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Albert Einstein
Hero of Giftedness



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I would like to discuss a book which helps to inform educators and parents about gifted education in other countries from developmental, family and international perspectives. It is an excellent example of the increasing worldwide interest in studying and educating the most advanced students. By using the case study research method, Hanna David, Ph.D. and Echo Wu, Ph.D. have written fascinating accounts of Israeli and Chinese students who have demonstrated giftedness in public school classrooms and at the university level. David is a professor of education at Ben Gurion University in Eilat, Israel and Echo Wu is now teaching at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Their book, *Understanding Giftedness: A Chinese-Israeli Casebook* (Pearson, 2010, ISBN 981-06-8300-6), contains such research topics as a study of five gifted boys in one classroom, parental influences of three Chinese-American families on talent development, case study of a visually disabled young boy (seven years), conversation with a Chinese Nobel Laureate (chemistry), and case study of a gifted family emigrating from Russia to Israel. All of these studies are a clear demonstration of the forcefulness of gifted characteristics and behavior under sometimes severe pressures from cultural influences and learning disabilities. The book also serves as an inspiration to researchers who use the case study method for studying giftedness. In this sense, David and Wu follow the traditions of Piaget and other masters of child development who grounded their work in making systematic observations and carefully recording the individual child's intellectual development. I highly recommend that *Understanding Giftedness* be used as a model for further studies of the gifted mind.

I would also like to discuss some further observations of the gifted field (e.g., see the last two issues of *GEPO*):

- Federal funding for gifted education has been the lowest of any special program for decades. This past fall of 2009, the measly amount of \$7.4 million was almost completely eliminated by Congress, but the politicians changed their minds and saved the Javits Grant program for one more year. Compare this situation to federal entitlement funding of billions of dollars per year for No Child Left behind, Head Start, Title I and Special Education.

- Most states do not provide funds for educating the gifted, and many do not require special programming for the gifted.
- Local school boards are fast reducing or completely eliminating what little programming they currently have for educating gifted students. I advise you to track this situation nationally by setting up a Google Alert for "Gifted Education Programs." Please contact me if you need help in doing this.
- I refer you to the following link (Davidson Institute) which provides much practical information concerning the state-by-state and national situations for educating the gifted: <http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/StatePolicy.aspx>.

In this issue, Echo Wu presents an informative article on various methods currently used to identify students for gifted programs involving standardized tests and checklists. Her article should be very helpful to parents who are trying to understand sometimes convoluted identification processes. The essay by Will Fitzhugh is based upon his twenty-three years as publisher and editor of the outstanding history periodical, *The Concord Review*. His emphasis on Varsity Academics® should be used by teachers and parents as an example of what one determined and knowledgeable individual can do to challenge gifted students. We need more Will Fitzhughs in all subject areas if this field is to survive and thrive. Many educators and parents are clearly concerned with the social and emotional development of gifted students. This is why I included the article by Stephie P. McCumbee who is a graduate student in reading education at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. She discusses some of the research on depression in gifted children and indicates that basic questions need to be resolved, such as whether they are more susceptible to emotional disorders than their less gifted peers. Dr. Michael Walters addresses the question of whether historical fiction is an effective means for teaching gifted students about important historical events. His essay on three books by Jeff Shaara about World War Two gives some interesting answers.

Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D. Publisher

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Screening and Identifying Gifted Children: What All Educators and Parents Should Know

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Knowing and Not Knowing

When I talk to teachers, parents and other practitioners about gifted education, one of the most frequently asked questions I have encountered is related to identification. It seems that people tend to know very well that early and timely intervention is likely to offer young gifted children more opportunities towards fulfilling their perceived potential, and such an early identification is a pivotal issue amongst other pertinent issues in educating the gifted and talented. However, not everyone clearly knows the identification procedures, the pros and cons of Multiple Intelligence (MI) tests, and the differences between screening and nominations. It is the purpose of this paper to address the above issues.

Identification of gifted and talented children is a process through which we attempt to become aware of students whose abilities, motivational patterns, self-esteem, creativity, and/or other capabilities are above average, and that differentiated educational services are needed to make possible the fulfillment of these children's potentials (Feldhusen, 1998). As a starting point of provisions for gifted education, identification is a critical data gathering process which helps educators and parents answer questions and thus make further decisions (Assouline, 2003). It is also crucial in helping us to see the specific gifts and talents of individual children so that they would have a chance to receive appropriate educational programs that meet their needs.

