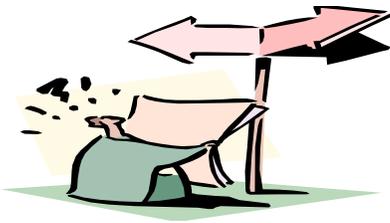




Deeper Learners How a Caring Adult can Help a Gifted Child

No single method



Where's a good program? A good summer course? A great school? Have you any lesson plans? The GCABC is often asked these questions by adults who work with or parent gifted children.

Many assume that as there are age based norms for regular children, there are norms for gifted children as well. Supply the right program and these children will

learn better, suffer less stress, have more friends, stop disrupting the class.

In reality, all gifted children are different. They may be as different from each other as they are from age based norms. "Assessments" or "tests" for giftedness often confuse this issue further, grouping children by IQ scores or ability with language or numbers. Although gifted children may all have the ability to learn more at a different rate than *average*, they do not form a homogenous learning group.

One of the reasons the B.C. Ministry of Education classifies Gifted Children as Special Needs Students is the recognition that they require individualised programming which should be recorded in an **Individualized Educational Plan** (I.E.P.)

Grouping children who do well in classroom work or on a particular test in a *challenge* class for a limited time a week may do nothing to create the specialised **learning program** a particular child needs. However **grouping gifted children can be very beneficial for their emotional needs and sense of self worth.**

of each *individuals* understanding. Cookie cutter activities and *gifted* lesson plans *aren't* the solution but may be a major part of the problem.

Gifted children may need formal tools sooner than their age peers in order to let them use information they already possess. Reading, writing and math are areas where gifted children may surpass their grade peers by several years at school entry. Instead of basic facts, they need skills more commonly taught in intermediate and high school grades, exposure to writing styles, critical reading, analysis of pattern.

Learning on the edge

We all learn *on the edge* of our knowledge base, the **zone of proximal development**. Just as body conditioning improves by stretching a little harder, running a little further than current capacity, a knowledge base increases in the same way.

If we envision a child teetering on a surfboard on the edge of their wave of knowledge, a gifted child might be seen as riding on the crest of a tsunami. The higher the gift the larger the wave.

This means learning, although involving the same process, has a much wider and more well used base to



draw on. Knowledge and facts are often not the skill sets which are lacking. Guided experience and the opportunity to refine, relate and work critically with **ability based peers**, are areas where the gifted child needs exposure.

Adults working with gifted children must find and provide activities at the edge

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Giftedness is Asynchronous Development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally. The Columbus Group 1991



Gifted Children Need... Although gifted children vary widely there are some standard needs for their success. Here are ten to try

Know their ability level and be prepared to give them formal tools earlier.

Many gifted children have been reading or working with numbers for several years before they reach primary school. Once their level is determined, they should be offered instruction in the skills of writing analysis that are appropriate for their reading level or math skills beyond simple number operations. Without appropriate skill outlines they often develop their own, which may create gaps in their understanding.

Help them watch for and interpret instructions aimed at age peers

Their sophisticated vocabulary and thinking skills mean they may **complicate**, rather than simplify instruction. Used to working in whole context situations they may not realise others work one step at a time, and they may base answers on their entire contextual knowledge rather than the lesson plan for a particular period. One standard school ability test asks if a cloud is always a) humid, b) fluffy, c) white, d) big, e) high. Gifted children who don't realise they are supposed to limit their scope **must** pick d) big, as they know there are clouds of dust, gas, locusts. Big, although not a satisfactory answer, is the only one which is relative and could be applied to all clouds larger than a molecule. (The correct answer for this test is humid, an unlikely choice for a gifted child!)

Enrichment should mean not more but deeper and finer, cross connected

Gifted children often feel the reward for excellence is extra work. (a perfect score in the spelling pre test gets you more words! If the required essay is 200 words good writers may need 400.) This teaches a gifted child to hide their abilities in order to avoid doing more. Use higher levels of **Bloom's taxonomy** when choosing activities for gifted children. Compare, analyse, link, synthesise, evaluate, contrast. **Do not add** these on to expected outcomes for the rest of the group! (Fred will clean his room, but Terry will clean his room, then the house **and** explain why it is important to the family that he do so.) The assumption should be that Terry, by working at the analysis level, is using his skills to demonstrate mastery of the lower levels. Or as one gifted

peer puts it. "If they already know how to dig a ditch don't make them dig 20 more because they can!"

