

Notes from 17th Annual New England Conference on Gifted and Talented Education

Oct 13-15, 2011

Freedom Baird

20 Reed Street

Cambridge, MA 02140

freedom.baird@gmail.com

Conversation before the start of the conference with Karen McGrady, teacher in the town of St. Albans, ME, and with Ann Cutten, teacher at Sanford in Maine, and therapist, and (it turns out) recipient of an award at the conference.

- Book recommendation for parents: **Mindsets**, by Carol Dweck © 2007

http://www.amazon.com/Mindset-Psychology-Success-Carol-Dweck/dp/0345472322/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320775285&sr=1-1

About the difference between a growth mindset, a fixed mindset, etc. About the difference between praising for effort vs. praising for intelligence.

- Another book recommendation for parents: **Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis**, by James T. Webb

http://www.amazon.com/Misdiagnosis-Diagnoses-Gifted-Children-Adults/dp/0910707677/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320775525&sr=1-1

- A book recommendation for those working with accelerated learners from disadvantaged families: **A Framework for Understanding Poverty**, by Ruby K. Payne

http://www.amazon.com/Framework-Understanding-Poverty-2009-Printing/dp/B001A1MDGM/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320775687&sr=1-1

Opening remarks at the conference by Vermont Education Commissioner, Armando Vilaseca:

- Vermont is working on a waiver to NCLB
- Multiple measures of assessing student achievement are needed, using one form of assessment only is wrong
- Let students demonstrate their learning, show student progress against their own standard
- Age-based groupings don't work for all kids
- Teachers feel isolated in dealing with multiple levels of students
- Help teachers do differentiated instruction
- Use other groupings, allow students to move in and out of groups

- Meeting the needs of accelerated learners is hardest in elementary school and the middle grades, the challenge to do it right is the greatest
- Vermont is a model for the rest of the country, with the origins of the “Common Core” etc.

Carol Storey, conference chair, opening remarks:

- Classroom teachers need helpmates who are specialists in teaching accelerated learners

Breakout Session: Step Into Your Future: Voices of Gifted Dropouts

Run by Nancy Mildrum, an Enrichment Teacher at the Georgia Elementary and Middle School, in St. Albans, VT

- Session was about the evolution and implementation of a program called “Step Into Your Future” for all middle-school students transitioning to high school. It grew out of research focused on interviewing gifted dropouts in Vermont.
- Working with accelerated learners from disadvantaged families is very, very challenging
- They have a yearning to be themselves. Ref: Walt Whitman – Song of Self
- They run the “Step Into Your Future” program for their 7th and 8th graders
 - The curriculum for the program was developed from research on gifted dropouts
 - The program is designed to help *all* 7th & 8th graders transition successfully to high school
 - The program is run once a week, for four weeks, during lunch. The kids make the food!
 - The curriculum model is based on storytelling, and also food & community building
 - For the 7th grader the curriculum focuses on thinking about transitioning to High School. For the 8th grader it focuses on understanding themselves, and what they might want to study in high school.
 - Graduates of the Georgia School, high school students, come back to talk to the middle-schoolers about the transition, and answer their questions, and encourage them. They let the kids know about all the choices they’ll have in HS.
 - The program is a time to honor the students and prepare them to move on
 - It teaches them to advocate for themselves
 - The teachers of the program are sensitive to the message that there’s college, and also other options after HS

- The program is revised every year
 - The kids learn about resilience
 - The curriculum is given to the teachers in bound notebooks, to make less work for the teachers. The teachers are encouraged to make the curriculum their own.
 - Each group participating in the program is a small group of 9 or 10 kids of all ability levels. The core 7th and 8th grade teachers take each group. The guidance counselor plans the groups, to avoid conflicts between certain kids.
 - The program has been used for nine years
 - All the kids benefit. Even the strong, students, many of whom are anxious, but hide it. The very accelerated learners are often dealing with a lot of anxiety.
- A resource for teens who are accelerated learners, and who are “autodidacts”: The **Teenage Liberation Handbook**, by Grace Llewellyn
http://www.amazon.com/Teenage-Liberation-Handbook-School-Education/dp/0962959170/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320777032&sr=1-1
 - An observation from a veteran teacher: 5th & 6th graders are *more able to learn* than 7th & 8th graders, because of adolescence/hormones. It’s an observable phenomenon.
 - Nancy welcomes other schools to use the program. nmildrum@fwsu.org

