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- Building Resilience in Gifted Children
- Chill Out! Helping Gifted Youth Deal with Stress
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In this issue we revisit a topic that is critical to the healthy development of gifted youngsters. However, it is a painful and elusive subject for so many of our gifted young people. An observer, not familiar with the characteristics of giftedness, might think that above-average intelligence, ability, and talent would produce a high sense of self, enabling children to feel secure and pleased with themselves. But we who work and live with bright children know that the opposite is too often the case. Their age peers don't usually connect to them, thinking they are weird or "geeks." Their teachers may expect them to conform to grade level requirements, following a prescribed, but confining, curriculum. At times even their parents don't understand their mood swings—from great joy to uncontrollable tears, their sense of inadequacy, and their intense concentration on interests to the exclusion of everything else.

In the words of Henry David Thoreau, talented author, poet, and philosopher:

*If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
Perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears,
However measured or far away.*

The self-esteem of children who are different is often fragile. The teen years are especially painful. Gifted children at any age require the support and understanding and encouragement of parents and teachers. They need to know it's okay to be gifted. ♦

Share your stories of gifted kids. Contact Editor Carol Fertig, cfertig@earthlink.net.

Building Resilience in Gifted Children

Maureen Neihart

Can resiliency be taught or is it innate?

Why do some children bounce back from trouble relatively quickly and easily while others struggle for years to regain their balance? Why do things go right for some children raised in adverse circumstances? These are questions that have been investigated through resilience research for almost 50 years. The concept of resilience is not new, but its application to parenting and teaching is. We have good longitudinal data about the scope of resilience in children and the factors associated with it.

The emotional health and social competence of gifted children has been under investigation for more than two decades. We now understand the factors that increase the risk for negative outcomes and what seems to protect young people from stressors.

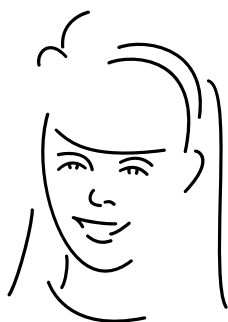
What do Resilient Children Look Like?

Resilience allows one to achieve emotional health and social competence in spite of a history of adversity. There are three waves of resilience research. The first wave, 40 years ago, examined risk factors in children. It was this research that told us that being raised in poverty increases the likelihood of criminality, mental illness, and substance abuse in adulthood and that childhood abuse is also associated with a host of negative outcomes later in life.

The second wave of research asked the question, what do resilient children look like? These studies concluded that while there isn't a universal set of traits among resilient children, children who beat the odds usually demonstrate a cluster of characteristics.

- Compassion for others
- Sense of humor
- Persistence in the face of failure
- Moral conviction or a strong code of ethics
- Interest in spirituality or religion
- A respectful manner
- Ability to get attention in positive ways
- Skill at problem solving
- Feeling of autonomy
- Positive outlook on life
- Belief that one's effort can change things
- Talent or hobby
- Flexibility in gender roles

The second wave also examined conditions that buffer children from the negative effects of risk factors. Studies identified several protective factors in families and communities, including things like smaller family size, available nurturance from an adult, one close friend or more, and reliance on a social support network. All studies from the second wave of research concluded that the single best predictor



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of positive outcomes among children raised in stressful circumstances is a relationship with another. The sine qua non of resilient children is the presence of a significant other who consistently believes in them, nurtures them, and loves them. There's something about just being with people who can see the potential in us that transforms us.

A few years ago we invited four multiexceptional young men—gifted high school and college students with learning problems—to speak on a panel to a large group of teachers and parents about their school experiences. The two hours with these students had more impact on the audience than any presentation made by one of the experts. Without exception, all the boys made reference to a period in their life that was so difficult (usually elementary school) that they or their parents despaired they would ever succeed in school or in life. And, without exception and without any prompting, all spoke at length about teachers who believed in them at times when they were ready to give up on themselves. They not only remembered these teachers' names, but they also spoke about the specific lessons they had learned from them that they felt contributed to their success as adults. These young men's personal testimonies to the power of a relationship to overcome adversity were very moving.

Gifted Children: At Risk or Resilient?

More than two decades of research on the risk and resilience of gifted children indicates that, in addition to the risk factors common to all children (e.g., poverty, maltreatment, trauma, or loss), gifted children face three additional risk factors: asynchrony in their development, difficulty finding others with similar interests, and lack of challenge in the classroom. As a group, gifted children are no more at risk than other children to depression, anxiety, suicide, delinquency, and behavior problems, but among the gifted, at least three groups have heightened vulnerability: highly gifted, gifted children with learning problems (multiexceptional), and gifted young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Highly gifted children, typically defined as those who score four or more standard deviations above the norm on a measure of ability, are more vulnerable than moderately gifted children. Because their levels of ability are so high, it becomes exceeding-

ly difficult to find others like themselves. In addition, it is difficult to provide them with appropriate levels of challenge in the regular classroom. These two risk factors heighten their vulnerability for social, emotional, and academic problems. Multiexceptional children are at greater risk for academic underachievement and for social or emotional problems because their asynchrony (i.e., the differences in their abilities) is the most extreme. These children are typically excellent conceptual thinkers who make connections easily and generate original ideas but often have great difficulty with the mechanics of reading, writing, or organization. They are usually not provided with appropriate levels of challenge in school because schools traditionally focus on remediation of the deficits of these children rather than on developing their talents. Further, the challenges they face with regulating arousal and controlling impulses can significantly interfere with their adjustment, especially during the early elementary years. As a result of their personal characteristics and the difficulty getting optimal matches with the curriculum, we commonly see mood disorders and behavior problems in this population by adolescence.

“ *The sine qua non of resilient children is the presence of a significant other who consistently believes in them, nurtures them, and loves them.* ”

Poor gifted children are negatively impacted by many more environmental, physical, and psychosocial factors than their non-poor peers. For instance, their parents are more likely to be divorced, engage in more punitive parenting, have smaller support networks, and make less frequent contact with those networks. Poor children's parents are less involved with their children's school activities than are parents of non-poor children, are less aware of their children's school experiences, and provide considerably less cognitive stimulation and enrichment. Poor teenagers are more dependent on their peers than their parents for social and emotional support than are children from higher incomes.

There is strong, clear evidence that poor children grow up in environments that are more physically hazardous. They have less access to healthy food because low-income neighborhoods often

have fewer supermarkets than higher income neighborhoods. They experience more pollution, more toxins and allergens, more crowding, more noise, more structural defects, more street traffic, more crime, and more violence. It is no surprise, then, that poor children have a significantly higher rate of injury and accidents than do more affluent children.

Predictability and consistency are important for developing a sense of security and trust, and studies indicate that poor children are more likely to live in chaotic or unstable home environments. Poor children move more often than non-poor children and are more likely to be evicted in a single year. Their homelife tends to be characterized by fewer routines and structure than that of non-poor children.

What Should We Do?

An important finding from the second generation of resilience research is that resilience is not innate. People acquire resilience. It's a learned behavior. This finding has obvious implications for parents and educators. It means there are things we can do to promote resilience in our children. This is the focus of the third wave of research.

“ When the going gets tough, the person who succeeds is the person who doesn't give up. ”

We are just beginning to explore the effectiveness of different interventions in building resilience. Although we do not yet have any definitive answers concerning what works, studies do point to two things we can do to enhance a child's ability to achieve emotional health, social competence, and academic success in the face of adversity.

The first is to strengthen supportive relationships. Since social supports are powerful predictors of positive outcomes, and gifted children often face more difficulty accessing true peers, we should do everything we can to help gifted children build social support networks.

Some of the best advice I've heard on this comes from parents of gifted students with serious learning problems. One mom advised parents to forge a

strong relationship with one person at their child's school. Don't start over every year. Choose one person—a teacher, counselor, or administrator—and do everything you can to nurture that relationship. Be real with them. Show your appreciation for all they do. Be honest with them about your strengths and weaknesses as a family, as a parent. Be willing to receive feedback and give it in return. If you do this, said the mom, you will have one person at school who really knows your child and can advocate for him effectively. You will have someone on your side to lift you up and cheer you on when you are tired, frustrated, sad, or angry.

Children who have a strong network of relationships tend to overcome adversity and recover more easily after upsetting events than do children without such supports. If other gifted children are not readily available in a young person's environment, efforts should be made to increase access to older children who share her interests. These opportunities are often found in cross-aged interest clubs. Chess clubs, book clubs, 4-H, scouting, music or dance lessons, community education, etc. are good places for gifted children to meet older children who share their passions. This means that we may need to allow gifted children to make close friendships with students who are several years older. We may have to discuss appropriate boundaries and help our children learn how to recognize and set limits for behavior that is acceptable for their developmental levels and for their families' values.

Don't Give Up and Don't Give In

People who are resilient are people who are able to sustain a lot of effort over time. They keep going even when the effort is taxing, or they are unsure of the outcome. When the going gets tough, the person who succeeds is the person who doesn't give up. We should be developing the will to succeed in gifted children.

Perseverance is a learned behavior. We learn to sustain effort over time by facing challenges early in life. Many bright people are not challenged early enough in their lives to learn how to sustain effort over the long haul. A child may earn good grades and high praise for the first six or seven years of school without making much effort at all. But consider the things they don't learn that most children learn by the end of 3rd or 4th grade. Among other things, they don't learn to tolerate frustration, to sustain effort when things are difficult, or how to cope with stress and negative emotion. How can you be resilient if you can't keep up

a strong effort? We must teach gifted children to persevere, and for that, we must make sure that they have opportunities to struggle. It's by facing a series of smaller challenges that children build the confidence they need to take on larger ones.

I once worked with a gifted teenager who was seriously depressed. Although she made a lot of progress by the end of a year, she was still so disabled by her emotional problems that she could not attend public school. About 18 months into her care, her progress was reviewed by several psychiatrists and psychologists not involved in her treatment. All affirmed the progress she had made. Some thought it was impressive that she had improved as much as she had. Several, though, cautioned me not to hope for much more. "You're lucky you got this far. She's probably going to be chronically mentally ill," said one. "This may be as good as it gets for her," said another.

Nevertheless, this girl and I persisted. She didn't give up on her goal for health, and I didn't give in to the naysayers around me. Several years later, I got to see her reclaim her emotional health. She attended a public high school where she achieved in honors classes, and she later graduated from a competitive college. She had the courage to live with the pain, feel the fear, and hope for better things. I had the courage to hope with her. When you have the courage to hope, you lend your spirit to someone else to endure, to persevere.

