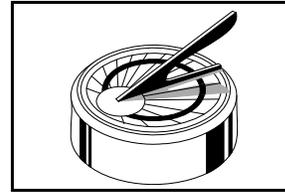


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Two irksome problems in the gifted field that need to be resolved are: (1) **Deceptive programming** – Teachers are assigned the task of providing resource enrichment classes but receive little support from the principal, regular education staff and central administration. I recently had a frantic telephone call from a teacher saying that she could not effectively provide differentiated services because regular classroom teachers arbitrarily refuse to allow gifted students to attend her classes on schedule. The excuse is they will miss “important lessons or tests.” This is a clear example of “in name only” gifted programming which deceives parents while the district misuses state gifted funds. Unfortunately, public schools continue to ignore parent complaints and to violate state laws regarding the education of gifted students.

(2) **Little recognition for efforts by school district staff** in providing innovative differentiated services, and **lack of collegiality (shared power and authority)** among academics, school district staff and other educators. Local and state gifted organizations are usually managed and strongly influenced by local educators and parents who have been instrumental in designing innovative gifted programs. But much of this work receives little or no national exposure because they are not members of currently influential academic groups. This problem is systemic throughout the field, and is clearly demonstrated in gifted education journals and at national conferences. One of the major causes is the lack of equal representation by local and state educators and parents on the governing boards of national gifted organizations. Equality among school personnel, parents and academics in managing national organizations and confer-

ences would be fair and empirically justifiable based upon current membership statistics. Maybe it is time for a new national organization that emphasizes school district personnel and parent achievements in educating gifted students.

The first article presents a new teacher training initiative by the National Association for Gifted Children. The authors emphasize that this initiative, **The Mary Frasier Teacher Scholars Program**, is based on Professor Frasier’s important work in identifying and educating gifted minority students. Professor Donna Ford holds the Betts Chair of Education and Human Development in the Peabody College, Vanderbilt University Special Education Department. Professor Tarek C. Grantham is the Gifted & Creative Education Program Coordinator in the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Georgia. The article by Dr. Sylvia Tansey discusses the need for more effective gifted education programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She has been associated with this school district since 1946 as a teacher, psychologist and volunteer. Please see her biography at the end of this article. The third article in this issue is authored by Janis Purnell, a social studies teacher concerned with designing rigorous history and social studies curricula. She has recently published a book on this topic entitled, **Using the Internet: American History Projects for the Gifted Classroom, Grades 4 - 8** (GEP, 2006). Next, Marcy Reedy, who is Public Affairs Manager at the Center for Excellence in Education, describes a special science and mathematics program, and Michael Walters closes with a discussion of George Orwell’s essays.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D. Publisher

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Highlights from The Mary Frasier Teacher Scholars Program: A Dream Come True

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Nationally, school districts are grappling with a severe shortage of students who choose teaching as a major, and school districts throughout the country are seeking ways to address teacher shortages. The shortages are most evident among culturally diverse populations, who represent only 6% of the teaching profession. This paucity of diverse teachers comes at a time when our schools have become more diverse than ever before. For example, approximately 40% of the student population in K-12 settings is Black, Latino, Asian, and American Indian (Banks, 2006). Thus, we are witnessing an inverse relationship between teacher demographics and student demographics.

Why does diversity among teachers matter? Some scholars contend that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) teachers are effective cultural liaisons or bridges for CLD students (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994). Sharing similar backgrounds, experiences, values, customs and traditions, CLD students and teachers are able to build positive relationships that result in increased engagement and achievement. Likewise, it is maintained that CLD teachers are able to serve as mentors and role models to CLD students. For example, when CLD students see teachers who are culturally and linguistically diverse, they are more likely to consider teaching as a viable, worthy profession.

Whatever one's reasons for seeking a diverse teaching profession, we are not experiencing much progress. This lack of diversity among teachers begs the question, how can we better prepare our current teaching force to become culturally competent? How can we prepare teachers working with low-income and diverse students to become effective and skilled at recognizing giftedness among this population? How can we help teachers to better serve these students, too many of whom are seldom recognized as gifted and talented?

During the 2006 year, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) created an innovative program to honor and continue the legacy of Dr. Mary Frasier who passed away over one year ago. She was a former president of this association from 1987-1989, and a pioneer in the field of gifted education. During the 2006 Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, NAGC launched The Mary Frasier Teacher Scholars for Diverse Talent Development Program. We welcomed 88 Frasier Scholars – all educators in Title I schools. Few had formal preparation in gifted education. For many of these teachers, attending the conference was a dream come true; most did not have the funds to attend. Through this visionary program, NAGC responded to two needs to recruit: (1) more diverse teachers into the field of gifted education; and (2) more teachers in low-income and diverse schools into the field of gifted education. The ultimate goal of the program is to identify and serve more children from under-represented populations. The Frasier Scholars attended special sessions at the conference and were assigned a mentor; they also received stipends to support attendance to the conference.

Dr. Frasier designed and launched the Frasier Talent Assessment Profile (F-TAP) through the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. As one of many legacies, she developed several models to rectify the persistent barriers related to attitude, access, assessment, and accommodation (*The Four As*) facing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and low-income youth. She implemented multidimensional assessment procedures that were sensitive to individual differences and to matching gifted program options to students' identified strengths. As founder of the Torrance Center for Creativity and Talent Development at the University of Georgia, Dr. Frasier dedicated her life and career to improving education for under-represented students. In this short article, we highlight some components of Dr. Frasier's work (the Four As), the Program, and the important work that still lies ahead as we seek to increase diversity in gifted education programs and services.

Dr. Frasier's Four As

Frasier (1997) synthesized research related to problems associated with the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse students for gifted programs and concluded that there are four persistent issues. Her *Fours As* – attitude, access, assessment, and accommodation – provide a framework from which to approach staff development and training for educators regarding equity issues in gifted education.

Access refers to ways in which culturally and linguistically diverse students become considered for gifted program placement. Too often, educators hold low academic expectations for CLD students, which means that such teachers will fail to adequately create opportunities in classrooms for these students to demonstrate their abilities. An unchallenging learning environment does little to prepare students to

be viable candidates for services beyond the regular curriculum. Low expectations are compounded when educators do not have the skills to recognize “gifted behaviors” when expressed by CLD students in non-traditional ways, as Frasier noted throughout her career. Frasier’s work highlights the reality that, when provided with common characteristics associated with typical and atypical gifted students, many educators still struggle to recognize these characteristics, particularly if CLD students are underachievers, from low-income backgrounds, or speak non-standard English. We must consider the influence of culture and environment on the manifestation of gifts and talents in different racial and ethnic groups, and the effects they have on teacher referrals and students’ test performance (Ford & Joseph, 2006; Ford & Whiting, 2006; Whiting & Ford, 2006).

Assessment refers to the entire process of evaluating the presence of and degree of giftedness. Too little data is gathered in the assessment process; multiple measures are critical in the assessment of CLD students to offset the narrow policies and practices. For example, one factor that contributes to under-representation is an over-reliance on teacher nominations (Elhoweris et al., 2005). In addition, there is an over-reliance on standardized tests to determine the child’s gifted potential, which can be problematic when these instruments are developed based on Euro-American values and behaviors. Frasier and Passow (1994) and Passow and Frasier (1996) outlined other major critiques of the assessment practices in gifted education that helped to guide the field toward a new paradigm of identifying talent potential.

Accommodation refers to program design and curricular experiences to support the needs and interests of CLD students. Inadequate program designs and curricula that do not address different cultural and linguistic experiences thwart the motivation of CLD students and their academic success (Ford & Harris, 1999). To accommodate students’ needs, cultural and linguistic diversity cannot be ignored; instead, teachers must view students’ differences in a positive way, and change their teaching styles and curricula accordingly (see Ford & Harris, 1999; Ford & Milner, 2005; Tomlinson et al., 2004). In addition, educators must involve parents and mentors to make the programmatic and curricular experiences equitable, authentic and culturally relevant for CLD students (Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, and Bridges, 2005; Grantham, 2004).

Attitude refers to a mental position, feeling or emotion towards CLD students. Negative attitudes, such as deficit thinking, hinder efforts to recognize and develop gifts and talents among CLD and low-income students (Ford et al., 2002; Ford et al., 2005). Deficit thinking makes it difficult to believe that gifts and talents exist or can emerge from CLD or low-income students. Frasier’s research encouraged educators and parents to be reflective about their attitudes and beliefs, and how thinking influences behaviors and actions: What negative concerns about ability in CLD students or economically disadvantaged groups create barriers? What beliefs about CLD families hinder educators from working collaboratively with them? Essentially, Dr. Frasier encouraged educators to be advocates and talent scouts – to actively and proactively search for gifts and talents in students. An important first step in appropriately identifying and placing students in programs is to be clear about what giftedness means. Frasier concurred with Hagen’s (1980) ideas about giftedness:

“Giftedness is a concept or psychological construct, not a trait of a person. We do not measure giftedness directly as we would tallness. Instead we infer giftedness by observing certain characteristics or behaviors of individuals. Our inferences about giftedness will be accurate to the extent that the characteristics or behaviors we choose to observe are relevant to the construct and are validly and reliably appraised” (p. 1).

For example, intense curiosity is an indicator of advanced intellectual ability that typically corresponds with a teacher referral checklist item, such as “Asks a lot of questions.” However, what if the child is an English language learner? What if the student is a Native American who has been taught by his/her culture not to question adults? Frasier’s TABs (traits, aptitudes, and behaviors) encourage educators to be more sensitive to the variety of ways that children might express the same gifts and talents.

A Final Word

As was noted by the U.S. Department of Education (1993), giftedness is present in every cultural group and across all economic strata. No group is inherently more intelligent or talented than any other. Too often, however, students who are low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse (or both) do not participate in gifted education programs and services. This under-identification is a major waste of human potential. The Mary Frasier Teacher Scholars Program is a new talent development initiative – a proactive, visionary project, developed by NAGC to address this loss. Eighty-eight educators from Title I schools received training designed to empower them to recognize gifts and talents among their students, to not be distracted by differences, and to challenge their students. Our desire is that these educators return to their respective schools and communities with the knowledge, dispositions and skills to bring out the best in their students. We believe this is what Dr. Frasier would have wanted.

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GATE Programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District: Do they Exist or Not?**Sylvia Tansey****Psychologist (Retired) Los Angeles Unified School District**

To present what I want to discuss about Gifted and Talented Education in California, but specifically in Los Angeles, I must go far, far back in my own personal/educational history. My father was born in a small shtetl in the Ukraine of the Tsars. He emigrated before the 1917 revolution when he was a teenager, and he entered the United States by way of Ellis Island. My mother also came through Ellis Island, towards the end of World War I. She was born in Czernowitz, a shtetl in the Pale, set aside by Catherine the Great of Russia for her Jews. However, my mother often bragged about being born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her father had earlier settled in Chicago and established his business as a furrier, although he had been a rural schoolteacher in Europe. Towards the end of World War I, he brought his wife and five children to Chicago. In Chicago, my parents were brought together by a marriage broker.

My father was uneducated, but he did speak Yiddish and Ukrainian; he taught himself English – I still have his Russian-English dictionary. However, what I remember very, very well, from my earliest years, is that our home was loaded with shelves of books, all in English, and that my father and I always gave each other books as gifts. My mother, being from Czernowitz, knew German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. All her life, she spoke the same “Hoch Deutsch” German that I learned in high school and at UCLA.

