

Title: Gifted 101

Theme: Challenging Gifted Students

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ABSTRACT

GT101 is a PowerPoint-like presentation available free on line at the website of the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education. It is a quick and easy way to offer in servicing or a source for self-help knowledge builder for those who recognize the importance of understanding and supporting gifted students in our schools. The six sections of the pdf can be viewed separately. Educators and parents are also invited to request a speaker from the Michigan Alliance to help 'fill in the gaps' when wanting to utilize the presentation.

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What is gifted? How do I identify gifted students in my classroom? Do these students need a different curriculum? These are some of the questions new teachers find themselves asking when confronted, usually by a parent, to challenge their gifted child in the classroom, or observing a student acting out in some way in the classroom because they are bored.

The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education, www.migiftedchild.org, a non-profit organization, active for more than 30 years, realized that teaching degrees rarely provide any significant information about gifted students. GT101 was developed as a PowerPoint-like presentation that is available to download free to provide an easily-accessible way to learn about gifted students and how to meet their needs. With school budgets cut everywhere, our organization offers this for anyone interested and, if needed, will even send speakers to fill in the gaps when presenting. There are six sections included in the PowerPoint: Characteristics, Identification, Programming Strategies, Teachers, Social/Emotional Needs, and Resources.

GT101 has been used effectively to provide basic information about gifted students for professional development purposes and self-study. Many educators and parents have downloaded this from the organization's website for their own use or to share with others. This PowerPoint type program has been presented at several conferences and has been used regularly as a springboard for

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meaningful discussions that can lead to improved educational planning for gifted. GT101 is valuable to anyone who wants or needs a good overview of gifted education. This also makes a great presentation to parents who want to learn more about clever children and understand their social/emotional makeup and how to challenge them appropriately.

Gifted students are often the most underachieving of all students in our schools, when their performance is compared against their potential. They need modified services or activities not ordinarily provided to others in the regular classroom because of their advanced or accelerated development as well as their high level of awareness and intensity and a greater depth of thinking and feeling. Children who are gifted are particularly vulnerable. When educators recognize the needs of gifted students and learn what and how to provide “modified services” even in these challenging economic times, then these children will be able to reach their potential and feel normalized being themselves.

GT101 begins in Section 1 by defining gifted and introducing the characteristics to identify these unique children. According to Dr. Ellen Fiedler, Past President for Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education, “Children who are gifted are those who do things a little bit earlier, a little bit faster, a little bit better, and perhaps a little bit differently from most other children. Because of their advanced or accelerated development and because they have a high level of *awareness and intensity* and a greater *depth of thinking and feeling*, children who are gifted are particularly vulnerable. They NEED modified services or activities not ordinarily

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provided to others.” Various descriptors of gifted children are offered to help in recognizing these students. Details are included regarding their cognitive traits, creative traits, affective traits and behavioral traits. Realize there is an additional ‘bell curve’ to these learners. Some characteristics, based on the work of Dr. Barbara Clark, author, discussed are: questioning attitude, intellectual curiosity, high energy, alertness and eagerness, diverse interest and abilities, powers of concentration for long periods of time, need to determine “why” of things. Individual differences among the gifted override generalizations about characteristics. Our organization’s slogan, “*ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL,*” certainly applies here.

Some of the traits in gifted children are: unusual emotional depth and intensity, heightened self-awareness, accompanied by feelings of being different, idealism, sense of justice, high expectations of self, fascinated with learning, need little down time, high levels of frustration, particularly when having difficulty meeting standards of performance (self- or other-imposed).

When discussing the gifted student, be sure to include all levels and areas of strength each child may exhibit. This includes twice exceptional (2E) - gifted students with learning disabilities, gifted students with Asperger’s, gifted students with ADHD, those with Bipolar, OCD, depression, etc. Knowing that these children are also gifted paints a whole different picture as to how to work with them and handle their individual needs.

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Section 2 discusses testing to help identify gifted students. Most gifted students will test above grade level, sometimes three to four grade levels ahead.

However, remember those 2E students? They may not “test” well and again, one size does not fit all. When students test high, 95% or higher, on standardized tests, it does not provide an accurate picture of what the child actually knows.

The ceiling of the test is way too low. As an illustration of how “off the mark” the test can be, GT101 shows the Normal Distribution Curve and the New Distribution Curve, indicating the range of these higher scores.

GT101 goes on to explore some of the issues and problems that gifted children may present. A gifted child almost always has difficulty with social situations. A “teacher-pleaser” would be an example of one social problem. A student who feels comfortable speaking only with adults is another example. Another student may sit in the back of the room and read and seems to not be participating.

Bright UNDERACHIEVERS are easily missed, as are “atypical” gifted students, including those with other exceptional educational needs or from culturally-diverse or economically-disadvantaged backgrounds. GT101 describes initial screening, testing, achievement or performance, as well as supplementary tools. GT101 also describes a District-wide approach for identifying gifted students.

Programming options are offered in Section 3. The gifted student has been identified, what now? Challenging Gifted Students describes program strategies, both no cost and low cost options, or with a little money. Some of these

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strategies include ability grouping, acceleration, differentiated curriculum, and testing out.

Being an effective teacher is covered in Section 4 of GT101. A teacher of gifted does not have to be gifted, although they should be bright, self-confident, enthusiastic about learning, and understand the difference a high level of intelligence creates for a student. Openness, caring and flexibility are extremely important characteristics. The PowerPoint presentation identifies seven characteristics of effective teachers of the gifted.

The social-emotional needs of gifted children described in Section 5 are very revealing. These needs are directly related to being gifted. Asynchronicity is a large issue, both for the teacher and the student. Consideration for the “the whole child” will prevent potential problems, including: underachievement, depression and anxiety, perfectionism, behavior problems, acting out, dropping out, feeling alone and isolated. Helping gifted kids grow up to have satisfying meaningful lives in all ways is the goal to discovering these students in the classroom.

Section 6, the last section of the PowerPoint, lists resources, books and websites that are available to help meet the needs of gifted students. Some of the books are especially written for the gifted student and helpful for the student to discover why they are different.

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It is important that the needs of these brighter, quirky, sensitive and unique learners be met in order to: ensure their self-esteem, to give them a higher purpose for staying in education, recognize their gifts and talents to expand them, and give them an opportunity to soar in areas never thought possible before. These students are the future and if they are turned off to learning, their “giftedness” turns off too.

Educators and parents are encouraged to invite someone with additional expertise to help in presenting the GT101 PowerPoint. Please contact THE MICHIGAN ALLIANCE FOR GIFTED EDUCATION for further information and assistance. The GT101 presentation is available free online at the website (www.migiftedchild.org) in PDF and QuickTime formats.