



# The Learning Highway

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*The Learning Highway* is a newsletter for Carlsbad teachers, in grades K – 12, providing information and resources to assist them in working with their Advanced Learner students.

Each issue offers a wide variety of GATE Teacher Resources. In this issue you will find articles and information focusing on gifted students in grades K – 2. See a list of great websites and search programs for our primary grade students. You will also find an interesting article about supporting our young talented readers.

In the **GATE RESOURCES K-12** folder, you will find Extension Menus in all subject areas for both the Elementary and Secondary levels. All of the Extension Menus are Word Documents and can be copied and customized to your specific needs. You will also find materials for Depth and Complexity, literature units, specific grade levels, teacher support, and general GATE information.

Back issues of *The Learning Highway* are archived on the District webpage at [www.carlsbadusd.k12.ca.us/GATE.htm](http://www.carlsbadusd.k12.ca.us/GATE.htm).

If you have any questions and/or topics you would like to see in future issues, please contact Joyce Vallone, GATE Facilitator.

## Common Gifted Education Myths

*Gifted Education Communicator*, Winter 2007

### MYTH:

Gifted students don't need help; they'll do fine on their own.

### TRUTH:

Would you send a star athlete to train for the Olympics without a coach? Gifted students need guidance from well trained, challenging teachers to help develop their talents. Many gifted students may be so far ahead of their same-age-peers that they know more than half of the grade-level curriculum before the school year begins. Their resulting boredom and frustration can lead to low achievement, despondency, or unhealthy work habits. The role of the teacher is so critical for spotting and nurturing talents in school.

### MYTH:

Teachers challenge all the students, so gifted kids will be fine in the regular classroom.

### TRUTH:

Although it's true that teachers try to challenge all students and do the best they can, they are frequently unfamiliar with the needs of gifted children and do not know how to best serve them in the classroom. The National Research Center on Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) found that 61% of classroom teachers had no training in teaching highly able students, which limited the challenging educational opportunities offered to Advanced Learners. (*Ed. There will be GATE District workshops during the summer and next school year.*)

### MYTH:

That student can't be gifted; he's receiving poor grades.

### TRUTH:

Underachievement describes a discrepancy between a student's performance and his actual ability. The roots of this problem differ, based on each child's experiences. Gifted students may become bored or frustrated in an unchallenging situation, causing them to lose interest, learn bad study habits, or distrust the school environment. Other students may mask their abilities to try to fit in socially with their same-age peers. No matter the cause, it is imperative that a caring and perceptive adult help gifted learners break the cycle of underachievement in order for them to achieve their full potential.

See Hoagie's Gifted Education Page [www.hogiesgifted.org](http://www.hogiesgifted.org) on underachievement in gifted boys, girls, and/or minority students.

## District Contacts

### Elementary

Aviara Oaks -- Syndi Lyon  
Buena Vista -- Sharon Zak  
Calavera Hills -- Merry VanHouten  
Hope -- Myles Mayfield  
Jefferson -- Kate Alva  
Kelly -- Lindsey Gordon  
Magnolia -- Karol Lee  
Pacific Rim -- Megan Smith  
Poinsettia -- Jessica Fuller

### Secondary

Aviara Oaks Middle -- Joan Bray  
Calvera Hills Middle -- Patty Adams  
Valley Middle -- Peggy Hodge/Lori Vallen  
Seaside Academy -- Joanne Cook  
CHS -- Counselors

### District

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## **Serving Young Gifted Learners On the Web**

**The Internet: It's not just for big kids any more!**

### **Poisson Rouge**

Explore the alphabet, play the xylophone, find constellations in the night sky, search for missing picture pieces, sing a round of Frere Jacques, and experiment with numbers. No reading is required, but tons of fun is in store for our youngest learners.

[www.poissonrouge.com](http://www.poissonrouge.com)

### **Jackson Pollock**

This site offers an interactive canvas, where everyone can paint like Jackson Pollock. Move your mouse to paint, and click to change the color – there is a nearly endless number of choices! This is a tough exercise for an ordered, organized adult-but an amazing experience for a child of wonder!

