



EDUCATION OF GIFTED LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN

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Abstract:

Why do some students show little or no interest towards school tasks while they spend considerable time and effort in doing creative activities inside and outside the school? These behaviours are typical of some students who are simultaneously gifted and learning disabled. For many people, however, the terms learning disabilities and giftedness are at opposite ends of a learning continuum. Generally, for the purpose of providing provision of special education, a student may be identified as either a learning disabled or gifted one, but not both. Non acceptance of these typical cases primarily stems from faulty and incomplete understandings. This is not surprising, because the "experts" in each of these areas have difficulty in reaching agreement. Some still believe that giftedness is equated with outstanding achievement across all subject areas. On the other hand, many educators view below-grade-level achievement as a pre-requisite for the diagnosis of a learning disability. As a result, many of the extremely bright students who are struggling to do well in academic areas may not be identified as learning disabled and being debarred of getting special help to improve their academic achievements. The students of this category need special education programme.

Characteristics of Gifted Learning Disabled Children:

Recent advances in both fields have focused on the possibility that both sets of behaviour can exist simultaneously (Baum, 1999; Baum and Owen, 1988; Fox, Brody, Whitmore and Maker, 1985 and Tobin, 1983). Gifted and learning disabled children exhibit remarkable talents and strengths in some areas and at the same time exhibit disability in some other areas. The gifted and learning disabled children can be grouped (Baum, 1999) into three categories.

- Identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities
- Unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities may be masked by average achievement, and
- Identified learning disabled students who are also gifted.

Identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities *are* easily identified as gifted because of high achievement or high IQ scores. As they grow older, discrepancies widen between expected and actual performance. These students may *impress* teachers with their verbal abilities, while their spelling or handwriting contradicts their performance in verbal *areas*. At times, they may be forgetful, sloppy and disorganized. In upper primary school or secondary school, where they have to perform more long-term written assignments, to show better and wider comprehension and to do independent reading there some bright students find it increasingly difficult to achieve. Teachers and parents mistakenly think that if these students would only try harder, they could succeed. But these students have learning disability. So without proper identification of their subtle disabilities, it is not possible to help these students to achieve better academic performance. Moreover, early detection of the disability may help teachers and professionals to design learning strategies and compensation techniques to help these students in dealing with their duality of learning behaviours. *Learning disability is not the only cause of a discrepancy between potential and achievement.* There are a number of other reasons for the under-achievement of the bright students. Sometimes, expectations are unrealistic. Excelling in science, for example, is no assurance that high-level performance will be shown in language area also.

The second group of students is usually *unidentified gifted students with learning disabilities*". These students are rarely noticed in school situations. These students usually struggle hard to perform well in the class. These students have to work hard with their superior intellectual abilities to overcome their learning disabilities. In essence, *their gift masks the disability and the disability masks the gift* (Baum, 1999). It is very difficult to identify these learners, as these students do not want to show up their exceptional qualities. But their hidden talents and abilities may emerge in specific content areas or may be stimulated by a classroom teacher who uses a creative approach to teaching and learning. Identified learning-disabled students who are also gifted constitute the third group. These bright children, discovered within the population of students who are identified as learning disabled, often fail to achieve expected level of academic success. The identification of these students becomes very easy because of the talents they are able to show (Baum, 1999) interestingly these children often have high-level interests at home the creative abilities. Intellectual strength and passion they bring to their hobbies are clear indicators of their potential for giftedness (Renzulli, 1978) because these students are bright and sensitive, they are more acutely aware of their difficulty in learning. These students tend to generalize their feelings of academic failure to an overall sense of failure in life. Research has shown that this group of students is often rated by teachers as most disruptive at school.

In a general classroom situation these students do not get sufficient opportunities to improve their extraordinary qualities and as a result these students are frequently found to be off task: day dream, or complain of headaches and stomach aches: and they become easily frustrated and use their creative abilities to avoid tasks (Baum & Owen, 1988, Whitmore. 1980)

Curricular Needs:

Although each of these subgroups has unique problems. They all require an environment that will nurture their gifted qualities, attend to the learning Disability and provide the emotional support to deal with their Inconsistent abilities. The following general guidelines can assist professionals and teaches in developing programmes that will meet the needs of these students. The most important strategy Is that attention should be focused on the development of the gifted talents of the learners rather than their disabilities. Research has shown that a focus on weaknesses at the expense of developing gifts can result in poor self- esteem, a lack of motivation. Depression and stress (Baum. 1984; Whitmore & Maker, 1985). Apart from this, attention should also be focused on the development of strengths, interests, and superior intellectual capacities of these learners. These students need a stimulating educational environment, which will enable them to fully develop their talents and abilities. Further, enrichment activities should be designed to overcome problematic weaknesses and to highlight abstract thinking and creative production. Improved achievement in basic skills for many students may become an unexpected bonus (Baum, 1999). Provision of a nurturing environment that values individual differences may go a long way in developing these talents to the fullest extent possible. According to *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* (1962), individuals must feel like they belong and are valued in order to reach their potential or self-actualize.

To help the children for self-actualization the curriculum must be continually modified in accordance with the abilities, interests capabilities and needs of the learner to enable them to achieve success. Currently, only certain abilities and activities are rewarded by schools, primarily those that involve strong academic proficiency particularly.

In reading and writing. Success in the real world depends on skills *or* knowledge in other areas besides reading and writing. Students are to be rewarded and encouraged for what they do well. The cooperative learning or group learning strategies may be adopted to foster and support interdependence Encouragement for different compensatory strategies such as a poor speller will always need to check for errors in spelling before submitting the written materials and students who have difficulty memorizing mathematics will be advised to use a calculator to assure *accuracy*. These children do not want the curriculum to be less challenging *or* demanding. Rather, *they need alternative ways to receive the information* (Baum, 1999).

Advanced organizers approach may be used to help students *receive* and communicate information Students who have difficulty *organizing* and managing time also benefit from receiving outlines of class lectures, study guides, and a syllabus of topics to be *covered*. Teach students who have difficulty in transferring ideas to a sequential format on paper to use brainstorming and webbing to generate outlines and organize written work. Steps should be taken to provide a structure or visual format to guide the teaching and learning A sketch of an essay or science project will enable these4 students to produce a well- organized product Use of technology to promote effective learning may be tried. Technology has provided efficient means to organize and access information, increase accuracy in mathematics and spelling In short. it allows students with learning disabilities to produce the desired learning outcomes with confidence Variety of options for communication of Ideas may be used in the class. Writing is not the only way to communicate; all learning can be expressed and applied in a variety of modes. Slides, models, speeches, mime, murals, and film productions are examples. Students who have problems in short-term memory may be helped by developing strategies for remembering. The use of mnemonics, especially those created by students themselves, is one effective strategy to enhance memory. Visualization techniques have also proved to be effective for better memorization. Awareness regarding individual strengths and weaknesses may be developed among the learners.

It is imperative that students who are gifted with learning disabilities understand their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses so that they can make *intelligent* choices about their future (Baum, 1999). Sharing of experience with adults who are gifted and learning-disabled will lend validity to the belief that such individuals can succeed.

Conclusion:

Students who are both “gifted and learning disabled”. Must learn how to develop their gifted qualities and to overcome their learning disabilities. They must be encouraged to choose careers in accordance with their strengths. A well planned educational programme with care, love and affection can make these students self-sufficient in learning and also be able to take appropriate decisions about what they truly need in their lives.

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