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Teaching in Circles: Learning to Harmonize as a Co-Teacher of Gifted Education

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Abstract

In this autoethnography, I explored my daily challenges and frustrations working as a teacher of gifted students in inclusion classrooms in an elementary public school. Inquiring about how I coped with these challenges and eventually thrived in the position, I journaled weekly about my teaching experiences during a six-month period and collected e-mails to teachers and parents. I employed constant comparative analysis and five themes emerged: frustration, isolation, advocacy, collaboration, and influence. I discussed the themes within the greater social and cultural context, drawing upon psychology and educational theories.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Co-Teaching, Gifted Education, Teacher Isolation, Teachers as Advocates

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Teaching in Circles: Learning to Harmonize as a Co-Teacher of Gifted Education

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In this autoethnography, I explored my daily challenges and frustrations working as a teacher of gifted students in inclusion classrooms in an elementary public school. Inquiring about how I coped with these challenges and eventually thrived in the position, I journaled weekly about my teaching experiences during a six-month period and collected e-mails to teachers and parents. I employed constant comparative analysis and five themes emerged: frustration, isolation, advocacy, collaboration, and influence. I discussed the themes within the greater social and cultural context, drawing upon psychology and educational theories. Keywords: Autoethnography, Co-Teaching, Gifted Education, Teacher Isolation, Teachers as Advocates

How I Came to Write an Autoethnography

Did I error in taking this job? I entertained this thought just weeks after I accepted a position as a resource teacher of gifted students at a k-8 school in a large urban school district. The job seemed miles apart from my previous teaching job—a fifth-grade teacher of gifted students in a self-contained classroom, the major difference being that instead of having my own classroom I now had to work in other teachers' classrooms. I accepted the position for several reasons: I wanted to be closer to my fiancé (love will make a man do crazy things); also, I believed teaching in a larger school district would provide more opportunity; the job also paid more. But now, I had to adhere to other teacher's schedules. I had to adjust to their plans, to their teaching styles, and to their personalities. I also lacked my own space. I had to work at a small table in the classroom—if provided—or find another location, usually the school's media center. Furthermore, I had to justify my pedagogy to colleagues, who often had little or no training in gifted education. I recall during my first year on the job on particularly pointed email, in which I informed a colleague that it "was not my first rodeo" and I expected to be treated like a professional! In truth, I wanted to quit the job at times, return to my previous position. However, I persisted, and over the course of several years, I coped and even occasionally thrived in the job. I developed my craft and furthered my education. I gained recognition in the form of awards (ironically, voted on by colleagues). Most importantly, I improved relationships with co-teachers, learning to work with rather than against them, and to even influence their pedagogy when it came to gifted and advanced learners. While the job still presents challenges, I evolved and "grew" into the position. I offer this analogy: I went from running head first, clumsily, hitting resistance head-on at every turn to more of the poised Aikido master, who skillfully avoids obstacles and redirects oncoming energy, using it to his or her advantage (in the Japanese martial art, Aikido, the practitioner blends his energy with that of the opponent to neutralize and control rather than aggressively defeat an attacker; mutual cooperation and awareness of others are emphasized) (Faggianelli & Lukoff, 2006). Founder, Ueshiba (n.d.) described the principles of his art in the following way: "In Aikido we never attack. An attack is proof that one is out of control. Never run away from any kind of challenge, but do not try to suppress or control an opponent unnaturally. Let attackers come any way they like and then blend with them. Never chase after opponents. Redirect each attack and get firmly

