Gifted and Cyber

New Year, New Literacy Program

What Does It Mean to Be a Gifted Student?

Book Reviews
Gifted and Cyber

Matthew Smith

Keywords: gifted, cyber school, asynchronous, independent study, dual enrollment

In search for a more perfect school environment, gifted students and parents may consider a cyber school as a viable alternative. Some students choose cyber programs because they seek a more flexible school schedule, others to avoid an environment where they suffered from bullying. The reasons for turning to a cyber school are just about as diverse as a population of gifted students. As an educator who has worked with gifted students in cyber schools for 10 years, I hope to offer some insight into the world of cyber schooling, why it can be beneficial for gifted students, and how to avoid some of the pitfalls that challenge cyber students.

Crash Course in Cyber School Terminology

Before we discuss why cyber schooling and gifted education can be a good match, there is some basic cyber school vocabulary that is worth a review. Cyber schools typically follow either a synchronous or asynchronous instructional model. My school is asynchronous, which means that students can work through instructional material and assignments at their own pace. There are minimal deadlines for work and live class attendance is not mandatory. In a synchronous setting, students often work in classes or cohorts and follow a prescribed curriculum with regular deadlines. Having a sense of whether a student will adapt to either environment is a necessary starting point when considering a cyber school.

Many of the characteristics we associate with giftedness are very conducive to learning in a cyber school. Students who are self-motivated can learn independently of others, and have the ability to learn at an accelerated pace tend to do well in a cyber school. Cyber schools can be very good at engendering excellent time management, self-advocacy, and communication skills. This is a process that takes a large effort on the part of students, parents, and teachers, and comes with some significant pitfalls.

Pitfalls of Cyber Schooling

There are individual pitfalls and systematic pitfalls. Gifted students are just as likely to fall victim to the perils of poor time management and procrastination as any other student. The effects of poor time management and procrastination can be masked by the fact that these individuals often pass, but they don't necessarily live up to their potential: see underachievement. These students may appear less qualified than their seemingly more ambitious peers, but in reality, they are likely not challenged enough or engaged in school. As a result, some otherwise talented students may get
overlooked for enrichment and acceleration programs. This ushers in systematic "blind spots" that can hinder a cyber school's ability to effectively identify and serve their gifted population.

In a recent series of conversations, I spoke with a mother who was in the process of withdrawing her son from my school. The child was accelerated through elementary school and was well ahead of his grade-level cohort in certain subject areas. The mother elaborated on the child's interests and accomplishments, all of which were above the child's grade level. As a gifted educator, these are crystal clear signs that a student needs enrichment, acceleration, or both. This particular student was placed in a program designed to transition middle school students into high school with the support of more synchronous instruction and more restrictive deadlines. Teachers saw a student who procrastinated, lacked motivation and interest, and achieved below his potential. By the time I had the opportunity to introduce some of the exciting possibilities the school could offer this student, the family had decided to leave the school in search of other opportunities.

**Benefits and Opportunities**

For every gifted student that gets overlooked, many more eagerly engage in an environment that fosters and promotes some of the best practices in gifted pedagogy. Based on research conducted by Karen Rogers, programs that provide pull-out enrichment, effective curriculum compacting, opportunities to accelerate through the curriculum, and dual enrollment produce a stronger effect size compared to a regular education classroom. (Rogers, 1993) Cyber schools are well equipped to offer a flexible environment that accommodates these options. In an asynchronous cyber school, the big logistical barrier of scheduling students for courses or providing enough time for a good pull-out program is minimal.

This lack of logistical barriers opens up multiple pathways for students and families. Teachers have the flexibility to work one-on-one with students and often have the free reign to make accommodations within their courses. Students can work at their own pace and choose how quickly they want to accelerate through the curriculum. For those who worry about bullying or busy work, courses accommodate students who may not want to attend classes; for those who worry about socialization, opportunities to connect with a community of gifted and talented individuals are easily facilitated. For some of my students, the highlight of their week is a gifted seminar session where our whole community of gifted learners comes together to discuss the perks and pitfalls of giftedness. This touch point provides the socialization that some kids need, but also an affirmation that they are not the only ones charting a new course as a gifted student in the cyber school.

By the later years of high school that trail-blazing course distinguishes graduates-to-be from the typical pool of college applicants. Cyber schools may have the ability to offer unique independent study options, dual enrollment at a variety of colleges and universities, or job shadowing and internship opportunities. Interest-based academic clubs like quiz bowl, mock trial, Model UN, or
Math Counts are often available in cyber schools. Not to mention, service organizations like the National Honor Society, which includes a lot of the gifted population, can take their projects to a state or even national level. Over the years I have had students who enter their senior year with a plethora of Advanced Placement courses, intend to take a dual enrollment, and still have time in their schedule to pursue their interests through independent study or internship. Talk about a college application that stands out!