Provide an area of learning where interest and commitment determine level, not chronological age

Pace and scope of delivery are the main criteria here. Music, art, dance, theatre and athletics are the most common forms of unrestricted learning delivery, usually supplied privately. Other learning can be delivered this way as well. Gifted learners with a passion for Chemistry should not have to fulfil their passion only outside school hours, wait until they reach grade 11 or study nuclear fission on the internet! The model used to teach music; progression at your own pace, with opportunities for valid criticism and work with ability peers, aided by someone who can guide your experience, should be the norm for **all** learning. Gifted children **need** this especially in their areas of passion. If unrestricted learning is difficult to achieve due to school schedules, or lack of experienced staff, try distance education courses or private tutors (check notice boards at colleges or universities).

Offer supportive outlines to help them develop manageable parameters

As sophisticated readers and observers they may have too much information and need to learn how to choose **one idea** for writing or research projects. They may also have great difficulty starting projects for this reason. (One child consistently had difficulty with run on sentences and lack of description until it was pointed out to him that a paragraph about a shipwreck did not have to detail **every** instance which occurred.) Teach them to organise according to a single **still** picture in their mind. One picture, one idea, one paragraph.

Provide them with alternatives to fact delivery.

Especially in subjects such as math, expose them to series, algebra, calculus, and geometry if they demonstrate understanding of the facts expected of their age based peers. If they were competent at music you would encourage them to explore all the richness of the various forms. Do the same with exposure to other subjects in which they have more than average competencies. Remem-

ber, **learning to appreciate** Beethoven, or calculus, **does not require** that you **perform it flawlessly**.

They need organisational skills to learn the value of ordinary time schedules so they understand how the average person paces themselves.

Gifted children fill their days with **more** than age peers. Their need for structure is different, they have more to organise, more connections to examine. Their wide ranging interests, although often interrelated, rarely fall into standard static patterns and **they need to participate in creating their own structure in order to make it work**. They may assume they are weak at organising, concentrating, remembering, but many of them never learn to sort or discard. They have no measure of what **ordinary mortals** expect to accomplish in a set time. Without this measure they push themselves to overachieve, to become perfectionists, resulting in high stress levels.

They need appreciative outlets for their creativity (Comedy time for the class clown, extended research time to work on projects) Adults must take their cue from where a gifted child is. Gifted children, like butterflies may not follow direct routes.

Offer them respect as valued contributors These are not children to be **moulded** but those whose **different outlook** will shape all our futures. Respect and encourage their unusual ideas, help them explore, perfect them. Their age belies their abilities, they will not be patronised. Introduce them to working communities in their field of passion and support their entry as full participants into these communities.

Help them deal with the procrastination and perfectionism which have their roots in deeper than normal understanding.

Help them develop realistic comparisons for their ability level when their knowledge vastly outreaches their experience or motor skills. Show them what practise and analysis mean to their skill development and **praise their effort**, not their outcome.

Support needs and passions, not scores or performance

Coming from widely differing backgrounds, with many self taught skills and knowledge bases, each gifted child's asynchronicity is heightened. Just as no natural wave is consistent in speed or crest drop, no gifted child will be the same as another. *Average* children follow an anticipated pattern of knowledge acquisition, governed mainly by what they are exposed to at school and in social settings with their peers. Gifted children, who may have created their own learning methods and fact stores outside the system, and who may choose to avoid age peers, have wider, higher, deeper knowledge bases and corresponding gaps. **Be a coach, not a fact or activity supplier. Each child must be supported as an individual.**

Development differs widely amongst gifted children, although Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski suggested the stimuli response of gifted individuals is stronger than normal in five areas which he called *overexcitabilities (o e s)* These involve psychological and central nervous system sensitivities. Knowledge of a particular gifted child's 'overexcitabilities' may help to find peers for that particular child (see resources for Dabrowski) The manifestation of these 'overexcitabilities' may cause an individual to be *perceived* as immature, hypersensitive, uncooperative, hyperactive or socially maladapted. They may refuse to wear certain fabrics, squirm in a particular t shirt or pair of socks, cry at books, movies, criticism of others. They may be hypersensitive to sound, light, food textures. Being in social environments may tire them out with sensory overload. **Adults who work with gifted children must be aware of these differences.**

Resources

Bloom's Taxonomy The GCA have info on this in their chapter handout "Beginning the Odyssey" or check out these websites <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/bloom.html> (part of uvic's student handbook) or <http://members.aol.com/PegFlint/bloom1.html> a site that explains Bloom's taxonomy in layman's terms.

