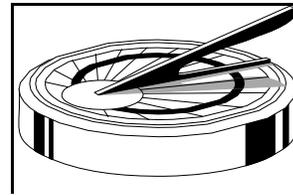


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Theories and models developed in the gifted education field have helped teachers to become more effective in working with gifted students, but it is important to understand that they will not always produce the desired results. For example, test results might indicate that a particular gifted child might benefit from a differentiated language arts curriculum that occurs in a cluster group of like-minded students. However, unbeknownst to the teacher, this student is enjoying self-differentiation, outside of school, through reading about great scientists and working on homemade science and technology experiments with neighborhood friends. Here is where a teacher's perceptions might collide and conflict with what the gifted student is really interested in learning, and why it is so important to determine their interests both in- and outside of school.

It is also important to use information about exceptionally accomplished individuals to inspire gifted students to pursue their interests with gusto. In this regard, several of my authors and I are currently studying Heroes of Giftedness, i.e., individuals from the sciences, literature, the arts, technology and other fields who can be models and mentors for these students and serve as inspirational mentors. As we write about them, we are learning that American society and culture have many of these heroes. Ellen Winner has written that giftedness includes, "A rage to master" (*Gifted Children: Myths and Realities*, 1996, pp. 3-4). By examining the lives of such individuals as Brian Greene (physicist and mathematician), Annie Dillard (non-fiction and fiction author), Wynton Marsalis (musician and composer), Khaled Hosseini (author and MD) and Rita Dove (poet and professor), we can gain some understanding of what this rage to master is all about. The main task has been to identify Heroes of Giftedness who have a high degree on ingenuity, persistence and character (positive values and standards of behavior). Many

commentators on today's society ask, "Where have all the heroes gone." The answer will not come from taking a course in differentiated curriculum or cluster grouping. Instead, we should look beyond the academic study of giftedness to the world-at-large. Here we will find many Heroes of Giftedness – if we would only take enough time to look for them. Who are your heroes? May your own study of these heroes inspire you to achieve the best possible education for gifted students!

Joan Smutny is well-known to our readers and widely appreciated by teachers and parents through her books, enrichment programs and lectures. Her most recent book is *Reclaiming the Lives of Gifted Girls and Women* (2008, Royal Fireworks Press). In Part 1 of her essay, she discusses some of the problems of obtaining the best possible education for gifted girls. Smutny argues that although many gender barriers have been reduced in the last thirty years, there are still persistent cultural factors that prevent gifted girls from achieving their full potential. Robert E. Myers, in the second essay, gives his fascinating observations of the creativity field from the perspective of fifty years. I would like to introduce Amy Bernstein, who obtained her Masters Degree in Gifted Education from the University of Virginia. She is an excellent writer and has been a teacher of gifted students in Massachusetts. Her fascinating discussion points out some of the pitfalls she has experienced in implementing differentiated education in various school districts. Eugene and Diana Avergon are art educators and experts on teaching art to gifted students. Their analysis of Wayne Thiebaud's work demonstrates how mentors can play a significant role in the development of an artist's techniques and career. In the final presentation, Michael Walters writes about one of his Heroes of Giftedness, Khaled Hosseini.

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## Securing a Future for Gifted Girls

**Joan Franklin Smutny    Center for Gifted    National-Louis University**

Let us imagine a gifted girl who achieves high honors for her work through all the years of elementary and secondary education. Friends, family and teachers foresee a future of great promise. “She will invent something,” her science teacher says. “She will write a novel!” her father asserts. Instead, she drifts, taking one job, then another, trying to decide which way to go. When she meets her future husband, she is almost relieved. He seems confident and grounded, more secure in how to find his place in the world. He even helps her to define herself, advises her on what to do.

Looking back years later, she realizes that her marriage, rather than anchoring her, merely increased her wandering. Not that she doesn’t love her family. But sometimes, an echo from her past floats back, calling her. She remembers the days when she used to sit in the branches of the old apple tree and create imaginary adventures across the globe. She wonders, was I destined for nothing more?

When we think about the needs of gifted girls, we have to include their growth into adulthood. For while the seeds of a problem may begin in early or middle grade school years, they may not show themselves until the girl, now a woman, steps into the world. Only then do we ask, “What happened?” Where did we go wrong in preparing this student for her life as an adult woman? What support system, what skills and experiences will better enable our most able girls to navigate the rougher waters where they feel they may not belong or should not travel?

This article takes a long and broad view of the special challenges and needs of gifted females as they develop in our schools and then set their course into young adulthood. It focuses particularly on the incremental decline in self-confidence and self-knowledge that whittle away their expectations for the future. A young girl becomes more concerned about gaining the approval of a teacher or parent than following her own dreams; a college student turns down a scholarship to support the career of her husband; a mother agrees to postpone the opening of a treasured art studio because her in-laws need her help. Somehow, somewhere along the line, they give their lives away and forget who they are. In regard to this problem, an eighth grade female student said, “Being smart is a lot of pressure, even from your own family. Pretty soon you forget everything you wanted to do and you wake up one morning and wonder who that is in the mirror looking back at you.”

The challenge we face is that gifted girls often do not show signs of this inner corrosion. They can be articulate in class, achieve high grades, and pursue their interests with energy and passion. Yet, over time, they begin to lose ownership over their lives – to doubt the validity of their interests and thoughts and to hunger for a place where they truly belong. As a sixth grader reported once, “I would love just one day when no one said, ‘that’s weird,’ about something I said or did.” So the question is: How can we help gifted girls know, embrace and stand up for themselves as they move through the waters of adolescence into adulthood?

### **Losing the Path**

Reports of better times for gifted girls and women have not meant the end of gender bias in our society. Certainly, more gifted girls and young women today feel encouraged to achieve, assume leadership and pursue careers formerly dominated by men (Phillips, 1998). The women’s movement and the programs it inspired have helped promising girls plan and act on deeply held interests and aspirations for careers (Gassin, E.A., Kelly, K.R. & Feldhusen, J.F., 1993). By the late 1990s, over 80% of high school leadership positions were held by girls, prompting lower participation in leadership among high school boys (see Kerr, 2000). During the past decade, gifted females have also entered the fields of math and science in greater numbers, earning 46% of biology doctorates, and filling more than half medical school classes (Vanderkam, 2005).

