

# GIFTED CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

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**Abstract.** The subject of gifted children is actual and of interest. This is due to the multiple implications alleged by the specifics, needs, development and interaction presumed by these children with significantly above-average abilities. The specificity of gifted children is marked by diversity. There are a significant number of areas where special abilities can be found. In addition, giftedness can also be associated with other personal conditions, even by various deficits. Thus, the necessities of gifted children are often significantly customized leading to a wide variety. The care and development of gifted children is a challenge for both parents and the education system. For parents, the characteristics of child development, marked by particularities, discrepancies, atypical needs can lead to difficulties ranging across a wide range, from providing the needed resources to social isolation. Therefore being the parent of a gifted child implies responsibility and openness for the parent in identifying and supporting the development of the child, concurrently with a permanent opening to new information on this area. For the education system the challenges are also multiple. Firstly, gifted children require adequate didactic and auxiliary staff. Simultaneously with the preparation of educators, it is necessary to update and continuously adapt the didactic material according to the type and stages of the manifestation of the giftedness. Last but not least, giftedness may also require changes to the rules, programs or even legislation so that they can be valued as much as possible.

**Keywords:** gifted children; development; education

Why focus on the gifted? This is not a matter of selection or exclusion of others but rather an effort to prevent losing human and social potential. Also, offering gifted children more opportunities can be approached from the perspective of individual human rights or as a matter of equal opportunities. Understanding their need for education and adjusting education to their capabilities is a long term effort that requires multiple theoretical clarifications. For this it is important answering unclear or debated topics and find long term solutions. The first one is defining giftedness. “Arriving at a suitable definition requires clarity of purpose about:

- The contrasting range of overlapping terms and concepts available in discussing high ability
  - The organisational ethos underpinning the agreed definition
  - The availability of generic definitions and how they might be used to scaffold a whole-school formula
- Theoretical models of gifted performance and how they relate to learners and learning within the school

- Appropriate professional development activities to achieve consensus.” (Tunnicliffe, 2010)

Each point of the above list is a matter of debate. Giftedness has multiple definitions resulted from different cultures and several authors. The purpose of these definitions could be theoretical or practical. An example: “Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society.” (Marland, 1972) Another critical point are reliable instrument that can be used to determine the presence and grade of giftedness for any areas considered.

Although seems a useful and logical definition it raises the problem of defining high performance. Also, a separate discussion is reserved for the areas of high performance considered. This is why in the same author offers a list of these areas:

- General intellectual ability;
- Specific academic aptitude;
- Creative or productive thinking;
- Leadership ability;
- Visual and performing arts;
- Psychomotor ability.” (Marland, 1972)

Extending giftedness beyond intellectual and academic abilities allows including more children in different programs and this is an institutional achievement that echoes in any family that has a gifted child. But, such specific list is still restrictive because it is anytime possible as different social values or scientific advancements to consider further areas. As can be seen the source mentioned above, the Marland Report is a state initiative but there are also other non-governmental organizations active in the field of gifted children. These two actors can cooperate. It is of interest if there is “legislation or special provisions for gifted children and whether the government or educational services” “in contact with non-governmental organizations concerned with gifted children”. In February 1994 only few countries had such a specific legislation or a cooperation between state institutions and non-governmental organizations and only four countries had permanent contacts or even were offering financial support to NGOs (Demetriou, 1994).

Most often giftedness is considered an intellectual ability (IQ score  $\geq 130$ ). But as mentioned above other gifted children may prove over average artistic, musical, creative and/or leadership abilities. It is recommended to spot giftedness as soon as possible to nurture talents in due time. Until age of 5/6 there are limited possibilities to include gifted children into a gifted education program so that family should try to identify and nurture own children giftedness.

The common means used to determine giftedness are IQ (Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children or Stanford Binet), ability and achievement tests, observation and/or a review of the children’s activities/results/products in and outside school. It’s important to keep in mind that any tests used to assess giftedness should don’t limit the amount of knowledge children can prove (Cicerchia, M.).

In time parents and educators found out that gifted children present often specific traits and behaviors:

a. They are curious and ask a lot of questions. Gifted kids are often curious about the world around them and may ask detailed questions to satisfy their thirst for knowledge. This curiosity goes beyond simple interest in a topic and can extend to aspects that are seemingly outside of the scope of a lesson. In a school setting, the child may not be satisfied with only learning what is necessary in order to do well on an exam or complete an assignment. At home, there may not always be time or the background knowledge required to provide answers. While this can be frustrating for teachers, parents and children alike, it's important to avoid discouraging a child from asking questions as this can be de-motivating and shut-down future communication attempts.

b. They take their own approach to assignments. Whereas bright students look to please the teacher and finish assignments, gifted children often have their own way of going about things. This can be due to a desire to focus on only one aspect of a topic or a perceived lack of challenge in the task itself. For example, in a school essay they may only partially answer the question or go off on a tangent. In a Math setting a child may take an alternative route to problem solving than that which was required by the question. In both situations it's important for teachers to be tolerant and avoid reprimanding or penalizing the child for not following directions. This can damage morale and self-esteem and result in less effort being put into future assignments. Teachers may also notice that gifted children prefer to work alone and can easily get lost in their thoughts.

c. They have a large vocabulary and prefer adult conversation. One of the first things people notice about gifted children is their vocabulary. They often understand and use more words than their peers, including abstract and figurative language. This may be due to their reading habits and exposure to more advanced texts. It can also be thanks to a heightened sensitivity to syntax and an ability to guess at the meaning of new words encountered in context. It's also easier for these kids to remember words, as they require less repetition in order to acquire language. As a result, they may feel more at ease communicating with adults due to their advanced language skills. Nonetheless, it is still important to encourage a child to engage with his or her peers to prevent them from becoming isolated and withdrawing due to perceived differences in intellectual ability.