No child is so resilient that nothing upsets him. Rather, children vary in their expression of vulnerability and resilience. We cannot change a child's history, and there may be little we can do in some cases to reduce the risk factors in a child's life, but we shouldn't let that discourage us. Circumstances do not determine outcomes. Developmental outcomes are the result of a shifting balance between factors that heighten vulnerability and those that enhance resilience. Given what we know about resilience in general, and in gifted children in particular, we can say that efforts to build resilience should focus first and foremost on strengthening supportive relationships and teaching children to persevere. Studies also point to the advantage that people have when they are able to maintain a positive outlook on life.

There's also value in telling stories, especially stories of courage and selflessness. Stories that inspire

people to hope may reinforce the habit of turning in that direction when times get tough. Stories of others' resilience prompt us to ask ourselves, what would I do if that happened to me?

Tilly Smith, a 10-year old British girl saved her family and 100 others from a tsunami. Tilly was on a beach in Phuket, Thailand with her parents and 7-year-old sister when the tide rushed out. While everyone stood around bewildered, Tilly recalled a science lesson on tidal waves that she'd had two weeks earlier and warned everyone to get off the beach. Thanks to her willingness to speak up, the beach was evacuated before the wave came, and no one on the beach was seriously injured or killed. Tilly's story is a reminder to us all that we're never too young to make a difference.

When he heard about the tidal wave's devastation, 7-year-old Jesse Taconelli wondered aloud to his mother if somebody might have lost his favorite bear in the tsunami. He couldn't get over the idea that he had received everything on his Christmas list, and many children had lost everything. He determined that instead of saving money for the puppy he had wanted, his New Year's resolution would be to start a tzedakah, a Jewish tradition of charity, for victims of the tsunami. On his own, he came up with the idea of a gratitude tax, based on one's blessings. With his mom's help, Jesse listed 18 questions people could answer to determine the blessings in their lives and the gratitude tax they owed. His questions included items like, "How many kinds of cookies are in your cabinets?" "How many pillows are on your bed?" "How many people say I love you to you every day?" Jesse suggested that people pay one dollar for every blessing they counted in their lives. His own family's total came to \$63. In one week, Jesse raised more than \$1,000 for Save the Children, and he got local stores to donate \$5,000 worth of teddy bears. His mother said, "It's been a life-altering experience for him. As a mom, I've learned a lot."



Nancy Bonn-Winkler



Nancy Bonn-Winkler is the Gifted Program Counselor at the Center for Creative Learning in the Rockwood School District, Missouri.

I am quite sure that many of my former high school teachers would not believe that I am a successful counselor of gifted children. First, I most certainly did not demonstrate any outstanding academic talent in school, and second, my behavior seemed to be more on the lines of oppositional defiant than on compliance or leadership. Interestingly, however, I entered high school with dreams of achievement and a willingness and desire to make those dreams come true.

I graduated from elementary school the same month my older sister graduated from high school. At her graduation, I remember hearing students' names announced followed by a lengthy description of their achievements and earned scholarships. I thought to myself that I also wanted to be the kid on stage with the scholarships and awards being announced for all to hear. So off to high school I went with freshly pressed clothes and a positive "I can do it" attitude. Along with our books, schedules, and behavioral expectations, all students were given a freshly printed orange demerit card, which we were required to carry with us each and every day for the next four years. My personal goal was to do well in my studies and to become a high school cheerleader. Both of those goals came to fruition, although my grades would have been higher if I had possessed better study skills. Without producing any real effort, I was in the top 100 in my class of over 550 students. I was a cheerleader. Life seemed good. That was freshman year, and things were about to change.

On a warm and sunny day, with school windows open, warm breezes blowing and the end of the school year in sight, I headed to a required study hall which, in my mind, meant "free period!" I entered as the bell rang. This was typical as our school had four floors, long corridors, and only four minutes for passing time. The teacher told me to give him my demerit card, as I was late. I respectfully queried the demerit since I was walking in as the bell began to ring. The teacher's response was to give me another demerit for questioning him. I was to receive two demerits, for what? I wasn't late, and I felt I had a right to ask a question about his action. The teacher saw my devastation, as tears were rolling down my face, and offered an alternative. I could take two swats with a paddle instead of the demerits. I was horrified. I remember trying to process what was happening and couldn't quite get a grip on the teacher's rationale for his behavior. My demerit card was clean. I followed "their" rules, so what was happening here? I was a good girl! I felt the situation was unjust, but I was trapped. On that warm spring day, I took the demerits, and that teacher took my dreams.

As I witnessed continual inconsistencies at my school, a growing sense of cognitive dissidence set in. The inconsistencies I observed were not only behavioral but philosophical as well. Behaviorally, I questioned why teachers were not accountable when **they** "crossed the line" (like coming to class late), while students were corrected or punished. Philosophically, I was perplexed because the right and wrong guidelines that were taught daily were not carried out in practice. I felt powerless. In actuality, I was powerless. I believed right was right and wrong was wrong but learned quickly that there

were a lot of gray areas. I survived by learning to live within the gray areas, although I would have preferred to thrive. In the end, I chose not to engage in this system of inconsistencies, and I chose not to give unearned respect to my teachers. Why should I? They started the war.

The next three years were an academic waste. Admittedly, I did far less than my best but, surprisingly, continued to do just fine with a minimum of effort. I cannot remember studying or cracking a book. As for cheerleading....well, I became disenchanted with that dream, too, as I literally disengaged from the entire school system—a system, I learned, that did not believe in me nor I in it.

It was my turn to graduate. No honors, no scholarships, and no emotional tears on my part. I was done with school and looked forward to “getting out.” Before graduation I had to visit with an advisor, who was also a physical education teacher. She chatted with me about my future and about college. I reported that I had no desire to go to college. Nor did I want to enter any other academic “situation.” She advised me that I would not want to miss out on all the fun I would have in college and to consider it as an option. No one at this school had ever talked with me about college. Her simple words were incredibly nourishing to this emotionally and academically starved teenager. College....fun....me....you really think so? That one person truly affected the course of my future. I graduated, and in the fall I went to a local community college.

At the community college, I did not have a goal, focus, or career plan. I just took all the basic classes like everyone else. Very slowly, something foreign and unexpected began to happen. I discovered that I actually liked learning. I started to take classes that interested me, like piano, psychology, creative writing, philosophy, sociology, and so on. During one semester I was taking 19 credits and loving it. I was even learning how to study. As great as this learning experience was for me, my two years were up, and I needed to move on academically. My advisor invested some time, helping me focus on a career path and a college to support that choice. In two short years, I developed a passion for learning, chose a career, and began to believe in me as a person with academic ability. I was on my way!

I did not reflect upon my high school educational experience until my first reunion, five years after graduation. I was working successfully as a special education teacher with children I adored. A catalyst for attending the reunion was to see past teachers and to let them know—let them see—that

I had actually made something of myself. I was a bit naïve in thinking that many teachers attend those events and that they would even care about what became of me. The reunion was just that—a reunion of past students. There was no sense of enlightenment or closure.

Other reunions occurred over the years, and my anger and disappointment about my high school experiences intensified. Perhaps my feelings worsened because I had entered the field of school counseling and was better able to see my role in those experiences more clearly. What I saw was a student with a lot of potential who, with a bit of compassion and direction, could have flourished. What a waste!

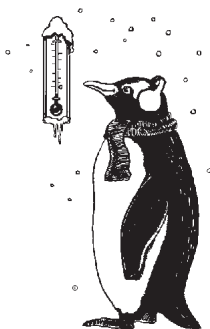
Those high school experiences, hurtful as they were, have provided me with insights that have proven to be invaluable. You see, I don’t need to imagine how it feels to be an angry, disengaged, disenchanted student because I was one—one who survived. I am now the child advocate that I wish I had as a student. Counseling or teaching is not just about curriculum, theory, technique, or trends. It is about insight, experiences, empathy, and building trusting relationships, too. I adhere to my own set of core beliefs that guide me in my advocacy. Students have rights to

1. be recognized and accepted as individuals.
2. be treated with compassion and respect.
3. be gently redirected without shame or blame.
4. be heard and affirmed when they express their thoughts and feelings.
5. an emotionally safe environment.
6. act their chronological, mental, and emotional ages.
7. receive support.
8. be part of the decision-making processes that involve them.
9. reach their potential.
10. be encouraged to follow their dreams.

It is so easy to believe in those rights when a student’s behavior is considered good. But when a student questions, disagrees, shows anger or aggression, or even becomes frustrated, the response is often defensive. There is no doubt that type of behavior would be off-putting and uncomfortable to anyone. However, one must remember that the behavior is symptomatic. There were many reasons for my inappropriate behavior, and I know that I made my own choices. But the behavior was only symptomatic. I “acted” badly; I was not bad. My emotional survival became dependent upon my resilience in a system-centered school. Outsmarting that system gave me back a sense of control and power, but it did not make up for the emotional and academic isolation from school that I felt. I should have been thriving instead of surviving. So should all students. It is their right. ♦

Chill Out! Helping Gifted Youth Deal with Stress

Terry Bradley



Terry Bradley, from Boulder, Colorado, is the mother of two gifted teenagers. She is an educational consultant specializing in social and emotional issues of the gifted and facilitates discussion groups with middle and high school students.

What are some specific, practical ways to teach stress management?

What causes stress in gifted youth and what specific skills do they need to manage it? Although stress is a real presence in all our lives, it can be more intense for the gifted because they are usually more sensitive, introspective, and emotional. Growing up gifted is a qualitatively different experience, which can manifest itself in the complex way a gifted individual feels and emotes. In addition to the normal stressors of adolescence, with giftedness comes asynchronous development, higher expectations, lack of academic challenge, over scheduling, perfectionism, difficulty finding true peers, and extreme concerns about justness and fairness.

Fortunately, research on risk and resilience in gifted children (Neihart & Reis et al., 2002) shows that gifted kids have many inherent qualities that may also contribute to their resilience. This can certainly serve as a protective factor. Educating our youth about stress management skills may enable them to cope even more effectively.

Baum and Nicols (2003) identified five indicators of kids who are overly stressed.

- Physiological headaches, stomachaches, nervousness, insomnia
- Emotional excessive crying, lashing out, hostility, anger, violence
- Relational conflicts with family and friends, withdrawal from others
- Mental anxiety, panic, confusion, feeling threatened or frightened, apathy
- Spiritual submission, no way out, helplessness

Experienced in moderation, these indicators are manageable and even expected. However, too many of these feelings, especially over extended periods of time, can lead to severe emotional and physical problems. We must teach children to manage and control their stress in order to prevent it from becoming overwhelming.

Handling stress is a learned skill that needs to be taught and modeled. Though children are often told to “chill out,” they are seldom instructed how to actually do it. A good place to begin is with role models. If we, as adults, call attention to and acknowledge our own stress, we can explain to our children and students what specific strategies we are implementing in order to deal with it. By acknowledging our stress, and normalizing it, we are making it less taboo.

A healthy dose of stress can actually go a long way in inspiring us to perform at our highest levels of ability and propelling us into action. Highly stressful situations are generally areas of great importance (i.e., a performance, a deadline, a test, an important gathering of significant others, an overabundance of work piling up, or friends/relatives pressuring us into doing something we’ve been putting off).

Stress is common, but as basic a response as it is, many of us try to

hide our stress from our children. Why? It could be that we don't want to burden them, or we don't want them to think we can't handle it, or we feel it's too personal an experience. If our reaction is to ignore it or allow it to consume us, that is what our children see as a viable response to stress. If they see us using appropriate relaxation techniques, they may view these as practical ways to cope with stress.

“...gifted kids have many inherent qualities that may also contribute to their resilience.”

Envision acknowledging our stress as opposed to ignoring it, talking it through with our children as an emotion to be dealt with and managed rather than being embarrassed by signs of personal weakness, and implementing healthy strategies instead of burying our heads in the sand and hoping it will all go away soon.

When my two young children expressed an interest in helping me bake, I tried to patiently explain each step of the recipe, happy that they were curious about the world around them. In my kitchen, I always made sure that cleaning up afterwards was as much a part of the baking experience as double-checking the measurements before adding the ingredients to the bowl. As a result, my teenagers still dutifully clean up the cooking area before leaving the kitchen and, unassisted, make a great batch of chocolate chip cookies. Had I not modeled those steps time and again and discussed them out loud, I think my children would have dusted off their hands and left the dirty dishes on the counter for mom to deal with. Just as there are good chocolate chip cookie recipes, there are also successful “recipes” for helping children deal with stress.

Galbraith and Delisle (1996) advise that to manage stress, we must identify what causes it, take responsibility for it, and move toward positive action. The first part of this sounds pretty straight forward, doesn't it? After all, don't we always know the cause of our stress? Well, actually, no. Many individuals are not “tuned in” to themselves and their feelings. Not all people think introspectively, master the ability to sift through their emotions, and compartmentalize their feelings to arrive at the realization of what is causing stress. In fact, when my gifted son showed signs of stress in school, I would

ask the obligatory, “What's wrong?” He would answer, “I don't know. I'm just kind of upset.” At that point, I would ask him specific questions to help him identify what was causing his anxiety. Questions like, “Are things alright with your teachers?” “Are you and your friends getting along okay?” “Did something happen here at home that made you mad?” Inevitably, his face would come alive when I asked the trigger question. He'd then say something like, “Yeah, at recess the boys play football, but they never ask me to play.” Or, “My teachers and my friends are expecting me to be in the science fair again this year, but I'm not really interested in doing it anymore.” By modeling this process with children who are not aware of their feelings, we can help them learn the art of self-examination when they are “unsettled.”

As a teacher of the gifted, I have had great success helping students identify the stressors in their lives with the following activity adapted from a teen inventory designed by Schmitz and Hipp (1995). The authors' checklist inventory focuses on five common stress areas: school, self, friends, home, and life. I have modified this inventory to create Stressors Related to Your Future. I put one heading on each of five sheets of butcher paper, give the students markers, and let them work in groups jotting down ideas for each area. The amount of information they relate never ceases to amaze me. This activity helps them identify their stressors, heightens their awareness of the various types of stress they are trying to balance, and validates the fact that even though they are “just kids” they do have legitimate issues impacting their lives.

Another suggestion from Galbraith and Delisle is to help gifted kids take responsibility for their stress. Mendaglio (2005) says, “With superior intellectual ability [gifted individuals] can pick up on details and nuances of a situation and process them very quickly.” As a result, they “...feel more because they see more.” He goes on to explain that “emotions are created by our interpretation of events, not by events themselves.” From this perspective, it is easy to understand how a seemingly “minor” incident in one person's eyes could incite extreme ramifications to a delicate psyche in another person.

Identical triggers will elicit a variety of responses from different people. For example, scoring a B on a paper may be “no big deal” for one student, whereas it can be a traumatizing event for another. This perspective puts the responsibility of feeling and action squarely on the individual.

Galbraith and Delisle also suggest taking positive

action to successfully manage stress. In facilitating discussion groups with gifted middle and high school students, I do a number of activities that help them understand and manage their stress. They keep a daily Stress-o-Meter log (Romain & Verdick, 2000). Drawing an illustration of a thermometer, I make multiple copies and staple a personal stress log booklet for each child, with a couple of weeks' worth of duplicate thermometers. They write the day's date and color in the "mercury" to reflect their current level of stress. Romain and Verdick have created a great example of a thermometer, which comes complete with captions that read "Cool as a Cucumber," "Kind of Stressed," "Way Stressed," reaching all the way up to "Yikes!" After they have colored their thermometers to reflect their levels of stress on that particular day, we reflect and share what is going on that is causing each of us to feel that way. As you can imagine, there is a strong variance among the students.

“ Life skills are long-term character builders that boost, rather than drain, our energy. ”

Many valuable lessons come from this activity.

- It allows every student to see that others experience stress just as they do.
- It allows every student to realize that stress levels vary from day to day. Sometimes, the variation is highly significant. This reassures students that even when they're having a "Way Stressed" day, there's always hope that tomorrow will be better. Rarely do students remain stressed out at high levels for days or weeks on end. If we can help them see that high stress levels happen and that they will not necessarily be stuck at those levels forever, it is easier for them to weather the rough times.
- It encourages them to have healthy conversations about stress, as opposed to ignoring the feelings and emotions that inherently come with it. Keep in mind that a stress booklet like this should be used for a shorter, rather than a longer, period of time. In order for it to be positive rather than oppressive, personal stress disclosures should be restricted to reflect awareness of stress and not preoccupation with it. We want to help them positively manage stress but not become obsessive about it.

Once a climate of understanding and support about the topic of stress has been established, we work on "coping strategies" and "life skills" (Schmitz & Hipp). Coping strategies are short-term fixes that help us "get by." Life skills have more of a long-term benefit because they help build up resilience and actually manage the stress. Implementing both short- and long-term strategies is important to successfully cope with the assortment of stressors in our lives.

Students brainstorm a list of what they do to calm themselves when they get stressed. Some suggestions I've heard young people cite include listen to music, hang out with friends, go for a run, play computer games, eat comfort foods, watch TV, write up a plan of what absolutely has to get done now and what can wait, go to a movie, read a good book, divert attention to a hobby, get advice from parents, play an instrument, sleep, go shopping, and unfortunately, consume alcohol and drugs. After brainstorming possibilities, students go back over their lists and figure out which of these genuinely help them manage and control stress and which ones feel good at the time but actually cause them to avoid the stressors. As mentioned before, coping strategies (the short-term fixes) have a time and a place in our lives. But if we are constantly procrastinating or avoiding or escaping, we won't take control of our stress. Rather, our stress takes control of us.

Life skills are long-term character builders that boost, rather than drain, our energy. If we have several healthy life skills under our belts, we focus on our ability to regulate any negativity that comes our way. So what are these life skills? If I asked you the question, "Over the years, what have you learned in life that has helped you to manage and control your own stress?" the lists generated would be as varied as the readers. Grab a pencil and a piece of paper. I guarantee you will be able to list quite a few. In fact, years ago I was asked that very question by a group of students who were in a rigorous IB program at a very competitive high school. They wanted to know the secret to managing stress. After reading the suggestions of Schmitz and Hipp, combined with my own soul searching, this is the list at which I arrived.

- Incorporate humor wherever you can. Be able to laugh at yourself.
- Get adequate sleep.
- Make time for your hobbies and passions. They recharge your batteries and make life more meaningful.
- Spend time with people who boost your energy levels rather than drain them. "Decluttering" is

not just for kitchen drawers; it works for people, too.

- Take care of your body with good nutrition and regular exercise.
- Use positive self talk. Why should someone believe in you if you don't first believe in yourself?
- Help others. Volunteer your time to assist those less fortunate or those who can benefit from your presence. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."
- Reach out for help when you need it. Surround yourself with people who provide you with a genuine support system.
- Schedule time for relaxation.
- Implement methods that help you become better organized. Whether this is accomplished with a calendar book, computer software, a PDA, a checklist, or sticky notes, organize your life so you can be more in control of it. Prioritize your list and then set out to accomplish your goals one by one. Break tasks down into manageable parts.

Life skills are quite powerful. They act like a buffer against adversity in the world. To be most beneficial, life skills need to be implemented proactively so that when stress comes your way you already have an arsenal of "weapons" to defend yourself. Remember, your list of life skills might be significantly different from mine. Keep your list handy as a reminder of your healthy defense mechanisms, and practice them regularly.

When I discuss this topic with students, I encourage them to generate a list of life skills that works for them. I then help them to discern the difference between the short-term and the long-term fixes, and I remind them how they are both important. Depending on the amount of time available, I spend a few sessions focusing on various life skills in order to explore them more fully. For real-life application, it's beneficial to go "in-depth" and investigate the real meaning and power of each one.

Finally, a culminating activity to use is expanded from an idea by Romain and Verdick. Students make a Panic Mechanic kit from a shoebox, magazines, and art supplies. They decorate the outside of the box (to represent their outer bodies) with symbols/words/pictures/drawings depicting stressors of the world that cause them pressure. The inside of the box represents their inner consciousness. It is decorated with forces within themselves (various coping strategies and life skills)

which act upon the outside stressors to help them manage.

I am constantly learning about factors that cause stress in young people. Likewise, I am continually encouraged by the power and resiliency that these students possess. Although some stressors don't have a short-term or even a long-term fix, relying on the strength of life skills can at least help take the "edge" off the distress. ♦

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Combining Public School and Homeschool: Better than “Good Enough”

Evelyn Eisele



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How can one combine homeschool and public school to spell success?

Fourth place....I went to school that day with a fever and a queasy stomach to sit for three hours in a blue plastic chair in my elementary school cafeteria. I tensely anticipated the periodic arrival of the school librarian who bore in one hand a little book called *Paideia* and in the other a black microphone into which she intoned weighty words, one by one. She stopped before each student, read a word from the tiny volume into the apprehensive student's eyes, and waited. I wrapped my cool, damp fingers around the proffered microphone. I swallowed hard and methodically mouthed the word into the microphone. Then, letter by letter, I worked my way through: "m-e-l....," pause.... "i-t....," deep breath.... "t-o-l-o-g-i-s-t....melittologist." After waiting for Ms. R's smile, I tentatively released my breath and heard the precious word: "Correct." After hours and weeks of daily practice, repeating words and their spellings with my father out of *Paideia*, I climbed to fourth place in my elementary school spelling bee that year. This placement allowed me to advance to the district level of the spelling bee.

