

Educational Resources Outside School

Most schools in India meet only a few of the educational needs of the gifted child. It is up to parents to provide the atmosphere required to nurture and develop the child's talents outside the school environment

1) Enriching the home environment

It is essential to engage children in activities that are mentally stimulating. Particularly in the preschool years, this stimulation—derived from toys, puzzles, books, and blocks—can help children develop basic psychomotor skills and reveal areas of interest. While the market for early-childhood stimulation is growing, there is no evidence that enrichment makes children smarter. What research does show is that cognitive deprivation retards development. Which means, it is better to steer clear of toys that claim to 'advance' a child's development. With substantive efforts, you may get a child to read a few months before she normally would have, but this is highly unlikely to have any long-term beneficial effects. (Of course, if a child spontaneously learns to read or draw earlier than expected, you should provide the appropriate facilities.)

Allow gifted preschoolers plenty of time for unstructured solitary and peer play, daydreaming, and independent exploration and experimentation.

The interests of young children change rapidly. While it may be tempting to accede to a seven-year-old child's demands for a science kit in the hope of unearthing a gift, it may be wiser to wait until the child has demonstrated commitment to the subject before investing in the equipment. There are plenty of homegrown experiments available to children with access to books and the internet. Many gifted children with a scientific bent of mind spontaneously engage in informal observation, classification, speculation, and experimentation. We have observed a seven-year-old gather and classify stones based on multiple dimensions; experiment with twigs to see what kind of shape projects to the greatest horizontal distance; observe the pattern in which sand falls from a spinning bucket and

the smoothening effect of rubbing her hands on rough concrete. The same child was then able to arrive at explanations for these phenomena, approximating the concepts of centrifugal force and friction. The point is that, for gifted children, expensive and elaborate toys are not necessary for independent observation, exploration, and discovery.

One of the best investments you can make in a gifted child is to spend time reading with him. Most gifted children learn to read rapidly and are avid readers. Membership in a local library is a solid long-term investment.

2) Academic/talent search competitions

Talent search competitions such as the Olympiads, IRIS-Intel and the National Talent Search Exam provide a framework to identify and direct gifted children's

Nurturing Gifted Children

high energy and ability. Research suggests that participation in academic and talent search competitions—particularly those where small groups of children produce projects—may increase creativity and motivation in the short-term. Long-term effects are less clear. These competitions often serve as an entry-point to other opportunities; above all, children benefit from exposure to ideas and from interactions with other high-ability peers. For a child who finds school boring and intellectual company scarce, these competitions may serve an important socio-emotional function.

3) Meet-up groups

Many gifted children experience intellectual and emotional loneliness. Identify other bright children in your area and organise weekly or monthly meet-ups. Since most schools do not practise ability grouping, your child will value this opportunity to interact with other children with similar abilities and interests. Such initiatives are especially essential in the Indian context where there are no clear opportunities for these children in the formal educational system. Parent networks have worked wonders for children with disabilities and the same will be the case for gifted children.

4) Networking with other parents

Parent groups, both physical and electronic, offer a useful platform to discuss concerns, share ideas, and develop tools for gifted advocacy.

5) Mentorship

Possibly the most useful resource for a gifted child is a mentor outside school. Parents who can identify a mentor via their informal networks can help ensure that the child stays motivated and has opportunities to explore his interest area. If individual mentorship is not available, take your child to a talk or programme anchored by experts from his interest area.

Aside from the arts, finding mentors outside the formal education system is not easy. Research suggests that the most useful mentors are professionals or researchers at the peak of their

careers, those in touch with cutting-edge developments. For younger children still developing basic content knowledge, well-informed teachers or graduate students may be more realistic mentorship options.

6) Websites and other public-domain resources with information and activities

There are many resources in the public domain with content and activities for gifted children. Some of the more useful websites include:

- www.mensaforkids.org
- www.ixl.com/Math
- www.exquisite-minds.com
- www.nayagam.wordpress.com/2007/06/03/arvind-guptas-website
- www.nif.org.in/Grassroot_Innovations_Dr_Anil_Gupta



The National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS)

is conducting a project on the Identification of Gifted Children.



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For more information on the project and the NIAS Gifted Identification programme, access www.prodigy.net.in

