

What Do Teachers Need to Know and Do When Talent Development is Their Goal?

By Professor Karen B. Rogers,
University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Years ago there was a movie starring Peter Sellers called *Being There*, which was built on the premise that if one, no matter what his cognitive ability, was present and did or said nothing of importance (in this case, quoted things seen on television), he would be considered wise and a political “player”. In this case, the character had no conception of what was going on, but was accepted nonetheless. As we reflect on this year’s theme for the ITAG conference, “Getting into the Game — Moving from Pawns to Players”, it is hoped we will find more appropriate ways to establish ourselves with the wisdom we have accumulated through our experiences with giftedness and talent. Can we demonstrate our skill in developing the potential of our learners to the point where others notice? And, once demonstrated, how do we go about being accepted for these skills? The big question, then, is how do teachers of learners with gifts and talents demonstrate their effectiveness for what they do and how can they get to the table of acceptance in general education politically?

Demonstrating Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness has long been a passion of mine. That is, what makes a teacher particularly effective in bringing out the best in his or her learners? And is what it takes to be effective with the brightest and highest performing students the same as what one needs to be effective with the general population of learners in our schools? As it turns out, the research leads us to possible answers to both of these very complex questions. We have access to two bodies of research on teacher effectiveness: effectiveness with general learners and effectiveness with gifted and talented learners. And, as it turns out, what we need to do is quite different when dealing with potential development of both “populations” of learners! I am including a table that lists a few research studies on both sides of effectiveness that you might want to brush up on if you have the same passion for this as I do. **(See Table 1.)**

Table 1: Research Resources on Teacher Effectiveness

GT Teachers	Regular Teachers
Personal Characteristics (Approach)	Personal Characteristics (Approach)
Vialle & Quigley (2002)	Ayres, Sawyer, & Dinham (2004)
Bernal (1994)	Batten, Martin, & Khamis (1993)
Chan (2001)	Brown & McIntyre (1993)
Intellectual/Cognitive Traits	Intellectual/Cognitive Traits
Landvogt (2001)	Berliner (1986)
Bishop (1980)	
Bernal (1994)	
Professional/Teaching Strategies	Professional/Teaching Strategies
Nelson & Prindle (1992)	Borko & Livingston (1989)
Whitlock & DuCette (1989)	Cooper & McIntyre (1996)
Zimmerman (1990)	Ayres & Dinham (2003)

What we see as differences from these resources are the following:

Professional Approach

1. GT teachers tend to “guide on the side”, while regular teachers “facilitate” for the whole class using applications and problem solving. (Q: Are these the same thing?)
2. GT teachers vary the pacing of instruction to match the previous experiences of learners and the complexity of the instructional materials; regular teachers aim their instruction at a “steering group” in their classrooms, usually at the 19th – 23rd percentile of ability (according to Slavin).
3. GT teachers provide consistent, “accurate” feedback aimed at improving outcomes; regular teachers



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THE MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Iowa Talented and Gifted Association is to recognize, support, and respect the unique and diverse needs of talented and gifted learners through advocacy, education, and networking.

THE ASSOCIATION

ITAG, an affiliate of the National Association for Gifted Children, is a tax exempt, 509(c)2 and 501(c)3 organization which was organized more than 25 years ago with a vision that gifted and talented children in the State of Iowa should receive an education commensurate with their abilities and needs. It promotes advocacy at the state and local level, pre-service and in-service training in gifted education, and parent/community awareness, education and involvement. ITAG is comprised of parents, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who share an interest in the growth and development of gifted and talented individuals in Iowa. ITAG annual membership dues are: Member - \$50; Institution - \$150; Friend - \$100-\$999; Sponsor - \$1000 or more; Affiliates Parent Groups - \$30; Affiliates Teacher Groups - \$35.

THE BOARD

meets during the months of November, January, March, May, August, and during the Annual Conference in October. Interested persons are welcome to attend meetings. Please contact a Board Member for the date, time, and location of a meeting if you plan to attend.

THE ITAG NEWS

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ITAG does not endorse any specific perspective or methodology, but presents issues and articles that may be helpful in a variety of educational settings, and/or to many populations of gifted children.

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Reflection...some say it is a mirror to the soul. It is so powerful that its results can cause changes in direction, provide new dimensions in creativity, help us to determine a true focus, and sometimes help us move from heartbreak to opportunity. I'm not sure that there is anything more powerful to help us examine our practice and to make changes that we would not have considered without this time of reflection.

This summer I have been teaching an online class for the first time. In this new learning environment I have had to ask my students to extend grace to me as together many of us are learning this new format for teaching and learning. However, as much as I have learned about teaching online, I have learned even more about myself as a teacher and advocate of my former TAG students and parents.

Journal writing and reflections are a tremendous way for me to gather baseline data and formative assessment opportunities about current thinking from my students who are working on their TAG endorsement. My students' responses and reflections in regard to learning about gifted children have provided a mirror to my own practices of teaching gifted children, and my current practices of working with adult learners. My students have been reading and responding to Deborah Ruf's book, *5 Levels of Gifted*, and to a 1999 article printed in Roper Review from Miraca Gross, "Small poppies: Highly gifted children in the early years." Reading the responses from my adult students has been an experience that is hard to put into words. Both of these sources help us understand the needs of gifted children from the perspective of parents and families. Both help us understand that gifted children are not a "like" group, but their skills, interests, motivation,

and attitudes are as varied as an art piece done in mosaic. What I knew in my heart and what their reflections helped me to verbalize was that as a TAG teacher and coordinator, even though I had parents actively involved in supporting me and their children with MY program, I did not support THEM in the way that they needed. Being the only teacher of gifted in my district for most of the time in my position, I had to determine where I would put my time and resources. *My biggest mistake was not* taking time to form a circle of trust with a group of parents. I should have been seeking out parents who were interested in learning more about the needs of their children. I could have then asked this group to help support the rest of the parents through an organized parent group. Together we could have developed the support and advocacy that is needed for educating parents, gifted children and teachers about the true NEEDS of gifted children.

One of the goals of the ITAG board this year is to do a better job of providing the support you need to start parent groups across the state. During this time of budget cuts, we need parental support and advocacy more than ever. We have lost two very valued colleagues from one of the AEAs in Iowa whose positions were cut because of budget. Many of our AEAs do not have a TAG-endorsed consultant to support our schools with correct and up-to-date information about meeting the NEEDS of gifted children. My adult students consistently ask why the information that they are learning has not been presented in undergraduate or graduate studies. They now see that inaccurate information and lack of information has hindered the access to learning that gifted children deserve and need.

