

A JOURNAL  
FOR EDUCATORS  
AND PARENTS

# Gifted Education Communicator

## Interdisciplinary Studies: Social Studies

# Gifted Education Communicator

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## GIFTED EDUCATION COMMUNICATOR

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Once a year we focus on a subject-area of study for gifted learners, and this one—History/Social Studies—is my favorite. Could it be that I was trained in history and taught in the field throughout my teaching days? Yes! I believe that becoming expert in language arts may be an even greater priority as it is the basis of studying and transmitting all knowledge—old and new. Happily the creators of the California Common Core Curriculum (as well as CCC throughout the states) recognize that becoming expert in language arts (reading and writing) through the content area of history and social studies is a logical and powerful combination. So, let our students revel in history and social studies as they become meaningful consumers and originators of new thought and new technologies.

We open our features section with a passionate commentary on “The Importance of Studying History” by Michael Postma. He shares his beliefs that the study of history is vital for humans in creating the future, transmission of cultural literacy, intellectual recognition of patterns, and sharing empathic brotherhood with all peoples. He gives us much to think about.

I have already admitted my love of history but now must confess that in high school I hated it! During my tenure as editor of this journal (beginning in 1999), I have never written a feature article for it and have some reservations about doing so now. But as I look back through my career as an educator, I know that my best days were always in the classroom in direct engagement with my students. It’s not that managing a district program for gifted students, co-authoring the California standards for gifted learners, editing this journal, and putting thousands of readers in touch with timely and important ideas in the field are not important. It’s simply that those classroom days were the ones that gave me the greatest personal fulfillment. And it’s why I want today’s teachers to engage their students in the study of history and social studies in ways that they will enjoy—both teachers and students—in order to become the standard bearers of our civilization throughout the new millennium. (A lofty goal I know!) I have shared some strategies I found successful in teaching history in “Confessions of a Middle School History Teacher.”

One of the most effective ways of engaging students in “doing history and social studies” is through service learning. Erik Schwinger and Jim Delisle provide powerful examples of service learning in their work with the Davidson Young Scholars Ambassador Program. In their article, “Gaining Wisdom by Giving Back: Helping Gifted Young People Help Others” they share some of the objectives of the Davidson Institute founded by Bob and Jan Davidson in 1999. The Ambassador program is just one of many components of the Institute, but one that has an enormous “pay off” in terms of gifted young people making a difference in the world. Schwinger and Delisle describe the projects of three gifted young ambassadors and their results. The article is meant not merely to awe readers as to what individual young people can do, but to encourage other teachers to engage their students in meaningful service-learning projects themselves.

Returning to the California Common Core Curriculum, we

next present an upbeat and encouraging short piece by a current Oakland California history teacher. Katherine Suyeyasu asks, “What Do the Common Core State Standards Mean for History Teaching and Learning?”

She too was not particularly interested in the study of history while in high school, and states,

Too many of my teachers treated history as a body of facts and students as bodies to fill with those facts.

What I have since learned is that while history may begin with facts.

Sandra Kaplan, in her article, “Social Studies and the Common Core” provides us with a pedagogical perspective for the promise of the Common Core Curriculum as a meaningful path for gifted students to learn in appropriate environments and to have the opportunities they need for study in our schools. She warns, however, that the standards... “...do not include all that might be included or do not include the types of advanced curriculum aligned to students who surpass the standards before high school graduation.”

Kaplan goes on to give specific examples of how to build on the tenants of the Common Core for gifted students.

Given this presidential election year, “The Politics of Teaching Politics” by Sandra Kaplan and Jessica Manzone is both timely and an opportunity to put into practice the importance of student engagement in the study of history and social studies. They comment, “Too often, young students are led to believe that politics is “just for adults.” They are taught to examine what others have done politically rather than what they themselves might do in similar situations.”

The authors include charts and three lessons plans to illustrate their points and to provide examples for teachers.

Finally, in a short piece titled “Student Teaching: A Catalyst to Activate the Teaching and Learning of Social Studies,” Sandra Kaplan and Jessica Manzone present the reflections of three recent graduates of the Master of Arts in Teaching online program at the University of Southern California. It made me think back to my own student teaching days and the reflections I had during the early part of my career; current teachers may find themselves doing the same.

The Winter issue of the GEC will focus on the twice-exceptional learner (2-e)—those who are both gifted and face one or more learning challenges. These challenges include learning disabilities, learning disorders, attention difficulties, or other learning differences. We want to make this issue make a difference for you and your students or children.

—Margaret Gosfield, Acquisitions Editor



**S**ocial Studies: From Boring to Bam! Way back in caveman days when I was in grade school, I was unfortunate enough to have a series of lackluster history teachers who contributed to a cumulative effect of me not liking the subject. Those were the days when geography and history were stand-alone things and the student was expected to memorize the dry dusty facts and then spit them out on the scheduled testing day. It was like a slow painful death for my creative brain.

But even more unfortunate than those horribly long classes, now that I am partially homeschooling my three gifted children, I find myself lacking in certain basics. They might ask me where a certain country is and I have to say, “Uh, let’s look that up.” Or when they ask me the date that such-and-such happened and I don’t have a ready answer—now, suddenly, I truly wish I *had* memorized more of those historical facts.

I’m not advocating that my life would be richer or fuller if I had memorized more, but if somewhere along the way I’d come across an educational situation that stimulated my interest in a way that engaged me enough to care, I’d certainly be better off and I would certainly be of more help to my own children.

My profoundly gifted 9-year-old daughter is crazy about horses. I recently was lucky enough to take her and her friend down to the San Diego Natural History Museum where they are holding an exhibit, “The Horse” (<http://www.sdnhm.org/exhibitions/current-exhibitions/the-horse/>): From fossils and horse evolution, to hunters and the domestication of horses and the entwining of humans and horses. It’s the kind of multidisciplinary adventure that naturally engages a young horse lover on many levels—even if she happens to “dislike” history. Now that’s the kind of learning I’m talking about!

An exhibit like this, which incorporates many disciplines as well as many types of technology, makes it crystal clear that the days of static learning are gone for good—thank goodness for that. Technology has changed everything. Even if a topic is presented as a stand-alone issue, the global nature of our communication means that everything is obviously interconnected in ways that are blazingly clear to any student who is involved with online studying or research.

Of course, if you are involved in education and have not had the time or inclination to fully understand either how to use technology to enhance a student’s learning experience in social studies, look no further than this issue of the GEC to get you started. On top of the technology tips and resources in this issue, there are plenty of specific ideas and lots of information to grab even the most reluctant student of social studies.

Carolyn Cooper offers some easy-to-use examples within her discussion of many of the changes in social studies with the influx of technology. Cooper says:

Social studies, a key component of interdisciplinary studies,

is a significantly more complex discipline today than it has ever been. The history, geography, and current events once considered separate subjects are incorporated today in technology-based instruction.



If you’re hesitant to encourage your students to blog due to safety concerns or a lack of information, please check out “Kidblog” to get some great “how to” blog advice, as well as specific ideas on how to incorporate blogging into your interdisciplinary studies. Kidblog is free – and it’s safe.

And for those in need of a complete lesson in social studies, Beth Littrel’s “Literacy Development in the Common Core Standards” give a step-by-step lesson plan for a biography unit developed for a Special Day Class for Gifted Students (Tier Three Intervention), but which has been used successfully with modifications in a GATE cluster class as differentiation for all students, including Basic and Below Basic students.

The importance of stimulating interdisciplinary learning cannot be overstated. And as a teacher or parent if you’ve ever asked the question, “Is there a way to help younger students understand and begin to appreciate interdisciplinary connections?” the answer is yes. You can find out how by reading Parent Talk in this issue.

I’d also like to introduce a new column in the GEC titled “Counseling Corner,” by Dan Peters. He offers great insight in his debut column, “What is this Gifted Thing, Anyway?” He says:

Then there are the multiple definitions of gifted. Some describe giftedness as showing “advanced development” in the categories listed above. Others state that giftedness is “advanced ability and/or potential,” while still others prioritize talent, or abilities that result in a product, or advanced level of performance as the prime evidence of giftedness. Finally, there are many who explain gifted individuals in terms of their personality characteristics, and describe them to be more “driven,” “intense,” and “sensitive” than those who are not gifted.

I think about all of these things when trying to answer that seemingly simple question, “What is this gifted thing?”

The world is, of course, filled with the riches and impact of all that social studies includes such as, psychology, politics, history, and economics. So there’s no reason any child should ever feel that it’s just a body of facts to be boringly memorized and spit back out. My daughter’s visit to the San Diego Natural History Museum to see the horse exhibit provided the type of enriched and fun learning experience that we should seek for all our children.

—Karen Daniels, Managing Editor

# CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES

2012

## DECEMBER

DECEMBER 15, 2012

### Central Cities Gifted Children's Association and Los Angeles USD

Pasadena Convention Center, Pasadena, CA  
www.centralcities.org

2013

## JANUARY

JANUARY 17 - 18, 2013

### SENG Model Parent Group Facilitator Training

Courtyard Orlando Lake Buena Vista in the Marriott Village, Orlando, FL  
www.sengifted.org

JANUARY 24 - 26, 2013

### Utah Gifted and Talented

Davis Conference Center, Layton, UT  
www.uagc.org

## FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 20-22, 2013

### Arkansas Association for Gifted and Talented

Peabody Hotel, Little Rock, AR  
www.agate-arkansas.org

FEBRUARY 4 - 5, 2013

### Kentucky Association for Gifted Education

Marriott Griffin Gate, Lexington, KY  
kagegifted.org

FEBRUARY 7 - 8, 2013

### Arizona Association of Gifted & Talented

Black Canyon Conference Center, Phoenix, AZ  
www.arizonagifted.org

FEBRUARY 15-17, 2013

### California Association for the Gifted

Anaheim Marriott  
Anaheim, CA  
cagifted.org

## MARCH

MARCH 11 - 12, 2013

### Georgia Association for Gifted Children

Classic Center, Athens, GA  
www.gagc.org

## APRIL

APRIL 3 - 6, 2013

### CEC Convention and Expo

Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, San Antonio, TX  
www.cec.sped.org

APRIL 6, 2013

### Florida Association of the Gifted

Tampa, FL  
www.flagifted.org

APRIL 18 - 19, 2013

### Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education

Robert Morris University and Holiday Inn, Pittsburgh, PA  
www.giftedpage.org

## NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 6-10, 2013

### National Association for Gifted Children

Indianapolis, IN  
www.nagc.org/

## CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE GIFTED

### 51ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE: MAGIC OF THE MIND

February 15-17, 2013  
Anaheim, CA

For details and registration information, visit  
www.cagifted.org

## UPCOMING ISSUES

OF THE GIFTED

EDUCATION

COMMUNICATOR

Winter - Twice-Exceptional Gifted Learners

Spring - Giftedness for Life

Summer - Parenting Gifted Learners

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## WELCOME DR. DAN PETERS

Beginning this issue you'll see a new column, "Counselors Corner" written by Dan Peters. Dan is a licensed psychologist and Co-Founder and Clinical Director of the Summit Center, specializing in the assessment and treatment of gifted, talented, and creative individuals and families. He is also Co-Director of Camp Summit for the

Gifted, Talented, and Creative. Dr. Peters serves on the Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) Editorial Board and is Associate Chair of the National Association of Gifted Children's (NAGC) Assessments of Giftedness Special Interest Group. He is an Advisory Board Member for the California Association for the Gifted.

# Making Connections

## In and Outside of School

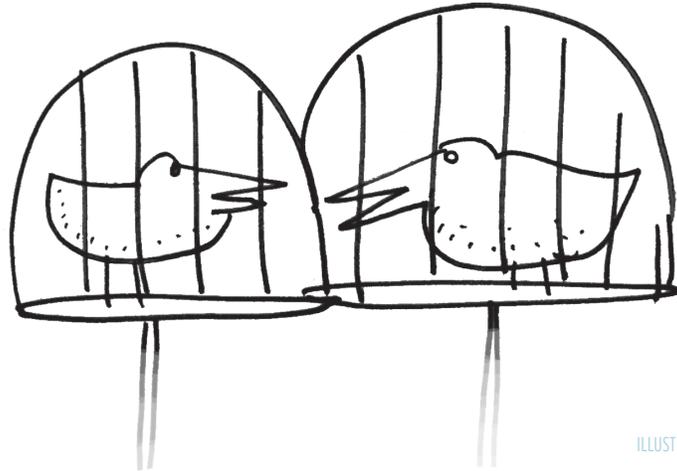


ILLUSTRATION BY JON PEARSON

In elementary school, children usually learn their various subjects separately—e.g. math, science, reading, spelling, social studies, etc., as though each one has no relationship to the other. Learning subjects in this way doesn't do much to promote relevance, higher-level thinking, or creativity; today's teachers are under so much pressure to improve student performance in each of these subject areas that they believe they can't afford to waste time making connections to other areas. They focus instead on teaching facts and rote skills, staying mostly at the lower levels of understanding in Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking. Without meaning any harm, teachers say to themselves, "Just forget the higher levels, the analyzing, evaluating, and creating; we just don't have time for that."

Sadly, for many students, it is only when they reach college or graduate school and begin to study a field in depth—such as engineering, architecture, or medicine—that they reach the higher levels of thinking and truly see how all subjects interrelate to make up our world. Is there a way to help younger students understand and begin to appreciate interdisciplinary connections? Parents and grandparents, with all of their real-life experience, can help.

First, we can simply be interested in what our children are studying in school and get actively involved in their learning. We can ask a child to share and reflect upon what she is learning in school and reinforce learning by making connections through conversations with children. We can encourage the child's natural curiosity by asking provocative questions like, "Do you know how long frogs can stay underwater?" Or, "Would you like to learn how a piano works?" Questions that prompt a child to think and wonder prompt additional learning.

Second, we can appreciate (and thank) those classroom teachers who do make connections, and who use thematic or problem-based approaches. In a problem-based approach, students might study a problem like rainforest depletion and discover a complex interrelationship of factors. They might learn, for example, that rainforests are important for their ability to clean the air by using the CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. Students can

then learn that people burn the trees for fuel and that farmers need to clear land for crops, both of which destroy rainforest. They can learn that, with diminishing rainforests, CO<sub>2</sub> levels are rising, and these higher levels are causing harm to the atmosphere, which in turn causes still more problems. Students who study in this way are learning a systems approach—that many factors in the rainforest problem depend on many other factors. They learn the interrelationships of science, economics, history, and social studies. They see that multiple factors influence a living and changing system like a rainforest.

Readers who want to help students learn strategies for solving complex problems will want to look at the Future Problem Solving Program website at [www.FPSP.org](http://www.FPSP.org), where they will find information about local, national, and international problem-solving competitions for teams of students from elementary to high school age, as well as how to become a coach for such a team. Many states have active FPSP websites, making it easy for interested parents and potential coaches to join in. Some schools offer this as a part of their gifted program; others offer it as an after-school program.

A thematic approach to teaching is similar to the problem-based approach in that students study topics and discover connections. If the theme is *transportation*, students might choose to study flight. They could study the history of *flight* starting with the Wright brothers and ending with today's experimental flights of drones or spy planes. If the theme is *weather*, students might want to study extreme weather—tornados, thunderstorms, hurricanes. In her book *Inspiring Middle School Minds*, author Judy Willis describes a thematic unit in which her students followed the Alaska Iditerod dog-sled race. Students followed the race online and cheered for their designated dog team as the race progressed. They kept daily statistics and speculated on which team would win. Prior to the race, they studied Alaska geography, history, and culture, as well as information about the care and training of sled dogs. It is easy to see that children would be excited

about this type of unit, and how it involved learning many different subjects.

Willis is an expert on learning and the brain; she explains how being excited about learning allows students' brains to make stronger connections to long-term memory storage areas (Willis, 2009). Her Iditerod unit enabled her students to learn many different subjects, all of which were grounded in a real-world event. What are other ways to help students make more connections in the everyday world?

**Math and science.** When you are driving, if a child asks, "When are we going to get there?" you can point to the speedometer and ask the child if he knows what "mph" means. If the car is moving at 70 mph and it is now 2 p.m., how much farther will we be at 3 p.m.? And at 4 p.m.? This helps children apply their knowledge of math facts, taking concepts further and deeper through real-world application. Even simple, everyday tasks like measuring ingredients for cooking and baking serve as reinforcement for math and science.

**History and social studies.** Experiences of parents and grandparents give fresh perspective to present-day events. Grandma remembers that during WWII, sugar, butter, and tires were rationed. Or, a parent might explain, "We didn't have Internet or video games or cell phones when I was growing up; we played outdoors—baseball, kickball, hide and seek, and other games; we played until it got dark and we had to come in." Knowing that the world has changed so much in one or two generations gives young people the understanding that the world will no doubt continue to change during their lifetime—an important connection or realization.

