

Supporting Gifted Children in the Early Years

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
What we mean by advanced cognitive development	3
The term 'gifted'	3
Supporting Gifted Children.....	4
Five key strategies to use.....	4
The role of play and the Environment.....	6
Learning Plans.....	6
The need to make adjustments.....	7
Websites for young children and adults to explore together	7
Websites for families and teachers.....	7
Where to get more information	8

Introduction

Every child is different and there will always be variation in the rates at which young children develop. Children reach milestones in each aspect of their development in their own time. From learning to walk and talk through to toilet training and dressing themselves. From birth, some children consistently show they are developing more rapidly than usual. This can be in one or more areas of development.

Parents are often the first to notice that their child is developing differently to other children. Research shows that parents are the most reliable source of information about their child's development. Parents have a critical role to play as their child's first educator.

What we mean by advanced cognitive development

We refer to the development of a child's thinking and mental functioning as their 'cognitive development'. For some children it naturally progresses rapidly from a very young age, without any 'coaching' from parents. The adults around a child may notice that they are able to:

- remember and retell events in greater detail than expected
- use a very broad vocabulary
- complete more advanced puzzles
- typically read earlier than other children
- prefer the company of adults or older children
- play games with quite complex rules
- explain their understanding of the world in ways that might be expected from much older children.

It is important to know that advanced cognitive development does not necessarily mean that other areas of the child's development (for example their fine motor control), will be advanced too. Their development may be average or even slower than other children of the same age in some other areas.

Students who have advanced cognitive development sometimes display asynchronous development. ¹This means advanced cognitive development and intense feelings at the same time. These combine to create inner feelings and awareness's that are different from the norm. This makes students vulnerable and requires modifications in teaching, parenting and counselling in order for them to develop optimally.

The term 'gifted'

Advanced cognitive development can be referred to as "being gifted." There is a lot of research, which shows that gifted children are not the product of 'pushy parents.' Gifted students have needs that are different to other children.

²Gifted students possess outstanding natural abilities in at least one domain. To a degree that places them at least among the top 10% of age peers. Students who have been granted early entry to school have demonstrated the capacity for advanced development in or close to, the top 2% of their same age peers.

¹ Silverman, L 2013, Giftedness 101, Springer Publishing Company, New York.

² Gange, F 2009, Building gifts into talents: Detailed overview of the DMGT . ResearchGate, publication/287583969, accessed 10 December 2021,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287583969_Building_gifts_into_talents_Detailed_overview_of_the_DMGT_20

Supporting Gifted Children

Children who are gifted need opportunities to develop through:

- play to engage with new knowledge and skills.
- participate in activities that match their interests and capabilities.
- develop their understanding of how the world works.

This ensures that they develop belief in themselves as capable and confident learners from a very young age.

Gifted children often show intense curiosity and a very strong desire to learn. They are often able to focus and concentrate on tasks that interest them for a long time. Their strong memory and abstract thinking ability means that they may begin to read, write or use numbers earlier than usual. They might find normal play activities 'boring' or children of their own age 'too babyish.' Gifted students may seek out older playmates who share their interests or games with more structure.

It is tempting to think that such a child's needs can only be met by starting school earlier than usual. However, this is not true for all gifted children. In some cases these needs can be successfully addressed by the adults who care for them in their home or a childcare environment, using the five key strategies described on the following pages.

Five key strategies to use

1. Grouping

All human beings have a strong need to belong and to feel valued and accepted for who they are. A common characteristic of gifted children is that they begin to compare themselves with other children at an earlier than usual age. They are often aware that they differ from other children of their own age, both in their interests and in what they can do. They may think there is something wrong with themselves. It helps to explain that they are simply learning more quickly than some other children and to provide regular opportunities for them to play and learn with 'like-minded' peers; other children who share a common interest or an older group, who more closely match their stage of cognitive development.

Opportunities for connecting with other children occur in community-based programs such as:

- Playgroup Tasmania
- Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
- Coder College – BBC Microbit programs
- Libraries Tasmania – Fun stuff for kids
- Club-based activities
- Learning programs such as music or drama classes

Other helpful sites to find like-minded children are:

- **What's On 4 Little Ones?** <https://www.whatson4kids.com.au/search-by-state/tasmania/>
- **Tassie Out and About** <https://www.facebook.com/tassieoutandabout>

2. Be flexible with time

Being flexible with the time that a child spends on play-based tasks is important. Sometimes they will want extra time to delve more deeply to follow something that catches their interest. They may return to it over several days, weeks or even months.

At other times they will understand a concept or master a skill very quickly and be ready to move on with little or no need for consolidation. Being tuned in to how they are progressing allows an adult to help them move on or explore more deeply, as and when required.

3. Increase the level of challenge and complexity

It is very easy to underestimate the capabilities of gifted children. For example, limiting what they do by:

- Making assumptions about things such as the level of complexity in the puzzles.
- The content of books that we share with them.
- The sort of thinking required for an activity.

As for all children, it is important gifted children have opportunities to wrestle with a problem that they find hard. To try a range of strategies, to concentrate deeply and to develop persistence and resilience in their learning. Teachers need to help students understand that mistakes are a healthy part of learning. Not achieving the correct answer immediately is alright. This is when students are learning how to learn! Experiences in this area of resilience development need to be provided as early as possible.

