

To support ACT public schools in their implementation of the Gifted and Talented Students policy, the Directorate has commissioned Gateways Education to develop a series of six articles over the next three years to provide information to parents and the community about gifted and talented children. The following article is the first in the series and highlights the characteristics and needs of gifted learners.

This article and further information about the education of gifted and talented learners, including Gifted and Talented Fact Sheets for parents, can be found on the Directorate [website](#).

Understanding the Gifted Learners in our Classrooms

Recognising and understanding gifted learners is challenging for educators and parents alike. The characteristics and needs of students who are gifted are personal and unique, and recognising them involves understanding that these specific characteristics may be demonstrated through a variety of different behaviours often presenting differently in school compared to at home.

The ACT Education and Training Directorate Gifted and Talented Students Policy is based on the Francois Gagné Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2008). This model highlights the impact of environmental and intrapersonal catalysts on the development of giftedness towards talent or competency. Although intellectual or academic giftedness is only one of the domains in Gagné's model, it is the domain which often requires the most differentiated response in the classroom.

Gifted students have characteristics and needs which are different from those of their same age peers. As a group, intellectually gifted learners comprehend complex ideas quickly, learn more rapidly and in greater depth, and may exhibit interests that differ from those of their age peers. They need time for in-depth exploration, to manipulate ideas and draw generalisations about seemingly unconnected concepts, and to ask provocative questions. Gifted learners find excitement and pleasure from intellectual challenge and show initiative and originality in work, particularly in areas of high interest and passion. At times gifted learners will show extraordinary degrees of motivation and a single-minded pursuit of goals, which their peers may find hard to understand. However, these students may also be self-critical in evaluating and correcting their own efforts, exhibiting perfectionist behaviours, which lead to task avoidance and the tendency to take criticism from others very much to heart.

Gifted students often demonstrate an ability to handle abstract ideas and flexibility in thinking, which allows them to consider problems from a number of viewpoints and show high levels of empathy for the feelings and circumstances of other people.

Gifted students possess a need for like-minded friends and longer-term relationships than their same aged peers and this often results in a preference for older friends or friendships with much younger, but equally gifted students. When like-minded connections are not available to them, they may experience feelings of isolation and

rejection and subsequent accusations of social maladjustment from those around them.

It is important to recognise that gifted learners are not a homogenous group and that students may exhibit differing levels of giftedness across one or more of the domains outlined in the Gagné model. Equally, it is important to acknowledge that giftedness does not always translate to talent and thus underachievement may need to be addressed in the case of some gifted learners. Ultimately, gifted learners require support in order to achieve their full potential. To this extent, they are no different to any other students whose learning needs differ from the norm.

References

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