



The Five OEs

Following are explanations of the five overexcitabilities (OEs)—emotional, imaginal, intellectual, psychomotor, sensual—as well as strategies for working with a GC with a given OE. Note that a GC need not display every characteristic associated with an OE in order to have the OE.

Emotional

Spot GCs with the emotional OE by looking for:

- Strong emotions
- Extreme sensitivity
- Passionately empathetic to the suffering of others
- Overreaction to situations
- Heightened fears or anxieties
- Physical response to emotions (e.g., a stomachache)
- Strong attachment to people, objects, or places
- Strong ability to articulate feelings

Try these strategies (as appropriate for the GC's particular characteristics) to help GCs with the emotional OE:

- Don't accuse the GC of overreacting, even if the reaction to an event is extreme relative to those of other students (e.g., a nine-year-old who cries when you display his "A+" work on the board). Rather, discuss with the student why he is upset and help him develop strategies to regulate his feelings.
- Don't tell the GC her feelings are wrong. Rather, let the student know that the feelings are natural (i.e., they are what they are) and that she can control what she does with the feelings. For instance, she can be more cognizant of how she reacts, and whether or not she continues to fixate on a problem.
- Teach the GC calming techniques. For example, counting to ten, taking deep breaths, and visualizing a calm place can all be helpful. Since GCs with the emotional OE are often highly aware of their emotions, they can quickly get the hang of such exercises. If you associate the practice with a key phrase, merely mentioning that phrase to the GC can trigger the appropriate technique.

Personal Account: When my gifted daughter gets overly upset, we say “calm your body” (a phrase borrowed from one of her teachers) and she immediately closes her eyes, puts her hand on her belly, takes deep breaths, and turns her focus to breathing to calm her emotions. Since we’ve encouraged the practice to be a consistent, routine response, she often does this on her own, when necessary, without prompting.

- Refer to books and resources that help students understand and govern their feelings, as appropriate for the GC’s age. Elementary teachers might want to visit www.elementaryschoolcounseling.org/identifying-and-expressing-feelings.html and www.tolerance.org/exchange/healthy-way-show-feelings. Teachers of all grade levels can visit the “Resources” tab’s “Social & Emotional Development” link at www.parenttoolkit.com; though designed for parents, it’s also useful for teachers.
- Be on high alert for teasing and bullying. Overly sensitive GCs can be particularly prone to being teased or bullied. For example, they could be labeled “cry baby” or their outbursts might make peers uncomfortable.

Imaginational

Spot GCs with the imaginational OE by looking for:

- An overactive imagination that might distract the GC
- Highly creative
- Keen ability to visualize
- Imaginary friends or worlds
- Elaborate storytelling skills
- Excessive daydreaming
- Poor organizational skills
- Difficulty focusing when bored
- Strong dislike for tasks that don’t engage creativity

Try these strategies (as appropriate for the GC’s particular characteristics) to help GCs with the imaginational OE:

- Adjust your projects or assignments as needed to provide the GC with imaginative options. Ideally, all of your assignments give students some differentiated options from which to choose. If, for each assignment, at least one option allows the GC to engage her imagination, you can help the GC capitalize on the benefits of this OE.

Case in Point: Teachers in Laguna Beach Unified School District can opt to complete the Rocket Ready program, which prepares them to build instruction around a world problem requiring a solution (such as finding ways third world countries can harness wind power for electricity). Teachers equip students by teaching them concepts students can use to devise and construct a solution, but the way students go about solving the problem and building a prototype is up to them. This enlists students' creativity and allows GCs to apply their full potential.

- Encourage the GC to propose a unique way he can complete an assignment. For example, rather than have the GC paste scenes on a poster to illustrate plot stages, allow the student to draw the illustrations.
- Help the GC develop organizational systems. GCs with the imaginal OE may struggle with traditional systems for organization. Their backpacks, desks, cubbies, and study spaces can be shockingly messy.
- Allow the GC to doodle. While daydreaming interferes with the GC's focus on a learning task, unfocused doodling can actually help some GCs remain attentive. Ensure the doodling doesn't become a distraction or deface property.
- Give the GC added opportunities for praise related to the imaginal OE. For example, ask the GC for suggestions on ways a class routine can be made more interesting or fun. If you implement the idea successfully, tell the class who thought of the idea and initiate a round of applause for the GC.

