

Gifted and Talented Education

Definitions of gifted and talented

The widely accepted definition of giftedness and talented is adopted from François Gagné's model (2004), where 'giftedness' is understood as outstanding potential and 'talent' as outstanding performance.

Gifted

- Gifted individuals possess outstanding natural intellectual, physical, creative or social abilities.
- Importantly, gifted children and young people may or may not be high achievers – while they may have outstanding potential they can be disengaged and under-achieve.
- While all gifted individuals have the potential to perform at a significantly higher level than their age-peers, their level of ability may be considered on a scale of mildly to extremely gifted.
- Around 10-15% of people may fall within the full range of gifted abilities, however high to extreme levels of giftedness are only prevalent in a very small proportion of the population (1-2%).

Talent

Talented individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding mastery of systematically developed knowledge and skills in one or more areas. They typically develop these competencies through practice and are usually highly motivated and persistent in their endeavours.

Gifted and talented children and young people may have one or more gifts or talents across a wide range of domains, including:

- discrete academic disciplines, such as mathematics, science, languages or the humanities
- an area of physical, artistic or technical ability, such as a gift in a sport, the visual or performing arts, agricultural science or software development
- creativity, innovative thinking and problem-solving ability
- social, communicative and leadership ability.

Gifted and talented children and young people, like all young people, should be encouraged, challenged and inspired if they are to realise their potential.

Learning opportunities for the gifted and talented

Gifted and talented children and young people experience a sense of wellbeing and engagement when provided with supportive and challenging learning environments and opportunities that are responsive to their individual strengths and interests.

School settings should respond to each individual child's or young person's learning profile. For the gifted individual, this often requires modifying the curriculum. Planning a differentiated curriculum makes it stimulating for gifted children or young people.

A differentiated curriculum is a curriculum that offers a variety of entry points for learners who differ in abilities, knowledge and skills and allows them to progress through it at a rate that matches their learning.

Personalised learning

Gifted and talented children and young people often differ from their age-peers not only in terms of their abilities, but in their preferred learning style as well. They have particular learning needs that require specific strategies and approaches that include, but are not limited to:

- daily challenge in their specific areas of ability or interest
- learning experiences that reflect a range of learning styles
- opportunities to socialise and learn with peers of like-ability as well as work independently on areas of interest
- connections to people and opportunities beyond the early childhood setting or school that support their particular passions and talents while connecting to the curriculum (Rogers, 2007).

While education for the gifted and talented requires specific strategies in terms of curriculum, assessment and teaching method, it also involves consideration of social-emotional development. Some researchers, such as Sisk, suggest that gifted children and young people are more likely to be sensitive, perfectionists and preoccupied with moral issues, and so they may require particular support in terms of social-emotional development .

When high-ability children and young people are in educational settings where their abilities are not recognised and supported, they typically experience boredom, frustration and decreased motivation (Neihart et al., 2002). They may disengage from learning or deliberately under-achieve in order to fit in. Some gifted learners may become disruptive in the classroom or exit early from schooling.

Gifted and talented children and young people have particular learning requirements. Responding to these requirements is not an optional extra – it is a key responsibility of early childhood settings and schools.

Programs and approaches may include:

- personalising the curriculum with opportunities to respond to the learner’s needs;
- curriculum differentiation through changes in pace, depth, complexity and teaching method;
- different models of grouping, for example, interest and subject acceleration;
- specialised programs that offer students access to specialist expertise and facilities, including facilities available in the wider community, as part of deep engagement with a particular curriculum area;
- mentoring programs within or between schools to connect students with ‘like minds’
- engaging students with strengthened personalised learning opportunities that provide greater breadth and depth of learning; and,
- opportunities to engage with university courses or higher level vocational education.