

MINDSET AND GIFTED: TWO PERSPECTIVES

GIFTEDNESS: A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Carol Dweck, Ph.D.



True or false?

- Some people are born gifted, and others are not.
- You can tell who will be gifted from early on.
- Gifted children should be labeled and praised for their brains and talent.

All of these statements are accepted by many as true. However, as evidence has accumulated over the past decade, another view has been gaining credence that portrays giftedness as a more dynamic quality that can grow or stagnate. With this outlook comes a shift in emphasis from how to identify gifted children to how to cultivate giftedness and talent—a change in focus from measurement psychology to cognitive and motivational psychology.

Genius and great, creative contributions are the product of passion, learning, and persistence.

Gifted People Are *Made*, Not *Just Born*

More researchers are regarding motivation as the key ingredient for exceptional achievement. Their work suggests that creative genius itself grows out of the ability to sustain intense commitment for extended lengths of time in the face of obstacles. They tell us that many well-known geniuses—Edison, Darwin, even Einstein—were ordinary bright children who became obsessed with something and because of that obsession ended up making enormous contributions.

Mozart, whom we think of as composing in early childhood, did not produce original and noteworthy works until after more than ten years of non-stop composing; Beethoven talked about long periods of time when he carried his musical ideas within him and revised them over and over in his head before he started writing them down. Studies of other musical performers reveal a similar pattern. Brilliant pianists and violinists are different from their promising peers in their devotion and practice—not in their natural talent.

Researchers who study creative genius have debunked the

(Continued on page 3)

BELIEFS ABOUT ABILITY

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.



Carol Dweck's (2006) book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, has re-opened the ancient nature versus nurture controversy. In our success-oriented society, we are always looking for the magic bullet that will allow all children to be successful. How do we define success? Success is achievement of one's goals. Achievement requires effort. In a competitive society, achievement means being better than others. But we are also an egalitarian society, which means that everyone must have an equal opportunity to succeed. This leads to the conclusion that success must be solely the effect of effort. Then, those who are successful will have earned their rank through hard work and those who are not successful have forfeited their success through "laziness." Differences in ability play no role in this equation.

This argument sounds very inviting – especially in a competitive society that is inherently anti-intellectual. The fly in the ointment is that, despite our protestations, there *are* inherent differences in ability. Much as we would like to believe that we live in Lake Wobegon, where all of our children are above average, there is a vast range of abilities among the human species. There are children who are 4 or more standard deviations below the mean and there are children who are 6 or more standard deviations above the mean. A child with an IQ of 40 and a child with an IQ of 190 have different educational needs. Effort is not the whole story.

Our egalitarian sentiments would lead us to believe that we are all gifted in some way. It is true that every human being is a gift to the world. Every human being is precious and has something special to offer the world. And every human being is capable of

(Continued on page 4)

BALLOT INSIDE

Please see the enclosed insert for your Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education Ballot. In addition to voting on the Board of Directors, an overhaul of the bylaws is up for a vote.

Please return your completed ballot promptly. A copy of the proposed bylaws can be found on our website www.migiftedchild.org.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jean K. Becker, Ph.D.

Making MEAP-ade

Happy Spring! While the weather outside may still be cool, we are all fired up to grow the Michigan Alliance for Gifted and to assist those across our state who speak for gifted kids.



On a recent evening I met with one of our local chapters. Listening to parents and educators talk about the pressures facing public schools got me thinking. As in most school districts, the educational holy grail there was doing well on the Michigan Education Assessment Program. Children move between schools and budgets are tight, with even slimmer funding probably in the future, yet the school is under pressure to raise MEAP scores! Since we cannot change that, how can we use those pressures to provide better educational opportunities for academically able youngsters?

While there are many ways to raise a school's MEAP scores, one of the easiest and most reliable is to get kids who test better to come to your school. The most sure-fire way to do that? Elementary, my dear (James) Watson! Develop a great program that will attract gifted children.

Developing ways to nurture children who learn more rapidly and test higher than grade level does not have to cost more. Children can sit in on classes above their age level in subjects where they can handle the higher level work. Any school with more than one class per grade can have a class with a faster pace to stimulate bright kids and allow them to learn at their own rate. If neighboring schools refuse to consider acceleration or grade skipping, you will be a magnet if you take the time to examine where each child is, individually, and place each child in the class truly suited to what they need, as opposed to where they "should be" chronologically.

The more other gifted programs shrink or disappear, the more children your school will attract. The more you serve gifted kids, the more inviting you will be to excellent teachers and parents who really value education. And that is how when life gives us MEAPs, we can use them to make MEAP-ade, even when times are tough!



Andrea Schroeder, Vice President for Advocacy and Jean Becker, President...making plans for the Michigan Alliance

LINKS, LINKS, LINKS ...

<http://www.mindsetworks.com/webnav/videogallery.aspx> - For great videos on fostering growth mindsets, how to praise children, embracing failures, effort, and active inquiry, check out this Brainology website.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1838571/> - From Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, this article "Why do beliefs about intelligence influence learning success? A social cognitive neuroscience model," explains some of the scientific research behind mindset theory.

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness/post/the_psychology_of_success/ - This interesting video post discusses how "kids with "growth mindsets" are more likely embrace challenges and enjoy their activities.

