

Jessica Kingsley Publishers



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**Gifted children: a guide for parents and professionals**, edited by Kate Distin, London, Jessica Kingsley, 2006, £14.99, ISBN 1-84310-439-3

This book attends to the needs of gifted children, defined as the top 5% in ability, and those of their parents. Written by a group of 10 volunteer counsellors who have 3–30 years' experience in counselling gifted children and their families for the UK's National Association for Gifted Children, this is the book they wish they had had as a companion when experiencing problems first-hand as gifted children themselves or as parents or grandparents of gifted children.

Problems and how to approach them are the acknowledged focus, so that those gifted children and parents with less turbulent lives are invisible in this book. Despite this bias, the tone is always constructive, never negative. Consistent is the message of the twin challenges of accepting or expressing giftedness and finding a place in the wider community as a member of a minority group. The approach taken is about understanding rather than labelling and about individual differences among the generalizations.

The book has three sections. Part one, "Gifted Children and their Families", and part three, "Conclusions", have been written collaboratively, addressing issues relevant to the "average gifted" and offering practical responses. These sections are comprehensive and very easily digested. Illustrative cases bring the chapters to life. Readers are invited to either read or ignore the accompanying questions for reflection in highlighted boxes.

Chapter two covers the intellectual, social and emotional characteristics of giftedness and their implications at home and at school. This is very informative, but I feel concerned that social immaturity is put forward to explain difficulties with peers whereas the research literature suggests that maturity beyond that of peers can also cause social problems. In chapter three, the challenges of parenting gifted children, in knowing what is reasonable, are clear. The wider world, where children and parents have to deal with the responses of their peers and extended family, is the focus of chapter four. Chapter five takes a balanced look at what it is like at school for the child, the parent and the teacher. The reader will find empathy for the teacher, realistic strategies for parents in working successfully with schools, and things to consider if changing schools. The issue of acceleration is given less

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attention than might be expected, but there are details for downloading relevant reading material. The benefits and challenges of home education are treated in chapter six.

Part two, "Special Talents and Special Needs", is quite different in structure and style. This is where individual counsellors write from their particular expertise and research on a limited range of "minorities within a minority" (p. 160). The intention is that readers dip into those chapters that are relevant, about gifted children with Asperger syndrome, linguistic or creative talents, multiple talents or musical giftedness. There is an excellent chapter on adolescence with an overlay relevant to the gifted. A chapter on effective communication, while valuable in itself, does not seem to quite belong in this section.

For each chapter of the book there is a bullet-point summary, a brief reference list (this was never meant to be an academic publication), contacts and books, most by respected authors from the gifted literature. An index and a comprehensive appendix of contact details, including website and email addresses, contribute to the book's user-friendliness. There is a concerted effort to move beyond the UK experience, providing details of organizations, institutions and resources in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Where the text mentions details specific to UK education systems, there are explanatory notes.

Although parents are the major focus of this book, professionals, as the title indicates, have much to gain from reading it if seeking to understand and meet the needs, especially the emotional needs, of gifted children and their parents. It dispels myths and offers practical strategies for assistance with a range of issues in the settings of home, school and the wider community. While there are aspects of giftedness left unexplored, this is an excellent resource that should meet its stated goal of helping gifted children and their families to live more comfortably with giftedness and to reach beyond the challenges towards the rewards.

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