My father had created a successful business in an office of the famous Merchandise Mart in Chicago; he designed and manufactured bedspreads, quilts, and drapes. However, he lost it all in the Depression of 1929. We moved to California and made a new start at the end of 1933. I was enrolled in the fourth grade in an elementary school in Los Angeles in January 1934. And this is when the long history my own involvement in the public schools of Los Angeles truly began. I can still tell you today the names of my three female teachers: Hellhof, 4th grade; Hartwell, 5th grade; and Tollefson, 6th grade – in fact, when I was hired to teach in the schools of Los Angeles, in September 1946, as a World War II Emergency teacher and given a class of 50 children in four grade levels – I used my strong memories of them, as well as of the principal in that same school, as my guides. It is significant that Mrs. Tollefson studied with our class the contemporary situation in Ethiopia. Our luncheon graduation (printed) program was a map of that country, with the menu and the day’s program inside. It is now faded but not difficult to read. I made the “Tribute” and then, the school song was the last item on the program, contributed by one of my classmates.

Before I go any further, it is enormously important to remember that it would take a large library of history books to describe the differences in the American society between then, a bit over seventy years ago and now, in 2006. I do remember that the students in my elementary school usually came from working-class families, with mother a full-time homemaker, and with two or three children. The children appeared to be well taken care of, the parents were interested in their education, and I certainly did not know any children who did not speak English.

Today, 75% of the student body in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) lives in poverty. An overlapping 75% speak a language other than English, but mostly Spanish, in spite of the fact that about 90 languages are represented in the public schools of Los Angeles. In the elementary school where I now volunteer as a bilingual school psychologist, there are many mothers, uneducated in Mexico and living in poverty here, who have seven, eight, nine, or even ten children by several different men. Very few mothers who were not born in the United States attempt to learn to speak English. I cannot even attempt to further describe here the scientific, medical, socio-economic, cultural, technological, political, and educational differences between 1936 and 2006. It was a world so different from today’s that I would be lost were I to return for a visit.

An aside here: I must mention something I have learned in my life-long educational journey. I discovered the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth on attachment, and I’ve read the history of Anna Freud’s work in London during the Blitz in 1940. And as I write, I remember how I behaved with my daughter, who was born in 1957, and is now a decent human being, and a fine and experienced architect. As a semi-retired elementary school teacher, and without knowing the terminology, I worked to attach to her and to stimulate her. We continue to be good friends. If the Congress and the President of the United States of America were eager enough and willing to find a legal and ethical way to teach parents – or better yet, all high school students – the enormous value of attachment and stimulation, we would probably not lose as many of our children as we do now, including our intellectually gifted as well as special needs children.

I also have fond memories of several of my teachers in junior high school, and I remember very well the teachers at Los Angeles High School who taught me German, Biology, English, French, Chemistry, History, and Art. Since I was always an eager and attentive student, I earned good grades, but the first

time I heard anything about intellectual giftedness was in the tenth grade, at Los Angeles High School. I was one of a group of students seated in the auditorium, where we were administered the Otis, a group I. Q. test. I did not learn my score – nor, as I remember, were we told anything about the results of the test – but, since I loved school and worked hard, and came from a home where I was always intellectually stimulated, I assumed that I did well. I earned excellent grades in high school and experienced no problems in being admitted to UCLA in February 1942.

At UCLA, in one of my early courses in psychology, I was administered an intelligence test that I think was the first edition of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). I was then told that I was gifted intellectually. Nor did I have any difficulties being admitted, when I applied to the Graduate School of Education at the University of Southern California (at the age of 48 ½) to study educational psychology and earn the school psychology credential. Because I continued to teach, tried to be a good parent, and did extensive research for my dissertation, it took me ten years to earn the doctorate. The LAUSD hired me as a bilingual school psychologist about a year before I was granted the doctorate in August 1982.

GATE is the California “Gifted and Talented Education” law. I do not know if it is still on the books, but I do remember, in about 1984, I administered a test of intellectual ability to a fifth grade female, as well as a test of academic achievement. She had an average I. Q., but her academic scores were well above age expectancy. The senior psychologist reprimanded me when I turned the child down for the average intellectual ability, because she did qualify for the label “gifted” under the law. However, so far as I know, she was not then treated any differently. Although I remember administering tests of intellectual ability to children who were referred for learning disabilities, I also remember – and will later discuss here some cases – that nothing was done for gifted students, learning disabled or not. The Larry P. California Supreme Court decision ruled in late 1986 that African-American students could not be given tests of intellectual ability because the tests that were administered were not standardized on them. The District then wisely decided not to administer tests for intellectual ability to any child who might have been learning disabled. Some time before the Larry P. order was handed down I remember that we were told that California was going to give the District only enough money for every psychologist to assess only one child for giftedness. Nowadays, when the school psychologist administers an intelligence test to a child who was referred because of a possible learning disability, she can use only the Matrix Analogies Test (MAT). It is a non-verbal, visual-spatial test; that means that she will not learn anything about the verbal reasoning skills of the child, unless she utilizes other measures. I created an informal interview form that I continue to use when I want to become better acquainted with the intellectual and academic abilities of my counselees.

In the elementary school in which I soon begin my tenth year as a two-day-a-week retired/volunteer bilingual school psychologist, I have consulted with the teacher who was in charge of the now dead, but previously full-blown and successful gifted program. She thinks that lack of money shut it down more than ten years ago. When I was asked, two academic years ago, to check out the second grade teachers’ referrals for gifted testing, I discovered that most of the children I interviewed who came from families with no more than four children seemed to be highly intelligent. However, because of the “lack of resources,” the LAUSD administers only a group test, the Ravens, which is a non-verbal, visual-spatial test created for individual presentation. I also discovered from my experience in searching for gifted students that the girls wrote essays in English much better than the boys; however, they did not do so well on the Ravens. Thus, many girls were not identified as gifted and many boys were. (We have known for a long time that girls do acquire language skills earlier than boys, and that boys acquire math skills earlier than girls. I feel that I personally am a good example of this.)

