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Between the Lines

Publisher's Perspective

Dorothy Knopper

To celebrate twenty plus years of *Understanding Our Gifted*, its quality articles, and our leap into the digital new world, we have reprinted some of our readers' favorites in this *Understanding Our Gifted Revisited* issue.

The articles in this issue are only a few of our favorites, including an inside look at a talented student's life in music, a gifted architectural student's take on staying challenged, and a tribute to author and illustrator James Marshall from our long-time writer Jerry Flack.

It has been challenging to select the articles for this *Understanding Our Gifted Revisited* issue. We welcome your input as loyal readers and supporters of *Understanding Our Gifted*. Please send us the names and authors of your favorite articles so we can do this again! ❖

Contact Editor Ann Leggett: *oceangirl19@comcast.net*

Mozart and Today's Student Musician

Rob Knopper

This article originally appeared in the 2010, Summer edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*. The author biography at the end of the article was current at the time of publication.

Suppose then, a capital speech in Shakespeare never seen before, and yet read by a child of 8 years old, with all the pathetic energy of a Garrick. Let it be conceived likewise, that the child is reading, with a glance of the eye, three different comments on this speech tending to its illustration; and that one comment is written in Greek, the second in Hebrew, and the third in Etruscan characters…When all this is conceived, it will convey some idea of what this boy is capable of.

Daines Barrington, an English lawyer, antiquary, and naturalist, commenting on Mozart's talents in 1770, after tests confirmed that the youngster was indeed a child genius (Solomon, M., 1995, *Mozart: A Life*, NYC: Harper Collins).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was the ultimate child prodigy. It is said that Mozart, after attending a service at the Vatican, wrote down an entire sacred piece of music after one hearing. There are countless examples of the amazing feats that Mozart accomplished through his childhood, not to mention his huge compositional output through his life. It is very interesting to consider Mozart and his upbringing when discussing music and education since his situation was a prime example of a job well done. Many factors cause certain children to become musicians, but most important are the intrinsic characteristics of the student and the learning environment in which he is raised. Obviously, Mozart and his family hit the jackpot with both of these aspects: nature and nurture.

I am a musician—and have been playing classical percussion seriously since my freshman year in high school.

For me, there was never any question as to what instrument I'd play. I began taking formal lessons when I was in 4th grade, but I started playing drums long before that. I probably practiced more on the dashboard of my parents' car to music that my dad played on the radio than I did on real drums. I was also really into reading the lyrics off the liner notes of CDs as I was listening to the music. Trying to pick out the drum part amongst a complex layering of instrumentation was a favorite activity. As we listened to music, my dad would constantly ask me, "Can you play that?" And of course I would always answer, "Yes!" I would try to sing an alternative drum part or guitar melody over a song and state earnestly, "If I wrote the song I would have put this in it, too." I already felt like a rock and roll expert when I started taking lessons in elementary school.

First I developed a strong appreciation for music, saving the actual making of music until later. I became a drummer by default. I had drummer heroes, and I'd read drum magazines, and I longed to be the drummers in those bands. I was inspired. That is extremely important for a music student. There has to be an underlying

commitment, an almost religious devotion to a successful music career. There also needs to be strong support from parents.

My first major percussion teacher told my parents that his job was, first and foremost, not to get in the way of my progress. He meant to say that with the amount of interest and drive I showed at the time, I would develop on my own, regardless of the amount of direction he provided. I have learned from many different musicians that teachers and parents who impose their will on young people as they learn their instruments, rather than motivate and inspire them with a positive environment, do more harm than good.

Looking back, I view my progression from playing my drum set to classical percussion as a natural process. From the beginning, I listened to rock music—I was born to a Beatles song, and my dad always played music for me. I was continually taken to concerts as I was growing up. My entire musical mindset is based on rock music. Now, when I listen to classical music, I get most excited when I hear tonalities similar to progressive rock from the 70's. The music I grew up with—Yes, Genesis, Frank Zappa, the Beatles, etc.—has commonalities with many eras of classical music. Chord progressions, colors, rhythmic composition, phrase structures, melody and harmony balance, and plenty of other characteristics of classic and progressive rock are comparable to baroque, classical, romantic, and contemporary music. For example, the rhythms Stravinsky uses in *The Rite of Spring* are very similar to rock and roll. The differences are minor—instrumentation and an increased level of pitch dissonance are the main distinctions—but the energy and syncopation could be any rock CD, and the story that the *Rite of Spring* tells is no less exciting than the Who's *Tommy*.

A band that I have always enjoyed is Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. This trio of a drummer, a keyboardist, and a bassist/singer did adaptations of a number of different classical pieces. The group played each piece in its own way, extending themes, adding lyrics, and introducing jam sessions as they pleased. It is great music, and there is even an interview where the members of the band say that in certain instances, the still living composers of the pieces who heard their rock and roll arrangements, liked those better than the originals! My first experience with this rock and roll/classical connection was listening to Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which is a piece that Emerson, Lake, and Palmer arranged as a full length CD. It was great to be in love with a rock song and then hear the same song's original, played by an orchestra. Before that experience, I wondered how I was supposed to appreciate classical music. Once I found all these connections, it made sense to me. Recently, I heard a performance of Sergei Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* played by the New York Philharmonic. As soon as the second movement started, I knew it was a song Emerson, Lake, and Palmer had adapted, even though I'd never heard the original. The song *Enemy God*, on the album *Works Live* is indeed an arrangement of that piece. Some rock pieces do not have classical originals, even though it seems that they should. How would *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, an 80-minute masterpiece by the band Yes, be different if it was an arrangement of a Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) symphony? If the basic ideas for *Shock the Monkey* by Peter Gabriel or even *One* by U2 were written by Tchaikovsky or Beethoven, how would they sound? This central interest bridges my natural love of rock music to classical music.

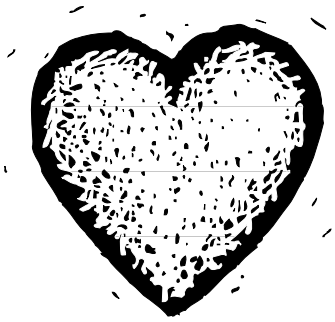
My success as a classical percussionist is easily tracked. When I was a freshman in high school, I finished soccer season and had to decide what to do after school every day. Things start to get boring when your parents aren't coming to pick you up for another hour and a half. I decided to practice percussion two hours each day. It was not a decision forced on me by anyone. The important thing was that I kept my hands moving and I got used to the instruments that I was playing. One comment for aspiring young musicians is definitely truer now than ever: As hard as you work practicing now, you are learning music and therefore cutting time off of every piece you will have to learn in the future. Practicing is about the bigger picture. It affects your whole life, and it is a bonus to learn something for yourself or for your teacher right then. ❖

Rob Knopper, in an earlier edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*, wrote about "Mozart and Today's Student Musician." Rob returns to this article several years later as a graduate of the Juilliard School in New York City, with a Bachelor of Music degree. His major is percussion, with emphasis on orchestra performance.

Finding the Passion

Nick Leggett

This article originally appeared in the 2005, Spring edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*. The author biography at the end of the article was current at the time of publication.



After-school activities....Those three little words can strike fear into any parent's heart. Extra-curricular activities are needed for resumes, college applications, to keep young ones occupied; they define many a child's life during pre-college years. Parents often rush to involve their children in as many activities as possible as early as possible.

Now, before you sign your 10-year-old up for the 4th-grade Neurosurgery Society, stop and take a few breaths. Your child is heavily affected by the extra-curricular activities you choose.

I am a gifted student, and I have that "wonderful" gifted-kid attribute known as Excruciatingly-Bored-When-Not-Challenged. (I'm sure there is some technical or educationally correct term for this malady, but I don't know what it is.) From the time I started elementary school, my journey has been very interesting. Jumping straight from preschool to 1st grade was a band-aid approach but the only logical choice at the time. Things became more interesting as I progressed through school. I did reasonably well throughout elementary school, attending charter and focus schools, but when I got to 6th grade, I tanked. A traditional seven-period middle school format put me over the edge. I left the first semester of 6th grade with a 2.0, definitely not my usual grade average. I felt lost. I had no interest in my classes. The teachers were busy with other kids.

