

GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PACKAGE FOR TEACHERS

Module 3



Early Childhood



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GERRIC

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Welcome!

You are about to start a Professional Development Course which will help you identify the gifted and talented students in your class or your school, and differentiate the curriculum to respond to their individual learning needs. You'll also be able to decide which of your students may benefit from various forms of ability or interest grouping and which may possibly be candidates for one or more of the many forms of academic acceleration.

About the Package

The course consists of six Modules

Each Module consists of three levels: Core, Extension and Specialisation. The Core levels of the six Modules are the heart of this course. The Core Modules contain essential information and practical advice and strategies to assist you to identify and respond to your gifted and talented students.

We strongly suggest that you complete the Core level of each Module.

Pre-tests

We are aware that teachers and school administrators will enter this course with a wide range of existing knowledge of gifted and talented education. To accommodate this range of knowledge and experience, we have started each Core Module, from Module 2 onwards, with a pre-test. We encourage you to take these pre-tests and, if you 'test out' on any Module at Core level, simply move on to the next Module. For example, if you 'test out' of Core Module 2 you will pass over that Module and move on to Core Module 3.

Extension and Specialisation Levels

Extension and Specialisation levels for each Module. Material covered in the Extension and Specialisation levels builds on the knowledge you will have gained from the Core level in each Module. Key issues are examined in greater depth and participants explore a wider range of issues in the cognitive and social-emotional development of gifted students. New identification, curriculum differentiation and program development techniques are introduced.

The Extension and Specialisation levels require teachers, counsellors and administrators to undertake further reading and practical activities to reflect on classroom practice, school practice and policy. They encourage participants to focus on their specific role in the school and prepare a brief action plan to demonstrate application or mastery of outcomes.

Schools may decide that completion of the course at Specialisation level would be a useful prerequisite for becoming the school's Gifted Education Coordinator.

What will you learn in this course?

The course consists of six Modules:

Module One: Understanding Giftedness

Understanding the nature of giftedness and talent; what the terms mean; levels and types of giftedness. Cognitive and affective characteristics of gifted and talented students; ways in which these students may differ from their classmates - even if at first we don't observe this.

Module Two: The Identification of Gifted Students

A range of practical identification procedures, with particular attention to procedures which are effective in identifying gifted students from culturally diverse and disadvantaged groups. We'll be emphasising the use of a combination of approaches rather than a single measure such as IQ testing or teacher nomination used in isolation.

Module Three: Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Students

Understanding the social and emotional characteristics and needs of gifted students. Ways in which gifted students may differ somewhat from their classmates in their social and emotional development. Supporting gifted students and their parents. Teaching strategies and class structures which foster the development of positive social attitudes and supportive peer relationships in gifted students.

Module Four: Understanding Underachievement in Gifted Students

Understanding the causes of underachievement in gifted students. Identifying gifted underachievers and planning interventions designed to prevent and reverse cycles of underachievement.

Module Five: Curriculum Differentiation for Gifted Students

Teaching strategies and methods of curriculum differentiation which enhance the learning of gifted students in the regular classroom. Appropriate use of different enrichment models that international research has found to be effective with gifted and talented students. Practical applications of pre-testing, curriculum compacting and individualised programming.

Module Six: Developing Programs and Provisions for Gifted Students

Practical strategies for the establishment and monitoring of ability, achievement or interest grouping, and the many forms of accelerated progression. Particular attention will be paid to the effects of various strategies on students' academic and social development.

Using the package

Much of the material is suitable across teaching and learning contexts. This content is not specifically marked. However, content that may be applicable to your particular context is identified as follows:

Role	Classroom Teacher 	Executive Staff 	Principal 
Location	Urban 	Rural 	
Mode	Self Study 	Small Group 	Whole Staff 

Follow these symbols through the content to customise your learning path.

Each Module comes in two parts, each concluding with a practical exercise. We suggest that you complete the first and second parts a few days apart - unless this is not workable in your particular learning context. This will give you a chance to digest the information in Part 1 and work through the Reflective/Practical component.

Core Module 3: Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Students

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Module 3

Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Students

Welcome to the third Module in this Professional Development Course.

(1) At what age do students generally begin to make social comparisons?

- (a) 5 (b) 7 (c) 9 (d) 11 (e) 13

(2) The 'forced-choice dilemma' is a conflict between:

- (a) identity and intimacy
(b) achievement and empathy
(c) intimacy and achievement
(d) identity and achievement

(3) If a student has an ego-involved motivational orientation what is likely to be her main source of pleasure in learning?

(4) Why may some gifted students be wrongly diagnosed as having ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)?

(1) b

(2) c

(3) She is likely to be mainly focussed on being recognised as being brighter or more successful than the other students.

(4) They may be exhibiting psychomotor overexcitabilities.

If you were not correct in your answers to these four questions you should benefit from at least some of the information that follows in this Module.

If your answers to all four questions were correct you may not need to complete this Module, though we advise that you still skim-read it to check whether it offers you anything new.

The Extension level Module provides further information for you to consider on these and other issues in the socio-affective development of gifted and talented students.

Outcomes

At the completion of this Module you will be able to:

- recognise ways in which intellectually gifted children differ from their age-peers in their affective development.
- identify behaviours which may suggest that bright students are masking their abilities for peer acceptance.
- recognise 'over-excitabilities' which may be indicative of high abilities.

Some affective characteristics of young gifted children

In Module 1, we briefly reviewed some of the affective (social and emotional) characteristics of gifted and talented young children. Let's call some of these to mind.

- An unusually well-developed sense of justice and 'fairness'. They may become upset if they feel that one child has been unfair to another - or if they feel a teacher or other adult has been unfair to a classmate.
- Emotional intensity. Gifted children tend to experience emotional reactions at a deeper level than their age-peers.
- They often have play interests that are more like those of older children. They begin to enjoy structured, 'rules-based' games at earlier ages than their age-peers.
- They tend to prefer the companionship of children a little older, or sometimes some years older.
- They may have rather different conceptions and expectations of friendship from those of their age-peers.
- An enhanced capacity to empathise with the feelings of others - even with older children or adults.
- They can sometimes become very frustrated when their fine motor coordination won't allow them to produce art work or writing at the level they can envisage in their imaginations.
- A more mature sense of humour than age-peers - for example, a liking for verbal rather than visual humour.

Emotional maturity

Teachers generally accept that academically gifted students are more mature, in their cognitive development, than the majority of their classmates. However, they often expect that the social and emotional development of academically gifted students will be on a par with their age-peers - and this is not necessarily the case.

The intellectual and emotional development of most students is appropriate to their chronological age. However, children who differ significantly from their age-peers in terms of their intellectual development also differ somewhat in their emotional maturity.

As briefly outlined in Module 1, students whose capacity to learn is developmentally delayed tend also to be somewhat less mature, socially and emotionally, than their classmates of average ability. Social-emotional development tends to be rather more closely linked to intellectual development than to chronological age.



