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A Conversation with Parents of Children with Unusual Abilities

Irving A. Alexander, Ph.D.

American Association for Gifted Children

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of any part of this work contact:**

**Margaret Evans Gayle, Executive Director
The American Association for Gifted Children
Duke University
Box 90270
Durham, NC 27708-0270**

919.783.6152

AAGC website: www.aagc.org

Dr. Irving Alexander is Professor Emeritus at Duke University in the Department of Psychology and President of the American Association for Gifted Children, located at Duke University. This *Working Paper* was written in response to the numerous requests that AAGC receives from parents regarding their children with unusual abilities and how they may help them reach their potential.

Working Papers are issued occasionally by the AAGC in order to inform public discussion of issues related to the education of the gifted. Over the past few years AAGC has focused its mission on reviewing the research findings about preschoolers with unusual abilities and informing parents and professionals about how to best support them in their development. This paper will provide the basis for further discussions about issues and promising activities that are important to parents of very bright young children.

A Conversation with Parents of Children with Unusual Abilities

Irving E. Alexander, Ph.D.

Introduction

For the past several years I have been involved in dealing with a variety of issues that pertain to the identification, understanding, and development of children with unusual capabilities. I had been preparing for this work for many prior years, but for the most part, not quite realizing it. As a student, especially in higher education, and then as an academic for a half century dealing with highly selected graduate and undergraduate students in elite private institutions, it seemed as though my world was constantly filled with people who possessed high levels of capability. So much so that it was hard for me to realize that they were in any way unusual. Then several years ago, I was asked to assume a leadership role in the American Association for Gifted Children (AAGC), and I soon found myself combing resources for answers to the questions I encountered in trying to fulfill the organization's mission.

A large part of that mission has been to gather and disseminate information relevant to the identification and education of young people who exhibit unusual capabilities. From the time that AAGC was founded, more than fifty years ago, the major audience for its various publications has been parents and educators particularly concerned with education for the "gifted." Over the years, with the great advances in communication resources, inquiries became more direct and personalized, not easily satisfied by the recommendation of a general published resource. By the time AAGC had relocated its facilities to Duke

University's Talent Identification Program in the late 1980s, parents from all over the world were asking us for information via phone calls, letters, and early e-mail communication. Most often we try to direct people to resources in their immediate area that might directly lead to the information or services they seek, but lately it has seemed there is still a need for an overview of what it means to be gifted and just what giftedness is, or might be.

A fair number of inquiries that we receive, naturally, no matter the specific question or questions asked, seek a verification of unusual ability level in a particular child. What often appear to be simple questions, however, usually turn out to be complex. The askers generally pose comparative questions, usually tied to a child's performance at a particular age level, and we still don't know enough about child development to answer a

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simple "yes" or "no" every time someone asks "does this mean my child is gifted?" There are few easy answers. When I first decided to share the fruits of my exploration into the land of unusual ability, I mistakenly thought it would be a straightforward task. But in thinking about the things I might say, I began to realize how multifaceted this topic is and how it relates not just to individuals but to so many of the critical issues of our rapidly changing culture.

A Trip to the Museum

On a recent trip to New York I reserved some time to visit the Museum of Modern Art. The museum was crowded, but the flow of viewers in any room moved along at a comfortable if languid pace. I found myself next to a father with a preschool child who I estimated to be somewhere between four and six, extremely verbal, and inquisitive. We were viewing an architectural exhibit at the moment, and the child brought forth a constant stream of questions. No sooner had the father responded to one than another appeared. Before too long the father began to show his disapproval, mostly by his tone of voice and the “shushing” sounds he made. This served to intensify the urgency level of the questions, and I could anticipate that the situation might easily lead to a control issue, in which the parent would have to exercise some more radical form of parental authority in order to relieve his mounting distress. When I tried to understand what the child might be experiencing, it seemed as though his high level of interest and curiosity, which produced the good feeling of excitement, was being thwarted by a father who was showing increasing displeasure toward him—for no justifiable reason that the child could discern. Surprising even myself, I finally turned to the father, excusing my interruption, and commented to him how important I thought it was not to cut off the flow of interest shown by the child through the nature and constancy of his questions. I further volunteered something to the effect that being able or willing to supply correct answers was less important than supporting the signs of interest in acquiring knowledge displayed by the child. I’m not so sure that the father either appreciated my unexpected intervention or even processed what I was

saying. He was clearly suffering a variety of negative feelings from which he needed relief. In retrospect, I have thought of how sad it would be if, in a worst case scenario, an expression of consuming interest led to a loss of communication with and estrangement from the people who had high intimacy value for the child—or for anyone in a similar situation, for that matter. It would be even more tragic if the child developed the expectation that sharing enthusiasms and interest with intimates would eventually lead to displays of anger or irritation on their parts.

