

Characteristics of Gifted Learners

Parent Part B of the
Competencies
Collaboration

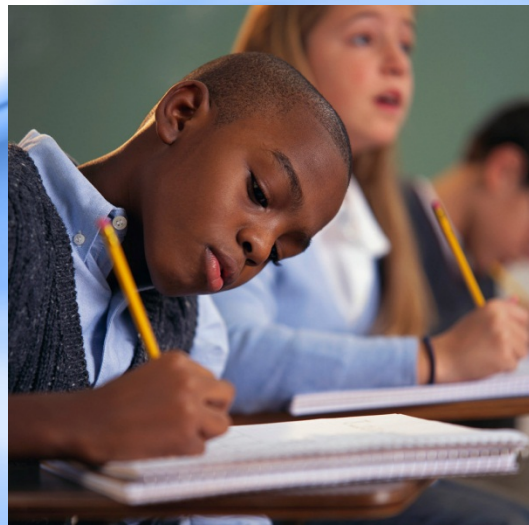
SEVA Council of Gifted Administrators



Characteristics of Gifted Learners

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Definition of Giftedness

“Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.”

~The United States Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB)



“Gifted” and “Talented”

- The terms are used interchangeably by many
- ‘Talented’ tends to refer to individuals with abilities in the arts
- ‘Gifted’ often refers to abilities in academia
- The VA Gifted *Regulations* refer only to giftedness and not talents, but students may be identified as gifted in visual and performing arts



A parent's understanding
of characteristics and behaviors
of gifted children will:

*Assist in
identification
and providing
appropriate
educational
services*

*Support
affective (social
and emotional)
needs*

*Support
cognitive and
intellectual
needs*

Some Learning Characteristics of Gifted Children and Adolescents

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graph TD; A[Some Learning Characteristics of Gifted Children and Adolescents] --> B[Characteristics of Gifted Learners]; A --> C[Possible Concomitant Problems and Implications];
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Characteristics of Gifted Learners

Possible Concomitant Problems and Implications

Characteristics can manifest themselves in positive ways or in ways that may create problems for gifted learners in a classroom. Due to the nature of gifted learners, both achievers and underachievers, it becomes necessary to recognize that each one of these characteristics may be present in varying degrees.

Characteristics

- Keen power of observation; naive receptivity; sense of the significant; willingness to examine the unusual
- Powers of abstraction, conceptualized, synthesis; interest in inductive learning and problem solving; pleasure in intellectual activity
- Interest in cause-effect relations and ability to see relationships; interest in applying concepts; love of truth
- Liking for structure and order; liking for consistency, as in value systems, number systems, clocks, calendars
- Retentiveness
- Verbal proficiency; large vocabulary; facility in expression; interest in reading; breadth of information in advanced areas
- Questioning attitude, intellectual curiosity, inquisitive mind, intrinsic motivation
- Power of critical thinking; skepticism, evaluative testing, self-criticism and self-checking

Possible Concomitant Problems

- Possible gullibility
- Occasional resistance to directions; rejection or omission of detail
- Difficulty in accepting the illogical
- Invention of own systems, sometimes conflicting
- Dislike for routine drill
- Need for specialized reading vocabulary early; escape into verbalism
- Lack of early home or school stimulation
- Critical attitude toward others; discouragement from self-criticism

Characteristics

- Creativeness and inventiveness; a liking for new ways of doing things; interest in creating, brainstorming, freewheeling
- Power of concentration; intense attention that excludes all else; long attention span
- Persistent, goal-directed behavior
- Sensitivity, intuitiveness, empathy for others; need for emotional support and a sympathetic attitude

- High energy, alertness, eagerness; periods of intense voluntary effort preceding invention

- Independence in work and study; preference for individualized work; self-reliance, need for freedom of movement and action
- Versatility and virtuosity; diversity of interests and abilities; many hobbies

- Friendliness and outgoingness

Concomitant Problems

- Rejection of knowledge; need to invent for oneself

- Resistance to interruption

- Stubbornness
- Need for success and recognition; sensitivity to criticism; vulnerability to peer-group rejection

- Frustration with inactivity and absence of progress

- Parent and peer-group pressures and nonconformity; problems of rejection and rebellion

- Lack of homogeneity in group work; need for flexibility and individualization; need for help in exploring and developing interests

- Need for peer-group relations in many types of groups; problems with social leadership

- It is much like two sides of the same coin: some gifted characteristics are exhibited in ways that may be considered counterproductive. When these behaviors are demonstrated by students, they may be perceived as negative when, in fact, they could be indicators of giftedness.
- For example, a student who likes consistency and structure may invent and insist upon his/her own way of doing things which may be consistent but in conflict with what is required.
- When non-productive behaviors arise in a classroom, it is important to look at the causes of the behaviors, rather than just at the behaviors.