But while these gains are to be celebrated, gifted females continue to struggle with societal pressures, inequities and expectations (see Kerr, 1997; Rimm, 2001; Gilligan, 1993; Reis, 1998). By the mid-1990s, women were still earning approximately 60 percent of male wages (Reis, 1996). Even in the fields of math and science where their numbers have increased, gifted women have not always found the institutional culture open to their different values, interests and ideas, which, among other things, would make these fields more relevant to human needs and conditions (Thom, 2001). Consequently, a number of them withdraw from pure math and science, finding them overly abstract (Vanderkam, 2005). At the same time, a “culture of romance” (Kerr, 2000) prompts a number of talented women to re-assess their abilities and lower the bar for future pursuits. They are more likely to follow their boyfriends or husbands to *their* jobs rather than the reverse, and of course, they bear the brunt of child rearing responsibilities.

For those women who break out of this mold and into new fields of opportunity, gaining access to new (and often male-dominant) professions can often seem like the first and easiest step. Contributing to these fields in any significant way presents unique challenges in how they perceive themselves. Anita Borg of the Institute for Women and Technology reported that a female colleague, a Ph.D. engineer at Compaq once confessed the following: “I want you to know that the first time I met you was the first time in my life that I ever felt like I was both a woman and an engineer at the same moment” (in Thom, 2001, p. 87). In a similar vein, a frustrated high school girl wrote to her parents from a science expedition in Alaska: “I am a stranger in a strange land, for sure. Not because this is Alaska but because of my group. At first, they didn’t think I knew what I was talking about because... why? Because I’m a girl I guess. Now they see I actually do have a brain, but they take credit for my work and act like they came up with my ideas themselves!” She was one of three girls in a field-study experience headed by university scientists. Her father said that one of the university scientists was a woman and admitted that if it weren’t for her, “I don’t know if she would’ve stuck with science at all.”

Yet, struggles such as these often go unacknowledged in society. “Talk show authors bemoan the idea that attention to concerns of girls and women has impeded the education and guidance of boys,” Kerr observes. She continues:

“Sex role stereotypes are dead, they say, and now we must attend to the business of educating in a gender free society. As is true with the reports of the ends of any social trends that make people uncomfortable, these reports of the death of the gender gap are greatly exaggerated. The gender gap is alive and well in gifted education, in research about giftedness, and in the lives of gifted girls and boys. Prescribed gender role behaviors that dominated in the first part of this century continue to hold the power to bias education and research, and to restrict the psychological and life choices of gifted girls and boys, men and women” (2000).

Perhaps the greatest challenge for gifted girls today is not so much one of achievement in school as it is achievement *in life* (Smutny, 2008). “She’s a good student,” a mother once said happily of a highly gifted fourth grader I had taught. “She does her work on time, gets mostly A’s. We’re proud of her.” I tell this mother what an imaginative writer her daughter is and ask if she enjoyed reading her fractured fairytale. The mother’s eyes seemed blank, almost uncomprehending. “Pretty bizarre,” her mother smiled, clearly not impressed. The response made me cringe. I had taught this child for several years and each summer, she had come to me panting for new opportunities to write, scribbling poems and ideas for stories on any scrap of paper she could find. From our conversations, she was clearly not receiving a great deal of encouragement at home. Did her mother know what a special gift her daughter had? Did she understand how easily it could slip from her grasp without special mentoring and support?

The social and emotional struggles that gifted women have later in life often begin earlier – in the elementary and secondary years (Reis, 2002). Particularly in adolescence, girls develop a sense that if they are too free and open, they could lose their connections with peers, even with their own friends. Self-confidence and self-acceptance decline markedly during the middle school years (AAUW, 1992; Reis, 1998; Kerr, 1997; Rimm, 2001). On the path toward young adulthood, many gifted girls learn to dissociate themselves from their own real thoughts, feelings and interests (Gilligan, 1993). This dissociation is the beginning of the end for a number of young women and often goes unnoticed. As Barbara A. Kerr (1997, p. 173) has observed: “A society that wastes female brilliance has made it the norm for gifted women to lead an average life, and gifted women have largely adapted to that norm.”

In many gifted girls I have seen, a deeply felt ambivalence emerges: on the one hand, a stirring within the soul to explore their abilities and aim for the high peaks; on the other, a need to belong to a community (of peers, parents, neighborhoods). This “debilitating tension” (AAUW, 1992) becomes the condition under which they try (and sometimes fail) to unfurl their powers to the world.

Consider the experience of Gabrielle. According to her mother, seventh grade Gabrielle was a devoted conservationist. She loved nature and several times participated in an ecology program where she became skilled at testing water in several local ponds. She also studied native plant and animal life and participated in a study of suburban development on local ecologies.

Gabrielle’s mother assumed that her daughter would enjoy science in school as a natural extension of her extracurricular interests. But she did not. In fact, according to her teacher, Gabrielle seemed disinterested and rarely showed any sign of exceptional ability in science. When asked what her favorite class was, Gabrielle just shrugged and said, “recess.” When the teacher talked to her mother, the latter expressed surprise over the disinterest exhibited by her usually enthusiastic daughter.

Gabrielle didn’t want to share her knowledge or enthusiasm with her classmates. When her mother pressed her about it, she finally blurted out that she wanted to keep her ecology work to herself. “They wouldn’t understand,” she said defensively, “and I don’t see why they have to know.” She was afraid that the teacher would start treating her differently than her peers and that the class would laugh at her for “hangin’ out with the frogs,” as one child sneeringly told her. So Gabrielle stayed quiet and tried not to draw attention to herself.

In earlier years, her mother reported, Gabrielle jumped at any opportunity to scramble around in the woods with a sketchbook and several paperback identification books crammed in her backpack. Now, she just feels like an oddity.

