Developing Gifted Behavior

The Barrington, Illinois, gifted program emphasizes gifted *behavior* rather than "gifted students." Students can participate in special activities if they show gifted behavior.

JUDY W. EBY

The curriculum model for elementary gifted programming presented here differs significantly from others for one important reason: it proposes to change behavior rather than children. *It is based on the single, unifying concept that gifted behavior is the active, independent use of one's ability, creativity, and task commitment to produce something of value.*

The definition of gifted behavior allows educators the opportunity to develop curriculum with appropriate behavioral objectives; that is, learning experiences that challenge students' ability, allow them to make creative responses, encourage independent action, and require task commitment. Participation in several such learning experiences has a cumulative effect on children's behavior: they learn that they can control and direct their own talents, rather than seeing themselves as passive recipients of a nebulous "gift."

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Thus, the gifted behavior model avoids labeling children. Labels are difficult to live up to, and are probably counterproductive. Children may experience many negative emotional jolts in their efforts to live up to the inflated image that parents and teachers appear to have of "gifted students."

Labels are also elitist. Special programming for special needs is not elitist, but labeling is. Quotas of "gifted children" selected through the use of vague and mysterious test scores and recommendations are reminiscent of country club selection practices in the 1950s, where individuals were accepted and rejected without ever being informed what the criteria were. This curriculum model and the identification model, which is an integral part of the whole, allows children to become an active part of the selection system. (See "Gifted Behavior—A Non-Elitist Approach"[1] for a more detailed description of the identification system.)

The most comprehensible way to describe this curriculum model is to give a detailed example of an appropriate learning experience that has been used successfully with students—in this case, a unit on inventors for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. This unit was offered to stu-

dents in the Barrington, Illinois, school district in the fall of 1983. Others, in Figures 3 and 4, were part of the Academic Talent Program at Prairie Grove School between 1978 and 1983.

Pre-Task Identification

Identification of qualified students is made on the basis of demonstrated ability. This identification system is a critical component of the program because it simulates "real life" conditions of goal attainment and reward for achievement. It requires children to:

- Actively seek entry into the program.
- Behave in an independent manner to complete the requirements for entry.
- Demonstrate ability, creativity, and task commitment by producing a simple product.

In this example, children who are interested in the unit on Inventors and Inventions are given an Official Entry Form (Figure 1), which details the scope of the learning unit and the requirements for admission. This device also serves as an effective motivator for children, and a reliable and efficient method of communicating program goals and expectations to parents.

Mary Hunter

Figure 1. Official Entry Form

Community Unit School District 220
Barrington, Illinois

Building Resource Program

Inventors and Inventions
4th–6th Grades

You are invited to participate in a research and problem-solving unit studying inventors and their inventions. Students who take part in this unit will read at least one biography of an inventor, create their own inventions, and give a speech about the inventions they create.
To be eligible for this quarter, you must do the following pre-task and turn it in to your resource teacher on or before Friday, September ___.

Pre-task

Invent a new toy, game, or mobile object using one or more milk cartons and any other materials you choose. Turn it in with a one-page description about it, telling how it works, who would enjoy playing with it, and how it would be packaged and advertised if it were offered for sale.

Your invention will be judged on the basis of creativity and task commitment. This means you should try to create an original toy, using lots of imagination. It also means that you need to be neat and careful. Show pride in your work by redoing it until it is just the way you want it to be. Here's a special hint: You can always do *more* than we ask for. The pre-task directions are for the minimum required. Going beyond the minimum is rewarded in this program.

There will be four to six students selected for each group. Please turn in your entry along with this official entry form on or before September ___. You must have your parent's signature on this form.

_____ student signature

_____ parent signature

"Identification of qualified students is made on the basis of demonstrated ability."

Judy Eby

"Students are eligible for the unit if their products meet the standards set by the program director or teacher."

Judy Eby

Pre-task inventions turned in by the due date are evaluated using the Eby Unit Selection Matrix (Figure 2). This matrix was designed with flexibility in mind, making it applicable in a variety of learning situations. Cut-off scores may be determined to meet local needs.[2]

Pre-task inventions are evaluated in a conference with the children so that they can see what they have done well and what they could improve. Students are eligible for the unit if their products meet the standard set by the program director or teacher. Children who fail to meet the program's standards should be

given an opportunity to make necessary revisions and resubmit their products within a specified time. This allows students to benefit from critical feedback without penalty while reducing the chance of misjudgment on the part of the evaluator. It gives students an opportunity to demonstrate independence, motivation, and ability (all important parts of the behavior we are trying to develop) by redoing and improving the original effort. Some children will respond with increased energy and enthusiasm and go on to outshine their peers. Others will choose not to redo their initial effort, but they will recognize that it was their own choice not to reapply. It is important to deal compassionately with these children by suggesting that a

Mary H. Nemeth

Figure 2. Eby Identification Instrument
Unit Selection Matrix

Student Name _____ Grade ____ Date _____
Unit of Study _____ Evaluated by _____
Description of Pre-task _____