As giftedness and talents of young children may not always be easy to observe, one important question is: What are the best means for identifying them? Traditional IQ tests, MI tests, other screening tests and checklists are the most common instruments for identification. Performance evaluations, interviews, observations, and nominations are also major components of assessment tools. Apparently, no single instrument carries the assurance that it could function in certainty to identify gifted qualities among the whole childhood population.

This paper focuses on two major types of identification procedures: first, screening, as exemplified by tests and performance; and second, nomination. Screening is commonly classified as an objective procedure, which includes more than several varying measures. For instance, screening involves traditional standardized cognitive tests of general and creative ability, and non-traditional assessments such as behavioral checklists, products and performance evaluations. Nomination, which is normally considered as a subjective tool for identification, includes teacher, parent, peer, and/or student self nominations. The paper will begin with a brief account of traditional IQ tests and MI tests, and discuss the pros and cons of using these tests as identification tools. It will then explore using products and performance as screening options, and will also discuss how different nominations can be used for identification. I will conclude with a discussion of my own experiences with gifted children, and with some practical recommendations for identification gifted children.

Screenings

Screening via Intelligence Tests

Ever since the 1920s, or even before, many educators already regarded IQ as the most prominent and pervasive indicator of intelligence. Tannenbaum (1983) explains the reason for IQ's popularity is that it evaluates some of the most persistently cultivated abilities of children, and IQ focuses on skills developed in the course of children's experiences that are important for achievement in school.

In the last century, IQ tests commonly served to provide direction for educators to plan appropriate programs for gifted and talented children. Assouline (2003) argued that, "Although the general public, as well as some educators, sometimes criticize testing as an unnecessary education practice, there is strong evidence that testing should continue to be an integral part of the education of all students, and gifted students in particular" (p.144). Some other scholars also believe that IQ tests are reasonably reliable, and these tests can offer teachers and parents results obtained by an experienced tester.

Intelligence tests can be administered to individuals as well as groups. The major individual tests are the Wechsler Intelligence Scales (WIS), among which the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) is for children between ages three and seven years-three months, and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) between six and sixteen years inclusive. Both tests can be completed without reading or writing. Subjects over 16 are tested with the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS). Another commonly used IQ test is the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (SBIS), which is also a verbal and performance task used to assess children's intelligence. In the recent decades, many other tests have become available such as group intelligence tests, achievement tests, and creativity tests, especially with the development of MI theories as represented by researchers such as Howard Gardner (1999) and Robert Sternberg (2003). In MI theory, Gardner questions the idea that intelligence is a single entity and that it can be measured simply via IQ tests. More research has been conducted by others in investigating new tools to identify the gifted and talented. For example, the empirical study of Bracken and Brown (2008) indicated that by using a Clinical Assessment of Behavior

tool for identification purposes, teachers were found to have more accurately identified gifted children from a pool of over 1,000 kindergartens students when compared to using other general abilities tests.

Pros and Cons of IQ Tests

While the value of intelligence tests can hardly be doubted, there are some disadvantages in using such tests as the single measure for identifying gifted and talented students. First, most IQ tests rely heavily on students' linguistic and logical-mathematical capabilities. These tests are unlikely to measure many other potential abilities, such as divergent thinking or artistic abilities.

Second, some researchers argue that IQ tests may not be as stable as once assumed. Testing experiences indicate that unstable results might be due to test errors, regression towards the mean, or a change in children's functioning levels as a result of their learning experiences.

Third, a serious weakness of some IQ tests is the ceiling effect, i.e., a child's abilities exceed the highest scores being set for that particular test. In consequence, that child's true capabilities under such a test are not ascertained. For example, some of the exceptionally gifted children in a study conducted by Gross (2004) scored above IQ 175 on the Binet, but scored below 150 on the WIS. This variance is ascribed to the fact that the Binet test has a higher ceiling.

Fourth, IQ tests frequently produce different results for different groups in terms of ethnicity, cultural background, social-economic status, and it seems easier to find talents among one group than another. Particularly, IQ tests may not be valid and fair for identifying minority students. Additionally, giving individual IQ tests are a costly process since they require a highly trained professional to conduct, to score, and to interpret test results (Linden & Hoover, 1994).

In spite of all its limitations, IQ tests still have an important role in identifying gifted and talented children, and should continue to be a crucial part of gifted education. Therefore, total rejection of IQ tests in school programs is not recommended.

Screening via Products and Performance

Another screening tool is authentic assessment, which can examine students' actual abilities, learning products and performance in specific subject areas. Such a screening process includes a variety of methods — parent and teacher checklists, portfolios, projects, and observations.

