

GORDANA STANKOVSKA & MYQEREME RUSI**COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY****Abstract**

Intellectually gifted students are defined as those who demonstrate outstanding ability to grapple with competition or superior academic potential. But intellectually gifted individual with specific learning disabilities are the most misunderstood and neglected segment of the student population at the community.

Students who are gifted and have learning disabilities are those who possess an outstanding gift or talent and capable of high performance, but who also have a learning disability that makes some aspects of academic achievement difficult. There are variable degrees of severity of learning and learning disabilities can exist in students of all ability levels. So learning disabilities may differentially affect all areas of knowledge acquisition.

These students are more vulnerable to social and emotional problems. Learning disability may cause frustration, anxiety, depression, peer relations, introversion. Gifted students with disabilities tend to evaluate themselves more on what they are unable to do than on their substantial abilities.

So in this review we examine some of the theoretical arguments, regulations and educational practices that affect students with learning disabilities who are gifted.

Key words: gifted student, learning disability, emotions, cognitive characteristic

Introduction

Traditionally, education of the gifted students has focused on their cognitive abilities and ignored their social and emotional needs. Also it is an area that is receiving increasing attention, with more research being undertaken in this field.

Intellectually gifted students are defined as those who demonstrate outstanding ability to grapple with competition or superior academic potential. They exhibit high capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity or excel in specific academic fields. Outstanding talents are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economics starts and in all areas of human life. However intellectually gifted individual with specific learning disabilities are the most misunderstood and neglected segment of the student population at the community.

It is clear that we are dealing with a very heterogeneous group of students who represents all types of intellectual giftedness and academic talents, in combination with various forms of learning disabilities.

The literature is replete with references to individuals with extremely high abilities and talents who also have a specific learning disability (Sattler, 2002; Bow & Owen, 2004). Some psychologists have even suggested that, at least for some individuals, the learning disability may be fundamentally associated with giftedness. To most of them who work with individuals with disabilities, being gifted and also

having learning disabilities does not to be unfamiliar or especially problematic condition (Gunderson, Mahesh & Rees, 1987).

Definition of learning disability

The United States Office of education (USOE, 1977) defined a specific learning disability as

”... a disorder in one or more of the basis psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia...”

Children with learning disability cannot try harder, pay closer attention or ignore their motivation for success; they need help to learn how to do those things. A learning disability is not a problem with intelligence, because they have high intellectual capability. An individual with a learning disability exhibits a significant discrepancy between his or her level of performance in a particular academic area and his or her general intellectual ability. Learning disabilities may differentially affect all areas of knowledge acquisition.

Learning disabilities are caused by a difference in the brain that affects how information is received, processed or communicated. Persons with learning disabilities have trouble processing sensory information, because they see, hear and understand things differently.

Definition of gifted/learning disability

Students who are gifted and have learning disabilities are those who have an outstanding gift or talent and are capable of high performance, but who also have a learning disability that makes some aspect of academic achievement difficult. Their academic performance is substantially below what would be accepted based in their general intellectual ability.

The literature in this area suggests that there are different types of gifted/learning disabled students (Bow, Owen & Dixon, 1991). The first group includes students who have been identified as gifted, have some learning problems and exhibit above average achievement in elementary school. The second group includes students who have severe learning disabilities, but they may also have superior attitude in one or more academic or intellectual areas. The third type of gifted/learning disabled student remains unidentified as either learning disabled or gifted. These students have disabilities that conceal their gifts and gifts that camouflage their disabilities. The psychological theory says that the gift masks disability and disability mask gift (Winner, 2000). The discrepancy between their intellectual capacity and academic performance is not noted. Motivation level, interest, self-efficacy, skills and other cognitive factors contribute to their academic success.

Now it is very clear that trying to find one defining pattern or set of scores to identify all gifted students with learning disabilities is most difficult. On the other

hand, there are some defining markers that should be considered in identifying these students:

- Poor memory for isolated facts, but excellent comprehension;
- Difficulty reading, writing or spelling, but excellent language skills;
- Skill in manipulating people and situations, but poor interpersonal skills;
- Poor performance on simple facts such as addition and subtraction, but capable of complex, conceptual manipulations such as algebraic concepts;
- Ability to concentrate for unusually long periods of time when the topic is of interest, but inability to control his or her action and attention when the topic is not of interest;
- Lacking self-regulation and goal-setting strategies.

Psychological characteristics of gifted/learning disabled students

Students who are both gifted and have learning disabilities exhibit remarkable talents in some areas and disability weaknesses than others. These students display high verbal expressive ability and goal conceptual understanding concurrent with significant academic underachievement and frustration or a lack of motivation. Also they may be inattentive in class, struggle with basic spelling or reading skills, have poor peer relationships and low self-esteem. At the same time they may have excellent vocabularies, exceptional analytic and comprehension skills, show extraordinary interest or talent in particular area.

These students are more sensitive and appear to be acutely aware of their difficulties with learning. They tend to generalize their feelings of academic failure to an overall sense of inadequacy. They are often easily frustrated and may use their creative abilities to avoid tasks. Academic challenges may lead to low self-esteem, withdrawal and behavior problems.

The literature suggests that to be socially accepted, students should be cooperative, share, offer pleasant greetings, have positive interactions with peers, ask for and give information, make conversation. Students with learning disabilities have difficulties in their social and emotional life (Siegel, 2000).

