

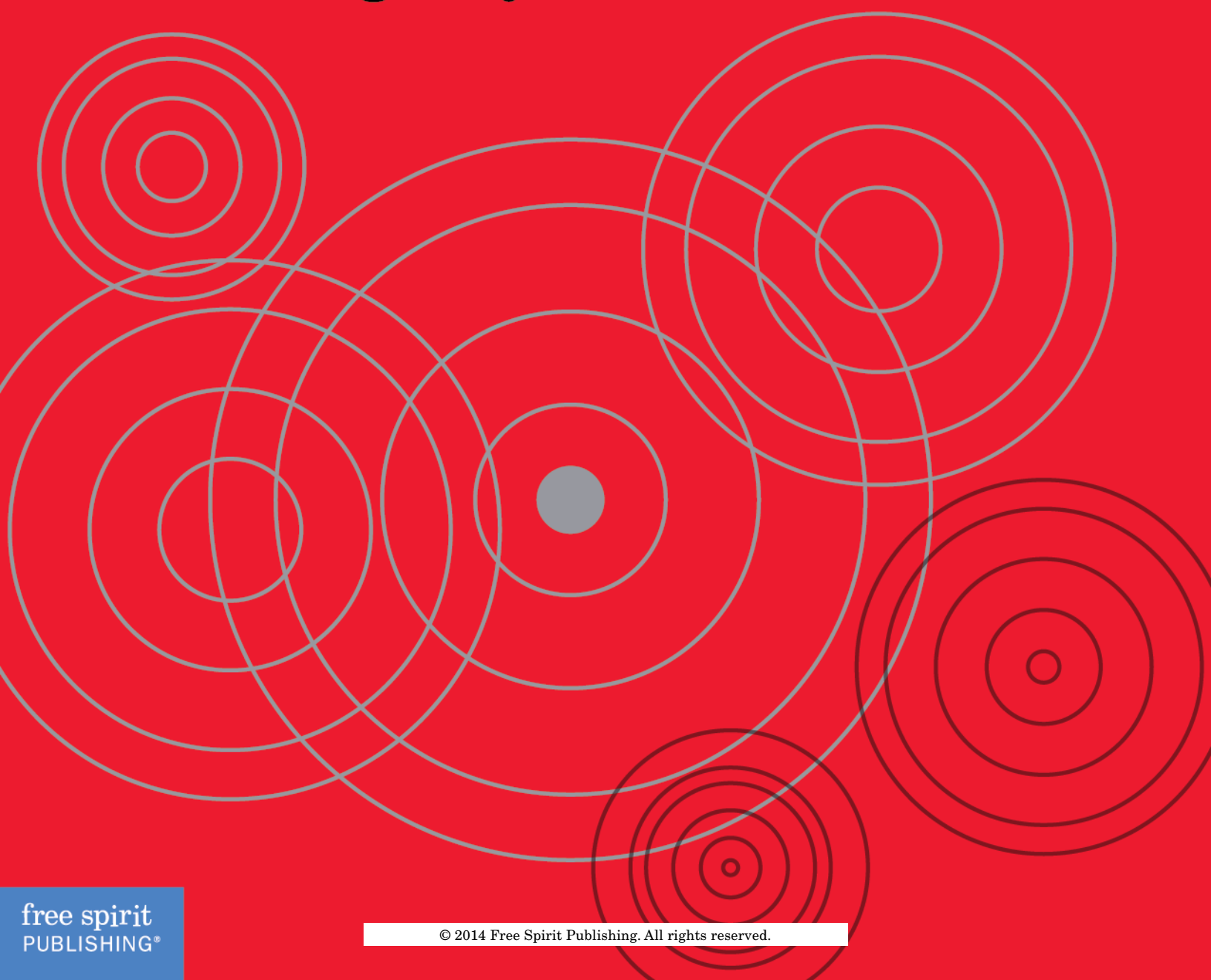
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DIANE HEACOX, Ed.D. | RICHARD M. CASH, Ed.D.

# Differentiation for **Gifted** Learners

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Going Beyond the Basics



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Praise for

# Differentiation for Gifted Learners

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*“Differentiation for Gifted Learners takes the reader on a journey that is both conceptual and practical at the same time. It offers direction and sophisticated solutions for issues faced by advanced and progressive schools.”*

—**Antarina S. F. Amir**, founder and CEO of HighScope Institute Indonesia

“Heacox and Cash clearly understand the landscape of schools and what is needed to make programming work. The many user-friendly lists and suggestions for classroom strategies make this book an excellent reference for daily use.”

—**Felicia A. Dixon, Ph.D.**, author of *Programs and Services for Gifted Secondary Students* and editor of *The Handbook of Secondary Gifted Education*

“Richard and Diane have hit a home run with this book! It provides exactly what teachers, coaches, gifted specialists, coordinators, and administrators need to help high-ability students develop a growth mindset, reverse underachievement, develop autonomy, and direct their own learning.”

—**Lora McHugh**, gifted and talented education program coordinator, Clark County School District

*“Differentiation for Gifted Learners is an excellent resource . . . Filled with practical definitions and explanations, the book offers a straightforward understanding of what it means to be gifted and talented, and the components of a strong gifted program.”*

—**Susie Strasser**, high school English teacher, San Diego Public Schools

“At last, a comprehensive, up-to-date book that explicitly describes how to differentiate for gifted and talented learners. The authors include a variety of instructional strategies that educators can use immediately with their identified students. If you are looking for practical information on the topic of differentiation for gifted students, look no further.”

—**Patti Drapeau**, gifted education consultant at the Maine Department of Education, adjunct faculty at the University of Southern Maine, and author of *Differentiated Instruction: Making It Work*

“Heacox and Cash have each made significant contributions to the field of gifted education. Together, they more than double their impact in this thoughtful, easy-to-read book. They use current research to address timely issues like differentiating the Common Core State Standards for high ability students, co-teaching as a collaborative effort, and focusing on assessment as a critical element of the instructional process. They tackle topics not previously discussed like working with immigrant students and designing challenging honors courses for secondary students. This book is full of practical suggestions for classroom teachers, gifted education specialists, and principals. It is a must-have for those eager to go ‘Beyond the Basics.’”