Intellectual

This might read as a description of all GCs, since so many GCs can be considered intellectual. However, not all GCs have the intellectual OE—particularly not as a dominant OE. While the strategies below will work with many GCs, it might be more important to focus on other OEs for particular students. For example, as a GC, my own imaginal OE was far more dominant than my intellectual GC and, thus, I would have benefited more from imaginal-friendly learning tasks than intellectual ones. Thus, don't assume the following strategies supersede those for other OEs where GCs are concerned.

Spot GCs with the intellectual OE by looking for:

- Highly active mind
- High level of curiosity
- Passionate about acquiring knowledge
- Deep and/or independent thinker

- Strong concentration and/or reading
- Strong visual memory
- Observant
- A tendency toward arrogance and impatience with peers

Try these strategies (as appropriate for the GC's particular characteristics) to help GCs with the intellectual OE:

- Adjust your projects or assignments as needed to allow the GC to investigate in-depth issues. For example, expand on an assignment that explores regions that struggle the most with starvation to explore why some regions struggle with starvation while food is abundant elsewhere in the world.
- Be on the lookout for signs of depression. Sometimes a GC's deep thinking about life's big problems can trigger depression. Work with the GC's parent(s) and school resources, as necessary, to get the GC help if depression is present. As it turns out, this (intellectual) OE can offer additional hope for the depressed. Whereas a "just snap out of it" approach is ineffective, it can help to instead engage the GC in what is being done to solve whatever problem torments her. For example, if the GC is troubled over environmental destruction, introduce her to literature on people's efforts to save the environment and encourage her to co-organize the school's electronics recycling drive. Even GCs not depressed over world problems benefit from opportunities for activism. Share such opportunities with the GC and his parent(s) as appropriate to encourage GC empowerment.

Personal Account: One of my GCs, a boy named Kim, had an inordinately difficult time grappling with the tragedies of September 11, 2001. He visited a counselor, who determined that Kim was not depressed. Rather, Kim had encountered a problem he was unable to solve. Unlike an issue such as environmental devastation, about which a child can take immediate action (e.g., recycling) to help in some way, the complexity of issues that fueled the 9/11 attacks left Kim powerless to do anything about them. I thus looked closer to home. Sadly, following September 11, our Muslim students were being harassed at their morning bus stop by passing adults to such a degree that the bus route was changed so that those students were picked up first each morning. Our Muslim students were also spoken to harshly by some peers at school. I shared these facts with Kim one day at Nutrition Break and asked him what he thought students could do about it. Kim suggested things such as showing added kindness to Muslim students and telling his

friends to be kind to them. Kim brightened at the possibilities. He also asked me questions, giving us the chance to discuss how most Muslims promote a peaceful lifestyle, and the difference between them and those who promote violence. Kim was a shy student, and I wasn't aware of any large-scale movement he launched to defend our school's Muslim students. However, I did notice changes I like to think stemmed from his concern—for example, Kim's classmate Fadia, who had stopped wearing her headscarf (a serious matter in her culture) at school following the attacks, went back to wearing it. After Kim found ways that he could have an impact related to an issue that preoccupied him, he seemed more at peace.

- Introduce the GC to a variety of ways to find answers to questions. This should involve varied sources as well as the skills needed to evaluate those sources (e.g., “Can a marketing website be trusted?”), crosscheck facts, and extract relevant information.
- Coach the GC in humility and a growth mindset. GCs with the intellectual OE can be particularly prone to arrogance and impatience with others, which can harm peer relations and lifelong potential. While self-confidence should be fostered, nurturing a growth mindset (e.g., praising trying hard rather than praising being smart) is just as important. For more details on the growth mindset, read the work of Dr. Carol Dweck (2008).
- Help the GC overcome possible difficulties collaborating. Talk to an impatience-prone GC privately about collaboration requiring its own kind of “smarts,” which will play an important role throughout her life. Share ways the GC can abide a slower peer, such as: pretending to be a teacher (i.e., mirroring how you would interact with a struggling student); using the time to delve deeper into her own part of the project; or studying the group's other peers and mentally evaluating how “smart” their collaboration skills are (and, for an added challenge, trying to top them).