In my experience working with families, I've seen children like Gabrielle survive the badgering of peers and their own gnawing uncertainties through the support of parents and teachers. But I've also seen other gifted girls adjust their sights and expectations, because of someone else's idea of what they should be or because they've learned to disregard the voice of their own hearts and minds. "Gifted girls are always taking notes," a mother and guidance counselor once told me. "Their giftedness makes them more aware, more tuned into the messages society puts out." They digest images from television, print and internet sources; they observe women around them — how they talk to men, what they sacrifice, how they navigate difficult relationships, how freely they live their lives. Women in the curriculum — their absence or presence — tells volumes about the world that awaits them. Is there a place for their passionate love for photography? For their dream of exploring the wintering grounds of the Painted Bunting?

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## **Looking Back at a Half-Century of Creativity and Education**

**Robert E. Myers Healdsburg, California**

Two events took place fifty years ago that changed my life. Our son Ted was born in January of 1958, and six months later I took a course at Reed College from Robert C. Wilson. Since Ted was our first-born and Bob Wilson offered a course about the gifted, I became intensely interested in the possibility of our son being blessed with superior intelligence. Wilson had been one of J. P. Guilford's protégés at the University of Southern California, and so I soon learned of Guilford's three-dimensional Structure of the Intellect model.

So, while observing Ted closely, in a wishful way, I was made aware of expanding concepts of intelligence and giftedness. This led to my writing a master's thesis about creative writing and my becoming a graduate student of E. Paul Torrance at the University of Minnesota. Ted has never claimed to be gifted or creative (although one of his artistic endeavors in the fifth grade hangs proudly on a wall in our home), but my life was irrevocably changed by being associated with Paul Torrance.

I relate the above in order to lay claim to being a spiritual son to Dr. Torrance and a spiritual grandson to Dr. Guilford, whose textbook, *Fields of Psychology*, was the first psychology book I ever owned and whom I consulted in 1978 concerning a film I produced about flexibility of thinking. The personalities and research procedures of Guilford and Torrance could hardly be more divergent, to use one of Guilford's terms. He inquired in a methodological, if not mechanistic way, guided by statistical techniques; and Torrance proceeded in a highly intuitive fashion, guided marvelously by his own experiences and his humanistic instincts.

The foregoing provides some personal background which may account for my making the following observations about creativity and education:

### **Respect is the Basis for All Positive Human Relationships.**

This dictum is even more pertinent when a creative child is involved. Here is what Paul Torrance advised teachers who would foster creativity in the classroom to do in 1965 (*Rewarding Creative Behavior*, p. 43):

- Be respectful of unusual questions.
- Be respectful of imaginative and unusual ideas.
- Show your students that their ideas have value.
- Occasionally have students do something "for practice."
- Tie in evaluation with cause and consequences.

Torrance's advice is just as valid today, of course. To state the obvious, if we don't value the student, all kinds of bad things can happen — and do.

### **It's an Individual's Attitude that Counts.**

According to many people who have thought deeply about the progress, relationships, successes, failures, happiness, and health of humans, your most priceless possession is your attitude. Clearly, having a respectful attitude toward creative youngsters is crucial in fostering their growth, but attitude also includes much more — about one's self, society, fulfillment, loved ones, nature, life, death, and spirit. Authorities such as Elwood N. Chapman (1995) are convinced that we can improve our attitudes about children and learning. For a teacher, nurturing creative abilities begins with a positive attitude about the student and his or her potentialities.

### **Rewards Come in Many Guises to Students of All Intellectual Capabilities.**

When behavior modification was fashionable in the schools, teachers often carried on their persons M & Ms, raisins, and other goodies. I always thought that extrinsic rewards were a poor substitute for intrinsic rewards such as satisfaction and discovery. I still think so, and I'm not surprised that the Skinnerians have faded away. Common sense told us that some children respond well to prizes and praise, but others don't. I remember well the behavior of one boy whom I had praised and rewarded with a good grade. He thought I had given him a signal to relax and rest on his laurels — and his performance plummeted. Many students are motivated by the basic reward of the schools, namely, grades. But a great many are not so motivated. We can point to family background as the underlying reason for disinterest in getting good grades, but the matter of rewards is too complicated to cite only social or ethnic reasons for underperformance in school. Gifted students frequently are indifferent to grades as a reward, and so it behooves us to use criteria other than grades and test scores in identifying the gifted, especially the highly creative.

I might add that punishments also come in many guises. Consider the teacher who intends to reward the bright but shy student by making him the star of the class play. The student may well suffer and never forgive the teacher. I once promoted a bright seventh-grader into the top eighth-grade class. (The school assigned students into so-called homogeneous classes according to test scores, but teachers could exert some influence.) The girl was in the next-to-highest class, and I thought her performance in the seventh grade should be rewarded by placing her in the top group. She never forgave me. Probably there were two reasons for her unhappiness with me. First, she may have been far more comfortable with her friends in the next-to-highest group. Second, she may have felt too much pressure keeping up with the students in the highest class. I never found out why, but I know that thereafter she couldn't stand the sight of me.

**A Teacher of the Gifted does not Have to be “Brilliant,” but Should Definitely be Enthusiastic about the Growth of His or Her Students and, Whenever Possible, be Avid about Subject Matter.**

It was once thought that it took an intellectually brilliant teacher to handle and/or inspire gifted students. Dr. Torrance and I investigated the matter of what students value in their teachers (1970), and our findings are still quite appropriate for teachers of the gifted. Our respondents saw the ideal teacher essentially as one who values, is concerned about, and helps young people. He or she is an honest, trusting person who is at ease with young people and makes them feel comfortable in his or her presence. Above all, he or she is human; a person who makes mistakes and may even lose his or her temper occasionally. Moreover, the ideal teacher provides opportunities for his or her students to grow.

As might be expected, the responses of the younger subjects of our study indicated that they were more accepting of affection from their teachers and the older ones were more rejecting of affection. With maturity, intellectual stimulation becomes more important. Increasingly greater value is placed on the teacher who causes the student to think, is excited about learning, encourages thinking, and respects the student's ideas. With maturity, physical appearance, orderliness, and accuracy become less important.

We thought it was clear that the ideal teacher is a creative teacher. His or her own behavior is creative, but even more important: the ideal teacher encourages and facilitates creative development and functioning among his or her students.