**Enrichment.** School fieldtrips are rare these days, but as a caring parent, you can take your child to visit a farm to see how and where crops like apples, pumpkins, beans, and corn grow. Or, there may be a history museum where your child can learn about American Indian history or the wagon trains that crossed the West. Even a day at the park or a walk along a river can provide enrichment as you experience the outdoors.

**Nature.** Just a few short generations back, more people lived on farms, grew their own food, spent long hours outdoors, and understood the connection between the land and self-sufficiency. Most children today live in urban settings and spend far less time outdoors than children in earlier generations, but research shows that children who play outside score higher on concentration tests, have better coordination and agility, have better memory levels, are physically healthier, are better able to handle daily stresses, and have better social relationships (Ward, 2012).

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* (2008), notes that while video games give a child a short-lived feeling of success, that success doesn't come close to the successful feelings that come after climbing a tree, catching a fish, or attaining similar accomplishments in nature. According to Louv, "When you're sitting in front of a screen, you're not using all of your senses at the same time. Nowhere other than in nature do kids use their senses in such a stimulated way" (NPR, 2005).

Recently we took three of our very urbanized grandchildren, ages 6-9, on a houseboat trip—a big change for them from days largely filled with computer and video games. For five days they experienced boating, swimming, kayaking, making sand castles, climbing sandstone hills, sleeping under the stars, fishing, and watching grandpa clean the fish for cooking. "Does it have a brain? Where is the stomach?" Each child made important physical and mental connections from their time in nature, and gained new confidence.

Learning academic subjects one by one is wasted time if our children do not understand the interconnectedness within the larger picture of our planet. Just saying that everything is interconnected doesn't work; what works instead is for students to *experience* things being connected. We fragment their learning when we say, "We have to stop now because it's time for math."

"Not only does Nature teach kids science and nurture their imaginations and creativity, but Nature needs the children to become her future stewards."  
~Richard Louv

An entire generation of young people and their future families face enormous social and environmental challenges. Our planet is a huge system with many components that interact. We must help our youth think and learn with broad, interdisciplinary views. Teaching children with a greater emphasis on connections will prepare them for life in an increasingly complex world. ■

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JAMES T. WEBB, PH.D., the founder of SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted Children), has been recognized as one of the 25 most influential psychologists nationally on gifted education. The lead author of five books and several DVD s about gifted children, Dr. Webb served on the Board of Directors for the National Association for Gifted Children. In 2010 he received the prestigious Ruth A. Martinson Past-Presidents' Award from the California Association for the Gifted.

# Interdisciplinary Studies

## Social Studies from Chalkboard to High Tech

**W**hen I began teaching many years ago, my students were fifth-graders. As the term “social studies” was not in our school’s lexicon at that time, history and geography were listed on the students’ report cards as separate subjects. The study of current events, a third and critical component of social studies, was left to each teacher’s discretion, as I recall, and noted only in occasional remarks on the report card.

Now, teachers with an understanding of history, geography, and current events recognize the relationship that exists between and among these disciplines. To teach each separately is to reduce the “subject” to only facts, omitting the rich information within the topic being taught.

Of the three disciplines, history and geography were more complex than current events. History at the fifth-grade level included a broad-brush approach to ancient lore, to which many of my students—particularly those who were first-generation American—could not relate. Geography was an overwhelming sea of maps that baffled most of my students from day one. Maps the size of the chalkboard were seldom in color, which, given that many of my students’ primary language was French Canadian, made locating names of states, key cities, major rivers, and mountain ranges particularly difficult.

Current events, however, came to the rescue. I quickly learned to use this component in several ways: as a citizenship lesson; an update of national and world news; a tool to help my students connect to major events throughout the globe; and, frankly, as a more relaxed means of learning that didn’t require textbooks that only some of my students could read. Current events became the backbone of our classroom, quite possibly because our students of French Canadian descent gradually became comfortable within an environment that supported every student.

### TEACHER CREATIVITY A “MUST”

We worked as a team, my self-contained class of thirty-three students and I, to acquaint each other with the key understandings of history, geography, and current events. But creating long lists of mere facts to later recite, as some of my colleagues required, was a tactic I absolutely abhorred and would not permit! Learning was far more complex and exciting than merely creating lists of sterile facts.

Teachers needed to be creative to compensate for the paucity of interesting teaching materials. As television was just making its appearance in homes, its value for student research was extremely

limited. Whereas today’s students can find and retrieve information via multiple forms of technology far beyond TV, how creative our students became 50 years ago was primarily a function of their teacher’s resourcefulness.

I myself used our maps for multiple purposes. One who enjoys studying words, I connected terms on the map with other uses of them, e.g., “Gulf of Mexico “ and a “gulf” as a deep hollow or a wide separation. To expand the term “gulf” I asked the class to apply the latter definition to a friendship, which called for shifting to a higher level of thinking. For this activity students formed small groups to discuss the effect(s) of a gulf within a close association and later shared their ideas with the class, thinking of even additional uses of the word in question. The natural extension of this exercise, predictably, was to locate other words on maps that, also, could have various meanings.

Quite frequently, students with exceptional writing skills extended this activity by creating poems, essays, and/or demonstrating how words could have multiple uses. In time, my advanced-level students created word puzzles that became even more challenging for the small group of students who had found their niche in studying words. Their competitive spirit was most entertaining to observe!

### FAST FORWARD: FROM CHALKBOARD TO HIGH TECH

Social studies, a key component of interdisciplinary studies, is a significantly more complex discipline today than it has ever been. The history, geography, and current events once considered separate subjects are incorporated today in technology-based instruction.

As I browse news magazines and search the Web weekly for articles pertaining to education, I’m impressed with the increasing amounts of advice America’s corporate sector is currently giving educators. To prevent America’s middle class from collapsing, intense curricula of science and technology are being created for students, many of whom until now have demonstrated neither the ambition nor coaching to finish high school, much less consider working in prominent tech-oriented companies.

What does high tech have to do with social studies? To me the relationship is obvious: both deal with human beings and their lives. Currently, altogether too many teens live in poverty, drop out of school, have an abysmal home life, absent parental direction, and turn to crime. And, regrettably, the numbers of teens without much hope are increasing exponentially! This desperate situation is a bona fide crisis for America, and the

corporate world is finally taking bold steps to address it.

In the high-tech field now reaching out to high school-age students who have all but given up hope for a brighter future, students selected for these demanding programs will be taught critical thinking as well as problem-solving skills. What's more, I predict that the gifted ones among them will be required to learn and use the advanced-level cognitive skills that gifted students in mainstream settings are already applying to a variety of situations.

Included in these high-level skills are the ability to state and test assumptions, hypothesize, prove or validate with evidence, and determine relevance as well as to differentiate fact from opinion (Kaplan, 2012), among other advanced-level skills. Analyzing and critiquing information incorporate each of these skills, essential to the constantly-evolving field of "high tech."

### SOCIAL ACTIVISM: A NEW TWIST ON INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

"Interdisciplinary studies" today is an exciting field! Social studies has been enhanced, I believe, by the numerous causes that America's young adults are choosing to champion. Be the target of their concern a nationwide bank's attempt to charge a monthly fee for its debit-card users or a zoning board's requiring the removal of a children's tree house built for them by their dad, an Iraq-war veteran, change agents are persuading significant numbers of supporters to speak out against situations that are blatantly wrong.

With new titles, functions, and seemingly-endless possibilities, many of which are yet to be explored fully, interdisciplinary studies gives students an exciting platform of social activism from which to launch their creative endeavors. (Author's note: Might the self-serving "me generation" be giving way to the more empathetic "we" attitude? Let's hope so!)

Social activism appears to be attracting bright, thirty-something, entrepreneurial individuals dedicated to causes in which they are completely engaged. Ben Rattray, creator of Change.org, for example, recently led a campaign that "ordinary folks can now mobilize extraordinary support for their causes" (Ghosh & Dias, 2012). Once poised for Wall Street, where his sights were set on nothing short of meteoric success as soon as possible, this enterprising young man was recently introduced to Facebook. A consistently-bright student throughout his schooling, Rattray realized immediately that championing social causes would help others in need, which, he felt certain, a Wall Street position would not. He was ready to tackle the new field of using social media to bring about needed change for a better world. The rest is history, to which millions of users of social networking can attest.

Change in itself frightens many people, but the seeds of goodness are taking root in the hearts and minds of an increasing number of adventuresome gifted students. These individuals use their "natural empathy, the ability to understand and respect different points of view," says education technology consultant Alan November (February, 2010). "This skill is often extended to include 'global empathy,' due to the likelihood of working or doing business with someone in another nation, with its own culture and . . . unique perspective." November reminds us that technology makes it easy for today's students to learn global empathy, thanks to the availability of instant information about the social and political climate of other countries as well as opportunities to contact peers abroad.

### A FINAL NOTE OF OPTIMISM

Is there an encouraging angle to the all-too-often dead end for college grads who would prefer using their talent to help others in lieu of simply making money? The answer is a resounding "YES"!

Andrew Yang is the founder of Venture for America (VFA), a nonprofit that places talented, serious-minded college grads in growth companies. To highly-probable candidates he says of these companies, "They could do something amazing. They could create jobs."

Yang explains that the "appeal is learning entrepreneurial skills that help participants hatch ideas for their own ventures." VFA," he says, "becomes a kind of start-up boot camp" for these gifted high-fliers whom he's recruiting. After training top college grads, VFA sends them to struggling start-ups; then, with two years under their belt of growing those companies, they learn how to become entrepreneurs. The firms that are hiring benefit significantly as they get top talent "on the cheap" (Macasai, 2012).

Two of Yang's recent recruits are excited about the opportunity to do work that capitalizes on their respective talents. Todd Nelson, 22, is "fascinated by renewable energy and can absolutely see (himself) starting a clean-tech company one day." The entrepreneurial world draws Derek Turner, also 22, a VFA fellow and Columbia University senior, who eagerly welcomes change. "The moment you stop changing," he says, "you die out."

With talent and commitment of this caliber increasing throughout our country at unprecedented speed, America can regain its prominence as a forward-thinking, creative, and energetic nation. Our gifted students hold the key to America's future, I believe. Their native intelligence, problem-solving skills, and sensitivity toward the needs of others appears to be emerging from the grip of complacency that has crippled America's drive for too long. As Alexander Pope observed long ago, "hope springs eternal." Now is the time to celebrate it! ■

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## What is this “gifted” thing anyway?

This is a question I am asked—in one form or another—on a regular basis. I find myself pausing, assessing who is asking, how much they may or may not understand, how open to the idea of “gifted” they may be, and then mentally searching through all of the definitions and descriptions about gifted I know, to carefully craft an answer that has the best chance of sticking and being understood. Why is answering this question so hard?

I find there are several main reasons that this is such a difficult question. First, the word “gifted” is loaded. It turns people off. It seems to suggest that “gifted” people are more special and better than people who are not gifted. It seems to imply that gifted people “have more” so it not only puts them in a position of being seen as elite, but also as not needing “more” of anything because they already have more than most.

The next reason is that such different criteria are used to determine who is gifted (and who isn't). Some people consider gifted individuals the top 2% on an IQ test; others use the top 5% and the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) recently changed its definition to include the top 10%. The field is split, with some believing we cannot “water down” the criteria for those considered highly gifted because it diminishes those who *are* really different and need more accommodations. Others believe we need to broaden the definition to include larger numbers in order to impact education policy and funding so gifted kids receive more appropriate services.

Another concern is the different gifted categories. Most people seem to agree that the categories or types of giftedness include: intellectual, academic, visual and performing arts, creativity, and leadership ability. However, how many schools

have gifted programs for learners other than academically gifted? If you are creative and not in a program that emphasizes or encourages creativity, are you still gifted? If you are a leader among your peers, but have academic learning problems and do not score well on tests, are you still gifted? If you are an advanced musician but your school does not have a music program, are you still gifted?

Thus, many ways are used to define and recommend children for gifted programming; but what does that really mean?

Then there are the multiple definitions of gifted. Some describe giftedness as showing “advanced development” in the categories listed above. Others state that giftedness is “advanced ability and/or potential,” while still others prioritize talent, or abilities that result in a product, or advanced level of performance as the prime evidence of giftedness. Finally, there are many who explain gifted individuals in terms of their personality characteristics, and describe them to be more “driven,” “intense,” and “sensitive” than those who are not gifted.

I think about all of these things when trying to answer that seemingly simple question, “What is this gifted thing?” I find myself smiling at the person who is asking, and knowing that I have a very short window to educate them about a group of individuals who have great potential to impact our world, but who also are at great risk of not being able to bring their abilities to fruition.

### BRIDGING THE GAP

While the question seems simple and innocent enough, it is a really important one that represents both a lack of understanding of this group of individuals as well as the *opportunity* to explain what “this gifted thing” is. You may be talking to someone who

## Working with gift kids is not rocket science. It merely requires understanding who they are and what they need. Yet, understanding gifted kids and giving them what they need continues to be a challenge for people.

can make decisions that impact gifted kids; or help a parent or teacher better understand a gifted kid; or explain giftedness to another who is curious or misunderstanding.

I have found that giftedness, and the accommodation and differentiation needed, is misunderstood by most people. While our field is not united about what giftedness is, the even larger issue seems to be how we explain what giftedness is to those outside of our field—teachers and other educators, parents, other family members, or the public at large. These are the people who influence gifted children on a daily basis through their feedback. It is this feedback or messaging that is internalized and used by gifted children to form their identities.

Through my years of sitting in school meetings and parent counseling sessions related to gifted children, I have found that the most critical piece in bridging the gap in understanding is to *join* the person or people I am speaking to. It is important to understand where others are coming from when trying to explain who a gifted child is and what his or her needs are. Separating gifted children from the rest is often necessary in terms of explaining differences; however, separating them from others without attempting to also join them, results in a differentness and isolation that often does not result in the needed understanding, differentiation, and accommodation that can help a gifted child survive, and ultimately thrive.

My experience has shown me time and time again that all people want to be understood and heard. That includes the person who is asking the question about the “gifted thing,”—whether it be the administrator who is responsible for an entire district, the teacher who is needing to meet the needs of all her students, or the parent who may be exhausted and exasperated by his or her gifted child. Their experiences need to be heard and understood in order for my message about a gifted child to be heard. I need to join them where they are so I can successfully explain to them about who a particular gifted child is, and the needs of gifted individuals.

### WHAT TO SAY SO PEOPLE WILL LISTEN

So what do I do? I find myself with a few different ideas or phrases that I keep in my back pocket. I decide which ones to use based on my audience and my ideas about their motivation to understand a gifted child. I try to use language which I feel will be meaningful to the person asking the question with the goal of providing an opportunity for a new understanding of a murky and confusing term.

Here are some of the phrases and ideas that I use to explain giftedness and gifted children:

- They tend to have advanced thinking and see things differently than most their age
- They tend to have an unexpected, yet remarkable understanding of things well beyond their years
- They tend to be more intense, sensitive, and driven than others their age
- They often know much, or all of the school work in their grade and beyond
- They can often act both older than peers in some things and younger than their peers in others

The above descriptions are meant to be just that—descriptions of gifted individuals that set the stage both for empathy of the experience of the gifted child, and the accommodations and differentiation that can literally make or break a gifted child’s development and experience. I chose which description or descriptions to use based on what I think the receiver will resonate with—intensity, sensitivity, drive, advanced ability, creative and divergent thinking, or all of them. I am looking for them to nod their head and say or show some sign of understanding. This understanding then leads to the next important step—what a gifted child needs.

If and when I get to this point, I often reply:

- To be challenged intellectually
- To be given academic material at their current level of knowledge
- To be with others who are true peers—who are like them and value them
- To be accepted for who they are

I often say that working with and teaching gifted kids is not rocket science. It merely requires understanding who they are and what they need. Yet, understanding gifted kids and giving them what they need continues to be a challenge for the vast majority of people. All of us who work with gifted kids have a calling. Our mission is to describe gifted children to others so they are better understood. We need to understand why we are being asked the question, and figure out the best way to explain it so it is heard and understood. If gifted children are better understood, then it will be easier to get them the resources they need to grow, develop, and thrive. So, “what is this gifted thing anyway?” What will you say...? ■



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# The Importance of Studying History

By Michael Postma

**H**istory is a very important part of every student's education; perhaps the most important piece to the puzzle that enables productive citizenship. Not only does the study of one's past give a child the story of how humans came to be over a period of time, but it also gives children a framework within which they can identify their roots as well as the environment within which they are nurtured. For gifted children, that framework is especially important given the nature of overexcitability that is often present within their beings. To be able to engage in productive citizenship and to make a difference is an innate characteristic of sensitive children. The study of history as it pertains to the human condition is an essential piece of their personal growth, just as it should be for all students.

