

# Understanding gifted students

## Factsheet 1: What 'gifted' and 'talented' means

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### Purpose

Gifted and talented students are a diverse group. Each gifted and talented student presents strengths that combine as a unique blend of characteristics (Gagné, 2021). This means a range of strategies need to be available to ensure gifted and talented students receive equitable opportunity and appropriate challenge.

This factsheet provides an approach to understanding the terms 'gifted' and 'talented' based on François Gagne's Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (1985)<sup>1</sup>, which identifies commonly recognised characteristics of gifted and talented students.

### Definitions of 'gifted' and 'talented'

Understanding and usage of the terms 'gifted' and 'talented' varies. Without a widely accepted definition of these terms, they are often used as synonyms. However, for the purpose of this factsheet the terms are treated as separate. According to Gagné (2021):

- **gifts** refer to an individual's untrained potential, or 'remarkable *aptitudes*' which places them 'among the top 10% of age peers' (p. 57). Gifts fall within six domains
  - intellectual
  - creative
  - socio-affective
  - sensorimotor
  - muscular
  - motor control
- **talents** are defined as 'the outstanding mastery of *systematically developed* abilities called competencies (knowledge and skills)' to a degree that places an individual 'among the top 10% of their developmental peers in that field' (p. 48). Competencies are grouped according to eight fields
  - academic
  - technical
  - science and technology
  - arts
  - people services
  - management/sales
  - business systems
  - sports and athletics
  - games.

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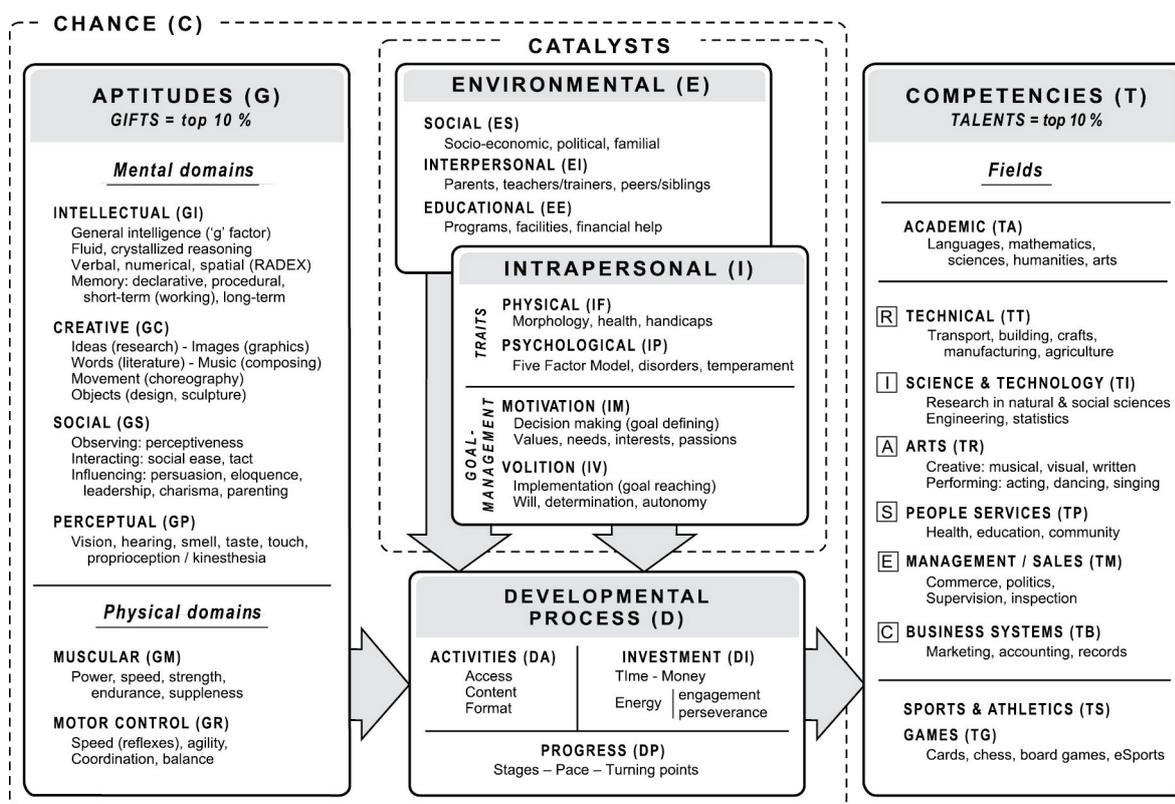
<sup>1</sup> François Gagné recently replaced the original 'Differentiated' with 'Differentiating' in the model's name.

# Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent

François Gagné’s Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (Figure 1) outlines the process whereby an individual’s potential (gifts) become systematically developed knowledge and skills (talents) (Gagné, 2021). This occurs through systematic, long-term development of gifts that usually extends beyond formal years of schooling.

Gagné’s model emphasises the vital role schools play in helping gifted students develop their natural abilities into talents. While giftedness reflects a student’s innate potential, talent emerges through sustained and structured development. Schools support students to transform their gifts into talents by implementing appropriate programs, fostering engaging learning environments, and guiding students through their growth (Thomson, 2012). These environmental supports act as key drivers in the developmental process that enables gifts to evolve into talents (Gagné, 2021).

Figure 1: Gagné’s Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (2020)



## Why we use 'gifted'

Gagné’s model recognises that gifts can take years — sometimes a lifetime — to develop into talents (Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2023). For clarity and consistency, we will use the term ‘gifted’ throughout, acknowledging that talent development is a long-term process influenced by many factors.

## Characteristics of gifted students

Gifted students can present in a variety of ways and have been identified across diverse cultural language and economic contexts (Adelson et al., 2023). As such, there is no definitive list of characteristics that can be used to conclusively identify gifted students.

Relative to their same-aged peers, gifted students *could* include students who:

- grasp new material quickly
- develop new skills with fewer repetitions
- demonstrate deeper, more advanced and complex thinking skills
- exhibit a more progressive sense of humour
- have a stronger sense of justice
- can analyse information in a more complex manner (Johnsen, 2021).

Gifted students may also be more intense, curious and sensitive than their peers. They may also 'overthink' concepts and possibilities (Grant and Morrissey, 2021).

The traits listed above are not exhaustive and not every gifted student will display all characteristics.

Although Gagné (2021) recognises that gifted students tend to have the capability to learn at a faster rate or in more depth than their peers, their abilities may also be referred to as 'asynchronous' (i.e. 'out of sync') because their abilities might be:

- developmentally advanced in some areas, in relation to their chronological age
- delayed, in relation to developmental milestones and expectations, in other areas.

For example, a gifted student may demonstrate advanced abilities in areas like intellectual reasoning or verbal expression, while other skills — such as fine-motor coordination or writing — may remain age-appropriate or be delayed due to a learning disability, such as dysgraphia.

## Identification

Gifted students can be difficult to identify. They may not appear gifted due to a lack of challenge, boredom, disengagement or social difficulties. Without sufficient challenge, gifted students may not engage with learning and may not necessarily demonstrate high levels of achievement. Further information can be found in 'Factsheet 2: Identifying gifted students'.

## Conclusion

Teachers and schools play an integral role when it comes to identifying and supporting gifted students. By watching for certain behaviours and characteristics, and consulting with relevant stakeholders, such as parents/carers, teachers can better recognise the gifted students they teach. Each gifted student is an individual with unique potential, requiring tailored opportunities and a learning environment that supports the development of their gifts into talents.

## References

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## More information

This is the first factsheet in a suite of documents that examine various aspects of gifted and talented education including:

- Factsheet 1: Understanding gifted students
- Factsheet 2: Identifying gifted students
- Factsheet 3: Developing gifted students

If you would like more information, please visit the QCAA website [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au) and search for 'Gifted and Talented'. Alternatively, phone (07) 3120 6102 or email the K–10 Curriculum and Assessment branch at [australiancurriculum@qcaa.qld.edu.au](mailto:australiancurriculum@qcaa.qld.edu.au).



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1. Gagné, F. (2020). *Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) figure*. Supplied and used with permission.