

***TIP*-ical Kids: Cognitive and Affective Characteristics of High Ability Children and Youth**

Presented by

RICHARD D. COURTRIGHT, PH.D.

GIFTED EDUCATION RESEARCH SPECIALIST, DUKE UNIVERSITY TALENT IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM

Myths of Giftedness

The Gifted are...

- more prone to emotional disturbance
- have everything going their way
- can succeed without help
- should be valued mostly for their brain power
- are more stable and mature
- should assume responsibility for others
- enjoy being examples to/for other children
- have abilities that are always valued by their families
- excel or exceed the norms in all areas of development
- need to be disciplined more than others
- will always reveal their giftedness
- are high achievers with high motivation to excel in school

Truths of Giftedness

The Gifted are the most heterogeneous group to study because they can vary the most on the most variables. (*Tracy Cross, The College of William and Mary*)

Personality

- Insightfulness
- Intensity
- Sensitivity/Empathy
- Need to understand
- Non-conformity
- Perfectionism
- Perseverance
- Acute self-awareness
- Need for mental stimulation
- Excellent sense of humor
- Need for precision of logic
- Questioning/challenging authority

Intellectual

- Capacity for reflection
- Passion for learning
- Early moral concern
- Complex thought processes
- Exceptional reasoning ability
- Divergent thinking/ creativity
- Analytical thinking
- Facility with abstraction
- Intellectual curiosity
- Rapid learning rate
- Vivid imagination

Endogenous characteristics

- Originates from the characteristics of the individual
- Examples in gifted students:
 - Overexcitabilities
 - Asynchronous development
 - Perfectionism
 - Excessive self-criticism
 - Multipotentiality

DABROWSKI's Theory of Emotional Development

Three Factors:

Factor 1: Heredity / Constitutional

Factor 2: Environmental / Social

Factor 3: Self-directed / Autonomous

Developmental Potential:

Overexcitabilities

Special abilities or talents

Autonomous factors

Overexcitabilities

Higher than average responsiveness to stimuli... in intensity, frequency and duration...[having] the effect of making concrete stimuli more complex, enhancing emotional content, and amplifying every experience.

- ❖ Psychomotor
- ❖ Sensual
- ❖ Imaginational
- ❖ Intellectual
- ❖ Emotional

The Columbus Group

“Giftedness is *asynchronous development* in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm... This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.”

Positive Characteristics of the Gifted and “The Shadow Side” – The Cognitive Domain

ANALYTICAL

- Identifies cause-effect relationships
- Finds and solves problems
- Perceives and understands relationships and comprehends meanings
- Relates one idea to many others in advanced ways
- Generates ideas that appear to be random and/or irrelevant
- Connects to inappropriate or overly personal topics
- Misperceives “the big idea”; may be unable to distinguish priorities or hierarchies

CONCEPTUAL

- Manipulates abstract symbol systems
- Moves quickly from examples to principles
- Develops and synthesizes ideas, essential questions, and essential understandings

- Becomes bored with school and same-age peers
- Seen by others as different and out of step
- May resist mastering foundational skills
- Rejects or omits detail

CREATIVE

- Innovates
- Considers the unusual and is comfortable thinking and working “outside the box”
- Embraces new experiences and processes
- Envisions art where others may not
- Creates art using unconventional methods

- Challenges norms and trends in ways that alienate or confuse others; pushes limits or confronts taboos in the exploration of new paradigms
- Appears impractical or inconsiderate
- Exhibits gullibility
- Rejects old paradigms with intolerance or disdain
- Can embrace an eccentric persona in pursuit of creativity that may alienate others

CRITICAL

- Holds high expectations
- Reflects on and critiques own products and performances
- Identifies problems, flaws, or shortcomings

- Exhibits perfectionism
- Becomes discouraged or depressed
- Places too much emphasis on success and recognition
- Displays intolerance toward others
- Evaluates others even if unsolicited or inappropriate

FOCUSED

- Concentrates intensely with a long attention span in areas of interest
- Produces much in short periods
- Displays goal-directed behavior
- Pursues knowledge passionately in areas of interest
- Resists interruption, reasonable delays, or even periods of rest

- Neglects duties or people during periods of sustained interest
- Rejects schedule changes

INQUISITIVE

- Searches for significance
- Demonstrates intellectual curiosity and problem-solving skills
- Asks probing questions

- Second guesses teaching methods
- Asks embarrassing questions
- Questions authority and rules

SYSTEMATIC

- Categorizes concepts, objects, and people into structure and order
- Develops goals, procedures, long-term and short-term strategies

- Makes concepts or situations unduly complex
- Constructs unnecessarily elaborate rules or systems
- Values processes and products over people

VERBAL

- Expresses ideas, insights, and feelings well
- Utilizes a large vocabulary
- Understands multiple meanings and nuances of words

- May use words to escape or avoid situations
- Argues for the sake of being argumentative
- Dominates classroom discussions
- Can lead to alienation, perception as “different” or out of step

VERSATILE

- Possesses diverse interests
- Demonstrates wide-ranging abilities and excellence across disciplines and talents
- Pursues a range of activities with passion
- Displays frustration over lack of time
- Can burn-out from exhaustion from doing too many activities
- Appears scattered and disorganized
- May “mourn” when forced to choose between or among competing interests
- May require or expect continual competence in too many areas

WELL-INFORMED

- Acquires and retains information quickly
- Masters large systems of knowledge
- Reads well and widely
- Retains vast amounts of information
- Learns new material rapidly, demonstrating excellent short and long-term memory
- Resists practice, routine, or drill
- Reacts impatiently to the slowness of others
- Seen by others as a know-it-all
- May have gaps in knowledge—can’t assume they know everything about everything

