Emotional/Behavioral Disorders in Gifted Learners

- Counseling Gifted Youth
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Emotional/Behavioral Disorders in Gifted Learners

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Counseling a Gifted Adolescent Through Isolation

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Underachievement in the Eye of the Beholder

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Elizabeth C. Cavazos, B.A., is currently working toward a master’s in gifted education through Hardin-Simmons University. Her research interests include instructional strategies and curriculum models for the gifted learner. She has taught in an elementary school in Irving, Texas for 9 years and currently teaches in a self-contained gifted classroom.

Mary M. Christopher, Ph.D., completed her doctorate in curriculum and instruction at Texas Tech University in 2003. After teaching for more than 15 years in elementary and middle schools in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kentucky, she now serves as assistant professor in educational Studies at Hardin-Simmons University. She recently completed 4 years of service on the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented board. She begins a term as past-president of the Research Division of TAGT this year. Her research interests include gifted university students and appropriate instructional strategies for gifted learners. She can be reached at mchris@hsutx.edu.

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Independent Study Plus Mentorship: One Size Really Can Fit All

Shannon South is an advanced academics specialist for the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District, teaching fourth–through sixth–grade gifted and talented students. She recently developed an ISM program for the Irving Independent School District and now serves as its mentor coordinator. She is also pursuing graduate studies through Hardin-Simmons University. She can be reached at shannonsouth@hebisd.edu

Gifted Kids in Crisis

Dawn M. Bailey, M.Ed., completed her graduate work in gifted education at Hardin-Simmons University in 2003. Having taught for 12 years, primarily with elementary students, she now serves as the advanced academics consultant for Birdville Independent School District in northeast Texas. She is a member of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented and recently received the Non Doctoral Student Award from the National Association for Gifted Children. She is currently working on her second master’s degree in educational administration from the University of North Texas. Her research interests include appropriate programming and curriculum development for gifted and talented learners.

Mary M. Christopher, Ph.D., completed her doctorate in curriculum and instruction at Texas Tech University in 2003. After teaching for more than 15 years in elementary and middle schools in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kentucky, she now serves as assistant professor in educational studies at Hardin-Simmons University. She recently completed 4 years of service on the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented board. She begins a term as past-president of the Research Division of TAGT this year. Her research interests include gifted university students and appropriate instructional strategies for gifted learners. She can be reached at mchris@hsutx.edu.

What the Research Says About Gifted Students With Behavior Disorders

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Emotional/Behavioral Disorders in Gifted Learners

Juan* was the smartest and most popular boy in my sixth-grade gifted and talented class. He was handsome, polite, sensitive, kind-hearted, and athletic, endearing himself daily to his teachers and peers alike. It was no surprise to me when he was elected class president. He was a straight "A" student because he either aced the test or produced the most outstanding project or report in the class.

After Juan went to junior high school, I really missed his smiling face. Every now and then, like some of my other students, he stopped by my classroom to visit during 6-weeks or semester tests, when the junior high campuses had early dismissal. He seemed as upbeat and happy as ever.

When Juan was in the eighth grade, I received a call at home one evening from his homeroom teacher. The words I heard next will stay with me for the rest of my life. “I thought you would want to know that Juan Romero committed suicide yesterday. He hanged himself in the basement of his parents’ home. He often spoke of you and how much he enjoyed your class, and I thought you should know.”

In disbelief and choked with sobs, I expressed my shock and bewilderment. “But why? Why would this young man, who had it all, want to do such a thing?” The obviously shaken man on the other end of the line had no answer. I tearfully copied down the funeral arrangements he gave me with shaking hands and a heavy heart, thanked him for calling, and collapsed on the sofa to tearfully recall all my favorite memories of this very special young man.

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The day of the funeral was one of the saddest days of my life. My entire former sixth-grade gifted class, now in Juan’s eighth-grade class, came and sat with me and we cried together in the last three pews of Juan’s church.

His parents spoke to me afterwards. “He couldn’t have done this,” his mother sobbed. “It must have been an accident!” His dad thanked me for caring about his son.

During my brief conversations with former students, one girl mentioned to me that Juan had made his first B on a paper that week, but she “felt sure it couldn’t have upset him that much.” The more I thought about that remark, the more I wondered if she could be wrong. To this day, I do not really know why it happened, but I can tell you the impact it had on me. That day I made a vow to never again let another gifted child leave my classroom without making a B somewhere along the way, followed by a one-on-one, eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart talk about the importance of learning versus grades on a report card and the fact that self-worth is not determined by or linked to grades.

During the years that followed, I learned that many gifted children think they have to be perfect because they feel that parents, teachers, and others expect perfection from them. Experts have speculated that gifted youth are at high risk for suicide due to their extreme sensitivity and perfectionism. Perfectionism is experienced, according to a recent survey, among approximately 46% of gifted middle school students. Perfectionism means a student may:

- be afraid of making mistakes;
- equate self-worth with grades (at home and at school);
- expect to ace tests throughout his or her school career, though the work continues to be more challenging each year; and
- feel sad, scared, and stressed much of the time.

How can these gifted students who are trying to cope with perfectionism be helped? The solution to this problem lies with informed parents and professional counseling. School counselors desperately need specialized training to deal with the unique emotional needs of gifted young people.

Was Juan a victim of perfectionism? How can this tendency among many gifted children be refocused toward healthier thinking and behavior?

The pursuit of excellence is a much more worthy goal. It means taking risks, trying new things, growing, changing, making mistakes, and learning from them. The pursuit of excellence sometimes means failing to achieve a goal. This leads to learning the value of persistence and that it is okay to fail. (To find out what “works,” we need to find out what doesn’t.) Pursuing excellence, rather than struggling with perfectionism, also lays the foundation for healthy self-esteem and a happier life.

*The name of this student has been changed to protect his identity.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S UPDATE

by Tracy Weinberg

2005 promises to be an exciting year full of changes and growth at TAGT, a year to work to fulfill the promises of the past year and “Enrich the Legacy” of the association.

The biggest change will be the hiring of a new executive director; as 2004 ended, TAGT bid farewell to Jay McIntire, who moved with his family back to his native Maine. I am serving as the interim executive director while the executive board conducts a nationwide search. The vision and leadership he brought to TAGT during his 2+ years at the helm will be sorely missed.

The past year brought many worthwhile changes to TAGT. They include:

- The Legacy Book Awards, a national recognition of the most exceptional books in the field of gifted education for scholars, educators, parents, adolescents, and youth. The winners are noted in the current TAGT Newsletter and on our Web site at http://www.txgifted.org.
- A redeveloped and upgraded TAGT Web site. As the staff has taken on the management of the Web site, TAGT has been able to beef up its content, give it a bit of a facelift, and keep it more up to date. One major change that benefits the entire gifted community in Texas is the posting of Insights, TAGT’s Annual Directory of Scholarships, Grants, and Awards on the public portion of the Web site. Now all interested teachers, parents, and students can access this most valuable resource.
- A greatly enhanced Members Only section on the TAGT Web site. Additions include audio interviews with leaders in the field of gifted education and on other topics of interest. The newly redesigned TAGT Newsletter is posted there; the electronic format permits a great deal more information to be available at a fraction of the cost. Finally, Tempo, TAGT’s quarterly journal, is available there in electronic form, beginning with the Fall 2004 issue. (It will still be mailed to all members)
- The formation of the TAGT Dual Language/Multicultural Division. This division, led by Dr. Rebecca Rendón of Brownsville ISD, will focus attention on one of the most underserved gifted populations in the state. Look for outstanding sessions organized by the division at the TAGT annual conference.
- The reorganization of the Research Division, under the leadership of Dr. Barbara Polnick of Sam Houston State University. They are hard at work on developing their goals, and you can expect to see more sessions on research topics at the TAGT annual conference.

The coming year offers many opportunities and challenges. Foremost among them will be advocacy work on behalf of gifted students and those who live and work with them. The ongoing effort to encourage legislation that will strengthen gifted education is a major goal of TAGT. We have been meeting regularly with a number of key legislators in both the Texas House and the Texas Senate, and we hope those efforts will bear fruit. There has been particular interest in the Performance Standards Project as a means to increased accountability for gifted education. If you visit their Web site at http://www.performancestandards.org, you might see the future of gifted education.

Also, TAGT has been testifying tirelessly, if not entirely successfully, to the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) regarding the G/T Supplemental Teaching certificate. As of this date, it is still unclear whether this certificate will become required for new teachers to the field or whether this will remain the only teaching field that does not require a specialized certificate. TAGT believes that it would be most unfortunate to single out gifted students as the only population not worthy of specialized expertise from its teachers. You can monitor progress on both of these issues on the TAGT Web site.

In the meantime, be sure to mark your calendars for two upcoming TAGT conferences:

- The Leadership Conference, hosted by TAGT’s Coordinators’ Division, will be March 31–April 1, in Austin. Keynote speakers will be Senator Florence Shapiro, chair of the Senate Education Committee, and TAGT past-president Dr. Bertie Kingore.
- TAGT’s 28th Annual Professional Development Conference for Educators and Parents, “Marvel of the Mind,” will be in San Antonio at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, November 2–5. Keynote speakers will be Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, one of the country’s foremost experts on gifted education, on “The Role of Gifted Education in Equity and Excellence” and the energetic young entrepreneur Jason Dorsey, on “How Gifted Education Saved My Life!” There are exciting preconference sessions on Wednesday, a planned Family Day for parents and children on Saturday, and a redesigned schedule that will help you rediscover the excitement that is the country’s premier gifted education conference.

I hope this is just the beginning of a year that will enrich TAGT’s legacy and show Texas and the country the future of gifted education.
Loneliness and isolation are common themes in the literature on the social and emotional concerns of gifted individuals (Kerr & Cohn, 2001; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). Yet, the field has not explored these areas in terms of clinical approaches designed to assist gifted individuals form more meaningful affiliations.

One purpose of this article is to begin to close the gap between the awareness that gifted individuals struggle with these issues and strategies for addressing them. What follows is a clinical example of how one highly gifted client and his therapist began to resolve this struggle. A second purpose is to show how this session fits within the framework of my Gifted Identity Formation Model (GIFM; Mahoney, 1998). GIFM is designed to help counselors and therapists working with gifted clients to account for their unique and complex nature and to direct clinical approaches accordingly. The basic premise of the GIFM is that the therapist should look at the client’s social system and explore how his or her giftedness has impacted relationships and in turn impacted identity. It is crucial that the therapist not overlook giftedness as a variable in the client’s social system. If giftedness is overlooked in the therapy, the client may ultimately feel misunderstood, and feelings of isolation and loneliness will have been exacerbated by the therapy itself. The construct of affiliation, which the GIFM refers to as one of the underpinnings of identity formation, is important for the therapist to understand because it pertains to a gifted individual’s development of peer relationships. For the average individual, peer affiliations are likely to occur naturally, probably not requiring intervention and not having lasting negative impact on identity formation. With a gifted individual, affiliations with those of similar levels of ability are less likely to occur naturally and may need to be facilitated. In the case of the client who is the focus here, he was clearly lacking awareness of why he had struggled so long with trying to fit in. Using the GIFM, for this case the issues of loneliness and isolation are placed in the cross-matrix area of the construct Affiliation and the Social System.

This client’s initial perception of his struggle with isolation and loneliness was incongruent with his perception of self in regard to his giftedness. He lacked awareness of how his being highly gifted created unique differences between him and most of those with whom he interacted. *I helped the client become more aware of how his giftedness impacted his social system and his feelings of isolation and loneliness.*

### The Client

The client was a 17-year-old highly gifted male in his senior year of high school and a veteran member of an ongoing counseling group for gifted boys. Mid-year during his senior year, he sought individual counseling from the group leader to explore issues related to feelings of isolation and connection with others and to explore issues in depth that had surfaced in the group. Though his parents were divorced, both were highly supportive of the client. He was a high achiever academically, but did not participate in extra-curricular activities until his senior year, when he became involved with the drama department. He was the second child of several siblings and step-siblings. The transcribed session described here is the fourth individual session.

This session shows evidence of a marked change in the client’s level of insight. The client was able to integrate into his sense of self an understanding of how his giftedness was related to his feelings of isolation and loneliness. He also began to take responsibility for how he would address these issues in the future. In this session the client explored his defenses against awareness of his role in creating feelings of loneliness and isolation. In most clinical approaches, a therapist is unlikely to include giftedness as a variable that impacts on the intense isolation and loneliness experienced by the client during his formative years. In this client’s situation, the social system interfacing with his life had an impact on his identity as a gifted person. His social system impacted how he perceived himself in relation to his peers and how he understood their ways of relating to him.
talking a lot in school to fill space. You're saying you're doing this out of a sense of abandonment.

J. That's not the cause. It's more what I feel when I think about it. I think I can put it better. It's more out of a sense of loneliness and isolation, but if I sit there and I don't talk, I feel like just another person. But, when I do talk, it's not any better because I feel that people are just thinking of me as a set of behaviors that aren't even me.

