



Gifted Unlimited, II

Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 2012

Chartered in 1963, NWGCA is a statewide, nonprofit organization of people with an interest in meeting the special needs of highly capable children

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The other achievement gap



Deborah L. Ruff

How can we better encourage and reinforce the most entrepreneurial and talented among us? We can start by changing the ways we set up schools and the ways we address the very different learning abilities and needs of the students in them.

The well-known “achievement gap” refers to the difference in the average academic performance between our highest and lowest achieving population groups. Closing that gap has led us to focus our

attention on students who are struggling with fundamental achievement. As little progress is made to close these gaps, it seems we refuse to explore anything beyond external influences as probable causes for our failures. We rarely speak of *individual* differences in ability. I recently attended a symposium where speakers repeatedly reminded us that “just because we don’t like what the research is telling us does not mean it is bad research.”

I believe our most worrisome achievement gap should be the performance gap we see *within each individual* rather than those between any *groups* of people. Our society benefits from the support and nurturance of our brightest minds, and here’s what the research tells us: A person’s intellectual profile, capacity to learn within different domains—along with certain differences in personality, gender, exposure to opportunities, and luck—is

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Parents are key with legislature and school districts

HB 2261, Sec. 708 states: “for highly capable students, access to accelerated learning and enhanced instruction is access to a basic education.”

Washington is the first state to legislate gifted education as part of basic education. But legislation is empty without action.

Many school districts in Washington have no gifted education programs. Others try to serve gifted children in regular education classrooms with untrained teachers.

What do parents need to do now? (1) Ask your school board what they are doing to implement the HB2261 mandate; (2) Urge

districts and legislators to support professional development in identifying and serving divergent needs of the highly capable; and (3) Urge data collection and out-of-level testing to measure growth of students and to assist in determining program success.

Be patient, persistent, and persuasive.



Gifted 2.0 Hi-Cap Instruction for the Digital Age

2012 WAETAG CONFERENCE

Hotel Murano | Tacoma

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS - PARENT STRAND

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

7:30-8:00 a.m.	Registration, WAETAG Marketplace, Breakfast
8:00-9:00 a.m. (Keynote)	Instructional Strategies for the Digital Age Roger Fisher, Keynote Speaker
9:00-9:45 a.m.	Speed Lessons
9:45-10:00 a.m.	BREAK IN WAETAG MARKETPLACE
10:00-11:00 a.m. (Breakout)	*Recovering Perfectionists Unite! Suzanne Burdick

Are you or someone you love a perfectionist? Perfectionism brings many strengths, but it can also feel like in addiction. Join Suzanne as she shares her dynamic life-and-death story of “recovery” in which she learned to savor the strengths of excellence while letting go of anxiety and control; then explore your own story.

11:00-11:15 a.m. BREAK IN WAETAG MARKETPLACE

11:15-12:15 p.m. ***Mind Matters: Ten things you need to know about student brains (Breakout)** Lisa Van Gemert
What are the most vital things educators and parents need to know about what brain research has to say about student success? Discover the key structures of the brain vital for learning, the reason kids under stress can't learn, what the brain has to say about giftedness and much more.

12:15-1:30 p.m. Lunch with WAETAG Business Meeting

1:30-2:30 p.m. **Seven Brain Trade-Offs That Create Cognitive Diversity in Gifted Students (Keynote)** Brock L. Eide, M.D., M.A., Fernette Eide, M.D.

2:30-2:45 p.m. BREAK

2:45-3:45 p.m. ***Lit from Within: Internal Motivation in the Gifted Learner (Breakout)** Lisa Van Gemert
Learn the secrets behind enhancing achievement drive in gifted students. What does the research say, and what roles do self-concept and optimism play in helping kids develop their intrinsic motivation? Find out the pitfalls of rewards, and take away seven strategies you can use right now to light the fire within any child.

3:45 – 4:00 p.m. BREAK IN WAETAG MARKETPLACE

4:00 – 5:00 p.m. **Cognitive Monsters and Intellectual Heroes in the 21st Century (Keynote)** Roger Fisher

* Breakout session recommended for parents.





