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Identifying twice-exceptional students in the early years of schooling:

A case study

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WHO AM I?

- Primary teacher
- Mother
- University lecturer/tutor
- Academic

WHY THE INTEREST?

- Student inspiration
- Lived experience

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WHAT LED TO THIS RESEARCH?

- For twice-exceptional individuals who possess giftedness and disability simultaneously, **identification of both exceptions can be challenging** (Haines et al., 2020)
- Many gifted and twice-exceptional **students remain unidentified**, with their individual needs for differentiation, extension, and/or acceleration remaining unaddressed (Epstein et al., 2011; Haines et al., 2020; Silverman, 2013; Wormald, 2015).
- There is a need for identification of both exceptions (giftedness and disability/ies) in order to rightly **support their needs** (Ronksley-Pavia & Townend, 2017; Shaughnessy, 2019).
- Research needed in twice-exceptional within the **early years** of learning (Hodge & Kemp, 2006).
- **FOCUS:** What are the current **formal and informal identification practices** for identifying the learning needs of twice-exceptional students in the **early years of schooling**.

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DEFINITIONS

Giftedness

Giftedness refers to outstanding natural abilities or aptitudes, which places a child in the **top 10% of their age peers** (Gagné, 2020).

Disability

Impairments in the **physical, cognitive, social and emotional, language and communication** domains (Cth,1992).

Twice-Exceptional

Students with **intellectual giftedness alongside any disability(ies) which impact learning**, are considered twice-exceptional (Ronksley-Pavia, 2015).

Prevalence

Estimates in Australia ranging from **2–7%, representing 78,668 to 283,204 school-aged** learners (Ronksley-Pavia, 2020). *likely to be an underestimation

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BACKGROUND LITERATURE
KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **Teacher** Many teachers are not able to identify twice-exceptional learners or meet their needs as, according to Wormald (2011), they **do not have the "ability, knowledge and support to do so"** (p. 8).

- **Principal** Provides a key role in disability support and gifted education opportunities within a school, holding an **organisational mobilising role as a leader** (Guilbault & Kirsch, 2020) .

- **Specialist Educator** A **dual approach** (to identification, support, and provisions for twice-exceptional learners) by a gifted education professional and a disability support professional (Hughes, 2019). Foley-Nicpon et al.'s (2013) reported, **educators for gifted students to be best at identifying twice-exceptional** learners.

- **Parents/carers** **Key recognisers** of both ability and disability in their child (Wormald et al., 2014). Besnoy (2018) reported on parents as the child's most important **advocate**.

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BACKGROUND LITERATURE
IDENTIFICATION PRACTICES

- **Policies on identifying learning needs** National, state, and local policy for **identifying the needs** of learners (Hodge & Kemp, 2006) .
- **The purpose of assessment practices** Assessment purpose ***for, of, as*** learning. Shift over time to focus more on *for* learning, as a "**way in which we gather evidence upon which teaching decisions are based**" (Berman & Graham, 2018, p. 96)
- **Gifted identification** Traditionally **IQ tests** ; For placement in **gifted programs or on transition** to high-school
- **Twice-exceptional identification** **Discrepancies** in IQ scores (Silverman & Gilman, 2019); **Masking** (Baum & Owen, 2004; Josephson et al., 2018); **Comprehensive assessment approach** (Amend, 2018; Al-Hroub, 2013, Morrison & Rizza, 2017).
- **Early identification** Gagné's (2015) recommends the early years being an **easier time for recognising giftedness, before any formal education has taken place.**

STUDY DESIGN

Do current assessment practices in a school setting in Prep and Year 1 have the potential to identify twice-exceptional learners?

a). What are the current identification practices being used in Prep and Year 1 to identify the learning needs of students?

b). What are the purposes of these assessment practices?

Methodology	Single case study
Participant	Qld state school; One specialist teacher
Data Collection	Document reviews; Semi-structured interviews
Theoretical framework	Bronfenbrenner (BEST) (1979; 2006) + Gagne (DMGT) (2020) = The developing gifted child's bio-ecological system
Analysis	Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021)

FINDINGS FROM THE DATA

Educational structures	▪ Repeated policies ▪ An Independent initiative
Practices in Place	▪ Collecting data ▪ Making decisions
Personnel	▪ The principal ▪ The specialist Educator of the Gifted and Talented

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EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES
REPEATED POLICIES

Table 4.3

Repeated Policy Statements for Identifying Student Learning Needs

National	"Efficiently and effectively identify where students are in their learning.… Ascertain the stage of learning reached.… Identify any gaps in skills and knowledge" (Online Formative Assessment Initiative, Australian Government, 2020b, p. 3).
State	"Identification of students' learning needs … that enhances teacher's ability to establish where students are in their learning" (Understanding K-12 assessment, Queensland Government, 2022b, p. 1).
Local	"Use a range of formative assessment strategies in an ongoing way to identify learning needs of students … to identify gaps in learning" (Curriculum and Pedagogical Framework, Document J).