In the same way, students who are more developmentally advanced in their capacity to learn than their age-peers - academically gifted students - also tend to be somewhat more mature, emotionally and socially, than their classmates.

However, for a range of reasons which we'll explore in this Module, this advancement may not be readily visible. Some gifted students learn, surprisingly early in their school careers, that to display abilities and opinions that are different from those of the majority of their classmates can lead to mockery or even ostracism.

How early can this begin?

It is important to understand how early the process of 'dumbing down' for peer acceptance can start - and therefore for how many years some gifted students may have been doing this before you encounter them!

The onset of social comparisons

People make social comparisons as a process of self-evaluation. Comparing our progress against that of peers gives us evaluative feedback on our own performance. In general, we choose to compare ourselves to people whose ability or experience roughly approximates our own (Festinger, 1954). The weekend golfer doesn't measure himself against the club professional. The club pro doesn't measure himself against Tiger Woods.

In general, young children don't make social comparisons. In the pre-school years and the early years of school, they tend to be rather 'self'-centred. So when a young child wants to evaluate her progress she compares what she can do today with what **she** could do earlier, and assesses how much she has improved.



'I can do 6 hops without having to put my foot down,' thinks Jenny. 'Last time I tried I could only do 4!' Her reference point is her own previous experience. She's not particularly interested in what other kids can do.

However, as she gets a bit older she becomes aware of ways in which she resembles and differs from other children. She starts to norm-reference - making social comparisons of her own progress in terms of what the other kids can do. She may discover she's not as physically adept as she had thought, or she may find that only a few of her age-peers match her abilities.

Children generally move from self-referencing to norm-referencing at around age 7, but this is linked to the individual child's capacity to make evaluative comparisons. Some children take quite a bit longer to reach this stage. Intellectually gifted children tend to reach it earlier. Many gifted young children are norm-referencing before they enter school.

As discussed in Module 1, it's not unusual for gifted children to enter school already reading, writing and counting. The gifted child who is norm-referencing may become aware within the first few days that the other children have not yet developed these skills. Unless the teacher becomes aware of the gifted child's advancement and shows pleasure in it, the child may become acutely aware that she is different, and may moderate or even stop the behaviour that is setting her apart from her classmates.

An Australian study of 60 children who entered school already reading found that more than 40 of them significantly moderated their reading performance, or deliberately stopped reading in class, within two weeks (Gross, 2004). The children who continued to read were those whose teachers accepted and facilitated it.

It is important that we recognise how disturbingly early gifted students can begin to mask their abilities for peer acceptance.

An aid to identifying gifted young students

Psychologists have known, for many years, the relationship between high ability and early norm-referencing. A classic study conducted almost 40 years ago, with several classes of five- and six-year-olds, illustrated the skill with which many gifted young children learn to adapt to, and mirror, the behaviours of the group in which they are placed (Gordon & Thomas, 1967).

In this study, the researchers asked the children's teachers to describe each child's behaviour when faced with a new activity or social situation, and to classify the child under one of four descriptors:

Plungers: Children who plunged into new activities or situations quickly and positively.

Go-alongers: Children who 'went along' with the group in a generally positive manner but who rarely took the initiative or adopted a leadership role.

Sideliners: Children who preferred to wait for a bit until a new activity was **established** and then gradually became involved.

Nonparticipants: Children who remained negative to new situations for weeks or months, or even indefinitely.

The psychologists also asked the teachers to make a professional judgment of the general level of intelligence of each child. Interestingly, the teachers overwhelmingly asserted that the 'plungers' were of well above average intelligence.

However, when the psychologists actually tested the children, the gifted children appeared not among the 'plungers', but among the 'sideliners' and 'go-alongers'. The gifted young children were already functioning from a norm-referenced perspective and had learned to stand back a little and check out the behaviours and conventions that were accepted by their classmates, before they committed themselves to an activity. Ironically, their teachers had confused motivation and self-confidence with high ability.

Watch for the student who waits a bit before joining in a new activity. This may be a gifted student who has realised that some of his ideas or attitudes are 'different' and who is checking out what behaviours his age-peers will accept.

The forced-choice dilemma

Even in the early childhood years, some academically gifted students may find themselves faced with a choice - fit in and be accepted or stand out and risk rejection.

It's tempting to say, 'Well, that's not so in my class/ my school/my region. We teach our students to value the individuality of each child.' Certainly, valuing individuality and celebrating diversity are an important part of what makes Australia special. However, we are not a nation that readily honours our tall poppies - and some of our small poppies pick this up very quickly.



At home, Caitlin, aged 5, was reading more like an 8-year-old, but when she entered school her teacher placed her in a pre-reading group because she showed no signs, in class, of being able to read. The teacher and Caitlin's mother later found that she was pretending, in class, to be a non-reader because her best friend was in this group. When she was subsequently placed with more advanced students, she happily worked at their level (Silverman, 1989).

Caitlin's mother found that she was confusing being liked with being 'like'. She had been convinced that if she did not behave 'like' the other children, they would not like her. She realised that she was different in her reading abilities, the games she liked playing and the way she felt about many things, and she quickly camouflaged the most obvious of these differences.



Children like Caitlin, who realise early in their school experience that they are different from their age-peers, can be placed in a 'forced-choice' dilemma where they have to choose between **achievement** - performing academically at their true level - and **intimacy** - being accepted by the peer group.

If they allow the other students to see the ways in which they differ in both their intellectual and emotional development, they place themselves at risk of peer rejection. However, if their need for social acceptance is greater than their drive for achievement, then they must conceal their advanced abilities, their sometimes unusual interests, and even their atypical play preferences, in a continuing effort to win peer approval (Gross, 1989).

Being allowed to work with a group of bright or more able students can go a long way to solving the **'forced-choice dilemma'**.

Miraca Gross's article, 'The pursuit of excellence or the search for intimacy: The forced-choice dilemma of gifted youth', which comes as a resource paper with this Module, explores these issues further.

The Gagné model illustrates how important it is that gifted and talented students are encouraged to accept and value their gifts. As we discussed in Module 1, teachers sometimes confuse conceit, which we certainly want students to avoid, with a healthy pride in one's abilities which is an essential constituent of self-esteem.

If students feel that their abilities set them apart from their age-peers, they are unlikely to want to develop their gifts into talents.

Gifted students may need our help and support to resolve the forced-choice dilemma, so that they no longer feel they have to choose between talent development and social acceptance.



Gifted young children in rural areas

The forced-choice dilemma can be particularly acute for gifted students in rural areas. The more children there are at a particular grade level, the more chance a gifted student has of finding an ability peer. In a school which has two or three classes at entry level, the teachers may decide to cluster the early readers together in one class. However, gifted young children in rural schools, or schools serving a smaller population, have more of a problem. If you are the only person in your class who is already reading, or writing, or counting, what do you do? If you want to work at your level, do you have to work on your own? If you want to work with other children, do you have to work at a level you have already passed through? And where do you find friends who share your interests if no one in your class has yet developed them?

