

The Association of Educators of Gifted, Talented and Creative Children in BC

"The Leading Edge"

Special points of interest:

- Retirement congratulations to UBC's Dr. Marion Porath
- New Teachers' Conference offers opportunity to learn more about giftedness
- Reviving the GCAs
- Parents as Partners
- Gifted Ed 2013 Conference presents Dr. Shelagh Gallagher and Problem-Based Learning

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A Message from Your President

Welcome to our new and renewed AE-GTCCBC members!

It has been another busy year for our organization. In the fall I was very fortunate to meet many of you at our annual Gifted Conference where Stephanie Tolan spoke about recognizing and supporting the social and emotional needs of gifted children. She also spent part of the day discussing strategies for reading and writing with gifted children. The presentation was

engaging and the feedback from our attendees very positive. Many thanks to all of you for your continued support!

This spring, our organization participated in the annual New Teacher's Conference where we displayed a variety of gifted materials and information about the gifted child. I was encouraged by the eagerness of the new teachers to learn more about giftedness and to improve their practices. Many spent the break time gathering as much infor-

mation as possible to take back to their classrooms. We truly have an inspired and talented group of professionals on the horizon..

On the Saturday of the conference I was fortunate to lead a presentation entitled *Meeting the Needs of the Gifted*. My goal was to assist new teachers in gaining a better understanding of the gifted child and provide them with classroom strategies and

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"Many thanks to all of you for your continued support!"

An Interview with Eminent Gifted Educator, Dr. Marion Porath

By Becca Ferguson

In June, Professor Marion Porath retires from the faculty of the Department of Educational Psychology, Counselling and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. Throughout her career, Marion has made valuable contributions to

the field of gifted education and has supervised and nurtured many Graduate students in the High Ability program of Special Education. As Marion retires, she has kindly agreed to share her thoughts and insights about education with us.

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An Interview with Marion Porath-continued from page 1:

Becca: *Marion, you have contributed so much to the field of Gifted Education. How did you get involved in Gifted Education?*

Marion: I became involved as a result of my elementary teaching experience. I taught at a time when it was common to have 35 students in a classroom. There were many different needs and I recognized that my brightest students weren't getting what they deserved. I took courses (EPSE 303 and 408!) while I was still a teacher and learned a lot about differentiating curriculum and offering challenging experiences. I wanted more, though, and eventually I pursued graduate work that combined gifted education and developmental psychology since, as a result of my teaching experience, I had many questions about the nature of cognitive development in gifted learners.

Becca: *Many educators are debating the meaning of giftedness in different social, cultural, and educational contexts. What do you feel the term 'gifted' means?*

Marion: I prefer to not use the term since it carries a lot of baggage and it implies an absolute construct that one either "has" or "doesn't have." It doesn't capture the complexity of advanced development; the variety of influences on exceptionally creative, deep thinking; or the many interesting pathways that comprise human development. So – what would I use instead? For some time, I've used "high ability." "Advanced development" is another term that I think captures the reality of learners' needs.

Becca: *You have interviewed*

gifted students, investigated mentorship models, studied highly gifted opera singers, and looked at a variety of facets of gifted education. How did you become involved with so many diverse projects?

Marion: I'm very curious! I also got involved with different projects as a result of interesting collaborations with colleagues. I think my interest in diverse projects reflects, at least in part, my elementary teaching roots. I know how students can demonstrate many ways of being intelligent and how they respond in different ways to opportunities and choice in learning.

Becca: *What advice would you want to give to students, educators, and parents about giftedness?*

Marion: My advice would be to:

- ◇ Understand how you/your child/students learn.
- ◇ Foster understanding of what it means to be a lawyer, astrophysicist, writer, etc. Think about and discuss the extent to which students understand themselves in these terms. Understand that career development can involve different paths and stages. Multiple careers are common and can be complementary.
- ◇ Think about the immense potential of human learning. Don't think about societal limits imposed by our age/grade-oriented system.
- ◇ Be curious about different ways of being intelligent and the ways in which other cultures view and foster intelligence.

- ◇ Be creative and flexible in thinking of ways to learn and challenge yourself.
- ◇ Learn about effective advocacy.
- ◇ Dream!

Becca: *What would be your dream project to work on?*

Marion: I'd love to create a Reggio Emilia-style classroom – a place that's aesthetically beautiful, honours all students' competence, and offers rich opportunities to expand and deepen thinking based on an integration of students' interests and questions with the curriculum. There would be no identification procedures or preselection; rather the emphasis would be on a community of learners that can accomplish great things together. I'd take an arts-based approach to documenting student learning (e.g., video; artistic representation; photography; and teacher, student, and parent narratives) and involve students in using arts-based methods to represent their identities as learners and the processes of learning.

Please join us in the fall for the second part of our interview and to read Marion's insights on personalized learning and optimal learning environments.