(The client is beginning to clarify that the way he is behaving in school, talking a lot, is really a manifestation of his deeper feelings of loneliness and isolation, which he had formerly identified as abandonment.)

A. It sounds, then, that you're invalidated.

J. Uh-huh. Stabbing myself at every turn.

(The client demonstrates here how deeply he internalizes the pain of not being able to affiliate with others.)

A. So you're expecting these people to understand and relate to you on the level that you're relating to them.

(At this point, I am helping the client clarify his expectations of others, that they understand him before he understands others. That expectation is another way the client externalizes responsibility for struggle and defends against facing the complexity of his struggle as it relates to his high level of giftedness.)

A. It's none of those things. It has to do with the audience or the classmates or the set of people or the individuals you're trying to relate to (all fall under the category of affiliates) and whether or not you're assuming they could actually relate with you. You're assuming they have the same level of interests, same level of desire, same level of intellectual precocity, same level of understanding of material. When they don't reciprocate, that sets off your feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Then you go back and attribute it to—what?

J. Fears of loneliness and abandonment I attribute to itself. I go in a full circle of—Yeah, I see what you mean. My mind has been liking to ignore that fact, hasn't it, that maybe it's not that they don't want to relate to me or communicate to me; it's just that they can't. Or even if they did have the mental capability to, they'd be afraid to or wouldn't be ready to.

(Most therapists might interpret what the client just described as arrogant or elitist. It is not. The client clearly has to get to a point where he can distinguish that there is a distinct difference in the way gifted people relate.)

J. I'm using my different level or trend of thinking, which is so different than theirs, I guess. Most people wouldn't be able to relate to me, and then I feel disappointed when everybody can't. I expect everybody to be able to understand me.

A. Which speaks to what about your self-awareness?

(At this point, I am helping the client clarify his expectations of others, that they understand him before he understands others. That expectation is another way the client externalizes responsibility for struggle and defends against facing the complexity of his struggle as it relates to his high level of giftedness.)

A. I hear you, but there's something missing in the equation.

J. Fear? Anger? Happiness?

A. No. It's none of those things. It has to do with the audience or the classmates or the set of people or the individuals you're trying to relate to (all fall under the category of affiliates) and whether or not you're assuming they could actually relate with you. You're assuming they have the same level of interests, same level of desire, same level of intellectual precocity, same level of understanding of material. When they don't reciprocate, that sets off your feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Then you go back and attribute it to—what?

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J. I'm using my different level or trend of thinking, which is so different than theirs, I guess. Most people wouldn't be able to relate to me, and then I feel disappointed when everybody can't. I expect everybody to be able to understand me.

A. Which speaks to what about your self-awareness?
I try to go through other people to understand myself, let their reactions to the things I’m saying dictate the way I think about if the things I’m saying matter.

(This statement is indicative of self-validation and affirmation as it pertains to the self and social system.)

A. It sounds like that process doesn’t work for you.

J. No, it doesn’t. Because they’re not really in a position to invalidate what I’m saying, and yet I let them. I’m giving them too much power over me. I’m giving everybody too much power over me because I don’t really want it myself. Then I would really have to deal with myself instead of trying to make other people deal with me.

(The client has come to an understanding of self and validation.)

A. Dealing with yourself would include—?

J. Recognizing how I feel.

A. If I asked you, “How do you feel?” my sense is we’d go back into that cycle, and again you wouldn’t talk about what the issues are around why you feel that way, even though you can identify how you feel quite readily.

J. I’m doing it again.

A. What is “it” that you’re doing?

J. I’m using understanding to shield myself again.

A. From what? Shield? Shield?

J. What do you mean, “shield”? I’m using my shield to avoid understanding my shield?

A. You said you’re shielding yourself again.

(The client is the teacher here—the therapist is not the expert. I need to understand the term the client is using. I am asking the client to define his defense posture—his “shield.” The client wanted me to define the term, and I turned the question/challenge back to the client. This all occurred very subtly in the session above where the client responds, “What do you mean—shield?” as if I had used the word first. If I had “taken the bait,” the client would have been rescued from exploring his defensive position.)

J. Uh-huh. Stop using that word. Well, abusing that word.

A. Sounds like some aspect of yourself that you’re not acknowledging. You started to talk about it, and you acknowledged that on some level people couldn’t relate, whatever words you used. And then you moved away from saying more about that and you went back into your feelings around isolation, loneliness, and feeling less worthy.

J. Yeah, okay. I see what you mean now. I think what I’m doing is I’m avoiding thinking about how I have trouble interacting with people instead of focusing on these feelings that I can’t just by themselves do anything about. Ignoring why I’m really feeling these things. Trying to explain why I feel.

A. Talk about your feelings of isolation.

(I am challenging the client to move further into exploring his feelings of isolation and loneliness. At this point, I am trying to hold the client accountable, not to just identify the feelings of isolation and loneliness, but also to express them and to explore them on a deeper level so that the client can begin to understand how they relate to his struggle with being gifted and, in turn, affect his ability to form affiliations with both gifted and nongifted people.)

J. I see what you mean now. I think what I’m doing is avoiding thinking about how I have trouble interacting with people instead of focusing on these feelings that, just by themselves, I can’t do anything about. Ignoring why I really feel these things. Trying to explain why I feel them with themselves. Which isn’t possible.

(The client is admitting at this point that he has not really explored the depth of his trouble interacting with people, and I am now going to move in the direction of discovering the function of his avoidance of exploring these feelings at a deeper level, particularly exploring these feelings in relation to his being gifted.)

A. What function does that behavior serve for you?

J. It makes me not have to face that there are going to be very few people who can relate to me the way I need to be related to, and I don’t want to face that. Instead I try to focus on the way I feel so I don’t have to do anything about it.

(At this point, for the first time, the client admits that his isolation and loneliness have something to do with his being gifted. This is a crucial awareness. Prior to this point, the client’s belief system was that the trouble he was having with social affiliations was not related to any aspect of his gifted identity. What is important for me to know, and what makes this type of counseling session different from working with conventional problems with affiliation and socialization, is the level of awareness the client has regarding the root of why he is not able to make the affiliation. Once the client can identify that, because he is gifted, there is inherently a unique set of aspects surrounding affiliation that must be reconciled with, the process differs from conventional counseling. The client would not be able to move on to the next phase if there were no accurate awareness of this unique context. In actuality, if this part of the counseling did not reconcile the client with his giftedness, the counseling would inevitably hit an impasse and possibly produce more feelings of isolation and loneliness. Not only would the client feel his peers couldn’t affiliate and understand, he would feel the therapist also could not.)

A. So, you can express how you feel, but it’s not connected to the real reason you’re feeling that way. So, you don’t have to deal with the fact that you can’t find people who can really relate to you.

J. So probably people that can relate to me, I assume that—well, I don’t know if this is true—but it could be that I am seeking out people who won’t be able to understand me. Well, actually, I don’t think it’s true.

A. I don’t think it’s true either. And I’m glad that you acknowledge that it isn’t true.

J. Yeah. It didn’t seem right to me. I think it’s just a way of me . . .

A. Well, I think you’re judging your quest for seeking people, and I think it’s totally appropriate for you to seek out people.

J. Yeah, I was contradicting it by focusing on something else again.

A. Rather than starting to realize that this process of seeking out like minds is quite a challenge for you. It brings up all these issues around your loneliness and isolation that have been relevant to your life up to this point. It’s a lack of awareness as to why you’ve been so lonely and isolated.

J. Yeah, I’m skittering away from the issue every single way I can.

A. And the issue is . . .

J. Okay. The issue is that I cannot find people who I can relate to fully and who I feel can understand and accept me for who I am.

A. And who are you?
At this point in the session, the client has progressed considerably since the session began. The fact that so early in the session he has been able to take on and integrate this whole issue clearly reflects his giftedness. I can now delve even further into issues surrounding the client’s identity.

J. I don’t know.

A. You’ve just shut down.

(In actuality, the client didn’t “shut down.” He actually became introspective, as is evident in his next statement.)

J. Yes. I’m a very bright person who is very sensitive to a lot of things and who feels a deep need to help people and to be understood.

A. What’s it like for you to say that?

(At this point, I am asking the client to explore his feelings around professing his identity—to discuss what it is like to validate his own identity as a gifted person. What he described above are characteristics of a gifted person. This statement is obviously something he has known and experienced deeply about himself. Therefore, much of this session is not really new to him. It may be seen as an unveiling process of his gifted self that he inherently knows to be there.)

J. It’s kind of frightening because not only am I realizing that’s true; I’m realizing that I don’t want to admit that it’s true. I don’t want to admit that I’m unique and that it’s going to be hard for people to relate to me because I’m different from them in a lot of ways.

A. And that’s frightening.

(At this point, I am simply reflecting the client’s fright. However, this therapeutic “event” is of great magnitude in assisting the client in his struggle with social affiliation. Reflecting feelings, without interpretation, oftentimes is the key to unlocking even more awareness. This simple use of reflection of feelings, when done appropriately, can move the client forward tremendously. It is a rare event when someone reflects feelings, instead of reflecting content, advising, interpreting, fixing, rescuing, or preventing feelings.)

J. Yes, it is. I think what I’ve been doing in response to feeling that way is, instead of realizing that I am different and I have different thoughts and trying to find people who can understand me for who I am, I’ve been trying to change myself or hide myself in order to be accepted by people who I don’t feel could really accept who I am, whether that is true or not.

(At this point, the client is acknowledging his own compensation strategies. He is also indirectly acknowledging how much he is giving up in relationships, particularly with other gifted people.)

A. Can you say more about this process of hiding yourself?

J. Yes. I feel a lot of negative when I talk about the way I feel and the way I think. I get a lot of negative reinforcement. Like people are going to say that some of it is true and some of it is imaginary and created by me. But, for whatever reason, I don’t often talk about things that really matter to me. I don’t try to relate to people on my own level. I try to relate on theirs. I spend very little time focusing on myself in conversations—well, no time, almost. I try to relate to everybody by focusing on who they are, their needs, their desires, thus ignoring myself and creating a very bad relationship that is dependent on them.

(After this statement, I reflect typical tenets of counseling: recognizing the client’s strengths and addressing his feelings; a prelude to the realization of what I’m realizing now.)

A. It sounds like a lot of that evolves out of your desire to be understood. And yet, it leads you to be totally misunderstood. Because your real self, and things that are really important to you, you won’t express.

J. Or when I do try to express them occasionally, I quickly back down and allow myself to be completely diverted. Because it’s so hard for me to talk about things, about myself, because I think the other person wouldn’t understand. So I give up and I run away.

A. What are you thinking?

J. I’m thinking a few things. That I have quite a bit more self-awareness now, and I’m realizing how much this has been impacting my actions and how it will impact my actions now.

(At this point, the client has come full circle. He is now able to conceptualize his struggle in relationship with his social system and affiliation.)

I’m also kind of uneasy because this is a lot for me to face, for me to deal with, because it is a very frightening thing that I’ve never dealt with before. That there will not be very many people that I will be able to relate to and who can relate to me and understand me and I understand them. And the other thing is . . .

(At this point, I begin to strategize how he is going to implement this new awareness—and call attention to positive movement.)

A. You talk about it, though, as though it’s in the future. And yet, it’s happening already.

J. Yes.

A. I want to go back to the part where you were frightened about facing this awareness.

J. Yeah. I think that what really is scaring me is feeling that, in most of my relationships with other people I have right now and have had in the past, I’ve not actually been able to relate to a person on the level that I need. That’s a really frightening thought. It doesn’t really make me feel alone. Yeah, it makes me feel alone.

A. Sounds like there is more that it does to you.

J. I guess it makes me feel like the relationships that I’ve had with people are less real or less meaningful, in a way. Because almost all my relationships, I’ve just had them on a distant, superficial level. A great example of that is my cousin Steve, who is one of my best friends. Until about 2 months ago, I had never talked to him at all about anything real. Ever.

A. It sounds like about 2 months ago you talked to him about something more real, then?

J. Yeah. On the phone I got this intense . . . like a prelude to the realization of what I’m realizing now.

(At this point, I call attention to the relationship with his cousin in response to earlier work in sessions and previous group process. I use an experience the client brought up 2 months previously.)

J. Yeah. On the phone I got this intense . . . like a prelude to the realization of what I’m realizing now.

(I know that good therapy is a client learning what he already knows, but the function of the therapist is to help bring this knowledge to a greater awareness, integration, and availability for the client’s later reference.)

I’ve realized how dysfunctional, in a way, our relationship was, and how, although we’d done lots and lots of stuff together, we didn’t really understand
Each other more than a vague kind of companionship. So, I talked about it and then after I chiseled through 30,000 tons of ice and humor and such, I finally kind of got through to him. Now, although we kind of avoid it off and on, now we kind of realize it and we're a lot closer to each other. We have some kind of mutual, real understanding relationship. Now it makes me realize how little of that I've done in my life and how few relationships I have, that I've had I've tried to change myself to try to be accepted allows me to be free not to try to undermine my own self-confidence based on other people's opinions of me. Or what I perceive other people's opinions of me. Or what I perceive other people's opinions of me. Or what I perceive other people's opinions of me.