Now, I am going to discuss several of the psycho educational assessments I did for the LAUSD, but only as a volunteer. Several of the teachers in my volunteer school, after they became familiar with my work, asked me to assess their own children for giftedness and/or possible learning disabilities. I also did some cases as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for the Los Angeles County Juvenile Court (Dependency Division), and as the special education consultant for the Alliance for Children’s Rights (a pro bono organization that continues to do good things for children). I worked with these specific children as a California Licensed Educational Psychologist.

As a school psychologist, I worked on two cases in my volunteer school – one in October 1999 and the second in May 2001. Both boys were second graders when they were referred to me by their teachers because they thought that the boys might suffer from ADHD. The school nurse agreed when I discussed their problems with her. One of the youngsters, S., did exhibit the symptoms of ADHD during the assessment process so I quoted Barkley, Silver and Cantwell, among others, in my assessment report. S.’s reading and spelling were very poor, but he scored in math at the 50th percentile. His self-esteem was very low. He also had problems with visual and auditory memory; however, on the MAT, he was at the 91st percentile. The school nurse offered to arrange for testing for ADHD by a psychiatrist but the mother refused. Because of the co-morbidities, he was placed in a special education class (under PL 94-142), and his Individual Education Plan (IEP) also included counseling with me. His family took him out of our school for the 5th grade without any explanation. Here was a youngster with potential. Who knows where he is now?

I met J. in April 2001 when he was in the second grade, the youngest of seven children by three different fathers. The school site nurse had referred J., early in September 2000, to the family doctor because of hyperactivity, inattentiveness, and inability to focus in class. The doctor referred the child to Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center for diagnosis. Mother never followed through, in spite of the fact that she had reported to this examiner that J. “is active, fights with brother at times and fights with other children as well,” and that she loves him. Briefly, the results of my assessment: His score on the MAT was at Stanine 9 and in the top 2% of the population for his age, and in any discussion with me over the course of four years, he asked excellent, thoughtful questions, albeit in poor English. However, his scores on an academic measure were at low percentiles, except for math computation, at 27th percentile (low enough!). His English was not good. With me, he used some Spanish because he didn’t know the English in spite of the fact that he had pre-school experience in the housing project, and had attended our school since kindergarten. He had large problems with auditory sequential memory, and finally he suffered from low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity, and feelings of separation from family members – these were demonstrated by tests, but also by his behaviors throughout the years I knew him. Because I had several conferences with J.’s mother, I knew that she and his father had been born in Mexico; she had been in the US for at least twenty years – and she spoke and read only Spanish. J. was placed in a special education classroom with an excellent teacher – but an ADHD child with no support from a dysfunctional home does not show much improvement, no matter how competent and loving the teacher may be. I will close with this anecdote: One morning, the teacher sent for me in an emergency. When I arrived, J. was standing alone, outside his classroom, weeping convulsively, unable to talk. I took him in my arms, held him until he calmed down and was able to talk. He told me that his mother wanted to marry another man – she was not married to his father – but he loved his father very much and spent a lot of time with him, and if she did marry that other man, he would not see his father again. The tears flowed again and he said that he would tell his Mom that if she married that other man, he would not live with her. He did tell his Mom that, and she did not marry the other man. The very, very sad part of this story is this: The teacher and I agreed that J. would have many problems in middle school because he did not know how to control his behavior – I have not heard anything since he left us over a year ago.

Now, here are three cases in which I administered the WISC-R as a Licensed Educational Psychologist in my home office. The first was a six-year old male in the first grade, attending an elementary school in the LAUSD. His father was the manager of my neighborhood movie theater. The parents of M. requested the assessment because they had been told ever since the child had been in pre-k, kindergarten and the first grade, that he was ADHD. Both parents came to the US from Spanish-speaking countries when they were about nine years old, mother from

Ecuador, father from Mexico; we always spoke English together – as did M. during the assessment. Mother was an accountant and close to a master’s degree in accountancy; father was a high school graduate, had a home workshop, and was seeking a more important and better job when we met. These parents both worked full time. However, both demonstrated wonderful attachment and stimulation behaviors to M. and his younger sibling. M. did NOT exhibit any of the attributes of ADHD on the February 8, 2000 list from the LAUSD, nor did he display any during his time with this examiner. In fact, he was very cooperative and interested in the office environment and learned how to use my stopwatch. His score on the WISC-R was “superior” in the top 6.7 % of the population for his age. My written report suggested what the teacher should do, as well as what the parents might do – in addition to continuing what they had been doing. Every once-in-a-while, the current manager tells me that family sends me a ‘hello.’

The next case involved the youngest son (of four siblings) of one of the teachers in my volunteer school. (Mother, father, and all four siblings are gifted intellectually – and apparently demonstrate that in their professions!) She referred him to me to determine if he had a learning disability that interfered with his academic achievement. D. was fifteen-and-a-half years old when I tested him in January and February of 2001. His mother found him to be inattentive, easily distracted, impulsive, hyperactive, and demonstrated problems with peers, on a check sheet – and he was on medication. On the WISC-R, his total score was “very superior,” at the 99th percentile. The scores on the Performance subtests were lower, because his perfectionism required more time, while the Verbal subtests were not timed. D.’s scores on the Wide Range Achievement Test – Revised (WRAT-3) in reading, spelling and arithmetic were “all post high school.” My case summary was more personal than not: “...D.’s feeling that he is ‘not good enough’ may have something to do with the fact that he is the youngest member of a family of outstandingly competent achievers...and what is **he** supposed to do?” Two years or so after the assessment, I saw D. on our school grounds: He was there to help his mother with the children in her classroom.

