

Nurturing Giftedness at Home with Young Learners

By Jennifer Wellberg

Many parents of gifted learners have struggled at some point in time with knowing how to support their child's unique talents and abilities at home. A recent elementary school program in a North Carolina public school system offers ideas, derived from research-based gifted instruction, for supporting your child's learning outside of the classroom.

Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow was developed at Duke University with a grant from the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program to help identify gifted students who are underrepresented in gifted programs and provide challenge for all students in the K–3 classroom. All students can benefit from this intervention, but it shines a spotlight on the advanced students in the classroom, allowing them to be referred for gifted services.

The Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow intervention involves

three frameworks: *Thinking Skills*, *Habits of Mind*, and *Task Rotations*, that inspire children to improve observation and description skills, develop academic vocabulary, and understand the thought processes that guide their learning. All three frameworks are embedded in the core content areas, such as math, science, and English.

How Parents Can Implement at Home

The aim of the Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow intervention is to raise expectations for all students. Every student is capable of doing more than expected and the challenge will spotlight their strengths. Applying this same idea at home will nurture your child's giftedness outside of school.

Thinking Skills

- **Observing.** Make a homemade microscope with your child to encourage their observation skills. All that is required is a plastic cup, a piece of plastic wrap, scissors, a rubber band, and a drop of water! Use the scissors to cut a flap in the side of a plastic cup. Place a piece of plastic wrap over the top and secure it with a rubber band. Carefully place your specimen inside

Tips for Providing Support at Home

The structure and repetition of the three components in the classroom work together to help students' build confidence and competence as thinkers. However, when it comes to nurturing a child's giftedness outside of school, many parents may struggle with ideas for providing support at home that challenges and enriches their child's gifted education. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

- As your child progresses academically, encourage them to look for analogies to help cope with new and unfamiliar information or situations.
- Know your child's learning style. Does your child love to memorize information or do they prefer a self-expressive activity that showcases their creativity? Understanding how your child naturally gravitates toward learning will allow you to provide supportive tools to help them succeed.
- Remember to change your materials and strategies periodically to coincide with your child's age, changing interests, and abilities.
- Finally, encourage your child to explain what they are learning as well as teach what they are learning to others. This will help to build confidence and clarify any information with an adult that they may not fully understand.



the cup through the flap. Finally, add a drop of water on top of the plastic wrap. The water acts as a lens and magnifies the specimen!

- **Defining.** Help your child define unknown words and concepts. Use sight words and substitute synonyms when giving an explanation. Also try to help motivate your child by teaching them to define their goals.
- **Describing.** Encourage your child to use their senses to describe the things they observe in their environment. For example: *How does it sound? What color is it? Is it rough or soft?*
- **Sequencing.** After reading a story, ask questions related to the characters, the plot, and the setting. *What happened at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story?* Encourage your child to ponder an alternative ending or describe how the outcome would be different if the characters made different choices along the way.

- **Find Similarities and Differences.** Challenge your child to explain how two very similar objects are different and how two very different objects are similar.
- **Classifying.** Encourage your child to help with chores around the house. Sorting laundry, grocery store items, and toys is an excellent way to help them practice classifying and categorizing. Consider varying the attributes such as sorting by color, then shape, then size.

Task Rotations

- **Mastery Learners.** Play a game of Jeopardy with your child that will allow them to have the opportunity to receive immediate feedback as they increase their content knowledge.
- **Interpersonal Learners.** Encourage your child to volunteer with a community service project that will provide an

Three Frameworks that Work at Home

1 Building Thinking Skills is a research-based program that teaches students how to develop basic communication and analytical skills. Students learn different cognitive strategies, such as how to observe, describe, sequence, classify, identify similarities and differences, and recognize analogies in order to become better thinkers.¹ Thinking skills lessons are sequenced according to a child's natural developmental progression. When children learn something new, they describe the characteristics that they observe. Making comparisons naturally follows, by distinguishing similarities and differences, which allows objects to be grouped together or arranged in order as a sequence of events. It also teaches students how to transfer these skills by focusing on the steps involved in their thought processes, an essential component to apply critical thinking skills.

