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Musings: What do gifted young adults who have been accelerated want for their own children?
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Cheryl Franklin-Rohr

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Understanding Our GIFTED

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

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Between the Lines

Dorothy Knopper

A new column in a new newsletter -- a writer's challenge!

I first wrote the above in 1988 to kick off my column in UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED (UOG). We are now embarking on another change as we welcome a new company to the ownership of the journal ....AppleCore Communications, LLC, with owner Kristin Ludwig.

We are all very excited about the change which will enable us to bring you new information about the gifted and talented children in your homes and schools. Keep in touch with our website (www.our-gifted.com) which will have updates and also good news about the February 24, 2012 Beyond Giftednes XIX Conference, now in the planning stages.

And while we are on the subject of changes, Sandra Berger, an Information Specialist and long time expert in the field of gifted/talented education for ERIC Clearinghouse on Gifted Education and Disabilities shared her extensive knowledge on the changes in gifted education:

Gifted Education is 100 years old, significantly older than most of us and our kids. Let's begin in the 60s, after the Russians launched Sputnik. At that time, gifted was a monolithic concept and a conundrum was created: equality vs. individual rights.

The federal government funded all the states for the development of gifted programming. But the feds didn't give enough to the first Mandate. Many of the states developed "resource" rooms. Other states developed self-contained programs that required a formal identification process.

Dorothy Knopper *is the mother of three grown and successful gifted children and an ardent gifted supporter. She is the founder of the Beyond Giftedness conference, now in it's 19th year, and the developer of the current Understanding Our Gifted Journal which will begin it's 25th year this fall.*

That is where the monolithic concept of giftedness was nurtured and IQ testing became popular.

Trend 1: The broadening concept of intelligence from a single numerical rating to a multidimensional system.

Trend 2: Development of curriculum that met the needs of kids with "high" IQs as well as those who were talented but not necessarily high achieving.

Trend 3: A further broadening of intelligence and programs to accommodate the many bright students from outside the United States. Some of these students did not speak English, thus the development of "diversity" emphasis and multicultural programs.

Many strategies created and developed in Gifted Education are now used to improve regular education. They have become almost universal.

Making Connections

Kristin Ludwig

Kristin Ludwig *is, most importantly, the mother of two amazing boys. Most of her career has been spent in marketing/promotions roles. Prior to motherhood, she owned a conference planning business, working primarily with special education conferences. Most recently, Kristin started AppleCore Communications, to continue her work with marketing/promotions, conference planning, and publishing.*

First of all, a confession. I borrowed the title "Making Connections" from Lou Lloyd-Zannini. Lou is the keynote presenter for the Beyond Giftedness XIX conference and used the phrase as his original working title for his keynote.

The words stayed in my mind and, as I thought about the path that brought me to the *Understanding Our Gifted* journal, I realized it was a long line of connections. I will spare you the details of my early working life and say simply that most of the work I did came about because of who I knew -- connections. The pertinent connections started at the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce where I worked in the marketing department. The woman who planned the Chamber's annual dinner asked me to work with her and eventually sold her conference planning business to me. I met my husband when he keynoted one of my conferences. My husband, in turn, introduced me to Sandy Berger with whom he worked at the time. Sandy is a long-time friend and colleague of Dorothy Knopper who has been publishing the journal for 25 years. Dorothy asked Sandy for her thoughts on who might be appropriate to help her with the journal and her yearly conference. Sandy contacted me, I connected with Dorothy, and a truly wonderful partnership was created.

Being familiar with the challenges of gifted kids and educators through my husband who formerly worked in the gifted field on many levels, I'm thrilled to have this opportunity to work with Dorothy in bringing information to educators and parents of gifted.

There are certain connections in one's life that are more important than others. My thought is that my connection with Dorothy, and through her to all of you, will rank toward the top of my list.

Egalitarianism 2.0 and the Assault on Aptitude

Steve Schroeder-Davis

Steve Schroeder-Davis
has coordinated gifted programs in Elk River, MN for 31 years and teaches in the Saint Mary's Gifted Certificate Program, which he created. Steve's Master's and Doctoral degrees focused on gifted issues, and his dissertation won the John C. Gowan Doctoral Research Award at NAGC's forty-third annual conference. Steve writes and presents frequently on issues relevant to gifted students and their advocates

I first encountered Francoys Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) during a presentation Dr. Gagné delivered in Minnesota many years ago. I was impressed then with how comprehensive the model was, and with Gagné's continued research and refinement, I now find the model to be an unparalleled explanation of, and blueprint for, understanding how gifts (aptitudes) are translated into talents (performance). While developing the model, Gagné also blessed our field with a cogent distinction between *gifted*: "the possession and use of outstanding natural abilities," and *talented*: "the outstanding mastery of *systematically developed abilities*" (Gagné 2004).

The crucial distinction between gifts and talents is also reflected in the following definition recently developed by a committee of gifted experts and submitted to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) in 2009:

> Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in the top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (p. 1)

Gagné's (2008) DMGT, depicted below, is entirely consonant with, and surely informed, the expert definition.

