

The Empowerment of Gifted Minds: An Education Designed for Success

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Brandon walks into his classroom and feels immediately welcomed by the warm, friendly greeting of his very experienced and passionate teacher. His eyes light up once he enters his class. Brandon is surrounded by various activity centers related to his interests in reading, science, and social studies. He ponders what his adventures in learning will be as he gazes at the shelves of enticing books before him. Brandon is never bored in class, as he always has projects and activities designed for his level. Meanwhile Brandon's friend Li is excited because she is getting ready for her spring musical performance and Anita is preparing for a fun filled school assembly.

These children are happy because their school content is differentiated and individualized to meet their unique needs. They also have many hands on learning opportunities. While much research suggests that gifted children often fair poorly in traditional educational settings, we must ask ourselves why we only talk about this type of setting for 'gifted' children. This type of learning environment is what all children thrive in.

So why is it that there are so few programming options for our gifted, talented, and creative youth? One issue is how we define giftedness. There are many phenomenal theorists in the field of gifted education, each with research and support for their point of view. Howard Gardner, Robert Sternberg, David Weschler, and Joseph Renzulli are some of the best known researchers in the field of gifted education, however typical school settings rely on only one criteria for admitting students into their programs for the gifted: an exceptionally high IQ score. Is this because of an elitist view of gifted education? Are there concerns that by using a wider range of criteria for giftedness we will no longer be truly serving that population?

It is my hope that this narrow definition of giftedness is not due to elitism, rather it comes from a concern that we will no longer be working with truly gifted children if we do not specifically define what constitutes giftedness. In my experience with the programs at Meritor Academy and other similar programs, I have learned that this is not a fear we need to concern ourselves with.

At Meritor Academy we do not rely on one simplistic definition of giftedness, talent, or creativity. While many of our students do meet the traditional IQ score based criteria for giftedness, others do not. For example, we also have students that are exceptional in the arts, sciences, or leadership. We also believe that many gifted individuals are never identified because they are not in an environment conducive to discovering their gifts. This is what we strive for at Meritor Academy: an environment that will help each student discover their unique individual gifts and talents.