Conversation with teachers during morning break. Recommendations:

- Conference: **Learning and the Brain** <http://www.learningandthebrain.com/>
- Book: **Re-Forming Gifted Education: How Parents and Teachers Can Match the Program to the Child**, by Karen B. Rogers
http://www.amazon.com/Re-Forming-Gifted-Education-Parents-Teachers/dp/0910707464/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320777597&sr=1-1
- Book: **The Cluster Grouping Handbook: A Schoolwide Model: How to Challenge Gifted Students and Improve Achievement for All**, by Susan Winebrenner and Dina Brulles
http://www.amazon.com/Cluster-Grouping-Handbook-Schoolwide-Achievement/dp/1575422794/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320777643&sr=1-1
- Report: **A Nation Deceived** - http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/Nation_Deceived/
- Book recommended by Deborah Fisher, public school teacher in Waltham
And **Still We Rise: The Trials and Triumphs of Twelve Gifted Inner-City Students**, by Miles Corwin

http://www.amazon.com/Still-We-Rise-Triumphs-Inner-City/dp/0380798298/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320778283&sr=1-1

Breakout Session: **Best Practices for G/T: Your District's Report Card**

Run by Linda Burdick, a consultant with 25+ years of experience working with accelerated learners in grades k-12. She developed an IEP for accelerated learners in her school district. She is the former president of NHAGE (New Hampshire Association for Gifted Education) and editor of the NHAGE newsletter. As a consultant, she is hired by school districts to conduct and audit of programs for accelerated learners, and make recommendations.

The session covered: what services for accelerated learners are research-based? How does our district "measure up" to national standards? We looked at current best practices, tools to analyze how our district is doing, what we do well, and how we can improve services for our accelerated learners.

- The standards have changed for evaluating programs. The NAGC has current standards that reflect best practices
- Identifying accelerated learners is a huge piece, they can't all be lumped together, there's a huge range among them.
- In evaluating your district look at: what are the standards? What are we doing well? Where are the gaps? Use the NAGC matrix (checklist) to look at all the aspects.
- **Assessments:** When evaluating assessments the most important question is: how aware are teachers of traits of accelerated learners? Are profiles of accelerated learners developed including individual strengths and weaknesses?
- E.g. in New Hampshire, all elementary school kids take the SCAT or PLUS test at a computer center, to identify if they are accelerated learners.
- The Iowa Acceleration Scale is one of the best available to assess whether or not a kid is accelerated in their learning of some subjects.
- Once kids demonstrate that they can score highly on an above grade-level test, that opens lots of doors. E.g. Johns Hopkins has scholarships. Lots of programs for accelerated learners have scholarships.
- Side note: accelerated learners reading scores rise during the summer. They flat line during the school year (due to underchallenge).
- **Learning Environments:** when evaluating learning environments, survey all the parents, teachers, staff, principals. Learn what their attitude is.

- Are teachers talking to kids about understanding characteristics and behaviors of accelerated learners?
- Work with district to increase rigor, through things like academic competitions, district-wide differentiated instruction, national talent searches.
- Kids have different learning styles: some kids are quick with the answers, some kids need time to chew on the question.
- Girls often need time to think and plan before they do something.
- Instructional Strategies: do the educators regularly practice differentiated instruction? This might work for some learners who are moderately accelerated.
- Do educators pre-assess, then compact the curriculum for kids who need it? You will see those kids no longer are behavior problems anymore.
- Help educators know what the *replacement* activities are
- Recommended reading:
 - A Nation Deceived
 - Fair Isn't Always Equal
 - Re-Forming Gifted Education
 - The Cluster Grouping Handbook
- Do accelerated learners have access to more complex tasks?
- Do accelerated learners identify an interest and explore it?
- Don't restrict advanced activities and opportunities to just accelerated learners, let all the kids try. Those who want to and can will continue. Those for whom it's too hard can stop.
- **Cognitive and Affective Growth:** do underachieving accelerated learners have access to specialized interventions? How are their strengths also tapped?
- Cluster grouping raises achievement for *all* students

