



BULLETIN

Dual Exceptionalities

by

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Gifted students with disabling conditions comprise a major group of underserved, understimulated youth (Karnes & Johnson, 1991). A major portion of their time often is spent in remediation or learning to circumvent the effects of the disability, which in turn may preclude the recognition and development of cognitive abilities. It is not unexpected, then, to find that a significant discrepancy between the measured academic potential of these students and their actual performance frequently exists (Whitmore, 1987). Furthermore, this population is most likely far larger than most educators suspect: 1/6 of the gifted children tested at Linda Silverman's Gifted Development Center were found to have some type of learning disability. 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 remediated or circumvented.

Identification of giftedness in students who are disabled is problematic. Neither of the customary identification methods—standardized tests and observational checklists—is adequate, without major modification, for discovering the abilities of these children. Children whose hearing is impaired 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 (e.g., due to inability to control vocal musculature) 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 limited mobility may be unable to complete nonverbal or "performance" tests requiring hand manipulation unless such assessments are modified extensively. In addition, limited life experiences due to impaired mobility may artificially lower scores (Hokanson & Jospe, 1976; Whitmore & Maker, 1985).

A second criterion often used for placement in gifted programs is teacher recommendation. Standard lists of characteristics (e.g., Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, & Hartman, 1976) may be inadequate for unmasking hidden potentiality in children who have disabilities. For example, "advanced vocabulary" frequently appears on lists of characteristics of the gifted. The vocabulary development of children who are deaf is often behind schedule; children without oral speech cannot easily express their knowledge of vocabulary; children who are blind may use words correctly without fully understanding them; and children who are learning disabled may be able to orally use high-level vocabulary but be unable to express themselves in writing, or vice versa. In addition, gifted children with disabilities often use their intelligence to circumvent the disability. This may cause both exceptionalities to appear less extreme: the disability appears 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 lists of characteristics of gifted students with specific disabilities on the following page are intended to assist parents and teachers in recognizing intellectual giftedness in the presence of a disability.

Characteristics of Gifted Students with Specific Disabilities

Students with <i>Visual</i> Disabilities	Students with <i>Physical</i> Disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fast rate of learning • superior memory • superior verbal communication skills and vocabulary • advanced problem solving skills • creative production or thought may progress more slowly than sighted students in some academic areas • learn Braille quite easily • great persistence • motivation to know • sometimes slower rate of cognitive development than sighted students • excellent ability to concentrate (Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Maker, 1977) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn or develop 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-critical and perfectionistic • cognitive development may not be based on direct experience • may have difficulty with abstractions • may have limited achievement due to pace of work (Hokanson & Jospe, 1976; Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Whitmore, 1986; Willard-Holt, 1994)
Students with <i>Hearing</i> Disabilities	Students with <i>Learning</i> Disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop speechreading 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 in everyday situations • apt to be on grade level • delays in concept attainment • self-starters • good sense of humor • enjoy manipulating environment • intuitive • ingenious in solving problems • symbolic language abilities (different symbol system) (Whitmore & Maker, 1985; Maker, 1977; Kirk, 1972; Willard-Holt, 1991) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 solving skills • difficulty with memorization, computation, phonics, and/or spelling • distractible and/or disorganized • supersensitive • perfectionistic • grasp metaphors, analogies, satire • comprehend complex systems • unreasonable self-expectations • often fail to complete assignments • difficulties with sequential tasks • wide variety of interests (Silverman, 1989; Reis, 1994)

A common educational “diagnosis” at the present time is ADHD. Research has found that in many cases, a child is diagnosed with ADHD when in fact the child is gifted and reacting to an inappropriate curriculum. The following table highlights the similarities between giftedness and ADHD. 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 is more likely gifted; whereas, if the behavior is consistent across all situations, the child is more likely ADHD. Of course, it is also possible for a child to be BOTH gifted and ADHD.

Characteristics of Gifted Students	Characteristics of Students with ADHD
Poor attention and daydreaming when bored	Poorly sustained attention
Low tolerance for persistence on tasks that seem irrelevant	Diminished persistence on tasks not having immediate consequences
Begins many projects, sees few to completion	Often shifts from one uncompleted activity to another
Development of judgment lags behind intellectual growth	Impulsivity, poor delay of gratification
Intensity may lead to power struggles with authorities	Impaired adherence to commands to regulate or inhibit behavior on social contexts
High activity level; may need less sleep	More active, restless than other children
Difficulty restraining desire to talk	Often talks excessively
May be disruptive	Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into games)
Questions rules, customs, and traditions	Difficulty adhering to rules and regulations
Loses work, forgets homework, is disorganized	Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities at home or school
May appear careless	May appear inattentive to details
Highly sensitive to criticism	Highly sensitive to criticism
Do not exhibit problem behaviors in all situations	Problem behaviors exist in all settings, but are more severe in some settings
More consistent levels of performance; fairly consistent pace	Variability in task performance and time used to accomplish tasks
(Lind, 1993; Webb, 1993; Webb & Latimer, 1998)	(American Psychiatric Assn, 1987; Barkley, 1990; Barkon, 1998; Lind & Silverman, 1994)

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

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
- Weight more heavily characteristics that enable child to effectively compensate for the disability



- Compare to others with similar disabilities
- Weight more heavily areas of performance unaffected by the disability
- Allow child to participate in gifted programming on a trial basis

INSTRUCTION

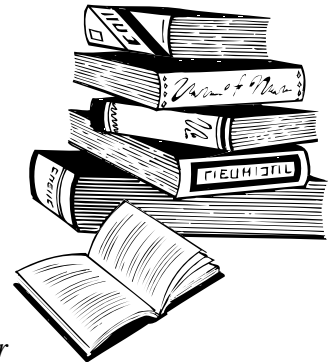
- Be aware of the powerful role of language—reduce communication limitations and develop alternative modes for thinking and communicating
- Emphasize high-level abstract thinking, creativity, and a problem-solving approach
- Have great expectations: these children tend to get “smarter” as they get older and often become successful adults in fields such as technology, architecture, engineering, aeronautics, mathematics, science, fine arts, and business leadership
- 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 learning styles
- Use intellectual strengths to develop coping strategies
- Develop self-concept



CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

- Facilitate an accepting atmosphere
 - Discuss disability (and its implications) *and capabilities* with classmates
 - Expect participation in all activities
 - Model and demand respect for all
 - Candidly answer peers' questions
- Treat child with disability as normally as possible
- Strive for normal peer interactions
- Model acceptance/celebration of individual differences

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