(At this point, the client is realizing that he is not limited in terms of how he affiliates with others—differing from his earlier statements that it was going to be with very few people. Even though he is still highly gifted and the number of people he can relate with may be limited at some level, he is realizing that it is not an impossible task for him to find social affiliation.)

A. What is it that is making you feel optimistic?

J. Realizing that I don't have to change myself to be accepted or that I can't change myself to try to be accepted allows me to be free not to try to undermine my self-confidence based on other people's opinions of me. Or what I perceive other people's opinions of me. (Even if this client regresses from this powerful acknowledgement of some sort)

(Continued on Page 32)
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders in Gifted Learners

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- Mt. Pleasant-July 7-8, 2005
- Wichita Falls-July 18-19, 2005

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Underachievers of all types have mystified educators for decades. Cases of gifted underachievers, however, have further baffled counselors and school psychologists because educators commonly misidentify and label gifted students as learning disabled, trouble-makers, misfits, nonproducers, and lazy students. One popular case study of such a grossly misidentified underachiever was that of Albert Einstein. Albert loved fantasy as a young boy, but he did not communicate verbally until the age of 4. His speech did not improve until after the age of 9. Einstein despised memorizing facts, and his teachers considered him a slow learner. He did not test well, and facts simply bored him. At the age of 18, he failed the entrance exam to engineering school. However, Albert Einstein went on to become one of the world’s greatest thinkers (Polette, 2004).

Definition of Underachievement

One problem of underachievement begins with its definition. No consensus exists regarding what underachievement actually looks like, where it starts, and how or when the metamorphosis to achievement occurs (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). The manifestation of underachievement may reflect a mismatch between the student and the curriculum (Reis & McCoach, 2000). According to Delisle, the best description of the word lazy describes “people who are not motivated in ways you want them to be” (p. 1). The same description can apply to the word underachiever. Another expert in the field of gifted and talented education, Cecil Frey (2002), defines underachievers as students who demonstrate a significant discrepancy between their cognitive potential and their performance in the classroom. Studies recognize that these students may demonstrate remarkable strengths and talents in some areas and disabling weaknesses in others.

Researchers have studied various types of underachievement and have failed to develop one consistent definition. The definition of underachievement becomes important because of the implied negative student images. Underachievement, a favorite buzzword within the educational community, becomes especially important to clarify when identifying the gifted underachiever. One school of thought defines underachievement as a behavior, or a problem of attitude (Delisle, 2002). The very term, underachievement, implies disapproval and failure in the eyes of adults due to a student’s stubbornness, as well as his or her choice of behavior. While studying the topic of underachieving gifted students, Baker, Bridge, and Evans (1998) concluded that the failure of the child to perform academically at a level commensurate with his or her potential defines the term underachiever. Other researchers suggest that it should be defined by a lack of success in school. Therefore, due to the lack of a clear definition, most research focuses more on the characteristics and causes of underachievement in the educational setting (Delisle).

Characteristics of Underachievers and Nonproducers

Research provides a plethora of checklists containing behaviors and characteristics exhibited by underachieving students. Some professionals attempt to define underachievement by determining a discrepancy between age and performance (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Mandel & Marcus, 1995; Rimm 1997). Others suggest longitudinal data to screen for underachievement (Rimm, Cornale, Manos, & Behrend, 1989). Underachievement often mimics other learning disorders such as learning disabilities, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, as well as depression. Poor study habits, low leadership status with their peers, and the inability to focus on future goals are additional behaviors exhibited by underachievers. Several researchers (Baum, Olenchak, & Owen, 1998; Clark, 1988; Gallagher, 1991; Schunk, 1998; Van Boxtel & Mönk, 1992) list other characteristics educators may discover when trying to identify underachievement, such as:

- low self-esteem;
- boredom in school;
- low maturity levels;
- extreme perfectionism;
- feelings of rejection from family members;
- marked hostility toward adult authority;
- resistance toward adult influence;
- feelings of being victimized;
- disorganization;
- impulsivity;
- failure to set realistic goals; and

Delisle (1992) differentiates between underachievers who are unable to perform at their ability level and nonproducers who choose not to perform. Therefore, nonproducers have a separate set of characteristics. Confusing these two types of underachievers reduces the rate of success in reversing the patterns of underachievement. To properly identify a truly gifted underachiever, educators must look for other behaviors that also occur in nonproducers. Some characteristics common to gifted underachievers and nonproducers include a dislike of school, fear of adult rejection, tendency to withdraw, few interests in or outside of school, and a feeling of helplessness. In many cases, separating the nonproducer from the underachiever becomes a difficult task (Delisle, 1992). The blame for underachievement may lie in taught behavior. Nonproducers master the art of relying on their own ability to get by without putting forth effort; they simply lack the motivation to change. Curricula that do not challenge the underachiever and lack creative appeal leave students uninterested and bored (Delisle, 2002). Underachievers, on the other hand, do not understand the underlying reasons for their inability to achieve, regardless of changes made in the curriculum or in their efforts to improve. Educators must understand that underachievers display different behaviors than nonproducers.

Causes of Underachievement

Once identification as a gifted underachiever occurs, it is important to uncover the causes of this problem. Studies prove that genetics do not contribute to the student’s underachievement syndrome;
rather, a multitude of factors can lead to the problem. These factors may be grouped into four critical areas: physical circumstances, environmental factors, emotional states, and intellectual situations (Smith, 2003).

Physical circumstances may include any persistent or chronic illnesses such as allergies or asthma. These conditions alone do not make a child an underachiever; however, missing too much school may. Consistent school absence hinders the child from learning the basic curriculum, which can lead to underachievement in upper grades. The child becomes frustrated and shows little motivation to remediate missed skills.

There are at least three environmental factors that may contribute to underachievement: school, home, and society in general (Smith, 2003). Researchers speculate that certain aspects of school, such as too much or too little competition, conflict with teachers, peer pressure, lack of opportunities to be creative, and a desire to fit in, affect a student’s ability to achieve in the classroom. In the home, lack of proper early reading and motivation can cause underachievement. Other issues in the home, such as overprotective parents, sibling rivalry, pressure to conform, and conflict with parents may cause a student to underperform (Rimm, 1995). Poverty also affects underachievement because the family’s focus is often on securing basic needs, rather than nurturing and cultivating early learning experiences. Family dynamics play an important role in deep-seated causes of gifted underachievement, as well. Emotional factors should also be considered when examining underachievement. Low self-esteem diminishes the desire to complete quality work. Feelings of not fitting in with others, being ignored by peers and teachers, and being dumb often affect a child’s self-esteem (Smith).

Intellectual factors of underachievement may be difficult to determine due to invalid test scores. Gifted students who show no intelligence discrepancies according to standardized test scores can still be underachievers. It is easy to say that underachievers are “just not smart enough,” but the statement is rarely true (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Impairment due to specific learning disabilities, brain damage/cerebral dysfunction or neurological impairment, or lack of normal hearing or visual perception may coincide with underachievement. Some underachieving students are dyslexic or neurologically disabled, but it is the lack of appropriate programming that produces that underachievement, rather than the disability. These students frequently lack adequate challenge or encouragement to develop their intellectual abilities because of low expectations and a narrow curriculum. Waldron and Saphire (Gallagher, 1991) examined the abilities of 24 elementary-aged gifted/learning-disabled students compared to 24 gifted students without learning disabilities. The study showed that gifted/learning-disabled students did not perform as well as other gifted students on a variety of standardized tests, which included digital span coding and block design. The results suggest that the learning-disabled students may demonstrate the characteristics of organic brain syndrome, showing areas of deficit in rote auditory memory, rather than simply underachievement.

All these factors tend to work against the student’s achieving in the classroom, but most underachievers can improve when given appropriate assistance. Learning to identify the underlying causes of underachievement is crucial to the correction of the problem. Underachievement develops over a long period of time, usually starting with an early failure in learning to read, so it cannot be corrected overnight or in one school year. According to Smith (2003), a child struggling with underachievement needs a long-term commitment of help and support from parents, teachers, and peers.

**INTERVENTION PLANS FOR UNDERACHIEVEMENT**

Over the past decades, educators have questioned the effectiveness of a variety of interventions. Most interventions lack documentation of their effectiveness in reversing underachievement in gifted students, or such documentation is inconsistent and inconclusive. According to Reis and McCoach (2000), most interventions in the schools aim to reverse gifted underachievement through counseling and instructional interventions. “Counseling intervention concentrates on changing the personal or family dynamics that contribute to a student’s underachievement” (Reis & McCoach, p. 84). Such interventions usually involve individual, peer, or family counseling or a combination of several types of counseling (Jeon, 1990). In most counseling situations, the counselor should refrain from forcing the underachiever to become a more successful student. The student must decide if success is a desirable personal goal. Therefore, the counselor’s job focuses on reversing counterproductive habits and behaviors that support underachievement (Reis & McCoach).

Delisle classifies reinforcement strategies with underachievers into three clusters: supportive, intrinsic, and remedial. Supportive strategies “affirm the worth of the child in the classroom and convey the promise of greater potential and success yet to be discovered and enjoyed” (Whitmore, 1980, p. 265). Supportive strategies rely on the teacher as a support partner with the student and help to put the child back in charge of his or her own education (Delisle, 1992). These strategies include:

- elimination of previously mastered work;
- individualized curriculum and instruction using selected topics of interests;
- daily class meetings and contracts; and
- student choice of work.

Intrinsic strategies “are designed to develop intrinsic achievement motivation through the child’s discovery of rewards available as a result of efforts to learn, achieve, and contribute to the group” (Whitmore, 1980, p. 265). Intrinsic strategies rely on self-motivation along with verbal rewards for self-initiated behaviors, such as:

- frequent and positive contact with the family;
- student-selected daily goals;
- student evaluation of work prior to teacher’s assessment; and
- long- and short-term goals made in collaboration with the teacher.

Remedial strategies are “employed to improve the student’s academic performance in an area of learning in which he or she has evidenced difficulty learning, has experienced a sense of failure, and has become unmotivated to engage in learning tasks” (Whitmore, 1980, p. 271).
Several strategies provide a structure for effective remediation:
- peer tutoring in student's strength area;
- small group instruction in students' areas of weakness;
- self instructed goals for improvement determined between the student and the teacher; and
- encouragement administered daily by the teacher and family.

Conclusion

Based on research, defining underachievement for any learner remains difficult. Seeing a student's capabilities and an occasional glimpse of brilliance often replaced by a wall of apathy and apparent indifference compels parents, educators, and counselors to uncover the answer for this troubling area of giftedness. Identifying characteristics in the early years of a child's development, as well as social patterns with family, teachers, and peers, foreshadows future problems with underachievement in school. Pinpointing specific causes of the problem and intervening as quickly as possible with individual, group, and family counseling have proved to be effective with reversing underachievement in upper elementary grades. Using supportive, intrinsic, and remedial strategies that allow students to take back the responsibility of their own learning may help gifted students as they transition from underachievement to productive learning in the classroom. Underachieving is not a new dilemma for gifted children. Additional research regarding underachievement of gifted learners must follow to provide effective solutions to this problem.

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Independent Study Plus Mentorship: One Size Really Does Fit All

Shannon South

There is not a person living in the United States who doesn’t scoff at the “one-size-fits-all” concept, and rightly so; students exhibit a myriad of academic and social needs. However, for the gifted population there exists an educational programming option that does fit an array of advanced-ability students and that also addresses the unique social and emotional hurdles they must overcome: the Independent Study plus Mentorship.

As IQ (intelligence quotient) and test scores are easily measured and justified, most districts have become adept at identifying and serving those students with general intellectual abilities. However, there are those gifted students whose abilities and social proclivities and sensibilities do not comply with Advanced Placement programming tracks to which most GT students are assigned once in high school. So who are these “off-the-track” students? They might be the highly focused and creative students whose mode of speech and dress set them apart from the norm. They might be those annoyingly brilliant students who utterly lack the motivation to do much beyond slouching indolently in the back row of the classroom. Nontraditional students might be languishing in an English as a Second Language (ESL) or Limited English Proficiency (LEP) classroom despite their extraordinary abilities; they also might be disenfranchised minority students or students for whom poverty has removed the emotional, mental, and physical resources needed to compete in a traditional advanced classroom setting and who require a program and instructional design to fit their special needs. Students deprived of social, emotional, and economic resources often need, for example, opportunities to present their work orally and visually, to work with mentors with whom they share an interest, and enjoy the academic and social support offered by small-group participation (Slocumb & Payne, 2000).

And still there are more: the singularly gifted students, the visual and performing arts mavens, those students with whom gadgets of any kind are not safe from dissection, and the students who lead by the strength of their resolve and personality. Many of these diverse needs can be served through an independent study course, made most effective when mentorship is an integral part of the equation.

