Gifted Kids – Out of Sync?

Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted

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Do gifted students have social and emotional needs that are different from those of more typical students?

- Qualitatively different?
- Exclusive?
- Seen across gifted populations?
No clear answer, unless…

- You redefine the question as suggested by Thomas Buescher *(A Framework for understanding the social and emotional development of gifted and talented students. Roper review. 1985)*

And


What are the social and emotional issues of gifted children?
Cross says...

...the culture in which the child is immersed has an important influence on the experience of being gifted. The cultural values interact with the social goals of the student and the issues associated with growing up in America. Therefore, the social and emotional needs of any particular gifted child may be predictable, but cannot be decided a priori.
Can we agree...

1. Gifted students share many developmental characteristics and problems with all people.
   1. They are children first and have much in common with typical children.
   2. People develop over time – gifted and non-gifted.
   3. Giftedness manifests in many domains, so as a group gifted children are heterogeneous. Few statements are true for all gifted children.
   4. Gifted children have similar psychological needs as typical children – need for acceptance, competence, and control over environment.
   5. Much of a gifted child’s view of the world and his place in it is derived from early life experiences with family and family members but are influenced by peers as he grows older.
2. Life experiences of the gifted are different just because they are gifted.
   • Extraordinary capabilities may result in them “seeing” the world differently.
   • They are different but unlike other exceptionalities, this differentness can be hidden.

3. Influences outside the individual have an impact on gifted children.
   1. Value of their giftedness varies with cultures and circumstances.
   2. Americans have mixed view.

Issues result from coping with these "truths"
The student works at managing the information about his giftedness in situation specific decisions.
With a partner or in your head, discuss the strategy you see your child using most often.
Giftedness is **asynchronous development** in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. To have the mental maturity of a 14 year old and the physical maturity of an 8 year old poses a unique set of challenges analogous to those which face the child with a 14-year-old body and an 8-year-old mind.

Asynchrony intensifies as IQ increases, because of the greater discrepancy between the child’s mental and chronological ages. Asynchrony also increases with increased discrepancies between strengths and weaknesses. The construct of asynchronous development is particularly applicable to gifted children with learning disabilities.

Linda Kreger Silverman, PhD, director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development and its subsidiary, the Gifted Development Center, in Denver, Colorado.
What characteristics of the gifted can contribute to issues?

• Need for power or control. Many gifted children prefer leadership roles, opportunities for choice, independent work and self-management of time.
• Heightened awareness of moral issues. Many gifted students feel they must DO something to alleviate suffering, preserve the ecosystem, make peace lasting.
• Experience the world as a big picture – as system.
• Prefer their own company, quiet reticent personalities.
• Perceptiveness – understand several points of view, unwritten rules, grasp patterns of behavior.

Restrictive environments where even the most basic self-management of time is denied may result in struggles for control or depression.

The reality of the hugeness of the task can also cause depression. May become bitter or cynical.

Frustrated by the fragmented nature of subjects, classes.

Seen as non-participatory.

May be very sensitive toward other’s attitudes toward them.

Generalizations vs. stereotypes
Asynchrony, a relatively new way of looking at giftedness, but has deep historical roots. Leta Hollingworth, often called the mother of gifted education, viewed giftedness as a set of complex psychological issues arising out of the disparities between these children’s mental and chronological ages. Hollingworth established that the farther removed children are from the average in intelligence, the more pressing their adjustment problems become.

Casts the social and emotional needs of the gifted in terms of **risk** and **resilience**. She speaks of protective factors and vulnerabilities.
Risk Factors
- Asynchronous development resulting in a sense of dissonance
- High – sometimes unreachable – expectations for themselves
- Excessive parent intrusion resulting in a lack of self-sufficiency
- Disparity between instructional environment and student needs resulting in disengagement
- Trouble finding a peer group
- Gender – females may mask giftedness to gain social acceptance.

