I am honored, excited, and a little nervous, to serve as the president of BVPAGE this year. We have an opportunity to build on the successes that I’ve witnessed over the past few years and I think the time is right to do that! Over the past few months the Board has implemented a new membership policy that we think will better serve the parents of the gifted students we represent and advocate for. If your child has an IEP for gifted, you are a member—it’s that simple. If you wish to receive communication directly from BVPAGE, including this newsletter, and advance notice via email of programs and other events, we do need your contact information. Just complete the form on the back page and mail it to our membership chair at the address provided. We also ask that you consider a donation to BVPAGE to help with costs such as speaker fees and honorariums, and other program costs.

BVPAGE has typically sponsored four programs a year on a variety of topics of interest. The board position of Program Chair/VP is still open. This is a great opportunity for a parent to get involved with BVPAGE so if you are interested in that position, or if you would like to try chairing one program to see how it works, let us know.

Board meetings are scheduled for the second Thursday of the month, from 7–9 pm, in the Marooner Room at District Office, and they are open. This year we are trying to make better use of the time of our school reps, by having a “Rap with the Reps” every other month; the next “Rap” meeting will be Jan 8, 2009. The idea is that each of these months will have a time slot devoted to school representatives. Reps can report successes, and talk about issues of concern for their parents or teachers. One way that our Board has discussed that we might benefit the gifted students and teachers, is to aid with sharing information across our large district—particularly what works well. A successful program at one school may benefit other schools if we can share these ideas.

BVPAGE plans to continue to strengthen our relationship with district administrators and school board members. We’ve volunteered to serve on some committees where parent input is needed. The results of our survey were discussed with administrators last year and resulted in some very positive conversations. It’s been shown that gifted kids learn differently, and have different needs, than other kids. We want to educate and remind school and district administrators, as well as our elected officials, of this need.

Finally, I know everyone will remember to vote in the upcoming election. In addition to the national races, I ask you to educate yourselves on the candidates for some important state races including Kansas State Board of Education and Kansas House of Representatives. Though less high-profile, these elected officials are instrumental in determining what our kids learn, how they learn it, and how our schools and programs are funded. We need to work together to make sure gifted programming in the Blue Valley School District meets our kids needs now and in the future.

Sincerely,
Patty Logan
DCT’s Corner (District Coordinating Teacher)  
Dr. Sheri Stewart  

There are several big projects gifted education teachers are working on this fall. They are: 1) continued work on our Process Skills group curriculum, 2) devising sample differentiation ideas for classroom teachers, and 3) the Gifted Program Self Study. And, of course, our teachers continue to provide challenging, interesting curriculum for your gifted students every day!

We are currently reviewing the four model Process Skills units that were written this summer. The Process Skills Group Curriculum includes units on: critical and creative thinking, problem solving, research and technology. Last year we researched these 21st Century Skills and developed Scope and Sequence charts for each skill group. Next we will brainstorm topics that might be developed into skills units for elementary, middle and high school levels. As more units are written, they will be shared with all gifted education teachers. Within these units the skills are prescribed but the content of the unit will be chosen from student interest, content currently studied in the general education classroom or other sources. We are excited to have curriculum that is based on research, can be shared, and will have common expectations and assessments.

At the same time we are also working on devising sample differentiation activities and units that can be shared with general education teachers. Your students are gifted all day; not just during gifted education class. But general education teachers have a broad array of abilities in their classroom that they are trying to teach. We feel that the gifted education teachers have expertise in developing sample activities or units that classroom teachers could use or modify. Thus, easing their preparation and encouraging use of differentiation.

And finally, our third special project is the Gifted Program Self Study. Much work has gone into the proposal for this study. Next a timeline and the procedures need administrative approval before we proceed with data collection. It is probable that the study will include a review of the eligibility process, gifted education services, general education services for gifted students, and internal and external communication. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus groups) will be used to collect and analyze current practices. We hope that this self study will provide information from various stakeholders that will help us to continue to have the best services for gifted students in Blue Valley School District. We believe that our district tagline, “Education Beyond Expectations” is a call for us to continually examine our practices, keep those that are working, and revise those that need modifications.

