

These therapeutic approaches are often helpful with others, but may backfire with the gifted. Misdiagnosis, laziness and therapists' enthusiasm to peruse their favoured therapy style may be harmful. Some clients are most reluctant to return to treatment, having experienced repeated failure leading to self-blame.

I find CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) most effective, offering simple, easy, direct and speedy solutions suitable for gifted people. A clear diagnosis, correct labelling, achievable goals and practical tools bring swift results. Once giftedness and bullying are identified and rationalised, clients quickly create a healthy concept of their past and themselves, from which difficulties are understood and changes made.

Clients very quickly grasp concepts which non-gifted struggle with and may apply CBT techniques so quickly and

effectively that I often have to catch up. I also notice that writing exercises, a basic component of CBT, are often unnecessary. Psychological theories and CBT techniques are often applied without arduous therapeutic work others must work through.

Once clients understand the nature of giftedness and its peculiar challenges and difficulties, clarity is gained, and a great weight lifted from them. That weight being the belief there is something wrong with them. Normalisation of problems, (viewing them as healthy and normal for gifted people), and not evidence of their weirdness, can be the most therapeutic element of treatment.

Once bullying and its relation to their past problems and present self-regard is understood, it is relatively simple to create a more healthy and constructive

self-image. Confidence increases, anxiety is reduced, leading to self-acceptance and compassion replacing unhealthy self-criticism. With this change comes a reduction in anxiety, increase in social activity and problems such as perfectionism and procrastination are brought under control.

Gifted people have the capacity for rapid and permanent change, once given correct information and simple techniques to achieve this.

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## Grade Skipping in Hamburg

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Individual grade skipping is one of the most effective options to support the gifted. Scientific proof for it have been convincing for years (Colangelo et al. 2004, Heinbokel 2016, BMBF 2017).

Despite that, this option is rarely used in the states of Germany. This is also a fact in the state of Hamburg. For years just about 100 pupils skipped a grade, which is about 0,05 per cent of all pupils. That means that according to statistics it is not even used for all of the most intelligent pupils.

Here is an interesting report by a primary school teacher:

*After reading the literature on this subject intensively we suddenly had more and more cases of grade skipping at our school. What had happened? In the regular talks on the development of the children those with special gifts were taken more into focus and*

*grade skipping was discussed by the heads of the school with the form teachers. The parents were given the brochure published by the Landesinstitut<sup>1</sup> and they were offered counseling by the school. In those talks we listened to the parents' and the teachers' fears and worries. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages and offered that the children spend time in the higher grade. Suddenly grade skipping was not frightening anymore and was accepted as a positive option to promote the gifted.*

In order to support the process of skipping and to help the teachers in Hamburg as well as the parents to take a decision, Hamburg has got a system of support that includes several elements.

First of all there is individual support of grade skipping. Pupils who skipped a grade can apply for support, in order to compensate for partial problems. It is important that this option is seen as educationally beneficial and appropriate by the school and the parents. This partial support is meant to help the decision and can be made use of in one subject (if



there are gaps in knowledge because of acceleration) or support to develop self-organization and learning skills.

As a rule there are 40 periods a year (fee for an educational expert or a teacher), which means about one period a week. It is possible to extend this time, but is rarely applied for. Experience shows that about 20 per cent of the children apply for this type of support.

It is interesting to see how this kind of support developed.

In 2004 the education authority worked out the number of periods that would be „saved“ per year through pupils who skipped a grade (these move faster through the school system and therefore „cause“ less costs). This sum was the basis for different flexible options for „grade skippers“ and „potential grade skippers“ in Hamburg.

Out of this money not only the individual support of grade skippers is funded, but also other offers for the group of very bright and gifted children and youth. Of course there are options of enrichment as well. Different types of school, e.g. primary and secondary schools, cooperate. There are many different courses offered by experts, e.g. journalists, media experts, architects. In these courses they get additional challenges, can follow their interests and meet others who are just as bright and interested.

On this basis between 500 and 700 pupils are supported in Hamburg every year. This can be an example that can be transferred to other German states or education authorities and can assure a systematic support of bright and gifted pupils.

Another element of the support system of grade skipping in Hamburg is the information and counselling service of the Beratungsstelle besondere Begabung – BbB (information Centre for Special Gifts). This centre has worked in Hamburg since 2006 and counsels parents and schools on the subject of gifted education.

One of the central subjects of counseling are questions concerning grade skipping. The multi professional team of the BbB offers preliminary discussions (that includes a psychological assessment), supervision during the trial period and a ‚round table‘ when all those involved, the parents and the school, come to a decision. After grade skipping counseling can continue, follow-up meetings or individual support (see above) can be arranged.

To prepare and accompany the individual counseling process there is the BbB brochure ‚Skipping a grade‘<sup>1</sup>. This brochure is aimed at answering practical questions and can be used free of charge as a

guideline for counseling by experts at schools and parents in Hamburg.

In 2009 Hamburg introduced inclusion<sup>2</sup> at all the state schools. This should certainly be in the interest of most of the very bright and gifted pupils. Despite that: in all the in-service courses at the Landesinstitut on the subject of the promotion of the gifted, grade skipping as part of all the options for bright pupils is regularly presented and discussed.

The aim is to contemplate the question when grade skipping, that means acceleration through the school system, makes sense for the development of a child or a youngster.

In Hamburg grade skipping remains an individual decision, related to the development and the individual potential of a child or a youngster! It does not happen automatically and is not at all mandatory for all the very bright, gifted and high achieving pupils. However, when high potential, combined with a permanent lack of challenge, results in stress for the child, if there are few other problems and there are no other risk factors such as a serious learning disability or emotional problems, this option must not be overlooked. It can be the absolutely right and necessary option for the individual development of some children, who suffer from a permanent lack of challenge.

A careful consideration of the chances and the risks as well as a prognosis must always be the basis of the decision.

In our experience reservations towards grade skipping are often caused by

problems in relationships (e.g. difficulties in communicating between parents and a teacher) or they happen because of the situation in a particular school (for example the receiving class is already full).

Summing up it can be said that there are four elements in supporting those who want to skip:

1. A handbook available to everybody
2. The offer of individual counselling for parents and schools
3. Optional individual support after skipping
4. The inclusion of the subject in the basic teacher training on the promotion of the bright and the gifted.

These provisions assure that this option – if there is a good reason to use it – is not made too difficult for any pupil, or it is advised against it.

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<sup>1</sup> Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung (Institute for Teacher Training and the Development of Schools <https://li.hamburg.de>)

Brochure: <https://li.hamburg.de/contentblob/5206922/e1647a0541a0932ca64e10467096e299/data/download-pdf-ueberspringen-einer-klassenstufe.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Parents of all students, no matter what their handicaps or special abilities are, can choose the regular school. The German schools are divided up into elementary schools (grades 1 to 4) and different branches of secondary schools (grades 5 to 9/10 or 12/13). Depending on the federal state, the secondary schools can be organized differently. In Hamburg there are two different types. The Gymnasium (grades 5 bis 12) and the Stadtteilschulen (grades 5-10 or 13).