In Module 5, we will look at ways of differentiating the curriculum so that it becomes more responsive to individual differences in learning, but we still have to be sensitive to the social factor. How do we respond to the gifted student whose interests and emotional development are more like those of someone older?

In a split grade or composite class, or in a one- or two-teacher school, the gifted student can be allowed to work, in her particular talent areas, with older students. In Module 6: **Developing Programs and Provisions for Gifted Students** we'll discuss some of the forms of acceleration which allow students who are academically advanced and emotionally mature for their age, to work either full time, or for specific subjects, with an older grade. Acceleration has a wealth of research to support it (Rogers, 2002).

A class which has students at more than one grade level is ideally set up for a gifted student's smooth transition to an older grade.



Re-read the section on ‘An aid to identifying gifted young students’. Note how Gordon and Thomas classified young children’s behaviours when faced with a new activity or social situation:

Plungers: Children who plunged into new activities or situations quickly and positively.

Go-alongers: Children who ‘went along’ with the group in a generally positive manner but who rarely took the initiative or adopted a leadership role.

Sideliners: Children who preferred to wait for a bit until a new activity was **established** and then gradually became involved.

Nonparticipants: Children who remained negative to new situations for weeks or months, or even indefinitely.

Which children in your own class would you classify under each heading? (Yes, some children might fit into two or more of the groups!)

In which groups did Gordon and Thomas tend to find the gifted students?

You may want to look a little closer at students whom you’ve classified in these groups. (Look at this information along with the information you’ve gathered on your students from Module 2.)



What behaviours or attitudes are seen as ‘cool’ by the students in your school? How might bright or gifted students in your school mask their behaviour to be accepted and why might they feel this is necessary?



Have you had a parent tell you, when she enrolled her child, that the child was reading, yet the class teacher affirmed that the child was not? Is it possible that the child was norm-referencing and stopped reading to be like the others? What Year is the child in now? What is the present teacher’s impression of his or her ability?

Gagné's model shows clearly the influence of intrapersonal catalysts - aspects of the student's social and emotional development - in facilitating or impeding the translation of giftedness into talent. Let's look at some aspects of socio-affective development and their possible relationships to student achievement.

Self-concept and self-esteem

Self-concept has been succinctly defined as the collection of ideas that one has about oneself (Neihart, 1999). It is an important constituent of personality and it can certainly influence students' attitudes and behaviours but its influence may have been exaggerated over the last few years. Nicholas Colangelo, a leading expert on counselling gifted students, comments wryly that almost everything 'good' in school life has been linked by pop psychologists to a positive self-concept and almost everything that sets students at any sort of risk has been linked to a negative self-concept (Colangelo, 2003). Yet it's not as simple as that.

Firstly, self-concept is multi-faceted. A student may have a high academic self-concept, a low social self-concept, an average self-concept on issues bearing on family relationships and a very high physical self-concept. (And these are only some of the facets.) In addition, one can have a high academic self-concept in maths and a lower verbal self-concept. So what is a 'positive' or 'negative' self-concept?

Secondly, research has shown that students with relatively low academic self-concepts can achieve outstanding success in school while students with high academic self-concepts can perform quite poorly. Equally, students with high social self-concepts can engage in socially destructive behaviour. Self-concept is one's view of oneself - it may not accurately reflect reality!

Self-esteem is the affective element of self-concept; how the student feels about her academic achievement, social acceptability, family relationships or perhaps physical attractiveness.

A mathematically gifted student may have a positive academic self-concept but lower academic self-esteem if peer pressure has caused her to undervalue her talent.

By contrast, a student of average ability who is achieving at levels commensurate with her ability and has learned to feel good about this may have modest academic self-concept but high academic self-esteem.

Self-esteem and ability grouping

Australian educators are traditionally wary of placing gifted students in ability grouped settings, believing that grouping provides little academic advantage and may even damage the gifted students' self-esteem. However, research provides a very different picture. As we will discuss in Module 6: **Developing Programs and Provisions for Gifted Students**, gifted students who enter ability-grouped settings tend to perform substantially better on later measures of school achievement (measures of 'value added') than do equally bright students in mixed-ability classes.



Some studies have found no difference or little difference in the self-concept or self-esteem of academically gifted students and students of average ability while others have found differences favouring gifted students.

What happens to the self-esteem of students who are ability grouped? Some studies have found no effect of grouping on self-esteem or self-concept. Others have found that the academic self-esteem of gifted students takes a slight dip on entry to ability grouped programs - although long-term studies suggest that this is usually temporary.

One large scale Australian study of 1500 New South Wales students moving from primary to secondary school found a dip in academic self-esteem over the first few months of high school. However, the academic self-esteem of students entering Selective High Schools for gifted students remained higher than that of their age-peers entering comprehensive high schools and their social self-esteem was likewise higher (Gross, 1997).

You may like to look further at issues of self-esteem and grouping in the Extension and Specialisation levels of this Module.

Motivation

Most gifted students **love** learning. They get enormous pleasure out of gaining more and more knowledge and acquiring higher and higher levels of skill. Remember the little boy in Module 1 whose father described him as having a **rage** to learn?

In the early childhood years most children are intrinsically motivated to learn. The urge to learn comes from within them. They enjoy learning simply for learning's sake.

However, as children move through school, things become a little more complex. Some children remain intrinsically motivated. For others, motivation gradually becomes more extrinsic - powered by factors other than the pure desire to increase skills and knowledge.

Mastery goals and task involvement

Children who want to learn for learning's sake tend to have a pretty realistic attitude to learning. They recognise that sometimes learning doesn't come easily; you have to practise and work at what you are doing if you want to improve. In general, students who adopt mastery goals focus on mastering the work and improving their performance.



Gifted students with a mastery orientation prefer tasks that are challenging and require them to strive for success, and they tend to use more effective learning strategies (Dweck, 1986). They are not concerned with being best in the class - if that happens, it happens, and it's probably quite nice, but it's not their primary goal in learning.

Psychologist John Nicholls (1983) described students with a mastery orientation as 'task involved'.

Performance goals and ego-involvement

Other students may be powered by performance goals. For these students, doing well, and being recognised and praised for it, are more important than increasing their skills or knowledge. They tend to measure their ability by whether or not they succeed at a task rather than by the strategies they use to achieve success.

Gifted students with a performance orientation may prefer tasks that they can succeed at without too much effort, rather than tasks which demand an increase in knowledge or skill.

Nicholls described students with a performance orientation as 'ego-involved'. He noted that these students' focus tends to be less on mastering the work and more on a desire to look smart or avoid looking stupid.

Research suggests that, certainly in the early years of school, most gifted students are task involved. We'll explore this further later in this Module .

