

ABC PEEL NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: GINA HEISZ

Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board:

One thing ABC Peel needs to improve on is our contact and support for students in the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board. I have to admit that I know very little about the services they provide for gifted children. I would like to know more! If you do have children in the DPCDSB, or if you know any families with bright or gifted children in that board, please pass on our contact information to them.

I have been reading a lot about budget problems in the board, and I am very curious about how the problems might impact on gifted education.

So, let us know what your concerns are. Tell us how the programs offered meet the needs of your bright and gifted children. Are you familiar with the identification procedures? What support is offered to young gifted children before the congregated classes start? If your child turns down a placement in a congregated class, what services are offered in the regular class? Most importantly though, tell us what ABC Peel can do for you!

BOARD UPDATES:

On January 29, 2007 the Peel Board held a full-day Professional Development for all enhanced learning teachers from grades 1 through 8 and SERTs (special education resource teachers). It was coordinated by Joan Dinnin (Spec.Ed. Co-Ordinator). Two representatives from ABC Peel were in attendance including myself (Lori D'Aquila), and Gina Heisz. We attended the morning session that was facilitated by representatives from the field offices. They were: Stefanie De Angelis, Jan Crofoot and Sharman Howes. The morning session theme was mathematics, with an IEP session in the afternoon.

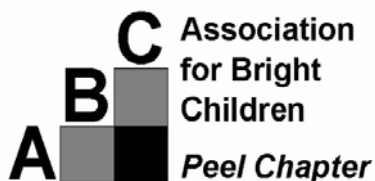
There were approximately 36 in attendance and we worked in groups of six or so. The first task was "Who's on The Bus?" where we were asked to write down all of the characteristics that gifted children bring to a math class. Among those listed were: curious, intense, motivated, wants the answer, wants the formula, and impatient, and many, many more.

The next session involved diagnostics. We worked in groups to discuss the math term 'perimeter'. We used mind maps, frayer models, visual word associations and placemats. Each group had to discuss their thought process and explain it to the rest of the room. We tried to link it to the generalized mathematics achievement charts for grades 1 to 8 that we were given.

We then did a hands-on problem solving game called "the handshake problem." We were given different types of manipulatives and were told to use as many as possible to come up with the correct answer. We had to write down all of the different ways we came up with the correct answer, and again, present the process to the group for feedback.

The last part of the morning session involved a discussion of the different math contests, resources and books available to teachers and parents in Peel. The CHAMP contest was discussed along with the Math Olympics and the GAUSS competition for grades 7 and 8. Here is a list of books that should be in your child's school that are available to parents: RADICAL MATH, MATH AT HAND, MATH ON CALL, GET IT TOGETHER, and the Marilyn Burns RESOURCE BOOK for K to grade 8. Another resource is the CD "THE SUPER SOURCE" which should be available in each school. There is also a DATA FAIR on February 20, 2007 from noon till 3pm at Central Peel S.S. in Brampton.

In all it was a very informative morning and it is great to see the enthusiasm from the teachers getting together to network ideas and share and learn from each other. Thanks to Shirley-Ann Teal our Superintendent of Special Education for organizing the day and realizing that Professional Development for teachers of the gifted is very important.



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PARENTS' NIGHT THIS MONTH:

This month our parents' night will be held on February 22, 2007. Our topic will be "**The Cognitive Science and Artificial Intelligence Program at the University of Toronto.**" There will also be a demonstration of Lego Mindstorms which is used in the 3rd year course entitled, "Exploring Artificial Intelligence Models and Programs." The meeting will be held in the Mississauga room which is on the lower level of the Peel board offices. Please join us at 7:15pm for coffee and the talk will begin at 7:30 pm. Children in grades 7 and up are welcome.

You may ask, "What is cognitive science?" Here is an explanation from the U of T website:

Cognitive Science is the interdisciplinary study of the mind. Philosophers have wondered about the nature of consciousness; psychologists have studied how we perceive the environment and organize our behavior in it; linguists have examined how language empowers human communication; computer scientists have built programs and robots that aim at human-level performance; neuroscientists have wrestled with the immense complexity of the brain; and anthropologists have traced the origins of human cognition millions of years into the past.