The Why’s of the Independent Study Plus Mentorship (ISM)

Academic Implications

The Texas Education Agency offers a blueprint for an ISM class on its performance standards Web site (http://www.performancestandards.org) on which individual school districts may base their own programs. The Independent Study Mentorship program is a research-based, advanced level, active learning course designed to provide high school juniors and seniors with an opportunity to explore an array of advanced-ability students and to discover problems with conformity, interpersonal difficulties, problems determining a fulfilling vocation (Delisle, 1992)—can be addressed by the individualized nature of the ISM. Social and emotional guidance issues are easily identified when ISM teachers and mentors conference regularly with students. In addition, the supportive community of an ISM class allows students to encourage and challenge each other throughout the research and development of products and speech writing and public speaking. Most importantly, though, from a social and emotional standpoint, ISM students evolve into a family that honors individual differences: unique personalities on different paths, but all working toward the same goal of becoming experts in a field of their own choosing.

Beginning with the guidance of an ISM teacher, students learn organizational skills, develop critical and creative thinking skills, develop new ways to look at problem solving and strategic planning, and practice research techniques that become increasingly advanced as investigations into their topic of study become focused. Because educators’ experiences with students indicate that they think and learn differently (Smith, 2002), career guidance instruments and learning-style inventories such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and “True Colors” (which may be available through a school’s counseling office) can be used to help students acquire and develop their own personal skills, evaluate learning options, and make informed decisions when considering career choices. Maximizing the learning potential of all students is most effective “when the classroom environment is compatible with their learning style preferences” (Rayneri & Gerber, 2004, p. 90).

By combining ISM advanced research projects with the opportunity for refining public-speaking skills, students from diverse backgrounds are afforded the occasion to develop professional education and business etiquette. The ISM offers these students a special opportunity to investigate the contributions made by members of various racial and ethnic groups, as well as the social issues that affect their work, during their research and product develop-

Social and Emotional Implications

According to surveys reported in the Journal of Counseling and Development (Kerr & Colangelo, 1988), academically talented students often gravitate toward individualized education. Because the independent study is designed to meet individual, rather than group, needs, some of the concerns shared by many gifted students—problems with conformity, interpersonal difficulties, problems determining a fulfilling vocation (Delisle, 1992)—can be addressed by the individualized nature of the ISM. Social and emotional guidance issues are easily identified when ISM teachers and mentors conference regularly with students. In addition, the supportive community of an ISM class allows students to encourage and challenge each other throughout the research and development of products and speech writing and public speaking. Most importantly, though, from a social and emotional standpoint, ISM students evolve into a family that honors individual differences: unique personalities on different paths, but all working toward the same goal of becoming experts in a field of their own choosing.

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opment. According to NEA Today (Harris, 1996, p. 6), students learn how to “defend their positions and stand up for themselves later in life” by making presentations and defending their opinions. Additionally, utilizing all available technologies and software encourages students’ participation and learning during the writing and editing process of reporting secondary resources. Videotaping interviews and practice speeches encourages self-evaluation and develops improved speaking skills.

The Mentor

Mentoring not only aids in the ISM student’s career exploration, but also helps make the “entire school experience personally meaningful to youth” (Davalos & Haensly, 1997, p. 204). Mentors, according to E. Paul Torrance, create a secure environment in which students can create freely and learn to share their personal energies on worthy goals (Pleiss & Feldhusen, 1995). Mentors aid gifted minorities and low-income students who, after working with professionals, show “gains in self-concept and in their knowledge about possible careers” (Pleiss & Feldhusen, p. 160).

Mentors, according to various studies, may be particularly helpful to those GT students “off the traditional path”: the gifted underachievers, GT students with learning disabilities or physical difficulties, ESL/LEP students, and gifted girls (Pleiss & Feldhusen).

The need for independent study combined with mentorship “has been extensively articulated, particularly in terms of specific career exposure and career guidance, as well as for general social and emotional development” (Davalos & Haensly, 1997, p. 1); students need more individual attention than they have been receiving. Results of a study of students who participated in an ISM program in a school district from a large southwestern city from 1989–1994 found that improved self-esteem was identified as the number one comment received in response to the study questionnaire (Davalos & Haensly).

The How’s of the ISM

No time, no money, no teaching units, no facilities, no supplies: It’s enough to make even the hardiest of educators wither into pessimism and lassitude. What the ISM requires of potential practitioners is no more or no less than it requires of its students: creative thinking, strategic problem solving, and fortitude.

An effective ISM advocate must start with the school district’s current financial reality; gather the available human resources; research sources of local, state, and federal grant monies; identify potential problems before they arise and list possible solutions; and, with every conceivable base covered, begin advocating for a new reality.

A good first step is conferencing with an administrator who enthusiastically supports the independent study concept. The district’s GT coordinator often will be your most dedicated advocate. Once there is an agreement of support, the next step may be writing a proposal with a plan of development for the ISM to be submitted to the appropriate administrators for approval. Start the research process for the proposal with TEA’s Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students, which states that both independent study courses and mentorship programs are components of acceptable learning opportunities for gifted students. Visit http://www.performancestandards.org to learn about the details of the ISM. Draft a proposal to fit the needs of the district and include:

1. why the district needs an Independent Study Mentorship program;
2. the purpose of the Independent Study Mentorship program;
3. an overview of the Independent Study Mentorship program;
4. Independent Study Mentorship program support personnel—for example, an ISM Program Facilitator, ISM Teacher of Record, Mentors, Judges (for end-of-the-year presentations), and an ISM Oversight Committee; and
5. project assessment and brief closing statement.

After the concept proposal has been approved, begin meeting with district principals to share your knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, TEA’s Independent Study Performance Standards Project (PSP). Elicit their input about possible road-blocks to implementation of the ISM, note their concerns and insights, and strive to enlist their support for this new course offering.

Ascertain what resources are available: budget monies, empty classrooms, teacher units, miscellaneous supplies. If none of the obvious resources are forthcoming, it’s time to think creatively. Recruit the smartest and most creatively savvy educators in the district to the ISM development team.

For consideration:

- Who could teach the ISM if no teacher units are available?
- Are the high school librarians certified teachers?
- What about the technology specialists? Could any of them get free for a couple of hours a day to teach the ISM class?
- No classrooms? Does the high school have a library? Where better for a research class to meet than in a library?
- What about retired teachers who might be interested in part-time employment?

Leave no stones unturned in your quest for the ISM. If a variety of different ways to structure an ISM course at little cost to the school district can be identified (combined with the opportunity for the school to provide its students with innovative educational practices), even the most traditional administrators often can be convinced.

Once the possible key ISM players are identified, a steering committee to oversee the development process should be formed and should include representatives from instructional technology, parent/student Services, fine arts, career and technology, ESL/LEP, and any other interested parties who might have students who would benefit from participating in an independent study situation. The ISM umbrella is large and inclusive, and the formation of an ISM family requires constant communication and deliberate nurturance of good will, especially when it comes to the bureaucratic details of course descriptions, credits, grade points, and PEIMS codes.

Advance preparation is the name of the ISM development and implementation game. Look to the Department of Education for information about federal grant monies and learn how to apply for applicable local, state, and federal grants (http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg57.html). Occasionally, monies from different departmental budgets can be combined when serving a diverse
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A group of students in a specific course, and Title I funds often can be appropriated to serve low-socioeconomic-status students (http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html).

While all this sounds overwhelming when considered from an individual perspective, it is the distribution of responsibilities and duties that can create a successful ISM program. A cooperative effort between educators and administrators from academic, fine arts, and technology can breathe life into new ventures.

When everyone gives a little, much can be accomplished.

Bottom Line: No Guts, No Glory

The development and implementation of the Independent Study Mentorship program is a worthy and reasonable goal for districts who want to broaden their base of GT offerings at the secondary level in a fiscally responsible manner. The ISM provides an opportunity for students to create meaning and purpose in their educational lives, explore career options, and build the self-esteem needed to support and nourish their life goals. Through the ISM, unique personalities and styles are celebrated and honored with both individual attention and public recognition. Districts can provide this opportunity for their students with a little cooperation, creative thinking, and the dedicated work of educators who believe they can gradually change the face of gifted education by adding alternate dimensions to its topography—new twists, turns, hills, and valleys to be traversed that will include students previously left dejectedly on the roadside, waiting for a ride that will take them where they need or want to go.

REFERENCES


Suicide ranks as the fifth leading cause of death among 5- to 14-year-olds and is the third leading cause of death for those between 15 and 24 years of age (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). The statistics are alarming. More than 6,000 young people take their lives each year, with at least 10 times that number attempting suicide (Delisle, 2000). The suicide rate of adolescents has increased by at least 300% in the last three decades, with at least 10% of adolescents attempting suicide (Kerr & Milliones, 1995). A look behind these numbers reveals the shattered lives of children and families in pain, each with a unique story and experience left untold. Often, the decision to end one’s life is not a conscious wish to die, but rather a pronouncement that living has become too painful (Delisle, 1992, p. 162). Youth who contemplate suicide are in a profound state of confusion and conflict. Ultimately, they want the emotional suffering to end and are searching for a purpose and reason to continue living (Kendrick, 2001).

Problems Associated with Depression in Gifted Youth

Gifted children are at risk of encountering severe emotional problems due to the dynamics of their giftedness. These children make more abstract connections, synthesize diverse experiences, and draw sophisticated conclusions at much earlier ages than their peers. For some gifted children, these unique perceptions lead to feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and ultimately depression (Freedman & Jensen, 1999). A “minority within a minority” in terms of their social and emotional needs, gifted children at risk for emotional disturbance need the support and intervention of caring adults to reverse the detrimental effects caused by depression (Delisle, 1992). Multiple causes of depression appear in youth; however, five problems are more often associated with depression in gifted youth than with any other group: perfectionism, societal expectations, dys-synchronous development, existential thinking, and the imposter syndrome (Delisle, 2000).

Perfectionism

The most influential and potentially destructive aspect of giftedness is perfectionism. Many gifted children possess perfectionist tendencies that may range in intensity from the “healthy pursuit of excellence” to “living in a constant state of anxiety about making mistakes” (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999, p. 4). Dysfunctional perfectionists set extremely high standards for themselves and are unforgiving of their setbacks. They also internalize others’ excessive expectations and negative criticisms more intensely than their own achievements. Perfectionists tend to tie their self-worth to their achievements, viewing themselves as failures when they do not achieve to their ideal. Thus, they may procrastinate, become workaholics, overcommit themselves, develop eating disorders, or demonstrate hostility toward themselves and others (Adderholdt & Goldberg). Other common characteristics of perfectionism include overanalyzing personal decisions, seeking constant approval from others, and avoiding new experiences (Schuler, 1999). All of these negative behaviors result in severe feelings of guilt and anguish for the perfectionist.

Perfectionism, for many gifted youth, begins at an early age. Often, gifted children learn more quickly than their age peers, and have a long history of making easy A’s in classes that present little or no challenge to them. Gifted youth soon learn that they can produce perfect schoolwork through minimal effort, thus equating minimal effort to being gifted (Winner, 1996). They conclude that giftedness means instant mastery and immediate achievement. Parents and teachers are also quick to praise these achievements and come to expect a continuing level of high performance, which adds more pressure on the student to perform. This desire to be perfect then transcends other areas of life outside of the school setting to the point where doing your best becomes the struggle to be the best in the mind of a perfectionist (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). Many gifted students do not experience academic struggles until late in high school, when remaining at the top of their class becomes difficult. These students have not yet developed the productive study habits needed to feel successful. At this point, depression may develop as they “suspect that they are no longer gifted, and their sense of self-worth is undermined” (Kaplan, 1990, p. 2).
Perfectionism is a learned behavior that can be unlearned. Parents and teachers must help children realize that moving away from perfectionism does not mean lowering standards and that making mistakes is a valuable part of learning (Delisle, 2000; Hately, 2001). The focus shifts to the path taken, rather than the result itself. Children must be taught how to balance schoolwork, play, and meaningful relationships in order to break the cycle of defeat that perfectionism creates. Perfectionists need assistance in breaking down tasks into small, attainable goals. Adults can help by applauding persistence, rewarding efforts, and honoring time invested in the task. By expecting progress and not perfection, adults convey courage and acknowledge learning. Also, knowing that successful people keep working at something even when their efforts are not immediately rewarded promotes personal growth and satisfaction (Nugent, 2000). A reformed perfectionist recalls her success, “It was when I stopped trying to do everything right that I started doing things well” (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999, p. 7).

Societal Expectations

A common misconception in society is that to whom much is given, much is expected in return. True or not, many gifted children feel a special sense of responsibility to “live up to their potential” (Freedman & Jensen, 1999, p. 3). The burden to become change makers and the pressure to solve tomorrow’s problems results in feelings of aimlessness and helplessness in today’s children. This situation is further complicated by numerous career options available to gifted youth because of their multiple abilities. An adolescent may have the talent and desire to become a successful mechanic, while the adults in his life push him to become a doctor or lawyer so he can “make a difference” in the future. This constant push and pull of internal versus external expectations drains energy and may lead to a great sense of doubt and despair (Jackson, 1998).