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- show a commitment to hard work and use effort as a measure of student success.
- 4. GT teachers recognize the importance of intellectual development in GT learners; regular teachers expect order and purpose in the classroom first and foremost.
- 5. GT teachers have “highly developed” teaching skill and knowledge; regular teachers implement a “broad repertoire” of instructional media and strategies.

Intellectual/Cognitive Ability

1. GT teachers have expertise in a specific academic or talent area; regular teachers have mastered content knowledge.
2. GT teachers are self-directed in their own learning and exhibit a love for advanced learning; regular teachers are the same in this.
3. GT teachers have a strong belief in individual differences and individualization; regular teachers focus on the development of the learner and view the learner as a “person.”(Are these two the same?)
4. GT teachers exhibit a high degree of intelligence; regular teachers are slightly above average in ability (110-115 IQ).

Personal Approach

1. GT teachers have a genuine interest in and liking of GT learners; regular teachers show respect of all learners.
2. GT teachers are levelheaded and keep their patience and emotional stability; regular teachers are “themselves” with students and are approachable.
3. GT teachers possess a high degree of intellectual ability/honesty; regular teachers are sought out by colleagues for teaching advice, exuding an air of competence about them.

While it is one thing to read other people’s research based on their observations of teachers who bring out the best in students, I felt it was important to hear from gifted students themselves about what made their most effective teachers. While in Australia, I was able to administer a questionnaire to 3,500 gifted students, all housed in a single “selective high school”, that is, an all-gifted

school housing grades 7-12 in the state of New South Wales. I had two parts to my questionnaire. The first part asked students to put in their own descriptive words what made the “best” teacher they had ever had. Then I included a Likert scale of 81 teacher characteristics and strategies and asked them to rate how often as well as how important each of these behaviors were in a teacher who “brought out their personal best”. The 81 characteristics came from an exhaustive search of the GT teacher effectiveness research literature. The final question on the questionnaire was to have them describe in their own words what made the “worst” teacher they had ever had. Thus, I asked the students to generate their own characteristics (positive and negative) as well as respond to the researched characteristics. In order to be included in the list of “most effective”, I used the generated positive and negative descriptors the students gave me and when 80% or more stated the same thing, that made the list you see in Table 2. **(See Table 2.)**

Table 2. Student-Generated Traits of Effective GT Teachers

Professional Traits	Intellectual Traits	Personal Traits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covering the material supposed to be covered • Eliminating excess drill and review • Compacting the curriculum through pre-assessment • Providing new materials regularly with less repetition of old “stuff” • Adjusting instructional pace appropriate to subject matter (usually described as moving quickly through material) • Providing immediate corrective feedback • Providing a scaffold (whole of the concept) up front, followed by chance to analyze and reflect on its parts • Making individual accommodations for individual students • Being organized and clear in presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the subject matter backwards and forwards to the point of “having fun” with it • Is enthusiastic about subject, continuing to learn in that area along with students • Displays no overt biases toward race and gender • Trusts students to make good learning choices and providing opportunities for independent learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees GT learner as unique individual • Likes able students in general • Is patient and even-tempered in nature

Although we cannot generalize from one study, even if the sample size is large, it is important to note how well the responses correlated to the previous synthesis of the research literature, not obtained by asking the kids!

However, there is more to demonstrating effectiveness than just personality, professional approach, and intellectual capability: there is also the effective GT teacher's knowledge of the research on best practices (Rogers, 2007). This is capsulized below as questions about this research are asked and answered:

Question One: What does the research say about GT instructional delivery and differentiation? **Answer:** The learning preferences of GT learners are acknowledged and sufficient opportunities are provided for the learners to (1) participate in independent, in-depth studies, (2) progress through self-instructional materials at a comfortable, self-chosen pace, (3) create and carry out self-structured projects, (4) engage in high level "synthesis-oriented" discussions with able peers, (5) receive lecture "bursts" (quick distillation of key concepts, enduring understandings, important information), and (6) engage in simulations and hands-on activities that apply what has been learned, don't just repeat or summarize what has been learned. Another aspect of this differentiated delivery is that the qualitative difference in cognitive wiring among the gifted is acknowledged and taught for, including (1) a pacing 2-3 times faster than "normal" in subjects such as math and lower-level sciences, (2) elimination of excess "drill and kill", (3) focus on complex concepts, generalizations, and principles, (4) whole-to-part teaching sequence for concepts, (5) opportunities for individual reflection and analysis of own learning, (6) opportunity to study a concept "in-depth", and (7) acquisition of new knowledge and skills on a daily basis in all areas of "talent".

Question Two: What does the research say about the curriculum delivered to GT learners? **Answer:** The "regular" curriculum outcomes are modified to (1) be more abstract, (2) include more complexity and depth, (3) connect with other disciplines, (4) be taught whole – to – part, (5) relate to human issues and problems, and (6) teach methods practicing professional use. The processes required to educe student thinking and learning focus on (1) HOTS (higher order thinking skills), not MOTS (more of the same), (2) open-ended thinking and production, (3) proof and reasoning, (4) discovery, shared inquiry, and problem-based learning, (5) value of group production (learning to work in a group of like peers without always being the leader, for example), and (6) freedom of choice in what will be learned.

Question 3: What does the research say about the ways teachers can organize group experiences for gifted

learners? **Answer:** Use a variety of ability group options (in moderation), such as cluster grouping, self-contained classrooms, specialty magnet schools, pull-out programs, like-ability cooperative groups or dyads. Likewise, use a variety of performance group options (in moderation), such as regrouping-by-performance-level classrooms or within-class groups, performance cluster classrooms, pull-out programs focused on performance talents (writing, science, etc.), cross-graded classes (especially effective in math), like-performance cooperative groups or dyads.

Question 4: What does the research say about the ways teachers should accelerate the experiences of gifted learners? **Answer:** Teachers can shorten the years in school through grade skipping, multi-age classrooms, credit by testing out, early college admission, and grade telescoping (doing 3 years work at middle school in 2 years' time, for example). Teachers can also provide students with advanced (accelerated content and skills) via early entrance to school, concurrent enrollment across school building, subject acceleration, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs, and mentorships.

