



Newsmagazine

THE ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN OF ONTARIO

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Summer Issue

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The Case for Acceleration

By Jane Langille

When considering the optimal placement for a gifted child, sometimes it is appropriate to consider the option of acceleration. This article will define acceleration, outline the common myths and perceptions, explain why it may not be supported by educators, and provide an overview of research supporting the benefits of acceleration, particularly for exceptionally and profoundly gifted children.

Acceleration means that the student completes school in less time than is usually required and can be accomplished by several means: grade skipping; early entrance to kindergarten; subject acceleration; grade telescoping (for example, finishing kindergarten to grade 3 in less than 4 years with the same teacher); concurrent enrolment; Advanced Placement courses; early admission to post-secondary school; and credit by examination. Acceleration is used as a strategy to keep the student adequately challenged, given their advanced ability and achievement level.

There are several common myths and perceptions about acceleration. The most commonly cited drawback is that the student may suffer social problems when placed with a group of older peers. The other concern is that the student may suffer stress from the advancement. Southern, Jones and Fiscus (1989) detail four main concerns of teachers regarding the possible maladaptive effects of acceleration on gifted students. Teachers feared that the students would "(a) lose their academic advantage in later school years, (b) experience difficulties in social and emotional development as a result of being relatively young and mediocre in achievement compared to their older class-mates, (c) lack the physical and emotional maturity to handle the stress of acceleration, and (d) become arrogant or elitist in their attitudes to others" (Southern, Jones, and Fiscus, 1989).

In his article *Educational Research and Educational Policy: The Strange Case of Acceleration*, James J. Gallagher asserts that educators hesitate to employ educational acceleration due to several reasons. First and foremost, educators are not usually familiar with the available research. If however they are familiar with the research, they fear that the studies may not have sufficiently taken into account the social and emotional problems that might have been encountered by the students. Third, their teaching practices and attitudes tend to be determined by tradition and personal sentiment.

Researchers have documented several studies which clearly show the benefits of acceleration, especially for the exceptionally and profoundly gifted. The definition for these sub-groups varies among studies, but in general terms, exceptionally gifted students are usually defined as having an IQ of 160-179 and profoundly gifted students are usually defined as those with an IQ level of 180 or greater. Moderately gifted students are defined as those with an IQ of 130+ and they greatly outnumber students at the higher levels of giftedness. In general, the identification procedures and the programs developed for gifted students are usually based on the needs of the moderately gifted. However, researchers have noted profound differences between moderately and exceptionally gifted studentsContinued on page 3....

President's Message

Breaking news !!! On May 21, 2003, The Ministry of Education released a discussion paper for Special Education Program Standards. All stakeholders are invited to comment on this important step forward in the goal of establishing province-wide standards in special education. ABC has been involved from the beginning, as one of the key parent groups representing exceptional children. Chapter Presidents should communicate awareness of this discussion paper with their SEACs and let me know if they are willing to review ABC's response. The draft program standards in the discussion paper would apply to all students with special education needs and you will find specific questions for consideration on page 9 of the document. ABC must send a written response by the end of July, so please review the discussion paper on the ABC website at www.abcontario.ca and email your responses to abcinfo@abcontario.ca. Ginny Dunlop, ABC Vice President and MACSE Representative (Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education) will be co-ordinating the response from ABC.

In our "fast forward into summer" issue of the ABC Newsmagazine, we offer two different topics we hope will provide some interesting food for thought in your parenting or teaching journey. The first is called *The Case for Acceleration* and it discusses how acceleration can be an effective approach to meet the needs of some gifted students, based on an investigation of the research available.

The second topic is called *Tips for Effective Advocacy*. It can be overwhelming at times to advocate for our children but it is absolutely essential to get involved from time to time in order to make sure they are receiving the support they need to maximize their potential. The tips outlined were adapted by permission from the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. No matter what the exceptionality, effective advocacy skills are useful for any parents needing to support their children. Have a great summer!

Carol Ann Sloat
President, ABC Ontario

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Please forward to abcinfo@abcontario.ca to the attention of the Editor.

ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT
CHILDREN OF ONTARIO
2 BLOOR STREET W.
SUITE 100-156
TORONTO, ON M4W 2G7
(416) 925-6136

www.abcontario.ca
Email: abcinfo@abcontario.ca

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Continued...The Case for Acceleration

on almost every cognitive and affective variable studied. In her synthesis of the available research from 81 studies conducted from 1912-1988, Karen B. Rogers concludes that the research shows no substantial positive or negative socialization and psychological effect differences for most forms of acceleration.

