

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
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PART ONE Who are the Gifted Learning Disabled?

Chapter 1 Introduction	2
Chapter 2 A Matter of Definition	7
Historical Perspective of Learning Disabilities	7
A Definition	12
An Historical Perspective of Gifts and Talents	12
Chapter 3 Learning-Disabled and Gifted: Who Are They?	15
The Three Varieties of GLD Students	15
Identified Gifted Students Who Have Subtle LD	15
Unidentified Students	16
Identified Learning-Disabled Students Who Are Also Gifted ..	16
Characteristics of Gifted Learning-Disabled Students	17
Intellectual Skills	18
Behavior	19

PART TWO Theoretical Perspectives

Introduction	24
Chapter 4 Motivation	25
What is Motivation?	25
Arousal and Sensory Stimulation	26
Arousal and Hyperactivity	27
Self-Efficacy	27
How Does Efficacy Information Get Into the Head?	28
Enhancing Self-Efficacy	29
Attributions For Success and Failure	30
Attribution in the Classroom	31
Shyness in the Attribution Pattern	33

Chapter 5 Cognition and Self-Regulation	34
Sensory Storage	35
Short-Term Storage	35
Long-Term Storage	36
Memory and Exceptional Students	37
Memory and Self-Regulated Learning	38
Chapter 6 Recognition and Application of Intellectual Strengths ..	40
Integrative Versus Dispersive Intelligence	40
Measuring Integrative Intelligence	42
Using the Information	46

PART THREE Practical Considerations

Introduction	56
Chapter 7 Identification	57
Procedures for Identification of a Specific Learning Disability	57
Documentation of a Severe Discrepancy	57
Evaluating Psychological Processing Difficulties	58
Learning Behavior Assessment	58
Procedures for Identifying the Gift	61
<i>A Priori</i> Identification	61
Dynamic Identification of Specific Abilities	64
Gifts in Spatial Design	66
Gifts in Visual Literacy	70
Dramatic Expression	78
Chapter 8 Attending to the Gift	79
Essential Components	79
Alternate Modes for Thinking and Communicating	80
Strategies to Identify Gifts	80
Motivating Activities	80
Instructional Strategies	80
Program Designs	81
Placement in Existing Programs	81
Placement in Specially Designed Programs	81
Gifted-Handicapped Mentor Program	82
Project Challenge—2	85
RESCUE: Focus on Talent	88

Chapter 9 Instructional Strategies	90
Where to Begin	90
Selecting Appropriate Activities	90
Compensation Strategies	92
Ways for GLD Students with Limited Reading Skills to Acquire Information	92
Strategies for Improving Poor Organizational Skills	98
Ideas for Enhancing Memory Skills in GLD Students	105
Using Technology to Circumvent Poor Skills in Writing and Spelling	107
Considerations Which Enable GLD Students to Feel Valued. . .	108
Managing Behavior	109
Social and Emotional Concerns	110
Rap Sessions—A Model	111
Epilogue	113

APPENDICES

Appendix A

SEAT: Self-Efficacy for Academic Tasks	115
--	-----

Appendix B

Ways of Learning	123
------------------------	-----

Appendix C

Myself and Others	129
-------------------------	-----

Appendix D

Structured Interview	133
----------------------------	-----

Appendix E

Special Education Center Publications	134
---	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY

139

INDEX

147

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How can a child learn and not learn at the same time? Why do some students apply little or no effort to school tasks while they commit time and considerable effort to demanding, creative activities outside of school? These behaviors describe GIFTED, LEARNING-DISABLED (GLD) students. Indeed, discovering answers to these questions will unlock the unique mysteries of students who are bright but learning-disabled. The answers will also clarify the dilemma these students face daily in coping with the paradox of school failure and creative achievement.

We'd like to introduce you to three young people who have suffered the consequences of being bright and creative, yet unsuccessful in school. The stories of these students vividly depict the striking inconsistencies in the behavior of GLD students. By examining the commonalities shared by the three, we can begin to understand the frustration and confusion experienced not only by the students themselves, but by all who interact with them. We can begin to appreciate the need for more information about their characteristics and how we might help these special students to succeed.

Neil

"School is like a basketball game, totally irrelevant to life," spouted a high school student who was daily experiencing failure in school. This analogy unfortunately was true for Neil. School, like basketball, became irrelevant to him when it failed to address or to satisfy any of his needs.

His teachers described Neil as lazy, claiming

that he could do much better if he applied himself: "When I talk to Neil, he has so much to offer. But he just doesn't produce." His fellow classmates, applauding his cleverness, viewed Neil as the class clown. Neil saw himself as a misfit. The inconsistencies of his own abilities, his interpretation of people's perceptions of him, and his own feeling of inadequacy totally frustrated Neil.

Neil began to experience difficulty in school in the fourth grade. As he proceeded through the grades, he accomplished less and less. By the time he reached high school, he was in such a depressed emotional state that weekly psychological counseling became necessary. The psychologist suggested an educational evaluation. The results of the evaluation concluded that Neil had learning disabilities that were manifested in difficulty in written organization and sequential tasks for math and algebra.

Accordingly, Neil's curriculum was adjusted. He received supplemental instruction. Special provisions were made in testing and assignments. These are procedures usually recommended for learning-disabled students. However, unlike most learning-disabled students who begin to experience success and start to feel better about themselves, Neil became depressed. He felt that his better grades depended on the school's making concessions for him in light of his specific learning disabilities, even though his school successes were merely watered-down versions of what other bright students could accomplish. In fact, he did not view his achievements as successes at all.

To understand why Neil felt frustrated and unfulfilled even though his grades improved, it is necessary to learn more about him. He is a very