Question 5: What does the research say about the ways teachers might individualize or facilitate flexible progress for gifted learners in the K-12 system? **Answer:** Teachers can compact (pre-assess and then provide replacement experiences for what has been previously learned), place these kids in continuous progress classrooms, allow for testing out and credit for prior learning, use mentorships to advance a child beyond where the school has the capability of continuing this advanced learning in a talent area, allow for independent study with credit attached, and allow the student to engage in on-line learning courses in lieu of courses offered in his or her current school setting.

Question 6: If we make time in the school day for the GT learner to move more quickly and at a more advanced learning level, what else do we have "time" to add to his or her learning outcomes? **Answer:** "Room" needs to be found in GT program services, according to the GT literature base, for (1) the "classics" of literature, the great ideas of philosophy, science, history, and the arts, (2) infusion of the arts in all areas of the curriculum (aesthetics, criticism, history), (3) divergent production training, (4) organization, planning, and time management training, (5) communication and group skills training, (6) affective awareness and support, (7) social issues, ethical dilemmas, and

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conflict resolutions discussions, and (8) service learning and social action experiences.

To summarize this part of the article, then, teachers of the gifted and talented can demonstrate their effectiveness through their behaviors as well as the knowledge and skills they acquire and implement. The field of gifted education is rich with research-supported “best practices” and the effective teacher not only knows what these practices are, but uses them in daily interactions with learners with gifts or talents.

Getting the Message Out

With the little space left to me, we come to the discussion of how we get a place at the table of general educational strategizing. Many solutions for this have been suggested over the years, but being a fairly small field with only some local “control”, we have not been able to make much headway in national thinking. The Javits grants provided some potential for our getting there, but now with their de-funding, despite their long productive history and outcome realization, we are back at Square One.

In the most recent presidential address at the annual convention of National Association for Gifted Children, President Paula Olszewski-Kubilius suggested that we move away from the conception of giftedness if we want that place at the table, espousing, instead, the conception of talent development. In other words, the field should forget trying to identify, define, and program for children with intellectual potential, whether generalized or specific, and focus on advancing the performance skills of those who are performing at higher than expected levels for their age or grade level. The argument goes that if we took our highest performing math students, for example, and continued to move them forward in math, then the math world out there would recognize the efficacy of our efforts. This would necessitate the exclusion of those with strong raw potential who have not had access, due to cultural diversity, economic disadvantage, or linguistic diversity, to enriched learning experiences, those who have a special education issue in addition to advanced intellectual capability, and those who underachieve due to motivational or environmental factors. If our field could just focus on those who already demonstrate the development of their potential, the other fields in education

would accept us for the expertise we demonstrate on a daily basis and through our research. In other words, if we thought the “gifted could make it on their own” before, the argument is now that they will have to do that. The only ones we will support are those already showing demonstrated extraordinary performance. This will, of course, limit the numbers we need to be concerned about in the field as well as ensuring that our evaluations of talent development services are consistently positive. This may be a new rendition of the phrase, “Them’s that has it, gets” or, more formally, “success breeds success”.

I am probably already communicating where I fall on this issue, instead of presenting an objective perspective on this most current argument for getting our field “to the table”. But, as my recent Javits Project on Twice Exceptionality has pointed out, about 1 child of 5 who are gifted have some processing or behavioral issue that works against high performance. These children will no longer be served through any program – too smart to qualify via RTI or special education services, and too disabled to qualify as “gifted”, let alone talented. Similar arguments could be presented for other forms of diversity among those with potential. Can we now turn our backs on this large subpopulation of learners in the interests of getting to the table? I don’t think this is the solution, but I honestly cannot think of a better solution either. I will leave it up to you to figure out this conundrum.

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As with any reflection, if we don’t alter something that is brought to our attention when looking in our mirror, then that time spent gazing was for the wrong purpose. We can either use our reflection to stroke our ego, or we can use it to illuminate the true condition, and make the needed changes to improve. I will forever be grateful to my students for helping me learn and move from my heartbreak of not doing something, to finding the new opportunity to do the right thing.

By Linda Moehring,
ITAG President and Legislative
Committee Representative

Meet the Candidates!

Read about the people who are running for the Iowa Talented and Gifted Board of Directors. Then go to the web site address at the end of this article to cast your vote!

The voting will be open from August 27, 2012 until September 28, 2012. The board members will be announced at the ITAG conference October 15, 2012, in Des Moines.

Get information and register for the ITAG conference "Getting into the Game: Pawns to Players" on the ITAG web site at www.iowatag.org.

Candidate for President



Board Member Matt Robie is an Extended Learning Program teacher for the Ankeny Community School District, teaching K-5 students at Prairie Trail Elementary School. He has served on the ITAG board of directors since 2007 and is editor of the ITAG News Magazine. Matt has 13 years of experience teaching gifted elementary and middle school students, and serves as co-content facilitator and acceleration specialist for Ankeny's ELP Department. Matt, a 2010 recipient of the Yager Exemplary Teaching and Learning Recognition Award, received his B.A. in Elementary Education from the University of Northern Iowa, and his Master's Degree in Education from Michigan State University. Matt holds endorsements in K-12 TAG, K-8 Reading, and K-8 Science, and currently teaches two TAG Endorsement courses for Drake University. Professional areas of interest include problem-based learning, academic acceleration, and STEM initiatives. You may contact Matt at matt.robie@ankenyschools.org.

Candidates for Board of Directors



Board Member Sue Chartier is the Gifted Education Consultant, Instructional Math Coach and an Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) Coach in Residence for Northwest Area Education Agency. She has been in education 26 years, 10 years as a middle school teacher in the Sioux City Community School District where she had elementary teams in Odyssey of the Mind and Destination Imagination, and 16 with the AEA. She earned her BA and Gifted Education endorsement from Morningside College and MA from the University of South Dakota. Sue is a member of ITAG, NAGC and ASCD. You may contact Sue at schartier@nwaea.org



Board Member Ashley Delaney is an Extended Learning Program teacher for Ankeny Community Schools. She is in her sixth year of teaching gifted education and her ninth year teaching overall. After graduating from Iowa State in 2004, Ashley began her teaching career at an impoverished school on the southside of Chicago. After moving back to Iowa to teach at Saydel High School, she started her Masters degree at Drake University where she graduated in 2010 with an emphasis in gifted and talented education. Ashley's focus is on secondary programming and services, but she has taught the entire spectrum of ages throughout her career. Ashley is one of the co-chairs for the 2012 ITAG conference and is responsible for collecting dates and information for the web site. You can contact Ashley Delaney at mrsashleydelaney@gmail.com.