d. They have original ideas. A child with giftedness is an original thinker and able to access abstract reasoning and bring together ideas from different areas. They may have a wild imagination and develop their own sophisticated stories, songs and/or plays. These examples of creative work can contain complex language and show an advanced appreciation for humor.

e. They are cognitively advanced and able to self-teach new skills. Children who are gifted may teach themselves how to read and write before they learn in school. They often have advanced cognitive reasoning skills and a good memory. Some estimates suggest that an average student needs to hear something repeated 8-15 times in order to acquire it, whereas a gifted child may only need to encounter a

word, fact or idea 1-2 times. In Math class, these kids may use logic and reasoning to solve problems before they have been introduced to the target concept. They learn quickly and do not require as much practice as other children to develop new skills. They may easily become bored when a lesson is repetitive and this can lead to them tuning out. Children with giftedness can often benefit from a condensed curriculum that covers more material in less time.

f. They are sensitive to their environment. From a young age the gifted child is very alert and tuned into his or her environment. Some have acute concentration skills and can easily become hyper-focused on a task. It is through engaging with new stimuli that they are able to develop cognitively. That's why it is important to ensure gifted children receive adequate stimulation, particularly in school settings that offers plenty of room for advancement.

g. They have strong feelings. These children may be quite opinionated and have strong feelings about topics that are important to them. They can also be more aware of the opinions and feelings of other people. However, this does not necessarily translate into knowing how to deal with this information through appropriate social channels. They may be quite emotional. Because some gifted kids are extremely self-aware, it can cause them to become introvert and feel that they don't fit in. This is one reason why parents may choose to move a child into a gifted program where they will have other intellectually advanced kids as peers." (Cicerchia).

Having gifted children in the family is not going to be an easy task all the time. Their high activity level, uneasy/multiple areas questions or even approaches can significantly test family members' knowledge, ties and resources, especially when there are other siblings and parents struggle to find a balance and offer the optimal attention and resources to each of them. This effort can be even higher when the giftedness is associated with academic/learning difficulties and parents have unspoken assumptions or open disagreements about how to deal with the gifted child or, are facing different „views on how best to meet their minority child's needs, or by unhelpful advice and interventions from the extended family or in-laws, or simply as a result of the exhaustion and confusion that they are experiencing as individuals" (Distin, 2006). In these conditions, would be useful any piece of advice from specialists or people with similar experiences, patients, good communication skills and ability to make ponderate decisions. Parents most often try to meet their gifted children needs struggling in the same time to clarify which would be the optimal way or means and what is reasonable to do. But despite their best wishes is also expectable for parents to imagine, reinforce and find best ways to communicate rules that prevent them from exhaustion. If gifted children are not managed appropriately they also can bring a significant emotional burden through conflicts among siblings or contesting parents authority. If these negative scenarios are developing for time long enough parents can burn out or feel helpless in managing their children/family. But should be kept in mind that even if giftedness was identified and well managed in the family, special dedicated programs, professional staff or institutions (kindergarten or schools) could be scarcely or not at all available compromising partially children's talents. There are authors that consider that the

role of family is crucial for development of gifted children: “The family and its role in moulding the gifted child’s attitudes, values and aspirations may well be the most significant factor in talent development. If the family does not value, encourage and facilitate the growth of the young child’s gifts, they will not develop, in later life, as talents. Indeed, in Bloom’s study of 120 young adults who had achieved eminence, at an unusually early age, as pianists, sculptors, swimmers, tennis players, research mathematicians and research neurologists (Bloom, 1985), the role of the school appears to have been less than the home influences, including parenting style, and the encouragement of mentors who took a personal, as well as professional, interest in the fostering of the student’s exceptional abilities.” (Gross, 2004)

If appropriate institutional conditions are accessible could be expected like gifted children (most often those ranking top – 3 to 5% - among same age peers) to be sent for screening. In this process is expected to identify areas and levels of giftedness (Cicerchia; Tunnicliffe, 2010).

Further, related to able, gifted and talented (AG&T) learners in educational institutions there are few more areas of interests (Tunnicliffe, 2010):

1. Institutions policy for AG&T recognizing that:
  - Policy is the key to establishing and safeguarding effective practice
  - There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to policy development and discrete AG&T policies can either stand alone or be linked to more generic teaching and learning and/or inclusion policies
  - Policies need to be as unique as the institutions in which they are formulated.
2. Issues of whole-school provision that include:
  - The evaluation of the learning environment
  - Cross-curricular planning in support of creative learning
  - Auditing the impact of curriculum support initiatives for the more able
  - The role of school leadership in embedding personalised learning practices for AG&T pupils
  - Using AG&T mentors as a part of a coordinated learning support programme.
3. Effective provision for AG&T learners incorporating the following factors:
  - A learning environment that expects and celebrates excellence
  - A differentiated, open-ended approach, enriched by both critical and creative thinking
  - It can be modelled and stimulated through appropriate textual frameworks or starting points
  - Learners are helped to perceive connections and appreciate links across diverse areas of study
  - A personalised understanding of learning needs and styles is promoted.
4. Provision for AG&T learners, outside the classroom, which can involve:
  - A wide range of academic clubs and/or interest groups made available within an extended school day
  - Taking advantage of external providers, agencies, learning partnerships and the wider community to extend learning opportunities
  - The possibility of personalised provision for individual learners

- Support for parents and carers in encouraging their AG&T youngsters
- Bringing external learning opportunities into the classroom using ICT.

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