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The child in this case seemed particularly articulate for his age and may, indeed, have been “gifted” in one way or another, but it’s really the role of the parent that I want to focus on in this example, and that role remains the same whether the child is gifted or not. At the most basic level, parents must be a continuous source for a child’s feeling of security, no matter what the speed of the child’s development. You could say that raising a child with special talents is just like raising any other child—but more so.

What Is Giftedness?

There is a great variety of factors that may be involved in the transition from an early demonstration of high-level potential, of any kind, to the expression of that potential in adulthood. This transition is obviously of great concern to parents, but unfortunately the relationship between early signs of giftedness and outstanding performance later in life is not well understood. In fact, we are all aware that many highly accomplished leaders in numerous avenues of human endeavor were not recognized as having unusual capabilities when they were young. By the same token, we know that unusual signs of early ability are no guarantee of success in later life.

Sometimes a child can even pay a price for being labeled gifted. So frequently, ability, if recognized early, may be misused as a sign of entitlement that can serve to separate a child from peers who may not be all that different in performance level when such factors as motivation, organizational ability, general disposition, and so forth are added to the mix. I do not mean to convey the impression that the identification and education of people with unusual potential should be overlooked in our society. On the contrary, I hope that educators will arrive at even better means to accomplish these tasks. My wish is that, when we speak of a “gifted child,” we remember to place the emphasis on the second word.

With that in mind, however, it is obviously an interest in the first word that leads parents to call us at the AAGC. So what is giftedness? A researcher would tell you that if a child can recognize all of the letters of the alphabet at age

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two with no outside instruction, it would be taken as a sign of unusual ability. If most children could perform this task at the age of four, one might estimate that with regard to this skill the child was two years in advance of its age.

Intelligence levels for children are essentially built on this principle. They include items that are indicative of children’s mental development at various age levels. The difficulty of testing young children, however, is that we really don’t know enough yet about individual developmental progress. For some children, it is relatively even. Many progress at a steady rate, and this pace is used as a guide or rule-of-thumb when we assess children. However, we know that some children spurt at various times. This may be one of the reasons that the correlation between intelligence scores at two points in time during the pre-school years are decidedly smaller than at later times in the prescribed space of years of compulsory education. Other factors are undoubtedly involved, including the adequacy of measuring instruments for children of early ages, in addition to the consistency in the rate of development in the individual.

Many of the scholars who have contributed to the literature on giftedness point to certain personality characteristics as essential for eventual success. In one form or another they

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refer to a high level of motivation and unusual persistence even under conditions of hardship or little progress. Yet not all children who are judged to be at the upper levels of the population, on the tests employed, display these characteristics. There are children who seem to be endowed with the ability to process information rapidly and reach comfortable levels of performance in a variety of elementary intellectual skills with little effort. They are aware of their abilities and seem to enjoy the positive response they produce. Many of these children show no special interest in the subject matter itself other than being able to perform well in that with which they are faced either at school or in the home or a community setting. Because of their high-level natural abilities, which may be broad in scope, these children may develop little mastery motivation, or need for persistence in the face of difficulty, early in life. In the ensuing years school performance may fall off as certain subject matters become more complex, or rules have to be mastered in order for progress to take place. Such children may present difficult problems for parents to understand or cope with. It can appear as though a child who early on

showed great promise at some point seems to lose some of that promise. If performance feedback was at all important in the mix, the change in the attitudes of significant adult authorities can, for some, reduce motivation and introduce the possibility of various psychological problems relating to one’s image of one’s self.

