

Characteristics of Twice-Exceptional Children

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The following list should be viewed as characteristics which are *typical* of many children who are gifted and who also have a disability, rather than characteristics which *all* such children possess. These twice-exceptional children do not form a simple, homogeneous group; they are a highly diverse group of learners.

Indicators of Cognitive/Affective Strengths

- Have a wide range of interests that are not related to school topics or learning.
- Have a specific talent or consuming interest area for which they have an exceptional memory and knowledge.
- Are interested in the "big picture" rather than small details.
- Are extremely curious and questioning.
- Possess high levels of problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Have penetrating insights.
- Are capable of setting up situations to their own advantage often as a coping method.
- Are extremely creative in their approach to tasks and as a technique to compensate for their disability.
- Have an unusual imagination.
- Are humorous often in "bizarre" ways.
- Have advanced ideas and opinions which they are uninhibited in expressing.
- Have a superior vocabulary.
- Have very high energy levels.

Indicators of Cognitive/Affective Problems

- Have discrepant verbal and performance abilities.
- Have deficient or extremely uneven academic skills which cause them to lack academic initiative, appear academically unmotivated, avoid school tasks, and frequently fail to complete assignments.
- Are extremely frustrated by school.
- Have auditory and/or visual processing problems which may cause them to respond slowly, to work slowly, and to appear to think slowly.
- Have problems with long-term and/or short-term memory.
- Have motorical difficulties exhibited by clumsiness, poor handwriting, or problems completing paper-and-pencil tasks.
- Lack organizational skills and study skills; often appearing to be extremely "messy."
- Are unable to think in a linear fashion; have difficulty following directions.
- Are easily frustrated; give up quickly on tasks; are afraid to risk being wrong or making mistakes.
- Have difficulty explaining or expressing ideas, "getting-to-the-point," and/or expressing feelings.
- Blame others for their problems while believing that their successes are only due to "luck."
- Are distractible; unable to maintain attention for long periods of time.
- Are unable to control impulses.
- Have poor social skills; demonstrate antisocial behaviors.
- Are highly sensitive to criticism.

Indicators of Low Self-Esteem

One of the most common characteristics of these children is low self-esteem. They frequently "disguise" this low self-esteem through the use of any or all of the following behaviors:

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| • Anger | • Disruptive behaviors | • Withdrawal |
| • Self-criticism | • Clowning behaviors | • Daydreaming and fantasy |
| • Crying | • Denial of problems | • Apathetic behaviors |

Distinguishing Characteristics of Gifted Students With Factors

	Traditional Characteristics	Characteristics of Culturally/Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students	Characteristics of Low Socio-Economic Gifted Students	Characteristics of Gifted Students With Disabilities
Basic Skills	Ability to learn basic skills quickly and easily and retain information with less repetition	May require more repetition or hands-on experiences at an introductory level	Lack of opportunities and access to school-readiness materials may delay acquisition of basic skills	Often struggles to learn basic skills due to cognitive processing difficulties; needs to learn compensatory strategies in order to acquire basic skills and information
Verbal Skills	High verbal ability	May have high verbal ability in native language; may rapidly acquire English language skills if they possess academic skills in their home language	Lack of opportunities may delay the development of verbal skills	High verbal ability but extreme difficulty in written language area; may use language in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times
Reading Ability	Early reading ability	May demonstrate strong storytelling ability and ability to read environmental print in home language	Lack of access to reading materials may delay acquisition of reading skills	Frequently has reading problems due to cognitive processing deficits
Observation Skills	Keen powers of observation	May display high levels of visual memory or auditory memory skills	Strong observational skills which are often used to "survive on the streets"	Strong observation skills but often has deficits in memory skills
Problem Solving	Strong critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills	Strong critical thinking in primary language; often solves problems in creative ways; particularly interested in solving "real-world" problems	Excels in brainstorming and solving "real-world" problems; strong critical thinking ability; rapid decision-making skills	Excels in solving "real-world" problems; outstanding critical thinking and decision-making skills; often independently develops compensatory skills
Persistence	Long attention span — persistent, intense concentration	Long attention span — persistent, intense concentration	Persistent in areas of interest usually unrelated to school	Frequently has attention deficit problems but may concentrate for long periods in areas of interest

Albuquerque Public Schools Gifted Task Force; developed by E. Nielsen (1999).

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Traditional Characteristics	Characteristics of Culturally/Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students	Characteristics of Low Socio-Economic Gifted Students	Characteristics of Gifted Students With Disabilities
Questioning attitude	Some culturally diverse children are raised not to question authority	Questioning attitude which may at times be demonstrated in a confronting or challenging way	Strong questioning attitude; may appear disrespectful when questioning information, facts, etc. presented by teacher
Creative in the generation of thoughts, ideas, actions; innovative	Often displays richness of imagery in ideas, art, music, primary language, etc.; can improvise with commonplace objects	Strong creative abilities	Unusual imagination; frequently generates original and at times rather "bizarre" ideas
Takes risks	Degree of risk taking may depend upon the familiarity of the situation based on different cultural experiences	Takes risks often without consideration of consequences	Often unwilling to take risks with regard to academics; takes risks in non-school areas without consideration of consequences
Unusual, often highly developed, sense of humor	Humor may be displayed through unique use of language and responses	May use humor to become "class clown," to deal with stressful situations, and to avoid trouble	Humor may be used to divert attention from school failure; may use humor to make fun of peers or to avoid trouble
May mature at different rates than age peers	Accepts responsibilities in the home normally reserved for older children	Often mature earlier than age peers since they must accept responsibilities in the home which are normally reserved for older children or even adults; inexperience may make them appear socially immature	Sometimes appear immature since they may use anger, crying, withdrawal, etc. to express feelings and to deal with difficulties
Sense of independence	May be culturally socialized to work in groups rather than independently	Circumstances often have forced the student to become extremely independent and self-sufficient	Requires frequent teacher support and feedback in deficit areas; highly independent in other areas; often appears to be extremely stubborn and inflexible

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Distinguishing Characteristics of Gifted Students With Factors

Traditional Characteristics	Characteristics of Culturally/Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students	Characteristics of Low Socio-Economic Gifted Students	Characteristics of Gifted Students With Disabilities
Emotionality Sensitive	May be sensitive, particularly to racial or cultural issues	May be critical of self and others including teachers; can understand and express concern about the feelings of others even while engaging in anti-social behavior	Sensitive regarding disability area(s); highly critical of self and others including teachers; can express concern about the feelings of others even while engaging in anti-social behavior
Social Skills May not be accepted by other children and may feel isolated	May be perceived as a loner due to racial/cultural isolation and/or inability to speak English; entertains self easily using imagination in games and ingenious play	Economic circumstances as well as his/her giftedness may isolate the student from more financially secure peers	May be perceived as a loner since they do not fit typical model for either a gifted or a learning disabled student; sometimes has difficulty being accepted by peers due to poor social skills
Leadership Exhibits leadership ability	May be a leader in the community but not in the school setting; demonstrates "street-wise" behavior	May be a leader among the more non-traditional students; demonstrates strong "street-wise" behavior; often excels in brainstorming and problem-solving around social issues	Often leaders among the more non-traditional students; demonstrate strong "street-wise" behavior; the disability may interfere with ability to exercise leadership skills
Broad Interests Wide range of interests	Interests may include individual culturally related activities	Wide range of interests that are often unrelated to topics/subjects addressed in school	Wide range of interests but is handicapped in pursuing them due to process/learning problems
Focused Interests Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others	Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others	Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others — usually not related to school subjects	Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others — often not related to school subjects

Albuquerque Public Schools Gifted Task Force, developed by E. Nielsen (1999). Sources: New Mexico State Dept. of Ed. (1994) *Technical Assistance Document-Gifted Education*; Fox, L., Brody, I., & Tobin, D. (1983). *Learning Disabled Gifted Children*; Torrance, E.P., Goff, K., & Neil, B. (1998). *Multicultural Mentoring of the Gifted and Talented*; Van Tassel-Baska, J., Patton, J., & Prillaman, D. (1991). *Gifted Youth At Risk*.