As you can see, we are very busy this fall doing our best to serve gifted students in the Blue Valley School District!

What makes a child gifted and talented may not always be good grades in school, but a different way of looking at the world and learning.  

--Chuck Grassley
Creating A Culture of Thinking and Dialogue at Home

When Jack's mom walked into her 9-year-old son's classroom, she had a good idea of what she was looking for in a teacher and in a classroom. Jack had been identified as gifted and talented at the age of 7. As a kindergartener, he was a nonstop reader, as well as a nonstop talker. His constant questioning and announcements of knowledge tried the patience of his teachers. Jack's mother, Layne, wanted a teacher for her son who would value creativity, uphold academic rigor, and inspire and embrace Jack's uniqueness. She wanted a classroom where questioning was encouraged and students were engaged in active learning. Layne wanted what educators call a "culture of thinking and dialogue" for her son.

Layne knew what a culture of thinking might look like in a classroom, but she hadn't thought how to create a culture of thinking at home. Most parents of gifted children are aware of the benefit of having books and other hands-on learning materials available to their children. However, there is more involved in creating a thoughtful and intellectual learning environment at home than just books and science kits.

The way a group communicates, what it communicates, and what it values are all components of a culture of thinking. In The Thinking Classroom: Learning and Teaching in a Culture of Thinking, Tishman, Perkins, and Jay (1994) describe the process of establishing a classroom culture of thinking in four distinct ways: modeling, explanation, interaction, and feedback. The four methods can be modified to create an environment of thinking and inquiry in the home.

Developing Thinking Dispositions Using Modeling

Aristotle once said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." What thinking behaviors or dispositions should parents model for their children?

A disposition is a person's prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination. Thinking dispositions are comprised of one's attitudes, emotions, and motivations that emerge when facing a situation that requires thinking (Costa, 2001; Tishman & Andrade, 1995). Often these dispositions are acquired when young people pay close attention to how their parents solve problems. Consciously or subconsciously, they're taking notes and watching their parents. Are their parents persistent or impulsive? Do they seek out multiple approaches? Are they creative and innovative? Do they question unknowns and seek out problems? These are just a few dispositions that make up successful thinkers. Modeling thinking dispositions provides an effective way for parents to cultivate these behaviors in their children (see Table 1).

Many children learn more from watching parents' behaviors than listening to their words. Observing a young child playing with a doll can illustrate this point. As a parent, Layne always verbally stressed the importance of acting in kind and caring ways. However, she was quite alarmed when she witnessed her 4-year-old daughter yelling and scolding her doll in an aggressive manner. She reflected back to her own parental behaviors when she was upset or frustrated with her children. It was her angry behaviors rather than her words of wisdom that stuck with her daughter. Every parental action, either positive or negative, becomes stored in a child's brain and added to his or her framework of life perceptions. Parental actions provide children with a roadmap for life. Verbal lectures or words of wisdom often lack the long-term efficacy of actions. Thinking dispositions are cultivated through social interaction. Some thinking dispositions to model include being clear and seeking precision, managing impulsivity, and acting in innovative or creative ways. Expressing oneself musically, verbally, artistically, or through writing allows children to see their parents challenge conventions and take risks. Children also have some of these dispositions or characteristics, however, they tend to focus or rely too heavily on just a few (Tishman et al., 1994). For example, a gifted child may be overly careful and organized at the expense of taking intellectual risks. She may have a large storehouse of knowledge and therefore only offer arguments in favor of her own case rather than examining issues from multiple perspectives. Modeling fair mindedness, inquisitiveness, and flexibility starts with the parents. To borrow from Mahatma Gandhi, "Be the change you want to see in the world." In addition to parental modeling of thinking dispositions, children's and adolescent literature provide a wealth of examples of good reasoning or thinking. Fictional characters such as Atticus Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird and historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. model open-mindedness and determination.