behind it.” In essence, I learned to co-teach in “circles,” moving in softer, gentle circular motions rather than in an aggressive, linear fashion. For instance, rather than try to force a co-teacher to utilize a gifted education strategy with my students, I learned it was wiser to gently suggest it, a soft sell some might say. I might compose an e-mail stating, “Hi there, I learned this new tool to get students to consider their reading text or article from a number of perspectives; the gifted kids would really benefit but I think it would elevate the discussion for the entire class. Let me know if you ever want try it.” Naturally, I wanted to know what happened. As part of my wonderments, I sought answers to what caused me to survive the conditions of the job and adapt to the point where I eventually became effective? What psychological and/or philosophical changes caused me to successfully adjust, even to the point where I expanded my influence with other teachers and students outside of my immediate instruction? I began to explore gifted education literature to make meaning of my experiences. I came across literature explaining the importance of having trained teachers of gifted (Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994) and the isolation they might feel as the only teacher of gifted on campus (Henley et al., 2010). While these literatures helped inform this inquiry, they didn’t fully satisfy my intellectually quest to better understand my role as a gifted education educator. There apparently existed a gap in the literature regarding the specific emotional and psychological challenges faced by these teachers and the stages they might go through as they become more seasoned. In addition to helping my own psyche, I believed that investigating my personal experiences could begin to shed light on this topic and might benefit others teaching in the profession. Deciding upon the “right” methodology to conduct an inquiry is always a challenge (Saldaña, 2009). I gravitated toward autoethnography. Once considered a questionable form of qualitative research, autoethnography has thrived and gained more acceptance as a legitimate methodology (Pourreau, 2014). Using approaches such as personal narrative, personal essays, firsthand accounts, and autobiography, autoethnography enables the researcher to discuss his or her own experiences through inquiry supported by theory and practice (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2003; McIlveen, 2008; Pourreau, 2014). I required a methodology where I could insert myself at the center of the research in order to deeply explore my experiences. Furthermore, opposed to simply writing an autobiography, autoethnography beckoned me to dig deeper for answers by connecting my experiences to a social and cultural context, to connect my world with the bigger picture—thus, helping to make sense of what I had experienced.

Who Am I?

As the sole study participant, I believe it necessary to provide background on myself. I am a 40-something-year-old, white, male. I am a teacher, researcher, doctoral student, fiancé, father, and friend. I earned a bachelor’s degree in English and went to work as a newspaper reporter, mainly covering the education beat. Feeling an urge to teach, I changed careers and worked as long-term substitute teacher at a middle school. I secured a full-time job at the school and taught language arts to seventh-grade students. Not particularly wanting to work with middle school students (can’t imagine why), I accepted a position teaching gifted fifth-grade students. I had to “Google” the word “gifted” since I had no idea what it meant. I quickly learned and loved working with this population due to the children’s creativity, deep thinking, and quirkiness. I later accepted a job as a resource teacher at a k-8 magnet school and continued my work with gifted children. Along the way, I earned a master’s degree in gifted education—I wanted to know more about this field-and upon graduating, I entered a doctoral program in education. I am a curious person, always wondering and questioning Friends and family have called me kind, creative, intelligent, and selfish. I think it’s also important to note that, although I can and do collaborate, I prefer to work alone. I feel I can work at a faster pace, unencumbered.

I currently work as a graduate student at a large research university. However, when writing this article, I worked as a teacher of gifted elementary students at a K-8 public school. I have held this position for the past four years. I teach 28 gifted children, who using the school district's guidelines, generally must obtain an intelligence quotient score of 130 or higher. While I may "pull" the students to another room to work on projects, I often work with the students on reading and writing skills while they are participating in the general classroom; this requires working closely with six other teachers, who work within second to fifth-grade classrooms. For example, I request the teachers' lesson plans and decide how to incorporate enrichment activities for the gifted and higher-performing students. Since this inquiry revolved around my position as a teacher of gifted, it involved reflecting, making observations, and recording journal or field notes for myself on a daily or sometimes weekly basis. While I think sharing this inquiry might help others going through similar experiences and coping with similar challenges in their professional lives, I also wrote this article to help articulate my own thoughts and experiences and help me grow intellectually and emotionally.

How I Conducted My Research

Data Collection

After receiving consent from the school district and the university's internal review board (actually the IRB does not consider autoethnography "research" since it does not involve study participants), I began collecting data by documenting my thoughts, actions, and observations using a journal. During a six-month period, I recorded notes in my journal, typing them into a Word document, daily to once per week, depending on whether I believed I had something substantial to record. I dated the journal entries and mainly just wrote freely, trying to capture the emotion or intensity of the moment. I feared waiting until the end of the week to journal my thoughts could cause me to forget relevant information or lose the intensity of the moment. Furthermore, I collected e-mails sent to colleagues and parents during that time period. I believed that the communications, though written by myself, could help triangulate the data and add more depth and richness.

How I Analyzed the Data

Researchers must decide what method of data analysis will best answer their research questions (Richards, 2013). I sought a method that would allow me to glean meaning from two separate forms of language-based data (the journal and e-mails) and allow encompassing themes to emerge that might help satisfy my wonderments. After considerable study, I settled upon constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, I collated the journal entries and written communications chronologically by date in hopes of identifying patterns across the data and providing organization for my analysis. Next, I engaged in Open Coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by reading and re-reading the data and making notes and highlighting pertinent information. For instance, I noticed that I consistently used the word "frustrated" in my journal entries; hence, I underlined the word in my notes whenever I began to reappear. I later practiced Axial Coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by rearranging the data—for instance, I sectioned the data off into short paragraphs and rearranged it for the purpose of analyzing the information from new perspectives. Coding is not necessarily a neat, linear practice but rather a cyclical process (Saldaña, 2009). Therefore, I put the notes aside for several weeks then returned to analyze the data again, moving through it, making additional notes and comments, fluctuating between Open and Axial Coding. Finally, I engaged in Selective Coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as I assigned the codes to core categories and compared the categories against

each other to determine further relationships. Using the core categories, I developed encompassing themes. I titled the themes and wrote brief descriptions for each theme.