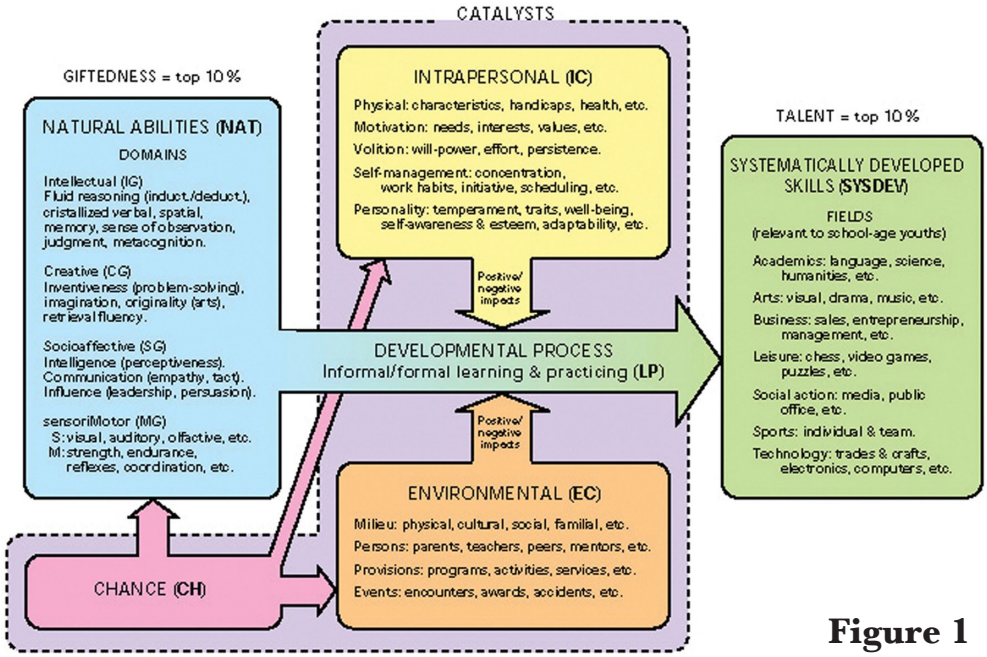

Figure 1

The conceptions of talent development represented in Gagné's DMGT, the (re) definition proposed to NAGC, and all other developmental models with which I was familiar - until recently - shared two fundamental assumptions: (a) giftedness is initially a genetic endowment that facilitates speed and mastery of learning, and (b) giftedness is normative in that it refers to individuals who have "abnormal" aptitude compared to age peers in one or more domains. These two assumptions have been challenged recently by a remarkable number of authors who either explicitly or implicitly discount – or deny – that genetics are a factor in talent development, and who further assert that giftedness is *not* normative, but is available to everyone. David Shenk is an example of one such author. His 2010 book, *The Genius in all of Us: Why Everything You've Been Told About Genetics, Talent, and IQ is Wrong*, directly challenges Gagné's DMGT premise that "one cannot become talented without first being gifted" (Gagné, 2000, p. 2).

"One cannot become talented without first being gifted."

If Shenk's view was an aberration, one could be dismissive of yet another attempt to democratize giftedness out of existence, but fellow authors Matthew Syed (*Bounce*, 2010),

Daniel Coyle (*The Talent Code*, 2009), Geoff Colvin (*Talent is Overrated*, 2008), and Malcolm Gladwell (*Outliers*, 2008) are ubiquitous on YouTube, and their books, which are widely read and have been adopted in faculty study groups, all share and promote the belief that heritable capacity plays little or no role in the development of mastery and expertise. Their corollary to the proposition that there is "genius in all of us" is seductively aspirational, implying that with hard work and dedication, virtually anyone can become expert at virtually anything (Syed actually states that . . . "*anybody* can achieve the same results with opportunity and dedication). (p. 23, emphasis in the original) The fallacy of the "genius in all of us" argument is that it conflates ipsative (individual) growth and improvement with normative performance, that is, achieving elite status in a given field. For example, after years of hard work, I was able to lower my marathon time from an initial 3 hours and 30 minutes to 2 hours and 45 minutes, a dramatic improvement of which I am proud. My best time, however, is not remotely close to being elite, as that would necessitate my improving by at least another 30 minutes. More to the point, there are no circumstances under which I could become an elite runner, as I lack the necessary ectomorphic build, lung capacity, and slow twitch muscles. In short, I lack the genetic material to be an elite runner.

Therein lies the collective appeal of the books: The authors advance the exciting, inspiring, and entirely valid idea that we can all improve at anything we decide is important. The authors all make another crucial point, especially for our children: The talent we see demonstrated in performers such as Roger Federer, David Beckman, the Beatles, and Bobby Fisher are not (just) the result of innate gifts, but of years of very hard work and deliberate practice. Unfortunately, in promoting individual improvement, the authors have both implicitly and explicitly diminished or denied the role of aptitude in the acquisition of talent, thereby calling into question the need for gifted programs and services. Why would we need early entrance to kindergarten, acceleration policies, magnet schools, staff development, or gifted education courses if gifted children do not exist? (See for example, Chapter 2 in *Bounce*: "The Myth of the Child Prodigy.")

In this article, I will first provide an overview of the authors' egalitarian assertions, and then illustrate each author's contentions in a chart format. I will continue the critique by expanding on the points made in the chart, and finally, I will close by suggesting how we can minimize the threat to gifted education by using the authors' own assertions to justify the necessity of gifted programs and services.

With minor variations, each author replaces the role of genetic

endowment (giftedness) in the development of talent with some other factor (e.g., luck, deliberate practice, "ignition," coaching, mentors, the "10,000 hour rule") to explain various accomplishments, for example, those of the Beatles, Mozart, Picasso, and Bill Gates. The authors all oppose the simplistic "nature-nurture" dichotomy, claiming that too much emphasis has been placed on genetics and not nearly enough on environmental factors. Further, the authors suggest the dichotomous nature-nurture model should be replaced with the term interactionism to reflect the mutual interdependence of genetics and the environment.

The authors and other interactionists appear to agree on two fundamentals:

1. Both heredity and environment contribute to intelligence.
2. Heredity and environment interact in various ways.

Ironically, the authors then proceed to replace the posited overemphasis on *genetics* with an overemphasis on *environment*, attributing talent development disproportionately to factors such as luck, deliberate practice, "ignition," coaching, mentors, the "10,000 hour rule," and other environmental elements. Further, the fact that genetics and the environment interact is hardly revelatory. As evident in Figure 1 (p. 5), interactionism has been integral in Gagné's model (to which none of the authors refer) since at least 1995.

Beyond propounding an unbalanced "interactionist" view of talent development, the authors advance the idea that foundational aptitude is unnecessary, as seen in Table 1 on page 9.

In scanning the table, readers will note the authors consistently reference the "10,000 hour rule" and "mindset" (they are a bit incestuous as well, referencing one another no less than 15 times). I would like to deal with *Mindset* (the book and the concept) in a future article, as author Carol Dweck has made too

Table 1

Book Title	Representative Quote	Aptitude Replaced By:	Critique
The Genius in All of Us: Why Everything You've Been Told about Genetics, Talent, and IQ is Wrong 2010	"But in revealing talent to be a process, the simple idea of genetic giftedness is forever debunked" (p. 56).	"Triggers" such as a growth mindset, hard work, persistence and the "10,000 rule.	Ironically, while criticizing the "nature-nurture" dichotomy, Shenk makes the same mistake by positing that talent development is entirely the result of "triggers," essentially eliminating genetics as a factor in talent development.
Bounce 2010	"(Hard work) . . . ought to dispel the myth that they (Mozart's abilities) emerged from on high, like gifts from the gods" (p. 58).	Growth mindset, the 10,000 hour rule, hard work, persistence and "motivational jolts."	Syed conjures the myth that Mozart's abilities "emerged from on high," and then refutes the myth that he created by attributing Mozart's aptitude to hard work.
Bounce 2 2010	"The Myth of the Child Prodigy," subtitle for chapter 2 (p. 55).	Innate talent explained away by the 10,000 rule for prodigies such as Josh Waitzkin.	Josh Waitzkin, the real life protagonist in *Searching for Bobby Fisher*, was born in 1976, introduced to chess at 6, won the NYC primary chess championship at age 7, and was national runner up in 1985 (age 8), long before he had played 10,000 hours of chess.
The Talent Code: Greatness Isn't Born. It's Grown. Here's How. 2009	Greatness Isn't Born. It's Grown. Here's How (Book's subtitle).	Deep practice, ignition, master coaching, the 10,000 hour rule, growth mindset.	Coyle commits the either-or false dichotomy in the title!
Talent is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everyone Else 2009	"Most profoundly, Colvin shows that great performance isn't reserved for a preordained few" (Introduction).	Deliberate (sustained, intense) practice, the 10,000 hour rule.	"Great performance is reserved for a preordained few" is a gratuitous attempt to link giftedness to elitism.
Outliers: The Story of Success 2008	"Today, many of (Lewis) Terman's ideas remain central to the way we think about success. Schools have programs for the 'gifted'" (p.75).	The 10,000 hour rule, luck, families, culture, class.	1) Putting "gifted" in quotes implies such students don't exist. 2) Most of Gladwell's catalysts (luck, family, culture) are as deterministic as genetics, and (genetic) determinism is one of the factors Gladwell is attempting to refute.

