

Characteristics and Needs of Gifted Students

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Who Are the Gifted?

Giftedness is a collection of certain characteristics that have been displayed by remarkable adults and children past and present. Among the gifted there is great diversity; they are not a homogeneous group. Each gifted person has a different combination of characteristics and demonstrates them in different ways. Gifted people may be uneven (asynchronous) in development; a gifted individual may have extraordinary ability in several areas, but be average or even below average in other areas.

Years of research about giftedness indicate that the following traits—in some combination—are characteristic of gifted youngsters:

- keenly observant
- learns very quickly with few repetitions
- highly curious
- independent or non-conforming
- creative
- ability to retain information
- imaginative
- able to concentrate intensely
- able to develop a social conscience—sense of justice and responsibility—early
- able to set high standards for self
- intuitive
- empathetic
- persistent
- resistant to routine; prefers challenge
- interested in a wide variety of topics
- intensely involved in a topic
- able to reason abstractly and perceive relationships earlier than others
- mature, playful, or unusual sense of humor.

These characteristics may be assets or liabilities in the school setting. The gifted child may or may not finish class assignments quickly and may be either well-behaved or disruptive. Many gifted pupils are “good students” and high achievers, but others, equally gifted, are not. Because of their diversity and individuality, there is no easy formula for the identification of gifted students or for developing programming and services to meet their varying needs.

Twelve Traits of Giftedness: A Non-Biased Profile

Adapted from material from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and Mary Ruth Coleman, Ph.D., University of North Carolina.

| Trait, Aptitude, or Behavior | General Description | How It May Look | CLD (Culturally & Linguistically Diverse) Considerations |
|--|--|---|--|
| Motivation Evidence of desire to learn. | Internal drive or encouragement that initiates, directs, or sustains individual or group behavior in order to satisfy a need or attain a goal. | Demonstrates persistence in pursuing or completing self-selected tasks (may be culturally influenced); evident in school or non-school activities. Enthusiastic learner; has aspirations to be somebody, to do something. | Competitiveness may not be valued. Group achievement may be valued over individual accomplishment. |
| Interests Intense, sometimes unusual, interests. | Activities, avocations, objects, etc. that have special worth or significance and are given special attention. | Unusual or advanced interests, topic, or activity; self-starter; pursues an activity unceasingly beyond the group. | Some students may prefer teacher-directed learning. In some other cultures, individual choice is preferred for learning activities. |
| Communication Skills Highly expressive with words, numbers, or symbols. | Transmission and reception of signals or meanings through a system of symbols (codes, gestures, language, and numbers). | Unusual ability to communicate (verbally, nonverbally, physically, artistically, symbolically; uses particularly apt examples, illustrations, or elaborations. | May see strong interpersonal skills or a preference for unassertive or indirect ways of self-expression. May prefer to use collective ideas. |
| Problem-Solving Ability Effective, often inventive, strategies for recognizing and solving problems. | Process of determining a correct sequence of alternatives leading to a desired goal or to successful completion of a performance task. | Unusual ability to devise or adopt a systematic strategy to solve problems and to change the strategy if it is not working; creates new designs; inventor. | May prefer community-based problem-solving. |
| Memory Large storehouse of information on school or non-school topics. | Exceptional ability to retain and retrieve information. | Already knows; needs only 1 – 2 repetitions for mastery; has a wealth of information about school and non-school topics; pays attention to details; manipulates information. | What the student chooses to memorize may be different from teacher’s expectations. May use stories & legends as a memory tool. |
| Inquiry/Curiosity Questions, experiments, explores. | Method or process of seeking knowledge, understanding, or information. | Asks unusual questions for age; plays around with ideas; extensive exploratory behaviors directed toward eliciting information about materials, devices, or situations. | Sometimes not as highly valued in other cultures – may prefer teacher direction. |