My parents taught me that merely "adequate" is not sufficient. Initially, this idea seems to point the way to a feeling of perpetual insufficiency—the sort of pressure that drives one to sudden and self-inflicted emotional death. What they actually taught me, however, is that I cannot simply offer the bare minimum effort to attain what someone else sees as "good enough." As a little girl, I remember practicing the piano with my mother by my side. After several fruitless attempts at a particularly difficult exercise, I glanced up at my mother and demanded, "Is that good enough?" Recalling my current piano teacher's frequent use of that phrase as approbation, my mother decided that perhaps it was time to find a different teacher—one who would not accept something that was merely "good enough," something less than the best I could offer. It is only when I put forth my best effort and achieve to the best of my ability that my efforts are "good enough." And when I have reached that point, no one should tell me that I should do more. I do not measure my achievements either positively or negatively by someone else's definition of adequacy, but on the basis of my own goals and abilities. Throughout my years of learning, both in and out of school, this is the standard that my parents bequeathed me.

I began homeschooling halfway through my 5th-grade year partly because of this philosophy. A few months after what seemed to a 5th grader the epic accomplishment of placing fourth in a spelling bee, I auditioned to give a short presentation of my elementary school's news on local television. When I was not chosen, my mother called my teacher to find out how I could improve for any future public speaking opportunities. My teacher responded: "Oh, she was perfect. We just thought that since she had been picked for so many things like the spelling bee already, we should give someone else a chance." My parents did not want me to grow accustomed to the idea that all I had to do in order to succeed was to "wait my turn." After talking to my teachers and researching what homeschooling would involve, I left public school and studied at home.

This was not the first time my parents had considered homeschooling me. They had vaguely mulled the idea over since the beginning of my 1st-grade year because they hoped to help me avoid negative

peer influences.

Another reason why my parents and I chose homeschooling was because of my dedication to classical piano. I took lessons once a week and practiced at least two hours a day. This amount of practice left me scrambling at the end of the week to accomplish my goals for my next lesson. My parents and I agreed that I would probably be able to learn more efficiently at home, even though I benefited from the gifted and talented program at my elementary school. By covering the same amount of material in a shorter period of time, I had more time to spend at the piano and other activities than I had while in public school. In addition, I was able to learn at my own pace rather than having to wait for other students to catch up.

“ Without the extra time homeschooling allowed me, I would never have had the opportunity to personally encounter musical performance on such a grand scale. ”

My piano skills and my love for music grew significantly over my three and a half homeschool years. During my 7th-grade year, I auditioned by CD to participate in the 2000 Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the spring, I learned that I was one of a couple American pianists inducted into the group of 21 contestants from around the world. The competition spanned three rounds over the course of five days, requiring the memorization of 60 minutes of solo piano music in addition to a concerto movement. The young musicians, ranging in age from 11 to 13, played 25 minutes of music in the first round and 35 minutes in the second round. Never before had I been surrounded by so many individuals who were so dedicated to their art. Never before had I had the opportunity to perform and hear such a quantity and quality of music in a place even remotely comparable to the Assembly Hall on Temple Square. I was not chosen to continue to the final round, but the experience of playing in public in a towering, resonant hall on a nine-foot Italian Fazioli grand piano was reward enough for having worked so hard. Without the extra time homeschooling allowed me, I would never have had the opportunity to personally encounter musical performance on such a grand scale.

In spite of the extra time I had to involve myself with piano and with activities such as Girl Scouts and a weekly choir, homeschooling still had its drawbacks for me. It was easy to become isolated because my house was both my educational center and my primary recreational venue. By no means

was I some sort of maladjusted recluse, but I would have benefited had I been involved in more social activities.

After three years of homeschooling, my parents and I decided that it was best that I go back to public school. We realized that at higher academic levels, almost all the subjects I would be taking were better suited to learning in a group environment. Literature and history merit group discussion, and there are only so many science laboratory experiments that can be completed (safely) at one's kitchen sink. We ultimately decided that I would begin attending high school in 9th grade.

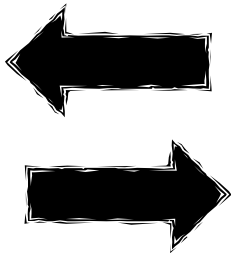
Before the beginning of the school year, we met with the gifted and talented coordinator at the school to discuss my options. Her help, along with that of my guidance counselor, was immensely valuable in selecting courses that were best for me, including honors and AP classes. These two people were also very helpful when recommending colleges to consider, researching scholarships, and obtaining recommendations.

The transition from homeschool to public school was easier for me than most people expected. Of course, I had to adjust to the new environment and the occasional need to transport myself across a quarter-mile campus in a seven-minute passing period, but I did not have to adjust the standards of my work significantly. I remember the little speech my teacher gave us the first day of my honors physical science class: "This isn't middle school any more," he said. "You can't be sloppy and get away with it here." I remember the little jab of fear I felt thinking how I might be in over my head. After all, these other kids had been in similar situations before—they were used to the school standards and expectations; all I had to go on was my work at home. The preparation I received at home, though, was plenty. My parents never accepted anything less than my best. They knew, more than any teacher could have known, how much I put into my work, and they did not let me pass something off as merely "good enough." Because my parents taught me to measure my work by the care I took in doing it, I was already used to giving my best. I didn't have to change the amount of effort I put into my work based on a standard of "good enough" because what was adequate for me had always been equivalent to the best I could give.

I cannot imagine my scholastic career unfolding better than it did. Attending a public high school gave me the academic environment necessary for a higher level of work and laid the base for a successful college search. Homeschooling throughout middle school allowed me the time to develop the musical skills that earned me a scholarship to Wake Forest University. It also helped solidify the work ethic and world view that my parents instilled in me at a very young age, both of which I have carried into my time in college. ❖

Diagnosis or Misdiagnosis

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Why are gifted children often misdiagnosed as having behavioral or mental health disorders?

The quiet kindergarten classroom, meticulously prepared by a caring teacher, was ready for the first day. Desks were neatly arranged, and each had a child's name printed in the corner, even though the teacher knew that many children would not recognize their names. When Sal entered the classroom, it was quickly apparent that he was different. He bypassed the other children and ignored the teacher's greeting. He headed immediately to the desks, reading each name to find the right one. He spent the day absorbed, gazing with focused attention all around his new environment, yet he did not interact with others. At recess time, Sal wanted to sit in the corner and read a book that he had brought. In all of her years in education, the teacher had never seen a child behave like Sal; he was different. After several days of similar behavior, the teacher began to speculate, "Sal looks like he must have some disorder."

Does Sal possibly have Asperger's Disorder or some other condition that affected his behavior in the first days of school? Is he a gifted child who was so excited about the new learning opportunities that he simply tuned all others out? Is it some combination of the two? These questions are not easy for most health care professionals to answer. Why? Because health care and counseling professionals—the ones who make the diagnoses—typically have received little training in the characteristics and common behaviors of gifted children.

How frequently are gifted children misdiagnosed? Frankly, there are no research data, though we do know it occurs, and perhaps frequently (Webb, et al., 2005). How do we draw this conclusion? Because we have tested children whose parents have come to us for a second (or third) opinion, and in our clinical experience it appears that behaviors typical for the gifted may be mistaken for behavioral disorders in more than 25 percent of gifted children. In our combined experience, gifted behaviors are most often mistaken for ADHD, Asperger's Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Bipolar Disorder.

This phenomenon of misdiagnosis may occur because our society is "label-happy." Frankly, diagnostic labels are sometimes misused. In some cases, a diagnosis is used as an excuse rather than an explanation leading to appropriate management. It is easier to get a diagnosis for the behavior and then medication to control it than it is to adjust curriculum and school experiences to make them more appropriate for a child, especially if inappropriate curriculum has not been considered as a possible cause of the problem (Ruf, 2005).

The scope of behavioral and mental health diagnoses has increased amazingly in the last 50 years. The first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association*, published in 1952, was less than 100 pages long. The current version is almost

1,000 pages. Children who used to be called unruly, disruptive, or unmanageable are now often labeled as having an Oppositional Defiant Disorder or a Conduct Disorder. Energetic children suddenly have ADHD. Some of these labels are useful. When carefully and thoughtfully applied, they can identify real disorders requiring professional intervention. While more services are now available, justifications in the form of paperwork and labels are necessary to obtain them. Until we have the resources and the will to treat each student as an individual, labels and categories—though often stigmatizing—are necessary to get help for the most “dysfunctional.”

Deviating from the norm does not, by itself, indicate dysfunctionality. If there is no room for different styles of thinking or behaving, there will be little room for creativity and innovation. It is worrisome that our society jumps so quickly to give labels of behavior disorders because it has little tolerance for quirks, idiosyncrasies, or behaviors that don't fit the age norms. As funding for schools decreases and accountability for results increases, our society still clings to the idea that each child should move through 12 years of education to leave high school looking identical and meeting minimum standards, as if people were products off an assembly line.

Human behavior is still largely a mystery, and a desire to “fix” unusual people or behavior is understandable. When a parent complains of a child's misbehavior, the urge to find an answer and a cure is strong. The danger is that diagnostic labels can become the end of the process rather than the beginning, and the label for unusual behavior may simply represent the latest fad among professionals. Usually these fads follow ubiquitous continuing education seminars that provide required hours for licensure and are presented as fact but are not evaluated for accuracy. We have seen many such fads come and go. In each circumstance the argument was made that it was not a whim but rather an increased accuracy of identifying a previously overlooked disorder. The most recent and egregious fad diagnosis, in our opinion, is “Rapid-Cycling Pediatric Bipolar Disorder.”

We have estimated the percentage of gifted children referred to us where a particular diagnosis of a behavioral disorder was wrong and where instead the correct diagnosis or most appropriate explanation for the behavior was “gifted.” Our

best estimates of incorrect diagnoses are as follows: ADHD, 34 percent; Asperger's Disorder, 76 percent; Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, 67 percent; Bipolar, 96 percent. These figures suggest that some diagnoses given to gifted children are inaccurate most of the time. These children were usually simply behaving in reaction to an inappropriate educational placement, intolerance of their advanced abilities and interests by their age peers, or to inappropriate parenting. In essence, the problems resulted from a failure to take giftedness into account. Giftedness better explains the behavior, and addressing the giftedness would result in more improvements than treating the behavior as a “disorder.”

“...it appears that behaviors typical for the gifted may be mistaken for behavioral disorders in more than 25 percent of gifted children.”

It is important for professionals and parents to take a step back and view the situation not from the narrow perspective of “How can we make this child more compliant in the environment she is in?” but rather to consider the wider perspective of what is the best environment for this child. These “diagnoses” are nothing but rough categories describing clusters of behavior that may be caused by anything from brain damage to child abuse and from physical aberrations to environmental stimuli. We must remind ourselves that the bottom line is getting the best function in the least restrictive, most supportive environment available while encouraging development.