The last case that I describe here was referred by one of the teachers in my volunteer school. She thought that her daughter might have problems with visual perceptual skills. The teacher is a Japanese-American who is married to a Jewish man. She was a talented clarinetist at age 16 and has taught at all levels in our school. She is now the literacy coach. She was the person, as a second grade teacher, who was responsible for the paperwork referrals (for the District) of the children who might be gifted – I helped her with that task. Now, no teacher has that assignment, and the Los Angeles Unified School District will not allow me to do it. She is one of the most intelligent – and kindest – persons I have had the honor to know. Her husband is a music teacher in the high school of another District. I worked with W. in October 2001, when she was almost fourteen-and-a-

half years old. She was assessed with the WISC-R, the WRAT-3, the Test of Visual-Perceptual Skills (TVPS), and with a full-page informal essay, written about a subject of her choice – she was urged to ask for spelling help if she needed it. Her scores were very high on both subtests of the WISC-R: “very superior,” at the 99th percentile for her age. On the WRAT-3, her reading score was in the top 34% of high school students for her age; in the top 21% for her age in arithmetic; spelling was well below expectations for her ability and age. It was my opinion that the low spelling score was at least partially due to the fact that she is a phonetic speller. Also, she seems to have inadequate visual/auditory memory – that is, she has not learned to associate the sight with the sound of the words that are not phonetic, she has no sight vocabulary. This is the problem – English is only 50% phonetic. The essay demonstrated the same problem. The TVPS suggested that she has a poor visual sequential memory. I suggested that she create flash cards and explained how to study them. A year or two later, she developed some severe physical problems. I do not know how things are now. Update: Mother reports that her daughter is now well physically and is enrolled in a community college in order to decide what she wants to study.

Conclusion

Ever since I can remember, I have been attracted by persons of any age who impressed me as being more intelligent than the great majority of people I meet. As I grew in years and education, it became clear to me that these people might help me do what I still yearn to do: Learn everything there is to learn! Many would say that my life-long wish is truly foolish; especially because it is almost impossible to learn everything there is to know in these supremely modern times. But, I do continue to study and read and consult with those who have something to teach me.

A responsibility I took upon myself, many, many years ago – perhaps because my father told me, when I was in my early teens, that I should be a teacher – is to make our World a more just place, by way of one child at a time. This means that I will continue my four extremely important child-related volunteer projects for as long as my brain and body allow me to – and I will continue to study with the gifted children who come my way. However, since my small contribution to helping children make the most of their public school education is a mere drop in the United States’ ocean of incompetent, too large, urban, public school bureaucracies, which, like the Los Angeles Unified School District, have large student bodies of children living in poverty with uneducated parents, I’m going to indulge myself here by discussing the changes I would make, specifically in the LAUSD, were I as wealthy as Bill Gates and Warren Buffet together – and if I were so powerful and thoughtful and sensible that the United States Congress would be willing to listen to my suggestions.

The first, the most crucial change, and perhaps the easiest, I want to make is in the curriculum of the eighth graders of the State of California or even, simply, Los Angeles. I would require a science class in which the students are taught about the John Bowlby theories of attachment and loss (1st volume); separation: anxiety and anger (2nd volume); and loss: sadness and depression (3rd volume). I would include some of the most recent research of the neuroscientists and the experts in child development. I would require such a course, at a much more advanced level, in the undergraduate education of teachers of all grade levels, of school psychologists, and of speech therapists in California. I will also include courses, in undergraduate but especially in graduate school, in all Letters and Sciences classes, about intellectually gifted children as well as learning disabled children, and any relationship between those two conditions in specific youngsters.

I interrupt myself to discuss the status of the special needs youngsters in the LAUSD. A federal class action suit was brought against the LAUSD in 1993 for NEVER having been in compliance with PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed in 1975. I know the truth of that allegation because I became a “pioneer” resource specialist teacher in February 1977 (because I had already earned my master’s in educational psychology). We had one forty-hour, very informative, training session – that was it. I was the person who informed my school staff, the parents, etc. A good plan, with the approval of the United States District Court, was created by two highly experienced educational consultants, to make the appropriate, legal changes in the LAUSD, and it was proceeding well. However, a new superintendent came on board in 2000. Not being a trained educator, he made two horrible changes in the District’s procedures: First, he went back to the U.S. Federal Court and urged that changes be made in the original plan, so now we have the “Modified Consent Decree.” The District is having tremendous problems attempting to make the required changes, which should have been completed by June 2006; thus, the case is now open-ended. Only five of the required 18 Outcomes have been completed. Who knows when the remaining 13 will be completed? The plaintiffs’ attorneys insist, when I ask, that there is enough money. However, one of the major problems is that, nation-wide, there are not enough well trained, competent school psychologists, speech and language therapists, and special and general education teachers. Congress has never supplied the funds promised in the 1975 law, and the California State Legislature has not done enough for public education for about thirty years. Thus, the monthly meetings that I have been attending since the summer of 1997 turn out to be a gigantic waste of thought, effort, time, and money.

The second change that this new superintendent ordered has completely re-ordered the way our elementary school teachers do their work. They are required to use the Open Court Reading Program (OCR, one of the State recommended reading programs) even in the classes for the learning disabled. That

means that the teachers must follow this program word for word and line for line, all in a timely fashion, no matter how well trained and how much previous teaching experience they have had in the elementary schools of Los Angeles. They must do the same for the teaching of writing and arithmetic. To me, it does not make sense that the teachers are required to spend much time in being trained in these new programs, not least because the children have no time for physical education, for music, or for art, or for individual instruction in their classrooms. I do admit that some of the excellent teachers in my volunteer school have learned to like the OCR, at least partially because the state-mandated test scores are to some extent improving, and perhaps because there are literacy and math coaches to help the teachers, in each elementary school. But, it seems clear to me that the children are being taught to the test, nor are the tests standardized on our population. Also, I have heard many complaints from teachers that the vocabulary in all three subjects is extremely difficult. The gist of my own very strong opposition to the OCR and writing and arithmetic programs is that they are based on the supposition that the majority of the children in our elementary schools were born and grew up in homes where they received the benefits of attachment and stimulation – and it is clear that is NOT the reality. Therefore, the children who attend the elementary schools in the LAUSD need to be in smaller classes and to receive much more individualized attention, no matter what the academic programs may be.