Table 4.4

Repeated Policy Statements for Meeting Student Needs

National	"… promote personalised learning and provide support that aims to fulfil the individual capabilities and needs of learners" (The Alice Springs [Mparntwe] Education Declaration, DESE, 2019, p. 5).
State	"… provide the curriculum in ways that meet the diverse learning needs of all students" (P-12 CARF, Queensland Government, 2021b, p. 3).
Local	"Use … Differentiation planner to cater for the individual learning needs of students in your class" (Whole school curriculum and reporting plan, Document H).

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EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES
AN INDEPENDENT INTITIATIVE

Table 4.5

An Independent Local Policy

National	"Each state and territory has processes in place to identify gifted and talented learners" (Meeting the needs of gifted and talented students, ACARA, n.d.a, p. 4).
	⇩
State	"Use school-wide processes to identify groups and individuals who require tailored supports, including … students with disability … gifted and talented students" (P-12 CARF, Queensland Government, 2021b, p. 3).
	⇩
Local	"We screen our whole Year 1 cohort for intellectual giftedness in Term 2 each year, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to be identified and supported from a young age" (Gifted and Talented Education document, Document A).

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PRACTICES IN PLACE
COLLECTING STUDENT DATA IN SCHOOLS

Table 4.8

Assessments at the Case School in Order of Administration

Timing	Assessment	Purpose
Pre-entry to school	• Transition statements	• Understand a child's learning ability and progress
On-entry to school	• Early Start interviews	• Identify what a child already knows
Beginning of year or unit of teaching	• Brilliant behaviours teacher checklist	• To inform observations of possible gifted students
	• Pre-assessment tools (Diagnostic tests, teacher observation)	• Identify learning needs
	• Quick test of language	• Identify language difficulties
	• Learner profile tools (surveys, checklists)	• Assess demonstrated ability
Ongoing	• Literacy Continuum	• Monitor literacy development
	• Work samples	• Evidence of learning
	• Observations	• Evidence of ability
	• Monitoring checklists	• Assess learning progress
	• Running records	• Assess language and reading ability, monitor progress
	• PM benchmarking	• Assess reading ability. Monitor progress
	• DSA (Diagnostic Spelling Analysis)	• Identify spelling ability
	• PROSE (informal reading assessment)	• Assess reading ability
End of year or unit of teaching	• Jolly Phonics (T2, T4)	• Assess letter, sounds and words ability
	• Portfolio – introduced 2012	• Gather student work - reporting
	• Performance	• Evidence of learning
	• Curriculum to the Classroom (C2C v8)	• Evidence of learning
	• Teacher transition statements	• Share information with new teacher
Specific	• ADHD checklist	• Measures executive functioning skills
	• WISC	• Measures intellectual ability
	• External Reports	• Verification, validation, recommendation
	• SAGES-3 – T2 Year 1	• Identify gifted students
	• Off-level testing	• Identify gifted ability/needs
	• Additional Early Start interviews	• Re-assess learning
	• Quick test of language	• Re-assess language ability

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PRACTICES IN PLACE
COLLECTING STUDENT DATA – GIFTED IDENTIFIERS

Teacher observations

Brilliant Behaviours Checklist – attributes connected to *high potential abilities* (Possibilities for Learning, n.d.). *The majority of flagging [nominating as potentially gifted] … happens in Prep, when the* ***teachers notice things*** (Interview 1).

