

THE CONCEPT OF SPECIAL CHILDREN - TALENTED, CREATIVE, GIFTED CHILDREN

Introduction

Hope we as students understand that everybody require opportunities to learn, grow, and be challenged to strive for excellence. Students with exceptional talents and learning potential have needs that require specific knowledge and attention. With careful nurturing and appropriate education, gifted students have the potential to make a unique contribution to their communities and the world. Academic growth, creative potential and sometimes enthusiasm for educational success and eventual professional achievements and substantial contributions to society are also lost. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and /or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realise their contribution to self and society. An interesting phenomenon, relative to the gifted children is noteworthy. While lower ability students tend to be low in all mental abilities, high performers" are not as likely to be uniformly high in all areas. Thus, Einstein, who was a great scientist, was not a playwright; nor was Shakespeare a great scientist.

Definitions

There is no single accepted definition of giftedness. Some of the more common definitions in use today can be variedly discussed.



Thirty years ago "giftedness" was defined by ones IQ score. Although it is no longer accepted today as the only measure, no doubt that it is still used by many. It is simple and not entirely without merit. If a student has a very high IQ, it is a significant indicator, indeed the single most important one, of a student's academic potential. It is not meaningless or trivial. If a student scores highly on an IQ test, but performs at an average or below average level academically, this needs further investigation.

Giftedness in children denotes their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity. Giftedness is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits. Gifted children either possess or are capable of developing these traits and applying them to any valuable area of human performance. They have an above average ability with high levels of task

commitment and creativity. Gifted and talented children are identified by virtue of outstanding abilities and high performance. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and /or potential ability in any of the areas of general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual performance arts and the ability of the children.

Giftedness is the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities, in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual in at least the top 10 percent of age peers.

'Gifted and talented' describes children with the ability or potential to develop significantly ahead of their peers. The key word is potential. Potential isn't enough; a child needs support and guidance to achieve his/her gifted potential. Supporting and encouraging gifted children are exactly where home and school need to partner in. There are 4 domains representing giftedness such as intellectual, creative, socio-affective and sensory motor. 'Gifted' learners are those with high abilities in one or more academic subjects or those who have practical skills in areas such as sport, music, design or creativity and performing arts.

Skills and attributes such as leadership, decision-making and organisation may also be taken into account.

Identifying giftedness

There is no formula to identify gifted students. Ultimately teacher's knowledge, insight and wisdom are even more important than the results of standardised testing. This is particularly true with students whose first language is not English, those with disabilities, and those from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Then, we have already seen a check list and if a child is seen having many of the characteristics in any one or more categories, then the child may be identified as a gifted child. Without identification, and sometimes at a young age, this potential may never be realised. Some of the sources of information which can be used as part of the identification process are, such as the results of standardised tests in the areas of cognitive ability, general achievement, and creativity, teacher's observations, including anecdotal reports and informal assessments. This can be further discovered by various checklists and inventories, nominations by parents, peers, and self for various activities a high level of interest and task commitment in a particular area of learning and so on. Understanding the various typical characteristics across different aspects of a gifted child helps in identifying giftedness.

Behavioural aspects Gifted children's behaviour differs from that of their age-mates. They Show incredible intensity in energy, imagination, intellectual prowess, sensitivity, and emotion as compared to other children. They have a passionate interest in one or more topics, and would spend all available time learning more about it if possible. They can work independently at an earlier age and can concentrate for longer periods. Their interests are both wildly diverse and intensely focused. They like to learn new things,

examine the unusual, and are highly inquisitive. Gifted children commonly learn basic skills better, more quickly, and with less practice.