Jenny Larson has been teaching K-12 gifted students in North Central Iowa for the past 20 years. She is currently a 7th-8th grade TAG instructor and high school TAG advisor for the Fort Dodge Community School District. Jenny received her B.A. in Elementary Education from William Penn University and will receive a Masters Degree in Education from Morningside this spring. Jenny holds endorsements in K-12 TAG, K-8 Reading, and Middle School Education. She is passionate about early programming for young gifted children, problem-based learning, creativity in the classroom, and the integration of technology into gifted education. She has been an academic coach for Mock Trial, National History Day, Math Counts, and Quiz Bowl and was named NHD Teacher of the Year in 2007. Jenny is a member of NACG, ITAG, and Lakeland TAG.

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Board Member D. LeAnn Oldenburger was one of the first 40 students of Central Academy in Des Moines. As a young adult, LeAnn served as a community liaison for the Des Moines Gifted program, and was the G/T Program Coordinator for Central Iowa Mensa. After college, LeAnn spent 10 years jet setting while her husband Gary served in the US Air Force. After returning home, she completed her G/T Endorsement from Drake University and taught ELP at Carlisle Middle School half time from 2007-2009 while home schooling her seven gifted children including one son who is twice exceptional — being deaf and highly creative. In 2009 and in 2011, LeAnn was co-chair for the October ITAG Conference with Linda Moehring, referring to the experiences as “a wonderful opportunity to give back to the gifted community.” LeAnn has been serving on the board since 2010.



Board Member Susan Wouters has been an educator with the Waukee Community School District for 16 years, working with gifted children and their families for 13 of those years as an Extended Learning Program (ELP) teacher. She has taught and facilitated gifted and talented programming at both the elementary and secondary levels and has served as ELP Coordinator for the district. Susan co-founded and led Waukee Academic Boosters for 3 years and has planned and implemented professional development pertaining to gifted education for K-8 staff. She is a member of ITAG, NAGC and ASCD. Susan received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Graceland University, TAG endorsement from University of Iowa, and Masters of Science in Education, Curriculum Leadership, from Drake University. She has presented at several ITAG conferences and currently working as a co-chair for the 2012 ITAG conference. You can contact Susan at swouters@waukee.k12.ia.us.

Go to the following web site to vote after August 27 to access the ballot.

<http://survey.aea.k12.ia.us/survey/94541/c886/>

The August Spotlight will also include this link. Each computer can vote only once. Only ITAG members may vote for the board candidates.

ITAG Partners

PLEASE HELP! We are in need of experienced TAG/ELP educators who could serve as a mentor/partner with a less experienced colleague. This connection may be based on e-mail correspondence, but could develop into whatever relationship the two teachers decide.

We currently need experience at all instructional levels. Please consider guiding a new colleague in uncharted territory!

E-mail Kenn Wathen, Educator Outreach, kwathen@hamburg.k12.ia.us if you would be willing to help.

Your “Kudos” are Needed!

ITAG would like to communicate the success of gifted students and their teachers in our next newsletter. Do you have an accomplishment or a photo you’d like to share?

Please send your “kudos” our way at roddoreen@aim.com

Become a Friend of ITAG!

An additional \$50 beyond your existing membership helps ITAG in its efforts to preserve and promote gifted-friendly legislation, both at the state and national level. Send your contribution to 200 W. 2nd Avenue, Indianola, Iowa, 50125 and let us celebrate you as the organization’s newest FRIEND!



Getting Into the Game: Parents are Players Too!

ITAG Annual Conference Parent Night
featuring Arlene DeVries
Monday, October 15, 2012, 7:00 pm



FREE

COST: This is a FREE event. RSVP is required online. Registration information is available at iowatag.org

WHO: Parents, teachers, administrators, and all interested parties

WHAT: Social-emotional aspects of gifted learners are the focus of this session. Anyone wanting more information and ideas on affective needs and services should plan on attending as little is covered in the conference.

WHERE: Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn, Ambassador Room

DETAILS: In a micro-conference format, Arlene DeVries of SENG is starting the evening with a 30-45 minute keynote address on the maturation and development of gifted individuals. A selection of four 45-minute breakout sessions following her address will allow attendees to personalize their experiences. The breakout sessions are detailed below. The evening will finish with a 15-20 minute presentation on the benefits of a parent affiliate group and how to start one and time for networking.



BREAKOUT SESSIONS: Detailed descriptions are available on the ITAG web site at www.iowatag.org.

**The Gift of Self: Developing and
Enhancing Self-Concept in
Gifted Youth**
Lisa Van Gemert, MENSA

**Gifted Adults: Do You Stop
Being Gifted After High School?**
Jay Swords, Davenport CSD

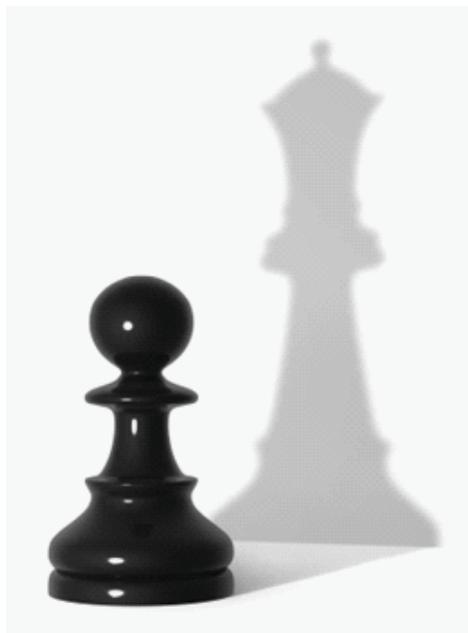
**Social/Emotional Issues and
Characteristics of the Gifted
Learner**
Jas Overlin, West Des Moines CSD

**Using Games and
Puzzles to Increase
Frustration Tolerance**
Kathy Jones, AHA Learning

2012 Iowa Talented and Gifted Association Conference



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Innovation in Education

By Laurie J. Croft

The editors for the Iowa Talented and Gifted (ITAG) newsletter offered me the opportunity to write an article about innovation, and I enthusiastically accepted. After I accepted, I began to worry about how I should frame such an extensive topic. When I googled the word “innovation,” for example, I found over 94,000,000 possibilities (yes, that’s six zeroes)! Wikipedia notes: “**Innovation** is the creation of better or more effective products, processes, services, technologies, or ideas that are readily available to markets, governments, and society. Innovation differs from invention in that innovation refers to the use of better and, as a result, novel idea or method, whereas invention refers more directly to the creation of the idea or method itself.” (“Innovation,” 2012, para. 1).