[www.jacksonpollock.org](http://www.jacksonpollock.org)

### **San Francisco Symphony Kids'**

This site is an engaging introduction to the music of the orchestra. Experiment with instruments, learn to read music, and create your own tunes. The Music Lab offers an introduction to music, from tempo and pitch, to harmony and the symbols of music. Continue to the *Performulator*, and select and play your own songs, or listen to a wide variety of orchestral music on the Radio. Experiment with *Instrumentation*, to see how changing the parts can change the song. SFSKids is a great place to spend a musical afternoon! [www.sfskids.org](http://www.sfskids.org)

### **Cool Science for Curious Kids**

Howard Hughes Medical Institute offers Cool Science for Curious Kids. Experiment with Air Junk, create a butterfly that emerges from its chrysalis, or learn to observe in a 1" Square project. Learn to classify animals by their common characteristics. And finish your afternoon of

science with an experiment for dinner: create an interactive salad to learn about all the edible plant parts, then finish the experiment by shopping to make your own plant-part salad at home!

[www.hhmi.org/coolscience](http://www.hhmi.org/coolscience)

### **PBS Kids Fetch Games**

This site is full of interactive fun. Create a WHOAHLer Coaster, and make sure that it's not only safe, but fun. Dish it Out offers an introduction to chain reaction activities – can you make the ball fall into the container? Take the built-in challenges, or create your own! Build your own Robot Rover, and then use him to retrieve items for Ruff's next show. Are your ears sensitive enough to crack Dog Ears safe? And visit Link-O-Vision to see if you can link all the animals and facts.

[www.pbskids.org/fetcj/games/index.html](http://www.pbskids.org/fetcj/games/index.html)

### **Math Cats**

Math Cats offers lots of different math explorations. Can you help Math Cat sail across the river with wolf, goat, and cabbage? Careful, there are some tricky possibilities. Math Cat's OBBL Architecture Blocks are fun to build with, but they don't stay where you put them, often with amusing results. Can you make the Math Cats balance? One cat balances with one cat, but how many ants does it take to balance with a fly? How many neutrons balance with a single carbon atom? The power of mass is amazing! And there are lots more adventures for Math Cats to explore.

[www.mathcats.com](http://www.mathcats.com)

### **Funbrain**

Funbrain offers games to challenge your brain in math, words and lots more. Learn to Sign the Alphabet, or read *On the Rocks*, the Funbrain cartoon. Try all 25 games at the Math Arcade (pick your level, grade 1 to 8), or play MadLibs at the Reading Center. (Don't tell kids these are educational games.)

[www.funbrain.com/kidcenter.html](http://www.funbrain.com/kidcenter.html)

## Web-Based Search Programs for Young Researchers

*Gifted Child Today*, Spring 2005

Young researchers often find Web searches overwhelming. According to Trotter (2004) ("Web Searches Often Overwhelm Young Researchers," *Education Week*), students must use crude Web search tools, identify synonyms that relate to key words using adult categories, spell words correctly, sort through endless advertising, and other spam, and judge data. These challenges are the rationale behind new search engines designed expressly for children. One of these search engines, the International Children's Digital Library (<http://www.icdlbooks.org>), provides a simple search where children click on illustrated buttons indicating subjects. Clicking on any button leads to a selection of online books. Another method uses a globe and allows students to choose books from different parts of the country. Another search program, Grokker2 (<http://www.grokker.com>), takes the results of searches from other Web search tools such as Google and sorts them into a visual map of circles that represents commonalities across Web search pages. The user can focus on any of the circles, but the screen never presents more than 10 to keep the user from being overwhelmed. The user may then delete circles that do not seem related to the research topic.

### ***Save these dates!***

#### **District GATE Summer Buy Back Opportunities**

Learn more about using **Depth and Complexity** in your classroom.

#### **Beginner Level Session:**

Wednesday, Aug. 6, 2008

#### **Advanced Level Session:**

Wednesday, Aug. 13, 2008

Both sessions will meet at the District Office, 8:30 AM. – 2:30 PM. Lunch will be provided. This will count for 6 hours of buy-back credit

**More information to coming soon!**

Excerpts from

## **When "Mrs. Wishy Washy" is Wrung Out Challenging Young, Talented Readers**

By Elizabeth A. Fogarty and Sally Reis  
Gifted Educator Communicator, Winter 2007

*Erin sat on the floor of the kindergarten classroom and her long black hair hung in two even braids as she listened intently to her teacher read from the book, Mrs. Wishy Washy, by Joy Cowley. Occasionally, her teacher called on students to fill in a word in the very predictable text.*