Jim DeLisle – Keynote Speaker

- Teachers play a *very* important part in identifying accelerated learners. Especially veteran teachers.
- In early America we had the one-room-school house model out of necessity. There was peer-to-peer tutoring, most schools only went to 8th grade. But the curriculum followed the child out of necessity – it was silly to hold a child back, because they only had 8 years to be educated.

- The Templeton Foundation conducted a multimillion \$ study of all different types, ways in which learners can be accelerated. They published the report “**A Nation Deceived**”.
- Jim has a new book: **More Than a Test Score**, about teens who are accelerated learners
- What’s the real target in dealing with underachievement in accelerated learners:
 - Need to address the root cause
 - Underachievement is the accelerated learner’s quest for intellectual dignity, they know when their intellect is being ignored
 - The student rebels against work assignments that are too easy, they stare out the window
 - The older student says things like “this work is pointless”, “I already know this”
 - Jim, in his work as a teacher, asks: “please help me understand what you would like to learn that would be meaningful to you”
 - He tries to restore dignity, he relinquishes some classroom control
 - He thinks of his students who are accelerated learners as *allies*
 - What can our underachieving accelerated learners teach us about their abilities?
- Accelerated learners, both children and teens, *must* be grouped together in order to grow.
- Advocates for accelerated learners must stand up for their right to be grouped together
- A good question to ask students: what did today’s lessons teach you about yourself, or about the world outside of school?
- The inclusion model results in a one-size-fits-all classroom. But accelerated learners are not included in the studies. They are shown to be “not harmed” by heterogeneous groupings. But they also don’t excel.
- The poet Richard Brautigan has a wonderful poem, "The Memoirs of Jesse James", about being an accelerated learner, bored in school, terribly resentful
- The Davidson Institute is an excellent online resource for accelerated learners. Lots of resources, all free.
- Magazine recommendation: “Parenting for High Potential” magazine
- The Kahn Academy also has lots of free resources

Breakout Session: **Self-Regulation and Self Concepts Affects of Minority Gifted Students**

Run by Ruth Lyons a co-founder of the Renzulli Academy in New Haven, CT, for high-potential, high-poverty, urban minority youth.

Covering: Self-regulation is the degree to which individuals are motivated to participate in their own learning. The session focused on the characteristics and learning experience of the students at the Renzulli Academy.

- The Academy is a public school, housed in one of the districts' school buildings at first, but now in its own building.
- Many accelerated learners coast through the early grades without learning proper self-regulation skills
- Kids have to learn how to learn. The first month is very hard for many of the kids coming to the Academy for the first time.
- Underachievement *can* be reversed
- The learning of self-regulation is a fairly new concept (50-60 years old)
- Kids *can* learn to control themselves. Are taught to acquire specific strategies. Instead of being reactive, they are taught to be proactive.
- Goals direct activities
 - Mind-mapping
 - Problem solving for goal setting & decision making
- In traditional classrooms, often, teachers own the learning process, and students are dependent on them. Need to change this. At the Academy students are given choice.
- In middle-school, peer pressure can prevent kids from self-regulating
- Also, lack of role-modeling in the home is a problem
- The work of learning self-regulation is never really done. The kids can't say "I learned that" and be done with it. That's a challenge for the kids.
- Zimmerman's Triadic Forms of Self-Regulation: Behavioral, Personal, Environmental – these all interact with each other
- Personal Strategies
 - Organizing and transforming information
 - Goal setting
 - Keeping records
 - Written and verbal rehearsing/memorizing, mnemonics, etc
- Behavioral Strategies
 - Analyze the learning task
 - Think about the consequence of their actions
 - Students have to show that they know a strategy