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Giftedness: A Motivational Perspective ... Dr. Carol Dweck	1
Beliefs About Ability ... Dr. Linda Silverman	1
From the President ... Dr. Jean Becker	2
Links, Links, Links	2
Editor's Notes ... Nan Janecke	3
Discover the Belin-Blank Center	5
Contribute an Article to <i>Images</i>	5
The 10 Most Important Things We Learned at NAGC ... Dr. Kelly Schultz & Nan Janecke	6
Book Review: Mindset: The New Psychology of Success	7
Book Review: Roland Smith's Peak ... Adam Dorstewitz	7
Are You a Cheerleader in Your School District ... Marie Brucker	8
Parent-To-Parent	9
Advancing Potential and All That Jazz: NAGC 58th Annual Convention	9
Organizational Strategies for the Gifted Student ... Dr. Kelly Schultz	10
Mensa Announces Award Winning Games	11
Alliance's Spring Conference	11
New NAGC Career Center	13
Alliance Chapters	14
2010-2011 Board of Directors	15

(Dweck continued from page 1)

idea that full-blown creative contributions emerge effortlessly or naturally from talented and gifted individuals. Instead, they suggest that genius and great, creative contributions are the product of passion, learning, and persistence.

Mindsets

So, what makes some people more passionate, learning-oriented, and persistent than others? Through 30 years of research and collaboration, I have found students' mindsets—their beliefs about the nature of their intelligence—play a key role.

Some students believe that their intelligence is a fixed trait. They have a certain amount and that's that. When students have this *fixed mindset*, they worry about how much intelligence they possess, and they are often afraid to make mistakes and reveal inadequacies. Gifted children with fixed mindsets may worry that they do not have enough intelligence to meet future challenges or that future events might prove the gifted label to be undeserved. Thus the fixed mindset creates a framework in which students feel they must prove over and over that they are smart and avoid situations in which they might look otherwise.

Other students have a *growth mindset*. They believe that their intelligence can be developed over time through their effort and learning. They do not believe necessarily that everyone has the same intelligence or that anyone can be Einstein, but they do believe that everyone can learn and be-

come smarter. Thus the growth mindset creates a framework in which students focus their efforts, not on looking smart but on becoming smarter.

How do we measure the mindsets? Mindsets are assessed by asking students to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements like: "You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you really can't do much to change it" (fixed mindset) or "No matter who you are, you can change your intelligence a lot" (growth mindset). In general, we find that about 40 percent of students tend to agree with the fixed mindset items and 40 percent tend to agree with the growth mindset items, with the remaining 20 percent having no clear choice.

Which mindset is correct? Although some argue the stability of intelligence, increasing evidence from cognitive psychology shows that basic components of intelligence can be enhanced, while neuroscience is demonstrating the tremendous plasticity of the brain over the lifespan.

Alfred Binet, the inventor of the IQ test, had a very strong growth mindset. He believed that intelligence could be fundamentally altered by education, and he devoted most of his career to designing curricula that would do that. He devised the IQ test simply to identify students in the Paris public schools who were not profiting from the schools' current curriculum, so he could find ways to get them back on track. He never intended his test to be used to measure anything fixed.

(See *Giftedness*, page 12)

EDITOR'S NOTES

Nan Janecke

When I selected Carol Dweck's article as the lead piece for this edition of Images after seeing her as a speaker at NAGC's 2010 Convention, little did I realize the controversy I was unleashing. Apparently, the division in the gifted community between those who believe children are born "gifted," and those who are interested in "talent development" is wide and entrenched. Who knew? My perspective is that it's possible for these two fields of thought to coexist: children are born gifted, but their giftedness must be nurtured in order for them to reach their full potential. And part of nurturing has to do with what Dweck is saying about motivation, and how learning won't always – or shouldn't always – be easy. This is the same thing my boss says to parents of gifted students every year: don't steal the struggle.

As a parent or educator of any child, our first instinct is to help. Help with homework, help with teachers, help to reduce stress, help them to understand...help, help, help! But when are we helping too much? When do we take away the ability to meet a challenge, to figure things out for yourself, to learn to do things on their own? Like everything else with parenting, this can be a very fine line. Sometimes they need

help finding their way, sometimes we have to let them be a little lost.

The fact that gifted children sometimes don't struggle academically until high school or even college presents a dilemma. You want your student to get grades, get into a good college, compete for scholarships. At what point is it more important that they are learning something new, even if it's hard, or uncomfortable, or downright difficult? Like all children, the gifted can have extremely fragile egos. As Carol Dweck explains, an academic challenge can very easily morph into "I must not be very smart if I can't do this" if it's not addressed appropriately. Don't be afraid to let your student know that it's about the effort, about conquering their fears, and coping with the struggle that really counts.

There is a lot on the news these days about "helicopter parenting," those parents who micromanage every portion of their children's lives, not just in grade school and high school, but into college and beyond. We forget that unless we let our children struggle at some point, it quickly goes from micromanaging because we want to, to micromanaging because we have to – because we have raised children who are incapable of facing the world on their own. Don't steal their struggle now, and it's much less likely that they'll struggle later.

(Silverman continued from page 1)

success. Every human being can become successful if she sets goals, believes in her ability to reach those goals, and works hard to achieve those goals. When we redefine success, taking it out of the competitive perspective, yes, hard work and confidence do lead to personal success.

But this does not mean that every human being is gifted. Only when we define giftedness as achievement, or the potential for recognized achievement, do we get caught in the trap of believing that giftedness is a function of effort. When giftedness is defined as developmental advancement, it can be readily seen that in all societies some children develop at a faster rate than others, just as in all societies some children are developmentally delayed. Differences in development are real and require differentiated responses.

