

GT EXPRESS

A newsletter for parents



The Multidimensional Gifted Child

Giftedness and Culture by Dr. Jim Granada, Director

Typically when we define the term “culture” we attach the term to the heritage of a particular ethnic group. Culture can have a much broader definition if we view it with a wider lens. When we look at culture as the rules, values, and ways of thinking of a group of individuals sharing a common environment, then we can reason that our children navigate through a variety of “cultures” every day.

The community in which one lives, the neighborhood, the extended family, and the nuclear family all provide different cultural contexts in which children must have knowledge of in order to be successful. Once they are in school, they add to that list the culture of the school and the micro-cultures of the classrooms in which they are placed.



Visit any school and you will see variances in the classrooms you pass by, reflective of the teacher and students that make up what would be considered as an “accidental community,” one in which children have been placed. The culture of each of these classrooms develops as the children in this new setting develop with the teacher into a community of learners each year.

Gifted students may or may not have challenges as they navigate through the multiple cultural settings they

experience each day. Those with highly developed analytical skills may question the variances between the settings, comparing, and contrasting them and arriving at conclusions about each setting. Those with a high sense of fairness may question the inequities that exist within each setting and between them. The risk takers may try to apply the rules and procedures associated with one setting to another with very different rules. The problem solvers will likely assess their roles and responsibilities within each setting and navigate fluidly through each of them, adapting to each like a chameleon.

We live in a complex world, and children aren’t always equipped to know how to deal with these complexities. As parents and educators, we must develop within children a sense of confidence to be able to manage within all these contexts they will experience, a sense of trust so they will come to us with their questions, and the flexibility and resilience to survive the contexts in which they may not fit. Broadening the way we view “culture” is one means to that end.



Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that builds up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools.

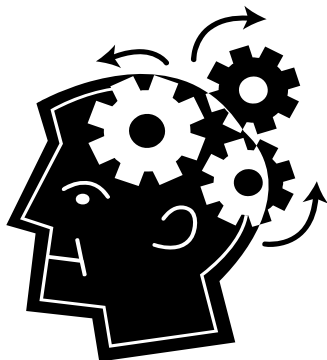
Terrence Deal and Kent Patterson

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

In this issue we take a look at the multidimensional gifted child. We will explore the complexities of being gifted and take an analytical look at GT children to understand their strengths and needs.

A Mind for the Future by Rhonda Boyer

This summer I had the good fortune to listen to Howard Gardner speak at the Advanced Placement National Convention in Seattle, Washington. His message explored the types of thinking that parents and educators need to nurture and develop in children to help them prepare for the demands of a future where a global economy will connect many different fields of work and learning together. Gardner typically refers to these various types of thinking as “minds”. Here is a brief introduction to each mind.



The Disciplined Mind. This type of thinking emphasizes two different meanings of the word *discipline*. First, a disciplined person becomes knowledgeable in one or more major content areas, such as: mathematics, technology, and geography. Eventually this person can become an expert in these fields. Second, he or she has a continuous desire or passion for learning new information and methods about a field regardless of the learning environment or purpose (work or leisure).

The Synthesizing Mind. Technology has opened a floodgate for the amount of new information that is available at our fingertips. Often times this information has not been analyzed or evaluated. When used alone it may not be an accurate source of information. The sheer volume and accessibility of information available to us today requires the ability to determine reliability, to select and sort based on importance, and to question information in order to develop a true understanding of the information gathered. The human brain seeks connections; therefore, creation is a natural behavior in young children. However, as children mature into adolescents and then into adults the ability to connect experiences and learning from different sources of information, must be intentionally taught and practiced.

The Creating Mind. Although a creation may be unique, it is not always important. Creativity is the blending of three independent elements: the individual, the information, and the subject matter. An individual with the creating mind goes beyond what is known in a content area by asking new and deep questions and then by attempting to answer these same questions. This type of thinking may occur within and among cultural groups or in social areas that involve the valuing of a new solution or invention.

The Respectful Mind. This type of thinking recognizes differences in people and culture as a natural part of life. They have the need to understand others beyond just acceptance and political correctness. Accepting the differences within and across groups of individuals and valuing their potential contributions builds respect. Often this public respect begins with the respectful mind; however, to extend this thought to its fullest potential, it should be explored from the home to the community to the world.

The Ethical Mind. “Good work” describes work that exhibits excellence, engagement, and ethics. The view of one’s self extends beyond that of an individual to the role of a global citizen with an ethical view of the world around them. This viewpoint explores social and personal justice. The ethical mind is willing to speak out for the better good of the world despite any personal problems.