**Practical Considerations**

The last few extremely enthusiastic paragraphs may make gifted students and parents want to run out and sign up at the nearest cyber school, but there are some important practical considerations. First is advocacy. Like any other school, gifted students in cyber school need their parents and teachers to not only recognize their talents but to take an active role in developing them. Second, the pitfalls of a cyber school environment are real. Without an awareness of and a plan to meet the challenges of being in a very new, often unstructured cyber school environment, even gifted kids will struggle. Finally, a trusted mentor or academic advisor is an invaluable partner in this whole learning process. As a teacher of gifted, the biggest impact I make is not in the courses I teach (although every teacher fond of their discipline would like to think so), but with the students who I mentor and advise. The journey of a gifted student in cyber school should not be a lonely one. The ability of a cyber school to personalize learning through curriculum compacting, enhanced course offerings, and opportunities to extend learning beyond school becomes fulfilled by the engaging and supportive teachers who accompany gifted students on their educational path.

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References

New Year, New Literacy Program

Cheryl Rys

Like many teachers, I start the year with the best intentions of using my arsenal of GATE tools, but quickly find myself immersed in district provided curriculum. This year was no exception. Our district adopted a new literacy program. As with any new program, I feel it important to teach it to my students with fidelity. But, is it best for my 4th grade class of gifted students? This is where the struggle began. I needed to find a way to incorporate what I know is best for my students and also give the new program a chance as it truly has many great components.

I began incorporating my GATE tools for learning first through questioning with depth and complexity. I knew that using these thinking tools would help my students think more deeply about the topic we were studying. I started the year making sure my students had an understanding of all the prompts. For some they were new and others were merely a review. Slowly I incorporated the prompts into my questioning and our class discussions while still teaching the ELA standards found in our new literacy program.

The format of the new literacy program, while time consuming to teach, does encourage student independent work time as well as integration with content areas. Unit 1, Government, was a perfect lead into our study of California- A Changing State. Over the year, students will refer to the universal theme of “change”.

As for “independent study”, rather than having my students partake in the suggested independent activities, I created several independent activities centered on California. I wanted my students to learn their own California Story so they could make connections during our year long study. Students interviewed family members to find out when their story began. For many, their own story began in California because they were born here. What the students found most interesting was the when and why their families began their stay in California. Students also discussed how their family interacts with California’s resources, climates and activities. This year I am focusing on creating engaging and innovative ways to learn. So, after research, students told their California Story using green screen video technology.
I wanted my students to learn more about California’s regions. So, I created an interactive hyperdoc for their next independent study. Students took on the role of a “geographer” and researched the details that make up each region. Details included location, climate, resources, animals and vegetation to name a few. But, rather than the typical “region report”, students applied their knowledge as a geographer to state a claim as to why their chosen region has the population it has. To share their findings, students created a VOKI.

As stated before, our first ELA unit of study is Government in Action. Students are learning about how our government works and “How government influences the way we live?” This prompted a lesson on “open and closed ended questions”. Table groups created questions and, what’s a better way to ask them? None other than asking them to a real California Park Ranger working at our state Capitol in Sacramento. My students participated in a virtual field trip experience (PORTS) offered by California Department of Parks and Recreation.
It’s only been a month into the school year, but I have learned through intentional lesson design that includes engagement and innovative ideas, I am able to provide the education my students deserve, while still following my district’s newly adopted literacy program.
What Does It Mean to Be a Gifted Student?

Mary Karapetyan

What does it mean to be a gifted student? According to Natural Association, “children are gifted when their ability is significantly above the norm for their age”. For me being a gifted student is challenging yourself to explore new areas of study and excel in those areas. Being a gifted student never left me feeling different; I was treated the same as my other peers. Thus, while I had the opportunity to broaden my knowledge, I am still able to participate in school as a typical teenager would.

As an elementary student classes weren't challenging for me. Understanding new material came naturally to me and homework was never a problem. For example learning about long division intrigued me rather than confusing me, allowing me to quickly figure out the difference between large numbers at a young age. Therefore, I never felt particularly challenged from the material I learned in my basic classes, and was left wanting to learn more.

In the third grade I was presented the option to take a test to classify as a gifted student. Initially I was nervous and scared to take this test, because I believed that if I passed the test I was going to have switch schools or have to do an overwhelming amount of schoolwork. I was also anxious because, if I had failed the test, I feared I would appear unintelligent. Walking into the classroom, these feelings of anxiety didn't subside until the second I received the results.

