

☑ When your name is called, you meet with me to reflect and assess.

☑ Be prepared to explain how you met and how you exceeded expectations.

☑ Select one item randomly. Select a second piece to review from your station log and folder.

☑ We will discuss your self assessments of your learning behaviors and products, and collaboratively determine your contract grade.

STUDENT __________ DATE __________

TEACHER __________ DATE __________

“Consider All Angles” emphasizes process engagement, social-emotional connections, summarization, and documents how students challenged themselves to extend the learning task.

Well-developed tiered stations enable advanced and gifted students to flourish and continuously learn in mixed-ability environments. Tiered learning stations are a realistic differentiation strategy when the emphasis switches from preparation intensity to instructional integrity through simple techniques that enhance academic rigor.

RESOURCES

DR. BERTIE KINGORE is an international consultant and award-winning author of twenty-five books, seven interactive CDs, numerous articles, and instructional aids. She has received many honors including the Legacy Award as the author of the 2005 Educator Book of the Year, the Outstanding Alumnus Award from the University of North Texas, and the Texas Gifted Educator of the Year Award. She is a respected and popular speaker at national and international conferences, helping educators translate research into effective instructional applications.
There is no question that environment affects learning. An engaging room encourages education. So, teachers struggle to create a clear, crisp space and they succeed, sometimes brilliantly. However, there are many ways to set up a classroom. Do all classrooms have to be the model of order and clarity?

Certainly, classrooms must be clean and safe. They also must reflect the learning that is to be done therein. There may be another model for classrooms: the studio model. In the creative world, there are two distinct spaces: the studio and the showroom. Both spaces are critical to the creative process, but they are very different from each other in structure. When creating a learning environment you might want to consider the studio as well as the show place.

A studio is the space where an artist (including performers), create. It is filled with tools and materials, and can feel chaotic. For many (but certainly not all), the creative process is not orderly or organized. In fact, there are theories that chaos and chaotic reasoning may promote creativity (chaos computing is a fine example of this).

The showroom, by contrast, is the place where the created works are displayed. It may be a shop, or a museum, or simply a space that is organized to allow total focus on the product. Showrooms are comfortable and predictable and soothing in their way; there is just one thing going on in a showroom so that attention goes to the viewing of the product or work.

A SAMPLE STUDIO

At my high school we had an art teacher (since retired) who was remarkable. She launched many young artists during her career. Each day, each year, she worked tirelessly and successfully to help students find the creative forces inside of them. Former students still recall her with reverence. However, her classroom was a mess. Everywhere you looked there were scraps of paper and pots of paint and brushes scattered throughout the room. Walls were filled and over-filled with examples of works of former students.

Many students blossomed in this studio. They were never far from inspiration or materials. It was almost impossible not to create art, and in many cases, great art. But was the environ-

Classroom as Studio
Organized Chaos & Creative Production
By Dan Nelson

PHOTO BY DAN NELSON
ment too chaotic for some? Possibly. For some students, as well as some parents, and maybe many administrators, a rich, diverse, seemingly chaotic environment can be too much. With a limited amount of time for review (one parent night, one class-period observation) the value of the depth of the environment is not evident. So, the parent or the administrator comes away with the idea that the room is a “mess.” They wanted to see a showroom, but what they saw was a studio. It is easy to judge such a place as unfit if you just take a surface look at the place; that’s why it’s so important to look at how the students interact with the place.

In this art class, the students worked at their own pace, doing different things with different materials. At any given time, one student might be investigating the gradations of color on the color wheel; another might be applying color swatches to a cube to see how light, shadow and plane alter our perception of color; and a third might be practicing hash markings to show depth of tonality. Each student is learning in her or his own way, and each student is using the materials appropriate to her or his own direction. Luckily, in such a room the materials are close at hand and readily visible; less time is taken up hunting for something and more time can be spent on the activity.

An administrator entering this classroom would see a mess and perhaps even describe it as “pandemonium.” But, looking past the apparent lack of organization and by looking at student activity, an administrator might see the students engaged in their learning. Closer examination might show differentiation; a student who is striving to abstract the meaning of red by representing it with only hash markings could be sitting next to a student who is discovering the shades of orange as he mixes his acrylics. The classroom as studio can provide the materials and the area for investigation.

In a studio, the place is less important than the action in it. Observers, however, are frequently distracted by the place itself, and therefore cannot see the activity within. It is important to remember that an empty classroom has almost no meaning; it is similar to library books on the shelf. Only when students are in the classroom and using space does the functioning of the room become clear.

**SAMPLE “SHOWROOM” SPACES**

But what if the administrator wants to see a showroom? We are conditioned to want to see a fully realized product. When we go to a restaurant, we order our food and it arrives prepared and ready for consumption. The dining room is the showroom in this example. The atmosphere and ambiance are prescribed and controlled; the experience is not left to chance. We appreciate this, especially if we have had a challenging day. It is comforting to settle back into an upholstered booth, order, and wait for our dinner. We can talk and relax because both the environment and the experience are predictable. Very few of us want to see into the kitchen, and even fewer want to be in the middle of the kitchen during peak time. It would probably seem chaotic. The kitchen is the studio, and there is a perfectly good reason the kitchen is frequently walled off from the dining room.

For a math class, it may be perfectly feasible to have all students sitting in rows, following along as the teacher or another student explains the solution to a problem. This is especially true in classes where all students share the same ability level and are all working at the same pace. These classrooms do exist; there are such groupings of students out there.

In my experience, administrators and many parents prefer such classroom environments. The learning is evident and orderly—and even better—it is predictable. There is a sense of control over the entire experience. Such classrooms foster the idea of strong classroom management.

Of course, engagement cannot be the only measure of a successful classroom environment. There is also the concern of safety. The classroom must be safe, and allow for safe experimentation. The room
must be clean; there are general guidelines for material safety that must be recognized. Piling materials for example, in front of exits, or obscuring safety equipment, is never acceptable. These are requirements for both studio and showroom classes.

**MY EXPERIENCE**

Another concern is the temperament of the students. In my photography classes I have students who are perfectly at home with the organized chaos of the photo studio. Having lighting and props, and reflectors and backdrops scattered through the room is just fine for them. There are others, though, who retreat from that environment. For them, an orderly space is required for concentration. I have to accommodate these students as well. Luckily, I have a very large classroom that allows for me to split the area into “zones” or “centers.” When an orderly student needs to use the photo studio, we reset the area to its original condition. When a student who is comfortable with disorder needs the studio, she arranges the studio to fit her needs. At the end of each day (or the week, depending on the duration of the project), the room is returned to its “original” condition. It isn’t necessarily tidy, and it is never sterile, but it is organized and ready for the next project.

