

Gifted Development Center

a service of **The Institute for the Study of Advanced Development**

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Technical Wizards

Linda Silverman, Ph.D.

Some of the children we are least likely to understand, or deal with effectively in the schools, are those who are best suited to our technological future. These children are natural technical wizards. From the earliest moments of life, they are fascinated with mechanical objects and how things work. Several children who have come to the Gifted Child Development Center for testing are classic examples of this phenomenon.

M's first word at the age of 5 months was "fan," referring to the ceiling fan, which began his interest in electrical gadgets. For his third birthday, M wanted a ground fault interrupter (don't ask me what that means...). He made his first electromagnetic generator at the age of 4, and his first amplifier at the age of 5.

When he was tested at the age of 5, instead of drawing a person, M drew a diode circuit and a transformer with a built-in plug. In his Sentence Completion test, M said he thinks most about "electronic circuits," dreams of "electronic circuits," hates when his brother gets into his electronics and destroys them, is unhappy sometimes when his circuits don't work, that his mother and father help him with electronics, and when he gets older he's going to be "somebody who does a lot of electronics." Imagine being M's teacher and trying to teach him spelling!

Unless all of the words had something to do with electronic circuitry, it is doubtful that you would hold M's interest or enthusiasm for very long.

Some parents have been rightfully concerned about the welfare of their technical wizards during early childhood. One mother wrote on her parent questionnaire:

At 2 years, 1 month, his favorite gift was a Mickey Mouse calculator. He'd sit for an hour or more pressing the buttons, adding and subtracting by one. By 2 ½, he was counting to 100 forwards and from 100 to 0 backwards. Then he started counting by 10's. Clocks and gears entered our life around this time. He got clocks for gifts and we'd sit on the bed watching them. He wanted to know about gears and had to see the engine of the car. We'd be riding and he'd be listening for the gears operating. The summer when he was 2 ½ we'd go to the amusement park, and the kids loved the rides but I was a nervous wreck. He would lean way over to see how the ride operated. On the merry-go-round his head was always up watching the poles to see how they operated or else he was leaning into the center of the ride to see the gears. On one of the little car rides, he started crawling under one of the cars. We ran with the attendant and when we got there he looked up and asked, "What makes this thing run, anyway?"

How to cope with a technical wizard in the classroom or family?

Respect their passion and give them as many opportunities as possible to learn what they want to learn. Don't try to round them out and expand their interests. Some schools are ideally suited for such "immersion learners," as Dee Lovecky and Stephanie Tolan call them. In these programs, the curriculum is designed around the child's interests; reading, spelling, creative writing, mathematics are all woven into the study of rockets or computers or mechanics. Computer-assisted instruction and interactive computers may be the most effective teaching tools for these naturally investigative minds. They respond better to machines than to people. We have to remember that not all children are "people persons" – some are much more comfortable in the world of objects. We need them to be who they are. They will become our technical leaders.

Rock-a-by Data

*Rock-a-by data,
on a hard disk
Back your work up,
or run a great risk
If power should surge,
computer will fall
And down will come
hard disk,
data and all.*

Tom Mayer

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