



Young Gifted Children

Help needed to identify young gifted children

The Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia believes Early Childhood Educators are uniquely positioned and equipped to recognize and support many of the gifted children of B.C. before they are admitted to more formal learning programs. In an effort to enlist the assistance of knowledgeable, experienced Early Childhood Professionals the GCABC has produced this newsletter.

Numerous young gifted children experience difficulty when entering formal schooling. Observation of

their early behaviour is extremely helpful for proper identification and creation of appropriate learning programs for these out of step, asynchronous learners.



The strong observational skills an ECE teacher brings to their work with young children can help parents and children to learn to work with, rather than hide, resent or fear their differences.

The unique learning styles that help define these children as gifted can lead to many complex behaviours if early needs are not recognized and met. Behaviour changes that have been documented include: becoming argumentative, apathetic, socially withdrawn, out of control or clinically depressed, among a wide range of other behaviours.

Yet these are the children who beg to attend Early Childhood programs because of their extreme desire to learn. We hope this newsletter will offer educators information to recognize and support these children

Who are our gifted children?

Gifted children are often defined based on what they produce, a definition of limited use in early childhood education. They are also often defined by a list of traits many, but not all gifted children have in common. Parents of these children agree the most useful definition of gifted children comes from the work of the Columbus group, a group of psychologists, edu-

cators and parents who came up with the following description of giftedness in 1991.

Giftedness is 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 counselling in order for them to develop optimally.

This means these children develop in an uneven manner, significantly out of developmental step with their age peers.

A GCABC special newsletter

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Special points of interest:

- ☺ Checklist of behaviours which help identify gifted kids
- ☺ Research data on highly gifted children
- ☺ Areas where you can help
- ☺ Resources

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Different from birth

Gifted children are on a developmentally different schedule from infancy onward. This places them out of sync with expected development stages internally and externally. Programs which anticipate limited powers of concentration and break complicated subjects into simple pieces for children to understand may stress gifted children. Sequences may be too simple for minds which thrive on complexity and challenge. Able to process huge quantities of information rapidly, gifted children may find nothing to interest or engage them in regular programs

and may act out. Stephanie Tolan, author and gifted advocate, has a wonderful analogy for this process. She likens it to feeding an elephant grass, one blade at a time. Not only will he die of malnutrition before you can get sufficient food into him, he is unlikely to realize you are trying to feed him at all. That single blade of grass is simply too small to notice. Computers offer another analogy for these children's differences. Like a multiple window computer, many gifted children work on several unrelated problems at the same time. An unconscious process bubbling

quietly in the background may suddenly end with ahaa! Having no idea where the answer appeared from, the child may only be certain that it is correct. Unable to explain why, they just know it. (And will often defend it vigorously.) Adults unable to understand this process or achieve it themselves, often discredit or discount these abilities in young children and may insist they work in ways alien to them to solve problems. You must show your work! Not comfortable working in this fashion, accused of cheating by peers unable to understand this process, the gifted child may shut down in an attempt to become normal.



Pushy parents?

Do parents push these children and train them? Force their development? Usually it is the child who pulls rather than the parent who pushes. All parents think their child is gifted! is unsupported myth. Parents who notice their child's development differs from age peers have observed these differences since birth. If they are familiar with the concept, they are usually accurate in identifying their child as gifted (85%).

Parents of gifted children often have some of the following worries. Sometimes I'm frightened for my child. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility. There are times when I feel isolated. I can't keep up! Parenting a gifted child is more intense and isolating. The child's asynchrony may cause them to exhibit a wide range of age behaviours at the same time, making them demanding to parent. At four, they may be four playing soccer, eight when reading, twelve building Lego®, twenty when

worrying about world peace, and two putting toys away. This wide asynchrony is difficult for parents, schools, and the child to handle. It is hard to fit in when so much of your environment depends on chronological age, a measure which may be the least relevant part of a gifted child's development. Sharing your professional knowledge of their child's relative strengths can help parents enormously.