From Frustration to Collaboration to Influence: Learning Co-Teaching Aikido

From my analysis, the following themes emerged: 1. Frustration 2. Isolation 3. Advocacy 4. Collaboration and 5. Influence. I intentionally presented the themes in the manner they appear. Hence, the order of the themes is significant since I realized they demonstrated the challenges and eventual breakthroughs I experienced as an educator; each theme seemed to fuel the others. For instance, my frustration with colleagues intensified feeling of isolation. These experiences strengthened my advocacy efforts. My motivation to create change caused me to realize the value of collaboration. Finally, collaborative efforts and learning to harmonize my efforts with the teachers extended my influence.

Frustration

Though I “grew” into my new position and became more effective, it wasn’t always a smooth process. I experienced an almost steady state of frustration due to strained relations with co-teachers, particularly during the first few months of the school year. Having to enter their classrooms to teach, I constantly felt at the mercy of the general education teachers. Having different ideas about gifted education and how to best serve high-ability students served as a constant primer for frustration.

Journal Entry, 7-12-15

Learned about my new schedule. Going to be co-teaching with some new folks, who I never worked with before. A few are long-time teachers, who might be “set” in their ways. Little apprehensive about how this might go.

E-mail to Co-teachers, 9-22-2015

I feel the need to clarify some issues regarding the gifted program. Teachers have expressed concern over some gifted students not performing in the classroom at expected levels, completing assignments, scoring proficient on tests, etc. With an influx of new students coming to the gifted program this school year, I anticipate that these challenges on an IQ score and a list of characteristics suggesting they are gifted. This means they have the potential to show above-average ability in at one least one area or subject. The key word is potential. It does not mean they are an excellent student, an academic scholar, or will excel in every subject... Finally, I need to stress that when students are enrolled in the gifted program, parents sign a contract (education plan). This plan promises that the student will receive gifted services and also that they will receive enrichment (service learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning). My job is to provide that enrichment--within the English-language arts framework. So when you're suggesting to me what lessons the students need to be working on, please remember that I must package this learning into these enrichment models to honor the contract. I must also work on having students make progress on their two education plan goals (which are written to a student's strengths. i.e. creativity, advanced research). I have to document this progress, which is hard to do if students are not working on some type of project or

advanced activity. (AND all of this within 45-50 minutes-provided there is not FAIR testing, LDC, other some other requirement going on). I have worked hard to be flexible and adaptable and consider your needs in the classroom (I had my own room for years), and I simply ask the same of you.

The above e-mail conveyed my frustration with the perception that the classroom teachers failed to consider my duties and responsibilities as a teacher of gifted. For example, did they understand that I also had obligations to the parents and expectations to meet regarding the quality and integrity of the school's gifted program? Also, the correspondence expressed my frustration with the teachers unrealistically expecting all identified gifted students as automatically achieving academic excellence, despite ample research suggesting otherwise (Ritchotte, Matthews, & Flowers, 2014).

Journal Entry, 10-20-15

Teacher gives me an attitude, says they had so much to do. When are they going to make up their work? He asks. I haven't pulled the kids from class all week due to the (district required lesson). So controlling! Why not pre-test the kids on spelling/vocabulary, that would save time, (expletive).

Journal Entry 11/13/15

Frustrated. One teacher resisting my taking students out of room. The teacher says he differentiates but whenever I go in the room, they are all doing the same lesson, at the same time. I told him that he is making it hard for me to differentiate to see me as the differentiation helper. Some teachers are just really controlling, head strong, they don't collaborate well. I'm trying.

