# CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Newsletter of the Conceptual Foundations Network of the National Association for Gifted Children

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## Reaching Out and Making It Real

In any field it is often useful to step back and think, are we getting our message out there? This is particularly important to the field of gifted education because we don't seem to be doing a great job of this. What is really going on? In this issue Elizabeth Romey promotes this sociocultural exploration in her discussion of Felicia's Dixon's NAGC conference presentation on the dissemination of ideas in gifted education among the public. Jim Delisle continues the theme as he compares the field of gifted education through the metaphor of film. Jean Peterson takes a slightly different approach in her discussion of research on the real lived experience of giftedness.

So how can we bridge the gap between ideas and practice in order to create real change? One answer is provided by Julie Lenner McDonald and Todd Kettler in their discussion of leadership on the front lines of gifted education. Another is in the tribute to John Feldhusen given by Abbey Cash. We must not forget the contributions of our past scholars. We need to stop repeating our history. And finally we look to the future of information dissemination. Marla Capper reviews the four most viewed WebPages about gifted education in our "book" review section. We also are excited to announce our presence on Facebook! Let's make sure we are a vehicle of real dialogue!

~ Erin Morris Miller, Editor

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS CHAIR

**Robert Schultz, PhD**

### Being Advocates for Our Cause

With your leadership team having endured the latest round of conference proposal evaluations, we have developed a strong program for Atlanta. I will leave you in a bit of suspense, but let me intrigue you by sharing that our sessions are cutting edge while also uniquely historical. I am sure you will enjoy the offerings and be proud that you belong to this network!

As I discussed at our Network meeting last year, a focal goal I have is to increase our membership—specifically at the graduate student level. One of the only ways we can ensure a high quality group of developing professionals is to invite people to come together and join the discussions that ground our field. As I see it, our network holds the responsibility of passing down the legacy of the field's history, research base, and scholarly accomplishments. We serve as advocates for gifted individuals; and now, we must also serve as advocates for our own cause in order to grow our network—and ultimately our field.

So, start discussions and invite graduate students that you know to get involved with our Network. Invite

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them to contribute to this newsletter. Invite them to get involved in the conversations that swirl within our ranks. To further assist you in this invitational process, I will be putting together a "reception" for new graduate student members to our network. Check with me for details.

Finally, as we each head into a little "down time" over the summer months, consider formulating and developing an article or think-aloud piece to add to our newsletter. It doesn't have to be an epic; it can be 500-750 words. What it does need to be is engaging, thoughtful, or provocative. Share a belief you have, or a controversial contention. These are the "seeds" of discussion and deliberation that our Network needs to plant within our field to invigorate our growth and development.

And, lastly (at least in this column!), a book to add to your summer reading list is *Teaching By Numbers* (Peter Taubman, 2009). It will likely infuriate you, but in a good way. Taubman provides a clear discussion about the broad field of education and the (negative) influence accountability has had. He doesn't offer up solutions; but does carve out a deftly defined space that we in the field of Gifted Child Education can use as a starting point for promoting our core efforts on behalf of children in a broader way.

Carpe Diem!

***Be a Friend!***

***Be a Part of the Conceptual Foundations Network's Page on Facebook***

## Look Who's Talking (and Listening)!

## The Importance of Cultural Depictions of Foundational Concepts in Gifted Education

**Elizabeth A. Romey, PhD**
Network Chair-elect

As a member of the Network leadership, I sometimes find myself so busy helping to arrange sessions, participate in meetings, and generally "pitch in" that I forget to attend the presentations themselves! However, one session that I made a point to attend was Felicia Dixon's presentation on depictions of giftedness in popular culture—and I'm glad I did, as it perfectly expressed my own perspective on what conceptual foundations of gifted education truly is.

Dr. Dixon provided a variety of examples of films, movies, and other media that depict gifted individuals; more to the point, she discussed how to discuss stereotyping (and its kinder cousin, archetyping) of giftedness issues with gifted students. The presentation has inspired at least one of our members to conduct her own action research on the responses of her own classes of secondary-level gifted students to depictions of giftedness in film—an important result in itself.

However, what struck me most powerfully about the presentation was its implicit acknowledgement of how ideas about giftedness are actually disseminated among the general public. I don't think any of us are under the delusion that anyone outside the field of education reads our research articles—and usually, our readership is confined not only to colleagues, but those who are either reading them for a class assignment or a literature review for their own research. In other words, as far as scholarly work goes, we're talking to, or at least amongst, ourselves.

Dr. Dixon's presentation takes the important step of looking at what people *are* actually reading, and watching, about our students—examining the sources of information and perception in popular culture that are actually being absorbed, not only by gifted students themselves, but by the rest of the people with whom they interact.

To me, this kind of sociocultural perspective on giftedness lies at the heart of the Conceptual Foundations Network, and is in fact what drew me to the network in the first place, and inspired me to take an active leadership role. I see the mission of our network as exploring, not only the foundational concepts put forth by the established and emerging leaders in our field, but also the broader cultural perspectives and paradigms in which they, and all of us as educators, do our work with gifted individuals. Part of this role includes situating education, and gifted education specifically, in its rightful place among the rest of the social sciences, by examining how perspectives in history, political science, and philosophy, among other fields, have influenced and shaped our field, and been shaped by it in turn. But it also involves being aware of larger cultural forces, outside the context of the scholarly disciplines—the perspectives and positions held by the general public, outside the "ivory tower" of academe, which will ultimately have the most impact on what services we are able to provide for our students.

As citizens of a democracy, we are subject to majority rule, which means that whatever ideas are presented to the majority through sources in popular culture will ultimately be those that are put into practice. Thus, it behooves us in gifted education, and especially in Conceptual Foundations, to be aware of, and sensitive to, not only the foundational concepts in our field, but the concepts that form the foundation of the rest of the world's view of the population that we serve--- and to prepare our students to do the same as well.

***How does it feel to be a sandwich? Yet another adventure in gifted education class...***

# Gifted Education Goes Hollywood: A Film-Lover's Guide to Our Field's Future

**Jim Delisle, PhD**

I've always been a fan of the movies, enjoying with equal verve the cuteness of *E.T.* and the evil of Lord Voldemort; the scruffy love between Bogart and Hepburn in *The African Queen* and the wrong-on-so-many levels amorous adventures of 20-something "Harold" and 82 year old "Maude." Be it Judy Garland trekking to Oz in her ruby slippers or Morgan Freeman simply *Driving Miss Daisy* to her next unnecessary appointment, the movies have always brought me to exotic, outside places near and far, and to dramatic indoor spaces I'd rather have avoided seeing.

Intriguingly, when I consider some new and classic films and their characters, I am reminded of this field of study I have embraced as my own for the past 32 years: gifted child education. The characters and plots of many Hollywood classic films have much to teach us about the past, present and future of our field. So, sit back and relax, munch on some popcorn, and take this cinematic journey with me as we explore the exciting, volatile and (at times) exasperating field of gifted child education, as seen through a lens of movie magic.

Film #1: *Groundhog Day*

You remember the film: a bored, washed-up weatherman, played by Bill Murray, grabs the assignment of reporting the antics of Punxsutawney Phil on February 2. After a tedious day and a short night of sleep, Bill Murray's character awakens to a new dawn . . . on February 2. And the next day, too, is February 2. Day after tedious day, Bill Murray relives events that, to everyone around him, are as brand new as each fresh sunrise suggests, but to Bill, are a rehash of previous yesterdays.

After advocating for gifted children for more than three decades, I'm beginning to feel a bit of Bill Murray's frustration with sameness. As I examine what our field's principles and practices looked like when I began my work with gifted children in 1978, I get a disquieting sense that we haven't come very far.

As Yogi Berra said, "It's déjà vu all over again." Countless millions of dollars and billions of words extolling what we *must* do to help gifted children have been spent or spewed during these past 30 years, yet too many gifted children still sit in our nation's classrooms with their intellectual and emotional needs ignored. Too, a public more concerned with equity than excellence still raises the "elitism" issue as one reason why gifted education is unnecessary or undemocratic. After all, smart kids will make it on their own, won't they?

If I had to cite one reason for this malaise in momentum that has stuck our field in a rut for far too long, it would be that we cannot get our definitional house in order. While some are "stingy" with distributing giftedness to the top 1 – 3% of the population, others extol the benefits of identifying giftedness across intellectual, academic, artistic and creative domains, thereby increasing the number of gifted children exponentionally. *Until we can, as a field, agree on a common conception of giftedness that will guide our efforts from school to school, and State to State,* we will continue to experience the educational equivalent of *Groundhog Day*, waking up each morning to the disquieting sameness of the day before.

Film #2: *Twilight Zone: The Movie*

It's hard to forget the tinny music and baritone introduction that Rod Serling gave to his TV show and film: "You are traveling through another dimension, a dimension not of sight or sound, but of mind . . . ." In the case of gifted child education, Serling would then add the following: "you are entering, the Identification Black Hole."

It follows naturally that if we cannot even agree on the definition of giftedness, then *identifying* it would be problematic. Not to worry, though, for identification schemes abound that use an alphabetic mélange of tests—ITBS, SAT, and other fill-in-the-bubble equivalents—to quantify giftedness as a clear-cut case of ins and outs. Ninety-fifth percentile and above? Welcome to the world of gifted child education. Ninety-third percentile? So sorry, you fail to qualify.