EVALUATION OF PRE-TASK	HIGHLY SUPERIOR	ABOVE AVERAGE	AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE
TASK COMMITMENT				
1. Is turned in on time or before	4	3	2	1
2. Shows accuracy and authenticity	4	3	2	1
3. Shows completeness and attention to detail	4	3	2	1
4. Shows care and pride of workmanship	4	3	2	1
5. Goes beyond the minimum required	4	3	2	1
CREATIVITY				
1. Captures attention of reader or viewer	4	3	2	1
2. Shows originality and imagination (unique responses)	4	3	2	1
3. Shows flexibility and independence (redefines problem or goal)	4	3	2	1
4. Shows complexity of thought (depth of responses)	4	3	2	1
5. Shows fluency of ideas (many responses)	4	3	2	1

TOTAL SCORE

____ ELIGIBLE (____ or more points)
____ INELIGIBLE (less than ____ points)

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later unit may better suit their talents and abilities.

Structure of the Learning Experience
This learning unit, and others described in Figures 3 and 4 (through page 43) have been developed with three major goals in mind. Each unit:

1. Challenges the child's ability.

2. Allows an opportunity to be creative.

3. Requires task commitment to complete a product.

In the Inventors' Unit, the challenge was presented in two main areas. First, each child was to research the life of one important inventor and give a speech as if he or she were that inventor. Second, each child learned through class experiences current problem-solving techniques and was then challenged to create a second invention to be exhibited

Figure 3. Learning Experiences to Develop Gifted Behavior* in *Primary* Elementary Students

THEME OF UNIT	ACTIVITIES	PROCESSES EMPHASIZED	USES ABILITY	ALLOWS CREATIVITY	REQUIRES T.C.
Endangered Animals Species Pre-Task: Write a one-page story about an animal.	1. Teacher instruction about endangered species, including filmstrips and games.	1. Human awareness	X		
	2. Write letters to appropriate government agencies.	2. Communication skills	X	X	X
	3. Discussion of solution to problems faced by endangered animals.	3. Communication skills Problem solving	X	X	
	4. Compile a book about endangered species—each child contributing one or more story. Type stories on ditto masters, duplicate, bind.	4. Communication skills Research skills	X	X	X
	5. Self-evaluation of unit.	5. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X
Turning Literature into Drama Pre-Task: Read aloud to instructor with good voice expression.	1. Read aloud together a story with several characters. (Winnie the Pooh works especially well.)	1. Communication skills	X		
	2. Assign parts and re-read with emphasis on voice expression.	2. Communication skills	X	X	
	3. Act out story without book—allow improvising.	3. Communication skills Problem solving skills	X	X	
	4. Practice and perform.		X	X	X
Ancient Egyptian Pyramids Pre-Task: Make a poster about Egypt and the pyramids	1. Students find and read books about pyramids.	1. Research skills	X		X
	2. Teacher reads McAuley's *Pyramids* to the group and leads discussions.	2. Communication skills	X	X	
	3. Group plans and builds a model of a pyramid, using the concepts in McAuley's book.	3. Communication skills Research skills Problem solving	X	X	X
	4. Pyramids are displayed and children speak about them to audience of peers and adults.	4. Communication skills	X	X	X
	5. Self-evaluation of unit.	5. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X

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before the entire school community in an "Invention Expo." Both experiences allowed children to be creative and both involved products (the speech and the invention) that required them to practice task commitment.

By participating in several such learning experiences over a period of time, students learn how to put their abilities and talents to productive use. Experiencing success in carefully controlled circumstances in the classroom increases the likelihood that children will become creative, productive, adults with lasting benefit to themselves and to humankind.□

[1]Judy Eby, "Gifted Behavior—A Non-Elitist Approach," *Educational Leadership* 40 (May 1983): 30–36.

[2]This matrix, along with other identification materials developed by the author, is published by Slosson Educational Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 280, East Aurora, NY 14052. Copyright 1984.

Figure 3. (continued)

THEME OF UNIT	ACTIVITIES	PROCESSES EMPHASIZED	USES ABILITY	ALLOWS CREATIVITY	REQUIRES T.C.
Guinness Book of World Records Pre-Task: Completion of a teacher-made worksheet of word problems	1. Teacher develops a series of math word problems and a series of research facts problems for students to complete.	1. Research skills Problem solving	X		X
	2. Students develop problems for each other.	2. Research skills Problem solving Communication skills	X	X	X
	3. Group develops a series of activities and competitions for their class to take part in.	3. Problem solving Communication skills	X	X	X
Local Birds—A Spring Unit Pre-Task: An illustrated one page report on one type of bird	1. Teacher instruction about birds which are native to local community.	1. Environmental awareness	X		
	2. Games and activities which help children identify different birds.	2. Environmental awareness Communication skills	X	X	
	3. Children record the type and number of birds which visit their own homes. Each prepares a chart and graph to show results.	3. Research skills Communication skills	X	X	X
	4. Self-evaluation of unit.	4. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X
Dollars and Sense Pre-Task: Completion of a teacher-made worksheet on basic math with money	1. Games and activities which give the children experience in counting money and making change.	1. Problem solving Communication skills	X	X	
	2. Simulated experience in which children must make choices about what to buy.	2. Problem solving Self-awareness	X	X	
	3. Group plans a field trip to local shopping area; they are given lists of things to buy with a specific amount of money. Small groups shop and comparisons are made back at school.	3. Problem solving Human-awareness Communication skills Research skills	X	X	X

*Gifted behavior is the active use of ability, creativity, and task commitment.