I hadn’t asked if ITAG’s desired goal was a review of innovative educational strategies — many of which originated in the field of gifted education and were adopted by general education. Perhaps they hoped for an overview of a few of the innovations that are transforming today’s educational landscape. Or perhaps the editors were more interested in innovations in pedagogy that could be especially beneficial to the talent development process, facilitating the differentiation of content and encouraging more meaningful and authentic student products — both innovative teaching and teaching for innovation.

This article will try to provide an overview of innovation in education, beginning with the most dramatic educational innovation ever: the development of a system of public education that provided education to children from families that were previously excluded. One reality, however, is that even successful innovations become the commonplace, and new innovations are needed to meet changing needs. Teaching has evolved, and many of the innovations associated today with best practices in education were launched by teachers in programs for the gifted. Dramatic changes in 21st Century technology are introducing innovative possibilities that could transform schools; whether or not these innovations comprise a new educational institution has yet to be seen. What remains constant, however, is the need for excellent teachers who can find the innovative strategies that meet the needs of the wide variety of children in our schools. The best educators use innovation to teach, and they also teach innovation as one of the most important tools they can provide

to today’s learners. The explicit use of programs such as Invent Iowa encourage authentic problem solving, critical and creative thinking, imagination and innovation, too often missing in general education today. Gifted education is less driven by the mandates of legislation such as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*; gifted educators are uniquely positioned to continue to introduce, utilize, and advocate for best practices that allow our brightest students to shape the innovations of tomorrow.

Innovation in the Industrial Era: Education of the Masses

The business of education is rooted in the Industrial Era. If you watched the opening ceremony for the 2012 summer Olympics in London, you had a chance to watch the unfolding of the Industrial Revolution as it began in England and changed the world. The innovations that marked the transition from the 18th to the 19th Centuries led to unprecedented economic growth for the populations of the countries — including the United States — that shared in vast changes in agriculture, technology, manufacturing, transportation. One of the guiding principles of the period was the notion of scientific management, utilizing science to inform practice in manufacturing to lead to the standardization of best practices. The language of the Industrial Era included mass production, sequential assembly, the division of labor. Envision the production of the Model T on the first assembly line, making the automobile available to a greater number of people through the use of interchangeable parts, uniformity, and precision.

Education, too, needed to determine best practices to engage vast numbers of children from middle- and low-income families — children who had never had access to an education before. The American system of mass education emphasized ways to tame unruly children, provide children of the same age the same content, and promote the values of the nation. Public education was an innovation that resulted in unmatched levels of literacy. From its inception, education in the United States has valued a system of scientific management (research-based practices), mass production (compulsory attendance), sequential assembly (assigning children to classes based on date of birth), and a division of labor, with teachers trained to

specialize in assigned disciplines for assigned ages (certification and endorsement). The educational innovations of the Industrial Era became institutionalized, however, and before the end of the 20th Century, critics were suggesting much of the system had become stagnant and ineffective for too many children.

Educational Makeover: Educational Innovations from Gifted Education

“The educational practices we explore with our talented learners fill a gap, meet a need, provide a practical solution, and deserve notice...” (Robinson, 2011).

In the late 1800s, educators in a few isolated school districts envisioned something different for their more precocious learners. At approximately the same time, Alfred Binet conceptualized intelligence testing in France, and by the 1920s, scholars such as Lewis Terman on the West Coast and Leta Stetter Hollingworth on the East Coast began studies of gifted learners that inform our understandings today. Advocates in individual school districts continued to add opportunities for advanced students. The shocking successful launch of the Soviet Sputnik in 1957 sparked widespread American fears of losing the technological edge in a Cold-War-world and encouraged greater interest in developing a globally-competitive workforce, unsurpassed in innovative and inventive inclinations. Although teams of educators developed exciting and innovative curriculum, especially in science and mathematics, cultural forces during the 1960s transcended the uneasiness about the educational needs of America’s brightest students. Few benefited from the new curriculum as society and schools instead emphasized equity, as if excellence and equity were mutually exclusive concepts (Colangelo, 2003).

The 1972 *Marland Report*, authorized by then-Commissioner of Education Sydney Marland, reminded Congress and the public that America had as many as 2.5 million gifted children, most of whom were not being well served by their schools. While not mandating or even authorizing any federal or state interventions on behalf of gifted learners, the widespread dissemination of factual details correlated with educational innovations for gifted learners that have become more widely accepted in general education today. Teachers implemented higher-order and critical thinking programs, as well as the use of individual projects to facilitate individual progress. Teachers of the gifted embraced Problem-Based Learning (PBL); as a strategy, versions of problem-based learning have gained acceptance in general education (Robinson, 2011). In schools

today, flexible grouping and formative assessments, as well as the broad concept of differentiation, are part of the lexicon, even if they are not always implemented in ways that benefit the talented learners for whom they were originally conceptualized.

21st Century Innovations: Rapidly Evolving Options

“To stay ahead and sustain our standard of living, we must prepare our students for the 21st Century with new skills — they must be capable, creative, innovative problem-solvers — along with the traditional core skills” (Gee, 2008).

While many Asian countries are integrating practices introducing their students to scientific innovation and technological entrepreneurship, the emphasis on testing-for-proficiency under NCLB has limited opportunities to encourage creativity and innovation (Ibata-Arens, 2012). Darling-Hammond (2000) found an “almost inverse relationship between statewide testing policies and ... student performance” (p. 23) as many classroom teachers limit their instruction to better match possible test items. The introduction of the Common Core has been challenged as closing the door on educational innovation (Butcher, McGroarty, & Finne, 2012; Evers & Greene, 2011), even as some districts limit opportunities for teacher creativity through scripted and/or paced instruction. Curriculum standardization and standardized assessment is correlated with a decline in student creativity, as measured by the Torrance Tests of Creativity (Zhao, 2012).