Every person has the right to make his or her life meaningful. One important element in developing a positive self-concept emerges from the need to feel understood and accepted by others (Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985). Gifted children are first and foremost children with distinct interests, abilities, and personalities. They should not feel responsible for solving the world’s problems, nor should they have to live up to others’ expectations. Gifted children need opportunities to select and explore activities that bring them personal fulfillment without the fear that they may disappoint others. Caring adults should be available for guidance and encouragement, but ultimately they must allow gifted children to develop goals on their own (Kaplan, 1990). Teachers play an important role in creating a supportive learning environment, both directly and indirectly. Smiling, sharing enthusiasm and encouraging words are only the beginning. A supportive learning environment must also include clear expectations, flexibility, constructive criticism, tangible rewards, and scheduled times for sharing and relaxing (Schmitz & Galbraith).

Dyssynchronous Development

A third cause of depression among gifted youth results from dyssynchronous development. All children grow through the same stages of development, but at varying rates. Gifted youth often reach intellectual maturity before emotional and physical maturity, thus resulting in a distinct gap between mind and body, or dyssynchrony (Delisle, 1992).

Several researchers have referred to the uneven development of gifted individuals as dyssynchrony (Delisle, 1992; Hollingworth, 1942; Kerr, 1991; Terrassier, 1985). Although this term is essentially synonymous to asynchrony, dyssynchrony conveys negative, pathological overtones (Silverman, 1993, 2002), therefore making it the more appropriate term as a causal factor for depression. Terrassier (1985) identifies two expressions of dyssynchrony: internal and social. Within gifted individuals, internal dyssynchrony occurs as they experience varying rates of intellectual, psychomotor, and affective development. Social dyssynchrony involves a mismatch between advanced cognitive development of gifted individuals when placed in a social setting with age peers.

Gifted children form expectations and standards according to their mental age, rather than their chronological age, which may lead to feelings of guilt or frustration when those goals are not met (Silverman, 1993, 2002). The conflicting messages of conformity and individuality emerge earlier for some gifted youth than others. This struggle becomes most notable in adolescents who want to be cool and fit in with others their same age. Peers may be cruel and unaccepting of differences. Many children conclude that their giftedness somehow alienates them from others, so they often mask their talents. Gifted girls frequently hold this perception and go underground when being popular becomes more important than being smart (Kerr, 1997). This internal conflict may lead to a poor self-image and bouts of depression.

Adolescence is a difficult time of adjustment. During this period of development, adults must recognize emotional changes that occur and show patience with gifted adolescents. Gifted youth need encouragement and reassurance that it is alright to excel at activities that their peers may not. Connecting with a peer who has experienced similar circumstances may help diminish feelings of isolation (Buescher, 1989).

Existential Thinking

Because gifted children possess the ability to consider many complex issues and ask tough questions that should, but may not, have answers, they are more likely to be affected by existential depression. Existential depression arises when an individual confronts the basic issues of existence such as death, freedom, and justice, as well as limitations of time and space (Little, 2002; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). Gifted children tend to be more sensitive to the “big picture” and hold a passion for truth and fairness that makes deceit and insensitivity unbearable at times. They become more aware of global events as they internalize the atrocities on the news depicting stories of famine, crime, terrorism, and pollution. Yet, these children may not be emotionally mature enough to process the information productively (Walker, 1991). This awareness may lead gifted children to ask hard questions such as, “Why do people say one thing and do another? Why do people say things they don’t mean? Why are so many people uncaring in the world? How much difference can one person’s life make? What is my purpose in life?” (Delisle, 1992, p. 158). When gifted children share
these concerns, they are often met with reactions of puzzlement from those who are focusing on more concrete issues or who cannot offer adequate answers. They quickly discover that they cannot control or change the situation for the better. Then, they seek a sense of meaning and purpose in their existence as they become more aware of how brief and finite life can be in this large scary, world. The frustration and isolation resulting from powerlessness may quickly transform into deep depression. If left unchecked, existential depression can lead to desperate attempts to belong to the world coupled with contemplations of suicide (Little; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan).

Adults can assist gifted children with this form of depression. Meaningful relationships break down the feelings of isolation. Knowing that someone else has experienced similar questions helps one feel less alone. Touch, another important element of existence, shown through daily hugs, pets on the shoulder, or high-fives, helps establish a connection that builds bonds of trust. If the gifted child is reluctant to share physical closeness, an adult may try saying, “I know that you may not want a hug, but I could sure use one.” Another useful intervention is bibliotherapy. Hebert (1995) suggests that biographies may be useful in assisting gifted children in dealing with issues of underachievement, self-inflicted pressure, and cultural alienation. Reading about people who have struggled with their own gifts along their life’s journey provides an opportunity to eliminate feelings of isolation. Involvement in service projects, in which a child actively gives of him- or herself to others, may also bring encouragement and hope to those searching for a meaningful purpose in life (Little, 2002; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982).

**The Imposter Syndrome**

Talented youth often mirror perfectionist tendencies because they question the reality and validity of the gifts they possess. Many gifted children are identified for placement in gifted programs at a young age. If they do not understand the nature and significance of their giftedness, feelings of doubt and disbelief tend to surface as they grow into adolescence (Dweck, 2000). They question the validity of test scores, the observations of adults, and academic performances that do not meet their levels of expectation. These gifted students may feel the need to prove their worthiness with each new challenge they face. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to criticism, suggestions, and emotional appeals from others. Insensitive adults and jealous peers can perpetuate this impostor syndrome by setting unrealistically high goals for achievement that cause unbearable levels of stress and anxiety for the gifted youth (Buescher, 1989; Kaplan, 1990).

In helping gifted students develop a realistic and accurate self-concept, it is essential to recognize and appreciate efforts and improvement. Efforts are within a student’s control, whereas the outcomes are not. Gifted children need to be shown love and acceptance regardless of the outcome, so they feel cherished as a person, rather than for their achievements (Cohen & Frydenberg, 1996). If a child thinks he or she must always do the best work possible, there is little room for mistakes. Adults may help by assisting them in setting priorities and deciding which tasks require best efforts and which do not (Kaplan, 1990). Rather than reminding a child to “always do your best,” it is better to reinforce that “less than perfection is more than acceptable” (Delisle, 1999, p. 3).

**Prevention and Intervention of Depression and Suicide**

In addition to developing quality gifted programs that address the unique social and emotional needs of gifted students, awareness of depression and suicide must also be addressed by parents and teachers. A child experiencing depression of any magnitude needs the intervention and support of caring adults. Understanding and recognizing the causes of depression is the first step in helping a gifted child at risk (Nelson & Galas, 1994). Open communication, wholesome relationships, and positive coping strategies are all important ingredients in the healing process. Often, regular exercise, proper diet, adequate sleep, and relaxation techniques help alleviate the effects of depression. However, severe cases of depression may require the intervention of counselors or other professionals. In some cases, these tools are not enough, and medical attention is also required from a physician specializing in chemical imbalances (Kerr & Milliones, 1995).

**Suicide Warning Signs**

While no empirical data support the belief that gifted children are at higher risks for depression and suicide than the total adolescent population, suicide attempts among youth have increased in recent decades (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002). Parents and teachers dealing with gifted adolescents who are at risk for severe depression or potential suicide may need to seek professional help. Experts agree that those who are in danger of committing suicide show many danger signs in advance that should not be ignored (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999; Gross 1993; Jackson, 1998; Kendrick, 2001). Signals of impending suicide include the following:

- sudden changes in personality or behavior;
- sudden changes in eating or sleeping habits;
- engaging in high-risk behaviors such as alcohol or other drug use;
- lack of interest in or withdrawal from planned activities;
- persistent boredom;
- severe depression that lasts a week or longer;
- withdrawal from family and friends (self-imposed isolation);
- inability to have fun;
- concealed or direct suicide threats (often given to peers);
- loss of interest in personal grooming;
- an illness that has no apparent cause;
- preoccupation with death and death-related themes;
- giving away prized possessions to family and friends;
- saying goodbye to family and friends;
- difficulty concentrating;
- an unexplained decline in the quality of schoolwork;
- a recent suicide of a friend or relative;
- a previous suicide attempt;
- talking about suicide, either jokingly or seriously;
- running away from home, family,
school, etc.; and
• feelings of meaningless in life.

Conclusion

Suicide is a tragic end to the beautiful gift of life, full of so many wonderful possibilities that ended too soon. With at least 10 attempts (many unreported) for every 1 suicide committed, a great need appears for the implementation of suicide-prevention programs within junior high and high school mental health curricula. Mentioning suicide in a health class as a part of a clinical discussion does not promote its occurrence; rather, it promotes awareness (Delisle, 1992, 2000). Raising the question of suicide encourages a young person to talk about internal pain with a caring adult and helps eliminate feelings of isolation. Many quality resources available today to educators and parents make ignoring this issue unfathomable. These gifted children need to know that they are society’s most wanted: deep within the depths of their doubt lies an “invincible summer” of vibrant life (Delisle, 1992, p. 162).

References


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Book Reviews

Books for Children

Ruby’s Wish (ISBN: 0-818-3490-5) tells the story of a young girl, Ruby, who is determined to break with the family expectations of marriage. Set in rural China, Ruby displays great talent and intelligence and wants to attend university like the boys in her family, rather being married. Written by Shirin Yim Bridges and illustrated Sophie Blackall, Ruby’s Wish is the true story of the author’s grandmother. For more information, contact Chronicle Books, 85 Second St., San Francisco, CA 94105; http://www.chroniclekids.com.

Not So True Stories and Unreasonable Rhymes (ISBN: 0-818-3773-4) takes the reader on a magical ride with vibrant illustrations and rhymes far from ordinary. Carin Berger uses eccentric characters who are larger than life, such as Rodeo Rosy and Daddy-O, to create a world of adventure and whimsy. The cut paper illustrations in combination with the poems engage the eyes, as well as the ears. For more information, contact Chronicle Books, 85 Second St., San Francisco, CA 94105; http://www.chroniclekids.com.

Folk Wisdom of Mexico/Proverbios y dichos Mexicanos (ISBN: 0-818-4773-X) is an introduction to Mexican proverbs in both Spanish and English. This book is the perfect introduction to the laughter, love, and faith prevalent in Mexican folk culture. The proverbs can be used as a springboard for further writing or deeper research into the Mexican culture. The illustrations in woodblock print also help to capture vividly the themes expressed. For more information, contact Chronicle Books, 85 Second St., San Francisco, CA, 94105; http://www.chroniclebooks.com.

Confusion experienced by many in determining if an individual is gifted or suffers from a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder is clarified in the book Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD, Asperger’s, Depression, and Other Disorders (ISBN 0-910707-67-7) by James T. Webb, Edward R. Amend, Nadia E. Webb, Jean Goerss, Paul Bejan, and F. Richard Olenchak. Focusing on the implications of frequent misdiagnoses of gifted people, this book provides a wealth of information for the individual, parents, educators, and health care professionals in determining a correct diagnosis and resulting treatments of gifted, talented, and creative children and adults. Too many individuals suffer needlessly because of misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses. The authors logically sequence the book to explain in understandable terms what is meant by the term gifted and why so many gifted individuals are misdiagnosed. The use of anecdotes to support the literature and cited research gives a face to the gifted and to those afflicted with mental, behavioral, or emotional disorders. The authors seek to create a new way of looking at behavioral, educational, and health care concerns of gifted children and adults. For more information, contact Great Potential Press, P.O. Box 5057, Scottsdale, AZ 85261; (877) 954-4200, http://www.giftedbooks.com.

Reviewed by Anthony Grandinetti
In the past, society believed that “only a thin line separated genius from madness” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 4). Lombroso (1891) supported this belief by publishing “scientific” results suggesting that famous men had a disproportionate number of emotional disturbances. Attempting to dispel this belief, Terman and his colleagues (1925) studied a sample of gifted students from elementary through adult years. He concluded that gifted individuals excelled in both cognitive and psychological areas. Since these early studies suffer from biased samples, many professionals still ask these questions: Is there a higher incidence of behavior disorders among gifted and talented students? Do they suffer from more depression? Are they more successful in committing suicide? These questions will be addressed in this review of the recent literature.

We defined behavior disorders or emotional disturbance according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was used (§ 300.7 Child with a Disability, Part 4).

(i) The term [emotional disturbance] means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

A. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

B. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

C. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

D. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

E. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

(ii) The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

We examined articles published since 1994 in Gifted Child Quarterly, Journal for the Education of the Gifted, Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, and Roeper Review. To be included, the article needed to be empirical and focus on gifted students with behavior disorders as defined in IDEA or on students who have a greater likelihood of being described as having a behavior disorder, such as gifted students who are “emotionally intense” (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997) or who manifest atypical behaviors such as creativity (Gallucci, Middleton, & Kline, 1999). International studies and reviews of the research were not included. These selection criteria identified 25 studies.