Learning Needs Based on Gifted Characteristics

Characteristic

Excellent memory

Advanced comprehension

Varied interests (multipotentiality)

Excellent verbal skills

Flexibility and creativity of thought processes

Accelerated rate of thinking

Goal-oriented focus

Learning Need

Access to large quantities of information

Challenging learning activities

Exposure to a wide range of topics and ideas

Opportunities for in-depth discussion and reflection

Challenging and varied problem solving activities

Individually paced learning

Extended time for specific learning activities

Learning Needs Based on Gifted Characteristics, cont.

Characteristic	Learning Need
Independence in learning	Independent and self-directed learning tasks
Analytical thinking	Opportunities for high-level thinking and problem solving; “time to think”
Self-motivation	Active involvement in learning and setting goals for learning
Emotional sensitivity	Opportunities for reflection
Interest in adult issues	Exposure to real world issues
Abstract and holistic reasoning	Multidisciplinary approach to learning
Voracious reader	Access to extensive and diverse resources

Adapted from materials from State of Victoria, Australia

Creativity

Characteristics of creative students may include:

- openness to experience
- setting personal (unique) standards for evaluation
- ability to play with ideas
- willingness to take risks
- preference for complexity
- tolerance for ambiguity
- the ability to become submerged in a task

Creativity is not just about talent in the arts! Consider how classroom and home experiences can enhance these productive behaviors. Consider referring your child for gifted services if you see repeated evidence of these characteristics.

Source: ERIC EC Digest #E476 (1990) ERIC Clearinghouse

Perfectionistic and Underachieving Gifted Students

Characteristics of perfectionistic gifted students may include:

- Showing reluctance beginning a task
- Starting work over often and working slowly to avoid mistakes
- Having difficulty completing assignments on time
- Being needy of teacher (or parent) attention and crying easily when frustrated
- Arguing and defending in response to teacher (or parent) comments

Underachieving gifted students:

- May not see the philosophical need to complete assignments
- May feel unmotivated by required work that does not hold their interest or challenge them
- May sometimes be afraid to fail and so never begin

Adapted from work by Susan Winebrenner

Bright student or gifted student?

Helping parents understand why their prodigy might not be identified as gifted...

Bright student

Knows the answers
Is interested
Has good ideas
Works hard
Answers the questions
Is in the top group
Listens with interest
Learns with ease
Requires 6-8 repetitions for mastery
Enjoys peers
Grasps the meaning
Copies accurately
Enjoys school
Absorbs information
Is a technician
Enjoys sequential learning

Gifted Student

Asks the questions
Is highly curious
May have wild, silly ideas
May play around, yet tests well
Discusses in detail, elaborates
Goes beyond the group
May show strong feelings/opinions
Already knows
May require little repetition
Prefers adults
Draws inferences
Creates a new design
Enjoys learning
Manipulates information
Is an inventor
Thrives on complexity

-J. Szabos

Twice-exceptional Learners

(also referred to as students with dual exceptionalities)

demonstrating high performance

academic and/or artistic

also has a permanent or temporary cognitive, physical, behavioral, or emotional disability



*Needs differentiated services
to meet his/her potential*

The Paradox of Twice-exceptional Learners

Signs of Giftedness

- ~excellent long-term memory
- ~extensive vocabulary
- ~ excels in reading comprehension
- ~excels in mathematical reasoning
- ~advanced verbal skills in discussions
- ~facile with computers
- ~grasps abstract concepts
- ~performs better with challenging work
- ~thrives on complexity
- ~highly creative, imaginative
- ~reasons well
- ~is a keen observer

Signs of Learning Disabilities

- ~poor short-term memory
- ~speaking vocabulary more sophisticated than written
- ~struggles with decoding words
- ~has difficulty with computation
- ~refuses to do written work
- ~handwriting is illegible
- ~has difficulty with spelling and phonics
- ~struggles with sequential material
- ~has difficulty with rote memorization
- ~often inattentive in class
- ~emotions can overpower reasoning
- ~poor auditory memory
- ~poor listening skills

Source: Linda Kreger Silverman, PhD
Gifted Development Center © 1997-2011

Gifted Students with Asperger's Syndrome (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Students with Asperger's Syndrome may be highly verbal, have obsessive interests in certain subjects, have exceptional memories, usually have above average IQ's, are hypersensitive to sensory stimuli and experience social isolation. Gifted individuals can manifest these behaviors as well. However, even though children with Asperger's Syndrome manifest behaviors that are very similar to gifted children, upon closer examination, the *motivation* for the behaviors is quite different. For example, both gifted children and children with Asperger's Syndrome are highly verbal. Both populations usually have extremely advanced vocabularies and love to talk about their interests. The difference is that children with Asperger's are very literal and have a difficult time with abstract thought. This is not the case with the gifted child. The child with Asperger's will memorize a vast number of facts and parrot them back. The gifted child on the other hand, understands the concepts behind the words.

