



When
Gifted Kids
Don't Have
All the Answers

**How to Meet
Their Social
and Emotional
Needs**

**Judy Galbraith, M.A.
Jim Delisle, Ph.D.**

**Revised &
Updated Edition**

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Praise for When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers

“This book belongs in the canon of gifted literature. Every teacher, parent, or mental health professional working with the gifted should have a well-worn, dog-eared copy on his or her desk. Its readability, practical advice, and unique voice make it a must own. Five stars and two thumbs up.”

—**Lisa Van Gemert**, youth and education ambassador, Mensa Foundation

“An excellent resource for advocates—both teachers and parents—offering practical and insightful strategies on how to answer information seekers and critics alike about gifted children and their education.”

—**Lisa Conrad**, founder and blogger at Gifted Parenting Support, and moderator of Twitter’s Global Gifted & Talented Chat (#gtchat)

“Jim and Judy are on target! This book really does help students, parents, educators, and friends of gifted people understand that being gifted is truly a blessing, not a burden.”

—**Patti Rendon**, gifted and talented coordinator in Edinburg, Texas

“Galbraith and Delisle successfully bridge the gap between research and practice to make a positive, practical difference for gifted young people. This text is a thorough, thoughtful, and utterly essential collection of information and actions that will benefit gifted kids and the adults in their lives.”

—**Colleen Harsin**, director of the Davidson Academy

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Judy Galbraith, M.A.
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the devoted advocates of gifted youth whose efforts often go unnoticed or are undervalued. There may be days when you're not sure if your work is making any difference, and you may feel discouraged by a society that largely misunderstands the importance of what you do. I hope that, in some small way, this book encourages and helps you to carry on the good fight. Remember, your heart knows the truth: Gifted kids are worth your efforts. They need and appreciate your support, advocacy, challenge, and caring.

—**Judy Galbraith**

The first edition of this book was dedicated, wholly and completely, to my son, Matt, whose love and laughter I cherish. I see no reason to change that dedication, but simply to add someone to it: his wife, Jen, who completes him (and our family) in meaningful and beautiful ways.

—**Jim Delisle**

Acknowledgments

As we were preparing the final copy for this book, we were both struck by the number of letters, anecdotes, and personal reflections that are included in it. Some were written by colleagues we have known for years, others by students who were in our classes or who crossed our lives for only a brief moment, and still more by individuals close to our hearts due to the personal relationships we have shared with them. In all cases, their words and reflections have added immeasurably to our understanding of giftedness. Even more, though, these excerpts represent both the friendships and professional relationships that have been forged between us and so many generous others. To every individual who has helped make this book more complete, more “grounded,” we thank you with much sincerity.

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Introduction

Gifted kids are so much more than high grades and test scores. You probably know that already; that's why you're reading this book. But for teachers just starting out (or burning out, or overwhelmed with the day-to-day concerns of their job), it's sometimes difficult to see past all that achievement and potential to the child or adolescent who may be filled with anxiety, pressured to be perfect, lonely, alienated, confused, and unsure of what the future might bring.

We can both remember the specific incidents that first called our attention to gifted kids' social and emotional needs.

Judy: Early in my career as a gifted education specialist I worked with teens. One day, three boys hung around after class, and I overheard them talking. "Now I get to go be my family's identified patient,"

one said. Another asked, "Have you ever taken a Rorschach test?" The third said, "I'm seeing a psychiatrist." I suddenly realized that all three students had personal experience with mental health issues, and I wondered: What about the others? It was a wake-up call for me. Not long after, another of my students attempted suicide. When I looked at my program with new eyes, I saw that it was based entirely on meeting gifted kids' academic needs. It occurred to me that if a student's mental health is off-center significantly, or even a little, what point is there in trying to push academic challenge when that's usually the easy part of life for gifted kids? I made it my personal mission to educate myself about mental health, and to balance my academic program with life skills—learning about oneself and others.