**A Sense of Humor is an Indispensable Asset for Teachers of the Gifted.**

Because gifted students typically have keen senses of humor, to be effective with these youngsters a teacher must also possess a good sense of humor. As many people have pointed out, however, it seems that everyone includes a sense of humor among his or her basic personality traits. (That thought, in itself, is amusing.) Some senses of humor, on the other hand, are not conducive to encouraging students to learn and grow. I'm thinking especially of the teacher who relies on sarcasm to maintain control of a class. That kind of humor is often antithetical to the open expression of ideas that gifted youngsters need to share with others.

In conducting classes for teachers, I have found that the type of teacher who is driven to be authoritative frequently can't go along with a pun, gag, or gaffe, and is unable to laugh at himself/herself. For example, I posed these questions to one class of experienced teachers:

Is a month a mile? Do pickles come in the summer? Does the sun sound tired today? Is a boy before a woman? Where does the cold go?

Each of these questions can be dealt with seriously or flippantly, logically or illogically, symbolically or literally. Students, especially younger ones, aren't daunted by the questions, but many adults are befuddled and frustrated by this kind of question. For instance, these are a few of the teachers' answers to the first question:

“Yes, if you are a snail or a slug.” “No, a month is a measure of time, while a mile is a measure of distance.” “Only on Thursdays when it's raining.” “Yes, if you were constructing a highway, it might take a month to make a mile of highway.” “In my dreams, when I'm trying to run and can't seem to move my feet, it would take me a month to go a mile.”

The response that especially indicated a lack of a sense of humor — or at least an inability to be whimsical — was the second one, “No, a month is a measure of time, while a mile is a measure of distance.” (I could have added an exclamation mark to that.) That person was a no-nonsense teacher of the old-school type. If I'd asked that person to be whimsical or off-beat, it would have caused no little frustration. As you can see, the questions also call for an active imagination, and it is my contention that humor does in fact require imagination. The teacher of gifted children really does need a good imagination.

## **We are Always Going to Have Fads in Education.**

The cry has constantly been that educators need to find the best methods of teaching reading, mathematics, science, and writing. That seems eminently logical. However, we often discard some method that really works for another one whose main virtue is that it is newer. Various systems of beliefs have swayed the thinking of the educational community, from those of John Dewey's to B. F. Skinner's to Carl Roger's and to Howard Gardner's. I expect that there will always be a fad that teachers will rush to embrace, in an effort to find the magic formula that will ensure success with every student. Currently, there is something called "differentiation," which must have some truths but which also must have been there all of the time. The basic reason for all this bandwagoning — and this is rarely stated either for the teaching fraternity or for the public — is that teaching children is a very risky undertaking at best and the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship are constantly changing.

I've seen the creativity bandwagon come and go at least two times. At the moment, it is out of sight. Where once the words "creative" and "creativity" were clichés, now they are merely adjectives that are used for any kind of product or service. When those words were in vogue in the educational community, they were used and abused so often as to be meaningless. Today, they *are* meaningless.

Well, after fifty years of thinking and hoping that the "creativity movement" would accomplish wonders, I've come to the conclusion that it probably did some good. Some educators and parents weren't so sure. They thought classrooms would become ever more chaotic and the basic skills and knowledge that should be acquired by young people would be ignored and lost. From my perspective, the teachers who valued creative thinking were rewarded. Their students did grow, and they did feel good about themselves. We certainly don't live in an atmosphere that places a premium upon creative thinking now. The thoughts of teachers are crowded with ways in which test scores can be improved. Oh well, the creativity bandwagon may be sighted once again. I hope it doesn't take another fifty years.

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### **Differentiation Is an Art, Not a Science**

**Amy Bernstein Framingham, Massachusetts**

Perhaps it is because I come from a background in the arts that I sometimes become frustrated by scientific approaches to differentiation in education. Scientists seek answers to problems; they hypothesize solutions and use experiments to try these solutions out. Then they do studies to find out how effective their solution has been. If the results show that the idea has not been effective a large percentage of the time, they consider the idea a failure and give it up. Artists, on the other hand, do not think in terms of problems to be solved. Artists find creative applications that fit each presented situation, and regard limitations as helpful structures to their challenges. The strange shape of a theater space, the budget limitations for materials, or the need to be paid by the word enough to support yourself are all the sorts of limitations artists relish and employ to help them create.

Once a work is finished, an artist would never expect that what he had produced for a specific play, magazine or painting would solve all the problems of the next project. At the most, he might hope to use some of the ideas he had learned in one to approach the next

situation. No artist of any kind would say that a work of art was a failure if only some people appreciated or could use it some of the time. Artists know that when dealing with human beings, there are no general “solutions,” only creative ideas that work for some people in some circumstances and may never work again in the same way.

Differentiation for gifted students is an art, not a science. Every time one approaches a new situation: new student, be it a new kind of learner, classroom setting, school or subject matter, one must create anew. One can use the ideas from previous successful applications, and some of them may work again, but no matter how well a project or concept succeeded for one set of students in one situation, it will not be successful in the same way for another. Each situation is unique.

To make differentiation effective, one needs a creative thinker with the expertise to train and model and help create the curriculum which goes along with the required material; a differentiation expert. This artist must be able to take the concepts within to a higher level, and make sure they conform to the present situation. An administration that supports the efforts of the artists, and her co-artists – the classroom teacher – is also required.

The idea of teaching at different levels at the same time to different children in a classroom is a creative response to the standardization of education. The desire to come up with a scientific “solution” to educating gifted children is the kind of thinking that has gotten us into the trouble we are now. We cannot “solve the problem” of educating gifted students in schools full of all kinds of students. We can only continue to construct a culture and structure through which each individual teacher can do her or his best to reach each student at their level and push them to go further. And we must continue to insist that this be done.

In running two inclusion programs for gifted students over nine years in public schools in the Boston area, I have seen differentiation in action; I have seen it work and not work. We must insist that teachers be artists, and that they get the time, training and support they need to do so. In the past, parents and advocates of students with other special needs would not accept that teachers had no time to differentiate for their children, even though they heard it for years.