important a contribution to be summarized here. The 10,000 hour rule is based on the work of psychologist K. Andres Ericsson (1991), who studied the performance of violinists at Berlin's elite Academy of Music and found the distinguishing factor separating the ultimate excellence of students' performance was not the initial skill level of the student, but the amount of time spent in intense, focused, deliberate practice. Students who practiced in this manner for approximately 10,000 hours over many years became the best musicians, regardless of their entry-level ability, and those who did not practice as much or as intensely progressed the least, again, irrespective of their initial ability. From this study, Gladwell and others drew the conclusion that persistence, effort, and the right kind of practice – rather than innate aptitude – explained elite performance. Gladwell (2008) summarizes the study:

"The striking thing about Ericsson's study is that he and his colleagues couldn't find any 'naturals,' musicians who floated effortlessly to the top while practicing a fraction of the time their peers did. Nor could they find any 'grinds,' people who worked harder than everyone else, yet just didn't have what it takes to break the top ranks. Their research suggests that *once a musician has enough ability* [emphasis added] to get into a top music school, the thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works. That's it. And what's more, the people at the very top don't work just harder or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, much harder." (p. 39)

Note my italics within Gladwell's (2008) text: "*once a musician has enough ability* to get into a top music school, the thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works." Gladwell's subtly embedded ability disclaimer is absolutely crucial in understanding how he and others have chosen to interpret and promote Ericsson's study. While it's important to recognize that without serious and sustained hard work, gifted children will not reach their full potential—and the authors have made a significant contribution in making this so clear—I find it both disappointing and disingenuous that without exception, they trumpet the 10,000 hour rule while simultaneously minimizing or omitting the fact that the basis for exceptional performance is sufficient natural ability. The students in Ericsson's study, for example, had to be gifted enough to be enrolled in an elite institution in the first place. The authors are collectively propagating a talent development formula Gagné advanced at least 15 years earlier, but minus the crucial factor of giftedness.

The important role foundational aptitude plays in talent is effectively illustrated in another chapter of Gladwell's (2008) book. In chapter two, "The 10,000 Hour Rule," Gladwell equivocates, "[Bill] Gates and the Beatles are all

undeniably talented. Lennon and McCartney had a musical gift of the sort that comes along once in a generation" (p. 55). In his book (p. 50), speeches, and on YouTube, Gladwell often refers to the Beatles' "Hamburg Crucible." Between 1960 and 1962, the Beatles made five trips to Germany, playing for 8 hours a night, 7 nights a week, for weeks at a time, thereby performing live together over a thousand times in 2 years. Gladwell quotes Beatles' biographer Phillip Norman: " . . . when they came back, they sounded like no one else. It was the making of them" (p. 50). As a bit of a Beatles expert, I concur with the calculus that the Beatles would not have improved as rapidly or dramatically without Hamburg. I would even concede they might not have become "The Beatles" as we now know them without Hamburg, but the fact that the Beatles became immensely talented after years of practice does *not* mean that their initial aptitude was irrelevant. Rory and the Hurricanes were in Hamburg too (initially as the featured band; the Beatles were their back-up), but I bet most of you have never heard of them. It was the Beatles unique gifts plus hard work and persistence that resulted in one of the most talented bands in music history.

"talent and high intelligence are somewhat scarce gems, scattered throughout the human gene pool"

In *Bounce*, Syed (2010) endeavors to "dispel the myth that [Mozart's abilities] emerged from on high, like gifts from the gods" (p. 58), a colloquial caricature intended to exalt Mozart's authentic innate ability to the level of absurdity. On the jacket cover of *Talent is Overrated*, Colvin (2008) assures us "great performance isn't reserved for the preordained few." In *The Genius in All of Us*, Shenk (2010) first advances what he calls the conventional wisdom that "talent and high intelligence are somewhat scarce gems, scattered throughout the human gene pool. . . . The best we can do is to locate and polish those gems and accept the limitations built into the rest of us" (p. 6), and then recants, asserting, "no one is genetically designed into greatness" (p. 43). Each of these quotes reveals what I believe – and I think the authors know – is the untenable position that genetic endowment plays little or no role in talent development.

"no one is genetically designed into greatness"

Gagné's terminology has evolved over the years he's put into crafting his talent development model, but the formula remains the same. In oversimplified terms, it looks like the graphic below (the magnified words represent the Beatles' superior aptitude and resultant superior competence) and explains the Beatles and Rory and the Hurricanes in Hamburg and beyond:

Beatles: **Aptitude** + catalysts + practice = (degree of) **competence**

Rory and the Hurricanes: Aptitude + catalysts + practice = (degree of) **competence**

Note Gagné's rendering of talent development (DMGT) preceded all the books cited here, is more comprehensive, and is more consistent with the interactionist orientation (he avoided the *either-genetics-or-environment* fallacy). Further, Gagné has delineated specifics within his model that are far more detailed than anything offered in the books being critiqued here.

The DMGT also frames gifts and talents as normative, yet accessible (approximately 30% of the U.S. population could be defined as gifted in Gagné's model if the top 10% of individuals in each natural ability domain are considered) and blessedly refrains from using quotes around the term *gifted*, an affectation I find noxious and condescending in that it implies the existence of gifted individuals is merely a construct advocates fabricate in order to receive services for their gifted children. I don't recall ever seeing quotes around other exceptional populations: To my knowledge, no one has written that Helen Keller was "gifted" and "blind," yet they are both demonstrable exceptionalities deserving accommodation.

There are two other aspects of these recent publications that are important to mention, as they both undermine the authors' credibility. One is the authors' habit of embedding disclaimers, equivocations, and cherry-picked examples in their various texts. For example, a mere nine pages after trumpeting that we are all capable of genius, Shenk (2010) states, "This is not to say that we don't have important genetic differences among us, yielding advantages and disadvantages. Of course we do, and those differences have profound consequences" (p. 9). Perhaps the most striking disclaimer in the Shenk text is the footnote that appears on p. 57 and belies the book's title:

"This ten-thousand hour phenomenon has recently attracted significant media attention, and has become corrupted and confused. Critics have somehow understood it to be a claim

"I know of no more injurious or pernicious myth to our field than the charge of elitism…"

that anyone can achieve anything by putting in ten thousand hours of practice. No serious researcher in expertise studies has ever made any such claim. Ericsson and others have merely observed that approximately ten thousand hours of deliberate practice seems to be one of the necessary components to extraordinary achievement."

