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Resources & ideas for parents & educators of gifted children

Talent

Center for
Talent
DEVELOPMENT®

Beach Balls & Books

By Susan Corwith, PhD

Does your child have a passion for robotics, chemistry or science fiction? Is s/he eager for academic challenges not always available in school? Is s/he looking for friends with whom s/he can talk about academics? Are you at a loss as to what to do with him or her during the summer?

Academic summer programs are a great option for bright students. Studies have shown that they provide academically talented students with a variety of benefits ranging from a positive feeling about learning (because there's a match between the child's intellectual abilities and the rigor of the material s/he is studying) to growth in acceptance of others (plus an increased knowledge of other cultures and an enhanced world view). Not a bad return on an investment!

But how do you know which summer program provides the right fit for your child? And what determines a high-quality program?

To find the best fit for your student there are several attributes of high-quality programs of which to be aware and several criteria you should use to make a decision about which program to attend. I want to start by highlighting the attributes of high-quality programs, which are divided into four clusters. This information comes from my dissertation research on the subject of high-quality summer programs for academically talented

students and the practical, hands-on experience I have had as a summer program coordinator. (More information that I gathered about summer programs is on the Center for Talent Development (CTD) web site at <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/beachballsandbooks/>)

High-quality programs exhibit the following attributes:

- 1 Committed and competent participants including:**
 - Knowledgeable, skilled and invested administrators
 - Passionate, intellectual and diverse students
 - Passionate and masterful instructors
 - Passionate and empathetic residential life staff
- 2 Approaches and structures that promote holistic development such as:**
 - Residence on a college campus
 - Balance of work and play
 - Responsiveness to individual student and staff needs
 - Advanced courses (often offered for credit)
 - Small classes and low student-to-teacher ratio
 - Immersion in one course taught in a block schedule
 - Structured time for processing and reflection
 - Adequate resources
- 3 Student-centered and responsive teaching and learning that emphasize:**
 - Interactive, analytical dialogue
 - Instructive and detailed feedback
 - Purposeful, outcomes-based learning
 - Accelerated, fast-paced classes

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

What is a "Great" Program?

What makes a summer program – or any program for gifted students for that

matter – great or exceptional? The staff at Center for Talent Development (CTD) discuss this often. But the talk is not just idle. We survey parents and students constantly. And there's a great deal of research that has already been conducted on this subject. One reason I hired Susan Corwith as an Associate Director two years ago to run our Summer Program is that she had thoroughly researched what aspects of a summer program make it successful, as part of her doctoral dissertation.

In this issue, Susan shares some of her most salient points. We also interviewed one of our former students as to what made the CTD program she attended (our three-week service learning program Civic Leadership Institute, held in downtown Chicago) so rewarding to her.

There is additional information about program quality on our web site (try as we did, we could not condense Susan's 311-page dissertation into 750 words).

Both of my children attended academic summer programs. Even if I weren't their Mom, they would say they benefited greatly from the challenges the courses provided, and the opportunity to interact with other really bright kids, and, of course, they thought being on a college campus was great. But before you take my advice – that Summer Programs will benefit your children more than you can imagine – please read these two articles and make a list of characteristics that you should investigate as you choose a program.

Paula Abezushi-Kubilus

WHO SAID THIS?

“If the past cannot teach the present and the father cannot teach the son, then history need not have bothered to go on, and the world has wasted a great deal of time.”

Answer at <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/resources/newslettersolutions>

Leaving Milwaukee ... & Finding CTD

Not a single one of Amanda Laabs' relatives lives outside the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area. But she knew that she would. And so did her parents. So it wasn't a big surprise to anyone when she traveled to Illinois two summers ago to attend the three-week Civic Leadership Institute (CLI), a program designed for outstanding high school students which combines an innovative service-learning curriculum with an unforgettable residential experience in the heart of Chicago. As you will read, the program had a profound impact on many decisions Amanda has made.



CTD: What made you interested in attending the summer program offered by the Civic Education Project (CEP)?

Laabs: I had been involved with the Center for Talent Development (CTD) before (Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search and the online Creative Writing Honors course through CTD's Gifted LearningLinks), and I must have been placed on your mailing list because I received a catalog from CEP for the Civic Leadership Institute (CLI) in the mail. It interested me for a number of reasons. I was living an incredibly sheltered, suburban life at the time and had always had a desire to break out of it. I didn't know how to start something like that; I was completely overwhelmed. Then the CLI catalog arrived. It was perfect timing. It seemed like the perfect first step towards changing my role in the world.

CTD: Did you have any trouble convincing your family it was a good idea for you not only to travel out of state but also to attend a three-week residential service-learning program?