**It is the past that creates the future.** More importantly, it is the past that creates the person and the community within which that person operates. A skewed, tainted, or selective version of that history perpetuates a misrepresentation, not only of the past but a misrepresentation of the person learning that history. Students cannot or will not understand themselves or understand their place within a collective societal context if they have not learned and understood the history of that society. It is therefore vitally important that all members of a society, regardless of their historical roots, understand their position within their community. The knowledge of individual roots and their connection to present conditions gives each and every person validity and worth. It is therefore critical to learn the importance of historical knowledge and the role it plays in our lives.

**History gives us cultural literacy,** or the cultural capital that comes with the understanding of historical names, dates, events, and concepts. Apart from that obvious asset, the study of history gives us meaning. It helps us to think critically about important narratives that have occurred over time. History also allows us to form arguments that are meaningful when we examine the events that shape society in the present. Should we celebrate Columbus Day or should we lament it? The study of history gives us a variety of perspectives from different groups, genders, and periods. It is important to understand how others view the events that have unfolded in our past. If we do not recognize this basic premise we will have a difficult time accepting those who are different from us or even accepting their opinions.

**The astute historian can also recognize patterns** within historical contexts and teach others to avoid the pitfalls that others have fallen into in the past. Unfortunately, in terms of the patterns of movements within education, we have not learned and applied this simple lesson to some of the basic problems within education that continue to haunt the nation over and over again. Is it not what this entire debate is about? Have we not learned that a conservative agenda within the realm of social studies education is not the answer to engaging, and yes, even empowering our students with a viable knowledge of

the past? History itself teaches us to move forward, to recognize our mistakes and learn from them, to be inclusive of all peoples because that is the essence of history; the lives of people, not just the lives of the movers and shakers of the western world. The personalizing of a historical overview can give students a connection to themselves and a connection to their community—a vital link in the shaping of well-rounded individuals.

**History is also virtuous.** Within the study of history one can find empathy or the vision of the world through the eyes of someone else. Perhaps President Bush's foreign policy in Iraq might have been more empathetic had he spent time with average Iraqi citizens. History is also honest. Although one wonders at the intentions of those who write our children's texts, for the most part history should teach us to recognize the accomplishments and failings of our race as well as the doings of people who differ from us. Staying within the limits of what the data will sustain, rather than engaging in appealing but exaggeratedly dishonest speculations, allows the student to accurately summarize the views and deed of others; especially those with whom we disagree. Another virtue of history is that it depicts for the student a sense of justice (war tribunals, South African elections of 1994) and outrage at the injustices of people or peoples (Guatemala 1954 or Hungary 1956) which provokes the questions that need discussion such as is man inherently good? Is the distribution of power and domination equal? Whose government for which people? History also offers us the virtues of humility, courage, wisdom, and finally, perhaps most importantly, hope. The stories of human accomplishment in the face of overwhelming odds (Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Luther, Mandela) are antidotes to the depictions of human suffering, misery, and failure that we face both historically and within our day-to-day lives.

**To abandon history is to doom our future**—a future that includes our children and grandchildren. It may require tremendous efforts to sustain a truthful version of our past but it is certainly the least we can do for those that come after us. Let's give our children that opportunity, the opportunity to reconcile old wounds, to lead the way toward a comprehensive understanding of who we were, who we are, and who we can be. ■



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# “I Hated High School History!”

Confessions of a Middle School History Teacher

By Margaret Gosfield

PHOTO BY DAN NELSON

I always expected to become a teacher—that’s what girls did in the 1950s. But had you told me as a senior in high school that I would become a history teacher down the road, I would have laughed you out the door! History—and the other social studies—was so boring! And totally irrelevant to my life. No, I would be an English teacher so that I could teach great literature and plumb the depths of students’ intellectual understanding—never mind that boring grammar stuff.

I can still visualize my 10<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. history class up on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of our school. There was our teacher, Claude, sitting at his desk at the front of the room (We called him Claude amongst ourselves though never to his face.) extolling information from our textbook written by Carl Becker.

I don’t remember what was in the text but I remember its author because Claude referred to him so often. I know that we did nothing but read the text, answer questions, and then talk about it; notice that I did not say “discuss” the issues because the “talk” was done primarily by Claude, presumably in the manner he had learned history in his own college classes.

I learned later that Carl Becker was a remarkable historian who, among many other books, wrote “a very successful high school text, *Modern History: The Rise of a Democratic, Scientific, and Industrialized Civilization* (1931).” I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 1957 though the book went through numerous reprints up into the 1980s and presumably was much in vogue in the 1950s. But no matter what was in the text, class was deadly dull, and we were always hoping for something to enliven it. It rarely did.

It wasn’t until my junior year in university that everything turned around for me and I changed my major to history. What caused the turn around? Another remarkable historian, C. Warren Hollister, world renowned as an expert in medieval European history. It was a large lecture class alas, but Dr. Hollister made history come alive. It was so obvious that he found his subject intensely interesting himself. William the Conqueror’s invasion of England in 1066 was a vivid happening to him and he made it so for us as well—so much so that I remember it clearly today, almost 50 years later. I sat on the edge of my seat gathering it all in!

***The lesson to be learned? The teacher makes the difference!***

**“WHY STUDY HISTORY? THERE’S NO FUTURE IN IT.”**

My students loved to tease me with that quote. I countered with George Santayana’s: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” But it’s a legitimate question. Why should 13-year-olds be interested in Paul Revere? No one brings emergency warnings today via horseback! And Benjamin Franklin’s development of a colonial postal system of mail wagon deliveries? Today students send instant messages to their friends by texting on their Smartphones—multiple times a day! Not until students can connect their everyday lives to events of the past will they be able to learn from them.

In 1977 the television mini-series, “Roots,” based on the book by Alex Haley made family history popular. Four years earlier, I started my own family history project in my U.S. history classes for gifted students. We were studying immigration to the United States and I

wanted the students to see if they could learn where and when their ancestors emigrated. Students were required to complete a basic family tree, interview an older relative and choose a visual presentation on some aspect of their family history. (They could also choose to research an historical American family if they wished.) By far the most popular choice was preparing a display of artifacts of family “heirlooms.” Other choices included a large-scale family immigration map, family recipe book, or family scrapbook. We set up the student displays in the school library and invited parents and other U.S. history classes to visit our “family history museum.”

The project was so successful that other U.S. history teachers wanted to join in. Thereafter, the display was set up in the cafeteria and held at night with as many as 350 students participating. About that time I made a presentation of the project at the annual conference of the California Association for the Gifted, held that year in Los Angeles. Since that was a relatively short drive from my school, I invited two students and their parents to bring their displays for the audience to see. One was a Chinese American student whose mother spoke during the discussion period; she proclaimed that originally her children considered the Chinese family artifacts she had as “junk,” but now they considered them to be “treasures.” Over the years, many parents told me that the project resulted in more family discussion than ever before—and grandparents too!

*The lesson to be learned? Relevance makes the difference.*

they made the best use of the time allotted to them.

Come convention day and they were ready. Each group presented its best orators, waved its campaign banners, chanted slogans—some even had accompanying music and did a march around the room when its candidate was nominated (they had seen clips of current campaign convention activity).

I believe that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson became real people to them, and students recognized that events of an earlier era laid the foundation for a process that continues to this day—for good or bad.

*The lesson to be learned: Active engagement makes the difference.*

### THINK LIKE AN HISTORIAN: THINK LIKE AN ARCHEOLOGIST

Students of history—as well as every other discipline—need to look at the events and facts of any given situation through the eyes of the individuals involved in the original activity. During our study of prehistory, I wanted my students to understand the process used by archeologists when interpreting a culture that lived before recorded history. I wanted them to recognize the need to use careful procedures in digging up the items used by these people and the cautions one must use in interpreting the artifacts whose users could not speak for themselves.

In class we learned about the lost culture of Atlantis—which did have historical references but no recorded history of its own;

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### SIMULATING THE REAL THING

Benjamin Franklin said, “A penny saved, is a penny earned.” That’s why even today, I never fail to bend over and pick up a dropped penny on the street or walkway. For me that maxim means that the little things along the way add up to something big. But can one really expect middle school students to recognize that studying an event from the past will have any meaning for them today? This election year provides an opportunity for relating history to what students and their elders may be talking about at the dinner table or when watching television.

We were studying the development of political parties in the young United States during the election of 1800. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were the protagonists; the two men had very divergent views of government: John Adams preferred a strong federal government to protect society from itself. Jefferson on the other hand, in a letter to James Madison maintained that “a little rebellion now and then is a good thing.”

My classes were divided into these opposing camps and prepared for their respective party conventions. They had to research the issues and events in order to prepare their campaign buttons, slogans, speeches, and props. They also had to organize how it would all fit together and divide the tasks to assure

in fact there is still disagreement as to just where Atlantis was located. We also studied the procedures and the many roles played by individuals in archeology when they go into the field to carry out a “dig.”

“The Dig” was a simulation developed by Interact educational company. (I just learned that they still publish it, and it is in its 3rd edition.) Groups of students created a culture, placed “artifacts” in the ground or a large box, then traded with another group and “uncovered” the artifacts and interpreted the culture’s characteristics based on those artifacts.

I used the same basic idea but on the appointed day of the dig, I went early to a particular beach of our coastal town, staked out a grid large enough for two entire classes to be engaged. I then proceeded to plant “artifacts” in the sand at different levels and placements. I had obtained most of these artifacts at a local thrift store; over the years I built up quite a collection.

About mid-morning my teaching partner brought our students from school in the big yellow bus to begin our dig. Students in the various groups were reminded of their individual roles and responsibilities chosen in class earlier and their need to use the tools of archeologists—both intangible and material. It usually took them about two hours to complete their tasks

and eat their sack lunches before we headed back to school. The next day we began the process of interpretation.

Of course, the students all knew that this was a simulation and that their brief training did not make them experts—either in the careful procedures used by real archeologists or in their skills of interpretation when examining the “evidence” they brought back to the classroom. But I think it did give them an understanding of what it takes to think like an archeologist, who is in fact, one type of specialized historian. (Thanks to Professor Sandra Kaplan of the University of Southern California for her “Think Like A Disciplinarian” methods and publications.)

***The lesson to be learned: Perspective makes the difference.***

### THOSE DREADED ISPS

It is my firm belief that teachers of gifted learners must be preparing students for higher education down the road. They may not all be headed for 4-year liberal arts colleges or universities, but they will almost all be seeking advanced training. And we must help them develop the tools they will need to meet the advanced challenges they will encounter. Even an inexact domain such as history (inexact in that many interpretations may exist of the same event), careful methods of procedure must be developed when

counted. In subsequent units they selected their own problems, but followed the same general procedure.

I can't say that this activity was one that my students thought was “fun” but it was one that provided intellectual challenge and discipline. And happy to say, numerous students came back later to tell me that these activities provided the experience they needed to meet advanced learning challenges after leaving middle school.

***The lesson to be learned: The method makes the difference.***

As a retired teacher of history, I sometimes think how my teaching would be different today. Most importantly, my students would have ready access to primary source materials that were often difficult for me to obtain when I began my teaching. How glorious it must be to assign a topic of research where students have virtual access to myriad sources pertaining directly to the person or event they are studying. Not only are museum, media, and government archives available to students, but teachers have untold resources as well in the various electronic education programs set up to assist them in the use of primary sources. I am proud to say that one of my former students who now teaches at George Mason University was instrumental in developing one such teacher resource: History Matters (and is

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studying the past to get as close to the truth as possible. I tried to instill in my students the need to use the steps of scientific method in solving historic problems.

Early in each school year I introduced a series of Independent Study Problems students would be expected to carry out—one per unit of study. They were expected to choose a problem of interest related to the unit, develop a hypothesis, research the topic and synthesize what they had learned in a paper due at the end of the unit. The paper must also include an evaluation of how well they had carried out their research.

I usually provided the first problem as a quick sample of what was expected. One problem I presented was the identity of an ancient female pharaoh. Being the ham that I am, I dressed up in an Egyptian costume I had devised based upon my own research of Queen Hapshetsut, who started her reign about 1479 B.C. As I paced the room in my Egyptian costume, I provided them with pertinent information that would provide clues to my identity. Of course, most guessed (hypothesized) that I was Cleopatra—probably the only female Egyptian they had ever heard of—and then set out to prove or disprove that guess.

In their written papers they were to document the sources they used to find their research information and to evaluate the process and information. Whether or not their “answer” had been originally correct did not matter. In this case, the procedure was what

also the co-director of the National History Education Clearinghouse). I take no credit for any of her accomplishments, but I hope that I did help to spark her interest in and love of history. Kelly Schrum—kudos to you!

And kudos to all history teachers still in the classroom. And thanks to former student, Dan Nelson, who now teaches digital photography at Ventura High School, and who jogged my memory regarding some of the “projects” we engaged in during the 1970s at Balboa. When I began my teaching career in history, I vowed that if my classes ever came to be like those of Claude, I would immediately quit the field and apply myself elsewhere. History is made up of the stories of people—what could be more exciting than that? History classes should be too. ■



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# Gaining Wisdom by Giving Back

Helping  
Gifted Young People  
Help Others

By Erik Schwinger & Jim Delisle



In many ways, Ethan is just like any other teenager growing up in suburban America. While not in school, he enjoys basketball, volleyball, and computer games with friends and playing guitar with his brother. However, there is one thing that sets Ethan apart from most other young people his age. For the past 3 years, he has focused much of his energy on growing and building his community service project: Music to My Ears (<http://www.musicatomyearshanover.org/>). Music to My Ears is an all-volunteer organization consisting of Ethan's team of middle and high school students who provide music lessons to elementary school-aged children. Ethan founded Music to My Ears in 2009 when budget cuts at his local school forced the closure of its strings program. Since then, Ethan has provided music lessons to nearly 60 children, his team of 18 volunteer teachers logging more than 800 service hours in two chapter locations (his hometown of Mechanicsville, VA and a second location in Fredericksburg, MD). Ethan is presently working with a young lady in Texas to develop a third chapter, and several other friends of his have expressed interest as well. Ethan currently has a waiting list of students for his next session and is providing consultation for other musicians to start chapters of Music To My Ears in their own towns by utilizing the structure he has developed.

While certainly an exceptional young man in many ways, Ethan is not alone. He is one of a growing number of young social entrepreneurs to realize—at a very early age—that they have the power within themselves to make a difference on the issues that matter most to them. In addition to being tremendously dedicated to service, Ethan is also an intellectually gifted young man. In 2007 he was accepted as a Davidson Young Scholar (<http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/YoungScholars>) a free membership organization designed to nurture and support profoundly intelligent young people ages 5-18 years old. In 2009, Ethan submitted an application and project proposal for Music to My Ears to participate in the Davidson Young Scholars Ambassador Program (YSAP). The Ambassador Program, designed to foster learning and civic engagement through community service and leadership, includes an 18 month training process which challenges young people to identify a problem or an unmet need in their community (or in the world at-large), and then propose, design, build, and manage their very own service ventures

aimed at addressing that problem or meeting that need.

The Ambassador Program includes a series of 8 one-week long online seminars, administered no more frequently than once per month over the course of a calendar year, on the following topics: writing a strategic business plan, self-advocacy, interpersonal communication, website design, leadership, philanthropy, fundraising, and public/media relations. The online seminars present content and discussion aimed at providing the Ambassadors with specific feedback about their projects and ideas, along with the confidence and skills to move forward towards their goals.

Another key feature of the Ambassador Program is personalized support and guidance from a program advisor. The role of the advisor is not to tell the Ambassadors what to do or how to do it, but rather to facilitate the figuring of that out on their own. Because of the broad range of issues the Ambassadors choose to take action on (they are free to choose anything as long as it is service-oriented), the advisors are usually not experts in those fields, nor do they need to be. Because this is a true experiential method, there is plenty of trial and error (setbacks and successes are both common) but in the Ambassador Program, that is all part and parcel of the learning process. Critical thinking, resilience, creative problem solving and learning to deal with obstacles and challenges when they arise are a few of the latent benefits of participating in the Ambassador Program.

The Young Scholars Ambassador Program is the brainchild of Davidson Institute for Talent Development (DITD) Co-founder Jan Davidson. Having built the Davidson Institute into a nationally recognized nonprofit organization, Jan still felt more could be done to encourage and develop a philanthropic mindset among these highly gifted young people. Her well known quote “if you have the *ability* to help others, you have the *responsibility* to do so” provided inspiration for, and remains a guiding principle of, the Ambassador Program.