—**Chrystyna V. Mursky**, director of professional learning at Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and educational consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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# Dedication

To the educators whose classrooms and schools we have visited, as well as those we have yet to visit; it is our intent that this book strengthens and extends your instructional practices for gifted learners. We also hope that it provides much needed encouragement and support in your advocacy for the unique needs of gifted learners.

# Acknowledgments

To our Free Spirit friends and pets, especially to Judy Galbraith and Meg Bratsch. Your encouragement, support, and celebration of our work has been extraordinary. You make us better authors, educators, and advocates!

## From Diane

Richard, I get inspiration from your brilliant, creative and inquisitive mind and you make me laugh when I need to! Yours is always the first email I open since I know it is going to make my day. Working together is complete joy!

To my brother, Greg, whose passion for his work, his family and life itself serves as a daily inspiration for me.

To Kylie, my marine biologist daughter, may your new career bring you the joy and satisfaction that mine has brought me.

To my husband, John, for your steadfast patience with a very busy woman.

## From Richard

The process of writing this book with my good friend and colleague, Dr. Diane Heacox, was a true pleasure. Diane, your continual striving for quality and intellectual integrity are an inspiration for me. Also, I love that you laugh at my jokes. I know we will have many more years of laughing and learning together!

To Craig Feltmann, and the “Steno Pool” (Roxxy and Vellma), thank you for keeping me from going off the deep end and always supporting me. I love you!

To my siblings (Susan, JC, and Robert), their families, and my friends: thank you for believing in me and always encouraging me to persevere.

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# Foreword

Marcia Gentry, Ph.D.

Diane Heacox and Richard Cash are professionals who continue to make important contributions to gifted child education by helping teachers better differentiate their curriculum and instruction, and not surprisingly, they deliver with *Differentiation for Gifted Learners: Beyond the Basics*. Additionally, each author is a bright spot in the field bringing energy, integrity, and knowledge as they connect across disciplines and with educators within and outside of gifted education. In this book, as scholar-practitioners they bring scholarship and methods to teachers in a friendly, accessible, and useable format. This book and the workshops they each contribute will continue to help thousands of teachers reach and teach their students. Differentiation is often recommended, but many teachers struggle to implement it. *Differentiation for Gifted Learners* will help guide teachers to confidently practice differentiation strategies and, in doing so, benefit students across the country and around the world.

There are many reasons for you to read this book, namely, it is well written, filled with practical strategies that will work with students, and offers sage advice from two well-respected experts in gifted child education. However, as my differentiation-expert graduate student Jason McIntosh pointed out after he read it, there are also several circumstances under which you should NOT read this book. In fact, in developing a list of these circumstances, he used one of the strategies from the book called *reverse brainstorming*. He is convinced that you should NOT read this book if:

1. You do not need to learn new ways to differentiate using the Common Core State Standards.
2. You have already been exposed to the newly created Cash-Heacox Teaching and Learning Continuum.

3. All of your colleagues are on board with differentiation for gifted students and you do not need any tips for engaging them.
4. The term “Candy Wrapper Lesson Design” makes perfect sense to you.
5. You do not desire to see dozens of example activities that enrich, enhance, or extend content for students.
6. You have all stars and no steps when it comes to differentiation (see page 142).
7. You are a master at asking higher-level critical thinking questions of your students. You understand perfectly how to ensure an honors class is rigorous enough.
8. You know how the Autonomous Learner Model, the Holistic Development Framework, and Response to Intervention can be combined to create the Progressive Program Model.
9. You routinely empower all of your students to develop confidence through accountability, collaboration, and initiative.

For everyone else I highly recommend reading *Differentiation for Gifted Learners*. You will discover numerous practical strategies, discussions about recent brain research, and new ways of tackling old problems. I encourage you to challenge yourself as an educator just as much as you strive to challenge your students to think and work at advanced levels. The authors have put forth a teacher-friendly resource that takes differentiation to the next level. I believe this book will become one of those on your desk with worn and creased pages because you will use it so frequently. I predict that you will recommend it to your colleagues, but you will not let them borrow it!

**Marcia Gentry, Ph.D.**, *professor of education and executive director of the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University*



# Introduction

---

We both have gotten the calls. The school needs someone to come and provide training to all teachers on differentiation. We ask: “What can you tell me about services for gifted students in your school?” Then comes the answer: “Well, actually we had to cut gifted. With all the new initiatives, we just don’t have the budget to support it anymore. But we told the parents that we would have an expert come in and work with our teachers so that the needs of our gifted students can be handled in the inclusion classroom.” What needs to be said next is that differentiation for all is not the same as differentiation for gifted learners. Their learning differences are unique, unlike those of other students in the classroom. Some schools recognize and address this reality, but in too many schools, there is an assumption that differentiating will automatically meet the specific needs of gifted learners. In other schools, differentiation for gifted students does not follow best practices and appears shallow and trivial. Certainly in these circumstances, differentiation does not respond to the distinctive learning characteristics and profiles of gifted students.

## About This Book

The purpose of this book is to clearly define and describe how effective differentiation is different for gifted and advanced learners and to show you how to meet the needs of these students. While differentiation is often talked about today as it relates to standards-based education, the term has been used widely in gifted education for decades. Experts in the field of gifted education originally defined *differentiation* as “modifications in content, process, or products in response to the specific learning differences of gifted and/or talented learners.”

*Differentiation for Gifted Learners: Beyond the Basics* focuses on the specific learning needs of and differences among gifted students and offers effective ways that teachers can plan for

these differences. We provide strategies, formats, templates, and examples of differentiation for kindergarten through grade twelve classrooms and represent a variety of curricular applications across all core content areas. In addition, we offer guidance for the design of programs and services for gifted students that specifically respond to their learning needs that extend above and beyond the inclusion differentiated curriculum in the inclusion classroom.