Again, my frustration seemed to stem from my colleagues' apparent lack of understanding of gifted children's needs. As Gallagher, Harradine, and Coleman (1997) emphasized, "unless prepared to teach gifted students, most teachers have little or no background on strategies to cope with these creative and fertile minds. They need information about how to provide intellectual stimulation through problem-based learning or higher-order thinking or a variety of differentiated programming. The more knowledge teachers have about differentiated methods and strategies, the more they will be able to adequately address all of their students' needs." (p.136). For instance, in the case of the teacher resisting the idea of the students being pulled out of the classroom, strategies such as curriculum compacting –where students are allowed to take pre-assessments to show mastery of instructional material –might have enabled him to manage the students leaving the classroom without losing academic ground. Nevertheless, since most classroom teachers are not required to complete gifted education coursework, it's understandable that I would grow frustrated when working with other educators that have different teaching philosophies, which I no doubt believed were not best practices for gifted kids.

Isolation

It is not uncommon for teachers, particularly when starting their career, to feel isolated (McCluskey, Sim, & Johnson, 2011). Being the only teacher on campus who specialized in teaching gifted and talented students predisposed me to feel alone in my mission. While I

purposely congregated with several other teachers, whose company I enjoyed, I could not escape feelings of isolation.

Journal Entry, 9-4-2015

Sometimes feel like only one who fights for gifted, uses enrichment, project-based learning.

Journal Entry, 9-17-2015

Completing paperwork/education plans for new gifted students. Handful of new students this year. No extra help. I don't like paperwork (who does?). I am responsible for staffing, paperwork, screening potential gifted, teaching—all myself. A one-man army!

These journals reflected the challenge of serving as the sole teacher of gifted education on a school campus. Certainly, I had colleagues who also taught gifted children—but they worked on different campuses, limiting our interactions to e-mails, text messages, and infrequent, face-to-face conversations at trainings and conferences. I had no one at the school who closely shared the same pedagogical stance; I obviously cared the most (at least in my mind) about enrichment activities, research projects, and other gifted education strategies. I lacked the same feelings of camaraderie experienced when I attended gifted education conferences, where others shared the same goals, passions, and ideals. So often, I retreated to my office and read an article about gifted education. I tried to reaffirm why my role and actions were important at the school. Alone, I read and pondered, and reinforced my feelings of isolation.

Advocacy

Teachers, including teachers of the gifted, care deeply about educational issues, and therefore, should advocate for their students (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). Increasingly, I found myself advocating for my gifted students. I began to advocate in direct ways, through conversations with co-teachers through e-mails but also in more indirect ways. During meetings, I suggested parents advocate harder for their children.

Journal Entry, 10-2-2015

Afterschool, had conversation with parent. Asked if she thought her (gifted) child was being challenged. She wondered because he gets As easily. I said parents have to advocate, talk to teachers to make sure these kids are more of a priority. This seems to be the theme of my conversations with parents. Am I pushing too hard? Am I not being a good colleague to my co-teachers? Doing what is right for the kids may mean not making friends, making waves.

Journal Entry, 10-16-2015

Parent spoke with me about accelerating her son from fourth to fifth grade. Told her she needs to advocate for her son's learning needs, that acceleration is not a priority in schools. I told her to politely persist with it.

I employed the help of parents to advocate for the gifted students; I realized that the dissatisfaction of the parents mirrored my own and served as an opportunity to gain allies in my advocacy efforts. Rather than fight the complaints, like the Aikido master side-stepping an attack and redirecting it, I redirected the parents' concerns towards the goal of meeting the gifted students' needs. While that might appear wise, I also struggled with whether I was betraying the teachers since it could cause them more work and strife; I respected my colleagues, and as a former classroom teacher, I knew how demanding their jobs were.

Collaboration

Gradually, organically, I began to experience positive experiences of collaboration with co-teachers. Initially, I collaborated well with a particular teacher or two, then with other teachers on my teaching team. I began planning lessons with some, communicating more about instruction.

Journal Entry, 10/19/15

I've been co-teaching with two, (omitted) grade teachers. We work well together. When it works, it works well. I really enjoy working with them and complimenting their styles.

Journal Entry, 11/12/15

Great experience teaching with (omitted) grade teacher. She let me take the lead on sharing the lesson. When it works, it really works—like marriage. We collaborate well together, share ideas, improve lessons. Other teachers seem very controlling of their classroom and lessons—do not invite me into this space.

Journal Entry, 12/9/15

I feel like I gelled much more with the co-teachers. I feel more in sync with what they are doing. I've had to give a little regarding what and how I want to teach, though. However, I feel it's best for the kids for me to be on the same page as their classroom teachers. It's taken several months this school year, but I felt like I finally "harmonized."

