# RAISING THE CEILING IN THE ART ROOM FOR THE ARTISTICALLY GIFTED: AN INTERVIEW WITH BARRY SHAUCK

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This interview was conducted via telephone and e-mail in May 2008 with Barry Shauck, currently head of art education and professor at Boston University and the incoming president of the National Art Education Association. The programs for artistically gifted students described herein have received many accolades and national acknowledgement.

*As Instructional Facilitator for the Visual Arts in Howard County, MD (from 1986–2002), you had an enrichment program for students with visual arts talent. Would you describe the identification, curriculum, instruction, and program design for the gifted?*

## Identification Process

Identification of gifted and talented 5th through 12th-grade students for our Visual Arts Enrichment Program, held on Saturdays throughout the school year, involved a formal, multicriteria process. Our philosophy was that studio production held greater importance than observed behaviors. Yet, we also valued the insights of parents, art teachers, and others who might be in a position to recognize exceptionalities. We distributed to schools application materials that included a portfolio packet (see Figure 1) and three nomination forms—one each from the student's parents, art teacher, and another person asked by the nominee to respond (see Appendix A). Portfolio submissions required studio works that depicted the figure from life, demonstrated observational and perceptual skills, and competence in artmaking. Students were invited to include their sketchbook/journals. Works were judged on the effective application of (1) craftsmanship; (2) artistic behaviors or confident experimentation


**Figure 1. Portfolio packet.**

and investigation of media possibilities; (3) uniqueness of solutions; (4) formal qualities, such as the organization of space and accurate use of proportions; and (5) use of an aesthetically successful theme or the successful choice of design for media. Credentials were weighted; nomination forms counted one-third toward the screening score and studio responses counted two-thirds.

## Staffing

Initially the program was taught by one art teacher who was identified for any number of strengths—the ability to generate challenging and unusual strategies for approaching studio problems, being adept in observational skills, the ability to use these qualities to generate an interesting syllabus, and political and social capabilities for working with parents and students. The course met at the art teacher's home school if we could arrange it; if there were concerns about serving all populations we chose a centrally located secondary school. The teaching staff was expanded to a team of two as the program grew. Team teachers were selected on the basis of complementary studio skills and interpersonal relationships.

## Curriculum

The program was delivered on Saturdays from 9 a.m.–3 p.m., meeting about 14 times over the course of the academic year. The class served 20 to 30 students. The curriculum was based on a classic canon of portfolio preparation problems through which students were given practice rendering the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface. Thematic and compositional problems included the figure in motion, the still-life, self-portraiture, figures in the interior, and rendering of mechanical objects. A syllabus was developed by the teaching team and distributed to students and their parents that identified objectives, concepts, works of art to be studied, and assignments for each meeting. An annual end-of year exhibition of work from the Saturday class took place in the Department of Education Gallery.

While I was there we served students in grades 7 through 12. Middle school students refined basic skills required for preparation of gifted and talented screening portfolios: effective composition, use of light and dark, perceptual skills, content driven by meaningful personal response, and the use of a sketchbook to develop ideas. Students at the high school level examined works by first-year college students shown through images found in college catalogues, offering them unique peer appropriate models for college application. Teachers helped students analyze ways successful art school students had solved thematic problems so that they could better understand the ways in which an artist's personal voice emerged through artmaking.

Current programs for students identified as gifted and talented in the visual arts in Howard County have been expanded. They now include grade-level-specific classes for middle and high school students, as well as elective summer enrichment classes for elementary students. Summer enrichment programs always employ an art teacher adept at observational drawing. This is done so that students who are particularly skilled in drawing may be identified early and offered a developmental path to enter the Saturday enrichment program. Other summer class offerings capitalize on particular art teacher studio practices such as bookmaking, plein air painting, or are based on a theme such as transportation where the focus might be on the mechanics of cars, planes, trains, and trucks.

*In addition to special programs, you inspired your art teachers to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms—including the gifted. In what ways did you encourage them to meet the needs of those with visual art talent? Please provide an example or two.*

## Thematic Exhibition Challenges as Staff Development

To this day the visual arts program in Howard County, MD, maintains an annual calendar of 15 or more exhibitions. The exhibition calendar is conceptually tied to a comprehensive program of staff development. Countywide visual arts conferences occur twice annually, once in the fall and once in the spring, introducing themes for exhibitions a year in advance. Typically, an artist is selected who gives a lecture on a theme and the day includes thematic and media-based workshops where teachers can engage in planning and artmaking that can be taken back to their schools and studio classrooms to use as conceptual models. Diverse and prominent artists have been employed as consultants or visiting artists to conduct master classes with art teachers. Painter Wolf Kahn offered a master class to launch a thematic emphasis on landscapes. Artist Howardina Pindell introduced the theme *Travel and Correspondence Art* and shared journals she'd kept on her various adventures and journeys. A local artist and college professor gave a drawing workshop that called teachers' attention to methods for rendering portraits.