**Chapter 1** is a reference point for educators in defining giftedness and understanding the differences among gifted students that require specific differentiation practices. We present an overview of the federal definition of giftedness as well as explore the implications of distinctions between gifts and talents. We note the challenges of gifted students who are also English language learners, who have ADHD, or who face other learning or behavior challenges. We also discuss the similarities between students who are gifted and students with Asperger’s syndrome. Various cultural and ethnic communities sometimes associate different attributes with giftedness; we’ll explore this and offer recommendations for providing equal access to and equity in services for gifted learners.

**Chapter 2** addresses the specifics of differentiation for gifted learners. Based on neurological studies, we explain why differentiating for gifted learners is much more than just adding activities—even those we consider differentiated—that the learner may perceive as “more of the same.” We provide practical strategies that enable teachers to focus content on advanced concepts and complex ideas. We also suggest ways to engage all levels and types of gifted students in using the tools of the practicing professional to produce significant products that have value to others.

**Chapter 3** considers the implications of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for the education of gifted students. We present ideas for

applying and extending the standards in ways that enhance the education of gifted learners.

**Chapter 4** provides guidance in developing, refining, or extending quality programs and services for gifted students from elementary school through high school. The educational support systems and structures for gifted learners are typically not mandated or reinforced by state/provincial or federal rule or law. Therefore, districts and states/provinces are left to their own resources to provide equitable services and programs for these students. This chapter outlines a spectrum of services that address the varying needs of gifted learners and provide significant differentiation of content, process, and product to help each of them reach her or his maximum potential. We suggest that services for gifted students are not limited to one type of program, but are wide ranging with a focus on talent, academic, and social/emotional development.

**Chapter 5** considers the design of honors and advanced courses at the secondary level. As schools become more diverse and funds dwindle, exclusive programming for gifted learners has become more difficult to sustain. In addition, if specialized courses are offered too often, there is little distinction between “regular” and “advanced” sections of a course, and the teacher frequently lacks training in differentiation for gifted learners. This chapter helps teachers ensure that courses for gifted students are distinguished by *articulation*, *alignment*, and *accountability*, or the “Triple A” method. In addition, this chapter offers an outstanding curricular framework that infuses the pedagogy of gifted education into secondary courses.

**Chapter 6** discusses the changing roles of educators in the differentiated classroom. This chapter provides critical information on the specific educational and social/emotional needs of gifted learners that must be addressed in the general education setting. We also explore how the roles of teacher and students change within the differentiated classroom, and we present our model—the Teaching and Learning Continuum (TLC)—which outlines how to develop greater

student responsibility, self-regulation, and learning autonomy in your classroom.

**Chapter 7** describes co-teaching as a collaborative approach to differentiation for gifted learners. In many schools, classroom teachers have primary responsibility for meeting the needs of gifted students in their classrooms without the assistance or support of gifted education specialists. Such “inclusion” classrooms demand teachers who have specialized training in differentiation for gifted learners. However, when schools have gifted education specialists available to support the needs of gifted learners, co-teaching can be effectively used by these specialists and classroom teachers. This chapter details the co-teaching model and introduces six effective co-teaching strategies in differentiation for gifted learners. We also offer specific suggestions for building and maintaining effective collaboration between gifted education specialists and classroom teachers.

**Chapter 8** provides valuable guidance for teachers who are challenged by gifted students who may underachieve and produce selectively or not at all. In this chapter, we discuss potential underlying issues related to these learners. We suggest potential causes for lack of school performance and offer strategies to break the cycle of underachievement. We also provide coaching tips for teachers that can be used to support school success and curtail a gifted student’s slide into low production.

**Chapter 9** addresses assessment for learning and its critical relationship to differentiation for gifted students. We suggest the ways in which pre-assessment and formative assessment specifically inform our planning for gifted learners. Informal assessment strategies are provided that minimize planning and preparation time for teachers. Because critical and creative thinking are foundational to differentiation for gifted learners, specific assessment strategies for assessing creative and critical thinking skills are detailed. In addition, we discuss the connections between descriptive feedback and student achievement, and provide guidelines and strategies to optimize the results of this feedback.

**Chapter 10** contains ideas for how the gifted education specialist can provide leadership in embedding the strategies of differentiation for gifted learners in classroom practice. Most educators of the gifted are not school administrators but are on a teachers' contract as specialists, facilitators, directors, or teachers on special assignment. However, they are often expected to take on leadership roles in the school. This chapter discusses the challenges of "quasi-administrators" and suggests appropriate roles and typical responsibilities for these specialists, such as instructional coaching. We describe specific coaching strategies along with processes, procedures, and routines that gifted education specialists often find effective. Finally, we present a collaborative approach to supporting professional development and professional learning communities called *lesson study*. We offer direction for establishing lesson study as well as templates for quickly implementing the process in your school.

**Chapter 11** provides some go-to resources for your practice. We present an easy-to-use reference to guide your planning of differentiated learning experiences. This collection of strategies enables you to consider content, process, and product differentiation across readiness, interest, and learning profile differences among gifted students. We also include a handy summary of what distinguishes differentiation for gifted learners, which will be a helpful resource in conversations on this topic with colleagues, parents, students, and other stakeholders.

All of the reproducible forms in this book are available as digital files. See page ix for information on how and where to download them.

If you wish to use this book in a professional learning community or book study group, a PLC Guide with chapter-by-chapter discussion questions and teaching suggestions is available. You may download the free guide at [freespirit.com](http://freespirit.com).