The vast majority of the studies described the incidence and characteristics of gifted students with specific behavior disorders or disabilities. Seven of the studies examined general behavior disorders among gifted students (Cornell, Delcourt, Bland, Goldberg, & Oram, 1994; Garland & Zigler, 1999; Gallucci, Middleton, & Kline, 1999a; Gallucci, Middleton, & Kline, 1999b; Rizza & Morrison, 2002; Saunders, 2003; Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997); five, perfectionism (Orange, 1997; Parker & Mills, 1996; Roberts & Lovett, 1994; Schuler, 2000; Siegle & Schuler, 2000); three, underachievement that resulted in behavior problems (Hébert, 2001; Neumeister & Hébert, 2003; Schultz, 2002); three, depression (Baker, 1995; Jackson, 1998; Metha & McWhirter, 1997); three, suicide (Cross, Cook, & Dixon, 1996; Cross, Gust-Brey, & Ball, 2002; Metha & McWhirter, 1997); three, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004; Moon, Zentall, Grskovic, Hall, & Stormont, 2001; Jarosewich & Stocking, 2003); and one, learning disability (Shaywitz, Holahan, Fletcher, Freudenheim, Makuch, & Shaywitz, 2001). While most of the researchers made recommendations regarding interventions at the conclusion of their articles, only Adams (1996) focused on an intervention: a school’s response to adolescent suicide.

The majority of the sample included students at the secondary level, with 8 authors including high school students and 9 examining middle school students. Only 5 of the articles described characteristics of students with behavior disorders at the elementary level (Cornell et al., 1994; Moon et al., 2001; Saunders, 2003; Shaywitz et al., 2001; Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). While no article included only girls, 7 studies did include only boys because they exhibited the behavior disorder or they were of interest to the researchers. Two of the articles surveyed graduate students (Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004; Rizza & Morrison, 2002) and their perceptions of gifted students and those with behavior disorders.

Dominating the methods used to collect data were descriptive studies in which groups of students were administered tests and compared to one another (n = 13). The next most frequent method was case studies (n = 7), followed by psychological autopsy (n = 2) and surveys (n = 2). Psychological autopsy was used as a research approach for studying gifted students who committed suicide.

Researchers did not report a higher incidence of behavior disorders among gifted students and the general population (Cornell et al., 1994). This similarity in incidence was true for those who were highly creative (Gallucci, Middleton, &
Kline, 1999) and those who were more highly gifted (Shaywitz et al., 2001). Even among gifted students with diagnoses of depression, anxiety, and ADHD/ADD, rates were comparable or lower than the general population (Jarosewich & Stocking, 2003). Gifted students did exhibit fewer behavior problems (Gallucci, Middleton, & Kline, 1999a) and more advanced coping skills and judgment (Garland & Zigler, 1999). On the other hand, gifted boys who were diagnosed with ADHD seemed to have “more emotional distress than is typical for gifted children” (Moon et al., 2001, p. 237).

The researchers did report that graduate students tended to stereotype extreme characteristics, with gifted students viewed as having more positive characteristics than students with behavior disorders, (Rizza & Morrison, 2002). In fact, Hartnett, Nelson, and Rinn (2004) found that a giftedness category influenced the diagnosis of ADHD among graduate students who were majoring in counseling. These authors felt that gifted students may exhibit many behaviors similar to ADHD children because they are bored in class, have high energy, and experience difficulty paying attention, act without forethought, experience problems on certain tasks, and have difficulty following rules. Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) reported that some of these negative behaviors were typical of “overexcitabilities” and might lead to inappropriate diagnoses. Saunders (2003) found that, when a misbehaving student was labeled as gifted, teachers’ perceptions changed and the student exhibited more appropriate behavior.

Gifted students do appear to have a higher rate of perfectionism than the normal population, with over 85% reporting characteristics (Orange, 1997; Parker & Mills, 1996; Schuler, 2000). More boys (64%) than girls (35%) were nonperfectionistic (Schuler, 2000). An equal number of boys and girls (about 50%) were in a continual state of anxiety over making a mistake (i.e., neurotic; Schuler, 2000). Girls were more likely to be healthy perfectionists as compared to boys (Parker & Mills, 1996). Siegle and Schuler (2000) found that perfectionism appeared to increase among girls throughout middle school.

One quasi-experimental study examined gifted students’ reactions to scholastic failure (Roberts & Lovett, 1994). These researchers found that academically gifted students reported significantly more irrational beliefs, higher levels of self-oriented perfectionism, and larger negative reactions to academic failure than nongifted students. They concluded that perfectionistic tendencies among highly gifted students are internalized, rather than socially prescribed.

Perfectionism is one factor that may influence underachievement (Schultz, 2002). Other factors include inappropriate curricular and counseling experiences, interests other than school, family problems, negative peer and environmental influences, and discipline (Hébert, 2001; Spiers, Neumeister & Hébert, 2003; Schultz, 2002). In the case of one college student, the authors suggested that the underachieving student might profit from online courses, rather than a typical classroom setting.

In terms of depression, Baker (1995) did not find any significant differences of depression and suicidal ideation among academically gifted, exceptionally gifted, and average students. Those gifted students who do exhibit depression need a “haven” where they can express themselves without judgment and have opportunities for healthy interactions with other gifted students (Jackson, 1998).

Suicide appears to be positively related to the level of depression and past and recent stress (Metha & McWhirter, 1997). Substance abuse and life-changing events were factors in predicting suicidal thoughts among gifted and nongifted students (Metha & McWhirter). Those who do commit suicide generally manifest depression, anger, mood swings, and confusion about the future; poor impulse control along with substance abuse; relational difficulties with self, family members, and romantic interests; and isolation from people capable of dealing with irrational logic (Cross, Cook, & Dixon, 1996; Cross, Gust-Brey, & Ball, 2002). Adams (1996) described a school’s response to three suicides within 3 months. The school revised admission criteria, hired more mental health personnel, and disseminated information to faculty and students. Communication and intervention are essential in preventing suicide (Cross, Gust-Brey, & Ball).

In summary, gifted students do not exhibit a higher incidence of behavior disorders, including depression and suicide, than the general population. Contrary to the surveyed graduate students’ reports, gifted students tend to exhibit fewer behavior problems and have more advanced coping skills. As a whole, gifted students are more perfectionistic, with girls exhibiting more perfectionism than boys. This perfectionism also influences gifted students’ reactions to failure, which is more intense than the normal population. Underachievement, depression, and suicide are influenced by a complex set of factors. More research is needed in the area of effective interventions. Researchers do recommend that gifted students be provided a safe environment where they can learn and grow (Cross, Gust-Brey, & Ball, 2002).


Adams describes to the school’s response to the three suicides committed in a span of approximately 3 months in the spring of 1994. The school is located on the campus of a university and governed in large part by the university’s board of trustees. A task force was implemented immediately after the end of the school year in June by the university’s dean of the College of Education with the following goals: assist in developing a screening procedure for psychological problems along with a prevention program, gather information on the suicides and report results, and host a conference for residential academies for gifted students. The school decided on three strategies: hire a new coordinator of admissions to increase the applicant pool, follow up on teacher recommendations regarding a students’ mental and/or emotional wellness, and revise questions in the student interview to include questions about emotional, social, and mental wellness. More mental health personnel were hired, counseling was offered on-site and within walking distance, students were given information cards that included various resource options, and postintervention sessions were held for the faculty. The following school year (1994–1995), two senior girls expressed concern to the administration about their classmates dealing with the previous three suicides. Immediately, the administration gathered nearly 30 coun-
selectors and school personnel to be available for any student in the auditorium after lunch. Before the scheduled date of the school’s crisis management workshop, another girl student from the junior class attempted suicide. Adams points out that addressing issues versus ignoring them is a healthier way to deal with a situation like this, and conversations with faculty, staff, and students during the 1995–1996 school year indicated more positive attitudes and open lines of communication.


Baker’s study selected a total of 146 exceptionally gifted, gifted, and average students from Midwestern communities to examine the incidence of depression and suicidal ideation. The exceptionally gifted students (n = 32) were from the Northwestern Talent Search program and had scored over 900 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) when they were 13 years old. This group of students were in grades 9–11 and contained 56% boys and 44% girl students, with 90% Caucasian, 3% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 3% other. Forty-six students in grades 9–11 whose class rank placed them in the top 5% of their public high school class were selected for the second gifted group. The researchers added 12 students to the gifted group in grades 7–10 scoring above the 95th percentile on standardized tests. The norms of the instruments used allowed for the inclusion of 7–12 graders, making a total of 58 students for the second group of gifted students. This group included 29% boys and 71% girls, with 95% Caucasian, 3% Asian, and 2% Hispanic students. Fifty-six students in grades 9–11 were selected for the academically average group based on being ranked approximately the midpoint of their class. This sample consisted of 55% boys and 45% girls with 96% Caucasian, 2% African American, and 2% Hispanic students. The Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS; Reynolds, 1987) and the Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ; Reynolds, 1988) were administered in class or study hall. Findings included no significant differences of depression and suicidal ideation among academically gifted, exceptionally gifted, and average students.


This study examined differences in behavior problems between gifted or regular students. This sample consisted of 675 gifted students and 322 regular students. The gifted students included 46.5% boys and 53.5% girls, with 60.7% White, 26.8% African American, 7.7% Hispanic, and 4.7% other. The regular students included 45% boys and 54% girls, with 57.5% White, 36.6% African American students, 0.9% Hispanic students, and 5% students from other backgrounds. In the fall of their 2nd or 3rd grade year, the students were administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Form J (Cornell et al., 1992). The teachers completed the Teacher Report Form (TRF; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) along with the Child Behavior Checklist. Data on family socioeconomic status were assessed by the Hollingshead Education Scale (Hollingshead, 1975), but was only available for 422 gifted and 200 regular education students. The authors found no significant differences of behavior problems between gifted and nongifted elementary students.


The authors provide an overview of the psychological autopsy as a research method, information about the unique characteristics involving the three suicides, factors that were consistent with suicides among the general adolescent population, and themes and commonalities among the cases that may be related to giftedness. The three adolescent victims attended a state-supported, residential Midwest high school for academically talented 11th and 12th grade students in 1994. Case 1 was a 15-year-old boy who had been withdrawn from the high school for disciplinary dismissal and committed suicide by hanging at the psychiatric hospital where he was being treated for depression. Case 2 was a 16-year-old boy who shot himself near the school on prom night. Case 3 was a 16-year-old boy who was identified as being at-risk following the death of Case 2. Case 3 also hanged himself outside of his former high school. The researchers used interviews and archival information to collect data on the victims. Commonalities between the victims and the general adolescent suicide population included being adolescent Caucasian boys; manifestation of depression, anger, mood swings, and confusion about the future; poor impulse control along with substance abuse; relational difficulties with selves, family members, and romantic interests; and isolation from people capable of dealing with irrational logic. The warning signs shared by all victims included behavior problems, a period of escalation of problems, talking about suicide, changes in academic performance, constriction, and family histories of psychological problems. Dabrowski’s theory of giftedness was used as a theoretical construct for the analysis of themes related to giftedness. The authors concluded that the manifestations of overexcitabilities among the three victims—expressing polarized, egocentric value systems; engaging in group discussions of suicide as a solution; expressing behaviors consistent with Dabrowski’s Level II or Level III of Positive Disintegration; and attending a residential school as a means of escape—were all commonalities related to their giftedness. Warning signs include atypical divergent thinking, extreme emotionality, preoccupation with negative themes, excessive introspection, and sensitivity. The authors assert that “it is better to have a live enemy than a dead friend” (p. 408).


This study described the life of a gifted 21-year-old college student who committed suicide. The purpose was to discover the interaction of his psychological characteristics with the environment, significant life stages, and events.
The identification of such factors might reduce the likelihood of suicide among similar groups of individuals. The authors used the data-gathering methods of a psychological autopsy, which included interviews with significant people in the student’s life and archival information (medical records and school records) to assess a variety of factors including behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and relationships. The authors concluded that parents need immediate information about suicide and that aberrant behavior should never be considered typical of a gifted individual. Professionals should provide safe environments for gifted students to learn and grow. Communication and intervention are essential in preventing suicide.


This study examined the question of whether gifted children are more likely to have higher levels of potential behavior disorders as compared to students of average intelligence. For the gifted student sample, the authors recruited 26 boys and 18 girls ages 12–16 in a residential summer enrichment program for gifted students in Louisiana. Ethnicity of this sample was 74.4% Caucasian, 4.5% African American, 6.8% Asian American, 9.1% Hispanic, and 4.5% other. To expand the socioeconomic diversity, a comparison gifted group of 18 boys and 16 girls was recruited from Connecticut public schools. The comparison group consisted of students ages 12–15, with 76.5% Caucasian, 2.9% Hispanic, 11.8% African American, and 8.8% Asian American. All gifted students had scores greater than 130 (n = 78) as determined by intelligence quotients on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III; Wechsler, 1991). Children with average IQs (n = 62) comprised the nongifted group. The nongifted group (n = 62) ages 12–16 was recruited from regular education classes in Connecticut schools and included 33 boys and 29 girls. Parents of all students completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991). ANOVA analyses showed no differences between the Louisiana and Connecticut gifted groups, and these two groups were combined for the CBCL ratings. The authors found that the CBCL ratings of gifted children in Louisiana and Connecticut and the ratings for nongifted students in Connecticut were shown to be consistent with national norms. It was also found that both gifted and nongifted groups demonstrated fewer behavioral problems.