As I progressed through middle school, I simply did not do the homework. It was boring. It was repetitive. I learned it the first time it was explained to me. The teachers seemed to have no idea what I was going through, so little help was to be found from them. By 8th grade, my mother had an epiphany. "Maybe, if he's being challenged at a higher level, a much higher level, in something he's interested in, he'll do better in every subject. Let's send him to college."

So began the First School District War. "No, we won't pay for it. He can't do it. No middle-schooler has ever gone to college while attending his regular school."

Let's just skip ahead and reveal that my mother won. Don't push her buttons. Long story short, I took Japanese at the University of Colorado while I was in 8th and 9th grades. It was tough but fun. During lunch period at my middle school, my mother would swing by to pick me up for the drive to the university. She'd sit and read while I attended class. Then I would head back for my afternoon middle school classes. Lo and behold! My grades in all subjects

went through the roof. I was actually excited to go to school again. My brain was engaged. I felt like a new person. Finally, I was surrounded by people who were interested in the same things I was, not only whether Dave was going out with Sally or who would win the volleyball tournament. Let's face it, I was different, and this situation worked for me. But similar situations will work for others.

This may not be the golden solution for all children, but every child needs to enjoy what she is doing. When it comes down to it, Harvard is not going to care that your child was in the Extreme Gardening Club in school. Selective schools will, however, be interested to know whether she contributed to the club, learned anything from the endeavor, and stuck with it and enjoyed it.

"Now I find ways to challenge myslelf by entering international design competitions or randomly taking a sculpture class."

My current passion is architecture. Ever since my yearning to be a United Nations translator wore off, I knew that I wanted to be an architect. I have always had an eye for design, and I have been nursing an addiction for beautiful things since birth. During my junior year of high school, I was playing the game at full force. SATs, ACTs, GPAs, college applications, resumes…. it was bearing down hard. So, in order not to flunk senior year due to burnout, I decided to do something crazy over summer break. My top choice for college was the University of Southern California (USC), deep in the heart of Los Angeles. The school had a summer program for future architecture students. I applied, they accepted, and I was on a plane to the City of Angels.

My experiences there touched my life in so many ways. I developed a huge group of friends with whom I still stay in touch. I learned that the only profession I would ever be happy in was architecture, and it cemented USC as my first-choice school. The experience was not easy. It was the first time I had been away from home for an extended period of time, and I spent approximately nine hours a day in the studio, working away. It was a challenge. But I accepted it wholeheartedly, and the experience propelled me through my senior year with few glitches. Again, this is an example of an outside activity on a larger scale than a weekend art class, but it is the same principle.

I just finished my first year at USC's School of Architecture, loving every minute of it. Now I find ways to challenge myself by entering international design competitions or randomly taking a sculpture class. I still get bored easily, but I learned from an early age through my outside activities to keep looking for that challenge, that edge to keep me going.

I'm no expert, I'm not a parent, and I'm not an educator, but I am a gifted kid who has been through many of the challenges gifted kids often face. My advice? Help your gifted student find his passion: art, science, whatever it may be. Watch for signs. See his strengths. Involve him in a high-quality program, and sit back and watch. Don't pile up the activities. Provide time, space, and don't overload. Give good options and a gentle push, and surround your student with people who will help him reach his goals. See if you can find older mentors to help your child explore ideas. Let him reach for the stars. It worked for me and changed my life forever. ❖

Nick Leggett just finished his first year at the University of Southern California School of Architecture.

Secrets of Successful Homeschooling

Lisa Rivero

This article originally appeared in the 2003, Summer edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*. The author biography at the end of the article was current at the time of publication.

You've decided to homeschool. You've gathered resources, completed the required legal forms, and bought every imaginable school supply from pencils to pocket folders. You've planned your days down to the minute.

7:30 - breakfast
8:00 - math
8:45 - writing on MWF, spelling on TTh
9:30 - snack and outdoor play (recess)
10:00 - history on MWF, science on TTh
11:00 - reading
noon - lunch

By finishing all official homeschool tasks by noon each day, your afternoons will be free for leisurely field trips, music lessons, and sports.

Finally, the long awaited day has arrived: day one of homeschooling. Nothing goes as you expect. Your oldest child wakes up too late. Your youngest refuses to play the math game you planned, while your middle child finishes all his algebra problems in 10 minutes and wants more. They all think the writing assignment is boring. Rain keeps everyone inside. They do enjoy history, but a friend calls at 10:45 and you can't make the transition to reading on time. By noon, the children are fighting, and your head is pounding. If this has been your experience with homeschooling gifted children, you are not alone. *(Quotes from homeschooling parents are interspersed throughout this article.)*

What happened to all my ideas about these cozy family "learning times" with compliant learners? Why did I buy into the idea that homeschooling would create this wonderful harmonious and calm lifestyle? We are not calm and easygoing people. And giftedness creates its own challenges. Our children, especially our oldest who is 11, are high-intensity people; they show great intellectual gifts, great emotional energy, intense focus, nonstop conversation, etc. So much intensity can be wearing. We're working on ways to coexist better.

Parents who homeschool gifted children often find the daily practice of home education very different from what they had imagined. Gifted children are complex in both personality and learning styles. They can be willful, easily frustrated, and sensitive to parental moods. If their learning style is particularly strong, they may need resources that are hard to find or that must be created from scratch. When a particular resource or approach to learning

does work well, they can go through materials at a breathtaking pace, covering two, three, or even more grades in a single year.

On the other hand, gifted children can be extremely self-motivated, persistent, and creative. Their endless curiosity and innate desire to learn can make homeschooling an excellent fit, academically, socially, and emotionally. Parents who say that homeschooling works well for their gifted children have learned from others or discovered on their own several secrets that make home education more enjoyable and successful for everyone. Those secrets have little to do with educational standards or expensive resources. They have more to do with what might be called habits of mind. In over three dozen interviews I've conducted with homeschool parents of gifted children, three themes have emerged again and again: patience, practice, and persistence.

- Patience not only with our children but also with ourselves
- Practice in the arts of homeschooling and parenting
- Persistence in the face of complexity

Patience is an ability or willingness to suppress restlessness or annoyance when confronted with delay or provocation. Patience requires taking the long-term view rather than focusing on the difficulties of the moment. Only the parent of a gifted child can truly understand the patience required to weather daily storms of emotion, sensitivities, and excitabilities. One parent writes that at age 5 her son began to withdraw and complain that he was "strange" and "different" from other children his age. Other gifted children become very upset by characters or events in books, even books that are seemingly "age appropriate," or they question the meaning of life with a passion and determination that would leave philosophers dumbstruck. When gifted children enter pre-adolescence, these sensitivities and emotions can become even more intense as the children feel every twinge of their changing bodies and hear every nuance of parental disapproval or misunderstanding. For parents who don't get a break during school hours, such strong and unpredictable feelings require a special kind of emotional patience. Sensitive children will be quick to reflect or react to our own adult fears and confusion, even when those fears aren't spoken, so it is important to listen to *their* fears without adding our own. As their eyes search ours for reassurance that everything is okay, we can use patience to say, "Yes, all is well." Holt (1967) put it this way: "My aim…is to persuade [adults] to look at children, patiently, repeatedly, respectfully, and to hold off making theories and judgments about them until they have in their minds what most of them do not now have—a reasonably accurate model of what children are like" (p. 173).

Until we know who our children are, we cannot create an education that fits their needs. Watching and listening patiently then becomes one of the most important and yet most overlooked techniques of homeschooling.

I have learned a lot about myself since starting homeschooling, [including] that I am not patient and how to be more patient. I have learned to ask questions before jumping in to solve problems. I have learned to listen with my heart as well as my ears. I have learned to make sure I understand the girls before jumping in with suggestions. And I've learned to have more fun with learning and life.

