



The Journey Continues

RESEARCHING NEW QUESTIONS

The value of information

This handbook gives you some of the information you need to help you support your child who is gifted, but this is just a starting point. The more information you have about your child's learning needs, programs and issues, the more able you will be to positively impact your child's future. The information you acquire through further research could help you understand, support, guide and mentor your child with greater confidence and skill. Researching educational issues could provide you with valuable information to consider in making future decisions about your child's education.

Choosing issues to research

During your child's school career, you may seek information on a diversity of topics, from developmental issues to instructional strategies. Sometimes figuring out what question to ask is a difficult task. Try brainstorming to create a list of questions. Here is a sampling of the types of questions that parents of children who are gifted might research:

- How could my child benefit from computer technology?
- What are some ways to support my child's spelling skills?
- What should I do if my child is underachieving?
- How can I help my child plan for a career?

Narrowing down your question

Pare your list down to the most important questions and try to specify exactly what you need to know. For example, if you decide to research more about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), your questions might focus on current medical research and educational literature. Think about the kind of information you need: are you looking for screening information? Do you want to know how AD/HD affects learning and behaviour? What are the controversial issues? Are some treatments more credible than others? What kinds of things can you do at home? What can you expect the school to do? What are the long-term educational and health implications? Write down whatever questions you have about the issue.

Finding information

- *People* can be excellent resources to direct and focus your inquiries. People to consider include staff from schools, community agencies, government institutions and libraries.
- *Libraries* should be one of your first destinations when you start your research. Often just phoning the reference desk at your local library will provide you with enough information to focus your research. In addition to the local public library, there are libraries in universities, colleges and

government departments. Print materials found in a library are usually highly credible because these resources have been selected by subject librarians in specific areas, such as government, law, arts, language and literature, or fiction. As well, librarians may be able to recommend reliable sources elsewhere, such as good sites to visit on the Internet.

- *Print resources* can provide a variety of information. Newspapers are an accessible and current source for general information. Magazines and periodicals are other sources of information that is current but more specialized than newspaper information. Your local library's copy of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or the *Canadian Periodical Index* will provide the names of publications in your subject area. Books, though often less current than periodicals, cover topics in greater detail. Other printed material—such as pamphlets, annual reports and newsletters from relevant organizations—can provide information of a general nature that may help to direct your inquiry.
- The *Internet* has a huge amount of information about almost every topic imaginable. The cautionary note to any user of the Internet is that you must check the reliability of the source. Online resources are often linked through a library's home page to other virtual online resources; going from the library's Web site out into the Internet can save time and help ensure reliability.
- *Television, film and audiocassettes* provide information on both general and specific topics and issues.

Checking reliability of sources

You can use the 5Ws + H to evaluate the source of information. Consider the following questions.

- *Who is the author?* Where does the author work? At a recognized institution or government? Have other people mentioned the author? For Web sites, is the author or organization clearly stated?
- *What is the purpose of the source?* Who is the audience? Is the information factual or propaganda—does the author use facts or emotions to get his or her point across?
- *When was the material created?* For print material, check the publication date and whether this is first edition or a revision of the material. For a Web site, check whether links still work and look at the last time the site was updated. Older material may present information and statistics that are out-of-date.
- *Where was the source published or created?* Is the publisher or journal reputable? Is the journal reviewed? Books or periodicals that are self-published may have a hidden agenda. For Web sites, certain domain names may indicate a greater reliability. For example, the ending “.edu” signifies an American university and “.gov” is reserved for the Canadian government, both of which are reliable sources.
- *How can I tell if the source is accurate?* Double-check your sources by comparing the facts and ideas presented in them to those presented in other sources. Can you find the same information in three other sources? Consider whether the source might be biased or uninformed. Authors or Web sites might be speaking about something that is beyond their level of expertise. They may have used unreliable sources in the first place and passed this information on to you. Or they may have hidden agendas; for example, they may be trying to sell you a product. If the material is a book, see if you can find a review of the book to determine how others have assessed it.

- *Why should I use this source?* You may be able to get the information quicker from another source. If you can not verify the source, you might want to leave it and search for a piece by a known author.

Comparing sources

The more information you find, the better your understanding of the issue will be. When you use only one source of information, you can not be sure that it is current, accurate or complete. Some information presented as fact may be unsupported opinion. As a general guideline, try to gather information from at least three sources.

When you feel you have enough information, review your notes. Reread the print material you found. You may note that some of the information is contradictory or does not support what you have learned. With controversial issues, where people have taken sides, you have to decide on the reliability of the sources supporting each side.

Accessing library resources

The reference librarian at your local library can get you started on using library resources, and show you which database or periodical index to use to continue researching on your own. Periodical indexes are a source of author, title and abstract information for articles published in magazines, newspapers and other periodicals. The broadest index of popular consumer magazines is called the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. To access more specialized information, you could use the indexes that are organized according to subject areas: for example, the *Education Index*, *Index Medicus*, *Psychological Abstracts*, *Social Science and Humanities Index* or *Applied Science and Technology Index*.

