



Davidson Institute
for Talent Development

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Frequently Asked Questions About Giftedness

Author(s): Davidson Institute for Talent Development

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General Information

Q. Who are the "profoundly intelligent"?

Profoundly intelligent young people are those with an exceptionally high level of intellectual precocity. While neither exceptionally high nor low intelligence can be determined only in terms of an intelligence quotient, an IQ score can be a useful index for identifying the intellectual potential of an individual by looking at the individual's "mental age" and comparing it to his/her "chronological age."

In terms of measurement, different tests produce different numbers. So, generally speaking, profoundly intelligent individuals are those individuals who have IQ's that are at the 99.999% percentile. For an overview of commonly used assessments, please view the Test, Score and Portfolio Guide.

It's important to also note that, despite many stereotypes, profoundly intelligent young people come from all ethnic groups, races, economic levels, and geographic areas. Like other young people, the profoundly intelligent are unique individuals with varied and multifaceted traits:

- Some of them demonstrate mastery in multiple domain areas; others excel in a single domain area.
- Some of them have highly developed social skills; others have limited social skills.
- Some of them are highly sensitive and suffer terribly from an unkind act or thoughtless remark; others are less affected.
- Some of them are perfectionists; others are quite comfortable taking risks and making mistakes.
- Some of them are extremely intense and appear to be hyperactive at times; others are not.
- Some of them excel in their classes; others do not.
- Some of them are both highly intelligent and learning disabled.
- Many are highly verbal, highly mathematical, highly musical, highly athletic, highly inventive, and many excel in other areas.

Characteristics

Q. What are some of the characteristics of profoundly intelligent children?

While profoundly intelligent children are a diverse group of unique individuals, some of the characteristics they share in common are:

- An extreme need for constant mental stimulation.
- An ability to learn and process complex information rapidly.
- A need to explore subjects in surprising depth, to understand the why and how as well as the what.
- An insatiable curiosity; endless questions and inquiries about how things work.
- A need for precision in thinking and expression. A student who answers questions with that depends... is your first clue of extreme intelligence.
- An ability to focus intently on a subject of interest for long periods of time.
- An inability to concentrate on a task that is not intellectually challenging, such as those that involve repetition or that present material in bite size pieces.
- A propensity toward underachievement, particularly in females and adolescents who want to fit in with their classmates.

How Many

Q. How many profoundly intelligent young people are there?

We don't really know. Statistically it is estimated that individuals with an IQ of 145+ appear in the population at a ratio of 1 in 1,000 and individuals with an IQ of 160+ appear in the population at a ratio of fewer than 1 in 10,000 and those with an IQ of 180+ appear in the population at a ratio of fewer than 1 in a million. Because the most commonly used IQ tests, including those listed in the Davidson Institute's Test, Score and Portfolio Guide, have a ceiling of 159, it is difficult to determine how many individuals have IQ's above 160.

Some researchers make the case that the actual incidence of such children in the population is demonstrably higher. Lewis Terman, author of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (the first American IQ test), expressed a great deal of surprise when he conducted a major longitudinal study of gifted children in the early 1920s, and discovered that children above 170 IQ were "all out of proportion" to the numbers he had expected to find. Other researchers, clinicians, and educators, separated by a century of time and located in widely varying geographic locales, have also discovered an unexpectedly high incidence of exceptionally and profoundly intelligent children.

Some researchers have estimated that there may be six to 10 times as many children in the 160+ IQ range than previously thought (see Robinson, below). Finding these children, in part, seems to be a function of actually looking for them, as well as using a variety of formal and informal assessments that can measure the full range of their abilities.

To learn more about IQ and population numbers, please reference the cited material in [this factsheet](#), which is available in the Davidson Institute's press room.

IQ and Testing

Q. When and how should students be tested for giftedness?

The optimal age for assessment is between the ages of four and nine. In general, testing a child when he/she is younger can be more revealing than testing an older child. According to Kathi Kearney, "The older the child is when the test is administered, the less 'room' there is on the test itself to demonstrate advanced ability; thus, an older child's score may not reflect the full extent of his giftedness."

When considering whether or not to have a child assessed, parents should determine the specific academic outcomes they hope to address through formal assessment. This will help both the tester and the family to select appropriate assessment instruments.

An IQ number alone does not provide adequate information about a student's intellectual abilities. Other information that should be evaluated are samples of the student's work, as well as observations of the student's parents and teachers.

There are a variety of instruments available that assess intelligence and achievement. Many are listed in the Davidson Institute's Test, Score, and Portfolio Guide and detailed information on various testing and assessment instruments can be found in GT-CyberSource.

An assessment of the extent of a student's precocity may assist parents and educators to provide the most appropriate intellectual and emotional support for the student. Assessment of giftedness provides schools with the information required to make the appropriate educational provisions for the profoundly intelligent student.

Developmental Issues

Q. What are some of the developmental issues of profoundly intelligent children?

Very often profoundly intelligent children have unique developmental needs because their development is "out of sync" with the normal development of their age group. Their advanced cognitive abilities may cause them to perceive the world differently than their age-peers.