Another aspect of patience involves having reasonable expectations for our children and not pressuring them to learn a skill or body of knowledge before they are ready. Sometimes children tune into a parent's unspoken high expectations and respond by "tuning out" or refusing to work. "He won't do what I tell him!" is a frequent complaint. Perhaps the child is using non-compliance as a way to take some control over his learning. Freed and Parsons (1997) write that parents who homeschool can avoid such non-compliance by approaching all learning tasks in a non-judgmental way. This does not mean that we shouldn't care what our children are learning or take seriously our role as home educators. It does mean, however, that by acting as facilitator rather than teacher we may have more success, especially with gifted children, who tend to be strong-willed.

As I gradually gave up the role of being "teacher" and became a learner, I found joy in a different sense from before. I began learning right along with my children in whatever we were doing…I have found that the more we work together as learners, the more the children are willing to follow a lead I might suggest, which was not

the case at first when I was trying to force a direction or an activity.

For example, if a homeschool child balks at writing assignments, the parent can try writing with the child rather than simply assigning writing. Perhaps you both can have a time in the morning when you write in your respective journals, side by side. Or you can write a story together, each of you taking a turn with the plot. Some homeschool parents write letters to their children on a regular basis as a way to express affection or to indicate learning assignments. In this way the child sees writing as an activity that is important to you and not just as a homeschool task. Writing is also presented as a life-long activity, not a lesson reserved for school-age children. These kinds of shared and cooperative learning activities also take pressure off the parent to be the perfect teacher. Homeschool parents must be patient with themselves and not try to be Homeschool Super Mom (or Dad).

The most important advice I can give for the first year of homeschooling is to take things slowly and not try to cover everything. There is so much adjustment in the first year...You need to adjust to everyone's being home all the time, and you need to learn how to get along, how to cope with each other. It's not a good time to try to "do it all" academically or socially. Take it slowly, and learn to enjoy your family again.

It has helped me to designate certain times of day as times I am "off duty" [from five children]. Before 8 a.m., if children are awake, they know they need to occupy themselves quietly in their rooms. This gives me time for classical piano, my personal creative outlet. Then, during the little ones' afternoon nap, the older children do silent sustained reading, assuring all of us a quiet break.

Everyone needs a break at times. Sometimes we just need to talk through our own anxieties about homeschooling and giftedness. If your local homeschool support group doesn't already have a group for parents of gifted children, consider starting one. The group can be formal, with regular meetings and activities, or it can be as informal as a group of parents who meet at each other's homes for coffee while their children play. Homeschool parents need to give themselves permission to take a break and seek their own emotional support. Children who are physically very active or who are kinesthetic learners call on a different kind of patience.

My son has to be personally (and physically) involved in whatever he is studying. He has to draw, write, touch, arrange, and flip through pages himself. He loves interrupting and offering his ideas and thoughts. He hates it when he has to sit down calmly and listen to a lecture.

Homeschool parents of active children can look for ways to integrate activity and learning whenever possible. One homeschool parent allows her son to sit on a big bouncy ball while watching educational videos. Another encourages her daughter to take frequent breaks from sedentary activities to run outside or swing. When our son was younger, he often opened a book on the floor and read it while sitting on his knees and stretching a handful of rubber bands. He also has enjoyed acting out scenes from books or history, either on his own or with friends. These activities not only release psychomotor excitability—preventing a pent-up explosion later in the day—they also promote sensory integration.

Recently I visited a homeschooling family with three very intense, very bright children, but the youngest child, age 4, literally "stood out" as needing the majority of the parents' patience. As we adults had a conversation in the kitchen, the child climbed from chair to chair, sometimes standing on an empty chair to offer a pronouncement before climbing down again, and then leaving the room to retrieve some treasure and bringing it back to show me. I don't think he was still for two seconds out of 20 minutes. He was extremely articulate and eager to be a part of the discussion.

What impressed me, though, was both parents' seemingly endless wells of patience. They did not try to make him sit still (it would have been fruitless), and they did not apologize for his behavior. He was doing nothing wrong. He was not rude, and he mostly waited his turn before speaking. He was being a very normal, active, highly gifted young child. I couldn't help wondering how less pleasant the visit would have been had the parents been annoyed with the boy's need to move and allowed themselves to focus on his activity

rather than our conversation.

Of course, some of us are born more patient than others. What if we're not naturally patient? What if constant activity or noise or talking drives us crazy? Patience can be learned and increased with practice. If we lose our patience in the morning, we can refuse to become discouraged and simply try harder in the afternoon. We can remember that being more patient is a long-term goal that will not be shattered in a moment's weakness. This practice will make us not only better homeschoolers, but better parents.

Homeschooling a gifted child requires the parent not *to have expectations about what might be appropriate for a child's age level. It requires flexibility and a realization that the child can be many different ages at once.*

Homeschooling parents of gifted children must be ready to adjust learning experiences for several ages within a single child, often simultaneously. A highly gifted 8-year-old may need to understand high school level history concepts written at a 4th grade reading level but geared to the sensitivities of a 2nd grader.

To accommodate these complex needs, parents must experiment through trial and error to find what works. Educational history documentaries often present challenging and interesting concepts, although care must be taken with topics of war for highly sensitive children. Many gifted children enjoy humorous history, such as The History News series by Candlewick Press ***(http://www.candlewick.com/cwp/)***.Geographical history and maps, living history museums, historical fiction, and historical crafts and costumes are other ways to learn about history so as to adjust the level of learning to the child.

With practice, finding ways to allow children to work at several levels at once becomes natural.

My daughter, age 15, works at several different levels at the same time. Last year, she alternated between college level texts, adult and science fiction, and comic and picture books for art...I think the girls have their own reasons for working at a variety of levels, and I think it helps them assimilate new information, too. It allows them to accommodate their natural rhythm of interest as well as development.

Not only can gifted children be many ages at once, but they can also learn in several ways at once. Highly gifted children often have several strong learning styles. An approach that works for one subject or on one day may not work all the time. This complexity requires homeschool parents to be persistent in looking for what works and to be willing to change course when necessary:

The steps necessary to make homeschooling successful start with a variety of different trials with different approaches. An open mind and knowing that tomorrow is another day is a must.

A good practice is to make available several different approaches to a subject, allowing the child to choose what will work best. This diversity of resources need not be expensive. For example, you might have available for the study of fractions some colorful and inexpensive workbooks, one or two textbooks, picture books about fractions from the library, dice (use them to make up division problems), recipes to be multiplied or divided, and fraction rods (you can make these yourself with inexpensive wood rods, a jigsaw, and paint). Watch your child to see what she prefers, and if the preference changes from day to day or is consistent. Keep in mind that sometimes gifted children will change their learning style preferences, so don't allow yourself to get locked into a single curriculum or approach. Our son, for example, thrived in his early homeschool years on an unstructured, "unschooling" environment that allowed him to learn about whatever interested him at the moment. Now, as he approaches early adolescence, he prefers more teacher-directed activities, such as distance learning high school courses, or highly structured subjects, such as computer programming. I know of other homeschooled gifted children who required scheduled learning when young and needed more of an unschooling approach when older.

Homeschooling is not the right educational choice for every family, but when homeschooling is difficult, parents can practice patience and persistence before assuming that home education won't work for them. The secrets of successful homeschooling are available

to everyone. The joys and benefits— learning, respect, and love—are immeasurable.

I've learned that I'm a good mom. I give my children everything I can and more. I'm not perfect. Our homeschooling isn't perfect, but we work at it. We learn from each other, and our love and respect for one another continues to grow. ❖

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Lisa Rivero, from Milwaukee, is a homeschool parent, writer, and gifted education advocate. She has taught intense and creative learners at elementary and college levels. She is the author of Creative Home Schooling for Gifted Children: A Resource Guide.

New Paths of Learning

Joan Franklin Smutny

This article originally appeared in the 2010, Spring edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*. The author biography at the end of the article was current at the time of publication.