In her earlier work, "Motivational Processes affecting Learning," Carol Dweck (1986) laid the empirical foundations of her book, *Mindset*. She studied pre-adolescents' belief systems about their abilities. She discovered that those who believe that intelligence is fixed shy away from challenging work, whereas those who believe that intelligence is malleable seek challenge and persist in the face of failure. Students who see intelligence as fixed seek favorable judgments of their ability, avoid negative judgments, display helplessness, avoid challenge and quit when faced with difficult tasks. The two groups have very different attitudes toward effort. Those who believe that intelligence can develop through learning are mastery-oriented and try to increase their competence by learning new skills. They set learning goals for themselves. Learning goals focus these students on effort. Effort is a means of surmounting obstacles and increasing abilities. However, those who see intelligence as fixed set "performance goals," which undermines effort. They see smart people as achieving effortlessly. Therefore, "the mere exertion of effort calls ability into question" (Dweck, 1986, p. 1043). The more effort they have to put forth, the less satisfied they feel.

The essence of this earlier work was the examination of gender differences in belief systems. This focus has been mysteriously lost in *Mindset*. The population selected for study was "bright" students – another term for gifted. Dweck definitely found gender differences in belief systems. Bright pre-adolescent boys believed that they could increase their competence by learning new skills, and were willing to put forth the effort to master new material. Bright pre-adolescent girls, on the other hand, believed that intelligence was fixed, they had less confidence in their ability to overcome challenges, and they tended to take easier courses. They displayed a tendency toward unduly low expectations. They attributed failure to lack of ability and success to luck. Past successes did not increase their confidence. Bright girls preferred tasks they were good at, while bright boys preferred tasks they had to work hard to master.

In her research, Dweck (1986) found that bright girls often

preferred to help others rather than take on new challenges in learning, and that this eventually undermined their self-confidence. She observed that during the first six years of school, bright girls could get by performing what they already knew. Then, in junior high school, they were suddenly thrust into mathematics classes where they encountered a considerable amount of new material. For the first time since they began school, they had to stretch themselves intellectually. As they had so little experience doing so, they had no idea if they were capable. "Continued success on personally easy tasks...is ineffective in producing stable confidence, challenge seeking, and persistence... Indeed, such procedures have sometimes been found to backfire by producing lower confidence in ability" (Dweck, 1986, p. 1046).

Performance goals, according to Dweck (1986), are emphasized within the competitive reward structure of school. They promote defensive strategies. They create the conditions that have been found to undermine intrinsic interest. Dweck blamed elementary schools for not providing enough opportunities for bright students to struggle with difficult tasks. And she concluded that, over time, all individuals can increase their intelligence through learning. However, the group that is convinced that intelligence is fixed (bright girls) show relatively little gain in intelligence over the lifespan.

Dweck's earlier findings provide a solid basis for programs for the gifted, differentiated instruction, and special attention to the belief systems of gifted girls. Her research and conclusions served as an inspiration to the field of gifted education for two decades. It is very clear that belief systems affect learning and can prevent the growth of intelligence. It is very clear that we must provide gifted students with hard enough work early in life so that they learn how to struggle. Carol Morreale, a gifted coordinator in Lake Forest, Illinois, used this argument to convince the uninformed that gifted students need special programs. She said that if the gifted are given the same work as all the other students, we are "depriving them of the right to struggle to learn." Carol Dweck's work affirms this.

It is also very clear that gifted girls are at greater risk than gifted boys, because they are more likely to adopt a maladaptive belief system that equates effort with proof of low ability. Gifted adolescent girls' self-esteem is undermined when they believe that high ability means achieving good grades effortlessly.

There is an unquestionable relationship between one's belief systems and the amount of effort that one puts forth. If one believes that ability is fixed and cannot grow, one is less likely to strive to increase ability. It is clear that ability in all areas improves with practice. However, there is a difference between *innate* and *fixed*. And here is where the waters get muddied.

(Continued on page 13)

Contribute an Article to *Images*!

Parents, students, teachers, administrators, counselors, researchers: Share your experience educating, parenting, advocating for, or studying gifted children – or even being a gifted student yourself. Write an article for a future issue of *Images*!

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Articles due: August 1, 2011

Publication date: September 15, 2011

Volume 22, Issue 1, 2012

Articles due: February 1, 2012

Publication date: March 15, 2012

Would you like your events and activities publicized in this newsletter or would you like to submit an article? Contact Nan Janecke, editor of *Images*:

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DISCOVER THE BELIN-BLANK CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

The mission of the Belin-Blank Center is to empower and serve the international gifted community through exemplary leadership in programs, research, and advocacy.

The Belin-Blank Center:

- identifies gifted, talented, and artistic learners;
- offers specialized educational opportunities for students;
- increases awareness and use of acceleration to enhance learning;
- provides assessment, counseling, and consultation services;
- develops curriculum resources and materials;
- facilitates the professional development of educators;
- disseminates information through conferences and publications;
- leads in local, national, and international policy formation;
- enhances educational opportunities through technology;
- collaborates with the worldwide gifted community;
- promotes access, diversity, and equity in developing talent.

Founded in 1988, the Belin-Blank Center has established a national and international reputation for its research, training, and service. The Center offers professional development opportunities, academic-year and summer programs for students, summer programs for international students, diversity initiatives to support minority students, the Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS) program to identify exceptional academic talent, an early-entrance to college program (the National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering), a comprehensive clinic that offers assessment and counseling services, and an institute dedicated to academic acceleration (Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration). Information on these programs is available in English at www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/.

It was here at the Belin-Blank Center that the Iowa Acceleration Scale was developed by Dr. Susan Assouline and Dr. Nicholas Colangelo.



Marie Brucker, VP for Chapters, and Toni Szymanski, formerly of the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education. Toni is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa and working under Dr. David Lohman of the Connie Belin-Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/>.

