

香港資優教育學院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

Factsheet

GIFTED CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULTIES

A study by NAGC (UK) in 2001 estimated that 5-10% of gifted children could have a learning difficulty, due to a sensory impairment, physical difficulty or specific learning difficulty. Conversely, approximately 2-5% of children with disabilities may also be gifted. Gifted children with learning difficulties may have some skills below the norm, but others that are within the gifted range. This may result in 'failure' in some academic tasks, and excellent achievement in others.

Learning difficulties can lead to ineffective learning strategies, low self-esteem, and disruptive behaviour. Parents and teachers are often left confused and helpless as to what strategies to pursue.

Three types of gifted children with learning difficulties have been identified:

High ability recognised, learning difficulties unrecognized

- A child compensates for her/his difficulties through use of advanced abilities, so problems remain hidden
- As child grows older, their learning difficulties produce an increasing discrepancy between expected and actual performance
- Impression of being 'very able' is contradicted by poor handwriting/forgetfulness/disorganisation
- It appears as if they are 'not trying enough'
- However, their ability enables them to 'get by'. Hence, recognition of difficulties occurs much later than for less able children

Learning difficulties recognised, giftedness unrecognized

- Child is recognised for what she/he cannot do
- Their difficulty of disability pulls down their achievement, so their abilities are not recognised
- Learning difficulty/disabled categorization emphasises pupil's weaknesses rather than strengths
- Often fail miserably at school
- Result can be low self-esteem, low achievement, disruptive behaviour
- Creative talents may be displayed at home
- Both high ability and learning difficulties unrecognized
- The child's abilities mask their learning problems and their learning problems mask their abilities
- The child invests lots of intellectual and emotional energy, to achieve 'average' results
- Their intellectual ability works overtime to help compensate for weaknesses caused by an undiagnosed learning disability
- Their true abilities only surface when a creative and perceptive teacher gives them a task which unlocks their area of talent
- This is the group which is most at risk of under-achievement
- Many people only discover the real cause of their difficulties after they have left school

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Identification of gifted and talented children with learning difficulties is hampered by:

- Stereotyped views about what gifted children are like – ('happy little genius' model)
- Lack of information for teachers
- Single assessment measures (which identify either high ability or learning difficulties, but not both)