The absurdity of trying to capture a trait as sublimely complex as intelligence with simplistic tools that were never intended to be used for such purposes confounds both educators and parents alike. Working under the misguided assumption that quantifiable precision equates with legitimacy, we have erred in two ways: we have over-identified high academic achievers as gifted, and we have under-identified low-performing students as non-gifted.

Some solutions?: I suggest returning to the widespread use of individual IQ tests, which are the best measurement tools yet devised by psychologists to inform us which children among many think in unique, sophisticated ways that leave others their age in the intellectual dust. No one scores 144 on the WISC by accident. Further, we need to consider as valid the expert opinions of professionals who know high intellect when they see it. I tell you what: if I have a veteran teacher who has seen hundreds or thousands of children come through her classroom over a decade or more, I am going to believe her observations of a child—any child—more than I am going to trust a one-day, one-time test score that doesn't either know or care if a particular child's test results were indicative of true ability or some anomaly, like an empty belly, a head full of mucus, or a heart stymied by the fear of doing poorly.

There is nothing valid about so-called objective measures that have little bulk and texture, and there is much to extol about the merits of teacher judgment in identifying children who think, feel, play and learn in a different, higher key than most.

Film #3: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*

There is no way to highlight the plight of gifted children in today's schools without paying homage to one of the silver screen's most lovable and compelling bad boys: Ferris Bueller. In this classic film, Matthew Broderick plays a high school senior with many well-planned absences, each one cleverly disguised as a necessary sick day. Instead of learning about the Great Depression from his social studies teacher ("Anyone??? Anyone???"), Ferris is tooling around downtown Chicago in a vintage 1961 Ferrari owned by his best friend's father, who keeps the car in the garage, never driving it but, in the words of his son, Cameron, "he just rubs it with a diaper."

Metaphorically speaking, Ferris experiences the same pent-up frustration as that garaged Ferrari: both of them are underperforming, neither being given the chance to race their respective engines to their intrinsic limits. The central question for gifted child advocates related to Ferris Bueller is this: *can we rev up our attention to underachievement?*

Since 1966, when a book by Jane Beasley Raph and Abraham Tannenbaum titled *Bright Underachievers*

appeared, up through the current day, the issue of underachievement among gifted students has been frustratingly difficult to reverse. I think I know why: if you look at much of the literature on methods of reversing underachievement, the majority of "solutions" are punitive and degrading. Instead of taking into account the real concerns of perennial underachievers—a lackluster curriculum, meaningless homework, little time to pursue topics of keen, personal interest in school—we remove those elements of life that are enjoyable (e.g. sports, driving privileges, computer access) until grades improve. Or, we place these students on contracts that address "performance goals" with little regard to the student's compelling insights into the purposeless curriculum he feels he is being asked to complete. In other words, *we require that the student do all the changing while the stifling situation he confronts in school remains virtually the same.*

In essence, underachievement is not a matter of *curriculum* it is an issue of *intellectual dignity*, a dignity that is denied every "underachieving" child whose views of his education are discarded as irrelevant. Gifted students are our allies, not our enemies; like us, they want a successful school experience for themselves. But as long as we keep "blaming" underachievement on the student, the resolution of this dilemma will remain elusive. In the name of *dignity*—our students' and our own—it is time to shift gears, and put that intellectual Ferrari in motion.

**Hurray for Hollywood!**

There are many more films that can teach us much about the field of gifted child education—*Get Smart* can teach us about the benefits of acceleration; *Stand By Me* shows us the importance of learning and living alongside an intellectual peer; *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is a testimonial to the importance of lifelong advocacy for those who are different from others around them—but until and unless we are ready to make some decisive decisions about ways to route our field in different directions, I'm afraid that *Groundhog Day* will be our field's movie mantra. On with the show? For the sake of the gifted children in our lives, the answer better be 'yes'.

*Jim Delisle is a retired professor and teacher who has written 15 books, including* ***Parenting Gifted Kids*** *and* ***The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook*** *(with Judy Galbraith). He can be reached at jim.delisle@yahoo.com*

# The Asset/Burden Paradox of Giftedness

**Jean Peterson, PhD**

Giftedness is commonly presented as an advantage, a strength, and an asset. In fact, empirical literature includes considerable evidence that giftedness is a positive phenomenon. Summaries of pertinent research have concluded that children and adolescents who are gifted are no more or less likely than others to experience mental health problems. Yet that conclusion has not generated a great deal of scholarly attention to those who do experience them and who may or may not reveal their concerns and ask for help.

Therefore, considering exceptional ability simultaneously as both asset and vulnerability represents a type of conceptual shift in the field and raises questions about why the latter is not a more frequent focus. Perhaps positive aspects help to affirm invested adults and their and gifted students' sense of themselves. These individuals may also assume that positive qualities should be emphasized when advocating for services. Perhaps the positive emphasis protects against early, less positive stereotypes. Perhaps it translates to advocacy language arguing that services are deserved, not that services are needed for well-being. Perhaps considering negative aspects is uncomfortable. Perhaps the measurement emphasis in the field does not encourage complex qualitative exploration of the multi-faceted, subjective *experience* of, for example, underachievement, perfectionism, change and loss, developmental challenges, and difficult family and school circumstances for gifted individuals.

Such exploration might illuminate aspects of the population that would generate new emphases in the field, more overt support for social and emotional development, new language for advocacy, and important information for educators, parents, and gifted youth as well. It is often only when considering counseling issues, per se, that the dark side of giftedness is attended to—beyond concerns about curricular differentiation.

At NAGC in the fall, I presented perspectives about the paradox of giftedness against a backdrop of findings from a 15-year qualitative, longitudinal case study, which represents the kind of exploration just mentioned. Findings in that study reflected that

assets and burdens may exist in equal measure when a remarkable individual responds to extremely negative life events and circumstances—and even to extremely positive life events and circumstances. The subject of the study epitomized not only the sensitivity, intensity, and overexcitabilities that have been associated with giftedness, but also Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration—as related to developmental challenges. Now an adult, she articulated her perspectives related to her *experience* as a long-term qualitative research subject, providing a window for viewing aspects of giftedness that represent vulnerability and burden—in equal measure with asset and strength.

# Our Moral Imperative: The Ethics of Leadership in Gifted Education

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What is leadership in gifted education? There are those that take the lead, such as district administrators charged with coordinating programs and services, gifted lead teachers and gifted intervention specialists responsible for the daily facilitation of learning, university faculty who research and prepare pre-service and in-service teachers, state and national interest groups helping to advance the field as well as state education agency divisions, working passionately to meet the needs of gifted students. What makes these leaders different then leaders in Student Services or the Mathematics department? Leadership in gifted education is unique. This uniqueness comes from our past research, our present practice and our future endeavors. Our past, present and future are enveloped by values and ethics.

It is no secret the field of gifted education is marked by challenges that it faced twenty years ago, thirty years ago and perhaps a half century ago. As Jolly and Kettler (2008) point out, there is disconnect between what we know from research and what we see in practice. Is there a way to bridge this disconnect and begin to effectively answer the challenges the field faces? In looking to build such a bridge, let us explore the role of leadership and what it means to be a leader in gifted education.

*Defining Leadership*

What is leadership? Leadership is influence. Leaders influence thoughts, actions, and motivations of followers. One way to influence is to articulate and build a value system that inspires followers to think like the leader and motivates them to act according to those values. Burns (1978) defines leadership as "inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations of both leaders and followers" (p. 19). From this definition, Burns introduces the idea of transformational leadership. Those who are transformational leaders form relationships of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents (p. 4). According to Maxwell (1998) the true measure of leadership is influence. It is the ability to obtain followers. For Kouzes and Posner (2002), leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. Leadership involves modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart. Leadership means "the capacity of a human community – people living and working together – to bring forth new realities" (Senge, 1999, p. 78). Senge maintains that, "Leaders energize through generating and sustaining creative tension, through fostering commitment to realizing a dream and to telling the truth about what it is" (p. 80). Leadership is influencing others to act, representing goals and values, converting followers into leaders, converting leaders into moral agents, as well as building and sharing a dream with those around the leader.

In educational leadership, there is a pull between management and leadership. What is the goal of the position? Is the agenda transactional or transformational in orientation? In reality, without influence, managers cannot be leaders. Leaders must know how and when to influence the thoughts, actions and motivations of others. For those who manage their role in gifted education, the duty generally falls into the category of "other duties as assigned". Managing gifted education leaves out the ethics and values that are the foundation of the field.

*Defining Ethics and Values*

The ethics of leadership builds a foundation for leaders in gifted education as there are elements that

differ from general education. Leadership in gifted education includes values that drive decision making and problem solving. Acting on the values prevalent in gifted education forms the basis for the ethics of leadership. Articulating and understanding the values prevalent in the field are necessary for leadership.

Where are the values in gifted education and how are they defined? Values of any field are found in its narratives, its research and its public policies. Whereas research and policy provide direction, the narratives often provide inspiration and motivation. Leadership thrives on narrative. Gifted education builds upon a foundation of unique narratives that make gifted education leadership different from general education leadership. Knowing and participating in these unique narratives is a critical component of influence; thus, strong leadership in gifted education (Burns, 1978).

Narratives in gifted education run the continuum from misconception to research based truth. Narratives include individual difference in cognitive abilities make a difference and appropriate provisions for gifted learners yield recognized achievement gains. Other narratives include gifted education being an elitist opportunity and most parents and board members believing their child is gifted. Still others include talent development is typically not random or accidental or not all achievement gaps should be closed (in fact, some should continue to broaden). Other narratives surround services and funding. While this list is certainly not exhaustive, it illustrates the many narratives that gifted education leaders need to know and understand to be strong in their position.

Our colleagues in other specialized areas of education also have narratives. One we do not share with Students Services or the Mathematics department is the narrative of sympathy. Gifted education is home to the narrative of privilege. Education is an enterprise driven by public policy. Public policy is most often created for those in need, not for those who are privileged. Thus, the narrative of privilege places gifted education in a position of advocacy.

School leaders must respond to various accountabilities. At times, these accountabilities compete. The demands from the local community, the state, the nation, and of the profession force school leaders to juggle multiple interests and obligations (Cranston, Ehrick, & Kimber, 2003). School leaders must balance a variety of values and expectations in conflicting interests as they make decisions (Cooper, 1998). Leaders have options in how they respond: respond to the biggest bark and the biggest bite or respond based on values, morals, and ethics. Because of the narrative of privilege, leaders in gifted education must choose the second option. Hodgekinson (1991) argues that "values, morals, and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life" (p. 11).

Ethics in education asks leaders to hold a moral accountability to wanting what is best for learners. Professional accountability is upholding the standards or ethics of the profession of education (Eraut, 1993). Fullan and Hargreaves argue that regardless of whether it is moral accountability or professional accountability, both reinforce the notion that educational leadership has a moral purpose (1991). Therefore, ethics is fundamentally about what we ought to do (Freakley & Burgh, 2000). It forces the question, how ought a professional in gifted education act as a leader?

Starrett (1991) suggests that educational administrators have a moral responsibility to be proactive to create an ethical environment for the conduct of education. To do this, leaders can employ the ethics of critique, justice, and caring. The ethic of critique requires leaders to look critically at all aspects of the educational setting. Does the school setting and structure reflect the way students learn best? Who benefits from these arrangements? What values does our school structure reflect? The ethic of justice requires that the school serve both the common good of the school as well as the rights of the individual. Where may the rights of the gifted students conflict with the common good of the school? The ethic of care asks leaders to think beyond external forces and extrinsic motivators. The ethic of care begins with those things that are best for students as they develop within the culture of the community. Gifted students are the "end" rather than the "means."

The ethic of advocacy is particular to gifted education leaders and is born of the triumphs and struggles resulting from the narratives of the field, particularly the narrative of privilege. Without the ethic of advocacy, educational provisions for gifted students are often sparse and minimally effective. Without the ethic of advocacy, gifted education programs and funding are on the expendable list. Without the ethic of advocacy, the ethic of critique may never address gifted education. Without the ethic of advocacy, the ethic of justice forgets about

the rights of gifted students. Without the ethic of advocacy, the ethic of care falls victim to the narrative of privilege. To advocate is to make a statement about what ought to be; thus advocacy is fundamentally an ethical response. Successful advocacy can influence the thoughts, actions, and motivations of others.

*Concluding Thoughts*

What does it mean to act as a leader in the field of gifted education? Leadership in gifted education is an ethical endeavor involving not only the typical critiques of a leader, but also actively involves the ethic of advocacy. A deeper appreciation for the role of leadership in gifted education could improve the disconnect between research and practice. Quality research in our field could continue for decades; yet without appropriate leadership the challenges will remain.

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# Tribute to the Life and Work of John Feldhusen: A Retrospective

**Abbey Block Cash, PhD**

NAGC is to be lauded for its efforts, last fall, to pay tribute to Dr. John Feldhusen, Retired Professor from Perdue. He was described as a "scholar and a gentlemen who dedicated his life" ….to the identification and nurturing of gifted and talented children. Shortly following dawn on Saturday, November 7, eminent researchers and educators, along with loyal colleagues, students, friends, and parents in the field came together to honor him and celebrate his life; the room was filled with his many admirers, who touted his numerous contributions to gifted education.

Sincere dedications came from well-known individuals in the field including Anne Robinson, Pamela Clinkenbeard, Donald Treffinger, Sally Reis, Joyce Van-Tassel Baska, Joe Renzulli, Penny Kolloff, and Sidney Moon, among many others. Some spoke of his professional honors and achievements, (e.g., awards for Distinguished Professor, Distinguished Scholar, Distinguished Service and the Ann Issacs Founder's Award; being Editor of the Gifted Child Quarterly; and his participation with the World Council for Gifted Children). Others spoke of his important research, and the scholarly articles he wrote, informing and enlightening educators in the field. Testimony was offered to enumerate the many opportunities he provided to colleagues and students alike, helping them to network, and to connect their research with grants. Individuals spoke of being encouraged by Dr. Feldhusen, and they noted the important theories that were generously shared with them, and then made public to interested stakeholders.

Still others provided personal stories and anecdotes of his warm and generous mentoring and relationships. Sally Reis noted the importance of remembering John as her friend and colleague. She encouraged NAGC and the field of Gifted Education to support what she termed "Institutional Memory" of the field, while individuals were around to receive the recognition. She acknowledged the efforts of the Conceptual Foundations Network in our work with the Legacy Series, which is focused on sustaining and

videotaping the accomplishments of our most distinguished and prolific educators and researchers As friends and colleagues provided their emotional and moving good-bys, it occurred to me that something had been omitted.

At first, it was not clear what was missing.

And then I realized, I did not feel personally represented by the many wonderful tributes being made in Dr. Feldhusen's behalf.

My detachment took me back to the early 1980s, and I primarily wore a "different hat". I was a young mother when I first heard John Feldhusen speak at a local conference in Albany, New York. I was desperately working to maintain a gifted program in my local, rural school district, where I was a parent advocate Along with a handful of parents, we had kept the momentum going since the late 1970s, and although I was a teacher in my own right in a neighboring school district, I felt that to be taken seriously, I had to sharpen my abilities in the field of gifted education, and become a quasi "expert". To this end, I attended as many conferences as possible. AGATE, Advocacy for Gifted and Talented Education, had just been founded in New York State under the direction of Dr. Alexinia Baldwin, and this spurred a heightened awareness in this New York Capital City. I began taking courses at SUNY Albany, and this eventually led to my career in the field of Gifted Education and my Professorship at SUNY New Paltz.

Dr. Feldhusen impressed me and I think everyone in his audience with his directness, his clarity of theory, and his straightforward message. He emphasized appropriate testing procedures to identify gifted youngsters; the value of thoughtful, measured ability grouping; and his strong support for acceleration practices.

I attended several of Dr. Feldhusen's informative presentations over the years, and I always left believing that I had ammunition to use with my local School District Officials, the Board of Education, and the Superintendent. I visited my university library many times to gain access to the informative articles he had authored. My favorite, and the one I most often quoted, was "Synthesis of Research on Gifted Youth" written in 1989. I often cited his theories on using multiple identification measures, and worried about his skepticism regarding true validity. When my son took a 3 week accelerated math course through Johns Hopkins' CTY Program, I quoted Dr. Feldhusen's support of Julian Stanley's work, and his own views on acceleration; based on this, I was successfully able to persuade a high school principal to substitute my son's summer program, and grade (92 as earned on his regent's exam) for the full year high school course.

And so, on this uncharacteristically warm November morning in St. Louis in 2009, I realized that the **point of view** not being represented during the memorial tribute for Dr. Feldhusen was the words and ideas he provided to **parents** of the gifted. These were powerful words—impressive remarks and convincing arguments—all of which were to be used when board meetings ran late into the night, and the early morning, and when less informed, misguided board members were attempting to make cuts to the schools' gifted programs. These persuasive arguments could also be effectively levied at School Superintendents or Curriculum Directors in the privacy of their offices to convince them to add monies, as line items, to help finance wavering gifted programs.

I quoted Dr. Feldhusen's admonitions that acceleration does **not** cause social-emotional problems if carefully planned. I assured school administrators that regular classroom teachers often preferred that the highly gifted be removed from their regular education classrooms, as it gave other students the opportunity to "shine" when they did not have to compete with more precocious children who tended to dominate the conversations.

The legacy that John Feldhusen provided to me and many other parent advocates of the gifted was the "talking points" his articles made available; they were clear, and reasonable, and convincing. In this regard, his support to parents and advocates in the trenches was un-paralleled, in my personal experience.

I regret not having had the opportunity to publicly, albeit posthumously, thank him for this, and to share this perspective with his notable champions. I appreciate the opportunity to do this now, and perhaps my sentiments and voice will resonate with others.

# Reader's Corner Book Reviews and Books of Interest

*In this issue we deviated a bit from the theme of "books of interest" and invited Marla Read Capper, soon to be completing her PhD from the University of Virginia, to review major websites regarding gifted education from the perspective of an individual who was new to the field.*

*~ The Editor*

## Googling Gifted

**Marla Read Capper**

In my day-to-day life being a gifted education scholar does not garner much attention, but that often changes when I am mixing at a social event, where parents swarm around me, hungry to share detailed accounts of their clever children and their exceptional accomplishments. Often these scenarios begin the same. Initially, I am drawn into the discussion because I am just so overjoyed that someone is actually interested in talking about my passion, particularly given that I have spent the better part of the evening dodging chatter ranging from sports, to pop culture icons, to Wall Street.