Syed's (2008) attempt to disprove the existence of prodigies can't seem to explain Josh Waitzkin, the real life protagonist in "Searching for Bobby Fisher," who was introduced to chess when he was 6 years old and won the New York City primary chess championship at age 7, long before he could have reached the hallowed "10,000 hours" of deliberate practice. And note the phrasing Colvin (2008) uses in *Talent is Overrated*: "It isn't specific inborn abilities. We've seen extensive evidence that call into question whether such abilities exist, [his assertion] and even if certain of them might, they clearly do not *determine* excellence" (p. 50). Of course innate abilities do not *determine* excellence, as that is a performance issue. Innate abilities (giftedness) do, however, serve to increase both the rapidity and mastery of skills acquisition.

Of more concern than the authors' contradictory disclaimers, however, are their attempts to tie giftedness to elitism, a charge that appears to have incantatory power in our culture, even though it is easily refuted. The word *elitism* has several definitions and connotations. I selected a definition from the Free On-Line Dictionary (www.thefreedictionary.com) that I think encapsulates both a commonly accepted meaning and the connotation that provokes the tacit cultural resentment to which the authors are appealing: Elitism is "the belief that certain persons or members of certain classes or groups deserve favored treatment by virtue of their perceived superiority, as in intellect, social status, or financial resources."

I know of no more injurious or pernicious myth to our field than the charge of elitism, especially as represented in this definition. While even Shenk (2010)—whose positions are more extreme than those of the other authors—grants

that certain individuals "have important genetic differences . . . yielding advantages" (p. 9), all of these authors have chosen to shun the simple normative meaning of "elite" (meaning highly skilled, as in *the elite troops of the President's bodyguard*) and used the term instead to suggest the gifted are receiving "favored treatment by virtue of their perceived superiority, as in intellect, social status, or financial resources" . The jacket of Shenk's book states: "IQ testing and widespread acceptance of 'innate' abilities . . . have created much misdirected public policy, especially in education." I infer from this quote the author is concerned that *too much* attention or funding is devoted to students with innate ability, which should strike readers as curious after reading the summary findings of the most recent state-of-the-state report from NAGC (www.nagc.org):

• The federal government's support for gifted children stands at only 2 cents of every $100 dollars it invests in K-12 education.

• Only 5 states require all teachers to receive pre-service training in gifted and talented education.

• Only 5 states require annual professional development for teachers in specialized gifted and talented programs.

• The majority of gifted children are placed in the regular classroom setting where most teachers have little to no specialized training in gifted education.

Since the NAGC report's publication in 2009, monies for gifted have been zeroed out at the Federal level: there are no targeted funds for gifted students coming from NCLB, and as reflected in the report, the states are certainly not compensating. Add to the malign neglect described in the NAGC summary above the fact that virtually the entire educational enterprise (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Response to Intervention, Reading Recovery) is devoted to compensatory programming for those achieving below standard or grade level, and one is left wondering how anyone can imply the gifted are somehow receiving elitist "favored treatment." I for one would be rendered catatonic if gifted education received funding and support remotely approaching equity, though I'm hoping to live to see the day!

In my introduction to this article, I promised I would take the authors' assertions and turn them on their head to justify the necessity of gifted programs and services, and I will close by doing so. The authors discussed in this article are united in the belief that hard work, effort, and persistence are required if talent development is to reach fruition, as encapsulated in Colvin's (2008) description of "deliberate practice," which appears on the jacket cover of *Talent is Overrated*: "Deliberate practice isn't the kind of hard work your parents told you about. It's difficult. It hurts. But more of it equals better performance. Tons of it equals great performance."

If we were to grant that Colvin is correct regarding the singular efficacy of the "practice effect," and if in addition we embraced credulity and granted that innate abilities are not relevant, we would still be left with the fact that students in schools are grouped by age, and therefore instruction is often targeted to an age-based median, inevitably meaning some students are below the median, and some are above. If gifted students are to encounter the difficult, challenging, hard work that requires persistence, effort, and even occasional "failure," then schools will have to address and rectify the grotesque inequities in the current system, which all but abandon "readier" students, leaving them without the very challenges the authors correctly insist are needed for individuals to develop optimally.

Once again, Gagné's DMGT anticipated the concept of deliberate practice and other catalysts: the bridge connecting gifts to talents is the developmental process, which can only be "developmental" if it is challenging. If the authors I have critiqued are as *authentically* (as opposed to coercively) egalitarian as they purport to be, they should join gifted advocates in demanding a developmental process in education that is sufficiently flexible, challenging, rigorous, and relevant to require *all* of our students to engage in the "deliberate practice" that will allow them to develop their talent(s) to the best of their ability, whatever that ability may be.

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Teaching Ahab

Jay McIntire

Jay McIntire
is the former executive director of the Texas Association for Gifted and Talented and has served on the public policy committee for NAGC. Currently, he is a superintendent of schools in New Hampshire.

Parents are constantly adjusting to the changing needs of their children. For me this summer, it was adjusting to my 7-year-old son's broken arm. Our planned bike trip was delayed; his love of swimming had to be deferred for a month; and the kenpo (karate) classes he'd just begun were put on hold. Our family faced the task of giving him a great, adaptive summer without shortchanging our 5-year old who wanted to do all of the typical summer activities.

Many teachers and families accommodate to difficult situations facing their children or to children who present difficulties themselves. Youngsters have a tendancy to simply refuse to do (or eat, or watch, or try) anything they don't want to. Giftedness can add another complexity to difficult children, but also can provide opportunities for adults to channel a child's obstinate nature.

Many of us know gifted children or youth who are extremely driven in their area of interest, but who are indifferent to or obstinately avoid activities or school subjects that don't suit their fancy or that don't interest them. I sometimes refer to this variety of gifted child as an "Ahab." Like the famous captain of the Pequod, Ahabs (who can be boys or girls) are driven by one vision, one passion, or one overarching concern that seems impossible to influence.

Such gifted kids allocate their effort and attention based on rigid internalized rules or to a well-established aspiration. Many kids go through a pony phase or a dinosaur phase, but for Ahabs these are not phases – they are more like all-encompassing obsessions. All children need direction from the adults in their lives, but these kids seem immune to external suggestion or motivation. I have known such children who have categorically refused to do homework, or to do homework in subjects they don't think matter – spelling

and penmanship have been the most common in my experience. Once Ahabs decide something is important, or isn't, it seems that no amount of reward or punishment can influence them which can cause the adults in their lives frustration and worry. These adults need to provide opportunities for Ahabs to thrive in their interest area, but also to learn ancillary knowledge and skills that these youngsters will need to be successful later in life.

If a student is truly unwilling or unable to take an interest outside of their chosen field, the most effective strategy for their caretakers and educators is to accept the child's passion and seek to expand their interests by tying other subjects to the child's individual vision. Avoid at all cost the inclination to punish an Ahab by denying him or her access to their passion. The negative consequences are almost certain to outweigh any success.