*"In went the cow.  
Wishy washy, wishy, washy.  
In went the pig.  
Wishy washy, wishy washy.  
In went the duck.  
Wishy washy, wishy washy."*

*The hands waving in the air indicated that each child wished to be called on to read aloud the word "cow", "pig", or "duck" in the text that matched the picture. Even more fun was to be called upon to sing-song the words "wishy washy, wishy washy" at the end of each sentence, for every child knew that those words came last. But few hands went up when the teacher presented questions about more challenging text – text that did not correspond as well with the picture and did not follow a predictable pattern. As the hands went down, the teacher gazed hopefully from child to child. When she realized that no one else could help, she called on Erin to fill in the blanks with words she read easily. It was a pattern that Erin and her teacher had followed often in the first half of the year and one that led her teacher to realize that Erin was a talented reader.*

A meeting requested by Erin's parents prompted her teacher to contact us as we were working in her school on a research project about differentiated reading

instruction at the time. Erin's parents had told her teacher that Erin had begun to complain about not liking school and had felt ill when getting ready for school. This, they felt, was particularly troubling since they believed Erin to be a bright, inquisitive girl. Her teacher knew that Erin was different from the other children in her kindergarten classroom, and she also believed that Erin's reading talents were just one indicator of her academic precocity. Although her teacher had attempted to differentiate Erin's curriculum in math and reading from the beginning of the school year, she did not believe her efforts were enough. After conducting a formal reading assessment, however, her teacher found that Erin was reading on a level that would be at least four grades above her current grade. She also admitted that even though she had some experience in differentiating instruction and content, the differences between Erin and her peers, especially in reading, made it difficult to provide sufficient challenge for Erin in the regular kindergarten classroom. This scenario exists in kindergarten and preschool classes across the county as precocious readers face instruction in reading that is well below their challenge level. This article summarizes some research about early, talented readers and suggests strategies that can be used to support and challenge them in school.

### **Who Are Young, Talented Readers?**

A definition of young, talented readers must be synthesized from what is known about research on three topics: Young children, gifted children, and reading. Most research and anecdotal writing on this topic defines gifted readers as those who are reading about two grade levels above their peers, understand language subtleties, use language for humor, write words and sentences early, and may produce higher quality creative writing. Additionally, it has been suggested that they automatically integrate prior knowledge and experience into their reading, utilize higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, and communicate these

ideas. Several researchers indicate that talented readers also have high verbal ability and express themselves well, and early readers are said to use colorful and descriptive phrasing, demonstrate advanced understanding of language, have an expansive vocabulary, perceive relationships between and among characters, and grasp complex ideas.

What are the differences between talented readers in general and early, above-level precocious readers? Precocious readers are defined as those whose progress through the earliest stages of literacy acquisition is so exceptionally rapid that they merit special attention from researchers and school personnel. However, that precocity in reading is no guarantee of talent in verbal reasoning and subsequent identification of giftedness. Most recently, some researchers have refined a conception of talented readers as those who display enjoyment in the reading process, read early and above level, and demonstrate both advanced processing and advanced language skills.

There are differing theories on the best way to teach reading to young students. But, when a kindergarten student like Erin reads at such an advanced level, she has transcended the typical benchmarks for that grade level and moved beyond the process of learning to read to the process of reading to learn.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Gifted Children**

When teachers consider their students' abilities, they examine them through the lenses of the grades they teach - lenses tinted by their prior experience and knowledge. What teachers believe and understand about the ability levels of the students and their expectations regarding the curriculum also influences their perceptions of their students. Both prior training and experience have taught teachers to implement developmentally appropriate content for a given grade level. Many teachers believe that the activities and curriculum that are suitable for students

in one grade level will not be suitable for another.

Debate and discussion continues regarding what constitutes “developmentally appropriate practice” for children at both kindergarten and preschool levels. Some teachers and professional educators believe that an academic focus is simply inappropriate for pre-kindergarten programming that should, instead, focus on the social development of young children. The problem with these guidelines is that they usually include recommendations for a particular grade level based on typically developing students, rather than atypical gifted students. Therefore “developmentally appropriate practices” appropriate for most students at a particular grade level are actually inappropriate for gifted students because they do not take into account their advanced intellectual development in a typical area. For example, while it might be appropriate for most kindergarteners to learn to form letters by molding clay, such instruction would not advance the literacy skills of a kindergarten student who began the year reading at a second or third grade or even higher level. Developmentally appropriate

practice, then, is situational and must be redefined for young, talented readers.