Cognitive Science is born from the realization that the human mind is so complex and mysterious that we need to co-ordinate the efforts of every one of these disciplines, if we are going to make significant progress in understanding the marvel that is the human mind.

Please tell your friends about this amazing evening with Professor John Vervaeke and 4th year student Najam Tirmizi. There is no cost and you do not have to be a member to attend.

LAST MONTH'S PARENT NIGHT:

On January 25, 2007 our Parents' Night topic was "Why Choose Regional Gifted at the Secondary Level?" We had an amazing turnout with approximately 100 people.

Our speaker was Lois McGinn from Glenforest Secondary, and along with gifted co-ordinator Monika Quinn from the Woodlands School they gave a very enthusiastic presentation about the gifted programs available at the two Mississauga high schools.

They explained what each of the programs can provide at these schools and showed a video made by the students in the gifted program at Glenforest Secondary. There was also a powerpoint presentation which helped parents understand the choices available, and also gave some valuable information about the IB program at Glenforest.

GOOD NEWS:

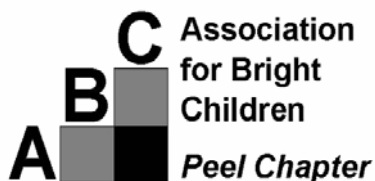
This will be a new section of our newsletter where we announce all of the great achievements of our members' children. If you know of a child who has done something special, please email us at abcpeelnews@hotmail.com with a small paragraph about the child's accomplishment and we will try to publish one article per month in this section.

ABC PEEL chapter would like to congratulate Jason D'Aquila, a recent graduate of the Regional Enhanced Program at Heart Lake Secondary, on receiving a \$20,000 entrance scholarship from the University of Toronto. Jason, aged 16, began high school at age 10 when he took grade 10 enhanced mathematics at the local high school, which also had a gifted program. After being accelerated one grade in 1999, he was accelerated another grade in 2003 and became a full-time student in high school at the age of 12. Jason graduated from the Regional Enhanced Program in June 2006 with a 93.5% average.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

MIND MAPS were developed in the late 1960's by Tony Buzan as a way to help students make notes that used only key words and images.

THE FRAYER MODEL is an adaption of the concept map.



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BOOK REVIEW: GENIUS DENIED **How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Minds**

Book by Jan and Bob Davidson with Laura Vanderkam
ISBN #0-7432-5461-9 Published 2004, Simon and Shuster

(Editors' Notes: Excellent and thought provoking. An additional article will follow in a subsequent newsletter).

About the Author(s): Jan and Bob Davidson are the founders of the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, which provides financial and other assistance to gifted children. They live in Incline Village, Nevada. Prior to entering the world of Philanthropy they owned Davidson Software, an educational software company. Laura Vanderkam is a freelance writer and contributing editor at Reader's Digest. As well, she is a member of USA Today's Board of contributors. She lives in New York City.

"With all the talk of failing schools these days, we often forget that schools can fail their brightest students too. Gifted children forced into a "one size fits all" approach to schooling find themselves bored or frustrated, which can lead to underachievement, behaviour problems, or depression. Without sufficient challenges and resources, say Jan and Bob Davidson, America's brightest young minds languish, never reaching their full potential. Society can't afford that loss".

The Davidson's founded their non-profit organization in 1999 to help American's brightest children get the education they need. They often receive e-mail from parents describing their children. While they often 'smile' at these stories, sadly not all the stories that are shared with them make them smile. In fact, most of the stories they are told, tell them how "schools and communities are neglecting these highly intelligent children".

These children are kept with their age-mates, and often do not receive work that challenges them. Often they are told they will just have to learn to work at the same pace as everyone else. Talk about de-motivation !!!

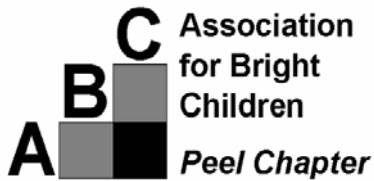
Whether schools and communities choose to squelch or nurture their intelligent young people, and what happens when they choose to deny or embrace these individuals, this book tells their stories.