I accept the possibility that my opinions about the OCR, etc. may come from my several and longtime prejudices against the LAUSD. Therefore, I suggest that the soon-to-be new superintendent consult with several of our very fine local liberal arts colleges and universities to plan a longitudinal study of an appropriate number of schools with historically low academic achievement scores, to begin when the children enter kindergarten in a new academic year, and close when they graduate from high school. If enough elementary schools are chosen to participate in such research, we should be able to learn how effective the current curriculum is.

Second, I would use my funds to dismantle and re-create the enormous public education bureaucracies in every major city in these United States, where a large percentage of the student body lives in poverty and with uneducated caretakers. It is obvious to me that such great societal and financial changes would take a generation, if not longer, to become a reality. Thus, I would slowly and carefully start now to involve parents by teaching them about the philosophy and practice of attachment and stimulation, especially at the time their children are enrolled at the pre-kindergarten level.

These opinions are the end result of my seventy-two-year involvement with the elementary schools of Los Angeles, my excellent education in the public schools of Los Angeles, my undergraduate work at UCLA, my graduate studies at the University of Southern California, and my continuing/continuous reading, study, and consultations about public education in our America.

Biography: I was admitted to UCLA in February 1942; graduated in 1948, with a BA in psychology. In September 1946, I was hired to work as a World War II Emergency elementary school teacher in the schools of Los Angeles; retired for ten years to be a full-time mother; returned in 1966. On my own, I had studied the educational philosophy and methods employed in England around the time of World War II – open education – and in the later part of 1970, decided to teach my sixth grade class with my own interpretation of open education. Within a year, the school psychologist told me that I was referring to her children who did need help, and she suggested that I study school psychology. Both my master's degree thesis and doctoral dissertation are about open education. I retired from full time work in February 1987, and then worked as a substitute bilingual school psychologist for about ten years. At the same time, I became actively involved in several pro bono organizations related to children's issues. In 1997, I became a two-days-a-week retired/volunteer bilingual school psychologist in an elementary school in East Los Angeles where I continue to do the work I love with the children I love.

Project-Based and Performance Task Activities for Teaching History and Social Studies to the Gifted

Janis Purnell Teacher of the Gifted Littlestown, Pennsylvania School District

“Every day you live becomes a piece of history, and every living person on earth is connected by that one single concept.” Those words are the beginning of a great adventure in my gifted classroom every year. While my gifted students may enjoy the scientific experiments, challenging mathematical puzzles, and interesting novels we read in class, it is always Social Studies topics that they come to anticipate most anxiously. The study of

history can be quite dry and boring. In the beginning of the year, my students will question why it is important to learn about events in the past while they are busy living their lives in the present. My response to this is always a mysterious, “You’ll see.” I never answer the question; instead, I allow them to answer it for themselves at the end of the school year.

Gifted students not only need challenge, they need a reason for learning. They need to see the goal so that they may form initial impressions that will allow them to learn new concepts well. These new concepts are not always content-driven. Instead, they may simply learn how to use their knowledge better by exploring possible options and linking and categorizing ideas at a higher level. This leads to new knowledge in which they may invest positive emotion.

They also need to have their curiosity increased; they need to be interested. This is the most important task facing a teacher of the gifted, as it is the teacher who controls the initial interest level in the classroom. A good teacher is able to take the driest and most unexciting concept and turn it into something valuable and compelling. I strive to do that with every subject, but I have found that history is the one that lends itself most beautifully to this task.

I believe that the most important role of the teacher is that of a facilitator. I would never stand up in front of a gifted class and lecture. I may provide bits and pieces of information that may be vital at some point, but that information is guided by the needs and interests of the students as they are completing their studies and activities. Those needs and interests change yearly, and depend solely on the direction the individual students are taking at any given point in time.

Perhaps the biggest boost to teaching Social Studies in the gifted classroom has been the advancement of technology and the role it plays in schools today. The majority of classrooms have access to at least one computer that is connected to the Internet. It is this tool that allows you to take your students out of the classroom to experience things from a different perspective. Virtual field trips are just one of many things used extensively in schools today. But even these field trips do not allow for the personal experience that is so vital for gifted students.

In my classroom, virtual field trips are used for sensory awareness and background information only. They would never be used as a “culminating experience,” as I believe culminating experiences should be physically engaging. In this way, the students remember the information because they have truly used it. The actual activities have little to do with the Internet. I do feel it is in the best interest of my students to supply them with certain Internet sites as resources while they complete their study of certain topics, but much time is given to using printed sources to gain information and understanding as well.

Although Internet scavenger hunts and web quests, when done well, are a wonderful addition to any study, my gifted students do not sit down in front of a computer screen every day and complete them. Many scavenger hunts currently on the Internet pose a task that is comparable to answering questions from a textbook. Similarly, many web quests tie the students to the computer in their search for information and ideas.

In order for gifted students to learn, they must be engaged. They need to physically research and test ideas, and interact with the task or with others to gain insight. It is always my students’ choice to either complete or not complete a web-based activity I have included in my list of resources for any particular project. It is the students who decide if going through these activities will lead to a better understanding of the task at hand, or simply provide them with information they already know.

I have found that the best type of activities to complete in the gifted Social Studies classroom are project-based and/or performance task activities. Both of these methods lend themselves well to a thoroughly engaging experience for the gifted student.