Several college art educators also were called upon to give workshops. For example, Karen Carroll (Baker & Carroll, 1987) addressed ways masterworks could be used as exemplars for studio teaching; Al Hurwitz (Hurwitz & Madeja, 2003) shared his strategies for using the museum as a setting for studio learning; Janet Olson shared ideas from the research described in her text *Envisioning Writing* (1992) for a show centered on the art of the narrative; and you, Sandy, shared your research related to encouraging creative thinking by designing "elegant problems" (Kay, 1998) that offered guidance in preparing for a show called *Shaping Elegant Problems That Enable Children's Voices*. These themes also fostered partnerships with the county arts council and museums in the Baltimore/Washington metropolitan area offered a variety of exhibition and meeting venues.

For example, illustrator Ed Sorel and his wife and writer, Nancy, presented work based on their collaborative book *First Encounters* (1994) in 2000. Ed produced 65 witty drawings to accompany Nancy's stories of actual first meetings between great, near great, famous, and infamous pairs such as Sigmund Freud and Gustav Mahler, Sarah Bernhardt and Thomas Alva Edison (she fainted in his arms), Richard Nixon and Madame Mao, Berthe Morisot and Edouard Manet, and Enrico Caruso and Giacomo Puccini. Ed and Nancy's entertaining husband-and-wife-banter, in which Nancy chastised Ed's bawdiness, brought delight and laughter to everyone. After their opening session in a large auditorium, Nancy conducted a master class on writing and Ed conducted a master class on illustration. Every art teacher received a copy of *First Encounters* (1994) for reference in lesson planning. A year later an exhibition was held at the professional galleries of the Howard County Arts Council. Ed's preparatory sketches were shown in a small gallery while the main exhibition featured more than 500 pieces of K–12 student work shown in an adjacent and expansive, larger gallery.

As a staff development process, these sorts of countywide thematic exhibitions challenged art teachers to author new lessons, try new media, collaborate with colleagues in and across schools, shape classic problems around innovative ideas, and apply approaches to curriculum that involved both divergent and convergent stages of thought. The process also included a jury, composed of a team of peer art teachers, to select works for acceptance from submissions from the schools. The team got practice in closely analyzing works, searching for innovative teaching ideas and quality student work. The final exhibition further extended the staff development process with its pedagogical value and examples of excellence shared with the public.

## Other Initiatives Raising the Bar in Teaching and Student Performance

Annual Senior Shows involved jurors to assess artwork with high school juniors and seniors and their teachers. Each high school could enter a given number of works accompanied by student-generated artists' statements. Each school also could identify one senior to speak from slides of personal work at the opening reception and one promising junior to represent each high school in the display identified by peers, teachers, administrators, and jurors. The presenting speakers group gathered a week ahead of time to practice their slide-talks and the juror spoke about the collective body of work at the reception. Each of these elements promoted community, dialogue, mentorship, and higher levels of studio investiga-

tion among high school students and teachers across the county.

Another effort in staff development was the initiation of a study group on middle school observational drawing. Volunteer members met periodically after school, bringing samples of assignments and student work, talking about questions and issues, and discussing the finer points of teaching drawing in conversations facilitated by college art educator Karen Carroll. Teachers gave presentations for their peers, as did Jaye Ayres (1998) on her research testing Betty Edward's (1989) curriculum for *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain,* in which she compared the work of students selected to represent the academically gifted, artistically gifted, average ability, and learning disabled. Occasionally the study group members also participated in workshops to develop their own skills as in when we called on the expertise of Abby Sangiamo from the faculty at the Maryland Institute College of Art, well known for his teaching of portraiture. The study group has had an impact, improving the depth of instruction and quality of student work across the county.

*You are currently a professor at Boston University working with students who are becoming art teachers. In what ways do you address gifted education with your undergraduate and graduate students?*

## Raising the Ceiling in the Artroom

First, I encourage teachers to meet the learning needs of all students, including meeting the high-end needs of gifted students with an appropriately complex curriculum. Our pre-practicum field experiences include opportunities to work within BU's programs that draw young students with an advanced interest in art from the Boston-area schools. As a requirement of our course in Elementary Methods of Art Education, students have two options. One is to develop an enrichment program of six 1-hour sessions for fourth graders at a neighboring elementary school; here, art education students research observational drawing strategies and get practice in teaching with them. An alternative option is to develop extended, 3-hour lessons that include drawing in one of our four Boston University galleries; here, student interns design lessons related to objects and regalia on current display. Again, these teaching opportunities are driven by thematic topics such as lessons resulting in the production of oversized interior structures of fruits and vegetables modeled by BU faculty member Hugh O'Donnell (2003) and the identification papers of self as historical prisoner.

