Teaching for Learning: 
Curriculum Differentiation for High Ability and Gifted Learners
February 27 and 28, 2017
Vanderbilt University • Peabody College

Keynote and Featured Speakers:

Catherine Little, Ph.D., from the University of Connecticut is an Associate Professor in Educational Psychology. She teaches classes in gifted and talented education and in the undergraduate honors program in education. Previously, she served as a Visiting Assistant Professor in Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary. Catherine has a Ph.D. from William and Mary in Education Policy, Planning, and Leadership. Dr. Little’s research interests include professional development, differentiation of curriculum and instruction for advanced learners, and classroom questioning practices. She has written and co-written several book chapters and journal articles related to curriculum and gifted education. She has also co-written several curriculum units.

Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D., is an assistant research professor in special education and the executive director of Programs for Talented Youth at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Stambaugh conducts research in gifted education with a focus on students living in rural settings, students of poverty, and curriculum and instructional interventions that promote gifted student learning. She is the co-author/editor of several books, book chapters, and journal articles. She frequently provides keynotes, professional development workshops, and consultation to school districts nationally and internationally and shares her work at refereed research conferences. She serves on the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) awards and professional standards committees and is a reviewer for leading research journals in the field of gifted education. She is also the co-author of the popular curriculum supplements, Jacob’s Ladder. She has co-authored many curriculum units, including NAGC awarding winning Programs for Talented Youth Language Arts units.

Jennifer Ufnar, Ph.D., is the current director of the Scientist in the Classroom Partnership Program at Vanderbilt University within the Department of Teaching and Learning. She holds a Ph.D. in Biology, and has recently joined the Department of Teaching and Learning from a faculty position at Southern Vermont College. Dr. Ufnar has over a decade of experience in teaching at the K-16 level and implementing and directing programs in the science education arena. Dr. Ufnar is a member of the Peabody-MNPS Steering Committee for the program, and recruits and mentors graduate students in the program.
Currently Scheduled Session Descriptions**

Questions and Answers and What Happens in Between (Catherine Little, Ph.D.)
Educators have long emphasized the importance of high-level and high-quality questioning and discussion in the classroom for all learners and to challenge advanced learners. Yet, what do we really mean when we talk about this type of questioning, and what does it look like in action? Perhaps more importantly, how can we work on doing it as well as possible to promote high levels of student thinking? This session explores some of what we know about asking questions and listening to answers as key components of fostering strong thinking and discourse in the classroom. We will explore classroom applications of questioning research from inside and outside the field of gifted education, and we will discuss ways of promoting professional development and reflection related to questioning practices to differentiate instruction and add rigor to the curriculum.

Differentiating without the Fluffy Stuff (Catherine Little, Ph.D.)
Differentiation of curriculum and instruction is an essential component of providing support for advanced learners. However, the quality of resources advertised as examples of differentiation varies considerably. Sometimes the effort to apply a differentiation strategy in an engaging way may lead us to lose sight of the central goals and content of a learning experience, such that the “fluff” takes precedence over the essential learning. In this session, we will discuss what makes something fluff versus substance and engage attendees in using key criteria to examine sample resources for aspects of quality differentiation.

Peer tutoring: Effective strategy or unfair use of student time? (Catherine Little, Ph.D.)
Teachers often try to manage “fast finishers” by having them help other students, using the argument that “we learn something better when we teach it.” Peer tutoring is also sometimes promoted as an approach to developing students’ leadership skills and empathy. Yet among gifted education specialists, most are opposed to this practice. What does the research say about this issue, and how can advocates for gifted learners help colleagues examine this practice more critically? In this session, we will wrestle with the rationale for peer tutoring and consider its use with advanced learners. Leaders and teachers alike will find this information useful for creating evidence supported practices in your district or your classroom.

When They Already Know What You are Going to Teach (Catherine Little, Ph.D.)
Many advanced learners enter a new grade level, course, or unit already knowing a lot of the content that teachers will address. Thus, teachers need strategies for determining students’ level of mastery and differentiating to ensure that students are able to engage in new learning instead of repetition. Compacting is an approach to examining students’ progress and planning systematically for their learning experiences while content they already know is addressed. In this session, we will discuss the rationale for compacting and key elements for making it work.

Differentiating STEM Instruction in the Heterogeneous Classroom through Inquiry (Jennifer Ufnar, Ph.D.)
In this session, teachers will gain insight into utilizing inquiry to differentiate the learning of STEM concepts to meet the needs of all students in the K-12 general education classroom. Example strategies will be provided during the session, and teachers will learn how to create lessons that both address and extend the learning beyond the required standards to support the needs of high-ability students.
Use of Problem-Based Learning to Target High Level Learners in the Gifted Classroom (Jennifer Ufnar, Ph.D.)

In this session, teachers will learn how to design Problem-based Learning (PBL) units to reach gifted K-12 learners. Teachers will learn how to help students move beyond teacher-defined PBL units to student-designed units that both address and extend the learning beyond the required standards to support the needs of high-ability students.

Paul’s Reasoning Model (Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D.)

When teachers say to a student “think about it”, what do they really mean? How is thinking defined and how can thinking be taught? This session introduces individuals to Paul’s Reasoning Model as a model for enhancing critical thinking in the classroom. We will explore ways the model can be used to ask complex questions, craft issue-based research questions, analyze writing and justify ideas, and differentiate thinking processes for all students and more specifically for advanced learners.