Far from a traditionally structured service-learning approach, which typically requires much preparation and reflection inside the classroom, the Ambassador Program looks more like a college-level independent study course. Once accepted into the program, students complete a series of low-intensity requirements (the online seminars), punctuated by periodic check-ins and reporting to their advisor for updates, sugges-

tions and advice. This process is stretched over the course of 18 months from beginning to end, allowing plenty of time for their projects to incubate and develop organically. The onus of responsibility to meet their personal and project goals lies squarely on the shoulders of the Ambassadors, the majority of whom are middle and early high school aged. It is a lot of responsibility, but when provided with the appropriate tools for the job, they almost always exceed expectations and deliver in a big way.

### CONNECTING PHILANTHROPY WITH SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

In 1994, the *National Council for the Social Studies* (NCSS) published national curriculum standards for the first time. In defining social studies as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote social competence” (National Council for the Social Studies, p. 1) NCSS transformed social studies from a “who fought which battle in what year” focus, to one that sought to mesh the many dimensions involved in true civic competence. Thus, disciplines such as anthropology, economics, geography, philosophy, political science and religion came under this broad umbrella of “social studies.” The ultimate NCSS goal was to “help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.” (NCSS, p. 1)

To call the Ambassador Program a traditional “social studies curriculum” would be a misnomer. There is no formal instruction on American government, economics, political science, or world civilizations. However, the Ambassador Program does go a long way towards meeting the NCSS goals, which are not always addressed in traditional social studies classrooms. Depending on the projects these students decide to take on, some may end up learning a great deal about a particular aspect of American culture, economics, politics or governance, while others may get a crash course in international matters such as globalization, natural resource depletion,



illiteracy, or poverty. The hands-on context within which the Ambassadors experience these issues (and develop their own solutions) is much more powerful than anything they could ever glean from reading a textbook. Also, in considering the ten themes that NCSS believes essential in the development of competent citizens (see Box 1); we find considerable overlap in these themes and the ones that emerge through the various Ambassadors’ projects. Let’s consider just two additional projects that are ongoing now by Ambassadors who recently completed the program.

### SACHIN AND ELIZABETH

When Sachin was 13 years old, he observed many of his neighbors throwing computers and other electronics out with their trash. Well aware of the dangers of e-waste, Sachin decided to do something about it. Fast-forward 5 years and Sachin is now the founder of the Community Recycling Campaign for a Better Tomorrow (<http://www.crcfbt.org/>), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. In addition to recycling and refurbishing thousands of electronics, Sachin and his team have expanded their activities to develop an Adopt-A-School Program in India, raise thousands of dollars for organizations including UNICEF and the Hemophilia Foundation, and have distributed literally tons of clothing to victims of natural disasters throughout the world.

Elizabeth knows firsthand how difficult it is to lose a pet. When her good friend Bubba passed away, she felt compelled to provide supports for other children who experience similar loss. Elizabeth worked diligently to research the grieving process, interviewed individuals who recently lost their own pets and partnered with professionals in cinema and veterinary medicine to develop a comprehensive resource to help young people make sense of, and deal with, losing a pet. In October of 2010 (at 13 years old) she went live with her website, *A Hole In My Heart: A Child’s Guide to Pet Loss* ([www.ChildPetLoss.com](http://www.ChildPetLoss.com)), which includes a video that Elizabeth produced. Elizabeth has also partnered with the Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital’s Argus Institute to provide her video as a resource on their webpage: *Helping Children Through Pet Illness and Death*.

### THE FOCUS ON INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

To fully appreciate the learning processes taking place, one must examine the many layers of independent inquiry that the Ambassadors’ projects contain. First and foremost is the background knowledge that must be gathered before any fieldwork can begin in earnest. The students initiate their own research on whatever issue they feel is important and build a proposal for *who, what, where and when* they will help, along with well thought-out reasoning for *why* and *how* their solution will work. Once that critical (and somewhat academic) first step is completed, it’s on to the real applied work of drafting a strategic business plan and implementing that plan.

Learning firsthand how to be responsible students and citizens by working independently, meeting self-imposed and external deadlines, and developing relationships

#### THE TEN THEMES OF NCSS SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION

1. Culture
2. Time, continuity and change
3. People, places and environments
4. Individual development and identity
5. Individuals, groups and institutions
6. Power, authority and governance
7. Production, distribution and consumption
8. Science, technology and society
9. Global connections
10. Civic ideas and practices

FURTHER ELABORATION ON THESE THEMES MAY BE FOUND AT

[www.socialstudies.org/standards](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards)

BOX 1

with other local or national organizations whose missions are similar is the pragmatic layer of this experiential learning process. These young people gain a greater understanding of the interconnectedness—and diversity—of the modern world by interacting directly with it. They more fully appreciate the dynamic nature of the human condition not because it is an abstract concept they read in a textbook, but because it is something they have now experienced firsthand. They are presented with the opportunity to formulate an identity as an active, responsible citizen and gain a better understanding of the “self” in the broader societal context. Most importantly, they come to understand how problems that might seem distant, irrelevant, or insurmountable at first can be addressed locally in methodical ways with everyday actions. They realize that one person can truly make a difference.

As proof of the benefits of this independent inquiry, here is what Sachin and Elizabeth said about their projects’ impacts—on themselves and others:

I am so fortunate and proud to say that I was part of 2008-2009 Young Scholar Ambassador Program. Through it, I not only learned the skills necessary to start and maintain my community service project, but also skills like leadership and planning that have helped me in every area of my life. The Ambassador Program has helped me learn and practice what community service means and enabled me to continue to learn and grow as a human being. —*Sachin*

The Ambassador program provided the training necessary to complete my service project, *A Hole in My Heart: A Child’s Guide to Pet Loss*. I was unsure how to approach a project of this size. As I continued throughout the webinars, I began to understand how to break the large project into manageable pieces. I interviewed specialists in documentary making and grief counseling. These interviews provided the framework for the content of the DVD. With help from a grief counselor and a local veterinarian, I identified and interviewed children whose personal experiences with pet loss added great value to the finished project. A difficult aspect of this project was fundraising. Again, with help from the documentarian and from my Ambassador Program advisor, I persevered. I wrote grant proposals. It took two years to raise the needed capital for the project, but eventually we did it! —*Elizabeth*

It might seem odd to talk about projects, which sound more like environmental initiatives or music programs in an article about social studies education. While these projects (and all the Ambassadors’ Projects) focus on issues as diverse as the young people who administer them, the common thread remains: these students are getting “out there” in a service capacity—engaging with their communities, partnering with local and national organizations, drawing on their enthusiasm and passion for



#### STEPS TO GETTING STARTED WITH A SERVICE PROJECT

1. Identify and reach a problem in your community:
  - a. Who needs help?
  - b. Why do they need help?
  - c. How will you help them?
2. Develop a strategic plan including:
  - a. Long-term mission statement
  - b. Several Shorter-term goals
  - c. Strategic action steps to achieve those goals
  - d. Set deadlines and timelines for completing the action steps
3. Get Started!
  - a. Start with the first action steps and move forward from there
  - b. Keeps a positive outlook, there will be plenty of doubters and challenges along the way
  - c. Modify and adjust your strategic plan s needed as you go.

BOX 2

a cause, actively building relationships, and learning about the interconnectedness of people from diverse socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds. Importantly, they also learn to recognize voids in the services provided by existing institutions while adding value and strengthening social support networks locally. Becoming engaged citizens and being a force for positive change in their communities not only allows them to enrich their own lives, but the lives of those around them.

#### LEARNING LIFELONG LESSONS

When compared to other students, gifted learners often experience much less challenge inside the regular classroom. Allowing them to step outside the bounds of traditional learning environments and venture out into the “real world” (with appropriate supports, of course) empowers them to take ownership of an issue they see as important and make a tangible difference in the world. This empowerment benefits the gifted young people, who likely experience the world with a high level of intensity, by providing an avenue for them to take action on an issue they feel is important. The experience can be truly transformative on many levels. The goals at the outset of such a venture need not be grandiose. Simple, manageable and achievable goals are key for success at the beginning, but these may certainly give way to revised and more ambitious goals later.

While the Ambassador Program does provide a level of support and structure, the great thing about community service projects such as the ones being completed by these young people is that they can be done anywhere at any time. They may be incorporated as part of a service learning or independent project at school or at home with the help of teachers and parents. No real expertise is needed from the start; it’s a *learn-as-you-go* adventure! The most important ingredients are a passion to make a difference

## Additional Resources Related to Service Learning

### • YOUTHSITE:

<http://www.servicelearning.org/youthsite>

YouthSITE provides students K-college with specific ideas for how to make differences in their local communities. Examples include The EPA Planet Protectors Club For Kids, for elementary students, and On Giants' Shoulders, a high school-college student-run program that uses web cameras and the Internet to mentor younger students, especially in underserved neighborhoods.

### • STATE FARM YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD (YAB):

<http://www.statefarmyab.com>

The YAB consists of 30, 17-20 year olds from the US and Canada who are charged with helping State Farm design and implement \$5 million in annual grants to schools for service learning projects. Examples include the "Farmers Market Project" in Newman, CA, in which students from two high schools grow, harvest and sell fruits and vegetables. Proceeds from the sale of these foods go back to projects designed to aid their local community. The "I-AM" (Inform, Activate, Motivate) College-Bound Project" in Oakland, CA is a student-run program to teach high school peers what it takes to be "college ready".

### • GLOBAL CITIZEN YEAR:

<http://www.globalcitizenyear.org>

In this program, high-potential graduating high school seniors are selected and trained to do a "gap year" of community service in Africa, Asia or Latin America, working in hospitals, schools, clinics and other person-focused settings.

### • NATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING CLEARINGHOUSE (NSLC):

<http://servicelearning.org/slice/>

The NSLC provides a database with hundreds of service learning lesson plans, syllabi and project ideas fro grades K-college. An array of community-based organizations that support service-learning projects is also included.

### • COMMUNITY SERVICE SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES:

[http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles\\_id\\_10483.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10483.aspx)

Written by the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, this article provides links to many resources that will come in handy for any young person pursuing community service activities.

### • WHAT IS PHILANTHROPY:

<http://whatisphilanthropy.org>

Executive Producer Dr. Salvatore Alaimo explores the cultural and societal significance of philanthropy in both historical and contemporary American society.

and healthy doses of resilience and patience when things don't go as planned. See Box 2 below for a simple outline to getting started.

### BACK TO ETHAN

The benefits of truly independent service-learning projects of this scale are many. They provide autonomy and self-confidence for the participating students, as well as aiding others in the process. For example, one of Ethan's teachers is using her volunteer hours to fulfill community service hours for a scholarship. Another friend of his is thinking about starting a chapter for her senior project next year, and yet another (the young lady from Texas mentioned at the beginning of this article) may eventually apply her experiences managing her proposed chapter for her Gold Award in Girl Scouts. "You don't have to be completely altruistic for the community to benefit," Ethan says. "Some of us are just teaching because we enjoy it."

We asked Ethan who he feels benefits more from his Music to My Ears program, the students receiving the lessons, or the volunteer teachers?

It is hard to say who benefits more from the program. At first glance it would be the students, since they are gaining knowledge of their musical instrument and have the benefit of their teacher as a role model. However, teachers benefit just as much, if not more, because they gain teaching experience, practice time on their instrument, and life skills such as communication and leadership. Most of all, they have an opportunity to make a positive difference in their communities.

The labor of love Ethan has invested so much time building into a valuable community resource has not gone unnoticed. He has been recognized as a leader in his community with a Prudential Spirit of Community Award, the Presidential Volunteer Service Award, Kids are Heroes®, and has received commendations from the Virginia State Senate and the Maryland Governor's Office. Not bad for a young man who earlier this year celebrated his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday!

Marcel Proust said that "we don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us." By encouraging gifted young people to pursue their passions and embark on this journey beyond the classroom in service of the community, such wisdom is acquired one small, important step at a time.

If you would like to learn more about the projects being undertaken by the current group of Young Scholar Ambassadors, visit the Davidson Young Scholars Class of 2013 Ambassadors page by clicking on <http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/YoungScholars>. ■



### REFERENCE

National curriculum standards for social studies: Executive summary. Accessed at [www.socialstudies.org/standards](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards).

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**JIM DELISLE** has worked with gifted children and those who work on their behalf for 33 years. The author of 17 books, including the best-selling *Gifted Teen Survival Guide* (with Judy Galbraith), Jim's career has focused on integrating the intellectual and affective lives of gifted young people. He has worked as a consultant for the Davidson Institute since its inception in 1999. He can be reached at [jim.delisle@yahoo.com](mailto:jim.delisle@yahoo.com).

# What Do the Common Core State Standards Mean for History Teaching and Learning?

## Engaging Students in the Discourse of History

By *Katherine Suyeyasu*

As a student, I did not have much interest in history because I learned it as a set body of knowledge. There was nothing to figure out or argue. There were no grey areas. I never once considered what historians did or even if there were any historians left. From my perspective all the work of history had already been done.

My misconception of history as a set body of knowledge had everything to do with the sources and pedagogical methods that my teachers were using. My textbooks presented history as a static body of knowledge devoid of all traces of historical thinking. Too many of my teachers treated history as a body of facts and students as bodies to fill with those facts.

What I have since learned is that while history may begin with facts, it does not end there. The excitement and rigor of learning history lies in the interpretation—how one makes sense of the facts. Learning history provides an opportunity for our students to have a voice in an ongoing dialogue about what happened in the past and why it matters. To engage in this scholarly dialogue, our students must learn what it means to think, read, and write like historians.

If our students are going to develop an appreciation of history as a dynamic discipline of meaning-making, they must be immersed in models of history texts that demonstrate varied perspectives on a topic. Our students need to analyze historical arguments that allow them to identify and evaluate authors' claims and the evidence used to support those claims. Additionally, our students need multiple opportunities to try their own hand at making meaning through historical thinking and writing.

The Common Core Standards in reading and writing for middle and high school validate the importance of students engaging in the practice of analyzing and writing historical arguments. In the Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12, 8th-grade students are expected to “delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient. . . .” (Standard 8). When students read the genre of historical argument with the purpose of identifying and evalu-

ating the author's claim and the evidence used to support that claim, they are not only exposed to the content of history, but also the discourse of history. When students “analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation” (Standard 9), they are experiencing a discipline that holds the possibility of multiple interpretations and invites participation in the making of meaning.

In the Writing Standards 6–12, 8th-grade students are expected to “write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence” (Standard 1). As part of this standard, students must make a claim, distinguish that claim from alternate claims, and support their claims with reasoning and evidence. Having already analyzed what characterizes the genre of historical argument, students are now positioned to experiment with constructing their own written arguments.

As a student, what I did not yet know about history is that there always has been and always will be historical meaning to be made and arguments to be constructed. The Common Core Standards offer an exciting expectation that our students can and will engage in the rigors of this historical discourse. To support students in meeting this expectation, teachers need access to a wide range of historical writing models beyond those offered in history textbooks. Teachers also need access to resources that are based in pedagogical methods that align with an understanding of history as a dynamic discipline based in interpretation. As a teacher, I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues to continue refining our practice of teaching history.

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*Editor's note\* You may access this column and others like it at: <http://teachinghistory.org/issues-and-research/roundtable/response/25352>. It is part of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University with funding from the U.S. Department of Education.*



# Social Studies and the Common Core

*By Sandra N. Kaplan*

PHOTO BY DAN NELSON

*The lives of the characters reflected times gone by; they were reminiscent of the historical events of the 1930s.*

*“Now as in the past, governments seek to...” stated the Governor in his annual speech to the Assembly.*

*His perfect pitching score helps us recall the excitement when Babe Ruth...*

Literature, speeches, and a newspaper sports page exemplify the relationship between text and history. The Common Core Standards, anticipated to be implemented during the 2012–2013 school year, clearly articulate the relationship between literacy and history/social studies. The Introduction section to the Common Core Standards states: “Students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas...” The consequences of this link and subsequent dependency between literacy and history/social studies have profound implications for the teaching and learning of social studies in today’s curriculum, for gifted students, and

for the goals of a defined differentiated curriculum for these learners. The link between the Common Core Standards and differentiation are noted by the:

- responses to the often-cited characteristics of giftedness that describes the students’ abilities, needs, and interests to make connections and think critically;
- practices in the application of several prompts of Depth

COMMON CORE STANDARDS’ PHRASES	GOALS OF DIFFERENTIATION
Gather relevant information	Critical thinking skills
Produce clear and coherent writing	Inductive and Deductive Reasoning Skills
Draw evidence	Research skills
Write arguments	Problem Solving and Creative Thinking Skills

and Complexity outlined in the GATE Standards (CDE, 2005): patterns, trends, perspectives, over time, and interdisciplinary connections;

- redefinition of the professional development experiences that illustrate how the educational goals outlined for the gifted have a significant “spill-over” effect for all students;
- recognition of the need to recognize the importance of the classics and current events as integral features of a well-defined differentiated curriculum and the expectations of a well-educated individual as an outcome of experiencing the gifted program or services;
- reinforcement of the set of Advanced Reading Strategies such as Side-by-Side Reading and Reading Around the Genre, promoting expert-like readers in an assigned or selected topic of study; and the
- support for the use of multiple and varied primary and secondary references as an integral feature of the objectives written to conduct a research project and/or an independent study.