Fewer than 10 years into his landmark longitudinal study, Terman was able to identify in 1930 that the sub-group of students at the IQ level of 170+ tended to be social isolates, not from choice, but because they found it almost impossible to find others among their age-peers who shared their exceptional reasoning ability, unusually developed language skills, specific interests, or way of viewing the world, all characteristic of much older children. Hollingworth corroborated this finding in 1942 with the conclusion that above the IQ level of 160, the difference between the exceptionally gifted child and age-peers is so great that it leads to special problems of development correlated with social isolation. It is important to note that Hollingworth emphasized that this isolation was not a result of emotional problems in the gifted students per se, but rather was caused by the absence of a suitable peer group with whom they could relate. When they were accelerated and permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, the loneliness and social isolation disappeared. Terman concluded that nearly all children of IQ 135+ should be accelerated in order to permit college entrance by the age of 17 at least, and that the majority of the group would be better off entering at the age of 16.

Miraca Gross, Ph. D conducted a 10 year longitudinal study starting in 1986, to measure the intellectual, academic, social and emotional development of 40 Australian students with an IQ of 160 and above. The majority of the test subjects were retained in the regular classroom, a few were permitted a single grade skip of 12 months, and 9 were permitted radical acceleration of at least 3 years. Her observation of the majority group in retention was that they practised a deliberate and sustained underachievement for peer acceptance and had been doing so since their earliest years in school. These students were "only too aware that they differed from their age-peers in both academic and emotional development". Although their academic self-esteem scored positively, the majority in this group scored more than one standard deviation below the mean on the sub-scale measuring social self-esteem. The few who were permitted the single grade-skip were observed to be experiencing similar results as the retained group, implying that the single grade-skip was insufficient to make a difference in social self-esteem. Finally, the nine students who were permitted radical acceleration were the only students in the study to show social esteem more than one standard deviation above the mean. Dr. Gross states in her article *Radical Acceleration: Responding to academic and social needs of extremely gifted adolescents* that "for extremely gifted children, contact with intellectual peers, or at least with other students at the same developmental levels as themselves, becomes an urgent necessity". Further, she concludes that if the extremely or profoundly gifted child is to come anywhere near maximizing their intellectual and academic potential, they require an educational program which differs significantly in structure, pace and content than the program which is offered to the moderately gifted child. She points out that over the last 50 years, researchers tracing the intellectual and psychosocial development of the exceptional and profoundly gifted have consistently advised that these sub-groups are best served by a series of carefully monitored grade-skips, spaced over the course of their school career.

In terms of the stress of the acceleration on the student, David Elkind stated in his influential book *The Hurried Child (1981)* that acceleration would rob the students of time and childhood experience and place them under too much stress at a time when they are not yet mature enough to handle it. James Gallagher points out however, that Elkind's concern came from school-readiness literature which did not directly address considerations for the gifted. In fact, in 1988 Elkind later reversed his stand against acceleration of the gifted and is now one of its active promoters. Dr. Wendy Roedell points out in her article *Vulnerabilities of Highly Gifted Children*, it is important to remember that a child with an IQ of 164 is as different intellectually from a child with an IQ of 132 as that child is different from the child with an IQ of 100. Forcing the exceptionally or even profoundly gifted child to learn at the pace of the average child, or even the pace of the moderately gifted child, is similar to placing an average child in a class of learning-disabled students and asking that child to slow down their learning to keep pace with the rest of the class.

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Book Reviews

USE YOUR HEAD: Tony Buzan, BBC Books, BBC Worldwide Limited, London, UK, 1995, 154 pp. ISBN 0-563-37103-X

The author Tony Buzan is the originator of Mind Maps™ and is the President of The Brain Foundation, Founder of the Brain Trust and the Use Your Head Clubs, and the creator of the concept of Mental Literacy. As one of the world's leading authors, he has published 20 books. This volume in particular has sold more than 1 million copies worldwide. The concepts outlined in this book have been featured in the record-breaking *Use Your Head Series* on BBC Television.