At my high school, I teach the yearbook class and have done so now for nineteen years. It is one of my favorite classes to teach because the ultimate product is created for the students at the school. Therefore, the structure of the class is very much focused on the authenticity of the content. To be successful, the book must reflect the students and the slice of time during which the book was created. To accomplish this, the class is organized chaos. One student works on a layout while another edits photos; two others create posters advertising an upcoming event that the photographers will cover. No one is doing the same thing at the same time; they can’t. Our content comes to us at various times, and our product is delivered to the printer at other times. Yet, each year, the yearbook is produced and delivered on time (some years have been trickier than others). When the yearbook is delivered at the end of the year, the readers are completely unaware of the chaos that went into creating the book; they just see the result.

If I ran a showroom class instead of a studio class, we would all be doing the same thing at the same time. Each page would be similar to the next with little variation. That certainly has value: it would look great to administrators and would be comforting to the parents of prospective students as they drop by to preview the school. What these parents and administrators find, though, can be surprising. Students are all over the room working, discussing, brainstorming, editing, or out gathering information. The adults may not realize they have wandered into a studio.

Each teacher must let the curriculum and the approach dictate the organization for the classroom. For many classes, a showroom approach is best. Ordered desks and materials in tidy stacks can be the best way to put a classroom together. However, there are some classes that require a studio approach. Classes that rely on creativity and problem solving, and classes that require students to work independently of each other, may benefit from a studio approach. It may look like chaos to some, but I have planned the chaos in my classrooms and know how to use the dynamics and energy within students to make it work.

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During the earliest years of their lives, young children learn by exploring environments; they finger, touch, and manipulate whatever they can get their hands on. Gradually, these explorations become more focused as they learn and become more curious about the world around them. As higher-level thinking develops and they enter school, young primary students continue to create and improvise with any materials at hand, inventing the world as they go (Belgrad, 1998, p. 373). This constructive behavior of young children has led to classroom environments that emphasize play, exploration, risk taking, and creative problem solving. In the ideal setting, the resources, and daily lessons extend, engage, and challenge all students, including the gifted.

It’s important to remember that environments are influenced by those who inhabit them. Hence, young gifted students can contribute richly to the classroom through the knowledge they’ve gained from the lives they’ve lived so far. One child may have a wealth of stories told by his grandmother who just arrived from China—a wonderful source for literacy. Another knows about engines from her dad’s tinkering with cars in his garage. She loves creating sculptures from leftover pipes, wires, and machinery—a potential link to mathematics. Yet another child may want to share things from a family trip: maps, pictures, and diagrams of stars, exotic lizards, or rock formations—catalysts for lessons in science and geography. Luis Moll (1992), who studied the life experiences and practical knowledge of bilingual students in the barrio schools of Tucson, Arizona, used the term “funds of knowledge” to describe these areas of skill and ability.

THE LEARNING SPACE

A classroom begins with the designed space. Besides its appearance and arrangement, other environments come into play—the social/emotional (“feel” of the room), the dynamic (“flow” of movement to different learning spaces), the cultural (sources, displays, language-learning), and the structural (scheduling, daily routines). In the right circumstances, the teachers and students who occupy this environment continually create and adapt it. The following features establish a foundation for young gifted children to develop their abilities:

DESIGN
• Visual stimulation (color and design—e.g., posters, art, displays)
• Learning centers (theme-based, interests, learning styles)
• Materials (hands-on, multimedia, natural objects, art supplies)
• Seating arrangements (whole class, small group, small areas for “messier” work)

STRUCTURE
• Beginnings for the day (environmental/sound music, improvisations, creative movement)
• Sharing time (interests, discoveries, stories, nature objects—leaf, nest, shell)
• Student responsibilities (cleaning up, storing supplies, doing classroom jobs, being civil)
• Movement (whole class to small group, extension activities, and independent work)

CULTURE
• Sources (multilingual/multicultural books, posters, signs, audio)
• Celebrations (class activities, pictures, video, dance, song)
• Oral/written expression (traditional tales, family stories, poetry, song)
• Visual expression (symbols, colors, art styles, architecture)

ATMOSPHERE
• Openness (questioning, taking risks, being spontaneous)
• Adventure (enticing catalysts, creative options, inclusion of interests)
• Support and care (free thinking encouraged, risk-taking and innovation embraced)
• Peer relationships (cooperation encouraged, bullying outlawed, interests emphasized)

This kind of classroom is an ideal place for young gifted students who quickly get the feeling that something new is about to happen. Will they unravel a hidden mystery of science by looking through a magnifying glass? Will they discover the magic of words through an oral reading of poetic verse? As much as possible, young students need to use
sources other than those specifically created for the classroom. Books, games, and software about the natural world cannot compare with acorns, rocks, and nests. A geometry lesson expands considerably when applied to the principles of kite making where students measure and calculate angles and distances.

Einstein has excellent advice here:

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.

THE NURTURING SPACE

Most gifted children are thin-skinned and can rarely do well without developing the inner strength to persevere. Their high sensibilities may strike at any moment. They can feel intensely vulnerable and raw to every jibe (real or imagined), every change in the atmosphere, every assignment that confines or restricts. They react dramatically to their own and others’ failings and are apt to question the value of their work due to minor flaws. Here are some general guidelines to support their social and emotional needs:

Validate the child’s ideas and questions no matter what. Support a young gifted child’s own learning process rather than re-direct it because it seems unusual or idiosyncratic. A sensitive child responds better when a teacher says, “I love what you’ve done here but can you tell me what this means? What is the next step? Have you thought of this other possibility?” The child feels validated because the teacher values her ideas and wants to help her make it better. Instead of giving up out of embarrassment, the gifted student feels encouraged to ask for more support when needed.

Celebrate curiosity and discovery. Teacher enthusiasm is infectious and inspires a sense of joy and adventure for the day’s activities. Present new topics so that young students can encounter problems or situations directly and reflect on their experiences. Encourage them to ask questions and show them how to observe, test their ideas, and look for clues. Offer resources for them to make their own discoveries and imagine what might be a solution or answer. Pose open questions that allow them to find more solutions. Support their curiosity. What do they want to know? What intrigues them about this topic?

Acknowledge bravery and persistence. Teachers should privately acknowledge children whenever they cope well with a difficult situation. A teacher who sees a struggling gifted child comfort an unpopular peer should acknowledge him. Being different is hard enough; showing that difference in class takes real courage. A child who risks ridicule by offering an idea that seems crazy or weird to peers deserves support and encouragement. In this way, gifted students gain strength by valuing what really matters to them and by taking risks.