Deep Explanations Using Tiered Questioning

International Baccalaureate (IB) is an academically rigorous school model based on inquiry. When I went through my IB training, I was told that you could tell when you are in an exemplary classroom by the depth and complexity of the questions students asked. I think the same can be said for the intellectual quality of homes. Recently, experts have placed greater emphasis on the idea that thinking or questioning skills need to be taught explicitly (Anderson et al., 2001; Cotton, 1991). Before children can engage in good questioning, they need to know what good questioning is. How can parents and teachers demand higher level questioning without explicit tools? At a school I worked in at Oregon, we developed a simple cuing system called Tiered Questioning to help children ask questions that required depth and complexity. These questions demanded more of students than just telling them to ask "why" questions. As a parent of a 4- and 5-year-old, I know that elementary-aged students have the question of "why" mastered.

Students in Kindergarten through eighth grade at this school in Oregon systematically were taught Tiered Questioning keywords to assist them in posing their own high-level questions. The Tiered Questioning words were function, consequences, influences, origin, significance, and possibilities. These keywords were broken down into three levels of sophistication. For example, function was at the lowest level because it only requires students to list details. Influences and significance are progressively more complex questions necessitating that the student synthesize information (Hunkins, 1989; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). As students progressed throughout the school year, their mastery of these keywords improved, as did the quality of their discussions. Parents were encouraged to explain and use these keywords with their children throughout the day and especially during story time or read-aloud time with children. Inquiry prompts are instrumental to opening new paths of thought. These few Tiered Questioning keywords allowed children to ask and learn at a higher level. Imagine the sophistication of questioning at the dinner table if children became proficient at using these keywords. A 10-year-old might ask his parents, "What's the significance of a particular bedtime?" or "What's the origin of our 8 p.m. bedtime?" These are simple examples of using the key words, however, gifted children with diverse expertise and interests can use these words to stimulate endless indepth conversations (see Figure 1).

Authentic Interactions With Choices and Decision Making

Good thinkers examine their choices and make sound decisions. Decision making often is best learned through real-life practice and repetition. Children can practice decision making at a young age when the stakes are small. Given the inspiration to make decisions, children need to be provided with choices so they can examine their options based on their own criteria. What will happen if I choose this? Should I do my homework after school or after dinner? Is this a good choice? Why? What will happen if I decide to do my homework after watching all of my favorite TV shows? Should I play on the soccer team or join the art club?
Creating a Culture...Continued

Younger children need to have a magnitude of challenging experiences before they reach their teenage years. Rimm (1996) emphasized that entrusting children with more choices and freedom as they mature to adolescence will help them feel trusted and empowered. Sending kids the message that they are able to make good choices and that parents trust their thinking ability will assist them in their teenage years when they need to make decisions of greater consequence.

Domineering and overcontrolling parents often don't allow their gifted children to make significant or even minor decisions. Their children constantly are told what to do. They are told when to do homework, when and what chores to do, and who to play with. Overprotective parents shelter their children from the consequences of decision making and act as their rescuers. When free from the direct management of their parents, these children are rank beginners in decision making. As an elementary school principal, I was amazed by the number of parents who would drive back to school to deliver a forgotten lunch, coat, or homework assignment. Situations such as these are perfect, low-stakes learning situations for a child. These parents robbed their children of the opportunity to learn the consequences of poor decision making by swooping in and rescuing them. Confidence and self-efficacy are both byproducts of decision making (Butter, Robinson, & Scanlan, 2005; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990; Fay & Funk, 1995). When a child is comfortable and skilled in decision making, her belief in the ability to handle problems is enhanced. What messages are parents giving their children about their thinking ability when they prevent them from making decisions and protect them from consequences? They are really telling their child, "You don't know how to think. You can't make it without me. I have to do your thinking for you and tell you what to do."

Good teaching in a math classroom provides a classic example of metacognition. Exemplary math teachers require students to explain how they reached a solution. The students will verbally or in writing review the mental steps they engaged in to solve the problem. Parents can follow the same process at home. When my daughter was first learning to read, she would come home from school and tell me about a new word she had learned. I would ask, "How do you learn that new word?" She would explain how she would look at the picture on the page and then sound out the word. Children, like adults, solve problems every day. Asking children to explain their successes not only improves their metacognitive skills, but also develops their self-concept (Fay & Funk, 1995).

