

# Global Learning Deficit (Slow Learner)

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You have a student who does not grasp the content you are teaching. They are failing everything. You refer the student for special education services. After a full individual evaluation, it is determined that the student does not meet eligibility for special education services. Your repose is, "How is that possible? They have to have a learning disability? Or "They have to be SpEd." (*Remember, there is no such thing as a SpEd student. All students are general education students; some just receive special education services. Say it with me. "Special education is a service."*)

Now on to teling you how that is possible: The student has what is called a **global learning deficit**, not a learning disability. Now you are wondering, "What is that? What is the Difference?" First, let's debunk the myth that special education services are for **ALL** students that are failing or struggling with learning or that when one struggles, it must be due to a disability. The truth is we all have strengths and weaknesses. To qualify for special education services as a student with a **specific learning disability**, one must present with average or close to average intelligence Students with a global learning deficit **do not** present with average or close to average IQ, **and** they do not have an intellectual disability; they merely learn information at a slower pace than their peer

## What's the Difference -- Slow Learner or Learning Disabled?

A **slow learner** is a child of below-average intelligence whose thinking skills have developed significantly more slowly than the norm for their age. This child will go through the same primary developmental stages as other children but will do so at a substantially slower rate. However, this development, while being slower, is nevertheless relatively even.

An individual with a **specific learning disability** is one of average or above-average intelligence who has specific difficulties which can make learning very difficult. There may be deficits in any of the basic central nervous system functions, which have to do with the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, i.e., attention, memory, language, auditory and visual perception, motor coordination and planning, spatial orientation, impulse control, and sequencing. In short, there is a discrepancy between the child's potential and actual achievement.

## What does it mean to be a struggling learner or slow learner?

A "slow learner" is **not a diagnostic category**; it is a term people use to describe a student who has the ability to learn necessary academic skills but at a rate and depth below average same-age peers. To grasp new concepts, a slow learner needs more time, more repetition, and often more resources from teachers to be successful. Reasoning skills are typically delayed, which makes new concepts difficult to learn. A slow learner has traditionally been identified as anyone with a Full-Scale IQ, one standard deviation below the mean, but not as low as two standard deviations below the mean. If a cognitive assessment (IQ test) has a mean (average) of 100, we expect most students will fall within one standard deviation of 100. That means that most students have an IQ of 85 to 115. Those who fall two standard deviations below the mean are often identified as having an Intellectual Disability (IQ below 70). A slow learner does not meet the criteria for an Intellectual Disability (formally called

mental retardation). However, they learn slower than average students and will need additional help to succeed. *Source: FAQ Parents ask about Struggling (Slow) Learners By Erin N. King, Ed.S., Nationally Certified School Psychologist*

**What are some of the educational challenges for struggling or slow learners?**

Typically, a slow learner has difficulty with higher-order thinking or reasoning skills. This suggests that it will be more challenging to learn new concepts. New skills need to be based upon already mastered concepts; this can be difficult when the majority of the class has already mastered a concept and is moving on, while the slow learner needs more time. This can lead to gaps in knowledge and basic skills. The more gaps in a content area, the more challenging it is for anyone to learn new concepts. It's also important to recognize that these students are typically keenly aware they are struggling, and self-confidence can be an issue. They are prone to anxiety and low self-image and eventually may be quick to give up. They often feel "stupid" and start hating school. They spend all day doing something that is difficult for them, which can be very draining. Finding other activities that the student can be successful at is significant. There should be an emphasis on their strengths as well. *Source: School Psychologist Files.*

**If these students struggle so much, why are they not eligible for special education service?**

Special Education services are provided for students who have a disability. Slow learners typically do not have a disability, even though they need extra support. Cognitive abilities are too high for these learners to be considered for an Intellectual Disability. However, their abilities are usually too low to be considered a [Learning Disability](#). Consider that a learning disability consists of discrepancies between average abilities and below-average academics coupled with a processing deficit. Schools often look for a discrepancy between a student's ability and where they are performing. Slow learners tend to perform at their ability level, which is below average.

To the disappointment of many, slow learners do not receive special education services. Although a student does not receive special education services, a student will require additional help, support, and accommodations through general education. *Source: School Psychologist Files* There is no reason that general education cannot provide support. Students need to be included in programs that schools already provide.

**Lastly, identifying a child as being disabled when no disability exists is a violation under Section 504.** Food for thought: If you have irritable bowel syndrome, would you want a doctor to treat your condition as they would one with colon cancer? The same symptoms do not equate to the same treatment plan.



Almost done! One more page!

Facts	How to support students that acquire information slowly?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students with learning disabilities have disorders in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.</li><li>• A student with LD (learning disability) has deficits in one or two areas while performing at or above the average in other areas. The child's potential or overall intelligence is greater than their poor achievement would predict; this is called the ability-achievement discrepancy. Some children even fall under both the gifted and LD categories and are thus referred to as <i>twice-exceptional</i>. Yes, a student can be LD and gifted.</li><li>• Children in need of remedial instruction, such as children who are behind a grade level or who are "slow learners" but who have not been diagnosed as having a specific learning disability or other disability, are NOT considered persons with disabilities." - U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report, Sept. 1997</li><li>• Identification of a child as being disabled when no disability exists is a violation under Section 504.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repetition, repetition, repetition. You might feel like you are saying the same thing over and over, but it helps make a concept more concrete.</li><li>• Connect content to previous knowledge.</li><li>• Connect content to real life experience.</li><li>• Provide activities in which the child can experience success.</li><li>• Tutoring- This helps fill in gaps in basic skills and it helps a student stay caught up.</li><li>• Teach the most important concepts and leave out some of the less important details.</li><li>• Teach study skills to help a student become more efficient in studying.</li><li>• Be patient.</li><li>• Wait-Time to respond and Extended time to complete assignments.</li><li>• Provide leadership roles.</li><li>• Celebrate success and improvement, no matter how small.</li></ul>