Overexcitable

Recognition and acceptance of the child's internal differences is essential. These differences likely include emotional intensity, unusual awareness and tolerance of complexity and paradox, and potential for extraordinary development. Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski suggested the stimuli response of these individuals is stronger than normal in five areas. He called these overexcitabilities, (oe's,) as they involve psychological and central nervous system sensitivity. OE's describe

the unusual intensity of the gifted, as well as the many ways in which they look and behave oddly when compared to norms. These are brief examples of the five :

Psychomotor oe need for physical expression, movement, energy, dance.

Sensual oe highly sensory, touch, texture, color, taste, light, sound. Can't tolerate clothes labels, twisted socks, moved to tears by Mozart.

Imaginational oe dreamers, space cadets, visual thinkers, metaphors.

Intellectual oe stimulated by intellectual challenge, problems.

Emotional oe broad range of emotional intensity, happier, sadder, more depressed, extreme empathy, compassion.

Gifted people have different intensities and combinations of oe's but Dabrowski believed emotional oe to be central to them all. In children these oes are often mistaken for lack of control and immaturity.

Some behaviours of young gifted children

Gifted children often have abilities which may not be recognized. They may also have highly creative abilities which are not expected and hard to see, or have disabilities which mask their high abilities.



The following are often observed compared to age based norms:

- ÿ Has a good memory
- ÿ Has a subtle or mature sense of humour (may understand word puns before other children) may not appreciate silly or bathroom humour of other children the same age
- ÿ Is exceptionally curious
- ÿ May see solutions that rarely occur to others
- ÿ Has a high energy level
- ÿ Has a wider knowledge base
- ÿ Uses advanced vocabulary
- ÿ Uses advanced grammar or sentence structure
- ÿ May be very interested in abstract terms (time, space)
- ÿ Is interested in cause and effect relationships
- ÿ Has a long attention span **for activities of own choosing**
- ÿ May enjoy difficult puzzles
- ÿ Sees endless possibilities for various situations or uses for objects
- ÿ Says what he/she thinks without regard for consequences
- ÿ Great imagination, frequent daydreamer
- ÿ Highly developed powers of concentration, may need to be physically touched to become aware of surroundings
- ÿ May have advanced sense of justice and fairness (and may not be able to understand responses of age peers.)
- ÿ May be strongly motivated to do things that interest him/her, may be unwilling to work on other activities
- ÿ May be reluctant to move from one subject area to another, becomes so engrossed in concept that wishes to explore it fully
- ÿ Transfers concepts and learning to new situations
- ÿ May prefer the company of older children or adults
- ÿ May prefer to work alone, resists co-operative learning
- ÿ May have wide gaps in abilities or knowledge.
- ÿ May struggle with easy materials but thrive on complexity
- ÿ May have difficulty with handwriting or pencil use. (complains of it being too slow)
- ÿ May have advanced hand/eye coordination
- ÿ May be emotionally sensitive (high levels of self criticism, may have low self concept and poor peer relations. May ask many questions about pain, death, anger, love)
- ÿ May like to count, may play with number concepts (work in bases other than 10 for example)
- ÿ May choose factual books and dislike fiction and fairy stories
- ÿ May collect things
- ÿ May have more imaginary friends than regular children and be able to describe them in detail.

Parents and caregivers are extremely accurate in their assessment of children as "gifted"

Strengths or admired traits vs Possible Problems

Strength

Verbal skills
 Long attention span
 Acquires/retains information easily
 Creativity, inventiveness
 Independent, prefers individualized work
 Critical thinking
 Preference for Complexity
 Versatility
 Sensitive, empathy for others

Possible Problem

Talks too much, talks above the heads of his or her age peers
 Tunnel Vision; resists interruption, stubbornness, resists duties
 Inaccuracy, sloppiness, impatient with others, dislikes basic routine
 Escape into fantasy, rejection of norms, may be seen as disruptive
 Inability to accept help from peers, nonconformity, reliant on self
 Critical of others, perfectionism, unreasonable standards for self
 Resistance to simple solutions; constructs complicated rules, bossy
 Appears disorganized, scattered, frustrated over lack of time
 Extreme sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection

A Study of 241 Profoundly Gifted Children*

Dr. Karen Rogers Associate Professor of Gifted Studies University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. Karen Rogers, a researcher of international renown, analyzed data at the Gifted Development Center in 1994-1995 during a postdoctoral fellowship. The analysis consisted of data on 241 children between 2½ and 12½ years of age, with IQs ranging from 160 to 237+ on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Form L-M). Here are some of the findings from that study:

Reasons for Assessment

The main reason parents requested testing (82%) was to obtain help with educational placement decisions.