Back when I was teaching elementary and middle school gifted students, I was unable to convince the identification committee that a certain 7th grade girl should be identified as gifted and enrolled in my program for students who were generally intellectually gifted. The comments were along the lines of, "She dedicates all her time to the theater and is getting all the stimulation and advanced learning from it that she can handle." Others felt that her complete devotion to theater would make her unwilling to engage in my more academically oriented program. They did not deny that she had ability, but felt that she did not have a need and would not benefit. They also felt that teachers were having a hard enough time getting her to do her best work in some core academic subjects because her interests were elsewhere. It did not make sense to give her another distraction, they felt. Although I was unable to work with her on a regular basis, I did have informal opportunities to help her.

"Accept the child's passion and seek to expand their interests by tying other subjects to the child's individual vision."

This young woman was fully dedicated to her acting craft. She excelled in the writing component of her language arts class and was an eager reader. She was moderately interested in social studies, but was difficult to engage in math and science. Although she was not in my program, I did have a good informal relationship with her. In K's eighth grade year, I was approached by one of her teachers who asked if I would help her select a science fair project. The science fair was mandatory in this small, rural middle school, with all teachers helping students select projects, learn and write about them, develop visual representations, and communicate about them using visual and written media as well as preparing oral presentations. I met a few times with K- and it didn't take us long to settle on a project. From it she refined her skills in expository writing, art, statistical analysis, and psychobiology. Most important from a motivational standpoint, it was going to help her be more successful in theater.

K's project was simple and elegant. It was her own twist on the classic psychological tool the "thematic apperception test" (TAT). The TAT is a projective test in which subjects are shown ambiguous pictures of people and are asked to tell a story about the picture. The stories can be interpreted to provide insight into many aspects of the test subject, including their personality, attitudes, motives, and conflicts.

K showed individual classmates black and white pictures of people interacting. There were no captions to the pictures and the emotional state of those depicted was ambiguous. The students were asked to identify the feeling of a specific character in the picture. The experimental aspect of the project was that when her classmates viewed the pictures, they were bathed in tinted light. By analyzing how the subjects' perception of emotion in the picture varied based on the color of light, she validated the literature on how the colors of stage lights influence the emotional experience of an audience at a play.

My productive relationship with K ultimately led to my convincing her to participate in the math team I coached even though she was generally a disinterested math student. Although I was not one of K's teachers, I was asked my opinion when it came time for her parents to decide which high school she would attend. I advised one that had a strong theater program, but also had a reputable gifted program that could encourage her to excel in academics as a way to expand her opportunities as an adult.

Did K win the science fair? No, she didn't. After all, she got a very late start on her project and there were other gifted students in the school, some of whom were deeply immersed in science. She did, nevertheless, engage actively and produce a high-quality project that had strong science content and had meaning for her.

What's this young woman up to now? I don't know if she is still involved with the theater, but last year she published her first book, the first scholarly biography of a 20th century Nobel Prize winner.

So, what do we learn from this student that applies to someone near and dear to you?

Gifted children, like all children, vary in innumerable ways. Two of them seem to be their internal versus external motivation and the breadth or myopia of their interests. For those who are internally driven and motivated and tend toward the myopic, it is often essential for parents and educators to "play along," tolerate the singularity of interest, and help the student realize that success in whatever endeavor they envision will be more likely, easier to achieve, or can be at a higher level if other skills are honed. Only by showing a child how broad knowledge serves their individual passion can some students be motivated to study outside their area of interest.

Another Ahab I know was a young man who was highly gifted and grade accelerated. He was very small in stature compared to his classmates, and was very vocal about his academic superiority. In fact, he was downright mean to his peers. This was a very focused young man who aspired to be President and had his trajectory to the White House well planned. He pointed out to me the high percentage of presidents who had served in the military, so he planned to do so. He pointed out that being educated at an elite university was an advantage. When I asked him about political party affiliation he was very pointed in telling me that if one did not join one of the parties and work to further its interests, one's chances of being taken seriously, much less elected, were minute. He informed me at 11 years old that he was a democrat. He studied history carefully and was very interested in developing his writing and speaking

"Only by showing a child how broad knowledge serves their individual passion can some students be motivated to study outside their area of interest."

skills. When asked about his sometimes testy relationship with his peers, he once told me that he was honing his skills in debate.

He was highly internally driven, but luckily for him and his teachers his goal was one that was easy to guide toward broad academic success. If he were seeking to be elected in a strict meritocracy, he might have been doing all the right things, but he could not have won an election of his own classmates. When I brought up the conflict between his admittedly poor peer relations and his desire to win a nomination and an election, he seemed genuinely stunned. It had not occurred to him that as well as learning to debate, he also needed to learn to earn the respect of others. Belittling them did not seem productive.

After high school, this young man went on to excel in military training while attending an elite university. If he took what I suggested to him about his peer relations to heart, I fully expect to see him on the democratic presidential ticket one day.

My message is this – creative, motivated adults serve these gifted students well by finding reasons for the students to broaden their thinking and learning. The only way I have found to do so is to point out how doing so will serve the student's self-interest.

David Henry Feldman and Lynn Goldsmith, in their 1991 classic, "Nature's Gambit: Child Prodigies and the Development of Human Potential" identified the fields in which precocious performance is most common. My belief is that these overlap with the types of fields in which students are most apt to develop a singular passion. I find that there are science kids, theater kids, and (visual) arts kids who are hard to shake from their areas of interest. Students singularly focused on computers/technology, math, and music are out there and are identified by Feldman and Goldsmith, but I've found these students to frequently be eclectic learners. Gifted readers are also frequently easy to convince that reading broadly has

advantages, although some science fiction aficionados can be very limited in their choices.

Students whose interest in science turns them away from writing, speaking, and social sciences can often be swayed by giving them access to lectures by eminent scientists and by demonstrating that their role models had to communicate in some manner with those in their fields in order to change scientific understanding. The arts can be especially difficult for science students, but projects on the physics of music, the science of color, or the application of visual literacy skills across virtually all fields of science can meet the needs of the most rigorous art teacher while allowing the student to learn something that they can embrace as important within their limited scope of interest/tolerance.

Such projects can also be used to lure budding artists to tackle projects that will please science teachers. Of course few of these ideas will be tolerated in a school that does not embrace differentiation of instruction and does not understand that in order to teach state-mandated content, we have to teach individual students, some of whom already know what's in the textbook or simply won't attend to it unless it seems germane to their vision.

Gifted students who have chosen a life course can be hard to sway, but that's a good thing. Without singularity of purpose they would not work hard enough or well enough to generate new ideas. They can, however, be convinced to learn the ancillary skills necessary to get the grades needed to get into college, to write well enough to communicate their ideas, or to apply science to become more effective in the theater. Without the ability to command a crew (albeit not perfectly), Ahab would have been just a deranged seaman.