Some instructional techniques typically used to teach older children to read or write may also be useful for early readers, but a talented reader’s development may be quite different from his or her chronological peers, and simply using instructional methods from later grades may not be effective, instead, reading strategies must be differentiated.

### **Instruction for the Young, Talented Reader**

Since the patterns of early readers vary, our experiences in implementing



programming options and differentiated reading suggest that differentiation must occur across three components:

- Support and challenge
- Advanced strategy use
- Personalization of interest

Each of these components appears to be essential for the continuing development of young, talented readers, but each must be differentiated to meet the unique patterns of this diverse group.

**Support and challenge** - The impact of effective literacy teachers on early and struggling readers cannot be underestimated, for appropriate instruction can prevent reading difficulties. Talented readers are also affected by teachers’ ability to teach literacy, to recognize precocity in reading, and to utilize their knowledge of their reading curriculum, all of which interact with a teacher’s ability to differentiate appropriately. It was found that only a small number of kindergarten teachers and fewer than half of the first grade teachers surveyed provided alternate activities for students who were already readers during “reading readiness” activities. Primary grade teachers frequently use small group reading instruction, often creating their own materials rather than using commercially prepared basal readers and worksheets. Many primary grade teachers use grouping arrangements and materials tailored to individual needs more often than intermediate grade teachers, but little research has been conducted on which instructional strategies can help early, talented readers to make continuous progress in reading.

Support for early, talented readers necessitates the use of alternative learning environments and different reading strategies, but neither of these should occur for all students all of the time. For example, individual work is effective for some early, talented readers but children cannot be expected to work alone all of the time, as the support and challenge of a teacher is necessary to provide adequate levels of challenge. In fact, research about some urban gifted students in grades three and

four found that most had never been challenged in reading and when asked to read even slightly above grade level, these students became frustrated and gave up trying to read appropriately challenging materials after only minutes of effort.

Conducting literacy assessments using running records and story retellings has the potential to alert primary grade teachers to reading talents in young children. This is especially important in very young children because they come to kindergarten with vastly different home literacy experiences that affect their reading readiness. Likewise, some precocious young readers may not tell or show their teachers that they are able to read at an advanced level, requiring primary grade teachers to carefully examine the individual abilities of their children. In Erin's situation, the reading assessments conducted by her teacher demonstrated that even the differentiated experiences she was providing were not sufficiently challenging for Erin.

**Strategies** - In our review of current research relating to reading strategies, it became apparent about the need to integrate reading strategies into reading instruction. Reading strategies are used by students to integrate higher-order thinking skills such as questioning, making inferences, making connections, understanding ones' own thinking processes, visualizing, determining importance, and synthesizing in order to make meaning of the text.

In our work with teachers we are often asked about the differences between reading skills and reading strategies. Teaching certain reading skills, like word-level decoding, can be a pretty straightforward task for reading teachers because the skills can be taught using rules that can be followed. However, teaching students how to be strategic readers can be much more difficult because the strategies are contextually dependent and lack a distinct pattern for their use. Reading strategies are also more difficult to assess because unlike giving a vocabulary test to measure reading skills, teachers must

determine the extent to which students are able to use reading strategies in context. Early readers can be challenged with reading strategy instruction that is appropriately challenging and engages and interests them.

Helping young, talented readers make appropriate book choices is an important step toward ensuring a continuing desire to read and an appropriate level of challenge. Books for talented, young readers should be selected with appropriateness in mind as well as to introduce these children to advanced content, themes, ideas and advanced language.

Children's first experiences with reading should be joyful, and they should enjoy and anticipate reading as a happy time that is spent reading books on the lap of a parent or listening to stories in the company of classmates. The more pleasurable these early experiences, the more likely a child will want to read independently and develop the self-regulation necessary to become lifelong learners. Increasing reading interest has been recommended as one of the most effective ways to prevent reading difficulties. Research has shown that if students do not enjoy reading by the time they are in the intermediate grades, they will not continue to read independently. There is a declining trend in U.S. reading scores beginning in fourth grade and continuing through middle school and high school. If we can both challenge

and engage precocious readers, we believe we can reverse the trend for this group, and enable them to make

continuous progress and enjoy reading. (You can find Language Arts Primary Grades Menus and Extensions in the GATE Public Folders.)