Throughout the course of this discussion, I use many different descriptive terms to characterize the children in question, those who in the past were designated as “gifted” children. I do this in part to call attention to the fact that the label itself carries very little specific information about any child other than that he or she performed at some agreed upon, relatively high level on the instrument designated to assess factors thought to be relevant to intellectual ability. In former times it was assumed that development in these factors would follow a fairly even course with appropriate forms of accelerated curricula. But clearly we know that all children of equal intellectual ability as measured by a test instrument are not the same in a variety of other ways that may turn out to be crucial to their intellectual, artistic, or athletic progress. Furthermore, although we have created a category called “gifted or talented,” we know that there are clear distinctions to be made within that category. Not all members of that group are equally gifted or talented. Nor are we yet certain of how to bring those gifts or talents to their maximal expression.

The Cultural Context of Giftedness

We use the word “gifted” to describe children who display, either in preschool or in the early school years, performances that distinguish them as being considerably in

advance of other children their age. The performance is almost always connected to some ability highly valued by the culture—for us certainly things intellectual (early language development, reading skill, numerical development, reasoning ability, memory, and others) or musical (instrumental skill or vocal ability). When these talents are recognized by the care-taking figures, usually parents or other relatives, these adults are faced with the problem of what they can do to foster the demonstrated potential. The solution to such a problem is tied to a host of factors that in varying degrees may influence parental decision. Consider a child with demonstrated musical potential living in a sparsely populated area of the country where there are few avenues available for high-level instruction as opposed to a child living in a metropolitan area with multiple available resources. Parents faced with the first situation have been known to relocate at a considerable distance in order to foster the unusual ability. This decision must certainly be influenced by the parent's certainty of employment in a new setting, which in turn depends on a host of economic factors. What a parent is willing or able to do to foster unusual development in a child may not be apparent to the parent at the beginning of the process. The more unusual the child's development, the greater the necessity and the likelihood of parental involvement. In the modern era with changing roles for women in the work force and the growing necessity for two-income families, such involvement may no longer be as feasible as it once was, and more attention is likely to be paid to outside forces like schools, community activities, and individual instruction to fill what was traditionally the parental role.

I would venture a guess that parents who discover striking abilities in their preschool children become more keenly aware of the need to do something about it beyond what they are personally able to do. While our society has made inroads into this general problem with increased numbers of day care centers, both public and private, these are not likely to be geared to the needs of children with unusually rapid development. Of necessity they are centered programmatically on general age-level abilities, both social and intellectual. While there is no doubt in my mind that communities differ widely in the number and quality of resources available and that this is probably reflected in day care centers, as well, I would still contend that relatively few, no matter where located, are able to concentrate on the developmental needs of what we have chosen to call “gifted children.”

The more unusual the child's development, the greater the necessity and the likelihood of parental involvement.

The problem becomes somewhat less acute in more affluent communities, in which both private and public resources are generated to attract the interests of and provide stimulation and pleasure for young and old. In less affluent communities, where more people are likely to share fewer resources and where ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, and in general a population of varying levels of education and varying levels of articulation live, parents of children of unusual ability face even more difficult problems. A major one involves that of recognition. Do the outstanding abilities of the child match those most highly

valued by the majority culture and thus likely to be considered for entry into special school programs? Will such programs exist? In our system, the criteria are heavily weighted toward demonstrable proficiency in verbal and mathematical skills. These may be too restrictive to cover the potential capabilities of children emanating from the backgrounds just described. How then to deal with children from varying backgrounds who are unusually perceptive and even knowledgeable in certain respects far in advance of their years?

One thing appears evident in this regard. It probably is a truism that majority cultures find ways of supporting, encouraging, and developing those activities and skills that they value most. In our culture we have by

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now fortunately approached the point where minority expression of unusual talent is more likely to be recognized and even incorporated into the culture at large than it used to be. Certain of the arts and the fields of entertainment and sports reflect this development well, and the future portends increasing opportunities in a variety of realms. A growing mainstream acceptance of people with abilities traditionally valued more highly in a subgroup poses its own challenges, however. The problem faced by members of many minority groups concerns the price that may be paid for acculturation. How much will the values of their own subculture change or be lost completely as a function of acculturation, or, if the subculture itself remains intact,

how much contact with it will the mainstream-accepted, “gifted” individual lose if he or she strives to develop his or her potential? In light of such issues, giftedness can be a burden as well as a blessing. Most people effect a compromise position in which selected values of their subculture are maintained and passed on while they participate in those aspects of the majority culture that are not found objectionable.