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THE 10 MOST IMPORTANT THINGS WE LEARNED AT NAGC

Kelly Schultz, PhD, and Nan Janecke

In November, 2010, the National Association for Gifted Children held its annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia. From the many, many presentations offered at the convention, the following were highlights:

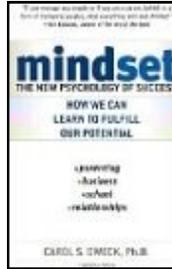
1. Gifted students are just as likely to have organizational challenges as other students, but are less likely to be taught ways to organize their life in a manner that helps them. Gifted students who are taught organization as a life skill will find their quality of life greatly improved. This presentation was given by Ellen Fiedler, PhD and Michelle Kane, EdD.
2. An advisory committee for a school district's gifted programming can be extremely helpful. Committee members should include the community, parents, teachers, and administrators. Advisory committees must balance the needs of students with the district policies, but can advocate change at a district level instead of one school at a time. Gail Fischer Hubbard and Joan P. Brownlee from Prince William County Public Schools indicated that their advisory committee was a great advantage to getting gifted resources allocated in a systematic way.
3. Richard Olenchak's research on "Emotional Underpinnings of Academic Achievement" may be ground breaking when dealing with the affective development of gifted students. Just as we must differentiate curriculum for students, there is a need to differentiate for social and emotional development. The research in this area demonstrates several techniques for effectively addressing content and social-emotional issues in an integrated, comprehensive fashion.
4. Overexcitability is a sensitivity of the nervous system, an expanded awareness of and a heightened capacity to respond to stimuli such as noise, light, smell, touch etc. Can you imagine life in a family where multiple people have overexcitabilities in different areas? Teresa Rowison and Debbie Michels described such families and gave recommendations on how to cope. A good sense of humor helps immensely.
5. Underachievement can have many root causes, and successful intervention depends on asking the correct questions to get to that root cause. Gifted children in particular are skilled in intentionally covering up, or not understanding, what lies at the heart of the choices they make. William Hoff's presentation gave great examples of interview tactics to use in uncovering core issues and concerns.
6. Carol Dweck's research into mindsets, and how having a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset can alter a child's view of him or herself, was eye opening. How we praise and encourage our children may have the opposite effect of what we're looking for, and it is important to choose our words carefully.
7. Middle school classrooms can be a lively learning environment for gifted readers and writers. Jim DeLisle's presentation on "Growing Good Writers" offered 12 imaginative and unique lessons designed to enhance character, creativity, and self-awareness. A book by the same name will be published soon, and is highly recommended for language arts instructors and curriculum directors.
8. The impetus for improved education for gifted students will come from the need for more highly capable STEM students. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics are the buzzwords of the day, and the dearth of students heading into and being successful in those fields will be the motivation to create better learning environments for everyone. Expect to hear a great deal from both politicians and educators in the next few years about STEM – and advocates should be ready to use STEM improvements as a way to ask for more challenging educational opportunities.
9. It is important for gifted programs to identify the student population they are serving, and to analyze whether or not they are reaching minority and underserved populations who are also frequently under-identified as gifted. A panel of presenters on "Best Practices for Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students" also stressed the need for presenting works by minority authors and researchers to give all students a broader view of the world and to give students role models of all races, creeds, and religions.
10. In a wonderful presentation entitled "Everybody Needs an Edna," Kathi Kearney and Rachel Morris discussed the need for students, parents, and advocates alike to have a mentor to help guide them through the minefield of growing up gifted. Educational, social-emotional, and mental issues all require someone with a working knowledge of what works – and what doesn't – to help you through the day. They stressed the importance of building a support system that works for you and your family, and gave permission for us to use their ideas to create a similar presentation, so look for it to be coming to a chapter near you.

Dr. Kelly Schultz and Nan Janecke are the program coordinator and the assistant program coordinator of Western Michigan University's Academically Talented Youth Program.

BOOK REVIEWS

CAROL DWECK'S MINDSET: THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS

Dweck's book (Ballantine Books, 2007) delves into the research behind the growth vs. fixed mindset. A mindset is "an established set of attitudes held by someone." A growth mindset embraces the idea that intelligence can be grown, and that hard work and study can make you smarter, and better. A fixed mindset, on the other hand, concludes that you are as smart and as talented as you're ever going to be. Plus – surprise! – you might have a different mindset for different areas. For instance, you might think you can't get any smarter, but if you practice hard you might develop a better golf swing. With checklists to help you determine which mindset you have, and ideas on how to change your mindset to improve your life, Dweck shows how a particular mindset can affect how you view all different areas of your life. Although some areas of the book are repetitive, the research into mindsets and techniques for changing the mindsets of students and teachers will alter the way you think about how children learn, what innate intelligence really is, and what defines success.



ROLAND SMITH'S PEAK

Adam Dorstewitz

Peak (Harcourt, 2008) is an amazing book written by Roland Smith. It is simply incredible because Roland Smith takes you straight into the wonderings and workings of Peak Marcello's mind. You start to feel his emotions and his thoughts before he even tells you. Peak is trying to summit Mount Everest at the age of fourteen, attempting to be the youngest one to do it. Peak's adventures are simply fantastic and the reader is left trying to figure out what Peak is trying to do next. Smith lets the reader go into our hero's mind and it is an astounding place to journey into. When seeing the cover of this book, it appeared it might have been a non-fiction book, but instead, it is an extremely realistic piece of fiction. The mental images that Roland Smith paints for the reader are thrilling. From the first few pages, the reader's mind is taken on a fast paced journey and is found wanting in its attempt to acclimate.

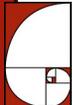


This book was something of a surprise for me because I love fantasy, but this particular book caught my eye, just with the look of the cover and the title. I am also a sports fan and this book really primed my interest. From the first page I was hooked and could not put it down. I found every excuse to read and finished the book in a day or two. The author had me rooting for Peak to reach his goal. I will not spoil the ending as you have to experience this action-packed climb yourself. In addition to being a fast-paced adventure, the dialogue in this tome is packed with humor. This book was truly time well spent with an excellent cast of characters. Roland Smith transports us into a world that very few will ever experience outside of the pages of this book.