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not greatly responsive to outside influences to change it. Twin and adoption studies, as well as Head Start and any number of other early intervention programs, indicate consistently that the brain is like a muscle that can be exercised to perform at its own best level, but when the workouts stop, that muscle strength returns to where it was before.

The spread of human intellectual ability is vast across all populations. By the time children are about seven years old and in first grade, the typical same-aged mixed-ability public school classroom already has 12 grade equivalencies of achievement in it. There is no way to make all people intellectually the same any more than there is a way to make everybody the same sex or the same height. Every individual should be challenged to grow intellectually, and we're now generally ignoring those individuals with the highest potential.

The United States has one of the widest intellectual ability ranges in the world because our diverse economy has attracted people from all over the world. Populations of other countries actually have different ability averages and ranges, different strengths and weaknesses. For whatever reason (and there are many) only about ten percent of the U.S. population is intellectually capable of professional-level achievement, no matter how hard we push and support everyone else.

We cast aside good approaches to educating every person to the best of his or her ability when we can't accept that people are innately different from one another from the get-go. We further cripple our efforts when we shame people for doing their best at important occupations that are not considered prestigious (e.g., the trades,

services, labor). Indeed, one result of our current emphasis on making all students "college ready" is that we are overlooking legitimate, needed job training for individuals whose abilities, regardless of their education, will never make them college ready. Less than one-quarter of the American population has the kind of reasoning and learning abilities that lend themselves to college-level training. Rather than a college degree to earn a good living, we should adjust how we pay people for work they are able to do and give them the training they need to do it well.

How can we better encourage and reinforce the most entrepreneurial and talented among us? Let's set up campuses where students are enabled to move to classes where what they're ready to learn is already being taught by teachers who really know their subjects. Let's start as early as the very first years children attend school. Grouping kids by age for instruction makes about as much pedagogical sense as grouping them by height. There's no good reason for the practice, and there's no research to support its efficacy for cognitive or social learning. It would cost less, not more, to group children by readiness to learn, not by grade level or age.

Most ability-grouped classroom instruction and junior high school tracking ended in the 1970s. Both were perceived to pigeon-hole students and take away opportunities. Now, however, most coursework is aimed at a slightly-below-average target group – struggling learners – so they'll pass No Child Left Behind Act exams. Everyone endures the same seven to eight repetitions of material over six years of elementary school and an equally repetitive pace for

middle school. Smart children become bored, tune out, or act out, and those who cooperate learn an underachievement ethic.

Here's what the brightest students need instead. The top five percent of learners could finish the elementary curriculum in four years or less. The highest two percent could take three years or less. The top one percent could finish in one or two years (in at least one subject area), and at least one child in the school probably would be smart enough to do it all in less than one year. Does anyone wonder why they don't want to go on to college and graduate school? All they can picture is more of the same. They've rarely experienced real competition or real soul mate friendships, because anyone who is like them got spread out – blended – into other classes to make it "fair." Everything is too easy and boring for eight or nine years and then becomes unexpectedly very hard. While we prepare many students for college who will never enjoy reading or understand algebra, we bore the socks off our brightest students and never give them a chance to learn to their capacity or prepare for the intellectual labor for which they were designed.

If all students could move at their own pace, they could be grouped and regrouped to work with students of different abilities and backgrounds, depending upon the subject. Continuous progress and ability grouping moves *all* students to where they need to be.

How would these changes encourage the most talented among us? Bright students would experience challenging and stimulating learning from the time they start school. They'd learn what they're capable of

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Bullying and the gifted: Welcome back to school?

Why the gifted may be more likely to be bullied—and what you can do about it.
Christopher Taibbi, M.A.T.

By now, most of us have packed our kids off to school for the start of the new academic year. The tedium of political and medical ads on television are bookended by those encouraging us to spend our back-to-school money at the nearest big chain office supply store. You've purchased notebooks, folders, pencils, boxes of tissues, composition (a.k.a. "cow") books, glue sticks, markers, . . . all the common objects that make up the teacher's list of essentials. For my own sake, I feel lucky: my son is one of those who likes school. Well, I should say he likes the *concept* of it—that is, until the first day hits and his Spanish teacher hands out a multi-page homework review packet to complete in three days. Then he realizes (and we do, too) that his initial flush of school supply shopping giddiness won't carry him quite far enough. No matter which fresh pencil you choose to sharpen, in the end, work is still work. Still, I count myself lucky.

