Gifted Children

Q: I think my child is gifted and talented. What can I do to encourage and nurture him?

A: My question would be, in what way/s do you think your child is gifted? I would assume that you have noticed an advanced level in creative thinking, or metacognitive thinking. Otherwise, you would have said something like, my child is talented in piano, or painting, or swimming.

I rarely hear a parent say, my child is gifted in penmanship, or my child is gifted in decoding words. The term gifted is usually assigned to higher mental skills, not the nuts and bolts of the 3R’s. However, it is often the lack of mastery of basic skills that will eventually prevent your child from blooming successfully.

It is usually due to parental nurturing that a child is suddenly termed gifted. The father or mother, or some other influential older person in the child’s life, probably spends time with the child, reading together, discussing, analyzing, comparing, and critiquing; practicing, in short, all those higher level skills that are often left out of institutionalized education, at least in the early stages.

Less often, a parent will tell me that his child is talented in math. This is often because the parent has invested in drilling the child in all the basic arithmetic facts, and has therefore enabled him/her to enjoy solving math problems without being handicapped by inferior tools.

So, what can you, as a parent, to help your child on his/her way to academic or artistic success? Firstly, continue whatever you were doing. That was what led him/her to become talented in the first place. Don’t stop.

Secondly, make sure to cover his/her bases. Do not skip around, simply because you decide that his/her higher level thinking is more developed than his/her peers. Spelling, vocabulary, mental math, all these are still very important tools.

Thirdly, make sure not to neglect other subjects. Just because your child can play a piano sonata at age 5 doesn’t mean s/he should not have to read or count. Just because s/he is academically advanced doesn’t mean s/he should be physically unfit.

And finally, what you wanted me to say all along, look for programs or schools that might enhance his/her special abilities and talents.