Notes from 17th Annual New England Conference on Gifted and Talented Education

- They do academic competitions in 4th grade. It's hard on them, they're really challenged. They need a lot of emotional support during this.
- Environmental Strategies
 - External resources, adaptation of students environments
 - Structuring the study environment: physical setting, minimize distraction, break up study periods
- Self-Regulation in urban and other settings:
- Personal factors, different personal circumstances
- Individual factors -> self-efficacy, age, gender, motivation, personal effort
- One African-American teacher, Marcella, works in New Haven, gives her students this advice: "get used to being the only one", i.e. the only African-American student in a given environment
- Marcella teacher her students that high-achievement *is* African
- It's so important for accelerated learners to be with their intellectual peers
- The Renzulli Academy gives the credits (scores) for the kids back to the schools they were transferred out of. Also, it's only 120 students out of a very big school district.
- What can we do *now*:
 - Recognize students skills, and their contribution to their own growth
 - Make work personally meaningful
 - Pay attention to student interests
 - Discuss cause-and-effect relationships, making choices. Teach them to reflect after incidents.
 - Help students trust their environment
 - Teach resilience skills. Robert Steinberg: When responding to a bad situation: you can change yourself, you can change your environment, or you can go somewhere else.
 - Students should develop self-regulation strategies as discussed in this talk. Ask them what has worked for them.
 - We remember best when we create, are visual, have something unusual
 - Don't give up on yourself or your students!
- Resource on "Individual Achievement Differences" – "A Hope in the Unseen", book by Ron Suskind, about a kid named Cedric Jennings
- Identification tests:

- Raven = non verbal abilities test, alternate IQ
- SAGE (Screening Assessment for Gifted Education) => pictorial analogies
- Naglieri = newer versions of the pictorial idea
- Parent behavior checklist
- Teacher behavior checklist
- Ask the teachers what tools they need

Colleen Harsin, Director of the Davidson Institute's Davidson Academy –

Saturday Keynote speech

- Davidson Foundation is a private non-profit
- Davidson Academy is a public school in Nevada for kids who are profoundly accelerated in their learning of some subjects
- Davidson Institute has free services: **Young Scholars**, and **Davidson Database**
 - Families in the Young Scholars Program are assigned an advocate. It's free.
 - Davidson Database, also free, tons of info, open to the public: articles, research, a free mentoring guidebook
- Davidson Academy: 2006-2007 was their first school year. It's a public school. But had no public funding in the first year. Now they receive supplemental funding from the state.
- They differ from a charter school. Charter school = lottery. Davidson Academy = eligibility criteria.
- The kids are thought of as "adults in training".
- Students who get into trouble are asked to tell the story, answer the question: "how did this seem to be a good idea?"
- Kids are involved in creating their education plan
- In advocating for what needs to change in your district: be specific, be positive, prioritize, document, include pros & cons
- **Assessments** are essential in a program for accelerated learners. Assessment is a rational process, supported by evidence. There are many tools -> IQ, achievement, aptitude, work samples, others
- Utilize a university to have kids assessed for less money
- Books and resources:
 - **Advocating for Exceptionally Gifted Young People, 2011**

Notes from 17th Annual New England Conference on Gifted and Talented Education

- Genius Denied, 2004 (anecdotal)
 - A Nation Deceived, 2004, report
 - Re-Forming Gifted Education, Rogers, 2001
 - Getting to “Yes”, to learn how to be a constructive participant
- Ms. Harsin showed a video of the Davidson Academy kids, teachers, and parents. One parent said, paraphrasing: “take a bunch of 7th graders, how would they feel if you gave them 3rd grade work to do, every day, all year. They would feel frustrated, bored. They would act out. That’s how some accelerated learners feel in many school districts.”
 - When twice-exceptional (2E) kids arrive at the Davidson Academy, sometimes “the wheels fall off”. It’s a great challenge for them, they need extra support.
 - Policies and planning: look at policies, precedent, procedures
 - Get involved at the state level. Become aware of policies and legislation. Geniusdenied.com has a monthly e-newsletter update
 - The California Association for Gifted has a great guidebook for advocating for programs for accelerated learners