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# A Word to the Teacher

## *Ancient Civilisations*

*"... the young today need to learn that there has been change. They need to know about their past before they can understand the present, and plot the future."*

Margaret Mead, *The New York Times*, 1971

What has this to do with the study of Ancient Civilisations? We are bits and pieces of all these civilisations . . . Within their histories are the roots of our cultural, economic and educational systems.

The Sumerians provided the beginnings of our writing systems, mathematics and applied science. The Babylonians contributed a system of uniformly written laws. The Persians excelled in government and were responsible for a communication system similar to the Pony Express.

These units will help students tie their world and values into those beginnings. Having an awareness of what came before is necessary in understanding the present and in anticipating the future.

*One can learn the campaigns of the civil war with dates, battles and characters without learning anything about why wars are fought between friends or what ideas can be generalised to other conflict situations.*

James Gallagher

*Teaching the Gifted Child, 1974*

## Rationale for Self-directed Learning

Our children's education must be more than the memorisation of capitals of states, products of countries and dates and places of past wars. Most teachers and parents would agree that what is also wanted is for our children to learn to think for themselves, to organise their own time, to make wise choices, to work independently and to thoughtfully evaluate the results of their study.

### Obstacles to Independent Learning

In spite of the teacher's best efforts, many, if not most, classroom settings are organised in such a way that students are involved in timetables and organisational plans that foster dependence rather than the independence we prefer. Students are told what is to be learned and how long it will take them to learn it. The resources are defined by the teacher and, afterwards, the teacher, rather than the student, decides whether the learning experience was a satisfactory and valuable one.

## A Learning Atmosphere

Each time we, as educators, focus on what our objectives are, we need to take a fresh look at our classroom mode of operation and evaluate the effectiveness of the way we teach. Quite naturally, for most of us, our teaching style has more to do with how we were taught than with what recent research has shown about the learning process. Even our good instincts have been overcome by the years of conditioning we have known in our own educational experiences.

Like a breath of fresh air, the recent findings coming from the research on the brain and how it operates are supporting intuitive knowledge. This research is showing that our brains are receptive to learning only under certain conditions. Our job is to translate that information into a classroom atmosphere that provides:

- challenge
  - freedom within structure
  - trust and warmth
  - opportunities to experience success
  - personal involvement in the curricula

A natural transition generally occurs that transforms the former “teacher-lecturer” into a “fellow-learner”. As a “fellow-learner” the teacher’s role becomes one of a resource person, a facilitator and a classroom manager. In this maturing atmosphere, students gradually come to see themselves as responsible for their own learning and a foundation for self-direction is set.



At this point, a sometimes unexpected problem arises. We find the student no more ready for their independent learning than we, as teachers, were ready to allow it. The common occurrence is mentioned repeatedly in the literature dealing with programming for the gifted, an area where independent study and research are recommended as a major curricular activity [see Suggested Reading List; Maker (1982), Doherty and Evans (1980), and Feldhusen and Treffinger (1980)].

# Setting the Stage

After the days of the cavepeople . . .  
Before the pyramids of Egypt and the Parthenon of Greece . . .

People lived in cities . . .  
They learned to write . . .  
They had a system of government . . .  
Their art was beautiful . . .  
They traded with other countries . . .  
They built elaborate temples . . .

AND they invented something that most people use every day . . . **THE WHEEL!**





# 1. Vocabulary

You'll need to understand these words when you learn about the Ancient Civilisations:

SUMERIAN UR MINOS ZIGGURAT DELTA  
HAMMURABI EDUBBA

**FIND OUT** what these words mean.  
**CATEGORISE** them.

People	Places	Things

