

Giftedness and Learning Disabilities

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Authors: C. June Maker and Anne Jo Udall

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How Does One Identify the Learning Disabled Gifted?

It is difficult to describe or list typical characteristics of learning disabled gifted people because there are so many types of giftedness and so many possible learning disabilities. The biggest problem in identification is that a disability often masks or inhibits the expression of giftedness, so that it is difficult to tell whether a person's abilities are outstanding enough to indicate giftedness. On the other hand, giftedness can often mask the learning disability because the person's abilities can help him or her overcome or compensate for the disability.

Some weaknesses that are observed more frequently than others in these children are the following: poor handwriting, poor spelling, lack of organizational ability, and difficulty in employing systematic strategies for solving problems. More frequently observed strengths are in speaking, understanding and identifying relationships, vocabulary, knowledge of information related to a wide variety of topics, and observational skills. In general, thinking and reasoning processes are often not impaired, but the mechanics involved in writing, reading, mathematics computation, and completing academic tasks often present great difficulties.

To identify a student as learning disabled and gifted, one must consider a wide variety of information, including in depth assessment of both strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation should include individually administered intelligence tests, diagnostic achievement tests, evaluation of creative products by experts or teachers, peer evaluations of leadership ability, parent interviews, classroom observation of peer interaction and other performance, auditions (performing), tests of aptitude, and tests of creativity. In addition, tests of perceptual ability, visual motor coordination, and expressive ability can be used to pinpoint disabilities. One of the most frequently used indicators is a severe discrepancy between potential and performance.

After a variety of information has been collected, a committee of individuals familiar with the student (teachers, psychologists, parents, the principal) should review all information and decide whether the abilities are strong

enough to indicate grandness and the weaknesses are low enough to indicate a learning disability. This is, of necessity, a subjective decision made with the best interest of the student in mind.

What Are the Educational Implications?

There is no single best solution for meeting the educational needs of the gifted learning disabled student. Individual decisions will be made based on numerous factors, including the particular strengths and weaknesses of the student, parental preferences, the type of gifted program, and logistical considerations (i. e., district size, location of special programs, transportation, etc.). A program for gifted learning disabled students may take one of several forms:

- primarily an enrichment program with the student receiving additional help for the disability
- a self-contained program which focuses on both strengths and weaknesses
- primarily a remediation program.

Educators concerned with making sure these students receive appropriate services must be creative in their search for solutions. They must work with both educators of the gifted and handicapped. Furthermore, a strong advocacy role will often be necessary. It is still difficult for many people to not only accept the existence of the gifted learning disabled child, but to also understand the need for special programming.

What Are the Major Classroom Problems and How Can They be Solved?

Regardless of the educational placement agreed upon, there may well be some major problems in the classroom setting because of the unique nature of the gifted learning disabled child. The interaction of giftedness with learning disabilities produces children who may be simultaneously frustrating and inspiring. Experimenting with a variety of teaching strategies is often the quickest way to find out what will work for a given child.

The following are some suggestions for the classroom teacher to experiment with.

1. For Academic Problems:
 - Present material in a variety of ways (visually, orally, kinesthetically) have written material taped by parents, other students, or community helpers.

- Give students opportunities to share knowledge in different ways (taped reports, oral quizzes or tests, class demonstrations).
 - Provide alternative learning experiences which are not dependent on paper and pencil or reading (puzzles, logic games, tangrams, math manipulatives).
 - Place the child where the board and teacher can be easily seen.
 - Give realistic deadlines for completing assignments (often longer than for others).
 - Use contracts.
2. To Develop Compensatory Skills:
- Teach typing and computer literacy and encourage the use of calculators and tape recorders as aides.
 - Teach organizational and problem solving strategies using cognitive behavior modification techniques.
3. For Affective Needs:
- Reduce academic pressures as a way to lessen frustration and lack of motivation.
 - Use values clarification and role playing activities.
 - Use games such as UNGAME to encourage students to talk, and hold class meetings to discuss feelings and problems.
 - Bring successful gifted learning disabled adults into the classroom to serve as role models.
 - Explain what it is like to be gifted and learning disabled.
 - Work toward having the gifted learning disabled student learn to value her or himself as a strong, intelligent human being.

What Can Parents Do?

Parents must become effective advocates for their children. The first step to becoming an effective advocate is to learn as much as possible about the gifted learning disabled student.

Look to other parents of gifted learning disabled students for support and advice. Contact local parent organizations or the local chapters of The Council for Exceptional Children or The Association for the Gifted. Discover if the local universities have special education programs for the gifted learning disabled and ask for assistance. If there is a large district with a strong parent support network, consider the possibility of establishing a special program for these students. It will not be easy, but it can be done.

At home, the first step will again be to increase awareness of the child's needs. Then, it will be easier to accept the contradictions in the child. For example, many of these individuals will spend hours on a self-initiated project, but cannot seem to complete a single class assignment. Parents

often find themselves frustrated and angry because of these paradoxes. The reasons behind these behaviors are complex and children's shortcomings should not be simply explained away with the label lazy.

Accept your child, and acknowledge the strengths as well as the weaknesses. Praise the child for successes.

Provide an enriching environment (trips, puzzles, materials, and discussions about any topic of interest to the family).

Involve the child in making decisions about his or her life, including establishing a contract for school work or deciding to change from one special education program to another.

Do not compare your child with other offspring. This will do no one any good, and could do a lot of harm.

Talk honestly with your child about what it is like to be both gifted and learning disabled.

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This preview shows page 4 - 7 out of 35 pages. Giftedness, Intellectual Disabilities, and Learning Disabilities What is the traditional and modern definition of giftedness? What are the prerequisites? Individuals with IQ scores of 130 or greater. Now includes an exceptional talent, which the child loves and decides to master. o What are the concerns for gifted children? Gifted children are more mature than their peers, and easily interact with adults rather than children.Â Describe the criteria for learning disabilities Difficulty mastering an academic subject, of normal intelligence, not suffering from other conditions that could explain poor performance. o What are the 3 most common types of learning disabilities? ? o What are the causes and supports for children with learning disabilities?