

Gifted Education Communicator

Summer 2015

¿Comprendes?: Gifted ELLs in the CCSS Classroom

Learning While Vacationing: Not an Oxymoron

Looking Back - Looking Ahead

Summer Time: A Time to Talk

Teaching Skills Through Service Learning

Teaching Thinking: Spatial Thinking

Book Reviews



¿Comprendes? Gifted ELLs in the CCSS Classroom

Gina Estrada Danley

Expecting all children the same age to learn from the same materials is like expecting all children the same age to wear the same size clothing. Madeline Hunter

While an abundance of research exists pointing to effective strategies to use with gifted and talented students, and those to use with English Language Learners (ELLs), there is a dearth of research focused on the best strategies for teachers to use in educating ELLs who are identified as gifted. According to the California Census, the percentage of the population speaking a language other than English rose from 39.5% in 2000 to 43.7% in 2014. If districts are in fact identifying more Spanish speaking students as gifted, as the latest push has called for, then educators need to know how to best meet their needs in the classroom.

The Classroom Today

The Common Core State Standards (2010) call upon educators around the nation to provide instruction that is “aligned with college and work expectations,” “rigorous,” and “internationally benchmarked.” The CCSS also “lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century.” The expectation is that educators will provide the means by which every student in a public school will be educated - that is, with the same level of rigor so as to meet the same expectation.

Not all students sitting in desks across California arrive with the same background knowledge, exposure to the English language, cultural practices that mirror those of the mainstream USA, or ability to interact and communicate directly with others in the school setting. They do, however, arrive with background knowledge rooted in their own culture, deep exposure to their home language (for the purposes of this article we will refer to native Spanish speakers), their own cultural practices, and the ability to interact and communicate directly with others in their own familiar settings. Educators must learn how to reach out to, differentiate, scaffold, and assist gifted ELLs in the classroom in light of the rigorous demands of CCSS instruction coupled with the challenges presented by such vast cultural and linguistic differences.

Gifted students are often born with similar characteristics and attributes (Webb, Gore, Amend, DeVries, 2007); they also tend to exhibit particular attitudes and behaviors. Collectively, these characteristics can be matched with strategies for classroom instruction that are proven effective with ELLs. The following list provides suggestions for methods and strategies that should be used when differentiating the CCSS for gifted ELLs, or native Spanish speakers.

Suggested Strategies to use with Gifted ELLs

Characteristics of Gifted Children - Suggested Strategy for the Gifted ELL

Unusual alertness, even in infancy - *Teach the child in his native tongue as well as begin to develop his English as early as the preschool years.*

Rapid learner; puts thoughts together quickly - *Provide English language instruction at a much faster pace; provide language and content instruction simultaneously.*

Excellent memory - *Expose the young child to the alphabet, numbers, reading instruction, Spanish-English cognates and vocabulary as early as preschool; expose the older student to academic and domain-specific vocabulary and the conventions of grammar at a much faster pace while connecting this learning to the student's knowledge in his primary language.*

Unusually large vocabulary and complex sentence structure for age - *Do not "dumb down" the material or the pace; expose the student to mentor texts in English so he has numerous models of quality writing coupled with instruction. Students, especially ELLs, benefit greatly from exposure to models of the work educators expect to see. (Kinsella 2015)*

Advanced comprehension of word nuances, metaphors, and abstract ideas - *Increase the student's exposure to nuances, metaphors, and abstract ideas of the English language, and to as many Spanish-English cognates as possible (for a comprehensive list see <http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/articles/cognates.pdf>).*

Enjoys solving problems, especially with numbers and puzzles - *Provide students with non-language-based puzzles and problems to solve; ELLs will build academic confidence in math sooner than they will in English Language Arts.*

Often self-taught reading and writing skills as preschooler - *Assess younger preschool-aged children in their native tongue to measure early literacy skills; students will transfer these skills as they acquire new language.*

Deep, intense feelings and reactions - *Provide opportunities for students to speak in their native tongue about their emotions with other Spanish-speakers; increase the student's exposure to visual and performing arts as these often serve as nonverbal avenues for emotional connections.*

Highly sensitive - *Be aware of the non-verbal cues that children exhibit when they are emotionally upset, angry, distraught, etc., and provide an outlet or a rest time, an opportunity to check out for a minute.*

Thinking is abstract, complex, logical, and insightful - *Invite students to play with ideas in their native tongue, then pair them with bilingual students to share out verbally; offer opportunities to engage in the arts and engineering-based projects which embrace this type of thinking.*

Idealism and sense of justice at early age - *Allow time in the classroom to work out conflicts; teach students a structure for discussing and working through and beyond conflict.*

Concern with social and political issues and injustices - *Expose the student to current events; encourage the student to have discussions with their parents about these current events.*

Learn basic skills quickly and with little practice - *Pre-assess the student when possible and use the results to inform future instruction; all students deserve to receive credit for what they already know and to move forward from that point.*

Asks probing questions - *Through direct teaching and utilizing the Prompts of Depth and Complexity (Kaplan), invite the student into a discussion through pictorial/nonlinguistic representations that prompt higher level thinking skills. As students acquire the English language, provide sentence frames to guide them in collaborative conversations. Older students will benefit from engaging in structured dialogue settings such as the Socratic Seminar and Philosophical Chairs.*

Wide range of interests (or extreme focus in one area) - *Provide the student with well-structured Independent Study opportunities; pair him with a mentor who is bilingual. Always inform students and their families about local library opportunities so students can have endless access to books on topics of interest.*

Interest in experimenting and doing things differently - *Invite DIFFERENCE; encourage the student to try multiple ways of solving problems.*

Puts idea or things together that are not typical - *Do not criticize the student's ideas even if the ideas seem outlandish; they may be brilliant ideas, but stifled by the challenge of not having the English language mastered.*

Keen and/or unusual sense of humor - *Expose students to common American idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and humor so they can gain access to their meaning.*

Author Sandra Cisneros has been acclaimed as the first Mexican American female to publish a book through a mainstreaming publishing company. She claims that it was one of her high

school teachers who encouraged her writing; this teacher took three critical steps in Cisneros's education:

1. Identify, validate, nurture, and teach her how to apply her interests and strengths (i.e., creative writing) productively.
2. Create motivation for continued academic learning.
3. Provide a personal connection to school in the form of a mentor relationship. (Smutny, et. al. 2012).

No teacher can possibly know with certainty how far her students will succeed, in which careers her students will thrive, or who will be published or hold an important public office. However, every teacher should treat every student as if he or she might accomplish anything in life!

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Learning While Vacationing: Not an Oxymoron

Jessica Manzone

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Judy Dannenberg's book *Last Day Blues* provides a hysterically funny and not entirely fictitious look into the last few days of school. In the minds of the students, the teachers spend their final moments of the last day of school tearfully watching the buses pull away; their hearts filled with the sadness of a long and boring summer with nothing to keep them occupied until the students return in the fall. Classroom teachers and administrators reading this story are smiling quietly to themselves as they turn the final page. The last illustration says it all.



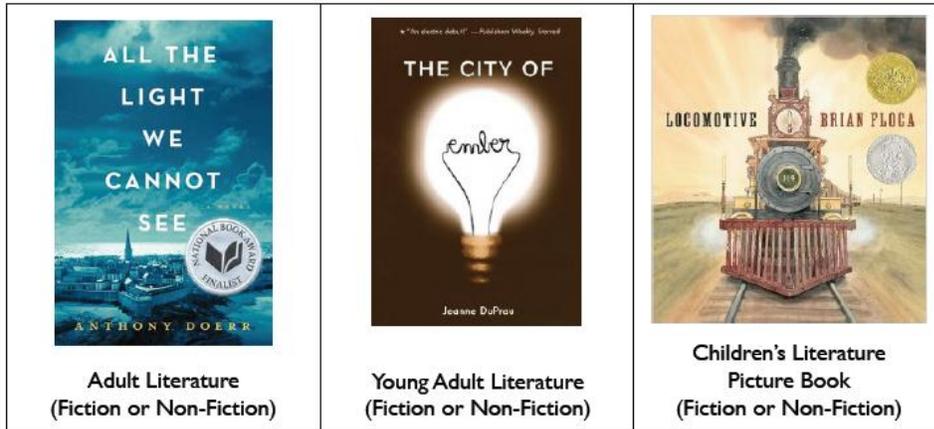
We love our jobs, our students, and our colleagues. However, when the final bell rings on the last day of school, we (like the characters portrayed in Julie Dannenberg's book) go running...leaping...jumping for joy...out the doors of the school and towards the start of our summer vacation. After we have spent a few days actually enjoying our morning coffee instead of balancing it in one hand while carrying final exams in another; after we have washed and folded the mounds of laundry that always seem to pile up during the last few weeks of school; and after we have had a few dinners with family and friends that do not involve talk about report cards. After all of that...when we finally settle into our summer vacation are we ready to entertain the notion that we can think critically and creatively for PLEASURE!

We tell our students that the skills we teach them in school – the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving exist all around us. They are there when we make decisions about what products to buy in the supermarket, when we determine where to vacation, and when we try and balance our household budgets. We tell our students that these skills are important, that they will use them in the real world as they navigate both academic and social situations. We stress to our students the need to practice these skills in various contexts and settings. But how often do we take the time to strategically and purposefully practice what we preach? How often do we intentionally engage in the practice of critical and creative thinking? The following activities are three quick yet purposeful ways that we, as adults, can engage our critical, creative, and problem-solving brains while simultaneously enjoying our summer vacation. These activities can be completed individually, with a group of friends, or with your children. You can write down your responses to these activities, discuss them in the car during a road trip, or simply think about them as you enjoy a lazy Tuesday afternoon in a hammock in your backyard. We encourage you to approach these divergent thinking activities with an open mind and a creative spirit. You may even discover that learning while on summer vacation can be fun and can serve as fodder for lesson planning in the fall (pause for audible gasp~!).

Activity #1 – A String of Books

Skills Targeted: Critical Thinking

The purpose of the activity is twofold: (a) to practice connecting multiple texts to a central theme, universal concept, or set of criteria, and (b) to explore the myriad of seminal and contemporary children’s and young adult literature available for use in the classroom. The activity is simple in concept. Select three books that you are **interested** in reading. Book number one must be a piece of adult literature that you have always wanted to read but could never seem to find the time during the school year. This book can be a non-fiction piece such as *Dead Wake* by Erik Larson or a fictional story such as *All the Light We See Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. Book number two can fall into any genre of your choice but must be classified as Young Adult Literature. Take some time to research your choice. You can select one book from a recent series such as Jeanne DuPrau’s *City of Ember*, or a classic text like Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*. Your final book (book three) must be a picture book or a piece of children’s literature. The content of the book can rest in any genre of your choosing but must contain illustrations. For example, you could select *Tuesday*, a wordless picture book by David Wiesner, or the critically acclaimed *Locomotive* by Brian Floca (it should be noted that both books are Caldecott Medal winners). Many of the books mentioned above currently sit on my own nightstand in anticipation of this activity. My first string of books will include:



Once you have selected your three books, it is time to “string” them together. Read the books in any order that you wish. Start to make connections, threads, or “strings” between the pieces of literature using any or all of the following criteria: plot, context, setting, character analysis, ethical issues, personal or societal impact, central theme, message, or universal concept such as power, conflict, change etc. Add as many books to your “string” as you would like. Share your “string” with family and friends. Invite them to add their books to your “string.” As you move from book to book over the course of your summer vacation, answer the following questions.

- How are the literary elements of the text related?
- What connections can I make between these texts and others I have already read?
- What additional books would I add to this “string” because they share something in common?
- How can I use the strategy “stringing” books in the classroom to generate student interest and find companion pieces to our district text?

Activity #2 -- Postcards Home

Skills Targeted: Creative Thinking

The purpose of this activity is to practice viewing objects and ideas in new and different ways; to develop the art of appreciation for the world around us and to see the various ways that objects and people in that world make us think and feel. This activity focuses on the development of sensory experiences and how sensory language can be used as a means of making writing more realistic and descriptive. Integrating the five senses within a writing piece can be used in strategic and purposeful ways to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the text and a feeling of first-hand experience. This activity helps us practice how to use our senses as the tools to analyze situations and contexts and move beyond basic

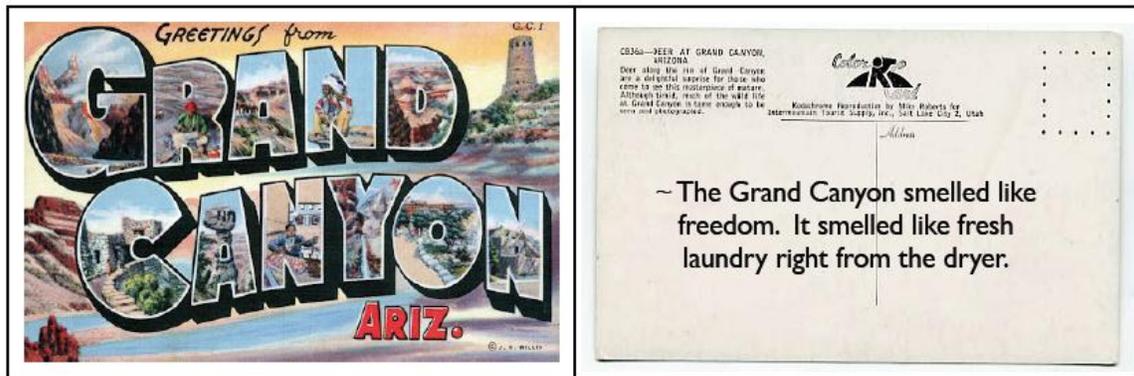
descriptions. As you travel to various locations during your summer vacation (parks, museums, famous landmarks, etc.) gather postcards from each stop. On the back of the postcard, write your responses to one or more of the following creative thinking, sensory-based questions. The goal of the exercise is to describe the location in the postcard to others using sensory details so that they can engage in an emotional connection with the location.

- How does [insert location] smell and sound?
- What would [insert location] have looked like 10, 50, or 100 years ago? What will it look like 10, 50, or 100 years in the future?
- How did [insert location] change or alter your mood?
- What memory did [insert location] make me think of?
- What food would pair well with [insert location]?

The concepts and skills inherent in this activity can also be translated into the classroom. For example, classroom teachers can create a learning center that contains a series of postcards from various locations (locally and around the world). The teacher can supply the postcards for the learning center or can enlist the help of the students, parents, and community members to submit postcards from their favorite vacation destinations. Students can engage in the following experiences within the learning center to practice the skill of applying sensory details to familiar and unknown contexts.

- Activity #1: Imagination Vacation -- Students select a postcard from the stack that they find interesting. Students engage in fantasy play to imagine that they are taking an upcoming trip to their selected location. Students will use sensory details to describe all of the wonderful things that they will see, touch, smell, taste, and hear on their imagined trip. Students can use their prior knowledge of the location if they have been before, can research the location if it is new to them, or they can make up the details based on their imagination and what they see visible in the postcard.
- Activity #2: Where am I? -- Students select a partner to work with at the learning center. One student randomly selects a postcard from the stack, but does not show it to their partner. The student uses sensory language to describe the location to their partner -- providing as many and as varied means describing the location as possible. The partner tries to guess the location depicted on the postcard based on the description. Students trade roles and continue the game so that each person has a turn as “describer” and “guesser.” Students discuss how the use of sensory details facilitated their ability to determine the location of the postcard and any additional details that would have been beneficial to them.

- **Activity #3: Story Swap** -- Students select a postcard from the stack (either purposefully or randomly). The location depicted in the postcard becomes the basis for the story they will write. Students can use their postcard location to write their story in one of more of the following ways: (a) students can use the postcard as the setting or environment in which the story takes place, (b) students can take a character from another story and “place” them in the setting or location depicted on the postcard, (c) students can use the postcard location across one or more time periods (past, present, and future), and (d) students can impose people, objects, or animals from different locations and time periods into their postcard location. Students can publish their sensory-based stories in a class book or website for peers and parents to read and enjoy.



Activity #3 – Tourist in My Hometown

Skills Targeted: Problem Solving

The purpose of this activity is to analyze the local context in which one works and lives. Context is defined as the time, the location (environment), the people, and the philosophical beliefs operating within a structure. For the purposes of this activity, a “structure” could represent an area as small as a neighborhood, or one as large as a town or city. Take some time to research the context of the structure where **you** (and your students) live and work. Consider the following points of reference as examples or key questions to research the context of your school and/or home.

- **Time** – What institutions exist in your area that are seminal or have been a part of the fabric of the community over time? What institutions exist in your area that have been recently developed or in the process of being developed? How has the concept of “time” impacted your neighborhood, town, or city?

- Location – Where is your location in relation to other cities, towns, and/or cultural centers? What natural resources exist in your location? What are the important or significant landmarks in your location? How does your location distinguish itself from others in the area?
- People – Who are the key decision makers in your area? What motivates their decision-making? Where in your location are there places for people to come together? What sub-structures exist in the area (churches, temples, mosques, soup kitchens, etc.) that provide support and resources to people?
- Philosophical Beliefs – What are the political beliefs or ideologies of the people who live and work in your area? What are the major political, social, and economic concerns and interests of the people in your area? How are conflicts resolved in your area?

There are two major outcomes for this activity: (a) the recognition of the impact of context (time, location, people, and philosophical belief) on the structure of education in your location, and (b) the research of local attractions and resources available in your area that can provide fodder for classroom and content connections.

Ready...Set...Vacation...

Seminal theorist and educator John Dewey stated that “education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” Dewey’s quote reminds us that the skills we teach our students have applications that extend well beyond the walls of our classrooms. The skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving permeate our lives, and yes, even find their way into our summer vacation. Whether we spend the summer sitting on the beach, kayaking the Everglades, or cleaning out the garage, we are still life-long learners and educators. We want to be engaged, we want to be stimulated, and we want to be inspired. We hope that these ideas serve as fodder for interesting discussions with friends, springboards for self-engagement, and a means of rejuvenation for the next school year. Enjoy your summer. Thank you for everything that you do to enhance the lives of the students in your classrooms and schools. Feel free to send us your thoughts or reflections on any of the activities.

Looking Back – Looking Ahead

A Reflection by
Merritt Alden Booster

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.

Summer Time: A Time to Talk

Sandra Kaplan
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It is acknowledged that teachers and students, students and students, and parents and children talk throughout all the seasons of the year. It also is acknowledged that the talk among these individuals represents meaningful discussions for the time and place. It also is acknowledged that these discussions may be characterized by their terse use of words, limited by the time allocated for discussion, shaped by the selection of a topic available for discussion, and the situation under which the discussion took place under circumstances of either work or play.

Summer time affords the times and events for discussions between adults and children and/or peers that transcend the brief commentary that often exists within the daily school year. Summer time can be the time for talk or a time that affords the opportunities to engage in discourse that is lengthy, complex, and revealing of many dimensions of the potential, talent and the emergent aptitude of children.

Students need to be assisted to “study talk” in order to understand the importance of talk in relationship to the nature of “giftedness” and the development of expertise and talent in roles individuals assume. Reading biographies and autobiographical sketches of people whose “talk” transformed the course of events or reshaped the knowledge that has been needed to advance society and the people within it. Contemplating the importance of why and how individuals participate in talk situations is vital to developing an appreciation for the abilities related to practicing the art of talking. Consider discussing with students the impact of talk derived from Ted Talks, podcasts, and news casting.

Time to talk is time to indulge in conversation that is representative of “talk as an art form.” The artistic process of discussion is learned and it is supported by learning how to focus talk on a variety of dimensions that allow talk to become a meaningful form of expression for speaker and listener. Some of the skills that are essential to developing “talking skills” are related to critical, creative, problem solving, and logical thought.

1. Elaborate on ideas with details that provide a continuum of expression from what is actually observed to what is perceived to be observed.
2. Evoke responses that represent multiple viewpoints and can be assessed as strong/weak, positive/negative. etc.
3. Recognize that every experience represents fodder for conversation.

4. Define the differences between prattle and talk.

Time to talk is time to indulge in conversation that is representative of “talk as an art form.” The artistic process of discussion is learned and it is supported by learning how to focus talk on a variety of dimensions that allow talk to become a meaningful form of expression for speaker and listener.

“Listen” to this discussion between two students who have shared a visit to the zoo. Note how their discussion is referenced to the topical areas identified as elements of the artistic process of the “talk.”

Child 1 – “I was just wondering what if the animals have a sense of the difference between roaming wild and being caged.”

Child 2 – “I don’t think so. Some of the animals do not know the difference.”

Child 1 – “We learned about the rights of people in our history class and I think that we need to establish some type of Bill of Rights for Animals.”

Child 2 – “There is a Humane Society and I think that they do that work for us but do animals have the right to have a lawyer or is there a court of appeal.”

Child 1 – “I think I will become a Zoologist.”

Child 2 – “That’s funny. Your first client could be the giraffe because he will have a long, long, long compliant.”

The “art of talk” is understanding how to apply the skills of critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and logic in discussions rather than simply relegating these skills to questions and answers within the course of the classrooms while studying a topic or responding to literary passages. Learning to be a “talker” is dependent on the need to learn the prerequisite skills. Summer time is a time to understand and practice the “art of talk” when there are so many experiences and the time that lends itself to good conversation. Basically, the “art of talk” is the development of an art form that allows students to experience themselves and the world in a unique way.

Teaching Skills Through Service Learning

Kelly Kuolt, Carlthorp School

Tom Marine, Carlthorp School

Jessica Manzone, University of Southern California

A sixth grade student stands in front of her class. She is describing ideas generated by her fellow classmates -- ideas that will help provide educational materials for low-income children living in San Bernardino County. She is calling for action.

“I went into this project feeling sympathetic,” she says, “but when I leave I want to feel empathetic. It’s time for us to stop talking and start doing.”

For the next three months, the sixth grade students at Carlthorp School took ownership of a service-learning project that placed them in the driver’s seat. They planned, compromised, adapted, learned from their mistakes, and ultimately delivered homemade ABC and 1,2,3 coloring books to a local Head Start program.

Although this accomplishment is inspiring, it only paints part of the picture. The real beauty of service learning resides in the empowerment it gives to students. They drive the project, often to unexpected heights and unforeseen outcomes, while gaining a variety of life skills: perseverance, problem solving, meeting management, community outreach, and critical thinking.

Service Learning in one word is *process*. From gaining awareness of and perspective on societal challenges, to reflection and educating future service leaders, the process is completely student-driven. They learn while leading.

One of the most common misconceptions of service learning is that it is the same as community service. Community service can take many different forms, ranging from penny drives, to making bag lunches for the homeless, to hour quotas for graduation. Oftentimes, students don’t get to choose how they become involved in service projects and have no opportunity to select one with personal impact. The purpose of this article is not to take away any value that community service provides. Many community service projects are important. However, we have come to realize that the fundamental difference between community service and service learning is how important *ownership* of both the project and the process is to the students. We have distinguished five key components of service learning that will be explained in more detail below.

Professional educators seek to develop learning experiences that meet the academic, social, and developmental needs of all the learners in a classroom. Just as the architect designs a blueprint for a building or a house, educators create learning experiences that outline the key features and non-negotiable elements of lessons. These features take into account the skills, concepts, and standards students should know and be able to demonstrate as well as their needs, interests, and abilities. The Common Core State Standards and the California Gifted and Talented Education Standards provide a comprehensive scope and sequence for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students should master as they proceed through the K-12 public school system. Many different pedagogical practices, models of teaching, and instructional strategies exist in the literature and have been designed to enable implementation of both the CCSS and GATE standards. We contend that Service Learning can be added to the list of techniques that educators can employ as a means of achieving the non-negotiable standards and preparing students for thinking and learning in a 21st Century society. The following chart highlights the steps of Service Learning and the standards addressed in each stage of the process.

| Steps of Service Learning | Alignment to CCSS | Alignment to GATE |
|--|---|---|
| Students gain awareness and perspective of societal challenges. | CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 | Connection to Universal Concepts such as Power, Conflict, Change, etc. <i>What larger ideas or themes reflect the community that you are a part of?</i> |
| Students link global and local challenges. | CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 | Connection to the prompts of Depth and Complexity. <i>What patterns exist locally, nationally, and globally?</i> |
| Students focus on a local challenge and develop process for service project. | CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 | Connection to the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving. <i>How can we prove with evidence that the problem is relevant?</i> |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Students, teachers, and experts partner to support and execute service project.</p> | <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6</p> | <p>Connection to Thinking Like a Disciplinarian</p> <p><i>From what perspectives can you approach the problem?</i></p> |
| <p>Students reflect and educate future service leaders.</p> | <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3</p> | <p>Connection to Big Ideas</p> <p><i>What are the key ideas that I have learned from my project?</i></p> |

Students take their first step by gaining awareness and perspective of societal challenges. This is the point where you find an organic connection to your curriculum and the students' lives, to help pique their interest in the content. In our classrooms, this connection occurred when a parent gave us a book called *I Believe in Zero* by Caryl M. Stern. The book discusses many worldwide challenges we face today and, more specifically, how they affect children. Our 6th grade team decided to read the chapter about child laborers in Bangladesh because it complemented our studies of global civilizations and our students' long-term country reports. The students learned about the tedious work these children perform for 12-14 hours each day and the absolute poverty they live in, often with limited access to food, healthcare, and educational opportunities.

We asked our students, "Why do we care about this issue?" and "How does it affect us?" After reading the chapter, we also discussed the cycle of poverty and contrasted our lives in Santa Monica with these children in Bangladesh. By gaining awareness of these global challenges, the students felt a growing sense of responsibility to take action.

Elementary school students have an uncompromising sense of right and wrong. When presented with an injustice, they want to do something about it. As the students read about child labor in Bangladesh, we could see the fire igniting within them. They wanted to be an active player solving this problem. So we asked them, "Do you have to go all the way to Bangladesh to make a difference? Or, is there a problem within our own community that deserves our attention?"

The class then discussed three topics related to our local community: early childhood education, animal welfare, and the ongoing water crisis in California. Suddenly, these world problems didn't seem a thousand miles away. They were right outside our door. The link from global to local is immensely important for two reasons. First, it presents students with motivation to serve their local community in a tangible way. Second, the local context enables the teacher to transfer responsibility to the students.

The students are now ready to focus on a local challenge and develop a process for creating a service project. This step started off as an idea session that we conducted over two class periods, both in small groups and as a whole grade level. A variety of great ideas came out of these brainstorming sessions, one being a mobile library that would travel to children in need of educational materials. Students generated more ideas after a Save the Children ambassador came to speak with the group. This person was able to articulate specific needs and inspire more student ideas. One of the main challenges in early education that resonated with the students was the lack of books available in homes affected by poverty. In the end, the students decided they wanted to create small, handmade books that could help the children learn basics, like numbers, colors and letters. We called them ABC books. Although only 12 students were heavily involved in this project, we asked if each of our homerooms would design books to help contribute. Ultimately, about 40 books were created for these young children to help them with their educational needs.

Executing the service project was the moment the students had all been waiting for. They had completed their research; they had reached out to a local expert who could help guide them; they had assigned roles within their group, and they had a clear, organized plan.

Through our contact at Save the Children, we partnered with a Head Start program in San Bernardino, California. The students volunteered their own weekend to visit this school and deliver their homemade educational books. As we watched our students teach and play with these younger children, they too were receiving a special gift from the experience. They achieved empathy.

The last, and arguably the most important component, occurs after the students execute their project and then reflect and educate future service leaders. Reflection allows the students to think about what they learned from their hands-on experiences. Each of the two visits to San Bernardino ended with a reflection session during which the students had an opportunity to share what they learned with each other and the Save the Children leaders. They also had the opportunity to ask questions and plan how they would like to continue to foster a long-term relationship with the organization.

Upon returning to school, the sixth graders discussed their goal of continuing this partnership and agreed the information must be shared with the fifth grade classes. They created a PowerPoint presentation with pictures and information about their service-learning project. Later, they shared their personal stories and answered questions from the fifth graders. When we began to introduce potential service learning projects to our class this year, members of the original project came back to share their advice and listen to the new ideas. We are now working to cultivate service leaders within our school alumni, who will come back to both advise and inspire our current students.

Service learning is a long-distance race that is completed one small step at a time. It is a series of organic experiences that often lead from one to another. It requires flexibility, both for the students and the teacher. It is completely student driven and it is about making “mistakes” along the way and learning from them. To be completely honest, we do not know where these projects are going at the start of the unit. However, by having an open mind and taking a few risks, special opportunities will naturally present themselves.

For example, earlier this year, we heard an interview with a nationally renowned homeless expert named Robert Marbut. We forwarded the link of the interview to our students running the Anti-Homelessness group and simply said there might be some ideas here that you could use in your project. Apparently, they were thinking bigger! The students reached out to Mr. Marbut and he took an interest in their desire to help the local homeless population. On one of his recent trips to Los Angeles, he came to visit and personally answered questions the students drafted. We had no idea this connection would be a possibility; however, one event can organically lead to another, which leads to another and another.

The Anti-Homelessness group is also a great example of how important flexibility is in the service learning process. Homelessness wasn't one of the original topics introduced, but it shows the flexible thinking the students had to possess in order to put in the time to research this issue on a local and national level, and present to their teachers why they thought it was a valuable project to work on.

Flexibility also has to come from the teacher's end. We didn't plan to work on all of these topics with our students, but we were able to support this group of students when they proposed homelessness as a topic. Still, we understand how difficult this can be as a teacher. You have your schedule, set plans on what to teach when, and a limited amount of time to do it. While we were flexible with the direction in which our classroom projects were heading, we did find that we regularly had to circle back to our student-generated list of service project steps in order to make sure the students weren't missing anything vital.

