

Teaching for
High Potential
QUALITY CLASSROOM PRACTICE FOR HIGH-ABILITY STUDENTS

Fall 2011



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BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Putting Research Into Practice

Benefits of Providing Enrichment to High-Potential Students from Low-Income Families

BY RACHELLE MILLER AND MARCIA GENTRY, PURDUE UNIVERSITY, WEST LAFAYETTE, IN

This article, connecting research and practice, is based on Scott Peters and Marcia Gentry's Fall 2010 Gifted Child Quarterly article, "Multigroup Construct Validity Evidence of the HOPE Scale: Instrumentation to Identify Low-Income Elementary Students for Gifted Programs" focused on the validity of the HOPE Scale, a 13-item teacher-rating instrument designed to identify academic and social components of giftedness in elementary-aged students.

What happens when a well-established *Super Saturday* program created for gifted and talented learners provides scholarships to high-potential students from low-income families? Will these students, who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, need additional academic and social support from their families and teachers in order to be successful in this program? Will these students enjoy the rigorous activities and advanced content routinely experienced by students who participate in this program? Let's find out.

The achievement gap continues to widen between students from low income and those from non-low-income families who score at the highest levels on achievement tests (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010). All too often, educators use test scores as a single or major criterion for entrance into gifted programs,

which results in students from low-income families, who have high-potential, being excluded from these opportunities (Worrell, 2007). Furthermore, educators who are concerned solely with achievement scores, unaware of other characteristics of high-ability children, often do not recognize the potential in these students (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, Quek & Struck, 2004). In light of these facts, it is important to note that students from low-income families who achieve at or above the 75th percentile are comparable to other students who achieve at or above the 95th percentile (Wyner, Bridgeland, & Duilio, 2009). They possess high levels of motivation, enthusiasm, and good grades in school.

In 2008, the Gifted Education Resource Institute (GERI) at Purdue University began Project HOPE (Having Opportunities Promotes Excellence), a three-year grant project funded from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. This project allowed us to provide scholarships to high-potential students from low-income families. We defined these high-potential students as those who qualified for the federal free and reduced meals program, students who scored at or above the 70th percentile on achievement tests or who were recommended by an educator as having potential were also considered. These students were provided full tuition (including any materials) and transportation to Super Saturday and Super Summer programs.

Scholar Selection

Five Midwestern school districts that had more than 30% of

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Rachelle Miller is a doctoral candidate who works at the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University.

Marcia Gentry, professor of educational studies, directs the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University.

Authors' Note: *This project was supported by a grant from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. Special thanks to Jillian Gates, Scott Peters, and Rebecca Mann who assisted with the HOPE Project.*

Convention Presenter

FROM THE EDITOR

We Teach “You” How to Think

**“We've taught you that the earth is round,
That red and white make pink,
And something else that matters more—
We've taught you how to think.”**

—Dr. Seuss & Jack Prelutsky

The above quote from the children's book *Hooray for Diffendoefer Day* encompasses for me the essence of what it means to teach for high potential. When I find myself frustrated with the current educational climate; one dominated by standardized testing, common core standards, and teacher accountability, I take the book off the shelf and read it. Whether you are an educator in a regular classroom, pull-out program, enrichment specialist, coordinator, or teacher in a self-contained gifted program, the words of Dr. Seuss should ring true for you.

Like many of you in the field of gifted education, it is often hard to explain to those who inquire that although we seek to identify and serve students with advanced talent, the methods that we utilize and the style with which it is delivered can, and should be, used for all students. Once learning styles are recognized, students need to be grouped by ability or interest. If content is mastered, curriculum compacting and choice of independent investigations and projects or other forms of acceleration can be offered. Lessons must be differentiated and curriculum varied in depth and breadth. Skill training should focus on creative problem solving, technology, written and oral communication, and most importantly, divergent and convergent thinking. Affective needs also need to be considered. To put it plainly, **students deserve individualized attention.**

Why share this with you as we begin yet another school year, one that for many of us will mean slimmer budgets, cutback of classroom materials, and a reduction in faculty? I hope it is a reminder of what gifted and talented education is all about—the students seated before us. It is why you are reading the pages of *Teaching for High Potential* and not *Teaching for Gifted Students*. In every classroom across the country there are students waiting to be identified and served. Share the articles in this and past issues with every educator you know, regardless of where and who they teach. Try out some of the strategies and suggestions offered by our columnists. Provide enrichment opportunities like the ones described by Rachel Miller and Marcia Gentry. Reduce the stress of competition by opening up a dialogue within the classroom. Lisa Rohde certainly gives some great advice. Finally, as Jennifer Hoffman has done, seek to re-vamp or create curriculum that is meaningful. The time to share what the field has to offer to education has arrived.

You will notice a saxophone icon on many of the pages of this issue. The reason being is that most of the authors and columnists in this issue are presenters at the 2011 NAGC convention in New Orleans. I hope to see you there. As always, I welcome your comments, suggestions, opinions, and ideas.



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Convention
Presenter

A Home away from Home: The Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts

BY JENNIFER SELTING TROESTER, O'NEILL PUBLIC SCHOOLS, O'NEILL, NEBRASKA • selt33@gmail.com

Editor's Note: *This column looks at the ways in which schools and programs serve gifted and talented students across the country. The columnist conducted interviews and reviewed material before presenting the creative programs and services provided by the school. The Louisiana School*

for Math, Science, and the Arts (LSMSA) is host to an NAGC Action Lab during the National Convention in New Orleans. For more information on these and other Action Labs, please visit: <http://www.nagc.org/2011actionlabs.aspx>.

In 1980, a key member of the Louisiana Legislature along with the Dean of Education from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches visited two residential schools for high-ability students in North Carolina. Recognizing the effective way that such a school can meet the needs of gifted, talented, and high-ability students, they set about the legislative process to establish the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts. The school enrolled its first class in 1983. Admission is open to any highly motivated, high achieving student wanting to take a challenging curriculum taught at the college level.