Positive Characteristics of the Gifted and “The Shadow Side” – The Affective Domain

EMOTIVE

- Develops strong emotional attachments to friends, mentors, or role models
- Exhibits emotional intensity to experiences
- Can be perceived as clingy or immature
- Experiences difficulty separating from the person they admire
- Can quickly become overwhelmed and depressed

ENERGETIC

- Can concentrate on tasks for extended periods
- Require less sleep
- Manifest intense verbalization
- Can crash or burnout
- Can annoy those who can’t keep up

HUMOROUS

- Initiates quick-witted one-liners, comebacks, and improvisations
- Demonstrates verbal dexterity
- Understands irony, satire, and double entendres
- Unaware or insensitive to the impact of humor on others
- May be misunderstood by peers or adults, when displaying sense of humor
- May become the class clown to gain attention
- Sees the absurdities of situations at expense of others

IDEALISTIC

- Possess a strong sense of justice and altruism
- Make choices based on principle (The Greater Good” or “Golden Rule”)
- Can be anxious over disconnect between “what is” and “what ought to be”
- May become disillusioned or cynical about others
- Can challenge authority (sometimes inappropriately)

INDEPENDENT

- March to the beat of their own drummer
- Possess intrinsic motivation
- Persevere in their efforts
- Assume a high level of personal responsibility
- Demonstrate task commitment
- May resist direction and engage in “battle of wills”
- May be unresponsive to others’ input
- May be perceived as excessively competitive

JUST

- Loves truth, equity and fair play
- Exhibits a strong sense of justice and fairness
- Demonstrates altruism
- Expresses concern about substance and order of rules and regulations
- Displays anxiety regarding humanitarian concerns
- Expects the same strong sense of justice from others
- Challenges authority or rules when perceived to be unfair

INFLUENTIAL

- Reads the group and perceives its needs
- Sets goals to help followers meet their needs
- Motivates a larger group toward a larger purpose
- Builds consensus and harmony
- Misinterprets group dynamics
- Appears bossy and domineering
- Misuses charisma or charm to achieve personal goals

SENSITIVE

- Expresses aesthetic awareness and appreciation; articulates awareness of beauty in various art forms
- Shows empathy for others
- Demonstrates altruism and idealism
- Is sensitive to criticism or peer rejection
- Feels different and alienated

Potential Problems Faced by *SOME* Gifted Individuals

Perfectionism

- Normal vs. Neurotic
- Antecedents of perfectionism:
 - Fear of failure
 - Task resistance

Perfectionism: Two KINDS

- **Neurotic:** individuals who are “unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never seem to do things good enough to warrant that feeling.” (Hamachek)
- **Normal:** individuals who “derive a very real sense of pleasure for the labours of a painstaking effort.” (Hamachek)

The goal is for students to move from neurotic perfectionists to normal perfectionists.

Perfectionism: Neurotic Kind

- Impossibly high and unnecessarily rigid standards
- Motivation from fear of failure instead of pursuit of success
- Worth measured in terms of accomplishment
- All-or-nothing (perfection OR failure)
- Difficulty in taking credit or pleasure because achievement is expected
- Procrastination
- Long delays in completing assignments
- Repeatedly starting over on assignments
- Overly emotional reactions to minor failures

- Low productivity due to procrastination or excessive “start-overs”

Uneven Development

- *Dyssynchrony*
- *Assynchrony*

Oversensitivity

- *Omnipotence* – higher cognitive ability leads to greater awareness of problems
- *Conscience* – becomes emotionally involved in issues
- *Unrealistic Goals* – development restricts ability to accomplish a desired goal

Unmet Expectations

- Feels high level of responsibility
- Withdraws, “forgets” to do tasks
- Continually encounters failure due to the setting of unrealistic goals

GRIT

Perseverance and passion for long-term goals.

MINDSET

When students and educators have a *growth* mindset (contrasted with a *fixed* mindset), they understand that intelligence can be developed. Students focus on improvement instead of worrying about how smart they are. They work hard to learn more and get smarter. Based on years of research by Stanford University’s Dr. Dweck, Lisa Blackwell Ph.D., and their colleagues, we know that students who learn this mindset show greater motivation in school, better grades, and higher test scores.

What Are Mindsets?

- ✓ Based on the research of Dr. Carol S. Dweck, Stanford University
- ✓ A personal belief about one’s own intelligence.
- ✓ Fixed or Growth
- ✓ Why Are Mindsets Important?
- ✓ Positive emotions facilitate learning
- ✓ Negative emotions hinder learning

A Growth Mindset is associated with more positive emotions and motivation --
Especially under conditions of challenge

What do Mindsets Predict?

- ✓ Students’ desire to learn
- ✓ Their belief in the power of effort
- ✓ Their resilience in the face of setbacks
- ✓ Their achievement over difficult transitions

Entitlement

- Feels the need to demonstrate superiority by taking advantage of others
 - By outdoing (being “better than”)

- By put-downs of others (sarcasm and wit)

Isolation

- Feels the anxiety of being different
 - Few role models
 - Lack of societal respect

Overload

- “Penciling in Playtime”

Disapproval

- Feels the need to gain approval
- Locus of control
 - By appeasement
 - By acting out, showing off

Exogenous Problems:

- Educational conformity vs. individualism
- Expectancies by others
- Peer relations
- Depression
- Family relations
- Power struggles
- Enmeshment (or “confluence”)
- Mistaking the abilities of the child
- Sibling relations
- Parental understanding (lack thereof)
- Chance and location factors

CONTACT:

Richard D. Courtright, Ph.D.
Gifted Education Research Specialist
Duke University Talent Identification Program
300 Fuller Street
Durham, NC 27701
(919) 668-9130
www.tip.duke.edu