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A Firm Grasp of the Obvious

Lou Lloyd-Zannini

Just for fun, let me make a couple of wild guesses about you. First, were I a betting man, I'd bet that since you're reading this journal, you are either personally or professionally involved with at least one gifted kid other than yourself. Second, I'm thinking that unless you're one of our readers from "down under," another academic year is either just about to start, or has just started.

So how did I do? Am I two for two? I sure hope so, because if I am, then I've just demonstrated that I've got a firm grasp of the obvious, and that, frankly, is the basis of this edition's Water Cooler: Renewing our grasp of the obvious.

At schools across the nation right now, student athletes in pony leagues, high schools and colleges are getting ready for football season. Many of them will hear their coaches give some rendition of Vince Lombardi's classic practice opener: "Gentlemen, this is a football." Lombardi knew that unless his players had a firm grasp of the obvious, the season was over before it even began.

But what does all that have to do with us in the field of gifted education? A lot, really, because unless we've got a firm grasp of the very basics, those obvious things that occasionally we need to review for ourselves, especially as another school year – another "season" of gifted education, if you would – is kicking off, our season is over before it has even begun.

Mercifully, I'm not going to carry the football analogy too much farther, largely because I stink at sports, and one of you is going to pick me up on it. (Besides, I never could get very far on a carry.) But without stretching even a little, we can draw a few similarities between football (and most other team

sports, for that matter) and gifted education: they are high-stakes, they involve a number of players working as a team to win – no matter how good the star player is, and they can be absolutely brutal if not played by the rules.

So with your kind indulgence, let's review a handful of things that all of us should keep in mind as we pull together for this new season of gifted education. They'll all be obvious, but they all need to be addressed if the game, and the season, are to go well.

Identify the game.
The last thing anyone wants to do is suit up for football and wind up playing tennis! Yet many times, parents and teachers of the gifted do just that – they come prepared for a cordial conversation, and wind up in a hostile showdown, or they come loaded for bear, and discover that their audience was actually cordial. Knowing the game, and being prepared to play by the rules in force is a critical skill, especially if we're involving our gifted kids in any sort of self-advocacy.

As a parent of a gifted child, I need to be aware of what "game" the school is playing, and what the rules of engagement are. Is administration for, against, or oblivious to, the needs of the gifted? Are teachers willing and able to discern and differentiate to meet the needs of gifted kids? Does the district support gifted programming? These are the very basic things we need to find out before we attempt to engage on our child's behalf.

What's the "game" of gifted education like in your child's school or district? Is it a collaborative and friendly environment – a partnership between parents and school – or is it closer to a wrestling match? Whichever it is, before it starts, before you engage, be sure that you've identified the game, that you know the rules of play, and that you show up ready for the right interaction.

Know the players.
Whatever the "game" of gifted education looks like in your location, it's critical to know who the players are. Who are the key participants in your local gifted arena? What are their strengths? What causes them to go to the sidelines? Who can we count on to pass off if they're in trouble, or to score in a tight situation? Who do we know will likely attempt to block our path, and maybe even emotionally or verbally slide tackle us, or body check us into the boards? Can we count on our collaborators to hang in when things get a little dicey? Who is likely to stay, and who is likely to cut and run? How willing are our teammates to "play" in the face of adversity?

Not only do we need to know the players, but we also need to know their favorite moves. Just as athletes do, parents, teachers and administrators of the gifted all have certain "plays" – behaviors, critical interactions, toss-off or engagement lines – that they favor, and tend to invoke, especially in a difficult situation. Knowing what the other players are apt to do in certain situations is critical if we are to be prepared to get past those situations and default responses,

and move forward toward achieving our team's goals: maintaining or improving the quality of education for our gifted kids. We have to know the players.

Figure out who is on which side.
Okay, I know this sounds really obvious. But really, before we get engaged in play, we need to know who is on our team, and who is on the other "side." While it may sound a bit adversarial to think of gifted education in terms of opposing teams, that's often the reality. Every school/district is working with significantly limited funding, and any verbalized new need is going to compete with already existing and underfunded needs, creating the potential for a hostile response.

Sadly, sometimes even those who we might think would be our collaborators, may surprise us with a competing need. (Just look at CEC if you think I'm kidding!) When there are limited resources, folks tend to polarize on their greatest need. So be sure that your "team" is all dedicated to the same proposition. Before the game is on, know who's with you and who's likely to oppose you.

Play hard, but fair.
One of the great life attitudes that I took with me from my involvement in the early days of "new games" was the proposition that we should play hard, play fair, and make sure that nobody gets hurt. What a great analogy for the game of gifted education!

Gifted education, and meeting the needs of gifted kids, is not a dispassionate enterprise. People come to the game ready to play hard. When you get right down to it, that's a good thing, because when we're fully engaged, we're at our best, and most prone to really make progress. But if we don't play fairly, things can rapidly degenerate to educational equivalent of a brawl at a soccer meet, with hostility and hard feelings all around, and no winner – just losers.

If we're going to engage in the game of gifted education, we have to be committed to playing hard, and playing fair. We need to hold the other team to the same standard: fairness and full engagement. And most of all, we need to make sure that no one gets hurt – especially our gifted kids, who have the most to lose if the game goes badly. Remember, being nice doesn't win the game, but being ugly doesn't either!

One more thought as we consider playing hard, and it comes to me from an athletic trainer friend who made an important distinction clear to me. Sometimes, when play is intense, a player "goes down." In those times, as the coaching and medical staff gather around the fallen player, they work to determine if it's hurt or if it's injured. If it's hurt, the player can shake it off and get back into play with no long term damage. But if it's injured, that player needs immediately to come out of the game for appropriate treatment. To play on an injury will just make it even worse, and possibly even a crippling event.

Sometimes, as we engage in spirited debate with those who see things differently

than we do, there can be a verbal collision where someone goes down, when something is said or implied that takes the wind out of one of the players. When that happens, we need to decide if it's hurt or injured. If the latter is true, before we can continue the game, we must address the injury appropriately, and be sure that we've resolved the issue before we resume play. It's a significant distinction, and we need to be attentive to it.

Focus on winning.
Okay, here's the last chunk of the obvious: If we don't set goals, we'll never achieve them. And if we fail to plan, we plan to fail. As we consider this "season" of gifted education, we need to go into it with identifiable, achievable, observable, and measurable goals, as well as a plan for reaching those goals.

I love the late Charles Schultz's Peanuts comic strips. One of my favorites has Charlie Brown shooting an arrow into a fence, then running up to it and drawing the circles of a target around the head of the arrow. When Lucy confronts him with her usual, sweet, "Charlie Brown, you knucklehead, what are you doing?" Charlie tells her that this way, he always gets a bullseye.

In my years in this field, I've seen a lot of Charlie Browns – well-intended folks who don't really have a goal or a plan, but want to make things better. Sadly, they seldom accomplish anything beyond getting frustrated.

So don't be a Charlie Brown. Set clear goals for what you want to accomplish this year – whether it be pulling together a program where there is none, or changing identification protocols, or convincing the school to encourage dual enrollments, or getting curriculum acceleration accepted as an appropriate model for gifted learners, or… The list is endless. But you can't do them all at once. So pick one, and then go for it, with everything you've got.