We must be as persistent as they have been. A computer program, or any one approach or scientifically supported technique might be a wonderful weapon in the arsenal of the differentiation practitioner, but they will never take the place of the creative artist. One would not ask a computer to paint a picture or to act in a play, nor would one try to paint a picture according to the “correct scientific method.” No more can one expect a computer, or a method, to be able to understand a human child and intuit what is best for him or her.

In the small town of Pepperell, Massachusetts, I was hired to create an inclusion Gifted and Talented program at the Varnum Brook Middle School. I was to locate the children who were gifted in Math or Language Arts. In keeping with the Massachusetts School System’s general philosophy of inclusion, the students were not to be removed from their classrooms under any circumstances. Luckily, I had just finished my Master’s Degree at the University of Virginia in Educational Psychology, and had had the good fortune to study with Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, the maven of differentiation along with many other experts, so I had an idea of what all this might entail. But no one had really spoken as much during my studies about the practical implications of inclusion, nor about how a regular classroom or subject teacher, with no background in Gifted Education, learns to differentiate for gifted children, or even becomes motivated to do so.

This challenge was just to my liking. As a former artist, I loved a situation in which limits were imposed, and I had been given some tools to use, but I had to make up my own process and structure, and the end product would be completely original. I blundered in with the enthusiasm of an actor who had been asked to star in a brand new play.

### **The Limits**

The school had three teams at each of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades, and three fifth grade classes in which all subjects were taught. Each of the middle school teams had one teacher per subject, so I had 21 teachers to convert and train.

### **The Tools**

I knew that what I was trying to do was important. I knew that it was a myth that gifted children would “just be fine” without help in the regular classroom because they were smart. I knew what higher-level thinking was and what kinds of curricula promoted it. I had been taught many systems for creating rich, abstract materials to serve these children.

## My Process

Being a neophyte at this point, I figured that getting the teachers all together and doing a workshop on giftedness and the importance of services for gifted children would be a good starting place. The principal, who was very supportive of the whole program, thought this was a good idea. I had not yet been in education very long, so I didn't know how often teachers had people talking at them about different things they should be doing in their classrooms. If I had had more experience, I might have begun in a less lecturing tone. Still, after the principal introduced me and explained how very important all of this was, I soldiered on.

I remember that I had worked hard on a series of overheads. I tried to get as much of what I had learned in two years of graduate school as possible into one half-hour. I doubt I taught anyone anything much. I showed them several systems for designing challenging curriculum to add to their already overwhelming load. I showed them a few ways they could restructure their classrooms to accommodate this new material. I was off to a great start. Soon, my experience as a performer told me I was losing my audience. The faces in front of me ranged from somewhat friendly, kind and trying to be interested to angry and openly resentful.

Back in my room, I contemplated my failure. Why weren't the teachers all fired up and ready to attack this new problem, as I was? At first rehearsal, actors are enthusiastic and ready for action, why weren't they? As an actor, I should have immediately imagined myself in the classroom teacher's position, and recognized how it differed from that of an artist. Nobody looks over a painter's shoulder to watch his process and check on each detail. A painter's parents don't call up a week into a process to complain about the fact that the brushes are frustrated. Teachers are not given an artist's time and freedom to experiment until they figure out what is needed. It belatedly occurred to me to ask the teachers what they needed instead of telling them.

Of course, some of them didn't even want to see me at this point. I decided to start with one or two who seemed at least open and welcoming, and then work through the neutral ones to the ones who were actually negative. There was a fifth grade teacher, a Mrs. C., who had told me she had a group of exceptionally smart girls in her room. They were about to start reading a book in class that she thought was too easy for them. Mrs. C. didn't think this work was appropriate for the three girls, but she didn't know what to do about it. During Language Arts, I went over to her room and entered shyly. Later I would become accustomed to barging into a room in the middle of a lesson, just as classroom teachers were used to Special Education helpers and others entering their rooms, but now it seemed rude, and I was tentative.

Mrs. C. bravely introduced me as "the new Challenge Specialist," and I sat at the back and watched the lesson, which was whole-class and slow. It came straight out of the Basil Reader; read one section, answer questions designed to ascertain if you had understood the reading on a concrete level, explain simple literary concepts like character, plot and summary, then read the next. The three girls whom Mrs. C. had mentioned were seated at various spots in the room. One was reading another book under her desk. Another one was listening and answering almost all of the questions. When Mrs. C. tried to call on someone else, she threw her hand up in the air and waggled it madly. The third was sitting there with a vacant look on her face, obviously thinking about something else entirely. At one point, when Mrs. C. turned her back, I saw this one fire a message at a friend.

Afterward, I met with Mrs. C. She had several students for whom this material was a challenge and she was fully occupied helping them. She was required to make sure everyone knew the literary concepts in the unit for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Exams, so she didn't see how she could skip them. I suggested we try pre-testing the three on the concepts to come in the next unit, and if they already knew them, setting up a reading group for them in which they would read and discuss a more difficult book and more abstract ideas about the same theme as the one in the Basil. I would meet with the girls once per week and lead discussions; the rest of the time they would have work to keep themselves busy on their own.

These three girls were highly motivated, mature, and interested in reading and writing. They aced the pretest and then went on to devour the full book I gave them and write complex answers to questions about the author's message, history, background and the "big ideas" of the text. They worked with this model for much of the year and learned how to write a persuasive essay using quotes from the text as proof of their interpretations, something that regularly wasn't taught until seventh grade. The girls struggled, and they loved it. Mrs. C. felt great because they were learning, and she was not neglecting anyone else. Later on in my career, I would have realized that this project was only a limited success. It offered nothing to the other children in the room and isolated my three. As differentiation, it was only a first step.

Meanwhile, the seventh grade math teacher came to me. He had a boy in his class who claimed already to know everything that he was teaching, and his parents were bugging the teacher. I asked if the child did know all the material already. The teacher wasn't sure. The student did very well in class, though. So I asked to test the child and find out what he did know. "Okay," said the teacher, (little knowing what a can of worms he was thereby opening). We gave Kyle the end of the year math test. He got 97 % right.

"I think he does know it," I said.

