

Metaphors for Inspiration

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Metaphors can sometimes say it better!

So many times people do not understand what gifted children go through if the system does not recognize their unique abilities and the need to learn at an appropriate pace in their area of high ability. Sometimes an analogy brings the point home better than anything else. The following metaphors can help bring about better understanding, empathy and insights.

SHOE SIZE *[This is good for the district that HAS a program, and suggests why you might not be happy with it.]*

Going into the shoe store, the salesperson says..." Do you have a size 7 foot? I have a size 7 shoe that should fit you very nicely, and may be just what you need. No? You have a size 9 foot? Well, all I have are size 7 shoes. Just wear this one anyway." "I can't get it on." "What's the matter with my shoe?" "Nothing is wrong with the shoe. It is a perfectly fine shoe. [i.e., program is great, just not a good fit. We are NOT putting down your program.]" "Well, maybe you would like my shoe if I put this pretty bow on it. Or maybe a shiny buckle? Now put it on. I don't understand why it doesn't fit. How about if I give you more size 7 shoes? Will three be enough [more of the same!]? Well, then something must be wrong with your foot. What's wrong with your foot?" "Nothing is wrong with my foot. I have a perfectly good foot." In order for shoes to work well for you, they have to be a good fit. And imagine what happens when you have to walk around all day in shoes that are too small—you get a little cranky, don't you? Or maybe you decide to stop wearing shoes altogether! Good programs and good kids need to be matched for a good fit.

THE ELEPHANT

Highly gifted children learn not only faster than others, but also differently. Standard teaching methods take complex subjects and break them into small, simple bits presented one at a time. Highly gifted minds can consume large amounts of information in a single gulp, and they thrive on complexity. Giving these children simple bits of information is like feeding an elephant one blade of grass at a time - he will starve before he even realizes that anyone is trying to feed him. [Excerpt from "Helping Your Highly Gifted Child" by Stephanie S. Tolan, ERIC EC Digest #E477, 1990]

MARATHON

People get very uncomfortable with the idea of students getting ahead of others through the use of acceleration. It is seen as an unfair advantage for gifted students. As if the whole process of

education is in some way a race, with only winners being the ones across the finish line first. Look at it in terms of a marathon. How many people run in the Boston Marathon? Thousands. How many of those thousands believe that they have the slightest chance of winning? eight? fifteen at the most? What on earth are those other thousands even doing there then? What do they gain by being part of such a hopeless venture? The value for them is in the process, being a part of the event, as each individual challenges him- or herself to a high standard, gaining in confidence and ability through training and improvement. The speed and success of the winners IN NO WAY diminish the accomplishments of the other runners, or the value of what they gain by participating. Is it valid to recognize the success of the winners? Absolutely! They deserve our admiration and applause. Seldom does high achievement come without hard work and dedication coupled with talent. By valuing excellence, society as a whole benefits.

THOROUGHBRED RACE HORSE

Consider the thoroughbred race horse that is confined to a small corral. The horse doesn't know why it is uncomfortable—nothing seems to be right. It is very active, but what is there to do about it? How does its “acting out” look to the owner (who never knew the breeding of the horse)? If the owner ever does try racing the horse, would it really perform well after being confined for years without proper training? And if it does race, is it performing as well as it could have if it had begun training at an earlier age? Do gifted children have to wait until high school to begin the race? What about all that lost training time?

BASKETBALL

(Being able to take pride in one's giftedness.) Imagine a kid on the basketball team at the middle school. He is the star player, and one of the reasons is that he is thirteen inches taller than the next tallest kid on his team or any of the other teams in his division. He also has some talent, and he really enjoys the game. He is always the leading scorer, and everyone is always telling him he is great, and congratulating him on his fine performances. He is on top of the world at first. The problem is winning is just so easy. It just doesn't take much effort, so the accolades seem like empty words. He starts feeling worse and worse about himself the more people praise him. He realizes that he does so well because he is tall. When he starts slacking off, people think they are putting too much pressure on him to score. Along comes a perceptive coach who understands about talent, and what having it can be like. He pulls a couple strings and gets the kid on a team that consists of mostly older players, taller, with more experience. The kid is so excited, but has a tough time—he's no longer the star of the team. The coach has to work hard to get him over the rough spots. There are many shocks to his confidence and ego, but he is working very hard and learning a lot. Now he feels a sense of pride in his accomplishments, even though to others his

performance seems less outstanding than before. BEWARE of a child who continues to maintain his self-esteem through accomplishments too easily attained—the easy A’s. It is a dangerously fragile situation. What you are able to do is only HALF as important as what you CHOOSE to do.

THE RACE CAR

Envision a turbo-charged race car driving up a hill on a two-lane highway behind a large, overloaded truck. As much as it may want to “behave” by going at the same pace as the truck, it isn’t at all easy. And what is happening to the engine? How long can this go on before permanent damage is done to the engine? Will it ever be the same?

HOW WOULD YOU REACT?

A savvy administrator was asking his staff about their feelings about inservicing and educational coursework. Several replied that they really appreciate learning new methods to apply in the classroom. In fact the longer, more difficult the classes were and the more hard work they involved, the more satisfaction they derived from their efforts. The administrator continued, "And how did you feel the time you listened to the presenter give an overview of the day and discovered that the inservice you had signed up for was an exact duplicate of information you had previously learned?" The answers came shooting back—I got up and demanded my money back, I wasn’t about to sit through THAT again, I have better things to do with my time, I stayed but fumed inside the whole time—how dare they waste my time!

The administrator then quietly asked, “And what did you tell your second grader?”