Protective Factors
- Verbal ability
- Intelligence
- Both of these result in the ability to engage in reflective thinking and create a sense of self-efficacy
- High self-concept
- Academic achievement results in placement in advantageous instructional environment.
- More likely to deal with a problem by changing their behavior or the environment. (alternate style of dealing with problems is to change your interpretation of the problem)
Specific issues of asynchronous development associated with the gifted

- Affect regulation
- Over-excitability
- Perfectionism
- Multi-potentiality
- Underachievement
Affect regulation - managing your emotions in a healthy way

- Gifted students are often, although not always, more mature than their chronologic age, but less mature than their mental or intellectual age.
Five developmental levels of self-actualization from egocentric to altruistic.

Inner conflict achieved but a disconnect from what is and what ought to be. Those with the greatest sense of disconnect also possess the greatest potential for development.

Over-excitabilities – enhanced modes of being in the world. Response to stimuli that is beyond normal and often of a different quality:

- **Psychomotor** – love of movement, rapid speech, relentless, drive
- **Sensual** – seeking sensual outlets for tensions, heightened pleasure for sensual enjoyment
- **Intellectual** – persistence in asking probing questions, preoccupation with theoretical problems, sharp sense of observation, symbolic thinking and striving for synthesis.
- **Imaginational** – rich imagery, inventiveness. Intense living in the world of fantasy.
- **Emotional** – intense loneliness, desire to offer love, fears, anxieties, strong recall of past affective situations
Problems of Perfectionism

The Gifted Kids Survival Guide by Galbraith and Delisle

- Set unreasonable, impossible goals for themselves.
- Chronically dissatisfied even with great results.
- Have difficulty enjoying the present moment because of thinking of the next hurdle.
- Avoid risk – “Is this right?”
- Have “all or nothing” view.
- Highly self critical and critical of others.
- Afraid of revealing any weakness or imperfections.
- Procrastinate because project may not be perfect or wait for the perfect time to start something.
- Difficult relationships because they may expect way too much of a partner or friend.
- Self-worth depends on performance.
- Compulsive planners.
- Have difficulty seeing situations, performances, projects, relationships as anything but “good” or “bad”.
Parenting approaches that mitigate perfectionism

• Praise process not result.
• Celebrate – don’t just tolerate – less than perfect results.
• Model this behavior your self.
• Get involved in activities that are not scored or judged in any way – hiking?
• Journal – share a weakness and celebrate an accomplishment or triumph.
Test strategy

• Before test – jot down how you prepared for test.
• After test, journal how you think you did.
• When test is returned, journal answer to questions:
  – How did this strategy work?
  – Am I satisfied?
  – If not – what is my plan
  – How will I document steps in my plan?
  – How will I know it worked?
  – What will I do if it doesn’t?
Multi-potentiality

Gifted students may have a variety of talent domains in which they might excel. For some this presents a problem of huge indecision and, for some, depression and anxiety.

Give your child permission to try many things but set limits on how many at a time. Talk it out. Use a “t” chart – things I like about ballet/downsides. What aspect of talent do I want to really develop, but give yourself permission to quit and go another direction. Realize you may not have to chose one career or the another.
Underachievement

Among the gifted, underachievement almost always has social and emotional causes, not academic causes.

Approach depends on the kind of underachievement.

The coaster
The manipulator
The perfectionist
The rebel
With a partner or in your head, discuss which issues you see at play in your child’s life.
Special populations at risk

- Females
- Twice exceptional
- Profoundly gifted
- English learners
Gifted girls have special vulnerabilities

- Joan Smutny – Gifted girls assume all sorts of extra burdens that educators need to understand. Few gifted girls know they are talented. They know only that they are different and that this difference is somehow wrong or weird.

- Barbara Kerr in *Smart Girls* (Gifted Psychology Press, 1994) asks how does the conflict between social expectation and personal potential affect gifted women?
Parenting strategies

- Awareness is power but issues are not predestined
- Talk it out – make time
- Gifted kids are kids first – have fun and enjoy
Advocate for education that...

- Provides resources for teachers to really get to know a student.
- Celebrates diversity of talents, learning styles, interests – not just tolerates them.
- Trains teachers in the special vulnerabilities of gifted students to certain social and emotional issues.
- Provides choices of all kinds – at the classroom level, at the grade level, and at the school level.
With a partner or in your head, discuss what was said tonight that resonates with you?