

# ED430344 1999-04-00 Dual Exceptionalities. ERIC Digest E574.

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## Dual Exceptionalities. ERIC Digest E574.

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Gifted students with disabling conditions remain a major group of underserved and understimulated youth (Cline, 1999). The focus on accommodations for their disabilities may preclude the recognition and development of their cognitive abilities. It is not unexpected, then, to find a significant discrepancy between the measured academic potential of these students and their actual performance in the classroom ((Whitmore & Maker, 1985). In order for these children to reach their potential, it is imperative that their intellectual strengths be recognized and nurtured, at the same time as their disability is accommodated appropriately.

## ASSESSMENT

Identification of giftedness in students who are disabled is problematic. The customary identification methods (standardized tests and observational checklists) are inadequate, without major modification. Standard lists of characteristics of gifted students may be inadequate for unmasking hidden potential in children who have disabilities. Children whose hearing is impaired, for example, cannot respond to oral directions, and they may also lack the vocabulary which reflects the complexity of their thoughts. Children whose speech or language is impaired cannot respond to tests requiring verbal responses. Children whose vision is impaired may be unable to respond to certain performance measures, and although their vocabulary may be quite advanced, they may not understand the full meaning of the words they use (e.g., color words). Children with learning disabilities may use high-level vocabulary in speaking but be unable to express themselves in writing, or vice versa. In addition, limited life experiences due to impaired mobility may artificially lower scores (Whitmore & Maker, 1985). Since the population of gifted/disabled students is difficult to locate, they seldom are included in standardized test norming groups, adding to the problems of comparison. In addition, gifted children with disabilities often use their intelligence to try to circumvent the disability. This may cause both exceptionalities to appear less extreme: the disability may appear less severe because the child is using the intellect to cope, while the efforts expended in that area may hinder other expressions of giftedness.

The following lists are intended to assist parents and teachers in recognizing intellectual giftedness in the presence of a disability.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

### 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



great persistence



motivation to know



sometimes slower rate of cognitive development than sighted students



excellent ability to concentrate



(Whitmore & Maker, 1985)

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 humor



persistence, patience



motivation to achieve



curiosity, insight



self criticism and perfectionism



cognitive development that may not be based on direct experience



possible difficulty with abstractions



possible limited achievement due to pace of work



(Cline, 1999; Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Willard-Holt, 1994)

Gifted Students with Hearing Impairments



development of speech-reading skills without instruction



early reading ability



excellent memory



ability to function in the regular school setting



rapid grasp of ideas



high reasoning ability



superior performance in school



wide range of interests



nontraditional ways of getting information



use of problem-solving skills in everyday situations



possibly on grade level



delays in concept attainment



self starters



good sense of humor



enjoyment of manipulating environment



intuition



ingenuity in solving problems



symbolic language abilities (different symbol system)



(Cline, 1999; Whitmore & Maker, 1985)

### Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities



high abstract reasoning ability



good mathematical reasoning ability



keen visual memory, spatial skills



advanced vocabulary



sophisticated sense of humor



imaginative and creative



insightful



exceptional ability in geometry, science, arts, music



good problem-finding and problem-solving skills



difficulty with memorization, computation, phonics, and/or spelling



distractibility and/or disorganization



supersensitivity



perfectionism



grasp of metaphors, analogies, satire



comprehension of complex systems



unreasonable self expectations



often, failure to complete assignments



difficulties with sequential tasks



wide variety of interests



(Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991; Silverman, 1989)

Research indicates that in many cases, a child is diagnosed with ADHD when in fact the child is gifted and reacting to an inappropriate curriculum (Webb & Latimer, 1993). The key to distinguishing between the two is the pervasiveness of the "acting out" behaviors. If the acting out is specific to certain situations, the child's behavior is more likely related to giftedness; whereas, if the behavior is consistent across all situations, the child's behavior is more likely related to ADHD. It is also possible for a child to be BOTH gifted



and ADHD. The following lists highlight the similarities between giftedness and ADHD.

#### Characteristics of Gifted Students Who Are Bored



Poor attention and daydreaming when bored



Low tolerance for persistence on tasks that seem irrelevant



Begin many projects, see few to completion



Development of judgment lags behind intellectual growth



Intensity may lead to power struggles with authorities



High activity level; may need less sleep



Difficulty restraining desire to talk; may be disruptive



Question rules, customs, and traditions



Lose work, forget homework, are disorganized



May appear careless



Highly sensitive to criticism



Do not exhibit problem behaviors in all situations



More consistent levels of performance at a fairly consistent pace



(Cline, 1999; Webb & Latimer, 1993)

Characteristics of Students with ADHD



Poorly sustained attention



Diminished persistence on tasks not having immediate consequences



Often shift from one uncompleted activity to another



Impulsivity, poor delay of gratification



Impaired adherence to commands to regulate or inhibit behavior in social contexts



More active, restless than other children



Often talk excessively



Often interrupt or intrude on others (e.g., butt into games)



Difficulty adhering to rules and regulations



Often lose things necessary for tasks or activities at home or school



May appear inattentive to details



Highly sensitive to criticism



Problem behaviors exist in all settings, but in some are more severe



Variability in task performance and time used to accomplish tasks.



(Barkley, 1990; Cline, 1999; Webb & Latimer, 1993)

Questions To Ask in Differentiating between Giftedness and ADHD



Could the behaviors be responses to inappropriate placement, insufficient challenge, or lack of intellectual peers?



Is the child able to concentrate when interested in the activity?



Have any curricular modifications been made in an attempt to change inappropriate

behaviors?



Has the child been interviewed? What are his/her feelings about the behaviors?



Does the child feel out of control? Do the parents perceive the child as being out of control?



Do the behaviors occur at certain times of the day, during certain activities, with certain teachers or in certain environments?

### Implications for Students with Dual Exceptionalities

Commitment to identifying and nurturing the gifts of students with disabilities implies specific changes in the way educators approach identification, instruction, and classroom dynamics. Identification \* Include students with disabilities in initial screening phase. \* Be willing to accept nonconventional indicators of intellectual talent. \* Look beyond test scores. \* When applying cutoffs, bear in mind the depression of scores that may occur due to the disability. \* DO NOT aggregate subtest scores into a composite score. \* Compare with others who have similar disabilities. \* Weight more heavily characteristics that enable the child to effectively compensate for the disability. \* Weight more heavily areas of performance unaffected by the disability. \* Allow the child to participate in gifted programs on a trial basis. Instruction \* Be aware of the powerful role of language; reduce communication limitations and develop alternative modes for thinking and communicating. \* Emphasize high-level abstract thinking, creativity, and a problem-solving approach. \* Have great expectations: these children often become successful as adults in fields requiring advanced education. \* Provide for individual pacing in areas of giftedness and disability. \* Provide challenging activities at an advanced level. \* Promote active inquiry, experimentation, and discussion. \* Promote self-direction. \* Offer options that enable students to use strengths and preferred ways of learning. \* Use intellectual strengths to develop coping strategies. \* Assist in strengthening the student's self concept. Classroom Dynamics \* Discuss disabilities/capabilities and their implications with the class. \* Expect participation in all activities; strive for normal peer interactions. \* Facilitate acceptance; model and demand respect for all. \* Candidly answer peers' questions. \* Treat a child with a disability the same way a child without a disability is treated. \* Model celebration of individual differences. Gifted students with disabilities must be provided with appropriate challenges. The personal and societal costs of not developing their potential cannot be overstated.

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