

Resources

Characteristics of Young Gifted Students

The highly advanced gifted child is a minority even among gifted children. The child's capacity to learn is significantly advanced even beyond the average for the intellectually and academically gifted.

One strong indicator that a child may be highly gifted is the early development of speech, coupled with an unusually speedy progression through the stages of speech development. In her study of exceptionally gifted children, Gross (1993) recorded linguistic precocity far beyond even that of moderately gifted children. The gifted children were able to link words into meaning earlier and with greater degrees of complexity than were their age peers. Early and fluent speech was also linked to excellent memory. Children in the study could recite poetry, passages from books and songs before the age of two. The accelerated development of speech and language reflect not only a quickly growing vocabulary and knowledge base, but rapidly improving conceptual and abstract thinking abilities as well. Comprehension, retention, vocabulary, stored information and logical abilities are often superior.

The highly advanced gifted child is a quick learner and can be passionate about learning. Often they are self-directed, highly energetic and goal oriented. For this reason, it is difficult for them to be confined to a curriculum that doesn't meet their needs.

Parents typically note that their child seemed to catch on to things effortlessly, was insatiably curious and had extraordinary memory. Parents report that their child reads a wide range of books, fiction and non-fiction; and is fascinated with numbers. The highly advanced gifted child is also more likely than other children their age to have collections, especially scientific collections. Many parents reported their child to be well-rounded, socially adjusted and physically developed.



In early years, the highly advanced gifted child may show signs of alertness and long attention spans. Preference for novelty is seen as early as infancy in terms of frequent desire for visual changes. They often sit, crawl and walk several months earlier than normal. High energy sometimes leads to hyperactivity when they are insufficiently stimulated. Even at a young age, these children may be aware of their own problem-solving strategies and use them to solve new problems. Handwriting is often a struggle; and they are bored with the goal to be neat. Their friends are often older children or adults. Affectively, highly advanced gifted children may show intense reactions to noise, pain and frustration. They are interested in moral and political problems and may worry about evil in the world (Winner, 1996).

Children who are highly gifted may have special problems of development that are correlated with social isolation. Most often age-mates do not share their interests, vocabulary or desire for more complex activities. These difficulties appear particularly acute at ages 4 through 9. When extremely gifted students are permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, loneliness and social isolation disappear and these children become accepted as valued classmates and friends (Hollingworth, 1929).

The Gifted Preschooler

Research on gifted children reveals that even in early childhood they display significant differences from the developmental patterns observable in age-peers of average ability.

Early development of exceptional verbal ability is often considered to be a sign or characteristic of giftedness. At age 2, an extensive vocabulary and agile use of language in a young gifted child will be remarkably evident. Freeman (1985) found young gifted children to be verbally precocious in three skill areas: talking, reading, and writing. This high verbal ability was found to be present as early as 3 years of age.

Gifted preschoolers are able to convey their ideas more easily to their peers, to communicate their feelings and to give directions. Often you will find these children sought out by peers for companionship, ideas and decisions.

Kitano (1985) found that in addition to demonstrating high levels of accumulated knowledge and thinking abilities, preschool gifted children also showed evidence of pre-logical thinking, creativity, discomfort with ambiguity and spontaneous incorporation of academic activities into free play. Perhaps as a reflection of the gifted child's greater language fluency, gifted preschoolers also talk about problems, rules and goals to a greater extent than do their average ability peers.

Berninger and Abbott (1995) found that kindergarten-age children who showed signs of math precocity had more complex reasoning skills and memory skills such as verbal reasoning skills, ability to remember complex information and ability to decode other symbolic systems such as maps and written language.

Curiosity, concentration, memory and a sense of humor are seen as areas of differentiation between gifted and non-gifted preschoolers. They may respond to riddles and verbal associations because of their ability to think quickly and see relationships more than peers of the same age.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of young gifted children is their high level of emotional sensitivity, which allows for the early development of values,

empathy and responsibility. Gifted preschoolers show more than average sharing and helping behaviors, more reactions to others' signs of distress and more sensitivity to the needs of others.

