

## **GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION DUAL EXCEPTIONALITY PARENT FACTSHEET**

**Dual exceptionality (or twice-exceptionality)** refers to gifted students who also present with one or more specific learning difficulties; physical, emotional or behavioural disabilities; or other factors which may impair performance and mask high potential.

Dual exceptionality is a term that is used to indicate a student who is gifted but who also has one or more additional exceptionalities. It can refer to gifted students who are deaf, vision-impaired or have a physical disability; it can also refer to gifted students who have an emotional or behavioural disability. More commonly, dual exceptionality is used for gifted students who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or a learning disability such as dysgraphia, dyslexia and dyscalculia.

Students with dual exceptionality 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. Research shows that although more boys are identified as having learning difficulties, there is a greater risk factor for girls. 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 students with dual exceptionalities to reach their potential.

Effective identification methods for students with a dual exceptionality may require modification to the processes currently existing 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.

Programs for students with a dual exceptionality will have similarities as well as differences from programs for gifted students who do not have a dual exceptionality. Programs for students with a dual exceptionality may include a differentiated curriculum incorporating advanced learning through enrichment, counselling provisions, acceleration options, and grouping. The programs will aim to develop the student's strengths, promote high achievement and enhance creative and other high-level thinking skills. Additionally the student will have an independent learning plan that will include adjustments for the student's disability and aim to develop compensation strategies for the student's disability (or dual exceptionality).

Developing positive self-concepts and self-efficacy should be a main priority in any program for these students. Learning to value high achievement will improve student self-belief. Peer support groups may help students with dual exceptionalities 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 some special assistance because of their disability or disorder. The main focus should be on recognising and supporting the student's strengths. Another focus is to prevent the disability or learning difficulty from limiting the development and expression of the student's talent.

## **Dual Exceptionalities**

In order for students with dual exceptionalities 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 age mates
- 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, and 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
  - 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 Asperger's Syndrome (AS)**

- 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 - 90% of students with AS
- 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 AS
- 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 intellectual peers?
- Is the student able to concentrate when interested in the activity?

- Have any curricular modifications been made in an attempt to change inappropriate behaviours?
- Has the student been interviewed? What are his or her feelings about the behaviours?
- Does the student feel out of control?
- Do you, as parents, believe that the child is out of control?

[Acknowledgement: National Association for Gifted Children, 2008]