

Insights

FAQ (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS) ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO ARE GIFTED AND TALENTED



Q. Can all children become gifted?

A. From the data neurobiology is providing, it is evident that nearly all children are born with very complex and unique brain structures. Although each child is different, they all seem to have extraordinary potential. I believe that, if given the opportunity to develop optimally, most children could perform at the level we now call *gifted*, and it probably would be more natural for them to do so.

Q. Which is more important for the development of intelligence—heredity or environment?

A. Both are important, and current research recognizes that the interaction between them is complex and interdependent. At this time, few knowledgeable scientists even try to speak of one as being more important than the other.

Q. What is the biggest problem with labeling a child gifted? Would it be better to call children who are gifted by another word?

A. The word *gifted* does give an unfortunate connotation to the group of children who bear this label. People often think these children were given a gift; that is, they did nothing to earn their ability or talent. Americans tend to be suspicious of anyone who gets something for nothing. This line of thinking has been responsible for a lot of misunderstanding about gifted children. However, giving them a different label would still not solve the problems labeling causes. We have this label now, so perhaps the best we can do is to be sure everyone, including the child who is gifted, understands what we mean by it.

Q. Will grouping students who are gifted together result in elitism?

A. When this question is asked, *elitism* usually implies that the students who are gifted will become arrogant and snobbish and think they are better than other children. Research indicates that grouping gifted students together appropriately and flexibly in the areas in which they need advanced or accelerated work results in their growth academically, and also gives them a more realistic view of their abilities. When they are never challenged, they do not learn good study skills and often have problems later as they try to pursue higher education. Arrogance can come either from unrealistic appraisal of their talent or from trying to cover up for the feeling of being different and not understanding why others continually reject them. In either case, flexible and appropriate grouping with intellectual peers who may or may not be age-mates will decrease that type of elitism, not increase it.

Q. Considering the focus on inclusion in the regular classroom, when is it appropriate to have special programs for students who are gifted?

A. When the material and the pacing used in the classroom are not allowing students to grow and learn on an ongoing basis, special provisions must be made. When there is no provision for students who are gifted to interact with intellectual peers, ways in which such groupings can occur must be planned. Research indicates that these are the minimum provisions that pupils who are gifted must have if they are to continue to develop and not regress, and not lose ability and motivation. For many students who are gifted, an appropriately individualized classroom can provide the differentiated materials and instruction needed. However, for children with gifts and talents whose pace and level of learning are significantly beyond those of their classmates, the least restrictive environment will *not* be the regular classroom. These students will need special classes and mentoring to grow and learn.

Q. Which is better for a gifted learner, acceleration or enrichment?

A. Pupils who are gifted need both acceleration and enrichment, and any gifted program should be designed to provide both. When to use each will depend on the student's needs.

Q. What is the difference between differentiation and individualization?

A. *Differentiation* for learners with gifts and talents is the preparation that is made for the curriculum to respond to their characteristic needs, such as allowing for a faster pace of learning and choosing themes and content that allow for more complex investigation. Individualization for children who are gifted is the process of adapting that curriculum to the needs and interests of particular students. A program for learners who are gifted requires both acceleration and enrichment to be really successful.

Q. Are most gifted children hyperactive?

A. Many children with gifts and talents have high levels of energy; they often require less sleep, and they are very, very curious. These traits may look like hyperactivity, but there is a difference. The energy of a child who is gifted is focused, directed, and intense. The energy of a hyperactive child is diffuse, random, and sporadic. Children who are gifted can attend to an activity that interests them for long periods of time; hyperactive children cannot. The brighter the child, the more the energy may look excessive.