Mrs. L. put me in charge of the reptile exhibit, and she said if I'm going to be a herpetologist someday I need to get started. We have a hooded chameleon and his eyes are like cones with beads inside. – 4th grader

I'm in a funk. Our debating program is cancelled. There's nothing to look forward to now. – 7th grader

I wish we had classes in new stuff, like architecture or law or graphic design or even construction. I'd like that. Everything's so the same. Even if I'm doing advanced math, it's still the same thing, except harder. – 6th grader

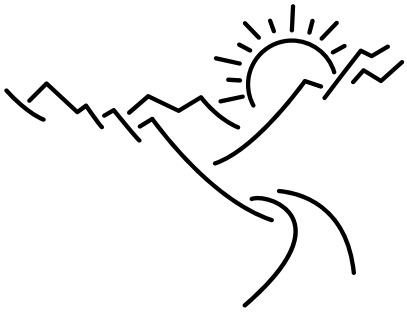
While resources for the gifted are not abundant, many schools do offer classes, programs, services, and/or clubs that broaden student learning beyond the curriculum. Unfortunately, with the economic downturn and the emphasis on testing for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, schools feel even less able to devote their scant resources to these activities. Treasured encounters with ecology, painting, music, debate, and journalism that opened up children's lives in marvelous and unforeseen ways have been spirited away like ghosts. A child in 3rd grade who tested water at a local forest preserve as part of a special program in science still asks his mother when he can go back to "collect more data."

What can we do to expand the horizons of gifted children—to open their minds to new worlds of knowledge and understanding? Programs for gifted students, particularly those offered at independent institutes or universities include classes rarely seen in a school setting. The Center for Gifted in the Chicago area offers courses like robotics, filmmaking, journalism, applied mathematics, and theater. Gifted children thrive in these programs not only because they provide challenge, but because they offer exposure to new, unexplored worlds.

Even if gifted programs are not available in the schools, teachers and parents can still find valuable resources. Ecology centers, community organizations, libraries, museums, and observatories offer unique learning opportunities. Gifted children benefit from volunteering for organizations that support a cause or interest that they share. Sometimes this meets two needs at once: pursuit of a passion and fulfillment of an emotional desire to help others. Volunteer opportunities exist in animal shelters, arts outreach programs, ecology centers, museums, aquariums, homeless shelters, and children's hospitals.

Use the Arts Whenever You Can

Some teachers shy away from the arts because they think they have to be trained artists in order to use them in the classroom. This is not the case.



Hang prints of great works of art on the walls or feature a different musical composition at the beginning and end of each class. A 1st grade teacher used art resources to teach skills and stimulate thinking. Theatrical exercises enhance writing/storytelling abilities. Constructing sculptures of animals refines observations about different species and habitats. All students benefit. "I had a girl," a teacher wrote, "who created a storybook using a combination of collage and her own writing. I had two boys who made a graffiti style map of their neighborhood—four times! By the fourth time, they had devised their own legend and shared it with the other students. The class members offered ideas for improving the map, and it sort of morphed into this enormous display that other classes came to see."

Integrate arts into the curriculum in targeted and efficient ways. Teachers need to carefully consider the goals of their units by asking the following types of questions:

- What are my students' learning styles, interests, and special talents?
- What kinds of learning experiences should they have (inductive thinking, sensing/intuiting, imagining/feeling, brainstorming)?
- How can the arts raise the level of complexity for gifted learners?
- What process and sources should they use?
- What do my students most love to do? Do they enjoy physical movement? Using their hands? Asking, "How else could we do this?" Imagining they are someone else, something else, somewhere else?
- Which process would best serve the aims and purpose of this specific lesson? What materials?
- In what way would creativity be most effective? As a catalyst at the beginning? As a process throughout the assignment? As a final project?

The following lists show how specific arts apply to subjects in the curriculum:

Visual Arts (literacy, geography, science, math): explore and respond to images, spatial reasoning, measuring, analyzing distance, perspective, proportions, dimensions, observing details, exploring color and light.
Sources: prints, paintings, magazines, posters, videos, colorful maps, models, displays of nature, magazines.

Theater (literacy, history): "What if?" exercises; imaginative role-playing; reader's theater; debating; creative explorations in humor, mood, feelings, and ideas.
Sources: costumes, masks, stage makeup, props, videos, video taped performances, CDs of sound effects, audio books.

Music (literacy, math, science): counting, adding, multiplying, dividing; measuring; evoking mood and atmosphere; imagining, feeling, sensing; discovering themes and structures.
Sources: CDs of music and sound (from diverse cultures), old musical instruments, books on music, materials for making instruments, composition paper, videos of great musicians.

Dance (math, science, literacy): measuring (line), shaping (pattern), experiencing (force, velocity, gravity), exploring change (seasons), transformation (caterpillar to butterfly), miming (story, mood), interpreting (ideas, cultures, stories).
Sources: open area or chairs and desks that are easily moved, costumes, CDs of music and sound effects, dance videos, rugs or mats for rolling on the floor.

Give Students Creative, Open-Ended Assignments
Making assignments more open-ended can take other forms besides the arts. Creativity is a mode of thinking. You can inspire students to think in new ways simply by the design of a problem, the questions you pose, or by encouraging students to draw on other interests and talents related to the subject at hand. Open-ended thinking encourages students to apply ideas, pursue mysteries, and discover connections that expand their intellectual and creative horizons. Learning becomes more relevant. Confidence increases as the children make their own contributions to the pool of knowledge in the classroom. Following are examples:

Thinking Mathematicians
A math teacher discovered that by using creative questioning, he could guide his 6th graders to deeper inquiry. Throughout years of mathematics instruction, each student is often judged by his ability to comprehend math that has already been formulated by others. Then, when the student begins work on his Ph.D., he is expected to discover something new—and he often has no idea how to proceed. The math teacher reasoned that students should be given the opportunity to formulate mathematical principles while they are young. The instructor decided to present a situation of some mathematical interest, let the students explore it, and encourage them through leading questions to formulate the fundamental mathematical principles that govern it (Smutny, 2003, p. 73).

Podcasting
A middle grade teacher used special software to guide creative students in developing a monthly podcast about the school. Interested youngsters met every Friday, with each episode using two hosts, two producers, four writers, a head writer, an interviewer, and musical composers. Set up as a school news program, the podcasts expanded as students worked on creative ideas together. They developed interviews, conducted student surveys, prepared special reports, wrote jokes, and recorded original musical compositions for the podcast.

As the project progressed, students became more confident, more adventurous, and more nurturing of each other's talents. Young people, who didn't think they were good writers, honed their skills by writing collaboratively with stronger writers. Students who were usually timid and quiet learned to be more vocal during meetings to get their ideas heard by the group or to project their voice when recording their parts as hosts (Smutny & von Fremd, 2009, p. 61).

Making History
Ms. T had her students assume the roles of historians. Focusing on discovery and revision as two unifying concepts, they searched for clues in primary and secondary sources and analyzed possible meanings and alternative interpretations. They prepared questions, interviewed people, and recorded information and insights as they worked.

Learners gained new appreciation for the work of historians and realized that historical interpretation is ongoing, dynamic, and evolves through the dual processes of discovery and revision. History is a puzzle to be solved, and the clues lead to new and better understandings of the present (Smutny & von Fremd, 2009, p. 103).

The Wall of Fame
Mr. A designed a corner of the classroom where students read biographies and related them to different fields. They chose a biography every other week as a dimension of their studies in history, art, literature, computers, and science. Children became intrigued by the role of pioneers in the development of various fields and explored these fields through story. The classroom had an expanding "wall of fame"—portraits, artwork, poems, and essays that students created from the lives of great achievers. The wall was very popular, for there was always someone new making an appearance. A person who tries the unachievable or defies the wisdom of his or her time is the perfect model for a gifted child. Biographies offer such examples, and students can become experts on famous people and events. One child who has read extensively about Abraham Lincoln writes about the hat he wore when giving speeches, and another focuses on the pen Lincoln used when composing his famous Address, including the following:

You may think that Abe Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address. Wrong! I did! I am the pen he used to write it!

