

Have you ever wondered whether you were exceptionally gifted?

November 10 2017, by Valérie Pennequin And Elodie Tricard



Credit: icwn

When you were in school, did you ever wonder why your grades fell short yet your puzzled teachers insisted that you were intelligent? As an adult, have you struggled to gain recognition for your work, despite

making what you feel are creative and valuable contributions? Do you often feel like your mind works more quickly than others do? Could it be that you're exceptionally gifted, yet don't know it?

It's a comforting thought in today's society, given its strong emphasis on intelligence. But before rushing off to complete the latest phoney online IQ test, it's important to take a closer look at the terminology. Although the terms "[gifted](#)", "precocious" and "high potential" are often used interchangeably, they're not synonymous.

Talent as a "gift"

Logically, the most common one – "gifted" – implies the possession of a gift. It conjures up images of fairy godmothers endowing a child with beauty, grace, and intelligence in the cradle, Sleeping Beauty-style. A gift is seen as a bonus, a special ability granted by genetics, chance or the heavens.

The notion of precocity is linked to time. Psychologist Todd Lubart, a professor at Paris Descartes University, explained this in greater detail in a [2006 book](#). The term implies a linear conception of intellectual development, from birth to adulthood – a theory developed by the Swiss psychologist [Jean Piaget](#) in the mid-1960s.

To be considered "precocious" is to be seen as being ahead of the majority of students of the same age. The educational system will occasionally offer such students the opportunity to skip ahead a year.

Yet more recent work in psychology is challenging this linear vision of development. Numerous studies have demonstrated that [intellectual development](#) accelerates at certain times while regressing at others. Even adults are capable of making blatant errors in logical reasoning, while babies turn out to be far more logical than previously thought, as French

psychologist Olivier Houdé [demonstrated in 1995](#).

Aptitude may be obvious, or not

"High potential" is a more subtle and, no doubt, more useful term. It refers to the difference between a person's aptitudes and their performance. What an individual demonstrates – their performance – is not always representative of their actual abilities, in other words, their aptitudes.

A person with high potential has specific potential, meaning an aptitude in a particular area. As American psychologist [Joseph Renzulli has explained](#), potential may either be fulfilled or not, depending on the individual's environment. Therefore, an individual with high potential may not show any particular *talent* – a word that refers to observable performance.

To better understand this paradox, we can draw a parallel with physical potential. A child with [hypermobility](#), for example, has great elasticity in certain muscles, tendons and ligaments and, therefore, a high potential for flexibility. If the child is born into a circus family, he or she may become a contortionist. Otherwise, this potential flexibility may never express itself as talent, but remain hidden. Had Mozart been born into a family where music was never played, would he have become a great composer?

Potential in sport and music

Consequently, there are more people with high potential than people with talent, because not all those with high potential will benefit from the conditions required for their potential to manifest.

It should be stressed that high potential exists outside of the intellectual domain. This becomes clearer when seen through the lens of the theory of multiple intelligences, developed by American psychologist [Howard Gardner in 2004](#). While the theory is not yet sufficiently vetted scientifically for use in research, it draws attention to areas that are often undervalued in schools, such as sports, music, drawing, the capacity for introspection, and even charisma. Gardner argues there are eight separate forms of intelligence, some of which we refer to as intelligence, such as verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities, while others are less typical, such as musical-rhythmic and bodily-kinaesthetic.

It is too often assumed that high potential is simply a matter of IQ. Psychologists assess IQ using psychometric tests, notably WISC-IV (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) and, recently, [WISC V](#) for children, and WAIS IV for adults. However, two researchers in psychology have demonstrated that a high IQ is a necessary condition to qualify as having high potential, but not sufficient per se.

The necessity of enthusiasm and perseverance

Let's start with Renzulli. In his [2002 model](#), he argued that high potential requires several factors to be united, including elevated intellectual abilities (which can be measured with an IQ test) and creativity (the ability to produce original responses), but also a high level of commitment, meaning strong personal motivation, entailing interest, enthusiasm, curiosity, perseverance, endurance, self-confidence, and a need for achievement.

In this theory, high potential can still be viewed as a "gift." However, it should first be identified, then sustained by the individuals themselves and those around them, who will make the necessary efforts so the potential is eventually manifested as talent.

Canadian psychologist François Gagné published [his own model in 2004](#). He theorized several types of catalysts required for high potential to manifest itself. The first relates to exceptional mental or physical capacities as well as personality traits, such as open-mindedness, conscientiousness, and high motivation. The second relates to the person's environment – for example, a favourable sociocultural background, or positive feedback from family, friends or teachers. The third is made up of life events, positive or otherwise, such as a birth, a new home, or the death of a loved one. He also highlighted a fourth type of catalyst – luck, correlated with meeting the right person at the right time.

All of these possible catalysts work together to bring out a person's natural capacities (gift). This model places great importance on an enriching environment, conducive to the manifestation of a person's potential (child or adult), in the home, at work, and in leisure activities.

So what should we do if we want to understand our own potential, or that of our children? The first step is to consult a psychologist who can provide a complete analysis. In addition to an IQ test, he or she will examine the areas where high potential can be expressed, with the use of recognized diagnostic tools by trained professionals. These will establish, with little margin for error, whether or not you have "high potential."

Note that this label is of little value in and of itself. The most important thing is to establish a picture of your strengths and weaknesses, to help you better know yourself and reach your own potential.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Have you ever wondered whether you were exceptionally gifted? (2017, November 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-exceptionally-gifted.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.