

## 8 Questions With Terry About Gifted and Talented

October 13, 2014

Michele Chambers is getting a Masters degree in Gifted and Talented education from Denver's Regis University. An assignment for her class "Advocacy, Service-Learning, and Twice-Exceptional" was to interview experts in the field of gifted ed. Michelle and I are on the executive board of the Colorado Association of Gifted and Talented (CAGT) so Michelle asked me to be one of her "experts". I wanted to share her questions and my answers.

### **Q: What inspired you to get involved in supporting gifted and talented education?**

A: I started out as a first grade classroom teacher. Then, I got involved in supporting GT education because of my son. I realized that, at age 3, he was doing many things at or beyond the level of my first graders. I started reading all that I could on giftedness, starting attending graduate level classes on giftedness, and eventually got my Masters degree in GT from the University of Northern Colorado. It was a way of being the best mom I could be for my gifted son. I then transferred that knowledge and experience to also supporting my gifted daughter, and working in schools and in the community supporting gifted students.

### **Q: In your opinion, what are common characteristics of an effective and successful advocate for gifted and talented education?**

A: First of all, an advocate needs to be informed. You can't ask for something that you can't express confidently to others. You also need to be aware of what is going well, and what could be improved in any given situation. An advocate needs to be vocal, and be confident to stand up for giftedness and what gifted students need. An advocate needs to be aware of community resources in order to provide information on those to families and educators who need to be educated. An advocate needs to be passionate about supporting not only educational needs, but social and emotional needs as well.

### **Q: What advice would you give to an educator who would like to begin a new school or community program to support gifted and talented education?**

A: Observe gifted programs that are successful and highly regarded. See what they are doing right. Listen to their philosophy and *observe* them teaching gifted children. Get advice from professionals who are doing it well. And, always *talk with* gifted students about what they like and what they feel they need.

### **Q: What are the essential steps that an advocate should take while designing and implementing a new program for gifted and talented education?**

A: Awareness and self-education are always necessary. Self-reflection helps. "What is *my* agenda? Am I in this for my own self promotion, or for my personal family needs, or am I in this for the greater good?"

### **Q: What are the community resources/programs that you have been most influential in creating and/or supporting the development of? What are the key factors that made your resources/programs successful?**

A: I am invited by districts to train educators and mental health workers throughout Colorado for SENG facilitator training so that they can learn effective methods that best support parents of gifted children. This program has been successful because it acknowledges that the parents are a *huge* part of the success of their gifted children. Regardless of the programming that a school offers children, parents need to be aware and responsive to their children, as well. It's the triangle of support – child, parents, school.

*Gifted children not only think differently,  
they feel differently too.*

“Creating and Facilitating Discussion Groups for Gifted Children” is a workshop I created because I have been successfully facilitating GT Discussion Groups with middle school and high school students for 14 years. I wanted to get others on board so I’m happy to train them in the art of discussion groups. That was the quote that changed my world. So many students have felt supported in these groups over the years. Discussion groups create a place where students can be themselves, express their ideas, gather support and advice from peers, and do it in a safe atmosphere, with a trusted adult. Why is this important? Because *what they think* matters. To quote Linda Silverman, “Gifted children not only think differently, they feel differently too.”

**Q: Please comment about your thoughts regarding service-learning and gifted education.**

A: I’m at a school that requires service-learning for students signed up for the IB Diploma. While it adds work to their already packed and stressful schedules, service-learning gives them the opportunity to think beyond themselves, and to take off their blinders. Often, children and adolescents can be self-centered and self-serving. Offering aid and support to others in the community promotes altruism. The gifted population tends to have a higher degree of altruism anyway, so this fits in with many of their natural tendencies.

**Q: Have you had any experience with servicing twice-exceptional (2e) students? If so, based on your experience, what can teacher and parent advocates do to provide further academic and social support for twice-exceptional students?**

A: As far as academic support, it is imperative that the GT teacher be involved in IEP and 504 reviews, and goal-setting. Often, it is the SpEd teacher that takes on this responsibility without the involvement of the GT teacher. Both need to be present at any meeting in which decisions/supports/interventions are being discussed. I am often included in the meetings for 2e students at my school, and I always bring the lens of “what they are doing right” and “meeting them where they are and moving them forward in their area(s) of strength.” This perspective must be offered. Generally, students are doing many more things right than not right, but we often focus more attention on what’s wrong. Let’s use what they are doing right to help build up the areas in which they are struggling. That builds resiliency.

Socially, one of the biggest 2e supports I’ve witnessed is the GT Discussion Group. In the discussions, 2e students keep right up with the other gifted students. They are generally very adept verbally and can express themselves quite well, which is honored and respected in a discussion. This levels the playing field and allows 2e students to feel that their GT label is not a mistake. 2e students can feel less of an “imposter” because these groups assure them to feel that they are capable and smart.

**Q: What advice would you give to educators who are beginning their journey in advocating for gifted and talented education, students, and families?**

A: Realize that it is often “two steps forward, one step back.” Our work in this field is really in its infancy. We have laid some hopeful groundwork in Colorado, which needs to be nurtured by passionately and firmly staying the course. We need to “address the elephant in the room” and stand up for the rights and needs of gifted children. We need to respond to the myths, correct misinformation, and continue to point out how it is only fair that gifted students learn something new every day, too (as should all students). To do this, we need to meet gifted students where they are and help move them forward. They will not simply make it *on their own*. They need support, nurturing and guidance in order to grow. Varsity athletes do not make it on their own; they require the guidance of someone who can help them become better than they were — not necessarily the best, but better than they were. Don’t all kids deserve this kind of attention?