I experienced a synergy with one co-teacher in particular; hence, my perception of co-teaching in general, I believe began to slowly change for the better. I realized that working together, we could accomplish much more. This relationship produced strong results (i.e., higher performing, deeper thinking, higher teacher evaluations) with the students in the classroom—the gifted students and the general classroom students. I began to see the value in harmonizing, in blending my energies rather than allowing them to dissipate through conflict and disagreement. Still, I felt that other co-teachers did not allow me to enter their space. For instance, they didn't share lesson plans as freely or welcome my ideas for enrichment. However, the positive relationship I enjoyed with that one particular teacher began to spill over—she provided testimony to the other co-teachers, telling them about the promising results she noticed in her classroom after implementing my suggestions. Soon, another co-teacher accepted my offer to teach a lesson together, using a gifted education strategy as the backbone of the lesson. At this point, I definitely felt better about my co-teaching situation.

Influence

When they work together with others, leaders contribute to a better community, improving the community and everyone within it (Ackerina, 2015). By blending my energies, my experience, my goal, and my talents with colleagues, I realized a greater impact. I realized that by moving in circles, meaning taking a more subtle approach with co-workers, I would eventually accomplish more in the long run. This sometimes meant going along with teachers, even if I didn't agree philosophically, until I could interject my influence at a later time. This e-mail to a co-teacher, who I originally struggled to connect with, reflected my new, "softer yet more powerful" approach.

E-mail, 3/24/16

Me: I really like the different roles (i.e., paparazzi) in the book clubs; I was thinking we might use the DeBono's Six Thinking Hats in a future lesson to look at an article or story. It pushes them to consider different perspectives, works well with gifted but also helpsother students since you can limit the number and type of hats they use.

Co-teacher: I would love to have you do that!

The above exchange demonstrated that by harmonizing with my opponent (I no longer viewed them as the opponent at this point) I accomplished more with less energy. I respected my colleague's teaching efforts (as evidence by the authentic compliment I gave) then subtly shifted directions by suggesting my own strategy—and it worked. I had come full circle myself—I no longer experienced the frustration, the disconnect, I had battled with earlier in the school year.

Making Sense of My Experiences: Social and Cultural Connections

To better understand my experience, I consulted a number of literatures, ranging from psychology, philosophy, education and other fields. I believe it's prudent to first explore my increasing feelings of frustration since they may have been the catalyst for my other themes. Maslow (1943) proposed a hierarchy of needs; after satisfying most basic physiological needs and safety needs, human begins sought to satisfy love needs, esteem needs, and finally, self-actualization needs. Alderfer (1967) advocated that a person is motivated by three core needs: Existence needs (basic needs), Relatedness needs (the need to maintain interpersonal relationships), and Growth needs (personal development, self-actualization). Furthermore,

Alderfer (1967) maintained that needs neglected on one level accentuate needs on another level. In the workplace, this could translate to the lack of satisfying the ability to grow (create and produce) on the job could intensify the need for healthy relationships with colleagues. Essentially, when a person fails to fulfill a need in one area, a new problem arises—a stronger need pops up in another area. In my situation, I clearly felt suppressed or blocked by particular teachers in my efforts to meet the needs of my gifted students. At the same time, I wanted to enjoy positive, collaborative relationships with co-teachers-but that failed to occur as well. Could it be that each need fed upon each other? These unmet needs could be a source of frustration.

I also experienced isolation. Being the only teacher of gifted on campus, I often (and sometimes still do) feel alone in my philosophical approach to education. But I am far from an anomaly; teacher isolation poses a problem in all areas of the profession (Pollock, 1996).