To find the articles you want to read, make a note of the information listed in the index:

- periodical title, volume number, issue date
- author's name
- title of article
- page numbers of article.

You will then need to locate the specific periodical within the library.

With the Internet, many libraries have connected their databases together into a virtual library where you can locate information outside the four walls of the library. From virtual online resources, you may access encyclopedias and dictionaries, Canadian sources like *Electric Library Canada Plus*, and magazine or newspaper articles. Through the *Canadian Periodical Index*, you can access specialized newsletters, the Health Reference Centre, the General Reference Centre, CPI.Q (a list of Canadian and international journals, magazines and other reference material), and the Business Index. To find recent articles about "self-advocacy skills," for example, type the phrase into a number of the search areas in the periodical index.

The NEOS Library Consortium is a collaboration of libraries across Alberta. NEOS has a Web site at www.neoslibraries.ca that allows you to access collections from government departments, college and university libraries and hospital libraries. This powerful Web site offers Albertans access to a wide range of materials, from conference proceedings to government documents. To get a NEOS card, contact one of the libraries listed on the Web site.

Using the Internet

Internet services that you should consider using for your research include the World Wide Web, chat rooms, live events using video and audio, and e-mail to write to your contacts, mailing lists, newsgroups and Web forums.

A search engine is an index of information on the Internet. Search engines conduct searches using key words. The best way to choose the word or words to use is to select the rarest word in your phrase. For example, instead of typing "choosing a tutor," you would simply use "tutor" for your search. If you have the choice,

specify the range of dates you expect the material to have been produced. This will ensure you get more current research.

The following is a list of commonly-used search engines.

www.google.com
 www.hotbot.com
 www.altavista.com
 www.excite.com
 www.beaucoup.com
 www.yahoo.com
 www.journalismnet.com
 www.dogpile.com (presents information taken from a number of search engines).

Since different search engines access different areas of the Web, learn how to use three or four different ones. Whenever you use a search engine, read its tips for advanced research so that you will know how to limit the search on the engine you are using.

You may also wish to access media sites, such as www.cbc.ca, www.bbc.co.uk and www.cnn.com.

Evaluating Internet information

Anyone can set up a Web site and offer information. Because of the range of material available on the Internet, from fiction to opinion to fact, it is up to you to evaluate the source of information. As a general rule, you should assess the author's credentials and the quality of the publication or Web site, determine if the material has been reviewed before publication, and consider the comprehensiveness and the tone of the material.

Contacting community agencies

Through your research, you may find the names of associations and community agencies that are available for further information. For example, many community associations have their own

Web sites, often with specific contact information. Keep a record of those that you feel would be of most interest to you. Make contact by phone, e-mail or letter to find out more about their services and how they could help you with your search. Always be sure to describe your project and offer to provide them with your findings. This type of communication encourages dialogue and makes it easier for you to return to the association with further requests. Consider writing a brief script of what you want to say and keeping it by the phone as you speak. Keep a pen handy to jot down the person's answers.

Tracking your research

There are different ways to organize and store research, so choose the method that works best for you. Some effective storage methods include:

- keeping all news articles, phone numbers and accumulated research in a labelled legal-size file folder or large envelope
- using an expanding file that is divided into sections to separate data by subject
- storing information in a three-ring binder by taping or gluing articles to hole-punched paper, or using clear plastic sleeves to hold information
- recording your findings onto audiocassette.

You may also consider using some of the following tips to keep organized.

- Make a list of contact names and phone numbers, and staple it to the front of your folder or envelope.
- Record the date, time and place for each piece of research you collect, including notes taken while you are on the telephone. Write this information directly onto articles.
- Record your own ideas, thoughts and feelings about the information you find as you go along.
- Create a chart to track key information.

Topic	Contacts	Date	Notes

Sharing information

Decide what your goal is for sharing your research. Do you want to create awareness? Do you want to start a dialogue? Do you want to prompt some specific action as a result of your findings? Once you determine your goal, write down the steps you have to take to reach it. Whom you share your information with, and in what context, will depend on the purpose you have.

Your child's school is often a good starting point for sharing research. Ask your child's teacher for a few minutes of his or her time. Bring in a copy of your report, discuss your findings and leave material behind for his or her consideration. Does your school have a newsletter? Most newsletter editors are actively looking for articles to include and might be interested in the findings of your research. School councils may also be receptive to your information.

If you would like to reach a larger audience, explore options in the community. Approach the community association you found to be most directly connected to your research and offer your findings to them. They may publish your report in their newsletter and/or ask you to speak at one of their association meetings.

If you are content with the findings and have no need to publicize your report, write it as a letter to your child and save it in a scrapbook. In future years, your child will value this symbol of the work you did guiding, mentoring and encouraging his or her gifts and talents.

