



## Field Notes—Teresa Reddish

*Scholarship Is a Career Turning Point*

*“We have some students that have never been to a mall or ridden an escalator. Some of them have never taken a bus into the city. I experienced this in Los Angeles, as well, where many of the kids had never seen a tide pool or been to the ocean. They just ride around their neighborhoods, and that’s all they know. To give them such life experiences is eye-opening. They’re like little sponges, soaking it all in.”*

Talking with Teresa Reddish is a bit like chatting with a hummingbird. Unflaggingly positive, her high energy and enthusiasm seem to buzz across miles of telephone wire.

Working with gifted children wasn’t a first or obvious choice for Teresa. You might say it was LEGOS that sealed the deal. She had been teaching third grade and had a cluster of gifted boys in her class. She wanted to learn how she could do LEGO robotics activities with them, but that required her having a gifted education teaching credential. When she began to work more closely with these students, she realized how desperately they needed an advocate. “I was like a lot of other people who have preconceived notions about gifted children,” shares Teresa. “I thought they already got it. Then I realized that there was way too much focus on catch-up in my classes, rather than extension. My gifted kids needed MORE. They weren’t being challenged. That’s when I became a cheerleader for them.” And *more* is indeed what Teresa brings to her students—through enrichment opportunities and exposure to divergent ways of thinking that expand their horizons and build confidence.

Every year she and another teacher take turns applying for Target field trip grants. But these aren’t conventional field trips: they are highly interactive and hands-on, and they give the children life experiences many of them wouldn’t have otherwise. She takes the students to a play and then gives them the opportunity to go backstage to talk to the actors afterwards. She

» Teresa Reddish and her Javits-Frasier mentor, Sally Krisel, share a moment after Teresa received NAGC’s Harry Passow Classroom Teacher Scholarship Award in 2014



» Teresa works with a 2nd grader on a LEGO Mindstorm Robots project.

takes them to an art museum, but not before they’ve talked about artists like Frida Kahlo and read books like *Chasing Vermeer*. Once at the museum, the children met an actual folk artist and made their own traditional masks and bowls. Before a trip to the local Botanical Museum, the class discussed the difference between medicinal and cooking herbs, later planting and potting their own herb gardens. “All of these field trip activities came out of what I learned at the NAGC Convention,” says Teresa. “We’re building background knowledge for these kids. Once I see them get it, it’s priceless for them.”

Teresa heard about the Javits-Frasier Scholarship in 2009 through a colleague. The NAGC Convention was in Georgia (where Teresa teaches) in 2010, so it was an ideal time to apply. “I was over the moon,” says Teresa when she heard she was one of that year’s recipients. “It was a turning point in my career.”

One of the things Teresa valued most about her Javits-Frasier experience was the opportunity to work with mentor Sally Krisel. “I was lucky or it was some kind of divine intervention for me to connect with Sally. She’s a force of nature. She has been such an inspiration to me. She helped me to map out my own professional goals and to really think about what kind of impact I wanted to make over the course of the next 20 years. And then, after the Convention, she gave the charge: ‘Now, you have this new information. It’s time to share it.’” It was Sally who encouraged Teresa to continue her studies at the University of Georgia to become a Specialist in Gifted and Creative Education. And it was Sally who told her she had to get out there and do her own advocacy on behalf of students. “Sally’s a great prompter and so much fun to bounce ideas off of. When you’re struggling with something, she always says exactly the right thing.”

Teresa and Sally have co-presented at the Georgia Gifted Association, but that’s just one of many ways Teresa stays active in gifted education advocacy. She also pays it forward by being a Javits-Frasier mentor.