According to Judy McIntyre, Director of External Affairs, the organization of LSMSA closely resembles an early college model. Students at LSMSA pursue college level courses but stay with their age peers in a high school-like environment. Students are grouped according to their needs. For example, sophomores who can handle the academic rigor of upper classes are welcome to accelerate. When students show that they have mastered a subject, they can grade skip or just move ahead within the class. Very few courses are grade specific, so it is common to see classes populated equally with sophomores and seniors. Teachers offer individualized instruction to students who need it within the framework of their course, and meet regularly with students during office hours and guided study. Assignments are differentiated and special research projects are assigned when requested by the students. Students are even offered the opportunity to take dual enrollment courses at several Louisiana Universities at no cost to the school or the students' parents. McIntyre also reports that



the majority of students say they were rarely challenged in their prior schooling, however, the reality of LSMSA is that students learn that even though they are smart, there is material out there that they have to struggle to master. They learn to be proud of their effort. This attitude can be summed up in a quote from student Sarah Sandifer, who states, "Instead of being pushed down, we are encouraged to think for ourselves and strive to be the best people we can be."

LSMSA does not rank its students, but the school does offer each student the opportunity to graduate with distinction. Juniors can elect whether or not they want to embark on a research project that will set them apart from their classmates. Distinction students have to approach a faculty member and

ask them to serve as their mentor and the head of their committee, draw up a research plan, gather their information, write a paper, defend their findings, and present the results of their research to an audience of their peers and faculty. The class of 2011 had four students graduate with distinction. The titles of two

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LOUISIANA SCHOOL FOR MATH, SCIENCE, AND THE ARTS (LSMSA)

Natchitoches, Louisiana • www.lsmsa.edu • Executive Director: Dr. Patrick Widhalm

Mission Statement: The Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts, a preeminent state-supported residential high school with competitive admissions for high achieving, highly motivated students, fosters in young scholars lifelong growth toward reaching individual potential and finding places of

work and service in a global society through the examination and exchange of ideas in a community of learners.

Enrollment: 322 Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors are enrolled from almost 80% of the parishes (counties) in Louisiana.

Excessive Competition among Gifted High School Students

By LISA ROHDE, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Competition among gifted students is not uncommon (Lee, 2002; Rizza & Reis, 2001). Many teachers and researchers might argue that competition is beneficial in encouraging students to create their best work, rivalry can indeed become detrimental to the learning process when it starts to interfere with a student's natural motivation. In many cases, this harmful competition goes unnoticed. Educators need to be aware of these "silent" contests that can lead to a host of classroom issues, arguments, and psychological conflicts.

Gifted students may compete for prestige, earning academic honors or awards, or to maintain their own sense of self-worth. The most common example of excessive competition can be seen in the way that gifted students worry about grade point averages and class rank. Separated from each other by fractions of points at times, these high achieving students may go to great lengths to outdo their peers. They may take extra classes, argue over a few lost points on a test, do extra credit to get additional points for their GPA, and even cheat. Through that extra effort, they hope to distinguish themselves from the other equally intelligent and talented students competing for admission to prestigious universities. One of the reasons for the competitive nature of gifted students may be perfectionism, which is common in gifted individuals. While some perfectionism can be healthy, perfectionism that is tied to students' positions in their peer group or their self-worth can be debilitating if they have long identified themselves with a certain level of achievement.

Sources of Competition

In addition to pressure to succeed placed on them by parents or teachers, gifted students' own motivations and traits may encourage competition. Their per-

formance may be driven by either mastery or performance goals. Depending on the type of goal set, students may have very different beliefs about their self-worth, the difficulty of tasks they undertake, and how they go about attempting to achieve those tasks (Ames, 1992). Mastery goals, or learning goals, involve seeking knowledge purely for one's own interest (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986). Students driven by mastery goals focus on learning rather than comparison with peers. Performance goals, however, are related to the desire to achieve a particular outcome, but not necessarily to attain the information through a deep learning experience (Ames, 1992). It is the students who are strongly motivated by performance goals who are prone to competition because they are more interested in surpassing peers than in the genuine pursuit of knowledge. Similarly, Clinkenbeard (1989) compared competitive students with individualistic students, students who preferred to work independently, and found that the competitive ones had less motivation to further study that topic, learned less than the individualistic group, and felt that strengthening their abilities was more important than effort on a single test or exam.

Sylvia Rimm has researched the consequences of competition, particularly on gifted underachievers. She found that only a small number of individuals are consistently successful in highly competitive environments, and for those who are less successful, competition may further accentuate shortcomings (Rimm, 1995). Therefore, too much focus on achieving a particular rank or GPA, and being unable to do so, could leave students feeling inadequate.

Compare vs. Compete

In a study of gifted high school females by Rizza and Reis (2001), the experience of competition was explored and defined

by its participants. Adults and teachers felt that competition was just part of the school atmosphere and despite efforts to discourage competition it still existed within their classrooms. For the students, competing in academics meant that they often ignored other activities in their lives. Significant amounts of time and energy were expended to excel, even to the point of arguing with teachers over grades on tests. In light of this competition for grades and overall GPA, the students were asked to instead "compare" their progress with others in the class, which would allow them to see how they

“ Teachers can provide students some way of charting their improvement on various aspects of their own performance. ”

measured up, providing satisfaction when they performed better than peers. In this study, the students described the term "comparison" as a healthier form of competition. Through comparison, the students in the once competitive classroom created a social support network in which they could share their successes and failures. In this way, individual and group successes could be shared and celebrated with their peers. An interesting result was noted in the study: Competitive environments were viewed negatively to a majority of the females yet they noted that using competition as a positive motivating force and using the term comparison in discussing grades and performance provided a better appreciation for their own and other's work.

Strategies for Success

In the Classroom

Teachers can address competition in a number of ways. First, they can focus on individual improvements in students' performance. Rather than encouraging students to compete against

Lisa Rohde, M.A., is a graduate student at the University of Georgia and is currently working on her doctorate in Educational Psychology.

one another, teachers can provide students some way of charting their improvement on various aspects of their own performance. Using portfolios so that students may see their individual improvements throughout the year is a great place to start. Have the students focus on one or two skill areas and as they receive feedback, write a reflection and associated goals. Teachers can also refrain from grading a paper with a letter or number, or at least have a way to annotate the grade by providing commentary and criticism instead, with the focus on providing comments that set realistic and attainable goals. To limit classroom competition, teachers could assign group projects or work that requires collaboration, with the roles of each member of the group made clear at the onset of the assignment.