Figure 4. Learning Experiences to Develop Gifted Behavior* in *Upper* Elementary and *Junior High* Students

THEME OF UNIT	ACTIVITIES	PROCESSES EMPHASIZED	USES ABILITY	ALLOWS CREATIVITY	REQUIRES T.C.
Problem-Solving Bowl Pre-Task: Solve a set of mathematical problems and puzzles given by the instructor	1. Teacher instruction on problem-solving techniques.	1. Communication skills Problem solving	X		
	2. Intramural competition between small groups on solution of puzzles and simulated problems.	2. Communication skills Problem solving	X	X	X
	3. Inter-scholastic competition between winning teams from each school.	3. Communication skills Problem solving	X	X	X
	4. Self-evaluation of unit.	4. Self-awareness	X		X
Aviation and Map-Making Pre-Task: Draw a map of one's own house and yard, using scale and symbols	1. Teacher instruction on map-making techniques, comparison of pre-aviation maps with present-day maps.	1. Research skills	X		
	2. Simulated map-making experiences of school and neighborhood.	2. Communication skills Problem solving Human awareness	X	X	X
	3. Plane ride over school and community. Students photograph area and make maps from photos.	3. Communication skills Problem solving	X	X	X
	4. Self-evaluation of unit.	4. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X
2001—A Research Odyssey Pre-Task: Write a one-two page story about the future	1. Teacher instruction on problems of the future, discussion about possibilities and solutions.	1. Human awareness Communication skills	X		
	2. Each student selects one problem or question to solve in a research study.	2. Research skills Problem solving	X	X	X
	3. Solutions are presented in the form of models, charts, graphs, and other displays. Entries are judged for relevancy, originality, and accuracy.	3. Communication skills Problem solving	X	X	X
	4. Self-evaluation of products and unit.	4. Self-awareness Communication skills	X	X	X
Architecture Pre-Task: Draw a scale map of your own room at home, using symbols for furniture	1. Teacher instruction on architectural concepts with discussion.	1. Human awareness Communication skills	X		
	2. Field trip to city to experience different styles of architecture.	2. Human awareness	X	X	
	3. Visit by an architect to discuss his craft.	3. Human awareness Communication skills	X	X	
	4. Each student produces a model or scale drawing of an original design for a building.	4. Problem solving Research skills	X	X	X
	5. Self-evaluation of unit.	5. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X

(Continued next page)

Figure 4. (continued)

THEME OF UNIT	ACTIVITIES	PROCESSES EMPHASIZED	USES ABILITY	ALLOWS CREATIVITY	REQUIRES T.C.
U.S. Presidents and the Electoral Process	1. Teacher instruction on presidents and the electoral process.	1. Human awareness	X		
Pre-Task: Make a time-line showing when each U.S. president was in office.	2. Independent research on the life and accomplishments of one president.	2. Human awareness Research skills	X		X
	3. Prepare and deliver a speech as if you were the President.	3. Human awareness Communication skills	X	X	X
	4. Group organization of a mock election in the school to coincide with national elections.	4. Communication skills Group problem solving	X	X	X
	5. Self-evaluation of unit.	5. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X
Turning Literature into Drama	1. Group selection of appropriate book.	1. Group problem solving		X	
Pre-Task: Distribute a short story. Ask the students to rewrite it into a script	2. Reading and discussion.	2. Communication skills Human awareness	X	X	X
	3. Dramatization in some form: play, puppet play, radio script, film.	3. Problem solving Communication skills	X	X	X
	4. Self-evaluation of unit.	4. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X
The Brain, The Mind, and Creativity	1. Teacher instruction on the subject.	1. Awareness of self and others	X		
Pre-Task: Draw and label an accurate picture of a human brain	2. Independent research on one puzzling question.	2. Research skills Independent problem solving	X	X	X
	3. Display results of research in Science Fair.	3. Communication skills	X	X	X
	4. Group planning of Science Fair.	4. Group problem solving	X	X	X
	5. Self-evaluation of completed product.	5. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X
An Oral History of the School Community and Its Older Residents	1. Instructor arranges for guest speakers to give background information.	1. Self-awareness	X		
Pre-Task: Write an autobiography	2. Simulated interviews in class to learn interview techniques.	2. Research skills Human awareness Communication skills	X	X	X
	3. Tape interviews of older residents and government leaders.	3. Research skills Human awareness Communication skills	X	X	X
	4. Compilation of results by group into final product (play, film, book, or series of articles).	4. Group problem solving Communication skills	X	X	X
	5. Self-evaluation.	5. Self-awareness Communication skills	X		X

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