

How schools can make the curriculum more challenging

Parent factsheet: Gifted and talented education

Programs are permanent sequences of goals, strategies and curriculum for educating gifted and talented students. Provisions are important components of a program.

Students who have been identified as gifted and talented require a differentiated program that is substantially different to that provided for other students.

The program should provide challenges and extend the students and include consideration of a student's cognitive, social and affective needs. Programs need to be carefully planned and documented, and evaluation should be implemented as an integral part of the program. Developmentally appropriate programs for gifted and talented students may include a combination of provisions to allow students access to meaningful learning opportunities such as a differentiated curriculum, incorporating advanced learning through enrichment experiences, counselling interventions, acceleration options, and grouping. These provisions are interdependent and strongly supported by research as central to increasing the learning outcomes for gifted individuals.

Enrichment can take many forms and may be timetabled into the regular school day or provided as extra-curricular opportunities. A benefit of enrichment, from a school's perspective, is that gifted individuals can remain in the mixed-ability classroom while undertaking tasks appropriate to their abilities and interests.

Although all students need and benefit from some form of enrichment, there are some types of enrichment that research shows should be offered consistently to gifted and talented individuals. This enrichment has three levels of complexity that are necessary and appropriate for gifted and talented children/young people: exposure (new ideas and skills not taught in the regular curriculum); extension (fuller development of the regular curriculum) and concept development (in-depth exploration of a concept) (Rogers, 2002).

The enrichment essentials supported by research include:

- self-directed projects
- fast-paced mathematics and science
- whole-to-part discovery of concepts (understanding the big picture before the details)
- critical and creative thinking skills
- in-depth topic development
- competitions
- interdisciplinary curriculum
- curriculum that is infused with the arts
- the 'classics'
- real world problems
- mentors (Rogers, 2002)

Parents or carers are encouraged to work with schools to achieve the best educational provisions for their gifted and talented child. However, no matter how well developed the educational plan, it is important for parents and carers to provide activities outside of school. There are 10 out-of-school provisions listed here that parents or carers may like to provide for their gifted child, all of which emphasise talent development, social adjustment, skill-building and knowledge of the world.

Out-of-school provisions for gifted individuals

1. Provide advanced learning opportunities, regardless of your child's age, in the specific area or areas in which your child's talents and interests lie. Your child will gain more from focusing on one activity at a time, particularly one that advances their skill level and desire to know. Once an outside class or activity has finished, you and your child can decide on the next activity together, again based on the child's interests, motivation and skill level at that time.
2. Provide opportunities for socialisation with others of like ability or interests. This becomes particularly important if your child has little or no chance to learn with true intellectual equals in school. It is human nature to make connections and lasting friendships among those who think like you and are interested in similar things. Outside-of-school enrichment classes are a place for friends.
3. Provide opportunities for socialisation with a mix of adults and individuals of varying abilities and ages. It is important to give your child the message that they are a part of a human 'community' and that they have a responsibility to that greater community. With their natural curiosity, idealism, sensitivity to the needs of others, and problem-solving abilities, gifted children usually enjoy working with others.
4. Find ways for your child to understand their own identity and uniqueness. Set blocks of time for your child to work alone or with you on the development of their talent and interests. The two of you can find those 'benchmarks of progress' through private competitions, special lessons, mentors or tutors, periods of self-study, or online instruction to move them along the path to full talent development. You are your child's most important teacher when it comes to confronting the moral and ethical dilemmas of life in general. Not only are you a model through your own behaviour of how to resolve such dilemmas, but you must also be ready for exploration of the 'what ifs' of these dilemmas. Many gifted children show early concerns for human issues, moral causes, and problems such as war, terrorism, hate, injustice, or environmental issues, and for many, the need to discuss and think about these concerns is foremost. They need the opportunity to think through and create a rationale for what they would do in such dilemmas long before they may be confronted with them in real life. Books may provide neutral territory in which to explore these issues – readings that you and your child can discuss together.
5. Provide your child with some of the 'classics' of literature, philosophy, art, music and theatre.
6. Provide a variety of experiences that build fine motor skills, dexterity, and spatial visualisation. Instruction in a musical instrument that requires finger dexterity (e.g. piano, violin, guitar, flute etc), particularly while learning to read music, is of benefit. Developing your child's computer keyboard skills is also important, allowing him or her to note thoughts down as quickly as they come to mind, and enable writing to become a joy rather than a burden. Learning to orienteer with a compass and a map builds visual-spatial skills, and listening to books or poetry – live or recorded – assists in developing listening and visualisation skills.
7. Provide experiences that require memorisation and improving the ability to remember. The field of knowledge is wide open with lists of things to learn; vocabulary, science and history facts to acquire; poetry, speech and prose to recite from memory. Teaching your child several different

ways to remember information, such as mnemonics, will also help them in later life.

8. Help your child learn to communicate precisely and expressively. Communication requires both a strong reception capacity (the ability to comprehend what is heard and then interpret it accurately), and expression component (the ability to share personal reflections, reactions, beliefs and values in oral and written forms). Spending time listening to the radio or audio books, having regular 'book club' discussions within the family, and having regular current events or social or moral issues discussions during family meals will help your child develop those capacities.
9. Teach your child a variety of problem-solving strategies that will help in social, real world and academic situations. There are many sources available for teaching your child how to make decisions, from what to wear tomorrow to their choice of university course. Likewise, strategies for inductive reasoning (making broader generalisations from specific observations) and deductive reasoning (hypothesising) can be taught at home in fun ways. Gifted children are often good problem finders, but they haven't necessarily learned the skills to be good problem solvers.
10. Help your child feel comfortable in and knowledgeable about the world. This begins by active description and interpretation of a child's own backyard, neighbourhood, community, state, country and the world. If affordable, family trips are invaluable; otherwise, travel can be done with books and films from the library. One way or another, your child will benefit from knowing how things work, what species live in different locations, and what varying geography looks like.

[Acknowledgement: Rogers, K.B. University of New South Wales 2002]