Finally, we arrive at schools, which sometimes seem a culture of their own. What any school system can ultimately do for any limited part of its population is, of course, a complex, multifaceted problem. The problem in a democratic society has unusually difficult aspects. Public education is geared toward finding the best ways to

educate the majority of the population in the basic skills it needs to carry out the multiple purposes of running a society. We are geared toward providing the means for the vast majority of our

children to learn to speak, read, and write a common language and to learn to manipulate the fundamental number concepts necessary to carry out the demands of everyday life. While it is true that the final six years of a twelve-year required curriculum moves into subject matters more concerned with adult interests like science, history, literature, and higher forms of mathematics, the major effort is geared toward what the majority of the population can assimilate with normal effort. That the schools can supply additional opportunities for those with intense interests and unusual abilities is in no sense ensured, given that budgets must be acceptable to voters, many of whom no longer have school children, never had children, or are

affluent enough to send their children to private institutions that may accommodate their particular needs.

When one also considers that any attribute contained in varying quantities in any group of people has a low end as well as a high end, we come face-to-face with the school administrator's task of the fair and most beneficial allocation of limited and no doubt insufficient funds. The needs are multiple, the demands are clear and usually justified, and the outcomes usually less than ideal for all concerned parents.

You may wonder at this point why I am calling these issues to your attention. I think it is only to point out to you that if you think that some public institutional resource will solve your problems related to gifted offspring, it is only likely to be true if you had no problem in the first place.

For those children who breeze through school with no great difficulty, who enjoy what experiences are offered to them, and who are positively disposed to benevolent authority, it may not make all that much difference. They will likely go on to higher education and get turned on by some challenge either by subject matter or mentor or choose an occupational path that will satisfy some other aspects of their value system, like material benefits, or assurance of opportunity, or altruistic service.

Perhaps in the not too distant future, with the great increases in the accessibility of knowledge of all sorts brought about mainly by technological advances, the problems of giftedness and its development will become less societal and more individual. The schools, in a democratic society, will be geared toward providing the basic tools necessary for life in the society. School curricula will continue to explore the best methods for imparting this knowledge to its citizenry. But the strict

lock-step rules for the rate or the conditions under which any student could increase his or her knowledge about any

The central figure in all of this, of course, is the child and strangely enough, the child as an individual and what he or she brings to the mix is perhaps the least studied of the various elements involved.

subject matter will no longer prevail, perhaps not even in the institutions of higher education, the colleges and universities. There already exist specialized video and audio courses taught by distinguished scholars, which are distributed commercially to anyone who can pay the modest asking price. Beyond that, university administrators and faculty are discussing online lecture courses, which may eventually carry possibilities for those not formally involved as students. The wave of the future may increase the freedom of those with special abilities and talents to move at a pace more conducive to their individual levels than is possible at present.

Child and Parent

The central figure in all of this, of course, is the child and strangely enough, the child as an individual and what he or she brings to the mix is perhaps the least studied of the various elements involved. What I mean is a child meeting

whatever criteria is set for carrying the label “gifted” or “talented” is then included in a category that is studied as a group whose mean or average characteristics are assigned to the individual members of that category whether they fit or not. Your child’s major identification should not be “gifted child” or “normal child” or anything else derived from a categorical designation based on a comparative

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description derived from a limited number of variables. Your child is a human being with a distinct personality and particular interests and a way of doing things that is more likely to be known by you than anyone else. His or her individuality, I would maintain, stands a great chance of being overlooked by inclusion in an elite category. Once included in that category he or she is more likely to be identified by area or areas of achievement than by personal characteristics. In many instances this can turn out to have tragic consequences.

So-called gifted children come in all sizes and shapes and personality configurations, just as all other children do, and personality is a significant factor for a parent to take into account when trying to deal with the growth and development of the child’s unusual abilities. Let us suppose two contrasting displayed faces to the world by a pair of children early in life. Let us even bypass

the question of how the style originated, whether from a force of nature or nurture or both. The children each show signs of unusual abilities for their age levels. One, however, is easy going, positive toward human interactions of all kinds, interested in conjoint activity with others, and receptive to the training provided by authority figures. For this child, life is with people. Such children wind up more easily in special programs and present a minimum of difficulty to parents. Let us endow the other child with a set of different characteristics. He or she is mostly concerned with how things work, how to solve puzzles, how to build structures. The affect of this child seems to be strongly dependent on the outcomes of personal effort in the activities undertaken. This child seems to live more in the world of ideas and less in the world of people. Authority may carry with it the idea of control and thus be looked upon with mild apprehension, as though authority can take you abruptly from that which provides you with pleasure or positive affect. To enhance maximum progress in the latter child would likely provide a challenge for most parents and teachers. The issue becomes even more complex when one begins to take into account other critical personality attributes how they complicate the mix with which the parent and eventually the instructor or teacher must deal.