2 Habits of Mind encourage metacognition, or thinking about one's thinking, especially when solving problems. The 16 Habits of Mind encourage students to persevere through tasks when an answer is not immediately determined, focusing on how students produce knowledge instead of how they simply reproduce it. Teachers focus on six of the 16 Habits of Mind in kindergarten through second grade:

- **In Kindergarten:** Persisting, Managing Impulsivity, Thinking about Your Thinking, and Questioning and Problem Posing
- **In Grade 1:** Thinking Flexibly
- **In Grade 2:** Creating, Imagining, and Innovating²

3 Similar to Habits of Mind, **Task Rotations** also focus on the process of learning. Teachers use Task Rotations to create differentiated learning activities that allow students to work together in small groups on one learning style at a time based on a rotational schedule. Task Rotation lessons are characterized according to one of four learning styles:

- **Mastery Learners**, who seek factual information, often through step-by-step processes
- **Interpersonal Learners**, who seek to understand through the lens of other people and social situations
- **Self-Expressive Learners**, who exercise creativity and emotions to explore ideas
- **Understanding Learners**, who focus on logic and reasoning³

Sources

¹ Parks, S. (2009). Teaching analytical and critical thinking skills in gifted education. In F. A. Karnes & S. M. Bean (Eds.), *Methods and materials for teaching the gifted* (pp. 261–300). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

² Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2009). *Habits of mind across the curriculum: Practical and creative strategies for teachers*. Alexandria, VA: Thoughtful Education Press.

³ Silver, H. F., Strong, R. W., & Perini, M. J. (2007). *The strategic teacher: Selecting the right research-based strategy for every lesson*. Alexandria, VA: Thoughtful Education Press.

opportunity for teamwork, and instill a sense of belonging, as they work to improve circumstances for others.

- **Self-Expressive Learners.** Play a game of Charades that will allow your child to use their imagination as they creatively act out an idea or theme.
- **Understanding Learners.** Nurture your child’s reasoning skills by engaging in a brief debate. Ask for their opinion on different matters and encourage them to be open to alternative views.

Habits of Mind

- **Persisting.** Encourage your child to persist even when they are struggling with tasks. Teach them not to give up at an early age and teach them that it is OK to make mistakes. Make sure they know that mistakes are a part of the learning process!
- **Manage Impulsivity.** Teach your child calming strategies, such as meditation or breathing techniques, that will help them when they feel frustrated.
- **Thinking about Your Thinking.** Encourage self-reflection. Looking inward for understanding will help your child learn how to improve their ability to self-regulate their learning as they grow and mature.

- **Questioning and Problem Posing.** Help your child learn how to ask questions with intention. Teach your child to identify what it is that they would like to know and the questions that they will need to ask in order to find an answer.
- **Thinking Flexibly.** Encourage flexible thinking by playing the “What’s This?” game. Ask your child to come up with as many answers as they can by manipulating a simple object such as a ball or basket.
- **Creating, Imagining, and Innovating.** Help your child learn to use tools to exercise their creativity. Tools for art, sewing, cooking, or woodworking will inspire originality and homemade inventions.

Whether your child has been formally identified as gifted or just has an endless appetite for learning, you can stoke her love for learning at home using the Nurturing for a Bright Tomorrow framework. ☺

Resources

IXL Learning—Learning K–12 educational practice by grade level and subject, www.ixl.com

Kiwi Crate—Monthly crates with age-appropriate materials for creative projects, www.kiwico.com

Smile Camp—STEAM summer camps and programs, <https://smilecamp.org>

Squishy Circuits—Conductive and insulating dough projects for teaching electrical circuits and engineering concepts, <https://squishycircuits.com>

Author’s Note

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