

Special Education Support Service: Information on Dual Exceptionality / Twice Exceptional

Note 1: *The Special Education Support Service wishes to acknowledge and thank Mr. Colm O Reilly, Acting, Director, Irish Centre for Talented Youth, Dublin City University, for his input in the compilation of this document.*

Note 2: *Some of this material is similar to some of the information on the **Gifted and Talented** factsheet. For more detailed information, please access this factsheet and its appendices.*

Definition

From Report of the Special Education Review Committee¹ (1993):

Pupils who are exceptionally able or talented are those who have demonstrated their capacity to achieve high performance in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) General intellectual ability;
- (b) Specific academic aptitude;
- (c) Creative or productive thinking;
- (d) Leadership ability;
- (e) Visual and performing arts;
- (f) Mechanical aptitude;
- (g) Psychomotor ability, e.g. in athletics, gymnastics.

The term 'gifted' tends to be reserved for those with an IQ greater than 130, i.e. the top 2% of the population. It is important to remember, though, that IQ scores extend to 170 and above and while the numbers of such people become progressively smaller with increasing score, the needs of these 'profoundly gifted' become increasingly acute. Within a school it would probably be reasonable to use a working definition, which would say that children with ability at the 97th percentile level in at least one area are seen as having special needs. At this kind of level, there are approximately 23,000 exceptionally able children within the Irish educational system. Such children are from all possible social backgrounds.

In the past few years there has been a growth in the number of students who are considered twice exceptional (also known as **dual exceptionality**). These are students who are gifted but also present with some sort of disability. Children can be gifted when they also have a learning difficulty or physical disability, have a visual, hearing or speech impairment, have an autistic spectrum disorder or emotional disabilities.

¹ The Special Education Review Committee was established by the Minister for Education in August 1991 and was chaired by Mr. Declan Brennan.

The most common forms of dual exceptionality that are dealt with at The Irish Centre for Talented Youth (CTYI) are Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Asperger's Syndrome. Smaller instances of visual and hearing impairment also occur.

These students defy the notion of 'global giftedness', a phrase that denotes ability or talent in all academic areas. Children who are both gifted and disabled simply exhibit remarkable talents and strengths in one area and disabling weaknesses in others. These children are often under-identified in the gifted and talented population.

Identification / Characteristics

Some characteristics to look for when attempting to identify these children are as follows:

- Evidence of an outstanding talent or ability;
- A discrepancy between expected and actual achievement;
- Evidence of a processing deficit.

For example, the identification of a processing deficit (obtained by examining subtest scores from an IQ test, such as the WISC-R, and/or specific processing tests) can help in differentiating between naturally occurring differences in the development of specific cognitive abilities (e.g., widely different levels of verbal ability vs. quantitative ability) and the co-occurrence of intellectual giftedness and a learning disability. Identification of a processing deficit can also help in differentiating between a gifted child who is underachieving because of educational placement issues (e.g., a curriculum that is not sufficiently challenging) and one who is not achieving at a level commensurate with his or her general ability because of a learning disability.

Subgroups for dual exceptionality

There are at least three subgroups of children whose dual exceptionality remains unrecognized. The first group includes students who have been identified as gifted yet exhibit difficulties in school. These students are often considered underachievers, and their underachievement may be attributed to poor self-concept, lack of motivation, or even some less flattering characteristics, such as laziness. Their learning disabilities usually remain unrecognized for most of their educational lives. As school becomes more challenging, their academic difficulties may increase to the point where they are falling sufficiently behind peers that someone finally suspects a disability.

A second group includes students whose learning disabilities are severe enough that they have been identified as having learning disabilities but whose exceptional abilities have never been recognized or addressed. It has been suggested that this may be a larger group of students than many people realize. Inadequate assessments and/or depressed IQ scores often lead to an underestimation of these students' intellectual abilities.

Perhaps the largest group of students with dual exceptionality are those whose abilities and disabilities mask each other; these children sit in general classrooms, ineligible for services provided for students who are gifted or have learning disabilities, and are considered to have average abilities. Because these students typically function at their normal school level, they are not seen as having problems or special needs. Their academic difficulties usually increase to the point where a learning disability may be suspected, but rarely is their true potential recognized.