Parent checklists are very important, especially for the early identification of gifted children. This is probably due to the fact that young children are closely attached to their parents and other family members. They are influenced more by parents than by anyone else at early stages of cognitive and behavioral development. In addition, parents understand children's strengths and intrinsic motivations, which may not be demonstrated in school. Meanwhile, teacher checklists are most popular in the identification process during school years, when children spend more time in school. However, both teacher and parent checklists have potential problems, either being too general to provide valuable information for identification purposes, or not including the traits of underachieving gifted students. For instance, some gifted children tend to hide their high abilities in order to win acceptance of their peers and teachers, which definitely makes it harder for teachers to find their potential.

Portfolios are another instrument for gathering information on students' development so as to gain insights into their academic, social and emotional development, and for identifying the gifted and talented. Portfolios may provide regular classroom teachers with instruments for observing, recording and storing examples of students' work, and they may also offer reflective information which helps in identifying specific student characteristics.

With respect to the use of performances in the screening process, children's performances in general and in specific assignments are commonly used for identifying giftedness and talents (e.g., Fisher, 2009). One of the advantages may well be that such performances are not limited to academic areas, but can occur in many other areas including sports, music, arts, and so on. Usually, high academic achievement or a truly artistic or creative artifact produced by a child indicates his/her likelihood of being gifted. However, low or ordinary grades or performance do not necessarily mean that a child is not gifted. It is understandable that children vary in their approaches to testing procedures and to the test examiners. Some children's personalities may stop them from being easy and comfortable during tests, and this may affect their performance, not only on IQ tests but also in general classroom tests. Furthermore, research has revealed that children may experience various constraints such as lack of motivation, fatigue or illness, poor reading skills, insufficient acquaintance with English, and a variety of behavioral problems. Any of these factors may interfere with their performance.

Plainly, just as we cannot rely solely on IQ tests or on other tests for identifying giftedness or talents, the process of identification cannot over-emphasize products or children's performances. Otherwise, not only could a large number of gifted and talented underachievers be screened out of special programs for these children, but some children with average potentials (who perform well occasionally) could be placed in gifted programs, and endure unnecessary pressures from a challenging learning environment.

Nominations

Teacher Nomination

Nominations can be made by parents, teachers, peers, and students themselves. The use of nominations in identifying gifted and talented students has been very popular in the past, and indeed, the most common means of identification of gifted children in the first half of the last century was through teacher nomination. The reason is that teacher nomination was regarded as a tool that offers teachers information about gifted and talented children that may not be detected by other means such as tests. For instance, a teacher may observe a child's extraordinary leadership ability within the classroom, while tests may fail to assess such abilities adequately or at all.

An advantage of teacher nomination is that a teacher may well address a child's specific strengths regarding academic and/or non-academic achievement on subjects such as math, physics, music, arts, or physical education. Another advantage of teacher nomination is a child's gender, age, and ethnicity differences may also be taken into account by the teacher. They are usually not assessed by standardized tests.

Parent Nomination

Similar to parent checklists, it is believed that parents are also considerably effective in nominating gifted children in their early years. Each day, children are with their parents or other family members for many hours, involving experiences that may allow them to informally manifest their giftedness or talents in the presence of these adults. Specifically, parents know about children's strengths and/or weaknesses better than others do before children start school, and in many cases their observations are accurate and reliable. For instance, they may identify children's gifts in oral language, reading, persistence, motivation or creativity.

Peer Nomination

Nomination by peers can also be helpful in addressing gifted behaviors that may be exhibited by potentially gifted students but may go unnoticed by their teachers (Feldhusen, Asher, & Hoover, 1984). Particularly, research indicates that peer nomination can be valuable in finding students with extraordinary social skills or leadership potential. It should be noted that peer nomination forms are generally used to supplement information gathered through more traditional assessment techniques. Peer nomination may strengthen identification procedures by supplementing information gathered with standardized tests, parent and teacher nominations, and other alternative identification tools.

Self Nomination

Some scholars (i.e., Richert, 1993) believe that self nomination can be a successful tool in identifying gifted and talented children starting at a later stage in primary education. Students can express their interests in different subjects and/or programs, and may also understand their own strengths, intrinsic motivation, and creativity. However, the most distinct disadvantage of self nomination is that gifted and talented students may not nominate themselves because they are underachievers or have low self-esteem.