Psychomotor

Spot GCs with the psychomotor OE by looking for:

- High energy, often mistaken for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Fervent enthusiasm
- Highly competitive
- Difficulty sitting still

- Nervous habits
- Impulsive actions
- Rapid speech
- Compulsive speech

Try these strategies (as appropriate for the GC's particular characteristics) to help GCs with the psychomotor OE:

- Find opportunities for the GC to move. You might say:
 - Please draw your diagram directly on the board;
 - Would you like to stand while you work on that?;
 - Would you two [older students] like to wrap up your literature discussion while circling the courtyard beside our window?;
 - Move station to station as you wish;
 - You can cut and paste those sentences to get the same effect;
 - Instead of drawing an atomic detail of an alpha helix of alanine residues, you can construct it using these straws and wood pegs;
 - During our 'brain breaks,' we'll be stretching and moving; or
 - Please pass out these exam copies before you begin work on your own.
- Make sure you are giving students plenty of time to talk at regular intervals. No class, regardless of the types of students in it, should involve students being quiet most of the time while the teacher talks most of the time. Students need to practice using academic language, expressing their thoughts, and so on.
- If the GC speaks English as a second language, seat him beside an English learner (EL) who shares the same native tongue. The GC's ability to translate when needed gives him added opportunities to talk that are conducive to classroom learning.

Personal Account: When teaching an 8th grade class, I had a Spanish-speaking GC named Alma who was usually bursting at the seams to talk. Her high test scores had helped her to be redesignated as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), whereas most of my native Spanish speakers had retained their EL status. I quickly learned the value of seating Alma next to my ELs who struggled the most. I told her she could whisper with students any time it was to clarify something in Spanish. This role made Alma feel empowered and valued. It also channeled her verbal energy in a positive way and reduced her "off-task"

conversations, which helped her education and my classroom management. Additionally, this arrangement was a boon to the ELs Alma assisted.

- When playing learning games or working on projects, celebrate trying hard over winning or outperforming. GCs with the psychomotor OE are sometimes overly competitive and can require coaching in sportsmanship.
- Offer psychomotor-friendly learning options. GCs with the psychomotor OE often favor less restricted activities that don't have single right answers or single ways to complete a project. Give these students open-ended learning options, even if it involves letting these students complete the same assignment or activity as other students in a different way. Ideally, all students will have differentiated options from which to choose. For example, you can give students the option of writing a paragraph on how the Tariff of 1832 changed American history, or using a webcam to film a video in which the impact of the Tariff of 1832 is made clear.
- Use objects to combat distraction. For example, give the GC a small, inexpensive trinket (e.g., a bracelet or money clip) to fidget with during class, so long as she remains focused on the lesson and is not distracted by the trinket. Simply handling the trinket can soothe the child as she remains otherwise engaged in learning.
- Use strategies designed for students with ADHD. While the psychomotor OE is definitely different than ADHD, some strategies that work well for the latter can also help with the former. For example, large rubber bands that wrap around chair legs are an unobtrusive comfort for many GCs who need to fidget or move. Exercise bands and bicycle inner tubes can be used, but bands designed specifically for this purpose (e.g., Bouncy Bands) can be found online. Also consider allowing the GC to chew gum, squeeze a stress ball, sit on a yoga ball, or use a standup desk.
- Put the student's energy to good use. While the task of passing out papers may not advance a GC's learning, timing the request with signs that the GC is overwhelmed by nervous energy will help the GC use the energy in a positive way and quickly move to a more learning-friendly state. Secondary GCs might benefit from having Physical Education scheduled for mid-day, allowing them to release some of their energy.

Sensual

GCs with the sensual OE often have a heightened propensity to find pleasure or displeasure from:

- Sight (e.g., overstimulation when exposed to many bright colors)
- Sound (e.g., keen love of music)
- Smell (e.g., easily offended by perfume or body sprays)
- Touch (e.g., habit of stroking different textures)
- Taste (e.g., preoccupied with food)

Try these strategies (as appropriate for the GC's particular characteristics) to help GCs with the sensual OE:

- Don't scold the GC for overreacting. For example, avoid statements such as "Calm down, the noise isn't that loud." Rather, respect that the stimuli is bothersome or distracting and take steps to remove or limit the disturbance.

