

Through Another's Eyes

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Engaging Students in Interdisciplinary Curricula

Curricula, whether presented in public schools, private schools, home schools, enrichment programs, after-school programs, classes for the gifted, or the regular classroom, must withstand the scrutiny of the community, parents, teachers, and, yes, even the students. Curricula that are not interesting have the potential to consume precious learning time and sap the energy and motivation of students.

Gifted students seem particularly sensitive to this quandary, as they must immediately be engaged in a dynamic curriculum. The teacher must ask, "Is this topic or theme interesting to the students, and does it have possible implications for their future?" If the answer is no, then we must question why we teach what we teach.

Interdisciplinary curricula open the world to students as they study the methods of disciplines or professions. For example, in the study of chemistry, knowledge and skills of the discipline are in line with the processes chemists use in their laboratories. In another instance, students interested in the law profession should have the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills of lawyers within the context of the courtroom. Involving community members and parents in the study of the discipline or profession strengthens the enthusiasm and motivation of students as they explore their interests.

As a response to student interest, in 2001, the Center for Community Learning and Enrichment at Baylor University in Waco, TX, collaborated with the Waco-McLennan County Young Lawyers Association to write a grant offering a special session at the enrichment program known as Super Saturday. The purpose of the grant was to provide funds for a Super Saturday session for career awareness of the law profession in an interactive, hands-on way for approximately 20

underprivileged gifted and talented students and their parents. The L.A.W.Y.E.R. (Local Attorneys and Waco Youth Enrichment Roundup) Super Saturday session funded by the Texas Young Lawyers Association was held in March of 2001.

The members of the Waco-McLennan County chapter, along with the center's director, designed the curriculum and coordinated the activities for the day. The session included a mock trial, career exploration on the Internet, lunch on the Baylor campus, and information dissemination sessions for parents. The mock trial was held in one of the practice courtrooms located in the Baylor School of Law. The students and their parents learned about court proceedings, court personnel, and the difference in civil and criminal cases through morning workshops conducted by community lawyers. Lunch provided a casual way for students and parents to interact with the lawyers.

Internet career exploration, led by a doctoral graduate student in the Baylor School of Education, provided many facts and interesting cases for the students to explore through the use of a WebQuest developed in collaboration between one of the lawyers and the graduate student. The WebQuests allowed students to discover information about the law profession by working from a teacher-made Web page that linked to several professional sites on the Internet. The Web page consisted of questions that could only be answered by the students

visiting the various professional sites. A word puzzle, when solved correctly, informed the students if their answers were right or not.

One of the objectives of L.A.W.Y.E.R. Super Saturday was to provide awareness of the legal services available to parents through the Waco-McLennan County Young Lawyers Association. Therefore, while the students solved their WebQuests, the lawyers devoted part of the afternoon to interactive sessions with parents addressing various legal topics. At the end of the day, the students and parents gathered in the courtroom to witness both a civil and a criminal trial where the students took on the roles of judge, jury, prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, plaintiff, and defendant.

In the civil case, the plaintiff, Humpty Dumpty, sued the manufacturer of the wall from which he fell, claiming the manufacturer used faulty material in the construction, which resulted in his severely injuring himself. The witnesses, all the King's men, were called to the witness stand one by one. Each told his perception of what happened that day as the jury intently listened. After much deliberation, the jury ruled in favor of defendant, Humpty Dumpty. The wall manufacturer was ordered to pay for Humpty's medical bills and the reconstruction of the wall.

In the criminal case, the prosecuting attorney brought charges against Jack, of beanstalk fame, for killing the Giant Ogre by taunting and luring him down the beanstalk, which caused him to fall to his death. Witnesses such as the Hen, the Harp, and the Ogre's wife testified in the trial. The defense attorney was able to build an incredible case as the jury found the defendant, Jack, not guilty for the Giant Ogre's death.

The day the students and their parents spent with local lawyers was billed a success. Student interest, along with the basic knowledge and skills it takes to be a

lawyer, made for an exciting and rewarding experience. One student said, "When I grow up, I want to be a lawyer. The reason is because I would like to help people who did not commit the crime. I would also help people who are in jail to get out if they didn't do anything wrong, and I would help the judges not put people in jail." When students can articulate their professional goals and state specific reasons why they want to achieve them,

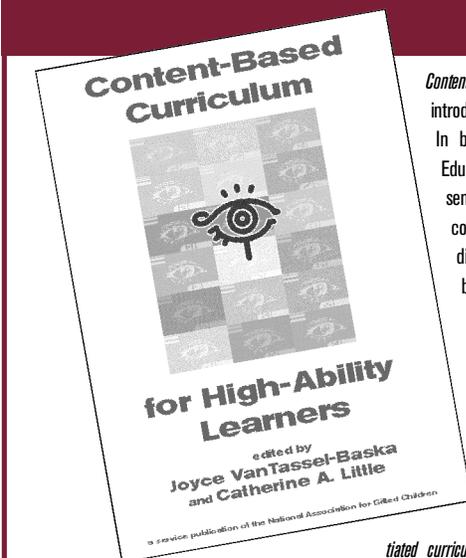
learning has taken place. Furthermore, the visions are painted in the students' minds. That is half the battle to making visions into goals and goals into reality.

Parent support and partnerships with businesses and professionals can assist the teacher in building interdisciplinary curricula that provide vital information to all students and support their interests, talents, and future professions.

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Content-Based Curriculum for High-Ability Learners

edited by **Joyce VanTassel-Baska** and **Catherine A. Little**



Content-Based Curriculum for High-Ability Learners provides a solid introduction to the issues surrounding curriculum development. In bringing together experts from the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary, this text presents cutting-edge design techniques and aligns the core content with national and state standards. The text is divided into three sections. The first section identifies the basic principles of curriculum development: accelerated learning within the core content areas, use of higher order process skills, development of creative student products, and concept development and learning. The second section incorporates these techniques into a chapter on each core content area: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Chapters are beneficial for both content-area-specific teachers and for general education teachers, as key concepts, such as *differentiated curriculum*, *grouping practices*, *acceleration*, and *assessment*, are

woven throughout the text. In addition, each chapter on a core content area provides concrete examples from the William and Mary units. Section three focuses on the roles of teachers, program coordinators, and administrators during curriculum design: selecting resources and materials, making appropriate instructional choices, and assessing student learning. The final section also offers suggestions for aligning curricula with content standards, identifies exemplary programs, and encourages educators to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their curricula



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