

Behavior Management Plan

The Student and Behavior

The student being dealt with is the gifted student. These students are often difficult to identify because their behavior mimics many other well known behavioral issues. The second factor further complicating their identification is the lack of intelligence of the instructor. This is not meant as an insult to the instructor, but rather a statement of fact. Unless the instructor is gifted as well, the student, while not possessing as much knowledge as the instructor, is more intelligent than the instructor. One indicator of superior intelligence is the ability to understand an entire system when presented with a single part. This concept is often so far beyond the capability of an ordinary person or teacher, it is mistaken as cheating, or arrogance.

The student with gifted intelligence will often not complete the work assigned to them. When asked to complete their work they will refuse, stating something like "I already understand the lesson and don't need to do the extra work". This is often mislabeled as oppositional and defiant behavior. When they do complete an assignment, they will sometimes turn in work that was not even assigned. Having completed the work early, the student will often become bored and distracted in class. This then leads to them challenging the instructor with clever wordplay or intentionally misdirecting the entire class, for their own amusement. You may be surprised or disappointed to find how easily a child can manipulate the instructor and class to bend to their will. This is often labeled as the class clown. All of the above misdiagnoses come with their own behavior management plans and interventions. Unfortunately none of those plans are effective for the gifted child. Have heart, if treated properly the gifted child will not only excel in their own life, they will make the life of the classroom and entire school a more productive and successful environment.

Imagine a child given the right access, trust, and responsibility in a school with advanced technology. The instructors would like to use the technology and the use is within their ability. Establishing the correct protocols and connections to allow the technology to be used as intended is beyond the capability of the currently employed faculty and staff. The gifted child could

be the one to install, configure, connect, and instruct on the use of the new technology. Or imagine a time when your classroom has electronic locks and you have locked yourself out of the room on a weekend activity. The gifted student, with whom you have established trust and a positive rapport, could give you access to your room using tools and techniques beyond the instructors comprehension.

The Purpose of the Behavior

School is a place where stones are polished and diamonds are dulled
-unknown author

The gifted mind provides many advantages for the student, but also there are many disadvantages. According to Gardner (1983) there are multiple types of intelligence. The most difficult to reach students are the ones that exhibit aptitude in several of these areas. The gifted student craves knowledge and understanding in their area of expertise. They also desire social interaction with peers. In this case we cannot define a peer as one of similar age, but rather one of similar ability. The occurrence and correct diagnosis of a gifted child is so rare, these children are often left in a world with no known peers. The teacher is incapable of understanding the world of the gifted child and their offered advice is ineffectual if not laughable from the perspective of the gifted child. Without the proper guidance of true peers, the gifted child will find their own methods of learning and entertaining themselves. This often happens at the detriment to the rest of society.

Much of their behavior stems from a need for appropriate social interaction with peers and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and understanding. To the ordinary teacher, and to their demise, they believe this means they need to give the student more work. Worse the teacher will pair the gifted student with struggling students in the hope that the struggling students will benefit from this tutoring. The results are often similar to the relationship you see in Harry Potter with Draco Malfoy leading Crabbe and Goyle with dangerous and painful results. When given the right guidance and appropriate support, the student will be able to perform as indicated above, and become a productive member of your society. Do not perpetuate the quote listed at the beginning of this section.

Two Teacher's Perspectives

I asked two teachers whom I respect as highly intelligent people and with years of experience. Take note of how their responses are indicative of the examples given above. Most teachers, even great teachers, do not know who to deal with gifted students.

“I like project based learning. Allowing students to learn by doing and teaching others. I'm usually underwhelmed by the genius.”
Said with sarcasm, “Break their thirst for knowledge by giving them plenty of worksheets. That is totally effective at ruining the teacher's career, it gives the gifted student a goal and something to rail against and focus on”

-Roy McCrory California School for the Deaf, Riverside 9 year veteran and coach to the schools championship academic team

“Deal with them however is best for them... speak with them on their level, ask questions about what they're doing, or provide activities that will stimulate rather than bore them”

-Heather Arazi LACOE instructor 10 year veteran

Strategies to Modify the Behavior

I am going to tell you the most difficult thing for an instructor to hear, and not the answer your credentialing program wants you to be told, You cannot handle these children. Unless you are an actual gifted person, you are not intelligent enough to understand and deal with them. You may want to believe that your years of experience and your worldly knowledge is enough to handle these people and provide them guidance, you are wrong. If you have ever dealt with a gifted student and they seem manageable, it is because they are either manipulating you, or they have learned coping techniques for dealing with your kind from some other source, or both. This is not meant to be demeaning or insulting, the bird does not mean to insult your lack of ability to fly when they take to the air, they are simply doing what they are designed to do. Understanding and accepting this basic concept will be the single most effective personal choice you make to improving your relationship and the behavior of a gifted child.