As mentioned earlier, some studies of gifted students entering ability grouped programs note a slight dip in academic self-esteem. Miraca Gross's 1997 study of students entering selective and comprehensive high schools found that the few gifted students (fewer than 5%) who experienced a more serious drop in self-esteem were strongly ego-involved. These students were not able to focus on, and enjoy, the more challenging work of the selective high school; their focus was on the fact that they were no longer the brightest student in the class.

Retaining task involvement

Children are more likely to retain a love of learning if they are allowed to **learn**. Joyce VanTassel-Baska (1992) defines learning as progressing to a level of knowledge or skill development that is higher than one's present level.



Emily entered school already reading at a six-year-old level. She was bright in many academic areas but she had a real passion for reading and read everything she could get her hands on. However, Ms Franklin, her teacher, placed her back on reading readiness exercises with the other children on the grounds that she had 'holes' in her reading skills and it was important to give her a more solid grounding before she was allowed to move on.

What Ms Franklin was effectively doing was halting Emily's learning. By being placed back at a stage she had already passed through, Emily was not being allowed to progress to a level of reading skill beyond what she had already attained.

Emily had been strongly task-involved. She loved encountering, and learning, new words. Now she was placed in a situation where there was nothing new to strive for. When Ms Franklin praised her fluent reading Emily 'knew' that the praise was not for her mastery of the work; after all, she had mastered it long before. She decided that the praise must be for being the best reader in the class. Over the course of the year Emily developed a more ego-involved perspective on learning. It became important to her to maintain her status as a 'bright student' and she was less willing to take risks in case she made mistakes.

Linda Silverman (1993) points out that at times when ‘outcomes-based’ education is in vogue it would be very easy for educators to create a performance goal classroom environment where success is measured by achieving goals rather than by the skill or effort through which the goals are achieved.

Can gifted young children be ‘over-excitabile’?

We have talked earlier about the emotional intensity of some young gifted children - their tendency to experience emotions at a deeper and more immediate level than their age-peers. This is often coupled with an enhanced capacity to empathise with other people’s feelings - to share the joys and sorrows of their friends more intensely than most other children of their age.

A third characteristic which we have not addressed yet is a tendency towards physical restlessness. These three characteristics, and others, are often misinterpreted by teachers as a sign of emotional immaturity

However, the research of a Polish psychiatrist, Kazimierz Dabrowski, offers another explanation. Dabrowski noted that intellectually gifted adults and young people tend to have a heightened awareness of their environment and a heightened capacity to respond to various intellectual, emotional or even physical stimuli.

Dabrowski calls this tendency ‘overexcitability’. This term is not used in any derogatory sense; it is a translation of a Polish word which means ‘super-stimulatability’, and it carries positive connotations, such as an insatiable love of learning, the capacity to care intensely for people and ideas, boundless energy, and a vivid imagination.

An excellent description of Dabrowski’s ‘overexcitabilities’ can be found in Linda Silverman’s book, *Counselling the Gifted and Talented* (Silverman, 1993).

Dabrowski identifies five overexcitabilities: intellectual, emotional, imaginal, sensual and psychomotor.

Intellectual overexcitability

Young children who demonstrate high levels of intellectual overexcitability (OE) tend to be academically gifted (Silverman, 1993). Emily, whom you met in the previous section, had many intellectual OE characteristics.

- **A passionate love of learning.**
- **An enhanced capacity for analytical thinking.** Emily liked analysing patterns in stories. When she was 5 she told her teacher that writers of fairy tales liked making their readers worried because they always put good people into problem situations and **then** rescued them.
- **Meta-analysis.** An enjoyment of thinking **about** thinking.
- **Sustained intellectual effort** and a **much longer attention span** than age-peers. Some gifted children will work for hours on a task or puzzle until they are happy with the result. They may become quite distressed if a teacher or parent tries to draw them away from the task before they have completed it to their satisfaction.
- **An enjoyment of detailed planning.** Jeff spent weeks before his 7th birthday developing three separate hour-by-hour timetables of exactly how he and his family might spend his special day. He then led a family ‘conference’ on which timetable they would follow.

- **Intense curiosity and an unwillingness to be satisfied with simplistic or incomplete answers.** When a well known author visited her school Emily asked him why so many fairy tales had three sets of characters - three bears, three little pigs - or three sets of tasks that the leading character had to accomplish. She was less than impressed when he jokingly told her that three was an easy number for the illustrator to draw. 'But the story-teller has to make up the story first,' she said firmly, 'so why do storytellers write things in threes?'

Some teachers may find this sort of insistence threatening, misinterpreting the child's passion for detail and completeness as a challenge to their authority, while the gifted child's classmates may find her insistence on seemingly obscure points quite incomprehensible.

Emotional overexcitability

This is characterised by the capacity for emotional depth; young children with OEs feel emotions more acutely. 'Nearly everything matters and it matters that it matters' (Kline & Meckstroth, 1985, p. 25).

- Young children with emotional OE may have an **unusual sensitivity to the feelings of other children** or even adults.
- They may develop a **strong attachment to other people or animals**. Some young gifted children may develop not just affection but a sincere love for their teacher.
- They **may not easily forgive themselves if they have hurt someone's feelings**.
- They **can be extremely self-critical**, worrying over small faults.
- They **may become particularly fond of places, as well as people**. While his older brothers were wildly excited at moving to a new home, Harry worried that the new people moving in might not look after the flowering shrub he and his father had planted the year before.

Imaginational overexcitability

This can be displayed through a great facility for invention and fantasy such as the creation of imaginary companions, an ability for vivid visual recall and detailed visualisation, and a deep love for poetry and drama.



- Linda Silverman (1993) notes that many gifted children with imaginational OE **explain stories or ideas in such great detail that adults beg them to get to the point**.
- They **often have a need to describe the subtle nuances of a situation or interaction**, rather than simply the factual details. 'I don't think she was angry with me,' 5-year-old Joel said about his teacher. 'I think she was angry with David but she had to be cross with me because I hit him first.'
- They **can have a great capacity for invention**, creating imaginary companions or even imaginary countries. The Brontë sisters did this as children.

- They **often visualise situations very vividly**. Their dreams, including daydreams, may be unusually elaborate.
- They **may demonstrate a capacity to mix truth with fantasy for effect**. Tuen transformed a large dog which he glimpsed at the park into a wolf which had escaped from the zoo and was lurking in the bushes. He described it so vividly to the lady next door that she phoned the zoo.
- They **may prefer to act out stories** rather than simply telling them.

Sensual overexcitability

This may be displayed in a heightened awareness of the senses; a deep aesthetic appreciation of beautiful objects, phrases of music or words.

