

Understanding the Highly Capable

Debunking Myths

Myth #1 Gifted kids are all model students. They are well behaved, get their work completed on time, and always get good grades. **NOPE.** *Some gifted students are all of the above, yet others procrastinate, do their own work instead of what was assigned, are disorganized and have poor study skills.*

Myth #2 All gifted students work up to their potential. **NOT TRUE.** *Gifted students may decide to do the minimum or choose easy tasks instead of ones that are challenging. Some get discouraged when the work doesn't come easily, so they quit.*

Myth #3 With gifted kids, reading and writing skills keep pace with each other. **NO SIR!** *Teachers often think a gifted reader should be a gifted writer; however, there is no consistent relationship between reading and writing skills in the development of gifted children.*

Myth #4 Gifted students will do fine without any special help from the school or teachers. **NO WAY.** *Gifted students need accommodations and differentiation to ensure academic growth just like other students.*

Myth #5 It is a good idea to ask gifted students to teach other students who are not understanding. **NOPE.** *Peer tutoring by gifted students takes away time the gifted students should be using for more advanced work and higher-level thinking. Gifted students need to continue moving forward just like every other student.*

Myth #6 Gifted kids are gifted in all areas. **NEGATIVE.** *Gifted kids can be gifted in one area and learning challenged in another.*



You think you know them...

Highly capable students may be the most rewarding or the most challenging students in our classrooms for a multitude of reasons. We witness these students reading anything put before them, yet their writing compositions may be disorganized and sloppily written. We listen to highly capable students discuss topics in great detail, yet for some when these thoughts are put into writing they become minimal. Highly capable students in the classroom may be model students who are motivated and score well on assessments....or....underachievers, disorganized and highly emotional. These are only a few of the characteristics associated with being highly capable. Read on to learn more about typical characteristics of highly capable students in the classroom. Some may surprise you!

...and then they surprise you.

"You are not required to teach all the standards to all of your students. You are only required to document that the standards assigned to you have been mastered by the students assigned to you." (Susan Winebrenner, *Teaching Gifted Kids in Today's Classroom*. 2012.)

Overexcitable

Many gifted children have a heightened response to stimuli, causing overexcitability. Renowned psychologist and psychiatrist, Kazimierz Dabrowski defined these intensities in five areas. Knowing more about each of these areas helps educators better understand some of the behaviors of their gifted students.

Intellectual Overexcitability

Intensely curious, avid readers possessing a need to gain knowledge and analyze. May get so excited that they interrupt class at inappropriate times. Also may become impatient with peers who cannot sustain their intellectual pace.

Sensual Overexcitability

May feel uncomfortable with sensory input. Distractions like clothing tags, classroom noises or smells may interfere with completing classroom work. When tense may become the center of attention or withdraw from stimulation.

Imaginational Overexcitability

Rich imagination with detailed visualization. Often mix truth with fiction. May have difficulty paying attention in a classroom focused on a rigid curriculum. Will spend time drawing and writing instead of completing schoolwork.

Emotional Overexcitability

Intense feelings, identify strongly with other's feelings, and exhibits complex emotions. May include physical responses like stomachaches. Their concern for others and intense feelings may interfere with everyday tasks and classroom assignments.

Psychomotor Overexcitability

Surplus of energy shown through rapid speech, enthusiasm, and physical activity. Highly competitive and act impulsively when tense. These students have the potential of being misdiagnosed with ADHD, instead of being identified as gifted.

For additional information on overexcitability and strategies to use with students visit:
sengifted.org/archives/articles/overexcitability-and-the-gifted



Further Reading

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset*. 2006.

Johnston, Peter H. *Opening Minds*. 2012.

Sousa, David A. *How the Gifted Brain Learns*. 2009.

Winebrenner, Susan. *Teaching Gifted Kids in Today's Classroom*. 2012.

Underachievement

Working with gifted students who are performing below their potential can be frustrating. A multitude of reasons exist for underachieving gifted kids, however the following strategies are worth considering.

SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES: Choose curriculum activities based on student interest and needs. Allow students to omit assignments for which they already show competency.

INTRINSIC STRATEGIES: Student desire to achieve is closely linked to their self-concept. For this reason, encourage *attempts* not just successes. Be aware of the fine line between encouragement and pressure. Encouragement emphasizes effort, while pressure emphasizes scores and grades.

REMEDIAL STRATEGIES: Mistakes are part of the learning process. Understand that gifted kids have both strengths and weaknesses academically. Meeting the needs of both ends is essential. Be careful about saying things like, "Why did you get such a low score? You are in Seminar and should be able to do better." This is rarely, if ever, effective.