What is Giftedness?

There is no one agreed upon definition of Giftedness. It can be defined by the heightened intensity of cognitive and intellectual abilities. Children who are gifted often excel in areas including motor functions, language abilities, and understanding information. Many people who are gifted have a difficult time socializing with others and generally keep to themselves.

It is said that in Canadian schools, giftedness can be diagnosed in schools if the child tests in the top two percentile for IQ in comparison to the entire population. Giftedness does not merely include being intelligent; rather, those who are gifted, excel in all areas of learning from a very young age. "Giftedness is defined as the asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (The Columbus Group, 1991)."

Common Characteristics of Gifted Students

- Advanced vocabulary at an early age
- Keen observation and curiosity
- Retention of a variety of information
- Periods of intense concentration
- Ability to understand complex concepts and abstract thoughts
- A broad and changing spectrum of interests
- Strong critical thinking skills and self-criticism
- Parental descriptions of their gifted child’s early behavior
- Longer concentration span in comparison to that of an average child
- Early and accurate use of large vocabulary
- Ability to reproduce stories and events at an early age
- Ability to read at an early age with little instruction
- Gifted students tend to acquire and process information and solve problems better, faster or at earlier ages than other students.
- Highly gifted children tend to make simple tasks more complex, have a need for extreme precision, understand complex patterns quickly, reason abstractly at an earlier age, and have exceptional memory.

Social Skills and Relationships

In a study conducted by Swiatek, he discovered three statistically reliable strategies for highly gifted adolescents to help deal with the social consequences of being gifted. The strategies included: denial of giftedness, popularity, peer acceptance and conformity. There was no gender difference in this strategy.

Students who are extremely far from the norm intellectually seem to have more trouble fitting in socially and emotionally as well.

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Identifying the Gifted in your Classroom

One of the best ways to determine if a child has giftedness is by asking parents. Many parents know at a young age that their child is exceptional. By assessing and considering the characteristics of giftedness is a great first step in identifying gifted children. **Do not** overlook students who display some of these characteristics, but have another exceptionality. Many students have many exceptionalities. Students with physical disabilities are often overlooked even though there disability in no way affects them cognitively. Students are sometimes called **“twice-exceptional children”** This makes them difficult to identify as they seem like average learners, because they are bright enough to compensate for disability.

Teaching Strategies

In your classroom, it is important for all students to be engaged and challenged. For the students with giftedness you need to consider their cognitive skills. Gifted students don’t need to be given extra work, or different material. Rather they should be challenged more deeply on the curriculum the class is working on. Although working on individual research projects can be beneficial as it requires a higher level of thinking, students with giftedness don’t always want to be separated and seen as different.

Within your classroom it is important to have **understanding, support and challenging learning materials and tools** available for students. Engaging gifted students in special hobbies, sports or activities is often helpful. It is also key to have realistic expectation, don’t expect too much out of them, just like all students they have strengths and weaknesses. Be aware of the potential challenges for gifted students, as they often have trouble learning concepts which results in frustration and/or struggle with social interactions. In some schools, programs for gifted children are available, as well as online courses. It is important to keep in mind that the advancement of students who are gifted in a grade and/or subject is an option for some students.

References


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