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## Gifted but Learning Disabled: A Puzzling Paradox

By: Susan Baum (1997)

### In this article:

- **Introduction**
- **Who are the learning disabled/gifted?**
  - **Identified gifted students with subtle learning disabilities**
  - **Unidentified students**
  - **Identified learning disabled students who are also gifted**
- **Curricular needs**
- **Conclusion**
- **References, resources, and additional readings**

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### Introduction

For many people, however, the terms learning disabilities and giftedness are at opposite ends of a learning continuum. In some states, because of funding regulations, a student may be identified and assisted with either learning disabilities or giftedness, but not both.

Uneasiness in accepting this seeming contradiction in terms stems primarily from faulty and incomplete understandings. This is not surprising, because the "experts" in each of these disciplines have difficulty reaching agreement. Some still believe that giftedness is equated with outstanding achievement across all subject areas. Thus, a student who is an expert on bugs at age 8 may automatically be excluded from consideration for a program for gifted students because he cannot read, though he can name and classify a hundred species of insects. Many educators view below-grade-level achievement as a prerequisite to a diagnosis of a learning disability. Thus, an extremely bright student who is struggling to stay on grade level may slip through the cracks of available services because he or she is not failing.

**Back to top**

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### Who are the learning disabled/gifted?

Recent advances in both fields have alerted professionals to the possibility that both sets of behavior can exist simultaneously (Baum and Owen, 1988; Fox, Brody, and Tobin, 1983; Whitmore and Maker, 1985). Children who are both gifted and learning disabled exhibit remarkable talents or strengths in some areas and disabling weaknesses in others. They can be grouped into three categories:

1. identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities
2. unidentified students whose gifts and disabilities may be masked by average achievement