This study examined whether gifted students are more likely to have higher levels of creativity and behavioral problems. The sample (n = 78) contained 26 boys and 18 girls ages 12–16 from a gifted summer program in Louisiana along with a comparison group of 18 boys and 16 girls in Connecticut public schools. Student IQ scores on the WISC-III were greater than 130. The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT; Torrance, 1990a) was used to measure creative potential and the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) was used to measure behavior problems. Using chi square analyses, the authors found no significant difference between groups with the gifted sample subjects showing an absence of behavior problems.


This study explored the relationship between giftedness and psychosocial problems. The sample consisted of 191 students, ages 13–15, attending a summer program for intellectually gifted youth based on exceptional Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores. The ethnic distribution consisted of 81% Anglo, 10% Asian American, 4% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 2% other, with 68% boys and 32% girls. The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) was mailed to the parents of the students to be used as a measure of behavioral difficulties. The CBCL scores of the sample were compared to norms for youth from a similar age bracket. The authors found that these extremely intellectually gifted youth exhibited advanced coping skills and judgment. The sample was also split into two groups using the median SAT score to create a gifted and highly gifted group to compare behavior problem scores. There was no evidence that highly gifted youth (as measured by aptitude scores) exhibited more emotional and behavioral problems than moderately gifted or nongifted youth.


This study examined the similarities of gifted children and ADHD children. The authors surveyed 44 first-year graduate students who were 20 to 36 years old. In the sample were 35 women and 8 men. Participants received a vignette about a hypothetical case study of a young boy with ADHD and gifted characteristics with two response alternatives. After randomly splitting the sample in half, the researcher distributed the two forms, Form A and B. On Form B, participants were able to choose from an array of diagnostic alternatives. On Form A, participants wrote their diagnoses. A chi-square analysis indicated a significant main effect and suggested that the presence of a giftedness category can influence the diagnosis of behavior typical of both giftedness and ADHD. Of all the participants given Form A, no one suggested a diagnosis of either giftedness or giftedness and ADHD. The results indicated that counselor training programs do not adequately clarify the differences between ADHD and giftedness. The authors concluded that the gifted may act like ADHD children since they are bored in class, have high energy, experience difficulty paying attention, act without forethought, experience problems on certain tasks, and have difficulty following rules. The danger in misdiagnosis is that the gifted students’ creativity can be squelched.


This study examines the lives of gifted males and how their urban life experiences influence their underachievement.
Six boys in grades 10–12 were included in this sample. Two were African American, 1 was Hispanic, and 3 were White. School administrators recommended these students based on achievement test results at or above the 85th percentile, but with a GPA of 2.0 or lower. A qualitative research design was used with a case study approach. Data were collected using participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and document reviews. Factors contributing to academic underachievement include inappropriate curricular and counseling experiences, family problems, negative peer and environmental influences, and discipline problems.


Jackson conducted a qualitative study examining the experiences of gifted depressed adolescents. She interviewed 10 gifted adolescents ages 16–19 with cognitive IQ scores of 130 or above and who were self-referred as having experience in a depressive state and by staff members as emotionally intense. The self-referral group indicated three or more symptoms listed in the Diagnostic Criteria for Depression (DSM-IV). The length of the depressive state reported by each of the students ranged from 2 weeks to 2 years. Using phenomenological research approach, Jackson reported that gifted adolescents need a “haven” where they can express themselves without judgment and educational programming, allowing for healthy interaction with other gifted students.


This study examined the incidence of psychological disorders, medication requirements, and counseling histories of 1,762 gifted students in grades 8–11 who were enrolled in the Duke University Talent Identification Program (TIP). The sample students were 11–17 years of age, with 1,291 (67%) White, 325 (17%) Asian, 89 (5%) African American, 85 (4%) Hispanic, 10 (<1%) Asian American, and 128 (6%) other or not reported. In reviewing medical information forms, the authors reported that 467 (27%) of the students had been prescribed medication at the time of the summer program. Only 76 (4%) of the prescriptions addressed a psychosocial diagnosis. The authors found that the most frequently reported diagnoses were ADHD/ADD, depression, and anxiety. However, these incidence rates of social/emotional difficulties were comparable or lower than general child and adolescent norms.


The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference between gifted and nongifted adolescents in terms of number and perceived stressfulness of life-changing events, depression, and suicide ideation. Seventy-two seventh and eighth grade gifted (n = 34) and nongifted (n = 38) students in an inner-city school district were selected. The sample consisted of 30 boys (42%) and 42 girls (58%), with 43% White, 40% Hispanic, 8% Native American, 4% African American, 3% Asian American, and 1% other. The average age of the gifted sample was 13, and the average age of the nongifted sample was 14. Both groups were administered the Adolescent Life-Change Event Scale (Yeaworth, McNamee, & Pozehl, 1980), modified by Ferguson (1981), and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, 1978). Gifted students were found to experience fewer life-changing events. Suicide ideation was positively correlated with the level of depression and past and recent stress. Drug or alcohol usage significantly predicted suicidal thoughts among gifted and nongifted students.


This multiple case study examined the emotional and social characteristics of gifted boys with ADHD as compared to nongifted boys with ADHD. Three students with both ADHD and giftedness were compared to two other groups: 3 students with giftedness only and 3 students with ADHD only. All subjects were from the same Midwest school district and were 8–10 years old. Their identification as ADHD or gifted was determined by the district as was their need for medication. A variety of methods were used, including collecting data with multiple methods from multiple sources, conducting analyses at three different levels (individual case, within-group, and cross-group), and using researchers with different theoretical perspectives. The authors found that ADHD is more likely to create peer relational problems and greater emotional difficulties as compared to giftedness. High intelligence did not serve as a protective factor on social relationships in young children. Being gifted and ADHD “seemed to increase emotional intensity and internal dysynchrony” and may cause “more emotional distress than is typical for gifted children” (p. 237).


This qualitative research design examined underachievement in a gifted university student. The subject was selected due to his demonstration of behaviors typical of underachievers, such as not purchasing textbooks, minimal class attendance, and sleeping through class. Sources of data included four in-depth interviews, observations, photographs, and archival data. The data were managed through coding and identifying themes and relationships across themes. The authors found that Sam was self-directed and developmentally advanced. His self-regulated learning preference did not conform to the educational system. The authors recommended an online course for students like Sam.


The purpose of this study was to refine the construct of perfectionism by
administering the Perfectionism Quiz to 109 students from 18 different high schools attending an honors conference in southwest Texas. The sample included 156 boys and 200 girls with a mean age of 16 years old. The ethnicity included 60% White, 30% Hispanic, and 10% African American. The Perfectionism Quiz has 30 Likert-type items, and 89% of the students scored in the top two categories, suggesting that perfectionism is a characteristic prevalent in this sample.


This study examined whether perfectionism is a common characteristic of gifted students as opposed to the general population. The sample included 600 academically talented students from a nationally gathered sample of sixth graders who were part of a longitudinal study conducted by the Institute for the Academic Advancement of Youth at Johns Hopkins University. There were 399 boys (66.5%) and 201 girls (33.5%) in the gifted group. A comparison group included 418 sixth graders from a nationally gathered sample of students not identified as gifted. This second group contained 237 boys (56.7%) and 181 girls (43.3%). The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990) was used to measure perfectionism, and the Standard International Occupational Prestige Scale (Treiman, 1977) was used to measure the socioeconomic status (SES), of the subjects’ parents. The gifted students did have parents with higher SES but the effect size of this difference was only 2% when comparing fathers’ SES and 3% when comparing mothers’ SES. Chi-square analyses were computed by group and by gender. Healthy and unhealthy perfectionism were found to be independent constructs. Girls were more likely to be healthy perfectionists as compared to boys, and boys were more likely to be nonperfectionists. The researchers did not find a statistically significant difference in the frequency of perfectionism between the gifted and nongifted.


This article examined future teachers’ stereotypical perceptions of gifted students and students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). The sample included 33 graduate and 59 undergraduate students from teacher preparation programs. In the graduate group were 27 (29.3%) women and 9 (9.8%) men, with 82% Caucasian, 3% Hispanic/Latin, 9% other, and 6% missing data. In the undergraduate group were 47 women and 12 men, with 76% Caucasian, 12% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 7% Hispanic/Latin, and 5% African American. Participants in this study were asked to categorize characteristics and behaviors as associated with gifted, EBD, or gifted/EBD students. The sample “clearly exhibited stereotypical thinking” when categorizing the most extreme characteristics in the survey. Gifted students were viewed more positively and EBD students were seen as having the most negative characteristics. The authors warned of the risk of misdiagnosis or a self-fulfilling prophecy if students’ oppo-
sitional behaviors are viewed with negative prejudice and stereotypical thinking. Preservice teacher programs may need to better address issues of students who are both gifted and EBD.


This study investigated whether gifted children were subject to perfectionism and irrational beliefs and if they were prone to more negative reactions to an experimentally induced failure. The sample included 60 junior high students from a predominately White, middle-to-upper-middle-class school district. The students were split into three categories, academically gifted, academic achievers, and nongifted, based on the school’s placement. Each of the three groups consisted of 10 boys (50%) and 10 girls (50%) in seventh and eighth grade. The nongifted students were selected at random in the general student population. The instruments used included the Common Belief Inventory for Students (CBIS; Hooper & Layne, 1983), the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1995), and The Conners Rating Scales for Hyperactivity (Conners, 1989a, 1989b). The results of the study were that Jason was already underachieving at age 8. His scores on the WISC-III indicated above-average intelligence, but below-average processing speed. Although Jason exhibited some behaviors similar to children with ADHD, tests did not indicate the presence of the disorder; rather, Jason “could be diagnosed as having an adjustment disorder with mixed emotional features” (p. 104). Also, Jason showed signs of anxiety and depression, “which can further interfere with learning, mental effort, and social functioning” (p. 105). The school district later placed Jason in a gifted program, Jason’s stepfather resumed full-time work, and he was attending summer enrichment classes. His family felt that the evaluation influenced a more positive perception of Jason, which in turn caused more appropriate behavior.


This study was a multiple case research design used to examine perfectionism in gifted rural middle school students enrolled in accelerated math, science, and English courses. The Goals and Work Habits Survey (Schuler, 1994) and an adaptation of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990) were administered to 66 gifted girls and 46 gifted boys in grades 7–8 (n = 112). Of the gifted sample, 12.5% was non-perfectionists and 87.5% (n = 98) was perfectionistic, with 29.5% (n = 33) of this group being perfectionistic at the neurotic level. A cluster analysis of the scores from the Goals and Work Habits Survey indicated differences in both gender and perfectionistic characteristics. More boys (64%) than girls (35%) were in the nonperfectionistic cluster, while more girls (68%) than boys (32%) were in the normal perfectionistic cluster. The neurotic student cluster contained almost equal numbers of boys (48% or n = 16) and girls (51% or n = 17). These students were in a continual state of anxiety over making a mistake. Normal perfectionists had a main theme of order and organization along with striving for their personal best. Twenty students were then selected for the multiple-case study. Semi-structured interviews and detailed explanations of responses to the Goals and Work Habits survey were conducted with the students. In addition, teachers, counselors, and parents of the 20 students completed the Empowering Gifted Behavior Scale (Jenkins-Friedman, Bransky, & Murphy, 1986). Fifteen students (75%) reported that at least one of their parents had perfectionistic tendencies. The author points out that since many of these gifted perfectionists are model students, many educators and parents are surprised when the stress of perfectionism drives students to harmful behavior such as suicide or eating disorders.


This study used a phenomenological approach to gain insight about underachievement among gifted students. The focus was on two 10th-grade students, one boy and one girl. A case study design was used. Data sources included classroom observations, interviews, and archival documents. Kate had an extensive network of friends at school that con-
tributed to her self-esteem and was more interested in staying in a comfort zone and fitting in with her peers than excelling academically. Shawn “prided himself on having the correct answers” and would not be likely to participate in a situation where he felt he was not in control, such as a class discussion or an oral quiz (p. 209). The fear of failure and high expectations for his performance sometimes caused anxiety. Shawn did feel underchallenged in his classes and thought that it was acceptable to slack off if he could keep good grades. Another interesting insight from this student was that he knew how to work the system: sit all day in school, not learn anything, but still get good grades.


This study compared behavioral, cognitive, attentional, and family history dimensions among four groups of boys categorized by intelligence and/or learning disability (LD). In the sample were 87 boys in grades 4–7. The four groups included 18 highly gifted boys (IQ 140–154; 20.7%), 17 low gifted boys (IQ 124–139; 19.5%), 26 boys with LD (29.9%), and a normal control group of 26 boys who were not identified as gifted or having a learning disability (29.9%). Each boy was administered the WISC-R and the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, Part II—Reading, Math, and Written Language. The teachers completed the Abbreviated Conners Teacher Rating Scale (ACTRS; Conners & Barkley, 1984), and the students’ parents completed the Yale Children’s Inventory (YCI; Shaywitz, Holahan, Marchione, Sadler, & Shaywitz, 1992). Using a MANOVA, the authors reported that both highly gifted and low gifted groups did not differ significantly when compared to the normal group in either behavioral or cognitive domains. Highly gifted boys did show levels of behavior problems similar to the learning disabled.


