

# Twice exceptionality

## Parent factsheet: Gifted and talented education

Twice exceptional students are sometimes hard to identify. This could be because:

- the giftedness and the disability or disorder may mask each other, and the student appears to be operating at an average level and neither exceptionality is recognised or accommodated
- the focus is on the disability or difficulty and the giftedness is overlooked
- the focus may be on the giftedness resulting in the disability or difficulty being overlooked. The gifted students will become more 'disadvantaged' as they progress through school because the work becomes more difficult and the disability or difficulty is not addressed.

It is important that giftedness and exceptionalities are identified as early as possible so that appropriate programs can be developed and implemented for these students. Girls have as many learning difficulties as boys but are often identified later as they typically show fewer behavioural disorders. Late identification of a learning difficulty decreases the opportunity for developing appropriate programs and reduces the possibility for twice exceptional students to reach their potential.

Effective identification methods for twice exceptional students may require modification to the processes currently in schools for the identification of gifted students. For example, hearing impaired students may not have a vocabulary which reflects the complexity of their thoughts; students with learning difficulties may use high-level vocabulary in speaking but be unable to express themselves in writing; and limited life experiences due to impaired mobility may artificially lower certain test scores.

Twice exceptional students will have the same opportunities for programs and provisions as gifted students who are not twice exceptional. However, the level of support may differ. The programs will aim to develop the student's strengths, promote high achievement and enhance creative and other high-level thinking skills. Twice exceptional students benefit from a strength-based Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that also includes adjustments for the disability.

Developing positive self-concepts and self-efficacy should be a main priority in any program for these students. Learning to value effort as well as high achievement will improve student self-belief. Peer support groups may help twice exceptional students develop positive self-concepts and social skills.

Instead of categorising the individual first as having a disability or learning difficulty and second as gifted, the gifted and talented program should view the student first as a gifted individual, but one who may need support because of their disability or disorder. The focus should be on recognising and supporting the student's strengths. The plan is to support where needed and extend talent development when needed.

## Twice exceptionalities

For twice exceptional students to reach their potential, it is imperative that their strengths be recognised and nurtured, at the same time as their disability or disorder is appropriately



accommodated. The following lists are intended to assist parents and teachers in recognising intellectual giftedness in the presence of a disability or difficulty.

## **Characteristics of gifted students with physical disabilities**

- Development of compensatory skills
- Creativity in finding alternate ways of communicating and accomplishing tasks
- Impressive store of knowledge
- Advanced academic skills
- Superior memory
- Exceptional problem-solving skills
- Rapid grasp of ideas
- Ability to set and strive for long-term goals
- Greater maturity than same age peers
- Good sense of humour
- Persistence, patience
- Motivation to achieve
- Curiosity, insight
- Self-criticism and perfectionism
- Cognitive development that may not be based on direct experience
- Possible limited achievement due to pace of work.

## **Characteristics of gifted students with hearing impairments**

- Development of speech-reading skills without instruction
- Early reading ability
- Rapid grasp of ideas
- High reasoning ability
- Excellent memory
- Superior performance in school
- Wide range of interests
- Intuition
- Non-traditional ways of getting information
- Ingenuity in solving problems
- Use of problem-solving skills in everyday situations
- Self-starters
- Good sense of humour
- Enjoyment of manipulating environment
- Symbolic language abilities (different symbol system)
- Delays in concept attainment.



## Characteristics of gifted students with learning difficulties

- High abstract reasoning ability
- Exceptional ability in geometry, science, arts, music
- Good mathematical reasoning ability
- Good problem-finding and problem-solving skills
- Comprehension of complex systems
- Wide variety of interests
- Insightful
- Keen visual memory, spatial skills
- Advanced vocabulary
- Grasp of metaphors, analogies, satire
- Sophisticated sense of humour
- Imaginative and creative
- Difficulty with memorisation, computation, phonics, an/ or spelling
- Distractibility and or disorganization
- Super-sensitivity
- Perfectionism
- Unreasonable self-expectations
- Often, failure to complete assignments
- Difficulties with sequential tasks.

## Characteristics of gifted students with visual impairment

- Fast rate of learning
- Superior memory
- Superior verbal communication skills and vocabulary such as:
  - advanced problem-solving skills
  - creative production or thought that may progress more slowly than sighted students in some academic areas
  - ease in learning Braille
  - motivation to know
  - sometimes slower rate of cognitive development than sighted students.

## Characteristics of gifted students with autism

- Pedantic, seamless speech which can run on and on, blending content and personal reflections
- Very low tolerance for change, agitation, aggression
- Prone to distraction, but it is from within their 'inner world'
- Can do word play, but typically doesn't understand humour that requires social give-and-take: doesn't laugh at things that are funny to most people or doesn't 'get' the joke

- Motor clumsiness is apparent in 50 to 90% of students with autism
- Emotional responses are often not what are considered appropriate: the response might be restricted, or there may be inappropriate laughter, anger or anxiousness. It is nearly always observed in students with autism
- A remarkable lack of insight and awareness regarding the feelings, needs and interests of other people.

## Questions to ask in differentiating between Giftedness and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- Could the behaviours be responses to inappropriate placement, insufficient challenge or lack of like-minded peers?
- Is the student able to concentrate when interested in the activity?
- Have any curricular modifications been made to change inappropriate behaviours?
- Has the student been interviewed? What are the student's feelings about the behaviours?
- Does the student feel out of control?
- Do you, as parents, believe that the child is out of control?
- Are the behaviours consistent at school and at home?
- Have you sought the advice of a paediatrician?

[Acknowledgement: National Association for Gifted Children, 2008]