For some people, the game is largely over when they find that their child meets some often-used criterion for admission to some specific school program that teaches a subject at an accelerated pace or with greater attention to subtle detail and independent work. Often times the criterion will turn out to be a standard intelligence test score that is reached by a limited percent of the population. For some parents, inclusion in this category may act as a certificate of entitlement, and it may serve to reduce the sense of intimate parent-child interaction around the

development of those things, whether school related or not, that stimulate their child's interest. In other instances the parental figures may turn to a strong position of advocacy, urging that the school provide greater resources for children with high-level capabilities, creating increased challenges for administrators with limited budgets and a basic commitment to fundamental education for all children. In my experience thus far with parents, however, they seem mostly concerned with immediate practical problems relating to their own responsibilities toward their children. When responding to these practical inquiries, I often retain the residual feeling that if those parents were aware of the complex issues involved in any solution to their inquiry, the question might change, or new possibilities for solutions might become evident.

The parent must find ways of unobtrusively fostering a child's interests without controlling the situation or "taking over." You don't have to have expertise in the area of your child's interests. You have to find ways of being helpful to your child in coping with the problems that may turn up in pursuing those interests. So far we've focused on the child as the central figure in all issues of giftedness, but let's now explore the various problems that may emerge for parents who discover unusual ability in their children.

Recently, when discussing with a friend some aspects of the issues I am sharing with you, I was told the story of a female college professor with a child whose high-level abilities were generally recognized. The professor's major concern seemed to be with making sure that her child did not suffer the same frustrations that she experienced as a child with similar intellectual attributes. What occurred to me when hearing this tale was how frequently we as parents make unwarranted assumptions

about the identity between the way we experienced the world and the way our children experience the world. This is even more likely to be the case the more the child is seen as "being like me" in some respects. It is probably unwise to focus on avoiding, for your child, things that were problematic for you. Your child may easily handle the same things. If not you may be of help in your sensitivity to the problem, your vantage point as an experienced adult, and a sympathetic, empathic listener, to a child attempting to cope with a problem that produces negative affect.

All through my life I can recall how the growth and development of one's children was a major source of conversation for parents of my acquaintance. At times it

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seemed as though the successes and failures attributed to the child by others were vicariously experienced by parents, as well. As a child I can still recall my mother's discomfort when friends and relatives would ask her why I was so skinny. Somehow she felt that it reflected poorly on her. Perhaps people thought that she didn't feed me enough or was not concerned enough to make sure that I ingested enough calories each day. I remember with amusement a time when she took me to a physician to inquire why I was

not suitably plump, given her attention to my welfare. He, of course, told her that I was perfectly healthy, at the lower but normal end of the weight scale for my age and height, and ventured a guess that all of this was due to a high level of physical activity. His response hardly satisfied her, because she was not sure that it would be sufficient to quell the suppositions of the curious. In a similar vein, I can recall an oft-repeated story my mother told about an action I took as a small child alerting others to the fact that I was carrying a contagious condition (whooping cough), which

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she saw as a sign of some sort of precocity. It is possible to draw from my own experience, as a parent, similar examples describing my own behavior and those of my friends. The involvement of parents in the lives of their children, as extensions of themselves, can frequently cause complications in the lives of the children and not infrequently they involve issues of performance in children who demonstrate high-level capabilities. From various research studies we have learned of the importance of parental and family support in the development of a child's potential. What forms that support should take is a complex issue

that ultimately depends on the nature of the individual participants. There is clear evidence, however, that the assurance of a strong sense of familial support and encouragement to develop one's individual interests are the most positive conditions for progress in highly selected teenagers and, it would be my guess, for most other people as well. There are instances, however, of people of great achievement who have not enjoyed the benefits of these conditions. Obviously there are multiple ways to accomplish most outcomes.