Plan your approach. Think through your strategies and options. Hope for a best-case scenario, and plan for the worst. And then play to win. Don't settle for second best.

So there you have it: a handful of simple and basic things we should keep in mind as we start into this year's season of gifted education. But they're also critical things, and if we fail to remember any of them, we – our gifted kid[s] and us – will likely not have a great season, and could ultimately lose the game. And while in sports, that's not life-threatening, in the lives and education of our gifted children, it is.

Go out. Play hard. Have a magnificent season. And remember: Though winning isn't everything, it's a whole lot better than the alternative!

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MUSINGS

What do gifted young adults who have been accelerated want for their own children?

Miraca U.M. Gross

What do academically young people who have been accelerated think and feel about acceleration? And how much are their perceptions influenced by their own experience?

Between 2002 and 2004, with two good friends and colleagues from the University of Iowa, Professors Nicholas Colangelo and Susan Assouline, I wrote (Volume 1) and edited (Volume 2) of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, a two volume report which synthesized more than 80 years of international research on the use of academic acceleration with intellectually gifted children and adolescents (Colangelo, Assouline and Gross, 2004). It is available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Russian and Spanish.

Development of the report was funded by the John Templeton Foundation of Pennsylvania. The late Sir John Templeton was concerned – as were Nick, Susan and I – about the underutilization of acceleration as an intervention for young people who are gifted. Through a comprehensive review of American and international research on acceleration we identified several reasons why schools and teachers are so often reluctant to allow gifted students to move through school at their own pace, undertaking work set at their own level of readiness, rather than at the pace and readiness of their classmates.

We found that educators' wariness of academic acceleration arose from two main clusters of concerns. The first of these clusters focused on the perception that "pushing" gifted children through school ahead of the normal pace would result in lowered academic achievement or even academic failure. The second cluster focused on the social and emotional difficulties that teachers believed would arise if gifted children were required to socialize with older children rather than with "peers". Disturbingly, Nick, Susan and I noted that in discussions of acceleration, the considerable majority of teachers, building principals and community members used the term "peers" specifically, and only, to denote children of similar chronological age- and that was a concern for us! There seemed to be little awareness that, for gifted children, ongoing contact with ability peers might be of equal, or even greater, importance in their academic and social development.

The teachers and school administrators we interviewed seemed to have very little knowledge of the research findings on the educational and social outcomes of acceleration; in many cases their perceptions of acceleration seemed to be derived from the print or television media (remember Doogie Howser, the 16-year-old doctor in the 1990s television series?) and from social mythology. If a child who had not been accelerated was experiencing academic or social difficulties at school, the teachers speculated on a wide range of possible causes. However, if the child had been accelerated the difficulties he or she was experiencing were almost invariably attributed directly to the acceleration and, in general, the educators did not look further to identify alternate or additional factors. Disturbingly, this blaming of acceleration for a student's difficulties occurred even when the student had already experienced similar difficulties before being accelerated!

How do young people who have been accelerated feel about acceleration?

Since the early 1980s, I have been engaged in a longitudinal study of the academic, emotional and social development of 60 young Australians who, as children, scored at or above IQ 160 on the *Stanford-Binet L-M* either as the original test (before 1992) or as a supplementary test after having earlier ceilinged out on the *SB Revision IV* or *WISC-III* (the versions of these tests then current). People scoring at this level appear in the population at ratios fewer than 1 in 10,000. The majority of the subjects are now in their late 20s or early 30s.

A small number of earlier studies has followed the academic and social development of exceptionally gifted (IQ 160-179) and profoundly gifted (IQ 180+) children through to adulthood, e.g. the Burks, Jensen and Terman (1930) sub-study of children of

Retaining a child of IQ 160 in the regular classroom… is rather like placing a child of IQ 100 in a class of severely intellectually delayed students of average IQ 40…

IQ 170+ within Terman's longitudinal study and Hollingworth's (1926, 1942) study of young people of IQ 180+.

A major focus of these studies has been schools' response to these young people's extraordinary abilities. A consistent finding of these studies, and other, shorter-term studies, e.g. Gallagher and Crowder (1957), Sheldon (1959), Janos (1983), Silverman and Kearney (1989), is that retaining exceptionally and profoundly gifted children in the regular (mixed-ability) classroom most often leads to serious underachievement. Furthermore, and equally disturbingly, it very often leads to social isolation and emotional distress.

Retaining a child of IQ 160 in the regular classroom and expecting normal achievement and socialization is rather like placing a child of IQ 100 in a class of severely intellectually delayed students of average IQ 40, and expecting her to achieve to the level of her potential and develop fulfilling social relationships. Children and adolescents of IQ 160+ are too different from their age-peers of average ability in their abilities, their interests and their social-emotional development to allow the development of lasting friendships.

Of the 60 young people in my study:

• 17 were radically accelerated (generally through three thoughtfully spaced grade-skips) and graduated from high school three or more years earlier than customary.

• 10 were accelerated by one or two years.

• The remaining 33, the majority, were retained for the entirety of their schooling in a lockstep curriculum with age-peers in what was, ironically, termed the inclusion classroom. None was permitted full-time ability grouping.

In most cases, the last thing the inclusion classroom students felt was included! They were socially isolated and many were, in fact, rejected by their classmates. Their academic abilities, their reading interests, their hobbies and their play preferences

were more akin to those of older children. They had virtually nothing in common with children of their own age.

Even the one-year accelerands found that after the initial glow of having somewhat harder work wore off, they were almost as bored as they had been earlier. They found it almost as difficult to form friendships as it had been in the mainstream classroom. By contrast, the two-year accelerands and the radical accelerands formed warm and productive social relationships with their new classmates and excelled in the more challenging and rigorous curriculum they were offered.

How has acceleration or non-acceleration in school affected social relationships in adulthood?

The majority of the radical accelerands (15 of 17) and two-year accelerands (3 of 4) are married or in long-term love relationships.

Having experienced their first acceleration in the early years of school they learned, early in their school experience, that they were liked by, and socially accepted by, their classmates. This allowed them to feel confident in forming social relationships in later years.

By contrast, young people who have never been accelerated, and those one-year accelerands who were not accelerated until the later years of elementary school and who were rejected by classmates in the early years of school, have had significant difficulties as adolescents and adults in forming warm or fulfilling social or love relationships. They learned early in their schooling that they were not readily accepted by their age-peers and this message has stayed with them making them reluctant to take the risk of further social rejection.

What do these exceptionally and profoundly gifted young people want for their own children?

Young people who were radically accelerated

Without exception they want for their children what they themselves received – an individualized response from the school which would almost certainly include some form of acceleration - possibly radical acceleration if the child's needs merited this. They accept completely that this would depend on their children's academic and social development.