Gender Differences

There was no difference in the mean IQ for boys and girls.

Birthing Issues

Mothers tended to be older than the norm. The mean age at the time of the child's birth was 30.8.

44% of the mothers report problems with delivery.

Sleep Patterns

50% of the parents report that their child needed less sleep than others. 60% are "day people" (more boys than girls), 17.5% are night people (more girls than boys) and 22.5% of the parents wrote in "both" in answer to the question!

Development in Infancy and Toddlerhood

94% were very alert as infants. 94% had a long attention span as an infant or toddler. 91% showed early language development. 60% showed early motor skill development. 48.9% were ambidextrous at some period of their development. 37% had imaginary playmates.

Language Development

The mean age at which these children spoke their first word was 9 months. The mean age at which the children sight read an easy reader was before 4.

Medical Issues

85% of the children had had ear infections. 52% have high pain tolerance.

44% have allergies and 9.6% have asthma.

The most significant allergy mentioned was to milk (35% of the allergic children).

The next highest allergy mentioned was trees (8.2%).

Most Prevalent Characteristics of Giftedness

99.4% learn rapidly
99.4% have extensive vocabulary
99.3% have excellent memory
99.3% reason well
97.9% are curious
96.1% are mature for their age at times
95.9% have an excellent sense of humor
93.8% have a keen sense of observation
93.5% have compassion for others
93.4% have a vivid imagination
93.4% have a long attention span
92.9% have ability with numbers
90.3% are concerned with justice and fairness
89.4% have facility with puzzles and Legos®
88.4% have a high energy level
88.3% are perfectionistic
85.9% are perseverant in their areas of interest
84.1% question authority
80.3% are avid readers

Descriptions

90% were described by their parents as "sensitive."
83% like to concentrate on one activity at a time.
79% report high energy or activity levels.
44% are sensitive to clothing tags and other tactile sensations.



Self-Concept

In tests of self-concept, these children are significantly more confident in their academic abilities than in their social acceptance

Educational Needs

The greatest educational need expressed was for a more challenging curriculum.

In tests of self-concept, these children are significantly more confident in their academic abilities than in their social acceptance

How significant are these data? We won't know until we've been able to enter random samples from the moderate, mildly and nongifted children's files. (Research Efforts)

Personal, Social, Medical and Psychological Factors in 160+ IQ Children

Presented by Karen Rogers and Linda Silverman at the National Association for Gifted Children 44th Annual Convention in Little Rock, Arkansas, November 7, 1997.

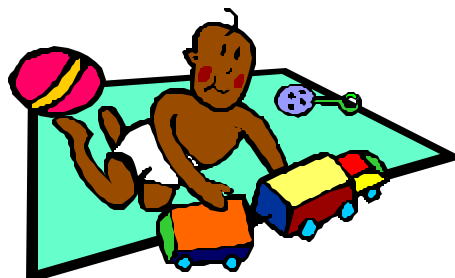
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Early readers, deep readers

Many young gifted children teach themselves to read at a very early age. By the time they enter early childhood ed programs they may already be sounding out letters, reading signs, or reading accurately both aloud and silently. Some of these children are such good readers that their silent reading speeds may cause it to seem as if they are skimming through picture books. They may also be concentrating so deeply on their reading that they are unaware of people speaking to them, or teachers attempting to engage their attention. As many adults assume children

must be taught to read, even parents can be surprised by the reading prowess of their child.

If you observe a child who rapidly flips through magazines or books, has trouble "hearing" instructions when they are looking at a book, or seems to have skills of early reading, ask them about their abilities. Are they able to read? Can they read aloud as well as silently? What types of materials do they like to read? Do they need quiet time to enjoy their books?