Create a sense of community. Despite their introspective nature, sensitive gifted children crave friendships as much as anyone. It’s important to help them find others who share their enthusiasms, abilities, and skills. Examples could include not only other gifted students but also peers with similar interests, members of after-school clubs (e.g., chess, science, writing), and, with supervision, even online communities. Anything that teachers can do to help their gifted students meet like-minded individuals will buoy them up during difficult times.

Encourage humor. Light-heartedness is a powerful force. Sensitive gifted students often possess more than the usual amount of wit, but they also have a tendency to take themselves very seriously. A minor problem can quickly become a catastrophe. This is another case where the teacher’s sense of humor affects how students respond to their challenges. Teachers who can laugh at themselves and their mistakes in class make it much easier for students to do the same. Light-heartedness in the classroom turns the serious business of learning into something spontaneous, playful, and fun.

THE CREATING SPACE

Research has proved that the classroom environment—particularly in its influence on motivation and creative expression—plays a central role in the degree to which high-ability students can become independent, innovative, imaginative thinkers (Amabile, 1996; Hennessey, 2004). When extrinsic pressures such as competition, evaluation, and external rewards outweigh other concerns, students tend to approach the learning process as a means to an end, undermining creativity and self-determination (Hennessey, 2004). Incorporating the creative dimension nurtures the intrinsic motivations of children—inner curiosity, imagination, and passion—giving birth to the inventor, the mad scientist, the storyteller, and the artist.

The following chart uses the metaphor of gardening to illustrate how to nurture creativity in the classroom (Smutny, Walker & Meckstroth, 2007, pgs. 40-41).

GUIDING CREATIVE LEARNERS

Preparing the Soil

• Openly share your own creative passions with your students.
• Fill the classroom with art, music, and a rich variety of enticing supplies.
• Design work spaces that beckon the creative muse in your students.
• Applaud originality, whenever and wherever expressed.
• Protect students from saboteurs: criticism, censure, and premature judgment.
• Celebrate risk-taking and bold endeavor.

Planting the Seeds

• Awaken imagination and artistic sensibilities through example and exposure to creative people and their works.
• Create open time for creative exploration.
• Share jewels of wisdom about the creative process.
• Point out the hidden, less traveled paths; warn against set
patterns.
• Celebrate the beginning steps of children’s own creative
process.

Watering and Feeding
• Design activities that engage the whole child: touching, feel-
ing, imagining, listening, sensing, composing, combining,
writing, improvising, constructing, molding, shaping.
• Provide for advanced learning in a variety of fields.
• Assign work that requires creative and imaginative thinking.
• Nurture boldness in vision and endeavor.

Weeding and Growing
• Teach strategies for constructive criticism and evaluation.
• Impart coping skills to deal with peer judgment, crippling
perfectionism, and frustration with the creative process.
• Support students’ trust in their own creative power.
• Give them opportunities to correct errors, refine visions, re-
write, re-create, improve, and elaborate.
• Find venues for students to show/demonstrate/perform/ex-
hibit for real audiences in the community.

By its nature, creativity expands the learning process and ex-
tends beyond the walls of the classroom. Young gifted students
need to see and experience the different ways creativity can
express itself in the larger world around them. Here are some
suggestions for teachers to accomplish this:

Biographies. Integrate biographies of famous people in vari-
ous fields whose contributions represent some facet of creativity
and imagination. Inventors, explorers, zoologists, architects,
and engineers depend on creative thinking as much as artists
and writers. Exposing young students to these life stories pre-

ares the ground for learning experiences beyond the school.

Community resources. When teachers or schools partner
with community resources—businesses, cultural centers, stu-
dios, architectural or engineering firms—they open the door to
new learning opportunities for young gifted children. This can
occur in a number of ways. First, professionals can share expe-
riences about their daily lives—their responsibilities at work,
the problems they encounter, and the solutions they’ve created.
Second, these professionals may be willing to mentor young
gifted children in projects related to their business and possibly
arrange for a visit to their company.

Child-friendly institutions. When possible, explore the
possibility of trips to museums, cultural centers, or historical

ocieties. Many of them offer educational opportunities for
young children. Just recently, in The Art Institute in Chicago,
local children listened to a story about shapes, explored the
galleries to find geometric shapes that appealed to them, and
then turned these into art compositions. At The Field Mu-
seum, they created a giant floor map of Africa and dissected
an owl pellet. In the Adler Planetarium, they peeked through
telescopes to get close-up views of the moon and stars, and
learned about the wild weather of various planets.

Cultural arts. Finding artists to work with students can be
life transforming. Gifted students become motivated and in-
spired by learning a cultural art form, by mastering new tech-
niques, and learning its history and interpretive styles. An ex-

mple is a mostly Hispanic school in Chicago that raised funds
to purchase mariachi instruments and hire a touring musician.
Gifted young students loved practicing, perfecting their skills, and
performing at different venues—community centers, neighbor-
hood celebrations, and music festivals. Muralists, video artists,
writers, and actors from different cultures can reveal a different
world to young children. A local poet-painter who shows students
how she mingles visual images with words to tell a story easily
sparks the imagination. It is not unusual in any community to
find children’s creative works in banks, stores, art centers, librar-
ies, or on prominent walls along a train station. Through these
actions, the creative environment expands—both from art worlds
outside the school to the children inside and from the gifted chil-
dren inside to the community venues around them.

Young gifted children deserve to learn in expanding environ-
ments—both within and beyond the classroom. They arrive at
the doors of our classrooms, eyes wide with anticipation, for they
have already seen, felt, and explored many things in their earliest
years of life. Confinement within a restricted environment and a
limited course of study closes the walls around them. Expanding
the classroom environment, therefore, ensures that they never lose
their connection to the real life mysteries that make them curious
and eager to learn.

RESOURCES
Children.” In J.F. Smutny (Ed). The young gifted child: Potential and promise, an
anthology (pp. 369-379). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press
of motivation and classroom climate. Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on
the Gifted and Talented.
connect homes and classrooms. Theory Into Practice, 31(2), 132-141.
Smutny, J.F. & von Fremd, S.E. (2011). Teaching advanced learners in the general educa-

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dren in the Chicago area annually. She also teaches creative
writing in many of these programs as well as courses on
gifted education for graduate students at the university level.
In 1996, she won the National Association for Gifted Children
(NAGC) Distinguished Service Award for outstanding contribu-
tion to the field of gifted education. In 2011 she received the E.
Paul Torrance Award for creativity. She is the author and editor
of numerous publications in the field of gifted education.
Over the past several months, I have considered gifted education from the lens of Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²). I have compared the pedagogical process to technology that my technophobic mother might use, to my experiences with farming as a small child, to visits to the doctor’s office, and to a GPS in my car. The message in each of these lessons has been the same: It’s never enough to leave no child behind. In the twenty-first century, we must create environments and pedagogies in which every child forges ahead.