## How to Use This Book

*Differentiation for Gifted Learners* extends the work of Diane's previous books, *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom* and *Making*

*Differentiation a Habit*. And it expands principles and practices initially presented in Richard's book, *Advancing Differentiation*, to the specific needs of gifted learners. This resource builds on the strong foundations of differentiation presented in our previous three books, and it provides clear direction and guidance in effective differentiation for gifted learners.

Our intent is to inform the practices and support the work of classroom teachers and gifted education specialists, as well as school leaders such as curriculum specialists, building principals, teacher leaders, and professional development trainers. We also encourage college and university faculty to use the book with preservice teachers and graduate students to deepen their understandings of the learning differences of gifted students and to better differentiate instruction for them within inclusion classrooms.

You may wish to read through the book chapter by chapter, or you may want to go directly to a particular topic that is of immediate interest to you. For example, as your school works with the Common Core State Standards, you will want to read and review our thoughts and ideas on its best applications for gifted learners in Chapter 3. If you are involved in establishing, revising, or refining high school courses, consider going directly to Chapter 5.

This book will not only help you apply best practices for gifted learners in your classroom, but will also enable you to assertively and with great detail outline and defend the ways that differentiation for gifted learners differs from the practices used with other students. As advocates for the gifted, we need to step up and claim these differences and clarify others' understandings of them.

Finally, we want to strengthen your gifted programs and services, extend the strategies of differentiation you are already using, and provide new ideas, tactics, formats, and templates to make appropriate differentiation for your gifted learners both practical and doable.

Come with us as we go *beyond* the basics of differentiation to practices that address the unique learning needs of gifted students!



# Chapter 1

## Giftedness Defined in Diverse Groups

### Definition of Gifts and Talents

Our definitions of gifted and talented learners have evolved over the years. Beginning with the 1972 Marland Report, the first national report on gifted education, the United States Office of Education worked to define what it means to be gifted and talented. This initial definition was broad and included academic and intellectual talent, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, creative and productive thinking, and psychomotor ability.<sup>1</sup> Psychomotor ability was removed from later versions of the federal definition, which was revised in 1978, 1988, and 1993. Here's how the 1988 definition read: "The term 'gifted and talented students' means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic (visual and performing), or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities."<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that, although many schools currently provide some level of services to students with intellectual gifts or high academic abilities, the federal definition provided direction for much broader services.

**Figure 1.1** on page 5 summarizes the characteristics of gifted students.

In 1993, the Office of Education revised its definition once again to define gifted and talented students as "Children and youth of outstanding

talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this definition suggests that gifted and talented students always perform at high levels. The reality is that some do not. Some gifted students are, in fact, academic underachievers. Yet they still need gifted services—especially academic interventions and services designed to break their cycle of underachievement. More information on underachieving and unmotivated gifted learners is provided in Chapter 8.

The 1993 definition also noted "Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor."<sup>4</sup> The issues that stem from this notation in the federal definition have historically been and continue to be a challenge for schools. Today, culturally diverse students continue to be underrepresented in gifted education programs and services.

**Gifts** are superior *innate* aptitudes; **talents** are outstanding *learned* capabilities.

For purposes of clarity, it is critical that we use a common definition for gifted and/or talented learners. The view of gifts and talents that we'll use in this book best reflects the work of François Gagné<sup>5</sup> along with a general synthesis of other leaders and researchers in the field of

<sup>1</sup>Marland, 1972.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, 1988.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Education, 1993.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Gagné, 1985, 2005.

Figure 1.1: Educational Characteristics and Behaviors of Gifted Students\* (also included in the digital download)

<p><b>Visual/Performing Arts</b></p> <p>Outstanding sense of spatial relationships</p> <p>Unusual ability for self-expression through art, dance, drama, music, etc.</p> <p>Desire for producing original product</p> <p>Practices talent regularly without being told</p> <p>Strives to improve artistic skills</p>		<p><b>General Intellectual Ability</b></p> <p>Comprehends and formulates abstract ideas</p> <p>Processes information in complex ways</p> <p>Observant</p> <p>Excited about new ideas</p> <p>Uses a large vocabulary</p> <p>Inquisitive</p> <p>Learns rapidly</p> <p>Self-starter</p>	
		<p><b>Creative Thinking</b></p> <p>Independent thinker</p> <p>Exhibits original thinking in oral and written expression</p> <p>Comes up with several solutions to a given problem</p> <p>Strong sense of humor</p> <p>Challenged by creative tasks</p>	
		<p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>Likes structure</p> <p>Well-liked by peers</p> <p>Considered a leader among peers</p> <p>Self-confident</p> <p>Good judgment in decision making</p> <p>High expectations for self and others</p>	
<p><b>Specific Academic Ability</b></p> <p>High academic success in a special interest area</p> <p>Pursues special interest with enthusiasm and vigor</p> <p>Good memorization ability</p> <p>Advanced comprehension</p> <p>Acquires basic skill knowledge quickly</p> <p>Self-directed and motivated</p>		<p>Chooses challenging tasks</p> <p>Makes quick and valid generalizations</p> <p>Enjoys difficult problems</p> <p>Reasons things out</p> <p>Grasps relationships</p> <p>Solves difficult and unique problems</p> <p>Generates sophisticated ideas and solutions</p>	
		<p>Improvises often</p> <p>Does not mind being different</p> <p>Creates innovative ideas or products</p> <p>Chooses original methods</p> <p>Engages in or indicates interest in creative activities</p> <p>Uses divergent thinking</p>	
		<p>Assumes responsibility</p> <p>Fluent, concise self-expression</p> <p>Foresees consequences of decisions</p> <p>Works well in groups</p> <p>Actively participates in group decision making</p>	

\* Adapted from a model developed by Eastern Connecticut State University and from the work of Marcia Gentry, 1999.

gifted education. We will define gifts and talents in this way:

- **Gifts** are superior *innate* aptitudes in intellectual, creative, social, and perceptual mental domains and muscular and motor physical domains. Gifts are born-with superior (top ten percent) aptitudes. They are the “promise” of giftedness, which may or may not develop into talents over time.
- **Talents** are outstanding *learned* capabilities and skills and abilities developed over time through training, learning, and practice.