Jim: Greg entered my life and my classroom at the same time. A fifth grader, he was fascinated by anything intellectual, and his sensitivity often caused him to see life from an altruistic angle seldom observed in boys his age. He drove his teachers nuts, though. He seldom finished anything he started, because once his fascination with a topic was sated, he felt it was time to move on. For two years, Greg was enrolled in my gifted program, and for two years, I had to fight to keep him there. He wasn't your stereotypical highachieving gifted child, but he was, indeed, a gifted child. I came to realize that the greatest needs he had were not in academics, but in the social and emotional realms of growing up gifted. Greg, and others like him, have guided my life ever since, and they have shown me the importance of looking beyond high achievement and glossy projects to find the gifted child beneath the academic veneer.

It's important to know that there isn't a big difference between addressing students' academic and emotional needs. You don't have to be a counselor with a degree. You don't have to have all the answers. We certainly don't! What we *do* have are years of experience working with gifted kids, studying gifted kids, reading about gifted kids, getting to know them, caring about them, and trying our best to help them.

We wrote this book to share what we've learned, to share what other experts say (including gifted kids themselves), and to give you some strategies, activities, and ideas you can start using right now to support the social and emotional needs of your own gifted students.

About This Book

- In **Chapter 1: What Is Giftedness?** we describe the general characteristics of gifted children and some problems associated with those characteristics. We present various definitions of giftedness and invite you to come up with your own definition. We spotlight many of the myths and misconceptions about giftedness (including the pervasive, pernicious myth that gifted education is “elitist”), and we consider the “gifted” label. This chapter includes two important information-gathering tools: a “Teacher Inventory” and a “Student Questionnaire.” We strongly encourage you to complete the inventory and have your gifted students complete the questionnaire. Both will provide you with valuable insights.
- In **Chapter 2: Identifying Gifted Kids**, we wonder (as we're sure you do) why identification is so complex, suggest ways to improve the identification process, look at some questionable practices in current identification methods, and present common questions about identification—along with answers we hope you'll find helpful.
- In **Chapter 3: Emotional Dimensions of Giftedness**, we describe some of the challenges gifted kids face from within and without, including super-sensitivity and perfectionism. We talk about different ways of being gifted and focus on three categories of giftedness which may predict emotional needs: gifted girls, gifted students from ethnic and cultural minorities, and gifted children with physical and learning differences. We point out

some trouble signs you can watch for, including symptoms indicating that a student may be deeply depressed or even suicidal.

- In **Chapter 4: Being a Gifted Education Teacher**, we empathize with you and the challenges you face in your job. We understand; we've been there! We offer some ideas for explaining gifted education to parents, colleagues, administrators, and others who may not understand what you do or why it's necessary to do it ("Aren't all children gifted?"). We consider what makes a good gifted education teacher and suggest specific actions you might take to build your own strengths. Then we offer strategies you can use to create a supportive environment for your students, both as a group and one-on-one.
- In **Chapter 5: Understanding Gifted Kids from the Inside Out**, we describe the difference between self-image and self-esteem and identify specific issues gifted children and adolescents face that set them apart. Then we present several activities related to those issues that help gifted kids explore their perceptions, consider their lives, learn more about themselves, be their own advocates, and like themselves more.
- In **Chapter 6: Underachiever or Selective Consumer?**, we consider a label that's often applied to gifted kids who don't live up to others' expectations: "underachiever." We distinguish between underachievement and nonproduction, which we prefer to call "selective consumerism." We review the literature and research on what has historically been called "underachievement." Then we suggest strategies for

reversing patterns of underachieving and selective consumer behaviors through curricular and counseling interventions.

- In **Chapter 7: The Eight Great Gripes of Gifted Kids**, we present a series of group discussions you can use to help students explore and understand the "Eight Great Gripes of Gifted Kids." The "Great Gripes" are problems and feelings that gifted kids have identified



as common to their experience: being bored in school; dealing with others' expectations; worrying about world problems and feeling helpless to do anything about them. The "Great Gripes" aren't new; in fact, gifted kids first told us about them more than thirty years ago. The specific gripes have changed somewhat in the decades since, but several core issues still loom large in kids' lives. Our discussions allow students to explore these issues in depth and feel more empowered to cope with them.

- In **Chapter 8: Making It Safe to Be Smart: Creating the Gifted-Friendly Classroom**, we focus on ways to make gifted students feel welcome, wanted, and able to be themselves. We discuss the relationship between self-esteem and school achievement. We introduce the idea of "Invitational Education" and present specific strategies you can use to make your curriculum, grading procedures, student evaluations, classroom environment, and even your disciplinary procedures more supportive. We also talk about ways to feel better about yourself as a teacher.