I was so enthralled with this book that I will be in search of other Roland Smith adventures, and hoping that he writes a series where Peak is the protagonist.

Adam Dorstewitz is a fifth-grader at Winchell Elementary School in Kalamazoo. Besides reading he enjoys playing baseball, the martial arts, and ringing bells in his church bell choir.





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ARE YOU A CHEERLEADER IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT?

Marie Brucker, Vice-President for Chapters

What do we know about cheerleaders? They are excited, energetic and very much a part of what is happening. They know their material. They maintain a positive outlook that can be contagious. They work as a team together—each one taking on an important part of the pyramid and the overall presentation.

As a parent of gifted children, can you picture yourself as part of such a team? Is there some part of the planning and the pyramid structure that could utilize your strengths? The vision you have as a parent of seeing your children excited by doing something connected with their passions or getting their problem-solving juices flowing no doubt moves you towards such a group in order to accomplish these goals.

Who are some of the key players in this team of cheerleaders for the gifted to make it all happen? Some team members will lead pull-out activities in math, science or language. Others will be behind the scenes gathering information and materials, communicating with others or helping to manage data. Still more will work as liaisons, spreading the news of what is happening and how to get more involved. As the team grows, so do the opportunities to reach out and excite more students and parents. This growth will also increase a group's influence on its administration.

Of course all this does not happen overnight but having a positive outlook and developing a cooperative, collaborative working relationship within the school district will expedite things happening for the students. An excellent illustration of this has been how Hartland's chapter, HP4K (Hartland Parents 4 Kids), has transformed from monthly information meetings to the creation of several activities and clubs for gifted children.

These activities started with a Voyager program meeting once a month, math games including Math Pentathlon, chess club, Word Wise language program, literacy circles, etc. Coming soon will be Science Olympiad and Art Reach enrichment programs, with many activities spreading to additional schools. All this developed through a close examination of what was offered, what is needed, and how parents make a difference immediately as they work with their school staff.

HP4K is now planning to have expanded opportunities in each school next fall. This activity has inspired the teaching staff and increased their awareness of the need to do collaborative work to stretch accelerated learners in the classroom. When HP4K's vision, activities and efforts were shared with the administration, they offered the parent group a link to the school website, and discussed the need for both in-service time and training for staff and classroom assistance,

utilizing HP4K parents. You can visit Hartland's website, <http://hartlandschools.us/> and click on the "Students and Parents" link to follow what they're doing. You can also find them on Facebook.

It is time for you to be part of your district's cheerleading team for gifted. For support and information, the Chapters tab at www.migiftedchild.org provides steps to help you get started. For additional guidance in the process and answers to questions, contact your local Regional Representative or the Vice-President for Chapters.

Jeannine and Glenn Gogoleski with Andrea Schroeder, Vice President for Advocacy, meeting on January 15, 2011.



MEDIA CONSULTANT NEEDED

The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education remains in need of a media consultant/public relations specialist to assist us in spreading the message on the needs of gifted children and in promoting in our events and activities to the general public.

If this is an area of interest for you and you would like to help out, please contact Jean Becker at jeanbecker@att.net. We would very much appreciate any help you can offer.



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PARENT-TO-PARENT

Our school is starting to talk about what we should do with my student for next year. I think some changes need to be made, but am not sure what I should be asking my school to do, or how to ask for it. How do I go about making sure that our family and the school are on the same page so that next year will be successful and appropriately challenging?

Spring is the time to sit down and discuss with your school district any changes that should be made for the next academic year. First, sit down with your child's teacher. What worked well this year, and what did not? Be sure to ask your student the same questions. If your school district allows you to request a teacher, check with other parents of gifted students. Are there particular teachers who work well with this population?

Next, sit down with your child's counselor, or the person at your school who makes the classroom assignments. Make sure they understand what you're looking for in a teacher, and that your interest is in meeting your child's needs, not just selecting a teacher.

This is also the time to ask if there are any in-school (all-day, clustering in subjects, pull-out) programs that might be appropriate for your child. Also inquire about out-of-school programs (cooperative programs at another location, or after-school programs) that might be available, either for next year or that you can be looking at down the road.

Be sure to bring with you any test scores you've received (IQ tests, Explore Tests, talent search results, etc.). Discuss what these results mean for your child's ability level and placement. You may also want to inquire about the feasibility of your child taking the next year's end-of-year exams. A score of 75 – 80% means that your child already knows most of the material they will be covering in a certain subject, and you will probably need to look at subject acceleration (skipping a year in math or language arts, for example). A high score in a number of different subject areas means you may want to look at accelerating an entire grade. If this is something you are considering, ask your school to administer tests to determine your student's Iowa Acceleration Scale score. The Iowa Acceleration Scale is an impartial way to view the appropriateness of grade skipping for individual students. If they do not have a copy, the manual can be purchased online.

Make sure your school district understands that you want to work with them to create the best possible learning environment for your child, and that your goal is to use this time so that everything is in place by the next school year. By giving them the time and tools they need, together you can create strategies that work.

ADVANCING POTENTIAL AND ALL THAT JAZZ

In November 2011 NAGC hosts the largest *annual convention* devoted to gifted and talented learners. Classroom teachers, gifted/talented coordinators, school administrators, researchers, parents, college and university faculty, and more, will converge in New Orleans, Louisiana, November 3-6, 2011, for the 58th Annual NAGC Convention. Throughout the pre-convention events, concurrent sessions, poster sessions, exhibit hall, general sessions, and networking events (both formal and informal!), you will witness the power of diverse viewpoints — from the field and from the classroom — coming together to make learning and life a challenging and rewarding experience for our nation's gifted and talented learners.