Some innovative educators, however, are taking advantage of changes in contemporary culture to re-envision education and to take advantage of new realities. Diverse knowledge sources are available almost anywhere, anytime (Robinson, 2011; Bellow, 2012); technological inventions and innovations have allowed us to connect in ways unimaginable when many of us were in school as students, or even when we began teaching. In contrast, texting, surfing the World Wide Web, and enjoying virtual reality have always been parts of the worlds of incoming college students today (Beloit, 2011). Technology has unveiled the world as an open classroom without boundaries, including virtual museum trips, interactive videos, and educational clips on YouTube (Bellow, 2012). Imaginative educators are exploring ways to embrace technology and use it in innovative ways. Many teachers are taking advantage of new resources available through web sites dedicated to standards-based lesson plans and resources; they are

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enriching their own professional learning through informal professional development. Districts across the nation have provided students with laptops or iPads, and many classrooms are equipped with SMART Boards (Rivero, 2009). Some teachers are ‘flipping’ their classrooms, and providing podcasting or videos to prepare students to engage in new content (Berrett, 2012). Some students benefit from learning customized for their needs with online programs, and they have access to wikis, blogs, tweeting, and texting from their more innovative teachers — and from informal online teachers never assigned to their classrooms.

Game-based learning represents one of today’s most innovative pedagogical strategies. Bill Gates, for example, envisioning the learning of the future, has partnered with the Center for Game Science at the University of Washington to develop a free online game called Refraction; Refraction will help students learn about and use fractions while saving virtual animals trapped in space (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2012). Game-based learning has its own principles designed to maximize the affinity space (an interest-driven space, typically accessible online) essential for either “little g” gaming (the software itself) or “Big G” gaming (the software plus the social interactions). Gee (2012) has elaborated on the principles essential for effective learning through game design, introducing terminology that reflects both fundamental shifts in educational focus and an ongoing emphasis on concepts that have long been significant in gifted education. Examples include *crowd sourcing*, focused on the efficacy — and the imperative — of social learning; *gamification* (motivating and eliciting the best contribution to the game); embedded production that elicits “modding” (a cognitive tool encouraging the creative modification or origination of something new — something not taught or even expected); and familiar concepts such as *problem solving*, *critical thinking*, and *innovation/creativity*. One principle essential to effective gaming for learning is a *cycle of expertise* that offers challenge, practice, mastery, and encourages the participant to seek even greater challenge (Vygotsky, anyone?).

Which innovations will become integral parts of the evolving 21st Century system of education? Some concepts are familiar, but others demand a stretch of the educational imagination. Many mourn the passing of educational essentials such as cursive writing; others welcome the clear and clean electronic fonts that have the potential to preserve paper — and trees. The expertise of educators

will determine which innovations are making the greatest difference for learners and their specific needs in today’s world, and which will become this century’s institutionalized best practices.

Innovative Teaching and Teaching for Innovation

Before the advent of game-based learning, before access to the newest apps or the electronic devices that allow students to utilize them, various educators — many working with gifted learners — served as effective catalysts for the development of talent among their students. Research has shown that “the teacher — more than any other factor — has the greatest influence on student achievement” (Flynt and Brozo, 2009, p. 536). Teachers who facilitate learning experiences that emphasize creativity and innovation must assess student progress with authentic outcomes and facilitate the development of individualized student products. These effective educators develop personal toolkits of strategies to help students succeed, but they also create an intangible learning culture that facilitates authentic learning that can’t be measured with standardized assessments (Varella, 2000; Carr & Skinner, 2009; Elliott, 2009; Flynt & Brozo, 2009; Lin, 2011).

Creativity and Innovation

Effective teachers understand that children with academic and creative gifts need to have those abilities identified, cultivated and actively nurtured, in the same ways talented artistic performers or young athletes are developed (Association for Psychological Science, 2011). Teachers of the gifted recognize that their programs may be students’ only opportunities for advanced knowledge or for creative products, and they understand that the creativity that leads to invention or innovation can be systematically taught. Sternberg (2004) has suggested that teachers can model creativity, as well as provide opportunities to

- recognize that greater content knowledge can either encourage—or impede—creative ideas in a field of study;
- tolerate ambiguity;
- redefine problems;
- carefully analyze one’s own ideas;
- practice convincing others of the value of those ideas;
- defend one’s ideas;
- believe in one’s ideas and abilities;
- take sensible academic risks to learn new things;
- be willing to grow; and
- find a passion area to pursue.

Creativity achieves a balance between novelty and usefulness. Creativity is all about understanding a topic well enough to visualize new perspectives and generate novel ideas — and innovation makes creative ideas practical and tangible (McGuinness, 2009; Sajid, 2011).

Innovation in Action

Teachers can take advantage of existing opportunities to involve students in what Shavinina calls innovative education, referring “to a wide range of educational interventions aimed at developing and transforming child talent into adult innovation” (2011, p. 3). Familiar opportunities such as Odyssey of the Mind and Future Problem Solving are available in Iowa and across the nation. Invent Iowa is an obvious choice for taking students beyond creative thinking activities and into the authentic application of novel ideas. Sponsored by the Belin-Blank Center, the freely-available online curriculum suggests multiple real-world activities to promote creative and critical thinking, as well as innovation and invention. Teachers can utilize individual lessons or provide motivated students the opportunity to showcase their innovations in a venue that provides both formal and informal evaluations for the models or prototypes of the products.

Invent Iowa is an example of a statewide program supported by political, business, and educational leaders in response to the perceived decline in American innovation. Invent Iowa, the state’s oldest STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) initiative, encourages a multidisciplinary process, including reading, research in both the library and real-world settings, divergent and convergent thinking skills, utilization of scientific and technological concepts, writing, design, and persuasive thinking. Celebrating its 25th anniversary at the 2012 Invent Iowa State Scholarship Event, the program allows young inventors to display inventions and innovations, and to describe the process used to develop their work; students could earn recognition and U.S. savings bonds. With the support of the Colleges of Engineering at both the University of Iowa and Iowa State University, high school students are encouraged to participate in the invention process; the best high school inventors could earn scholarships available upon matriculation in either College of Engineering, a very public and practical acknowledgment of the value of the early application of the habits of mind essential to the nation’s ability to meet constantly emerging global challenges.