| Trait, Aptitude, or Behavior | General Description | How It May Look | CLD (Culturally & Linguistically Diverse) Considerations |
|---|--|--|--|
| Insight Quickly grasps new concepts; sees connections; senses deeper meanings. | Sudden discovery of correct solution following attempts based primarily on trial and error; putting disparate elements together in unexpected ways. | Exceptional ability to draw inferences; appears to be a good guesser; is keenly observant; heightened capacity for seeing unusual and diverse relationships, integration of ideas and disciplines. | May be intuitive or holistic thinkers. |
| Reasoning Logical approaches to figuring out solutions. | Highly conscious, directed, controlled, active, intentional forward-looking, and goal-oriented thought. | Ability to make generalizations and use metaphors and analogies; can think things through in a logical manner; critical thinker; ability to think things through and come up with a plausible answer. | May demonstrate problem-solving in group setting, rather than individually. Some cultures value approximation over accuracy. |
| Imagination/Creativity Produces many ideas; highly original. | Process of forming mental images of objects; qualities, situations, or relationships which aren't immediately apparent to the senses; problem solving through nontraditional patterns of thinking. | Shows exceptional ingenuity in using everyday materials; is keenly observant; has wild, seemingly silly ideas; fluent, flexible producer of ideas; highly curious. | May be demonstrated through storytelling, dancing, writing, art, poetry, or creative thinking. |
| Humor Conveys and picks up on humor well. | Ability to synthesize key ideas or problems in complex situations in a humorous way; exceptional sense of timing in words or gestures. | Keen sense of humor that may be gentle or hostile; large accumulation of information about emotions; capacity for seeing unusual; uncommon emotional depth; openness to experiences; sensory awareness. | Need to be aware that humor is culturally-based. |
| Intensity (“Overexcitabilities”) Strength of reactions, responses, behaviors. (The term “overexcitabilities” comes from Polish psychologist Dabrowski.) | Very strong, even extreme, responses to stimuli in five areas: emotional, intellectual, sensory, psychomotor, and imagination. | Intense desire for experiences in the area(s) of overexcitability; powerful emotions; seeks intellectual stimulation; sensory experiences evoke strong responses; constant or repetitive movement or gesturing; intense fantasy life; may need creative outlets for intensity. | Individual drive may not be highly valued. Some cultures have a preference for novelty and personal freedom. |
| Sensitivity Strong reactions to emotional stimuli. | Events and situations in the affective and social domains elicit a stronger response than usual. | Strong sense of compassion; keen sense of justice; empathy; moral and ethical sensibilities; sense of being “different” socially; existential worrying; often overly self-critical. | May demonstrate a keen sense of injustice, awareness of the environment & people around them, or personal & religious integrity. |

Recognizing Creative Students

Creative students often:

- ask many questions, often challenging the teacher and the textbook
- use whatever is at hand in tasks, play, or humor
- have “off the beaten track” humor and playfulness
- are bored with recitation and memorization of facts; prefer talking about ideas and solutions
- have a reputation with students and teachers for unusual, even silly ideas
- have considerable energy, which can lead to behavior issues
- feel strongly about many things and often express feelings
- come up with unexpected, even “smart-alecky” answers
- like to work alone
- do not appear to be working hard, but do fairly well at examination time
- show an unusual capacity for originality, concentration, and hard work
- are resented by some children because of their unusual ideas and their forcefulness in presenting them.

These students may exhibit the following creative thinking abilities:

- fluency in producing ideas
- generating original and unusual ideas
- elaborating on and explaining ideas
- making unusual associations between different ideas
- displaying flexibility in thought patterns
- rearranging typical thought/logic patterns
- sensing when problems exist intuitively
- acting spontaneously
- visualizing mentally
- tolerating ambiguity and inconsistency
- making guesses and forming hypotheses
- taking risks
- redefining elements of a task
- working with extreme concentration

Traits Common to Gifted and Talented Students, Positive & Negative*

A compilation of lists by May V. Seagee, Sandra Kaplan, Susanne Richert and Roger Hanson.

