

GT EXPRESS

A newsletter for parents

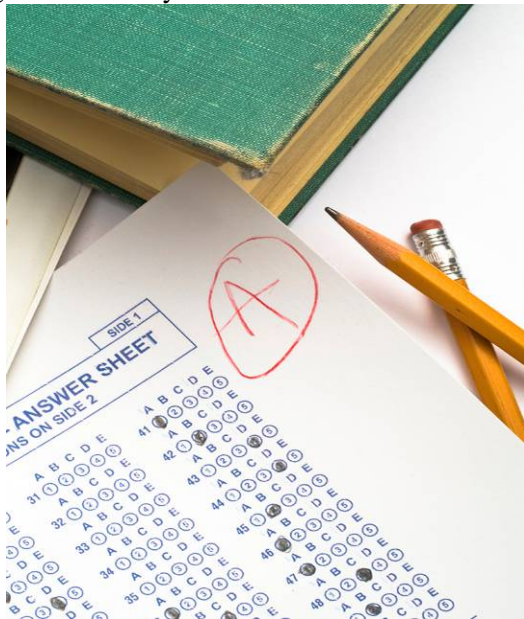
Spring 2009



Giftedness: Beyond Academics by Dr. Jim Granada, Director

Every year across school systems in Texas and the United States, children are identified for gifted education services. The predominant focuses of the services for which students are identified are the continued development of intellectual and academic talents. In Texas, academic giftedness has a strong presence, due in part to the references in the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* requiring emphasis of content in the four core academic areas (math, science, social studies, and reading/language arts). The AISD Gifted Program identifies and provides services in academic giftedness.

Although AISD does not specifically identify and provide services for all areas of giftedness, we recognize that many of our students exhibit unusual



traits in the other areas typically included in broad discussions of gifted education. These areas include leadership, creativity, and artistic talent. The AISD program, with its focus on academics, collects data on students being considered for GT identification inclusive of academic and intellectual traits. Data is not specifically collected targeting giftedness in other areas.

Students who exhibit strong traits in these other areas are often provided the kind of support needed to continue to develop their talents. Students with strong leadership skills may develop these skills through active involvement in extra-curricular activities that may include serving on the school's student council or assuming a leadership role in competitive athletics. Artistic students may be specifically tapped for development in music, art, theater, or dance by teachers that recognize the talent these students bring to the various instructional settings. Creative giftedness is somewhat more elusive since strong creative talent can be demonstrated in a variety of ways from generating original ideas for a research project to coming up with clever ways to get out of doing assignments. Creatively gifted students don't have the multiple options available for development of leadership or artistic talent; they rely more on an individual recognizing their creative ability and guiding them into creative endeavors.

The role of parents becomes greater for students who are gifted in areas outside of academics. Parents in Austin are lucky to have many opportunities for students to develop creatively, artistically, and in areas of

Continued on Page 5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

In this issue we take a look at beyond academics for the gifted child. We will explore the complexities of being gifted and take an analytical look at GT children to understand their strengths and needs.

- Recognizing Leadership Potential
- Improving Artistic Thinking in Gifted Children
- Giftedness and Languages Other Than English
- Resources for Summer Planning

Recognizing Leadership Potential by Rhonda Boyer

The state of Texas defines a gifted and talented child as one “who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:

1. exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
2. possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
3. excels in a specific academic field.” (TEC 29.121)

However, what constitutes “an unusual capacity for leadership?” In general, certain personality characteristics are linked to leadership: sociability, cooperativeness, integrity, emotional stability, and intelligence. (Pfeiffer, 2006) The connection between leadership and intelligence supports the recognition of leadership as a type of giftedness.



Below are ten effective leadership skills that Steven Pfeiffer (2006), former director of the Duke University Talent Identification Program, compiled from first hand observation of gifted children:

- Acting responsibly in social situations
- Accurately reading the feelings of others
- Displaying good social judgment
- Projecting a confident self-image
- Motivating others
- Getting along with others, including those one doesn't like
- Instilling trust and confidence in others
- Showing flexibility and comfort with divergent points of view
- Speaking well in front of others
- Demonstrating social savvy, including respect for authority, rules and social conventions

Parents can support their gifted child's leadership potential by providing opportunities for these skills to be practiced and developed in multiple ways in various situations.

1. Be the role model. Explain your behavior and its implications for yourself and others. This action increases your child's understanding of the reasons for choosing one behavior over another and the impact of that behavior on a situation or on another person.

2. Find the role model. Books, television, film, and technology provide role models across history and cultures. Practice active discussions that analyze the characteristics displayed by leaders and how to evaluate the leadership.

3. Be a democratic family. Involve your child in the selection, planning, follow through, and reflection on family activities and trips.

4. Support independence. Encourage your child to plan, carry out, and complete a variety of independent projects. Teach your child strategies for self-evaluation.