The Inventive Process

Central to inventive thinking learning modules is the introduction of and explicit instruction in one or more problem-solving models. Invent Iowa suggests steps that inventors might use after identifying a problem, including the careful consideration of a variety of questions that originate with who, what, when, where, why, and how (Baldus, *et. al*, 2005). The program also recommends five basic steps following the identification of a problem, including identifying relevant facts; considering potential problems; brainstorming ideas; finding potential solutions; and outlining a plan of action. Although creative thinkers might not take advantage of step-by-step models, for the novice inventors, an overview of a possible process mirrors the metacognition critical to developing greater expertise in any discipline, from planning steps, though monitoring operations, to assessing accuracy, appropriateness, and efficacy (Beyer, 1987). The open-ended problems in this type of innovative education encourage students to start “taking the sorts of risks an inventor would take” (Gorman, Plucker, & Callahan, 1998, p. 531).

Teachers and Young Inventors

Young inventors, recognized for particularly meritorious inventions in the Invent Iowa State Scholarship Event, are invited to participate in a formal ceremony recognizing outstanding achievement. Each of 57 inventors was encouraged to invite the teacher who had influenced him or her the most and to explain the role that individual had played. Thirty-two students, 17 female and 15 male, from 3rd grade through high school, took the opportunity to write comments about the teachers they invited to join them at the ceremony (Belin-Blank Center, 2010).

Students commented on personal attributes of the 27 women and 5 men they wanted to recognize. Descriptors of teachers from 28 public and 4 parochial schools included approachable, “awesome sense of humor,” cheerful, encouraging, energetic, enthusiastic, “understands his students.” Students noted:

- “She was so sweet and kind to all of us.”
- “He is a kind man and a dedicated teacher.”

The student inventors described teacher behaviors, as well, that made a difference in their learning and their lives. They focused on the ways that these educators from small rural schools, as well as larger suburban districts,

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empowered them and encouraged them to learn and do more than the students themselves thought possible.

- “[She] always had faith in me and saw my inventive mind. She encouraged me to keep thinking....”
- “Allowing students to freely express their creativity and demonstrate their own individual talents is something he does on a daily basis. In a school of 1,200 students, [he] does not treat you like a number, but as an individual.”
- “She encourages students to be creative and that you can accomplish many great things if you put your mind to it and have a positive attitude. I’ve participated in the state invention convention every year since 2007 and I’m always thinking of inventions I can create to make our family’s life easier.”

Many of the comments correlate with constructs proposed by the Tripod Project for School Improvement (Learning about Teaching, 2010); the “Seven C’s” (Care, Control, Clarify, Challenge, Captivate, Confer, and Consolidate) are designed to capture student perceptions about effective classroom environments (Tripod Project, 2012). Although the constructs are typically assessed through survey items, student-inventor comments suggest a classroom inventiveness climate particularly strong in caring:

Care	<p>“She was always really nice.”</p> <p>“[She] called [the morning of the Invention Convention] to tell me good luck and that ment [sic] a lot to me because she didn’t have to.”</p> <p>“When I needed help, she was there, with kindness and understanding, to guide me through the tasks I needed to complete.”</p>
Clarify	<p>“She tries to find out how each kid learns best.”</p>
Challenge	<p>“[He] pushed me in math to do my best and he had a huge impact on my science studies.”</p> <p>“She always encouraged me to do my best and more, even when I didn’t recognize my own potential.”</p>
Captivate	<p>“[He] makes learning seem fun, not like work.”</p> <p>“She inspires me to learn!”</p>
Confer	<p>“[He] gets to know the kids personally.”</p> <p>“She has always been very supportive my ideas and decisions in class.”</p> <p>“He listens to his students’ ideas and integrates them into the curriculum.”</p>

Issues of “control,” that is, compelling appropriate student behavior and time-on-task, and strategies to “consolidate,” to summarize or integrate general themes, were never referenced, perhaps because the inventiveness climate emphasized individualized, as well as engaged student-directed learning.

Innovation is the Business of Gifted Education

Our 21st Century learners need the tools to succeed in a world that is changing faster than ever before. The system of mass education innovated during the Industrial Era served to solidify and preserve the values identified as most significant for that time. Today’s schools are far more responsive to the variety of cultures represented in their classrooms, and the widely varying needs of individual students. As a society, we recognize the need for today’s learners to develop the knowledge and ability to imagine and introduce the innovations that can solve existing and emerging problems; “connecting innovation with gifted education is a necessity not only in the current political climate but also because we are a field with deeply held beliefs about the importance of problem solving, creativity, imagination, and invention — all critical components of innovation” (Robinson, 2011). Because their programs are less directly impacted by *NCLB*’s emphasis on testing for proficiency, teachers of the gifted are better positioned than most content-area teachers to explicitly encourage imagination, creativity, and innovation. Teachers of the gifted can motivate young scholars to relish the joy of learning and pursue knowledge beyond anything their teachers learned or imagined:

*Who’s to say
 What’s impossible?
 Well, they forgot
 This world keeps spinning,
 And with each new day
 I can feel a change in everything.
 And as the surface breaks, reflections fade,
 But in some ways they remain the same.
 And as my mind begins to spread its wings
 There’s no stopping curiosity
 (Upside Down, Jack Johnson, 2006)*

References available on request.

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Lessons from Athletics

*Using common-sense sports analogies
to encourage support for high ability learners*

By Matt Robie

ITAG Past President Diane Pratt has a quote from Professor Miraca Gross that has been embedded in her email signature for some time. *"In performance areas, it is generally accepted that you put high performers together. Not one country sent a mixed ability team to the Olympics."* I've often borrowed this quote when discussing grouping practices with my colleagues because they understand sports. I understand sports, parents understand sports, and school administrators understand sports. I hope the following analogies are useful as you work to encourage support for your high-ability students.

Acceleration

Acceleration is simple placement according to competence, a principle that goes unquestioned in athletics and the arts. – Camilla Benbow

You have a fifth grade son with exceptional basketball talent. For years he has shined on the court, and he has the potential to play Division 1 basketball someday. Your community has a solid parks and rec basketball program, where your son would be placed randomly on a team with age-peers. He'll be with his friends, with a caring coach, and he'll most likely be the MVP of every game. But because his ability is well-above that of his age peers, his practices will be meaningless to him. He won't learn anything new. He won't improve. He won't grow.

Your son also has the opportunity to "play up", to play in a league with sixth and seventh graders. He'll be more likely to learn new techniques and skills at faster-paced practices, and more effort will be required in order to compete on the same level as his older teammates. During games, he will likely still stand out as one of the best players due to his exceptional ability. However, at season's end, you know that he will have learned new skills, accepted and overcome challenge, and improved as a player.

