

# Every Child is a Gift

*January 2014*

Years ago when my oldest child began kindergarten, I was sure he was the brightest five-year-old boy that ever entered the door of his elementary school. I knew for a fact that he was gifted and would soon be at the head of his class. I can still remember my conversation with his teacher during our first parent/teacher conference when she informed his dad and me that although our child was learning, respectful, and got along well with the other children, he was very young and immature (he was barely five).

The teacher suggested he probably would have benefited from another year at home before entering school. I was sure she had no concept of a gifted child's characteristics. I was still working on my first degree in education and had no experience teaching five-year-olds. Even though his teacher had 25 years of experience teaching kindergarten, I felt sure she was wrong about my son!

After having my own classroom, I realized my son's teacher had been right. He was a very bright child, but he was immature and his talents still needed some time to develop. One thing I noticed, however, was even though his kindergarten teacher told me he was not quite ready for kindergarten, she treated him as if he was the brightest student in her class. She encouraged him to try new things, to believe in himself, and never failed to tell him how smart he was.

She talked to my son about the great things he was going to do when he grew up. She encouraged him to write stories and draw pictures about what he wanted to be and the adventures he wanted to have. She showed him the magic of the written word and instilled in him a love for reading. Though she had told me that he was not ready for the gifted class, she taught him as if he were gifted. That is how she treated every child in her class. She taught her students as if each of them were gifted. She told them all how smart they were and they all believed her, responding to her by doing things I never thought kindergarteners were capable of doing.

My son's kindergarten teacher taught me a valuable lesson, a lesson that I tried to use every year I was in the classroom. On the first day of each new school year, I would tell my students they were special and would let them know how excited I was to have each one of them in my class because they were so smart.

As a classroom teacher, I remembered my experiences as parents would often tell me they just knew their children were gifted. Sometimes they were and sometimes they weren't. The important thing was the parents thought their children were gifted. When parents believe in their children - tell them how smart they are, spend quality time with them and love them - they will blossom. Couple loving parents with a caring teacher and children will often surpass everyone's expectations.

The opposite is also true. After 25 years, I still remember a child in my first-grade classroom who told me during the first week of school that he could not read. When I tried to assure him that he didn't know how to read yet, but he would soon learn, he responded, "I can't learn to read because my mother says I am stupid." Despite my best efforts, Daniel was still struggling with reading at the end of the year. One reason he didn't make the progress he could have was because his mother planted the idea in his developing mind that he was not as smart as other children. I moved from that county and don't know what happened to Daniel. I feel confident that unless someone showed they believed he was smart and could learn to read, he never learned to read well.

Every child deserves to have an adult, preferably a parent, tell him every day how smart he is, how proud they are of him, and that he is loved. Every child also deserves a teacher who believes in him, plans challenging work for him, demonstrates why his lessons are important, and sets high expectations for him and his classmates. Every child deserves a home and school environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive. Every child deserves to be challenged academically. My goal in Whitfield County Schools is for every student to learn from a teacher who believes all children are gifted, because every child is a gift.