The simple truth is this program does not belong to us; it belongs to the students. They form their service groups and elect their leaders. They organize and run their meetings. They reach out to community members who can assist their efforts. In essence, we, the teachers, have transferred complete control of the program to the students.

Let's be completely honest. At best, this transfer of power can feel uncomfortable. At worst, it can feel terrifying. What if the students make the wrong decision? Or, what if something goes wrong? Well, let's go ahead and save you the drama. They *WILL* make a wrong decision and something *WILL* go wrong! That is when the true learning occurs. As we all know, some of our greatest life lessons came from the times we skinned our knees and had to pick ourselves back up.

Although the students run this process, your role as the teacher, parent, or partner is to support. Give them the tools and materials, but let them build. Give them advice and suggestions when prompted, but let them decide. Give them the motivation to succeed, and also the courage to fail, learn, and try again.

A final point to emphasize is that service learning will include "mistakes." However, we view mistakes more like learning opportunities. This year alone we've taught our students many valuable life skills, such as how to prepare for a meeting, write a formal e-mail, maintain internet safety, best practices for interviewing, public speaking skills, and more. Interestingly, these skills were not originally on our radar when we started the program.

An example of these "mistakes" occurred earlier this year, when our students wrote an email (without our knowledge) to Mr. Marbut regarding his work with the homeless. After becoming aware of this e-mail, we spoke to our students about proofreading emails before sending them, and checking in with a teacher before e-mailing unknown adults. The best part of this however, was that the students received a response within two days. They were so excited that their action had resulted in a potential partner and consultant to their project.

In addition to fostering understanding and supporting our students' actions in the community, we teachers recognize that the most valuable experience is how to incorporate these important life lessons into our students' academic experiences. Leading a service learning project gives the students a powerful voice in their education and teaches them how to advocate for their community.

Looking ahead, the ultimate goal of our service-learning program is to empower our students by nurturing their confidence, motivation, and empathy. To repeat, we want them to have the courage to fail, learn from their mistakes, and try again.

Before our trip to visit the Head Start program in San Bernardino County, our principal received an email from a student that demonstrates the power of service learning.

“I have big hopes, big dreams, and a big future,” the student wrote. “All of that is meaningless unless I can share it with others whose hopes, dreams, and futures are squashed by the evil foot of poverty.”

That is confidence! That is motivation! That is empathy! That is the spark that makes a difference in this world.

Teaching Thinking: Spatial Thinking

Angela Hasan

Teaching thinking with gifted students has been on the forefront in the elements that comprise a quantitatively differentiated curriculum for these students. Gifted education references critical thinking, creative thinking, and skills of logic as important elements of a such curriculum. In addition, the introduction of spatial thinking provides another element to a differentiated curriculum. References indicate that spatial thinking ability is an important effect in many fields of study such as mathematics, engineering, economics, and architecture. The following resources have been provided as an introduction to teaching spatial thinking with students of all ages and grade levels.

Spatial Thinking

The National Academy of Sciences defines spatial thinking as a constructive amalgam of three elements: *concepts of space*, *tools of representation*, and *processes of reasoning*. Space provides the conceptual and analytical framework within which data can be integrated, related, and structured into a whole. Representations—either internal and cognitive or external and graphic, linguistic, physical, and so forth—provide the forms within which structured information can be stored, analyzed, comprehended, and communicated to others. Reasoning processes provide the means of manipulating, interpreting, and explaining the structured information.

National Academy of Sciences

Learning to Think Spatially:

Geospatial Information Science (GIS) as a Support System in the K-12 Curriculum (2006)

GEOCACHING (<https://www.geocaching.com/play>)

Geocaching is way of using spatial thinking to find hidden treasures in your community. All you need is the Geocaching free app download to get clues to locate Geocaches (treasures) in your neighborhood. Children can learn practice concepts of space, technology to locate geospatial location, and problem solving.

GOOGLE EARTH (<http://earth.google.com>)

Students today can explore the world terrain and people without leaving home using Google Earth software (free download) that provides children access concepts of spatial thinking by exploring the earth. For example, let's think about touring the earth using a mobile phone, iPad, or computer. Geospatial technologies like GPS provide opportunities for students to view,

problem solve, and analyze data from locations they have not visited in the world. Before you begin your Sightseeing Tour, explore the Google Earth with your Desktop, Web, or Mobil device by using this link: <http://www.google.com/earth/explore/products/>

Next, let's take a Tour of 3D Buildings below:

<http://www.google.com/earth/explore/showcase/3dbuildings.html#tab=baseball-stadiums>

Download Google Earth first to Explore the 3-D Building surrounds.

Now explore the Castles and Places:

<http://www.google.com/earth/explore/showcase/3dbuildings.html#tab=castles>

World Skyscrapers:

<http://www.google.com/earth/explore/showcase/3dbuildings.html#tab=skyscrapers>

Art Museums:

<http://www.google.com/earth/explore/showcase/3dbuildings.html#tab=art-museums>

Soccer Stadiums:

<http://www.google.com/earth/explore/showcase/3dbuildings.html#tab=soccer-stadiums>

As you visit each place think about:

1. What questions do you have?
2. Is this a place you may want to travel to one day? Why or Why not?
3. How far do you think this location is from where you live?
4. Can you build a model or draw a picture that represents something you noticed during your tour?

