

## Equity Summit on Gifted Education



Welcome to our first Equity Summit on Gifted Education. I am thrilled to be here today, and especially thankful for the support that I have received from President Cauce, who has generously provided funding to support this Equity event, Dean Tuan from the College of Education who matched the university funding, and Dean Taylor, Vice Provost, and Dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, who oversees and supports all of the work that we do at the Robinson Center for Young Scholars. In particular, I have had many conversations with Dean Taylor who has helped me to articulate the premises for this conference and the relationship between gifted education and equity.

This summit has been a collaborative effort with colleagues from the College of Education, Seattle Public Schools, Whitworth University, Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. I am grateful to them for their time, creativity, and investment in putting ideas into action. I am also indebted my guest speakers and partners who have agreed to contribute to this endeavor from its inception of an idea – they have travelled across the country, generously giving us their time (without honorarium) to be with us – because they are deeply committed to the issues that we will discuss in the

next day and half.

So what is a Summit on Gifted Education? A **summit** is most often used when heads of state come together – it refers to people of the highest level of authority raising the level of importance to the topic. The title of this one and half day meeting was given in that vein –The focus of this Summit is of the highest importance; gifted education across the United States highlights the systemic advantages that white and higher income students have to advanced and accelerated learning. Students in gifted programs are usually in racially identifiable classes, examples of some of the most segregated classes in schools. It is not a surprise then that our institutions of higher education also mirror what we find in gifted education. Many more white children or children from higher income families are taking AP courses, completing more advanced math courses, taking SATs, and accessing more elite universities. We must look at the issue of disproportionality holistically throughout the educational system to address our problems in gifted education.

This Summit has brought together leaders not only in the field of gifted education, but those who have knowledge, expertise and perspectives of marginalized groups– to discuss equity more broadly. We are not here just to talk about how we change the identification process to allow more diverse students into gifted programs. That has been our traditional way of focusing on this problem. We have been focusing on only one solution for the last 20 years – to change the identification process. If we use a lower cut-off score, if we use a different measurement tool, if we use a tiered system of giftedness: We may have been seeking **right answers to the wrong questions**.



Today we are here to ask some different questions that are broader than just how to diversify America's and the state of Washington's Highly Capable Programs. That can't be the right question because our programs are still some of the most segregated power structures in schools. We must start asking different questions. We are asking broader, more problematic, and more complex questions – about access and barriers to advanced learning opportunities, about how we identify children who need ADVANCED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES – and therefore, because they need accelerated, enriched or advanced learning, qualify for highly capable services.

How do we define gifted education? Most students who have reached the level of a Research 1 Institution have had some form of advanced learning – honors classes, advanced mathematics, AP classes, enrichment in summer programs, school organizations that focus on leadership, or family experiences that have given them educational advantages. Students who come to kindergarten reading at the second or even fourth grade level – are advanced, and do need advanced curriculum and instruction. But they are coming to the kindergarten environment with educational

and academic advantages that are more about their race and income than it is about their abilities.

## Same Opportunities to Maximize Potential?



Look at these two children on the slide. The white 2 ½ pound baby is mine. I don't know the other child. Do you believe both of these children have the same opportunities to excel in an academic environment, pursue STEM careers at competitive universities and earn equal wages? I can tell you that after my son took the SAT he came home ecstatic because one of the reading comprehension paragraphs was about CERN – the physics accelerator in Geneva, Switzerland. We lived in Switzerland when he was four years old because my husband is an experimental physicist. My son could connect the reading with his prior knowledge. His experiences gave him an educational advantage – and this is just one example of how prior experiences impact future opportunities.



As educators, it is essential to design rich and meaningful curriculum and instruction that allows children to connect new learning to their prior experiences. For years, I have studied pedagogies: the pedagogy of the oppressed, critical pedagogies, the Pedagogy of Listening from the Schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, and most recently the *Pedagogy of Confidence* articulated by Yvette Jackson.