- Young children with sensual OE may have **an unusual sensitivity to particular pieces of music or poetry** and demand that these be read or played repetitively.
- They **may be fascinated by rhyming sounds** and use them over and over, just for the pleasure of hearing them. Jordan, at his first football match, exclaimed ‘Bounce and pounce! Bounce and pounce!’ almost obsessively until his father threatened to take him home.
- They **may enjoy the feel of particular materials**. However, this can also be manifested in an oversensitivity to certain clothing materials. Researchers report parents of sensually overexcitable children having to cut labels off the children’s clothes and even having to be particularly careful about the placement of sock seams, because the children react so strongly.
- **Some children develop a strong dislike of the texture of particular foods** and the feel of these foods in their mouths, even when they quite enjoy the taste.

Psychomotor overexcitability

This can be manifested in physical restlessness arising from surplus energy.

- The child’s surplus energy may show itself in **compulsive talking and chattering**.
- They **may develop nervous habits** such as tics, drumming fingers or nailbiting.
- Some children become **physically impulsive**. They may seem to need to be constantly on the move.
- The child may seem **almost unable to stay in his seat**. He may be in a state of almost continual movement, wriggling, pushing the chair back, swinging legs, etc.
- They may have **unusually rapid speech and exaggerated vocal expression**.

Unfortunately teachers often confuse this physical restlessness and distractability with the behaviours associated with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Teachers should monitor the young child’s distractable behaviours. If the behaviours seem to have a pattern related to the work that is being presented – eg, if they appear mainly when the child is bored, or frustrated by a slow pace of instruction, or required to do work that he has already mastered - they probably indicate psychomotor overexcitability rather than an attention deficit disorder. Ironically, the twitching, fiddling and shifting around may indicate an over-responsiveness to **lack** of intellectual stimulus!

The intensity of the young gifted child's response to intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and even physical stimuli can sometimes be confused with immaturity. It is important to understand that while some of the behaviours associated with intellectual, emotional and imaginal overexcitabilities may at first glance appear immature, they actually arise from the young child's intellectual and emotional maturity.

Psychologist Michael Piechowski (1986) suggests we should view the five overexcitabilities as channels of information flow, and ways in which children experience the world. When any of these channels is stronger than those of a child's peers, the child may feel embarrassed, uncomfortable or even guilty for being different from her classmates.

As Manaster and Powell (1983) described it, gifted students can be out of stage (dealing with concepts and goals far beyond the reach of their age-peers), out of phase (alienated from age-mates if they find themselves without an intellectual peer group with whom they can relate) and out of sync (realising painfully that they are different, and fearing that they will never find a group with whom they can merge without being dismissed as strange or weird). However, the very nature of overexcitabilities can make it difficult for the child to conceal them.

Experiencing 'flow'

Remember the little boy with 'a rage to learn'? Some gifted students truly have a passion for learning. As a child, Don Bradman spent hours each day, week after week, honing his batting skills, practising and improving, even though he was already far beyond the skill level of many adult players. Observers would report that he seemed lost to the outside world, totally absorbed in what he was doing.

Talented young musicians, athletes or dancers may set themselves goals that would seem impossible to the majority of their age-peers and will achieve these goals through years of dedicated practice. Again, people observing talented artists at practice frequently note their total immersion in what they are doing.

Many of these young people have fallen in love with a field, a discipline or a subject. When a student who deeply loves what she is doing is engaged in an activity where the level of challenge matches her level of ability, the experience can be totally absorbing and totally fulfilling. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes the feeling as being 'in flow'. It can be a transcendental experience of joy and self-actualisation. Moments when everything comes together and the solution to the problem arrives in the student's mind, or he achieves the perfect rendering of a musical phrase, can be 'peak' experiences.

We can let 'flow' happen for our gifted students by presenting them with appropriate levels of challenge. Flow comes from optimal engagement with a task. It doesn't come from doing, yet again, what one has been able to do for weeks - or months - or years.

In Modules 5 and 6 we will look at how to develop curriculum and learning environments which will allow our gifted students to experience flow.



Do you have a child in your class who shows one of more of the over excitabilities discussed here? How does the child behave? Are there any particular situations or events that seem to ‘set the child off’? Does the child show any signs of high ability?

OR

Do you have a bright child in your class who has been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD? After reading the over excitabilities section above, could there be another explanation for some of his or her behaviours?

ALSO

What do you really love doing that can result, for you, in ‘flow’ or in a peak emotional experience? How can you inculcate this feeling in your students?



Do you have a bright child in your school who has been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD? After reading the over-excitabilities section above, could there be another explanation for some of his or her behaviours?

When was the child diagnosed? How long had the problem been going on? Check with the child’s previous teachers; to what degree did the child show these behaviours in the earlier years?

ALSO

What do you really love doing that can result, for you, in ‘flow’ or in a peak emotional experience? How can your teachers inculcate this feeling in their students?



(1) Discuss with your colleagues students whom you presently teach, or have taught, who show one of more of the over-excitabilities discussed here. How does the child behave? Are there any particular situations or events that seem to ‘set the child off’? Does the child show any signs of high ability? Are you able to trace, through discussion, how early in the student’s school career these excitabilities became noticeable? Does the student still show them?

(2) Do you have a bright child in your class who has been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD? After reading the over-excitabilities section above, could there be another explanation for some of his or her behaviours?

Questions for Reflection

Once a child or adult has experienced 'flow' he or she wants to experience it again.

What can you do to ensure that all your students have this motivating experience?



Resources

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The Pursuit of Excellence or the Search for Intimacy? The Forced-Choice Dilemma of Gifted Youth

Miraca U.M. Gross

Educators often fail to recognize that the intellectually gifted differ from their age peers in their social and emotional development as much as in their intellectual and academic characteristics. A dilemma peculiar to gifted youth arises through the interaction of the psychosocial drives towards intimacy and achievement, which complement each other in students of average ability, but which place the gifted student in a forced-choice situation. If the gifted child chooses to satisfy the drive for excellence he or she must risk forfeiting the attainment of intimacy with age peers; if the choice is intimacy, the gifted may be forced into a pattern of systematic and deliberate underachievement to retain membership in the social group. Homogeneous grouping of gifted students is suggested as a partial solution to this dilemma.

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American education has found more comfort in assuming responsibility for socializing children than for meeting their unique educational needs.

Joyce Van-Tassel Baska,
Chicago, U.S.A., 1985

Australian schools are evolving as multi-purpose social service agencies rather than pedagogical centres.

K. Brian Start,
Melbourne, Australia, 1985

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It is ironic that at a time when American and Australian schools are increasingly abrogating their responsibilities towards the intellectual and academic development of their students to adopt, instead, the socializing roles formerly undertaken by the family and religion, the interest of many educators in intellectually gifted children is still stubbornly fixed on these students' intellectual characteristics, at the expense of any serious investigative concern for their social and emotional growth.

The problem is especially acute in Australia. Perhaps because of the dearth of Australian research into the needs and characteristics of the intellectually gifted child, and the unwillingness to interpret and harness overseas research, very little is known about the social and emotional needs of gifted children in Australia. Furthermore, investigation into the socio-emotional development of the highly able is hampered by the prevailing assumption that gifted students differ from their age peers on intellectual factors alone.