In this scenario, the choice seems obvious. Play up. When a freshman pitcher has the potential to lead the varsity softball team, we don't blink twice before putting her on the mound. When forming the varsity sprint

medley relay team, we don't disregard the fastest runner because she's an underclassman.

Just as in athletics, data should drive our decisions, and the whole child must be considered as academic accelerative options are explored. But when deemed appropriate by education professionals, don't let fear and logistical roadblocks get in a student's way. Acceleration is a research-based option that benefits many highly capable individuals by better motivating them toward schooling, enhancing their involvement with extracurricular activities, promoting more challenging options in the middle school and high school years, and preparing them to begin contributing to society at an earlier age. (NAGC, 2004)

Grouping

You are a high school track coach. You spend several practice sessions working with your athletes on passing the relay baton. It doesn't take long for you to realize that you have four runners who are exceptionally good at their passes. You find yourself with three options.

- a. Allow these four runners to form a team, and send them to work with an assistant coach on something different yet equally important, such as their starting technique.
- b. Allow these four runners to form a team, and have them continue to work on their baton passing, but with a specialist that you bring in from a local college who can help them to get even better.
- c. Split these four runners up onto four different relay teams, so all four teams perform equally in the upcoming meet, and your expert baton passers can serve as role models for their teammates.

Choice "c" seems silly right?

Or how about this idea? We do away with the 9th grade baseball team, the 10th grade team, the JV team, and the Varsity team, and we just have all the high school

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players play on mixed-ability teams. The better players can help the struggling players, serving as mentors.

Sound familiar?

Have you ever watched a football team prepare for a game? There are times when the whole team is doing the same thing. All players need to stretch, so when stretching they can be grouped heterogeneously. They all listen to the same pregame speech, so it doesn't matter how they are seated in the locker room. But conversely, there are times when the kicker needs to work with the other kickers in an area of strength. The receivers practice running routes and catching passes (their strength area), and the linemen practice technique with other linemen.

Different grouping practices are appropriate for different tasks, and I'd encourage you to read the research around grouping that is summarized by NAGC's position statement on the issue at <http://nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4450>.

But I'd also encourage you to follow the coach's lead, and stop using the words "role models, mentors, and self-esteem" as rationale for your grouping practices. Myths abound that grouping gifted children damages the self-esteem of struggling learners, creates an "elite" group who may think too highly of themselves, and is actually undemocratic and, at times, racist. None of these papers have any founding in actual research but the arguments continue decade after decade (Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner, 2002).

Instead, grouping is a vehicle educators can use to allow gifted children access to learning at the level and complexity they need (Loveless, 1998; Rogers, 2006; Tieso, 2003). More importantly, it allows gifted children to learn with and make social connections with same aged peers who think and learn in the same ways they do. Grouping can also help to simplify already overburdened teachers' lives by allowing them to focus more on the specific talent development needs they encounter in this potentially more homogeneous clustering. What educators must keep in mind, however, is that what these children will do once they are grouped is probably more important than which form of grouping has been selected (Kulik, 1992).

Early Childhood Programming

You have always been an avid tennis player, so your daughter has grown up around the sport. At age 5, she actually has become quite proficient at the game, and can defeat your friends' children that are several years older. She excitedly attends her first tennis camp, ready to play against children of the same ability.

But instead she is told that although she is quite talented, it is only because her mom has worked with her. It'll take a few years at tennis camp to know whether she really needs anything different. So in the meantime, she is to spend the entire summer grouped with age-peers, learning the lessons that had been previously prepared by the instructors for typical 5 year old players. After three years, they'll decide if she has a gift that needs nurtured through appropriate programming, or if instead everyone else catches up.

What a heartbreaking scenario this is, yet this is the reality that many of our young gifted children and their families face when they arrive at kindergarten. I have news for you. If by third grade the other students have "caught up", it often means we have failed her as a learner. Just like a tennis coach should meet the young athlete where she's at and move her forward, we should do the same for each of our kindergarten readers, and young gifted mathematicians.

Research indicates that an interactive and responsive environment in early childhood supports both cognitive and affective growth and establishes a pattern of successful learning that can continue throughout children's lives (Clark, 2002; Smutny, 1998). As such, the creation of rich and engaging learning environments in schools, homes, and communities during early childhood can enhance educational opportunities for learners and help put children on the path to academic achievement.

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ITAG News Magazine Moves to Electronic Format

The ITAG News Magazine will move to an electronic format, beginning with the Winter 2012-2013 issue. ITAG is excited about the increased opportunity for color, interactivity, cost-savings, and a close relationship between the newsletter and our new and improved web site, www.iowatag.org. The ITAG News will continue to bring you the same great articles, announcements and celebrations that you're used to — just now to your inbox, instead of your mailbox!

Monthly ITAG Spotlight

Are you receiving the ITAG Spotlight on Gifted Education e-mail? If not, please e-mail your current contact information to the ITAG office at itag@assoc-serv.com.

In addition, please make sure that you add ITAG's e-mail address as an approved contact in your e-mail program's address book.



ITAG Administrator of the Year

For the year 2012, the ITAG Board is honoring the Administrator of the Year, Pam Ehly, Director of Instruction, Iowa City Community School District. Pam was nominated by Kathy Jepson, Extended Learning program Coordinator for the Iowa City Community School District.

In nominating Pam, Kathy emphasizes Pam's advocacy for gifted programming. She has led the gifted education Curriculum Review process and supported the implementation of the Curriculum Review Improvement Plan. Through her work with the Administrative Council and securing the support of the School Board members, the district has witnessed increasing TAG personnel presence and services to under-served populations.

As Director of Instruction, Pam has increased programming for students; seen the hiring of additional staff; differentiated learning strategies; plus she has seen the hiring of counselors at the secondary level to help the social/emotional/intellectual needs of older students.

Pam has worked to support collaboration and cooperation among district teachers by providing time and designated funding for curriculum writing and strategies for high-ability students. Pam has worked hard to implement changes because she has demonstrated that she is a strong leader. Pam is awarded the Administrator of the Year Award to honor her for her support of high-ability students.

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Select two:

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Need more info on NAGC Networks? Visit www.nagc.org/networks.aspx

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Please consider a donation to assist in our efforts to increase awareness of the needs of high-ability learners. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, your donation to NAGC is tax deductible to the extent the law allows.

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