At the end of some chapters, you'll also find reproducible forms to help you learn more about your students and support their academic, social, and emotional development. See page viii for how to access the digital versions of these forms through Free Spirit Publishing's website.

Our goals throughout this book are to call attention to gifted students' issues, problems, and feelings; to support your efforts on behalf of gifted kids; to answer some of the tough questions you may have (or that you may be asked by others); and

to provide you with concrete, easy-to-use strategies and activities for meeting students' social and emotional needs. The goals of the strategies and activities are to help gifted kids understand what giftedness means; to invite them to embrace giftedness as an asset in their lives; to inspire them to take more responsibility for their learning and their actions; and to help them build life skills for dealing with perfectionism, conflicts with others, self-esteem issues, and other mental-health concerns.

The strategies and activities you'll find here have been used in many classrooms, some for many years. We're confident that you'll have success with them, too. Watch what happens as your gifted students learn to understand and accept themselves, understand and accept others, and realize that being gifted is a blessing, not a burden.

A Few Words of Encouragement

Naturally, we don't know exactly what kind of gifted program you teach in—or even if you teach in a gifted program. Maybe you're one of the lucky ones, with a full-time program or even a gifted magnet school that's strongly supported, generally understood, and adequately funded (at least for now). Maybe you staff a resource room where gifted students spend part of each day. Perhaps you're a "pull-out" program teacher who travels from school to school, spending an hour or two each week with each group of gifted students (and you have many groups). Maybe you teach an enrichment class, AP (Advanced Placement) classes, or an after-school,

weekend, or summer class for gifted students. Maybe you're a mentor to a gifted child.

Or maybe you're a "regular" classroom teacher, where your inclusive, mixed-abilities classroom may include students who range from highly gifted to gifted, to "average" students, those who have learning differences, kids at risk, students who have disabilities, homeless kids, and/or students for whom English is a new language. If so, you're probably being asked by your administration to differentiate the curriculum, or you will be at some point in the not-too-distant future.

Differentiation means changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction to meet each student's individual learning needs. In a time when gifted programs are being challenged or eliminated, differentiation is a way of ensuring that gifted students are given the learning opportunities they need. Depending on your situation, these opportunities may include curriculum compacting (compressing curriculum material into a shorter time frame, and allowing students to demonstrate mastery of content they already know); ability grouping (putting gifted students together for instruction in a particular subject area); flexible grouping (putting students together on an assignment-by-assignment basis); cluster grouping (putting all identified gifted students of the same grade level in the same classroom, usually one led by a teacher with training in gifted education); or individualized instruction (independent study projects).

Whatever your own situation might be, and however many gifted students you teach, we hope you know how truly essential you are. Over and over again, gifted

Relevant Research

As you read this book, you'll probably notice that some of the studies and research we cite aren't exactly new. In fact, some of them are relatively old. That's because—unfortunately—very little new, substantive research has been done about gifted kids and their needs. So when you do see references to older studies or research, we've included them because the results or information are still relevant—and also because there simply isn't newer information to offer.

students have told us about teachers who have made a tremendous difference in their lives. Gifted adults get misty-eyed when remembering grade-school teachers who took the time and made the effort to know them and guide them. Yes, you'll have bad days, maddening days, frustrating days, and days when you wish you'd followed a different career path altogether. Join the club! But please . . . keep teaching.

And please be willing to deal with the emotional lives of your students, not just their intellectual needs. Actually, working with students' affective needs may be (in the words of one teacher) "the best thing we can do for them." In an average busy day, with a tight schedule and loaded curriculum, it seems difficult to depart from the teacher's guide to deal with feelings. But as many people have pointed out, if students don't have good self-concepts

and good interpersonal relationships, anything else positive comes to a screeching halt.

Affective education belongs in the teacher's guide. And that's what this book is.

Stay in Touch

We'd love to hear from you. Please let us know what's been helpful in this book, what works for you (and doesn't). Are there other strategies and activities you've discovered or developed that seem especially effective with gifted kids? We'd appreciate your sharing them with us. Are there stories from your own experience that make a point, illuminate a need, or support the importance of gifted

education? Send them our way. We're always learning from "teachers in the trenches"—people like you. You may contact us by email or regular mail, and yes, we do respond:

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We hope to hear from you. And we wish you continued success in your efforts to understand, teach, and encourage social and emotional growth among the gifted students in your care.