"It depends on his ability level, of course, but my mother says he is *so* like what I was at that age that I think it's probable that he'll develop as extremely bright. *No way* would I want him stuck in the mainstream class like I was for the first three years. So . . acceleration, yes almost certainly. Radical acceleration . . .yes, possibly - but if we do it, we'll take it in stages like they did with me." (Shaun, aged 29.)

"Well, as you know she was talking at 7 months and speaking in sentences before her first birthday. .

and her early enrollment in school has been just great. She's loving it and topping the class despite being 18 months younger than the others. And she has great friendships. Jan and I want that to continue, so if she outgrows her classmates, up she goes! No hesitation! If she needs more, up she goes again." (Geoff, aged 30).

Two-year grade-skip? Absolutely. We should have done that with (his older brother) rather than just one. We may yet, too! He (older brother) handled the Year 3 grade-skip beautifully and I don't want him (younger brother) to waste the last year of primary *and* the second year of secondary like I did. He prefers to socialize with kids who're two or three years older anyway so I think he'd fit in just fine." (Tricia, aged 33).

One-year accelerands

"I'd want him to have that **at least**. I would have wanted more than one grade-skip myself because after the first few weeks . . the excitement of finally *learning* something . . . school became just as tedious as it had been at the start. I think my mother actually spoke to the school about another skip but they weren't having any." (Claire, aged 28)

"I'd want her to have more than one grade-skip. For me a single acceleration didn't even scratch the surface. In fact in some ways it was worse than no acceleration at all because in the beginning I *experienced* the euphoria of suddenly getting work that challenged me and it was like 'Hey, this stuff's hard and I can still do it!'

But then when I'd mastered it – quite quickly too - the work became boring again. Mum asked the school if I could skip again and they said, 'Well, no, he's leveled out and we don't want to risk stressing him.' *Stressing me*???" (Peron, aged 31).

Young people who were never accelerated

"*If* I marry and *if* I have children and *if* they are bright, I certainly wouldn't want them going through school lockstep as I did. So, I suppose, yes acceleration. But I've never had it myself so I'd be wary. If it's so good why didn't the school let me do it? . . . Well, actually I know why they didn't . . I won too many awards for them!. . I made them look good . . they wouldn't have wanted to miss out on that if I left too soon. . . But all the same, I'm not sure . . It might be just too great a risk." John, aged 30

"The school held me hostage in my own grade level and used me to carry off a lot of inter-school prizes. If they'd let me move up I wouldn't have won so many awards. That's really what it was all about." Penny, aged 29

Exceptionally and profoundly gifted young adults who have had personal experience of acceleration are willing (or more than willing!) to consider it for their own children. They know that the bad press acceleration attracts is unjustified. They've tried it and it works.

By contrast, equally gifted young adults who have been retained with age-peers throughout their schooling are reluctant to "risk" acceleration for their children. They *are* influenced by the bad press because they have no personal experience to set against it.

The more acceleration is employed within a school system, the more visible its success becomes to school administrators, teachers, parents and students. If schools fail to use it, educators, parents and students have no opportunity to evaluate its success. The message is clear and simple. Where and when acceleration will benefit gifted students, use it.

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Getting ready for school

Cheryl Franklin-Rohr

At the beginning of the school year, hope is alive with new beginnings, new teachers, new counselors, new schools or new environments. A fresh, new start can be positive, but it can also bring problems. Will the new teacher/administrator/school understand my child's instructional and emotional needs?

It is critical to begin the new school year on a positive note, and one way to begin this process is to open lines of communication with the new teacher and/or school. Even if your child has an IEP or a 504, you cannot assume that all critical information will be shared with everyone who works with your child. This is especially true if your child has changed schools or districts. So make sure that you have copies of your child's IEP or 504, as well as the Advanced Learning Plan (ALP).

At the elementary level, one way that I find helpful to share important information was to schedule a meeting at the beginning of the school year. You need a specific time set aside to meet with the classroom teacher to share your child's strengths, interests and challenges as well as strategies and/or interventions that have worked well in the past. Don't try to share this information at Back to School night; you will not have enough time and you and the teacher will both feel rushed. One error that I made with my son's teachers was to assume that the classroom teacher shared this information with all the staff who worked with my son. However, it doesn't always work that way. You will need to share this with the specials teachers, the classroom aides, the principal, lunchroom aides, etc.

At the middle school level, it is important to bring your child into the conversation. Your child needs to learn how to assert his/herself, but will need guidance from you. If your

"…a positive working relationship between the student and the teacher is the most critical factor in a high school's student's success."

child is on a team in the middle school, it is better to meet with the entire team together, including elective teachers, counselors, GT teacher (if there is one), Special Education teacher, etc. When all of the teachers sit down together, hear the same message, with your child at the same time, it will open up communication. Sometimes miscommunication happens, but frequently it was the student who would cause this miscommunication. If the parent and the teacher are having problems in communication, then the student has focused the attention on someone else; he/she is not in the spotlight any more.

At the high school level, your child needs to have the skills to share his/her strength areas, interests, and challenges. At this time of your child's education, your child should know what accommodations and/or modifications are necessary to be successful and then schedule a meeting with the teacher to share this information. At high school, I have found that a positive working relationship between the student and the teacher is the most critical factor in a high school's student's success. When a teacher understands what your child needs, then that teacher will be able to differentiate more effectively. Additionally, a student will work harder for a teacher that he/she likes respects.

Your child will always have some challenges in life, but these challenges can be more effectively addressed when open communication is part of the process. As the parent, you establish the pattern for this type of communication and advocacy while he or she is at school, a pattern your child can continue to use for preventing and solving problems in various life situations.

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Write for *Understanding Our Gifted*

Understanding Our Gifted is published quarterly as an online publication. The schedule and themes for upcoming issues are:

Issue	Publication Date	Article/Column Deadline	Theme
Fall 2011	Oct 15	Sep 15	Effective Assessment
Winter 2012	Jan 15	Dec 1	Differentation
Spring 2012	Apr 15	Mar 1	Bullying and the Gifted
Summer 2012	Jul 15	Jun 1	Home Schooling

Writers' Guidelines for *Understanding Our Gifted* can be found here. For more information, contact Acquisitions Editor, Sandra Berger, at sandraberger@erols.com or publisher, Kristin Ludwig, at kristin@our-gifted.com

Critique *Understanding Our Gifted*

Understanding Our Gifted is **your** journal. You may have noticed that this edition has some slight format changes on which we'd like your feedback. We'd also like comments, ideas, suggestions to help create a journal that is helpful to you. Please consider some of the aspects listed below and give us your opinion.

Layout -- Are the columns too narrow, too wide? Is the text easy to read? Should the overall size remain 8 1/2 x 11?

Content -- What would you like to see as a theme? Do we need more information for parents? For educators? For students? Would a column with links to pertinent websites (like Sandra Berger's former column) be helpful? What other sorts of information would you like to see?

Writers -- Are there any writers in the gifted field you feel would be a good match for *Understanding Our Gifted*?

Anything else?

Please email your comments to kristin@our-gifted.com and thank you for your feedback!