

Connecting for high potential

Your Tear and Share Guide

NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might face the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential.

Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of their students' potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

This month's topic: “We know this child is gifted. Now that the question of identification has been answered, what is my role? What are some practical ways I can support & encourage learning?”

A TEACHER VIEW

A few short weeks after her arrival, I realized that when Stephanie raised her hand to participate in class, I was eager to hear her ideas and then could be easily drawn into a two-way debate. Her thirst for learning was exciting, so I recommended screening for the gifted program. The process has taken a while but I've just received notification that Stephanie's “in.” However, I worry that my obvious pleasure in her scientific discourse, or the need to make modifications to accelerate her curriculum might make the other students feel excluded or envious. Also, will the attention give Stephanie a false sense that she's somehow better than the rest of the class?

How do I help Stephanie soar yet still respect the unique qualities and experiences of my other students?

A PARENT VIEW

Our child doesn't need a lot of repetition. He gets a concept almost immediately and then begins asking more and more questions as he applies the new information to other areas he's interested in. For example, when he first learned about Venn diagrams, he wanted to know if they would be a good way to show how groups of animals can be classified by similarities and differences. Unfortunately there wasn't time to include his idea within the classroom lesson. It isn't that his teacher doesn't care, but there's no support for GT, no training, nothing to help her!

Now in second grade, my son says he's “done with going to school” because he wants to spend his time really learning new things. What can we do as parents? Also, what should we be doing? We want him to stay eager to learn!

Let's be clear: The process of talent development is ongoing and requires high levels of attentiveness, energy, and time. However, even with differing viewpoints, a collegial team of teacher and parent can share the responsibility, plus discover myriad ways to positively reinforce each other's work!

1. Consider and clarify roles and responsibilities:

- One of a teacher's major roles is to assess the readiness level of all students in each subject area and provide appropriate instruction.
- A responsible teacher will create learning experiences that challenge and respect different levels of student readiness (whether below, on, or above grade level). He or she will also seek out knowledgeable colleagues and opportunities to further develop this professional expertise.
- An outstanding teacher makes learning exciting for all students. Although identified high-ability students in the class may not always be rapidly accelerated, all students are engaged in stimulating curricular experiences in a vibrant community of learning
- A primary parental role is to make sure his/her child has access to an optimal learning environment.
- Responsible parents respectfully reach out to the school, research what is currently available, accurately represent their child's characteristics and behaviors (as well as any changes in expressed attitude to classroom learning), and ask how they can support their child at home.
- Outstanding parents recognize that everything isn't always perfect, but they model positive problem-solving behavior. They don't tear down the school; instead they appreciate when their child is happy and excited about learning.

2. In the classroom:

- Activate your own prior knowledge. Identify strategies or classroom options already in place to challenge high-potential learners. As you make this list, consider how you might explain in a way that your students and their parents can understand the purpose and procedure of each option. Be sure to think about both Enrichment and Acceleration strategies. For more information, review NAGC's glossary of gifted education at www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=565.
- Success can start as a small change. Is there one new differentiation strategy to stimulate and inspire this student? It could benefit others, too.
- Help to champion the cause by working with colleagues to collect information and model good practices. Ask for more training in gifted.
- While it's appropriate for a parent to inquire about what's happening in the classroom, be sensitive. Don't give an impression that you are taking over educator areas like teaching methods, curriculum and content, or grading policies.
- On the other hand, parents should be well informed about different educational provisions. The chapter "Finding a Good Educational Fit" in *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* (2007; Great Potential Press) outlines current, key information.
- Does your child recognize the importance of good manners in school? Help your child become a non-adversarial advocate for his/her learning needs, rather than succumbing to boredom or disruptive behaviors.

3. In the home:

- Don't assume parents know where to easily find good resources about gifted children. Keep culture, language, and family circumstances in mind as you find and suggest options or materials. What resources can you offer parents?
- An observant teacher with content-area expertise can help parents draw connections or plan activities to build on a student's curiosity or interests. Are there events, venues, or opportunities in your community that might further a student's talent development? You may find the searchable Resource Directory at www.nagc.org helpful in this regard.
- Share a list of reading materials you wish you had time to cover in class. These suggestions might include books, periodicals, or other literature that can either be read independently, or as a family. Or, check *Some of My Best Friends Are Books: Guiding Gifted Readers from Preschool to High School* (2nd ed.) (2002; Great Potential Press), with summaries of over 300 books.
- Research shows that plentiful conversations between parents and children – talking over ideas – are an essential component of home environments that foster success. What are good topics? Think about areas of interest (on the part of either parent or child). Isn't that when you are most involved in learning? See the topic Keeping Your Child Challenged at: <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=967>.
- Homework? Look through the study guides and time management techniques in the section Organization Skills on NAGC's Parent pages: www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=968
- Think balance in learning. There is a time for schoolwork and a time for learning about other aspects of life. As a role model, how do you show value for such activities as after school music, athletics, community service, and free time for exploring interest areas, playing games, or savoring the beauty of life?

Teamwork: For the benefit of the child, reach out and share information. Why? It is not unusual for a gifted child to show different behaviors in different situations. For example, a girl who is a highly advanced reader might retreat and stop paying attention in a regular classroom, but be an animated conversationalist in the city library's reading group. Her school behavior could easily be misunderstood if parent and teacher don't compare notes. It takes teamwork to deliver consistent messages about expectations, opportunities, and the child's responsibility as an active learner.

Teamwork divides the task and doubles the success.

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