SAGES-3 (Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students – Third Edition)

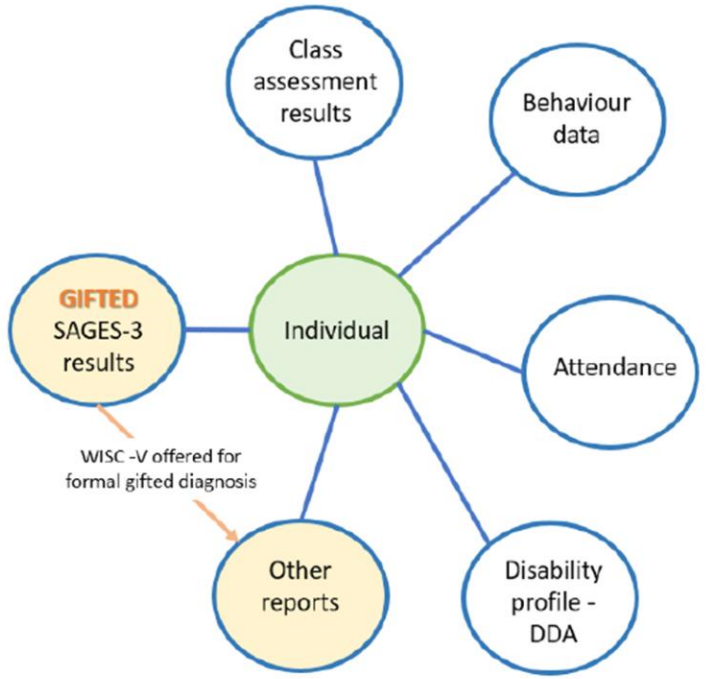
US norm-referenced **screening test** designed to "identify students who **are gifted and/or talented in intellectual and academic abilities**" (Johnsen & Corn, 2018, p. 1).

WISC-V

Periodically all of our ***verified students are offered a WISC-V*** *with our guidance officer* (Interview 1). "The information … is used to assist in developing recommendations and **strategies to support student's educational needs, but not to make a diagnosis"** (Assessments Administered by Guidance Officers and Psychologists, Queensland Government, 2021, p. 1).

Figure 4.3

Data Evidence Including Gifted Assessments



For a school-based assessment, that ***is valid evidence for us****, and so the way that we formally identify the student as gifted is we refer them to our student support services team and they/we have a conversation… present the evidence and … accept that as valid.* (Interview 1)

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PRACTICES IN PLACE
COLLECTING STUDENT DATA – TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL IDENTIFIERS

Teacher conversations

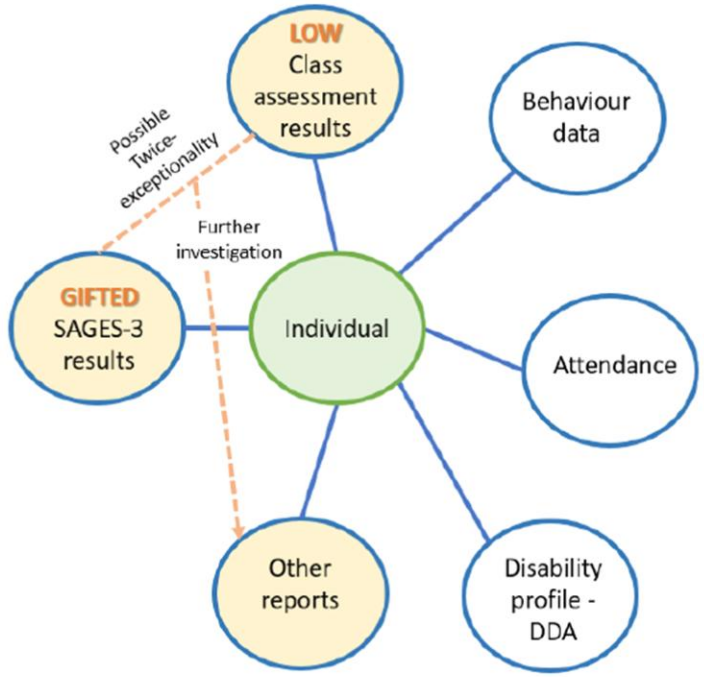
- Knowledge and understanding of twice-exceptional students is shared with staff through the Gifted and Talented Education document (Document A), with **suggested practices** for possible identification of these learners.
- "Students with 2e who have had a cognitive or psychometric assessment can often yield a **'spiky' profile**, so clear strengths and relative deficits are evident in their profile" (Document A).

Further investigation

- *If there's another **piece to the puzzle** that we don't know yet. That's where we have to **do some more digging*** (Interview 1).