As we consider learning environments in this issue, it occurs to me that we create environments for thinking every time we present a challenge to students at home or at school. Graphic organizers provide a two-dimensional environment that can be the launch point for new ideas. As I was lingering in an environment of self-defeat (also known as “writer’s block”), I had the good fortune to walk into a lesson from Mr. Alexander Hyres, an eighth grade Social Science and English-Language Arts teacher at The Bayside S.T.E.M ACADEMY in San Mateo. Mr. Hyres, his colleague, Bethany Feske, and the entire team at Bayside S.T.E.M. are ardent advocates for creating learning environments that challenge students to practice analytic, creative, and critical thinking in problem-solving settings. At the same time, Mr. Hyres has several students who are not yet proficient. He has the difficult task of engaging critical thinkers with appropriate scaffolds to make connections with students who struggle.

Alexander is responsible for teaching the California content standards for history-social science, and for teaching students to have the appropriate literacy anchors for college and career readiness in Social Sciences. The common core standards ask students to “[appreciate] the norms and conventions of each discipline, such as the kinds of evidence used in history and science…attention to precise details; and the capacity to evaluate intricate arguments, synthesize complex information, and follow detailed descriptions of events and concepts.”

It is tempting to think that since gifted students thrive on this kind of complexity, they come to school already knowing how to approach expository text as an evidentiary artifact to justify an argument. It has been our experience throughout the middle school gifted program that our students learn quickly when given an appropriate learning environment along with structures that suggest possibilities for organization. Graphic organizers can provide that structure for gifted students who are learning to navigate new content or conventions of an unfamiliar discipline. At the same time, these graphic organizers are lifelines to students who struggle. In the next several paragraphs, I will explain how Mr. Hyres’ lesson provided challenge to gifted students while offering appropriate scaffolding for students who struggle academically.
The inquiry on the day I walked into the classroom was, “What were the motives, hardships, and legacies of the groups that moved west in the 1800’s?” It was an inquiry that intrigued me, and I had a few minutes, so I stayed.

Mr. Hyres set up a matrix in which the stakeholders from this era were aligned in the far left column. “Motives,” “Hardships,” and “Legacies” headed the next three columns. Students had examples of primary and secondary sources that gave clues related to each of the characters in this part of the historical record. He then began showing how to use information from the textbook to make the inferences and synthesize ideas. Using “The Explorers” as his example, he went through the text and showed that hardships were defined in the print. He wrote examples of hardships, and then cited the text that held evidence for that fact. Motives, however, had to be “figured out” by looking for clues about why the explorers might want to head west at a time when exploring was a severe hardship. Mr. Hyres realized that many of his class were uncertain about the meaning of “legacy,” so he stopped the lesson to do explicit instruction on the academic language of the discipline. Students made connections with prior learning, and used their intuition to think about legacies that are tangible (e.g., literature or other recorded ideas, money, property) and those that are intangible (e.g., courage, understanding, hope).

Using a pedagogical strategy of gradual release, students could leave the guided practice to work independently. Some students remained in the guided practice group for almost the entire class period, and had prompts that helped them discover the answers within the language and graphics of the textbook. For those students, the answers were more concrete, but they still learned how to approach a complex task. Other students were free to explore the textbook, use primary sources, or more sophisticated sources to investigate the interaction of geographical, biographical, political, economic, and cultural history of the 1800s.

**Implications for Other Disciplines and Grade Levels**

In 2014, we will be using the California Common Core Standards. The K-5 anchor standards for writing expect elementary students to “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and sufficient evidence.” The standard is not that far from the lesson I just relayed. Students made connections with prior learning, and used their intuition to think about ideas that are tangible (e.g., literature or other recorded ideas, money, property) and those that are intangible (e.g., courage, understanding, hope).

In a second grade class, the current content standards center on the idea, “People Who Make a Difference.” Standard 2.1.1 requires that students trace the history of a family though the use of primary and secondary sources, including artifacts, photographs, interviews, and documents.” The second grade teacher, like the eighth grade one, can begin by creating a matrix of people who make a difference. Students can begin at home, using family photos, interviews, and artifacts to make inferences about the lives of people who make significant difference in their lives. Teachers can focus on hardships, motivations, and legacies of the people closest to them, or choose their own topics for I-search and reporting. (I-search is a term used by Roger Taylor to discuss the synthesis of ideas that comes from, among other things, studying primary sources.) While it might be tempting to use language that is less academic with a seven-year-old, I strongly encourage you to use and help them understand the more sophisticated language. I have not yet encountered a second grader who doesn’t enjoy the challenge of using “big” words, and if we give enough concrete examples and use the word in context several times throughout the week, they own the word, and can use it accurately in multiple contexts.

Third grade content standard 3.2.1 is “Describe national identities, religious beliefs, customs, and various folklore traditions.” 3.2.2: “Discuss ways in which physical geography, including climate, influenced how the local [Native Californians] adapted to their natural environments.” When I was teaching in a fourth and fifth grade special day class for gifted students, my dear friend and colleague was teaching third grade down the hall. Nancy used matrices similar to those that we used to analyze basic human activities (Taylor) to have third graders read text, tables, and pictures to record evidence of the national identity, religious beliefs, customs, folklore, geography, and climate of the Ohlone, California Native American, in the Bay area. Mrs. Hibson never threw students into the academic “deep end” without making sure she was there with life vests teaching them to swim. But at the same time, her third graders were never allowed to stay in an academic environment that didn’t challenge them to their full potential.

Responding to the instructional needs of every student in your classroom or around the dinner table at your home means that you set the bar at the highest possible level, and then stand behind, spotting and giving little pushes to make sure they clear the bar. The California Common Core Standards in 2014 will not be an insurmountable challenge for those teachers, both at home and school, that value thinking and provide the environments and who structures that ensure success. Learning is like the pole vault. It’s the same motion whether you’re a novice or an expert, but the bar continually moves, and your motion becomes more elegant with each new attempt. As we move into the summer issue, this column will continue to challenge us to use appropriate strategies for all learners, which is the message of RtI², but the focus will change to strategies for successful implementation of the California Common Core Standards that are to be implemented in just over a year.

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There’s lots of talk about changing the learning environment. Nearly everyone agrees that our children will be doing very different things than their parents, and we’re already doing very different things than we learned, and they are learning, in school. Although the world has changed in huge ways since we were fresh out of school, with few exceptions, school hasn’t changed. And this unchanged schooling is not how to prepare our kids for their future. What can we do?

