

The Edison Trait

Dreamers, Discoverers & Dynamos – How to Help the Child Who is Bright, Bored, and Having Problems in School by Lucy Jo Palladino Ph.D. (1999)

What is the Edison Trait? *(named after Inventor Thomas Alva Edison)*

Children with the “Edison Trait” are divergent thinkers. They display the following traits: an openness to multiple sights, sounds, and thoughts; a daring or wandering imagination; an intense focus on their own pursuits/interests; creative urges or compelling attraction for new ideas; a global perspective.

Dreamer, Discoverer, or Dynamo?

“Edison Trait” children tend to fall into one of these three categories (but there may be overlap):

Dreamer – Imaginative and artful, these kids are daydreamers who live with their head in the clouds, and can become quite absorbed in “inner space”.

Discoverer – These “doers” like to experiment first, and ask questions later. They often have strong opinions, and can be passionate, spontaneous, dramatic, or entertaining. They challenge rules and like to do things their own way.

Dynamo – These children have an inordinately high energy level and are constantly on the move. They may have an aggressive streak or like power, speed and personal challenge. Their impulsive and dauntless nature may land them in trouble.

Edison-trait kids are sometimes misidentified as having ADD or ADHD (*search sengifted.org – misdiagnosis initiative*). They may perplex or frustrate adults who believe they have serious behavior problems and label them as easily distracted, disorganized, disobedient, incompilant, neglectful or oppositional.

The Gift of Belief

These children report that having someone *who believes in them* (like an accepting and supportive parent or teacher) is the most significant help you can give them. ***As a parent, you must find ways to replace your worry with trust.***

What Classroom Strategies are Helpful?

Use of Fantasy – Anything is easier to learn if we can assimilate it into our own way of seeing the world, by hooking it to what we already know or care about through the use of play or fantasy. Work with their innate tendency to use visual images, metaphoric language, action, and imagination.

Multisensorial Experience – Switch it up by using a combination of visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic approaches to stimulate the senses. Do hands-on activities e.g., using manipulatives to teach math. Employ rhythm and movement.

Visual Cues – These kids are usually visual-spatial thinkers so using color-coding or color shock can be very effective (but only use to highlight positives, not to draw attention to mistakes). The GATE icons can work well as visual cues. Use graph paper to help organize work, and use mind-mapping to diagram thoughts (*see the book “Visual Leap” by Jesse Berg for excellent ideas*).

Learning Through Self-Expression – Capitalize on their exuberant, expressive nature and put it to work! Try role reversal (let them teach you), or use a buddy system so students try out being the teacher or the learner. Since hand-writing, grammar, and spelling are often challenging for them, utilize a computer or try dictation to increase motivation for writing. Let them work on their favorite topics. Use journaling as a “safe space” for free writing and expression (with out using too much correction or criticism).

Emphasis on Quality, Not Quantity – Faced with worksheets filled with problems, these kids can easily feel overwhelmed and can shut down (*see the book “The Shutdown Learner” by Richard Selznick*), or they may race through and make many mistakes which leads to discouragement. Break a goal into smaller parts, reward the accomplishment of the sub-goals, and build on small successes. Come up with positive ways to motivate them (*see examples in Chapter 12 of the book*).

Convergent vs. Divergent Thinking

Divergent – one thought stimulates many others; thinking *branches out*.

Convergent – many thoughts reduce to a single one; thinking *funnels in*.

Remember, the typical general education classroom is designed for convergent thinkers, so Edison-trait (divergent) thinkers require a different approach!