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## **PARENTING PRACTICES TO SUPPORT GIFTED CHILDREN**

Parents in New York City and elsewhere are concerned about school programs for gifted and talented students. However, parents should remember that they, too, will have a lasting educational effect on their children. In some areas of talent development (music, for example,) it is often the out-of-school activities that have the greatest impact on students. While educators, psychologists, and researchers have multiple techniques for identifying gifted students, parents often lack access to those techniques. Yet, parents do have access to a powerful strategy, “identification by provision.” Parents can provide a child or teen with varied experiences, observe the effects and continue when the child responds with enthusiasm and success. Gifted students, often quite unique, may have gifts in language acquisition, reading, writing, mathematics, science, music and art. While no child or teen will be gifted in all areas, good parenting practices can be focused on the individual child’s abilities. In this Parent Letter, parenting practices, programs and references are offered as a starting point. Many of these suggestions have come from other parents who have shared them with the author. Do share your resources by visiting the link on this website.

**Language skills.** Parents and family members are the essential teachers when a child is learning one or more languages. Researchers tell us that, in early childhood, no school or program has a greater impact on the child’s development of oral language skills. Bilingual parents can provide good linguistic role models by continuing to speak their dominant language to their children and by developing a social network that includes that language. For monolingual families, immersion programs, language videos and CDs, (such as the BBC Muzzy series), can be the first steps in learning a second language. Older students can attend summer residential programs such as those offered by Concordia Language Villages. To learn more about multiple language development, parents can read *Raising Multilingual Children* by Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa.

**Reading.** Becoming literate is an essential skill, and gifted children usually attain literacy skills earlier and to a much more advanced level than children of a similar age. Finding appropriate material is a challenge. Parents of gifted children have recalled favorite books from childhood and asked their most trusted friends and relatives for recommended reading materials. Their children, as early as second grade, turned to their closest friends for book suggestions. Sound advice about gifted readers can be found in *My Best Friends Are Books: Guiding the Gifted Reader* by Judith Wynn Halstead.

Parents should establish the home version of DEAR – Drop-Everything-And-Read time. Turn off televisions, radios and CD players and provide children with the valuable gift of quiet, uninterrupted reading time. Until children can read, parents should read to them daily. Generally, young gifted children can listen to stories or read to themselves for half an hour or more. Proficient readers, even in early elementary school, enjoy much longer reading periods, up to several hours in length.

**Writing.** Learning to put thoughts on paper is a process that takes most gifted children many years of sustained effort to master. Parents can help by encouraging their children to write by finding writing workshops and writing mentors. One successful program for older elementary

aged gifted students and teens has been the distance writing program offered via Johns Hopkins Institute for the Academic Advancement of Youth (IAAY). In that program, young writers are paired with experienced writing mentors and the effect has been remarkably good for the gifted students who have been followed over time.

**Mathematics.** Some gifted children are fascinated by math, become quite proficient early in elementary school and move beyond the standard math curriculum at surprisingly young ages. Finding them appropriate instruction is difficult. Their parents can find academic challenge for them in math competitions and the Math League materials. The IAAY program provides summer math programs, mathematics courses via the Internet, and reliable research on the outcomes of accelerated and enriched math instruction. An important resource for parents is the book, *Developing Mathematical Talent: A Guide for Challenging and Educating Gifted Students* by Susan Assouline and Ann Lupkowski-Shoplik.

**Science.** Some gifted students are fascinated by topics in science and seek out information and opportunities for direct experiences. Science museums for children are an invaluable resource. For example, the New York Hall of Science in Queens offers numerous exhibits, programs, materials and after school clubs to foster experiences in science. The Liberty Science Center in Jersey City is also a well-known resource as is the Museum of Natural History on Manhattan's West Side. Well-organized experiences in science, especially research-based experiences outside of formal schools, can have a lifelong impact on students who participate in them.

**Music and Art.** Most cities are rich in opportunities for music and art development. Music schools offer individual and group lessons as well as solo, ensemble and orchestral performing; art museums often provide weekend programs. For young artists and musicians, much of their talent development depends upon their interactions with adult artists and musicians. They need their parents to help them find these resources. To read about the actual experiences of parents of acclaimed young pianists and sculptors, take a look at *Developing Talent in Young People* by Benjamin Bloom.

For musical children, listening to good music is a vital part of a musical education as Wynton Marsalis in his wonderful video series, *Marsalis on Music*, reminds us. This can be as simple (and free) as turning on the radio or borrowing recordings from the local public library. Immersion in quality listening is something all parents can offer their children.

For artistic children, parents need to provide "unscheduled" time, a variety of materials and the freedom to work in a space that does not need to be neat. A corner of a room with a desk or drawing board is more than enough. You need not set up an entire studio! Creative children thrive on the opportunity to experiment with materials and develop their own products.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- The National Association for Gifted Children
- The Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development
- Advocacy for Gifted and Talented Education in New York State
- The Davidson Institute for Talent Development

Written and developed by Dr. Julia B. Osborn, a psychologist in private practice in NYC. Her research and articles on appear in the Articles section of the Davidson Institute for Talent Development website *The Parent Letter* has received generous support to NYU from Joseph Healey.