The first thing we need to do is listen. Our business leaders, our educators, and our young adults have ideas on how to change school to better prepare them for their future. Some of the ideas are good, and some aren’t so good, there is no doubt. But we know that what we’re doing isn’t working, so why not take a chance on change?

**LISTEN...**

TED Talk: Conrad Wolfram: Teaching kids real math with computers, [ted.com/talks/conrad_wolfram_teaching_kids_real_math_with_computers.html](http://ted.com/talks/conrad_wolfram_teaching_kids_real_math_with_computers.html) describes the problem with math education today, from the perspective of the student, the teacher, the employer and the world economy. Math is key to the world, and yet school math is becoming less and less popular with students, and kids are leaving school less and less prepared for the real world of math, according to employers. Name a subject that doesn’t use math in the real world. Math is key to mathematics, of course, but also scientists, psychologists and other social scientists, programmers, marketing, sales, clerical, construction, and of course the individual, in terms of shopping, budgeting, mortgages and rent... math is key to pretty much everything. It’s not key to writing, you might say, but I’m sure the authors want to know whether it’s more prudent to sell their work to publisher one or publisher two, whether it’s best to advertise online or in print, and all those things require... math.

Wolfram, of Wolfram Research, the company behind the cutting-edge knowledge engine Wolfram-Alpha, has a radical idea: use computers to teach math. There are places for hand-calculating, of course. But today’s young kids have no idea which came first, the paper and pencil or the computer. They are both second nature by the time the child enters school. Why are we removing the computer, the tool kids have grown up with, when they reach school age, and calling this “back to basics?” Why is typing the math problem on a computer considered any less educational than writing the math problem on...
a piece of paper? Listen to Wolfram and consider his ideas.

While you’re visiting TED Talks, take a listen to some of the other great TED Talks on education, including Arthur Benjamin’s formula for changing math education, ted.com/talks/lang/en/arthur_benjamin_s_formula_for_changing_math_education.html, who offers us easy to implement, inexpensive math education. Richard Baraniuk on open-source learning, ted.com/talks/lang/en/richard_baraniuk_on_open_source_learning.html, offers ideas on open-source online instruction that cuts out the textbook, and allows teachers to share and modify course materials freely, anywhere in the world! And last but perhaps even more important, Ken Robinson says schools kill creativity. Go to ted.com/talks/lang/en/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html, to see his profound pleas for an education system that nurtures creativity.

READ...

Millennials will benefit and suffer due to their hyperconnected lives, pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Future_of_Internet_2012_Young_brains_PDF.pdf according to a non-random survey of more than 1,000 invited thought leaders. While not research, these survey results make for a very interesting read. Learn of both pros and cons of the multi-tasking, instant gratification world our kids are growing up in. Compare our laments about losing print resources to ‘net resources, to our ancestors laments about losing verbally mastered rhyme as a memory tool, to printed books as a memory tool. Is our new migration all that different? Hear from teachers and business leaders, technology pioneers and government officials. And consider what you think the pros and cons of our interconnected, socially networked future will be!

LOOK...

Playgrounds of the Future, amandaripley.com/blog/playgrounds_of_the_future, shows us how recess can be a time of creativity and cooperation. Playgrounds, like other children’s toys, are getting fancier every year. New climbing obstacles, wilder slides, fancier swings, taller castles, but all fixed, built once, long before the kids come to play. Why not let kids create their own playground, using their own creativity and working together in their own teams? Why not play on a playground that can be different every time they play? Imagination Playground is just that… and kids love to use their imaginations to create their own play space! And if you think you’ve seen it all in this video, check out the CNN report on the same product… this time, the kids are working in a shallow water play area, and have new and different ideas incorporating the water along with the playground pieces! Jessica Yellin of CNN interviews David Rockwell and Susan Solomon at Imagination Playground at Burling Slip, vimeo.com/14651312. Visit the official site, Imagination Playground, imaginationplayground.com for another great video and more information.

Wondering what our kids future educational tools will look like? Here’s a preview, a product designed for kids, by kids: The Scale of the Universe, htwins.net/scale2/scale2.swf?bordercolor=white. Yes, this was designed by a 14-year-old, with technical support from his twin brother. Programming is a great way to learn logic, sequence and more. And it’s a marketable skill in the workplace, whether you’re a mathematician or a psychologist, business owner or teacher. The Scale of the Universe teaches us what the comparison is between a human at nearly 2 meters (scale = 10^1 or 1 meter) and a grain of salt (scale = 10^-3 or 1/1000 meter), or the diameter of our Sun (10^9 or 1,000,000,000 meters) and the Ant Nebula (10^16 or 10,000,000,000,000,000 meters).

There is no doubt that education must change for the 21st century, for our children to be prepared for 21st century jobs.

LEARN...

MITx, mitx.mit.edu, is MIT’s new learning initiative. Imagine taking an MIT course for free, no matter where you live, no matter how much you can afford to pay. Now imagine a whole portfolio of MIT courses available in this way. That’s MITx. The first MITx course rolled out in March 2012: 6.002x Circuits and Electronics. In the future, there will be a modest fee if the student chooses to test and become credentialed in the MITx course, but for now, credentials are free. MIT Provost L. Rafael Reif explains, “MITx will offer MIT teaching to people beyond our campus, widening access to education and offering new connections between the Institute and learners around the world.”

Looking for online math for a younger audience? Try Art of Problem Solving’s new online learning system, Alcumus, artofproblemsolving.com/Alcumus. Like more expensive online learning systems, Alcumus is intelligent, constantly adjusting to the student’s level and needs, whether the need is for more challenging material, or more practice with a particular topic.
You can go into settings, and move the level of problems up or down as appropriate, or run through the basics as a review; Alcumus will move quickly if you get everything right, through smart learning and learning challenges. There are detailed status reports, and parents or teachers can track individual students or whole classes. Topics currently covered range from Introductions to Algebra, Counting & Probability, Geometry and Number Theory, and pre-algebra I and II, algebra I and II, with more topics anticipated. And Alcumus is currently free!

Any discussion of creative learning environments has to mention Khan Academy, khanacademy.org. Since we’ve spoken of them in the past, we’ll mention a new addition to Khan Academy that is sure to please students: Vi Hart and her amazing math videos, khanacademy.org/search?page_search_query=vi+hart And by the time you read this article, there will be lots more Vi Hart videos on Khan Academy, explaining lots more math in our environment!