In **project-based activities**, students access background knowledge, perform the initial study of the specific subject, and then create a visual product which reflects their depth of understanding. Visual products may range from something as simple as a poster advertisement or photo essay, to more complex products like creating a web page based on information they learned in their study. In all cases, students are in charge of the content and direction of their final product through planning, development and presentation, which are very important components to learning for a gifted student.

It is wonderful to see students engaged in critical decision-making and taking initiative throughout the different phases of the project. They learn how to revise their initial plans to either include or exclude pieces of information. It is this process that allows the teacher to gain valuable criteria for assessing student work. Just as the learning is an ongoing process, so is the assessment. The teacher must always be aware of the students’ direction and how it does or does not impact the final product. Students themselves may assess their performance in certain areas of the project, which is a helpful tool when planning the next step in their study. It is most important for the teacher to monitor this self-assessment, as gifted students often set unrealistically high standards and goals for themselves, which can lead to them being self-critical.

In order for project-based studies to be valuable for gifted students, they must be able to integrate content knowledge in both the process and the product. It is very important, therefore, to have clearly articulated goals from the beginning of the project. Students need to know exactly how they are going to show their understanding through these products, and they also need direction as to what understanding is most important to display.

A recent study of the Mayan culture by my sixth-grade gifted students resulted in a “Mayan Museum” where different aspects of the culture were displayed. All materials were created by the students, based on chosen topics. The topics were broad enough to encompass many features of the culture. Additionally,

students could create one piece to display that was focused on a personal interest pertaining to the study of the Mayan culture. All of the components of this activity provided an opportunity for them to have a voice in how and what they learned. Because this topic was one they were studying in their regular Social Studies classroom, I only provided encyclopedias, library books, and specific Internet links to pertinent sites. The students had the background information they needed in terms of when and where – all I had to do was provide the vehicle for them to explore the culture more completely.

Students were actively engaged in various stages of the unit at all times – studying books and encyclopedias to gather information, searching on the Internet, finding related images to study, sketching ideas, creating notes in their Mayan logbook, and constructing actual project displays. The environment was completely student-centered. My role throughout the study was that of a facilitator only. I would walk around to all stations and give significant information in bits and pieces as needed to focus the students on specific aspects of their project. It was during this time that I would observe and make notes on the students' progress to aid in the assessment of each student.

A project that has depth and complexity will be both challenging and motivating to gifted students as they focus on their individual learning processes and move toward the construction of knowledge. For me, as a teacher, the most exciting part of a project-based activity is the observation of my gifted students during this process. It is gratifying to see them creatively involved, gaining valuable experience, setting goals for their projects, and striving to meet their own constantly evolving standards of excellence.

Performance task activities require more of a central focus from gifted students than do project-based activities. These kinds of activities are very useful when engaging in problem solving. Most often, the tasks are completed by groups of students rather than individually. The teacher writes the task based on content learning, and uses the task to incorporate thinking and reasoning skills among the student groups. The task itself should target content the students have already had the opportunity to learn. It should encourage creativity from the students and allow them to investigate multiple solutions. By working in a group, the gifted student interacts with other gifted students and is able to quickly process relevant information through the verbal exchange of ideas. This allows for divergent thinking and novel interpretation, which is extremely important in a gifted classroom.

The position of the student in these activities is based on a specific setting, role, audience, goal or challenge, and product. The students should be aware of some of the obstacles they must overcome through their previous study of the content. Other obstacles may come into play throughout the task activity, and

this is where students use their background knowledge, their understanding of the role they are playing, the specific task at hand, and their personal vision of the final product or solution to work through the obstacles.

I put a performance task together recently for my eighth-grade gifted students after a study of the events leading up to the Revolutionary War in their regular American History class. The task asked the students to access their understanding of those events to prepare a fact-based argument for declaring independence from Great Britain.

The student groups were asked to take on the role of a group of small Massachusetts village merchants in 1774. The merchants were asked to speak in favor of independence to a gathering of their neighbors. The task was to convince their neighbors to support the upcoming fight against Great Britain. Throughout the activity, students were called upon to access their knowledge of certain events that would have impacted a small village at that time in history. The goal was to present the arguments in context – addressing the most important events, and keeping in mind the audience to whom they were speaking.

Not only did this task require students to draw upon what they had learned in their regular studies, it also had them apply that knowledge to a specific situation. Students had to reflect upon these events personally, from the viewpoint of someone who was living in that time and who had much to gain or lose from their particular position. The first part of the task had students list the events in chronological order, and the outcome of those events. Many of the student groups mapped this information, seeing how it led to consequences for small villages at that time. Since the audience they were trying to reach was comprised of people like them, in their role as merchants, they applied this information in that context. Throughout the task, the students had to constantly ascertain which opinions in their arguments would warrant support, and be aware of how to construct support for those arguments. This required them to pull even more of their background knowledge into the task.

Some student groups took the task one step further in their presentation by actually pointing out certain audience members by name, and recounting how these events impacted them personally. This added relevancy to the information they were presenting to their audience as well as constructing the support for their argument.

Another part of the task led to an interesting debate among the individual presenters and their audience. As the students worked through the task, they were asked to come up with opposing viewpoints they stumbled upon during the formation of their own arguments. As the forum was, in effect, a community meeting, they could express these views as members of the audience group when a merchant group had finished presenting. In this way, the audience was actively involved as each group

presented their arguments. This part of the task not only allowed students to consider the opposite argument while creating their own speeches, thereby allowing them to address any opposition before it was voiced; it tested the resolve of the other groups' positions, their knowledge of the events, and the impact these events had on the villagers.

To aid in self-assessment throughout the activity, Analytic Rubrics were provided to all of the students in the beginning of the task. The assessment for this particular performance task included the obvious criteria of identification, explanation and support of the argument, attention to audience needs, effective speaking volume and rate, and appropriate language choices. It also included criteria that could be observed during the actual task process, such as maintaining an organizational plan and working cooperatively and collaboratively. Each student received an individual grade based on their role within the group and on their final presentation.