They are better able to construct and handle abstractions. They recognise and interpret nonverbal cues that other children can't. They do not need to watch the teacher to hear what is being said; they can operate on multiple brain channels simultaneously and process more than one task at a time. They do not take things for granted; seek to find out "how" and "why" more often. They tackle tasks and problems in a well-organized, goal-directed, and efficient manner. They exhibit an intrinsic motivation to learn, find out, or explore. They are often very persistent with a "I'd rather do it myself" attitude. Many gifted children learn to read early, with better comprehension. Gifted children often read widely, quickly, and intensely and have large vocabularies. They are hyperactive. They usually respond and relate well to parents, teachers, and other adults. They may prefer the company of older children and adults to that of their peers.

Learning Characteristics

We can also analyse gifted child with few common learning characteristics. They show keen observation and they have an eye for important details. They learn at a much faster pace and process material to a much greater depth. They read a great deal on their own, preferring books/magazines meant for older children. Such children often take great pleasure in intellectual activity. These kids have well-developed powers of abstraction, conceptualisation, and synthesis.

Few more characteristics of such kids are, they readily see cause-effect relationships. They display a questioning attitude and seek information for its own sake. They are often sceptical, critical, and evaluative. They are quick to spot inconsistencies. They also have a large information base about a variety of topics, which they can recall quickly. They have a strong memory, making review unnecessary. They quickly perceive similarities, differences, and anomalies. They readily grasp core concepts making valid generalizations about events/ people/ objects. They deal with complicated material by sorting it out and analyzing it systematically.



Creative Characteristics

Creative abilities of gifted children set them apart from other children of their age.

They are fluent, flexible thinkers who are able to generate possibilities, consequences, or related ideas.

They are original thinkers, seeking new, unusual, or unconventional associations and combinations. They can also see relationships among seemingly unrelated objects, ideas, or facts. They are elaborate thinkers, producing new steps, ideas, responses, to a basic idea. Gifted children are willing to entertain complexity and seem to thrive on problem solving. They are good guessers and can readily construct hypotheses or "what if" questions. They are often aware of their own impulsiveness and irrationality, and show emotional sensitivity. They are extremely curious about objects, ideas, situations, or events. They often display intellectual playfulness and like to fantasize and imagine. They can be less intellectually inhibited than their peers are in expressing opinions and ideas, They often disagree spiritedly with others statements. They are sensitive to beauty and are attracted to aesthetic values. There are many qualities that may characterise gifted learners but key factors are two, which can be classified into Precociousness and Intensity. Precociousness is to simply put, gifted students learn more quickly than their peers. Intensity is a quality which may be seen in both the emotional and cognitive realms. Gifted students are apt to display these intensities in areas such as:

1. Psychomotor - energetic, physically active and have difficulty unwinding at bed time.
2. Sensual - great sensitivity to input from all five senses; includes aesthetic awareness.
3. Imagination - vivid, detailed imagination; "thinks in pictures;" strong reaction to dreams.
4. Intellectual - loves academic challenges, learning new things; intensely curious.
5. Emotional - responds to virtually all emotions in an intense manner, which can also make one susceptible to depression.

Categories of Giftedness Observable Student Characteristics

It is important to define the categories of giftedness observable student characteristics as it comes in many forms. Often some forms of obvious giftedness get more attention and others get ignored or go unnoticed. This should be avoided.



General Intellectual Ability - This is the usual clever child and tends to be cut to average size. This type of giftedness is not confined only to academic achievement in school. Typical characteristics are those discussed above as learning characteristics.

Specific Academic Aptitude - This refers to natural inclination and excellence in a particular area – science, math, language, social sciences etc. Often a child gifted with in this category, although may show a special inclination to one subject, will be good in everything else.

Leadership Ability – Abilities demonstrated by this type of giftedness can be reviewed as capacity to carry out responsibility well, capability to demonstrate self-confidence and so on. They are well liked by classmates.

Leadership ability helps the kid to express ideas well, adapt readily to new situations, enjoy being around other people but they tend to dominate others. Preference to participate in most social activities in school and excellent athletic activities is also a part of this.

Visual and Performing Arts Ability - Abilities demonstrated by this type of giftedness also can be classified into many segments.

Visual: Kids with visual arts ability enjoys art activities, they can display interest in other student's art work, will also elaborate on ideas from other people and try variety of media and will have a criticism of their own work.

Music: When kids have music as their performing arts ability, they tend to sustain interest in music And will readily remember melodies, would display keen awareness and identification of a variety of sounds heard at a given moment and will be able to perceive fine discriminations in musical tone and will play a musical instrument with interest.

Drama: Kids with drama as their performing arts ability will prefer to volunteer themselves to participate in classroom skits and plays. They will also have the potential to tell stories or render accounts of experiences. They can use appropriate gestures and formal expressions to communicate feelings and thoughts. They will also handle body

with ease and poise and can hold the attention of a group when speaking. Very shortly they can also create original plays or plays from stories.

Kinaesthetic Ability - Abilities demonstrated by this type of giftedness can be discussed. Kids with kinaesthetic ability will demonstrate good control of body movements, has excellent eye-hand coordination, manipulate objects and puzzles with ease. They also complete complex mazes and word searches with ease and will learn new gross motor activities readily. They also have good sense of rhythm as well as will excel in athletic activities.



What can be done by school?

Schools have a responsibility to meet the educational needs of all their pupils. For pupils considered to be gifted and talented, this includes providing greater challenges in lessons and perhaps also further opportunities for pupils to develop their gifts or talents outside of the normal timetable. Schools must show these children that they are valued, giving them appropriate academic challenge and also chances to be together, to feel less isolated. 4 levels of activities may be considered.

1. Level 1: Activities intended for all students should incorporate some activities to challenge even the most gifted. These include thinking skills training, independent projects and exploratory activities.
2. Level 2: Many students must be motivated to participate in academic competitions, clubs, performing and visual arts.
3. Level 3: Some Students may be taken up for advanced classes, individual training, and participation in special programs.
4. Level 4: The few students identified as gifted need be given personal professional mentorships. There could be structured acceleration programs for the gifted. We need to consider the qualities such as the emotional needs of gifted students, their need for peer interaction, re-organization of the curriculum to include higher level skills and concepts. They also should be given an attention so that the subject matter organised according to structure and/or theme. Diversity of teaching strategies and learning experiences are to be implemented. As they are far more ahead in social and emotional maturity - the student should not have serious adjustment difficulties. Overall health of the child - frequent ill health is likely to result in missing school which may place too much stress even on a highly-gifted student.

Technology and the gifted

Computer technology, and, of course, the internet, is now an integral part of education. As a powerful tool for enrichment, this has opened unprecedented opportunities. Some specific uses for highly capable students of this area include, Electronic mentorship or electronic communication between mentor and student and online courses, which continue to grow in number and availability. There is also an overwhelming amount of information available. Discrete and intelligent use will go a long way in this path. E-mails and chat facilities bring likeminded people together. As we have disadvantages in everything, the flip side of this is it was concluded after often the perpetrators of computer crimes have been both young and “gifted”. There is much on the internet that, at worst, is dangerous and, at best, is a waste of time. Not all valuable or necessary information is on the Internet. Libraries travel, personal experiences and positive human interaction are still valuable sources of learning. Although human communication can be enhanced through electronic communication, it cannot replace the „real thing.”

Gifted children with special needs

Years ago, people did not associate giftedness with disabilities. At first glance, the concepts appear contradictory. However, they are not mutually exclusive. Although practically any disability can co-occur with giftedness, three of the most common ones

will be addressed below: Some children need to be understood as twice exceptional – one, because they are gifted and two because they have a mental disorder.

Learning Disabilities and Giftedness

Students with learning disabilities are characterised by overall average or above average intelligence but a discrepancy area of academic performance.



