

GIFTED STUDENTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

It is estimated that students who are gifted and highly talented encompass 5 to 15% of the school age population. These advanced students can have increased capabilities in academics, creativity, music, dance, art, and/or leadership. The following are recommended:

1. Compact the curriculum and provide enrichment activities. Provide environments that are stimulating, and address cognitive, physical, emotional, and social needs of gifted children in the curriculum. Let the students move quickly through the required curriculum content and onto more advanced material. Allow for academic rigor.

2. Implement a multi-level and multi-dimensional curriculum. Differentiate the curriculum in order to address differences in the rate, depth, and pace of learning. This will enable all students in the class to learn about a specific area by creating projects at their own ability level. For example, if students are learning about the state of Delaware, students of different ability levels can be assigned to different types of tasks. At the conclusion of the class, all of the students can present what they have learned to the entire group.

3. Be flexible with the curriculum. Take advantage of real-life experiences that can be translated into problem-solving academics for all students. For example, an impending snowstorm can be used to instruct students. Students of different ability levels can be given different tasks, such as figuring out what snow is made of, predicting the amount of snowfall, or determining how many snow plows will be needed if 8 inches fall.

4. Make the curriculum student-centered. Engage gifted students in the curriculum decision-making process, giving them an opportunity to learn how to take responsibility for their own learning. Draw the curriculum from the students' interests and educational needs.

5. Allow students to pursue independent projects based on their own individual interests. Independent projects can be assigned on the basis of ability level. Encourage creativity and original thinking among gifted students. Allow them to explore ways of connecting unrelated issues in creative ways.

6. Allow gifted children to assume ownership of their own learning through curriculum acceleration. Instruct them to work ahead to problems of skills that they do not know. To help children learn the value of attaining knowledge in their lives, encourage learning for its own sake, rather than emphasizing the end results or accomplishments. Teach research skills for accessing information; higher level thinking skills for processing it; creative thinking and problem-solving skills for flexibility in approach and generation of information; and communication skills for sharing it.

7. Try to maximize your students' potential by expecting them to do their best.

Encourage them to advance as quickly as they can. Assist in developing projects that allow them to achieve success one step at a time.

8. Teach interactively. Have students work together, teach one another, and actively participate in their own and their classmates' education. Note: This does not advocate gifted children being peer tutors in the classroom; the gifted student should be challenged as well. Emphasis should be on working together in the classroom. Cluster gifted children together as a table within the regular classroom and utilize advanced materials, as well as other suggested resources and modification, to meet their exceptional needs.

9. Explore many points of view about contemporary topics and allow opportunity to analyze and evaluate material. Allow open forums and debates in the classroom about controversial issues. As a teacher of gifted children, take an active stance. Be an advocate for gifted students. Utilize specialized training to ensure the ability to meet the needs of gifted students. Share personal interests with all students, to enrich and expand their world.

10. Consider team teaching, collaboration, and consultation with other teachers.

Use the knowledge, skills, and support of other educators or professionals in the schools.

11. Provide opportunities for gifted children to interact with other gifted children across grade levels and schools through competitions or collaborative projects.

12. Encourage gifted students to participate in extracurricular activities that involve academic skills. Examples include math and debate teams. Because gifted children are often natural leaders, it is important to invite them to use their talents and abilities in beneficial, rather than disruptive, manners. For example, encourage the gifted student to run for office in student council, or another extracurricular activity in which he/she is involved.

13. Involve students in academic contests. Gifted students tend to be competitive by nature. Therefore, participating in regional and national competitions such as spelling bees, science fairs, and essay competitions will be fun challenges.

14. Allow gifted children to create and publish a class newspaper to distribute. This consists of assisting students in understanding their special capabilities and the training necessary for them to reach their full potential.

15. Set individual goals. Help guide students in creating their own goals and set goals that are specific, measurable, aggressive, realistic, and within a reasonable time frame. Be sure not to place expectations that are too high or too low.

16. Consider parental input about the education of their gifted children.

17. Always remember that gifted children are similar in many ways to the average child in the classroom. Do not place unrealistic expectations and pressures on gifted children.

18. Address the counseling needs of each student to support emotional growth, as needed. Some gifted students have issues regarding anger, boredom, bullying, delinquency, isolation, depression, peer relations, perfectionism, dropping out of school, stress, frustration, and underachievement. About 20-25% of gifted students have emotional difficulties.

19. Remember that gifted children may not excel in all areas. They may be ahead of other students in some areas and behind in some areas. Become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the children in your class.

20. Do not assign extra work to gifted children who finish assignments early. This is unfair and frustrating to them. Simply offering more of the same only restricts further learning. Instead, allow those children to work on independent projects or other unfinished work when they finish an assignment early.

21. If a child attends resource rooms, communicate with the specialist for suggestions on how to enrich daily classwork. Avoid penalizing the child for special class attendance. Have another child in the regular classroom take notes and assignments for him/her.

22. Provide plenty of opportunities for gifted children and average children to engage in social activities. Some gifted children may need help in developing social skills.

23. Try to find the joy and uniqueness in each child. Children may exhibit their gifts on non-typical levels, rather than in general intellectual aptitude of specific academic abilities. Keep in mind that every child will have different needs.

24. Organize resources in order to free yourself to work with individual children and give the children greater control of the learning situation. Supplementary books and learning tools, community resources, and the use of community members with specific skills as mentors can be helpful.

25. Establish and maintain a warm, accepting classroom. Teach your classroom community to embrace diversity and honor differences. Provide an environment in which the child can demonstrate his or her potential or aptitude to learn and perform. Teachers should strive to establish a noncompetitive, individualized, and open classroom, which allows all students to advance at their own rate of learning.

26. Remember that implementing some of these strategies will benefit all of the children in the classroom, not just the gifted ones.

Resources:

Callahan, C. (1997). Giftedness. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Designing & developing programs for gifted students. (2003). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Handbook of gifted education. (2003). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Henage, D. (1990). *The Gifted Intervention Manual*. Columbia, MO: Hawthorne.

Heward, W.L. (2009). *Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education (9th ed.)*. New Jersey: Pearson.

Taylor, S. (2003). *Your top students: Classroom strategies that meet the needs of the gifted*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishing.

Winner, E. (1996). *Gifted children: myths and realities*. New York: Basic Books.

www.canteach.ca/links/linkgifted.html: Challenging Gifted Students in Regular Classrooms.

www.nagc.org: National Association for Gifted Students: Supporting the needs of high potential learners.

www.nwrel.org/msec/just_good/9/ch4.html: Strategies for Teaching Gifted Students in the Inclusion Classroom.

www.teachersfirst.com/gifted.shtml: Working with Gifted and Talented Students.

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