Expanding the lives of gifted children always begins with the learners themselves—their strengths, interests, and dreams. From the seeds we plant, students can relate their knowledge in math, science, history, and literature to fields like journalism, architecture, ecology, law, archeology, ornithology, robotics, and engineering. When learning creates a window to this larger world, young people envision a future of greater possibility for themselves. ❖

The beautiful dream
I have a dream.
It is a dream of trees that smell like peppermint
and a sky of violet blue,
where the leaves of trees fill up with blueberries
and the walls of houses touch the sky.
I am as light as a fly.
And I fly everywhere….
up, up to the top of a house
or the tallest tree,
or down, down to a pool
as still as a mirror.
I could fly anywhere….
to another land
or up again
into the sunlight of the violet sky.

Lisa, 2nd grade

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Don't Mention the "G" Word (Shhh!)

James R. Delisle

This article originally appeared in the 2001, Spring edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*. The author biography at the end of the article was current at the time of publication.

This poem is dedicated to Dr. Seuss.

It used to be, when folks were bold
And words weren't minced, and truth was told,
That people spoke a common tongue
They used a term we all once heard,
Simply put, the big "g" word.

But now….shhh!....you can't say "gifted,"
For if you do, you will have drifted
To a place of ill repute
Where malcontented folks refute
There's such a thing as a higher state
Of mind, of heart, of depth or rate
Of thinking, feeling, knowing, being,
Sensing, asking, crying, seeing.
These "g" word critics have lost their balance.
They think that "gifted" equates with "talents."
And the "g" word (shhh!) is just taboo.

Away! Away! They say to gifts

Thinking this denial lifts
All children to a common place
Where people do not have to face
The truth, that some have deeper thoughts
Than others, not by plans or plots,
To use their wits and thus, have gained
A higher ground of greater knowing,
A deeper depth, a profound showing
Of empathy, knowledge, wisdom, wit
That "g" word (shhh!), it still doth fit
These children, who've become a part
Of a world that's known right from the start
That some are gifted, in both mind and heart.

Sadly, though, too few take heed,
They spout "All children can succeed!"
"…Yes, that is true!" in haste I add
But when did it become so bad
To use the "g" word to define
Those able few whose intact minds
Race forward, faster, ever strong,
'Tis not a question of right or wrong,
Or better than, or me 'gainst you.
""But I know that the gifted, too,

Have special needs" we must now say
For if we don't, they'll go away
To a place where "gifted" equates with "bad."
It's way too wrong, and downright sad.
For when all are treated just the same
In this "multiple talents" or "inclusion" game
Then no one need be tagged or labeled,
That "g" word (shhh!), it can be tabled,
Pushed far into the deep, dark past,
That "g" word (shhh!) might breathe its last.
(Some may be happy, I'm aghast!)

For the gifted (shhh!) have always been
They always shall, for it's no sin
To be smarter than some, more able than most.
My dream? To someday serve as host
Of a feast where famous athletes talk
Of that new sensation, the "knowledge jock,"
And swim for miles in big, deep pools
Of learning, hoping that others see
That knowledge jocks. Yes, they deserve to be
Applauded and cheered, as their minds are set free.

And if it should happen that this day should come,
I'll lead a parade with a big, bold bass drum
With a rat-a-tat loudness that gives out a cheer
That the gifted are with us, they've always been here.

They won't go away, never will, never can,
So let us just hope that each woman and man
Will embrace the idea "It's OK to be smart."
And my idea of a good place to start?
Let's deliver the "g" word from persona non grata
And make it a good term, for it truly does matter
That the "Shhhing" end soon, so our children can know
That it's OK to be gifted; it's OK to grow.

A former classroom teacher, teacher of gifted children, and counselor of gifted adolescents, **Jim Delisle** recently retired from Kent State University where he served as Director of undergrad and grad programs in gifted child education for 25 years. He is the author of numerous articles and books on the subject of gifted education.

Early Ahead: Do Young Gifted Resemble Older Children?

Miraca U. M. Gross

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I recently met a delightful 7-year-old called Janna. She is a gifted child who was identified and helped through the support of an insightful and observant teacher.

Janna taught herself to read before her 5th birthday, but she received little encouragement from home. Her parents are what we in Australia call "battlers." No, that doesn't mean they fight each other; "battlers" are parents who are economically disadvantaged but who *fight* to give their children a chance. Between the two of them, Janna's parents hold down three jobs and still struggle economically.

It's not easy for Janna's mom, who is learning disabled. At age 7, Janna reads much better than her mother. Janna learned how to read from TV and from street signs. She has an innate, untutored *gift* for reading, even though it wasn't nurtured by family. Her home has few books and her parents are not avid readers. Mom has trouble reading, and Dad works all the hours he can get.

When Janna enrolled in school her parents didn't think to tell her teacher, Ms. C, that she was already reading. However, after a few days, Ms. C noticed that when Janna chose books from the "reading corner" she sat quietly moving her lips. Janna had taught herself to read and was "sounding" words out! Ms. C put the child on an individual reading program, and Janna's gift quickly flourished. But sadly, not all teachers are as observant. Many simply assume that children don't learn to read before starting school—so they don't look for it.

Characteristics of Young Intellectually Gifted Children

When a young child possesses *a cluster* of the following characteristics, he may be intellectually/academically gifted. How can we respond to help high abilities flourish into high achievement?

- **Ability to understand and use abstract symbol systems at a young age**

Gifted children may "pick up" reading from television, signs, and other sources long before they enter school and without being taught….as Janna did.

- **Early language development**

Many gifted children speak in short sentences when average children are just beginning to link words into pairs. This usually occurs when parents and caregivers talk regularly and directly to them. We

must be aware that a youngster who is learning English as her second language may be extremely fluent in her first language but much less confident in English.

- **Unusual facility with numbers**

Children may have the capacity to grasp abstract mathematical concepts at unusually early ages. Tara, age 5, was puzzled because shoes in a shop window were displayed singly instead of in pairs. "Why are they all by themselves?" she asked. Then, before her mother could answer, she exclaimed "Oh Mom, a pair is two, and one is half of a pair!" (What mathematical concepts has Tara already grasped that her teacher probably doesn't need to introduce formally?)

- **Exceptional memory**

Some gifted children can repeat songs and TV commercials by heart before age 2. They need very little repetition of instruction. We truly need to *individualize* instruction for able learners.

- **Rapid pace of learning**

Gifted young children seem to acquire knowledge effortlessly. Often they can generalize the knowledge to new situations in unexpected ways. For example, Jenny, age 2, had just visited her grandmother in the hospital. On the way home they passed a veterinarian's office with a sign that showed a smiling cat and dog with bandaged paws. "Look!" she called in delight, "A hospital for pussycats and puppy dogs."

- **Ability to ask reflective and probing questions**

The father of Tomas, age 3, was reading his son a bedtime story, but the child was preoccupied, looking out the window at the night sky. Suddenly the boy asked, "Dad, why does the moon only go for a walk on nights when the sky is cloudy?" (Think about it…. What had Tomas noticed?)

- **Early development of classification and investigation skills**

Gifted children may have a fascination with categories (i.e., dinosaurs, insects, plants, and patterns of shapes or numbers). They may understand and think about relationships that age peers simply don't see.

- **Love of rich vocabulary and the capacity to create complex sentences**

Sometimes classmates may have difficulty understanding what the gifted child is talking about. This can lead to social exclusion. Grouping the youngsters together for instruction in areas of strength may help with acceptance.

- **Preference for the companionship of older children or age peers who are also very bright**

Playgrounds that have areas restricted to children in specific grades can be problematic for gifted students who find themselves separated from their older friends—particularly if they don't easily make friends with age peers.

Emotional Maturity

Children who are intellectually gifted are often emotionally mature for their ages. For a variety of reasons—including an unrewarding curriculum, preference for others of the same intellectual ability, or a feeling of social rejection—this maturity is sometimes masked at school.

