

3 Characteristics of Gifted Children

The gifted children are not a homogeneous group, and every child possesses a unique blend of traits. However, when we look at gifted children as a group, we can see clusters of common characteristics. The last century has seen a significant shift in how theorists view giftedness in children and subsequently how practitioners should identify it. During the 20th century gifted children were solely identified by academic achievement i.e. those who scored within the top 1% on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. But the last 30-40 years of research into gifted education has shown that performance based definitions of giftedness are insufficient.

Traditional approaches fail to identify three main groups of gifted children:

1. Children who have not managed to translate their above average ability into above average achievement for a variety of possible reasons.
2. Children whose above average ability is masked by a learning or physical disability, known generally as Twice Exceptional Children.
3. Traditional approaches only value academic intelligence and generalise performance, masking peaks and troughs due to specific abilities - alternative intelligences are not respected.

Common characteristics of gifted:

1. Children who are gifted usually have very long attention spans. They can remain absorbed in study much longer than most children. In fact, they may rebel against time limits that characterize most educational design.
2. Most seem to learn basic skills faster and with less practice.
3. Most possess a large vocabulary. Personal histories usually reveal that, as infants, they began to talk earlier and used complex sentences earlier than the average child.
4. They are extremely curious and continually question not only who, what, where, and when, but why and how at a very young age.
5. Their sense of humour favours puns and riddles.
6. They often exhibit moral and social concerns (e.g., foreign policy, economics, and environment) typical of much older individuals.
7. Their ideas are often considered to be “far out.”
8. They usually show aptitude in one or more areas of artistic endeavour.
9. They have a need to work independently on some projects.

10. They prefer discovery and creative approaches to learning. Those who are reading oriented often demonstrate almost total recall of information learned through this medium.
11. Their leadership abilities tend to surface quite early. They will often dominate ideas and procedures in group projects.
12. At a very early age, many have demonstrated empathy for the handicapped and those less fortunate than them.

Children who fit into this group are more likely to:

- think quickly and accurately;
- work systematically;
- generate creative working solutions;
- work flexibly, processing unfamiliar information and applying knowledge, experience and insight into unfamiliar situations;
- communicate their thoughts and ideas well;
- be determined, diligent and interested in uncovering patterns;
- achieve, or show potential, in a wide range of contexts;
- be particularly creative;
- show great sensitivity or empathy;
- demonstrate particular physical dexterity or skill;
- make sound judgements;
- be outstanding leaders or team members;
- be fascinated by, or passionate about, a particular subject or aspect of the curriculum;
- and
- demonstrate high levels of attainment across a range of subjects or within a particular subject or aspect of work.

Gifted learners differ not only from standard population but also among themselves. The designations of the learner as ‘moderately’, ‘highly’ or ‘exceptionally’ gifted is not a matter of “labelling” the child. Rather it is a recognition that a group of gifted children can differ as much, or even more, among themselves as would a group of average ability children, and that different levels of ability require different types and levels of response.