Gifted or just slightly different?

Bart is a pupil at pre-university education level. Long ago, someone suggested that he might be gifted, but that was never actually investigated further. He feels 'somewhat different', but what can you do … He is active, has a lot of interests, and gets good grades without too much effort. He can't wait to go to university. Everyone in Bart's environment expects him to enjoy his time there and to be successful. However, after a few months at university, he runs into problems. His motivation is slipping, his results are disappointing, and the fear of failure is getting inside his head.

It has been common knowledge for some time now that the transition to higher education is not always smooth.
This also applies to many gifted students. They are expected to transfer to higher education without any problems and succeed at university without any additional support. This is a common misconception.

Many students, as well as their parents and supervisors, have no idea that intellectual giftedness can be the basis of these problems, let alone that they know how best to deal with it. At many universities and universities of applied sciences, this problem is starting to be addressed, but research into highly gifted, academic underperformers is still in its infancy.

It is not all sorrow and misery though. There are no actual figures, but most gifted students are successful in their academic performance, and often follow more than one programme. This is usually their own merit and not the result of the support they have received.

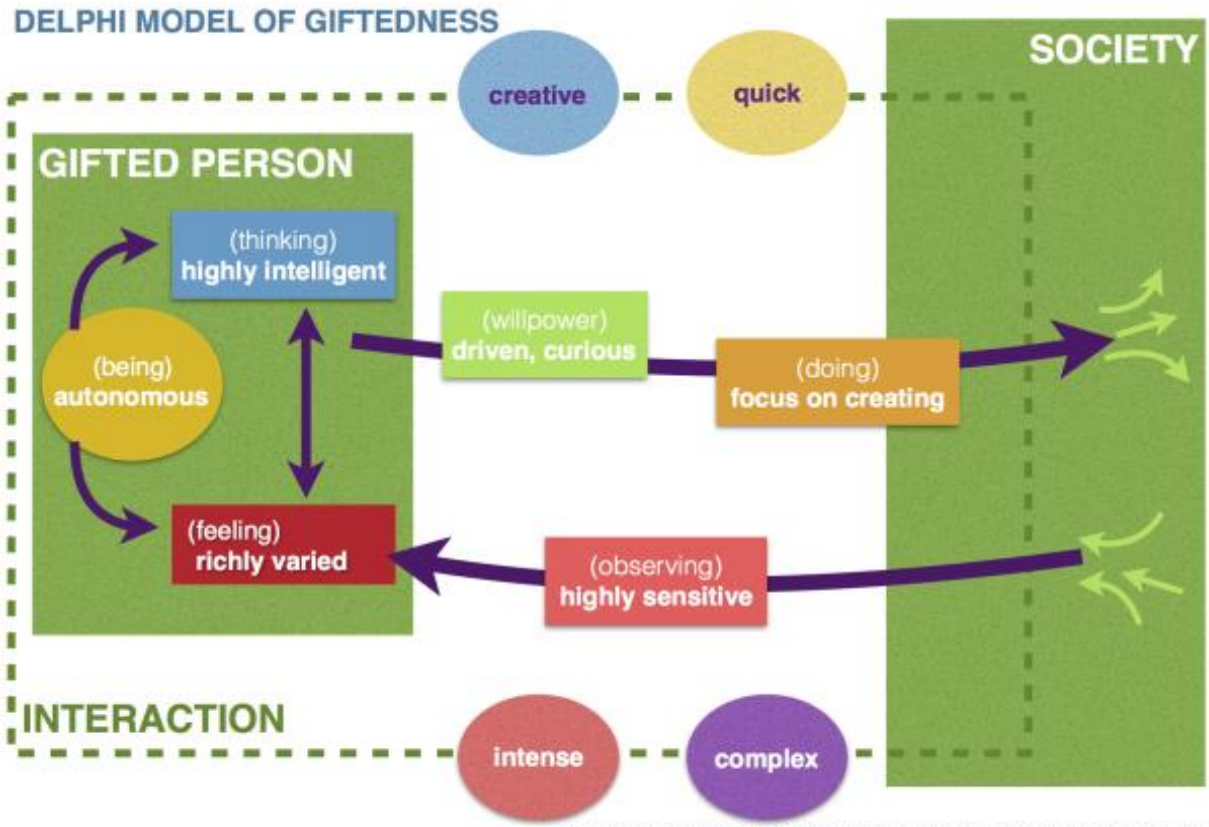
The purpose of this article on 'Giftedness' is to create awareness, and provide information to students and lecturers about intellectual giftedness at the University of Groningen. We will be discussing the following points:

- What is intellectual giftedness?
- What are the options?
- What can you do?
- More information

What is intellectual giftedness?

Intellectual giftedness is often defined on the basis of IQ scores; intellectual giftedness starts at an IQ score of 130. Several experts assume that intelligence, or an IQ score in itself, is not the only aspect of intellectual giftedness. That is why the Delphi model was developed in 2007.