The point is that whatever the differences in a child's ability, interest, education, and skills, parents do have a vital role to play in the development of children who demonstrate unusually rapid development and the potential for future high-level performance in culturally valued activities.

At the most basic level, parents must be a continuous source for the child's feeling of security, no matter how rapid the child develops. By this I mean bedrock security, a haven for the dangers of terror. Children constantly discovering new items in a strange world need to know that there is a dependable source available for the reduction of negative feelings that exploration may produce. Without that source, exploration itself may be diminished. In addition, I have often wondered if the positive feelings engendered in the child by parental displays of warmth, like smiling or touching, provide the essential model for the development of interests in the child. It is a though one is geared to continue activities that produce feelings similar to those produced in positive interaction with the parents. As infancy is negotiated and the child acquires locomotion and language, the touching, cooing, and reflexive smiling of the early years, all indicators of extreme dependency interactions, must find

replacements. The most logical avenue is in verbal communication. There are, however, barriers, that may enter at this level, especially with extremely bright children. Some parents get stuck in thinking that they must be able to answer all of a child's questions or else they will lose status or authority and no longer be valued. This brings us full circle, back to the father and child on their trip to the museum several years ago.

What are the possible parental resolutions to the difficulty of dealing with eager and inquiring young minds? No doubt there are many possibilities, but in one way or another they should include the parent coming to grips with his or her own limitations and changing roles in those preschool developmental years. You cannot always teach or exemplify what the child seeks, but your role must be to continue to stress the connectedness of the parent to what occupies the child's interests. The role may certainly change from that of an authority or expert to that of a facilitator. A child will benefit greatly from being introduced to other resources that will allow it to explore further aspects of the things that capture its interests.

The usual manner for young people to grow into parenthood is by observing as children what their own parents or the parents of friends did. Children seem to have a marvelous penchant for agreeing on the characteristics of "good" and "bad" parents. When parenthood begins, people are highly likely to share their experiences with friends or even become conversant with the recommended books of the era. In my time the child rearing "bible" was written by Dr. Benjamin Spock. It was a gold mine of both medical and sensible psychological information. For raising most children, the sources that I have already mentioned are typically found to be adequate. It is when children present unusual profiles either medically, psycho-

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logically, intellectually, or in some forms of expression valued by the culture that parents find it necessary to seek other sources to help them through the developmental process.

If your child meets the criteria set in your school district for special programming, he or she may still run into problems of peer group alienation that may effect his or her motivation to avail oneself of the opportunities presented. Understanding the difficulty from the child's point of view and giving him or her the necessary support to come to an ultimate resolution may be the most beneficial thing you can do. Success in life is neither guaranteed nor lost by inclusion or lack of inclusion in a secondary school or special educational program. What is perhaps as important, if not more so, is that you learn to be a quiet supporter and facilitator of those things in which your child shows interest. This kind of learning through interest development is less likely to be easily forgotten and can act as a springboard for positive feelings about what one can do for oneself. A parent engaging in such a role is more likely to become an advocate for increased community resources for children, including novel school programming, and to become more attracted to joining other

parents in groups devoted to the special needs of their children. I have often wondered why parents of advanced preschoolers do not engage administrative school personnel in helping them set up study groups in which they could share experiences related to the particular developmental problems they face and also invite local experts to meet with them to discuss the problems involved in parenting unusually bright children, especially as they relate to specific cultural demands, either that of the majority culture or that of any particular minority group.

Final Thoughts

In this discussion we have touched little on the relationship between ability in advance of one's years and creativity. This is so in part because it turns out to be a very complex issue about which not enough is known. It would not surprise me greatly that any parent with an identified child of unusual ability in some realm doesn't at one time or another entertain the fleeting wish, hope, or dream that his or her offspring will produce something that will make a real difference in people's lives. It is a well-intentioned dream with all sorts of possible psychological ramifications. The likelihood of this happening is, I would guess, no greater among those who were earlier identified as "gifted" than among those who did not carry this designation. There are so many factors involved in producing something truly creative that unusual ability may turn out to be only a small plus. I would think that a more feasible and perhaps in the long run a more satisfying aspiration for the parent of any child is to be a facilitator. Helping a child discover his or her own interests and the means for expressing them is a unique parental opportunity. In the best instance it can lead to the discovery of a life occupa-

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tion that is a continual source of positive affect, excitement, and enjoyment. To wake up each morning eager to get to your work, knowing, but not telling your employer, that despite its hardships and occasional disappointments you were committed to the job by the continual fascination of it. Artists and musicians not infrequently express such views. It is, in my estimation, not confined to those populations. To be "gifted and engaged" in such a manner is truly a blessing.