The Davidson's have discovered over the years that when it comes to "LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND", highly gifted students are the most likely to fall through the cracks of the classroom. In explaining what they mean by "Genius Denied" the Davidson's say these students are the most likely to underachieve, and may have the greatest gap between what is asked of them and their potential.

When something makes sense to us and we understand the concept we have what we call "aha moments". The purpose of this book was to share the stories of these students and how the schools deny these "aha" moments to their bright students by failing to challenge them. According to the authors, most educators and schools are not necessarily hostile to the needs of the gifted, rather they are indifferent. Schools may ask themselves why the focus should be on students who seem better able than others to fend for themselves. The myth perpetuates: people believe that these children have it easy.

All students regardless of level deserve to have their education needs met.

The Davidson's believe that schools shouldn't discriminate against gifted children. They subscribe to what many parents and educators also subscribe to which is that all kids, low-achievers, high achievers, and those in the middle deserve.... to have their education needs met. Through their institute, the Davidson's have met many young people. Some have written novels, or composed symphonies, all before they were old enough to vote. These are the young people whom have benefited from parents, teachers and mentors who supported and encouraged them. Unlike many of their peers, there intelligence was encouraged, nurtured, NOT denied. How can we as a society benefit from gifted children and their creativity later in their lives if we allow schools to dull their minds into indifference once they attend school or have been there for a while.



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Genius Denied ...continued

Shift in Thinking Needed, Time to Change Gears

The solution proposed by the Davidson's is simple and based on what we already know. Make the following two points a reality:

- 1) Make sure that gifted children, like all other children, are given material that is challenging enough to allow them to learn.
- 2) Place children together. Children learn best with their intellectual peers.

The education system needs to change gears. We need a complete Paradigm Shift. A Paradigm is a model or a pattern that forms the basis of a methodology. The traditional paradigm has focused on whether the child passes the standard test and spends the required time in a classroom. The new paradigm needs to focus on whether a child reaches their potential. This will require a major change in the way we currently think, for all of us, Administrators and Policy Makers, Teachers and Parents.

It won't be easy. Change rarely is. It is very difficult to think outside of the box we have all been conditioned to fit into. However, it is a cause worth fighting for. This will make school more worthwhile for all students. In the case of the gifted students, society will be the ones to reap the rewards for many years to come.

Education's Dirty Secret

The children the Davidson's have met over the years come from many different backgrounds and have many different strengths and needs. What do these students have in common you may ask?

All have:

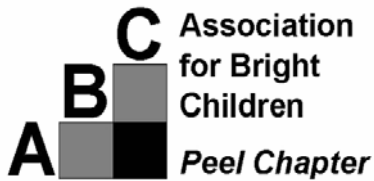
- Intellectual abilities years beyond their chronological age.
- Minds capable of astonishing things
- Need for teachers/schools that are capable of challenging them to the extent of their abilities

So why is it that many of these families have discovered the dirty little secret of gifted education. "Gifted education is largely haphazard, ineffective and under funded; it is more style than substance and rarely provides what gifted kids truly need: work that challenges them to the extent of their abilities in an environment with other kids who love to learn".

Pull-out Programs

"Pull-out programs don't provide what gifted children need which is advanced academic curriculum to match their abilities and the opportunity to explore topics in great depth while surrounded by academic peers. There is almost nowhere where bright children actually receive this kind of education program—a sorry state indeed". Changing laws and legislation takes years and will likely come too late for the parent seeking the help this could bring. It is easier to seek smaller accommodations for a child rather than larger than life changes in law and policy.

This double edged sword creates a cycle where nothing changes for gifted students. Allowing many of them spend their time in school staring at the floor. Other parties in the education process don't have an interest in changing things either. Schools want to keep the students exactly where they are enabling them to keep up the good test scores. This leaves students remaining in a regular classroom where they often have a hard time being comfortable with themselves and who they are. Often, their greatest fear is that no one else will be comfortable with whom they are. Remaining in a classroom and being granted credits. Not because they learned something, but rather for their attendance (spending time) in a classroom. With the current sorry state of education for the gifted, many bright students have to waste the whole year to be deemed sufficiently educated.