This can lead to what I call a "forced-choice" dilemma (Gross, 1989). Some gifted children feel they have to choose between working to their capacity in school and having friends. Should they *show* their excitement and interest in learning, at the risk of classmates rejecting them as "nerds," or should they pretend to be "just like everyone else" for the sake of peer acceptance? Some gifted young children who enter school already reading deliberately stop when they realize no one else can read (Gross, 2004). It's easy to associate "being liked" with "being like"!

How Should Parents and Schools Respond?

Gifted children thrive best academically and socially when they learn at their own level and pace, ideally in the company of at least *some* other students who share their abilities and interests. Some districts form special full-time classes of academically gifted children; others prefer pullout classes where the gifted can work together for several hours per week. Some schools form cluster groups with six to eight academically gifted youngsters in an otherwise mainstream classroom. Achievement soars, and children in these groups feel much less

pressure to "dumb down" for peer acceptance.

The goal of education is to assist and encourage *all* children to develop as they are capable—**to be what they can be**. The goal of gifted education is to identify children with *high* potential in any domain of ability and help them translate that potential into high performance. Gifted education is fully congruent with the premises that underpin the education of children generally.

Grouping gifted children is not elitist; instead, it's a practical strategy to enhance both learning and socialization. It has been done for years with children talented in music and sports. It should be as acceptable in our schools to foster academic gifts. That's *real* equal opportunity! ❖

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Making Great Kids Greater: Easing the Burden of Being Gifted

Dorothy Sisk

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The monarch butterflies were flying all around in our playground, and the kids ran about batting at them and even hurting and killing some of them. I started to cry, and Miss L. said I shouldn't be so sensitive. 'They are just insects.' But Mom, they are alive, and they need to stay alive.

Cameron, 6 years old, shared the above with her mother.

On the surface, gifted children may appear to be well adjusted, but they are often highly sensitive, perfectionistic, and intense. They usually have an acute awareness of moral issues, with a unique perception of themselves and others and deeper feelings at an earlier age than their peers. Because of these intense qualities, they may suffer from anxiety early on.

Cameron's value of nature is far beyond her chronological age. In a recent parent conference, her teacher suggested that, in the upcoming year, they focus on her immaturity. The teacher also recommended that Cameron not be included in the gifted program until she is more mature. Her mother contacted the Gifted Child Center at Lamar University, and I talked with her about the asynchrony of gifted kids and how Cameron's mental age was far beyond that of the average 1st grader. The Center had tested her when she was 5, and her mental age was 7. The staff was impressed by her sensitivity and eagerness to share the details of the birth of two baby kittens and how Mitzie, the mother cat, cared for them, "just like my mom cares for me, but Mom doesn't lick my face." This was said with a giggle, since her observation struck her as funny.

Cameron is similar to many gifted kids who demonstrate the emotional intensity Kazimierz Dabrowski discussed in his theory of emotional development. She cries easily, and this bothers her. She asked her parents, "Is something wrong with me when I cry about stories we read in school? The other kids laugh at me, and Miss L. just sighs."

Cameron's empathy for the monarch butterflies is an example of her emotional intensity, and she needs to learn that it is normal for her. When I visited her last week, she told me about the kids in her class hurting the butterflies, and her eyes welled up with tears. I listened and then quietly shared, "Cameron, I slow down in my car so I won't hit the butterflies. They can fly above the car." Cameron looked up and smiled weakly, "I didn't know big people cared, too."

When I met with Cameron and her mother to discuss the child's perceived "oversensitivity," I shared with them how Albert Schweitzer as a youngster had great difficulty playing with the boys in his town because they were cruel to animals. Their favorite activity was to try and hit birds with their slingshots; consequently,

Albert never played with them. One day, he decided to go to the orchard with the boys to try and hit the birds with his slingshot, in order to become part of the group. As they neared the orchard, he suddenly ran ahead, shouting and waving his hands to scare the birds away. The boys were angry with him, and they pelted him with rocks. That was when he decided to never hurt an animal. It is said that in his clinic in Africa, he would even walk around a trail of ants, so as not to step on them.

Cameron's parents and teachers can take the following steps to help the child understand herself better.

"...your gifted child will see that you... realize that their emotional intensity is an acceptable characteristic."

Books on Empathy and Sensitivity

Gifted kids often feel a sense of helplessness when they perceive problems in the community or in the world as they watch television and are bombarded with scenes of violence. They think there is nothing they can do to alleviate these problems.

Cameron was fascinated by the story of Albert Schweitzer. My first recommendation for her mother was to find books in which one of the characters shows empathy and sensitivity for others, so Cameron can see that it is all right to care.

Care Pairs

It is essential that parents and teachers nurture the sensitivity and empathy of gifted kids by encouraging them to share their feelings. One activity that can be used in the classroom is Care Pairs where two students share their feelings with one another about stories they read or stories that have been read to them. The kids can draw pictures, write, or tell about parts of the story they really liked, sharing their caring.

Modeling

When you read stories to children, and one of the animals is lost or left out of a party, you can pause and comment on how sad and lonely the character must feel. When someone shoves or bumps you, you might say, "She must have been in a big hurry, she didn't even see me." Or in the line at the grocery store when someone can't find their money, say, "I don't always know where my purse is either." Each time you model empathy and sensitivity, your gifted child will see that you attempt to place yourself in the other person's shoes and realize that their emotional intensity is an acceptable characteristic.

Positive Activism

Parents can help children utilize their qualities of sensitivity and empathy in positive ways. By understanding other people's points of view, gifted youngsters can see different perspectives and become activists, planning and working on projects and causes with others. One family was concerned that youngsters in the neighborhood were not playing outside. With other parents and children, they organized their backyard as a safe play area. They even poured cement on part of the lawn to provide an area for kick ball and other games.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a characteristic of many gifted kids, and it may sometimes be viewed as negative. However, Dabrowski stated that perfectionism is a positive trait that can lead to young people creating outstanding products. The challenge for parents and teachers is to help students use their perfectionism in positive ways. In a discussion with a group of middle school gifted kids who identified themselves as perfectionists, a talking stick was used to provide each student an opportunity to share ideas about perfectionism without interruption. As they each held the talking stick and shared, it was apparent that perfectionism was causing them stress. I asked if any of them had ideas on ways to handle their stress, and they made these suggestions:

• Use humor and laugh at yourself when you get stuck on thinking it never will be good enough.

• Make a schedule and stick to it.

• Say it is okay to make mistakes as long as one learns from them.

• Do deep breathing and count to 10.

• Take the dog for a walk.

Curriculum materials that allow students to move at their own pace are helpful. One example is the Kumon Math program (***www.kumon.com/method/math.asp?language=USA***), which provides not only a standard completion time, but an acceptable number of mistakes, providing permission for perfectionists to be less than perfect. The key for the perfectionist is to have choices. When teachers provide project-based learning or open-ended assignments, curriculum choices are often provided.

Zimmerman's (2006) six questions for building self-regulation can help alleviate perfectionism. Zimmerman suggests that students ask themselves.

- WHY am I doing this project?
- HOW and what strategies will I use to carry out my project?
- WHEN will I work on it and when is it due?
- WHAT are my accomplishments, stepping back from the project?
- WHERE is the best place to work on my project?
- WITH WHOM do I want to work? With another student and/or with other people as resources?

Ty is a 6th grade perfectionist who worked through the six questions with his teacher for a Moon Rock science project. Responding to WHY, he said, "It was a requirement for the class, but I worked on the project because I want to become a geologist." The HOW was to set time aside each evening, from 7:00-9:00 p.m., which also took care of WHEN. WHAT was to write in his Science Log to keep track of his progress on the project and to add any new questions. WHERE was his bedroom, using his computer, and WITH WHOM was Dr. S. at the Research Center and an 8th grade student, working on a similar project.

Ty's project earned an honorable mention in the science fair, but most important, he managed his perfectionism with the help of the six questions. Gifted kids who are introduced to these questions of self-regulation have the opportunity to reflect on the importance of goal attainment and to establish individual goals that they value. The key to managing perfectionism is to be in control and be able to make choices.

