

4. Two Discussions About Difficulties Experienced by People Who are Gifted/LD



Anxiety and Gifted/LD (Bees, 2003)

Anxiety is the result of being both gifted and having learning difficulties. Mental health professionals have seen many of the GOLD students. Often they stop attending school for a period of time in elementary school:

- Sometimes they are diagnosed as ADD
- Sometimes as obsessive-compulsive
- Sometimes with Asperger's Syndrome
- But always anxiety is their unwelcome companion.



Anxiety...

freezes the expression
of knowledge.

For most students who are gifted and who have learning difficulties a type of strangulation occurs. The gifted areas (which often involve absorbing knowledge through reading, listening, or the media) provide easy access to stimulation, energy, and new ideas. The learning difficulties (which often involve written output and organizational problems) block access to expressing this information, obtaining good grades, and the LD provides frustration and hopelessness. The two together—the gifts with the learning difficulties—could be described as a double handicap.

"Lazy" and Gifted/LD (Corinne Bees—unpublished)

These comments were written about eight years ago as a reaction after a meeting with a mental health counsellor who commented: "There is nothing wrong with this boy—he is just lazy." Unfortunately, this labelling is still prevalent.

"Lazy" is a superficial, trite, judgmental expression without any thought to what might be the cause of the observed behaviour. Corinne Bees prefers "unmotivated" and then she asks herself the question, "Why is this student unmotivated?" In tandem with this question comes another: "What will motivate this student?"



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For our population, many reasons contribute to their lack of motivation:

- Combination of their brightness and their learning problems.** The brightness, in most cases, is their ability to quickly take in information, evaluate, synthesize and juggle it creatively, which is energizing and easy for them.

Processing problems with written output, reading or attention problems drain their energy because of the extreme effort required from them for these tasks.



Somehow, their past school experiences appear to only exacerbate this problem because their difficulties have been misunderstood and they want to give up before they start.

Corinne Bees met a 16-year old student at a conference regarding Gifted/LD, who was already attending Capilano College in North Vancouver. He was embarrassed to tell her that he was only taking three courses because that was all the energy he had. He guiltily confessed that he went home every afternoon and watched TV because he was so exhausted by his morning courses and the output work he would have to do in the evening. It is unfortunate that he felt guilty about his need for rest!

- Non-sequential learning style.** Many bright students are not sequential learners so the change from subject to subject as occurs in our high schools is almost intolerable.

As well, they are intensely motivated to focus on one area of interest so when the bell rings, they may find it difficult to shift gears and move from subject to subject.

3. **Boredom.** With vocabularies at the 99th percentile, and general knowledge high, students who are Gifted/LD have to sit through numerous school hours hearing information they already know. They soon learn to be unmotivated and develop an attitude that doesn't value what they can get from school. Because of this negative association with school, they might be turned off even the challenging activities.



4. **Attention problems.** These difficulties interfere with the ability to achieve. For example, in math (which is based on cumulative knowledge), not only do students have trouble keeping up with the class, but if this is compounded with written output problems, the experience is very frustrating.
5. **Negative coping strategies.** The school experience leads many students who are Gifted/LD to develop many negative coping strategies: balking at completing assignments (which can seem to them like simple regurgitation - and then add in the written output problem); lying about homework and assignments which almost becomes compulsive; resisting going to school which, of course, escalates all problems; and sleeping too much.
6. **Criticism.** Negative comments or putdowns have too often been part of this student's school life.

References:

Corinne Bees, recently retired, was a special education teacher who designed and taught a program called the "GOLD" Program. The program, at Prince of Wales Secondary School in Vancouver, B.C., is for students who are Gifted with Learning Difficulties (Gifted/LD).

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