The nurturing or developing of one type of mind does not mean that the other types should be ignored. A conscious effort to develop skills and habits associated with each of these types of thinking will influence the expression of your gifted child’s potential for meaningful work and a meaningful life.

If you are interested in more information, read Howard Gardner’s *Five Minds for the Future* (2007).

College Corner is on our website.

Find a rationale for attending college, publications and websites for parents, students, and counselors, and the district’s scholarship search engine. You can find it at <http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/college.phtml>

The Value of a Positive Self-Esteem by Debi Torres

A common misconception is that gifted children are born with a positive concept or high self-esteem. Too often parents and teachers recognize, praise, and reward the achievement and performance of gifted children. While this may be appropriate, it has the unintended consequence that the gifted child is noted for his or her behavior rather than who he or she is as a person. “When we focus only on what gifted children can do rather than on who they are, we ignore vital aspects of their developing selves and risk distorting their sense of themselves and their worth” (Tolan, 1994).



Simply put, self-esteem is how an individual feels and thinks about him or herself based on the values of his or her environment. For many children, their self-esteem is a reflection of how people around them treat them and view them in everyday situations. Many gifted children are constantly defined by their intellectual achievements and this can sometimes cause difficulties with self-esteem throughout their developmental years.

It is never too early to think about nurturing your gifted child’s self-esteem. The process begins within the child well before they begin their first day of kindergarten and it continues throughout life. As a parent, you can support a positive self-esteem in your gifted child. The following tips are a starting point:

Foster pride in gifted areas. Since gifted children are often different from their peers they need help in understanding what it means to be gifted before they can accept their gift(s). This is an important step to building positive self-esteem. This will help to prevent the gifted child from hiding their academic strengths around their peers, which can lead to a negative self-concept.

Set realistic expectations. If a gifted child connects his self-esteem only to being “gifted” or to his academic accomplishments then what happens when he doesn’t make all As or doesn’t win first place in a competition? Also remember that gifted children aren’t perfect all the time; they are still children. Whether they are in first grade or eleventh grade they will continue to need guidance and support when navigating through the difficult choices in life.

Reinforce positive respect. Try telling your gifted child detailed things that you like and respect about him or her and try not to focus only on school-related accomplishments. Do you enjoy their sense of humor? What about their sensitivity to animals or environmental issues? Let them know frequently what you appreciate and balance the areas that you praise.

Replace judgmental comments with positive ones. Everyone makes mistakes. How do you handle the poor choices your gifted child makes? Whatever the consequence, remember to separate the mistake from the child. Remember that your child isn’t bad; they just made a bad choice. Be sure that you explain that to them.

Gifted children typically have a heightened sense of awareness about themselves. Ask your child what he or she is experiencing. Sometimes offering the opportunity to talk meaningful about sensitive topics in today’s busy and challenging world makes a huge difference. You and your gifted child will benefit from the extra quality time together.

Stephanie Tolan. (1994). Giftedness as asynchronous development. Available online at: http://www.stephanietolan.com/gt_as_asynch.htm (October 14, 2008).

Check out our Parent Clearinghouse website at <http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/clearinghouse.phtml>

Find publications, newsletters, and presentations.

Bilingualism and Giftedness by Monica Neshyba

When I was a girl, my parents decided to speak to me only in English because when they were children, they were not valued for their Spanish-speaking abilities or recognized for their academic potential. Still today, students learning English in schools and who speak another language at home have often been overlooked in the process of identifying gifted and talented students.

These students, including those who participated in bilingual education programs, were often seen as needing remediation because of their lack of English skills and not valued for their academic strengths and the skills they had learned at home. However, building a positive self-concept in children and developing a healthy attitude toward schooling rests on valuing what the children bring with them from home, including a language other than English (Gonzalez & Maez, 1995).

As I grew up, I began to understand the importance of knowing two or more languages. I needed to learn to read, write, and speak in Spanish, not only to speak with my relatives, but also to be able to communicate with more people and to have more job opportunities in the future.

Communication is a necessary part of life to obtain and share information and to express ideas. When someone can read, write and speak in more than one language, they can communicate and get to know people of different cultures from around the world.

The more one knows about different cultures, the more they learn about their own culture and can compare the differences and see the similarities.

Knowing languages other than English needs to be seen as an intellectual and cultural resource (Soto, 2007). Bilingual education programs that do see language as a resource may be more ideal to recognize bilingual students who are gifted in academic content areas (Granada, 2003).