Personal Account: Body spray commercials depicting a geeky young man applying the spray liberally, after which gorgeous women threw themselves at him, were at one time frequently aired. Periodically, one of my teenage students entered class smelling as if he believed the commercial's implication. A student or two would complain, the boy would pretend he wasn't the source of the fragrance, I'd open the windows, and we'd continue with the day's lesson. When this happened in Chantel's class period, however, she could not function. She behaved as if a stink bomb had gone off in the room. Chantel was a large, expressive GC, and her displeasure was a distraction to everyone's learning, including her own. I allowed Chantel to station her desk near the open door, regardless of how overdramatic this appeared to her peers. I also instituted a rule, which was to take effect the following day, that no one in Chantel's class period was to wear any fragrance that other students could smell. I also explained how one quick spray went a long way, and that one's own nose can become desensitized to a scent. I didn't have to express a consequence for breaking the new rule, as no one wanted the attention Chantel would bring the culprit's way. That class period was scent-free for the rest of the school year, restoring peace to Chantel's strong senses.

- Limit visual stimuli if it's a distraction. For example, seat the GC away from chaotically collaged bulletin boards.
- Limit exposure to sounds if they are a distraction. You could let the GC wear noise-canceling headphones when the class is doing a particularly boisterous activity (though classroom control should be solidly maintained to prevent students from becoming unruly).

- Limit exposure to smells that could be a distraction. For example, ask students to not wear perfume or body spray in the classroom, and seat the GC away from the windows if strong smells are coming from grass cutting, traffic, or the cafeteria.
- Limit textures if they are a distraction. For example, allow the GC to sit on a cushion or more comfortable chair, or suggest to the GC's parents that they remove irritating tags from his clothes.
- Do not use candy or treats as rewards or facilitate others feeding them to students (like allowing parents to bring cupcakes to school). However, some teachers have a successful practice of allowing students to consume their own food and drink in the classroom. If food-preoccupied GCs are distracted by a food policy, change it.
- Capitalize on the sensual OE's potential to support learning. For example, bring in a snakeskin for the GC to touch when teaching the science behind molting, or display vivid illustrations when teaching how cross-field inspirations occurred during the Renaissance.

Personal Account: I once worked with a World History teacher who collected props and replicas related to the lessons he taught. He would pass them around the room when introducing a new lesson. Imagine how much better a GC with the sensual OE could connect with a lesson on ancient China while holding a miniature Terracotta Army soldier or slipping a hemp tunic over her clothes. These props were displayed for the duration of the unit, where students could see and interact with them anytime, provided they didn't become distractions. This display further allowed GCs to capitalize on the sensual OE.



References

Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.



Gifted Child Notes

Using both the above information and the information in the book as a guide, complete the graphic organizer (on the following page) for each of your GCs. Keeping these sheets handy as you plan lessons will help you craft appropriate opportunities for every GC to provide optimum engagement and challenge.

Complete this sheet for each gifted child (put his/her name in the center) and keep it private.

Overexcitabilities

The child's OEs are:

- Emotional
- Imaginational
- Intellectual
- Psychomotor
- Sensual

Notes to guide how I handle and leverage these OEs:

Hidden Challenges

The child has these challenges:

- Asynchronous development
- 2E: _____
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged
- English learner
- Other (e.g., underachiever): _____

Notes to guide how I help the child overcome or navigate these challenges:



Engagement

Consider the child's:

- Standard-Specific Level
- Interests
- Extroversion vs. introversion
- Learning preferences (multiple intelligences, learning modalities, etc.)
- Other preferences

Notes to guide my lesson choices and differentiation for this child:

Challenge

When needed, acceleration approaches that tend to work best for the child are:

- Speed up lesson
- Skip ahead on lesson
- Skip to higher grade/level
- Go more in depth
- Work on different content

Notes on which enrichment opportunities I will offer this child: