

Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Children



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Do gifted children really have unusual social and emotional needs?

The Suggestion that High Ability Is Associated with Emotional or Social Difficulties Would Seem Counter-intuitive.

A generally accepted facet of the construct of "intelligence" is that intelligence implies problem-solving abilities in various areas, and these problem-solving abilities most often include

- Forethought
- Planning,
- Reasoning ability,
- Capacity to see cause-effect relations,
- Attention to details,
- Memory for relevant data
- A wide array of knowledge upon which the individual might draw

Historically, controversy has existed about whether intellectually gifted children and adults are prone to social and emotional problems.

- ▶ "Early ripe; early rot" and the classic Terman longitudinal studies.
- ▶ Hollingworth agreed, but noted that children of unusually high intelligence seemed more prone to certain types of problems
- ▶ "Optimum intelligence" range of about 120-145
- ▶ Most research concerning social and emotional needs of gifted children is based on gifted children who were identified as gifted in traditional ways and thus were children who showed unusual aptitude and performance in academic areas – i.e., children who were already functioning pretty well in school.

Two Fundamental Views on the Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Children

Literature concerning social-emotional needs of gifted children and adults can be grouped into two basic categories:

- ▶ One group of authors views gifted children as generally being able to fare quite well on their own, and gifted children with problems needing special interventions are seen as a relative minority.
- ▶ The other group of authors views gifted and talented persons as prone to problems and in need of special interventions to prevent or overcome their unique difficulties.

Endogenous versus Exogenous Sources of Problems Need to Be Considered

- ▶ Endogenous problems arise primarily from within the individual essentially regardless of environment; that is, endogenous problems stem from the very characteristics of the gifted child or adult
- ▶ Exogenous problems arise, or are caused, primarily because of the interaction of the child or adult with the environmental setting (e.g., family or the cultural milieu).
- ▶ Most social and emotional problems are exogenous—a lack of fit of the child with the environment.
- ▶ But the exogenous situations and problems interact with the child's innate characteristics.
- ▶ Some problems arise from the characteristics of gifted (endogenous), but most problems stem from the definition of gifted and the situations they find themselves in (exogenous).

Are Gifted Children the Ones Who Achieve in School?

Some are, but others do not do well in school, but yet they are still gifted.

Four Faces of Gifted Children

(Drews, 1963. *The Four Faces of Able Adolescents*)

▶ High Achievers



▶ Social Leaders



▶ Creative Intellectuals



▶ Nonconformist Rebels



Frequent Behaviors of Gifted Children

- ▶ Unusually large vocabularies
- ▶ Complex sentence structures
- ▶ Greater comprehension of language nuances
- ▶ Longer attention span, persistence
- ▶ Intensity of feelings and actions
- ▶ Wide range of interests
- ▶ Strong curiosity; limitless questions
- ▶ Like to experiment; puts ideas or things together in unusual ways

Frequent Behaviors of Gifted Children (continued)

- ▶ Learn basic skills quickly and with less practice than peers
- ▶ Largely self-taught reading and writing skills as pre-schoolers
- ▶ Unusually good memory; retain information
- ▶ Unusual sense of humor; may use puns
- ▶ Like to organize people and things, and typically devise complex games
- ▶ Imaginary playmates (as preschoolers)

Four Endogenous Factors Particularly Influence the Expression of Giftedness, as Well As Educational, Social, and Emotional Functioning

1. Level of Giftedness
2. Asynchronous Development
3. Thinking Styles
4. Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities

- ▶ The higher the child's overall ability level, the more these factors influence the behaviors.

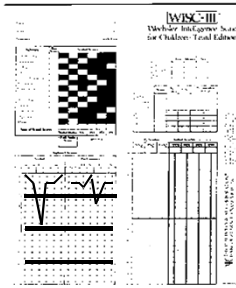
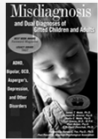
Level of Giftedness

Ruf (2003)

Levels of Giftedness	Approximate Score Range	Descriptive Designation
Level One	117 - 129	Moderately Gifted 120-124/Gifted 125-129
Level Two	125 - 135	Highly Gifted
Level Three	130 - 140	Exceptionally Gifted
Level Four	135 - 141	Exceptionally to Profoundly Gifted
Level Five	141+	Exceptionally to Profoundly Gifted



Asynchronous Development



Thinking Styles

Auditory-Sequential

- ▶ Prefers verbal explanations; uses language to remember
- ▶ Processes information sequentially; deals with one task at a time
- ▶ Produces ideas logically; prefers analyzing activities
- ▶ Prefers concrete thinking tasks; likes structured experiences
- ▶ Prefers proper working materials and proper settings for working
- ▶ Prefers to learn facts and details
- ▶ Approaches problems seriously

Visual-Spatial

- ▶ Prefers visual explanations; uses images to remember
- ▶ Processes information holistically; deals with several tasks at a time
- ▶ Produces ideas intuitively; prefers synthesizing activities
- ▶ Prefers abstract thinking tasks; likes open, fluid experiences
- ▶ Improvises with materials available; creates own structure
- ▶ Prefers to gain general overview
- ▶ Approaches problems playfully

Dabrowski Overexcitabilities



- ▶ **Intellectual** (Avid Reading, Curiosity, Asking Probing Questions, Concentration, Problem Solving, Introspection, Theoretical Thinking)
- ▶ **Imaginational** (Fantasy Play, Animistic and Imaginative Thinking, Vivid Visual Recall, Daydreaming, Love of Drama, Use of Metaphor)
- ▶ **Emotional** (Unusual Sensitivity and Responses; Concern for Others, Timidity and Shyness, Fear and Anxiety, Difficulty Adjusting to New Environments, Intensity of Feeling)
- ▶ **Psychomotor** (Marked Enthusiasm, Rapid Speech, Compulsive Chattering; Surplus of Energy, Nervous Habits, Impulsive Actions)
- ▶ **Sensual** (Heightened Awareness of Senses; Sensory Pleasures, Appreciation of Sensory Aspects of Experiences, Avoidance of Overstimulation)

Characteristic Strengths Can Create Problems

- ▶ Acquires information quickly **vs.** impatient with slowness of others
- ▶ Inquisitive attitude **vs.** asks embarrassing questions; strong willed
- ▶ Seeks systems and strives for order **vs.** seen as bossy or domineering
- ▶ Creative and inventive **vs.** may disrupt plans of others
- ▶ Intense concentration **vs.** resists interruption; seen as stubborn
- ▶ High energy **vs.** frustrated with inactivity
- ▶ Diverse interests **vs.** seen as scattered
- ▶ Strong sense of humor **vs.** humor may disrupt classroom or work
- ▶ Keen observer **vs.** sees inconsistencies and may become disillusioned

Although High Ability Is a Benefit Overall, Some Problems Are More Frequent

- ▶ Boredom (a low-grade anger, with hurt underneath)
- ▶ Impatience
- ▶ Underachievement
- ▶ Peer issues
- ▶ Sibling rivalry
- ▶ Power struggles with parents and teachers
- ▶ Feelings of loneliness
- ▶ Idealism and cynicism; excessive self-criticism
- ▶ Stress and perfectionism; avoidance of risk-taking
- ▶ Others have unrealistic expectations about them; multipotentiality
- ▶ Their judgment lags behind their intellectual abilities
- ▶ Misdiagnosis and overlooked dual diagnoses
- ▶ Health and behavioral problems
 - ▶ Learning disabilities (asynchronous; "twice-exceptional") (Wormald, 2015)
 - ▶ Asthma (Winer, 1997)
 - ▶ Allergies (Winer, 1997)
 - ▶ Eating Disorders (Kerr & Kurpius, 2004)
 - ▶ Reactive Hypoglycemia (Webb, et al, 2004)
 - ▶ Alcohol consumption (Kanazawa & Hellberg, 2010) & illegal drug use (White & Batty, 2012)
- ▶ Existential depression

Two Questions to Consider

- How Do We Identify Gifted Children?
- Do We Focus Too Much on Intelligence and Achievement in Gifted Children?

There is no perfect system for identifying gifted children.



"Pity the test doesn't measure all her skills...."

Identification Usually Focuses on Intelligence, but Does Intelligence Predict Eminence or Stellar Achievement?

- ▶ Intelligence, in general, predicts academic achievement - but not life achievement.
- ▶ Life achievement is more a matter of "deliberate practice" that enhances myelin connections (Coyle, 2009) and amount of practice (10 years or 10,000 hours) to be an expert. (Ericsson, 1996)
- ▶ Genetics effects differ depending on environment. (Nisbett, 2009)
 - ▶ In poor families, the effect is about 10% genetic.
 - ▶ In more enriched settings, the effect is about 50% genetic.
- ▶ Although a certain amount of innate ability seems necessary, the biggest single factor appears to be motivation, which Winner (2009) called a "rage to master" or Dweck's "Mindset."
- ▶ In other words, the social and emotional aspects, combined with opportunity, result in brain changes and skill development.

This Leads Us to Consider an Important Question.

As teachers and parents, what are we preparing them for?

Are we:

- ❖ preparing gifted children for college and career
- ❖ preparing them for life?
- ❖ or all of these?

How much should our emphasis be on grades, education, and acquiring knowledge?

And how much should be on motivation, caring, values, and excitement about learning?

- ▶ What is it that we should be nurturing?
- ▶ Do we want our gifted children to just reflect *our* values and dreams?
- ▶ Academics and motivation?
- ▶ Life skills, values, flexibility, and balance?
- ▶ All of these?
- ▶ If so, how?
- ▶ What a tremendous responsibility!

**In A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens,
Lisa Rivero Writes:**

▶ "... should college prep really be a full-time vocation? Young people, especially gifted teenagers who feel pressured to fulfill their potential sooner rather than later, often say that they have little time for reflection, for imagination and personal discovery, for leisurely reading or sleeping in or even long family vacations...all of which cut into their college prep career."

(A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens, p. 72)

▶ And in her blog she writes, "What happens to high achievers when the vehicle for their success – school and its rules and structure – is no longer there?"

(www.blogger.com/profile/09864490380365807023)

Presidential Scholars Research

Kaufmann, F. (1992). *What Educators Can Learn from Gifted Adults*.
www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10023.aspx

- ▶ Ten+ year follow-up study of 322 Presidential Scholars (1964-1968)
- ▶ All were in top one-half of 1% of National Merit Scholars; 77% ranked first in high school class
- ▶ 62% held offices in student organizations; 51% had received one or more awards for leadership
- ▶ 97% were college graduates; 61% had graduate degrees; 89% had received one or more awards in college
- ▶ 55% changed majors; 33% changed majors two or more times
- ▶ 29% doubted they had made the correct career decision
- ▶ 23% had received special awards since graduating
- ▶ 67% reported no participation in organized activities ("lack of time; no interest")

**Presidential Scholars Research –
Typical Comments**

- ▶ "Achievement and recognition were everything when I was a Presidential Scholar. Now I'm more concerned with personal satisfaction. If something that pleases me earns me compliments or other recognition, I'm grateful, but I won't compromise values or give up personal time to do anything which has as its purpose to gain recognition by others."
- ▶ "Much of my difficulty in the job-career area comes from (1) school, school, school – when I was little, what I wanted to be when I grew up was to go to college and (2) my great diversity of interests. It's a hard thing for those of us who were crammed with so many expectations to even know where we stand after ten years. Now it's time to try new ways."
- ▶ "I have become very cynical about the meaning of life. I don't think it's possible to be happy without drugging oneself in one way or another. To live intensely in pleasure and pain seems the best possible goal."

Lives of Promise: What Becomes of High School Valedictorians?

- ▶ In her study of 81 valedictorians, Karen Arnold found that academic success does not necessarily translate into career success or personal fulfillment.
- ▶ "Valedictorians leave high school at the top. Most continue to stellar academic performance in college. Yet their career attainment varies considerably. And even though most are strong occupational achievers, the great majority...do not appear headed for the very top of adult achievement success," (*Lives of Promise*, p. 287)
- ▶ "The most outstanding career achievers...are those who have found deep intrinsic meaning in learning and work." (*Lives of Promise*, p. 288)

Arnold, K. (1995). *Lives of promise: What becomes of high school valedictorians?* New York: Wiley.

Comments of Valedictorians after Ten Years

- ▶ "Your whole life you've been told, you go to high school, you go to college. And then once you get out of college, you've not given as much direction anymore. You know, there's no purpose in life anymore. What should you do after you graduate from college? You accomplished everything that everyone told you you should." (*Lives of Promise*, p. 287)
- ▶ "Since high school, I had a general direction that I lived by, certain rules that all I had to do was do them: go to school, classes, do what they tell you to do. I did that well, I functioned well within that environment. But it didn't create much of an individuality or creativity within myself. I never really explored what I really wanted--what did I really want in life?" (*Lives of Promise*, p. 42)

Blog Comments: "What factors do gifted children need to become successful and happy as adults?"

Roya Klingner, Bavarian Gifted Child Society

- Money, motivation, mentor.
- Resilience, reflectiveness, tenacity.
- Vision, flexibility, emotional insight, and good management of same.
- Understanding.
- Self-awareness, understanding of giftedness, finding a like-minded/ supportive and gifted life partner, the confidence to be different (and be happy about being different), the ability to "opt out" from the majority, resilience, determination, soul-affirming work, peace and tranquility and nature
- Educational challenges, peer group, resilience, motivation, home support, opportunities to develop talent, recognition, acceptance.
- Being validated and valued for who they are and the skills/contributions they share.
- Someone who was significant in their lives -- a path changer or path enabler.

However, one of the bloggers (Dr. Albert Ziegler) pointed out that:

"The question is comparable to the question, 'What are the two most important spices to cook a wonderful dish?' There is no answer to the question....(It) depends on the dish you want to cook."

It depends upon how you define success, and it can be more than academic degrees.



Success Implies Values and Existential Issues

Some of these basic existential issues are:

- What is the meaning of life?
- What is success?
- What gives my life meaning?
- What is transient and unimportant vs. what is truly important?
- How can I best survive and thrive in this sometimes crazy world?

What Do Gifted Children Need?

In my opinion, there are clear needs in six areas to help gifted children obtain success, and all involve social or emotional aspects.

1. School educational climate
2. Home and cultural environment
3. Understanding myths about gifted children
4. Matching educational programs to the child
5. Twice Exceptional gifted (2e)
6. Educating health care and counseling professionals

Yes, Gifted Children Do Have Special Needs! Being Bright Is Not Enough

- ▶ They are exceptional, but asynchronous, with different levels in different areas.
- ▶ Their behaviors, which are often "quirky," require special understanding.
- ▶ They need appropriate differentiation (and often special) educational placements.
- ▶ Their social and emotional needs require understanding and special approaches in:
 - ▶ Understanding their intensity and sensitivity
 - ▶ Peer relation issues
 - ▶ Sibling issues
 - ▶ Motivation and Underachievement
 - ▶ Perfectionism
 - ▶ Communication issues
 - ▶ Discipline and self-discipline
 - ▶ Creativity and questioning of traditions
 - ▶ Idealism and depression
 - ▶ Career guidance
 - ▶ Feeling that they are connected with the world

Recommended Readings

- *Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children: A Parent's Complete Guide* (Gilman, 2008).
- *Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More Than 700 Famous Men and Women* (Goertzel, Goertzel, Goertzel, and Hansen, 2003).
- *How to Parent So Children Will Learn*. (Rimm, 2008).
- *Lives of promise: What becomes of high school valedictorians?* (Arnold, 1995).
- *Living with Intensity* (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).
- *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults* (Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005).
- *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* (Webb, Gore, Amend, DeVries, 2007).

Recommended Readings

- *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens: Living with Intense and Creative Adolescents.* (Rivero, 2010).
- *Re-Forming Gifted Education: How Parents and Teachers Can Match the Program to the Child* (Rogers, 2002).
- *Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood, and the Search for Meaning* (Kerr and Cohn, 2001).
- *Smart Girls in the 21st Century: Understanding Talented Girls and Women.* (Kerr & McKay 2014).
- *The Smart Teens' Guide to Living with Intensity: How to Get More Out of Life and Learning.* (Rivero, 2010).
- *What Educators Can Learn from Gifted Adults.* www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10023.aspx (Kaufmann, 1992).
- *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades (and What You Can Do about It.* (Rimm, 2008).