Consider the Social and Emotional Side

Discussing competitiveness openly with students, particularly focusing on when and how they compete, the effects it has on their performance, and

how they feel about failure, is a great way to bring the issue out in the open. By voicing their concerns openly, students may be able to better understand what drives their behavior and see the effect that it has on their lives. Furthermore, they may realize that their peers experience the same pressure and they may create a community of support rather than one of competition.

Find the Source

If the source of competition seems to be coming from pressure placed on students by parents or others, teachers can attempt to address it through conferences with the parents. Keep in mind that many parents may believe that such pressure will help their child get into a “good” college or “get scholarships.” In understanding the pressures students feel, teachers may be able to have a conversation with parents and explain the possible dangers such behavior can have on their child’s overall performance. Additionally, there may be other sources of pressure, such as coaches,

mentors, or other teachers. Make an effort to determine where these messages are coming from and talk to those people about the effect they can have on the students.

With competition among gifted high school students, the issue is not whether they will be competitive, but rather how they will handle it for themselves and with others. Creating a safe classroom environment that is conducive to positive achievement is the primary responsibility of educators. When competition begins to impede a student’s performance in the class, something needs to be done about it. Try some of the approaches addressed here knowing that you’ll be doing something constructive for your students’ well-being. ■

Resources

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The TALENT Act

Limited federal leadership, coupled with a singular focus on grade-level proficiency, has resulted in an educational system that too often fails to address the unique learning needs of gifted students and those who could become high achieving with appropriate supports.

Success in the 21st century requires a commitment to developing student talent as early as possible. To address this urgent need, gifted education supporters have introduced legislation to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to provide responsible federal leadership in meeting the needs of gifted and high-ability students. **To Aid Gifted and High-Ability Learners by Empowering the Nation's Teachers (TALENT) Act.**

NAGC urges support of the TALENT Act to systematically ensure that all high-ability students, regardless of their zip code, are able to maximize their potential. The nation cannot afford to delay.



Visit NAGC's Talent Act webpage

(<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=7804>) or use your smartphone's QR code reader for additional information about the legislation with supporting resources, and find out how you and others can support this outstanding new piece of legislation. The time has come for a change in focus!



What a Picture is Worth

BY NANCY GREEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN
nagc@nagc.org

Editor's Note: NAGC executive director Nancy Green has numerous opportunities to observe and reflect upon developments in education and policy that connect to gifted and

talented education. Her inspirations serve as the foundation for this column.

For me, nothing resonates like a good analogy. While sometimes these turns of phrase become cliché, like “taking those second graders through the museum was like herding cats,” or “listening to Mr. Everett teach physics is like drinking from a fire hose,” fresh language that illuminates a situation or problem goes a long way toward conveying a powerful message that sticks.

I saw this first hand in May during a Senate briefing NAGC co-hosted with our advocacy partners at the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Titled, “*Leaving Talent on the Table: A discussion of how the United States leaves high ability students behind, how it affects our global competitiveness and what we can do about it,*” the briefing drew more than 35 staffers representing one-third of the Senate offices. Its purpose was to build awareness for and invite support of new legislation supporting gifted learners through research, professional development, and accountability called the “TALENT Act.”

From my vantage point, several aspects of this Senate briefing made it compelling. First, the “hosting” efforts of key staff from the offices of Senators Grassley and Casey—who stepped up to present the highlights of a case for support at the outset of the program. Second, extremely knowledgeable NAGC and CEC staff was available and willing to answer questions about the legislation, no matter how detailed. Finally, the participation of outside experts—represented by Sally Reis from the University of Connecticut and NAGC’s legislative and advocacy committee co-chair, and Julia Roberts, from Western Kentucky University, who holds a similar leadership role for CEC-The Association for the Gifted. (TAG)

Julia began her presentation this way: “How do you feel when you’re in a hurry to get someplace, but you can’t arrive any quicker because you’re stuck in a traffic jam?” Those of us in the audience could see the nodding heads

all around. “Frustrating, isn’t it? Well, gifted children left to languish in classrooms without educational challenge are stuck—and feel frustration much the same as any driver behind the wheel of a car that isn’t moving.”

She continued, “Or consider the differences between high-speed and dial-up Internet connections. The child who is intellectually gifted could be compared to high-speed Internet. This child—who has experienced appropriately challenging learning experiences—knows the joy of learning, just as you have enjoyed the speed of the Internet once you have switched from dial-up connections to high-speed wireless.”

These analogies, coupled with specific data points that reinforced the message, proved to be the perfect “one-two punch” for conveying a message about the plight of gifted learners. Drawing from first-hand classroom experience, both Sally Reis and Julia Roberts painted a picture that the audience could remember and relate to. From there, the “call to action” was a logical next step: encourage your Senator to support the nation’s brightest learners by supporting the TALENT Act. For more information about the House and Senate bills, and ways you can get support for the bills, access the TALENT Act webpage on the NAGC website. Information can be found on page 6.

So much on Capitol Hill is in limbo as I write this. We won’t know for several weeks, maybe months, the degree to which the Senate Briefing and the efforts around it, had an impact. What I know for sure is that I will never sit in a traffic jam again without thinking of that bright learner...and his/her feelings of frustration sitting bored in a classroom while the other students struggle with materials she learned six months ago. While data lay the groundwork for what we do, it’s the analogies and the stories that keep us motivated—in the classroom, at the policy table, in the halls of statehouses, and on Capitol Hill. ■



Julia Roberts (L) Sally Reis

SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT ON HIGH POTENTIAL

continued from page 3

papers speak for the scholarly work produced: “Numerical Solution to the Schrödinger Equation for the Tunneling of Nitrogen in the Ammonia Molecule” and “The Role of Interleukin-22 in Pulmonary Epithelial Cell Proliferation and Repair.”

Another innovative opportunity LSMSA offers is EXCEL, a recruiting and retention program that was begun nine years ago by Jennifer Mangum, a member of the math faculty. The goal was to recruit minority students and those from low-performing high schools and help them transition to the gifted learning environment at the school. According to McIntyre, a key component of EXCEL is a required four-week summer bridge program designed to fill gaps in knowledge. Students are given intensive instruction in academic writing, science, math, and the arts. If identified as an EXCEL candidate, a student must attend and successfully complete the summer bridge component to earn an invitation to the school. Once matriculated, EXCEL student progress is monitored through an intensive advising and mentorship process. The program has been successful beyond expectations. In 2011, the 100th EXCEL student graduated from LSMSA. Senior Kayla Dixon said, “without schools like ours, many talented and highly edu-

cated kids would fall through the cracks” and programs like EXCEL are proof that LSMSA does its best to give each and every student an opportunity to take advantage of what it has to offer.