Laabs: Not at all. Though I was born and raised in Milwaukee by a family with generations of history in the city, I always knew deep down I was destined to leave, explore the world, and make my own path in life. They knew that too and trusted me to take charge of my own life from a very early age. This included looking at schools on opposite sides of the country, and even across oceans. It doesn't sound like such a big deal to most people, but it was to my family.

CTD: What were the other kids in the program like?

Laabs: Most of them were from the Midwest, but there were also plenty from states across the country. Our backgrounds were generally the same (suburban, sheltered, etc.).

CTD: What is your take on the mission/philosophy of what the program set out to do?

Laabs: From what I understood, the mission of CLI was to educate young people about the problems in the world that they were not aware of, and then give them the tools to take action. The program combined classroom learning with service experience in an incredibly impactful and stimulating manner. The program was very well thought out, because it accomplished exactly what it set out to do.

CTD: What qualities/features of the program made it "work" for you?

Laabs: I think that the service learning was the best part of the program because it actually got us into the field and exposed us to what was really happening in the country. The classroom method was great for learning about the things that we couldn't experience in and around Chicago, such as international conflicts.

CTD: What parts of the program would you identify as most critical to its success?

Laabs: The best part of the program for me was the "final project." Each student was required to choose a topic focused around an injustice that was occurring in the world. For example, I chose child literacy. Other topics included gay rights, genocide, etc. Then we had to develop a program targeted at helping our topic, one that was practical and could be executed once we returned home. I developed a tutoring program for inner-city students. For a variety of reasons, it didn't get implemented but the model is still perfectly valid. I still have hopes for launching it some day.

CTD: What were the two most memorable moments for you?

Laabs: The first was eating at a homeless shelter in Chicago. We were told to sit apart from other students and talk to the patrons, which was simply eye opening for me. I realized that these people weren't that different from you and me; everyone has had or will have a moment in their life when they "fall" – lose a job, lose their money, their house – but whereas you and I have a network of family and friends to

help us out during these hard times, others don't have that sort of network. They have no one to help them up.

If I remember correctly, we had a few speakers from the Chicago Coalition of the Homeless (CCH) come to us. One of the speakers used to be homeless, and shared his experiences and how the CCH had helped him, but there was one thing that he said that I remember vividly: "When I look out into this group of young people, I see such a beautiful future for this world. You all are such beautiful people." It really struck me how lucky I was to have the life that I did, and how much responsibility I had to use it in the best way possible.

CTD: How did the experience impact decisions you made after attending the program?

Laabs: The Center for Talent Development was the sole reason that I discovered Northwestern University (NU), and after discovering the school, I quickly fell in love with it. I worked extremely hard during high school, always with admission to Northwestern in the back of my mind. If I hadn't had CTD to introduce me to NU, I may not have worked so hard, and I may not be where I am now. It also helped me roughly pinpoint how I want to spend the rest of my life. I always wanted to be in Medill, to be a journalism major, and I always knew I wanted to write for a living, but after CLI I decided that my dream job would be to use my writing as a catalyst to educate others and enact change around the country and, eventually, around the world.

CTD: Why would you recommend that other high school students attend a program like this?

Laabs: I think that if you go through life completely oblivious to what is going on around you, if you live completely wrapped up in yourself and your life...well, what's the point? There's so much to explore out there, and I think that a lot of high school students don't realize that. Your life doesn't have to begin and end in the same place, you don't have to follow in your family's or your parents' footsteps. There's so much out there to see and to do.

CTD: Good advice for us all. Thank you. ●

Beach Balls & Books

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- Cooperative peer learning
 - Freedom to make choices regarding the program and learning environment
 - Optimal match learning: the pace and level of instruction are matched to students' assessed abilities and needs
 - Advanced curriculum, authentic materials and complex topics
 - Depth and breadth of study
- 4 **Shared culture based on respect for learning including:**
- Respect for intellectual ability and development
 - Community of learners
 - Nurturing of the gifted identity and socialization
 - Risk-taking environment
 - High expectations for achievement

But selecting an excellent program for your student involves more than an understanding of what makes it of high quality. There are several criteria to consider.

When I asked a number of parents how they would select a summer academic program for their child, their answers ranged from the practical to the philosophical. "The one closest to home," said one. Another responded, "I want my kid to have a wonderful time – not just to be challenged academically but to meet other kids with similar abilities and interests so that she can connect with them – not feel as out of place as she often does."