Dual Diagnoses (aka Twice Exceptional)

Children who are gifted and also have behavioral or learning diagnoses are known as twice exceptional. How often does this occur? Gifted children are not immune to any disorder. Pyryt (2005) suggests it would be reasonable to consider that gifted children would have at least the same incidence of any disorder as children in general.

Twice exceptionality in gifted children might be best understood by identifying problems as within the child or environmentally caused. Some gifted students with internal problems are misdiagnosed because their specific deficits may mask giftedness, although sometimes giftedness can compensate for (and mask) such deficits. When the problem is within the child, it requires therapy and

support (e.g., as a child with strep throat requires an antibiotic).

Following are examples of problems within the child. An elementary school student was forgetful about routine matters and rejected by peers. Her grades were average. Once she was accurately diagnosed with ADD and placed on medication, she blossomed into a high achieving young lady with plenty of friends. Her ADD was masking her innate abilities.

A gifted boy sailed along with top grades until 4th grade when suddenly he began to fail in school. An evaluation for a specific learning disorder determined he had dyslexia. He had compensated for his dyslexia until he could no longer succeed with the increase in required reading. In this case his giftedness masked his dyslexia. Any student with sudden and unexplained school failure should be tested for learning disabilities.

In contrast, gifted children can develop environmentally caused behavior or emotional problems, such as depression and anxiety, in response to situations that are inappropriate for them. The problem is the child's intolerance for the environment, and the treatment for him is a change in the physical situation.

Mismatches between students and their environments are more subtle and far more common among gifted children. The diagnosis of many twice exceptional students depends on the assessment of temperament, development, and current environment.

“ These figures suggest that some diagnoses given to gifted children are inaccurate most of the time. ”

If a child is hypersensitive, a chaotic environment will likely have a negative effect on his emotional and mental health and lead to behavior problems. Conversely, if a child has a resilient personality, she may succeed unscathed, or at least minimally scarred, by a negative environment (Smith & Prior, 1995).

Without a well-informed cadre of professionals (pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, teachers) it is difficult to reduce the rate of

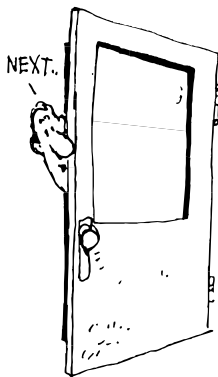
misdiagnosis among gifted children. Without a “gold standard” for definitive diagnosis, which incorporates giftedness and its implications, all mental health diagnoses of gifted children are subjective to a certain extent. Any credible conclusions could only come from organizing a panel of experts to submit a “consensus opinion” about this issue or, alternatively, organizing a group of recognized experts in each field to perform studies to reevaluate large numbers of gifted children who have been given psychiatric or behavioral disorder diagnoses. ❖

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What School Psychologists Can Do for Gifted Students

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How can school psychologists help gifted students?

School psychology training programs focus on understanding the unique learning needs and characteristics of students who have disabilities. This fact begs the question: What can or should a school psychologist do for a gifted student? Those who benefit from the skills of these professionals are gifted students with academic, social-emotional, and/or behavioral problems that often accompany giftedness; teachers and parents needing guidance in the care of these children; and those who need explanations of results obtained by psychological testing. School psychologists collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments and strengthen connections between home and school.

Twice Exceptional Students

The term "twice exceptional" is used to describe gifted students who also have specific academic, behavioral, and social-emotional difficulties. [Editor's Note: Physical disabilities are often included in twice exceptional.] This is a population of gifted students for whom the expertise and experience of school psychologists may be particularly relevant. Twice exceptional students include those who

- demonstrate advanced reasoning and comprehension ability but struggle with rote learning and memory
- have advanced ability across academic subjects but have difficulty with flexibility and developing social relationships
- possess superior intellectual ability, but their traits of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention interfere with academic performance

Best practices in the field of school psychology and federal law (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, www.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln*) dictate that a student's difficulties should first be addressed in the context of the regular classroom. School psychologists are trained to consult with teachers and school staff, parents, and students. When a child first begins to demonstrate difficulty, mental health professionals can provide support to define concerns precisely, explore factors that may be related to the student's problems, and help to generate possible solutions. At the early stage, difficulties may be successfully addressed by clarifying expectations, enlisting parent support, or making relatively minor adjustments in the curriculum or classroom environment.

School psychologists may work one-on-one with students to help build self-awareness and self-advocacy skills, to problem solve spe-

cific school-related issues, and to address anxiety and depression. They often work with groups of students to build skills in areas such as socialization and organization, to educate students about a shared difficulty such as a learning disability, or to address other therapeutic goals.

“ School psychologists collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments and strengthen connections between home and school. ”

When a student's difficulties continue despite intervention efforts, these professionals are often called upon, individually or as part of a team, to more fully explore the student's problems. At this stage, consideration is usually given to whether or not the student needs substantial support in addition to what is available in the regular classroom, e.g., special education services outlined in an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or significant accommodations in the regular classroom as may be provided through other government regulated plans.

In such circumstances, psychologists can provide a comprehensive assessment to identify unique strengths and weaknesses, and thus the unique needs, of an individual. Comprehensive assessment is particularly important for twice exceptional students. A focus on strengths alone may prevent accurate identification of difficulties that require intervention, and a focus on weaknesses alone may neglect the student's advanced ability in other areas. Also, strengths and weaknesses may mask each other in the classroom, leading the student to appear average. Any one of these incorrect perceptions may lead to inappropriate educational programming that may increase the likelihood of poor academic performance, behavioral difficulties, or social-emotional problems such as low self-esteem, depression, or anxiety.

Comprehensive assessment is also important for

accurate diagnosis. A mathematically gifted student who is seen as socially inept may be viewed and treated quite differently if it is determined that a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder is warranted. An unmotivated student may in fact have a specific learning disability that interferes with her ability to complete academic work at grade level in some areas, although she completes work quite easily in other areas. Difficulties with anxiety or depression may be misunderstood, particularly if they seem incongruent with a student's apparent school success.

School psychologists have the training and experience to evaluate the role of curriculum in a child's academic, behavioral, or social-emotional difficulties. While working with students with learning disabilities, it is often found that they are more likely to avoid doing work that is too difficult for them. Thus, improvements may result from a better match between a student's skills and the demands of the curriculum. School psychologists often use a tool called functional behavior assessment (FBA) to think beyond how a behavior looks (e.g., not doing homework) and to evaluate what variables are influencing the presence of a problem behavior or the absence of a desired behavior. For example, FBA could be used as a framework to evaluate if a student is more on task when work is challenging, is disorganized in all classes or only certain ones, or is withdrawn throughout the school day or only in specific settings.

Parents can also be helped to navigate the complexities of relevant legislation, as well as district- and school-level policies and goals. School psychologists can act as liaisons with other service providers, such as medical and mental health professionals in the community.

Clinical Services

The involvement of a mental health professional is especially appropriate in a clinical setting, as illustrated by the following case studies of gifted children:

Chris

Chris was a bright 9-year-old boy who had been placed in 14 foster homes in his young life. He came to the hospital's therapy day center because of chronic aggressive behaviors in class and at home. Chris's birth mother, with whom he was

again living, made it immediately known that he was biracial, and many of his issues in therapy centered on his refusal to associate with black culture. His father, a violent man who left his mother, was of African descent. So, for Chris, forming and embracing his identity as a biracial individual were two main goals of therapy. He was resistant to discussing these issues with his therapist.

His teachers noted that he was the highest achiever in class. Chris received very high marks in school and seemed to require no interventions there. He wanted to maintain control over his life in the form of grades, as he could not control who his parents were or to what culture he belonged. Chris's giftedness served him well in therapy. His psychologist had him read more complex stories about boys in similar situations. Because he could relate to these stories on an intellectual level, they served as a helpful foray into his emotional life. Indeed, multi-pronged therapy was required to fully serve Chris.

Tina

Tina was a bright 16-year-old girl who was placed in an inpatient adolescent service after experiencing a psychotic break and making suicidal threats. Her hospital-based teacher reported that Tina was highly uncooperative in class, and the psychology staff decided to have her behavior assessed. Tina demonstrated intelligence in the high average range, with superior performance in perceptual organization and high average performance in verbal comprehension. She also had several areas of difficulty, including cultural and historical knowledge, and working memory. With further exploration, it was determined that Tina's medication was causing side effects that were debilitating to her processing and retention of information. Indeed, her teacher noted that she was at least two years behind in knowledge of cultural and historical information; she had been on medication for about two years.

Tina's medication dosage was adjusted, and her ability to learn in the classroom improved. She was a passionate writer of poetry in her free time so more time to write was provided. Tina's teacher reported that she became more positive in class

with the additional free writing time.

School Psychology and Gifted Education

The American Psychological Association (APA) website provides an *Archival Description of School Psychology* (<http://www.apa.org/crsppp/schpsych.html>, accessed November 4, 2004). The APA text refers to children, youth, families, and the schooling process, concerns that are also central in gifted education. Valid assessments are key items in the school psychologist's kit bag, and these are critical to gifted education, as is attention to issues of diversity and equity.

According to the APA article, school psychologists are expected to be able to "design and evaluate innovative classroom programs, comprehensive and integrated service systems, and educational and psychological interventions." They synthesize "information on developmental mechanisms and contexts" and translate it into educational contexts for adults who are responsible for special needs children. Gifted education needs these people! ❖

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Musings

Big Fish in Little Ponds? Self-Esteem, Motivation, and Ability Grouping



Miraca U.M. Gross

The self-esteem movement...has helped lead to the abolition of tracking, lest those on lower tracks suffer damaged self-esteem; to the abandonment of IQ testing, lest those who score low feel low self-esteem; to massive grade inflation, lest those who score D's feel bad; to teaching aimed at the very bottom of the class, to spare the feelings of the kids slow to learn...Each tactic is used to protect the feelings of self-esteem of the kids who would otherwise be outshone. This gain is deemed to outweigh any benefits lost to the kids who would shine.
(Seligman, 1995, p. 28)

Seligman's concerns seem to be justified. Benbow and Stanley (1996) have discussed the problems of grade inflation in American schools and universities, while in my own country, Australia, many teachers oppose the process of assessing students' work with numerical or letter grades on the grounds that this may damage the self-esteem of students who don't achieve high grades. Calls for the abolition of ability-grouped programs for gifted students often rest on claims that such programs damage the self-esteem of students not enrolled in them—or that they even damage the self-esteem of students who *are* enrolled in them—yet there is little evidence to support these claims.

Colangelo (2003) comments wryly that almost everything "good" in school life has been linked by pop psychologists to a positive self-concept, and almost everything that sets students at any sort of risk has been linked to a negative self-concept.