Positives

1. Exhibits a great curiosity about objects, situations, events; delves into things and brings up new questions; involves self in many exploratory activities; interests self in a wide range of things.
2. Is self-initiating - needs little help in knowing what to do; pursues individual interests, seeks own direction.
3. Reveals originality in oral and written expression; consistently expresses unusually clever, unique ideas and suggestions.
4. Is artistically self-expressive; i.e., music, dance, drama, drawing, play activities, and/or other aesthetic expression.
5. Generates alternatives - suggests several directions; exhibits flexible thinking through constructive departures from the mainstream of thought in the classroom.
6. Is perceptually open to environment; employs all senses in awareness of things; is keenly observant and alert to things that are, as well as to things that are not.
7. Displays willingness for complexity - thrives on problem situations; selects a more difficult response, solution or problem over the easier; seeks complex, asymmetrical forms rather than symmetrical.
8. Imaginatively employs knowledge and information other than to memorize, store and recall; shapes new associations from items of information; combines elements of materials or knowledge in unique patterns.
9. Evaluates with superior judgment; employs reason and logic; recognizes implications and consequences. Visualizes relationships from disparate data.
10. Elaborates well; produces a variety of detailed steps; eagerly embellishes materials and ideas.
11. Hypothesizes well; possesses a sense of wonder about things; is an intelligent guesser, risk-taker.
12. Learns rapidly, readily, and efficiently. Achieves consistently good grades in most subjects.
13. Shows great verbal proficiency; large vocabulary, facility in expression, interest in reading, breadth of information in advanced areas.

Negatives

1. May be bored with routine tasks, refuse to do rote assignments and drill work.
2. May tend to dominate, refuse to accept authority or be nonconforming or stubborn.
3. May make jokes or puns at inappropriate times
4. May resist direction, reject the known and need to invent for self.
5. May challenge generally accepted ideas, refuse to focus on classroom tasks at hand, daydream.
6. May seem hypersensitive - over-react, get angry easily or be ready to cry when things go wrong.
7. May be difficult to move into a new topic.
8. May invent own systems, sometimes conflicting. May show frustration with inactivity and absence of progress.
9. May be self-critical, impatient with failures; also may be critical of teachers and others.
10. May be vulnerable to peer group rejection - needs recognition.
11. May be quite gullible.
12. May have failing grades, due to failure to meet basic requirements or turn in assignments.
13. May escape into verbalism or "empty speech."

Characteristics of Gifted Children

Linda Silverman, Ph.D.

- Gifted children often have unique learning styles; they learn in different ways from other children.
- They learn at a faster pace. They solve problems rapidly.
- They are usually developmentally advanced. They learn to talk, read, etc., earlier than usual.
- They are very curious and tend to ask complex questions.
- They give complicated answers. Their detailed explanations show greater depth of understanding of topics than their classmates.
- They are quick to recognize relationships, even relationships that others do not see.
- They organize information in new ways, creating new perspectives.
- They often see many solutions to a problem.
- Their thinking is more abstract than their classmates, involving hypothetical possibilities, rather than present realities.
- They often see ambiguity in what appears to be “factual” information.
- They have large vocabularies and tend to express themselves well.
- They have unusually good memories.
- They may be natural leaders. They may initiate and organize activities for others.
- They enjoy working independently. They easily become absorbed in the mastery of skills.
- They may prefer the company of older children and adults.
- They may like to be best in everything, and may refuse to participate in activities in which they might fail.
- They are often perfectionists, becoming very upset if things don't turn out as they expect. Sometimes they compare themselves and their achievements to great persons they have read about rather than to others their own age.
- They are not necessarily gifted in all areas.
- They usually don't want their giftedness pointed out.