Dabrowski's theory of overexcitabilities, most gifted people find it helps them accept who they are and helps to explain why they react the way they do to various stimuli. The basic description is at <http://www.ocsc.com/hoagies/overex.htm> a more involved description is here. <http://www.imag.net/dabrowski/>

Learning styles are a project of one time NASA researcher turned prof. Dr. Lois Breur Krause, who discusses how to adapt study skills and projects to suit learning style at <http://home.earthlink.net/~breurkrause/> also available in the GCABC library

John Taylor Gatto's books and articles on learning versus education systems at <http://www.preservenet.com/theory/Gatto.html>

Study skills University of Toronto handbook <http://www.campuslife.utoronto.ca/handbook/02002-StudySkills.change.html>

Ten Tips for Parents of Students Monique Prevost Lloyd, Oregon TAG Association (reprinted in *Beginning the Odyssey*, GCABC handouts in each chapter) <http://www.teleport.com/~rkaltwas/tag/articles/10tips.html>

What Educators should know about , , , a series of pamphlets available from the AEGTCCBC, the BC Teachers Professional Association for Gifted. Downloadable from the web at <http://www.bctf.bc.ca/PSAs/AEGTCCBC/index.html>

Special Education Services a Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines B.C. Ministry of Education available in every school in B.C. On the web at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/> Also check the the main B.C. ed site <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca> for IRP's and grade expectations to determine if your child exceeds expected performance for a particular grade.

Local colleges, universities, night, summer and distance schools may offer alternative delivery courses which allow gifted students better pacing or career development opportunities than regular high schools, check them out.

Mind maps explore ways of storing, relating and retrieving information with the many books by Tony Buzan or Michael Tipper, Grand Master of Memory at <http://www.happychild.org.uk/acc/tpr/index.htm>

General Web pages concerning giftedness with thousands of links:

Gifted Children's Association of B.C. Information on the B.C. organization <http://www.mybc.com/groups-bcgifted>

Gifted Canada, Canadian information and resources for gifted <http://www3.telus.net/giftedcanada>

Educators of the Gifted and Talented Children of B.C. <http://www.bctf.bc.ca/PSAs/AEGTCCBC/index.html>

Hoagies gifted page, major American source of info on all aspects of gifted children <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org>

Eric clearing house on Disabilities and Gifted Education run by the Council for Exceptional Children

<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericcec.htm>

Douance un site français pour les enfants surdoué <http://www.douance.org>



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A registered non profit organisation
dedicated to increasing awareness and
understanding of what it means to be
gifted.



These pages were written
by Lesley Ansell-
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Join the GCABC to help support Gifted
Children. Annual memberships are
available for \$35 , Most local member
groups have regular monthly meetings
and members have library privileges
and reduced rates at conferences.

Local contacts

Local member's groups of the GCABC exist all over the prov-
ince. Those in bold have regular meetings. Membership is
open to anyone concerned about gifted children. Local con-
tacts can supply you with more information or contact our
President, Lesley Ansell-Shepherd at 1-877-707-6111 or via
the gca website at <http://www.mybc.com/groups-bcgifted>



Armstrong	Sari Cox	250-294-3395	North Shore	Alistair Kent	604-925-6687
Cariboo-Chilcotin	Ken Soneff	250-398-7599	Powell River-Texada	Larry Dawe	604-486-7440
Central Okanagan	David Taylor	250-860-3020	Richmond	Tony Lukashuk	604-271-0907
Central Van. Island	Lianne Raynor	250-758-8735	Shuswap	Karen Bissenden	250-833-4886
Coquitlam	Sheila Armstrong	604-939-4820	South Island	Lesley Ansell-Shepherd	250-598-1670
Delta	Karen Gillespie	604 -940-0791	Surrey-White Rock	JoAnne Wardle	604-951-9570
Langley	Jean Lau	604-857-0810	Vancouver	Marta McIntosh	604-736-2705
			Vernon	Noelle Typusiak	250-545-0825

This publication is available in pdf (acrobat reader) format via the GCABC website at <http://www.gcabc.ca>
The GCABC is interested in any offers of support to produce or translate this newsletter to serve a wider section of the Gifted
Community. Please contact the GCABC at the numbers above to discuss how you or your organisation can help.

The preceding four pages are designed to be printed as a single page folded newsletter with pages 2 and 3 on the inside fold.

The following two pages are designed as a single page, double sided insert to be placed inside the newsletter and handed to gifted students by the adults the newsletter is directed at.