The purpose of this study was to explore perfectionism differences of gifted young adolescent students among different grade levels, gender, and birth order positions. In the sample were 391 gifted students in grades 6 (n = 154; 39.3%), 7 (n = 135; 34.5%), and 8 (n = 99; 25.3%), with 3 (0.8%) not indicating their grade level. A variety of SES levels were represented among the 223 girls (57%) and 164 (42%) boys, with 4 students (0.1%) who did not indicate their gender. There were 189 first-born or only children (48.3%), 59 middle children (15.1%), and 137 last-born children (35%). Six children did not indicate birth order. The Goals and Work Habits Survey (Schuler, 1994), adapted from the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990), was used to measure factors affecting perfectionism. The findings indicated an increase in girl perfectionism throughout middle school and that boys reported higher parental expectations. First-born adolescents reported the highest levels of parental criticism. The authors found that adolescent concerns of organization and personal standards were more problematic as compared to concern over mistakes and parental criticism.


The purpose of this study was to document the manifestations of Dabrowski’s overexcitabilities (psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginalional, and emotional) in young gifted children. The sample included 5 young children ages 4–6. Two children were girls and 3 were boys. They were nominated by early childhood teachers on the basis of their demonstrating characteristics described by Dabrowski. The researchers collected data from classroom observations, IQ tests (either the Stanford Binet or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children), an achievement test (usually the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement), an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) written for the child by the classroom teacher, and teacher interviews. Data were coded using the themes from Dabrowski’s theory. If a behavior characteristic was exhibited in three out of the five data sources, the authors concluded that the child had a pattern of behavior characteristic of that overexcitability. All 5 children were found to exhibit these three overexcitabilities: intellectual, imaginalional, and emotional. Only 2 children exhibited psychomotor and sensual overexcitability behaviors. Intellectual overexcitability can manifest itself by curiosity, asking “Why?” along with theoretical thinking. Imaginational overexcitability can be characterized by daydreaming, animistic and imaginative thinking, and fantasy play. Emotional overexcitability can be manifested in timidity and shyness, fear and anxiety, difficulty adjusting to new environments, intensity of feeling, and a concern for others. Psychomotor overexcitability can be evidenced by a surplus of energy, marked enthusiasm, and rapid speech. Sensual overexcitability is manifested in the extreme appreciation of sensual pleasures. The authors pointed out that these behaviors must be viewed first through the lens of Dabrowski’s theory before concluding that children have ADHD or other neurotic or behavior problems.

**References**


(Continued from Page 11) of change here, the fact that during this session he has been able to come to this level of awareness—that he does not have to change himself to be acceptable for affiliation—means that I can automatically assume that the potential is there for him to integrate and continue this growth. The fact that he has been able to come to this point so quickly may in some ways be deceiving. With the gifted client, the change might be somewhat more deceiving than with an average-range client. In actuality, the gifted client may be able to integrate this change as rapidly as it appears to have been integrated in this session. For an average-range client, a counselor would have to be concerned that the change occurring in this session would not be thoroughly integrated so immediately.)

A. Now that you’re acknowledging this or are more aware of this dynamic process that you’ve been involved in, why aren’t you falling back right at this moment into your feelings of abandon and isolation and helplessness that you were expressing at the beginning?

J. Because I’ve realized that I don’t need those things, and I don’t need to be hugging those things into me like some evil teddy bear. Those feelings are just things I’m creating to hurt myself. They’re not real things that serve any purpose. They’re just me undermining myself and hurting myself. Now that I realize what I’ve been using them for, I have no desire to feel them any more, and therefore I don’t.

Discussion

Until now, the client’s identity as a gifted individual has been affected by feelings of isolation and loneliness in his social context. He has sought out people who are unable to communicate with him easily, fundamentally denying his gifted identity. He has then attempted to adjust his behavior to fit their expectations, “hiding” himself in order to be accepted and understood and focusing on others’ needs, while ignoring his own. However, his inauthentic behavior, unreal self, and the accompanying superficial level of communication has left him feeling limited, unconfident, lonely, unsatisfied, disappointed, unworthy, and disconnected. He has blamed others for not understand-

ing him, and he has blamed himself for ineffective communication.

I helped the client explore significant feelings of loneliness and isolation early in the session, using open-ended questions and comments to encourage expression and examination of feelings. As a result, the client was able to acknowledge that few people can relate to him easily, a reality he has attempted to deny in the past. In addition, through examining his need for affiliation and the feelings that result from his lack of connection, he is finally able to affirm his differentness, essentially validating himself as a gifted person. Ironically, by embracing his differentness, the client feels “released” and optimistic. In his future relationships, he will likely be able to be more authentic and consequently more affiliated.

I was faithful to basic counseling tenets in my work with this highly gifted individual. The focus was on client strengths, not limitations. I reflected the client’s feelings, thereby validating them as real and important. I also paid attention to the positive movement the client was already experiencing. I respectfully and collaboratively helped the client to become no longer “stuck” in an ineffective and unsatisfying pattern of behavior. Most important, I recognized the high ability of the client and encouraged his self-direction.

Also important to note is the application of fundamental concepts related to the Gifted Identity Formation Model (Mahoney, 1998). Recognizing the cross-matrix intersection of the construct “affiliation” and the system “social” in the client’s frustrations and intense feelings surrounding social contact helped me to maintain focus on these two elements as they relate to gifted identity. I did not need to identify these, per se, in the session. However, the sustained attention to these areas, including the feelings related to them, moved the client to being able to embrace an identity that includes being gifted. The client’s integration of his new awareness into his sense of self will likely help him to relate authentically to others and find the affiliation he craves.

Conclusion

The presentation of a transcribed session, with accompanying therapist comments, illuminates how the Gifted Identity Formation Model (Mahoney, 1998) can be applied in therapy with gifted individuals—in this case, with an emphasis on social affiliation. The transcript (unabridged), comments, and subsequent discussion help to clarify therapeutic strategies for addressing loneliness and isolation in gifted individuals. The presentation also demonstrates how the model can help counselors and therapists who work with gifted clients to acknowledge the impact of giftedness on problems with social affiliation and to explore gifted identity development in terms of various constructs, such as affiliation. When highly able individuals are able to embrace their giftedness, they have increased potential for authentic communication and satisfying, meaningful relationships. Therapists who have awareness and understanding of giftedness and gifted identity development can help gifted clients struggling with loneliness and isolation to gain insight into their struggle and ultimately experience more meaningful social affiliation.

References


Emotional/Behavioral Disorders in Gifted Learners

The commonly held view at the turn of the 20th century characterized gifted children as peculiar, frail, and mentally unstable. Due in large part to the pioneering research of Lewis M. Terman and Leta S. Hollingworth, such myths were dispelled. Still, Terman’s work led educators to assume falsely that gifted children were so well adjusted that social and emotional issues were relatively non-existent. Hollingworth, however, cautioned that gifted children, especially those who were highly gifted, faced special issues with socialization and emotional development.

At the turn of the 21st century, gifted children are as well adjusted as any other group. Social and emotional issues occur when academic and intellectual needs and/or individual personalities are ill matched with the educational environment. Issues include, but are not limited to, asynchronous development, dyssynchronous development, perfectionism, and underachievement. Strategies and models can be implemented to help prevent these behaviors or help those students cope if problems already exist. Robinson, Reis, Neihart, and Moon (2002) offered several ways in which parents, teachers, and counselors can work together to provide educational and emotional support systems for gifted children. These include offering a qualitatively differentiated education, training those who work with and parent gifted children, recognizing the variance among gifted children, helping the gifted develop coping mechanisms in the face of challenges both intellectually and emotionally, offering support systems from early childhood through college, and advocating on behalf of gifted children.

As you’ve made your way to the end of this issue of Tempo, you’ve probably noticed that the journal has undergone something of a transformation. We’ve worked hard over the past few months to make changes to the design and format without losing the quality of articles relevant to practitioners, researchers, and parents. There are several changes still to come. I encourage teachers, graduate students, researchers, parents, and talented students to submit articles. Your contributions continue Tempo’s service to and advocacy for gifted and talented children. Along with the changes to the format and design, the editor of Tempo has also changed.

As I write my first column as the new editor of Tempo, I am reminded of why I entered the field of gifted education. As a product of public education, I had one teacher, Mrs. Betty Wade, who managed to maintain a level of rigor and challenge during my fifth- and sixth-grade years without trampling on my creative streak or imagination. In a self-contained gifted and talented classroom, Mrs. Wade and my fellow classmates constantly challenged me. During my own years as a public school teacher and later as graduate student and university instructor, the 2 years I spent with Mrs. Wade vividly remained in my memory as an example of what an environment for gifted and talented students should be both intellectually and socially. Thank you, Mrs. Wade, and to the other teachers like her!
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders in Gifted Learners

Guidelines for Article Submissions

Tempo welcomes manuscripts from educators, parents, and other advocates of gifted education. Tempo is a juried publication, and manuscripts are evaluated by members of the editorial board and/or other reviewers.

Please keep the following in mind when submitting manuscripts:

1. Manuscripts should be 5–12 pages on an upcoming topic:
2. References should follow the APA style as outlined in the fifth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.
3. Submit two copies of your typed, 12 pt. font, double-spaced manuscript. Use a 1 ½” margin on all sides. One copy of the manuscript must be submitted electronically to the editor.
4. In addition to a title page, a cover page must be attached that includes the author’s name, title, school and program affiliation, home and work address, email address, phone numbers, and fax number.
5. Place tables, figures, illustrations, and photographs on separate pages. Illustrations must be in black ink on white paper. Photographs must be glossy prints, either black and white or color, or transparencies. Each should have a title.
6. Authors of accepted manuscripts must transfer copyright to Tempo, which holds copyright to all articles and reviews.

Upcoming Issues:

**Upcoming 2005**

Measurement and Testing
Deadline: May 1, 2005

Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented
Membership Application
See www.txgifted.org for additional information

Name ____________________________________________________________
Mailing Address ____________________________________________
City __________________________________ State __________ Zip __________
Business/School District ____________________________________________
Telephone (home) ________ / ____________ (work) ________ / ____________ Fax ________ / ____________
Email address: ____________________________________________________

PLEASE CHECK ONE: THAT BEST APPLIES:
☑ Teacher ☐ Administrator/Coordinator ☐ Business/Community Member ☐ Counselor ☐ Parent ☐ School Board Member ☐ Student

IN ADDITION TO YOUR REGULAR MEMBERSHIP, YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN A TAGT DIVISION FOR A SMALL ADDITIONAL FEE:

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• TAGT Newsletter (online) • Periodic Email Updates • Reduced Fees at All Conferences

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$_________ TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED ☐ Check/Money Order ☐ Credit Card Payment

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RETURN FORM AND DUES TO: Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, P.O. Box 200338, Houston, TX 77216-0338.
CALL FOR NOMINATIONS
TAGT Executive Board Positions

Elections will be held in Summer 2005 to fill openings for Regional Director and Officer positions on the TAGT 2006 Executive Board. Individuals elected to the Board will take office in November 2005.

Regional Director Positions to be Filled: Regions I, III, V, VII, IX, XI, XIII, XV, XVII, XIX
Requirements for Regional Director Positions: Current TAGT membership; must reside in the region where a vacancy exists.

Officer Positions to be Filled: President-Elect, First Vice-President, Third Vice-President
Requirements for Officer Positions: Current TAGT membership; served at least one year on the Executive Board or on a TAGT Standing Committee; a Texas resident.

To be considered for nomination to the TAGT Executive Board, please complete the information below and return by May 1, 2005 to: TAGT Elections Committee, 406 East 11th Street, Suite 310, Austin, TX 78701-2617.

Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
Address: _________________________ City: __________________________ Zip: _______
Fax: ___________________________ E-Mail: __________________________ Region: _______

I. Position for Which You Wish to be Considered: ________________________________

II. Previous and/or Current TAGT Service (if applicable):
   Officer on the TAGT Executive Board: _________________________________________
   Name of Office                                      Dates of Service
   Regional Director on the TAGT Executive Board: ___________________________________
   Name of Office                                      Dates of Service
   TAGT Standing Committee: __________________________
   Name of Committee                                   Dates of Service

III. Current Position and Affiliation: ________________________________
   (district/campus, university, business, parent, etc.)

IV. Formal Education:
   Degree(s)          Special Certificates/Endorsements      Credentialing Institutions
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

V. List five current or past activities, jobs, offices, etc. (professional or volunteer) which you believe will contribute to your success in carrying out the obligations of the position for which you wish to be considered:
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

VI. On a separate sheet of paper, provide a statement of 50 words or less indicating what you hope to accomplish, should you be elected to the TAGT Executive Board. Your statement, or a portion of it, will appear in the June/July issue of the TAGT Newsletter.

VII. Attach a brief resume or curriculum vita (not to exceed two typewritten pages.)

VIII. Attach a photograph of yourself, preferably wallet-sized.