Here, in this corner of the American South, where European traditions blend with Caribbean influences, the history is as colorful as the local architecture; the food is the stuff of legend. Haitian and African Creoles developed an exotic, spicy cuisine and were instrumental in creating jazz and Cajun Zydeco. The street names are French and Spanish, the Creole architecture comes in a carnival of tropical colors, and the voodoo is a Caribbean import. The magic is irresistible.

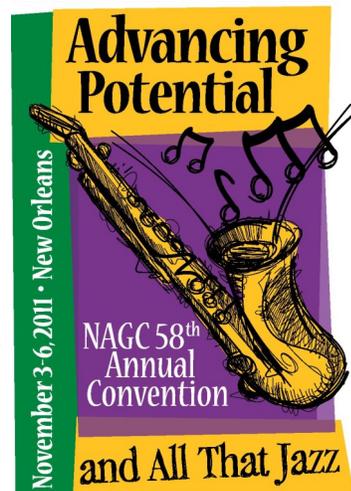
Here's just a sample of what you'll experience November 3-6, 2011, at the NAGC 58th Annual Convention & Exhibition in New Orleans:

- 350+ content-rich sessions covering 15 topic strands in gifted education;
- Updates on the latest research in gifted education from experts in the field;
- Networking opportunities with fellow gifted educators, researchers, and parents of gifted children; and an exhibit hall featuring new products, publications, technology, and resources.

In a word (or two) — this is your opportunity to expand your knowledge, learn from the great minds in your field, and share your successes and challenges with others who, like you, support the diverse needs of high-ability learners.

Who is NAGC? The National Association for Gifted Children is a nonprofit organization of parents, teachers, educators, and community leaders who work to expand support for high-ability learners across the United States.

National Association for Gifted Children



ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE GIFTED STUDENT

Kelly Schultz, Ph.D.



I am blessed with two completely different sons. My oldest son has major organizational challenges – lost homework, lost personal items, not able to plan assignments, not able to keep track of deadlines, etc. My youngest is usually very organized, in an innate way, but still has problems with long-term planning.

Both sons need help in this arena but in very different ways. Many gifted students have issues with organization – some because they aren't able to handle the organizational challenges that are forced upon them and some because they just need to be taught particular skills. This article gives insight into both types of challenges and strategies to help children and their families and teachers deal with these issues.

This article is based on “Organizationally Challenged?” How Developing Executive Function Can Help the Gifted,” a presentation by Ellen Fiedler, PhD, and Michelle Kane, EdD, at the 2010 National Association for Gifted Children’s annual conference. They kindly provided materials which have been adapted to create this article.

In a 2008 article, Mach, Vatcha & Harris defined executive function as “the ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, control and direct behavior.” This ability is regulated by a different part of the brain from the intelligence center, meaning a student who is academically gifted can have above average, average, or below average executive function. Even if a student is average at executive function, when compared to the student’s intellect the skills may seem below average. The main skills that executive function encompasses are organization, time management, planning, self-regulation and ability to inhibit actions. In other words, deficits in this area cause poor organizational skills and impulsiveness.

Being average or below average in executive function causes unique problems for gifted students. For years the student may not need to be organized because they remember facts easily and learn quickly, but at a certain level in school intelligence can't hide the organizational deficits any longer. Also, gifted students are frequently involved in a large number of activities, many of which may be above-grade level, and may require higher level organizational skills than the typical student. Frequently, however, the problem lies in the fact that organizational skills are mundane, and mundane tasks are not typically strengths of the gifted student.

So how do you go about correcting these executive function deficits? There are many organizational systems available for your child to use, and you should use inexpensive versions of each until you find a method that works for your

student. A method that works for one student is not necessarily effective for another, so experiment with different systems until you are successful. Planners are great tools, but some students think a day at a time while others plan a week or a month at a time. Word processing software has templates available that you can print out and use to see which way your student’s mind works, and once you have determined the mindset you can find an appropriate planner. You can also buy your child different sizes and shapes of sticky notes for writing reminders. Your student may find this preferable to writing in a planner.

Another way of helping students organize themselves is to allow them to use color or art. There are many notebooks, folders, sticky notes and paper that are different colors. Have your child pick a color that makes sense for science (maybe green or even pink) and then get a notebook, folder and book cover all in that color. Everything for science class should be the chosen color. If color is too simple, have the student draw pictures on the notebooks and folders or add stickers.

Many students that are organizationally challenged are also time challenged. The challenge is usually that a student doesn't internalize how long each time segment actually lasts. How long is a minute? An hour? I encourage clocks in every room of the house and buy my kids watches (lots of them since they are often lost). At every opportunity help your child estimate how long something will take to happen and then check how long it actually takes. This kind of skill is very valuable in time management but rarely taught.

As our students get older and move into the teenage years the organizational challenges become harder and their need for independence increases. At this stage collaborative problem solving becomes crucial. It's best if you can introduce this concept to the student in elementary school, but becomes imperative in middle school and high school. Sit down with your child as a team to address specific organizational challenges your student is experiencing at the moment. Talk about the issues, look at them from various perspectives, and work to discover what might be at the heart of the problem. Brainstorm possible ways to fix the problem – be creative and consider several possibilities, discussing which ones might be the best to try. Keep narrowing down the list until you find the solution that seems to best fit your family, then try that solution and meet again to see if it worked or if you need to try something else. Above all, keep the meeting collaborative. Don't put blame on anyone and don't demean any answer.