Judy Galbraith, M.A.
Jim Delisle, Ph.D.



What Is Giftedness?

Gifted can't really be defined, in my opinion. It means something slightly different to everyone, with gifted people being even more diverse in their definitions than anyone else.

—Martin, 16

When you hear the word “gifted,” what’s the first thing that comes to mind? Answer quickly. Don’t spend a lot of time pondering or framing the “right” response. This is not a test!

Did you immediately think “genius,” “prodigy,” “Einstein,” “exceptional,” “talented,” or “precocious”? Did you picture the child in your classroom who always seems to be one step ahead of you (or more)? Who never stops talking? Who’s always the first to raise his or her hand? Who has a million questions? Or did you

envision the child who spends hours staring out the window in apparent boredom, who seems to have few friends, who won’t turn in an assignment until it’s absolutely perfect? For you, is the word “gifted” positive—or negative?

Giftedness means many things. It means different things to different people, to society, and to gifted kids themselves. As a helpful starting point for understanding what giftedness is and means, consider the following list from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education:

Some General Characteristics of Gifted Children¹

These are typical factors stressed by educational authorities as being indicative of giftedness. Obviously, no child is outstanding in all characteristics.

1. Shows superior reasoning powers and marked ability to handle ideas; can generalize readily from specific facts and can see subtle relationships; has outstanding problem-solving ability.
2. Shows persistent intellectual curiosity; asks searching questions; shows exceptional interest in the nature of humankind and the universe.
3. Has a wide range of interests, often of an intellectual kind; develops one or more interests to considerable depth.
4. Is markedly superior in quality and quantity of written and/or spoken vocabulary; is interested in the subtleties of words and their uses.
5. Reads avidly and absorbs books well beyond his or her years.
6. Learns quickly and easily and retains what is learned; recalls important details, concepts and principles; comprehends readily.
7. Shows insight into arithmetical problems that require careful reasoning and grasps mathematical concepts readily.

Gifted Kids Speak Out

"Being gifted means I never stop asking questions!"
—Devorah, 9

"The best part of being gifted is being with intellectual peers who don't fret my endless questions and esoteric interests. The worst part of being gifted is living in a society whose focus is on making sure all the blades of grass measure up to level height and cutting off any that are higher than average."
—Annalee, 15

"Giftedness means that I'm smart. It also means I wear my heart on my sleeve. Others see the former, but totally miss the latter. I don't just 'get over it.' It's who I am."
—Nadine, 16

"It just means that I have a faster rate of computing things in my brain."
—Nori, 8

8. Shows creative ability or imaginative expression in such things as music, art, dance, drama; shows sensitivity and finesse in rhythm, movement, and bodily control.
9. Sustains concentration for lengthy periods and shows outstanding responsibility and independence in classroom work.
10. Sets realistically high standards for self; is self-critical in evaluating and correcting his or her own efforts.
11. Shows initiative and originality in intellectual work; shows flexibility in thinking and considers problems from a number of viewpoints.
12. Observes keenly and is responsive to new ideas.
13. Shows social poise and an ability to communicate with adults in a mature way.
14. Gets excitement and pleasure from intellectual challenge; shows an alert and subtle sense of humor.

In addition to these characteristics, gifted children can be extraordinarily sensitive. They often feel things more intensely than do other kids their age. They tend to develop empathy earlier than other children do. They often have a social conscience—and an intense awareness of the world’s problems. They worry about the world, the environment, wars and conflicts, hunger and homelessness. Their emotions are raw and deep, yet close to the surface.

Along with these many fine qualities can come various problems related to them.

Just as not all gifted kids have every one of the characteristics shown in the chart on pages 10–11, not all gifted kids have each (or most, or even some) of the problems associated with these characteristics. In fact, many of the problems they do have aren’t much different from those that other children and adolescents experience during the so-called “normal” process of growing up.

