

Special Education for the Gifted

by Janice Westra

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We are overlooking a part of the student body which needs special help. Remedial programs are provided for those who lag behind in certain areas. Special schools and classes are available for the retarded. A teacher gives special aid to students who have been absent for a few days. Whom are we overlooking? It's that small part of a classroom of students who are gifted.

You may say "Why do the gifted need extra help? They already have so many advantages." I say "Not true!" Regular school activities and standard curricula are often highly inappropriate and restrictive for the gifted child.

If these special children are not given every chance for development early in life they may be academically stunted. The student's motivation to learn may be dulled and he may join the ranks of the under-achievers. Why should he have to conquer boredom and wait for the rest of the class to catch up? Parents and teachers alike have the responsibility to see that their covenant children are given a challenging program throughout their schooling before problems of boredom and dulled motivation set in.

For the gifted child to reach his or her fullest potential he may need special classroom arrangements, instructional techniques, materials, and teachers.

Developing a program for the gifted student requires much dedication and commitment of a teacher. Whether the teacher is a special teacher, a private tutor, or the regular classroom teacher he or she must possess certain qualities.

The teacher needs to have a high level of energy and must enjoy teaching the gifted. Sensitivity to individual differences, a variety of interests, and a sense of humor are also desirable. A teacher must be well prepared in instructional techniques and in content area.

Don't forget the child's most important teacher. The *parent* is probably the best teacher a gifted student has! Motivation, self-image, and attitudes all stem from the home. Parents need to cooperate and work with the school to create a healthy attitude in their child. Who better knows the special needs of a child than his parent? A parent can respect and encourage a child. Individuality in the home must be permitted and the home environment needs to be stimulating and rewarding. *All* parents *must* spend time with their children. Converse with them, listen to them, respond to their many questions, and join in their activities! We all know how a child wants his parent there when he plays ball or reaches some hard-won goal. When a parent verbally shows approval to a child it means more than anything to them. Parents, take time and involve yourselves in your children's education!

What specifically can a teacher do for her gifted student? There are a wide variety of programs available. No one program is said to be any better than any other. Which program employed must be decided by looking at the individual needs of the student.

The enrichment program is accomplished within a regular classroom. It allows the student to investigate topics of interest in much greater detail than the normal classroom situation would allow. The child is allowed to go beyond the limits of day-to-day activities. The projects a child undertakes must have purpose, direction, and specified outcomes. It is not a time to give the child "busywork" nor is it a "do your own thing" idea. An enrichment program needs the structure and guidance of the teacher. Some possibilities for enrichment include:

1. Independent study,
2. Accelerated coverage of regular material,
3. Mini-courses,
4. Learning centers,
5. Special interest groups, and
6. Interest development centers.

A second type of program involves the resource room or special class. It involves many of the same practices as the enrichment program, however, the child has a special teacher for a few periods of the day. This incorporates even more special and personal attention.

Acceleration is a program which provides experiences normally given to older children. It speeds up the movement at which a child encounters a given content or particular sequence. Included among acceleration practices are:

1. Early admission to school,
2. Grade skipping,

3. Concurrent enrollment in high school or college,
4. Content acceleration,
5. Advanced placement tests,
6. Early admission to college.

There are many more possibilities and programs available for the gifted child. This is only intended as a light overview of possibilities.

Note that the gifted child need not be bright in all areas or be a "straight A" student. There may be only one area of interest or special talent.

We as Christians have a special calling toward these covenant children. We must bring them up so they will honor and glorify His name. We must do all in our power to enhance their learning experience. In humility, knowing that He controls all, we need to ask God's guidance in this precious calling.

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Teaching Children to Read: The Parents' Role

by Elaine Faber

Mrs. Elaine Faber, a former teacher and now mother, is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan.

Learning to read. What a major accomplishment this is for young children. We expect children to learn to read and to read well. Often we hear statements such as, "In first grade you will learn to read." And so we imply that the responsibility of the teaching of reading belongs to the schools. But what should parents know about reading and why should we as covenant parents be interested in and concerned with this topic?

Many books and articles have been written and continue to be written on the subject of reading. Many of these are published because there is an awareness that many children fail to read well. Statistics of reading achievement are periodically compared on local and national levels. Often children do not measure up to that expected of them and it is said that Johnny can't read. Schools and teachers are blamed for not doing their job. It is said that standards are too low and incorrect