

Celebrating Potential: The Shared Role in Supporting the Needs of Gifted Learners
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An essential component of the [Gifted Children's Bill of Rights](#) written by Del Siegle, Ph. D. is that they have, "a right...to learn something new every day." If one assumes this learning happens at a child's school, then it would seem few would argue with Siegle. This is because schools should be synonymous with learning. Where else, one could ask, would our children go for education? However a curious dichotomy can exist in schools, and at times these places of learning can diminish the needs of learners who have demonstrated potential for advancement.

To illustrate, I need to look no further than my daughter's experience in high school. In both her junior and senior years I had the opportunity to attend the academic awards at her school. During the ceremonies student representatives in each respective senior class were invited to speak, and each year the students' words contained a strikingly similar theme. The students provided a gentle warning to their peers that they should remember their academic success does not define them. While I understand their kind intent about having healthy self-concepts and being well-rounded individuals, I wondered if these students felt uncomfortable publicly celebrating their academic success.

I also wonder if it is the same with sports. It seems to me if an individual is a talented athlete, traditionally the accomplishments are openly and widely celebrated. After all, professional athletes revel in achieving status as the Greatest of All Time, or G.O.A.T. In "[The Palcuzzi Ploy](#)", the emphasis and value of sports programs in educational systems is brought to the forefront. A school principal, Mr. Palcuzzi proposes that gifted students should be advanced according to their talents, should have specially trained teachers, and be allowed time to share their talents with children of other schools- both in the area and across the state (with the school paying transportation costs). As expected, these proposals were met with questions and criticism. It was then that Mr. Palcuzzi explained that he was describing a program that currently existed within the school system- it was a program for gifted basketball players. One by one, each objection to a program for gifted learners was overcome when framed with the needs of talented athletes in mind. As "The Palcuzzi Ploy" author James J. Gallagher concludes:

What then does this tell us? The culture and community will support the kinds of activities that they find necessary, valuable, and/or enjoyable. If they feel that a program is sufficiently necessary or sufficiently enjoyable all sorts of objections are put aside as being relatively inconsequential. If, on the other hand, the community is not fully interested or involved in supporting such a program, all kinds of objections can be raised as to why these things should not be done, or cannot be done (Katz 6).

When a community is supportive of gifted learners, what should it strive to provide? I believe a focus on the needs of the gifted would mean instruction which fosters productive struggle for ALL students. Productive struggle describes a learning experience where the student brings some prior knowledge to the outset (in other words, the student knows a few things). However, the student needs to think and persist in order to be successful. The student will feel challenged, however they will know effort will lead to success. [Dr. Syliva Rimm](#) asserts, "The surest path to

high self-esteem is to be successful at something you perceived would be difficult. Each time we steal our students' struggle by insisting they do work that is too easy for them, we steal their opportunity to have an esteem-building experience. Unless kids are consistently engaged in challenging work, they will lose their motivation to work hard.”

Simply put, our children's learning environments, both at home and school, should foster learning and be places where potential is nurtured into talent. As [Carl Ann Tomlinson Ed.D.](#) so aptly describes:

What it takes to teach gifted learners well is actually a little common sense. It begins with the premise that each child should come to school to stretch and grow daily...And it envisions schooling as an escalator on which students continually progress, rather than a series of stairs, with landings on which advanced learners consistently wait (Tomlinson).

Learning is hard work, and when this work is properly nurtured and supported it results in meaningful study which is personally engaging and motivating. Our communities in North Dakota should strive to create such learning environments. More importantly, we should instill in our learners the knowledge that their accomplishments are worthy of celebration.

References:

Katz, Susan. [Gifted Education- Nourishing a Natural Resource](#)

Rimm, Sylvia Ph.D. www.sylviarimm.com

Siegle, Del Ph. D.. [Gifted Children's Bill of Rights](#)

Tomlinson, Carol Ann Ed. D. (1997). [What it Means to Teach Gifted Learners Well](#)