Talents reflect superior (top ten percent) performance in fields such as academics, science and technology, arts, social service, administration, business, games, or athletics.

Related to Gagné’s model, gifts over time have the potential to become talents in particular fields. However, with gifted students, we are unable to initially predict what specific talents will emerge or even if talents will be developed. Gifted students hold the promise for talent development, but gifts do not always result in talents.

## Gagné’s Model

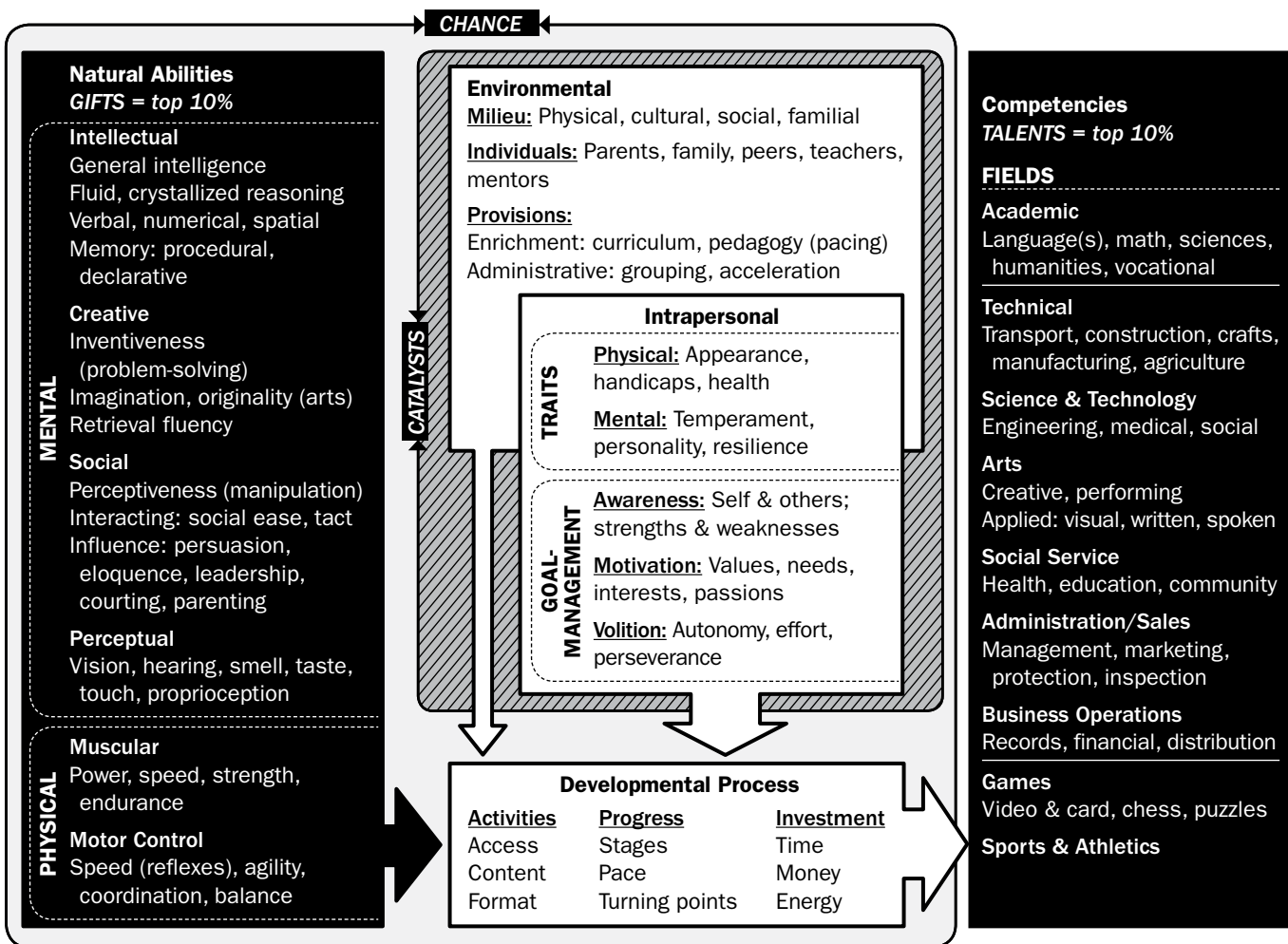
Gagne’s model of giftedness (**Figure 1.2**) specifies two categories of catalysts, environmental and intrapersonal, that influence when and if talents are developed. Environmental catalysts include milieu: the physical, cultural, social, and familial contexts. Other environmental catalysts include significant individuals in the student’s life as well as available educational provisions for developing gifts into talents. Intrapersonal catalysts reflect the student’s physical and mental traits as well as goal management capabilities. Catalysts either facilitate or inhibit the development of talent.

The developmental process is influenced by both environmental and intrapersonal catalysts. In addition, the kinds of activities students engage in, their learning progress, and their investment

of time and energy all influence talent development. If gifted students do not or cannot put time and effort into the development of their talents, those talents will not emerge. Regardless of how gifted a student is, if the student does not spend time training, learning, and practicing, one cannot expect specific talents to emerge.

**Intrapersonal catalysts** also influence talent development and include physical qualities like health status; motivation, including the student’s needs, interests, and values; volition, including willpower, effort, and persistence; self-management skills, reflecting persistence, work habits, and effort; and, finally, personality factors, including temperament, self-awareness, self-esteem, and flexibility. In considering intrapersonal catalysts, students who are highly

Figure 1.2: The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent\* (also included in the digital download)



\* Gagné, 2009.



interested in a particular subject or topic are more likely to put time into training, learning, and practice and, therefore, develop their talents in this field. Likewise, gifted students disinterested in a subject may not develop talents in this field because they are simply less motivated to put time into training, learning, and practice.