So readily accepted is this assumption that it has become enshrined even in the policies of Australian State government education systems. The State Government of South Australia, in its 1983 *Policy regarding fostering gifts and talents among children* lists "the educational needs of all students which should also be acknowledged in programs intended to foster gifts and talents." Throughout this list of "educational needs," the emphasis is on the student not as an individual, but as a member of the educational community. The policy highlights, for example:

the need to be in an environment which... recognizes membership in a range of groups including family, cultural groups, (where in some cases group membership is more important than individual performance), age peers, friendship and interest groups, the wider school community and society at large; and to be aware that each group functions according to its own set of values (South Australian Education Department, 1983).

This interpretation of the student's needs rests on two assumptions; first, that the values held by the gifted child will be congruent with the values of the social and cultural group from which he originates; and second, that where his cultural group values social cohesion above individual advancement (as in some Australian aboriginal cultures), the child will be able to balance the contrary dictates of his own intellectual drives and the expectations of his

cultural peers. Both assumptions spring from a failure to realize that the intellectually gifted differ from their age peers in their emotional and social development as much as in their intellectual and academic characteristics.

Social and Emotional Differences

It is now generally understood and accepted that a child's level of social and emotional development is more highly correlated with his mental age than with his chronological age (Tannenbaum, 1983; Janos and Robinson, 1985). Boehm's (1962) and Kohlberg's (1964) studies of moral development found that intellectually gifted children were able to make complex moral judgments much earlier than their age-peers of average ability, while some highly gifted elementary school children functioned at an externally controlled level of moral development normally found in less than ten percent of adults.

The gifted student's enhanced capacity for abstract reasoning, coupled with his frequently accelerated capacity to obtain and process information, lead him to become familiar with, and speculate on, ideas not normally encountered until a much later age. Hollingworth (1926) noted that highly gifted children often become deeply concerned with questions of origin and destiny at an age when children of average ability are still absorbed in much more egocentric concerns. Serious difficulties of communication can arise when the child attempts to share his interests with age-peers, or even with adults who may be threatened by his unusual preoccupation with moral or religious complexities.

Malcolm

Malcolm, (IQ 165) is five years old. One evening at tea he engaged his parents in a serious and analytical discussion as to what would happen to the universe if God "stopped existing." "After all," Malcolm contended, "when anything dies it goes back into the earth. When stars go supernova everything they're made of goes back into the universe. So if God died, what He is made of would go back into the universe too." Malcolm wanted to know whether scientists could predict the changes that God's death would cause to life on earth.

The child who can frame a sophisticated and coherent argument such as this clearly has needs and expectations far removed from those of the average five-year-old. He needs companions, preferably of his own age and ability level, with whom he can enjoy not only the pleasure and relaxation of play but

also the stimulation of high level intellectual speculation. He needs a warm and supportive home environment where his prodigious intellectual gifts are appreciated and where his urge to increase and develop his knowledge is understood and accepted as much as his childish desire for affection and approval. Especially he needs the support of adult friends and mentors who can appreciate that although his level of intellectual and moral development may permit him to speculate about matters such as the future of the universe, he is still a five-year-old child who may need comfort and reassurance when faced with the prospect of radical changes in his environment, even when it is his own philosophical musings which have prompted the vision of change! Especially he needs to be reassured that, although "different" he is accepted both in his peer culture and in society at large.

Much of the emotional trauma experienced by intellectually gifted young people arises from the conflicting psycho-social needs of intimacy and achievement. In the child or adolescent of average ability, these needs are compatible, indeed complementary. For the highly gifted, however, achievement of his or her remarkable potential may lead at best to peer disapproval or, in severe cases, to social ostracism. American high school students actively reject those of their peers who demonstrate high level academic or intellectual prowess without the ameliorating effect of sporting or athletic interests (Tannenbaum, 1962).

If we review the research on these two psychosocial drives, particularly as they are manifested in intellectually gifted students, we can understand more clearly the peculiar social and emotional dilemma of the highly able.

The Need for Achievement and Excellence

School-age children quickly become aware of the importance of achievement. Even for young students, schools stress the importance of success in the acquisition of knowledge, and children learn to measure their achievement against that of their peers. For the intellectually gifted student, the shift away from a self-referenced understanding of ability towards a norm-referenced analysis of one's ability as performance measured against the attainment standards of one's peers, happens even earlier than for his age-mate of average ability. There is ample evidence that much of the socialization of achievement related motives takes place early in childhood (Steinberg).

Is the drive towards excellence innate in the intellectually gifted child or is it developmentally determined? Whether we believe, with Renzulli (Renzulli, 1978) that the motivation to excel is an integral component of giftedness, or, with Gagne (Gagne, 1985) that it acts, at a later stage, as a catalyst in the emergence of talent, we must ask ourselves when and how the drive itself develops.

Francis Galton believed that the motivation to achieve is inborn. He wrote of the "inherent stimulus" and "labour-loving instinct" which are among "those qualities of intellect and disposition which urge and qualify a man to perform acts which lead to reputation" (Galton, 1869). All these qualities were seen, by Galton, as "natural ability."

Others maintain, however, that the motivation to excel is primarily the result of enriched home environment and training. Bloom's study of over 120 adults who achieved excellence in cognitive, artistic and athletic fields, identified three characteristics as critical to success: (a) an unusual willingness to undertake a remarkably high workload in order to achieve at a high level; (b) a determination to reach the highest standard of which one is capable; and (c) the ability to learn new techniques, ideas or processes in the talent field more rapidly than the average (Bloom, 1982).

It is notable that the first two characteristics are motivational. Significantly, Bloom claims that all three traits were considerably influenced by early socializing and training; indeed he states that the willingness to work was not strongly evident in his subjects until after the age of eight. It appeared to "manifest itself" after several years of instruction.

One might speculate whether, if the urge to achieve is positively influenced by socialization, it might equally be quashed by social pressures to reduce one's drive or productivity. If so, the gifted student who is subjected to intense and continual pressure to moderate his performance might eventually lose his motivation to succeed.

In his studies of young prodigies in natural science, musical composition, prose writing and chess, David Henry Feldman proposes that the attainment of excellence is the result of a confluence of a number of hereditary and environmental factors including the significant influence of personality (Feldman, 1981). He highlights the remarkably high levels of motivation displayed by the children in his study.

"Perhaps the most striking quality of the children in our study as well as other cases is the passion with which excellence is pursued" (Feldman, 1979). He claims, further, that the unusual "commitment, tenacity and joy in achievement" displayed by these children is the most visible sign that the required coincidence of social, environmental and personality factors has occurred.

Silverman (1983) also discusses the role of personality in the establishment of the drive towards achievement and proposes Dabrowski's "third factor" of personality development as a further explanation of how the urge towards excellence is developmental in nature rather than being an innate characteristic in the Galtonian sense.

