

Summary

Potential Plus UK has taken the decision to use the term high learning potential (HLP) to describe learners we support, instead of the word 'gifted' or 'gifted and talented' or 'more able' or 'very able'; which are all terms that have been used in schools and the media in the past. This advice sheet aimed at senior leadership and all teaching staff describes why we have adopted the term and what we mean when we use it.

Introduction

There is no universal agreement on exactly what it means to be 'gifted'. In reality, 'gifted' means different things to different people; academics, psychologists, teachers, parents and children themselves all have their own perception of what it means to be 'gifted'.

Historically, the word 'gifted' is associated with high intelligence (IQ) and as such would seem to require a formal measurement of this intelligence. However, Potential Plus UK does not, and never has, required a child to have undergone an IQ assessment to access our services. This is because Potential Plus UK has always maintained that it is not a high IQ society and that a child's intelligence, talent, and abilities need distinct and proactive support in order to fully develop. There are many more 'gifted' children than there are 'gifted' adults who have reached their potential and achieved tangible accomplishments and high accolades in their chosen field.

The above point adds weight to what Potential Plus UK has been striving towards for 50 years: that we are committed to the process of supporting and developing a child's high learning potential and supporting parents, teachers and other professionals to raise and educate happy children, who are on a life-long journey of developing and eventually fulfilling their own unique potential or personal excellence.

How do you feel when the word 'gifted' is used to describe a young child?

A little taken aback and surprised? Sceptical? Or do you take this declaration to mean that this child is somehow superior to other children and therefore, this child must be a genius - not a genius in the making, but already so.

Perhaps the word 'gifted' to you means 'perfect', so in labelling a child as 'gifted' this must mean that the future prospects for this child are unequivocally bright and free from obstacles. Take this train of thought a little further and you can easily reach the conclusion that no one need worry about this child, as they will be successful no matter what life throws at them and whichever school they go to. Cream surely rises to the top and a 'gifted' child is labelled as already being at the top of their class. The 'gifted' ones are already high attainers and will surely continue along that path smoothly; destined for success without the need for any further support or assistance. These so-called 'gifted' children and their parents certainly have it easy!

Unfortunately, this is far from the truth. The reality, as always, is a little more complex. For every child who is 'formally' identified as 'gifted' or 'more able' or 'very able' (depending on the term you prefer), there are many more who unfortunately fall under the radar; whom we, at Potential Plus UK, would class as having high learning potential and in definite need of extra challenge, support and identification by parents and educators.

Even for those who are formally labelled as 'gifted and talented', this identification is only the beginning. Being on a 'gifted and talented' register in school is simply not enough unless both the parents and the school truly understand the nature of these children and realise the importance of personalised learning and a distinct approach to parenting, education and support.

Why is Potential Plus UK now using the term High Learning Potential?

Over the years, Potential Plus UK has observed that, in the UK, there is a definite social stigma attached to the word 'gifted', and that parents, teachers and children themselves feel that the word is limiting, exclusive and at times unnecessary to bestow upon a child, who has as yet to fulfil their true potential.

Yet, every day, we hear from parents who have finally plucked up the courage to contact us because, for a number of reasons, they instinctively feel that their child is different to the norm. In fact, these parents are generally right; their children are different. The 'one size fits all' approach simply will not work for them. They don't just require more of the same work to keep them occupied; what they require is for their individual potential and talents to be recognised, nurtured, supported and challenged in order for them to feel fulfilled and to develop good self-esteem.

What are high potential learners like?

We hope that the term high learning potential encapsulates the ethos of Potential Plus UK and brings a better understanding of these children and the support they need.

- A high learning potential child will show flashes of brilliance from a very early age.
- A high potential learner needs opportunities, challenge, resources, encouragement to truly fulfill their unique potential; both in the home environment and the educational setting.
- High potential learners thrive on learning and new experiences.
- High learning potential is the very beginning and not the end product. Success and achievement are not determined by high learning potential alone. High learning potential is certainly a good start, but requires consistent support to fully develop.
- High potential learners, like all children, are capable of change – nurture them and they will flourish, succeed and achieve. Ignore their potential and they will wither, underachieve and lose their 'spark'.

- High potential learners have distinct social and emotional needs, which must be recognised and supported, alongside providing appropriate challenge for their intellectual abilities and potential.

Potential Plus UK has many years of experience in working with families and educators of high potential learners. These children have surprised, entertained, informed and questioned their families and others around them from a very early age. At times, they have also exasperated, annoyed and tested the patience of their families, friends and teachers!

Further Information

S02 Supporting High Potential Learners	High potential learners need support because they often lack regular challenge, leading to the underdevelopment of learning skills that are essential for success. There are also some sensory, social, emotional or special needs issues that may affect learning and can also lead to underachievement if not addressed. This advice sheet is aimed at teachers, teaching assistants and high learning potential lead teachers in primary and secondary phases. It covers why high potential learners need support and what kind of support is needed.
S501 Social and Emotional Needs of High Potential Learners	Educating happy, well-rounded and successful learners is important for every teacher. As social and emotional issues can appear frequently among high potential learners, this advice sheet looks at the cause of these and offers some advice on dealing with them in the classroom. This advice sheet is aimed at lead teachers and class teachers so that they are aware of and can understand the particular social and emotional needs of high potential learners.
<i>Gifted Children</i> by Kate Distin	The authors give an insight into what is 'normal' for children with high learning potential, acknowledge the difficulties they experience, and offer pointers for parents on how to support them at home, in the interaction with siblings and other family members, and at school.

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