As I listen intently to how their children were speaking Latin before they are potty trained, I smile and nod vigorously; waiting patiently for an opening to share (what I believe to be) thought-provoking ideas I have learned through my experiences as a teacher and from my graduate studies in gifted education. Just when I think that I spot my approaching opportunity to contribute, my smile and excitement begin to fade as the unsightly head of the ulterior motive begins to surface with the uttering of this seemingly innocent two-part question,

"So do you think that he sounds like he is gifted? I mean should we have him tested?"

It dawns on me that the parents who fall into this category not only want someone to hear how brilliant their child is, they want an "official" gifted label stamped on their child's forehead by someone in gifted education. These parents are seeking validation and praise; they are not seeking ideas of how to cultivate their children's talents. I feel deflated and politely exit the conversation before confirming any label.

Thankfully, not all parents are like this and that is what maintains my optimistic belief that each encounter is going to be different. From time to time it is different. I do meet parents who earnestly want to learn how to support their child's intellectual and creative growth, regardless of any labels; they just want to be responsive parents who provide an enriching environment. With this smaller percentage of parents, I engage in enthusiastic dialogue regarding possible academic pathways and out-of-school enrichment opportunities. They want to know all about what I have learned about gifted children.

Through my work as an educator and consultant, I have met many teachers and parents of highly able students. They are often unsure of where to turn. So when I was asked to explore what is available to a curious, novice teacher or parent who sincerely wants to find information that can assist them in their efforts to uncover and develop potential in children, I was intrigued as well. I have studied gifted education and worked with gifted students for 16 years and so it was interesting to try to approach the topic as if it were new to me. I thought to myself, where do I go when I have a question? If it is one that is easily answered and not philosophical, the answer is the World Wide Web. I am not alone.

Often people turn to the World Wide Web for answers, albeit good or bad so I thought that would be an appropriate place to begin my search. What happens when a person enters "gifted children" into a search engine? What resources and information are out there for parents and teachers? Finally, how accurate and helpful are the resources? I decided to cap my search at 4 and review some of the most commonly known ones. Some are independently managed, some are affiliated with national organizations in gifted and still others are supported by marketing and advertisement. In an effort to organize my findings, I have evaluated the web sites in several specific areas: presentation, information, tools/resources, and helpfulness.

**NAGC**

The first site that appeared in my search was that of NAGC, National Association for Gifted Children. The web site is organized, inviting and incredibly user-friendly. The information portals are clearly identified and purposefully arranged. It is the perfect place for an eager novice to gather basic information

for the classroom or for home. There is content from which the most experienced educators and researchers can learn. The information is current while still being sensitive to valuable historical perspectives; it spans from research-oriented to highly practical.

The web site provides a definition that many experts in the field endorse and many states employ, "students who give evidence of high achievement capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership capacity and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities." Citations for respected academicians, practitioners and researchers in the field of gifted education are used to support and validate the information presented on the web site and this is critical when considering whether the data and resources are reliable and should be trusted.

Despite the fact that there does not seem to be much aimed for gifted students to access, there is a wealth of practical as well as theoretical and research-based tools and resources for teachers, administrators, and parents included. A list of organized enrichment activities such as: early entrance programs, out-of-school enrichment programs, study abroad opportunities are provided. Though it is not a comprehensive list, it does offer a starting point. A person searching has the capability to search by state, which is particularly helpful, though again, many programs that I know exist were not included so the list should not be considered exhaustive.

There are some tools and resources for administrators, but the emphasis seems to be placed on parents and even more so on teachers and researchers. Recommendations for parents include helpful advice regarding academic programming decisions, advocacy, testing, and even ways to support your child at home. Though it does not provide an outlet for parents to connect with one another, it certainly provides all of the resources and tools necessary to answer questions parents may have; most importantly, the information provided is all corroborated by experts in the field. Parenting for High Potential is also a supplemental publication that presents relevant and valuable material for parents of highly able children.

There is an extensive assortment of tools and resources for teachers. *Teaching for High Potential* is complementary to the research-based articles in *Gifted Child Quarterly*, which aids in the process of linking research to practice. This section effectively translates what the research says and then suggests additional research articles for extension. The hot topics in gifted education are noted and then some accompanying readings are provided to delve deeper into the topics. This is particularly beneficial for today's busy teachers who may not have time to routinely read research journals to stay abreast the current research in gifted education. *The Teachers' Corner* connects principles of learning with practical advice as to how to implement them in the classroom. One could spend countless hours exploring the information presented on this web site and, in my opinion, it would be time well spent. I only hope that teachers, parents and administrators are taking advantage of it.

**CEC/TAG**

The next web site that I searched was the Council of Exceptional Children/Talented and Gifted (TAG). The presentation is welcoming and bright, but the content is a bit haphazardly arranged and the links are not clearly organized. This web site uses a lens of special education and places gifted education in that context. It is designed for those who are not new to gifted education and it especially helpful for those who have children or students with multiple exceptionalities, or reside in states that house gifted education within special education. It does not focus on introductory information. In fact, it appears to work in concert with NAGC and cater to those who have already previously visited the NAGC web site; it supplements the content presented there.