For many gifted students, there is a more severe and serious issue that threatens them the first days and weeks of school. They know it's there because they have encountered it before. Many of the students I see in my position have described it this way: they don't really "belong"; that they are merely "floating along" as the year progresses, not a "real part of the class", an "add-on." It's demoralizing enough that many of our gifted students may feel this way, but it is made so much worse when others in the room pick up on these feelings and actually turn on the gifted student. We're talking here about bullying

It's a perverse notion perhaps but, in many ways, the very qualities that help make a student gifted are the precise ones that may cause him/her to be bullied by his peers. They are ahead of their classmates academically and more advanced cognitively; they are more emotionally sensitive about rights and wrongs, at the local scale but also globally; a gifted person's sense of humor may be above the heads of their peers, so the jokes they make seem to backfire and then he looks foolish and odd. Gifted students are often perfectionists and may be quick to critically judge their peers. The list goes on. . . .

Now consider this: most teachers use cooperative learning, small group, activities during the first week of school as their way of having the students get to know each other. In this situation, one might imagine, those traits just mentioned could very well be a cocktail for disaster. Classmates become confused when Johnny uses difficult and advanced vocabulary as he interviews his tablemates. They become irritated when he suggests that the best way to make the poster is to use markers on the matte side of the board, not colored pencils on the glossy side. By the time he has corrected the spelling of the group members for the fourth time in five minutes—or insisted that they vote on who gets to do the writing—Johnny has effectively singled himself out. And once that first impression is made, it can be very hard to shrug it off. Classmates make cruel "geeky" comments, mock his attention to quality, and Johnny leaves school that day dreading the next.

So what to do? My answer may surprise you here because, contrary to others' advice, I would suggest the

solution might best begin first at home, and then at the school. You—as a parent, mentor, guardian—are an invaluable asset to your child. It is *you* who needs to be involved from the start. Begin by:

- **Listening carefully.** If your child comes home upset about what has happened at school with his peers, ask him to tell you about it from start to finish. Make time, sit down, and listen to the story. Ask questions, get the details, take notes if you need. These will be essential to the next few steps, which begin with. . . .

- **Educating.** It is true, without equivocation, that gifted people have distinct affective and cognitive traits that set them apart. He needs to understand that he is very different from his peers in these ways. He needs to understand that his peers, literally, do not necessarily feel or think the same way he does about what happens in the classroom. He needs to understand that his different perceptions and feelings and even abilities may be the very traits that are causing him to be singled out. That alone will not be enough, though. You'll also need to. . . .

- **Be explicit.** Go back and review the story that your child has told you about the day. Look over your notes. Compare the story and the place(s) where the day took a turn for the worse and see if you can relate it to those traits that your gifted child possesses. "I wonder, Johnny, do you think maybe your classmates got frustrated when you kept telling them to fix the spelling of 'your'?" "Do you think that the others in the group realized that the markers would smear if they used them on the glossy side of the poster? Or did you just assume they knew this?" Keep going, and be sure to. . . .

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• **Relate.** No, it's not fair that your child insisted on high quality work and was rebuffed for it. But you have experienced similar unfair situations in your own life. What was it like when *you* were frustrated with others at your office? What did *you* do? Perhaps you reminded yourself to breathe deep. You counted to ten. You figured out another way to address your concerns by stating them differently. You explained the reasons why your opinions might be important—rather than just blurting them out. Maybe, on a good day, you even looked at the problem from their point of view. Children will value your own experiences because it shows them that they are not alone. Next, you'll have to...

• **Coach and model.** Brainstorm ways that you can help your child with specific problems before they arise next time. When the teacher announces that the whole class will be denied ten minutes of recess because a just few people “messed it up for everyone else,” help him figure out ways he can effectively convey his opinion

about this injustice to the teacher without passively aggressively mumbling aloud under his breath about it—so loud that the teacher can hear it. Help him create alternative responses to taunts that kids may offer in order to defuse them. Help him recognize the occasions or the conditions at school that tend to “create the drama.” Anticipate them and model ways that you yourself might approach those circumstances. In short, your goal is to arm your child with a toolbox of thoughts and actions that he can use on his own at school. And keep in mind that you must...