Recommended Books for Parents of Preschoolers

Smutny, Joan Franklin and Kathleen and Stephen Veenker. *Your Gifted Child: How to Recognize and Develop the Special Talents in Your Child from Birth to Age Seven*. Ballantine Books, 1989. Paperback, \$10.00.

(This classic book is a must for parents of preschoolers. The information is still timely and on track with child development research. This practical guide is clearly written and offers specific information about understanding gifted children from infancy into elementary school.)

Smutny, Joan Franklin. *Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom: Identifying, Nurturing, Challenging Ages 3-10*. Free Spirit Publishing, 1997. Paperback. \$12.95.

(Another quality guide from an author that understands gifted children and their needs. Excellent resource for parents, teachers, and school administrators.)

Strip, Carol A. with Gretchen Hirsch. *Helping Gifted Children SOAR. A Practical Guide for Parents and Teachers*. Gifted Psychology Press, 602.954.4200. December 2000. Paperback, \$18.00.

(This new guide for parents and teachers is loaded with good, thorough, and reliable information. It has an excellent reference section that identifies books and web sites for specific issues or problems related to parenting children with high abilities. The range of topics include: Is My Child Gifted—Or Just Smart?, Testing and Screening, The Classroom, Making Choices, What is Best for Your Child and many more.)

Learn More about Children with Unusual Abilities!

To learn more about unusual abilities in young children and teens, AAGC recommends these books and other sources. Public libraries will have many of these resources. Librarians will be a great resource for recommending books and community resources that can help your child develop his/her interest. All of the books cited by AAGC in this paper would lead you to many resources that may help you understand the personality and attributes of your child and provide understandings that would help develop his or her interests.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly et al. *Talented Teenagers: the Roots of Success and Failure*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Feldman, David. *Nature's Gambit: Child Prodigies and the Development of Human Potential*. Basic Books, 1986.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. BasicBooks, 1985.

Karnes, Frances A., and R.G. Marquardt. *Gifted Children and Legal Issues: An Update*. Gifted Psychology Press, 2000.

Shurkin, Joel N. *Terman's Kids: The Groundbreaking Study of How the Gifted Grow Up*. Little, 1992.

Smutny, Joan Franklin. *Stand Up for Your Gifted Child: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home*. Free Spirit Publishing, October 2000. Paperback, \$14.95.

Winner, Ellen. *Gifted Children, Myths and Realities*. BasicBooks, Harper Collins, 1996.

Internet Resources

The AAGC website provides fact sheets and contacts for state associations for gifted and state directors for gifted education. www.jayi.com/aagc

The ERIC Clearinghouse has an extensive listing of educational resources and a special section on the research and education of gifted children. www.ericec.org/

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented conducts ongoing research in the areas of education of gifted with a focus on research into practice. www.gifted.uconn.edu/

Talent development programs include:

- § Academic Talent/UC Berkeley. www.atdp.berkeley.edu
- § Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University. www.ctd.northwestern.edu/
- § Rocky Mountain Talent Search. www.du.edu/education/ces/rtms.html
- § Talent Identification Program, Duke University. www.tip.duke.edu

Community and School Resources

- § Public libraries, museums, and parks and recreation programs provide many free activities.
- § Area universities will have departments that focus on child development or education.
- § Pediatricians, family physicians, and social services can recommend professionals in your community that are qualified to help you evaluate your child for special needs.
- § Every school district and all states have someone in charge of programs for gifted children or other special needs. They should be able to provide guidelines about the services in the public schools. Every state has a director for private schools and day care programs.

Free Catalogs for Books and Materials for Educating Gifted Children

- § Cobblestone Publishing. Free catalog. 603-924-7209
- § Free Spirit Press. Gifted Education. Free Catalog. 1-800-735-7323
- § Great Potential Press, Inc. 877-954-4200 www.giftedbooks.com
- § Michael Olaf's Essential Montessori. Montessori learning resources catalog. 707-826-1557
- § Zepher Press. Targets gifted education with a focus on critical thinking. 520-322-5090