5. Volunteer work. Volunteering provides real life settings for observing, modeling, and practicing leadership.

6. Foster decision making. Decision making, good or not, develops critical reasoning skills. The ability to review decisions made and outcomes influences future decision making.

Regardless of the area of identified giftedness, gifted children can all benefit from learning why leadership matters, what it looks like, and how to do it.

Karnes & Bean (1990). Leadership development and gifted students. Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, VA. ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Reston, VA. (ED321490 ERIC EC Digest #E485.)

Pfeiffer, S. I. (Spring 2006). Creating opportunities to develop leadership ability. Duke Gifted Letter. Duke University TIP. Retrieved 1/15/09 online at http://www.dukegiftedletter.com/articles/vol6no3_talent.html

Texas Education Code (1995). 29.121. Educational Programs. Subchapter D. Education Programs for Gifted and Talented Students. 74th Legislature.

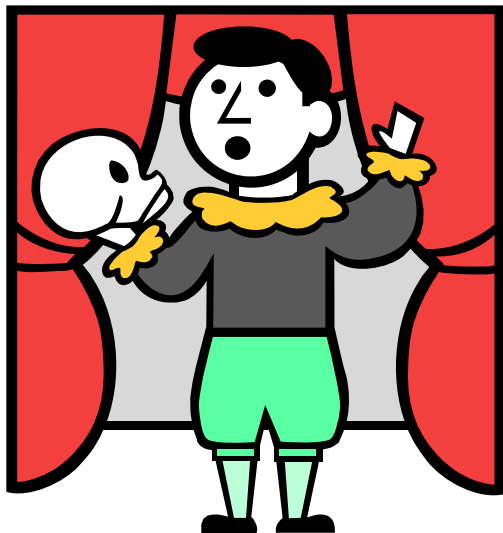
Improving Artistic Thinking in Gifted Children by Debi Torres

Integrating the arts into everyday learning activities that are tied to the unique needs, interests, and abilities of gifted students can challenge them to perform more complex and sophisticated tasks. Furthermore, the arts enhance academic and creative development. The following are activities that integrate the arts with academics.

Reading and Writing

The arts can strengthen all areas of oral and written communication and, for gifted students, provide more opportunities for creative problem-solving and analytical thinking.

Enhance critical thinking. While reading a story, your child can draw, sketch, or paint whatever is most vivid to them. Then, your child can discuss the artwork and its significance to the story.



Stimulate analytical thinking and imaginative interpretation. Work with your child to create a play out of a short story. Ask them to select the most important scenes and explain why they chose them.

Sharpen awareness of motivation and points of view. Ask your child to choose a conflict, issue, or problem raised by the story or book and stage a debate.

Undertake investigative research. Explore the history of an artist, actual artwork, or type of artistic expression. Using the research, your child could write a fictional piece based on a true story.

Explore multiple points of view. As an extension of the previous activity, the child could write historical fiction from the point of view of a piece of artwork, the people who had it, or the people who look at it.

Social Studies

Studying history, geography, and other social studies subjects through the arts (and vice versa) enables gifted students to investigate topics from multiple viewpoints and in more depth. As they create vivid representations of significant events, processes, and people, they analyze, assess, and interpret the facts and images before them.

Analyze the life of a famous historical figure. Your child can study the portraits of this person, musical pieces composed for them, stories told about them, and films made in their honor along with textual sources. What do visual representations tell them about this person? Children can pretend to be this historical figure, choose an issue that they feel passionate about and write a speech as this person.

Apply an art phenomenon to social/historical reality. Children act as reporters who travel back in time to cover important events in an artistic movement. They analyze a phenomenon (such as impressionism) and write a newspaper article about how this phenomenon responds to certain social, political, and historical conditions.

Science and Mathematics

Science, mathematics, and art all concern themselves with the true nature of things. Are things what they seem? Should the arts depict things as people experience them or as they are? By blending the arts with math and science, your gifted child can examine real-world applications of fundamental concepts and ideas such as distance, color, perspective, proportion.

Apply a scientific concept to a problem in art. Have your child explore a scientific subject (such as light). Place visuals together that seem particularly suited to this subject and ask the child to discuss how artists represent the science of light - its directions, color at different times of the day, its interaction with water and color, etc.