**Environmental catalysts** include the student's milieu (surroundings), reflecting family, social, and cultural settings; significant people in the student's life, including teachers, mentors, coaches, parents, and peers; provisions or opportunities to develop talents, such as gifted education services, school programs, or activities; and important events, such as awards, adventures, experiences, or encounters. Let's consider the potential effects of environmental catalysts using the example of a creatively gifted student who attends a school that does not provide music education. Such a student may not develop his or her innate musical talent because of a lack of opportunity for training, learning, and practice in this field. Conversely, a student given an opportunity to attend a summer STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) camp may develop both a passion for engineering design and talent in the field of engineering.

According to Gagné's model, a student with outstanding talents in a particular field is also likely to be gifted. This is because superior talents often require a solid foundation in related aptitudes. However, a gifted student will not necessarily develop talents if particular catalysts are not in place. Thus, we may have students who are gifted intellectually but not talented academically. This is the case with academically underachieving gifted learners.

It should be noted that Gagné suggests that talents continue to emerge in gifted individuals over time, even into adulthood. There is a strong relationship between innate ability (gifts) and the ease and speed of developing new talents. Many gifted adults may indeed have "hidden talents" that are discovered, given the opportunity for training, learning, and practice.

If we were to apply Gagné's concepts to the federal definition of giftedness, intellectual ability and creativity would be considered gifts. Specific academic abilities, leadership, and visual and performing arts would be considered talents.

### **Gifted vs. talented . . .**

For clarity and consistency, we will use the term *gifted* throughout this book.

Please keep in mind that we are thus referring to students who have innate superior aptitudes and who, over time and with the right catalysts and support for their gifts, develop into talented learners.

## **Identifying Giftedness Across Cultural, Linguistic, and Socioeconomic Communities**

Gifted students are found in all communities, including those that are culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse (sometimes known by the acronym CLED). Keep in mind, however, that *smart* may be defined differently across these communities or eclipsed by the financial hardships of a child's family. As such, educators need to view the characteristics of gifted learners through the lens of the communities' values, practices, beliefs, and economic circumstances.

### **Cultural Concepts of Giftedness**

Cognitive psychologist Robert Sternberg, a leading expert in giftedness, believes that how we identify gifted learners—and even the language we use when discussing giftedness—directly relates to our cultural values and concepts of giftedness. He suggests that the same children viewed as gifted in one culture may be seen as ordinary in another. For example, Sternberg's research found that Asian Americans tend to emphasize cognitive competence in their conception of giftedness, while Latino Americans tend to emphasize socioemotional competence. Thus, he suggests that Asian

Americans may be socialized in a way that promotes the development of cognitive competencies while Latino American children may be socialized to develop socioemotional competencies.<sup>6</sup>

Children viewed as gifted  
in one culture may be seen as  
ordinary in another.

Sternberg's concerns over this cultural bias lie in the reality that so many countries, including the United States, are fast becoming multi-cultural. Student performance is a function of the culture in which they are raised. However, students from nondominant cultures are often enrolled in schools where the teachers and the leadership, including in gifted education, operates according to a dominant culture model. Thus, many current conceptions of giftedness are limited when we consider the breadth of our cultural communities. By ignoring a different culture's perception of giftedness, we may fail to identify students who are in fact gifted.

Sternberg argues that schools must understand cultural concepts of "gifted" in order to determine how particular students may compare to the norms of their specific community.<sup>7</sup> It can be extremely helpful to have conversations in a culturally sensitive manner with representatives of your school's various cultural/ethnic communities, generally asking the question, "How would you describe a student who is exceptional?" The various answers you receive to this question may lead you to reconsider students of particular cultures for gifted programs who you might otherwise overlook.

Following are some general characteristics associated with being gifted. Consider how these characteristics might be expressed in various cultural/ethnic groups with different values, practices, and beliefs<sup>8</sup>:

- a strong desire to learn
- intense, sometimes unusual interests

- uncommon ability to communicate with words, numbers, and symbols
- effective and often inventive strategies for identifying and solving problems
- exceptional ability to retain and retrieve information, resulting in deep knowledge of particular topics or subjects
- extensive and unusual questions, experiments, and explorations
- quick understanding of new concepts; deeper understanding
- ability to make connections: "This is like this . . . because . . ."
- logical approaches to finding solutions
- ability to produce unique, original ideas
- keen, unusual sense of humor

## Identifying Gifted English Language Learners (ELL)

Much has been written about the difficulties in identifying ELL students who are gifted. We just provided some ideas on how different cultures may define *gifted*; however, with ELL students, we also need to carefully examine the methods we use to locate such gifted learners.

Many of the assessments used in gifted education services depend on language—a student's oral and written language skills. Yet with ELL students, advanced thinking and problem-solving abilities may be masked by limited use of the English language. This disadvantage also affects some students in rural settings, students in poverty, or those whose cultural or linguistic background differs from the native-speaking middle-class population for which such assessments were generally designed.

When considering which students, especially ELL students, might need gifted education services, it's best to use multiple criteria and draw information from as many sources as possible. This approach evaluates students from a variety of perspectives and, therefore, provides a more in-depth examination of their particular learning abilities and needs.

<sup>6</sup>Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993.

<sup>7</sup>Sternberg, 2007.

<sup>8</sup>Gosfield, ed., 2008.

How do we assess students without relying on language? Nonverbal standardized measures assess problem-solving skills using graphic representations with no language limitations. The Culture Fair Intelligence Tests, Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Tests, and Raven's Progressive Matrices are examples of nonverbal assessments used in many schools. Studies have found advantages and disadvantages of using each assessment, and particular assessments may be more effective with particular groups of ELL students. Schools have also sought to assess students in their native language.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to standardized measures, schools may set criteria that reflect exceptional ability in their particular ELL populations. Identifying such culturally based characteristics of giftedness may be particularly helpful to teachers who are learning how culture may disguise talents. These criteria will guide teachers as they observe students in their classroom. They may also be used as part of a behavioral checklist or inventory.

