

Looking Back – Looking Ahead

A Reflection by
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People change, context and understandings change, and thus, programs change.

Three of my favorite prompts of depth and complexity are Context, Multiple Points of View, and Change over Time. These lead to deeper understanding, of course, but also to a sense of greater excitement. My time as a GATE Coordinator over twenty years definitely had that!

When I began working for Rincon Valley School District it was 1994. There had been no gifted program around for years, and what had been in place, a pull-out program, was not remembered fondly by anyone. The context of the time included the belief of most teachers and administrators: “You don’t have to worry about her. She’s so bright she’ll do fine, no matter who she has as a teacher.” It was primarily the parents (I among them) who had unsettling misgivings about this philosophy – but little deep understanding of what our children needed or of the potential difficulties they might encounter emotionally, socially, and academically. At this point, the Superintendent decided to give the very bright students (selected solely by state test scores) something extra: an opportunity to take a short class in an area of interest.

This was a start.

Times change and people learn. I began a study of gifted education -- with CAG’s help. Conversations with parents, teachers, and district administration led to deeper discussions about needs, expectations, and programs. The push to effect change within the classroom for gifted learners was on. The push to understand the needs of and identify who belonged in GATE was on. The push to educate the parents to greater understanding of their children and to act as advocates was on. The result? Rincon Valley was recently granted CAG’s Five Star Award for its GATE program and differentiation is embedded in the belief system of the district – to the benefit of EVERY student.

I am now retired and proud of the changes made over my time as GATE Coordinator. Students now in our classes, identified as gifted or not, are learning in a different contextual arena – with teachers having a greater understanding of their needs.

I used to not believe in GATE...it was unnecessary and elitist.

Now I see the need and see what teaching this way does for all my students.

(4th grade teacher)

I teach the way I do because of what I learned through your GATE program.
(2nd grade teacher)

It's not perfect nor is it finished. The GATE program will change, for the world and perspectives are changing as well. Change is inevitable. To see change as an exciting opportunity is the essence of optimism. I am an optimist. Look at the Mission Statement of CAG. It ends with this statement: *By focusing on the gifts, talents, and potential of students, CAG's philosophy and practices enrich the education of all students.*

These are exciting times. There is still much work to be done so that every child has the opportunity to learn – and this opportunity must include the understanding of each child as an individual with great potential. The task of educators – and of parents – is to provide the support to unlock that potential. I hope that all involved in education – and are we not all teachers? – will take time to reflect. Peter Drucker, not directly involved in education but a teacher still, had this to say: *Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.*

There is still much to do.