

# Open Gifted

## Module 4: Presentation of Gifted Children in School

### Introduction

Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> video on this short course on gifted education. In this video I want to look a little deeper at how gifted children present in school and to challenge some of the myths about gifted children and gifted education.

There are a number of ingrained stereotypes of gifted children and it is important that teachers challenge these not just within their practice but whenever they come across them in the social interactions between students.

The traditional image of a gifted student is one who is a geek or a nerd and who wears glasses. There is a perception that gifted children are antisocial loners at best or mad geniuses in the making.

None of these perceptions do gifted children any favours and they are in fact groundless. In particular it is worth challenging the idea that gifted children are antisocial. The image of a child wandering around the schoolyard on their own should raise questions rather than judgments about why a child is not socializing.

Because gifted children tend to have different interests to other children it is very hard for them to find something in common with other children. When gifted children interact with children with similar interests they socialise just as normally as other children. So it is very important for schools provide opportunities for children with diverse interests to find like-minded individuals. This of course applies to all children not just to gifted.

### Myths about gifted children and gifted education

#### Myth 1: Gifted Education is elitist

There is a myth that making specific provision for gifted pupils is elitist. All children have a right to an appropriate education that will help them achieve their potential. This applies to gifted children also. The notion that gifted education is elitist stems in part from the reality that families who can afford to pay for additional supports do so. This of course raises questions about the missed opportunities for gifted children whose families cannot afford extra-curricular programmes.

#### Myth 2: Gifted students get straight 'A's.

The student who gets straight 'A's isn't necessarily gifted. In fact bright pupils who learn how to use the exam system perform better than gifted pupils who

have not been identified. Often gifted pupils coast by on what they learn in class during Junior Certificate (the national lower second level exam Irish students take at 15/16 years of age) but when they have to do some work at Leaving Certificate (the national upper second level exam Irish students take at 17/18 years of age), they haven't built up the study and work habits necessary for success.

### **Myth 3: Gifted pupils are smart enough to do well on their own.**

Gifted pupils need the guidance, support and wisdom of their teachers to make real progress just as sports stars still need coaches. As with all students, gifted pupils need appropriate instructional activities that will push them to achieve their potential.

### **Myth 4: Every Child is gifted**

Every child is a 'gift' but not every child is 'gifted'. The term 'gifted' in the technical sense, speaks to the exceptional ability of a child which when coupled with appropriate educational provision enables the child to realise their potential which they otherwise would not.

### **Characteristics**

Prof. Tracy Cross is professor of gifted education at the College of William and Mary Virginia USA and he is also an adjunct professor in DCU where he works closely with the Centre for Talented Youth in gifted research. Prof Cross identified five key characteristics of gifted children. These include asynchronous development, overexcitability, perfectionism, multi-potentiality, and excessive of self-criticism.

Asynchronous development, highlighted by the Columbus group definition, describes a situation where a child of, for example, eight years of age may have the intellectual ability of the 12-year-old and at the same time the emotional sensitivity only 6 year old. This difference in the development of the child raises challenges for the child and their parents and teachers.

Overexcitability is a term drawn from the work of Kazimierz Dabrowski and refers to heightened levels of sensitivity in gifted individuals. There are five overexcitabilities; imaginational, intellectual, emotional, sensual, and psychomotor. These overexcitabilities are sometimes referred to as intensities. There is a link below the video which will provide you with more information on each of these. In short, overexcitabilities speaks directly to the more intense inner experience gifted children have of the world they inhabit. These intense inner experiences produce external behaviours that may to some seem odd or unusual to other people.

Linda Silverman has referred to perfectionism as 'the crucible of giftedness'. Perfectionism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it drives self-actualisation. On the other, it becomes a crippling burden for gifted individuals whose perception of self and their endeavours in of never being good enough.

Multi-potentiality refers to the broad range of choices open to gifted individuals. When there is so much that one is capable of, it is difficult to make choices about what course of action to pursue, specifically with regard to college and

career choices. The danger here for gifted individuals is in never realising their potential.

<p><b>Intellectual traits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exceptional reasoning ability</li> <li>Intellectual curiosity</li> <li>Rapid learning rate</li> <li>Facility for abstraction</li> <li>Complex thought processes</li> <li>Vivid imagination</li> <li>Early moral concern</li> <li>Passion for learning</li> <li>Powers of concentration</li> <li>Analytical thinking</li> <li>Divergent thinking/creativity</li> <li>Keen sense of justice</li> <li>Capacity for reflection</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personality traits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insightful</li> <li>Need to understand</li> <li>Need for mental stimulation</li> <li>Perfectionism</li> <li>Need for precision/logic</li> <li>Excellent sense of humour</li> <li>Sensitivity/empathy</li> <li>Intensity</li> <li>Perseverance</li> <li>Acute self-awareness</li> <li>Nonconformity</li> <li>Questioning rules/authority</li> <li>Tendency to introversion</li> </ul>
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Clark, B. (2002). *Growing up gifted* (5th ed.) Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill

It's important to understand the difference between bright or highly achieving child and a gifted learner.

The bright child in class will be interested and attentive. They may work hard and may enjoy school. Significantly they may require between six and eight repetitions before mastering a particular concept. A bright child will have answers to questions, will have sound ideas and learn with relative ease.

A gifted learner on the other hand will question the answers they hear in class. They will play with ideas and may have silly or quirky ideas. They enjoy debate and discussion and prefer conversations with adults rather than their peers. Notably they require only one or two repetitions in order to master a concept. Any more than this and they may disengage and even unlearn something they had previously learned.

Next video Will look at some of the social and emotional issues impacting on gifted children and school.

## References

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