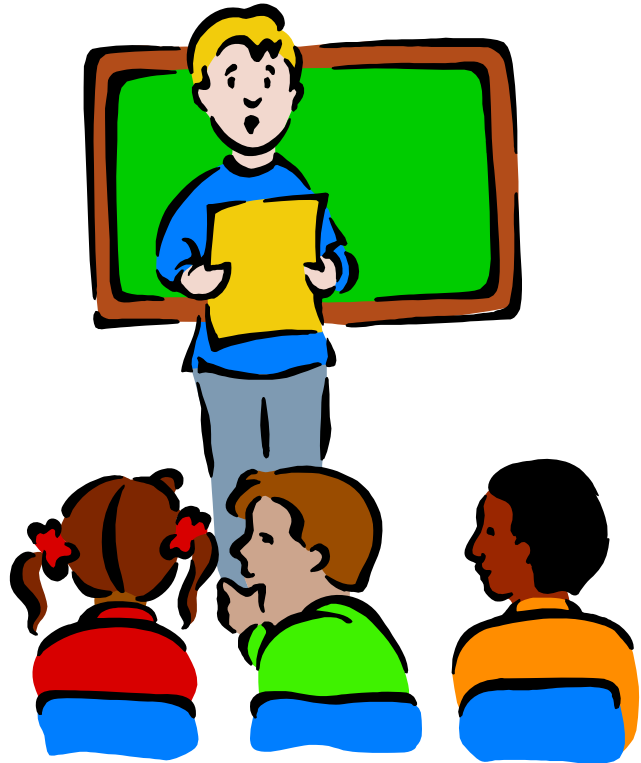
Continued on Page 5

Giftedness and Languages Other Than English by Micheal Hydak

You may remember the episode of "The Simpsons" where Lisa Simpson is sent to a magnet school because she has exhibited too many leadership qualities as head of the student council. One of her first comments in the school is "At last, a school where the French teacher actually speaks French!" Such an attitude towards foreign languages and gifted children, i.e., those languages were only for the gifted or, at the least, reserved for the college-bound, too long characterized much of American education. Contemporary thinking, however, is that foreign languages, known in Texas as Languages Other Than English or LOTE, are for all children, college-bound or not. European, Asian and African countries have long insisted that languages be universal in the curriculum and that they be started early. The events of 911 have served as a wake-up call to Americans that we need proficient speakers of a variety of languages in order to preserve and defend our national security. Such forward thinking is reinforced by graduation requirements in the state of Texas: 2 years of a foreign language for the Recommended Graduation Plan and 3 years for the Distinguished Achievement Plan.

If a foreign language is for everybody, what, then, is the role of foreign languages in the academic career of the gifted student? The answer is at once simple and complicated. On the one hand, there is a specific form of giftedness recognized by the state and local school districts termed "linguistically gifted." Such students may speak another language at home, be it Spanish, Chinese or Polish, in addition to being fluent in English. Similarly, students may have lived in a foreign country for substantial periods of time or have been fortunate enough to have had extended instruction in a foreign language in their elementary school. For these students, in middle schools where they exist in considerable numbers, the Austin Independent School District provides for an "accelerated" form of LOTE. Essentially, this means completing in middle school the first year of the high school curriculum in the same time period as does the high school student, i.e., in one year rather than the more common pattern of two years of middle school LOTE equaling one year of high school.

Nor is this phenomenon limited to Spanish alone. At Kealing Middle School, accelerated courses in French and Latin are being taught. The magnet middle and high schools in our district also offer a wider variety of languages and a longer sequence of language study,



culminating in the College Board's Advanced Placement program. Gifted students need not necessarily attend magnet schools in order to participate in the AP program, but they will find a wider variety of languages taught there and the AP program will be present in more languages.

Therefore, while Lisa Simpson perhaps oversimplified the state of foreign languages in the Springfield public schools, in Austin schools the gifted student should be able to find both the language and the level of the language that reflects his or her giftedness and that provides a challenge to it.

Michael G. Hydak, Ph.D. is the AISD Coordinator for Foreign Languages and Journalism.

Check out our Parent Corner
website at
[http://www.austinisd.org/
academics/curriculum/gt/
parentcorner.phtml](http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/parentcorner.phtml)

Find publications, newsletters,
and presentations.



Resources for Summer Planning

Insights is a tool to assist parents, educators, and students in locating special programs and activities for the summer, as well as providing various scholarship applications for identified gifted students. The Texas Association for Gifted and Talented produces this directory as a public service to the gifted community. We neither imply nor intend an endorsement of any individual program.

The *Insights* directory also includes applications for the TAGT Outstanding Teacher, Parent, Rising Star, and Advocate of the Gifted awards, Grants for Excellence

awards, and Parent/Educator Scholarships. Application procedures and deadlines vary for different awards, so please refer to individual applications for specific information. If you have questions or comments, please contact your TAGT at 512-499-8248. To obtain your copy of this resource visit

<http://www.txgifted.org/files/2009/Insights-2009.pdf>.