In the methods course, Processes and Structures, students are asked to design a media investigation based upon a theme. The theme has to be broad and deep enough to offer pathways for personal response to students at all developmental levels: preschool, elementary, middle, high, and post-secondary. Each student authors and designs a Looking/Learning document using digital design programs and includes three components: facts for viewing, ideas worth pursuing, and things worth doing, based on a model developed by Baker and Carroll (1987). Again, these assignments are designed to be flexible enough to serve all students while providing the gifted with challenges commensurate with their ability.

*As president-elect of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), do you see ways in which the fields of gifted and art education might work together to promote new scholarship?*

My research interests include sources of artistic inspiration and factors that influence artistic production, which could translate into models that can be applied to studio teaching. As NAEA president-elect, I would invite others to join in pursuing ways these ideas might lead to productive conversations in service of teachers to address the needs of gifted and talented students. I believe the visual arts have much to contribute to the education of the gifted and talented and much more needs to be considered to adequately address learning skills needed to thrive in the 21st century. GCT

## References


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Hurwitz, A., & Madeja, S. (with Katter, E.). (2003). *Pathways to art appreciation: A sourcebook for media and methods*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.

Kay, S. I. (1998). Shaping elegant problems for visual thinking. In J. W. Simpson, J. M. Delaney, K. L. Carroll, C. M. Hamilton, S. I. Kay, M. S. Kerlavage, et al. (Eds.), *Creating meaning through art: Teacher as choice maker* (pp. 260–288). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

O'Donnell, H. (2003). *Growing things. Exhibition of paintings held at the 808 Commonwealth Avenue Gallery*, Boston University, Boston.

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Sorel, E., & Sorel, N. C. (1994). *First encounters*. New York: Knopf.

# Appendix A

## Candidate Information Please Print Legibly

Student's last name _____ first name _____ middle initial _____

Number/street address _____ city _____ state _____ zip _____

Name of school _____ Art teacher's signature _____

Student's home telephone number _____ age at last birthday _____ date of birth _____

Gender _____ present grade in school _____

Name of parent or guardian _____ first _____ last _____

Signature of parent or guardian _____ date _____

Number/street address of parent or guardian _____ city _____ state _____ zip _____

## Howard County Gifted & Talented Visual Arts Program

☐ Other

### Nomination Form

As part of the process in screening candidates for the Gifted and Talented Visual Arts Program, students are requested to have someone, other than their parents, complete a nomination form. This nomination may be completed by oneself, a relative, another teacher, peers, or anyone with adequate knowledge of the student's art ability.

Directions: Place a check in the appropriate column and write comments where applicable.

| | Almost Always | Often | Occasionally | Never | Don't Know | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Works independently; self motivated | | | | | | |
| Does artwork outside of school | | | | | | |
| Shows pride and care when making artwork | | | | | | |
| Presents visual ideas in a unique way | | | | | | |
| Enjoys discussing art work of others | | | | | | |
| Enjoys visiting exhibits and art museums | | | | | | |

Student nominated: _____

Person nominating: _____ Relationship to student: _____

## Howard County Gifted & Talented Visual Arts Program

☐ Parent

### Parent Nomination Form

In identifying candidates for the Gifted and Talented Visual Arts Program, the art office is requesting parents/guardians assist in the selection process. Please check the column which best describes your child's artwork done outside of school. (Community projects, clubs, private art lessons, club activities, and independent artwork are some of the examples to consider.)

Directions: Place a check in the appropriate column and include comments.

| My son/daughter: | Almost Always | Often | Occasionally | Never | Don't Know | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Works independently; self motivated | | | | | | |
| Shows an interest in own environment | | | | | | |
| Enjoys going to exhibits, museums, and craft shows | | | | | | |
| Draws, paints, and works with other art materials at home | | | | | | |
| Enjoys and appreciates the work of others | | | | | | |
| Uses art ability in service to others | | | | | | |
| Shares dialogue about artwork with others | | | | | | |
| Shows pride and care when making art | | | | | | |

Student's name: _____ Parent's signature: _____ Date: __/__/____

## Howard County Gifted & Talented Visual Arts Program

☐ Art teacher

☐ Total

### Art Teacher Nomination Form

Name of Student: _____ School: _____ Grade: _____

Directions: Place a check in the appropriate column and include comments where applicable.

| The student: | Almost Always | Often | Occasionally | Never | Don't Know | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Is self motivated and works independently | | | | | | |
| Shows interest in discussing art | | | | | | |
| Supplements classroom knowledge with outside activity | | | | | | |
| Develops own ideas | | | | | | |
| Can formulate new problems from a given task | | | | | | |
| Handles media successfully | | | | | | |
| Develops visual ideas beyond what is expected | | | | | | |
| Demonstrates exceptional ability in organizing shapes in a composition | | | | | | |
| Shows concern for detail | | | | | | |
| Shows exceptional skill in expressing ideas visually | | | | | | |
| Can depict images from imagination and observation | | | | | | |
| Uses a variety of art elements for desired effects | | | | | | |

Teacher: _____ School: _____ Date: ___/___/_____