A think-aloud is a metacognitive strategy that makes a child's cognitive processes visible (Wilhelm, 2001). Think-alouds ask children to make predictions, ask questions, and visualize outcomes. Teachers and parents often utilize think-alouds when reading with children. They might ask questions such as, "Why did the boy leave the monster island?" or "What do you think he will do next?" Think-alouds can provide parents with an opportunity to assess the metacognitive thinking of their children during everyday activities. A parent can model a think-aloud by saying, "Boy, this is a lot of trash to take out. I'd better give myself plenty of time to take care of it." A powerful way to improve a child's metacognition is to ask reflective questions. When a child is completing homework ask, "Can you summarize what you've been working on?" "What do you think will happen next?" "How does what you are doing relate to your life?" Thoughtful questions will help children evaluate their self-awareness and monitor their own thinking.

Developing a new culture anywhere is difficult and making changes in the home is no exception. Allowing children to make independent decisions and accepting their choices is a challenge for many parents. There will be times when parents give in to their overprotective rescuing or drill sergeant lecturing (Fay & Funk, 1995). When stress levels rise and time is short, they won't always explain their thinking process to their children or take the time to reflect on mental actions with them. Successful thinking dispositions can give way to flight or fight responses. However, if parents are cognizant of these four strategies (modeling, explaining, interaction, and feedback) they can make the incremental steps that will create an insightful and thoughtful home environment.
Creating a Culture...Continued

Suggested Resources
Although there is not any one book that encompasses all of the concepts mentioned in this article, below are some books that individually examine the ideas for creating a culture of thinking and dialogue at home.


Cline, F. W., & Fay, J. (2006). Parenting with love and logic. Colorado Springs, CO: Pinon Press. Love and Logic is a parenting method that is used in homes and schools across the nation. It is well suited for parenting gifted children because of its theory of allowing children to become decision makers and problem solvers.


Eberle, B. (1997). Scamper. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press. Scamper is a guided thinking technique that allows for children to think in new and innovative ways. The activities in this book assist children in developing thinking dispositions such as being creative and seeking multiple perspectives.

Halsted, J. W. (2002). Some of my best friends are books: Guiding gifted readers from pre-school to high school. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press. This book provides parents with a comprehensive index of more than 100 books that are appropriate for gifted readers. The suggested books afford children an opportunity to question and inquire about big ideas using the Tiered Questioning model.


White, D. A. (2001). Philosophy for kids: 40 fun questions that help you wonder about everything! Waco, TX: Prufrock Press. If you are looking for a book that will improve the depth and complexity of discussions at the dinner table, this is the book. This book, designed for children ages 10 and up, investigates fundamental philosophical questions regarding values, knowledge, reality, and critical thinking.

References


Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking Disposition</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek</td>
<td>Generating an abundance of ideas sheds light on problem from every direction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>The ability to stay with a task through its completion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk-Taking</td>
<td>Being courageous, not afraid to try something new, and willing to cope with failure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>A desire to investigate and learn. Having wonder and intrigue in the novel, strange, or unexpected.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Thinking Disposition</th>
<th>Application</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek</td>
<td>Experiment with different ingredients when making dinner. Take new driving routes home. List all of the ways you can conserve energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>When a recipe fails in the kitchen, make adjustments and try it again. Grow a vegetable garden. If a plant dies, plant a new one and make changes in the watering schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-Taking</td>
<td>Encourage your child to try a new sport, enter a writing competition, or invite a new friend over to your house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Take apart an old toy and see its inner workings. Explore all of the museums in your town. Check out a wide spectrum of nonfiction books from the library.</td>
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Gifted Education 101

Thursday, October 16
7:00 pm
at Overland Trail Middle School,
133rd and Lamar

Join us for a program introducing Gifted Education in Blue Valley, entitled "Gifted Ed 101". We will feature a presentation by Dr. Sheri Stewart, District Coordinating Teacher for Gifted Education in Blue Valley. She will discuss topics including the identification process, and the specific roles played by the gifted education and general education departments. Information specific to elementary, middle, and high school levels will be discussed.

As a bonus, also presenting will be representatives from Duke TIP, a national program that offers identification and programs for gifted youth. If you have wondered what Duke TIP is, how to participate, or what they offer, you will want to attend this program.