Many gifted students have a problem with knowing exactly what needs to be done to organize different aspects of their life. For example, what does it mean to clean out your locker? What does it mean to clean your room? As adults, we know what we think is clean but kids and teens have a hard

(Continued on page 11)

(Schultz continued from page 10)

time envisioning the same thing that we do. If a clean locker or a clean room is the issue, then come up with a list of goals or expectations that must be met for the location to be considered clean. Do this together and listen to what your child wants to leave cluttered. Always have a place that is the student's to control. Maybe you decide that the closet can be organized the way the student wants, but the floor of their room has to be clear. Maybe you give the student a small (or large) table and he can put as much stuff on the table as he wants, in any way he wants. Maybe you just say that there can't be any dirty clothes or dishes in the room and let them live in their own room in whatever way they want. I was a slob as a teenager but the floor on my room is absolutely clean now.

Every once in awhile, make a fun game out of cleaning some part of the student's things. Maybe you can have a contest between your kids to see who can clean out their backpack the fastest (and the most complete). You can set a timer and say whoever finishes cleaning out their backpack before the buzzer gets a reward. If your student has a phone, have them take a picture of their clean locker every Friday and give them a reward if it meets the requirements you have come up with together (or do something fun together on the weekend).

An organized environment helps us to find things but may be difficult for your student to manage. In the end, don't despair. Every time you think that your child's life will be limited by these challenges, search for Albert Einstein's desk on the internet and realize that messy does not necessarily imply unsuccessful!

Dr. Kelly Schultz is Program Coordinator of the Academically Talented Youth Program at Western Michigan University's Lee Honors College, an instructor of geometry and AP Computer Science for ATYP, and the mother of two gifted sons.

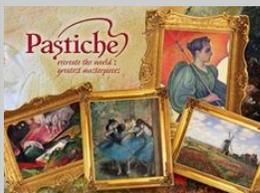
MENSA ANNOUNCES AWARD-WINNING GAMES

Every year Mensa tests new games submitted by the games' manufacturers. After an exciting Mind Games weekend, the following earned Mensa Select distinction honors:

InStructures (Jane's Games, www.janesgames.com) This is an exciting construction-themed game.



Pastiche (Gryphon Games, www.freddistribution.com) Explore the paintings, palettes, and pasts of artists in this unique and challenging game for the whole family.



Pirate versus Pirate (Out of the Box Publishing, www.otb-games.com) Pirates have discovered an island brimming with treasure; conquer the island by capturing the gold and silver, or by eliminating enemy pirates.



Stomple (GaZima Games, www.gazimagames.com) Outwit your opponents by stomping their marbles before they stomp yours!



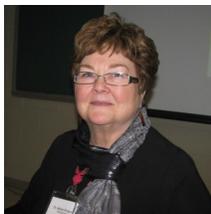
Uncle Chestnut's Table Gype (Eternal Revolution, www.eternalrevolution.com) An abstract strategy game with a random element.



SPRING CONFERENCE REVIEW

The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education's Spring Conference on Saturday, March 26, 2011, was an amazing event for all who attended. The venue at Michigan State University perfectly accommodated highly informative breakouts for parents and educators. For the students, there were thrills every hour with the choice of exciting tours of the Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory, exploring the role of fossil hunting, new ways of discovering math, how to do field research, and more. Even more exhilarating was the fact these students were delighted to find others who actually think like them and are similarly excited about science and other topics.

Keynote speaker Bertie Kingore provided a wealth of information and practical



hands-on experiences on differentiation and strategies to nurture potential and passion in the gifted.

Other adult breakouts on gifted, "quirky" and intense children (a wonderful presentation by Kim Waters) stirred attendees to conversations that were down to earth, problem solving, empathetic and energy boosting. Chatter continued around the lunch table with strategies for districts to work together and plans for making differences for gifted across the state.



Many thanks to sponsors Michigan State University and Northwestern University's Center for Talent Development. Don't miss the next conference this fall!

What the Mindsets Do?

The two mindsets create entire motivational frameworks. In these, students have different goals, attitudes about effort, and reactions to difficulty or setbacks.

Goals. In the fixed mindset, the major goal students have is to look and feel smart. They agree with statements like: “The main reason I do my schoolwork is to show I’m good at it.” Our research has shown that when students with a fixed mindset confront a challenging task, one on which they might make mistakes or reveal deficiencies, they often opt out. This happens even with important learning experiences and skills that are critical to their future success.

For students in a growth mindset, the major goal is to learn new things. They say “I like school work that I’ll learn from even if I make a lot of mistakes” and “It’s much more important for me to learn things in my classes than it is to get the best grades.” They care about grades, but learning is foremost.

Attitudes toward effort. Students with a fixed mindset often believe that effort is a bad thing. They believe that if you need effort, it means you have low ability. They agree with statements like: “To tell the truth, when I work hard at my schoolwork it makes me feel like I’m not very smart.” If they have ability, they believe, all things will come easily. This is extremely harmful, since all important things—especially the development of talent—require sustained effort. For students with a fixed mindset, effort is aversive. Their number one goal is to look and feel smart, and effort makes them feel dumb.

This is undoubtedly a reason that many very bright students stop working when school becomes difficult for them. Earlier in school, they coasted to high grades with little exertion. Indeed, the fact that they needed little effort, when others had to work hard, often becomes the definition of their giftedness. Then, things change. They need effort to do well, just like the other students did. Many such gifted students decide that they would rather retire while they are ahead than step down from the pedestal and step up the effort.

However, students with a growth mindset see effort as a good thing and as a tool for learning and becoming smarter. They say, “The harder you work at something, the better you’ll be at it.”

