

# Teaching Students Who Are Gifted: Misconceptions vs. Reality

By Crystal Mallett

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.”  
– Plutarch”

## RESOURCES

### WEBSITES

#### National Association for Gifted Children

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

Information for parents, teachers, and administrators about students who are gifted and how to support their learning.

#### Louisiana Believes

<http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/academics>

Information about the Louisiana Gifted and Talented Program as well as several downloadable files about teaching gifted students.

### E-BOOK

#### *You Know Your Child Is Gifted When . . . A Beginner's Guide to Life on the Bright Side.*

Galbraith, J. (2000). Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit. FREE download: <http://bit.ly/2bfVgC1>

Numerous misconceptions exist about teaching children who are gifted. Some people, including other teachers, believe that giftedness is a myth, that those students don't need special services, and that they will thrive in any classroom environment. Both experience and research prove these ideas to be false.

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING STUDENTS WHO ARE GIFTED

- **Giftedness isn't real.** While definitions of giftedness vary among states, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, n.d.) defines gifted students as those “who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains” (para. 5). The NAGC website provides the official definition for every state.
- **Gifted students don't require special services.** Gifted students are special education students, just like students who are learning-disabled. They have IEPs with measurable goals in their areas of giftedness, and teachers are required to provide services, both in terms of minutes and developmentally appropriate instruction, in accordance with the decisions of the IEP team. Ensuring that gifted students' needs are met can have a positive effect on the classroom experience for both students and teacher.
- **Gifted students are perfect students and make straight A's with no effort.** Gifted students are children just like their same-age peers. They have varied interests and abilities. Their exceptional abili-

ties, however, do not make them perfect. For example, a student may be gifted in writing, but fail at math. One may be a piano prodigy, but not be able to complete a science lab experiment. Gifted students do not fit into a one-size-fits-all mold. Their abilities are unique, and they may actually have to work harder than their non-gifted peers in some areas.

- **Gifted students behave perfectly.** While some gifted students do portray a more fine-tuned sense of empathy than their same-age peers, they do have limits. Often, a gifted student who is not being challenged, who is being overlooked for the sake of weaker students, or who is being overloaded with busywork instead of developmentally appropriate instruction will act out. A gifted student who is being challenged and allowed to grow and learn at a fitting pace, however, is much more likely to comply with social and classroom rules as well as remain on task and engaged in appropriate actions.

## IDENTIFYING GIFTEDNESS AND SUPPORTING QUALITY LEARNING

What steps do you take if you teach students who are gifted, whether in a self-contained setting or in a mainstream classroom? And what should you do if you suspect one of your students may be gifted?

- 1. Remember that a gifted student is still a child.** While they may sometimes be more mature than their same-age peers, they have similar age-related needs and preferences. Keep this in mind when choosing extended learning assignments and especially outside reading. Even if a child can understand the vocabulary and structure of a piece, it may not be an appropriate choice. Strive for a balance between what a student is capable of doing and what she or he should be doing at that age.
- 2. Don't ignore gifted students or their questions.** Doing so is inviting behavioral problems. While some gifted students will turn to a book or art project when they're finished with assigned classwork, others will become distractions, class clowns, or even overt troublemakers. The

last thing any teacher wants to deal with is a student who has nothing better to do than to cause trouble.

- 3. Remember that more work isn't the same as better work.** Just as you may have to modify assignments to meet the needs of students who are learning-disabled, you may also have to assign different work to gifted students. Consider things like project-based learning, choice boards, and other ways to increase their depth of knowledge. Expand your instruction in depth, breadth, and association. This may mean allowing gifted students to extend learning through the use of technology, research strategies, or presentations, for example.
- 4. If you suspect that you may have a gifted student in your class, begin gathering data, both quantitative and qualitative.** Look at classroom grades and standardized test scores. Look at ability, even if it is not reflected in grades or scores. Talk to the student and parents regarding their feelings about the school and class. If you still think the student may be gifted, contact the appropriate personnel in your school or district, which could mean a guidance counselor, school- or district-level special educator, educational diagnostician, or school committee. Make sure to include the student and the parents throughout the process.

With proper identification, preparation, and practices, teaching students who are gifted can be very rewarding for a teacher who is willing to put in the effort to work with that special population!

### Reference

National Association for Gifted Children. (n.d.). Definitions of giftedness [Web content]. Retrieved from <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/definitions-giftedness>

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