The overall premise is that there is much untapped potential in our brains and that with a better understanding of brain function, we are able to unleash that potential and greatly improve mental tasks such as reading speed and memory recall. "We are gathering knowledge that the brain is infinitely more subtle than we had previously thought, and that everyone who has what is ironically called a 'normal' brain has a much larger ability and potential than was previously believed." Buzan cites the case study example of Edward Hughes, a fairly average student who was performing at the B and C level in high school and had aspirations of attending Cambridge University, much to the shock and disbelief of his principal and teachers. After applying Buzan's Mind Maps™ and studying techniques, Edward Hughes did indeed perform as the top student with A level grades in the four examinations he took, including three marks of distinction and one mark as the top student ever. He was confirmed at Cambridge, continued to do very well there and was offered employment immediately after graduation as a Strategic Thinker for a multi-national entrepreneurial company, a job described by the University as 'one of the best ever' for a Cambridge undergraduate.

GIFTED KIDS SPEAK OUT: James R. Delisle, Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1987, 112 pp., ISBN 0-915793-10-5; www.freespirit.com.

In this book, hundreds of kids aged 6-13 talk about school, friends, their families and the future. James R. Delisle collected about 4000 responses to a survey placed in the Association for the Gifted's *Update* Publication, the *MENSA Bulletin* and many other targeted placements in the United States. He chose a range of responses to key questions about what it means to be gifted, getting along with others, and handling expectations, to name a few. This paperback is easy to read and easy to reference from any point. It would be helpful for gifted children who are newly identified, or for those who would benefit from hearing the perspective of others who are gifted.

James R. Delisle, Ph. D. is a professor of education at Kent State University and the parent of a gifted teenager. He also serves as the Co-Director of SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted), which is an international organization of parents, educators, and students.

KID STORIES: Jim Delisle, Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1991, 168 pp., ISBN 1-915793-34-2; www.freespirit.com.

Another book by the same author, (sometimes he goes by Jim and other times by James...). This self-help book details biographies of "20 young people you'd like to know". The biographies are about twenty school-age boys and girls who were brave, intelligent, inspirational or simply friendly, as they faced issues that each of us face. Meant to be an antidote to the sometimes boring biographies of famous dead people, Jim Delisle compiled *Kid Stories* to show school-age students that they can learn from one another as well as from famous adults. The stories are about children who did something as simple as being friendly toward a new classmate from a foreign country; as harrowing as getting emergency help for a child who had just been struck by a car; as exciting as preparing a scientific experiment that will fly on the space shuttle; and as inspirational as raising thousands of dollars to promote breast cancer awareness. The "Questions to Consider" following each biography are meant to serve as discussion starters among groups of students or for self reflection by individual readers.

WHEN GIFTED KIDS DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS: HOW TO MEET THEIR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS: Jim Delisle, Ph. D., and Judy Galbraith, M.A., Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2002, 278 pp., ISBN 1-57542-107-0; www.freespirit.com.

Gifted children are so much more than their intellectual ability. Sometimes it's difficult to see past all of the achievement and potential and see the child who may be anxious, pressured to be perfect, lonely, alienated, or confused about themselves. This book offers proven, practical suggestions for encouraging social and emotional growth among gifted children. The authors take a close look at gifted kids from the inside out (their self-esteem) and the outside in (challenges from family, school, peers, society). This book has lots of easy to use strategies, classroom-tested activities, and resources for teachers and parents alike.

Tips for Effective Advocacy

By Jane Langille

The term “advocate” comes from the Latin word for legal counsellor. It means one who supports, pleads the case of, defends, or vindicates someone else. At one time or another, parents of gifted children find that they need to advocate for their children. This necessity can arise at anytime in the educational journey - in the early stages of the identification process, during placement decisions, when requesting additional support from the teacher, or asking for different programming to meet the child’s needs. Advocating for change to their children’s education can be overwhelming and intimidating for parents. Parents may feel powerless to effect change within the school system, which has many layers of reporting relationships, mountains of policies and procedures and years of historical status quo.

Being an effective advocate starts with approaching advocacy as a methodical process. In December 2002, Lynn Ziraldo, Executive Director for the Learning Disabilities Association York Region, came to speak at the ABC York Region South parents’ meeting about effective advocacy. The following summarizes her “Tips to be an Effective Advocate” with elaboration from several articles about advocating for gifted children.