It is a much-simplified resource and appears to be less diligently maintained. The information that is provided for the most part though is important and useful. The documents to which there are links provide critical readings that are supported by experts in the field. There are some sample articles and abstracts for *Journal for the Education of the Gifted,* which is a respected, referred journal in gifted education.

This web site directs visitors to critical documents and beliefs statements regarding important issues that impact gifted children such as: RTI acceleration and the standards for teachers of the gifted. It does not concentrate on providing resources to use in the classroom or at home, but it does provide a forum for parents to send questions to a professional in gifted. A gifted education professional responds to questions

via email, but also has some columns archived to address what I can only guess to be commonly asked questions about raising and supporting their gifted children. Some of this information feels dated. I cannot help but question how recently these questions were asked and how germane they are today. Overall, I believe that the CEC/TAG web site serves as a helpful complement to the NAGC website.

**Hoagies' Gifted Education Page**

The next web site that I reviewed is called the Hoagies' Gifted Education Page. I have to admit that I was confused and a bit intrigued that first time I visited this web site. I was confused by the name of the web site and cheetah icon. I *had* to read on!

I learned that the web site is run by parent of a gifted child and supported though donations from patrons and users as well as commissions gained linking from the page to shop online. It is not associated with a professional organization or university so it has a numerous links to affiliated programs and companies which make it appear commercialized. In addition, the site appears extremely busy and cluttered with many words and not a lot of graphics. The website developed organically beginning as a small page of links and growing into a website with over 400 pages of information. The presentation is overwhelming and feels a bit like an Easter egg hunt, as much of the information is imbedded and scattered requiring deliberate searching. It is difficult to know where to click first.

While the two previous web sites reviewed offered relevant and useful information for researchers and academicians in gifted, this web site is designed more for parents, administrators, counselors and even children. Hoagies' has a lot of information, but it does not *provide* research, resources or tools, instead it directs visitors to other places where they can get the information by means of an annotated bibliography or additional links. It has some practical information for parents, teachers and counselors regardless of their level of experience in gifted education. The offerings ranged from introductory information like basic definitions to articles on pertinent issues impacting gifted children.

There are quite a lot of consumer products for gifted children such as: DVDs, magazines, music, books, etc. and this seems to fulfill a need for parents. In fact, the extensive reading lists would be helpful for teachers. Many of the links though send you to sponsored links and they require purchase and this frustrated me.

In summary, the web site is incredibly comprehensive. It pays an impressive amount of attention to resources for gifted children, but the overall presentation and complex layered organization of the site may turn some novice teachers and parents off. I found important content was imbedded and difficult to actually find.

**About.com**

The final web site that I reviewed was About.com. This "virtual clearing house" has information that from acne to action figures to…gifted education. A woman who presents her opinions based on her experiences with her gifted son manages the web site. Often bold opinions are stated as fact without citations. It does not utilize references to research or ideas based on experts in the field of gifted education. This is duplicitous to me since About.com claims to offer "expert guidance."

One person writes everything on the site (excluding the comments on the discussion boards), including the numerous links that suggest tangential reading. Some of the content seems to be accurate and solid, practical advice, while much of what I read perpetuates myths and stereotypes about gifted children through sweeping generalities that treat gifted students as a homogeneous group. Some of this takes places on the discussion boards and is due to this mode of communication. The nature discussion boards are such that people are able to express their feelings bounce ideas off of one another, but it is not easily monitored. I noticed that often opinions being stated as if facts. Research was usually not stated at all, but when it was, it was often misconstrued. It made me very nervous to think of people who were reading this as if it were fact. I understand the value of having a space for parents to share ideas and have been a part of important face-to-face discussions. I just worry about how it is being monitored in this case.

The author presents some extreme opinions that do not seem to align with what the leading academicians and practitioners in gifted education support such as a defining gifted as merely an IQ score. I believe that things are not as cut-and-dried as she presents. Overall, the web site does offer some interesting reading, but it should be read with caution understanding that this web site is a presentation of one woman's opinions.

In sum, I would confidently refer any parent or teacher to the NAGC web site and recommend most sections of the CEC/TAG web site to parents and teachers who are not new to the field of gifted education. I would be more cautious to recommend the other web sites I reviewed. They seem to be more loosely monitored. The Hoagies site may be overwhelming or engrossing depending on the users' abilities to parse for information and make judgments about products marketed for advanced children. There is the risk that users will be led astray by information on the About.com site that is not substantiated by experts in the field or validated by research.

*57th Annual Convention*

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I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.

~Abraham Lincoln

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★★★★★★★★★★

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