

What Parents of Gifted Students Need to Know About Television Viewing

Del Siegle - Editor

The most effective form of parental mediation of television viewing is purposeful selection of programs and viewing television with the child.

– D. Robert Abelman

Practitioners' Guide - A9405

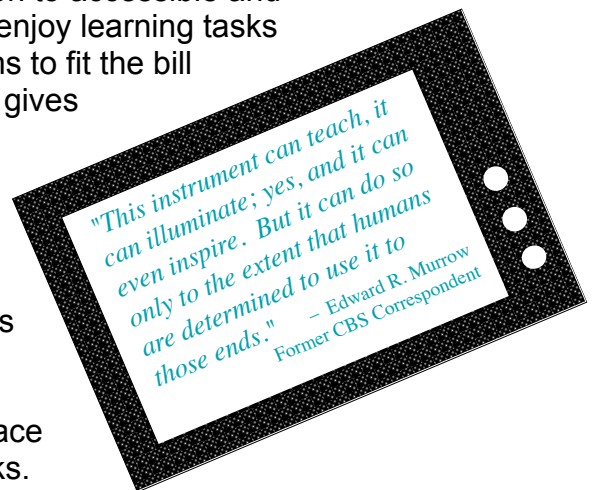
Implications for the Home

Television is one cultural factor that all children have in common. It is a highly prominent source of information and entertainment for most gifted children, and their attraction to it at an early age is reflective of their natural attraction to accessible and interesting sources of information. Gifted children enjoy learning tasks that are unstructured and flexible. Television seems to fit the bill and should be considered a viable learning tool. It gives gifted children an opportunity to observe and familiarize themselves with advanced or abstract concepts that are normally learned at a later age through other means.

Television viewing during the preschool years does not warrant concern by parents unless it unduly limits interaction with adults and other children, results in long-term viewing habits, or takes the place of other viable means of information, such as books.

Gifted preschool children are more likely to watch educational programs such as *Sesame Street*, *Reading Rainbow*, *Carmen San Diego*, or *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood* than cartoons and other children's programming, and they are more likely to do so at an earlier age. They are also inclined to watch these programs with greater regularity and devotion than other children. However, gifted children rapidly outgrow these programs and seek more interesting and appropriate alternatives.

Finding age-appropriate television content for young gifted children can be problematic. Parents should ensure that the programs being watched match their children's capability to follow story line and plot development and is sufficiently challenging. Children are likely to perceive many of the fictional characters found in more sophisticated adult-



oriented programming as real. Parents can view these programs with their children and discuss the themes and characters with them.

Parents of young children should avoid programming featuring marketable products. These program length commercials are becoming increasingly prevalent on television.

Television viewing should not be used as a reward or punishment. This places too much emphasis on the importance of the medium over other sources of information and entertainment.

Parents should not allow children to watch television haphazardly. They should purposefully select programming that has something to offer their children. This may require a certain amount of previewing and co-viewing with their children.

The television viewing habits of preteen and teenagers may serve as the foundation for important conversations about social roles and peer group pressures. During early adolescence gifted children tend to watch a great deal of television and may be especially attracted to fictional information about social interaction and behavioral roles. These programs can give parents an opportunity to discuss a variety of issues with their children.

For some children, under some conditions, some television is harmful. For other children under the same conditions, or for the same children under other conditions, it may be beneficial. It depends on the child. By monitoring what children watch and by discussing the programs they view, parents can make television a useful resource.

Research Facts

- By high school graduation, most children, regardless of ability level, spend between 10% and 30% more hours in front of the television set than in the classroom.
- Only 4% of all broadcast television and less than 8% of all public television programming is specifically created for school-age children; cable offers more quality selections.
- Gifted teens, and females in particular, are often poorly portrayed on television.
- Gifted preschool children typically watch two to three more hours of television per week than do other children of the same age, although once gifted children reach school age they watch less television than their peers. The existence of cable or VCRs does not increase the total amount of time gifted children spend in front of the television set.
- Gifted children are more active viewers than their peers. They are more involved in plot and story lines, less influenced by violence, and more aware of advertising appeals and strategies.

References

- Abelman, R. (1992). *Some children under some conditions: TV and the high potential kid* (RBDM9206). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

What is the NRC/GT?

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) is funded under the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, Institute of Educational Sciences, United States Department of Education. The mission of the NRC/GT is to plan and conduct theory-driven quality research that is problem-based, practice-relevant, and consumer-oriented.

Further information is available on-line from...

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT)

[<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt>]

[Research-Based Resources](#)

[On-line Resources](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Research Team](#)

[Resource Links](#)

[Underachievement Study](#)

And NRC/GT's What Works in Gifted Education Study...

[http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/NRCGT/what_works.html]

[Standards Used for Math & Reading Units](#)

[Sample Math & Reading Units](#)

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
2131 Hillside Road, Unit 3007
Storrs, CT 06269-3007
Tel: (860) 486-4826 Fax: (860) 486-2900
Web: <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt>