Nurturing Gifted Children at Home and School

TRACY KSIAZAK, PH.D.
BELIN-BLANK CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
Molly, adopted at age 12 weeks … with an instruction manual
Parents' Concerns about Gifted Kids

- Intense Interests
- Intense Feelings
- Peer relationships
- Perfectionism
- Managing stress
- Motivation
- Boredom
- Underachievement
- Finding challenge
- Asynchronous development
- Communication
- Loneliness
- Time alone
- Twice-exceptionality
- College and career planning
- Gender issues
- Communicating with teachers
What is giftedness?
Giftedness is ...

- High IQ (above 95% of the rest of the population)
- Outstanding ability in one or more specific areas or subjects
- Qualitative differences in addition to quantitative differences
Three Core Needs of Gifted Children (P. Susan Jackson)

1. **Communion** - authentic connection, stimulating reciprocal interactions

2. **Knowledge** - understanding of self, others, and the world

3. **Expression** - creating something, sharing oneself with the world, being true to oneself
Common Characteristics of Gifted Students
Asynchronous Development

Many Ages at Once

- Physical
- Intellectual
- Emotional
Asynchronous Development In Action
Asynchronously developing kids may need ...

- Friends of a variety of ages and interest similarities to meet different social needs
- Thoughtfully selected reading material
- Help learning good coping skills
- Realistic expectations from parents and teachers
Perfectionism

- Physical products may not match a gifted student’s goal or mental image.

- Students may internalize and magnify others’ high expectations for them. Or try to achieve perfection because they are under-challenged.

- Can harm self-esteem, family relationships, and peer relationships.
Helping with Perfectionism

- Encourage a “growth mindset”
- Praise effort, not just achievement
- Show kids that you, too, are a work in progress!
- Encourage risk taking – intellectual, emotional, and creative
- Share examples of something that you had to work hard at to develop a skill
Keen Sense of Justice and Empathy

- Concern with fairness
- Rule-following or experimentation with testing rules
- Desire to help others
- Very invested in world issues and disasters - poverty, homelessness, war, earthquakes, hurricanes, illnesses, refugees, human rights
- Frustration and sense of powerlessness
Strong Awareness of Others

- Ability to read subtleties of tone, nonverbal behaviors, facial expressions
- Understanding of subtext, implied messages
- Can be an asset or hindrance
Focused and Intense Interests

- Falling in love with an idea
- Subject matter experts
- Numerous hours spent on topics and projects of interest
- Depth vs. “well-roundedness”
Flexibility and Challenging the Norm

- Uniqueness
- Challenging the status quo
- Gifted students tend to be more androgynous and less rigid with regard to gender expectations
- Often willing to speak up about problems and/or injustices
Common Challenges for Gifted Students
Need for Challenge ... Met Through:

- **Acceleration**
  - Moving faster
  - Less repetition
  - New concepts presented as students are ready to learn them
  - Advanced problems
  - Higher-order thinking skills
  - Subject-based or grade-based

- **Enrichment**
  - Adding depth
  - Adding breadth
  - Introducing related topics
  - Incorporating projects
  - Extracurricular activities
  - Field trips
  - Problem-based learning
The Big Fish – Little Pond Effect

- When high-ability students are challenged for the first time or encounter peers with more advanced skills
- May cause re-assessment and self-perception changes
- Increases perspective
Friendship and Peer Issues

- Different peers fulfill different needs
  - Intellectual peer, interest peer, athletic peer, emotional peer ...

- Gifted children may feel lonely or experience isolation.

- Gifted children who are unique, highly able, or without access to other gifted children are at higher risk for being bullied
Gifted Children on Friends:

“My best friend is 16. I’m 12. Other people my age seem to be so shallow. I talk to Chris about politics, books, and sports we both watch. Plus he can drive, which is really cool.”

“My friends and I like to write and put on plays together in the backyard.”

“Sometimes I don’t know if other kids really want to be my friend or if they just want to work with me to get the right answers.”

“My brother is my best friend. He can be annoying, but we love the same things.”

“I like to play with lots of other kids. Jenny and I both like learning about space and want to be astronauts together. Louis has also read the Harry Potter books four times like me. Grace and I take gymnastics together. Micah and I ride bikes in the neighborhood. I have races to see who can do math problems faster with Kelsey.”

“I wish I had a friend. It’s lonely here.”
Stress and Time Management

- Pressure (real or imagined) to achieve in multiple spheres increases as bright students get older.

- In attempts to be well-rounded, students can become burned out.

- Help children to prioritize and "prune".

- Maintain adequate time for sleep, exercise, rest, play, and friendships.
Underachievement

- More likely when students are:
  - Inadequately challenged
  - Under-stimulated/bored
  - Experiencing other stressors
  - With peer groups that do not value intellect and/or school achievement

- May indicate social/emotional concerns

- Can have long-term impacts on self-concept and future opportunities
Twice-Exceptionality (2e): Gifted plus ...

- Dyslexia
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Dysgraphia
- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Medical Conditions
- Blind
- Deaf
- Cerebral Palsy
- Many other disabilities

- Other exceptionality may prevent student from expressing true high abilities
- May experience frustration in school
- Often need supports for both giftedness and disability to be successful at school
Where do we go from here?
At Home

- Praise effort, not just ability
- Model a growth mindset
- Help kids have three good coping skills/outlets
- Show interest in children’s passions
At Home

- Communicate with school
- Use community resources for enrichment and family fun – public libraries, parks, museums
- Share something you love to do or learn about with your child
For More Information About Giftedness:

- National Association for Gifted Children
  - www.nagc.org

- Iowa Talented and Gifted Association
  - www.iowatag.org

- Belin-Blank Center
  - www.belinblank.org

- Hoagies’ Gifted Education Page
  - www.hoagiesgifted.org
Thank you!

Please feel free to contact me for more suggested resources, or any other questions:

tracyksiazak@gmail.com