But many researchers, teachers, parents, and children themselves are realizing that gifted and talented kids may have special needs that come with being bright. Their view of the world, view of themselves, and other qualities (such as perfectionism and sensitivity) set them apart from peers and family—and at odds with their schools—just at a time in their lives when desire for conformity is greatest. Only in the last thirty years or so have we begun to address the cognitive needs of our brightest students, and many would argue that even this attention has been incomplete and spotty, as some schools offer much for gifted students and others do not. Still, to keep gifted children engaged in school and help them mature emotionally as well as intellectually, we must address their affective needs as vigorously as we address their cognitive ones.

What Does Giftedness Mean to You?

On pages 33–36, you’ll find a “Teacher Inventory” we developed as a think piece—a way for you to focus on your attitudes about giftedness and your concerns about working with gifted students. Try filling it out like a diary or journal you’d want to read in another five years.

Dualities of Giftedness

The child who . . .	May also be the child who . . .
Shows superior reasoning powers and marked ability to handle ideas	Is impatient; seems stuck-up or arrogant; challenges your authority; has difficulty getting along with less able peers
Can solve problems quickly and easily	Wants to move on quickly to more challenging problems, despite what the rest of the class is doing; hates to “wait for the group”; gets bored and frustrated
Shows persistent intellectual curiosity and asks searching questions	Drives you crazy with questions; asks inappropriate or embarrassing questions; is perceived as “nosy”
Shows exceptional interest in the nature of humankind and the universe	Has difficulty focusing on ideas that are less grand and sweeping; feels that everyday class work is trivial and meaningless; can't connect with interests of age peers
Has a wide range of interests; develops one or more interests to considerable depth	Seems scattered and disorganized; takes on too many projects at once; gets obsessed with a particular interest; resists direction or interruption; rebels against conforming to group tasks; disrupts class routines; is perceived as stubborn or uncooperative
Has an advanced vocabulary	Talks too much; uses words to intimidate other people; finds it hard to communicate with age peers; seems pompous or conceited—a “show-off”; plays word games that others don't understand or appreciate; dominates discussions; has trouble listening
Is an avid reader	Buries himself or herself in books and avoids social interaction
Learns quickly; comprehends readily	Gets bored with the regular curriculum; gets impatient with peers for being “slow”; resists assignments that don't present opportunities for new learning; dislikes drill and practice; does inaccurate or sloppy work
Grasps mathematical concepts readily	Has little or no patience for regular math lessons or homework

The child who . . .	May also be the child who . . .
Is creative and imaginative	Goes too far; seems disruptive; lacks interest in mundane assignments or details; wanders off the subject
Sustains concentration for lengthy periods of time	Has tunnel vision; hates to be interrupted; neglects regular assignments or responsibilities; is stubborn
Shows outstanding responsibility and independence	Has difficulty working with others; resists following directions; seems bossy and disrespectful; is unable to accept help; is a nonconformist
Sets high standards for self; is self-critical	Sets unrealistically high goals; is perfectionistic; lacks tolerance for others' mistakes; fears failure; avoids taking risks or trying new things; becomes depressed
Shows initiative and originality	Resists going along with the crowd (or the class); is a loner
Shows flexibility in thinking; considers problems from a number of viewpoints	Has difficulty focusing on or finishing assignments; has trouble making decisions
Observes keenly; is responsive to new ideas	Sees too much; becomes impatient
Communicates easily with adults	Has difficulty communicating with age peers
Gets excitement and pleasure from intellectual challenge	Expects or demands intellectual challenge; resists sameness and routine tasks
Has a keen sense of humor	Uses humor inappropriately to gain attention or attack others; becomes the class clown; is disruptive
Is sensitive, empathetic, and emotional	Takes things personally; is easily hurt or upset; feels powerless to solve the world's problems; becomes fearful, anxious, and sad; has trouble handling criticism or rejection; is "too emotional," laughing one moment and crying the next; may seem immature



Write honestly what's on your mind. What do you know or believe to be true from your research and experiences? What do you know or believe on a gut level? What makes sense to you personally?

Even if you're feeling fairly comfortable with your perception of giftedness, your role as a teacher, and your relationship with the gifted students in your care, please don't skip this inventory. Your responses will help you prepare for the activities and strategies in the rest of this book.