After finding out that I had passed and was now considered a gifted student, my feelings of anxiousness were replaced with excitement. I was still going to be a regular student in class with all my friends and the teachers I was familiar with. Also, because my classes had not changed, I was not going to be treated any differently from my peers with the exception of having more options to take difficult classes with more challenging information. This allowed me to later take two high school courses while I was still a middle school student, broadening my horizons in subjects such as math and languages.

Now, as a teenage high schooler, I understand that being a gifted student has provided me with the ability to go over the limit and push my personal boundaries. I have matured in ways that far exceed academic expectations by becoming more open to new opportunities, exploring various fields of studies, and taking on more responsibilities. This level of maturity has even led me to pursue student counsel, resulting in me being chosen as the ninth grade representative of my class. Thereby, my experiences as a gifted student have led me to challenge myself without changing my surroundings. Above all, I was still able to live the life of a typical student and gain the education that I have always strived for.
Book Review

Elaine S. Wiener

Education of the Gifted and Talented, Seventh Edition
Sylvia B. Rimm, Del Siegle, Gary A. Davis
Pearson Education, Inc.
paperback, $122.25, 460 pp.

This is an overwhelming book. Probably no other book about gifted education needs to be written. This says it all. It is very expensive compared to other books about gifted education. However, it is like an encyclopedia: you use it to look up information, not to sit and read. On the other hand, once you look up some information, you can't help reading more.

This would make a perfect book for libraries to have, for GATE programs to have in their offices, for schools to have in their individual libraries, and for teachers who love gifted education to keep in their own rooms. As expensive as books are these days, I wish that our GATE programs would give every teacher a copy of “Education of the Gifted and Talented.” It is the ultimate!

This review is going to start backwards. The references run from P. 391 to P. 440. The name index runs from P. 441 to P. 449. The subject index runs from P. 450 to P. 460. That is a lot. I suppose with today’s technology it was easy to collate those pages, but just being aware of the knowledge that is compiled is inundating.

The authors, Dr. Rimm, Dr. Siegle, and Dr. Davis are such gurus of gifted education that if you are a young new teacher, this is a wonderful introduction.

But if you are an old timer and know this material, enjoy the rerun. Old brains love relearning old material because there is always a new twist. This 7th edition, especially, has new information.

Chapter 1  Gifted Education: Matching Instruction with Needs
Chapter 2  Characteristics of Gifted Students
Chapter 3  Identifying Gifted and Talented Students
Chapter 4  Program Planning
Chapter 5  Acceleration
Chapter 6  Grouping, Differentiation, and Enrichment
Chapter 7  Curriculum Models
Chapter 8  Creativity I: The Creative Person, Creative Process and Creative Dramatics
Chapter 9  Creativity II: Teaching for Creative Growth
Chapter 10 Teaching Thinking Skills
Chapter 11 Leadership, Affective Learning, and Character Education
Chapter 12 Underachievement: Identification and Reversal
Chapter 13 Cultural Diversity and Economic Disadvantage: The Invisible Gifted
Chapter 14 Gifted Girls, Gifted Boys
Chapter 15 Gifted Children with Disabilities
Chapter 16 Parenting the Gifted Child
Chapter 17 Understanding and Counseling Gifted Students
Chapter 18 Program Evaluation

Here is an example of Chapter 12’s details:
Definition and Identification of Underachievement
Characteristics of Underachieving Gifted Children
Etiologies of Underachievement
Family Etiology
School Etiology
Reversal of Underachievement
Summary

As part of all these chapters are boxes, charts, and summaries to make the most encyclopedic, wonderful book.

Elaine S. Wiener
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Many educators have written about perseverance, and Dr. Sanguras shows respect to all of them and quotes them freely. To distinguish her book from others, Dr. Sanguras writes with a personal style which makes you feel that she is talking directly to you. Her book is very casual and easy to read. But make no mistake; she is very knowledgeable and professional.

Chapter 1: Anatomy of Grit
Chapter 2: Measuring Grit
Chapter 3: What Gritty Classrooms Can Learn From Gifted Education and Talent Development
Chapter 4: Integrating Grit, Mindsets, and Motivation
Chapter 5: Cultivating Passionate Students
Chapter 6: Building Grit at Home
Chapter 7: Creating a Gritty School Culture

This whole book is dedicated to the thought that “grit” is the best predictor of success. “Not IQ, prior achievement, or great hair...but grit.” Dr. Sanguras is funny!