Many educators profess that the sophistication of the Common Core Standards could replace the need to differentiate the curriculum for gifted students, and that existing curriculum standards be specifically articulated for the gifted. However, within the section labeled “What is Not Covered by Curriculum for Gifted Students,” there are explicit comments reporting that the standards focus on essential learning and do not include all that might be included or do not include the types of advanced curriculum aligned to students who surpass the standards before high school graduation. The following phrases extrapolated from some of the Common Core Standards readily identify with major goals of differentiation. They illustrate how the Common Core Standards can be the impetus for extension to differentiation of curriculum for the gifted.

Discussion about the Common Core Standards and a differentiated curriculum for the gifted is not fodder for a choice to support one curriculum set of requirements and expectations over the other. Educators of the gifted need to understand and support the compatible and symbiotic re-

COMMON CORE STANDARDS LITERACY AREA	ALIGNMENT TO DIFFERENTIATION	EXTENSIONS FOR ADVANCED AND GIFTED LEARNERS
<p><b>Reading:</b> Understand the meaning of words and phrases used in text including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to gifted students vocabulary acquisition abilities</li> <li>• Reinforce the language of the disciplines (Depth)</li> <li>• Acquire relationship of English to Latin and Greek words, phrases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study the nuances of language used in the “art of argumentation” in politics, political negotiations</li> <li>• Trace the chronological evolution of word and phrases associated with historical events</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reading:</b> Determine the author’s use of key terms and how he/she refines their meaning over the course of a text</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assert and support points of view (Complexity)</li> <li>• Examine the author’s written purpose in text and the authors’ biographic portraits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the author’s work over time complexity) to note how personal, social, political contexts affect the selection and use of language patterns</li> </ul>
<p><b>Writing:</b> Conduct a research project to answer a question and/or solve a problem drawing on several sources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct an independent study</li> <li>• Develop research skills</li> <li>• Develop independence of thinking and learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study the skills and dispositions of researchers written between and across disciplines to determine the criteria and paths to achieving expertise.</li> </ul>

## DIFFERENTIATING THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS: PLACEMENT

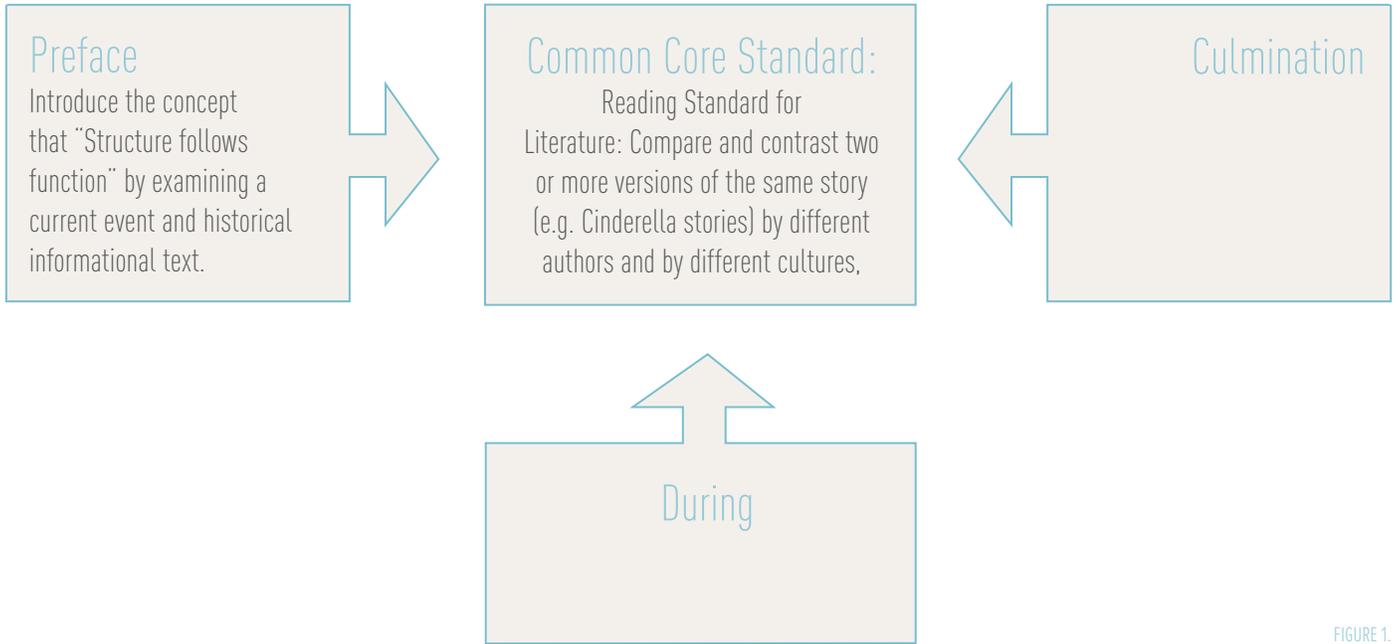


FIGURE 1.

## DIFFERENTIATING THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS: PLACEMENT

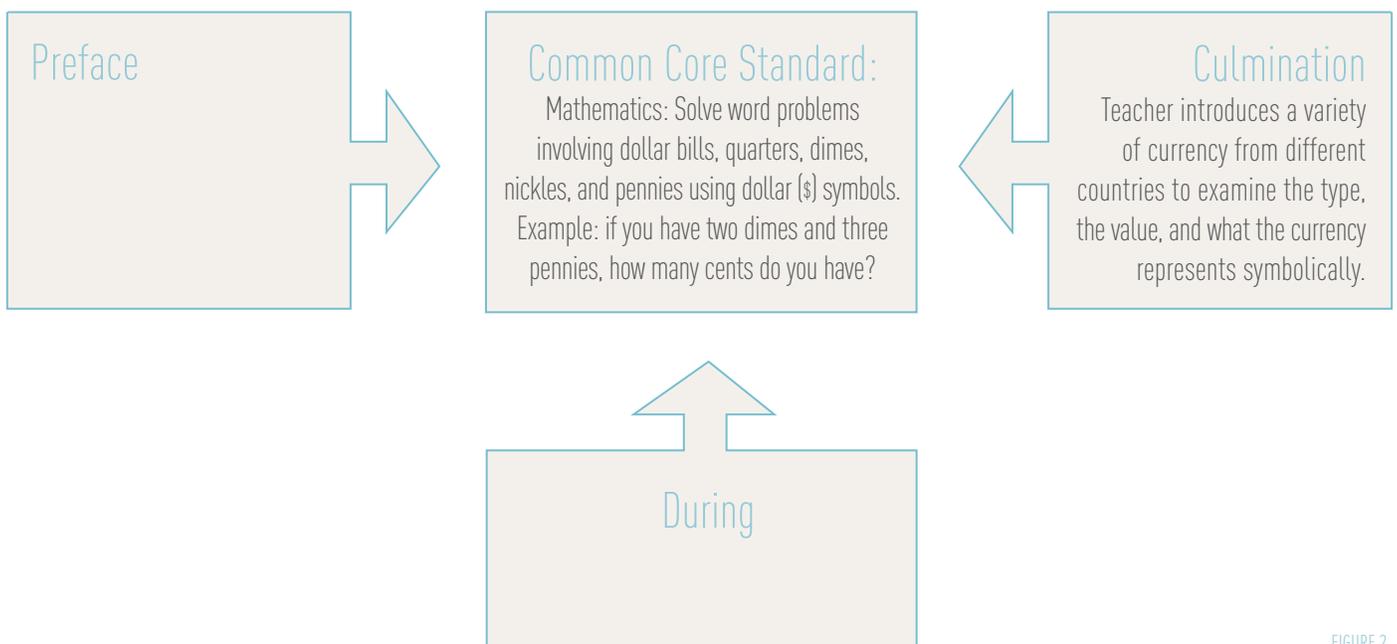


FIGURE 2.

## DIFFERENTIATING THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS: CLUSTERING

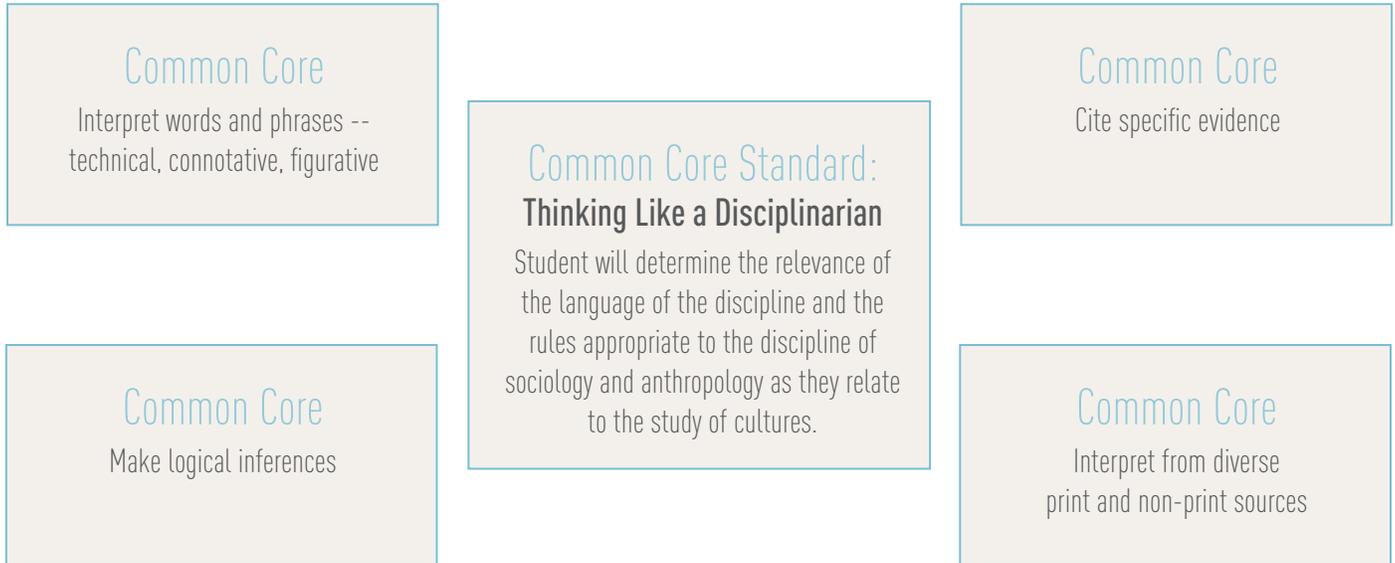


FIGURE 3 ILLUSTRATES HOW DIFFERENTIATING THE COMMON CORE BY CLUSTERING ELEMENTS OF THE STANDARDS (KEY WORDS AND/OR PHRASES) AROUND A DIFFERENTIATED ELEMENT OR OBJECTIVE.

relationship that can exist between both of these curriculum.

The alignment and extension of the Common Core Standards to accommodate gifted students requires attention to a three-step process. The major effect of this process is to generate thoughtful curriculum decision-making.

- **Step One: Readiness for Learning**
- Utilize formal and/or informal performance data to define the status of the learners' competence levels: recognize, apply, and/or transfer the skills and understandings to be taught.
- **Step Two: Instructional Scaffolding**
- Use the Readiness Assessment to match HOW to teach to WHAT students need to learn: didactic or inquiry teaching/learning strategies.
- **Step Three: Embedding**
- Decide the type of curriculum that would best facilitate the introduction and practice of the skill and/or understanding: basic, differentiated, individualized curriculum structures.

The figures above represent ways that teachers can decide to integrate Common Core Standards with differentiated curriculum. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how the Common

Core Standards becomes the centerpiece for decision-making. After thoroughly examining the readiness for student learning, the teacher will decide whether the differentiation for that Common Core standard will come as a preface, during, or as a culminating feature of the lesson.

The structure and scope of curriculum responsive to giftedness has been fraught with both controversy and creativity. The consistent efforts to answer the questions related to the curriculum demands for the gifted does not and should not be resolved even with the advent of the Common Core Standards. ■



**DR. SANDRA KAPLAN**, Professor of Clinical Education at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, consults for several state departments and school districts nationwide on the topics of education for gifted students, differentiated curriculum in depth and complexity and thematic interdisciplinarity. Dr. Kaplan has authored numerous articles and books on the nature and scope of differentiated curriculum for gifted students. She has served as a past president for both the California Association of the Gifted and the National Association for Gifted Children.



# The Politics of Teaching Politics

By Sandra N. Kaplan and Jessica Manzone

PHOTO BY DAN NELSON

While observing students in the elementary grades, it becomes apparent that the students have an informal understanding of politics that manifests itself in a variety of ways: selecting teammates for a game of kickball on the playground, finding a seat at the lunch table amongst friends, and voting for candidates in a student council election. One question related to the teaching of social studies is how the informal concepts of politics can become formalized as essential features of the social studies curriculum. This question has been an area of consideration and dialogue among scholars and educational philosopher for years. Dewey (1943) believed that a symbiotic relationship *between* politics and community exists, and is vitally important to the creation and promotion of a democratic society. The role of the school and the teacher is to acknowledge the barriers to promote the active engagement of politics and political science as a discipline in the social studies curriculum.

Too often, young students are led to believe that politics is “just for adults.” They are taught to examine what others have done politically rather than what they themselves might do in similar situations. In most classrooms, politics is typically taught and studied from “afar.” Rather than helping students understand, in a more personal way, what politics is and its relationship to societies, we focus on what it has been: what political

GLOBAL ISSUES	21 <sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS	NCSS STANDARDS
<b>Children as Consumers</b>	Explore the impacts and effects of an invention or technological innovation and analyze the pros and cons of its impact on society (Collaboration).	1.4 -- Individual Development and Identity 1.7 -- Production, Distribution, and Consumption 1.10 -- Civil Ideas and Practices
<b>Biodiversity &amp; the Environment</b>	Analyze, organize, and present information from the social sciences to compare and contrast various current issues (Communication).	1.2 -- Time, Continuity, and Change 1.3 -- People, Places, and the Environment 1.9 -- Global Connections
<b>Economics &amp; Trade</b>	Use digital resources to investigate political, social and economic issues in the past and present and how these issues affect the community (Critical Thinking and Problem Solving).	1.5 -- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions 1.6 -- Power, Authority, and Governance 1.7 -- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
<b>Food &amp; Agriculture</b>	Analyze the needs and wants of co-existing community constituencies and enact a situation in which they must work together (Flexibility & Adaptability).	1.2 -- Time, Continuity, and Change 1.3 -- People, Places, and the Environment 1.7 -- Production, Distribution, and Consumption 1.8 -- Science, Technology, and Society
<b>Power</b>	Critique sources of information from various types of information and analyze the difference between public and private information (Information Literacy).	1.5 -- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions 1.6 -- Power, Authority, and Governance 1.9 -- Global Connections 1.10 -- Civil Ideals and Practices
<b>Human Rights</b>	Develop creative solutions to a school or group problem (Learning & Innovation Skills).	1.1 -- Culture and Cultural Diversity 1.4 -- Individual Development and Identity 1.6 -- Power, Authority, and Governance 1.10 -- Civil Ideals and Practices

decisions were made, who made those decisions, and the ramifications of those decisions. Students, for example, are asked to examine the political decisions made during a United Nations assembly meeting. Questions revolve around identifying the key ideas, their individual contributions to arrive at an agreement, the significant negotiated outcomes, and the impact and influences of these outcomes on societies.

Although these examinations of politics lead to the attainment of important facts, they stop just short of helping students develop the “art of political argumentation” from these studies that transfer into today’s comprehension of politics. The ultimate goal behind the concept of understanding a political perspective is for students to actually practice making political decisions and justify those decisions through the development of a personal, politically founded voice.

The features (articulated above) serve as foundational blocks upon which interdisciplinary curricular units of study and learning experiences can be built.

Teaching young children to develop a political voice and formulate deep understandings of *politics* and government is dependent upon making connections between critical Global Issues, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, and social studies content standards. The chart above highlights the relationship that exists between these features.

