Underachieving Gifted Students: “Non-Productive?” or “Selective Consumers?”

What in the World Can We Do?

Presented by

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Many gifted students do not achieve up to the level of their abilities in school.

Parents and teachers often are aware but puzzled.

As school performance declines, parents and teachers sometimes wonder if the students are as capable as previously indicated.

Frequently, the children themselves lose confidence.
Some “Basics to Remember about Academic Achievement

- Even very bright children won’t necessarily receive “A” grades in everything.
- Students who complete almost all of their work perfectly may not be sufficiently challenged.
- All students should be expected to have strengths and weaknesses, as well as subjects they find more and less interesting.
Consider underachievement a problem if:

- It is severe *(achievement well below grade level or measured aptitude)*,
- It is longstanding *(occurring over more than one school year)*,
- or
- It is causing the student distress.
What Causes Gifted Children to Underachieve?

- Almost anything and everything!
- There are complex causes – it’s important not to oversimplify the problem.
- Gifted children may not understand why they are underachieving (although it’s still a good idea to ask them about what’s going on with them and listen thoughtfully to what they tell you).
- School and home causes usually combine to set this pattern in motion.
Possible School Causes

- Lack of challenge
- Too much or too little competition
- Conflicts with teachers
- Unidentified learning disabilities
- A move to either a more or a less difficult school or classroom
- Peer pressure
- Lack of opportunities to be creative
- Lack of structure or too much structure in the classroom
- Mismatch between the student’s learning preferences and intellectual strengths and the classroom strategies, expectations, and environment
Possible Home Causes

- Conflict between parents
- Overprotectiveness by parents
- Overempowerment of children
- Too much or too little attention
- Health problems
- Compelling family concerns (job loss, potential move, serious illness in the family, etc.)
- Sibling rivalry
- Feelings of pressure
- An anti-work attitude or overemphasis on work
Not all gifted underachievers are alike.

They have differing characteristics and needs.

The following two categories described by Dr. Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith help give us deeper insights into underachieving gifted students:

- **Non-productive gifted underachievers**
- **Gifted students who are “selective consumers”**

Let’s take a little closer look at all of this.
Non-Productive Underachievers or Selective Consumers – What’s the Difference?

**Underachievers**
- Do not understand causes or cures
- Are dependent and reactive
- Tend to withdraw
- Respect or fear authority figures
- Need both structure and imposed limits
- Exhibit uniformly weak performance

**Selective Consumers**
- Can explain both the problem & possible solutions
- Are independent and proactive
- Tend to rebel
- See teachers as adversaries; can be contentious
- Require little structure; need “breathing room
- Exhibit performance that varies relative to the teacher and/or content

*more to follow*
Non-Productive Underachiever or Selective Consumer?

Underachievers . . .
- Generally require family intervention
- Are often perfectionistic
- May feel that nothing they do is good enough
- Have a poor academic self-image

Selective consumers . . .
- Can usually be helped by using school resources
- May change “overnight”
- Are frequently satisfied with their accomplishments
- Exhibit performance that varies relative to the teacher and/or content
Positive Communication and Encouragement

Avoid Put Downs

1. Make sure your words or actions cannot be interpreted as rejection.

2. Be careful not to use sarcasm or say something which could be interpreted as a “put down.”

3. Correct the child privately when verbal discipline is necessary.

4. Help others (other family members & teachers) to see the underachieving child in a positive way.

(more to follow)
Positive Communication and Encouragement, continued

Build on strengths

5. Notice and comment to the child on his/her unique qualities, strengths, and capabilities.

6. Work with the child’s strengths thereby giving him/her the opportunity to feel successful.

7. Identify strengths and weaknesses using checklists and other assessment tools.

8. Help children to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

— Based on Motivating Underachievers by Carolyn Coil
Let’s talk . . .

♦ What questions do you have?

♦ What ideas would you like to share?

♦ What have you found that’s worked well in helping gifted underachievers?
Some Selected Resources . . .

Websites:

♦ AEGUS (Association for Gifted Underachieving Students)
  http://aegus1.org

♦ SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted)
  http://www.sengifted.org

♦ National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)
  http://www.nagc.org

♦ Hoagies
  http://hoagiesgifted.org


For a copy of the PowerPoint of this presentation:

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