Reggio Schools - 'Open Window' photo

AEGTCCBC 2012

Conference Report:

Reading and Writing with Gifted Students and Supporting Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Learners

By Becca Ferguson

On October 19th, 2012 Stephanie Tolan, the keynote speaker at the AEGTCCBC Council's annual conference, eloquently shared insights into gifted education, imparted valuable wisdom, and shared strategies for working with gifted students. Stephanie is the Newbery Honor winning author of *Surviving the Applewhites* and she has also written over two-dozen novels for children and young adults. She co-authored *Guiding the Gifted Child* and created the well-known essay "Is it a Cheetah?" which has been translated into over 40 languages. As an advocate for gifted education and a senior fellow at the Institute for Educational Advancement, she was instrumental in the creation of Yunasa, a camp for highly gifted children that focuses on bringing holistic balance to young people's lives.

Stephanie explored many rich ideas and her witty and articulate conversation covered topics ranging from the social emotional needs of gifted students, the continuum and diversity of gifted individuals, and the nature of intelligence and learning itself. She invited the audience to participate in a nuanced investigation into the power that reading and writing have to transform ideas and open up pathways for gifted students to share their thoughts and get to know themselves as learners in order to explore the inner recesses of their imaginations.

The presentation commenced by highlighting how unique gifted students are, and Stephanie emphasized the idea that each gifted individual has their own constellation of unique abilities. She then explored the "Is it a Cheetah?" metaphor, which likens gifted students to being able to run quickly and freely like a cheetah when they are able to exercise their potential.

As educators, we must strive to create inspirational, open-ended, and personalized learning environments that allow the gifted "cheetah" to truly run free and be intellectually nourished.

According to the metaphor, sometimes school systems unwittingly restrict gifted students' desires to run and explore their passions and ideas. As educators, we must strive to create inspirational, open-ended, and personalized learning environments that allow the gifted "cheetah" to truly run free and be intellectually nourished.

Stephanie suggested that numerous gifted children may not at first glance appear to be cheetahs, but that they must be given the freedom, respect, and understanding to dwell in the realm of ideas, thoughts, and passions.

The "cheetah" metaphor was then connected to a larger discussion of finding an optimal fit for gifted students that addresses their unique spectrum of needs, characteristics, and learning styles. Stephanie delved into the idea of asynchronous development, in which giftedness is defined as the merging of heightened intensity and advanced cognition that then gives way to internal experiences and a level of awareness that differs from the norm (The Columbus Group, 1991). Given this broad definition, how



Stephanie Tolan and Coyote

can educators best address gifted students' social, emotional, and intellectual needs? To examine this multifaceted question, Stephanie shared an anecdote about a group of children who were playing a game of Giants, Wizards, and Dwarves. During the game, rather than conform to the rules, a student asked if she could be a mermaid instead. This illustrates the power of allowing gifted students to connect with themselves, discover who they truly are, and develop a level of comfort with what they need in order to be nourished intellectually, socially, and emotionally. This will then enable them to break out of the mold of what they "ought" to be and embrace their own inner mermaids.

Stephanie also discussed the ability of Imagination to open up pathways for thinking about the surrounding world. Pursuing imaginative play as a conduit to social-emotional and intellectual health is key and "in an era of standardized testing the crevices in which *any* child's imagination can survive, let alone develop and flourish, have been boarded up, lost to sight under stacks of facts, piles of figures, lists of correct answers" (Tolan, 2012).

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Where have all the Gifted Children's Association Chapters gone? By Marcia Garries

GCAs can wax and wane. Depending on the terms of reference or the agendas on the table at a particular point in time the focus of GCAs may be very personal or very broad. However, and I would like to emphasize this point, parents as advocates do make a difference!

This fall I was approached by the District Parent Advisory Council to do a presentation to the parents in our district on Gifted and Twice Exceptional. In an 'abridged version' of this very important topic, I looked at profiles, myths and misperceptions. To allow for an interactive workshop in which the participants would have time to talk about the material and to dialogue with a variety of people, I requested that the participant list be limited to 100 parents.

Lo and behold on the night of the event over 150 parents arrived, some sitting on the floor, some on the window jams, but all very interested in learning more...about their children of course...but perhaps something of themselves as well. Lively conversations, questions and concerns surfaced very quickly. It was evident that there was a thirst to gain a greater understanding of their children and learn about how they may be supported in the school system. I knew I couldn't cover that in an hour and a half!

At the end of the presentation I gave a brief history of the support in the community and across school districts and how interested parents could become involved. After the presentation ended I was approached by a very keen group that offered meet to discuss how we

could move forward with refreshing the North Shore GCA.

I was thrilled to be amongst such energy and enthusiasm. And so, that is what we are doing; moving slowly, looking at ways we can build a systemic, thoughtful, and vibrant community of adults and children. We are looking at ways we can be pro-active and supportive for this exceptional group of learners.

