



Dr. Del Siegle  
NAGC President

## Gifted Children's Bill of Rights

In 1983, E. Paul Torrance published his *Manifesto for Children*, a guide for leading a creative life. The National Association for Gifted Children will be honoring Dr. Torrance on November 10 during the 54th annual conference in Minneapolis. In recognition of Dr. Torrance's concern for young people and his passion for their talent development, I begin my term as NAGC president by proposing a 2007 Gifted Children's Bill of Rights. While many of the 10 rights listed below pertain to all children, they are particularly relevant for students with special gifts and talents.

Over the next two years, NAGC will strive to expand its services to parents. We look forward to hearing your suggestions as we develop a comprehensive set of benefits to help parents facilitate their children's talent development.

### **Gifted children have a right to know about their giftedness.**

Parents and teachers are often reluctant to talk with children about their giftedness for a variety of reasons. Parents may not be sure what it means to be gifted or how their children became gifted. They may worry that giving children information about their identification as gifted causes them to feel superior or elitist. How we talk with children about their giftedness can have a dramatic impact on the way they view themselves and the daily challenges they face. Children need to understand that giftedness is not something that was bestowed upon them. While it is true that gifted students often acquire skills more quickly and easily than their peers, gifted children do learn these skills over time. They may have taught themselves to read, or learned to read easily at an early age, but they still learned to read. It is important for gifted children to recognize that the talents they possess are acquired, they had something to do with acquiring them, and they are capable of further developing these talents and even acquiring new ones. They need to learn to take responsibility for developing their gifts. They need to understand that having to work hard does not mean they are not gifted and that working hard can even make them more gifted.

### **Gifted children have a right to learn something new every day.**

Gifted children, like all children, have the right to learn something new every day; they also have the right to learn something new in school every day. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Research has shown that gifted children spend up to 80% of their time in classrooms doing exactly what everyone else is doing. For students who are academically advanced, this results in a tremendous loss of learning opportunities. When most of their school day is spent on material they already know or material they could learn

more quickly, gifted children are in danger of never reaching their potential. They do not experience the challenges that are required to reach high levels of productivity in their talent areas.

### **Gifted children have a right to be passionate about their talent area without apologies.**

Successful people are passionate about what they do. Gifted children often exhibit a single fascination with a topic or talent area and devote endless hours to learning about or perfecting it. Such dedication is needed to develop expertise in an area. While a minimal level of knowledge about a variety of topics in life is useful, children who show a strong interest in an area should be encouraged to pursue that interest.

### **Gifted children have a right to have an identity beyond their talent area.**

Young people are works in progress. Their interests and identities develop and change. In the early years and during adolescence they are not only developing their talents, they are also developing their sense of self. They need to understand that their value as a human being and the esteem parents hold for them go beyond the exceptional talents they possess. It is easy for parents to focus on developing their children's talents and to forget to recognize the many other fine traits their children possess. Children need to understand that while their parents value their gifts, love is unconditional, and they will be loved regardless of how well they perform in their talent area or mistakes they might make.

### **Gifted children have a right to feel good about their academic and intellectual accomplishments.**

While children's identities go beyond their giftedness, they do have a right to take pride in doing something well that required effort. Individuals should not be either boastful or ashamed of things beyond their control, such as their height or a physical handicap; however, they do have the right to feel good about accomplishments they did control. Children should feel good about performing well and the effort and dedication that were necessary to excel. Having a sense of pride in one's accomplishments is healthy as long as it does not belittle the efforts and accomplishments of others.

### **Gifted children have a right to make mistakes.**

Perfectionism can be a problem for gifted children, and taking healthy risks is an important part of developing talents. Thomas J. Watson, who built IBM into an international success, said, "If you want to succeed, double your failure rate." Mistakes are part of the learning process, and gifted individuals experience a variety of successes and failures as they strive for excellence. Parents can help their children understand that making mistakes is a natural

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part of learning and that successful individuals study and learn from their mistakes.

### **Gifted children have a right to seek guidance in the development of their talent.**

Talent does not flourish in isolation. It needs to be assisted and nurtured by those with advanced skills and experience. This can require the assistance of expertise outside traditional education venues. Isaac Newton wrote in a letter to fellow English scientist Robert Hooke, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Gifted children need giants to guide them, and this may require mentors who share their passion and talents. The well-known educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom noted that there is no shortage of talent, just a shortage of resources to develop it. Gifted children will need assistance in finding the resources necessary to guide their talent development.