1. **Believe in yourself – one person can do a lot.** You must not feel defeated before you start and you must enter each exchange feeling that you are an important part of the solution.
2. **Identify the unmet needs or rights.** Dr. Joan Franklin Smutny writes in her article “Communicating Effectively with Your Gifted Child’s School” that the best place to start is with your child. She advises that you should talk to your child about whatever problem they are having in school and try to get them to be as specific as possible. Talk to your child about the action you would like to take and discuss the options. Ask them what they would change to make school more interesting and you may be surprised at the answers. Karen B. Rogers, Ph. D. writes in her article “Tips for Parents: Preparing Schools for Your Highly Gifted Child” that it is important when approaching the school to come prepared with evidence of your child’s gifts or talents. You will need to show evidence of your child’s cognitive functioning levels, current subject matter interests, learning preferences, and personal characteristics. That way, you are prepared to answer factually when you are asked why you think your child is gifted.
3. **Be systematic – know and build your case by narrowing down the problem, doing your homework and documenting the facts.** Narrowing down the problem could involve further testing of the child to uncover areas of strengths and needs, providing concrete evidence of untapped potential that goes beyond the usual symptom of boredom in the classroom. Doing your homework involves finding out what your school board’s policies are for identifying and meeting the needs of gifted students. It is also useful to review the Special Education portion of the Education Act on the Ministry of Education web site to understand what legislation is currently in place to meet the needs of gifted children. It can be found at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/regs.html. Of interest, another author Toni Goodman, states that parents should “never attribute to malice what can be adequately explained by ignorance or stupidity”. Acknowledging the difference between ignorance and malice is critical if parents are to advocate effectively for their children. This is another reason why it is important to do thorough research into what your child’s rights are and stick to the facts of the case you are presenting. It is entirely possible that the teacher and/or principal may not always be aware of what the school board or government legislation requires them to do in terms of support for exceptional children.
4. **Know your resources and allies – identify the key players in the decision making process.** This includes starting with the teacher. Knowing a little bit about the teacher’s attitude toward gifted education can help you plan your strategy as you move forward. You may find an ally or you will gain some insight to the reasons for the resistance you may encounter as you work through the process. Dr. Smutny elaborates that teachers face many demands on their time and do not respond well to being told outright that they are not doing enough in the classroom. On the other hand, the gifted child has legitimate needs that the school should address and it is your job as a parent to go and advocate for change when these needs are not being met. Instead of stating “my son is really bored in math” a more productive approach would be “my son already knows this material in math and since he really loves this subject, I wondered if we could discuss other options”.
5. **Be assertive and communicate well** – an assertive person clearly states a viewpoint but takes into account other viewpoints as well, working for the right outcome co-operatively. Smutny advises that parents should keep the discussion focussed on the specifics of the child’s characteristics and needs rather than on a general philosophical debate about gifted education.
6. **Establish a strategy – formulate a desirable solution, put in the time needed for refinement, compromise and debate, and negotiate clearly.** You may find it useful to review a book about effective negotiating, like *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* by Fisher, Ury and Patton. It is important to respect the “chain of command” and start with the teacher, proceeding upwards until you reach an acceptable solution for your child. This can mean meetings with the principal, touching base with your SEAC representative, and potentially meetings with the Special Education Co-ordinator, Superintendent of Schools, Superintendent in charge of Special Education for the school board and in

Tips for Effective Advocacy continued...

some cases, Education Officers with the Ministry of Education.

7. **Develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills.** Remember to separate the people from the problem, focus on interests not positions. Try to work together to create options that will satisfy both parties. In her article “Supporting Gifted Education through Advocacy”, author Sandra L. Berger outlines the pitfall of using an adversarial rather than a persuasive approach. She states that the attitude of trying to win through intimidation almost always backfires. She elaborates that it is very defeating for advocates to display obvious contempt for the school administrators yet expect to receive accommodation to meet their child’s needs. Such actions are destructive to any progress and can be particularly deadly if the advocate is speaking on behalf of a gifted child, as the words gifted, talented, and exceptional can evoke fear of elitism.
8. **Keep a paper trail – your record-keeping can help keep you on track and can also be a tool to inform others.** The Learning Disabilities Association of Toronto publishes an advocacy workbook called *Under the Rainbow Advocacy Workbook*. It was written by Cora Koculym and Georgina Rayner and is an interactive profiling diary where parents can keep track and organize paperwork regarding assessments, preschool history and family milestones, pertinent medical information, testing reports, and the school experience. While written for parents of children with learning disabilities, the advocacy process is equally applicable to parents of gifted children. Particularly useful are the sections about developing useful needs statements and keeping track of Individual Education Plans, Report Cards and the section of tips for effective communication called “Let’s Talk Talking”.
9. **Follow-up – you need to monitor any change, evaluate, adapt, and build.** The communication feedback loop is important, and you should establish a timeline for evaluating the progress of any changes. You may be blazing a trail for others to receive better programming. You must be patient as change takes time. You may not get agreement to all of the changes you are requesting within the same school-year, sometimes change takes place over many years and it can be taxing to be patient while it is a child’s needs that are going unmet.
10. **Learn from others – join advocacy groups.** Networking with other parents who share similar concerns can help. Schools can be reluctant to make changes for just one student but may be more interested in providing modifications to the status quo if there is a broader need. Start with your local ABC chapter and you should also contact your ABC SEAC Representative (Special Education Advisory Committee) who can provide advice about procedures and protocols for specific service alternatives in your school board.

