From Student to Author:
Engaging Gifted Learners in the National Novel Writing Month Young Writers Program

Nancye Blair Black
Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Students develop and compose a long narrative story each November in a challenge called the National Novel Writing Month Young Writers Program (NaNoWriMo YWP). In Fall 2011, 16 gifted fourth and fifth graders participated through their twice-weekly pull-out gifted programming. Through use of a three-phase program implementation, NaNoWriMo YWP resources and online community, dynamic technology tools, and extended blocks of uninterrupted writing time, these students engaged in advanced writing instruction and practices in order to meet/surpass a personal narrative writing goal. Each of the participating gifted students met the school's learning objectives by identifying and applying advanced writing skills and improving knowledge and application of a personal goal-setting process. This chapter outlines the program's alignment with best practices in gifted education, the program implementation's educational goals/objectives, the specific strategies and practices used in implementing the program, the outcomes to student learning, and recommendations for gifted educators.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

McKeel Elementary Academy (MEA) is a public charter elementary school in central Florida, which provides a technology-infused education for 348 students. The diversity of the student body includes 75.1% Caucasians, 13% Black or African American, 8.4% Hispanic or Latino, 1.4% Asian, 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.7% with more than 1 race. Regarding socio-economic diversity, 22% of the students are on the free lunch program and 6% receive reduced-priced lunches. The 348 students are divided into three classes of each grade, with 18 students composing kindergarten through third grade classes and 22 students composing fourth and fifth grade classes. Generally, a similarly diverse make-up characterizes each of the classes. Since its establishment in 2003, McKeel Elementary Academy has demonstrated high student achievement and learning gains, gaining recognition as an "A" school.

SETTING THE STAGE

McKeel Elementary Academy provides a special instruction program to its students who are gifted. The state of Florida defines the gifted as "one who has superior intellectual development and is capable of high performance" ("6A-6.03019," 2002). According to *Florida's Plan for K-12 Gifted Education*, in order to be eligible for gifted services in the state of Florida, generally speaking, a student's evaluation must demonstrate a "need for a special instructional program, evidence of characteristics of the gifted, and [an] evaluation documenting intellectual development," including a score of 130 or higher on a qualifying IQ measure (Florida Department of Education (FL DOE), 2013b).

At the time of this program implementation, once students at MEA were identified as gifted, they were typically staffed into the school's gifted pull-out classes (FL DOE, 2013b, p. 42). The classes took place in the school's computer lab twice weekly, each for one hour. During this time, students engaged in a variety of independent and cooperative learning activities aimed at mastering critical and creative thinking skills, extending learning beyond the general education curriculum, and working toward other goals or skills identified in the students' Educational Plans (EP). During the 2011-2012 school year in the course of these pull-out classes, sixteen fourth and fifth grade gifted students participated in the National Novel Writing Month Young Writers Program.

As the Technology and Gifted Specialist for the school, I taught the gifted students, both during their general education classes' weekly technology classes, as well as for the two weekly homogenous gifted pull-out classes. My educational certifications

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