In addition to attending classes, students at LSMSA reside on campus. The head of the residential life program is also a psychologist and has built in many activities that help students understand stress management, conflict resolution, and workshops on how to develop a healthy self-concept. This affective curriculum pays off in helping students make an easy transition to college life. Students learn how to advocate for themselves, recognizing their academic performance is tied to personal choice.

LSMSA is a school that focuses on fostering student achievement. Many say the environment is “like a family” because of the tight relationships between staff and students, along with strong parent involvement. Mason Joiner, a former student, states, “The concept that everything at the school exists for the students’ use is part of the spirit of LSMSA and the school teaches students to take the initiative to make things happen.” The Louisiana school of Math, Science, and the Arts is a rare, yet perfect springboard for gifted and talented students ready to take that next step in life: college. ■

NEW PUBLICATION!

IDENTIFICATION

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF IDENTIFYING STUDENTS FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION SERVICES

Edited by Scott L. Hunsaker, Ph.D.

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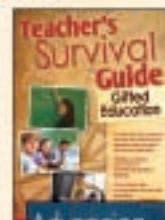
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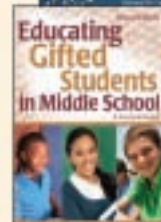
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Empowering Teachers to Recognize and Develop Giftedness in All Schools: The TALENT Act

BY JOY LAWSON DAVIS, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE • jdavis@louisiana.edu

As a local gifted education director a few years ago, I was asked to develop a plan to increase the equitable representation of all ethnic groups in the district's gifted program. I began by examining the data to find out how many students were identified, by category and ethnic group. I noticed immediately that there were a number of schools where there were **no students identified** as gifted. Each of the schools were Title I schools (predominately populated by culturally diverse and low-income students). My philosophy has always been that giftedness knows no boundaries of income, ethnicity, lifestyle, or disabling conditions. Over the next four years, through a partnership with the Title I department, our office was able to provide gifted education professional development (through coursework and workshops) for Title I teachers and ultimately, identify an increased number of Title I students to be served in the district's school-based and specialty center gifted programs.

Needless to say, when I first read the TALENT Act legislation pending before Congress and supported by NAGC and CEC, I was immediately reminded of the Title I teachers and students with whom I worked directly and thought of how important this legislation could be to Title I schools nationwide.

Overview of the TALENT Act

Success in the 21st century requires a national commitment to developing student talent as early as possible. New legislation To Aid Gifted and High-Ability Learners by Empowering the Nation's Teachers (TALENT) Act, is designed to enable school districts to provide for comprehensive talent development. The legislation was developed by lawmakers from the states of New Jersey, California, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. Representatives Elton Gallegly (CA-24) and Donald Payne (NJ-10) and Senators Chuck Grassley (Iowa) and Bob Casey (PA).

The major features of the TALENT Act are:

- A requirement that states and districts **specifically report learning growth for high ability students** on state report cards. In the past, states have only been required to report data for all students within the same data set with no disaggregation of data by ability groups. **This will cause states to be more proactive in ensuring that instruction is designed to meet the needs of all students**, not just those who meet mastery of basic standards.
- Specific targeting of schools serving populations traditionally under-represented and underserved populations in gifted and advanced learner programs. **As such,**

this legislation will provide the nation's first federally funded focus on Talent Development in schools serving a high population of culturally diverse and low income students.

- Requiring states to define and specify **what steps they will take to provide technical assistance to school districts in the task of identifying high potential low income students and those from culturally diverse backgrounds**. As an incentive, states will have to develop programs to recognize those districts whose plans succeed in increasing the proportion of underserved populations who score at the advanced level or higher on the state achievement tests.
- Support to train more classroom teachers in gifted education pedagogy. This training will ultimately lead teachers to developing evidence-based high-end instructional strategies for more students. States will be required **to clearly specify their professional development plans** to provide for these innovative instructional practices.
- A critical dissemination requirement so that more districts will have access to the latest developments in the field and **a new National Research and Dissemination Center** to investigate the effectiveness of identification and instructional strategies for gifted students.

It is clear that our nation is in dire need of federal funding and widespread support for the identification and nurturance of gifted learners from all cultural groups and income categories. According to Senator Grassley, "America can no longer afford to ignore the needs of our brightest students and, by doing so, squander their potential."

The TALENT Act needs the support of every citizen who cares about the future of our nation. Through successful passage and implementation of the features outlined, this legislation will provide broader access to sound research in gifted education pedagogy, thus, improving educational opportunities for low income and culturally diverse students nationwide.

A core team of expert advocates representing NAGC and CEC have supported and spoken on behalf of this legislation on Capitol Hill. Their offices continue in the efforts to make lawmakers aware of the importance of the bill's provisions. Their work is not enough. We need you to advocate as well. We need you to write to Representative and Senators to encourage their support of the TALENT Act (H.R. 1674/S.857). The online box on page 6 of this issue will lead you there. ■

Benefits of Providing Enrichment

continued from page 1

their students from low-income families were invited to participate in Project HOPE. Multiple measures were used throughout the HOPE Scholar recruitment process. First, the contact person in each school district invited students from low-income families who scored at or above the 70th percentile on their achievement tests. Second, each contact person contacted parents through letters, phone calls, and parent meetings in order to help parents understand the *Super Saturday* program and how it could benefit their child. Spanish translations of the courses were provided to families as needed. Third, teachers completed the *HOPE Scale* (Peters & Gentry, 2010) on each of their students.

Super Saturday and Super Summer

Super Saturday is an enrichment program created for gifted and talented students in Pre-K through 8th grade. These classes are offered six consecutive Saturdays during the spring and fall semesters from 9:00 AM to noon. Science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and humanities courses are offered at two or more grade levels above. High quality teachers are selected to teach these courses, and are required to attend a teacher-training program.

structors, teachers, or parents. Instructors who teach these courses are experts in a particular field or have a passion for that content area. For example, for the last six years a doctoral student in chemistry taught courses such as *Biomedical Engineering*, *Chemical Engineering*, and *Forensic Science*. In addition, all teachers require students to complete a project by the end of the last day of *Super Saturday*, and parents are invited to view the presentation of these projects.