• **Be patient!** All of this takes time. We all know that old habits die hard, even more so if those behaviors are intrinsically a part of who you are. New problems will arise, or different iterations of old ones will rear their heads. Be patient and stick with it. Listen, educate, review, relate, and reattack. Rinse, repeat. And if nothing seems to stick, finally, it's essential that you....

• **Be protective.** No child “deserves” to be unhappy or miserable. Bullying is not to be tolerated. You can do all the modeling, coaching, and empathy building in the world and it may not be enough. You *must* enlist the help of the teacher, the school, and the school's resources. Do not ever be afraid to demand satisfaction on this point. If you see no improvement, take your notes to school and insist on a conference with the teacher and the school's administrator. Explain your concerns with specific examples, demand a plan of action, expect results. Be the squeaky wheel for your child and your child's future.

As the year gets rolling, it's important to relish and revel in the good times. Revisiting the successes of school are just as important as reviewing the trying ones. Remind yourself and your child of this on those days when things get rough. It's my hope that the latter are relatively few but, if they arise, take charge proactively. You've got this.

Used with Permission. From *Gifted Ed Guru*, August 26, 2012.

It's back to school for parents, too

Marcia Holland, NWGCA president

“We have a nation-wide lack of adequate, ability-appropriate *educational growth* for a sizeable number of capable students and it seems no one is screaming about it!” Tamara Fisher

Summer is over. The kids are back in school. And, so are we, the parents. We can be fooled that our greatest responsibility is to drive our children to their myriad of activities. But, our back-to-school duties are so much greater than that, especially if our children are gifted learners.

What is our homework in the next months? We'll need to (1) review the mandated grade level learning expectations for our child in reading, math, science, writing, communication, social studies, art, and health and fitness, and (2) educate ourselves on the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and the Grade Level Standards and Common Core Standards that will guide the teaching in our child's classroom this year. We can do so by visiting the Web site of the Office of Superinten-

dent of Public Instruction and selecting the portion of the site for Grade Level Resources (www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/default.aspx). Then we follow the links to our child's grade level in each subject where we'll find a description of each learning requirement. If we discover that our child has already mastered some of the learning expectations, we should schedule a conference with our child's teacher to explore which resources are available and which

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Parents, continued from p. 5

curriculum differentiations the teacher is willing to make that meet or challenge our child's abilities.

Many of our children are in classrooms that are not designed for gifted learners. That puts a greater burden on us as parents to help the school system provide proper learning experiences for them. In a world of the public policy, "No Child Left Behind," the burden of ensuring that advanced learners learn to their capacity may fall upon our parental shoulders. We may need to educate our child's educators about our child's true competencies and capacity for learning. Our child may have figured out that she is capable of learning material that is not being provided in the classroom. While she knows that, she does not know how to let teachers know that she needs much more.

According to Helen Schinske: "Closing the achievement gap by pushing down the top is like fostering fitness by outlawing marathons." Do you recall how little Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* experienced an outlawing of her marathon? She knew how to read before entering school. One day she is reprimanded when caught reading the newspaper in class (after breezing through the reading assignment the teacher had given everyone) and is told to stop reading at home and to stop reading the newspaper in class. Scout says, "I mumbled that I was sorry and retired, meditating upon my crime." What was her "crime"? Knowing how to read and using that ability by reading in school!

As Madeline Hunter says, "Expecting all children the same age to learn from the same materials is like

expecting all children the same age to wear the same size clothing." In our child's classroom the students come in all sizes. We can make sure that our child uses materials and receives instruction that is the right size for him or her, not one that simply meets or exceeds grade-level educational benchmarks and standards.

In her informative blog, Tamara Fisher expresses this idea in different words, "If only we would educate them by reaching them where they are and stretching them to new levels, we would discover these kids are capable of so much more than we realize." I urge you to bookmark her blog which is found at http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/unwrapping_the_gifted/.

Let's help our children's teachers realize just how capable our children are by doing our homework!

Achievement, continued from p. 3

doing—with true peers—people they'll eventually work and compete with—instead of wasting time. They'd start advanced training understanding who they are and what the world is really like. Each child would have the tools that realistically fit him or her. We are not all the same, and we never will be, but that's okay and something we should celebrate. Let's support realistic expectations and goals for all American students. When we do that, our very brightest will also become the best they can be.

Deborah L. Ruf is founder of Educational Options in Minneapolis, where she works with families of highly

gifted children. Center of the American Experiment
August 2010, Minneapolis, MN
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SAVE THE DATE
Connections Conference
2012-13
Saturday, March 23
8:30 a.m.-2 :00 p.m.
Kalles Junior High
501 7th Avenue SE
Puyallap, WA 98372

"The only thing that is elitist about gifted education in this state is the fact that until districts are required to meet their needs, only those families who have the resources and knowledge to do so will be able to ensure that their gifted children will be educated appropriately."
Ann Gift, High Ability blog at <http://highabilty.wordpress.com/2012/09/17>

2012-2013

*Washington Highly Capable
Membership Campaign*

BE PART OF THE FORCE TO FURTHER GIFTED EDUCATION IN WASHINGTON
Join 1 or all 3 statewide organizations

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**TOGETHER
WE'RE STRONGER**

*Northwest Gifted
Child Association* *Washington Educators
of Talented and Gifted* *Washington Coalition
for Gifted Education*

<p>NWGCA</p> <p>Mission To support highly capable/gifted children by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting parents • Disseminating information • Encouraging development and maintenance of programs for gifted students • Supporting legislation <p>Major Activities Publishes a newsletter with local, state and national resources for gifted families</p> <p>Why Join? Parents need a voice at the state level as well as a way to connect on a local level. Parents are vital to ensure gifted programming remains a priority.</p>	<p>WAETAG</p> <p>Mission To improve educational opportunities for gifted students by strengthening services to and providing information for professionals serving these students in all settings.</p> <p>Major Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership symposium • Annual statewide conference and workshop • Quarterly coordinator meetings by ESD • Newsletter • Student scholarship for summer opportunities • Web page on regional, state, and national issues <p>Why Join? Teachers, parents and students face many of the same challenges in meeting the needs of the highly capable student. WAETAG provides a way to share ideas, voice concerns, and increase professional preparation.</p>	<p>WCGE</p> <p>Mission To work collaboratively with key state governmental decision makers on issues related to the education of highly capable students, their families, and their schools.</p> <p>Major Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ a lobbyist • Educate key decision makers on issues • Provide legislators with current information and seek their support for funding and programs . • Work with state agencies on highly capable issues • Inform members about legislative issues <p>Why Join? The Coalition is YOUR voice in Olympia and is the only non-profit gifted advocacy group in Washington that can hire a lobbyist. As a member of the Coalition, you provide the necessary financial support.</p>
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JOIN TODAY for the 2012-2013 school year
NWGCA/WAETAG
TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Membership Information **Does your employer match contributions?**

Name _____ School District _____

Address _____

Email Address _____ Phone _____

I do not want to share my information with other WA gifted organizations

Join: NWGCA \$35/year Mail to PO Box 10704, Spokane, WA 99209

WAETAG \$35/year Mail to 830 Cary Rd., Edmonds, WA 98020

WCGE \$35/year Mail to B. Poyneer, 18149 147 Ave SE, Renton, WA 98058

JOINT MEMBERSHIP SPECIAL Mail to B. Poyneer, 18149 147 Ave SE, Renton, WA 98058

Only \$90 for all 3 organizations **Make joint membership check payable to WCGE**



Annie Wright Schools

**Educational Forum for
Intellectually Curious Students and Their Families**

ANNIE WRIGHT SCHOOLS

Sunday, November 4, 2012

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

This forum is open to all who are interested in learning about opportunities designed to support the unique needs of critical and creative thinkers and includes:

- Presentations and discussions
- Exhibit hall showcasing local and national resources
- Interactive activities and mini-courses

For the latest forum information and to reserve spaces, visit: www.scholarsearchassoc.com, and then select the Tacoma Forum icon.

Participating Programs & Organizations thus far include:

Annie Wright School
Bard College at Simon's Rock (MA)
Center for Talented Youth (Johns Hopkins)
Centrum
The Math Forum @ Drexel
Northwest Gifted Child Association
Seabury School
University of Puget Sound
WA Imagination Network
... and more to come

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