With more and more English language learners in our schools and classrooms, we need to carefully consider the ways in which we identify gifted learners in various populations. Understanding the cultural, linguistic, and cognitive skills of ELL students is an important first step in developing culturally based definitions of gifts and talents.

## Socioeconomic Inequities

Results from the 1991 National Education Longitudinal Study of eighth-grade programs for gifted learners stands as an example of the economic inequities that have been present in gifted programs and services.<sup>10</sup> The data indicated that students whose families with incomes in the top quarter of the population were five times more likely to be in gifted programs than students from the bottom quarter.

Still today, gifted education continues to underserve poor children and serve more middle- and upper-middle-class children. To rectify this inequity, schools must evaluate the degree to which students involved in gifted programs

reflect the realities of their school populations. For example, are students on free and reduced lunch represented in your gifted population? If not, what are the obstacles or barriers to their involvement? In what ways are your school's cultural values and views of giftedness limiting access for students who are living in poverty?

Gifted education has long struggled with issues related to access and equity. Moving forward, we need to continue to critically examine the ways that our belief systems and cultural practices may shape how we identify and serve students. Access to excellence, through appropriate gifted services, should be assured for students from all cultural and linguistic communities and socioeconomic groups.

## Serving Recent Immigrant Children

As with ELL students, children whose families have recently immigrated represent a wide range of cultures and economic realities, and educators often face similar challenges in identifying and serving children from these groups who are gifted. A number of factors—including cultural and linguistic background, financial challenges, attitudes, conflicting peer expectations, cross-cultural stress, and even intergenerational family conflicts—increase the complexity of working with these families. Some students have had little, sporadic, or no formal education prior to immigration. In addition, hidden factors such as illegal immigration status, limited knowledge about how to access social and healthcare services, and physical and psychological problems resulting from political tensions in their country of origin may impact the students' educational progress and success. In some instances, immigrant children with English language learning status may not even be considered for gifted education services. Following are some suggestions for making gifted education services more accessible to children who have recently immigrated.<sup>11</sup>

### Communication

- Explain the purposes for gifted services to parents in their native language.

<sup>9</sup>Lewis, 2001.

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Department of Education, 1991.

<sup>11</sup>Partially based on the work of Harris, 1993.

- Consider what aspects of your program would be valued by the student's culture, and communicate that to parents.

### Identification

- Make an effort to learn about culturally based characteristics of giftedness related to immigrant children so you can better reflect on student learning behavior that occurs in the classroom.
- Assume nothing about the economic status or educational background of the families (for example, recent immigrants are sometimes assumed to have little money or education, which is certainly not always the case, depending on their reasons for immigrating).
- Interpret behavior in the context of the child's experiences.
- Consider using exploratory enrichment activities to observe how the immigrant student responds to new ideas and materials.
- Use referrals from peers inside or outside of the immigrant student's cultural group.

### Services

- Prepare to work with immigrant students by gathering information about the immigrant group's culture, country of origin, religion, history, values, and expectations.
- Provide services that are culturally sensitive, relevant, and responsive to the context of the immigrant group.
- Identify ways that gifted services may conflict with the student's culture, and work to remedy those conflicts.
- Consider the immigrant group's aspirations, and plan curriculum that responds to these goals.
- Use references and resources in the student's native language.
- Create opportunities for immigrant students to develop relationships with gifted peers outside their cultural community.
- Periodically meet with the student's other teachers to discuss their attitudes and

possible biases. Hold informal sessions to identify problems and exchange ideas.

To provide both equity and access to gifted services for children who are recent immigrants, we need to consider communication, identification, and services within the context of the immigrant group's culture, history, values, and aspirations.

See pages 200–205 for specific resources on serving gifted students who are culturally, linguistically, or economically diverse.

## Twice-Exceptional Learners: Gifted Students with Learning or Behavior Challenges

The gifts and talents of some students may be masked by other learning or behavior challenges. Referred to as “twice exceptional,” these students may have cognitive difficulties, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or Asperger's syndrome, as well as hidden gifts and talents that need to be acknowledged and nurtured.

The gifts and talents of some students may be masked by learning or behavior challenges.

It has been suggested that between 5 and 10 percent of a school's gifted population may also have learning difficulties.<sup>12</sup> Although specific characteristics of giftedness for students with learning difficulties may vary, research does reveal some common elements.

### Gifted Learners and ADHD

Some gifted students are identified as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This disorder must be diagnosed by a trained mental health professional or physician. It may be especially difficult to accurately diagnose ADHD in gifted learners, since some of the characteristics

<sup>12</sup>Dix and Schafer, 2005.

# © Characteristics of Gifted Students and Gifted Students with Learning Difficulties

General Characteristics of Intellectually Gifted Students*	Characteristics of Gifted Students with Learning Difficulties
Accelerated pace of learning; retain information with less repetition	May struggle with basic skills and reading due to processing deficits; may need compensatory strategies to ease learning
High verbal ability	High verbal ability but problems with written language; may use language inappropriately
Keen powers of observation	Strong observational skills; however, may have deficits in memory skills
Strong critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills	Strong critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills; excel in solving “real world” problems
Long attention spans, persistent, and intense ability to concentrate	Frequently have problems with concentration but in areas of interest are able to focus for long periods of time
Innovative; creative in generating thoughts, ideas, and actions	Unusual imagination; extremely divergent in thinking; generate original but sometimes “bizarre” ideas
Take risks	Often unwilling to take academic risks; take risks in non-school-related areas sometimes without considering consequences
May mature at different rates than same-age peers	Sometimes appear immature due to use of anger, withdrawal, and/or crying in dealing with difficulties
Independent	Require teacher support and feedback in deficit areas; can be more independent in interest areas; may appear stubborn and inflexible
Sensitive	Sensitive toward own deficits; can be critical of self and others; may engage in antisocial behaviors, though generally sensitive to the feelings of others
May have problems with friendships; may be isolated due to lack of intellectual peers or students with similar interests	May have problems with friends due to poor social skills; may appear to be loners since they do not represent a typical model of giftedness
Exhibit leadership abilities	May emerge as a leader among less traditional students; demonstrate “street smarts”; deficits may impact leadership abilities
Wide range of interests	Wide interests but deficits may hinder ability to follow them
Passion for particular topics	Passion for particular topics to the exclusion of others; interests often not school related
* Nielsen, E. M., et al. <i>Characteristics of Intellectually Gifted Students and Gifted Students with Learning Difficulties</i> . In an unpublished manuscript. Albuquerque Public Schools, 2000.	