In 2011, the United States Department of Education awarded the Los Angeles Unified School District a three-year Magnet School Assistance Program grant to design theme-based magnet programs as a means of simultaneously improving the academic performance of a school and attracting students of linguistic, cultural, and economic diversity, from many and varied neigh-

	<b>UNIT ONE LEADERS &amp; FOLLOWERS</b>	<b>UNIT THREE THE POWER OF POLITICS</b>	<b>UNIT FOUR VOICE</b>
<b>Universal Concepts</b>	Structures	Power	Change
<b>Big Ideas</b>	Structures have a hierarchy: leaders or followers. Structures change overtime. All structures have a purpose.	The effects of power can be measured in different ways. Power can be used and abused.	Ideas and information have a voice. Voices can be used to create change.
<b>Depth &amp; Complexity</b>	Patterns Point of View Language of the Discipline  	Ethics Point of View Patterns  	Overtime Point of View Language of the Discipline  
<b>Thinking like a Disciplinary</b>	Economist Geographer Political Scientist	Political Scientist Journalist Anthropologist	Sociologist Lawyer Geographer
<b>Critical &amp; Creative Thinking Skills</b>	Prove with Evidence Determine the Relevance	Judge with Criteria Note Ambiguity Substantiate	Minify/Magnify Determine the Relevance Substantiate Add-to
<b>Interdisciplinary Connections</b>	Language Arts -- Structures of different genres.	Mathematics -- Power of number placement & value Science -- Natural power in weather	Language Arts -- Characters' actions change to resolve conflict

borhoods. Tom Bradley Global Awareness Magnet in the urban center of Los Angeles was one of the schools funded to design and implement a “Politics and Government” theme-based curriculum. This approach to curriculum design uses the social studies disciplines defined by grade level standards as the units of study to focus on politics and government.

This politically themed, interdisciplinary social studies curriculum embeds aspects of the California Gifted and Talented Standards (CDE, 2005) for all students: Depth and Complexity, critical and creative thinking skills, universal concepts and big ideas, independent study, and Thinking Like a Disciplinarian. The curriculum was founded on the research-based definition of politics and on the belief that students make meaning of this definition through inquiry-based learning experiences. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) define politics as the overt and covert interactions and negotiations among people in which power is used to achieve/

influence a particular outcome. Using this definition as a conceptual framework, interdisciplinary units were created around four major themes: Leaders and Followers, Political Parties, The Power of Politics, and Voices. Open-ended unit plans were written that include the tenets of differentiated curriculum for gifted learners with the definition of politics and grade-level content standards across the disciplines. The teachers at Tom Bradley received continuous and ongoing professional development in language arts, math, and science to “align” the study of politics and government with content areas that meet the needs, interests, and abilities of the students in their classrooms. The following chart illustrates the framework used for creating differentiated, interdisciplinary units of study on politics and government employed at Tom Bradley.

Fundamental to the teaching of politics in an interdisciplinary curriculum is enabling students to observe, analyze, and critique

# SAMPLE LESSON ONE: POWER

## 1. STANDARD

Objective: Students will be able to define and prove the multiple meaning of the Big Idea: The effects of power can be measured in different ways. Students will apply the big idea to grade appropriate social studies, language arts, and mathematics standards. Students will create a chart accompanied by a written narrative to evidence the big idea.

Syntax	Activity	Script		
Motivation State the Object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show the following illustrations (scale, thermometer, justice scales, voltage, heat).</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask students to define what all of the pictures have in common.</li> <li>List the student responses on a retrieval chart</li> </ul> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Our Responses</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">What is the Connection?</td> </tr> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage students in a discussion as to the importance of measurement.</li> <li>Introduce the idea of covert (seen) and over (unseen) power. For example, the power of our heart to pump blood is not seen, but the power of electricity is.</li> </ul>	Our Responses	What is the Connection?	
Our Responses				
What is the Connection?				

	<p>The effects of power can be measured in different</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Our evidence of power</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">6</td> </tr> </table>	Our evidence of power	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our evidence of power								
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Integration & Reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will complete the large charted “v” with information that shows, that the effects of power can be measured in different ways: by vote, voices, and victories</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p style="font-weight: bold;">Vote, Voices, and Victories</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are to research political events, either past or present that indicate how vote, voices, and victories were the measured effects of power.</li> </ul>
------------------------------	--

## LESSON PLAN

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

MODEL OF TEACHING: **ADVANCED ORGANIZER**

Syntax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce students to the Big Idea: the effects of power can be measured in different ways.</li> <li>Reinforce academic Language related to following: effects, measured, power.</li> </ul>																		
Practice with the Advance Organizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a discussion using this chart as the basis of promoting the discussion.</li> </ul> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <th colspan="3" style="text-align: center;">Power</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Sources</th> <th>Effects</th> <th>Measurements</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Characters</td> <td>Using words acting in particular ways</td> <td>Reactions of other people to the characters in the story.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Numbers</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Animals</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ideas</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Power			Sources	Effects	Measurements	Characters	Using words acting in particular ways	Reactions of other people to the characters in the story.	Numbers			Animals			Ideas		
Power																			
Sources	Effects	Measurements																	
Characters	Using words acting in particular ways	Reactions of other people to the characters in the story.																	
Numbers																			
Animals																			
Ideas																			
Apply the advance Organizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify information to prove the Big Idea in the following ways:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship to social studies content standards.</li> <li>Teacher directed lecture or sharing.</li> <li>Student centered research (group work at the computer, group work in selected text material.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>																		
Share & Summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the following chart with information gathered during research.</li> <li>Review the and code the chart to identify the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most important idea</li> <li>Ideas that are least clear and need further investigation.</li> <li>Ideas that we question</li> </ul> </li> <li>Conduct a second research group or individual session so that in answered questions or ideas can be clarified.</li> <li>Conduct a discussion to summarize the learning that defines and proves the big idea:</li> </ul>																		

## SAMPLE LESSON TWO: VOICES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will be able to define and differentiate the details that distinguish the concept of “voices” after observing pictures, reading stories, and/or watching a video. They will complete a chart to illustrate the meaning of voices.

SYNTAX OF THE LESSON	ACTIVITY																		
Present the Puzzlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show students these pictures and ask them to define the meaning of “voice” in each picture.</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read a story from an anthology or picture book. Discuss how the author gave “voice” to the characters.</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>																		
Solicit Questions from Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask students what question they have about the MEANING and PRACTICES of “voice” by different people in different situations.</li> <li>List students’ questions. Note: their questions might be:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why do people use different to use a “voice”?</li> <li>How do people decide to use a “voice”?</li> <li>How do voices match the person’s needs?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>																		
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instruct students to find answers to their questions in a variety of resources:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story (Language arts)</li> <li>Biography (science)</li> <li>Historic event (social studies)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>																		
Share and Summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">Different Situation, Different Voices</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Situation</th> <th>Voice</th> <th>Reason</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="height: 20px;"></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </li> <li>Ask the following questions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imagine the situation of _____; what type of voice would be used and WHY?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Note examples of an entry to complete the chart.</li> </ul> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Situation</th> <th>Voice</th> <th>Reason</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Fire</td> <td>Loude upset voice of a fireman</td> <td>Warm People</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Football Game</td> <td>Cheering</td> <td>Encourage the team</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Different Situation, Different Voices			Situation	Voice	Reason				Situation	Voice	Reason	Fire	Loude upset voice of a fireman	Warm People	Football Game	Cheering	Encourage the team
Different Situation, Different Voices																			
Situation	Voice	Reason																	
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Fire	Loude upset voice of a fireman	Warm People																	
Football Game	Cheering	Encourage the team																	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the social studies standard for the grade level and complete the chart</li> </ul>																		
Recycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask students with other questions they have.</li> </ul>																		

the language patterns related to politics and government. It is in these language patterns or voice that students begin to understand (a) the dynamic nature of politics, (b) the implications of political decisions in all aspects of their lives, (c) and the roles and responsibilities of individuals in a politically charged society. Classroom discourse can be used to accomplish these goals and to determine the quality of thought that goes into political decisions making.

The sample lessons herein exemplify interdisciplinary approaches to teaching politics and government. Note that each lesson is based on an inquiry instructional method to allow for the development of student-centered independent thought as a prerequisite to understanding politics and acquiring a “voice.”

According to Rotherham and Willingham (2010), schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century demands the use of complex cognitive pro-

cesses and should function as a means by which students activate potential, practice leadership and problem solving strategies, and foster the critical and creative thinking skills necessary to move society beyond where we are to where we could be. The integration of politics into the content areas is essential to help students engage in the critical discourse of a democratic society. The formal teaching of politics in the classroom provides the entry point for developing personal perspective and voice, and for becoming critical consumers as well as critical producers of information and content. Unlike many of the skills that people master within a particular time frame, the teaching of politics requires skills that one learns to use, develop, and improve over a lifetime. The measure of a students’ ability to understand politics is not exemplified in *whom* they would vote for. It is however, exemplified by *how* they make the decision about their vote, *how* they ask the ques-

## SAMPLE LESSON THREE: VOICES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will be able to determine the relationship between academic vocabulary and the concept of voice in various disciplines

SYNTAX OF THE LESSON	ACTIVITY
Present the Advance Organizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask students to read this big idea: Ideas and information have a “voice” that represent a discipline.</li> </ul>
Relate the Advance Organizer to Prior Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce the set of pictures that represent previous learning in various discipline.                             <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin: 10px 0;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>plants botany</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>city architecture</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>flag history</p> </div> </div> </li> <li>Instruct students to identify the voice of the discipline by defining the relationship between the word and picture and the discipline.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example-“ the flag represents the stars for the states and that is a symbol of the history of our country”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Apply the Advance Organizer to New Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reintroduce students to the big idea: ideas and information have a “voice” that represent a discipline.</li> <li>Introduce students to the following charts that represent different disciplines of politics and government.</li> <li>Instruct students to work in groups in order to identify the “voice” or the definition of the words that are inserted within each of the disciplinary charts.</li> <li>Instruct students to research how the voices in these disciplines relate to what they are currently studying in social studies.</li> <li>Consider having students use the “voice” in the charts to do any one of the following learning experiences:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw a picture of how the voice “sounds” in contemporary society.</li> <li>Use the voice to design a character such as persuade or leader as part of a story or an essay.</li> <li>Dramatize the voice in a scene from contemporary or a historical event.</li> <li>Relate the voice to a literary work such as a biography to autobiography.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Linguistics</b> Language of the Discipline Structure Grammar Phonics Morphology</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Philosophy</b> Ethics Logic Morals Argument</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Law</b> Rules Constitution Systems Contracts</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><b>Psychology</b> Point of View Behavior Motivation Personality</p> </div> </div>

tions that would help them make good judgments, and *how* they view themselves as a political participants in society.

The authors wish to thank the administrators of the MSAP grant, Deborah Brandy, Estelle Lucket, and Dr. Genevieve Shepherd, principal at Tom Bradley for our involvement on the grant. ■

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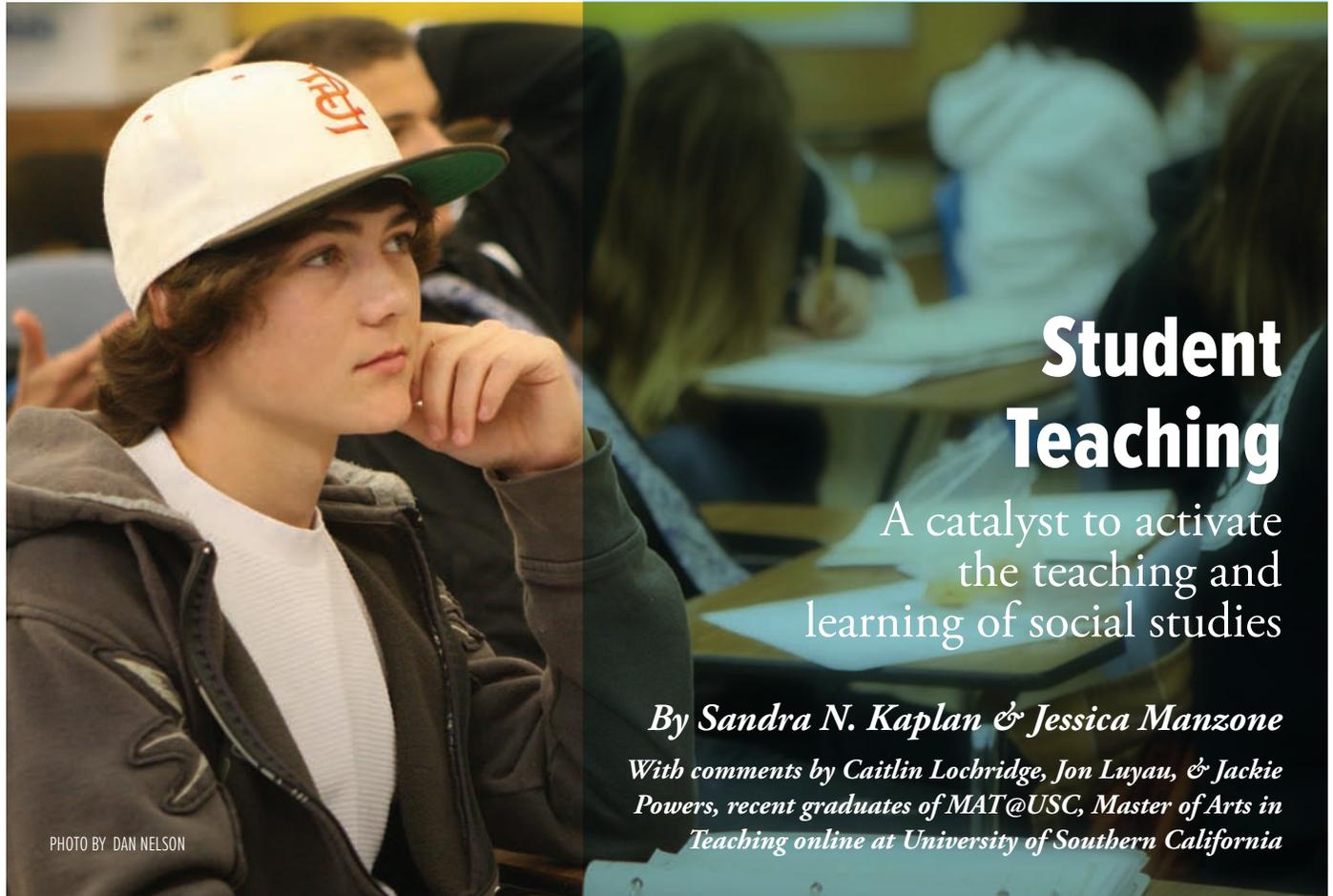
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# Student Teaching

A catalyst to activate the teaching and learning of social studies

*By Sandra N. Kaplan & Jessica Manzone*

*With comments by Caitlin Lochridge, Jon Luyau, & Jackie Powers, recent graduates of MAT@USC, Master of Arts in Teaching online at University of Southern California*

PHOTO BY DAN NELSON

The walk down the hallway from the entrance of the school to the door of the secondary social studies classroom is always accompanied by a myriad of questions: How will the students respond to the lesson? How will the lesson cover all of the required content? How will student learning be assessed? And how will the lesson incorporate tenets of differentiation to meet the needs of all learning profiles?

Sitting in the back of the room observing student teachers, we pose these questions to ourselves as university professors and to the teacher candidates with whom we work. Collectively, we seek answers to the above questions in order to develop comprehensive, engaging, and academically appropriate learning experiences for students across the social studies disciplines.

A student teacher is often perceived by veteran teachers as lacking rather than having a deep understanding of the content knowledge and skills needed to educate learners in a specific subject area. Our observations have highlighted the realization that student teachers carry with them into the classroom an unbridled love of the subject matter in which they teach and an intense desire to pass that love onto their students.

While veteran teachers perceive the student teacher as novice and inexperienced, we believe that they should be recognized for their commitment to the subject matter, the students they teach, and the process of becoming a professional educator. Student teachers are embedding techniques such as inquiry-

based pedagogy, the integration of current events, classics, and universal concepts into their lesson plans to revitalize students' interest in the social studies disciplines. The following passages are excerpts from the reflective journals of recent graduates of the Masters in the Art of Teaching program at the University of Southern California. Each of these students taught at the high school level. The excerpts document their experience during the student teaching process and articulate their struggles and triumphs as torchbearers for the social studies disciplines.

## JACKIE POWERS

It is not uncommon to step into a high school social studies classroom and hear students making comments such as, "I hate history! It is so boring" or "History is just a bunch of useless dates and names." Students often judge the importance of a discipline based on whether or not they see applicability to their own lives and experiences. Furthermore, many students often hold negative perceptions of social studies because of their past experiences with the subject. While there are many different factors that can lead a student to shy away from the discipline, it is possible to help each and every student develop a new perspective on the importance of social studies.