School Survival Skills for Gifted Students

One very gifted person we know is a psychologist who works with gifted youth. She says that in public places she feels she is wearing a mask. When she meets another gifted person she can remove that mask and be her normal self, but she uses her mask to fit in. The skills listed below are masks. You don't have to use all of them, just be aware that the conventions exist and can be used to help you fit in. Schools are systems. (read John Taylor Gatto's writings about the factory aspect of current schools.) You may already be successfully using most of these skills. If they make you gag, read the next page for some alternatives to regular systems.

Good students are perceived by most systems to be organised, neat and on time. Perception vs Reality is the survival skill. This is tough for a gifted student who may be organising everyone else with their leadership skills, and rarely on time because everyone talks to them about homework on the way to class! If you want better marks in a particular class, **look organised for that class**, have all your textbooks, file your returned assignments at the back of your binder. Always be on time (waiting politely with your book open helps as well).

Pick your spot Choose a place in the room where you can avoid the annoyance of lights, people talking, cross drafts etc. (Read Dabrowski in references.) Learn about group dynamics, sit where you can make eye contact with the teacher if you need to, and where you aren't lost behind any rabble that exist in your class, so you aren't judged by where you sit. (Hint, the front row is usually one of the **least** visible places to be. People talking to a group are less comfortable making eye contact with those closest to them.)

Hand in assignments on time To teachers this indicates you are organised, focussed, and had no trouble with the assignment. Crumpled edges and folds indicate *disorganisation* to many teachers. Many gifted students have trouble handing in assignments on time because they complete them several days before they are due and the assignment gets

covered up by all the other things they are working on. Keep finished assignments in a wall pocket, file folder or envelope, or print them out the night before they are due so you have a neat, professional product to hand in when the time comes. This expectation is related to how schools assume workplaces should function. Make your first impression count, you get more slack from the system if you start off looking good and seem prepared.

Any work you hand in should be neat, double spaced, and should always use examples from the previous lessons in that particular course. Gifted students often get into trouble here. When your English teacher has just finished talking about similes and metaphors, then asks you to write a paragraph about your reaction to a poem or a book, **show off the skill you are supposed to have learned in the assignment!** This is harder to remember the more gifted you are. You may have figured out similes and metaphors years ago and be really focussed on your reaction to the poem, or the political correctness of the language rather than using a particular form of writing (especially if you already knew it and day-dreamed through that section). Your class however may have just learned a particular skill and the marker may be looking for signs you are aware of it. Throw in a few examples, elaborate on them if you can. (simile and metaphor connected by using onomatopoeia!)

Figure out the pace and style of the class Classes in schools work linearly, adding small bits of information to their working base. If the pace is too slow, gifted students often lose focus, think of other things. Use the extra time in class to figure out more examples and practise the lesson, do the homework, or study and improve your debating skills by intentionally choosing a contrary position and arguing it silently in your brain. Here you have to know your style and pace and that of the teacher. If you daydream a lot, talk with your teacher. Ask if they can post the homework at the start of the class so you can work on that while the class is covering what you are already good at. (**Be prepared to demonstrate your mastery before you ask for any privileges!**) If the pace or style of the class are a problem, find your options. Can you switch classes? Take the class

next term with a different teacher? Write a challenge exam and get credit for the course? Take the course via distance education, night school, or summer school?

Learn to answer the level of questions you are asked Another problem area for gifted students. Sometimes the questions you are asked on tests or assignments assume you only learn information in class (learning on your own often isn't acknowledged). Always ask yourself what has been covered in the lesson. If the information you know wasn't covered, the question isn't about that. If the physics class has been covering velocity for the last week, Friday's test will be about the formula for velocity. The only tricky part will be to identify the various examples of rate, distance and time and plug them into the formula. Don't assume the teacher will try to "trick" you by throwing in something completely new. You may already know other formulas but if they haven't been talked about in the course you aren't expected to know or use them.

Social stuff Gifted people feel isolated. They form a small part of the population. If you feel no one understands you, find other gifted individuals even if they are in other grades or schools. Remember, gifted people seem to be more emotionally sensitive than the main population, you may be reacting to signals others aren't aware they are sending out. Trust your feelings, gifted people are very good at quickly recognising individuals like them.

Gifted students are... Many gifted students have problems because the "condition" of giftedness is very poorly understood by those who aren't gifted. If you know you wear a **gifted** label, find out what people assume that means and try to work with their expectations. Many teachers believe gifted students are prepared, organised, neat, courteous, self-assured and happy to do more work. (are scouts automatically gifted?) If you are *gifted* and you don't meet their expectations you may need to explain your hectic schedule, the fact that you are involved in three sports outside of school, building robots for a world take over, and really planning on making a life as a comedian with no intention or need to study French or Socials past grade 11. Try to communicate who you are as an individual and what learning **needs** you bring to class. Communication often opens up better opportunities.