What Other Gifted Educators Say

There are many views of giftedness, and even people who have studied the field for decades disagree on its definition. Here are a few examples showing the diversity of thought on the term "giftedness."

"Ask fifty people what is meant by giftedness and you will likely get fifty different definitions. Descriptions of giftedness also vary from one culture to another. For example, in a culture with no formal schooling, a skilled hunter might be the gifted one. Gifted abilities are more

likely to emerge when the individual's talents coincide with what is valued by the culture."

—David Sousa, from *How the Gifted Brain Learns* (2009)

"Giftedness is natural ability in domains of life such as academics, athletics, the arts, spirituality, and many other areas. But it is far more than innate talent. It is commitment and dedication, diligence, respect for inquiry, and a near fanatical passion for excellence. There are a lot of bright people who clerk at convenience stores. The world-class sculptors, surgeons, and scientists are the bright people who know the secret to great accomplishment: hard work."

—Jerry Flack, Ph.D., *President's Teaching Scholar, University of Colorado*

"Giftedness is the manifestation of performance or production that is clearly at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain even relative to that of other high-functioning individuals in that domain. Further, giftedness can be viewed as developmental, in that in the beginning stages, potential is the key variable; in later stages, achievement is the measure of giftedness; and in fully developed talents, eminence is the basis on which this label is granted."

—Rena Subotnik, Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, and Frank Worrell, from *Rethinking Giftedness and Gifted Education: A Proposed Definition Based on Psychological Science* (2011)

"Sometimes it's easier to say what giftedness is not than what it is. My conceptualization of giftedness is changing all the time. The more I study and think about

it, the more questions I ask, and the more I talk with people who know giftedness, the clearer it becomes. I used to think of giftedness as intelligence. Now I know that giftedness is more than intelligence. It's a way of being in the world. You can be smart and not be gifted. I think it's possible to have an IQ of 130 and not be gifted. I'm less sure about 145.

“Giftedness is a way of responding to what goes on around you and within you. There are affective as well as cognitive components. Some people say that giftedness is what you do. I say okay, but isn't who you are a big part of what you're capable of doing? I'm not sure you can separate the two. There seem to be common personality characteristics among people who achieve at very high levels, but you can have those personality characteristics and *not* achieve at very high levels, too. I'm saying that giftedness seems to require both—who you are and what you do. We do a lousy job in general education of paying attention to these psychosocial factors. There's too much emphasis on achievement without providing the psychological supports needed to get there. We tend to demand and abandon.”

—Maureen Neihart, Psy.D., *National Institute of Education, Singapore*

“Men equate giftedness with achievement. After we tested his son, one dad said to us, ‘He's only five. What could he have done in five years to be gifted?’ Women, on the other hand, perceive giftedness as *developmental advancement*. If a mom sees that her daughter is asking names of objects at eleven months, and memorizing books at seventeen months . . . she gets very anxious. ‘How will she *fit in* with the other children?’ ‘What will

the teacher do with her if she's already reading in kindergarten?’ Developing faster than other children makes a child vulnerable, and mothers are keenly aware of this vulnerability.”

—Dr. Linda Kreger Silverman, director, *Gifted Development Center, Denver, CO*

What Does Giftedness Mean to Society?

An estimated three million children in the United States (or approximately 5.5 percent of the student population) are considered gifted. Of course, this figure varies widely depending on how individuals define giftedness and how students are identified.

Dueling Definitions

There is no one right, absolute, or generally accepted definition of giftedness. Instead, there are federal and state government definitions, school and district definitions, researchers' definitions, advocacy organizations' definitions, dictionary definitions, encyclopedia definitions, teachers' definitions, parents' definitions, students' definitions . . . and the list goes on. Here's a sampling of definitions currently in use, with our brief comments about each of them.

From *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*:

[A gifted child is] any child who is naturally endowed with a high degree of general mental ability or extraordinary ability in a specific sphere of activity or knowledge. The designation of giftedness is largely a matter of administrative convenience. In most countries, the prevailing definition is an intelligence quotient (IQ) of 130 or above.

Authors' note: We appreciate the honesty here, calling the label of giftedness an “administrative convenience”—although there are probably those who see it more as an administrative *inconvenience*.

