



Dispelling the Myths Around Gifted Education

How often have you heard, “Gifted students will do fine on their own?” This is just one of the many myths that become barriers to properly educating millions of high-potential students. The following is a list of the most prevalent myths in gifted education, accompanied by evidence rebutting each of them.

Myth 1: Gifted students don’t need help; they’ll do fine on their own

Would you send a star athlete to train for the Olympics without a coach? Gifted students need guidance from well-trained teachers who challenge and support them in order to fully develop their abilities. Many gifted students may be so far ahead of their same-age peers that they know more than half of the grade-level curriculum before the school year begins. Their resulting boredom and frustration can lead to low achievement, despondency, or unhealthy work habits. The role of the teacher is crucial for spotting and nurturing talents in school.

Myth 2: Teachers challenge all the students, so gifted kids will be fine in the regular classroom

Although teachers try to challenge all students, they are frequently unfamiliar with the needs of gifted children and do not know how to best serve them in the classroom. A national study conducted by the Fordham Institute found that 58 percent of teachers have received no professional development focused on teaching academically advanced students in the past few years. What’s more, 73 percent of teachers agreed with this statement: “Too often, the brightest students are bored and under-challenged in school—we’re not giving them a sufficient A chance to thrive.” This report confirms what many families have known: Not all teachers are able to recognize and support gifted learners.

Myth 3: Gifted students make everyone else in the class smarter by providing a role model

Average or below-average students do not look to the gifted students in the class as role models. Watching or relying on someone who is expected to succeed does little to increase a struggling student’s sense of self-confidence. Similarly, gifted students benefit from classroom interactions with peers at similar performance levels and become bored, frustrated, and unmotivated when placed in classrooms with low or average-ability students.

Myth 4: All children are gifted

It is certainly true that all children have strengths and positive attributes, but not all children are gifted in the educational sense of the word. The label “gifted” in a school setting means that, when compared to others his or her age or grade, a child has an advanced capacity to learn and apply what is learned in one or more subject areas or the performing or fine arts. This advanced capacity requires modifications to the regular curriculum to ensure that these children are challenged and learn new material. Gifted does not connote good or better; it is a term that allows students to be identified for services that meet their unique learning needs.

Myth 5: Acceleration placement options are socially harmful for gifted students

Academically gifted students often feel bored or out of place with their age peers and naturally gravitate towards older students who are more similar as “intellectual peers.” Studies have shown that many students are happier with older students who share their interests than they are with children their own age. Acceleration placement options such as early entrance to kindergarten, grade skipping, or early exit should be considered for these students.

Myth 6: Gifted education programs are elitist

Gifted education programs are meant to help all high-ability students. Gifted learners are found in all cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. However, many of these students are denied the opportunity to maximize their potential because of the ways in which programs and services are funded, and/or flawed identification practices. For example, reliance on a single test score for gifted education services may exclude the selection of students with different cultural experiences and opportunities. Additionally, with no federal money and few states providing an adequate funding stream, most gifted education programs and services are dependent solely on local funds and parent demand. This means that,



in spite of the need, higher-income school districts are often the only ones able to provide services—giving the appearance of elitism.

Myth 7: That student can't be gifted—he's getting bad grades

Underachievement describes a discrepancy between a student's performance and his actual ability. The roots of this problem differ based on each child's experiences. Gifted students may become bored or frustrated in an unchallenging classroom situation, causing them to lose interest, learn bad study habits, or distrust the school environment. Other students may mask their abilities to try to fit in socially with their same-age peers; still others may have a learning disability that masks their giftedness. No matter the cause, it is imperative that a caring and perceptive adult help gifted learners break the cycle of underachievement in order to achieve their full potential.

Myth 8: Gifted students are happy, popular, and well adjusted in school

Many gifted students flourish in their communities and school environments. However, some gifted children differ in terms of their emotional and moral intensity, sensitivity to expectations and feelings, perfectionism, and deep concerns about societal problems. Others do not share interests with their classmates, resulting in isolation or being labeled unfavorably as “nerds.” Because of these difficulties, the school experience is one to be endured rather than celebrated.

Myth 9: That child can't be gifted—she has a disability

Some gifted students also have learning or other disabilities. These “twice-exceptional” students often go undetected in regular classrooms because their disability and gifts mask each other, making them appear “average.” Other twice-exceptional students are identified as having a learning disability and, as a result, are not considered for gifted services. In both cases, it is important to focus on the students' abilities and allow them access to challenging curricula in addition to receiving help for their learning disabilities.

Myth 10: Our district has a gifted and talented program: AP courses

While AP classes offer rigorous, advanced coursework, they do not constitute a gifted education program. The AP program is designed as college-level classes taught by high school teachers for students willing to work hard. The program is deficient in its service to gifted and talented students in two major areas: First, AP is limited by the subjects offered, which may be only a handful in most districts. Second, it is limited in that typically it is offered only in high school and is generally available only for eleventh- and twelfth-grade students. The College Board acknowledges that AP courses are for any student who is academically prepared and motivated to take a college-level course.

Myth 11: Gifted education requires an abundance of resources

Offering gifted education services need not break the bank. A fully developed gifted education program can look overwhelming in its scope and complexity. However, beginning a program requires little more than an acknowledgement by district and community personnel that gifted students need something different: a commitment to provide appropriate curriculum and instruction, as well as teacher training in identification and gifted education strategies.

<http://www.nagc.org/blog/dispelling-myths-around-gifted-education-4-6-16>

Editor's note: This is part of a series of blog posts that is collaboratively published every week by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and National Association for Gifted Children.