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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the characteristics of children who are gifted and have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Seven principles to reach and teach gifted learners with ADHD are recommended: (1) remembering that these learners have needs just like other children in their age groups; (2) having realistic expectations in helping these learners develop and utilize their strengths; (3) providing assignments that are stimulating and at their level of achievement and utilizing interactive teaching strategies, such as cooperative learning and reciprocal teaching; (4) providing structure so that these children can recognize and respect limits; (5) recognizing perfectionism and using this attribute to build self-esteem; (6) teaching problem-solving techniques; and (7) using the "Five M's Approach": mediation, management, modification, modeling, and mothering (fathering). (CR)

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**Mistaken Identity: Gifted and ADHD**

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**Abstract**

A review of the literature indicates that there are numerous similarities between the behavioral manifestations of Giftedness and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Educators and parents are cautioned to consider the implications for mistaking one condition for the other. Additionally, this article presents seven principles that can reach and teach the Gifted ADHD Learner.

### **Who is the Gifted ADHD Learner?**

It is possible for children to be both gifted and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). According to Webb and Latimer (1993) recognizing the difference between behaviors associated with giftedness, but characteristic of ADHD is not simple. When the child is both gifted and ADHD, it can be difficult to determine which behaviors are due to giftedness and which are resultant of ADHD.

Diagnosing whether a child is a gifted ADHD learner requires a critical evaluation of behavior in various settings and situations. The activities of gifted learners tend to be episodic and directed to specific goals. Those of the ADHD learner are continual and random. It is critical to observe the settings in which children's behaviors are problematic. Gifted children do not exhibit problems in all situations whereas children with ADHD typically exhibit the problem behaviors in most settings on a consistent basis. (Webb and Latimer, 1993).

According to (Silverman, 1994), the gifted child with ADHD exhibits a discrepancy between intellectual ability, as well as, gaps in social and emotional behavior. The child may be well below chronological age in these areas. As a result, these children can perform well academically, but poor social and emotional behavior causes them to be rejected by their peers.

Other characteristics that the Gifted ADHD student exhibits typically include hyperactivity, off-task behaviors, disruptions and power struggles with authority figures. Additionally, the problems associated with picking up on social cues, difficulties with self-monitoring and self-regulation adds to the difficulties experienced by these children.

Lovecky (1994) and others found that gifted children with ADHD possess several unique characteristics that provide useful information to parents and educators trying to reach and

teach these learners. These characteristics include asynchrony, which refers to behavior that is inconsistent between academic achievement and social and emotional maturity. Often, the gifted ADHD student will perform at a high academic level but demonstrate immature social skills that are intolerable to other gifted peers. Secondly, Gifted ADHD children may exhibit an increase in emotional reactivity, along with sensitivity to the environment. The inability to self-monitor and self-regulate behavior results in a discrepancy between ability and achievement. According to Lovecky (1993) "these children may find they are out of sync with everyone."

### **Seven Principles to Reach and Teach Gifted ADHD Learners**

There is no single treatment or teaching strategy to manage classroom behavior or cure the disorder. A multi-dimensional intervention program is recommended.

#### **Children First**

Despite the labels of high level of gifted and/or talented behaviors coupled with impulsive, hyperactive behaviors, these learners still have needs just like other children in their age groups. Realistic expectations are necessary in helping these learners develop and utilize their strengths. Patience must be exercised when setting up behavioral and educational programs.

#### **Set Realistic Expectations**

Gifted children with ADHD need a high level of stimulation. Parents and educators must remember to encourage a "you can do it attitude" without placing unrealistic expectations upon the child because of the gifted characteristic. Improvement of interpersonal relationships with peers and others while maintaining behavioral expectations that match chronological age is a

reasonable expectation of these children.

### **Learning and Teaching**

Because the gifted child with ADHD can work quickly and produce high quality work it is essential that assignments be stimulating and at their level of achievement. When academic work and activities are too easy and repetitious, these learners quickly become "off-task" and create self-amusing situations.

Interactive teaching strategies are well suited to meeting the unique needs of the gifted ADHD learner. Strategies that include cooperative learning opportunities, reciprocal teaching, attention to learning styles and multisensory activities are just a few ways of helping these children learn.

### **Provide Structure**

Educators and parents need to provide structure so that these children can recognize and respect limits. They must be given the same opportunities to develop character, self-monitoring, and self-regulating behaviors. Treating them as "special" will not guide them towards becoming responsible contributing members of society. Furthermore, by providing a structured environment, anxiety and frustration experiences can be lessened.

### **Compensatory Techniques**

Recognize perfectionism and use this attribute to build self-esteem. The focus should be on the positive aspects of perfectionism. For example, gifted ADHD learners may not complete assignments because the final copy is not perfect. A simple solution is to teach writing skills,

word processing and computer skills that will compensate for poor handwriting and faster thought processes. It is crucial to encourage independence and pride in accomplishments.

### **Teach Problem-Solving**

Along with learning how to self-monitor and regulate behaviors these children need to be taught problem-solving techniques. Because they often lack social and emotional maturity, they also need to be taught how to generalize problem-solving techniques to different situations.

### **Five "M's" Approach**

The children's Resource Center information packet for parents (CRC, 1988) outlines one model of treatment that provides a total approach for managing the gifted ADHD child. The five "M's" represents:

- Medication
- Management
- Modification
- Modeling
- Mothering (Fathering)

This model helps children learn how to organize various parts of their lives. The model has practicable applications for classroom and home use with the gifted ADHD learner.

**Conclusion**

Essential to working with the gifted ADHD learner is the recognition that they perform academically at a high level, but because of the ADHD behaviors, are out of sync with everyone. Educational planning must involve the home and focus on the total child rather than the label Gifted ADHD.

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