In her book entitled *The Pedagogy of Confidence*, she cited a fundamental question from Asa Hilliard, “With all good intentions and stipulations, why is there still not a systematic practice or pedagogy aimed at developing high intellectual performance in all students instead of instilling marginalizing practices for students of color, especially those in urban areas?” (pg 30). Jackson articulated what she described in classrooms that she toured in urban settings as pedagogy reflective of Friere’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

- Controlled instructional guidelines causing a downward shift to extended literacy blocks, where teaching is restricted to basal series;
- Controlled pacing guides with alignment neither to the students’ strengths or interests, nor to the actual assessments that were supposed to determine their needs;

- Eradication of exposure to the arts or to information outside basal readers or outdated texts that could expand students' frame of reference, thus curtailing their ability to infer meaning about topics that remain foreign to them; and
- Exclusion of enrichment options or credentialing courses that could increase opportunities for students. The additional heinous reality is that lessons taught that reflect the instructional guidelines or pacing guides rarely focus on the cognitive skills required by the standards (evaluation, analysis, problem solving), thus ***inhibiting students from meeting these standards and decreasing their rate of learning.***

Jackson's Pedagogy of Confidence is modeled after Gifted Education. She said, "What I discovered was that at the very same time that policies mandating a focus on weaknesses were proliferating for students labeled as "disadvantaged," other policies were being enacted for students who were labeled "gifted" that entitled them to a pedagogy that would identify and nurture their strengths." (p. 23)

She took these four pillars of gifted education and incorporated them into her model:

- Identifying and activating student strengths
- Eliciting high intellectual performance
- Providing enrichment
- Integrating prerequisites

The pedagogy of gifted education develops students' interests, passions, pushes them to excel and achieve with creative, critical, and analytical thinking. The pedagogy of gifted education focuses on challenge – and teachers in the field of gifted education are taught specific strategies on how to challenge their students – strategies that also work well within the general curriculum. Research has shown that all students may benefit from some of the same curriculum and instruction used in gifted education.

Jackson's work demonstrates that instruction matters, teacher beliefs matter, empowering students to engage in their own learning matters ----

Breaking down barriers so that more students have access to intellectually engaging, and advanced learning means making systemic and structural changes to our learning environments. These changes involve families, school boards, institutions of higher education, social services, and more. That is why this Equity Summit on Gifted Education must examine all issues associated with inequities and look at structural changes that impact all of gifted education – which I **define as enrichment, accelerated or advanced learning opportunities.**



## **What is Gifted Education?**

- **Enrichment, accelerated, and advanced Learning**
- **Pedagogy of strength and interest-based instruction**
- **Inquiry, creative expression, problem solving**

This is not just a conference where we sit passively and listen, and then go away and do nothing. In these one and half packed days, we will be putting our heads together – engaging in listening and discussion, sharing our own perspectives, asking questions, and generating possibilities --- possibilities for pathways that have yet been uncharted, or changes in systems that need small tweaks or major renovations to bring the pedagogy of gifted education – the pedagogy of challenge, the pedagogy of strength and interest-based instruction to facilitate maximum growth in all children.

***History can be changed, and is changed by taking possession of it, starting with the destiny of the children.***



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Lois Malaguzzi – beginning of the “People’s Nursery School,” Villa Cella, the first Reggio Emilia.

Hundred Languages of Children, Third Edition, Edwards, Gandina, & Foreman, 2012, p. 28).

## Table Discussions and Engagement

- Choose a recorder – write ideas on the discussion templates.
- Choose a facilitator – see the facilitator guide in the packet. Make sure all voices are heard.
- Leave the discussion sheet in the folders.
- Write down additional questions on color coded 3 X 5 cards – match the cards with the color discussion sheet so we know which session the questions come from. Tape your card on the chart paper so others can see your questions.

## Washington State Definition

- Highly capable students are students who **perform or show potential** for performing at significantly advanced academic levels when compared with others of their age, experiences, or environments. Outstanding abilities are seen within students' general intellectual aptitudes, specific academic abilities, and/or creative productivities within a specific domain.

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