

Talents Unlimited: One School's Success Story

Participation and motivation are no problem when teachers teach thinking with Talents Unlimited activities.

"We are planning a wedding between Mr. Q and Ms. U," a 5-year-old excitedly explains to a visitor at Westover Elementary Magnet School (Stamford, Connecticut). He points to a bulletin board which shows the four parts of the plan. "First we told about our plan," he says. "Then we thought of all the things we would need for our wedding." Under the heading, "Things Needed for the Wedding," the class has listed *something to eat, tablecloth, cake, tuxedo, flowers, veil, presents, music, judge, man to be Q, woman to be U, and bathroom (just in case).*

"Then we had to think of what we were going to do," the 5-year-old explains further, "and then put everything in the right place." The third heading on the bulletin board, "Steps in our Plan," includes the following: *send out invitations, buy a cake and juice, get stereo, and get married.*

The enthusiastic youngster goes on, "Before we could have the wedding, we had to think of problems that might spoil our plan." Again, the bulletin board reflects concerns of the class: *people might cause trouble by being too noisy, bride and groom might be late, judge might be absent, and people might spill the cake.*

As a result of this engaging lesson, there is a good chance these 5- and 6-year-olds will remember the Q-U relationship because the process used to plan the wedding required the youngsters to interact actively with the subject matter they were expected to remember. Such lessons occur with the same regularity at Westover School as do skills drills and morning exercises.

This exciting kind of learning results from a teacher training program called "Talents Unlimited." "Talents," as it is familiarly known, focuses on



Photographs by Janet Schneider, Westover School

critical and creative thinking, invites children to become active learners rather than passive receivers, and enables teachers to function as facilitators of learning rather than disseminators of information. Talents Unlimited proponents believe that nurturing children's abilities in the areas of productive thinking, communication, forecasting, decision making, and planning will improve their academic performance along with their chances for future success.



These youngsters learned much more than the letter/sound association /qu/: they learned how to plan a classroom event.

Since its inception at Westover in 1981, Talents Unlimited has worked to the satisfaction of teachers, parents, and students. Teachers plan 50-100 lessons each year to enhance children's thinking abilities; and children from kindergarten through 6th grade engage in daily activities during which they compare, design, predict, categorize, classify, invent, and communicate.

Results are encouraging: test scores exceed expectations at Westover, and student attendance is well above average. The children demonstrate enthusiasm for thinking critically and creatively and for participation in Talents lessons. Both students and teachers take pleasure in telling visitors about their work, exhibiting pride in their accomplishments. The reason for Talents Unlimited's success is simple—it works. Ask anyone at Westover School. □

Edmund L. Barbieri is Principal of Westover Elementary Magnet School, 412 Stillwater Ave., Stamford, CT 06902, and an Adjunct Professor at Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he teaches a course called Talents Unlimited.

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