Failure to have those challenging learning opportunities can result in the development of a mindset that learning should always come easily. Such a 'fixed mindset' can have major, negative implications later in the child's education journey.

To keep gifted children challenged and engaged teachers need to ensure:

- Jigsaw puzzles, tangrams, books and other resources cover a range of levels of difficulty.
- Include resources and problems that may be considered way too challenging for them.
- Make sure puzzles and new equipment are readily available for them to explore.
- Use puzzles as the basis for observing and interacting with the child to see where their understanding is up to.
- Give them challenges and ask questions to promote deep thinking.

4. Stimulate High Level Thinking

Gifted children thrive on tasks that require high level thinking. While the child is playing, an adult can support them by asking probing and open-ended questions from time to time. Questions such as:

- "what if ..."
- "when might ..."
- "which would ..."
- "who might ..."
- "why do you think ..."
- "how could we ..."

- “would you rather...”

These questions can be asked when sharing a book, video, puzzle, interactive game with an adult or when the child is engaged in playing with other children.

Children can also be invited to participate in tasks where they:

- apply their understanding (“show me how you ...”)
- make evaluations (“which is best; ... or ...”)
- analyse (“let’s group ...”) or
- create something new (“can you make a different ...”).

5. Collaboratively explore learning games

As well as traditional toys and resources that support play for gifted students there are now digital resources. Apps, games and songs are available for parents and teachers to explore and share with gifted children. They are open-ended, allowing the user to take their learning to their own level. They provide immediate feedback (providing a safe way to try out ideas) and are presented in ways that are very engaging and fun. To get you started, a collection of quality online resources is listed on the next page. For other media recommendations, the [‘Common Sense Media’](#) web site is a good place to look.

The role of play and the Environment

³“Play provides opportunities for children to learn, as they discover; create, improvise and imagine.” It is important to provide an environment for play that offers a range of objects and materials where children can explore and make discoveries. To provide opportunities for sustained thinking invite interactions with others. Opportunities for play with older children can also be beneficial.

Adults can take on a range of roles within children’s play by:

- Encouraging them to explore independently
- Creating opportunities for inquiry
- Actively joining in by responding to their ideas
- Modelling thinking and problem solving
- Asking questions that might challenge their understanding.

Learning Plans

Learning plans make sure students who have entered school early are supported. Having a learning plan outlines adjustments and extension required for students. Please check with your school sector to find out if a learning plan is required.

³ Australian Government of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments. 2010, Educators Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.

The need to make adjustments

⁴Children will show their learning in many and varied ways. So, gathering, documenting and analysing this evidence will need to be varied. Educators of young gifted children will need to make adjustments to ensure the full extent a student's knowledge, skills and understanding is captured.

Adults caring for a gifted child will also need to make some adjustments to the environment. Activities they provide will need to be designed so they ensure their unique learning needs are met. Through critical observation of how they respond to materials, activities and situations during play, a parent can take their cue from the child to see what they might be ready for or need next.

Further reading: an excellent source of further details, information and strategies is available in the book titled: [Gifted and Talented: Inclusion and Exclusion](#), by Cathie Harrison, available from the Early Childhood Australia Shop.

Websites for young children and adults to explore together

- [ABC Kids](#)
- [ABC Education](#)
- [Early Childhood collection from the Victorian Department of Education](#)
- [The KinderSite](#)
- [Education World](#)

Websites for families and teachers

- [Early Childhood Australia Online Shop](#)
- [Tasmanian Association for the Gifted](#)
- [Australian Curriculum - Meeting the needs of gifted and talented students](#)
- [Ministerial Instruction No 15 \(231KB, PDF\)](#)
- [Early Entry to School for Children who are Gifted Cross Sectoral Guidelines \(1027KB PDF\)](#)
- [Early School Entry for Gifted Students Application Form \(225KB, PDF\)](#)
- [Early School Entry for Gifted Students Application Form \(62KB, Word\)](#)
- [Psychologist Assessment Summary for WPPSI IV \(44KB, PDF\)](#)
- [Psychologist Assessment Summary for WPPSI IV \(40KB, Word\)](#)

⁴ Australian Government of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments. 2010, Educators Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.

Where to get more information

Catholic Education Tasmania

Ms Jenny Noble

Telephone: 6210 8888

Email: jenny.noble@catholic.tas.edu.au

Post: Catholic Education Tasmania

PO Box 102 North Hobart TAS 7002

Website: Catholic Education Tasmania

Department of Education

Manager Gifted and Highly Able

Telephone: 0427 610 338

Email: gifted.highlyable@education.tas.gov.au

Post: Inclusion and Diversity Services

GPO Box 169 Hobart TAS 7001

Website: Gifted Support - The Department of Education Tasmania

Independent Schools

Chrissy Gamble

Telephone: (03) 6224 0125

Email: cgamble@independentschools.tas.edu.au

Post: Independent Schools Tasmania

GPO Box 616 Sandy Bay TAS 7005

Website: <https://independentschools.tas.edu.au/>

Tasmanian Association for the Gifted (TAG)

Telephone: 0467 528 048

Email: tasgifted@gmail.com

Post: GPO Box 1942 Hobart TAS 7001

Website: Tasmanian Association for the Gifted