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IN THE NEWS:

10 year old twins enroll in University of Ottawa course.

"Twins 10, say U of O discriminated when it revoked student status".

This was the headline in the Ottawa Citizen on January 30, 2007. Sebastian and Douglas Foster, 10 year old twins, enrolled in the course at the University of Ottawa (U of O) with their Mother, Wendy Foster. The course "Science and Society" (SCI1101) which started last September 2006, is a course on science and social activism.

The course, which doesn't require students to have a math or science background has made headlines for its unconventional approach. It is more commonly known as the "activism" course. It is open to the public and the students are not marked by a conventional grading system.

There were no academic prerequisites for the course and Ms. Foster says that the University accepted both her and her sons as students. While the boys ages were not an issue at the time of the registration, their mother did provide their birth dates and mentioned that the children were young. A deposit was accepted as part of their tuition fees and each of the boys was issued a student card and had their status as "special students" confirmed.

This special status allowed all three of the Fosters to take the course for academic credit, even though they were not working towards degrees.

Once enrolled, the boys attended the weekly three-hour class, and actively participated in discussions.

Now, the boys are charging the University with age discrimination after they were deregistered from this course. The boys are taking their complaint to the Human Rights Commission claiming that the University has violated their rights to equal treatment because of their "age, social status and family status".

Andre LaLonde, the Dean of Science says that the situation is an honest mistake of staff registering the boys for the course without realizing that they were still in elementary school.

Professor Quoted

"Professor Denis Rancourt said the twins were full participants in his class, attending even after expulsion and passing with a 'Satisfactory.'"

A high school diploma was not necessary, he said. "I support the students. In fact, I wrote a letter to my dean when I learned they had been expelled, saying I felt this decision was a mistake."

Additional Links to this topic:

<http://www.thestar.com/article/176179>

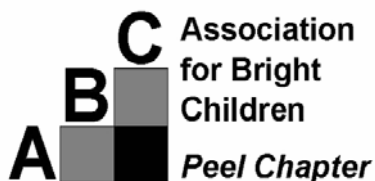
http://www.alternativevoices.ca/ac/ac-community_en.htm

http://www.tv.org/cfmx/tvoorg/tvoparents/index.cfm?page_id=145&action=article&article_title_url=&article_id=647

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education".

Mark Twain 1835-1910 ,US humourist and novelist.



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HUMOROUS SAYINGS:

"If vegetarians eat vegetables, what do humanitarians eat?"

"Why isn't phonetic spelled the way it sounds?"

"Why is 'abbreviated' such a long word?"

"Is the glass half empty, half full, or twice as large as it needs to be?"

DEFINITIONS:

Gross ignorance: 144 times worse than normal ignorance.

Fine: Tax for doing wrong. Tax: Fine for doing fine.

Pessimist: Someone who looks both ways before crossing a one-way street.

Pharmacist: A helper on the farm.

MEMBERSHIP ISSUES:

ABC Peel memberships can now be paid online. Please visit:

https://www.beanstream.com/scripts/cart/view_products.asp?merchant_id=117484753

Payment can be made with credit cards such as VISA, MASTERCARD and AMERICAN EXPRESS. Or, you can bring a cheque or cash with you to any Parents' Night meeting.

We would like to encourage everyone to renew their memberships as they come due.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST:

<http://www.leacock.ca/STUDENT.htm>

This is a link to the Stephen Leacock Humorous Short Story Competition 2007. It is open to all secondary students in Ontario. The deadline is March 15, 2007.

<http://www.literature.org/authors/>

This site has an online library of many classics in literature sorted by author. The entire text of the books is available chapter by chapter.

<http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/hmsv/index.html>

This is a Spelling/Vocabulary website for grades 1 to 8 with games and many other activities.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Telephone support: * 905-230-8281 (new number)

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