



## Extremely smart, but still having problems?

Many schools have started paying attention to their gifted pupils. However, there is still a lack of interest in gifted students at colleges and universities. We regret this situation. Being gifted is nice, but doesn't always automatically lead to good study achievements or a happy life. We see a lot of delay in getting a diploma and a lot of students quit when that could have been prevented when both the gifted student and the people around him/her have more knowledge of and attention to the characteristics and needs of gifted people. A lack of knowledge can lead to frustration for the student as well as the teacher. Although there isn't much scientific information available about this specific group, we think that we can give some information and recommendations to teachers and student advisors based on our experiences.

### What is giftedness?

The many definitions of giftedness that exist always mention having a high intelligence, besides other characteristics. At the IHBV we use the description created by a panel of twenty Dutch experts in 2008 through a Delphi study:

*A quick and clever thinker, who likes to deal with complex matters. Autonomous, passionate and inquisitive. A sensitive and emotionally rich individual, living intensely. He or she enjoys being creative.*<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of factors that prevent gifted people from being highly achieving students and being happy. We will discuss some of them.

### Being different

Many gifted people have felt different from a young age. Among other things, this has to do with their quick way of thinking and their way of perceiving and analysing. When they or their parents don't know that the difference lies in being gifted, this can lead to feelings of alienation, loneliness and sometimes psychological problems. For gifted people it can be difficult to find friends at the same level of development that they can talk to.

### Learning (and) studying

A gifted person starting at university or college will often have high expectations. Maybe the number of gifted people (students and teachers) at university, and possibly in college too, may be higher than average in secondary schools, but they will be the exception to the rule there as well. Besides this, gifted students often have a different style of learning than the average student;<sup>2</sup> they mostly need insight and elaboration. Reproducing facts is often tricky, while they do like to learn things based on insight. They haven't always developed enough effective studying skills and metacognitive skills. Just like other students, gifted students can also experience performance anxiety and psychological issues. Any dyslexia and dyscalculia issues may have been masked by giftedness for a long time, and lead to problems only when the curriculum starts getting really demanding.

### Recognising giftedness

Recognise that giftedness isn't always easy. Some of the gifted students will be aware of it already. Sometimes they are ashamed to mention their giftedness to teachers and student advisors, because they can react with prejudice. There can be self-doubt when studying is harder than expected and exam results are much worse than what the student is used to from before. Gifted students who don't know they are gifted will usually not relate their problems to giftedness.

From experience we know that the following thoughts can be common in gifted students. These thoughts are by no means evidence of being gifted, but they are an indication to start exploring the issue.

- I expected a lot more from the subject, is this all?
- I would like a lot more elaboration, why isn't it there?
- Why aren't I allowed to ask my questions?
- How is it possible that the teacher finds me threatening?
- Is this professor/teacher maybe stupid?
- I feel different from other students; what is wrong with me?
- I'm not sure about my capabilities; why?
- I'm not passing my exams, even though I have mastered the material; how is that possible?
- Why are the questions so stupid on the exams?
- Why do I have such a problem making choices?
- Why aren't I motivated to finish this course?

### Recommendations

- When students have problems studying remember to consider possible giftedness, even when their performance may not immediately suggest this.
- For learning problems, it is recommended to try to map them out clearly and address the issues that are found. For example: learning how to deal with performance anxiety and learning metacognitive skills, like planning and reflecting on the way a person studies.
- Some students may benefit from honours programs, others may not. Help the student find out what he/she needs, such as extra subjects or a different curriculum. And there are of course options outside the educational system: sports, music or volunteering.
- Some gifted students like the more general basic education that a number of colleges and University Colleges offer. This will allow the possibility to delay a more definite choice for some time.
- When a gifted student is seeking help with psychological issues we recommend to help them deal with their giftedness first of all. On [www.ihbv.nl/international](http://www.ihbv.nl/international) you find a list of coaches specialised in giftedness.
- On the (Dutch) website [HB-Forum.nl](http://HB-Forum.nl) is an active group of young people. In 7 cities in the Netherlands is a HB-café. One can visit Facebook groups, [peers2gather](https://www.facebook.com/peers2gather) and [Mensa](https://www.facebook.com/Mensa).

### References

1. Kooijman - van Thiel, M.B.G M. (red). *Hoogbegaafd. Dat zie je zó! Over zelfbeeld en imago van hoogbegaafden* (Gifted, obvious! On identity and self-image of Gifted Persons). Ede: OYA, 2008. [Dutch.]
2. Ven, R. van de & Nauta, N. *Gifted adults and their preferred style of learning*. 2012: <http://ihbv.nl/international/english/publications/>