Media discussions of self-concept are often disturbingly simplistic. Self-concept is multi-faceted. A student may have a high academic self-concept, a low social self-concept, an average self-concept on issues bearing on family relationships, and a very high physical self-concept. In addition, one can have a high academic self-concept in math but

a much lower academic self-concept in language. So what is a "positive" or "negative" self-concept?

Research shows that students with quite low academic self-concepts can achieve outstanding school success, while students with high academic self-concepts can perform quite poorly. Equally, students with high social self-concepts can engage in socially destructive behavior. Self-concept is one's *view* of oneself—it may not accurately reflect reality!

Self-esteem is the affective element of self-concept; how the student *feels* about what she believes. Both self-concept and self-esteem are influenced by the feedback one receives from other people. Teachers who deliberately withhold praise from gifted students for fear of making them conceited, while openly praising other students, can have a negative impact on the gifted students' academic self-concept and consequently their academic self-esteem.

Self-Esteem and Ability Grouping

The academic advantages of ability grouping are not in doubt. Research on the academic advantages when academically gifted students are ability-grouped is very positive—particularly when ability grouping is full-time and particularly for gifted students from minority and disadvantaged groups (Page & Keith, 1996). Gifted students who enter ability-grouped settings tend to perform substantially better on later measures of school achievement than do equally bright students in mixed-ability classes. Full-time ability-grouped programs (i.e., special classes and special schools) produce substantial positive gains. Part-time grouping (i.e., pullout programs) produces gains that are more moderate but still positive (Delcourt, et al., 1994).

However, the effects of ability grouping on self-concept and self-esteem are not quite so clear-cut. Some studies have found no difference or little difference in the self-concept or self-esteem of academically gifted students and students of average ability, while others have found differences favoring gifted students. Some studies have found that the academic self-esteem of gifted students takes a slight dip on entry to ability-grouped programs—although long-term studies suggest that this is usually temporary.

A study which I conducted of Australian students entering full-time ability grouping (Gross, 1997) suggests that shifts in self-esteem were influenced by the motivational orientation of the students.

Motivational Orientation

Most gifted students **love** learning. They get enormous pleasure out of increasing the levels of their knowledge and skill.

In early childhood, most children are intrinsically motivated to learn. The urge to learn comes from within them. They enjoy learning simply for learning's sake. However, as children move through school, things become a little more complex. Some children remain intrinsically motivated. For others, motivation gradually becomes more extrinsic—powered by factors other than the pure desire to increase skills and knowledge.

Mastery Goals and Task Involvement

Children who want to learn for learning's sake tend to have a pretty realistic attitude towards learning. They recognize that you have to practice and work at what you are doing if you want to improve. In general, students who adopt *mastery goals* focus on mastering the work and improving their performance.

Gifted students with a mastery orientation prefer tasks that are challenging and require them to strive for success. They also tend to use more effective learning strategies (Dweck, 1986). *Doing* their best is more important than *being* the best. If they top the class they're gratified, but it's not their primary goal in learning.

Performance Goals and Ego-Involvement

Other students may be powered by performance goals. For these students, doing well and being recognized and praised for it is more important than increasing their skills or knowledge. Gifted students with a performance orientation may prefer tasks that they can succeed at without too much effort, rather than tasks which demand an increase in knowledge or skill.

The Selective School Study

In an earlier "Musings" column in *Understanding Our Gifted* (Spring, 2004), I described the selective high school system here in New South Wales. What we call "high schools" serve students in grades 7-12. We have 23 *selective* high schools which serve approximately 5 percent of the student population. These are schools for academically gifted students within the state government school system. There are no fees; the only attendance criterion is high academic ability. These schools, which, by their nature, provide full-time ability grouping, are very popular with more than

five applicants for each place.

I wanted to test the often-expressed theory that ability grouping results in decreased academic self-esteem. Accordingly, the self-esteem of grade 7 students was evaluated in a number of selective high schools on three occasions during their first year of selective schooling—in the first two days of the school year, six weeks later, and six months after that. Their motivational orientation was also assessed. As a comparison group, I used grade 7 students in comprehensive (mixed-ability) high schools; they were tested at the same times and on the same instruments. This was a large scale study, assessing 1,500 grade 7 students (Gross, 1997).

Big Fish in Little Pond Effect

In the early 1980s an Australian researcher, Herbert Marsh, developed a theory which he called the Big Fish in the Little Pond Effect (Marsh & Parker, 1984). This proposed that bright students in low-ability schools (big fish in little ponds) would have higher academic self-concepts than equally able students in high-ability schools (big fish who are comparing themselves with other big fish). Marsh proposed that this drop in academic self-concept would be caused by the change in academic ranking which occurs when a gifted student who has scored at or near the top of a mixed-ability class moves to a new learning environment where *all* the students are bright, and he could end up ranked in the middle of the class or even in the lower half. Marsh questioned the value of grouping gifted students together if their self-concept is going to be diminished by the realization, for the first time, that they are no longer the best in the class and that there are pupils even more able than themselves. He did acknowledge, however, that gifted students learn best in ability-grouped settings.

My study of grade 7 students in selective and comprehensive high schools did indeed find that students in selective high schools experienced a dip in academic self-esteem over the first few months of high school. At first glance, this could seem to validate the big fish in little pond theory, as these students were, in general, moving from mixed-ability classes to an ability-grouped setting.

Interestingly, however, the comparison group of students entering comprehensive high schools (CHS) experienced a *similar dip*—and these students were moving from mixed-ability elementary schools to mixed-ability secondary schools! For these students, the self-esteem dip can't readily be attributed to the same theory, as it is unlikely that they experienced a significant change in ranking.

Even with the dip in academic self-esteem in both school types, the academic self-esteem of students entering selective high schools remained substantially higher than that of their age peers entering comprehensive high schools, and their social self-esteem was likewise higher (Gross, 1997). Significantly, in both types of schools, students whose motivational orientation was task-involved (learning for the love of learning) experienced less of a dip in academic self-esteem than students who were ego-involved (motivated by a need to outperform their classmates).

Reasons for Dip in Self-Esteem

A more likely cause of the dip in academic self-esteem in both the selective and comprehensive students is that they had just moved from being the oldest, most senior, and most educationally experienced students in a relatively small elementary school to being the youngest, newest, and least experienced students in a much larger secondary school. This sudden shift from being top of the age-grade pecking order in elementary school to being at the bottom in secondary could certainly account for a dip in academic self-esteem. Perhaps a dip in both groups was related to the academic pecking order in their former and current schools rather than to the type of school or class they were entering.

Can Self-Esteem Be Too High?

Gifted students who have "cruised by" for years in the mixed-ability classroom with success coming too easily can sometimes develop an unrealistically inflated academic self-concept. Occasionally these students become arrogant or conceited.

For these students, enrollment in an ability-grouped class with many students as bright as them can have positive academic and social outcomes. The realization that they are not the most gifted students in the school, that they have not yet developed some skills, and that they may fail at tasks can bring self-perceptions closer to reality. Everyone has to learn that failure—sometimes repeatedly—is a necessary step on the way to success. Grouping gifted students together makes it much easier for teachers to present them with work that will require effort, persistence, and commitment.

Importance of Home Support

It is important that parents of gifted students who are considering ability-grouped programs should understand that their child's class ranking will

most likely change in the new setting. My interviews with parents of gifted students whose academic self-esteem experienced *substantial* decreases in the first few months of selective high school found that many believed the change in class ranking was because their students had stopped working. These parents had difficulty in understanding that it was the environment that had changed rather than their children's efforts to succeed. It is likely that every student in a gifted class will have scored at or close to the top in a previous, mixed-ability class. Not everyone can be top in the new setting—nor is it necessarily important that they should be. ❖

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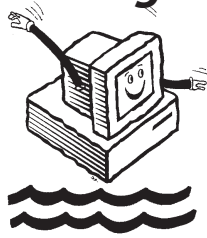
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Surfing the Net

Is Google Still the Google We Know and Love?

Sandra Berger



People who spend a lot of time researching on the web—like me—generally use Google (*www.google.com*) to search because it covers more ground than other search engines and is very user-friendly. Another reason I use it is that I get better results than using other search engines. It seems to think like I do. If I know what I want but don't know where to find it, I type in my search terms, usually set off by quotation marks, and click on "I'm feeling lucky." Nanoseconds later, Google returns one answer, and it is usually the right answer for me. So, you can probably see why I love Google. It gives me correct responses with a minimum of time and effort. It is the major search engine used by AOL and other Internet service providers, although if you use it on any website but its own, you will get an abbreviated version. Lately, Google's developers have branched out, and it's beginning to look like Google will soon be able to do everything but make your morning coffee. This may add frustration to your searching life because you will have to remember which one of Google's functions will deliver what you want, but I think there might be a payoff in the form of access to information as Google grows from search engine to a full-blown software company. Thus far Google is giving everything away, so you will see relatively little advertising, and when you see ads, they are related to your search. Google logic reads your mind!

The newest bells and whistles are incorporated into two new free software tools for Windows: Google Desktop (*desktop.google.com/*) and a free instant-messaging program called Google Talk (*www.google.com/talk/*). Desktop search is the name for the emerging field of tools that search the contents of a user's own computer files rather than searching the Internet. The emphasis is on data mining (searching for knowledge) all the informa-

tion that is available on the user's (that's you) computer, including web browser histories, email archives, word processor documents, and so on. Unfortunately it doesn't work on a Macintosh.

Google recently refined its desktop search feature. In the original version, you typed a few letters in a desktop search box, and in no time at all you would be looking at a complete list of files that included your search term, even if that term appeared inside the body of a document. It could search email, chat-session transcripts, and the contents of webpages you had visited. According to David Pogue, the New York Times technology guru, Google Desktop 1.0 was limited in the number of document types it could see, and you had to operate it from within your Internet browser. In Version 2, you can begin a search with a keystroke or by clicking in the search box that is always on the screen. A pop-up menu of search results appears as you begin to type and narrows itself with each additional keystroke. When you see what you want, click on it. In version 2, you can find and open a specific program, document, or control panel entirely from the keyboard. And, you can flag certain items (like banking) so they won't come up in a search.

The second new feature is Google Talk, which lets you communicate either by typing or, if your computer has a microphone and speaker, by talking. Google Talk is based on Gmail, Google's free, Internet-based email service, which gives users huge capacity for storage (2+ gigabytes for each account). Although Gmail works with both Macintosh and Windows computers, Google Talk works only with Windows. As long as you and your conversation partner are at Windows computers, you can converse with amazing sound quality. Google Talk communicates with popular chat programs and wants to end the era of proprietary chat networks. Right now, AOL, MSN, and Yahoo maintain separate, incompatible networks. Each wants to dominate, and, unfortunately, the customers are the losers. Until now, Gmail accounts were available by invitation only. My daughter, who lives in another state, has a Gmail account so she "invited" me to join. Google let the service spread gradually, giving each existing member a few additional invitations to extend. At one point, people were actually selling these invitations on eBay. Google did something clever to prevent spammers from gobbling thousands of accounts: When you apply for a Gmail account,

you must provide a cell phone number. Google sends a code to your phone, and you use it to complete the registration. You don't have to have a cell phone. You just have to know someone who does and will let you use his number one time. The person who owns the phone can get the code number for you because each cell phone is entitled to a number of registrations.