There is no doubt that education must change for the 21st century, for our children to be prepared for 21st century jobs. And there is no doubt that the technology of the 21st century makes many of the possibilities for change unfathomable using 20th century education paradigm. The question is, which technologies will prove most valuable to our new version of education, and how long will it take society to realize it and start seriously integrating it into both public and private education? Change isn’t easy. Choosing to try something new is at least as difficult as choosing to keep doing things the “same old way.” Education is already changing… let’s keep that change going!

Kids Korner and Teens Territory!

This month’s Kids Korner is intentionally slanted towards our older kids and teens. These are the kids who are deep into their education, and yet, digital natives.

BBC Ks3 Bitesize, bbc.co.uk/schools/ks3bitesize, is a site full of learning bits in English, science and math for kids ages 6-16. Nibble on bites of English, including reading, writing, speaking and listening. Shakespeare scenes and play summaries (two Romeo and Juliet, and The Tempest so far). In math (that’s maths in English), find bites of numerical operations, geometry, algebra and more. In science, nibble on organisms, behavior and health, chemical and material behavior, energy, electricity and forces, and the environment, Earth and universe! In each topic, revise (learn), complete the activity and take the test. Or play the games, using all your knowledge to solve the puzzles and challenges. Having specific problems? Check out the message boards and get answers to your trickiest questions!

The Prime Puzzles & Problems Connection (PP&P), primepuzzles.net, is a site for our advanced math kids. Every week a new puzzle related to prime numbers, and the next week, its solution. Magical squares, Cunningham chains, Carmichael numbers, and lots more interesting math questions… and just in case you can’t keep up with the kids, the answers are provided the next week.

MathCandy! mathcandy.tumblr.com, describes itself: “I make pictures with candy and math. You get to look at them!” Fun and creative, using rather advanced math. Pictured is a Riemann sum done with Rips Whips, AirHeads Sour Belts and Junior Caramels for weights! What can you do with candy and math? Candy and science? Some other unexpected pairing?

Alcumus, artofproblemsolving.com/Alcumus, is Art of Problem Solving’s online learning system, mentioned above. But what else is it to our teens? Alcumus includes over 9,000 problems from past math contests, including MathCounts, MOEMS, the American Mathematics Competitions, and the Centre for Education in Mathematics and Computing competitions… all waiting for you to solve in preparation for the next competition.

You know YouTube, youtube.com, but perhaps you aren’t familiar with YouTube Channels. Channels, you ask? Well, they’re more like collections by a specific poster. And there are some excellent YouTube Channels to visit regularly or even subscribe to…

Grey Explains, youtube.com/user/CGPGrey, is a channel of explanations of everything from the Electoral College (and the Trouble with the Electoral College) to Copyright: Forever Less One Day, from Daylight Savings Time Explained to the Difference Between the United Kingdom, Great Britain and England Explained.

Minute Physics, youtube.com/user/minutephysics, includes simple explanations of advanced physics concepts.

NatSciDemos, youtube.com/user/NatSciDemos, is the official YouTube channel of Harvard Natural Science Lecture
Demonstrations. Their Pendulum Waves is one of my favorite videos, but don’t miss other hits, including Color Subtraction, and for wave motion, study the Water Balloon Ping Pong Ball video. All amazing scientific demonstrations!

Brusspup, youtube.com/user/brusspup, features optical illusions, science and more. Start with the Crazy Moving Square Illusion, then move to the Amazing Fire Illusion or one of my favorites, the Most Amazing Illusion Ever!

SciShow, youtube.com/user/scishow, features science tidbits several times a week. Learn that the 5300-year-old ice man, Eddy, had a harder life than we knew. With brown hair and brown eyes, type O blood, he was lactose intolerant and was the earliest known carrier of Lyme disease. Did you know? And brown eyes, type O blood, he was lactose intolerant and was the earliest known carrier of Lyme disease. Did you know? And how many of you use Google “street view” to walk down streets around the world? Here’s a new one, even for you. Google is working to make “street view” available to us… from the Great Barrier Reef! I can’t wait! While you’re visiting SciShow, check out his episodes on Awesome Inventions by African Americans.

Want more of the Great Barrier Reef as soon as it’s available? Check out Catlin Seaview Survey, youtube.com/user/CATLINSEAVIEWSURVEY, new in February of 2012. This survey and its video will focus on the health and well-being of the Great Barrier Reef, providing crucial information as a baseline on the health of the Great Barrier Reef, as well as on the health of the reef through the earth’s climate change.

Enjoy all the great sites on the Kids Korner and Teens Territory this issue, and we’ll be back next issue with even more interesting internet sites to visit. Until then….

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Thanks to the power and potential of Internet Communication Technologies, teachers and students alike have access to unprecedented amounts of information and educational resources. Yet, the real gift of today’s technology is not that it merely allows for the consumption of knowledge and information but also provides for the creation of new content and resources that are capable of being distributed by anyone in the world with a computer and a connection to the Internet.

One of the most prolific creators of educational content of our time is Salman Khan of khanacademy.com. In just over five years, Khan has managed to record and share a library of over 3000 educational videos each lasting about 10 minutes. To create each of the videos Khan utilizes a Wacom Bamboo tablet (http://www.wacom.com/en/Products/Bamboo/BambooTablets.aspx), a free drawing program called SmoothDraw 3 (http://www.smoothdraw.com), and a video screen capture program, Camtasia Studio (http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html). The total estimated cost of these three tools is about $400.

The more that I watch Khan Academy videos, the more that I want to begin creating my own. But as a teacher I wondered if I would really need to invest in a tablet and an expensive piece of software, or if there were a way I could use free tools and resources that I might already have.

This led me to explore the other products that TechSmith offers that are free and would meet the needs and budget of any teacher. Jing (http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html) is a free and easy way to record up to 5 minutes of onscreen video. Available for both the Mac and PC, Jing is a program that is installed on your computer and resides on your desktop. Once activated it allows you to capture and annotate a still shot of your screen or to record every action that is taking place on screen. Utilizing a tool like Jing would allow you or your students to record short video tutorials with audio for any computer-based task.

Additionally, Jing is a perfect tool for providing feedback on students’ computer-based products. Rather than writing comments on student websites, one could simply create a screencast that interacts with and displays the exact areas being discussed. Jing also serves as a wonderful tool for providing specific video instructions for any computer-learning station or activity that you might create in your classroom. Rather than writing out step-by-step instructions or having to show individual students how to perform a task multiple times, Jing would allow you to record the task being done one time and that video could then be saved and shared with multiple students.

TechSmith also offers an intermediate level product with enhanced editing features and no time limits called Snagit (http://www.techsmith.com/snagit.html) for $49.95. As you
and your students begin developing more sophisticated videos, you will likely want the additional features offered by this program.

