

1 What is an able child?

In *Finding and Helping the Gifted Child* (Croome Helm, 1983), Trevor Kerry defines the able child as being one with an IQ of between 130 and 170, or one whose intelligence quotient may be lower than this but who displays specific and precocious skills in individual areas, such as music.

A more rough-and-ready diagnosis but one which will be more familiar to most classroom practitioners is that of the colleague who said, “They either do everything right, or they do one thing a lot more than right!”.

Perhaps one of the reasons we find it difficult to find a satisfactory definition for a gifted or able child is that there are not many of them. It has been estimated that only about 3% of all pupils will come into this category – that of boys and girls who show really superior all-round talents.

Rather more children would come under the general heading of talented. Perhaps a third of children show outstanding ability in one or perhaps two areas of the curriculum. Research has also shown that even more children are capable of well above average results in different curriculum-related areas if their potential is spotted and suitable programmes drawn up. In addition, a number of children also possess gifts which cannot be measured in strictly classroom terms. In the USA, for example, it has been found expedient to devise tests for singling out those fortunate children who possess great social skills and are able, with little effort almost to charm the birds from the trees. A few children, as well, will show outstanding natural qualities of leadership, which should be recognised, harnessed and developed for the good of the children and the school.

However, for our more mundane efforts in the primary school classroom we first need to identify and quantify what an able child is. No two gifted children are gifted in exactly the same way, but the majority of able children should possess most of the following attributes:

- 1 have plenty of ideas and are able to link them in an imaginative and interesting way
- 2 enjoy making up stories and pretending to be other people or engaging in imaginary exploits
- 3 can change their minds when fresh evidence is presented
- 4 enjoy altering or building upon basic ideas and activities
- 5 can juggle with different ideas at the same time
- 6 are gregarious and enjoy sharing ideas and discoveries with others, while preferring to do most of their work on their own
- 7 are unconventional and do things differently from their peers
- 8 often show outstanding ability in individual areas, eg music, creative writing, mathematics, etc
- 9 learn easily
- 10 work hard.

Experts are a little wary about providing exact definitions for children of outstanding ability. By and large, however, the term *able* tends to be used for the all-round gifted child, while *talented* is applied to a child with particular gifts in one subject or area.

As teachers we must cater for all the children in our care, the average, the slow-learning and the outstanding. Not even the most able of gifted and talented children can operate in a vacuum. It is not enough to say of them that they are so competent that they will flourish no matter what their circumstances. Their abilities must be recognised and nurtured. They must be given emotional support as well as academic succour. They must be stimulated yet provided with guidelines.

An able child is still a child, demanding all that a child needs – love, care, attention and an environment in which he or she can grow and be happy. In schools we should be ideally placed to provide these requisites.

Types of special ability

Profiles of gifted children suggest that they tend to fall into one of four main types:

- 1 *The high-achieving studious.* These are bright, hard-working boys and girls whose thinking tends to be conventional rather than unconventional.
- 2 *The social leaders.* These like working in groups and show pronounced powers of leadership.
- 3 *The creative intellectuals.* These display originality of thought and work best in situations in which they have freedom of choice.
- 4 *The rebels.* These are the unconventional mavericks who can be disruptive and difficult to work with unless they are carefully and tactfully guided.



Enrichment Projects in Art

- Make a collection of natural objects – flowers, seeds, etc, which have round shapes. Draw these objects. Put some of these circular shapes together to form an entirely new shape.
- Choose your favourite illustrations in books. Say why you like these illustrations. Can you make any suggestions for improving them?
- Select a colour which has to be made from a mixture of other colours. Make that colour and paint a picture using that colour alone.
- Make a collection of tin can sculptures. Collect a number of cans, making sure that they have no jagged edges. Cover them with white paper, paint eyes and mouths on them and add Plasticene ears and noses.
- Look at pictures of deserts. Make your own models and pictures of deserts, using different techniques and materials – drawing, painting modelling, etc on scraper-board, straw glued on paper, sand glued on cardboard, and so on.
- Paint a Christmas scene using a sponge soaked in paint and attached to a stick.
- Make a summer frieze by cutting out pictures of summer activities from newspapers and magazines. Use a long piece of wallpaper for the background and paint on the beach and the sea. When the paint has dried, stick on the cut out figures.
- Make a montage of facial features on paper. Cut out features from newspaper photographs – ears, noses, eyes, mouths. Glue these onto backing paper, making fresh faces by matching eyes from one picture with a nose from another, a mouth from a third and so on.
- Make an eggshell mosaic. Collect empty eggshells and break them into pieces. Wash them carefully. Paint a sheet of cardboard with a backing colour. Draw an outline of a building or a place. Glue or paste the pieces of eggshell over the picture.
- Make a model of a sea serpent in the sea. Paint a flat piece of wood to represent the sea. Then make a sea serpent out of strips of egg box tops. Paint them and glue the serpent to the sea.
- Make a scraper picture, imagining that the scraper board is the ceiling of a building to be decorated. Make a scraper board by taking a piece of white card and covering it with wax by rubbing two light-coloured crayons over it. Cover the wax with Indian ink. When the ink has dried scrape a picture on it with a pin or needle.



Enrichment Projects in Music

- Keep a diary listing all the sounds you hear in a single day. Make a list of all the sounds you would like to hear in a day. Make another list of sounds you would not like to hear in a day.
- Make your own sounds, exploring how different sounds make different noises. Compare tearing paper and cardboard, strike objects with other objects, blow into things, stretch things and let them go. Make a list of all the different sounds you have made.
- Make up a simple tune, using a home-made instrument – blower, shaker, beater, etc. Give your tune a title. Try to write some words to go with the tune.
- Listen to songs and music about different times of the year – winter, spring, summer, etc. Make up your own piece of music about a time of the year.
- How many different simple instruments can you make?
- Experiment with moving in time to different kinds of music. How do different songs lend themselves to different kinds of music?
- Make lists: *sad songs, happy songs, exciting songs, etc.*
- Make a collection of work songs – cowboy songs, sea shanties, etc. Sing and play them, at the same time miming the work being done.
- Make a collective of songs intended for special times of the year: Christmas, Harvest, etc. Compare and contrast the songs intended for the same periods.
- Use the nursery rhyme *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep* as the basis for a number of activities about spring. Sing the rhyme and play the tune on different instruments. Sing the song in a number of ways – loudly, softly, quickly, slowly, etc. Try to make up another rhyme about spring which can be fitted to the tune of *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*.