Due to circumstances surrounding their job, teachers in gifted, in particular, may experience strained relations with colleagues. With teachers of gifted traveling about classrooms to various grade levels or between schools, classroom teachers might wonder what they are doing when they are not around (Henley, et al., 2010). Though they may lack training, classroom teachers are expected to differentiate for advanced students, yet another responsibility added to a demanding schedule (Henley, et al., 2010). Isolation, strained relationships, blocked needs—yes, I experienced stress on the job, but research revealed that I was far from the exception. In fact, one-fourth of United States employees state their job as their main source of stress and three-quarters of workers believe they experience more work-related stress than a generation ago (Baruch, Stutman, & Grotberg, 2008). Nevertheless, my stress-- my bottled up frustration-- was apparently not healthy, at least if not properly directed. Psychologists have long contended that frustration leads to aggression (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939). The famous Barker, Dembo, and Lewin (1941) experiment found that when children forced to stand outside a room and watch others play with attractive were finally allowed to play with the objects, they exhibit aggressive behaviors, such as throwing the toys or breaking them. But my bottled up frustration-turned aggression seemed to fire my advocacy efforts. Rather than break things, I wrote e-mails. I worked harder for the gifted kids. I told parents to be more aggressive in their advocacy. Hence, anger can be a strong motivating force. It can compel one to prove someone wrong, take action, and/or create change (Habib, 2015). Specifically, my anger transformed into advocacy for my gifted students---meeting their needs, academically and affectively. However, I hit a wall. I realized that my efforts would produce less impact unless I worked cohesively with colleagues. I had to align my goals with their educational goals, get behind their energy before I could begin to “push” them in direction I desired. Rather than move straight ahead, like the Aikido master, I needed to move in softer, gentler circles, aligning and redirecting. Furthermore, I need to connect with my co-teachers since professional practice, as well as gifted education, cannot thrive in a vacuum (Coleman, Gallagher, & Job, 2012). This could explain my gradual success with colleagues as I began to work more cooperatively. While certainly not in all cases, I convinced some teachers to adopt practices used to challenge gifted and advanced learners. At least one teacher began to incorporate the techniques into the classroom with success; later, some other co-teachers followed suit. Influence is often a process rather than an event and often involves trying various techniques—even then, not everyone can be easily influenced (Bacon, 2012). I experienced an emotional high when a school district employee who spends time with teachers around campus informed me other teachers had mentioned how I had impacted their instruction and pedagogy. While I had not impacted every colleague in the same manner, I undoubtedly related better with all of them by aligning myself and my instruction with their teaching goals. For instance, when designing a lesson for my gifted students, I might ask a co-teacher, “what are your instructional goals this week?” or “what do you think about using this lesson?” I learned I could influence others more effectively by aligning one’s requests with the other person’s interests and goals (Bacon, 2012)

Limitations

The interpretations of the data are just that, my interpretations, and other researchers could have different interpretations of the same data. Writing an autoethnography for the first time also presented challenges: serving as my own study participant posed challenges with objectivity. How does one study him or herself without bias? Also, presenting information of a personal nature could present problems with being forthcoming. How can I be brutally honest myself and readers? What if co-workers read the article and get angry with me? Such questions circled my mind as I wrote this article.

Discussion

During this autoethnography, I explored my progression from a frustrated resource teacher, who second-guessed my decision to accept the position, to a functioning co-teacher, who, in at least in some cases, able to influence my colleagues to better challenge their gifted and advanced learners. The frustration I experienced fueled my advocacy efforts to help the gifted population—but I soon realized that this hard-charging, direct approach would fail without the cooperation of other teachers. I strove to collaborate. I purposely assumed a “softer” approach that called for aligning my instructional goals with those of the classroom teachers. This process educated me about the importance of relationships, of aligning oneself with others, and communicating. I appreciated the give and take of all relationships and learned to make this dynamic serve my purpose. Paraphrasing the words of Ueshiba (2002), I allowed my antagonists to act as they want and then blend with them. Rather than face problems head on, I mastered the art of redirecting each confrontation and then got firmly behind it. While this inquiry undoubtedly helped my better understand my role as a teacher of gifted and the stages I had endured to become more efficient on the job, I believe my experience could also serve others in similar positions. Teachers of the gifted face additional obstacles in addition to the common problems experienced by all educators. They battle isolation and perhaps a lack of acceptance by colleagues as they fight to provide accommodations and meet the needs of their gifted students. Knowing they might undergo various stages as they work to master their craft might benefit their professional development. One way to reflect on *how* we think rather than purely on just *what* we think and challenge our creative potential—whether we are a teacher or work in another profession—is through researching other disciplines, such as Aikido (Bradford, 2011). Consequently, embracing a “softer” approach that assists the in better harmonizing with co-teachers might not only make their work lives easier but also enable them to become more powerful advocates for the gifted, leaders who use influence for the betterment of all those around them. Finally, this autoethnography might shed light on the importance of classroom teachers receiving appropriate levels of gifted education training. While approximately 6 percent –or about 3 million children in U.S. schools - are identified as “gifted,” education majors can come out of college, some possessing graduate degrees, and head into classrooms with virtually no knowledge of the needs of gifted children or how to effectively work with them (Berman & Shultz, 2012). Of course, teachers of gifted are responsible for helping classroom teachers met the needs of these children, it would be reasonable to expect that more training for everyone could only result in improving relationships between teachers. Just think of the powerful impact of having educators blend their energies toward a common goal –having every child realize their potential, gifted or otherwise.

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