Beyond the Facts: Diving Deeper in Social Studies Instruction (Emily Mofield, Ed.D.)

How did the bubonic plague affect the Renaissance? How did the economy play a role in Indian Removal? How is social media affecting politics? Social Studies instruction should guide students to examine how history is a system of interconnected ideas and interacting factors that produce societal change. Learn how to apply the models used in the PTY curriculum, Finding Freedom, to promote in-depth inquiry for Social Studies instruction including ways to differentiate tasks, prepare tiered assignments, analyze primary sources, and create advanced product task demands to stimulate thinking for your gifted and high achieving students. Participants will learn how to infuse depth and complexity within Social Studies instruction and related accelerated literacy standards using field-tested models from a curriculum designed for gifted learners.

Simplifying Complexity in English Language Arts: Applying Models from the PTY ELA Curriculum to Enhance Student Rigor (Emily Mofield, Ed.D.)

Gifted students need modifications to their curriculum and ongoing acceleration of content. What are the essential elements for modifying or developing ELA curriculum so that it responds to the needs of gifted and high achieving learners? Providing challenging ELA lessons involves adding rigor to learning tasks, but adding such complexity takes time and practice. In this session, you will learn easy-to-use models found in the Programs for Talented Youth ELA curriculum that help simplify complexity for teaching literature, informational texts, and primary sources. Additionally, you will also learn to apply models that guide students to delve deeper into issues and themes relevant to students’ personal lives. Learn how models from nationally recognized award-winning curriculum can be used to tier questions, tasks, and products that appropriately challenge gifted students. Interact with other participants as you practice lessons and gain new ideas and strategies for supporting academic growth.

Lessons Learned: Designing Effective Curriculum for High Ability Learners (Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D. and Emily Mofield, Ed.D.)

Are you interested in writing curriculum for gifted learners, tasked with developing district curriculum plans, or being asked to create differentiated lessons that meet the needs of a variety of gifted learners? If so, how do you begin? What features of curriculum are most important to emphasize when working with gifted learners, in particular? In this session, two award-winning curriculum authors will share their lessons learned when developing curriculum for gifted learners.
and discuss how they go about designing curriculum that promotes learning gains for high achieving and gifted learners. Examples from a variety of award-winning curriculum will be shared.

**Leading Change in Gifted Education Programs: An Update for Tennessee Leaders in Gifted Education (Joanna Bivins, Ed.S., NCSP and Nancy Williams, Ed.S., NBCT, Tennessee Department of Education)**

TDOE representatives will meet with district leaders to provide state related policy and initiative updates related to gifted education. Specific topics covered will include information/updates related to the new Gifted Specialist position within the Office of Special Populations, disability definition and standards, an upcoming possible pilot program with gifted education, and how districts can access support.

*A lunch session is available for district leaders who would like to participate in a feedback session on presented stated updates with TDOE representatives and a more informal question and answer opportunity.*


The interactive session will cover topics addressing current concerns related to gifted education with TDOE representatives which may include technical support opportunities related to gifted programming, eligibility, reevaluations, IEP development hot topics, trends, and guidance resources.

**Questioning Across the Content Areas Using the Jacob’s Ladder Model (Sarah DeLisle, Ed.D. & Eric Fecht, M.Ed.)**

Jacob’s Ladder is a language arts curriculum supplement that was piloted and proven successful with low-income, high-ability students. In this session participants will learn how to use the scaffolded questioning approach of Jacob’s Ladder in both gifted and heterogeneous classrooms to create tasks and higher-order thinking questions that engage students in critical analysis. Originally designed to be a scaffolded approach to questioning with literature and nonfiction texts, the Jacob’s Ladder model can be used in other content areas as well. This session provides you with the knowledge to design and effectively implement your own questions and tasks using resources you already have in your classroom. This process can be utilized in at all grade levels—all it takes is the “know how” to design your own ladders to push all students’ thinking to new levels and to bring rigor into your everyday instructional practices.

**Using Jacob’s Ladder with Nonfiction Texts (Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D.)**

Comprehending and analyzing nonfiction texts is an important skill to develop in elementary and middle school students. In this session, participants will learn how to apply the research-based Jacob’s Ladder questioning model to assist students in comprehending and analyzing nonfiction texts—essays, articles, comparison documents, infographics, and more. Participants will learn how the model is specifically designed to move students through an inquiry process from basic understanding to critical analysis of texts as they are introduced to examples from the newly published nonfiction series of Jacob’s Ladder. The session will also include opportunities for practice as participants developing their own question ladders for nonfiction texts that are focused on grade levels in which they work with a focus on students in grades 3-7.
Developing and Supporting IEP Outcomes for Gifted Learners
Toni Brown, M.Ed., Williamson County Schools

Whether you are a classroom teacher, a teacher of gifted, or a leader of gifted programs and depending upon the state policies where you reside, you may be responsible at some level for developing, implementing, or monitoring gifted student individual plans. But what do appropriate goals for gifted students look like? What are typical goals you might suggest at an IEP or individual plan meeting that are likely to be effective for gifted learners? What other considerations need to be made and what support systems need to be included in a plan? In this session we will discuss all of these questions, look at examples of IEPs and try our hand at writing an IEP based on a case study. Although this session is geared toward educators in TN and will apply TN policies, anyone in charge of writing or implementing plans for gifted students is invited to attend.

*The listed descriptions are a sampling of the sessions offered and subject to change. Additional sessions may be added.*