By Marcia Garries

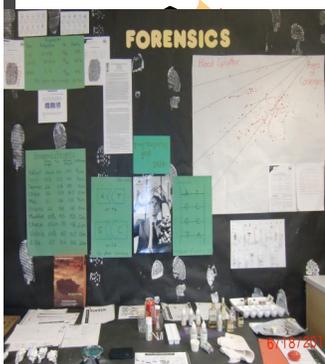
Marcia is District Administrator, Learning Services, North Vancouver School District #44. She is longtime member of the Lower Mainland Gifted Contacts Group and a perpetual advocate and supporter of gifted students.

GCABC
Gifted Children's Association of B.C.



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Forensics focuses on the distinction between evidence and inference – and there is no one solution.

It provides a mix of science, deductive logic, creative and critical thinking, group interaction and mystery –



Teaching Forensics Mystifies, Engages and Challenges By Nancy Greenall

In recent years Forensics has become a popular area of interest for both teachers and students. It provides a good mix of science, problem solving, creative thinking, group interaction, out-of-the-box thinking and mystery – a perfect combination for engaging students!

Fingerprinting is interesting for students as they identify their own prints as arch, whorl or loop and compare their class results to population norms.

Moving to footprints, students love painting the bottoms of their shoes white and walking across the black paper. They analyze and match shoeprints before calculating a suspect's projected height as 6 times their footprint length. Check out that formula and see how accurate it is!

Students can have great fun with written evidence, analyzing handwriting styles and using pen chromatology to determine who is guilty of writing the ransom note.

The old *Mystery Powders* unit is great for doing chemical analysis. Max Haines' *An Evening of Murder* party games can be easily modified:

students dress as the mystery characters. The game *Clue* also can be played.

Neo Sci's *Detective's Casebook Lab Kit* includes simulated urine analysis to determine the presence of poison, and simulated blood for blood typing. Depending on the age and sensitivity of the group students, we look at blood splatter and use math to determine the angle of impact and calculate the area of convergence. A mixture of corn syrup and liquid tempera paint make a realistic consistency of blood for these experiments.

DNA is a big topic as well. Students learn the basics of DNA pairs then create tasty models of DNA with colour-coded mini marshmallows on four toothpicks. These are then stuck into two licorice strands and twisted. Students compare and see that even with only four pairs, the DNA they made is unique.

Mystery murder puzzles are always a favorite and force students to think out-of-the-box and sharpen their questioning skills.

As a wind-up activity, I use the *Mystery Festival Teacher's Guide* from GEMS Kit. Here a crime scene has been drawn out including the outline of a body surrounded by evidence to be examined (e.g. "poisoned" pop). The activity includes fingerprint lifting (using crazy glue in a Ziplock bag) hair and fabric, scent, shoeprints, handwriting analysis (with Silly Putty and a mirror) and more. It focuses on the distinction between evidence and inference – and there is no solution. It could be carried further into holding a mock trial...

Mystery Festival Teacher's Guide is a great resource and the students love the activity. The book is somewhat more complicated than it needs to be, but is a great resource as a culminating activity for the Forensic unit.

Nancy Greenall teaches gifted students at the Mundy Road Challenge Centre in the Coquitlam School District. We are grateful that she has shared this exciting unit with us.

**ASSOCIATION OF
EDUCATORS OF
GIFTED, TALENTED
AND CREATIVE
CHILDREN IN B.C**

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differentiation tools for their journey. It was wonderful how truly engaged and open the participants were. The discussions were remarkable and the feedback from the large group was encouraging. It is my hope that the new teachers left with a better understanding of the needs of the gifted and some practical tools and strategies to use in their classrooms.

Looking ahead to the fall, we will again be hosting our annual conference. We are excited to have Shelagh Gallagher, a nationally recognized expert in gifted education, presenting on the topic of Problem Based Learning. Shelagh is the recipient of the National Association of Gifted Children award and a four-time winner of the NAGC Curriculum Division award for exemplary curriculum.

I look forward to seeing all of you again at the conference. To register please visit our AEGTCCBC homepage at:

<http://www.aegtccbc.ca/>

Shera Niewenhuizen
President of the AEGTCCBC
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AEGTCCBC 2012 Conference Report

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Embracing imagination can guide children into a world based on Stephanie's three magic words: flexibility, individualization, and willingness.

The afternoon culminated in a discussion of children's literature and writing. Stephanie shared writing techniques to help gifted students become attuned to their thoughts and enable them to craft pieces in a free, exploratory manner and follow the whims of their pens. She discussed books that inspire critical thinking to give gifted students the rich intellectual sustenance they need. It is important to find literature that stimulates ideas and matches students' advanced cognitive levels, but is developmentally and emotionally appropriate. Finding this literary equilibrium can be challenging, but Stephanie suggested thought-provoking material for a variety of ages on issues of bullying, dystopia, thinking differently, and making friends.

After a day of motivational ideas and rich discussion, one quote from an Osho Zen Master that resonated with me was: "You are not accidental. Existence needs you. Without you something will be missing in existence and nobody can replace it." This empowering statement is something I want to pass on to my students, so that they can harness their inner power and realize that they each bring something special to existence.

Becca Ferguson is a District Gifted Resource Teacher in School District 45, West Vancouver.