Dabrowski (1967) posits that in the drive to self-actualization and self-perception the variables of heredity and environment are joined by a third "autonomous" factor which is directly concerned with the pursuit of excellence. This "third factor" is a "powerful internal force propelling development towards high levels of integrity, authenticity, creativity, ethical responsibility and compassion" (Silverman, 1983). It is an emotional commitment to strive to realize one's intellectual and emotional potential to the fullest.

Dabrowski has developed his theory through a study of gifted or creative persons who have achieved eminence. However, unlike Galton, he sees the motivational drive not as innate, but as a developmental characteristic which evolves as the gifted individual progresses towards higher levels of human functioning. In Dabrowski's view, the pursuit of excellence is an off-shoot springing from the initial drive towards self-perfection.

It is important to note that, like Galton and like Renzulli who was influenced by MacKinnon's study of prominent architects (MacKinnon, 1964), Dabrowski developed his theory through a study of individuals who had already attained excellence. The subjects of Bloom and Feldman were also adults or children who had substantially achieved their potential and whose gifts had received recognition. We must ask ourselves, however, how far the theories of these researchers apply to gifted youth whose potential is not achieved. What of those who "fall by the wayside?" Setting aside external considerations such as lack of scholastic or other environmental opportunity, can their lack of success be attributed simply to the nondevelopment of the drive for

excellence? Or should we look further towards additional personal factors which may either inhibit or enhance the development of that drive?

Foster (1983) proposes that a necessary condition for the development of the drive to excel is a secure self-concept. In an individual whose self-concept is secure, the locus of evaluation of individual action is internal to the self. More importantly, in the context of this argument, "the standards of excellence in individual action are internal to the person in the form of their self-esteem and although the person is actively and accurately aware of the standards of performance held by the outside world he is most responsive to these internally held reference values" (Foster, 1983).

Such an individual, whose self-concept is secure, both stimulating and reinforcing his drive towards excellence, is less likely to be influenced by societal pressures to achieve only to group norms, or to conform to culturally determined standards of performance. Self-concept or self-esteem can then be viewed as facilitative factors in the realization of intellectual ability or potential (Feldhusen, 1986; Feldhusen & Hoover, 1986).

Self-concept, however, is in part derived from the view of himself which the child acquires through his interactions with the world around him, and particularly through his relationships with a limited number of significant others. For the child, particularly the gifted child who has been taught that academic attainment is to be especially valued, these may be his teachers and classmates as much as his family and friends.

The development of intimacy, a relationship of mutual support, concern and valuing, is, according to Foster, a necessary correlate of the development of a secure self-concept.

The Need for Intimacy

In the last decade, educators and psychologists have become increasingly aware of the influence of supportive intimate relationships on the attainment of human potential. Sears (1977), reviewing the life experience of the men in Terman's sample, notes that these men's perceptions regarding whether their lives had been satisfying or not were strongly related to the quality of intimate relationships they had enjoyed.

One of the measures of the supportiveness and intimacy of a relationship is the degree to which the significant

others in an individual's life provide him with accurate, honest and detailed feedback about his standard of performance both in the general arena and in his chosen domain of work. Open and honest feedback is necessary for the individual to understand his effect on others and on his chosen field; only then can he make an informed and objective evaluation of his contribution.

The gifted child's search for intimacy is well documented. Silverman (1983) documents several instances when intellectually gifted children have demonstrated concern and compassion for another child's physical or emotional distress at an age when the average child is almost totally egocentric in his view of the world and of relationships. The first words of Thomas Carlyle, spoken at the age of 11 months in response to the tears of a young companion, are said to have been, "What ails wee Jock?" (Cox, 1926). Indeed, the gifted child's need and capacity to form friendships is greater, and appears at an earlier age, than that of his age peers.

One is more likely to achieve intimate and supportive relationships with peers, than with persons with whom one has little in common. In human society, we seek the companionship of people with like values and interests. In childhood relationships, this translates into a seeking after people at the same developmental stage as oneself.

It has often been noted that intellectually gifted children tend to seek out, for companionship, older children or children of their own age who are at similar stages of intellectual development (Davis, 1924; Hollingworth, 1931; O'Shea, 1960). O'Shea (1960) noted that in several studies conducted over a number of years no variable correlated more highly with friendship choices in children than mental age, and that this stood considerably above any other factor. The search for like minds and like companionship appears to begin in very early childhood. Hubbard observed a heterogeneous group of three year olds at nursery school, measuring the children both in terms of the number of times the children chose each other as spontaneous play companions and in terms of the length of time they spent together as a group. When she calculated the correlation between mental age and spontaneous group participation, Hubbard found that children who played together most often showed a correlation of .41 with mental age, while for those who played together longest the correlation was a remarkable .62 (Hubbard, 1929).

The importance of play as an aid to socialization is widely documented. A major difficulty for highly gifted children, however, is that their play interests often differ quite radically from those of their age-peers. Terman made a special study of the play of those children in the gifted group who scored above 170 IQ and found that they were much more solitary in their play than were children clustering around IQ 140 (Burks, Jensen and Terman, 1930). Gifted girls are much less interested in doll-play than are their peers of average intelligence. On being asked by Leta Hollingworth why she did not care to play with dolls, a seven year old girl (IQ 170) replied, "They aren't real. The doll that is supposed to be a baby doll is twice as big as the one that is made like a mother doll." (Hollingworth, 1931). This rejection of doll-play can be a very real hindrance to socialization, as for young girls role-play with dolls plays a major part in establishing and setting the parameters of relationships. For the gifted child, however, the search for logic and structure may supercede the desire for social intercourse.

Generally the play interests of the gifted center on games of intellectual skill, while those of the average child involve predominantly simple sensory-motor activity. Hollingworth (1931) reports the mother of a highly gifted six year old saying, "He can never be satisfied just to toss a ball around." The gifted child prefers "competitive" play, where ideas and strategies are matched against each other (Terman, 1926; Witty and Lehman, 1927; Hollingworth, 1931), whereas the average child prefers games where such rules as exist are clearly defined and closely adhered to. This can cause conflict when the highly able child, who may see the illogicality or irrelevance of the rules, seeks to overturn them, either to improve the game or simply for the intellectual stimulation of the ensuing argument!

Because of these factors, the play of the highly intelligent tends to be an uneasy compromise between their own interests and abilities and their desire to be accepted into a social group. Children who are less willing or less able to make such a compromise often become "loners," preferring to invent solitary intellectual games which often center on fantasy and imagined adventure. A significant number of intellectually gifted children create imaginary playmates or imaginary countries, in an attempt to satisfy their need for companionship or social interaction at their own level and within their own interests (Terman, 1926; Hollingworth, 1926).