The Department of Advanced Academic Services has created a web page with a variety of summer enrichment opportunities specific to the local Austin area. Although many of these opportunities are not for gifted children only, gifted children do benefit from pursuing their interests and trying new activities. Check out <http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/summer.phtml>

Continued from Page 1

leadership, some of which are listed on our Advanced Academics web pages (links titled “academic competitions” and “summer options”) at <http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/>. Additionally, a wide variety of literature is available that addresses these additional areas of giftedness. Hoagies’ Gifted Education page (<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>) is an excellent starting point to discover more about these other areas of giftedness and how they can be developed.

While AISD is not currently providing services to GT students in areas other than the four core content areas, we have included Creative Thinking as a strand in our AISD Gifted Education Scope and Sequence and have also historically offered teacher training in the area of creativity. Expanding gifted education programming into these additional areas is part of an ongoing dialogue that takes place every year as we assess the state of our district GT program. I hope that some day soon we’ll be able to reach a point where we can effectively expand the program into one or more of these additional GT areas.

Continued from Page 3

Analyze the nature of matter using the arts and physics as sources. Your child can write down the assumptions artists (particularly experimental artists) are making about the nature of matter. Is it always in motion? Is it static? Is it solid and impenetrable as it appears? Then a follow up activity is to investigate one or more of these assumptions in physics.

Sharpen visual perception and estimation skills. Artists often test their perceptions by estimating distances and heights. Your child can use graph paper to enlarge or decrease the size of a picture. Using a ruler to determine an equivalency scale, your child should be able to duplicate the picture in a different size.

Conclusion

Integrating the arts into thinking in different content areas either at home or at school can enable gifted children to make unique discoveries and innovations. Because the arts immerse them in the creative process, they can apply their advanced reasoning and problem-solving abilities in new ways. These processes also offer an even greater opportunity to the gifted: to bring more of themselves - their own unique insight, ability, and vision - to a subject.

ODE TO CREATIVITY

*dedicated to the late Dr. Seuss
by Dr. Jim Granada*

Creativity, a concept of mystery, of wonder
To define it we don't know quite what to look
under...

Is it a spark possessed by the artist,
or a characteristic of only the smartest?

Is it a way to solve problems, you ask?
Unique ways of trying to complete a task?
Is it what causes original thought?
Can it be measured? Can it be taught?

What about the flexible thinkers?
Let's not forget the inventor who tinkers!
Then there's the person who generates lots
of responses when asked, "Will you please share
your thoughts?"

We all knew the kid who, when called on in class
Gave an answer that caused us to snicker en masse
Because his (or her) "left-field" response was quite
strange
A negative outcome would the teacher arrange

But what if that teacher had taken a pause after
asking
And probed for the link that this answer was masking
Perhaps a connection was there, not so odd...
Or a brilliant idea that just needed a prod?

But, alas, I have strayed from the question at hand
Being, "What of this concept can we understand?"
So we journey right now to the core of the matter
As I try to explain both the former and latter

Creativity stems from problems to solve
When much more than logic the mind must involve
The reason so many of us fail to use it
Is because our society won't allow us to choose it

We get so caught up in our efficiency
That we choose the quickest route from point A to point B
Or rely on the past, on experts, on norms
or get bogged down in filling out zillions of forms

The act of creating takes a little more time
It may not be direct but, instead, be sublime
Creative may veer from the logical route
May require techniques that you don't know about

For example, try taking a shoe and a sack
And use them to think up a nutritious snack!
Or maybe by using attributes of a mouse
You could think up a brand new design for a house!

Try asking someone from a whole different place
To assist in the solving of a problem you face
Then take the suggestions and in context apply them
And see if there might be a way you can try them

Try looking at things from a different perspective
Magnify, minimize, be a tad less objective
Take an idea and view it from over and under
Fear not the perception that stems from, "I wonder..."

See what you're doing through the eyes of a child
Be playful, have fun, take a chance and get wild
Observe how a child who's "untrained" solves a task
Then allow your own childlike ideas to unmask

These are but a few of the techniques to use
There are volumes and more about this, you can choose
But the key to success is to look deep within
And convince yourself over and over again

That creativity dwells in each person, untapped
And for some it's in areas that have yet to be mapped
So pick out some tools and begin searching today
To learn how to be more creative your way!

Department of Advanced Academic Services

Dr. Jim Granada, Director	414-9986
Sheila Cerda, Secretary	414-9986
Rhonda Boyer, Pre-AP/AP Specialist	414-0279
Debi Torres, Gifted Education Specialist	414-0155
Monica Neshyba, Bilingual Gifted Ed. Specialist	414-0176
Delaine Canales, Data Processor	414-0139

We're on the Web!

<http://www.austinisd.org/academic/curriculum/gt/>

The Department of Advanced Academic Services in Austin ISD provides support and services for numerous programs and events, including the following:

- Gifted and Talented Program
- Advanced Placement
- Pre-Advanced Placement
- International Baccalaureate Diploma Program
- International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program
- Academic Magnets
- Future Problem Solving