"Yeah, I guess," the teacher replied. But now we were truly in the soup. As long as he hadn't been sure that the child already knew everything that he was going to present that year, he could convince himself that he was maybe teaching him a little something, but now....

"Actually," he said, there is another child..."

I tested the girl, who achieved 95 % correct answers on the end of year exam.

I wound up going to the principal with this one. Luckily, he was completely supportive of the program. He had himself gone to Boston Latin School, so he knew how important challenge was for bright children. I made it clear to him that in my opinion, giving them enrichment projects was not enough. They were ready for acceleration in math and dying to learn new concepts. But I also told him that acceleration was more than a one-year commitment. Once you started it, you had to continue with it or you would limit the students' learning and frustrate them later. So my principal had to meet with the high school principal and set up a program whereby these two children would be able to do ninth grade math in their eighth grade year, and continue to accelerate as needed all the way up. That done they started to attend the ninth grade math class, managing the scheduling difficulties as needed. This process succeeded well for one of the children and not as well for the other. The boy was mature and dedicated, as well as mathematically gifted, and he got along okay with the older students. He was also good at sports and very sociable. They teased him some, but accepted him. The girl was less mature and was excelling at something that was not "for girls." She was lonely in the eighth grade class and had a hard time going up to the high school. She took a lot of teasing and required a great deal of my support not to drop out of this program. But, in the end, she graduated with high honors from high school and went on to study engineering.

One of the other fifth grade teachers came to me saying he had, he thought, a gifted student in his class who was disrupting the whole group. I went to observe. This child was off the walls. He never seemed to be listening to anything the teacher was saying, and was often humming or talking to himself during lessons. Sometimes he would get up in the middle of class and run across to look out the window. But when the teacher did an assessment at the end of the class period, he got everything right. He also seemed very lonely and sad. Was he gifted? Did he have an attention problem? What else was going on? I started by testing him. I gave him the TONI: Test of Nonverbal Intelligence which is untimed, but is expected to take about 40 minutes. Very few children his age finished the test at all, and if they were that capable, they generally finish in the regular time period or give up on the last few puzzles. At the end of three hours, this boy was still going at it. He would get up and wander the room, sometimes singing, seeming to be completely distracted and then come back with the answer. He spent the last hour-and-a-half on the last three problems, never giving up or seeming discouraged, and solved them all correctly.

What was I to do with this highly gifted child in a public school? I could appeal for the right to teach him separately, but this wouldn't help his social problems, and I couldn't give him the full time attention he would need. Finally, I assessed his areas of interest, picked out two other bright children and took them all out of the regular classroom to do a combination of a study of inventing, Leonardo da Vinci's life, and social skills training. I started training the teacher in curriculum compacting and together we set up a station for the student at the back of the room, which I kept constantly stocked with projects he could work on when he tested out of other work. Meanwhile, the teacher and I began to lobby the principal to skip him a couple of grades, which was never done in this school.

With an eighth grade math teacher I created a project for designing and building museum exhibits about math concepts for the Science Museum in Acton. With the help of volunteers I created a Challenge Room, open on Fridays and staffed by parents. It was full of projects that any child could work on if they had finished their work early and well, or tested out of it. I was able to use testing to locate the children who would need challenge services in Language Arts, Math or both ahead of time. This enabled us to cluster them together so that my time would be optimized and they would have others to spur them on. It also helped motivate the teacher of that classroom to differentiate for the group. The administration and I made sure that no one team or teacher was favored (or cursed, depending on your point of view) by always having these clusters. This meant that all the teachers had to work with me eventually, and that the students and parents couldn't decide that a certain team or teacher was "for the smart children." We started lunch groups for children who needed help with social issues. I felt that this program was overall pretty successful.

When the Pepperell Gifted Program funding was cut, I spent four years trying to reproduce in six elementary schools and two middle schools in Waltham what I had achieved at Varnum Brooke. In this job, I could only be at each school once or twice a week and had almost no time to create needed curriculum or to meet with teachers to train them, or co-create plans. I rushed around seeing children, talking to administrators and meeting with teachers. I had to start standardizing what I did. Instead of co-creating new materials with teachers, I could only lead general teacher workshops. Instead of creating new projects that fit each student's need, I began to have to recycle old projects, whether they were right for this student, or not.

In one of the elementary schools, the principal was truly a supporter of helping high-ability students. In her school, the program almost worked. She insisted that the teachers differentiate, along with everything else they had to do, and sought me out regularly to find out what I needed and what she could do to help. She came to conferences on Gifted Students and looked for mentors and others to help supplement our meager resources. In the other two elementary schools, I was placated or ignored. The principals let me come and do what I could do on my own, but hadn't the time nor the energy, nor did they really see the need to make my job possible. The middle school of which I had charge was actively negative. Eventually, I realized that I could not make this program successful with its limited resources. I finally decided to stop banging my head against a brick wall and left the job.

This failure did not prove to me that differentiation was impossible, however. What it did prove was that differentiation required sufficient resources to allow those attempting it to behave like artists and create for each situation as it appeared. One could not create a differentiated gifted program for a whole city by using a standardized scientific approach, even if the approach had worked elsewhere.

### **Final Words**

Differentiation for gifted students is an art, not a science. No matter how well experimentation shows that an idea succeeded, there is no reason to think it will be affective the next time. We must not settle for "solutions" to educating gifted children. Instead we must continue to advocate for the resources to allow our teachers to act as artists, and for our children to be treated as human beings: each unique, each deserving an artistic, creative response.

## **Contemporary American Artist Wayne Thiebaud: Some Influences and Mentors**

**Eugene Avergon    Diana Avergon**

**Art by Choice Books    Fletcher, North Carolina**

This essay will look at some of the mentors who influenced one of our best known 20th Century American painters, Wayne Thiebaud, an artist with a gift. What does it mean for an artist to have a gift? It could be summed up as having innate artistic ability and also personal drive to pursue that ability. In contemplating innate artistic ability, we come to realize that an artist needs to work alone, to work diligently, and to work at mastering and excelling in one or more visual domains. In viewing personal drive, we see evidence of the benefit from social stimulus – this often comes in the form of a mentor – a parent, a teacher, an advisor a friend or an influential persona, even from another era. The common thread among mentors is that they do influence the artist. Wayne Thiebaud had such mentors. In conclusion, we will touch upon how he gave back to the world through his art and by his service as a lifelong educator.