Although not all students with learning disabilities have social-emotional problems, they do run a greater risk than their nondisabled peers of having these types of problems. In the early years they are often rejected by their peers and have poor self-concepts. As adults, the scars from years of rejection can be painful and not easily forgotten. A possible reason for these social-emotional problems is that gifted students with learning disabilities have deficits in their social cognitions, so they are more sensitive to interpersonal conflicts, experience greater degrees of alienation and stress (Cross, Coleman & Stewart, 1995). Further research suggests that social interaction problems to gifted students with learning disabilities seem to be more evident in those who have problems in math, visual-spatial tasks, tactual tasks, self-regulation and organization.

Psychologists found that the frustrating nature of learning disability can lead to feeling anxiety, anger, low self-esteem and depression in gifted students. Depression and academic underachievement may be increased.

It is important to note that this social and emotional problem is strongly related to the gifted student's personal characteristics. For example, Dauber (1990) found

that extremely gifted students viewed themselves as more introverted, inhibited and with a negative self-image. He also reported that his peers saw them as much less popular, less socially active and less active in leading the crowd. So all this psychological characteristics are powerful arguments for their early identification and intervention.

On the other hand some empirical studies suggest that gifted students with some kind of learning disabilities are better adjusted than their non-gifted disabled peers. Supporters of this view believe that giftedness protects them from maladjustment: that the gifted are capable of greater understanding of self and others due to their cognitive capacities and therefore cope better with stress, conflicts and developmental capabilities (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

How should gifted students with learning disability be identified?

Early identification of students who are gifted with learning disability is crucial (Dole, 2000). Many students who are gifted/learning disabled are not identified until high school and college when academic work increases in difficulty. In early years, these students may appear to be normally, but are usually functioning well below their potential.

The identification of a learning disability requires documenting the difference between ability and achievement. Student with superior cognitive abilities who exhibit learning disability may be performing only slightly below grade level in their area of disability. Because of their qualitative differences gifted student with learning disability may require different assessment battery to identify and plan interventions from other student with learning disability. This assessment should consist of behavioral observations, an individual intelligence test and measures of cognitive processing, psychological scale for depression, anxiety and social isolation. We need to recognize that a learning disability can depressed the test performance of students who are academically talented.

Early identification and appropriate intervention are recommended to help prevent the development of the accompanying social and emotional problems that often arise when the needs of a gifted student with learning disabilities are overlooked (Kay, 2000). In addition, the identification of talents and learning problems should continue as an ongoing process throughout the life.

Hence, many gifted students with learning disabilities would be best served by separate programs developed especially for them. Also these students who present cognitive, social and emotional problems should receive careful attention and appropriate interventions which specifically address their relevant academic, emotional and social needs.

Conclusion

The lack of a clear description of gifted students with learning disabilities has resulted in only few of these students being identified. Evidence suggests that these students are a separate subgroup, represent different types of gifts/talents and disabilities, and more vulnerable to social and emotional problems. Ability grouping and acceleration have led to positive effects on gifted student's self-esteem. Many researchers claims that there are a number of strategies that are beneficial in

programming for the cognitive, emotional and social needs of gifted students, such as providing affective and cognitive components in programs, goal setting and problems solving. Also, many gifted students with learning disabilities may be best served by receiving extra, different support within the regular education setting.

Gifted students with learning disabilities may exhibit unique social and emotional needs that require differentiated counseling and support services.

References

- Bow, S. M., Owen, S. V. & Dixon, J. (1991): *To be gifted and learning disabled*. Mansfield, CT: Creative learning Press.
- Bow, S. M. & Owen, S. V. (2004): *To be gifted and learning disabled*. Mansfield, CT: Creative learning Press.
- Brody, L. E. & Mills, C. J. (1997): Gifted children with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 30, 282-296.
- Cross, T. L., Coleman, L. J. & Stewart, R. A. (1995): Psychosocial diversity around gifted adolescents: An exploratory study of two groups. *Exceptional Children*, 17(3), 181-185.
- Dauber, S. L. (1990): Aspects of personality and peer relations of extremely talented adolescents. *Professional School Journal*, 34(8), 10-14.
- Dole, S. (2000): The implications and resilience literature for gifted students and learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disability*, 23(4), 91-95.
- Gunderson, C. W., Mahesh, C. & Rees, J. W. (1987): The gifted learning disabled students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 31, 158-167.
- Kay, K. (2000): *Uniquely gifted: Identifying and meeting the needs of gifted students*. Mansfield, CT: Creative learning Press.
- Margolis, H. & McCabe, P. P. (2006): Improving self-efficacy and motivation: What to do, what to say. *Intervention in school and Clinic*, 41(4), 218-227.
- Sattler, J. M. (2002): *Assessment of children*. San Diego: Author.
- Siegel, D. (2000): Parenting achievement oriented children. *Parenting for High Educational*, 29(30), 6-17.
- United States Office of Education (1977): Assistance to states for education for handicapped children: Procedures for evaluating specific learning disabilities. *Federal Register*, 42, 2082-2085.
- Winner, E. (2000): Giftedness: Current theory and research. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 153-156.

Prof. Dr. Gordana Stankovska
State University of Tetovo
Faculty of Philosophy
Institute of Psychology
Tetovo
Republic of Macedonia
g.stankovska@yahoo.com

Prof. Dr. Myqereme Rusi
State University of Tetovo
Faculty of Philosophy
Institute of Psychology
Tetovo
Republic of Macedonia
m.rusi@yahoo.com