Help them to find suitable reading materials for their ability and ensure



that their reading time is shared with or not interrupted by non reading children. Finding appropriate subject matter for their reading ability age and interests may be a problem.

Ladybird first chapter books are often enjoyed as are Roald Dahl's books, (*Fantastic Mr Fox*, *The Twits*, *James and the Giant Peach* , *BFG*

Numbers

Many of these children already have a keen interest in numbers and patterns. Introduce them to chess, backgammon, the Chinese abacus, Montessori math materials or Don Cohen's book *Calculus by and for young people*.

Resources:

Bringing Out the Best a resource guide for parents of young gifted children Jacquelyn Saunders with Pamela Espeland , Free Spirit Publishing, 1986, 1991 This comprehensive guide focuses on characteristics, concerns (including schooling), and activities.

Drawing with Children, a course in enhancing creative capacity for Children and Adults Mona Brookes 1986, Jeremy Tarcher, Inc. Great ideas for getting anyone to draw and express their creativity

The Kingore Observation Inventory Bertie Kingore, Leadership publishers Inc. Des Moines, 1990, a simple method of using teacher observation to identify gifted students from early childhood to grade 3

Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom, Joan Smutny, Sally Yahnke Walker, Elizabeth Meckstroth, Free Spirit Publishing 1997 Techniques that work in the regular classroom with kindergarten and primary children. Lots of reproducible sheets and easy to use activities.

Parents Guide to Raising a Gifted Toddler, James Alvino, Ballentine Books. Compilation of articles from *Gifted Child Monthly*, focussing on the young gifted child.

Raising Your Spirited Child : A Guide for Parents Whose Child Is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, and Energetic by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka Sept 1992, Harperperennial library

Teaching Montessori in the Home, The Pre-School Years , Elizabeth Hainstock, Plume Books, Updated edition (September 1997) Simple materials and techniques which allow a child to explore many Montessori practises.

Web pages:

Gifted Children's Association of B.C. Information on the B.C. organization www.gcabc.ca

Gifted Canada , Canadian information on resources for gifted children <http://www3.telus.net/giftedcanada>

Hoagies gifted page, major source of info on all aspects of gifted children <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org>

Eric clearing house on Disabilites and Gifted Education run by the Council for Exceptional Children

<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericcec.htm>

Gifted Development Center <http://www.gifteddevelopment.com>

A GCABC special newsletter



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A registered non profit organization dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding of what it means to be gifted.



These pages were compiled by Lesley Ansell-Shepherd for the GCABC©1999



Join the GCABC to help support Gifted Children. Annual memberships are available for \$35, Most local members groups have regular monthly meetings and members have library privileges and reduced rates at annual conferences.

Local contacts

GCA members meet together throughout the province at informal meetings open to any member of the GCABC, regardless of their home location. **Contacts for groups with regular meetings are in bold**



Armstrong	Sari Cox	250-546-6658	Shuswap	Karen Bissenden	250-833-4886
Coquitlam	Sheila Armstrong	604-939-4820	South Island	Bridget Cassidy	250-656-8802
Delta	Karen Phee-Hale	604-952-4195	Surrey	Ann Ho	604 736-2705
Langley	Jean Lau	604-857-0810	Vancouver	Marta McIntosh	604-736-2705
North Shore	Alisa Paul	604-904-0970	Vernon	Noelle Typusiak	250-545-0825

references: **Overexcitable** Kazimierz Dabrowski Psychoneurosis is not an illness London: Gryf. Also Social Educational Child Psychiatry (Spoeczno- wychowawcza psychiatria dziecięca) Warszawa PZWS Poland 1959, 2nd ed. 1964 Information concerning Dabrowski and his publications is available from Bill Tillier's Website at www.imag.net/dabrowski

Who are our gifted children? Dr Linda Silverman, address to the World Council of Gifted Children, Hong Kong 1991 The Gifted Development Center, 1452 Marion Street, Denver, Colorado 80218 Voice: 303/837/8378