Chapter News

ABC Ottawa Region Chapter – This group actively advocated for changes to their board’s Special Education Plan by submitting an ABC Minority Report to the Ottawa Carleton District School Board’s Special Education Plan 2001-2002. In response to the submission, a committee of Board staff met to review the concerns expressed. The committee consisted of the Special Education Support Teacher and Psychologist for the Gifted Team, Special Education Program and Support Teachers, principals, a member of Quality Assurance, the elementary ESL coordinator and the Acting Coordinator of Field Services. A response was agreed upon and communicated to ABC Ottawa Region Chapter. The response included discussion of the following areas: early identification procedures and intervention, criteria for identification, multiple criteria, processes for identifying students with other exceptionalities and/or cultural and linguistic differences, adherence to regulation 181/98, Subsection 5(1) regarding IPRC process, range of placement options for secondary students, and special education staff requirements. Both the ABC Minority Report and the OCDSB Response can be accessed from the chapter web site at www.abcottawa.cyberus.ca.

ABC Peel Chapter – If you are looking for some summer reading for your gifted child or for yourself, try some of the suggestions on the Peel Chapter web site at www.abcpeel.org. There is also an interesting section called “Eduspeak and the Gifted”, a glossary of terms used in gifted education.

Advertisements

ABC Ontario Annual General Meeting

When: Saturday, August 9th, 2003

Where: Mountsberg Wildlife Centre—Cameron House. This 500 hectare conservation area is a combination of wetland, lake, woodland, and open meadow environments, distinguishing Mountsberg as an exceptional area for study of our natural world.

Fun Activities: Bring a picnic lunch, come when the park opens at 10:00 am and stay till it closes at 4 pm. Mountsberg will be offering a Birds of Prey show at 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm that anyone visiting the park can attend. ABC will be offering children’s activities at 2:00 pm. For older children we will have the Environmental Detective program, where children help solve a mysterious environmental calamity and learn the complexity of the factors involved in environmental stewardship. For younger children, we will offer the Owl Prowl, involving a visit to the Douglas G. Cockburn Raptor Centre and the Wildlife Walkway to explore the world of these highly adapted hunters. Children’s programs will last about an hour and run concurrently. Our AGM business meeting will start at 1:00 pm at the Cameron House. At 2:00 pm we will have a guest speaker, a park naturalist who will talk about one of the most important of the multiple intelligences, an understanding of the natural world.

How to get there: The Mountsberg Wildlife Centre is located in Campbellville, just south of Highway 401 between Milton and Guelph. From Highway 401, go south on Guelph Line. Turn west on Campbellville Road for 4 km and then go north on Miborough Line for 1 km to the park entrance. Alternatively, from Highway 6 or Guelph Line, follow Campbellville Road to Miborough Line and then go north for 1 km to the park entrance. You can find a nice map and learn more about the park at www.conservationhalton.on.ca/mountsberg.html.

Cost: \$4.50 each person from a member family or \$6.00 each person from a non-member family. Children under 4 are free.

YOU MUST PRE-REGISTER IN ADVANCE. To register, download a registration form from the ABC website at www.abcontario.ca and then send it along with a **cheque made out to ABC Ontario** to :LAURA OVERTON, 7 GENNELA SQUARE, SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO, M1B 5A7. If you are unable to download a form, please call Carol Ann Sloat at 519-757-0536 and she will mail one to you. **WE MUST RECEIVE YOUR REGISTRATION BY FRIDAY, JULY 25, 2003.**

ABC Ontario Membership Application

Family or individual membership fee \$40.00 for one year. Make cheques payable to ABC Ontario.
A portion of your membership fee will go to your Local Chapter.

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In addition to my membership, I enclose a tax deductible donation of \$_____ to ABC Ontario
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