But what if you want to create a video tutorial more similar to that of Khan Academy featuring a verbal explanation along with your own writing and drawing? Well if you have an iPad, then there are a variety of free tools that would allow you to do just that.

Two applications that show extreme promise for recording video tutorials on the iPad are ShowMe (http://www.showme.com) and Educreations (http://www.educreations.com). Both of these apps are free downloads and are remarkably similar to one another. They both start with a blank page and feature a variety of different markers that one can use to draw or write text on the screen. This can be accomplished by simply using one's finger or with the use of an additional stylus for the iPad.

As an aside, I have tried a variety of iPad styluses ranging in price from $5 to $40 and have not noticed a significant difference in any of the products. ShowMe and Educreations each have a “record” feature that captures any activity on the screen as well as audio, and I love that during the recording you can pause and then restart at any time. After you are finished with your recording, it can be easily shared in a variety of formats from completely private to online for the whole world to view. Both of these apps allow you to insert a photo from your library and to annotate it. An extremely useful, but not widely known feature, is the ability to take a screenshot of your iPad.

To capture whatever might be on your screen, simply press and hold the “Home” button located at the bottom of your screen at the same time that you press and hold the “On/Off” button on the top of the iPad. After 1 second, release both simultaneously, the screen will flash white and you will hear a camera sound indicating that a photo has been taken. The screenshot will now appear in your photo library and can be used as you would any other photo.

Jing, ShowMe, and Educreations, offer you and your students new ways to teach and share. Gone are the days when it is necessary to constantly teach the same thing in the same way to multiple groups or individuals. Also, each of these tools could be utilized to allow students to document and demonstrate their understanding of a topic. Imagine being able to see the process of creation rather then merely the final destination! Thanks to free apps like these you have the power to create our own Kahn Academy right in your own classroom.

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Using Animoto to Differentiate Instruction

ANIMOTO (WWW.ANIMOTO.COM) FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Students have loved videos since singing stars began making videos singing their songs and having them appear on MTV in the 1980s. Students dreamed of starring in their own video, dancing in front of the mirror with a hairbrush for a microphone. Many students have even tried making their own videos with video cameras and various kinds of installed software. However, those methods are cumbersome, sometimes expensive, and not accessible to all students.

Today, however, students can make videos of any subject in which they are interested. Animoto is a free cloud-based application that is fun and easy to use. The application includes the ability to upload your images, videos, and music; text can also be added. There are various tools for enhancing the video and making it your own. Videos can be easily e-mailed, embedded in a website, or blogged and shared with friends and family through Facebook, twitter, YouTube, flickr, tumblr, photobucket, MySpace, or your own website.

There are various plan options: Lite, Plus, and Pro. Animoto Lite is a free version with which students can make 30 second videos. Animoto Plus allows the creation of full-length videos and costs only $5 per month. Teachers
One of the most difficult social studies concepts for students is the understanding of events over time.

can create a class account for free and students in the class are allowed to create their own videos. (www.Animoto.com/education) There is also an iphone app and an Android app in development.


Animoto requires that students be 13 years old to create their own account. However, in the classroom, teachers create the class account. At home, parents can create an account and supervise the use of Animoto.

1. BEGINNING-OF-THE-YEAR ART PROJECT
Teachers: Take a digital picture of each student. Provide the students with scissors, magazines, paste, markers or crayons, and a blank piece of paper. Instruct them to cut out their face from the digital photo. Paste it on the blank paper, then cut out magazine pictures and use markers to complete a caricature of themselves. Photograph each photo and allow the students to create an Animoto video All About Me using the caricature photo and any other images they wish to use from the Internet or from their own photographs. Share the videos on a class webpage so students can get to know each other. Show at Back-to-School Night.
Parents: Assist your child in creating their own Animoto slideshow All About Me as described above for teachers. Share the video with other family members through email or a family website.

2. HOLIDAY OR BIRTHDAY GREETINGS
Teachers: Ask students to research the history of an upcoming holiday and create a video to share the information then share the videos at Open House.
Parents: Allow students to create a video to share with grandparents wishing them a Happy Valentine's Day or Happy 4th of July. Imagine the joy of grandparents viewing a video created by and starring your child.

3. MATH ASSESSMENT
Teachers: Want a unique way of assessing student progress on a certain math concept or algorithm? In my 1980s 6th grade class I would challenge students to write the process used to solve the problem rather than solve 30 of the same type problems, like long division. It was easy to assess their understanding and where they might be making errors. For a final assessment in 2012, ask each student to create a video explaining the process used to solve a problem. You can watch many 30 second videos faster than you can grade a class full of written tests and the students will find much more pleasure in the experience.
Parents: Students can use Animoto at home to create videos to teach younger family members how to solve math problems at their level. Younger family members can view the video over and over and practice their math problem solving skills without interruption or argument with older siblings or with you.

4. PROJECT SHARING
Teachers: How many of us educators have asked students to make oral presentations about a science fair project or California mission? Instead of asking each student to present to the rest of the students, ask students to create a video presentation of their project. Then ask each child to view the presentation of 5 other students (you assign the videos to be viewed by each student) and use a rubric to assess the project. Students will have to think about their project more thoroughly before creating the presentation and listeners do not have to sit through a class full of presentations. When it is time to share the projects with parents, for example, at Open House, you do not need to keep all the projects in the classroom. You can upload all the videos into i iTunes or a similar program and show the videos as a continuous loop during Open House. There is much less clutter and much less chance of projects being broken. The Animoto Community Help has instructions for using iTunes to create a continuous loop. The Community Help site also has suggestions for using Garage Band or Audacity.
Parents: Students can create an Animoto of a poem or story they have created at home or at school. The presentation can be shared with grandparents and friends.

5. VOCABULARY
Teachers: Remember when you got a list of vocabulary words and were asked to look them up in the dictionary, write a definition, and then use them in a sentence. Boooorrriing! If you are still making this assignment, you need to move into the technology age. Assign a new vocabulary word to each student. Ask them to make an Animoto video of the word using Internet images and music that helps students remember the definition. Post each video on your class wiki, website, or Google Group.
Parents:
Students can create their own vocabulary flash card videos and study vocabulary by viewing their videos. In a blog at http://www.freetech4teachers.com/2009/02/using-Animoto-and-glogster-and-wordle.html teacher Shelly Goodwin says that her students vocabulary scores "skyrocketed" when they used Animoto to create and study vocabulary.

6. FLIPPED CLASSROOM
Teachers:
If you have not heard about the Flipped Classroom concept, go to http://mindshift.kqed.org/2011/09/the-flipped-classroom-defined/ to learn more. In a flipped classroom, students watch lectures and do readings at home before the instructor introduces the concept or skill in the classroom. Teachers can use Animoto to create flipped classroom lessons to be viewed at home. Introduce a new story, science concept, social studies theme, or math process to provide students with prior knowledge before classroom discussions are held.