Based on this model, a gifted person can be described as: 'A fast and clever thinker (thinking) who can handle complex matters; autonomous (being), curious and driven by nature (wanting); at the same time also sensitive (perceiving) and emotional (feeling); intensely living and deriving pleasure from creating (doing).'



The various aspects that make up intellectual giftedness according to the Delphi model are shown in the figure above and described in the table below. It is important to note that intellectual giftedness occurs in different grades and that therefore various aspects can be present to a greater or lesser extent.

Aspects		**Examples**	**Interaction**
Being	Autonomous	- Independent - Self-deciding	**Quick**
Thinking	Highly intelligent	- Analytical - Make connections	
Feeling	Richly varied	- Rich inner world	**Intense**
Willpower	Driven and curious	- Always something new - Want much - Discipline - Eager to learn	**Complex**
Doing	Focus on creating	- Creative - Productive	**Creative**
Observing	Highly sensitive	- Intense perceiving	

Rianne van de Ven and Delphi Model by M.B.G.M. Kooijman - van Thiel.

Dabrowski overexcitabilities

Not only the Delphi model, but also Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration could be used to describe intellectual giftedness. In his theory, Dabrowski describes the different ways in which people can have a stronger response to stimuli, resulting in mental activities outside the 'ordinary', which he defines as Overexcitabilities. These Overexcitabilities are:
1. Psychomotor, which includes the physical surplus of energy;
2. Sensual, relating to the sensory, sensitive, and sensational abilities;
3. Intellectual, relating to an intense activity of the mind;
4. Imagination, which includes the broad imagination and free fantasy play;
5. Emotional, which is an intense experience of feelings and emotions.*

Many of the aspects that intellectually gifted people experience are related to these Overexcitabilities.

*More information about Dabrowski's theory can be found under the heading 'Interesting links'

Characteristics
Source: Hans Lip Coacht and Rianne van de Ven

Below is a list of characteristics that many intellectually gifted people experience. Keep in mind that not every intellectually gifted person experiences all characteristics, or experiences all characteristics to the same extent. Intellectual giftedness manifests itself in different ways in different individuals. However, most gifted people recognise themselves in many of the following characteristics:

- feeling 'different'
- feeling as if their way of thinking is not understood
- coming up with quick solutions
- struggling with authority
- having a strong sense of justice
- preferring not to engage in small talk
- often being too serious
- low self-image
- different sense of humour (jokes are not understood, in particular puns)
- making high demands
- being loyal and honest
- wanting to improve the world
- not willing to repeat themselves
- getting bored easily
- having a feeling of underperforming
- procrastinating
- wanting much
- sometimes feeling able to take on anything, at other times not
- being particularly creative

(with permission from and thanks to the Giftedness project at Wageningen University & Research)

What are the options?

If you recognize yourself in the above characteristics, you may have known this for a long time and are completely happy with it. That's great! However, if it raises doubts about you and if you are bothered by it, you might want to discuss it with someone, even if you achieve good academic results. If you encounter obstacles to studying, we will work with you to overcome these as best we can. For example, by creating a customized study schedule in consultation with your study advisor or by exploring the option of a second programme. In this case, you should contact the study advisor of the other study programme (www.rug.nl/studyadvisor). In case of motivational problems, issues with course selection, and delays, the Student Service Centre (SSC) organizes special training courses.

But perhaps you prefer to talk to fellow students who have similar experiences. To realize this, we have started a small-scale online community and organize meetings, not only to get to know each other and discuss topics, but first and foremost to get to know yourself better.

What can you do?

1. Make an appointment with your study advisor if you are having difficulty studying. Inform your study advisor about your situation and explain how it is affecting your study progress. The study advisor may decide to refer you to a student counsellor. Intellectual giftedness is not in itself a reason to qualify for special facilities or financial support. However, the psychological burden you can experience, or another diagnosis, can be.

2. To participate in the WhatsApp group and the meetings, please send an email to student counsellor Jos Karssies (j.karssies@rug.nl).

More information

A video clip about Excentra, centre of expertise for intellectual giftedness (www.excentra.be):
Why do so many gifted people fail to graduate? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFCLdJVoHVg&t=6s

Research at Fontys: About characteristics and possible attention in education:
https://fontys.nl/Innovatie-en-onderzoek/Goed-leraarschap-Goed-leiderschap/Hoogbegaafde-studenten-laten-floreren.htm

Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities:
- Scientific article: https://www.positivedisintegration.com/MendaglioandTillier2006.pdf

- A lecture about Dabrowski's Theory: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLwPwH1FmXM

Books:
- Paula Prober - Your Rainforest Mind: A Guide to the Well-Being of Gifted Adults and Youth
- James T. Webb - Searching for Meaning. Idealism, Bright Minds, Disillusionment, and Hope
- Noks Nauta & Rianne van de Ven- Hoogbegaafde volwassenen: zet je gaven intelligent en positief in

Relevant websites:
Dutch organisations: https://ihbv.nl/international (see also the leaflets)
https://www.mensa.org

UK organisation: https://www.nagc.org/myths-about-gifted-students