With the help and support of their parents and teachers, gifted kids can learn to see their differences as a normal part of who they are. Easing the burden of being gifted opens doors for kids to be all they can be, without the shackle of fear and anxiety for being different. ❖

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Parenting Roles and the College Decision

Jean Strop

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Both parents and students bring their own styles into the college selection process. Counselors who are aware of the characteristics of these styles can best help students when selecting appropriate schools.

Parent Styles/Roles

There are a variety of roles that parents assume when helping students prepare for the selection of colleges. Some parents shift roles at different stages of the process, and some continue to play just one role.

Researcher

The parent who assumes the researcher role believes that knowledge is power. Knowledge is achieved by reading books, studying websites, consulting experts, and visiting colleges. This parent often feels that there is a perfect match to be found through research, and she may not trust that the student and the counselor will examine the options with enough rigor to make the right decision.

Communicator

The parent who assumes the role of communicator asks the student probing questions, listens carefully to the responses, and tries to assist the young person to discover and articulate her preferences. This parent often acts as "guide on the side," empowering the student to make her own educated decisions.

Achiever

This role is usually assumed by a parent who attended a highly selective school or who only knows about a few highly selective schools, mostly through name recognition. He often encourages the student to take a heavy load of advanced classes to maximize the weighted grade point average. The young person is urged to take test preparation classes and college placement tests frequently to achieve the highest possible scores. He is encouraged to build a resume that includes extracurricular activities and community service, based not on preference and passion, but on the perceived expectations of the admissions departments at the highly selective schools. This parent often encourages a son or daughter to select colleges based on reputation, rather than those that are a good fit.

Competitor

The parent who assumes the competitor role is often very concerned with his image and the perceptions of others. This individual often encourages the selection of colleges that will be valued by others—those that might be more selective than the ones to which the children of friends are applying. This role is similar to the achiever parent role but is more focused on the young person's college selection being the most prestigious.

Taskmaster

The taskmaster parent sees the college decision process as a series of tasks to be accomplished by the student. This parent makes lists, reminds students of deadlines, and doesn't relax until the student has completed and mailed all college applications. The parent is perceived as a helpful cheerleader by students who have become autonomous. However, for the student who is more dependent or counter-dependent (resistant to direction and likely to do the opposite), the taskmaster is often perceived as annoying.

Avoider

Some parents are reluctant to have their children leave home or have no interest in the college application process. The parent avoids the topic of college and the student is often on her own when it comes to the college selection and application process. This role works for a highly independent student but does not do well for the student who has difficulty defining and following a process.

Worrier

These parents worry for a variety of reasons, including concerns that the student

- won't get into the college of his choice.
- isn't ready to handle the demands of the college .
- will select a college to attend, and it won't work out.
- will get in to a college with a high price tag, and the family won't be able to afford it.

The students, hearing these parental concerns often, may convert them into their own worries and a general fear of the college experience.

Supporting Parents and Students

It is a fact that college acceptance for high achieving gifted students has become less predictable due to a larger college-bound population (hence increased college applications), inflated grades, and test prep programs raising test scores. Therefore, high achieving students begin to look very similar on paper. This factor has created increased stress for parents and students, especially for those students who seek out-of-state or private school admission. Therefore, educators and counselors have an increased challenge to provide differentiated support to both the students and the parents involved in this college selection process (See Figure 1.).

The admissions process has become more difficult as the population applying to colleges increases. Required test scores and grades are on a steady rise at state colleges, and the process for gaining admission to out-of-state and private colleges has become much less predictable and seemingly arbitrary. Therefore, the stress levels of college applicants and their parents have increased exponentially. To assure good decisions, educators need to take a more active, systematic role in helping parents and students navigate these unknown waters. The destination—a good college match for students that will maximize their chances for happiness, fulfillment, and success. ❖

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Figure 1. Differentiated Support for Parents and Students in College Selection Process

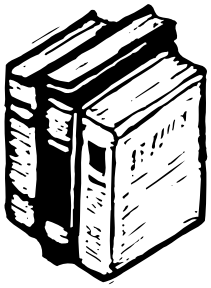
Role of Parent	Educator's Support For Parents in Each Role	Educator's Support For Students with Parents Assuming Each Role
Researcher	• Suggest good resources. • Help parents understand the needs, styles, and desires of the student. • Help parents understand that their perfectionism could cause stress for students.	• Suggest good resources. • Encourage students to consider own preferences and needs when selecting colleges. • Help students see that there is not just one perfect match out there.
	• Help parents realize that the college selection process at highly selective schools can be somewhat arbitrary.	• Assist students in narrowing down choices because the parents' "need to know" could overwhelm them with information and options.
Communicator	• Encourage parents to start early on process so there is time to find appropriate options. • Help parents find college matches once student needs/wants are articulated.	• Provide concrete options once needs/wants are articulated. • Provide personalized support to build a college list.
Achiever	• Help parents see the need to consider schools that are mid-range and foundation, as well as the highly selective. • Assist parents in seeing that a good fit is better than name recognition. • Support parents in listening to what their students want. • Since applying implies permission to attend, give realistic views about what the family can afford.	• Help students to see the need for a "good fit" rather than selecting a school solely by name recognition and selectivity. • Help students articulate their needs/wants to their parents. • Encourage students to express their true selves when writing the essay, rather than presenting a false image to the admissions officers.
Competitor	• Support parents in talking to students and listening to what students need/want. • Encourage parents to share with students what options are truly affordable. • Suggest that parents pull back from the process until the student decides on a college list based on his own needs/wants.	• Encourage students to articulate needs and wants and to select colleges based on best fit. • Spend time working with the students (apart from parents) to develop a list of colleges. • Support students to be assertive with parents who are very intense and sometimes controlling.

Taskmaster	• Encourage parents to take the time to enjoy the process. • Encourage parents to back off if the student starts to resist the process.	• Encourage students to keep parents apprised of progress. • Take a more active role with a student who resists the process or becomes blocked. • Support student to be assertive with parents who might become angry and controlling.
Avoider	• Suggest that the parent seek emotional/ therapeutic support to empower the student, or at the very least, to let go. • Support divorced parents to work together or find a mediator to assist.	• Help student understand the parents' paradigm. • Support the student to directly navigate the steps of the college selection process. • Assist students in applying for scholarships, financial aid, etc. so the parent's avoidance pattern doesn't impact college attendance.
Worrier	• Define for parents how to concretely support their student. • Help to dispel the concerns about their student attending college (i.e., counseling centers, learning centers, dorm options, etc.). • Suggest counseling/therapy support when anxiety is impacting the student's progress.	• Assist students in finding colleges where their unique needs will be met. • Teach students self-advocacy skills so the parent believes he will handle college well. • Suggest options that will assure success (i.e., counseling, study skills development, technical school, remediation, etc.).

James Marshall: A Tribute

Jerry Flack

This article originally appeared in the 2009, Spring edition of *Understanding Our Gifted*. The author biography at the end of the article was current at the time of publication.



The American Library Association posthumously awarded the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal to James Marshall in 2007, 15 years after his death. The Wilder award honors an author or illustrator whose books have made a lasting contribution to literature for children. The recognition of Marshall was long overdue considering that he created more than 75 books in his 20 year career as a children's author and illustrator. Most of his books remain in print today even though they were first published in the 1970s and 1980s.

James Marshall was a music prodigy who won a scholarship to the New England Conservatory of Music. However, a hand injury kept him from becoming a concert musician. He received his master's degree in French and Spanish from Trinity College and taught high school languages before becoming a children's book artist in 1979. Marshall's trademark line drawings are simple yet they convey delightful expression and offer humorous detail. In both form and spirit, Marshall's artwork epitomizes artist Paul Klee's delightful definition of a key element of drawing: "A line is a dot out for a walk."

Marshall's work is always funny and slightly irreverent. Perhaps his substantial body of work was best summed up by a 1st grader who wrote the following note to him. "I like the George and Martha books. They make me happy."

