

Characteristics of High Ability Learners

Dr. Karen Rogers, *Associate Professor of Gifted Studies, University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota* 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. Here are some of the findings from that study.

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 Lego's
- 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.

In addition, children in the primary grades (K - 2) capable of high performance may demonstrate achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas:

Intellectual Characteristics	
Displays intellectual curiosity.	The student who goes to books, including non-fiction and reference, often during free time. Asks questions which go beyond the typical for the age on particular subjects.
Is able to remember more and retrieve it easily from memory.	The student who is able to give correct feedback to any factual recall question.
Usually responds more quickly and appropriately than others his or her age.	The student who consistently has their hand raised first or calls out an answer first and the answer is an appropriate one.
Encodes and decodes easily.	As demonstrated through reading groups.
Is a keen observer.	The child who doesn't just look at an object, but sees color, pattern, size, weight possible uses, etc.
Can apply learning from one situation to other situations.	During a discussion on a certain topic, the student is able to relate an analogous situation from their personal experience. Another example could be a student who is able to transfer addition and subtraction skills to solving word problems.
Asks thought provoking questions; "Why?" questions.	Is genuinely concerned enough to ask why things happen or exist, either individually or during group discussion.
Is able to make generalizations.	The student who is able to see patterns when comparing related or unrelated topics; conceptualizes those patterns and then puts this into a general statement (is able to state the pattern or generalize it).
He or she wants to know why they are to do certain things and are not satisfied with "It's the rule".	The student who strives to see the relevance in assigned work or rules in the classroom. May possibly offer other alternatives to the rule.
Is able to retain material with one exposure.	Is able to recall material previously presented and may continue to build on that to show understanding.

Developmental Characteristics	
Is able to recognize that the amount of a substance doesn't change when its shape changes.	Can be observed through a science unit on properties. For example, if a cube of sugar is crushed, does the amount of sugar stay the same?
Is able to classify a group of objects into many categories and/or subcategories.	The student who looks at a collection of leaves in the fall and is able to classify them not only by color, size or shape but also by the type of leaf they are, where they came from, texture, etc...In other words, the student is able to classify a group of objects beyond the obvious.
Demonstrates a knowledge of right - left relationships.	The student can tell with little or no hesitation who sits to the right or left of him or her or whether the windows are to his or her right or left.
Is able to comprehend that the length of an object doesn't change when there is movement or displacement.	During a math or science unit, most students can see that two lines of the same length are equal, the gifted student will see that even though one line has been moved, they are still equal.
Can demonstrate a systematic approach to placing objects in serial order.	The student is able to arrange many things in serial order systematically and be correct the first time. The arrangement is not determined by trial and error.
Displays reversibility; is able to carry a thought forward and backward in time.	For example, every student is taught that there is to be no fighting or hurting in school and discussions on the subject often take place. A student who could reverse thoughts might say "So how come we have wars?". He or she sees an association between fighting in

	school and war, noting fine shades of meaning between words.
Shows the ability to conserve numbers.	This can be observed when teaching addition and subtraction facts. The student who can conserve numbers would be able to see an association between the addition facts for six. He or she sees that pairs of numbers can be grouped in different ways to get the same results. ($5+1=6$, $3+3=6$, $4+2=6$, $6+0=6$).
Shows the ability to conserve liquids.	This can be observed when teaching about metric measuring and the sizes of metric containers. For example, the student who can see that an amount of liquid in a short wide liter container remains that same when poured into a tall thin container.

Motivational Characteristics	
Has a broad attention span that enables him or her to do in depth problem solving and pursue interests.	The student's attention span enables them to work on things and stay on task or attend during discussions for longer periods of time than is considered "normal" for their age.
Initiates his or her own activities independently or with other students.	This student finds things to do with his or her time.
Delves into interests beyond the usual for his or her age.	The student shows not only an unusual interest, but takes an interest and delves into it in great detail through books, media or involving the teacher. The student wants to know all there is to know about a subject. Shows enough interest to pursue something in the library.
Assumes and carries responsibility well. The student can be counted on to do what he or she says they will do and do it well.	When asked to run an errand, the student can do so with no problems. When they have homework, they are responsible enough to do it and do it well. The student shows a great responsibility with library books and other borrowed materials
Exhibits a high degree of self confidence as a learner.	The student who is confident with his or her abilities will share ideas and class work with out fear.
Shows ability to plan and organize for independent work and projects.	When given the opportunity for independent work above and beyond daily seatwork the student is able to organize his or her time wisely in order to follow through on a task.
Maintains an optimistic or positive attitude toward new adventures.	This is exemplified by the student who says "I've never done this before, but I'll try it" or "This is new, it looks like fun."
Is very task oriented and committed to his or her task for the teacher and self.	This student is able to finish what he or she starts. Is able to stay on task and bring it to completion.
Is not easily discouraged and can accommodate to periodic adjustments and will adapt and continue working on a task.	This is the student who never gives up. For example, the teacher tells him or her that he or she hasn't done enough in relation to the assignment. A student who adapts easily will go on and try to adjust his or her work accordingly.