From the National Association for Gifted Children: Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10 percent or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

Authors' note: The complete definition goes on for two more paragraphs. Its adoption by NAGC in 2010 created a maelstrom of controversy, as it was perceived by some as being both overly complex and focused too strongly on achievement.

From the U.S. Department of Education, *Marland Report (1972)*: Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contributions to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude

3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability

Authors' note: If your school or state has a published definition of giftedness, chances are it's based on this one.

From the *No Child Left Behind Act*: The term “gifted and talented,” when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

Authors' note: This is a less clunky federal U.S. definition than the one from the *Marland Report*.

From the State of Alaska: Gifted means exhibiting outstanding intellect, ability, or creative talent.

From the State of Nebraska: “Learner with high ability” means a student who gives evidence of high performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, or artistic capacity or in specific academic fields and who requires accelerated or differentiated curriculum programs in order to develop those capabilities fully.

Authors' note: Alaska's brevity distills giftedness down to its core elements, while Nebraska's eliminates the term “gifted” altogether in favor of the more school-based (or palatable) term “learner with high ability.” But Nebraska's definition adds an important caveat: it states that highly able learners *require* special

services to have their unique needs addressed. That's a key addition. (Three states—New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and South Dakota—have no definition of giftedness at all.)

From respected experts on giftedness:

The following teachers, researchers, and others in the know about giftedness offer their own range of definitions.

Lewis Terman (1925): The top 1 percent level in general intelligence ability as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or a comparable instrument.

Dr. Paul Witty (1940): There are children whose outstanding potentialities in art, in writing, or in social leadership can be recognized largely by their performance. Hence, we have recommended that the definition of giftedness be expanded and that we consider any child gifted whose performance in a potentially valuable line of human activity is consistently remarkable.

Dr. Joseph Renzulli (1978): Giftedness consists of an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits—these clusters being above average general abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity.

Dr. Francois Gagné (2003): Giftedness designates the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities (called aptitudes or gifts), in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual among the top 10 percent of age peers. Talent designates the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and places an individual within the top 10 percent of age peers who are (or have been) active in that field.

Authors' note: Notice how we go from giftedness being the top 1 percent in 1925 to the top 10 percent in 2003. Witty's and Renzulli's definitions expand the pool of gifted candidates even further. No wonder people get so confused when asked to define a gifted child!

Annemarie Roeper (1982): Giftedness is a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences.

The Columbus Group (1991): Giftedness is asynchronous development in which cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual



capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order to develop optimally.

Authors' note: The latter two definitions focus on a different view of giftedness: it is not *something you do* at an outstanding level of accomplishment, but rather *someone you are* as an intellectual and emotionally intense human being.

These dueling definitions make for very confusing conversations among advocates for the gifted, for it appears that even the domain experts can't agree on who should be identified, and hence served, in gifted programs.

We suggest that the main problem with any definition isn't what it says, but how it's used. When we use definitions of giftedness to develop criteria for identifying students who need more challenging

educational opportunities, that's fine. When we use them to include people who really shouldn't be included, or exclude people who really shouldn't be excluded, that's not fine.

We're not sure that a universal definition of giftedness will ever be adopted. In fact, there are some who believe that we should follow the lead of South Dakota and not define giftedness at all. But as *Encyclopedia Britannica* points out, we often need labels like giftedness for administrative convenience. So, do definitions matter?

Do Definitions Matter?

Why do we need to define giftedness? Because in many schools, a definition serves as a foundation for developing and funding an appropriate educational program for gifted children. No definition, no program.

Many Ways to Be Gifted

Some experts speak about five "categories" of gifted children. There are those with **general intellectual ability**—in other words, they're smart at almost everything. These kids are quick learners who enjoy difficult problems and new ideas. Then there are those with **specific academic aptitude**, meaning they're exceptional in a particular subject or field. They tend to be well-read in the subjects that interest them and are typically motivated and self-directed. Other gifted kids shine in **creative or productive thinking**. These students are usually innovative learners and independent thinkers who don't mind standing apart from the crowd and who enjoy creative tasks. Some gifted kids **excel in leadership**. They are usually responsible, confident decision-makers, and are usually held in high esteem by their peers. Lastly, the gifts of some learners come out in the **visual or performing arts**. These students are expressive and artistically inclined, and tend to be discerning observers of artworks and performances.