Learning Options and Opportunities Many of you, and your parents, have tried *everything* to succeed in school and it just isn't working. Is it because you aren't *really* gifted? Gifted enough? Too Gifted? If you feel like the ugly duckling all the time, consider some alternatives.

Social or academic? What do you need? To get out of school so you can market your invention? To get to university so you can *learn*! To work with people like you? To find a group of people you feel comfortable with? To fit in? To work faster? To work on projects that interest you?

Identify what changes would benefit you. Is one particular course annoying, one teacher, the class? How can you change that?

Are you feeling stressed because you try to do too many things? (make a list of what you do and fill in how much time you do it over a week, most gifted individuals take on a lot more than 'average' people. Make sure you put down *everything*)

Is your life balanced? Are you getting good adrenaline rushes and relaxation from physical activity, or are you attached to a keyboard or book all day? Do you have someone to share your thoughts with? Is there someone who understands what it is like to be you (someone else who can't stand bubbles in pop, hears dog whistles, is sure the lights in the classroom scream and dance, all things some gifted people react to)

Is your daily schedule right for you? If you get up for band at 6 am and you're asleep by three, you might need to work out your natural rhythm and find a schedule that works for you. 8:30 math classes don't have to be the *only* option.

Finding help

Read about Dabrowski's theory of overexcitabilities, most gifted people find it helps to explain why they react the way they do to various stimuli. The basic description is at <http://www.ocsc.com/hoagies/overex.htm> a more involved description is here. <http://www.imag.net/dabrowski/>

Check for your learning style with one time NASA researcher turned prof. Dr. Lois, Breur Krause, who discusses how to adapt your study skills and projects to suit your style at <http://home.earthlink.net/~breurkrause/>

Read John Taylor Gatto's articles or books on learning versus education at <http://www.preservenet.com/theory/Gatto.html>

Search for other gifted people, entrepreneurs, writers, film makers etc. on the web. Try <http://www3.bc.sympatico.ca/giftedcanada/kids.html> for Canadian sites of all types or <http://www.realm.ca>

If school is really getting to you, read *The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education* by Grace Llewellyn 1997 It explores ways you can complete your education outside the normal system yet suit your personal needs.

Work on study skills with the University of Toronto <http://www.campuslife.utoronto.ca/handbook/handbook.html>

Read any of Tony Buzan's books on mind mapping etc to help you learn how you can sort out your brain files.

Alternatives to think about (all these happen in B.C. and probably in most other provinces. Check your options carefully before you decide on Advanced Placement or International Colleges Courses. Many Universities won't accept them. Get it in writing!)

Summer school isn't only for people who fail. A surprising number of gifted students (and private schools) use it to get good grades in less time. Spend half a day for a month doing a math course for the *next* grade, get through a language or other required course and free up space for advanced placement in a course you like, take socials with no major essays *and no group work!* (No time for group projects in summer school!) One course a summer after grade 7 (do a grade 8 course the summer you finish grade 7) can eliminate a whole year of requirements and speed you on to levels you are interested in. Summer courses allow compaction.

Night school may have better hours, assignments or teachers than your day class. (tech courses sometimes have better projects in night school because they cater to adults. Make sure you can use the course for official credit.)

Distance ed/homeschooling/correspondance may allow you to adjust your environment, daily schedule or pace to fit your lifestyle better. Work in the library instead of the math room with the squeaky floor at 8:30 am. Study biology on a mountain on weekends. Take a distance course that *has official exams* so that you comply with university entrance credits and provincial standards. (Did you know all the courses for a Dentistry degree (except the practicums) are now available on CD?)

Colleges have been known to run first year classes after school at a close local high school. Psychology 100 has been taken this way by an entire class of grade 8's preparing to do one class a year in order to get past road jams of first year students taking required courses. Ask your local college and sign up enough friends to fill a class. (College fees remain the same but you can spread them out over five years, one course at a time.) Take courses with no prerequisites first. Leave math 100 until grade 12 when it has almost the same curriculum as grade 12 math. By grade 12 end you could have all your required first year courses!

Universities will sometimes waive entrance requirements if a student is over 16 and has a letter from their principal supporting their application to a particular course. If you use summer school to jump through to higher science levels you may get to do first year biology or physics while still finishing your other high school requirements.