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Opportunities for Your Gifted and Talented Child

Tina Mischke

A teacher has a student who is constantly interrupting her with questions or causing inappropriate breaks in the lesson with comments. This student seems to want to second guess the teacher and challenges her on every topic. At times, this student is obviously not paying any attention to the lesson and sits at her desk involved in her own project, causing annoying distractions for the other students in the classroom. The teacher has observed a wide variety of emotions from frustration and anger to boredom and disinterest depending on the topic. She is at a loss as to how to engage this student appropriately in the classroom and is about ready to recommend a student study team and special education assessment.

Does the above student have a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit Disorder, low cognitive ability, emotional disturbance, or physical handicap? No, the above-described student is a gifted and talented child who is in a classroom that doesn't accommodate her learning style. Gifted and talented students are probably the most neglected segment of the student population when it comes to special services and programs. Although many schools do offer science Olympiads, school bands, and similar programs, my experience has been that teachers often volunteer their own after school time with no financial support and little school sponsorship.

If the schools don't offer the programs, where does a parent go to keep their gifted and talented child engaged and on a continuous learning and growing path? The following article offers some suggestions to get you started, but first, how do you know if your child fits this description? You may suspect that your precocious toddler is exhibiting above-average intelligence but gifted children are often not identified until they begin school. General education teachers should be trained to spot the signs and suggest assessment but a teacher with limited training in this area may miss the signs. That's when it's up to the parent to recommend an assessment for the G.A.T.E. (gifted and talented education) program if your school offers it.

Signs may include:

- * unusual retentiveness
- * advanced comprehension
- * varied interests and curiosity
- * high level of verbal ability
- * unusual intensity; goal-directed behavior
- * keen sense of humor (gentle or hostile)
- * unusual emotional depth
- * high expectations
- * leadership ability
- * unusual discrepancy between physical and intellectual development
- * experiments with psychic and metaphysical phenomena
- * interest in future

The above signs are a compilation of different intelligences—cognitive; affective; physical; and intuitive. A child can be considered gifted and talented with exceptional

intelligence in only one or several of these areas and be quite average in the others. Traditionally, students who are culturally different or come from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds often get overlooked in the process of identifying students for gifted programs. Parents should be aware that standardized tests are often biased against this type of student and can cause unfairly low scores. A parent who suspects that their child may benefit from a gifted program or who has a child who is exhibiting inappropriate classroom behaviors due to boredom or lack of intellectual stimulation should insist on assessment for the G.A.T.E. program, even if the school hasn't already suggested it.

In California, these students are served by the California Education Codes 52200-52212. Parents can check with their individual school district to find out what programs are available as it is up to each school board to define and enforce the code. Keep in mind that many schools cannot offer transportation and some of the other services that make it possible for students to participate in after-school programs and clubs. If your child can benefit from an intellectual or musical after-school program, it is just as important for the parent to support this endeavor with transportation and involvement as it is for a child participating in sports.

I have found the best resources for extracurricular, mentally-stimulating activities can be found on home-school websites on the internet. One educational advantage that home-school students have is community participation during the school day when most children are sitting in a classroom watching the clock. But even for children attending a public school, parents can provide the same type of stimulation with academic-oriented trips out in the community on weekends and school holidays.

Plan the trip with a brief outline of goals beforehand. For example, if you decide to take a trip to the Gold Bug Mine in Placerville, you could decide to create a list of types of minerals, make a photographic display of stalactites and stalagmites, or make a study of pre-industrial revolution equipment used for mining in the 1800s. By planning ahead and studying the subject before the trip, the event becomes a learning experience rather than just a day out. One excellent website for Northern California field trips is: <http://www.homefires.com/fieldtrips/>.

Although nothing can beat going out and having a hands-on learning experience (the "touchy-feely" method of education), another excellent resource for gifted students is the Internet. For families that don't have access to the internet at home, most city public libraries provide internet service for research and surfing. Usually all that is required is a library card. Also, parents can be assured that appropriate blocks are in place so your child is not accessing inappropriate web sites.

<http://www.homefires.com/fieldtrips/> There's more to the computer than sitting and playing solitaire all day or IMing (instant messaging) your friends. You can put your computer to work for you and keep your above-average student engaged and learning if you know where to look. Do a Yahoo or Google search for "webquest" and you will find resources for complete lesson plans available on the internet already packaged and ready to go. A webquest usually consists of a subject, an objective, materials, a procedure, a method of evaluation, and a list of web site links to follow to complete the assignment. The "virtual field trip" is another ready-to-go lesson plan available at many web sites on the internet.

<http://www.homefires.com/fieldtrips/> Gifted and talented children have specific social and emotional considerations. They may not know what they need in order to be successful. The observant teacher and the involved parent can be the best

advocate for the gifted and talented child, providing for their special needs and ensuring a successful school experience. <http://www.homefires.com/fieldtrips/> References available. Tina Mischke is currently completing her Master's of Science in Special Education and also has a B.A. in Communication Studies. After twenty years in the private sector in office management while volunteering as a literacy tutor and mentor, she has been in education full time since 2001 and is employed by the Fairfield- Suisun Unified School District. She can be reached at Pro2ter@yahoo.com.