Thus even play, which for the average child is one of the most important aids to socialization, serves to underscore the differences between the gifted child and his age-mates, rather than acting as a link between them.

It is clear that gifted children have the need for the companionship of intellectual peers, and are to some degree at least aware of this need. However, age peers of the intellectually gifted, especially in childhood, are often confused by the gifted child because it is difficult for them to identify with his superior cognitive abilities. The average child often downplays the superiority of the gifted by providing false feedback about the true extent of his gifts and talents. If this false feedback is accepted and internalized by the gifted child, he may develop a self-concept based on underrating himself, his abilities and his value to society. Particularly in a society such as Australia, where the highly egalitarian social ethos is based, in large part, on "cutting down the tall poppies" (Ward, 1958; Goldberg, 1981; Start, 1986) there is a very real danger that the gifted student will receive deliberately misleading information about his abilities and potential not only from classmates but also from teachers.

Conflict and Underachievement

It can be seen that unless the gifted child is provided with a peer group of companions of like intellectual ability, a vicious circle of misinformation and self criticism may arise. As we have discussed, the attainment of intimacy is a necessary correlate for the sustainment of the drive to self perfection. Through intimate relationships, the gifted child obtains honest and accurate feedback about his performance and his effect on others. Where this open and nonjudgmental feedback is available, the child will develop a secure and healthy self-concept. Where feedback is falsified and invalidated through envy or lack of understanding, or because the teacher prefers to conceal from the gifted child the true extent of his advancement, the gifted receive a negative and unrealistic view of themselves and their potential. This extremely diminished view of potential may result in poor self-esteem and low self-concept. As Foster has shown, a healthy self-concept is necessary for the establishment and maintainance of the drive towards excellence.

Thus the gifted child may come to believe that his gifts are ephemeral or of limited value. Since his strengths are undervalued by his peers, he may come to seek peer approval by seeking to

develop the skills and attributes which are valued. This may involve seeking peer approval by becoming the class clown, gaining leadership status in a group of disaffected students of much lower intellectual capacity, or developing a sporting talent at the expense of his academic ability.

Empirical studies which have investigated underachievement among gifted youth have uncovered some alarming statistics. An English study by Painter (1976) of 160 children of IQ 123 - 212 found that when the children's classroom performance was compared with their scores on standardized attainment tests of Math and English, over 60% of the students were working, in class, at a level more than four years below their tested achievement. Certainly much classroom underachievement can be attributed to an undemanding school curriculum which requires lock-step progression by chronological age rather than by academic or intellectual aptitude. However, there is no doubt that many gifted students underachieve quite deliberately in an attempt to win social acceptance by their classmates and teachers.

This, then, may be the central psychosocial dilemma of gifted youth. If the gifted child is to satisfy his drive for excellence, he must risk sacrificing the attainment of intimacy with his age peers. If the pursuit of intimacy is his primary need, he must moderate his standards of achievement, conceal, to some extent at least, his intellectual interests, and conform to a value system that may be seriously at variance with his own level of moral development, to retain the approval of the group into which he wishes to be accepted. It is this dilemma that is left unaddressed by the generalized and simplistic social assumptions of the South Australian policy on "fostering gifts and talents."

Because of the unusual qualities of perceptiveness and sensitivity which characterize intellectually gifted youth, many children who choose to sacrifice achievement for intimacy are remarkably successful in concealing their abilities. For some years Tom, a student in a South Australian elementary school, employed two quite distinct and separate vocabularies to avoid detection by his peers. His "normal" vocabulary, as he termed it, which he used with his family and close adult friends, was even at six years old, that of an informed and articulate adult. His alternative vocabulary, which he employed quite deliberately as a camouflage structure, was reserved for use at school with his teachers and age-peers; it was designed

to conceal, from people whom he did not trust, his shameful secret of having the mentality, interests and speech of a child twice his age. Tom's secret was only discovered when his level of intellectual frustration reached the point at which he began to employ quite severe physical violence against his classmates. The school psychologist who was brought in to test him prior to referring him for psychiatric evaluation, found that he has an IQ in excess of 170.

In a child such as this, the motivation to achieve has turned inwards and has become a motivation to succeed in a complex matrix of social deception.

The quotations which began this paper express the concerns of leading educators in the United States and Australia that schools are abrogating their responsibilities towards the intellectual and academic welfare of their students in favor of an increasingly dominant role in the socialization of children. Yet the lack of awareness and interest, even among educators of the gifted, in the social and emotional needs of this already disadvantaged group of children, suggests that the gifted are still seen as students who will achieve academic and social success on the strength of their intellectual gifts alone.

To the contrary, the gifted must be one of the few remaining groups in our society who are compelled, by the constraints of the educative and social system within which they operate, to choose which of two basic psychosocial needs should be fulfilled. Often neither need is satisfied. Research reports over the last thirty years on the number of intellectually gifted students who drop out of high school (Van Dyke and Hoyt, 1958; French, 1969; Marland, 1972) should have alerted us to the fact that a significant proportion of our most gifted youth are experiencing neither the euphoria of achievement nor the supportive warmth of intimacy in the present school climate. Is it any wonder that they leave, to seek it elsewhere?

In both the United States and Australia enlightened school systems are beginning to experiment with various student groupings to assist the gifted to establish peer relationships with other children who share their abilities and interests. In the United States, special schools for the gifted such as the Hunter Elementary School and the Julliard School of Music in New York have long provided opportunities for highly gifted students to work and socialize together with other children of exceptional potential. In Australia structured opportunities for peer interaction are much more limited,

but a number of fine programs such as the acceleration program at University High School, Melbourne, and the full time self-contained gifted classes in Northern Territory do exist and flourish, despite active opposition from politicians and the militant teachers' industrial unions. To answer and defuse hostility and opposition, we need much more empirical research on the effects of peer grouping on the social and emotional development of the gifted in homogeneously grouped and ungrouped settings. But first, educators and psychologists working in gifted education have to be convinced of the desirability of such research.

In a comprehensive review of research on the psychosocial development of the intellectually gifted, Janos and Robinson (1985) indicate that research findings regarding favorable personal and social adjustment emanate from studies of moderately rather than extremely gifted children. Janos and Robinson claim that although the special problems of the extremely gifted demand urgent investigation, "the research devoted to exploring them pales in comparison with that devoted to virtually any other maladaptive set of behaviors."

Let us close with the words of James, aged 12, on completing the probationary period which the South Australian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (SAAGTC) requires students to undertake before final acceptance into its student programs. James, who is highly gifted but a chronic underachiever at school, had attended a series of Math and Science classes pitched at the 15 - 16 year old level, and had performed exceptionally. One of the SAAGTC Committee asked him whether he would like to continue attending the classes.

James was visibly moved. "Saturday Club is the best thing that's ever happened to me," he said. "The kids are so friendly. Nobody here thinks I'm dumb and weird."

Then he added, "You know, when I'm here I don't think I'm dumb and weird either."

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