of ADHD are similar to the general characteristics of gifted learners. For example, both students who have ADHD and gifted students are creative, have high energy and abilities, and may be less inhibited and more likely to take risks.<sup>13</sup> Both may also create their own rules and become reluctant to disengage from a task they find fascinating. Their curiosity along with their need for stimulation may result in taking risks with little consideration of the consequences. Although these behaviors may “look” like ADHD, the students may simply be displaying the general characteristics of gifted learners.

In addition, psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski suggested that a trait he referred to as *overexcitability* is unique to some highly gifted learners.<sup>14</sup> Overexcitability refers to having an unusual intensity and sensitivity. Dabrowski identified five interrelated areas of overexcitability. For those with this trait, high levels of activity are noted in all five areas:

- 1. Psychomotor.** Students exhibit excessive energy, enthusiasm, drive, and restlessness; they are likely to talk rapidly and compulsively; they may act impulsively, have nervous habits, and can become “workaholics.”
- 2. Intellectual.** Students have high levels of curiosity and ask many probing questions. They carefully analyze ideas and are motivated to learn all there is about a topic. They may become preoccupied with problems in specific areas of interest. Also, they examine issues related to morality and ethics, and demonstrate high levels of moral thinking.
- 3. Imaginational.** These highly creative students are both excitable and sensitive. Capable of creating strong visual imagery, they may easily engage in metaphorical thinking such as poetry. Their imaginations are quite active and, therefore, they may combine truth with fiction.
- 4. Sensual.** These students exhibit pleasure in the senses: seeing, tasting, smelling, touching, and hearing.

<sup>13</sup> Baum and Reis, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Dabrowski, 1967.

**5. Emotional.** Students display both intense positive and negative feelings, resulting in emotional highs and lows. Highs result in positive energy; lows can bring both physical and psychological symptoms, including tenseness and anxiety, self-criticism, and feeling of inadequacy and inferiority. Such students are best described as being on an emotional roller coaster.<sup>15</sup>

Characteristics of overexcitability are similar to the poor attention, impulsiveness, and hyperactivity associated with ADHD. Therefore, it is critical that we accurately differentiate the high activity levels and unusual intensity of gifted students from the characteristics of individuals with ADHD. This takes the diagnostic skills of a trained mental health professional or physician who also thoroughly understands typical behaviors in gifted learners.

## Gifted Learners and Asperger’s Syndrome

Asperger’s syndrome includes high-functioning autism. Students with Asperger’s typically are linear and sequential thinkers who prefer order and predictability. Asperger’s does not affect one’s intellectual abilities; students with Asperger’s typically fall in the normal to above average intellectual range.

Behaviors that are typical with Asperger’s include<sup>16</sup>:

- introversion, social awkwardness, and aloofness
- attention problems
- overexcitability
- obsessive interests in limited topics
- hypersensitivity to such things as bright lights or loud noises
- motor clumsiness
- repetitive patterns of interests, activities, and play
- resistance to change
- an inability to interpret social cues; poor awareness of how others view them

<sup>15</sup> Davis, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Davis, 2006.

- excessive run-on talking and question asking
- concerns with fairness
- quirky sense of humor

Individuals with Asperger's do not typically remain aloof and withdrawn their entire lives; most show greater interest in others as they grow older. Many become well adapted but may still appear to be egocentric and idiosyncratic in their behaviors. People with Asperger's are sometimes described as "quirky."

Similar to the issues related to ADHD and the overexcitability of some gifted learners, the typical behaviors of Asperger's may also be common among students who are gifted. This raises two questions: Are introverted gifted students being misdiagnosed with Asperger's syndrome? Are we determining which gifted students also have Asperger's?<sup>17</sup>

Typical behaviors of Asperger's may also be common among students who are gifted.

Researcher James Webb and colleagues provide guidance in identifying students who may not truly have Asperger's but are simply exhibiting the behaviors of gifted learners. According to Webb, the following "disqualifies" students from Asperger's diagnoses but indicate giftedness.

- Students have normal friendships with others who have common interests.
- They can read interpersonal situations and the emotions of others.
- Their emotions are appropriate to the situation or issue.
- They appropriately display sympathy and empathy.
- They are aware of others' perceptions of them.
- They have little or no motor clumsiness.
- They tolerate abrupt changes in routines.
- Both their speech and their sense of humor are more adult-like.

<sup>17</sup>Davis, 2006.

- They understand both metaphors and idioms.<sup>18</sup>

Although it is certainly possible for students to have Asperger's syndrome and be gifted, we need to avoid making assumptions and to carefully consider both possibilities when these characteristics are present.

## Chapter Summary

Definitions of gifted have evolved since the 1972 Marland Report as have the distinctions between gifts and talents. Poverty and differing cultural concepts of giftedness are critical issues in gifted education as they relate to equity and access for students in gifted services. The field continues to face challenges in providing services and properly identifying gifted students who are also English language learners, recent immigrants, or twice-exceptional students. Educators must take care to avoid mislabeling students who may be gifted but whose behaviors may mask characteristics or be misinterpreted.

<sup>18</sup>Webb, et al., 2005.

