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Prufrock Press Inc.
P.O. Box 8813
Waco, TX 76714-8813
Phone: (800) 998-2208
Fax: (800) 240-0333
<http://www.prufrock.com>



PART I ————— ■

Who Are Gifted Learners With Special Needs?

■ ————— ■

*When will we also teach them who they are?
We should say to them—
You are unique—you are a marvel
In this whole world there is no one like you and
There never will be again.*

—Pablo Casals

It is important to ensure that educators understand who these students are, both in respect to their giftedness and their disability or socioeconomic and linguistic status. Thus, this book begins with clear definitions regarding what the authors mean by twice-exceptionality, students from poverty, and English language learners. Given these conditions, what does giftedness look like in these students? Who are they as individuals?



Defining Special Populations of Gifted Students

Twice-exceptional students are gifted students who are identified with learning, behavioral, or social problems that lead to a dual diagnosis for these conditions and giftedness. Twice-exceptional students may have a number of different underlying conditions that require attention, including autism spectrum disorders (Foley Nicpon, Assouline, Schuler, & Amend, 2010; Gallagher & Gallagher, 2002; Neihart & Poon, 2009), Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Kennedy, Banks, & Grandin, 2011), learning disabilities, and other syndromes that can interfere with learning. These students are most frequently identified first for their disability rather than their giftedness, although sometimes the gifted label emerges in the overall workup and testing of these students.

Gifted students from poverty are those identified as gifted who are on free or reduced lunch. Although poverty may be seen in multiple ways in the larger societal context, educational definitions have centered exclusively on income levels in households. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) has characterized a school as high-poverty when more than 75% of its students are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch. In 2012–2013, about 24% of students attended public schools that were classified as high-poverty. Using this high-poverty definition enables educators to identify important differences among students: 45% of Black and Hispanic students attended high-poverty schools, compared to 8% of White students. Thus, definitions of poverty are comingled with race. In the 2014–2015 school year, nearly half of Hispanic and Black public school students, one-third of

American Indian/Alaska Native students, and one-quarter of Pacific Islander students attended high-poverty schools. In contrast, 17% of students of two or more races, 15% of Asian students, and 8% of White students attended high-poverty schools. Problems with interventions for these students often are related to teachers not knowing who they are and therefore not being able to target interventions for them as a distinct group.

Gifted ELLs are those who are identified as “gifted and English language learners needing support for language development in English” (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2011). According to the NCES (2016), Spanish was the home language of 3.7 million ELLs in 2014–2015, representing 77.1% of all ELLs and 7.6% of all public K–12 students. Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese were the next most common home languages (spoken by approximately 109,000; 104,000; and 85,300 students, respectively). In 2014–2015, a greater percentage of public school students in lower grades than in upper grades were ELLs. For example, 16.7% of kindergarteners were ELLs, compared to 7.8% of sixth graders and 6.5% of eighth graders. Among 12th graders, only 4.1% of students were ELLs. This pattern is driven, in part, by students who are identified as ELLs when they enter elementary school but obtain English language proficiency before reaching upper grades. The issue of gifted students who are ELLs is most critical at the elementary level, where they may be left out of gifted programs until they reach an appropriate linguistic competency level. Even then, they may not be systematically considered.

Some of these learners may not be readily identified as gifted in a given school district due to the nature of their conditions. Low-income learners often have depressed ability and aptitude scores, based on limited exposure to quality stimulation and early education. English language learners may not be identified as gifted due to language and cultural barriers in schools. Students who are twice-exceptional with a learning disability may not qualify for programs that require high-level functioning in all areas of learning.

Etiology and Comorbid Conditions

Rarely do students experience one learning problem in isolation. Students with specific learning disabilities will often exhibit more than one learning disability in addition to other learning problems, such as ADHD (Berninger & Abbott, 2013; Lyman, Sanders, Abbott, & Berninger, 2017). Students who are twice-exceptional often exhibit a host of symptoms both at home and at school, ranging from learning problems, to depression, to anxiety disorders, to compulsive behaviors, to migraine headaches. These

comorbid conditions are fairly typical among students identified as twice-exceptional (Hughes, 2011). At the same time, almost 14% of the ELL population has been identified as having disabilities as well (NCES, 2015). Perhaps this percentage is understandable, given that the language problems and cultural barriers ELLs face may elicit negative behaviors leading more readily to disability identification. Many twice-exceptional students are also on a series of medications to treat different aspects of their problems. Their parents may be proactive in observing their problems and seeking medications that could improve them, along with providing a series of personal interventions that might help. It is also fair to say that successful treatments for these students are short-lived. What works for a student from ages 8–10 no longer does at age 11. Adolescence brings its own set of challenges that may require retuning the interventions and their intensity (Baum, Cooper, & Neu, 2001; Trail, 2011).

Students who are second language learners primarily exhibit problems related to language acquisition. These problems understanding high-level English concepts may hinder these students' ability to communicate to others their higher level thinking abilities. Difficulty understanding concepts also impedes their ability to translate their ideas fluently into written and oral communication (Dulong-Langley, 2017). Often these students remain silent in discussions due to this problem. Sometimes they also have a disability of some kind, which further masks their abilities.

Students who are members of minority groups may be perceived to exhibit the characteristics of their group more strongly than individual characteristics. Consequently, their minority status can prevent them from appearing ready for advanced work. Educators may see these students as reflecting group stereotypes without fully recognizing their abilities. In one study (VanTassel-Baska, 2010), students from different minority backgrounds preferred using different modes of expression to communicate learning. African Americans were likely to enjoy the expressive arts as a mode of talent display, often using nonverbal approaches to convey their ideas in music, dance, and the visual arts. Hispanic students were similar in that regard, perhaps due to language issues. Asian students also preferred nonverbal media to present their abilities, often in math and science-related areas. Students of poverty demonstrated characteristics similar to those of their cultural groups. White students of poverty modeled their behavior more closely on their higher socioeconomic White peers, using social cues and language to emulate their peers.

The central learning characteristics possessed by gifted minority students and students from poverty typically include:

1. openness to experience,
2. nonconformity and independent thinking,

3. creative and fluent thinking,
4. preference for oral expression,
5. quickness to blend feelings with thoughts,
6. responsiveness to multiple modes of learning as displayed in the arts,
7. preference for hands-on applications,
8. preference for real-world connections, and
9. responsiveness to individual learning patterns (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2007).

A curriculum that is responsive to such learners will need to possess enough flexibility to address these characterological needs. A multipronged approach to both curriculum and instruction is necessary to address these students' needs and those of the other populations of interest in this book.

Interventions That Work With Special Populations *in Gifted Education*

This text is for regular classroom teachers who work with special needs learners in their classrooms, and the specialists and administrators who support these populations. Students of poverty, English language learners, and the twice-exceptional are often overlooked for services in gifted programs and frequently miss out on opportunities to hone their skills and learn the culture of success. Interventions provided in this book promote talent development in schools, at home, and in the community. This book focuses on both the social-emotional and cognitive needs of these students, and provides templates for long-term planning and goal setting. The text also addresses challenges encountered in working with these students and effective strategies to overcome them.

Ariel Baska teaches all levels of Latin, including Advanced Placement, in Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia. **Joyce Van Tassel-Baska, Ed.D.**, is the Jody and Layton Smith Professor Emerita of Education and founding director of the Center for Gifted Education at William & Mary in Virginia, where she developed a graduate program and a research and development center in gifted education.



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