Why should we be interested in mentorship? Of what benefit were mentors for Wayne Thiebaud as a child, a student, an adult? Broadly speaking, a mentor can play an intellectual role and also an emotional role, both being potent motivating forces for the protégé. Students are served by mentors in many and various ways. "Zeal for work is teachable. So are goal orientation, self understanding, self-confidence, joy in living. . .and pleasure in serving others" (Sellin & Birch, 1980, p. 273). Wayne Thiebaud received abundance from those who influenced him and gave abundantly to those whom he would encounter.

Andy Warhol said that his art was mainly, ". . . about liking things" (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 35). Virginia Postrell in *The Substance of Style* uses a mantra, "I like that, I'm like that" (Postrell, 2003, p. 103). What gives a person a feeling that, "I'm like that?" Why did Wayne Thiebaud feel drawn to cartooning at an early age? How did commercial art influence his ongoing career? Did he select subject matter that he loved? What motivated him to work so hard? From whom did he gain inspiration? Pondering some of these questions provides a feeling for Thiebaud the learner, the artist and the teacher. It gives a glimpse into some of the sources of his interests and passions.

Born in 1920 in Mesa, Arizona, Wayne Thiebaud's family moved to Long Beach, California when he was one. He remembered childhood art activities set up by his mother on rainy days, and also his Uncle Jess, a cartoonist who showed the Thiebaud children his type of drawing skills. As a young adult, at Long Beach Polytechnic High School Thiebaud took art classes and was greatly influenced by a teacher, H. A. Foster who introduced him to production and design theory. When he broke his back at 16, he began

drawing extensively and was especially interested in cartooning. Disney Studios recognized his talent and hired him as an *in betweener* – one who draws the in between frames for principal animators.

Beyond high school, Thiebaud became more familiar with commercial art, continuing his studies at Frank Wiggins Trade School in Los Angeles and working as a sign painter, a freelance cartoonist and a movie poster illustrator. After service in the Army, he went to work as a layout designer and cartoonist for Rexall Drug Company's ad department. It was here that a mentor appeared. That person was Robert Mallary, a contemporary and self taught artist with an intellectually strong commitment to the study of art and art history. Mallary influenced Thiebaud so that he began to, “. . . read voraciously about art. He also began to paint seriously for the first time, looking consistently to Mallary for direction. ‘He was a mentor who tore apart what I did. . . I welcomed it because I needed his criticism so desperately’ ” (Tsujimoto, 1985, p. 22). Thiebaud's voracious self-learning points to the powerful drive of Mallary, as one who motivated his mind to constantly and aggressively seek and learn. This intellectual trait from Mallary was to be enduring.

Southern California in Thiebaud's early years was a place of palm trees, ice cream sundaes, soda fountains, luncheonettes and billboards. “This was Thiebaud's primal landscape and it stuck with him.” (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 47). On the GI Bill, he completed his undergraduate degree and his MA in the early 1950's. As an eclectic painter, his work referred to styles of other artists. In 1951 his solo exhibit at the Crocker Art Gallery was entitled Influences on a Young Painter – references seen here to Picasso, John Marin as well as to other painters.

In his early admiration of de Kooning, Thiebaud recognized that artist's connection with commercial art as well as his great knowledge of painting. The tempo of de Kooning's swirling and dancing brushstroke intrigued him. The years 1956-57 took Thiebaud to New York to learn about Abstract Expressionism. The Cedar Bar was a place of dialogues and discussion for New York painters. There he met de Kooning, Kline, Newman and other contemporary artists. De Kooning, like Thiebaud, loved the act of painting. Returning to California, Thiebaud pursued the double careers of painting and teaching. “It would take five years for the mature Thiebaud style to emerge, made from this strange alloy of de Kooning and the five-and dime, and it did at last in 1961. . . his first paintings of cakes and pies, . . . begin to appear” (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 50).

Although most well known for his paintings of food, his still lifes included pinball machines, flowers, tools and toys, just to name some of his subjects. Throughout, he was always most concerned with composition, light, color and scale. He admired Chardin's work (18th Century French painter) and his ability to describe in paint the softness of rabbit hair, the sheen of copper pots or the dull texture of clay pipes (Tsujimoto, 1985, p. 46). Thiebaud's pies and cakes looked like they were made of bakers' ingredients – the work of a confectioner. Working hard at mastering the domain of painting geometric solids, Thiebaud painted the same subjects again and again, using varying media and different compositions. Chardin was an inspiration here in that he had the ability to paint a still life over and over again each time putting intensity into the subject matter (Hurwitz, 1993).

Mallary's intellectual influence was rekindled in Thiebaud after his return from New York to Sacramento. He began researching the *Italian Macchiaioli* painters (1855-1862) who were concerned with light. His interest was in the technique by which the *Italian Macchiaioli* group used light and shadow to influence composition. The group was well known for applying paint in thick brush strokes – similar brushwork appearing in Thiebaud's early paintings of food. We can take note here of several significant influences merging to affect his work. In Thiebaud's cakes we see “. . . their double existence in the worlds of Euclid and Betty Crocker. . . .” (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 53). In his still life drawings and paintings from this period, he relied on memory to work. His experience in commercial art helped him here with a capacity to do quick compositional layouts.

In 1963, Thiebaud was awarded a fellowship from the University of California. It was during this year that he focused on figurative work – work that would continue. He began to use models and sometimes himself to draw from. Studying both the history and practice of drawing, he looked into works by Degas, Holbein, Picasso and Utamaro. Making a strong connection with Edward Hopper's figurative work, Thiebaud became interested in, “. . . freezing a moment in time. . . .” as Hopper did (Tsujimoto, 1985, p. 105). Like Hopper's figures, his subjects seem isolated, quiet and enigmatic. Thiebaud's admiration for the paintings of Hopper can be seen in the emulation of painting tendencies – the creation of realistic figures in cool and sometimes stark compositions with warm colors. An early engagement in the commercial art world is strongly evident in Thiebaud's figurative work. When he first came upon the work of Edward Hopper, who would continue to inspire him into his seventies, he stated, “I thought of it as a kind of illustration” (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 44).