An Examination of the HOPE Scholars' Experiences

Researchers examined the experiences of HOPE Scholars in the *Super Saturday* program. Miller and Gentry (2010) examined the perceptions of HOPE Scholars who attended *Super Saturday* during their first session of participation. Thirty-three out of 113 HOPE Scholars consented to be observed in their *Super Saturday* class and/or interviewed during the 4th or 5th Saturday of the program. All *Super Saturday* participants completed a *My Class Activities* (Gentry & Gable, 2001), form which assesses the frequency that students perceive the interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment of their classes. Student evaluations were examined for three groups: HOPE Schol-

means that HOPE Scholars perceived their classes no differently than general *Super Saturday* students.

Miller, Yang, and Gentry (2010) examined the perceptions of HOPE Scholars using a larger sample of 274. Findings from both of these studies indicate that high-potential students from low-income families can successfully achieve in an out-of-school enrichment program.

5 Tips for Providing Opportunities at Your School

Based on our experiences in providing out-of-school enrichment programs, we would like to share a few tips if you are interested in creating a similar enrichment program at your school.

1 Create courses that include advanced content outside of the students' curriculum.

When planning the first session, you may want to ask students and parents for their suggestions in order to find out what topics would interest the students. Start off small by offering only a few classes to see how students respond to them. These courses can be created by the gifted education coordinator or by a team of teachers who are familiar with creating curriculum for gifted students. Another option is to use commercially prepared units of study such as those available from the College of William and Mary, Science Education for Public Understanding Program, or Boston Museum of Science. It is important that your curricula include various differentiation techniques and support an appropriate environment for gifted learners.

2 Keep cost in mind.

Cost is something that you should anticipate when creating a program, but starting small is definitely more cost effective. Following the reflection of your first session, you can then expand or modify as necessary. Your school may have the additional funds to support a program like this, but many times that is not the situation. You may consider charging parents a registration fee for the program. These fees would allow you to pay teachers, unless teachers choose to volunteer for

“ Providing enrichment opportunities for gifted and talented children, especially those who lack opportunities at home, should be at the forefront of education. ”

Super Summer occurs for two weeks during the summer months. Students can attend two classes per day, one in the morning for three hours and another one in the afternoon for three hours. Again, all courses include advanced content and are similar to the courses offered in *Super Saturday*. This program is similar to a “day camp.”

Courses are developed by the *Super Saturday/Super Summer* coordinator, and proposals are also accepted from in-

ars who consented to be interviewed and/or observed, HOPE Scholars who did not consent to be interviewed and/or observed, and general *Super Saturday* students (students who did not receive HOPE scholarships). Findings indicated that HOPE Scholars had positive experiences, learned advanced content, and experienced hands-on learning and social support. Descriptive results showed that all three groups evaluated their courses similarly and favorably, which

the program, and to purchase supplies. What if your community desperately needs this kind of enrichment but the families at your school cannot afford to pay a registration fee? This presents a perfect opportunity to ask businesses or organizations to sponsor this program or donate supplies.

3 Select interested educators.

Are teachers at your school interested in being a part of this program? Do they have the expertise if you are interested in offering classes like *Robotics* or *Intro to Engineering*? Do you have parents with expertise in a certain area who could teach a *Mini Medical School* class or a *Vet Med* class? Are there any professionals in your community who are interested in volunteering? These are the questions you should ask. Once you have decided who is the best qualified to teach in your program, you can then complete background checks on all instructors and volunteers of your program to ensure the safety of your students.

4 Extend enrichment activities within the program.

Would you like to incorporate field trips and guest speakers in your program? Because the *Super Saturday* program is located on the Purdue campus, our teachers have access to the engineering buildings, biology labs, and the theater. If your school does not have a nearby college, think about places in your community that would be ideal for a field trip that would contribute to authentic learning in the course. Maybe your students can visit a law firm if your class is learning about law or an animal hospital if your class is learning veterinary medicine.

5 Be clear on program eligibility.

Who would benefit the most if they participated in this program? Do you have high-potential students from low-income families? If these students have a strong interest in a particular course you are offering, they will probably be successful in your program. Recall that the goal of your program should be to offer students experiences that they would not typically have in their classroom; experiences that could positively affect them academically and socially. Examples of resources that can help you begin your own out-of-school enrichment program can be found on the *Teaching for High Potential* website.

Providing enrichment opportunities for gifted and talented children, especially those who lack opportunities at home, should be at the forefront of education. The creation of a Super Summer or even a Super Saturday program in your area might be all that is needed to increase the numbers of identified students, so often gone unnoticed. ■

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Extreme ESP: Meaningful Thematic Activities for High-Ability Middle School Students

BY JENNIFER HOFFMAN, WALDWICK PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WALDWICK, NJ

Jennifer Hoffman teaches in an enrichment and gifted program at J.A. Traphagen School in Waldwick, NJ. She is the 2011 recipient of the Teacher of the Year Award there.

Middle school places numerous demands upon students of all ability levels, particularly high-ability learners who are expected to complete assignments in several different advanced classes while expanding their horizons through participation in extra-curricular activities. Retention of students in middle school gifted and talented programs may become problematic when so many academic and social demands are exacted upon these students. Mindful of the high expectations placed upon high-ability learners in middle school, I found it necessary to modify the curricula for my seventh grade Extended Studies Program (ESP), a class designed for these students.

In striving to meet the unique needs of learners in my seventh grade ESP class, I designed an instructional unit to foster learners' personal and intellectual growth. The program includes challenging activities in math, engineering, social studies, science, language arts, and community service. I conducted extensive research to design meaningful instructional activities learners would find challenging, interesting, and exciting and incorporated high-level thinking activities, interactive and collaborative experiences, and hands-on, inquiry-related lessons into the program. Hoping to motivate students, I named the instructional unit "Extreme Extended Studies Program!" which was subsequently shortened to "Extreme ESP!"

Themes and Curricular Connections

During the first session, learners are introduced to Extreme ESP! by participating in an activity called "Getting to Know You." They answer questions requiring them to name

items such as their favorite author, movie, subject, and activity. They are asked if they have ever participated in any extreme sport(s). After answering the questions, students enthusiastically move around the classroom as they compare their responses with every student in the class, recording similarities and differences. The class then discusses their answers, celebrating their shared responses as well as unique interests. This helps establish a col-

loration they would like to see passed to ensure safety for children.