Sponsored by:

Blue Valley Parent Advocates for Gifted Education

As always, anyone is welcome and your child does not need to have an IEP. This program will not be videotaped but if there are handouts or links they will be available on our website, www.bvpage.org. If you have questions you may contact Patty Logan, President of BVPAGE, at Blue Valley VM 404-1924.
Legislative Report

There is no specific legislative report this month.

Don’t forget to vote!

Student News

There’s Hope for the Future:
Student Investors Make Wise Decisions
Submitted by: Kathy Coughlin,
Gifted Specialist at Prairie Star Elementary

As I started the stock market unit with my fifth grade this year, the real market began to tumble. Since my students choose and track stocks from five real companies, I was dreading their first stock price check. As the real-world news became bleaker by the day, what I found out in observing my fifth grade investors has given me great hope for the future. These kids are making a profit in the market!

To explain further, in addition to studying about the free-market economy and how it works, my students are given a fictitious $1,000 to invest in five real companies of their choice. The rules are that these must be companies that provide goods or services that the student actually uses, and no energy stocks can be used. Once chosen, no new buying or selling can be done. We use a site called Wally One Stock (see link below) and students track their stocks every other day during this unit. If a stock shows a marked loss or gain, the student must research and try to find some plausible explanation as to why this happened. After the classroom unit is concluded, students will continue to track their stocks weekly until May to see long-term trends.

So, why are my students making a profit? Their explanations are simplicity itself. Several invested in Campbell’s Soup. They reasoned that, in tough economic times, canned soup is a cheap but nutritious choice to keep food budgets low. The same logic was applied to purchases of McDonald’s stock. Several students who have siblings in college purchased General Mills stock because, “when my brother is low on money that’s all he eats is cereal.” Even Hershey’s is looking good. Several girls told me that chocolate is comfort food, and with all the holidays coming up candy sales should be up, too.

So, while my 401K is bleeding a little, it’s reassuring to see my students smiling about their choices. And with my own retirement coming up in about ten years, I’m feeling better about our future economists and business leaders. Perhaps things are looking up after all!

UPCOMING BVPAGE BOARD MEETING DATES:
Our upcoming meetings are:
November 13, 2008
(No December meeting)
January 8, 2008
February 12, 2008
March 12, 2008 (tentative)
April 9, 2008
May 14, 2008

Johnson County Election Office:
News Around the District

Article by BVW Teacher Featured in SENG National Publication
An article written by Linda Collins, a gifted education teacher at Blue Valley West and last year’s Teacher of the Year in the Blue Valley District, was published in the September issue of the SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) Update. Linda’s article focuses on some of the special challenges that twice exceptional students often face in classroom settings and suggests ways for parents and teachers to help students meet those challenges.

Linda’s article can be accessed at http://www.sengifted.org/articles_parenting/collins_2e_back_to_school.shtml. The article is titled "Twice Exceptional/Twice Successful: Back to School Strategies That Work".

BVPAGE Parents Join Special Education Advisory Group
Patty Logan, BVPAGE president, and Judie Becker, BWV’s building rep, have joined the newly expanded Special Education Advisory Council (SPED). The Council was expanded when the District’s former Student Services Board Advisory Committee, which included gifted education, was folded into SPED. Board of Education members Sue Matson and Tony Thill have also joined SPED in the restructuring.

Like BVPAGE, the Council is an advocacy group for its parent and student communities with special programs, speakers and events throughout the year.

The BVPAGE Pages are published quarterly. If you have any news items for this newsletter, you may contact the editor, Angela Case, at: bvpage@everestkc.net
Do You Know About Duke TIP?

The Duke University Talent Identification Program (Duke TIP) is a non-profit educational organization that is recognized as a leader in identifying and serving the educational needs of academically gifted youth. Through identification, recognition, challenging educational programs, information, advocacy and research, Duke TIP provides resources to gifted students, their parents, educators, and schools for the development of the students’ optimal educational potential.

For more information read: http://www.tip.duke.edu/about/fact_sheet.pdf or check out the DukeTIP website at http://www.tip.duke.edu/

Representatives from the DukeTIP program will be at the October 16, 2008 BVPAGE Parent Program entitled “Gifted Education 101”.

EXPLORE Testing Registration begins in January, 2009