

International Perspectives on Gifted Education: Experiences in USA and Asia

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These notes provide a summary of the presentation made on August 6th 2008

For a little more than 3 weeks in May and June this year I was able to immerse myself in the education of gifted children in the USA, attending the Wallace International Research Symposium in Iowa, visiting the Centre for Talent Development at Northwestern University at Evanston IL and schools for the gifted in 3 states. I was then also able to join the teams from Australia competing at the Future Problem Solving Program International Competition in Michigan where they matched their skills with teams from around the USA and countries in the Asia Pacific region. Just a few weeks later I also attended the Asia Pacific Conference on Giftedness in Singapore.

Schools for the Gifted

I organised to visit 3 schools for gifted children and was made extremely welcome at each of them.

- Independent schools are not bound by the regulations of public schools.
- Allows for flexibility
- They receive no government funding, relying on tuition fees and fund raising for funds

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation in the USA has been shown to have had *negative* effects for gifted students. Independent not required to undergo the testing program of public schools so can avoid this issue.

There were a number of common threads that ran through these 3 very different schools

- No uniforms
- First name terms
- Responsibility for learning is shared
- All the schools were selective although the methods differed.
- The most outstanding positive was the self confidence and maturity of the young people I saw. They were clearly in an environment where their individuality was celebrated and they appeared to be flourishing.

Nueva School, California

Several particular features including environmental awareness, the Innovation Lab, a social and emotional curriculum from K to 8th grade.

- 360 students
- Kindergarten to 8th Grade about 5 – 14 yrs old
- Students go on to a range of High Schools in the Bay Area
- Grounds cover 33 acres, part of which is uncleared forest
- The forest forms part of the play area for the children where they are free to build cubbies, make installation art, observe and explore nature.....
- The original school was in the Mansion House, the Ballroom was the assembly area. Junior school still uses these facilities
- Separate buildings were added for the Middle School

A **Green Building program** was implemented for the latest buildings.

- Timber used is from trees removed from the building site
- The Library and Canteen area have a green living roof
- Roof of Admin area and classrooms house a photovoltaic array
- Water run off is caught and recycled
- All the building materials were selected with sustainability in mind.
- The Innovation Lab includes a real time tracking system for water and electricity usage in the school which provides for direct student involvement in resource management

The Innovation Lab

- Established in conjunction with the D-School (School of Design) at Stanford University.
- Used by students from K – 8
- Comprehensive scope and sequence for *design thinking* with a focus on creative thinking and problem solving.
- Planned scope and sequence for introduction of the *elements of decision making skills*.
- Director of the Innovations Lab has a degree in Electrical Engineering. She is currently the Kindergarten teacher

Social and Emotional Curriculum

- A formal Social and Emotional curriculum runs alongside other more traditional subject areas
- Lessons are weekly for Lower School and twice a week for Middle school
- Lessons taken by a counsellor/psychologist on staff
- Focus on emotional literacy skills
- Cover a wide range of issues appropriate to different stages of development
- Respect and confidentiality clearly evident

Class sizes and enrolments

- 20 or less students per class, 2 classes at each grade K – 4, 3 for Gr 5 - 8
- Need to have an IQ test to apply for a place
- 4 students meet the criteria *for each place available*
- Qualifying children are then invited to attend for a 'visit'
- Selection is made by a panel of 6 staff members who observe children during the visit
- Places offered to those who appear to be the best fit for the style of learning in the school.
- Most children start in Pre-K or K and few places become available until Middle School (Grade 5) where another 10 students are added.

Fees

- 2008 - 2009 fees not yet up on the website. Places for K were approx \$12000 per year
- 20% of the students receive some fee relief
- \$700,000 given in financial aid each year to students from K – 8

For more information about Nueva School visit their website www.nuevaschool.org

Quest Academy, Illinois

- K – 8th Grade
- Buildings are an old Public Library
- A gymnasium has been added with music and art studios above it
- No grounds, just a play area for the K outside
- Classroom environment is informal
- Integrated curriculum in Middle School – English/S&E is taught by one teacher with another for Maths/Science
- Many of the students go on to selective High schools, including the Science and Arts Academy

Curriculum

- 1st Grade was studying Australia and were excited to have real Australian visitor and asked lots of questions.
- 5th Graders were studying The Civil War had a log cabin in their classroom
- 7th Graders were preparing for a History Fair with a focus on Civil Rights
- Focus on individuality, creativity and the personal qualities needed for a Quest
- IQ test required as part of the selection process
- The Curriculum guide for the school can be viewed on their website

I was at the school on the day of the final rehearsals for the Spring Concert with a number of choirs, one of which was to compete in Hawaii over the summer break.