Parents:
Assist your child in creating his own Animoto slideshow in response to a flipped classroom assignment. For example, if the student is assigned a story to read before the story is introduced in the classroom, use Animoto to create a short summary of the story, or a character analysis from the story. Depending on the grade level, the depth of the Animoto show can be altered.

7. TIMELINES
Teachers:
One of the most difficult social studies concepts for students is the understanding of events over time. Even in high school, I remember not yet seeing that events in European history happened at the same time as events in Asian history. Students can use Animoto to create timelines of historical events in a certain country or among various countries.

Parents:
Assist your child in using Animoto to create a timeline of your family history. Encourage your child to interview various family members to gather further information about your family. This activity might lead to a further interest in genealogy. I researched my family genealogy and wish I had started much earlier while my elders were alive to interview.

8. BOOK REPORTS
Teachers:
Ask students to create an Animoto video to summarize a book they have read. To add depth to the assignment, ask students to make the topic of the video specific to a required standard such as “author’s purpose” or a Common Core Standard such as Grade 4 RL.4.6. “Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.” See http://techmeetsed.com/2011/05/21/Animoto-in-the-classroom/ for a sample book video.

Parents:
Allow your child to create an online book club at a Wiki-spaces with their friends. Students can all read the same book and then create a book review using Animoto. They can watch each other’s video and blog or text about what they each created and learned. Students might also each read a different book and then create an Animoto video to share with their online friends. Watching another student’s video might encourage other children to read the book and increase their own reading list.

9. END-OF-YEAR PROJECT
Teachers:
Ask each student to create an Animoto video to summarize what he or she learned throughout the year in your classroom in a given subject. Show the videos at Open House on a continuous loop.

Parents:
Assist your child in creating her own Animoto slideshow of what she learned during a school year and present it to the teacher for an end-of-the-year gift.

10. CAMPAIGN IN A PREVIOUS TIME
Teachers:
Allow students to work in groups. Each group will be assigned a ballot pair such as Lincoln and Johnson vs. McClellan and Pendleton in the 1864 election. Ask them to create an Animoto video of a campaign ad that would present the different perspectives on the issues of the time. This lesson can follow a class lesson on the issues, a reading of the issues, or require the students to research the issues on their own. This idea came from a series of lesson ideas at https://wiki.itap.purdue.edu/display/INSITE/Animoto#Animoto-second/.

Parents:
Talk to your child about a conflict that might be occurring among family members. Encourage your child to create an Animoto video that presents the differing viewpoints of the conflict. In the creation of the video, your child may permit family members to see the various viewpoints and help to resolve the conflict.

Have fun with Animoto. Send me the links to your student Animotos so I can use them for examples on my website. drbabs@starstream.net and www.drbabs.wikispaces.com.

BARBARA L. BRANCH, Ed.D., teaches two professional development courses in two Certificate Programs for educators, in the Sacramento area. She is retired from 35 years in the Sacramento City Unified School District where she served gifted children as a teacher, principal, and district gifted director. She is a member of the board of directors for the California Association for the Gifted as the educator representative from the Capital Region and is chair- man of the Capital Region GATE Consortium. She also teaches geocaching to 4th and 5th graders in the Academic Talent Search Program at Sacramento State University.
Gifted Education Programming Standards: A Guide to Planning and Implementing High-Quality Services

Edited by Susan K. Johnsen
Paperback, Waco, TX $39.95, 312 pp.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTINE HOEHNER

This book is a must for all coordinator’s of gifted programs! Whether planning for an entire district or a single school, Gifted Education Programming Standards is a useful, comprehensive guide to understanding the basics needed to educate gifted and talented learners.

Johnsen has included in this text, leading national authorities who specialize in such current topics as social emotional development, curriculum planning, instructional strategies and assessment. To help local Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) planners keep the organizational structure in mind, Johnsen has started the book with an overview and an introduction. The former briefly previews the contents of each chapter. The latter includes the bases for (research, theory/literature, practice) and a wonderful explanation of the principles underlying the Program Standards. (My favorite: “All educators are responsible for the education of students with gifts and talents.” It’s wonderful to see in print that principals, district coordinators, teachers, librarians, resource folks are all obligated to provide for GATE students, in addition to the average student, for whom most of the curriculum was created.)

Social emotional development has been a topic of great concern to parents within the last decade. Chapter 2 provides insights into the need for intellectual stimulation and self-acceptance, interaction with students of like interests, and the importance of mental age friendships. An example of how Kate (a fictionalized teacher) designed a GATE friendly classroom is included to illustrate for readers the need for bright students to be able to express information about themselves.

In my own experience, I taught 4th, 5th and 6th graders who were bussed from all parts of Los Angeles. So, during the summer, I would invite two “old” students (those returning) to have a pizza lunch with me and two “new” students. There were, of course, several of these luncheons, depending on the number of brand new students. Thus, the first day of school, every student had at least two buddies who were familiar friends. Only on very rare occasion did starting school have any separation anxiety on the part of the new students.

Identification of GATE students has also been a topic of some concern, especially in the larger school districts where significant numbers of students have the potential to be welcomed into the GATE program. Johnsen addresses this concern herself, in Chapter 4 where she discusses using information from multiple sources, including parents. A case study in this chapter provides a comprehensive look at Cesar, a bright third grader, and the rationale on how to best place him for support.

Finally, Chapter 9 is mentioned in this review because all too often evaluation of the GATE program is overlooked. How does a program coordinator know that what has been implemented is actually giving the positive results desired? Chapter 9 is very instructive. Here a plan of action for program evaluation is described. Table 9.4 shows an organized example for assessing student academic benefit. The six Gifted Programming Standards are entered in their entirety in Appendix A.

The above paragraphs are only a small portion of a significant body of works. The entire edition of Gifted Education Programming Standards is filled with information, ideas, explanations, concerns, solutions and examples.

It is a comprehensive look at Gifted Education and belongs on the desks of GATE program planners.

CHRISTINE HOEHNER spent 17 years in the Los Angeles Unified School District in the Highly Gifted Magnets, as a pull-out gifted teacher and as a regular 6th grade classroom teacher, and 14 years in Montebello Unified as a gifted magnet teacher. She also served 8 years as a gifted administrator and advisor in the Glendale Unified School District. Chris has an M.A. in Special Education, option Gifted and a second M.A. in Educational Administration. She has nearly completed an M.A. in Educational Psychology at UC Santa Barbara.
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