References

- Granada, A. (2003). Casting a wider net: Linking bilingual and gifted education. In J.A. Castellano, (Ed.), *Special populations in gifted education: Working with diverse gifted learners*. (pp. 1-14). Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Gonzalez, G & Maez, L. F. (1995). Advances in research in bilingual education. *Directions in Language & Education, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1*, 1-10.
- Soto, L. D. (2007). Gifted bilingual education. *Praeger handbook of Latino education in the U.S.*, p.185-189. Westport: Praeger.



Academic Magnets

The magnet programs offer students advanced academic studies in an environment built on collegial relationships, individual growth, and intellectual rigor. Emphasis is placed on independent research, group collaboration, presentation of new learning, and the development of original designs and solutions.

Admission to magnet programs is selective and by application. Each program has its own admission application form and deadlines.

Some common factors in admission include previous report card grades, nationally-normed standardized test results, an essay or letter, and teacher recommendations. Please contact the specific program for complete information and an application.

Fulmore Magnet Program

201 East Mary
Austin, TX 78724
(512) 841-4916
Director: Mary Ann Wilkinson, Ph.D.

Kealing Magnet

1607 Pennsylvania Avenue
Austin, TX 78702
(512) 414-3180
Director: Mary Ramberg

Liberal Arts and Science Academy (High School)

7309 Lazy Creek Drive
Austin, TX 78704
(512) 414-2589
Principal: Rene Sanchez

10 Habits of Highly Effective Brains by Alvaro Fernandez

1. **Learn** what is the "It" in "Use It or Lose It". A basic understanding will serve you well to appreciate your brain's beauty as a living and constantly-developing dense forest with billions of neurons and synapses.

2. Take care of your **nutrition**. Did you know that the brain only weighs 2% of body mass but consumes over 20% of the oxygen and nutrients we intake? As a general rule, you don't need expensive ultra-sophisticated nutritional supplements; just make sure you don't stuff yourself with the "bad stuff".

3. Remember that the brain is part of the body. Things that **exercise your body** can also help sharpen your brain: physical exercise enhances neurogenesis, the development of new neurons.

4. Practice **positive**, future-oriented **thoughts** until they become your default mindset and you look forward to every new day in a constructive way. Stress and anxiety, no matter whether induced by external events or by your own thoughts, actually kills neurons and prevent the creation of new ones. You can think of chronic stress as the opposite of exercise: it prevents the creation of new neurons.

5. Thrive on **Learning** and **Mental Challenges**. The point of having a brain is precisely to learn and to adapt to challenging new environments. Once new neurons appear in your brain, where they stay in your brain and how long they survive depends on

how you use them. "Use It or Lose It" does not mean "do crossword puzzle number 1,234,567". It means, "challenge your brain often with fundamentally new activities".

6. We are (as far as we know) the only self-directed organisms in this planet. **Aim high**. Once you graduate from college, keep learning. The brain keeps developing, no matter your age, and it reflects what you do with it.

7. **Explore, travel**. Adapting to new locations forces you to pay more attention to your environment. Make new decisions, use your brain.

8. **Don't Outsource Your Brain**. Not to media personalities, not to politicians, not to your smart neighbor... Make your own decisions, and mistakes. And learn from them. That way, you are training your brain, not your neighbor's.

9. Develop and maintain **stimulating friendships**. We are "social animals", and need social interaction.

10. **Laugh. Often**. Especially to cognitively complex humor, full of twists and surprises.

Excerpted from Fernandez, A. (August 22, 2007). "The ten habits of highly effective brains." SharpBrains 2008. CA: San Francisco. Retrieved 07/16/2008 from <http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2007/08/22/10-habits-of-highly-effective-brains/> Used with permission.



Academic Competitions

The following academic competitions are supported by various departments in the Austin ISD. Participation varies from campus to campus.

Check our website for more details.

http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/out_of_school.phtml



- AISD Student Anthology
- C-SPAN Student Cam
- Destination Imagination
- Foreign Language Competitions
- Future Problem Solving
- Geography Bee
- Math Counts
- Math Olympiad
- Math Pentathlon
- National History Day
- National Language Exams
- Robotics
- Science Fair
- Student Organizations
- University Interscholastic League (UIL)
- Visual Arts Scholastic Event

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We're on the Web!

<http://www.austinisd.org/academic/curriculum/gt/>

About Us . . .

The Department of Advanced Academic Services in Austin ISD provides support and services for numerous programs and events, including the following:

- Gifted and Talented Program
- Advanced Placement
- Pre-Advanced Placement
- International Baccalaureate Diploma Program
- International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program
- Academic Magnets
- Future Problem Solving