More information about Quest Academy can be found on their website at www.questacademy.org

The Roeper School, Michigan

“We seek to educate our students to live in the world as it should be, rather than as it is.”
George Roeper

This unique school was founded in 1941 by George and Annemarie Roeper. Annemarie’s family had fled Austria in the war and the original philosophy of the school is still strongly maintained. Annemarie who now lives in California, turns 90 in August 2008 and still visits the school regularly.

- 2 campuses with 630 students
- Pre K, and Stages I, II and III on original site
- Middle School and High School a few km away
- Most families remain Pre K – 12
- Qualitative Assessment method is used for selection
- IQ testing is conducted later (not before 7 years)

Uniquely Roeper

Lower School

- Each classroom has 2 trained teachers
- Each stage has 4 multi-age classes
- Personalised curriculum
- Choice – students choose within boundaries from Stage 1
- Teachers work with 4 students at a time in core areas
- Specialists for science, humanities, music, art, computing, French, library/literature, maths, PE/dance/movement

Middle and High School

- Students may have completed the requirements for High School by the end of 10th grade but need more hours and take classes for interest
- Approach learning from the emotional side to ensure they are the best version of themselves they can be
- Class size in MS and HS is 15 – 18. The rooms don't have 20 chairs.....
- Behaviour guidelines and expectations are for EVERYONE not just the students

More information about the Roeper School and its unique philosophy can be found at www.roeper.org

The Wallace Symposium

- Biannual Research Symposium held at the Belin Blank Centre at the University of Iowa.
- Latest in research and pedagogy
- Delegates from 52 countries
- EVERYONE is there to learn from the students through to the respected researchers whose work we read
- 50 Templeton International Fellows also attending this year for the first time.

Sessions and speakers of note this year

- James Gallagher
- Donna Ford
- Joyce Van Tassel-Baska
- Gagne's DMGT 2.0 – this was the first presentation of his latest version of DMGT
- Poster presentations to sample from many
- Update on the impact of A Nation Deceived

Each year speakers from outside of gifted education are invited to present. This year

- Economist: Tough Choices or Tough Future
- Neuroscientist: How the creative brain works

Comments to ponder

- Passion is the most powerful form of motivation. What we need (in our children and those making decisions) is glowing passion - the coals, not just the fire and flame
- Accessibility of opportunities for gifted children is different to availability of opportunities.....
- “Only the curious will learn and only the resolute will overcome the obstacles to learning. The quest quotient has always excited me more than the intelligence quotient.” (Eugene Wilson)
- The future belongs to the creative

The next Wallace International Research Symposium will be held in May 2010. Check the website closer to the date for more details <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/>

Centre for Talent Development, Northwestern University, Evanston Illinois

- Established 25 years ago
- Offers a wide range of programs and services for families, gifted children and teachers
- Saturday Enrichment Programs, 3 locations for students from K – 9th

- Gifted Learning Links, distance learning courses for students from Year 3 – 12 from USA and around the world (our students can access these courses)
- Civic Leadership Institute for high school students during the summer and week long service learning field study programs
- Academic Talent Search opportunities
- Conferences
- Summer programs
- Resources

Future Problem Solving International Competition, Michigan State University, East Lansing

This competition is HUGE with over 2000 students competing. A number of different threads ran through the 4 competition

- Competitive booklets
- Community Problem Solving
- Alternate comp
- Adult comp
- Scenario writing
- Action plan skit competition

Other events of note included the memento exchange and Variety Night where the range and depth of talent was amazing.

A number of teams from Australia did very well including 1 team from Penrhos College who were placed 10th in their division and were also finalists in the Action Plan Skit Competition.

Further details about the places I visited in the USA along with photographs from each of the schools can be found at http://www.thinkingahead.com.au/gifted_usa_2008.htm

Asia Pacific Conference on Giftedness, Singapore.

1650 delegates attended this conference with the added challenge of English being an additional language for many people.

Speakers of note from around the world presented included

- Robert Sternberg
- Kishore Muhbabani
- Gagne
- John Geake
- Kirri Tirsi
- Joyce Van Tassel-Baska

Things to ponder

- Different cultural perspectives
- Different conceptions of giftedness
- Cultural impacts on talent development

Australia was successful in their bid to hold the next Asia Pacific Conference which will be held in Sydney in July/August 2010.