Interwoven throughout the unit are rigorous math challenges from *Extreme Math* (Tyler & Tyler, 2004) and related interactive, hands-on engineering challenges. Engineering challenges include designing, constructing, and testing parachutes; building gliders; participating in a Barbie bungee jumping contest (*National Council of Teachers of Mathematics*, 2008); and a cantilever

“ Retention of students in middle school gifted and talented programs may become problematic when so many academic and social demands are exacted upon these students. ”

legal, supportive culture where students respect and appreciate each other's opinions and talents, and feel comfortable taking academic risks.

In subsequent sessions, learners conduct research to prepare for a debate about whether or not children and teens should participate in extreme sports. Their arguments include statements such as, "Statistics show that more children are injured while participating in traditional sports than extreme sports" and "Children and teens should not play extreme sports because they lack the maturity, training, and experience needed to play these sports safely." Then they brainstorm and write leg-

challenge that promotes divergent thinking and innovation.

Type III Enrichment Products (Ren-zulli & Reis, 1997) were incorporated into the unit. Using data from a survey ESP students administered to fourth graders in the district, Extreme ESP students designed products to promote safety covering issues such as the importance of wearing helmets when riding bicycles, train track safety, anti-bullying, and Internet safety. One Extreme ESP student created an original video game where players had to navigate their way through various safety hazards encountered along their cyber-journey. Other examples of original products

created by learners included an ad campaign, a short movie, a theatrical play, a commercial, a newspaper, poems, skits, posters and short stories.

What surprised me the most and became the strongest motivating element in this unit was my use of Renzulli's "Artistic Modification Menu" (Davis & Rimm, 2004), from *The Multiple Menu Model* of instruction, which involves the teacher delivering his or her own creative contribution. For the Artistic Modification Menu, I described an injury I suffered while ice-skating with my son at his friend's birthday party. Every student in the class listened wide-eyed with rapt attention as I described the accident, the doctor's responses at the emergency room, and the realization of how I would have had a severe brain injury with long-lasting repercussions had I not been wearing a helmet. Rarely one to share my opinions

or talk about myself to my students, the class was incredibly moved by my account. They then began sharing their own experiences. It was after this discussion that students became highly motivated in all aspects of this unit.

Goals of Extreme ESP!

The goals and objectives of Extreme ESP! promote convergent and divergent thinking skills, risk taking, refinement of thought, and empathy. Learners use convergent thinking skills in math challenges that require finding the solutions to complex math questions and utilize divergent thinking skills by engaging in brainstorming activities during engineering challenges and when developing legislative proposals. Learners are encouraged to take risks while conducting multiple trials to test their models for the engineering chal-

lenges and creating their final products. They strengthen their awareness of others and ability to provide assistance to people experiencing hardships by organizing and implementing a service project, raising awareness and funds for victims of natural disasters.

The objectives, specifically the use of convergent and divergent thinking skills, risk-taking, refinement of thought, and empathy, were assessed throughout this unit. Evaluation tools were inspired by methodology and instruments espoused by Davis and Rimm (2004), such as the use of program evaluation questionnaires, collection and analysis of classroom observation data, informal interviews, parent feedback from conferences and surveys, and student self-assessment forms. A teacher reflection journal was used to analyze instructional activities, materials needed, effective practices and areas

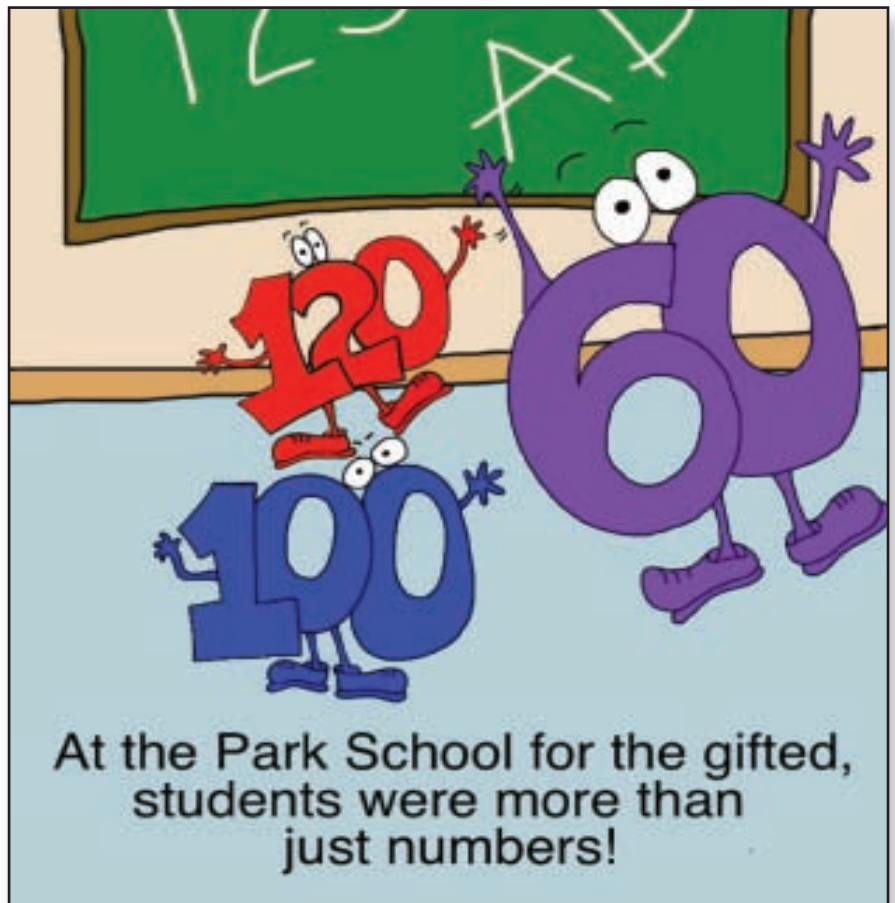
Write for THP

Do you have practical classroom applications of current research, theory, and best practices in the field of gifted education? Are you proud of the innovative way you address the needs of gifted students in your school or classroom? Have you created a successful lesson or unit plan that aligns with the revised NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards? If so, we want to hear from you! Send manuscripts to: Jeff S. Danielian, Editor, THP at jdanielian@nagc.org.