High Achiever, Gifted Learner, Creative Thinker

Bertie Kingore, Ph.D.

| A High Achiever... | A Gifted Learner..... | A Creative Thinker |
|--|--|--|
| Remembers the answers. Is interested. | Poses unforeseen questions. Is curious. | Sees exceptions. Wonders. |
| Is attentive. | Is selectively mentally engaged. | Daydreams; may seem off task |
| Generates advanced ideas. | Generates complex, abstract ideas. | Overflows with ideas, many of which will never be developed. |
| Works hard to achieve. | Knows without working hard. | Plays with ideas and concepts. |
| Answers the questions in detail. | Ponders with depth and multiple perspectives. | Injects new possibilities. |
| Performs at the top of the group. | Is beyond the group. | Is in own group. |
| Responds with interest and opinions. | Exhibits feelings and opinions from multiple perspectives. | Shares bizarre, sometimes conflicting opinions. |
| Learns with ease. | Already knows. | Questions: What if |
| Needs 6 to 8 repetitions to master. | Needs 1 to 3 repetitions to master. | Questions the need for mastery. |
| Comprehends at a high level. | Comprehends complex ideas. | Comprehends in-depth, complex ideas. |
| Enjoys the company of age peers. | Prefers the company of intellectual peers. | Prefers the company of creative peers but often works alone. |
| Understands complex, abstract humor. | Creates complex, abstract humor. | Relishes wild, off the wall humor. |
| Grasps the meaning. | Infers and connects concepts. | Makes mental leaps: Aha! |
| Completes assignments on time. | Initiates projects and extensions of assignments. | Initiates more projects than will ever be completed. |
| Is receptive. | Is intense. | Is independent and unconventional. |
| Is accurate and complete. | Is original and continually developing | Is original and continually developing. |
| Enjoys school often. | Enjoys self-directed learning. | Enjoys creating. |
| Absorbs information. | Manipulates information. | Improvises. |
| Is a technician with expertise in a field. | Is an expert who abstracts beyond the field. | Is an inventor and idea generator. |
| Memorizes well. | Guesses and infers well. | Creates and brainstorms well. |
| Is highly alert and observant | Anticipates and relates observations | Is intuitive |
| Is pleased with own learning. | Is self-critical | Is never finished with possibilities. |
| Gets A's. | May not be motivated by grades. | May not be motivated by grades. |
| Is able. | Is intellectual | Is idiosyncratic. |

Specific Problems of the Gifted

Linda Silverman, Ph.D.

- Confusion about the meaning of giftedness
- Feeling different
- Idealism
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Relentless self-criticism
- Increased levels of inner conflict
- Deep concerns with morality and justice
- Lack of understanding from others
- Unrealistic expectations of others
- Hostility of others toward their abilities
- Difficulty with social relationships
- Difficulty in selecting among a diversity of talents
- Lack of sufficient challenge in schoolwork
- Depression, often manifested as boredom
- High levels of anxiety
- Difficulty in accepting criticism
- Hiding talents to fit in with peers
- Nonconformity and resistance to authority
- Refusal to do routine, repetitive tasks
- Inappropriate criticizing of others
- Excessive competitiveness
- Isolation from peers
- Low frustration tolerance
- Intolerance of others
- Lack of study habits

Characteristics of the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Gifted and Talented Child

- Eagerness to share about their native culture
- A strong desire to teach peers words from their native language
- A strong sense of pride of their cultural heritage and ethnic background
- Eager to translate for peers and adults
- Balancing appropriate behaviors expected of the native culture and the new culture
- Advanced knowledge of idioms and native dialects with ability to translate and explain meanings in English
- Ability to understand jokes and puns related to cultural differences
- Able to read in native language two grades above his/her grade level
- Function at language proficiency level above that of their non-gifted LEP peers
- Code-switching ability
- Cross-cultural flexibility
- Sense of global community and awareness of other cultures and languages
- Learns a second or third language at an accelerated pace (formal or informal)
- May excel in math achievement tests when language ability is not a factor
- Strengths in the creative areas of: fluency, elaboration, originality and/or flexibility

Characteristics based on study of students participating in Project GOTCHA, Galaxies of Gifted and Creative Heights of Achievements, Title VII, Academic Excellence Program (1987-1996) Compilation of data completed by Nilda M Aguirre and Norma E Hernandez, Consultants for Project GOTCHA under International Education Consultants, Inc. (1996-1999) Copyrighted 1999.