During my experiences student teaching, I became aware of the stigma many students have against social studies. However, I found that a majority of students in my US

History and Economics classes became more receptive to learning the material when it was introduced using new approaches to teaching the material. One new approach that seemed to stimulate the students' thinking abilities was the use of "Big Ideas" and "Second Order Universal Concepts." Rather than asking students to complete bookwork or showing them a PowerPoint presentation, students were asked to look at concepts such as power, equality, and change and to discuss connections between their prior educational knowledge, their personal lives, and the new material being learned. Students would then relate these connections back to the main concept of discussion. Students were able to see what types of connections they could draw between different historical events, and how these connections might be applicable when attempting to understand their own world in a more complex way.

This use of critical thinking skills was something that many of the students had rarely been asked to do within the discipline of social studies. This strategy challenges students to draw their own conclusions about the discipline's relevance. Through consistent use of this strategy, I began to see quite a few students who had never participated in class emerge as actively engaged contributors to classroom discussions.

#### CAITLIN LOCHRIDGE

As a student teacher, I find that social studies students become really engaged by controversy. When I can polarize ideas about a historical topic, students contribute more actively to the discussion. Students are more excited about a subject when they can offer their own opinions and ideas about what they would have actually experienced or what they think. Often times, they find their own middle ground through the discussion. Another way to bring in controversy is to link a historical topic with a current event through debate. When students personally care about a topic, the debates can be impressive. Students naturally bring in other concepts and ideas and really use critical thinking skills in new and unique ways. Letting students problem-solve is a great strategy, but I find that they have to personally care about the problem to genuinely engage the material. It does not necessarily have to reflect their own lives, but something they find important. Students become really excited about high stakes situations and events, but those events must be framed in a right way so the information is not lost; especially if presented in lecture format, or something that is less engaging."

It seems that students are stimulated when they can directly connect the material to themselves in some way: their lives or interests, or their personal ideology. I think they are engaged in this way because the information informs their ideology and at the same time, they are still building their ideology. There is a sense that as a student teacher, I have to genuinely be engaged with them for students to be engaged in the material. They pay attention

and respond more frequently when I demonstrate that I care what their ideology is and that my goal is not to change it or shape it, but to hear it. There is something really elegant about the way that students can change opinions and ideas as the social studies content and their peers inform them. I think these shifts compel the whole class to become involved in my favorite subject

#### JON LUYAU

I felt that in order for me to fully immerse the students with the social studies content, I was going to need to integrate certain familiar references in their lives in order for them to make the connections with the topics under study. My student teaching experience is where I learned how to relate with the students on a more personal level in order to fully understand the manner in which they learn and how to motivate them to want to learn social studies. I tried many types of lessons and projects to see how the students reacted and in what ways they could learn history. Although some projects turned out better than others, I feel that this was a good time to help my students learn in new ways. I believe that by having students relate to the content, I captured the attention of the students to put forth effort into their work and to be proud of what they were presenting. The variety of diversity of students which I worked with allowed me to better understand different types of students and how to fully engage and immerse them into the rich content of the social sciences.

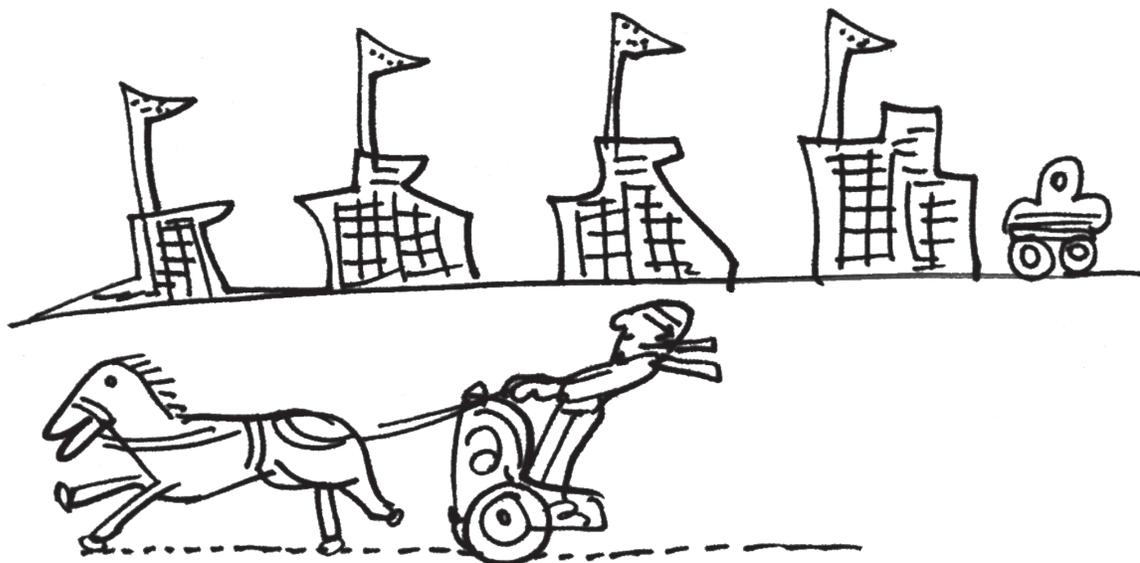
The developmental journey from student teacher to practicing professional helps veteran educators recognize the contributions of new members to our profession as subject-matter catalysts. ■



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## Literacy Development in the Common Core Standards

ILLUSTRATION BY JON PEARSON

Over the past several issues, we have considered RtI “Tier One” strategies that meet the needs of gifted students while developing the intellect in all students. That lens of equity and excellence remains, but the content is changing in anticipation of the Common Core Standards. This article will give a step-by-step lesson plan for a biography unit developed for a Special Day Class for Gifted Students (Tier Three Intervention), but has been used successfully with modifications in a GATE cluster class as differentiation for *all* students, including Basic and Below Basic students.

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (2011) require students to “gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new.” This project provides interdisciplinary connections as students choose famous people from many centuries and disciplines. The project can be narrowed or supported with graphic organizers or less rigorous text to support students who are not yet proficient or it can be broadened and enhanced with more rigor for those who are beyond proficiency.

The Common Core standards have increasing emphasis on expository text. In Grade 4, the distribution is 50% literature and 50% informational text. By Grade 12, only 30% of the text is literature, and 70% is informational. “The standards do not define the nature of advanced work for students to meet the Standards prior to the end of high school,” but literature, composition, and journalism are among the recommended possibilities for these students. This unit relies largely on expository text, but extends it by looking at primary sources, including sources from the arts and humanities.

**Identifying Greatness: A Biography Unit for Upper Elementary and Middle School** The California Common Core State Standards for Reading Informational Text in Grades 4-8 expect students to *Integrate Knowledge and Skills*. Students are expected to

- analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and

differences in the point of view they represent (standard 6, grade 5)

- interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears (standard 7, grade 4)
- draw information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently (Informational text standard 7, grade 5)
- integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably

From the Speaking and Listening standards, students are expected (beginning in third grade) to engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions . . . building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

In the sixth grade Reading Standards for Historical Literacy, students are expected to

- cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources
- identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose
- integrate visual information (e.g. in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps with other information in print and digital texts)

This biography unit introduces and develops each of the standards listed here. It was written and implemented in partnership with Kristen Sam Tsang, Karrie Passalacqua, and Danielle Schutz Tremain at College Park Elementary in the San Mateo-Foster City School District. In the project, students:

- choose a historical character from a brainstormed list, and find three informational texts that discuss the character, including one primary source
- find out information about politics, economy, the arts, tools and technology during the beginning years of this person's major contributions to history
- summarize reliable findings in an on-demand writing that is edited for a final draft
- participate in a Historical Summit that transcends time and space to discuss a prominent current event from the perspective of their character

**Day One:** Introduction: Students brainstorm historical figures from many disciplines including, but not limited to technology (remembering that at one time, a ball-point pen was cutting-edge technology), politics and government, economy, education, communication, recreation, philosophy or ethics, aesthetics, logic. The lesson begins with teacher input and modeling. Using the forced categories as a springboard for the brainstorm, the teacher shows the following graphic and fills in two or three examples:

After students have had a few minutes to think about famous people from many disciplines, they can turn to an elbow partner and take turns completing the sentence frame, "One famous person from \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_." By providing a few starter examples, reluctant students can use the teacher's

One famous person from (discipline) is _____.			
Technology	Politics	Economy	Communication
Thomas Edison Jonas Salk	Washington	Anna Schwartz	Maya Angelou
Philosophy or Ethics	Logic	Education	Recreation
Martin Luther King Jr.	Bobby Fisher	Maria Montessori	Jackie Robinson Billie Holliday

examples on several rounds.

When there is a lull in the conversation, students can write two or three of their best ideas on a class chart that will be a resource list of people they might like to research. Some teachers had students draw for a discipline so that every discipline was represented. Others let students make choice and sign up. Some struggling students were encouraged to choose from a shorter list of people for whom the teacher had prepared graphic organizers and rich resources at a slightly easier reading level.

**Day Two:** Once students have an idea about their historical character, they should go to the library and go online to find out whether or not there are academic resources readily available for that historical figure. At College Park, the teachers use an expository reading strategy that includes reading every first sentence of a paragraph as a way to quickly scan for information. They have students fill out a simple precursor to a bibliography for each book, website, or primary source that requires students to think about the reliability and bias in the writing:

Name of Book/Article: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Author: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Author's Credentials: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Author's Perspective: \_\_\_\_\_

Textual feature(s) that cause me to believe this is a reliable source:

If there are not sufficient resources available for that historical character, the student should choose a character that has readily available resources (or go to the public library to find additional sources of information). If they cannot find sufficient resources, they need to choose another character because of the time constraints on this project.

**Day Three:** Students read encyclopedic information about the person from two or three sources to get an idea about the person; find out about their hardships, motivations, and legacy; record four or five significant events that were caused by this person (not events that happened simultaneously, but events that were a direct result of this person's contributions).

**Day Four:** Note: This activity was designed for gifted students. If you have students who are not yet proficient, they might use this day to gather additional information. Students will learn about

the context of this person's life. Teachers demonstrate using a couple of historical figures (College Park teachers generally choose a historical character that is being studied by a struggling learner as a way of front-loading the information.

In the computer lab, students find significant national or world events that coincide with the time of this person's major contributions. In my classroom, I had several copies of *The Timetables of History* by Bernard Grun that provided a chronological matrix of significant events in the arts, politics, science, and technology for every year. Alternatively, if you search for "tables of history," you will find multiple sources of information about current events for various decades. Similarly, you can enter a year or range of years, and find sources that list important events. The extension of this activity is to ask students to think (write) about the relationship of current events to this person's life.

**Day Five (or more depending on the amount of time you have):** Students now have some background information on the person they will study as well as the context of their time in history. Now, it is time to begin gathering information relevant to the report of information. At College Park, teachers use the same matrix that was in the Spring, 2011 edition of *The Gifted Education Communicator*. Students brainstorm three questions, and then cite relevant information from each of three (or more) sources on a matrix that fills a sheet of 11 x 17 paper. That matrix looks something like this:

The default questions for this project were, "What were the hardships, motivations, and legacies of this person?" "What important events coincided with this person's life,

Source Question	Title: _____ Author: _____ Publisher: _____ Date: _____	Title: _____ Author: _____ Publisher: _____ Date: _____	PRIMARY SOURCE (in this space, site the source of this document)
Question 1	Citations from source 1 that answer question 1	Citations from source 2 that answer question 1	Citations from source 3 that answer question 1
Question 2	Citations from source 1 that answer question 2	Citations from source 2 that answer question 2	Citations from source 3 that answer question 2
Question 3	Citations from source 1 that answer question 2	Citations from source 2 that answer question 3	Citations from source 3 that answer question 3

and how was this person affected by, or contribute to those events?" "What other interesting information would you like to share?"

This research continues in class at College Park. The teachers want to be sure that students have the skills necessary to do this project independently, so while homework might include finding additional sources, the matrix is always completed in class.

**Day ?:** When students have had enough time to find the information, they are asked to write a five-paragraph, on-demand report of information that has an introduction, answers to questions 1, 2, and 3, and a conclusion. They complete this part of the project without notes. The rationale for this is that the purpose of notes is to commit important information to memory. Most students do an excellent job of reporting information this way by the second project. They begin to learn that note-taking is more than copying information; it's a study skill that helps us organize our thoughts and narrow our focus. After they finish with the on-demand draft, they get a blue pencil, get out their notes, and have the chance to add any relevant information to the paper. The final draft is done during writing instruction after peer and teacher editing.

**Concluding Activity:** When all of the students have information about the person they have studied, homework includes reading the newspaper or watching the news with your family for a few days to find out what current events are prominent in the news. In class, students discuss the facts of the various events (careful not to interject their opinions), noting the causes and effects of *one* prominent event.

Students brainstorm potential problems associated with the event, identify the most significant problem (from the perspective of the person they studied), and then brainstorm solutions that their historical figure might have suggested as answers to the current event.

When the class is conversant in that event, they bring a small prop (in these classes, the prop cannot cost more than 50 cents) to show some critical attribute of the person they studied. They move their desks into one large circle, make a name plate with the name of the person they studied, and then "become" that person as the class has a historical summit to discuss the events of the day. Anything students contribute to the discussion of the event is from the perspective of their historical figure. As a way of ensuring that each person contributes to the conversation, the teachers write the name of a participation partner on the back of each name card. Students make sure that their participation partner has contributed something to the conversation.

On the day I visited the class, the current event was the beginning of the "Occupy" movement, long before it became violent. It was inspiring to hear Dr. Martin Luther King sitting at the same table as Leonardo da Vinci, Bobby Fischer, and Maya Angelou. The question posed by the teacher was quite open-ended: "What is the most significant problem associated with 'Occupy,' and what solutions do you propose?" She drew a name out of her cup, and called on Bobby Fischer. The student representing Mr. Fischer responded, "I know what it is like to feel alienated and misunderstood." Fischer (who was represented by a female in the class) went on to tell a sentence or two about the events of "his" life, and then concluded that a peaceful protest was much more powerful than his own response of alienation and withdrawal. Fischer urged the movement to stay focused on a positive message, and to suggest solutions instead of problems. Fischer called on Maya Angelou, who began with a quote for which she is famous, "All men are prepared to accomplish the incredible if their ideals are threatened." She went on to create a metaphor for the movement

that paralleled the life of her hero, Langston Hughes. Ms. Angelou called on Leonardo da Vinci, who pulled out an elaborate drawing of various inventions to make life comfortable and safe in an encampment such as this. Da Vinci asked a few questions of the twentieth-century participants, "What is the black covering on your streets, and why do people have cars in New York, when that travel seems so much slower than by cart or foot in Florence and Milan? Dr. King gave warnings to the crowd to know their message and focus single-mindedly on that idea.

The conversation was interrupted after about 90 minutes by the lunch bell, and the teachers reported that students were still arguing (professionally) from that perspective for days after the summit. I was in the class one day after the events had become violent, and several of these historical giants walked up to me to engage in what should happen now. It was amazing that they were still in character, and had come to rely on the perspective of experts from other disciplines and other centuries.

I recently re-read an article from Rosenthal and Jacobson's rat study in 1963. The article discussed a lab situation where students were given different sets of rats to test. Some of the rats were labeled gifted at running mazes, and others were said to be incapable. In fact, the rats were chosen randomly, but the expectations and reactions of the lab assistants were biased by this information. The article came to mind because when teachers worked on this project, a teacher on another campus said, "Of course you can do that with your gifted students, but mine could never do it." While

it is probably true that many classrooms would not have the profound insight of these fourth and fifth graders, every student who embarked on the project had something meaningful to contribute to the conversation.

After this project, I have come to believe that greatness can be made as well as identified. It takes hard work and perseverance. It takes a teacher or parent standing in the student's corner to help with the study skills, and then gradually release to let the student practice independently. The solutions to problems not yet identified lay in the hands of these students who identify and embody greatness. ■

*Common Core State Standards Initiative. www.corestandards.org. 2011*

*Rosenthal, R., SL Jacobson, L. (1966). "Teachers' expectancies: Determinates of pupils' IQ gains." Psychological Reports, 19, 115-118.*



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## Blogging for Kids Using Kidblog

PHOTO BY DAN NELSON

For the past three summers I have taught a geocaching class to 4th and 5th graders at a local university Talent Search Program. The class met every day for two and a half hours for one week. In the first two summers, along with work on the computer, I had students write a journal paragraph each evening regarding the day's activities. I got a few uninspired sentences from each student. This past summer, I decided to set up a blog where the students could record their journal entries. The opportunity to express themselves in a technology environment gave the students the impetus to write much more. They were more expressive, uninhibited, and had much more fun writing the journal entries. Each student had his/her own blog site but was able to read other blog entries and leave comments for their classmates.

I researched several blog sites. I wanted a site that was easy to use, free, and safe for the students. I found **Kidblog (www.kidblog.com)** to meet my needs. As the teacher, I had to submit my email address to create the blog but none of the students had to submit any personal information. It was easy to create the individual blog sites. At **Kidblog**, you can add each student

individually or upload a cvs file (saved from a Microsoft Excel file.) I simply uploaded the cvs file of names and passwords and the individual blogs were created. I allowed the students to create their own password that would only be known to them. A brand new feature of **Kidblog** allows teachers to give students a secret code. Using the secret code, students can create their own blog page.

I had the option to make our site public or private. I chose to keep it private so that only my students and I could access the site. I also had the option to select from ten different themes to make the site look interesting and unique. The students were also able to change the theme on their blog site to reflect their individual interests. You can also create a group guest page or individual guest pages so that parents can leave comments about the blogs. Parents are given a password to the guest page or pages. The guest pages allow you to communicate with parents in an open and honest format.

Teachers can also leave comments for individual students. You can choose to allow all the students to see the comments or make

the comment only viewable by the individual student. This summer, I was able to comment quickly to each student each night. When I wanted to make a suggestion for improvement, I left a private comment for that student. They were so excited the next day when they had read my comments. Some of the students even told me that the improvement suggestions were helpful.

At **Kidblog**, you have the option to upload an image of the student. In a private blog, the student pictures might be fine. However, in a public or shared blog, I would suggest that you allow students to upload an avatar from the predefined list of avatars or an avatar they create a program like **Doppelme** ([www.doppelme.com](http://www.doppelme.com).)

Students cannot use **Kidblog** to create their own individual blogs. In fact, students under 13 are not allowed to create their own blog on any blog site. I suggest that parents who want to assist their children with creating an individual blog, create a blog under the parent's name and allow the children to use the blog for posting. Sites such as Blogger or WordPress can be used to create individual free blogs.

Before teachers or parents allow students to post to a blog, they should teach children responsible use of blogs and online activity. I set simple parameters for my summer students. I did not allow criticism or negative comments about others or inappropriate words. I required proper grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. In other words, no "texting."

Below are various ways that blogging can be used in the classroom and at home using **Kidblog**.

### 1. KWL

**Teachers:** It is common for teachers to use the KWL strategy (what I Know, what I Want to learn, and what I did Learn) to collect prior knowledge before beginning a new unit, story, or concept. Most often, the information is collected in class during group discussions with students. Using **Kidblog**, the teacher can pose a question on the blog to which students can respond at home before the discussion begins in the classroom. For example, before reading a story about someone moving to a new country, the teacher might pose the following blog question, "Have you ever moved to a new house or a new neighborhood? If so, how did you feel when you first arrived at the new place. If you haven't moved, what do you think you would miss the most if you did have to move?" Allowing students to respond at home gives them a chance to think and to discuss their ideas with their family or a few friends. Having taken the time to think about and write about their answers, the discussion class the next day would be much richer and vibrant with many more students contributing to the collective information.

**Parents:** Parents can support the teacher's question above by sharing their own feelings and losses when they moved to a new place. A family discussion of the teacher's question would be a great springboard for a student's response in the blog. As stated above, the discussion in the class the next day would be much richer.

### 2. BLOGPALS (BLOG PENPALS)

**Teachers:** Kidblog allows a teacher to share their blog with other classes. This allows the teacher to set up a blogpal opportunity between their class and another class anywhere in the world. **Kidblog** has a Facebook page where teachers can share their interest in connecting with another class.

**Parents:** Parents can support the blogpals, but helping students research and learn more about the city or country where the blogpals live. It might be fun to try foods read stories about the city or country. Student can then share the experiences with their blogpals.

### 3. BOOK TRAILERS

**Teachers:** Kidblog allows one to post videos and images. Instead of assigning written book reports, ask students to create a trailer for the book. Go to teacher librarian Michelle Harclerode's wiki at [www.booktrailersforreaders.com/](http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/) **How+to+make+a+book+trailer** for information on teaching students to create a book trailer. Free sites such as **Animoto** ([www.animoto.com](http://www.animoto.com)) and **Voicethread** ([www.voicethread.com](http://www.voicethread.com)) can be used to create a video.

**Parents:** Parents can encourage students to create a book trailer to share on their own blog site or website. It can be shared with friends and relatives for comment. Children love to read comments about their work, especially from people they know.

### 4. SHARE THEIR PASSION

**Teachers:** Most gifted children have an interest or even passion in something that has nothing to do with school. They might be deeply curious about parallel universes or the fashion industry. They would love to share their passion with others who are interested in the same thing but don't know if anyone else in the class shares their interest. Students can share their passion on the blog and see if anyone in the class or blogpal class responds with the same interest. Teachers may prompt this kind of discussion by posing a question that asks for students to share their interests. This kind of question is a good way to get the students to begin blogging.

**Parents:** Parents can encourage students to share their interests on the class blog. Since **Kidblog** is an educational blog site, parents might want to create an additional blog site or wiki for their children where they can publically share. Public blogging or website sharing can be very safe if parents set up the site. Students should never share their last name or post pictures of themselves. As I suggested above, children younger than 13 and even older children should use an avatar and a made-up name on their websites.

### 5. BUILDING MOTIVATION FOR WRITING

**Teachers:** **Kidblog** is a perfect place to share writing. Students can post their rough drafts to the blog and allow classmates to read and comment on the drafts. Allow students to refine their drafts before making any teacher comments. The students may feel freer to use suggestions from their peers for the first revisions of the writing. When students feel that they have a final draft, they can

post the newly refined writing for the teacher to read.

**Parents:** Parents can support the writing process by reading the rough drafts and also make suggestions for improvements. Parents want to be careful not to rewrite the work but make helpful suggestions for improvements or pose questions for the student to ponder. For example, “Have you thought about adding more descriptive adjectives to develop your characters in the story?”

## 6. DIARY OF A PROJECT

**Teachers:** Most teachers assign long-term projects at least once a year. Students often do not know how to plan their time wisely to work on a project a little each day. Use the blog to give the initial assignment. Every few days, write a blog entry that requires students to give their progress on the project. For example, if the assignment is a research project, ask student to blog about the research, the notes they are taking, the outline they are making, the writing they have been doing, the additional information they are creating such as maps, photos, or videos. Ask the students to post the finished project on the blog so that other students can read the final project. Allow other students to comment on the progress of the student and make suggestions for working on each part of the project. Students often take the advice from peers more readily than they do from teachers or parents.

**Parents:** Parents can watch the progress of a project by reading the blog and making comments to the student or teacher. Parents don't want to take over the project or take over the monitoring of the project. Positive comments that encourage progress or nudge improvement will help motivate your child to take responsibility and stay on track to complete the project.

## 7. COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: MATH CHALLENGES

**Teachers:** Meeting the Common Core Standards in Mathematics will require students to do more critical thinking than has been expected from the previous State Standards. Challenge your students to thinking deeper and with more complexity by posting Math Challenges. Create three or four levels of challenges so that each student can be challenged at their readiness level. My favorite math challenge for gifted 6th graders was the Four Fours. Ask students to find every number from zero to one hundred using four fours and any operations they know or can find. Ask them to post a solution when they have found one. Allow other students to evaluate the solution. There can be more than one way to find a solution so allow for alternatives.

**Parents:** Parents can assist in the Math Challenge by suggesting a new look at the approach to the problem. For example, parents could support the Four Fours by suggesting an operation to which students may not have been exposed, such as square root or factorial.  $4!$  (four factorial) =  $4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 24$ .  $4! + 4 + 4 + 4 = 36$ . That's Four Fours using factorial and addition as operations to create the number 36.

## 8. SUMMER BLOGGING

**Teachers:** Kindergarten teacher, Sharon Davison in Vermont, sent an email to her students prior to school starting introducing the **Kidblog** pages and inviting the students to

share things about themselves. They could post pictures of their summer activities, write about their interests, or tell something special about themselves. Parents were invited to assist with writing and posting. Imagine the excitement on the first day of school when students already know so much about each other. The summer blogging also gives the teacher an insight into the skills and interests of the children to make differentiation much more personal.

**Parents:** Parents can assist in the posting on the summer blog. If children are not yet reading or writing, parents can type while the child dictates their post. Parents can also read other students' blog posts and assist with typing comments.

## 9. GROW A BLOG: PLANT SCIENCE

**Teachers:** While studying plant science, give each student the seeds of a different plant. Allow the student to plant the seeds in a container provided by the teacher. Students take the plants home and watch them grow. On the blog they post daily reports of the progress of the growth of the plant. They should include graphs, photos, videos, tables, and written reports of the progress. The information should include reports of the amount of water used each day, the height of the plant, the number of leaves, and any flowering that occurs. This project can be used as an introduction to the parts of a plant and the process of photosynthesis. Students will have a lot of hands-on experience with the plant through the process of observation and blog reporting. Teachers might want to ask students to make predictions about growth rate as an introduction to the scientific process.

**Parents:** Parents can assist with the observations of the plant and the creation of graphs, photos, and tables. The growing project might provide plenty of family conversation and opportunities for learning.

## 10. WEBSITES THAT GIVE OTHER IDEAS

**Teachers:** While I was researching the best blog site to use to create my classroom blog, I found the following sites that give you further ideas for educational and personal blogs for kids

Kids Learn to Blog ([www.kidslearntoblog.com/](http://www.kidslearntoblog.com/))

Hello Kids ([www.hellokids.com/t\\_2856/blogs-for-kids](http://www.hellokids.com/t_2856/blogs-for-kids))

**Parents:** Kidsblog is not available for individual student blog site creation. . If parents want to help their child create a personal blog, see [http://www.surfnetkids.com/free\\_blogging\\_sites.htm](http://www.surfnetkids.com/free_blogging_sites.htm) for suggested blogging tools.

Have fun with **Kidblog**. Send me your thought and experiences. [drbabs@starstream.net](mailto:drbabs@starstream.net) and [www.drbabs.wikispaces.com](http://www.drbabs.wikispaces.com).



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## Gifted Program Evaluation A Handbook for Administrators & Coordinators

By Kristie Speirs Neumeister and  
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### REVIEWED BY CHRISTINE HOEHNER

Evaluating a school district's gifted program can be daunting, discouraging, thankless and useless. Not, however, if the district uses *Gifted Program*

*Evaluation* by Speirs Neumeister and Burney.

This new book on the evaluation of a gifted program is wonderful; it is useful, sensible, informative and practical. Every gifted and talented coordinator should have a copy close at hand.

After a year of agonizing over my district's gifted and talented (GATE) program, the assistant superintendent asked me the simplest, most complex question: "How do you know that your program is doing what you want it to do?" (i.e. how do you know it's effective?) Thus began an eight-year refining process. *Gifted Program Evaluation* would have been the book I would have kept in my pocket; I needed to create a formative evaluation procedure and I had no idea where to start. Speirs Neumeister and Burney have authored a book that tells you exactly where to begin, and is full of ideas, suggestions.

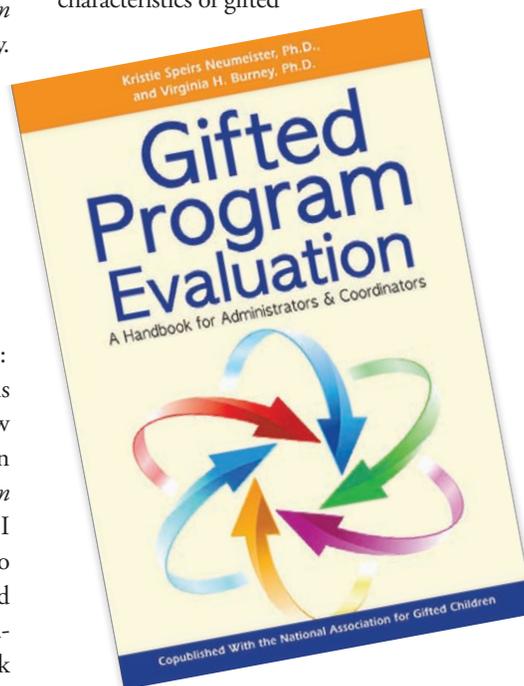
All eight chapters contain relevant and meaty content. In Chapter 1, the need for a special committee is cited. Too often in the interest of time, program familiarity and ease, a single coordinator or superintendent creates the evaluation document and process. Knowledgeable stakeholders, who will watch for inclusion of their personal points of program preference, are invaluable. In this chapter, a flowchart of the necessary steps is presented so the stakeholders may understand the extent of

the entire project.

Chapter 2 looks at program design and labels the responsibilities of classroom, building (school) and district.

Key to any specialized program is the process for identifying the participants. Chapter 3 views some critical components of evaluating identification procedures.

Stemming from different avenues of concern, "after you identify them, what do you do with them (the gifted student)?" becomes the most frequent question asked by directors, administrators, principals, teachers and parents. Chapter 4 looks at evaluating curriculum and instruction, through the Common Core Standards, the understanding of the characteristics of gifted



children and what advanced skill development is. Two of the chapter highlights, in my opinion, are embedded in lists. On one, the need for faster pacing is cited, while on the other, self-evaluation is set out as an important skill. Happily both of these, are dealt with in this book; in many gifted programs the two are not deemed necessary at all.

A dimension that often seems difficult to teach and nonetheless difficult to evaluate is the affective dimension, discussed in Chapter 5. Meeting the social emotional concerns

of a bright student can be the critical support system to sustaining oneself through a difficult content class in high school and college. Again, there is no underestimating the degree to which (a) healthy self-concept and (b) ease in making positive contacts underscores the success at sustaining determination through challenge.

Chapter 6 in *Gifted Program Evaluation*, discusses opportunities for preparing teachers in both academic and social/emotional needs of the gifted.

Program effectiveness is the content of Chapter 7. Here is the location of the initial question "How do you know your program is doing what you want it to do?" And even further, "How do you know it's effectively meeting the needs of your gifted students?" The Sample Survey for Evaluation Program Effectiveness is most useful; it asks for responses to the preceding two questions from all the stakeholders.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, has helpful advice on selecting an external evaluator. Allowing a review of the whole program gives an objective, formal, program evaluation as seen by a knowledgeable expert or team. The strengths and weaknesses of a district program can be brought to light for discussion and thus, keep it up to date, relevant and refreshed.

Interesting and useful, each Chapter terminates with Sample Survey items, interview prompts and checklists. The committee chair can locate plenty of actual example questions here.

The national economy has certainly affected Education! Many states lightened the gifted program so much that school districts had/have almost non-existent programs for their bright children. On the continuum from rebuilding a program to simply needing a refresher for the existing one (and every permutation in between), this book, *Gifted Program Evaluation*, is extremely valuable.

**CHRISTINE HOEHNER** is Associate Editor for Book Reviews for the *Gifted Education Communicator*. She is retired from the Glendale Unified School District gifted program in southern California and can be reached at [chrishoehner@yahoo.com](mailto:chrishoehner@yahoo.com)

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Our mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of gifted children and youth by generating funds to support research and development, scholarships, and gifted education projects. All funds will be distributed to meet the goals of the foundation.



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# Gifted Education Communicator

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GIFTED EDUCATION COMMUNICATOR, the online journal of the California Association for the Gifted is published four-times per year: Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. *Gifted Education Communicator* features articles and columns by nationally known leaders in the field of gifted education. The GEC is produced as an 8.5x11 layout in both flash and pdf formats. *Mechanical Specs:* Submit art/copy as file or on disk in appropriate online formatting.

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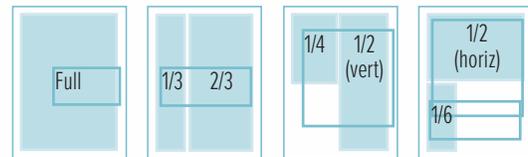
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## Ten Reasons

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1. Your membership supports CAG's work with the California department of Education and California's legislators, to ensure that gifted education continues in California.
2. Your membership supports research and development, books, position papers, and other resources focusing on issues, policies, and practices that impact the education of gifted and talented students.
3. Your membership supports CAG's Teacher Institutes, Parent Institutes, and a certificate program that teach theory and practice essential to the education of gifted students. The positive "spillover" effect for all students is well documented.
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7. Your membership entitles you to the *Gifted Education Communicator*, CAG's quarterly journal, and the *Intercom*, the organization's newsletter. These are important resources for parents and educators.
8. Your membership entitles you to reduced registration fees for the annual conference and other CAG events.
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