The incidence of learning disabilities in the gifted populations is at least as high as in the general population. For example, a student may be outstanding in math and science but average or below average in language-related subjects or vice versa. Occasionally, students may be strong in all but just one isolated area, for example, writing. In years past, no doubt, some of these students left school feeling frustrated, discouraged, and

sometimes angry. Even with our current knowledge they are not easily identified and tend to fall into one of the categories.

1. Those who are not identified as having learning disabilities but are recognised as gifted. In this case, giftedness hides the learning disability and sometimes these students tend to be dropouts.
2. Those who are identified as having a learning disability but are not seen as gifted. The learning disability may be so severe or in a critical academic area, such as reading, that it “hides” whatever gifts the student may possess. These children tend to get frustrated.

Sometimes a psycho-educational assessment may be necessary to fully understand an individual profile of strengths and corresponding weaknesses.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Giftedness

The hallmark of ADHD is both impulse control and hyperactivity. It is quite possible to have a quiet and compliant student go through school without the giftedness being identified.

Asperger’s Syndrome

Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) is one of a number of conditions that falls under the umbrella of Autism Spectrum Disorders. People with Asperger’s Syndrome often have above average ability, but have some degree of the social deficits that characterise autism. Gifted children with AS often show verbal fluency, superior memory, early fascination with letters and numbers, and passionate enthusiasm for particular topics of study that are also seen in normal gifted students. Despite these similarities, the autistic like qualities of the behaviour can be used to diagnose AS. Early intervention is important because it enables the child to get the help needed to develop social skills. Without this intervention, students with Asperger’s are very likely to be the victims of bullying, this may result in their giftedness being compromised, and their lives getting quite miserable.

Savants

Savant syndrome is a condition in which a person with serious mental disabilities, including autistic disorder, demonstrates profound and prodigious capacities or abilities far in excess of what would be considered normal. They score very low on IQ tests, while demonstrating exceptional skills or brilliance in specific areas, such as rapid calculation, art, memory, or musical ability.

People with savant syndrome may have neuro-developmental disorders, notably autism spectrum disorders or brain injuries. 50% of savants have autism; the other 50% often have some other forms of central nervous system injury or disease.[Savant skills are usually found in one or more of five major areas: art, musical abilities, calendar

calculation, mathematics and spatial skills. Such children are outside the scope of normal school and must be referred to specialists in special education.

Summary

All students require opportunities to learn, grow, and be challenged to strive for excellence. With careful nurturing and appropriate education, gifted students have the potential to make a unique contribution to their communities and the world. Without this, the price we and they pay is lost academic growth, lost creative potential and lost enthusiasm for educational success and professional achievements and contributions to society. While lower ability students tend to be low in all mental abilities, high performers' are not as likely to be uniformly high in all areas.

Thus, Einstein, while a great mathematician, was not a playwright; nor was Shakespeare a great scientist. Gifted and talented children are children who are identified as those who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. Gifted children either possess or are capable of developing above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity and applying them to any valuable area of human performance. Potential isn't enough; a child needs support and guidance to achieve his/her gifted potential. There are 4 domains representing giftedness: intellectual, creative, socio-affective and sensor motor.

Gifted children may be identified through their typical behavioural characteristics, learning characteristics and creative characteristics. There are many qualities that may characterise gifted learners but two are key factors: Precociousness and Intensity. Giftedness may be categorised as giftedness in intellectual ability, specific academic ability, leadership ability, ability in performing arts and kinaesthetic ability. There is no formula to identify gifted students. Ultimately teacher knowledge, insight and wisdom are important. Without identification, and sometimes at a young age, this potential may never be realised.



Schools must show these children that they are valued, giving them appropriate academic challenge and also opportunities to develop their particular area of giftedness.

As a powerful tool for enrichment, the computer has opened unprecedented opportunities for the honing of giftedness. Some children need to be understood as twice exceptional – one, because they are gifted and two because they have a mental disorder. They should be treated for their specific disorder and simultaneously be encouraged in their giftedness.