### **Gifted children have a right to have multiple peer groups and a variety of friends.**

Gifted children may have trouble finding same-age peers who share their interests and passions. Gifted children may be interested in social issues at an earlier age than their age-mate peers. They may also have trouble finding same-age peers with similar abilities. For these reasons, gifted children may have a variety of peer groups, some based on a similar age, others based on interest or intellectual development. It is not uncommon for gifted children to have younger and older friends and friends in different arenas. They may also choose not to have very many friends. A few close relationships may be sufficient.

### **Gifted children have a right to choose which of their talent areas they wish to pursue.**

Some gifted children excel in a variety of different areas, called multipotentiality. While this would not seem to be problematic, these children can have difficulty selecting a major when entering college or a career path upon graduation. Just as gifted children have the right to pursue those talent areas that interest them, they also have a right not to pursue every area in which they excel. High levels of performance require sustained effort over time. Few individuals are able to achieve this in multiple talent areas. Gifted children may exhibit interests in a variety of areas and derive great pleasure from participating in them, but the time and effort necessary to develop high levels of expertise usually necessitates focusing in one area.

### **Gifted children have a right not to be gifted at everything.**

Many gifted children may excel in one area, but be average, or even below average in another area. Young children in particular can show such "asynchronous development" when their physical skills and emotional maturity do not match their intellectual maturity. Gifted students with perfectionism issues may have trouble accepting that they do not do everything well and may avoid activities in which they do not excel. Parents can encourage their children to experience a variety of activities but not pressure

them to excel at all of them. On the other hand, there is no reason to force gifted children to expend considerable amounts of time and effort pursuing hobbies in which they are neither interested nor talented, in the hopes of creating well-rounded children. This can be frustrating to both parents and their gifted children. Albert Einstein's passion for mathematics and physics certainly overshadowed his skills in other areas, but those areas in which he did not excel were insignificant compared to what he accomplished in his chosen field.

By encouraging young people to recognize and develop their talents, we move humanity forward. This is important for two reasons. First, the nation and the world will benefit from what gifted individuals accomplish. Second, and perhaps more importantly, even if these individuals do not become accomplished scientists or best-selling authors, they lead happier and more enriched lives when they are allowed to pursue their interests and talents.

A student copy of the key points of this Gifted Children's Bill of Rights can be downloaded from the NAGC site at [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

### **Recommended Resources**

Bloom, B. S. (Ed.). (1985). *Developing Talent in Young People*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Torrance, E. P. (1983). *Manifesto for Children*. Athens, GA: Georgia Studies of Creative Behavior and Full Circle Counseling. (See also: <http://www.coe.uga.edu/coenews/2000/TorranceVideo.htm>).

Westberg, K. L., Archambault, F. X., Jr., Dobyms, S. M., & Salvin, T. J. (1993). *An Observation Study of Instructional and Curricular Practices Used with Gifted and Talented Students in Regular Classrooms* (Research Monograph 93104). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

### *Learning at Home* continued from page 19

## Dummies Guides

There is a multitude of "dummies guides" to making pieces of the World Wide Web (see: [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com)). For animation, Macromedia's Flash and Shockwave consult Macromedia Studio MX for Dummies (2003, ISBN 0764544071); this allows individuals to make their own pictures and animate them or to add motion to any website. To learn more advanced web languages such as XML, see XML for Dummies (2005, ISBN 0764588451), which some say is the future of web design, and CSS (refer to Cascading Style Sheets for Dummies, 2001, ISBN 0764508717), which let you add excitement and pizzazz to an otherwise pedestrian web page.

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- . . . to learn something new every day.
- . . . to be passionate about your talent area without apologies.
- . . . to have an identity beyond your talent area.
- . . . to feel good about your accomplishments.
- . . . to make mistakes.
- . . . to seek guidance in the development of your talent.
- . . . to have multiple peer groups and a variety of friends.
- . . . to choose which of your talent areas you wish to pursue.
- . . . not to be gifted at everything.

—Del Siegle  
2007–2009 NAGC President