Marshall's creations include George and Martha, Miss Nelson and Viola Swamp, The Stupids, The Cut-Ups, and a naughty little girl named Goldilocks.

George and Martha

Although James Marshall named the hippo best friends George and Martha after the dysfunctional husband and wife in Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, there is no similarity in the interactions between the respective couples.

True friendship is ever present through George and Martha's respect, loyalty, honesty, right to privacy, good advice, encouragement, forgiveness, empathy, solace, promises kept, generosity, consideration, and humor. As George says to Martha in *The Special Gift*, "It is wonderful to have a friend who knows how to make you laugh."

One measure of the lasting impact of James Marshall is the newly published anthology, *George and Martha: The Complete Stories of Two Best Friends* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008). This book includes all 35 George and Martha tales; a laudatory introduction by Maurice Sendak; and commentaries by contemporary greats in the world of children's literature, such as Marc Brown, Jon Scieszka, David Wiesner, Susan Meddaugh, and Jack Gantos. They write

of Marshall's extraordinary kindnesses and personal mentoring as well as the inspiration they have received from his deceptively simple tales and astonishing artwork.

Sendak writes that Marshall possessed a genius for friendship and that "George and Martha are the quintessential expression of that genius." Susan Meddaugh notes that Marshall was "…an artist of incomparable talent," while David Wiesner remarks on Marshall's economy of text and line: "Nothing extraneous exists in the stories; he has stripped everything away to get the essence of storytelling pictures and words. You wouldn't want to add anything or take anything away. It is all necessary and perfect."

In *Story Number One: Split Pea Soup*, Martha delights in spending all day making split pea soup, but, alas, George hates the pea-green potage. When he suspects that Martha is not looking, he pours a bowl of the soup into his loafers. But, Martha has been watching and knows that George will have to walk home in soggy loafers. The result prompts a perfect dialogue.

Martha: "And why didn't you tell me that you hate my split pea soup?"

George: "I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

Martha: "That's silly. Friends should always tell each other the truth. As a matter of fact, I don't like split pea soup very much myself. I only like to make it. From now on, you'll never have to eat that awful soup again."

"What a relief!" George sighed.

Fairy Tales

Marshall's fairy tales are perfect examples of his appealing and wacky humor, both verbal and visual. Although he utilizes anthropomorphism (the animals' ability to speak and display human characteristics), he never strays too far from the well recognized plots. Marshall's fairy tales are hilarious without ever becoming parodies of the original classics. In *Red Riding Hood* (Dial Books, 1987) and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Dial Books, 1988), the respective heroines are smugly self-satisfied and more than a little bit naughty without ever being rude or bad mannered.

In *The Three Little Pigs* (Dial Books, 1989), each of the vendors from whom the porcine characters purchase building materials offers a note of counsel. The man bearing a cartload of straw advises the first little pig that building a house from straw is NOT a good idea. The little pig replies haughtily, "Mind your own business."

The wolves in both *The Three Little Pigs* and *Red Riding Hood* are urbane, but also hilariously wicked. Similar malice is found in the caricatures of both the stepmother and the witch in *Hansel and Gretel* (Dial Books, 1990). Their gluttony and evil ways are unmistakable yet simultaneously witty.

A highlight of all of Marshall's fairy tales is his inventive and brilliantly colored illustrations that are filled with ever present traces of humor. Baby Bear's bedroom features a Texas flag plus a hand drawn map of Marshall's home state. Red Riding Hood encounters a dapper and sophisticated alligator on her way through the woods after the episode with the wolf at her grandmother's cottage. She gives him a very cool "get lost" greeting.

James Marshall's Favorite Fairy Tales (2001) on DVD features animated and musical versions of *Red Riding Hood*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, and *The Three Little Pigs*. It also features a brief commentary by Marshall that should be viewed by all parents and teachers who want to foster the creativity in their students. In *Getting to Know James Marshall*, the self-taught author-illustrator vividly recalls a 2nd-grade encounter with a callous teacher. He knew even at that early age that he wanted to grow up to become an artist. He thought of himself as a "Baby Picasso." While focused upon drawing his version of a perfectly stunning pecan tree, he heard the frightening sound of cruel laughter as his teacher looked at his drawing and promptly told him that he would never, ever be an artist. Marshall concludes this poignant segment by stating that he then silently put down his lime green crayon and did not draw again for more than 20 years. He did finally achieve delicious revenge. That teacher became the model for Viola Swamp in *Miss Nelson Is Missing!*

Collaboration: The Stupids and Miss Nelson

At least two generations of readers have laughed at the family of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Q. Stupid and the goings-on in Miss Nelson's classroom, both written by Harry Allard and illustrated by James Marshall. *The Stupids Step Out* (Houghton Mifflin, 1974) was their first collaboration. Despite the family name, there is nothing cruel or mean spirited in either the text or art work found in the adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley

Q. Stupid; their children Buster and Petunia; and their dog named "Kitty" and cat named "Xylophone," both family pets and chauffeurs. The humor found in The Stupids' series is reminiscent of the absent minded professor. The Stupids are a very happy family, and they enjoy their wacky lives to the fullest.

One example is the madcap party in *The Stupids Have a Ball* (Houghton Mifflin, 1978). It is report card time, and the family celebrates the fact that Buster and Petunia have flunked every single subject. Marshall is delightfully witty in his portrayal of The Stupids. Pictures on the walls in the Stupid household are never as labeled. A tree appears in the framed picture labeled "flower" and, of course, a flower is highlighted in the "Tree" oval frame. A jar of jam and a can of tuna sit on the bathtub rack. And, Grandfather Stupid is dressed in a child's playsuit. In *The Stupids Take Off* (Houghton Mifflin, 1989), Xylophone, the family cat, hangs breakfast food on the clothesline to dry, and father brushes his teeth with anchovy toothpaste.

The most famous teacher and classroom of students in children's literature may well be the kindly Miss Nelson and her bratty students in Room 207. In *Miss Nelson Is Missing!* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977), a sweet and tolerant teacher is confronted with students who delight in being disobedient. Paper airplanes soar through the air, and children talk and misbehave even during story hour. Then, one day events in Room 207 take a decided turn for the worst. Miss Nelson is absent and the world's meanest substitute, the infamous Viola Swamp, takes over. Miss Swamp tolerates no mischief and she increases the students' homework exponentially. Something must be done! The students report Miss Nelson as a missing person to Detective McSmogg at the local police station. But, just as mysteriously as Miss Nelson first disappeared, she reappears on the scene, Room 207, to discover her students have been greatly transformed. No teacher's return is more welcome, and her students suddenly model ideal manners. All is well except that Detective McSmogg is now seeking a new missing person: Viola Swamp. The further madcap adventures of Miss Nelson's gang of students may be found in Allard and Marshall's *Miss Nelson is Back* (Houghton Mifflin, 1982) and *Miss Nelson Has a Field Day* (Houghton Mifflin, 1985).

Activities

Author or illustrator studies may culminate with creative and imaginative new student products. Invite students to try any of the following James Marshall spin-offs:

1. Use Marshall's amazing flare for humor to create a new pair of animal friends who move into the same neighborhood as the hippos, George and Martha. The newcomers might be crocodiles or camels, but their dispositions are just the opposite of the beloved friends represented by George and Martha. Tell and illustrate a short, comical story about people whose childish quarrels illustrate why friendship is so very valuable in life.

2. Select a fairy tale such as Rapunzel or a folk tale such as Jack and the Beanstalk. Use James Marshall's *Red Riding Hood* or *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* as models to retell and illustrate new versions of Rapunzel and Jack that Marshall might have created.

3. One of the delights of series such as The Stupids and Miss Nelson is that they can be continued by creative students. Pairs of students may collaborate on brand new adventures for the Stanley Q. Stupid Family or the students in Room 207 of Horace B. Smedley Elementary School.

4. Research the life of James Marshall through the many biographical documents found on the Internet. Take a tip from Marshall's own creations. Write and illustrate a humorous account of Marshall's childhood or his years as a high school foreign language teacher. ❖

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