Landscapes were the third category of painting for Wayne Thiebaud, putting his attention on them in 1966. Here, an influential contemporary and friend was the California painter Richard Diebenkorn. When Thiebaud first started painting San Francisco street scenes, he worked on location. Not getting the colored edges on his images that he was seeking, he took his paintings back to the studio and focused there on color and composition. Like Diebenkorn, he was interested in light and also halation – the edges of objects

that appear illuminated, pulsating or vibrating. Thiebaud's landscapes give us an opportunity to view this phenomenon. "He has explained that it is a way, 'to give a little bit of vibration, so the eye will accept the form as not being so pasted on'" (Tsujiimoto, 1985, p. 49).

California's influence was great on both Thiebaud and Diebenkorn. "It is hard to imagine pictures like these – American surely in their subjects, but almost Mediterranean in their sense of ease – emerging in any other place in America before California in the seventies. Abundance had always been one of Thiebaud's subjects, but it had before been the touching, stuccoed, mock epic abundance of windows and diners. Now one has a sense in the cityscapes, just as one does in the Ocean Park [Diebenkorn] series of abundance that does not look outward for approval. . . ." (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 60).

Drawing constantly, Thiebaud considered it his research. He brought his sketchbook along to hospitals, churches, ships, airplanes, walking in museums, viewing athletic events, riding in the car, listening to concerts, watching television, and attending lectures. As to his philosophy, he stated, "Discipline is not a restriction but an aid to freedom. It prepares an artist to choose his own limitations. An artist needs the best studio instruction, the most rigorous demands and the toughest criticism to tune up his sensibilities" (Hurwitz, 1993). Mallary had been an early and rigorous critic.

As cartoons and commercial art continued to be in play throughout Thiebaud's career, he spoke of both as being useful and purposeful and having much in common with fine art. Regarding cartooning, he said "The power of the cartoon's graphic energy is something that has always struck me" (Hurwitz, 1993). An historic hero is George Herriman, illustrator of *Krazy Kat*, ". . . whose work graces the walls of Thiebaud's home right alongside works by Morandi and Picasso" (Hurwitz, 1993).

### **Conclusion**

Pleasure in being in service to others must come from a sense of being served, being successful, having something to share. Recalling Thiebaud's artistic career, wonderful mentors are evident along the way. His service to others is evident in his work as an artist and in his full life of teaching. Wayne Thiebaud's extensive career covered teaching and chairing the art department at Sacramento Junior College (now Sacramento City College) from 1951-60. After that he was assistant and associate professor of art at University of California, Davis. With numerous awards, and advisory and juror committee positions to his credit, he has entered the 21st Century as painter and mentor to many. "He especially credits his teaching and the constant dialogues with students and fellow faculty members with his ability to keep an open mind about artistic issues. . . ." (Steven Nash with Adam Gopnik, 2000, p. 96).

Artistic mentors help one think about one's own work and reflect. There is a sense of stability for continued exploration. "Nothing excites or motivates a gifted student [or adult] more than working with someone who has a passion for the same thing he does" (Carol Strip Whitney with Gretchen Hirsch, 2007, p. 130). Wayne Thiebaud receives and shares that passion. "When his students ask, 'what do you think I ought to be painting?' Wayne says, 'Find something you really want to paint. Something you really love'" (Rubin, 2007, p. 96). To find a list of museums and public art galleries showing Thiebaud's paintings, go to:

[http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/thiebaud\\_wayne.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/thiebaud_wayne.html)

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**Khaled Hosseini: Afghan-American Novelist and Medical Doctor**

**Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools**

Khaled Hosseini is truly a hero of giftedness. He was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was a diplomat and his mother was a teacher. The family lived in Iran during the time of the Shah. As a child, Hosseini read Persian poetry and translations of European classics such as *Alice in Wonderland*. While living in Tehran there was a coup in 1973 against King Mohammed Zahir Shah of Afghanistan. The family moved to Paris when the father was given another diplomatic assignment. The Soviet Russians sought to take advantage of the fragile situation in Afghanistan by supporting another coup in 1980. To back up this second coup they sent an occupation force of troops into Afghanistan. President Carter and the Pakistani Secret Service sponsored anti-Soviet guerillas who were religious Jihadists. The Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989 but the political inheritors were the Taliban, a vicious group of theocratic thugs that created a brutal tyranny. The eternal problems of this nation were also exacerbated by ethnic conflicts. During this tumultuous period, Hosseini and his family were given political asylum in the United States in 1980. They settled in San Jose, California without taking any of their financial assets from Afghanistan; therefore, they survived on welfare for years. Despite these economic conditions, they had a strong appreciation for education and culture.

Hosseini obtained a medical degree from the University of California-San Diego, specializing in internal medicine. His first novel, **The Kite Runner** (2003, Riverhead Books), was an international success. (The title refers to the protagonist's kite flying contests, which play a large role in Afghan society, and to his friend who retrieved the kites.) In this book, he became a spokesperson for the endurance and cultural values of the Afghan people. It was recently made into a film in 2007. Hosseini has written a second novel entitled, **A Thousand Splendid Suns** (2007, Riverhead Books), which describes the agony that the Afghan people suffered under the Taliban dictatorship – particularly the abuse of women.

Hosseini practiced internal medicine in Mountain View, California, and wrote his first novel on his off-hours as an MD. He did not want people to forget about the plight of Afghanistan under the Soviets and then the Taliban – so he arose at 4:00 AM each morning to work on his first book prior to assuming his daily medical duties. However, in 2004 he gave up his medical practice to devote more time to writing and working for the freedom of Afghanistan. Among the associations he has done volunteer work for are: Paralyzed Veterans of America, Aid to Afghan Children and the United Nations Refugee Agency. His volunteer involvements are an inspiration for the gifted. He has indeed displayed by his life and career how giftedness can be heroic.

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