

Connecting for high potential



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

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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.

Topics for this month: “Does Being Gifted Mean Gifted All the Time?”

“Gifted at Home, but not at School (or vice versa)?”

“Can Gifted be Gifted in Only Some Subjects?”

A Teacher’s View

As a middle school teacher, I get to meet an entirely new batch of students each and every late August. Forty-five new faces, each with varying degrees of achievement, differing learning styles, a variety of interests, and above all, a lot of students that do not fit the pre-conceived notion of what it means to be gifted and talented.

I never have been a fan of relying only on IQ to identify students as gifted and talented, and while I was aware of alternative forms of identification, I still couldn’t wrap my brain around those students that continually surprise me by showing unexpected abilities. And then there are the kids who obviously have had lot advantages and enrichment opportunities, but that doesn’t help them when they face a tough challenge. Many seem to give-up.

After attending a couple of conferences and workshops, I have more resources to help talk with colleagues and parents, yet it’s still difficult to convince others that gifted simply isn’t “one size fits all.” How can we make sure that different faces of gifted are not marginalized?

A Parent’s View

I’ve watched my two children grow in such different ways. I’m not necessarily saying they’re gifted (because don’t all parents think their children are special), but was clear from the start that the oldest, James, was reaching developmental milestones way ahead of others his age. Not only did he walk and talk early, he continues to show an uncanny ability for names, places, and numbers. I’ve hesitated to say anything to his teachers because he’s not an eager or accomplished reader and he hasn’t been good at regular homework or taking tests. Now he’s complaining that school is boring. A friend suggested he might be gifted. Should I ask? I don’t want to be pushy.

My daughter, on the other hand, was slow to talk. She’s shy and cautious, but just put crayons or a pencil in her hand and she comes to life in simply amazing ways. Her first grade year wasn’t a success though because she just didn’t (or couldn’t) do things “by the rules.” Two of her friends were referred for the gifted class, but she wasn’t. She seems to be at the same level. Should I ask?

Having exceptional abilities in one area doesn’t mean a child is gifted in all things, all the time.

Non-traditional, unconventional, “part-time” students may not be recognized, especially when they have gifts that seem to come and go. They are frequently a puzzle for teachers and parents to understand, let alone explain. It’s not unusual for people to assume that the identifier of “gifted” belongs to someone who is outstanding across the board. “Gifted” and “not gifted” together, in the same person? It feels counterintuitive. What about someone who tests as intellectually gifted but doesn’t act gifted (whatever “act gifted” means)? How can people be gifted but not achieve, perform, or demonstrate their exceptional abilities? Taking time to think and talk about these complicated questions can help avoid some of the frustrations and miscommunication about a school’s gifted programming options.

Not everyone shares the same understanding of giftedness. Chances are, very few people have taken the time to try to articulate what they believe about the topic. As the school year begins, we need to be aware of how others in our community view high-ability students and the necessity to provide programs to meet their needs. Start by reviewing the common myths about gifted education. The NAGC website lists 11 myths and provides evidence to dispel those misconceptions at: www.nagc.org/myths.aspx. Do the people around us believe them? If so, consider the following ideas and resources.

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Please copy this for other parents and teachers in your community
who may find the column useful.

Note: The full articles cited in this issue of *Connecting for High Potential* (CHP) can be accessed on the CHP Resource Page www.nagc.org/chp.aspx

1. Can THAT student be gifted? He's getting poor grades...

He could be a gifted child who may be underachieving – the term used to describe an unanticipated difference between a student's actual performance and his/her ability to perform.

AT SCHOOL

- To build awareness, start with resources and links from the NAGC webpage, "That student can't be gifted, he's receiving poor grades" at: http://www.nagc.org/myth_poorgrades.aspx.
- Giftedness represents a broad spectrum. For students at the middle school level, it's difficult to believe that a child struggling in one subject is capable of high achievement in another. Don't dismiss this as just "liking one class better than another." Take the time to look further. Check with other teachers regularly and assess each student's situation from a variety of angles.
- Visit the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students' (AEGUS) website at: <http://www.aegus1.org/>
- Note that homework problems, time management, and general organization issues will contribute to poor grades, but don't reflect intellectual ability.

AT HOME

- Explore information about underachievement to see if the descriptors match what you're observing in your child. Learn to recognize the signs in Sylvia Rimm's book, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades: And What You Can Do About It*, at the NAGC store <http://www.nagc.org/nagcstore.aspx>.
- When a child isn't doing well at school, it's not unusual for parents to back away from asking teachers whether their child might be gifted (even if there may have been, or be, several indicators at home). For ideas about thoughtfully approaching the teacher, read "Communicating Effectively With Your Gifted Child's School."
- Sometimes it's just not cool to be known as smart in school. Look at resources such as "Parenting High Achievers: Swimming Upstream Against the Cultural Current" from The NAGC Mile Marker Series™.

2. Can THAT student be gifted? She's got learning problems...

She could be a "twice-exceptional" or "2e" student – one who gives evidence of the potential for high achievement AND also gives evidence of one or more disabilities.

AT SCHOOL

- As a teacher, consider the possibility that the student who looks lazy or is having problems in your class might also have exceptional abilities. Before discounting the student, ask the question "What can he/she do?" not "What isn't this student able to do?"
- A 2008 NAGC Conference presenter noted "When the focus is on fixing weaknesses, the quality of [2e] students' work declines." School then becomes "pointless and devoid of learning." Read the full article from the 2e Newsletter, a bi-monthly online publication with targeted resources at www.nagc.org/chp.aspx.

AT HOME

- Explore information about 2e students in books such as *To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled and Smart Kids with School Problems: Things to Know and Ways to Help*. See if what you read matches what you're observing in your child.
- Real-life stories about successful people who weren't identified as gifted can help families see the larger picture. The book, *Learning Outside the Lines* was written by two young men (one with ADHD and the other with dyslexia) who compiled and developed a series of learning strategies that helped them graduate from Ivy League colleges.

3. Can THAT student be gifted? Maybe she or he is...

- "It may not be possible to change attitudes and reform systems overnight, but – by becoming sensitive "talent scouts" – parents and educators can make a definite beginning in identifying emerging abilities in children." This quote is from the article *Looking for Gifts in All the Wrong Places*. It's a compelling piece to share among parents and colleagues. Read the full article at www.nagc.org/chp.aspx.
- Become a leader and help others learn more about the many faces of gifted children. Organize a small meeting or presentation before or after school to address the concerns that you have.

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie - deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth - persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.

--John F. Kennedy