One of the first questions I ask when talking to parents about the advisability of their student attending a summer program is whether their child actually wants to attend a program. Parents and children need to consider goals and desired outcomes. I know this may sound obvious but I have encountered parents who sent their children to programs for reasons that weren't even related to the child's needs—

because the parents were going to Europe or because they wanted the child to be a doctor and taking a Latin course would help with medical terms (the child, of course, had no interest in being a doctor). I know from experience that it is rare that a student who does not want to attend a summer academic camp has a positive experience. Bottom line, the first question parents should address is what are they and the child trying to accomplish and is a summer program going to provide that outcome (intellectual stimulation, new friends, college experience, etc.)?

After that, the next discussions you have need to address the type, location, and length of the program. Is your child looking for an enrichment course? Or is s/he more interested in an accelerated, credit-bearing course where s/he will learn the same amount of material in three or four weeks as s/he would in nine months during the school year? Obviously the pace and emphasis at these two programs are very different.

Whether your child is a resident or wants to commute is also a big question and clearly dovetails with location. Sure, a school, college or university within your home state or town might have a terrific program, but sending your child to a new environment will provide him/her with a chance to learn about another slice of the United States—what a terrific opportunity for growth!

Myriad other criteria should be discussed before a final decision is made, including cost, program size, and level of supervision. But I am also going to add one last piece of advice to parents and guardians gleaned from years of experience and research. Whatever the program choice, it should be a chance for growth. I truly believe that it is a parent's responsibility to help provide his/her child, particularly a gifted child, with challenging learning opportunities. Facing challenges gives students the tools to make sound decisions and become confident, independent thinkers. At some point in his/her life, a child will need to face the world. Academic summer programs can provide students with the chance to take risks in a safe environment and prepare for future endeavors—while having lots of summer-time fun and creating bonds with new friends. ●

FUN & GAMES

Answer is at <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/resources/newslettersolutions>

What is the next letter in this sequence?

O - T - T - F - F - S - S - E - _



Susan Corwith is passionate about the field of gifted education and has been converting that passion into action for more than 15 years. She has held leadership roles in a number of institutions serving the gifted population and brings that experience to bear in her role as an associate director for Center for Talent Development (CTD). Her primary responsibilities with CTD include overseeing marketing and outreach as well as the Summer Program and Civic Education Project. She appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the gifted education field in myriad ways: through direct contact with students and their families, program development and research. Her multifaceted role, combined with CTD's commitment to excellence, allow Corwith to help develop gifted students' incredible potential, which, she believes, often goes untapped. "It's exciting to see what students can do and who they really are in an environment that nurtures and supports them," she says. Corwith holds a PhD in educational leadership and policy analysis, an MS in curriculum and instruction and a BS in secondary education, all from University of Wisconsin-Madison.

NEWS, DATES & OTHER IMPORTANT CTD INFORMATION

Have fun this summer! Learn a lot, too.

Three-week **Summer Program** Session 1 starts on June 28, 2009. Session 2 begins on July 19, 2009. One-week sessions for younger students also available. Course descriptions, dates for all Summer Programs and online registration available on the CTD web site. *New This Year!* Students completing PreK through grade 3 can attend CTD Leapfrog in Palatine, Illinois, at Quest Academy.

Summer Program is on YouTube. Big Ten Network piece has been posted. Go to the Summer Program home page and click on the link. Summer Program is also on Facebook. Become a fan! Link on the CTD and Summer Program home pages.

Civic Learning Institute, a three-week service learning program, is being offered this summer in Baltimore, Chicago and San Francisco. Dates are on the CTD web site.

Other Great CTD Programs

Gifted LearningLinks nine-week enrichment courses for students in grades 3 through 8 start again on June 15, 2009. AP® and honors classes start on the 15th of every month.

Sign up for **Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search**

(NUMATS), an above grade-level testing program that offers the EXPLORE, ACT and SAT to students in grades 3 through 9 several years ahead of schedule. Online registration available for ACT and SAT until April 28, 2009.

Come to the **Summer Conference!** Half-day family conference will be held on Saturday, June 27, 2009, from 1 p.m. until 5:15 p.m. on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston. Program includes keynote speaker for parents and age-specific interest sessions for students. More information on the web site. Don't miss this great opportunity!

We're going Electronic!

Starting this summer, *Talent* will be produced in electronic form. To receive *Talent* on your computer, send us an e-mail with the subject line "I want my Talent" and we'll make sure that your Summer issue is sent directly to your InBox. Don't miss a single issue. Send that e-mail to us today at ctd@northwestern.edu.

For more information on all these programs and offerings, go to the CTD web site, www.ctd.northwestern.edu, write us an e-mail at ctd@northwestern.edu or call us at 847/491-3782. ●