Another recent addition is the capacity to search print documents. You will love it, although there are both positive and negative aspects. Let's say you want to quote a phrase from a novel. You can remember the phrase (or part of it), and perhaps the author and title of the book, but not the entire quote or where the quote resides in the book. So you use Google Book Search (www.books.google.com/) and type a few words in the search box. Voila! The title of the book appears. Clicking on the book title generates an image of the page of the book along with other information about it and advertising links to online bookstores. The advertising also tells the consumer the name of the host library or bookstore and provides a map as to how to get there. The latest edition of Google Book Search is available in eight European countries: France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and Spain, in local languages. Content in Google Book Search comes from two sources: publishers and libraries. Google has agreements with five libraries, including Harvard and the University of Michigan, to scan their entire collections. The major publishers were reported to be upset. Let's hope that publishers continue to see the merits of allowing Google Print to scan their holdings. Google splits the revenue from the advertising with publishers, so profits may drive decision-making. You may recall the piracy problems in the music and film industries when publishers and artists were not compensated for their work. Those problems resulted in a new adjective—Napsterized—to describe taking the work of others (music) without permission. Google sees itself as a digital card catalog, but publishers may see what it does as infringement of copyrights. In fact, there are currently two suits against Google for copyright infringement—one by a leading authors' organization and the second by the Association of American Publishers.

What we need is a way to see how many hits our

search terms are going to generate BEFORE we do our searches so we can refine our search terms as we type them. If this makes sense to you, try using Google Suggest (www.google.com/webhp?complete=1). Google Suggest provides you with search suggestions, in real time, as you type. Key in a few letters of a particular search term, and Google Suggest displays a list of words it thinks are a match. It's useful when you are curious about the number of hits a term will generate, or you aren't sure what you are looking for but can think of one word. I tried typing in my name and Google Suggest showed me keyword suggestions as I keyed in each letter in my name.

I have one more piece of news regarding searching and finding information. If you read the morning newspaper on the Internet, this will interest you. A website was recently introduced that not only lets you find articles on the topic of your choice from hundreds of newspapers and magazines, it will also alert you to all the other news accounts floating around cyberspace that have any connection whatsoever to anything you read. The website, inform.com, looks like a newsreader service such as Yahoo News or Google News, but inform.com takes news reading one more step. It scans every news article from hundreds of publications (and blogs) and then creates an index. So if I'm reading a *Washington Post* article about Supreme Court nominations, it will give me a list of related stories about the Supreme Court judges and other topics in the text. Try it out, and take advantage of the opportunity to provide developers with feedback, especially if you like it, or offer ideas for improvement.

[Inform.com](http://inform.com) is not without its competitors. Topix.net claims to deliver the same service, so try both. ♦

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The Affective Side



Helping Highly Sensitive G/T Students Cope

Jean Strop

We all know gifted and bright students who cry easily, who are extremely tenderhearted, who are able to respond to another person's needs without prompting, or who question us about issues that we thought were being silently and internally processed. These highly sensitive individuals are often able to detect the feelings of others, to empathize with the pain or joy of others, and to vividly experience their own feelings, thoughts, and sensations. Though these young individuals are usually appreciated (and often envied) for their abilities, this gift of sensitivity brings with it many issues that need attention and support from caring adults.

Extreme Compassion

A highly sensitive student is often empathetic, able to put himself into the shoes of others in both positive and negative situations. This student is a very responsive and caring friend, sibling, and child. He puts an arm around an acquaintance who is feeling sad, when no one else has even noticed the sadness. He is extremely helpful (without prompting) around the house at a time when one or both parents might be feeling stressed, ill, or out-of-sorts. This student cries during touching movies, cringes at someone squashing a bug on the pavement, or shows true elation when a friend wins an award. Rather than making fun of the cranky old man down the street, this student befriends the man knowing (without being told) that he is merely sad and lonely. Though this compassion is a wonderful gift for the recipients, taken to an extreme, it can lead to non-healthy behaviors. The following are key issues for the highly compassionate student:

- **Being there for others at the expense of self**—This individual often abandons homework or a project to talk at length with a friend who is dis-

traught or sad, even if it means she might suffer consequences for not completing her own task on time. The needs of others are perceived as more important than personal wants/needs.

- **Being externally motivated and other-oriented**—This student often performs to please others, rather than to please self. Consequently, she can easily become overly dependent on feedback. Taken to an extreme, such a person becomes so accustomed to responding to the needs of others that she loses touch with her own needs, thoughts, and feelings.

- **Feeling drained**—This student often worries about world affairs that are beyond direct intervention. Sometimes needy and narcissistic individuals see him as an "easy mark," an individual who can be used and mistreated since he is too kind to retaliate. Interactions with this type of individual can deeply disappoint and sap the energy of a truly compassionate person.

- **Developing a need to be needed**—Students who are extremely compassionate might define themselves as "helpers." They feel valuable only when helping another, so they surround themselves with needy, vulnerable, and/or depressed individuals. When personally in need of support, it can be disappointing if those around are unable to respond because they are used to being "the recipients of help," rather than "the givers." This lack of a support system leaves the compassionate student vulnerable in times of distress.

Supportive Strategies

The parents and teachers of highly compassionate students can support them by doing one or more of the following:

- Teach students supportive self-talk strategies, such as saying to oneself, "It's okay to tell them I'll call back to talk more when I have my project finished," or "It's okay to take care of my needs in this situation, and that doesn't make me a bad person."

- Teach students strategies for goal setting, monitoring progress on projects, and developing self-reward systems to develop strong internal motivational structure.

- Encourage students to develop sets of friends who have a variety of needs and strengths, so that support systems will be available when needed. This can be accomplished by discussing openly the gifts and strengths needed in different situations.

- Discuss (with highly verbal students) the need

for give and take or balance in relationships.

- Help students find small ways to contribute or to address larger, global issues or concerns (i.e., fundraising for Katrina victims, building bird-houses or components for Habitat for Humanity homes, assisting older folks at a nursing home, etc.)

High Levels of Stress

Many highly sensitive students also experience higher levels of stress than their age peers. Being able to pick up multiple cues about the feelings and emotions in interactions does not automatically mean that the young person is able to sort out and understand this barrage of input from the environment. For instance, the student might feel that her parent or teacher is angry, but she may not be able to see what caused the anger or to whom the anger is directed. This student spends incredible energy trying to figure out the answers to these questions or assumes that the adult is angry at something she did or did not do. In this process, the sensitive student might be correct about the emotion but incorrect about the target. Signs of stress that might be experienced due to extreme emotional sensitivity include

- reporting that the teacher hates him but unable to describe a specific behavior that indicates this
- having frequent somatic symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, and sleep disturbances
- being so obsessed with figuring out “what is going on” with someone in her environment that she is unable to concentrate on schoolwork or other necessary tasks
- frequently asking questions such as, “Are you mad at me?” “Are you feeling all right?” “Did I do something to make you upset?”
- appearing intensely shy and tending to isolate himself from unfamiliar people but seeming extremely energized and even outgoing when around familiar individuals
- getting overly stimulated and drained when in a large crowd of people for an extended period of time
- crying frequently, appearing agitated and restless, and responding unusually abrupt and angry for no apparent reason

Supportive Strategies

To assist the student who experiences high stress responses, adults need to model and directly teach stress management techniques. These include strategies of progressive relaxation; positive self-talk; and the ability to divert haunting thoughts with positive images, creative visualization, and deep breathing. These students can also benefit from experimenting with strategies for enabling sound sleep (i.e., white noise, soothing music, nature sounds, and progressive relaxation). Peers, family members, and other adults can relieve stress by openly talking about their thoughts and feelings, so the sensitive individual doesn’t have to spend so much time “figuring out” the source, the type, and the target of those emotions.

Hypervigilant

Highly sensitive students who have been hurt, used, or deeply disappointed by others might become hypervigilant, always on watch and scanning the environment to determine if danger is present. Consequently, they may experience difficulties with the following:

- **Taking responsibility for how others feel**—Since they might not be able to distinguish the target of negative emotions, but still can feel the impact of those emotions, they may take on the responsibility for how others feel.
- **Losing important relationships**—When dealing with friends and family members who would rather not acknowledge some of their feelings, the hypervigilant individual may ask for clarification about thoughts/feelings to feel more at ease. This can make someone who has tucked these feelings safely away feel vulnerable, uncomfortable, or angry at the person who disturbed “the order of things.” If this sequence happens too often, it can result in the loss of the relationship because it is too painful for both parties. The person asking for clarification can feel a lack of trust if answers aren’t provided, and the person trying to maintain privacy might perceive the requests for clarification as intrusive.
- **Feeling overwhelmed**—Many highly sensitive students feel extremely overwhelmed when in emotionally charged situations (i.e., intense conflicts, loud and angry interchanges, situations with unexpressed negative emotion, and situations with verbal sparring).
- **Shutting down**—For highly sensitive students who experience sensory overload without relief, it

is not uncommon to become blocked or to totally shut down. In a classroom students may not be able to pay attention or to produce work, even when they want to do so. At home they might freeze when asked to perform seemingly simple tasks or chores. They might push others away at a time when solitude and isolation are not the best alternatives. Though they are highly empathetic in most situations, it might be difficult to access, to discuss, or to express feelings.

Supportive Strategies

One of the best ways to support a student who is hypervigilant is to provide an environment in which all parties are encouraged to openly express feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. Often this type of student becomes overwhelmed with her own feelings and emotions, so she needs to learn strategies for bracketing (i.e., writing all worries, concerns, and interfering feelings/thoughts on a paper and sealing them in an envelope to put them away for a while—perhaps while doing a necessary task). If the student experiences distress in a relationship or classroom, she needs permission and support to leave that relationship or environment. Hypervigilant students often experience high levels of stress because they are constantly processing their environment. Consequently, learning better ways to manage stress and to “shut down” their processing on their own terms can save them from shutting down involuntarily.

Difficulty with Boundaries

A highly sensitive individual often experiences two main concerns with boundaries: inability to distinguish his issues from the issues of others and blurring or dropping boundaries that are typically routine for others. Sometimes an adult will share confidences, ask opinions, and/or discuss peers with the sensitive student. This might create resentment from other siblings/peers, feelings of discomfort and/or stress at carrying a more adult burden, and difficulty in establishing appropriate boundaries outside of the familiar situation (i.e., with friends, parents of friends, teachers, etc.)

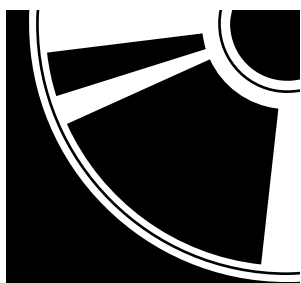
Supportive Strategies

The best way to teach highly sensitive students about boundaries is to model good boundary set-

ting, and to talk out loud about thought processes while setting those boundaries. For instance, if you are upset about work, you might say, “I’m upset about issues at work that I’m not free to discuss at home, so if you feel my frustration, it’s because of that and not anything you’ve done. I will tell you directly if you are doing something that frustrates me.” If a sensitive student picks up an emotion that you might not want to discuss, it is best to say, “Yes, I am feeling that emotion, but I’d rather not discuss it with you, since it’s not about you. I will find a way to work it out.” Denial of feelings that are detected by a sensitive student may cause more probing and distrust. It is best to teach sensitive students to “trust their instincts,” while still setting clear boundaries. Finally, since sensitive students are often empathetic and nurturing, it is not unusual for adults to feel comfortable enough to confide in them. Adults should sort out the issues that need to stay between the adults, versus issues that will support the student to trust her intuition.

Highly sensitive students are a blessing, a gift to those who know them. Their nurturing, compassionate, and gentle souls can soothe the most distressed among us. They know what others do not. They see what others do not. They feel what others do not. However, to truly respect these “givers and responders,” we must assist them in dealing with the vulnerabilities that accompany their sensitivities. Then, and only then, will these students be equipped to lead healthy and balanced lives, including both “give and take.” ❖

Jean Strop, a long-time psychologist, gifted resource teacher, and counselor, is currently a consultant and writer in affective education and college planning for gifted students.



Software Updates

Gregory C. Pattridge

It must have been the educator coming out in me when my mind drifted, listening to the “Money” song from the play *Cabaret*. I had recently demonstrated a lesson on money to a class of 1st graders, and through pre-assessment discovered there were three distinct groups. One group was very familiar with money and could even add up amounts to equal one dollar. A second group could identify coins but was still challenged by combining the coins into new amounts. A third group knew nothing about how much each coin was worth nor how to add up different amounts.

Starting the children from what they already knew and understood about money ideas and concepts, I created three readiness-based activities that would challenge each group just enough to move them forward. Although the lesson was successful, I knew that next I wanted to find quality software to support and extend what I had started in this classroom. The applause at the conclusion of the “Money” song broke my daydreaming and started me on a mission to find some good software that teaches money skills.

The software titles reviewed and recommended here are ones that match the selection criteria to have a) several difficulty levels, b) a variety of activities, c) a high level of interaction, and d) availability in both Windows and Mac formats. All of the programs are available through various educational vendors, but you will probably find the best price by going to each publisher’s website.

Money Skills 2.0

marblesoft.com

PreK-2

This beginning title includes five different activi-

ties that teach how to count money and make change. An extremely bright 5-year-old neighbor girl was used as a tester for many of the activities; all of them kept her interest. They included *Coins and Bills*, *Counting Money*, *Making Change*, *How Much Change*, and *The Marblesoft Store*. Within each activity there are various levels of difficulties to challenge, no matter what one’s entry knowledge might be. Anywhere from four to eighteen different levels are included to help keep interest and motivation moving forward.

For example, *The Marblesoft Store* teaches about the value of money in a store setting. The student is shown a piggy bank with the amount of money available and then he selects which items he wants from the store. Some items cannot be bought because they are too expensive. The levels begin with items less than \$4 and move up to items worth up to \$19.99. Various scaffolding/help features are taken away as a student moves up through the four levels, making it more challenging. The visuals of exchanging money really help in the retention of these important concepts.

Basic Coins

www.attainmentcompany.com

K-2

The uses of computer coins (penny, nickel, dime, quarter, half-dollar, and dollar) are displayed to teach beginning money skills. Three increasingly challenging activities are presented: *Name*, *Match*, and *Purchase*. The *Name* activity is very basic with the computer giving the name of the coin and its value. This would be a good place to start for a student who has limited exposure to money concepts. With the *Matching* activity, students identify the correct value from various coin combinations. The last activity, *Purchase*, uses a vending machine scenario and turns into the most challenging of the three. A student must be accurate with the amount of money put into the machine after selecting what she will buy. The CD has also nicely incorporated other technologies, including the TouchScreen format and IntelliKeys Keyboards. These separately purchased additions to your computer system can aid in the process of beginning computer use.

Dollars and Cents Series

www.attainmentcompany.com

K-8

This audio based program focuses on money man-

agement with three increasingly difficult activities. *First Money* is the initial program and is used to teach about independent money management. *Spending Money* is the second and more advanced program. Students buy products and then pay for them using bills and coins. The most challenging activity is *Making Change*. Here you function as a store clerk making transactions much like in a real retail store. All the programs give flexibility to select which coins and bills are presented to the student.

Hot Dog Stand Top Dog

www.sunburst.com

Grades 5-12

This fun program is set in a stadium with a vendor who is competing against other computer-generated vendors to become the most successful. Students who have mastered the concepts of basic money identification and change making will benefit the most from this program. Skills include data analysis, money management, inferential reading, interpreting charts and graphs, budgeting, and critical thinking. Three levels of play encourage the student to make wise purchasing and selling decisions to beat out their rivals.

Money-based math activities are very common in elementary classrooms. These titles will enhance lessons in the classroom or at home. They are all very independent in nature and help coach the user when mistakes are made. The teacher does not have to be at a child's side while she is using any of the programs. ♦

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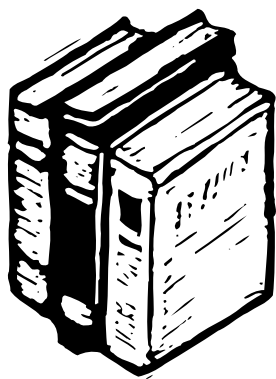
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Scholarly Pursuits for Young Gifted Youths

Jerry Flack

Among the most liberating moments of one's intellectual life is the realization that learning can take place independently. Once this is truly understood, the door opens to become a life-long learner. Reference tools, including books on countries of the world, atlases, and encyclopedias, are useful in this quest.

Countries

Many publishers use the ABC rubric to introduce young scholars to nations of the world. In *France A to Z*, Justine and Ron Fontes (2003, Scholastic) investigate one of the world's great countries through the introduction of its **B**uildings (e.g., Louvre Museum) and **C**ities (e.g., Paris). They even add a recipe under **F**oods for French toast. The authors provide a glossary of French and English words, a bibliography, and favorite websites for children.

Israel's ABCs by Holly Schroeder (2004, Picture Window Books) dramatically reveals Israel's great past and celebrates the diversity of people who live there today. **Z** may be for Zionism, but **B** is Bedouin; **G** is for the Gold Dome in Jerusalem that is sacred to Muslims; **V** is for Via Dolorosa, the "Street of Sorrow," visited by Christian pilgrims from around the world; and **P** is for Palestinians. Young readers learn that the water of the **D**ead Sea is nine times more salty than the world's oceans, and the **I**bex is Israel's rare goat. Pronunciation guides for Israeli, Hebrew, and Arabic, plus websites and an index, are provided. Other volumes in this terrific series focus upon New Zealand, Australia, Egypt, Mexico, Germany, Japan, Kenya, China, and the United States.

The *Postcards from... series* (Steck-Vaughn) is great for students just beginning to study the history, geography, and culture of countries other than their own. Gorgeous photography of each featured nation is arranged in a postcard album format featuring pictures and words from Australia to Spain. The text is fun to read because the information is brought to dynamic life by the "postcards" mailed to friends and family from young travelers. For example, *Postcards from Canada* by Zoe Dawson (1996) opens with a postcard map of the world's second largest nation. Jake receives a beautiful postcard of a spectacular glacial lake in Canada's Banff National Park. Later, a postcard from Lisa to Alice highlights Canada's national maple leaf flag with the Pacific Ocean port city of Vancouver as a backdrop.

Atlases

When atlases are mentioned, the name Hammond comes to mind, and the famed cartography publisher does not disappoint gifted investigators. At least three volumes are geared for young gifted students in the recent 2004 series **Mapmakers for the 21st Century**: *My First Atlas*, *The Dinosaur Atlas*, and *The Space Atlas*.

The Kingfisher First Picture Atlas by Deborah Chancellor (2005, Gardners Books) features a friendly ribbon-attached penguin bookmark that doubles as a key to a somewhat more sophisticated set of maps of the world. The same penguin appears on every spread in these bright and cheerful maps. Mr. Penguin may be seen climbing the Eiffel Tower in Paris or resting on one of the huge stones that make up the 4,000-year-old pyramids of Egypt.

The most complete and sophisticated atlas for slightly older geography detectives is the newly revised and expanded *National Geographic Student Atlas of the World* (2005, National Geographic Society). This exciting volume explains the science of cartography and map projections while simultaneously revealing worldwide physical and human systems. Physical and political maps are augmented with maps of climate, population, and predominant economies of all the countries of the world. The most dramatic maps are satellite image maps of the continents, islands, oceans, and seas. National flags of the world's more than 200 nations are represented. Articles on time zones and

world languages enliven the learning process even more.

Encyclopedias

The Kingfisher First Encyclopedia (2005, Gardners Books) is a brand new edition of the one-volume, all-purpose reference work first introduced in 1998. The alphabetically arranged entries take gifted learners through approximately 200 double-page entries from "aborigine" to "zoology." While the coverage of most topics is by necessity brief, young people will enjoy the fine balance of words and illustrations, primarily full-color photographs. For example, the aborigine article provides dramatic images of aboriginal people and their customs in Southeast Asia and Australia.

The "T-Rex" of pop-up books is *Encyclopedia Prehistorica: Dinosaurs* by Sabuda and Matthew Reinhart (2005, Candlewick Press). It is loaded with full-page spreads of prehistoric lizards that all but bound off the page into readers' faces. The book features more than 35 separate paleontology pop-ups. This volume, with its faux-antique cover, is magnificent and should not be missed by scholars of any age!

Other excellent encyclopedias worth considering are

- *DK Illustrated Family Encyclopedia*, 3-volume slipcase edition (2003, DK Publishing). It contains 12,000 color photographs and 5,000 current entries.
- *Scholastic Children's Encyclopedia* (2004, Scholastic). More than 600 entries are richly illustrated. ♦

Jerry Flack is Professor Emeritus of Education and President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado. He is a reviewer of children's literature and the author of 10 books and numerous articles on creativity and curriculum development.

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