This paragraph fascinated me:

“Beginning with Sir Francis Galton in the late 1800’s, psychologists have been enamored by the individual differences that make up varying levels of intelligence. Studying intelligence began as a very practical matter: Educators needed to identify which students would need special help in school, and the military needed to quickly assess the ability of its recruits. There were even some years when scientists toyed with the idea of limiting procreation to those who met certain intellectual criteria. I’m not kidding.”
“Grit in the Classroom” is full of ideas that are in big type:

- Grit is about fortitude and zeal.
- Self-discipline is the ability to control an impulse in order to overcome a weakness.
- Perseverance is a behavior, a purposeful action to pursue a goal or task despite obstacles.

These ideas in big print run throughout the whole book. And there are tables, charts, resources, and references. The resource chapter is especially inviting!!

In many ways this book is a compilation of what has been said by others. But we have many teachers who would probably enjoy a more casual approach. I hope that they also read the original educators who are the references in “Grit in the classroom.”

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Book Review

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Make Your Worrier a Warrior: A Guide to Conquering Your Child’s Fears
Dan Peters, Ph.D.
Great Potential Press
paperback, $11.43 186 pp.

This book is not specifically about gifted, although Chapter 12 address giftedness directly. However, please don’t forget that gifted children are children and have all the same fears and worries that any child has. Perhaps being gifted just allows worry at a higher level.

The cover alone is so clever that thinking this book applies only to our children has to be a mistake; it is obvious that we will learn about ourselves.

“This book is a ‘How To’ recipe book designed to help you help your child overcome worry and fear by teaching you a number of easy-to-follow strategies that you can then teach your child.”

Each and every chapter has “Things to Remember” and “Things to Do.”

For example:

Things to Remember:

✓ Children do not like feeling worried and scared.
✓ The Worry Monster is a bully.
✓ The worry and fear (The Worry Monster) is not part of them.
✓ You are going to help your child drive the Worry Monster away.

Things to Do:

✓ Tell your child about the Worry Monster---that he is a mythical creature who tries to make us feel worried and scared.
✓ Offer hope that you and your child will be able to do things that make the Worry Monster go away.
✓ Show your child a picture of the goofy Worry Monster, or ask your child to make a drawing of the Worry Monster---what she thinks he looks like.

There are charts and funny pictures, especially of monsters!... and always “Things to Remember” and “Things to Do.” That consistency provides a perfect plan that is so usable.
The Table of Contents is informative all by itself, and at the end, Suggested Reading and Resources, Endnotes, References, and Index are so very helpful. I like reading them first!!!

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Introduction
Chapter 1: Who is the Worry Monster
Chapter 2: Anxiety and the Fear Response
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Chapter 7: Mindfulness-Based Interventions
Chapter 8: Behavioral Interventions: Practice, Practice, Practice!
Chapter 9: Patrick, Savannah, and Drew
Chapter 10: Making a Plan to Tame the Worry Monster
Chapter 11: Fine Tuning and Healthy Habits
Chapter 12: Special Groups: Gifted, Twice-Exceptional (2e), ADHD, and Other Learning and Processing Challenges
Chapter 13: Do the Same Strategies Work for Adults

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Book Review

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The Music in George’s Head
Suzanne Slade
Illustrated by Stacy Innerst
(2016) CALKINS CREEK
An Imprint of Highlights
hardcover, $17.95, 40 pp

The human imagination never fails to amaze me, but “The Music in George’s Head” is a book that goes far beyond the usual “human imagination.”

Suzanne Slade uses words to wiggle and slide while her illustrator, Stacy Innerst, matches those words with illustrations that wiggle and slide all over the pages...up and down...sideways and round with swoops and binges.

Gifted kids and adults often see things in unique ways. In the old days this wasn’t as understood as it is now. When George was young, “sometimes he was so busy listening to the beautiful music in his head, he didn’t pay attention to other things---like getting to school on time.” (Well, maybe it is understood these days, but still not always appreciated.)

Suzanne Slade gives us many examples of George seeing music in his mind.

“George set out to compose a dazzling, daring piece for the concert. One that showed jazz was exciting, Limitless. Free. He scratched his head and paced the floors---and scratched and paced some more.”

Now picture the words in the previous paragraph as cavorting all over the page with drawings of George conducting and puzzling and playing piano and going off to sell his music.

Every page is in black and white or blue-ish...like the blues he wrote.

“Then George sat down at the piano. A clarinet fluttered softly, like butterfly wings on a morning breeze. George smiled at the clarinet player.” (And why he smiled is another part of this imaginative story and a special page in the book showing the clarinet wailing!)
The author’s and illustrator’s notes, time line, and bibliography are worthy of attention, and even the book jacket is a piece of art.

“The Music in George’s Head” is a picture book written for kids and should be shared and given to children. However, only adults will appreciate the way this book is written and illustrated. It is a perfect gift for those who savor “magical words” and also has illustrations that are just as magical. Buy many copies for your adult friends who appreciate and love George Gershwin.

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