This may sometimes cause them to feel "different" and socially isolated. Leta Stetter Hollingworth, one of the early experts on profoundly intelligent children, observed significant differences in the development of the moderately and profoundly intelligent. After years of research, she identified an IQ range of 125-155 as "socially optimal." Children scoring within this range were generally well balanced, self-confident, and outgoing; they were likely to become effective leaders because they were able to win the confidence and friendship of their age-peers. However, children with IQs of 160 and above were so different from their age-mates that developmental problems were common, particularly between the ages of 4 and 9. As Hollingworth noted, "To have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties."

In general, profoundly intelligent children who have a safe, supportive home environment and a schooling

situation that is appropriate to their advanced cognitive abilities will be more successful in their ability to cope with developmental issues.

Schooling

Q. What about schooling for profoundly intelligent young people?

Most schools group children based on age, which in most cases is not a productive learning environment for these students. The best situation for the profoundly intelligent child is for the parents and the school to develop an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) that takes into account the child's intellectual precocity and emotional development. Educational programs for profoundly intelligent children need to be customized for a profoundly intelligent learner. Sometimes an educational advocate can help. In the words of Miraca Gross, "Exceptional students are surely those for whom their schools should make an exception."

If you identify a profoundly gifted learner in your school or classroom, here are some options you can put into practice to help him or her learn:

Early Entrance to Kindergarten

A child has a right to work at his or her appropriate level. Some children may benefit from early acceptance to kindergarten by having their academic needs met in the classroom at a younger age.

Subject/Grade Acceleration

No other arrangement for profoundly gifted children works as well as acceleration. Support the profoundly intelligent student by accelerating him or her in one or more school subjects to provide intellectual challenge in areas where he or she is particularly advanced. Utilizing the Iowa Acceleration Scale can help parents and educators determine the best fit for a particular child (or student).

Parents and educators need to be aware of the research on acceleration (*A Nation Deceived*) and then work with schools to provide multi-age grouping of intellectual peers for highly intelligent students.

Self-contained Classes

In some cases, self-contained classes for the gifted are even more effective in providing students the opportunity to be challenged by and to connect with intellectual peers. It also simplifies a teacher's role by having a class of like like-minded individuals, rather than trying to differentiate within a heterogeneous classroom.

Independent Study

Before beginning a unit, allow students the opportunity to demonstrate what they know through pre-testing. If a student can demonstrate mastery, which can be considered 85%, work with him or her to develop an independent course of study to delve into the topic in greater depth. Examples of independent study options are online distance learning courses, correspondence courses, and forming a learning partnership with a mentor-teacher.

Pre-assessment and/or Credit by Exam

Some school districts offer examinations whereby students can skip one or more grades or a particular course by performing well on an examination of the material.

Dual Enrollment

Meeting the educational needs of a profoundly intelligent student may require enrollment in two or more levels of schooling at the same time: elementary and middle school, middle and high school, high school and college, elementary or middle school and college.

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs

Courses for students in high school which cover material at the college level and prepare students to take AP exams offered through the College Board testing program.

Extracurricular Opportunities

Extracurricular opportunities can offer intellectual challenges to profoundly intelligent students. Talent searches, state governor's programs, contests/competitions and the pursuit of a significant piece of work for a Davidson Fellows award are among the opportunities that could be explored.

Parenting

Q. How do you parent a profoundly intelligent child?

Parenting profoundly intelligent children is one of the most difficult parenting challenges. As Stephanie Tolan, writer and parent of a profoundly intelligent child herself, states:

Raising a profoundly gifted child can be agony, ecstasy, and everything in between. Adults must perform almost impossible feats of balance; supporting a child's gifts without pushing, valuing without over-investing, championing without taking over. It is costly, physically and emotionally draining, and intellectually demanding. In the first flush of pride, few parents realize that their task is in many ways similar to the task faced by parents of a child with severe handicaps. Our world does not accommodate differences easily, and it matters little whether the difference is perceived to be a deficit or an overabundance.

Unfortunately, there is little information or support for parents with profoundly intelligent children, and traditional parenting practices may not take into consideration the specific needs and sensitivities of these kids. As James Webb observed, "In some families, continual evaluation and criticism of performance--one's own and others--is a tradition. Any natural tendency to self-evaluate likely will be inflated (by the profoundly intelligent child). Depression and academic underachievement may be increased." Asynchrony in the child's development also may lead to asynchrony in the family system. While normal, this asynchrony presents a special set of challenges (and joys).

The experts agree that the most significant way parents can help their profoundly intelligent children become comfortable with themselves is by providing them with a safe, supportive home environment where they are loved and accepted for who they are, differences and all.

This article is provided as a service of the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, a 501(c)3 nonprofit operating foundation, which nurtures and supports profoundly intelligent young people and to provide opportunities for them to develop their talents and to make a positive difference. For more information, please visit <http://www.davidson-institute.org>, or call (775) 852-3483.

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