SMART COOKIES

BY BESS WILSON



needing modification. Students wrote that they looked forward to coming to class, being engaged and active, and enjoyed the diverse range of instructional activities.

Meeting Students' Needs

Extreme ESP! is specifically designed to embrace the unique characteristics of high-ability learners. Learners keep a reflection journal in which they gauge the level of difficulty of each math and engineering challenge so that I may adjust these activities to provide additional challenge or support when necessary. The research, debate, and use of evidence to support statements used in the legislative drafting activity satisfy the inquisitiveness, strong desire to learn and ability to form logical, insightful conclusions often demonstrated by advanced learners. Designing a well-communicated, innovative product for their service project suits the advanced vocabu-

lary, strong reading comprehension skills and adept creative problem-solving skills these students often exhibit. Additionally, ESP! enables students to successfully interact and collaborate with peers with similar needs and strengths, beginning with the very first buddy activity and culminating in the service project expansion.

Conclusion

High-ability middle school students, like their peers, are required to navigate their way through a labyrinth of multiple teachers and classes, extracurricular activities, social norms, and family responsibilities. Amidst these tasks, they often have tremendous amounts of energy, a need to find themselves, and a desire to fit in. Planning instructional units that embrace these students' high energy levels, creativity, and their need for a diverse range of interactive, hands-on learning experi-

ences enables teachers to engage these students and inspire them to think divergently, be innovative, and use their talents to help others. By designing an interdisciplinary program like Extreme ESP, teachers may successfully foster enthusiasm, personal and academic growth, and innovation in their high-ability middle school students. ■

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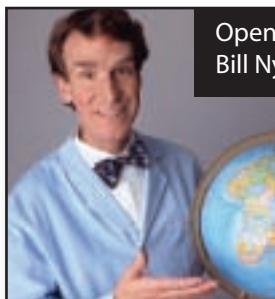
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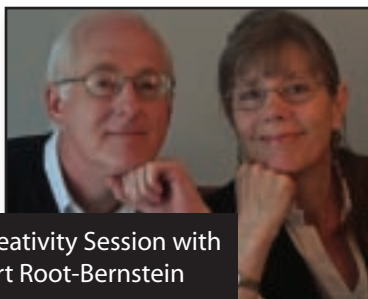
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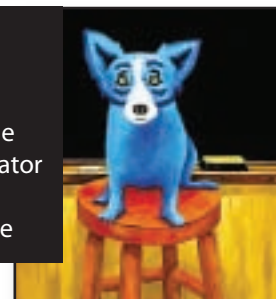


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Convention
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Note to Teachers: A Few Pointers for Parents

BY BOB SCHULTZ, UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO
robert.schultz@utoledo.edu

As the school year winds back up again, I thought it would be thought-provoking to provide teachers (and parents) with some input from GT kids about giftedness. The points that follow come from teens and are based on responses to questionnaires and personal interviews.

Q What advice would you give to parents of a student who has just been identified as gifted/talented?

“Nothing changes. Your child hasn’t mysteriously turned into some whiz kid overnight. They will still want to play the same way, do the same activities, and are going to be as goofy as regular. Enjoy them for who they are.” (Cherie, 13 years old)

“Start to get information. Most people get identified, but don’t know that this means the emotional side of life is just as important as the academic side. It’s time to take action to know more...a whole lot more.” (James, 14 years old)

“Start asking questions. Is there a special program or class? Who is in charge of it? Is there a parent group for GT families? Do GT kids and their families get together and do things?” (Sandy, 13 years old)

Q What do you think is the most important thing that parents do not know about being a gifted kid?

“There is a lot of pressure on kids who are GT. They are expected to know everything by everyone at school. Most GT kids put a lot of pressure on themselves since they really don’t know what being GT is really all about.” (Brenda, 14 years old)

“Stress. Most GT kids are expected to do more. This includes more work in regular classes, depth in answers, and helping other kids who don’t understand by tutoring. This stress is really painful.” (Abigail, 14 years old)

Q What do you wish parents would say to GT kids?

“I love you for who you are not what other people expect you to do and be.” (Tawnie, 14 years old)

“Go ahead, make mistakes. Fall down, trip up. Make a mess. Wallow around and see what happens. Life is supposed to be explored and lived based on your terms. Try something new and see what happens. Don’t always try to do your best—sometimes good enough is good enough!” (Dale, 14 years old)

“It’s just a label. This doesn’t make you better than other

people. It shows you are different and that you need different things to be happy and content.” (Debbie, 13 years old)

Q What do you wish parents would do with their GT kids?

“Try new things and grow together in adventures. Read with me and share the story. Help me try to overcome my fears, and maybe yours too.” (Val, 13 years old)

“Teach me how to get other people to take me seriously. I’m tired of being the cute little kid with the big ideas. I want to turn some of these ideas into reality and I need your help to do it.” (Elizabeth, 12 years old)

“Help your GT kid feel like a regular human being. Trying to be best or perfect only paralyzes us and we stop taking chances out of fear.” (Francis, 14 years old)

Much of my life’s work has been focused on learning about giftedness from the perspective of children and

“ Take the time to listen to your students and your children. ”

teens bearing the label. They have not often had their voices heard over the “noise” of the experts and adults around them.

Take the time to listen to your students and your children. They hold the key to understanding the social and emotional side of giftedness that guides the growth and development that is key to becoming a responsible and responsive adult.

In these troubled times of program cutting and accountability, gifted and talented students are our only chance of overcoming the burden of our myopic society, for they tend to see more broadly and deeply into issues that plague our society. As Alysha (13) shared, “If we [GT kids] are the future, how come everyone seems to tell us what to do, but no one ever seems to listen?” Let’s start by listening! ■

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Mirror, mirror on the wall, where do I find the greatest picture books of all?

BY BOB SENEY, MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN
bseney@muw.edu

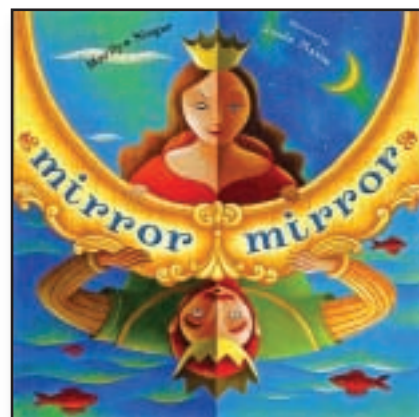
My intention was to present the foundation for a curriculum unit based upon two amazing books, but in doing so, I went way over my allotted space. I envision a really interesting unit based on the study of mirrors, and sometime, somewhere, I will share it. For now, let us look at the two books that inspired my thinking.