Cindy Little, 2002

Distinctions between characteristics of gifted students and gifted students with Asperger's Syndrome

Differentiating Characteristic	Gifted Student	Gifted with Asperger's Syndrome
Response to routines	May passively resist, but go along	Low tolerance for change in routines
Social Interaction	May be socially isolated	May be socially inept
Humor	Understands, uses humor in social situations	Does not reciprocate humor
Insight	Usually very good	Social insight often absent
Interests and knowledge base	Highly focused interests, extensive knowledge base	Highly focused interests, extensive knowledge base
Cognition	Advanced understanding	Advanced memorization
Empathy	Empathy for others and for abstract whole	Empathy for abstract whole; difficulty with empathy for others

Gifted Students with ADHD

Students with ADHD and gifted students responding to an inappropriate curriculum may have very similar characteristics, and a student may be *both* gifted and ADHD. Here is a brief description of their behaviors.

Bored Gifted Students

Poor attention, daydreaming
Low persistence on irrelevant tasks
Begin many projects, complete few
High activity level
Highly sensitive to criticism
Problems exist only in some situations
Questions rules, regulations
May appear disorganized
Intense

Students with ADHD

Poorly sustained attention
Low persistence on tasks without immediate consequences
Shift from one incomplete project to another
High activity, restlessness
Highly sensitive to criticism
Problems persist across many situations
Has difficulty adhering to rules
May appear forgetful, losing items
Impulsive

A Parent's Perspective

For a student who is gifted and has a learning disability, it means being bored to tears in math and science classes because they are too easy, while struggling to read grade-level books. It means not being able to read books that discuss science and other topics at his level of understanding. It means finding reading class books challenging, but the classroom discussions excruciatingly boring.

It means having his hands get cramped and tired after only one page of writing. It means being unable to write and think at the same time, so that his written work doesn't come anywhere near reflecting the depth of his thoughts. It means he is thinking about math concepts that his teachers don't understand, but having trouble writing them down.

For a student who is gifted and has ADHD, it means getting assignments wrong because he missed some of the instructions and therefore did the wrong thing correctly. It means getting into trouble for not paying attention because he is incapable of focusing on multi-step oral instructions, but seems too smart to not understand what he is supposed to do. It means getting in trouble for losing control at the end of the day, when he is tired and his medication has worn off, because "you're too smart to forget the rules".

-Lee Singer

- It is important to note that for the twice-exceptional learner, his or her own unique combination of characteristics means that an area of giftedness may mask a disability or a disability may mask an area of giftedness.
- While a disability may mask giftedness, so too can barriers associated with diversity, culture, and socioeconomic status. Areas of advanced ability clearly demonstrate the gifts and talents present in all subgroups of the general population.

Regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status, indicators of advanced ability include:

- *the ability to manipulate a symbol system,*
- *the ability to think logically,*
- *the ability to use stored knowledge to solve problems,*
- *the ability to reason by analogy,*
- *the ability to extrapolate knowledge to different circumstances, and*
- *creativity.*

Source: Griffin, 1992; Clasen, 1993; Coleman & Gallagher, 1995)



Regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status, indicators of advanced ability include:

- *resiliency: the ability to cope with school while living in challenging circumstances*
- *the ability to take on adult roles at home, such as managing the household and supervising siblings, even at the expense of school attendance and achievement,*
- *a strong sense of self, pride, and worth,*
- *leadership ability and an independent mind, and*
- *understanding one's cultural heritage.*

Source: Griffin, 1992; Clasen, 1993; Coleman & Gallagher, 1995)



Culturally and Linguistically Different Gifted Students

Culturally and linguistically different gifted students may:

- Acquire language with ease and rapidity
- Set high standards for themselves
- Use creative ability in problem solving
- Demonstrate strong leadership skills in their own culture
- Show abilities in fine or practical arts
- Have a richness in imagination and informal language
- Easily adapt to new situations
- Self-direct

Adapted from work by Susan Winebrenner

Resources for Further Study

Helping Gifted Children Soar by Carol A. Strip, Great Potential Press, 2000

Gifted Adolescents by Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Ph.D., Prufrock Press, Inc., 2010

On the Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Children by Tracy L. Cross, Prufrock Press, 2010

Patterns and Profiles of Promising Learners From Poverty by Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Ed.D. Prufrock Press, Inc., 2009

Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good? by Miriam Adderholdt and Jan Goldberg, Free Spirit Publishing, 1999

Real Boys by William Pollack, Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1998

Smart Boys by Barbara A. Kerr & Sanford J. Cohn, Great Potential Press, 2001

Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare, Guilford Press, 2009

Smart Girls by Barbara A. Kerr, Gifted Psychology Press, 1994

The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know? by Neihart, Reis, Robinson, and Moon, Prufrock Press, 2002

Work Left Undone: Choices & Compromises of Talented Females by Sally M. Reis, Creative Learning Press, 1998



Resources for Further Study

- National Association for Gifted Children <http://nagc.org/>
- Virginia Association for Gifted Children <http://www.vagifted.org/>
- ASCD <http://www.ascd.org/Default.aspx>
- Hoagies Gifted Page <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>