Put your story on the map.

Tour Builder: <https://tourbuilder.withgoogle.com/>

You can create your vacation stories using the Tour Builder. First "view a Tour." Then it's your turn to tell your story using narratives, photos, and a map.

Street Map: <https://www.google.com/maps/views/u/0/streetview?gl=us>

Let's grab a drink, move on, and take some sightseeing tours of the United States.

Make sure your go through the very short tutorial that will allow you to move around the locations you select and as you view the features of the landscape.

Map a Visit to a friend or family member: <https://www.google.com/maps/@34.0225578,-118.2828902,15z>

What about visiting the location of a relative or friend that lives in a different part of the United States, or even in another country? In the "Search" section at the top of your screen enter the

address of your relative including the city and state. If you do not know the address you can view the city and landscapes of your location. Use the “Explore this area” to visit the surrounds. What was interesting?

WHERE IN THE WORLD?



Somewhere in Google Earth is this interesting feature. Can you find it? *Be sure to click the image to the left for a larger view of this location* (<https://sites.google.com/site/sightseerwhereintheworld/>). When you think you've found it, post your answer [here](#).

Here are a few clues to lead you to the location:

- This building opened on August 3rd, 1997.
- It's located in the part of the world where the nights are drawing in.
- The capital city of the country where it is begins with "W."

Book Review

Elaine S. Wiener

Cheating, Dishonesty & Manipulation: Why Bright Kids Do It

Kate Maupin, M.A.

Great Potential Press, Inc.

Paperback, \$22.90, 306 pp.

ISBN 978-1-935067-29-0

Kate Maupin has woven together beautifully crafted words about a topic that is not easy to digest. Who wants to read about children who are so gifted that to amuse themselves they lie and cheat? Their parents don't want to know this. Their teachers do not want to know this. And the rest of society does not want to know about this chicanery, either!

But we had better start listening, and we had better understand WHY our most successful and blessed-with-high-ability children are behaving this way.

Kate Maupin has a gift for language and declares:

When we are made aware of their falsehoods, we are allowed a brief glimpse into the minds of these amazing children with intellects so UNDERUSED that they turn their brains into Rube Goldberg machines, prolonging simple activities into detailed machinations with the same basic, if pointless, result.

UNDERUSED? Listen to Ms. Maupin's words with opinions and research worthy of this whole book on the subject:

The cheating culture in the United States has risen to epic proportions...The numbers continue to rise as students age, suggesting that cheating behaviors become habitual and that students do not grow out of it.

Apparently this is a known phenomenon.

As early as 1939, [the famous] Leta Stetter Hollingworth, an educator and investigator into the lives of the 'self' of the young, gifted child, warned that many high-ability students hide their talents to avoid rejection or ridicule. The deception that they learn and practice is a result of the way they feel about how they are perceived. Hollingworth called for support for these students and for recognition of the so-called 'benign chicanery' that they were capable of as a way to cope with their giftedness.

Now that tells us WHY.

I know Leta Stetter Hollingworth's words. I read them, I studied them, and I took them with me throughout my career. But where did they go? Did I go on with my life and forget them? And here we are in 2015 with this same problem so entrenched that perhaps people don't even notice.

Think of the recent scandals on Wall Street. Were they accomplished by grown-ups who used to be our gifted students with UNDERUSED intellects?

Kate Maupin reminds us that *their reasons for cheating are varied and sometimes complicated, but they all seem to have one thing in common: the ability to create the most beautiful, intricate, and sometimes, seemingly pointless falsehoods and deceptions. They are the best deceivers in the world.*

The remainder of this book is composed of stories about students and a wonderful bibliography, which provides references for studies proving many points made through Maupin's words.

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Book Review

Elaine S. Wiener

Raising the Shy Child

Christine Fonseca

Prufrock Press Inc.

paperback, \$16.95, 223 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1-61821-398-3

Although this book was not written only for gifted children, shyness does apply to all, including adults. Christina Fonseca is a recognized author of gifted children, so her background covers a wide scope.

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is called a challenging beast by Dr. Fonseca. When I asked various people about their school experiences, I was shocked to learn how many suffered with SAD in their early years. It is hard to be young, it is hard to be gifted, and it is hard to be human. And so books are written to help. Thank goodness!

Because this is a Prufrock Press Inc. book, you can expect the usual format that is so wise and easy to follow. After pages that give the main ideas, there are worksheets, questionnaires, tip sheets, and Chalk talk for teachers. If you really want to solve a problem, just follow the yellow brick road. It's all here for you:

| | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| Part I | <i>When Shyness Becomes a Problem</i> |
| Part II | <i>Feeling Safe Inside Your Skin</i> |
| Part III | <i>Creating Safe Havens</i> |
| Part IV | <i>Social Anxiety</i> |

A warning: when reading this book, if your children are grown, you will feel guilty for not having been a more perfect parent. I once apologized to my child for this, and she answered that by apologizing I made her feel that what she became was not good enough. I learned that lesson and never did so again. Don't make that mistake yourself!

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