Mirror, Mirror by Marilyn Singer, illustrated by Josée Masse (2010, Dutton Children's Books) and *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010, Candlewick Press) are at the core of my plan. In Baker's *Mirror*, we have the story of two cultures and two life stories. The lives of two boys and their families, one in Australia and the other in Morocco, are presented in image only. As we follow these two very different families in their daily lives, we see that while different, there are indeed many connections. "But some things connect them...just as some things are the same for all families, no matter where they live." (*Preface*) This would make an interesting compare and contrast multicultural study, but we certainly can go way beyond that!

What makes this book even more unique is the format. Baker uses a concept that I have not seen before. The book is meant to be read lying open and flat. One turns the page on the left from the spine out to the left: the story of an Australian boy. At the same time, the reader turns the page on the right to the right: the story of a Moroccan boy. The book is designed for the stories to be read side by side! This beautifully presents the "idea of the book" that "outward appearances may be very different but a 'stranger' may not be a stranger at all. Like each other, we live to be loved by family and friends and to be a part of a larger community. Inwardly we are alike; it could be each other we see when we look in a mirror." (*Author's Notes*) Another interesting detail is that the limited text is presented in both English and Moroccan script.

Mirror, Mirror by Marilyn Singer presents a most in-

triguing form of poetry, which she calls a *reverso*, a form of poetry that is read both down the page and up! "When you read a *reverso* down, it is one poem. When you read it up, with changes allowed only in punctuation and capitalization, it is a different poem." (*Author's Notes*) Let us take the following example:



In Reverse by Marilyn Singer

Who
says
it's true—
down
is
the only view?
If you believe that,
this poem
will challenge
you.
Up
is
something new.

Something new
is
up.
You
will challenge
this poem
if you believe that
the only view
is
down.
It's true.
Says
who?

Singer's prose combined with Masse's delightful mirror images presents a series of *reversos* that retell several fairy tales. "Witty, irreverent, and exquisitely illustrated, this unique collection holds a cheeky mirror up to language and fairy tales, and renews the magic of both." (*Book Jacket*) Magic indeed! In these *reversos*, Singer tells the same story through two different points of view. As she notes: "A *reverso* is a form that is both challenging and fun—rather like creating and solving a puzzle. Try it yourself and you'll see what I mean!" (*Author's Notes*)

These two books could be used either as the springboard for a study unit or building up to one.

I favor the latter approach. There are so many content connections that can be made with mirrors: mythology (remember Narcissus?); art (Escher's print, *Magic Mirror* and the mirror art of Jean and Tom Heffernan); archeology and history (the development of mirrors and cultural roles); fairy tales (*Snow White*) music (many songs with "mirror" in the title); the writings of Leonardo Da Vinci and even the role of mirrors in Feng Shui. Finally, for in-depth, advanced, and accelerated topics, an investigation of Richard Rorty's controversial criticism of classical or foundational philosophy, *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* (30th Anniversary Edition: 2008, Princeton University Press) would be a great place for advanced students to start.

All of this from two picture books? You betchum!
Happy Reading! ■



Convention
Presenter

Tear down this firewall!

BRIAN C. HOUSAND, EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
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In a speech at the Brandenburg Gate on June 12, 1987, President Reagan challenged General Secretary Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. Just before uttering that iconic quotation, Reagan proclaimed, "We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace."

In 2010, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton warned that "a new information curtain is descending across much of the world," even as network technology spreads. She echoed Reagan's 1987 challenge to Gorbachev as she called for governments like China to lift the electronic barriers to communication. "Virtual walls are cropping up in place of visible ones."

Today, our gifted students have unprecedented access to information and resources via the Internet. As I have had the great fortune of being able to work with teachers across the country demonstrating technologies that can serve as powerful teaching and learning tools, one of the common complaints that is voiced time and time again is, "All of these Web 2.0 tools sound great, but many of the sites that you are suggesting are blocked by our schools." While it is frustrating for teachers, it is often even more frustrating for students.

“ Schools have become places where our students are trapped behind firewalls designed to protect them, but instead inhibit them from accessing information that is essential to their learning and their creative productivity. ”

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The creation of Internet filters in schools dates back to 2000. We all had just survived the Y2K bug that was supposed to render all computers useless and cause a global catastrophe, and services that we know and take for granted like Google, YouTube, and Facebook had yet to be invented. The Internet, still in its infancy, was seen as a great equalizer that would bring information to everyone as long as they were

connected. In 2000, Congress enacted the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the E-rate program to provide technology discounts to schools and public libraries. As a stipulation of receiving these funds, schools and libraries had to establish protection measures to block or filter Internet access to materials that are considered to be obscene, pornography, or harmful to minors. While these are materials that we all agree should not be accessed in schools, this loose criteria has caused numerous sites to be senselessly blocked.

In 2010, the National Education Technology Plan <http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010> was released, which called for "Balancing Connectivity and Student Safety on the Internet." While student safety on the Internet is essential, the plan recognizes that many filters designed to protect students also block access to legitimate learning content and such tools as blogs, wikis, and social networks that have the potential to support student learning and engagement.

It seems that in our attempts at protecting students we have in many instances only served to demonize technology. Regardless of what types of walls are built, our students will find ways around, over, under, and even through them. In discussions with tech-savvy gifted kids, I have often heard them refer to the Internet in school as "the fake Internet" and that if they want to actually use technology then they have to do so at home. Typically, this use is unsupervised and without educational purpose, and yet, students are often creating and producing for the pure enjoyment of the process. Gifted students are communicating and collaborating openly with each other.

I'm not one to instigate a charge, but I believe it is time for educators to stand up and demand access to Internet tools and resources that can help to empower our students. We must stop demonizing technology and instead work to teach responsibility. We must strive to develop good digital citizenship in our students, and should be reaching out to classrooms across the country and around the world with video tools like Skype, having conversations about what it means to be gifted on the global level. We must work with our students to cultivate a digital footprint that is a record of their accomplishments and creativity. If we want to prepare our students not only for tomorrow, and for today, then we must tear down this fire wall. ■

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