Figure 4.4

Data Evidence for Twice-Exceptional Identification (a)



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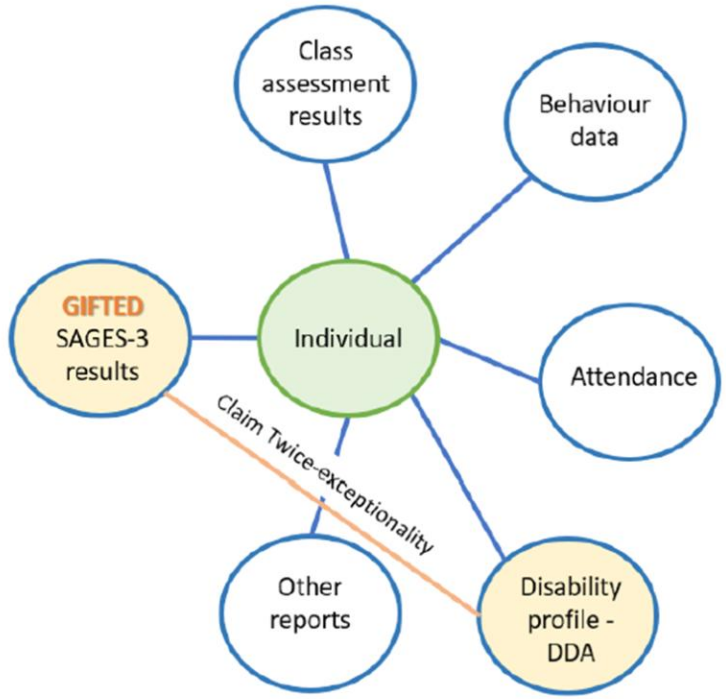
TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL IDENTIFICATION
IDENTIFICATION METHODS

Assumed diagnosis

- Disability + SAGES-3 gifted score
- *What we do tend to do with our kids that have got learning disabilities, … if they have had the SAGES-3 assessment done, that's typically enough for us to say, yes they have twice exceptionality* (Interview 1).

Figure 4.5

Data Evidence for Twice-Exceptional Identification (b)



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PERSONNEL
THE PRINCIPAL

Personal interest

Inclusion of practices for gifted and talented learners was **seen across multiple school planning documents.**

One of the first things they ever said … "I want you to be able to put your hand on your heart and say is that you know who your unidentified, gifted and talented kids are" (Interview 1). *[They were] really adamant "**who are gifted kids in your class** that have been **unidentified**, that are **flying under the radar**?"*

Financial support

Allocated **school resources** and **specialist teacher funding** toward growing and managing gifted education.

*My principal… **has invested very heavily in this role and in gifted education in general** in our school* (Interview 1).

They have *invest[ed] a decent amount of money into **purchasing the SAGES–3 screening assessment*** (Interview 1).

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PERSONNEL
THE SPECIALIST EDUCATOR OF GIFTED LEARNERS

Passion and knowledge of learners

Personal experience with twice-exceptionality, brought knowledge of characteristics, approaches, and difficulties needing to be recognised and understood. ***I'm quite passionate, about my role*** *… those kids get my advocacy* (Interview 1).

Large investment of time allocated to screening the entire Year 1 cohort. *The information that [SAGES-3] gave us has been,* ***invaluable"*** *(Interview 1).*

Education and coaching for teachers

Providing release time to enable **coaching support for teachers with identified G&T students** (Annual implementation plan, Document C). Stated **one-to-one coaching** as their preferred support for teachers.

[Teachers] are ***very, very good at recognising when something's unusual****. So, outside the norm or beyond what a typical Prep student would be demonstrating* (Interview 1). Also…*'well you tell me they're a genius, but* ***I just don't see it****'* (Interview 1).

Working alongside parents

"We view the parents of our students **as partners in their child's learning** and employ a collaborative approach to our curriculum provisioning for them" (Gifted and Talented Education document, Document A). *I'm a huge believer that parents* ***are very legitimate identifiers of giftedness in particular*** (Interview 1).

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KEY FINDINGS

POLICY INFORMS PRACTICE

KEY PERSONNEL DRIVE PRACTICE

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES ARE REQUIRED

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IS ESSENTIAL

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Instalment of Queensland state policy to identify gifted learners

A possible framework for local-level practices to identify gifted and twice-exceptional learners

Education for principals on the need to identify and support twice-exceptional learners

Professional development and preservice education for all teachers in gifted and twice-exceptional education

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WHAT NEXT?

Upcoming Research study

EXPERIENCES OF MULTI-EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER'S SENSE OF BELONGING ACROSS SCHOOL YEARS

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