Remember the two key factors this type of student wants, knowledge and interaction with peers. You can provide access to both. There are places, clubs, and workshops all around the world who welcome one of their own and are capable of providing the guidance and peer interaction these students need. If you have ever had the opportunity to watch the television show "Scorpion" you may be surprised to know the true intent of the show. While many of the episodes are sensationalized in their use of action, the actual scenarios are based on true events. The purpose of the show is to advertise to and recruit other gifted individuals. The hidden purpose is often missed by the average person. Knowing your local resources is very important, knowing your local gifted population is a requirement if you ever have a gifted student.

Providing access to knowledge is now easier than it has been in human history. We have a wealth of information and knowledge available to us. The important thing that you, the normal teacher, must remember is the gifted student does not need to have all of the parts of a system to understand the system completely. Trust them, if they tell you they "get it" or they "understand it" then they have probably grasped the concept and understand the implications and abstract applications better than you will ever be able to achieve. When a student comes to you and has only completed the most difficult problems in the math text and has not done the multitude of problems assigned, remember your goal is to teach, and they have demonstrated learning, your goal is not to keep them busy and out of your hair. Ask them what they want to do.

You can help them in goal setting and identifying different options and paths, but you cannot help them to succeed on these paths. You can offer them equipment and opportunities to learn different material, but you may not be able to keep up with them on what they are doing. Do not be afraid to build trust and rapport with them. As they exceed your capabilities in different areas, these emotional ties to you, the teacher, will help to guide them to use these abilities to the improvement of society.

One challenging side of dealing with someone of superior intellect is their view and approach toward emotions and human attachment.

"Yes I am very empathic, I feel everything you are feeling, I am just not sympathetic, I don't care how you feel"

At first glance this seems to be a heartless statement made by a student. Upon reflection you will see, this is just a statement of fact. The gifted student often sees solutions and answers beyond the capability of the average person. To the gifted student, the emotions being experienced are pointless when the solution and answer is so obvious to them. You as the teacher can help the student to display the proper response and behavior when confronted with an emotional stimulus from another person. Remember you are not teaching them how to feel, they know how to feel, you are teaching them societal normal behavior given a stimulus and response.

An example is when a person exhibits a death in the family. The student may respond with, "ok, everyone dies. Did you know that alive on the planet today there is at least one human who will probably live to be 500 years old, given the current development of technology and biological sciences. The research is fascinating, come here and let me show you about the new CRiSPR and CAS9 research". A more appropriate response would be "oh, I am sorry to hear that, how are you doing? Do you need someone to talk to?" These are the skills you can offer to your gifted student.

- Things you should not do
 - Do not make threats or plans you are not 100% committed to following through with
 - They will label you as untrustworthy and too stupid to understand yourself
 - Do not try to outsmart them
 - This is like giving a lion the scent of your blood and then taking off running
 - They will hunt you down and eat you alive
 - Do not pair them with struggling students
 - You are just providing minions and degrading human worth in their eyes
 - Do not send them out of the room for referrals or suspensions
 - They will view you as an adversary
 - Believe it or not, they could cost you your job
 - Do not openly challenge them in class
 - Sadly this is a battle you will rarely win
 - Their response may damage your relationship with the entire class

- If it is severe enough, they could ruin your career
- Do not insist they stay on task
 - Their minds often do not work unidimensionally as yours does
 - What may seem off task to you is part of a larger project beyond your comprehension
- Do not confuse intelligence with knowledge
 - These students are capable of learning and understanding at incredible speeds
 - They do not always know everything about a topic presented to them. It is this path of acquiring that knowledge and understanding that motivates them
- Things you should do
 - Find a gifted mentor
 - Not some idiot who says they work with gifted children
 - Find an actual gifted person who mentors other gifted people
 - Accept that they can fly and you cannot
 - You will earn their respect and support
 - Let them lead their own education
 - Provide options and areas they may not be aware of but let them guide you down these paths
 - Help them to learn appropriate responses to human interaction
 - You are not teaching them how to feel
 - You are teaching them the responses that will be found appropriate to other normal people
 - Be their friend
 - Just because you are not as smart as them, does not mean you cannot be a valued friend and confidant
 - Allow them to explore seemingly disparate topics
 - They may be on the verge of discovering some abstract relationship you cannot see
 - Understand these behaviors never go away, even in adulthood
 - The gifted student learns to behave in normal society if they are lucky
 - In adulthood they get relabeled as either arrogant or genius, or both
- Online Resources
 - <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/gifted-students-general-ed-classrooms-elissa-brown>
 - Good site for activities

- This site does not include information on identifying gifted students
- http://www.teachersfirst.com/gifted_spot.cfm
 - Good site to identify gifted students
 - Terrible resource for activities
 - Do not do anything this site suggests to mediate gifted behavior

References

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.