Creativity Characteristics	
Displays a sense of imagination in language arts activities.	The student displays a sense of fantasy and expresses actual happenings in his or her life in an imaginative way.
Shows a high level of imagination and creativity in play.	The student incorporates new and unconventional objects within his or her play; designs play activities which are more numerous and varied in content.

Is willing to try new things; is a risk taker.	This student doesn't need a lot of coaxing to try new things, but is willing to accept the challenge (Trying to sound out a new word, trying a new game...).
Has many ways of looking at an object or interpreting stories, etc...other than is common.	The student is able to see something different in the meaning of a story other than is common. For example, "Jack and the Beanstalk": The student who asks, "Why doesn't Jack get punished for stealing?"
Is able to generate a variety of ideas without sticking to just one.	The student who practices fluency and flexibility in thought; can brainstorm a topic and come up with many different ideas concerning the topic.
Displays creative and original verbal responses.	The student is able to produce interesting and unusual statements using advanced vocabulary in proper context.
Displays creativity and originality in visual and expressive arts.	This can be observed through the student's use of body language or play.

Communication Characteristics	
Has a well developed vocabulary and uses it accurately.	The student uses vocabulary in proper context which is unusual for his or her age.
Is able to give directions to others either verbally or written.	Is able to give directions on how to get somewhere in the building, how to play a game, how to do a particular assignment, etc...
Has the ability to express ideas through several forms of communication.	The student is able to not only verbally express an idea, but can also write, act or draw it (or any combination of these).
Is able to get beyond frustrations in the writing process, such as spelling or fine motor skills.	The student who takes a chance on spelling a word because he or she wants to use it even though it has never been presented before. The student who is not discouraged by poor fine motor skills which shows in his or her writing.
Communicates thoughts and feelings more easily than his or her peers.	The student is able to do this in small group settings such as reading and play groups, as well as in larger groups. This can also be seen through interaction with the teacher.
Conveys ideas effectively and follows a logical sequence of order.	For example, the student could retell a story of something that happened that makes sense to everyone listening, such as a vacation, pet story, etc...

Psychosocial Characteristics	
Is self-critical	The student strives for perfection; chooses to re do work until it meets with their own standards.
Displays a keen sense of humor	The student is able to tell a joke effectively or understand the punch line in a joke.
His or her ideas are of interest to his or her peers.	Other children listen to what they have to say or go to them for advice.
Shows a greater sensitivity than peers to understanding the attitudes and feelings of others.	The student displays concern and compassion for other class members or the teacher.
Is alert to non-verbal evidence of feelings (mood body language, voice intonations).	The student who knows when the teacher has "had enough" and recognizes the same in his or her peers.
Is comfortable and confident in sharing his or	The student who talks or shares work in the classroom often and on

her work or ideas in the classroom.	their own initiative.
Is able to relate easily with older children and adults.	This can be observed through free time in class, in the hallways, playground interactions with principal, nurse, aides, etc...
Is able to relate to another person's point of view.	In a difference of opinion between two friends, the student is able to recognize and understand that each person has a different point of view.

Psychomotor Characteristics	
Learns a physical skill more quickly than others.	The physical education teacher will see this characteristic most readily.
Accurately identifies own physical abilities and limitations.	The student knows that he or she does or does not have the physical ability to perform a particular task or skill.
Physically adapts more easily than his or her peers to unanticipated circumstances or events.	The student reacts quickly to a situation that might occur (fire drills, injury to others, loose ball on the playground...).
Has exceptional spatial visualizations as compared with age-mates.	The student can demonstrate through his or her drawings, an ability to put things together proportionally and in perspective. The student also shows depth perception in drawing (any one or combination of these characteristics).
Displays superior use of fine motor skills.	The student shows superior use in gripping pencils, coloring, scissor use, etc...