Chapter 5
Guided Passion Projects:
A Strength-Based Approach to Gifted Pedagogy

Lynne F. Henwood
FlexSchool Cloud Campus, USA

ABSTRACT

The Guided Passion Project (GPP) embraces a student-centered, strength-based approach to learning. The GPP is a vehicle for talent development. Gifted and twice-exceptional students tend to have very specific interests and can verbalize complex ideas, but often lack the time and space to develop them into a viable, authentic product. The secondary goal of the Guided Passion Project is the organic development of executive functioning skills. When students are invested in self-chosen, authentic projects that are aligned with their strengths and interests, the impetus to set goals, initiate tasks, and persevere is much stronger. As students begin to witness their own progress, their self-efficacy builds. Through scaffolded metacognitive practices and constructive feedback from their guides and peers, students reflect on and revise their work while learning that multiple failures are an essential part of eventual success. Students who previously did not feel that they had been able to move from the ideation phase to a final product have now proven that they are capable of success.

THE NEED TO ACTIVATE INTEREST

Gifted and twice-exceptional learners typically have a voracious appetite for learning. They begin their formal education with an unbridled enthusiasm to dive into areas of interest and passion and soak in all the knowledge they can. Too often, they are soon disappointed and disenchanted with the traditional school model and are left bored and uninspired. If the goal of education is to contribute to the development of innovative, creative problem solvers who are willing to take risks, educators must change their approach to teaching and learning.

When creating curricula that will engage the curious gifted learner, it is important to keep in mind that they often display perfectionistic behaviors. Many precocious children have been lauded by adults for their advanced abilities; praise that may inadvertently lead to risk-averse mindsets. If a child's identity has been developed around the proclivity to answer questions correctly and master concepts easily, the child may panic the first time they are confronted with a truly challenging task. As a result, some of these children will avoid situations that may threaten their identity as gifted learners, and instead "play it safe" by remaining inside their comfort zones (Dweck, 2007). These students may experience "imposter syndrome" as well, hoping that no one finds out that they are not actually "gifted' at all. To prevent these situations, we must shift the pedagogical framework to include opportunities for risk-taking, engagement in productive struggle, and reflection on failures and successes.

For twice-exceptional learners, those who display giftedness in some areas while struggling in others, this issue may be compounded. In many cases, a learning disability may have been masked by giftedness until the student is well into grade school or even middle school. Alternately, gifted learning needs may be obscured by a learning disability, such as dyslexia or slow processing speed. Special education classes, while well-meaning, focus on the remediation of skill deficits rather than the development of strengths and talent. Either of these situations can lead to a lack of self-efficacy, underachievement, anxiety, or depression. Lagging executive functioning skills, a common struggle for twice-exceptional students, exacerbate these difficulties (Baum et al., 2017).

AN INTEREST-BASED APPROACH TO CURRICULUM

Guided Passion Projects

At FlexSchool, a specialized school for gifted and twice-exceptional learners, students lead with their strengths. Before beginning classes at the school, students

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/guided-passion-projects/334268

Related Content

Pedagogical and Technological Considerations Designing Collaborative Learning Using Educational Technologies
Karen Skibba, Danyelle Mooreand Jennifer H. Herman (2013). *Research Perspectives and Best Practices in Educational Technology Integration (pp. 1-27).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/pedagogical-technological-considerations-designing-collaborative/74286

Beyond Content and Pedagogy: The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning in Higher Education
Susan N. Kushner Benson (2023). *Exploring Social Emotional Learning in Diverse Academic Settings (pp. 127-151).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/beyond-content-and-pedagogy/321386

A Great Wall of Difference: Musings on Instructional Design in Contemporary China
Susan Crichton (2007). *Instructional Design: Case Studies in Communities of Practice (pp. 91-105).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/great-wall-difference/23948

Faculty Resistance to Change: An Examination of Motivators and Barriers to Teaching Online in Higher Education
Erin Gratzand Lisa Looney (2020). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 1-14).*
www.irma-international.org/article/faculty-resistance-to-change/241254

Motivational Influences for Higher Education (HE) Students
Robert Costelloand Murray Lambert (2019). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 38-50).*
www.irma-international.org/article/motivational-influences-for-higher-education-he-students/216930