What do I need to look out for?

The following are the gifted characteristics of the twice exceptional student. Some or all may apply.

- excellent long-term memory
- extensive vocabulary and excels in reading comprehension
- excels in mathematical reasoning
- advanced verbal skills in discussions
- facile with computers
- grasps abstract concepts
- performs better with more challenging work
- excessive interest or knowledge on one particular topic
- superior general knowledge
- keen sense of humour

The following are the characteristics of the gifted child with a learning difficulty. Some or all may apply.

- Noticeable differences between the scores on verbal and non-verbal sections of a test
- Auditory or visual problems which cause responses or thought processes to appear slow
- Poor short-term memory
- Illegible handwriting and a reluctance to do written work
- Weak organisational and study skills resulting in poor work
- Speaking vocabulary often superior to written work
- Inability to learn unless subject is interesting to them, which may lead to inattentiveness
- Frustration with and often dislike of school

Strategies for parents

1. Focus attention on the development of the gifted ability.
2. Provide a nurturing environment that caters for individual differences.
3. Encourage compensation strategies.
4. Encourage awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses.

Too often in these cases too much attention is spent on the learning difficulty rather than the area where the child is gifted. In order to boost self esteem and to motivate the student more time must be given to developing the gifted ability. The student must also be made aware of areas that they are strong and weak in so that they can develop their own strategies for compensation.

What can I do as a teacher?

Exceptionally able children have special educational needs. Because regular schoolwork may not provide sufficient challenge they may experience boredom, which can lead to frustration at school. Students with dual exceptionality are sometimes referred to as 'twice-disabled' for obvious reasons. The following approaches can be of help in supporting / challenging an exceptionally talented student and sometimes a combination of these may be needed.

- (a) Acceleration: move the student into an older class for some or all subjects
- (b) Differentiation: keep the student with their usual age group, but provide different material
- (c) Open ended project work
- (d) Special classes
- (e) Enrichment Activities
- (f) Outside speakers
- (g) Avoid giving the student repetitious work

(See the factsheet on gifted and talented students for a more detailed explanation of these concepts)

In addition, for the student who has dual exceptionality, the following are also worth noting:

- Teachers should create a learning environment where individual differences are valued.
- There should be regular opportunities for students to express what they are learning in non-traditional ways.
- Consideration should be given to these students in testing situations. These should include time factors and the possibility of reading questions aloud to the student.
- Short term goals should be set rather than long projects.
- Teachers should find topics that the students are interested in to allow them to be stimulated.

Extra Resources

Organisations / Support Groups:

a.

CTYI, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

Tel: (01) 7005634 Fax: (01) 7005693 E-mail: ctyi@dcu.ie Website: www.dcu.ie/ctyi

The Irish Centre for Talented Youth (CTYI) works with young people of exceptional academic ability. The Centre aims to address the needs of these students by:

- Identifying high ability students throughout Ireland through annual Talent Searches;
- Providing services for these students, including Saturday classes, residential summer programmes, correspondence courses and Discovery Days;
- Giving support to parents and teachers;
- Carrying out research in this area.

2. Irish Association for Gifted Children / An Óige Thréitheach

Carmichael House, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7

Tel: (01) 8735702 Fax: (01) 8735737 Website: <http://www.iagc.ie>

3. National Association for Gifted Children

Suite 14, Challenge House, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 6DP, UK.

Tel: (0044) 870 7703217 Website: <http://www.nagcbrtain.org.uk>

d.

National Association for Able Children in Education

P.O. BOX 242, Arnolds Way, Oxford OX2 9FR, UK

Tel: (0044) 1865 861879 Fax: (0044) 1865 861880 Website: <http://www.nace.co.uk/>

Useful web addresses

http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/gt_ld/gifted_ld.html

This site contains links to a number of articles on dual exceptionality.

<http://www.newhorizons.org/spneeds/gifted/nowak3.htm>

This site contains a paper on dual exceptionality by Dr. Margi Nowak.