Reactions to setbacks. Students in a fixed mindset believe that setbacks measure them and reveal their (permanent) deficiencies. As a result they become discouraged and defensive, withdrawing their effort further. They are also more likely to consider cheating. Students in a growth mindset understand that setbacks mean that they must engage in the learning process more vigorously, ramping up their effort and looking for new study strategies.

Performance over time. Tracking students’ performance over difficult school transitions, in difficult courses, and on difficult tasks shows that the fixed mindset impedes learning and achievement, whereas the growth mindset fosters them.

How Are Mindsets Learned?

One way that children learn a fixed or growth mindset is through the praise they are given. Most parents believe that praising children’s intelligence or talent will build their self-esteem and their resilience. Our research shows that this belief is wrong. Instead, praising intelligence creates a fixed mindset with all of its vulnerabilities.

In a series of studies we gave students an IQ test and after the first set of problems, we praised half of them for their intelligence and half of them for their effort. We then gave students a choice of what to work on next. Intelligence-

*Genius and great,
creative contributions are the product of
passion, learning,
and persistence.*

praised children wanted tasks that would insure their success; effort-praised children wanted hard tasks that they could learn from.

After a setback, intelligence-praised children lost their confidence, interest, and ability to perform well. Their scores plummeted. Effort-praised children remained confident and engaged, showing better and better performance on the IQ test.

After the task, the intelligence praised children lied about their scores, because difficulty and setbacks were too threatening to admit. Effort-praised children told the truth. The moral is that telling children how smart they are backfires. Instead, we need to praise the process that children engage in—their effort, strategy, concentration, perseverance, and improvement.

Can Mindsets Be Changed?

Yes. In our own studies and those by other researchers, students in workshops were taught that the mind is like a muscle that gets stronger with learning, and that the brain forms new connections every time they apply themselves and learn something new. After growth-mindset workshops, students showed a greater value for and enjoyment in learning, more motivation in the classroom, and higher grades or achievement test scores. Many students who had been turned off to school or who were defensive about effort now opened themselves up to learning. Their peers in the control groups,

(See *Giftedness*, page 13)

(Continued from *Giftedness*, page 12)

who also had excellent workshops—but did not learn the growth mindset—showed no such gains.

We have developed and are now testing an interactive computer-based workshop called “Brainology,” in which students learn about the brain, its great potential for growth, and how to maximize its function and development. Students report that they visualize their neurons growing new connections as they learn, and this spurs them to work hard and learn new things.

Conclusion

The word *gifted* can have a fixed-mindset feel. It suggests that intelligence or talent is simply bestowed upon children through no effort of their own and, by extension that it should flourish through no effort of their own. I am seeing a record number of students who fear that if they work hard, make mistakes, or have deficiencies they will no longer be seen as gifted.

Parents and educators need to work to send a different message: that intelligence and talent are developed through passion, learning, and persistence—and that they value those traits, not “natural,” effortless perfection. They must convey that challenges are fun, effort is satisfying, mistakes are welcome clues, and even failures can put people on the path to success. When they do, they will shift the meaning of gifted from something children just have to something they have the opportunity and the privilege to develop.

Carol Dweck is regarded as one of the world’s leading researchers in the fields of personality, social psychology, and developmental psychology. She is the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. This article first appeared in the Duke Gifted Letter in Spring 2008, Volume 8, Issue 3. It is reprinted with permission.

NEW NAGC Career Center

The National Association for Gifted Children has added a Career Center to its webpage, calling it “The most direct and precise way to find qualified gifted education applicants and jobs in gifted education.”

For job seekers, the NAGC Career Center is free and provides access to the best employers and jobs in the industry. It includes: advanced job searching options; the ability to save your resume; and the opportunity to find employers looking only for gifted education personnel.

For employers, the Career Center gives targeted advertising for gifted education postings, including: quick and easy job posting; online reports for job activity statistics; and a resume search.

For more information, please visit www.nagc.org.

(Silverman continued from page 4)

Do gifted children exert less effort when they are identified and labeled? Do they exert less effort in schools and special programs for gifted students? Does labeling increase perfectionism? Experience with 6,000 gifted children over the last 31 years would suggest otherwise. In interpreting this newer work by Carol Dweck, we must be careful not to over generalize or we will come to the wrong conclusions. Innate abilities do not blossom in a vacuum. It takes recognition of exceptional ability, an appropriate environment where these abilities are nurtured and attention to students’ belief systems so that they come to believe in their capabilities. When these are in place, effort is likely to follow.

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Linda is a licensed psychologist who has been studying learning difference for over 40 years. She noted author, researcher and popular international speaker.



What are your thoughts on the mindset debate? Post your ideas on our Facebook page!

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Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education Chapters

Each of these local chapters provide parents opportunities to share information, to work with the schools, to hear speakers on various gifted and talented issues, and to generate and promote enrichment activities for gifted children. Note that some chapters also have their own websites. If you have further questions or would like to start a new chapter in your area, please contact Marie Brucker at 810-227-5379 or m.brucker@comcast.net. This list is regularly updated; we apologize for any errors or any exclusions. If you have any changes, please contact Marie Brucker.

*Groups forming; not affiliated at this time. **Chapters

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Images

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Nan Janecke, Editor

Mission

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Ads should be submitted to the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education, P.O. Box 70702, Rochester Hills, MI 48307; alliance@migiftedchild.org

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Membership Form



I would like to join the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education as an:

- Individual member** - open to any individual interested in furthering the goals of the Alliance. Yearly Dues: \$25.00
- Institutional member** - open to any organization or institution interested in furthering the goals of the Alliance. *Institutional membership entitles the organization or institution to designate five individuals as members of the Alliance.* Yearly Dues: \$100.00
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Affiliate member - Name of my Affiliate: _____
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Name _____ Referred by _____

Address _____

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(The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.)

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