Conclusion. Through these engaging project-based and performance task activities, gifted students learn to apply history to events in the present day. These activities lend well to a discussion of how history has had an impact on our thoughts and how and why we react to certain situations. Students are able to extend the concepts further by coming up with examples of situations in their personal lives that relate to the feelings or actions of those things they uncover in their studies. This leads to a better understanding of the initial concept put forth by the required task.

An understanding and appreciation of history and different cultures cannot be gained through reading as well as it can be gained through experience. Putting students in different roles or having them explore concepts through physical engagement is the best way to provide gifted students with the tools they will need to further expand their knowledge base.

No Average High School Student

**Marcy Reedy
Center for Excellence in Education McLean, Virginia**

Students of the Research Science Institute (RSI) are strongly determined, exceptionally intelligent, and above all, passionately committed to science and technology. RSI is a six week intensive summer research program for high school students sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Education and is reputed by top academic leaders as premiere in the U.S. for helping top scholars. RSI students have long-term dreams of discovering the next scientific breakthrough that will advance our nation and our world, even as they engage in short-term debates over who can ramble off the most digits in the pi sequence. In other words, they are not your average student.

Excitement and energy run high as approximately 60 U.S. and 20 international students gather each summer at MIT for what many call the most stimulating 6 weeks of their young lives. Each student is matched with a mentor from universities in the greater Boston region according to their specific area of interest within the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Under the guidance of their mentor, students embark upon a research journey that exposes them to opportunities generally far beyond the everyday high school experience. Students are encouraged to actively pursue their ideas as they investigate novel ways to dispose of radioactive waste or Markov Equations or nuclear pore complexes and everything in between. This journey culminates with written and oral research presentations delivered before their mentors, student peers and industry leaders.

Founded in 1983 by the late Admiral H.G. Rickover and Joann DiGennaro, CEE President, the mission of CEE is to nurture young scholars to careers of excellence and leadership in science and technology. A measure of the great success of RSI is that Alumni have consistently ranked among the top winners in well-regarded academic competitions and continue to pursue careers in cutting-edge research. To date, approximately 1,700 high school students have completed RSI and moved on to receive graduate degrees in the sciences and pursue diverse careers in government and private industries.

RSI is unique among high school enrichment programs. Not only is the program the only one of its kind offered free of charge to students competitively selected to attend, CEE also makes a sustained commitment to each young scholar who attends RSI throughout the 8-10 years of their graduate and undergraduate career. This commitment takes the form of long-term counsel, encouragement, and employment prospects. Furthermore, CEE sponsors follow-up activities to help ensure the educational, cultural, and social development of the students.

Perhaps a recent alumnus from RSI 2006 put it best when he said, "These 6 weeks have helped me shape my career goals and have set ablaze my passion for the sciences. I will most definitely pursue both research and application of the research in the business and commercial world in the future." As a not so average high school student, we know his dreams give encouragement to anyone concerned about the sciences.

Study of True Critical Thinking: George Orwell's Essays

Michael E. Walters

Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“ . . . The first thing that we ask of a writer is that he shan't tell lies, that he shall say what he really thinks, what he really feels . . . ”
(**George Orwell: Essays**, Everyman's Library, 2002, from *Literature and Totalitarianism*, p. 361)

George Orwell's essays should be an important part of gifted students' education. The art and discipline of nonfiction, expository writing is presently endangered. Modern society, due to bureaucratic power, emphasizes a type of cultural discourse stimulated and dominated by convoluted memoranda and mandatory directives. In contrast, Orwell's essays demonstrate a type of self-expression that is honestly and precisely communicated. They are not only examples of language at its clearest and most exact form but represent critical thought based upon independence and conscience.

In *A Hanging* (1931, pp. 16-20), he captured the bureaucracy of murder epitomized in the twentieth century by Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia by describing the hanging of a Hindu prisoner for an unidentified crime. The execution machinery is shown at its worst – the horror of an individual who was executed purely as a result of government edict. Orwell added two aspects that make it stick in the reader's mind and conscience. As the condemned man is being led to the gallows, a stray dog runs up and starts to show him affection. A few minutes later he seeks to avoid getting his shoes soiled by a mud puddle. Orwell also captured the attitude of bureaucratic inhumanity: After the hanging, the leader of the execution squad (superintendent of the jail) checked the body, found it dead, and exclaimed his satisfaction concerning how well everything went. His assistant (head jailer) recalled how another condemned man tried to cling to the bars of his cell and had to be dragged to the gallows. The bureaucrats-in-charge asked him why he was causing so much trouble. For Orwell, these unknown condemned men become representatives of bureaucratic totalitarianism.

He also wrote essays showing how the abuse of logic is related to bad writing, e.g., *Literature and Totalitarianism* (1941, pp 360-64) and *Politics and the English Language* (1945, pp. 954-67). He provided insight into the interrelationship between unclear, imprecise, abstract, convoluted thought and poor writing – the totalitarian mode of communication. His seminal novels concerning totalitarianism, **Animal Farm** (1945) and **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949), had their origins in these essays.

Orwell's main criterion for writing in a democratic society was based on decency and truth. By decency he meant that individuals had to choose the decent action, not the politically correct one. Mass executions were a result of indecent behavior caused by following dictatorial orders. Truth to Orwell meant that an individual's behavior is motivated by independent thought and conscience. The concept of group thinking and insensitivity to suffering is not acceptable. Humanity's future is now at stake as the methodology of indoctrination and weapons of mass destruction become more widespread. Orwell's essays are as relevant today as current events.

Announcing New Books from Gifted Education Press www.GiftedEdPress.com

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This book emphasizes the integration of traditional print media with Internet resources. It contains hundreds of Web Links that teachers and students can use to study various aspects of American history.

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