

## **Making Things Happen in Your G&T Classroom**

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More and more, the teacher's time is constricted. Freedom in the classroom is radically constrained by regulations and standards imposed upon teachers and their gifted students. Academic freedom is rapidly disappearing, if it has not already. Many teachers who invite me into their classrooms must go to great lengths to integrate my time into their already cramped academic day. In this article I offer suggestions, some unusual and perhaps uncomfortable for you at first, for getting the most out of your classroom time. I hope you find my insights useful.

### **Making Things Happen**

There is no priority or ranking of the suggestions that follow, just an attempt to get them out on the table for your consideration.

Team up with parents to provide special experiences for your class. While this may not be able to be accomplished during normal class time, there are always evenings, weekends, and after school to make the magic happen. Make sure to prep your parents ahead of time so they know their input on home work or project assignments will be needed. Maybe the G&T students can develop a website/newsletter you can use to keep parents informed about what is happening in class – or maybe an e-blast technique or perhaps some other creative use of media.

Work closely with your PTA/PTO. Maybe they can put some pressure upon the district and local schools. Have gifted students make presentations before PTA or PTO members so they see the kinds of things these students are capable of doing. Invite PTA/PTO folks into your classroom to see gifted students in action. They will know how to influence the administrative staffs in both your school and district. If you do not have a gifted parents' group in your school or district, start one or piggy-back onto one that is established and well-known.

Do some things that lead to you and your students being written up in a local paper or maybe in your district's website/newsletter. Positive press makes people sit up and take notice. It can often be the "Open Sesame" mantra that provides you with time, resources, and some freedom to do other things to benefit your students.

Write an article with many photos of students in action and publish it in a professional magazine, newsletter, conference paper, and the like. Teacher-written articles are always welcome by educational magazines. I have done this with several middle school teachers I have worked with, and their principals took immediate notice, one asking a teacher to start a new special school program. Nothing succeeds like success. Never underestimate the power of the written word.

Try an after-school invention club for students who have a special desire to create new things. Give the club time to shake-out and get down to a core of committed students. Turn on that creativity outside of the normal classroom routine and watch the students respond! I have seen students develop ideas worthy of patents and possible new businesses.

Make parents a part of the educational team and have them work with their students to develop ideas for new products. Urge the parents not to take over the project, but serve as mentors and sounding boards, helping their students see the multi-dimensional aspects of problem-solving. The students can do some foam-board presentations for display in the classroom or in a central location in the school. Here is a terrific way to get creative juices flowing.

Learn about Thomas Edison and study his incredible legacy of invention and new industries. Many schools and STEM programs are re-discovering this icon of invention. Check him out at [www.edisonmuckers.org](http://www.edisonmuckers.org). Enjoy the wealth of facts and figures and teacher resources on this website. Explore Edison's big inventions and the major industries he created. Identify and assess the value of his work, and how it created our modern world.

Bring in creative speakers from the engineering, architectural, literary, invention, and fine arts areas to talk to the students and their parents. Perhaps this can occur in the school during after-hours; invite teachers and interested students and parents to attend. I think you may find this type of activity draws lots of folks...and do not forget to take the opportunity to "plug" yourself and your students. Let the community know who you and your students are!

Host an invention contest in the school where everyone can participate. Choose a topic for students to focus their designs, and establish a judging rubric for selecting the top designs. Ask engineers, inventors, scientists, and researchers to serve as judges. Use this exercise as a way to integrate the curriculum and promote multi-dimensional problem solving. I have attended and participated in such events and parents become quite excited about seeing what their children and friends can invent. The feedback to the school is usually quite strong. Get the event covered by your town newspaper.

Establish a connection with your town's council or board of supervisors to give G&T students a more enhanced learning experiences. Bring them to a council meeting to see how new projects proposed in your town involve complex problem solving. . . . .a multi-dimensional look at many factors.

Maybe the council would like to sponsor a project for your students to try and solve, for example:

-What to do with an open parcel of land? -How to reduce traffic congestion in certain parts of the city? -How to use the land from an old abandoned right of way? -How to use old factory buildings?

All schools have their own concerns and problems, and this could be valuable to apply in your classroom, such as:

-How can you reduce traffic congestion at drop-off and pick-up times? -What can be done in the school to reduce fossil fuel energy use? -What will the schoolrooms look like in 25 years? -Can your students envision and design an addition to the school? -How can your school have face-to-face discussions with other children all over the world?

Imagine what creative ideas students can apply to their school. They have an incentive and ownership here to make something really extraordinary happen. Empower them and turn them loose! Show your district and local administrators what can happen when academic freedom is given and properly applied by you.

Determine if a local company might want to sponsor your class and school – visiting and hosting some design challenges, providing inspirational speakers, doing special projects with the students, teaching them about life after school and the modern business world. The school-to-work approach can be very illuminating to students and particularly interesting to parents.

### **Let Your Students Help Tell the Story**

Make your classroom shine so much that your students will be talking to others about what goes on. Who does not want to tell friends the cool things they are doing? Motivate you gifted students and they will create the buzz.

Allow them to decorate the room and make it appealing and exciting. Put a bulletin board outside the classroom with incredible things displayed there. Make it a magnet that pulls others around to peek inside the classroom.

Props are a big plus for students to touch, feel and discuss. Have them write away to companies and researchers who are doing really amazing work in hot technology areas, asking for props and demonstrations you might use in your classroom. The more students handle things, their questions and interest will increase exponentially, and so will interest in your classroom and what happens there. This news will reach administrators and they will soon be stopping by to see what is happening. That can mean more freedom to do other things.

Figure out a way to set your students apart – maybe with pins or buttons they wear and a slogan that epitomizes who they are, and what they do as a team. Let you G&T students develop their own identity.

Ask students to invite other teachers to stop by and visit your class – maybe to address some aspect of a subject, topic or technology you are discussing.

Take students outside the school, walking around and observing mundane things like power lines, traffic signals, streets and roads, and neighboring structures. Discuss how the technology developed to build this infrastructure. Imagine what such infrastructure might look like in the future. Maybe they can build models of the area around the school and highlight how math and science are related to all of this.

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Make your own opportunities to focus excitement around the classroom. Do not wait for others to do it. This is a good fight to engage in. There is much valuable learning to happen outside the often stultifying codes and standards imposed upon schools, teachers, and students – often by people who have long left the classroom, or perhaps never had the privilege of teaching there.

Your job is to unleash the talent of your gifted charges, and that time is excruciatingly important. Teach them in spite of organizational rigor mortis. Sidestep the beast of bureaucracy and make something of lasting value they will always remember. Fight the good fight!