It is suggested by researchers that when using nomination as a tool for identification, teacher, parent, peer, and/or self nominations should be combined. Ideally, a child should be nominated by more than one teacher, parent, or peer. "The greater the number of nomination sources, the greater is our confidence that a youth is indeed talented and merits further consideration" (Feldhusen, 1998, p.202). It is necessary, before using nomination procedures, that in-service workshops concerning the nature and characteristics of giftedness and talents should be held for teachers, parents, or students so that they would have a more accurate understanding of giftedness.

Potential Problems of Nominations

Regardless of the advantages of nomination, researchers have found some serious disadvantages. First, teachers or parents without training have difficulty in nominating gifted children. For instance, many teachers (without receiving special preparation) are not interested in, or they are even hostile towards gifted education. One of the most distinct characteristics of gifted and creative individuals is overexcitability (Tieso, 2007), but without a proper understanding of giftedness, and awareness of overexcitability, teachers may not be able to identify gifted students who have demonstrated learning disabilities or behavioral problems.

Second, gifted children who underachieve in school can easily be excluded from a gifted program. In other words, persons such as Einstein, Edison, and Churchill would be ruled out by teacher nomination, given that they did not perform well in class. Studies indicate that few teachers are willing to nominate students as being gifted if these students have patterns of problem behavior or low self-esteem, even if they may be highly gifted in specific areas. Teachers may also tend to favor students who are cooperative, and who do their homework well, neatly, and on time. Meanwhile, the extremely bright or creative, curious, and questioning students, who may be stubborn and rule-breaking, are not likely to be their teachers' favorites, but they may well be highly gifted.

Third, teacher, parent, peer or self nominations may not be always reliable. For instance, a teacher may not easily identify the giftedness of an underachieving gifted student, and a parent may exaggerate the ability of her/his child in order to put the child in gifted program. In addition, peer and probably other nominations are frequently criticized for their lack of information on their reliability and validity.

Identification Experiences in China and Hong Kong

In the past twenty years, I have been teaching as well as conducting research projects in China, Hong Kong, and the United States. My interest in gifted education became stronger when I started to inquire into issues related to the identification of gifted children when I was a graduate student at the Hong Kong University many years ago. Nevertheless, my research direction was changed from identification to the conceptual issues of giftedness because I found very little information or research studies in the literature regarding identification procedures in China.

The reasons for the lack of information were quite straightforward: First, very few research studies conducted in China were written in English and published in international journals. Second, and perhaps most importantly, it seems that identification of the gifted and talented is mainly done through the national standardized examinations at the end of the primary grades, junior high school and high school. IQ tests have rarely been administered to identify gifted children. There is no official government policy on gifted education even today, but individual schools, especially some urban schools in major cities in China, have used school-based procedures and tests to select gifted children for specific programs and provisions. For instance, students with higher grades on math or English subjects are chosen to join math or English afterschool activities and competitions.

In Hong Kong, gifted education has received much attention recently, particularly since the establishment of the Hong Kong Academy of Gifted Education in 2008. However, procedures for identifying gifted and talented children appear to be little known amongst Hong Kong educationalists. Using the previously discussed procedures is still at a very preliminary stage. Most schools are subject to the principle of offering equal education opportunities to all students, and thus are unwilling to actively employ various identification tools to identify gifted children.

The results gathered from my interviews with thirty-eight parents of children between three and six years have indicated some myths and misunderstandings related to gifted children existing amongst these Hong Kong parents. They seem to believe that gifted children must be those who have behavioral and/or social-emotional problems. Such a biased and unjustified conception of giftedness among Hong Kong parents, and most likely also among others, including teachers, researchers, and government officials, has resulted in an untold number of gifted children in Hong Kong being neglected. Such negligence may easily lead to gifted children not being identified, and consequently leading to mistreatment or inadequate provisions for their education.

Since 2007, several primary and secondary students (from ages 9 to 14) have been offered acceptance by universities in Hong Kong. Almost all of these children were identified by their parents, and were provided with extra-curriculum activities in and outside of school with the persistence and strong support from their parents and even the schools. Exciting as this news is to Hong Kong citizens, there is a concern and question that has been raised: How many more gifted and talented students are not identified, and are not as lucky as those few students offered appropriate opportunities to thrive?

It should be pointed out that fortunately some initiatives have been launched by the government and some institutions regarding the education of gifted and talented children in Hong Kong. For instance, the Hong Kong Academy of Gifted Education (HKAGE) has started to use some identification tools for identifying gifted and talented students of all ages in certain subject areas. The Program of the Gifted and Talented (PGT) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong uses tests, as well as teacher nominations, to identify gifted primary and secondary students to participate in their Saturday and summer gifted programs.

Practical Recommendations

Here are some recommendations for parents and educators to consider in identifying gifted children: First, IQ tests or any checklists should not be used in isolation, even though standardized tests are believed to be very useful identification tools. A combination of screening and nomination tools will be more effective in identifying children with a variety of giftedness and talents in different areas.

Second, teachers, parents, and students should all be offered a part to play in identifying gifted and talented children. Ideally, we need a team of professionals, including teachers, school psychologists, parents, and students themselves, to assess and plan for each child, and to provide her/him with appropriate individualized education. When such team work is not feasible, we should try to combine whatever tools can be used for identification purposes.

Third, with the ever-changing social-economic situation and the broadened process of globalization, educators are facing more complicated and diverse groups of students from various social-economic groups, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and familial backgrounds. Identification of gifted children can be more difficult and challenging among such students. Thus, teachers need to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills that are suitable for identifying the gifted. The following recommendation can be helpful in identifying the gifted and talented in a multi-cultural classroom: Learn about the different cultures and backgrounds of your students, get to know more about what they value, and learn about the most popular topics they are interested in discussing.

Summary

One of the most political, economic, and certainly, educational goals of society should be to identify as many gifted and talented individuals as possible, and to nurture their talent development at every educational stage. It is hoped that teachers and parents will be more confident and competent in promoting gifted education when equipped with a better understanding of the concepts of giftedness, have more knowledge of the characteristics of gifted and talented children, and at least acquire some basic information and skills concerning the use of identification tools. They will also be more effective in supporting the gifted student population to better deal with any problems this group may encounter. In that event, the goal of identifying as many gifted students as possible will not be too far from being attained.

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Varsity Academics®

Will Fitzhugh

The Concord Review

Gifted students, traditionally, have been called geeks, nerds, freaks, and wimps (or wimpesses—or whatever the female equivalent is). If they are particularly diligent academically, as well as good readers and competent writers, there is constant pressure from their peers to apologize for their academic inclinations, and to make every attempt to demonstrate their interest in sports, popular music and all the other preoccupations of their peers who are less diligent and less able academically. For the most part, the teachers of the gifted are at best ineffectual in changing that culture and seeing that the best students get the admiration and recognition they have earned.

By contrast, gifted athletes (always remembering that some who are intellectually gifted are also first-rate athletes) are celebrated by their peers and coaches, written up in the local media, or even in *PARADE MAGAZINE*, and offered, along with their trophies, the admiration of their school community.

Americans have decided that, while genes are as important a part of athletic success as they are for academic success, and while diligence is required for both, it is acceptable to praise athletes for their success and not acceptable to praise scholars at the school level to the same degree. Athletes who do well obviously tried hard, and for that they get rewarded, while scholars are probably “just smart” or “just gifted” and so cannot be recognized for having good genes, however great the diligence their achievements may have required.

Not only is this myopic and sadly biased in a misdirected way, it also has the effect of discouraging lots of students and their teachers from trying too hard academically. A high school student who spends hours out of school strengthening his neck for wrestling, or his legs for track, or his jump shot for basketball, is a model (see the movie *Hoosiers*), but just try to imagine a high school student who spends many extra hours outside of school doing academic work being treated as anything but a sad freak.

Since 1987, I have published 890 exemplary history research papers in 81 issues with work from secondary students in 44 states and 36 other countries. While some of them are undoubtedly of high intelligence, all have been diligent in their research and writing. Although my own IQ is four standard deviations above the mean, my diligence has been, at least in my earlier days, nothing to write home about, which could clearly be seen in my academic record at Harvard. It is perhaps because of that lack in me that I particularly cherish the diligence of the high school students who have allowed me to publish their work.

When I started out to typeset the first issue in the fall of 1988, I expected each issue of eleven essays to be about 110 pages long. To my surprise, the length of the submissions grew, along with their quality, and I have now published issues of 285 pages, 277 pages, and the like. Essays which I thought earlier would end at 4,000 words have now become longer, such as the paper on the murder of Philip of Macedon in the Spring 2009 issue (13,000+ words by a girl from Arizona with four years of Greek and six years of Latin, headed now for Yale) and the one on the Soviet-Afghan War (15,000+ words by a boy from Georgia with an International Baccalaureate Diploma, headed for Harvard).

Letters from authors have indicated to me that seeing the exemplary work of their peers, something not routinely made possible in their schools, unlike the regular public demonstrations of the athletic skill of their peers, has on occasion inspired them to raise their own standards and to work harder to be considered for publication in the only public journal in the world for the academic papers of high school students.

Here are some sample author comments:

“The back copies you sent me were a great help. I want to thank the other students who have been published in *The Concord Review*; the quality of their articles was what I aspired to. In the future I will use their techniques, such as using more original sources, to enhance my writing.” Ginger Gentile (East Hampton High School, then Columbia University)

“...Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank you, on behalf of all students who have been called upon to attempt the seemingly insurmountable task of writing an in-depth history paper, for providing us with plentiful examples of good writing and good history. Your publication has helped us to see a way through the jungle.” Jesse Esch (Archbishop Macdonald High School, then University of Alberta)

“In short, I would like to thank you not only for publishing my essay, but for motivating me to develop a deeper understanding of history. I hope that *The Concord Review* will continue to fascinate, challenge and inspire young historians for years to come.” Emma Curran Donnelly Hulse (North Central High School, then Columbia University)

“The opportunity that *The Concord Review* presented drove me to rewrite and revise my paper to emulate its high standards. Your journal truly provides an extraordinary opportunity and positive motivation for high school students to undertake extensive research and academic writing, experiences that ease the transition from high school to college.” (Pamela Ban, Thomas Worthington High School, then Harvard)

A few brave high school teachers have allowed their students to see the journal with work by their peers, but, as Broeck Oder of Santa Catalina School wrote in a letter to the Editor of the *New York Sun*: “Will Fitzhugh and *The Concord Review* have made invaluable contributions to the teaching and learning of high school history for more than twenty years. That more teachers have not utilized this remarkable resource to instruct, inspire, and motivate their students is both lamentable and indefensible.”

If it is lamentable that more students have not been allowed to see and try to measure up to the exemplary academic work of their peers, what could the reason be? Not too long ago the reluctance of some teachers to do that put me in mind of this analogy:

There is an old story about a worker, at one of the South African diamond mines, who would leave work once a week or so pushing a wheelbarrow full of sand. The guard would stop him and search the sand thoroughly, looking for any smuggled diamonds. When he found none, he would wave the worker through. This happened month after month, and finally the guard said, “Look, I know you are smuggling something, and I know it isn’t diamonds. If you tell me what it is, I won’t say anything, but I really want to know.” The worker smiled, and said, “wheelbarrows.”

I think of this story when teachers find excuses for not letting their students see the exemplary history essays written by their high school peers for *The Concord Review*. Often they feel they cannot give their students copies unless they can “teach” the contents. Or they already teach the topic of one of the essays they see in the issue. Or they don’t know anything about one of the topics. Or they don’t have time to teach one of the topics they see, or they don’t think students have time to read one or more of the essays, or they know something the high school author didn’t know, or they worry about plagiarism, or something else. There are many reasons employed to keep this unique journal out of the hands of secondary students.

They are, to my mind, “searching the sand.” The most important reason to show their high school students the journal is to let them see the wheelbarrow itself, that is, to show them that there exists in the world a professional journal that takes the history research

papers of high school students seriously enough to publish them on a quarterly basis. Whether the students read all the essays, or one of them, or none of them, they will see that, for some of their peers, high school academic work is treated with respect. And that is a message worth letting through the guard post, whatever anyone may think about, or want to do something with, the diamonds inside.

But, again we confront the odd imbalance in the practices of having pep rallies, stadia, uniforms and all the other paraphernalia of school sports and the attendant celebration of athletic competition and success (or failure), while in academics we keep the best work, for the most part, a secret between the student, the teacher and a few close friends.

One path pursued by too many educators in an effort to make academics more palatable and more rewarding is to dumb them down, and those in the gifted world are not immune to this temptation.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, surely the Senior gifted program in the United States, identifies hundreds of highly able students each year and offers them summer programs of real intensity in Physics, Calculus, and the like, but when it comes to challenging them to write, they fall back on personal stories. They have a contest called “Creative Minds Imagine” in which they ask students to compose what look to me like expanded diary entries about some event in their own lives...Here is an excerpt from last year’s First Place Winner.

“It is time to go snorkeling. I gather my gear, pull my mask over my head, and place the snorkel in my mouth. Just getting into the water, I slide on my fins and awkwardly waddle into the surf. I follow my father out, gently kicking my legs. Snorkeling is like a dream come true—I can swim with the fish in their homes. For a time, I can breathe under water, a skill we all lost at birth.

“As I swim on, gazing at all the fish, sea urchins, and coral, I am left to my own thoughts. There is no sound, save for my breathing and the soft pounding of the ocean. I relax, trying to forget that I shouldn’t be able to breathe, telling myself that I am completely safe.

“To my right, I see a humuhumunukunukuapua’a, the state [HI] fish. Here, neon yellow tang. There’s a pipefish, skinny and brown. They dart around like meteor showers, and then they are gone, hidden by the white coral. I float over coral mountains, squinting...

“A group of snorkelers is gathered in an area to our left. My father is curious, and we quickly join them. We discover a large, green turtle lazily swimming around in a circle, occasionally coming up for a breath. It swims right beneath my feet, so close that I have to be careful not to touch it. After a long while, my father and I swim away.

“Something is wrong with my snorkel. I begin to breathe hard, as if there’s no oxygen (which there isn’t). Water begins to leak into my eyes, and I am crying tears of salt. Then I burst out of the water, take my mask off, and flail around. Then I reposition my mask, close my eyes, and head toward the beach. Every so often, I look up and make sure I am still going the right way. I think how drowning would be a horrible way to die.

“Noticing that I am in mortal peril, my father swims over. We go back together. When we are safe, I tell him that my snorkel is too big. Relieved, I sit down on a chair and look for a bottle of cold water....”

One might ask, “Don’t they also have an essay competition for serious academic papers by high school students, like the International Baccalaureate Extended Essays and the sort of papers published in *The Concord Review*?” Well, they should, perhaps, but they don’t. When it comes to writing, most educators become all mushy and seem only interested in the personal experiences of students. And when they do ask for persuasive essays and the like they limit them to five paragraphs.

To give you an idea of the difference between a creative nonfiction paper by a high school student and the academic writing I have found they can do, here is a passage from one of this year’s Emerson Prize winners: This student, valedictorian at her high school in Ohio, is now at Princeton. Her 11,958-word paper (including endnotes and bibliography) was on Irish Nationalism:

“...In Ireland, a powerful Protestant English minority ruled a predominantly Irish Catholic nation. Englishmen immigrated into Irish cities, creating new ethnic, religious, and class divides.² Cities progressed industrially faster than rural communities, where traditional customs persevered.³ There was a ‘chronic mismatch between education and opportunity,’⁴ and the Protestant aristocracy sought to maintain its political power over the lower classes.⁵ All of these factors increased the ill feeling between English Protestants and Irish Catholics at the turn of the 20th century.

“Amidst the British intrusion, the Irish Catholic majority feared the dilution of their customs, and nationalism increased as Irishmen realized the need to preserve their cultural identity to distinguish them from the rest of Great Britain. The term ‘Irish Irlander’⁶ originated to characterize the true Irishman: Catholic and with Irish ancestry, learned in Irish folklore and competent in the speaking and reading of the Gaelic language.⁷ As the national identity took hold, it became increasingly important to keep the ‘mere Irish,’⁸ the quintessential Irish citizens, in Ireland. Irish nationalists ultimately hoped to gain Home Rule, or local autonomy from Britain. It has been said that the Home Rule Movement displayed ‘a blend of romantic idealism and an exaggerated moralism.’⁹ While that may be

true, as evident in the call to return to the glorified *Eire*¹⁰ of fairy tales and in the emphasis on Irish Catholic chastity, a more sweeping description is even more prescient: ‘Catholic nationalism made for exciting history lessons: Good versus Evil; heroic Irish Catholics defending their kind against the bottomless and inexplicable malevolence of English Protestants.’¹¹ Indeed, the divide between Catholic and Protestant, Irish and English, in most of Ireland was wide; the nationalists, and in many cases Catholic bishops and priests, sought to make it unbridgeable. These divisions led not only to the well-known political attempts for Home Rule, but also to the creation of a national identity rooted in the Catholic religion and Irish culture. Even as a cultural identity developed, nationalists struggled with how to include Protestant Irish...”

Of course, even some gifted high school students may not be ready to write papers like that, especially if they have not been guided in doing so over the years of their education, but it has been my experience that serious students who are given a chance to read such work by their peers may be inspired to take up the challenge of doing better academic work themselves.

We do not do our gifted students any favors by sparing them the effort to read nonfiction books and to write serious history research papers while they are still in school. For those who do not, no matter how gifted they may be, they will find themselves behind their peers who have met such standards and they will fight an uphill struggle in their adjustment to the nonfiction reading lists and research papers which the best colleges will ask them to manage.

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Depression and the Gifted Child **Stephie P. McCumbee** **University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

Even before the creation of gifted programs, there has been a strong interest in how giftedness affects the social and emotional needs of gifted students. After years of research, there are still “conflicting opinions and evidence concerning the prevalence of depression in the gifted population” (Jackson & Peterson, 2003, p. 177).

The first view is that gifted children are “prone to emotional or social difficulties due to their differences from the norm and heightened responses” (Jackson & Peterson, 2003, p. 177). Studies supporting this view state that gifted students may be vulnerable to isolation and loneliness and at risk for developing internalizing disorders (Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Ray, 2006; Reis & Renzulli, 2004).

The opposing view to this idea states that gifted children live comparable lives to their general education counterparts with no more depressive symptoms than peers not identified as gifted (Shaunessy, Suldo, Hardesty, & Shaffer, 2006). Studies supporting this view demonstrate that gifted children report feeling high levels of happiness and feel they have positive healthy relationships with their peers (Shaunessy, et al.; Peterson & Ray, 2006). Additionally, Jiannong, Ying, and Xingli (2008), show that gifted children use their positive self-concept and attitude to achieve their goals, partly contributing to their being studious and ambitious.

Although several perspectives are represented in the literature, a seemingly predominate one is that gifted children have built up protective barriers enabling them to cope with depressive disorders. Still, we cannot ignore the conflicting opinions existing in the literature regarding depression. The following section examines the overall perception of researchers and educators regarding depression in the gifted population.

Depression and the Gifted Population

The term “depression” has been used in many contexts; therefore, it is often hard to understand the magnitude of emotions accompanying the disorder. However, gifted and nongifted students struggle with its debilitating effects. The term depression in the literature review refers to the “combination of affective, cognitive, psychomotor, and vegetative manifestation that affects normal function” (Jackson and Peterson, 2006, p. 176). According to Jackson (1998), a depressive state describes a disorder in which the mood is “typified” by a deep feeling of sadness, feelings of “inadequacy,” a sense of “despondency” and a decline in activities. This mood is often characterized by “pessimism, despair and related symptoms” (p. 215). Determining the nature of depression in gifted students is very difficult. Depression is an emotion which is hard to study empirically, and it is also under-diagnosed (Gardner, 2003, p.30). Jackson and Peterson (2003) suggest, that “issues related to defining giftedness, questions about research methodology, and the intrapsychic complexities of highly gifted individuals preclude fact finding” (p. 177). Due to research on depression in gifted students using different samples of students, making meaningful connections is challenging. Although empirical research is the preferred method of evaluating a phenomenon, it is typical to find qualitative studies when dealing with internalizing situations.

Jackson and Peterson (2003) state that there is research supporting the fact that depression is associated with suicide in gifted adolescents. There is evidence, as well, supporting the idea that many gifted people in history have suffered extensively from

depression in various forms (p. 177). The underlying question is whether the studies are valid, and whether giftedness plays a role in adolescent depression. According to Baker (1995), “there are no well-controlled studies of suicidal ideation or attempts of suicide in gifted adolescents” (p. 218). This could partially be because depression is an inward emotion that is difficult to measure. Instead, researchers must rely heavily on qualitative studies to obtain data.

In a phenomenological study of depression, Jackson (1998) suggests that depression within the gifted does exist. The suggested rationale for the depressive gifted child, according to Jackson, is that gifted children “prefer complexities,” often finding themselves in situations offering “many contradictory ideas at one time” (p. 215). Although this information is true in some instances, it does not necessarily capture the perplexities of all gifted children. Typically the term gifted is accompanied by a persona of a well-behaved child who enjoys working hard. This is not always the case. Additionally, giftedness can present itself in a child who seems to be an underachiever, as well as a child who struggles to pay attention during reading class.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is often viewed as one of the many negative aspects challenging gifted children on a daily bases. However, research suggests this is not always the case. Rice, Leever, Christopher, and Porter (2006) state that the current research regarding perfectionism has been inconsistent and inconclusive in whether it is linked to higher achieving students. If perfectionism is associated with gifted adolescents, it is undecided if it is a positive or negative attribute. Perfectionism has two “faces,” one being maladaptive and the other being adaptive. Perfectionism in its maladaptive form can cause physical pain and psychological problems ranging from migraines, anxiety, depression and eating disorders. However, perfectionism in its adaptive form has been shown to have a positive effect on self esteem, social adjustment and academics. Generally speaking, adaptive characteristics present themselves in a maladaptive manner when accompanied by stress. This is because perfectionism can be accompanied by “unrealistic standards combined with relentless self-criticism” (p. 524). This toxic combination can cause gifted students to doubt themselves or become obsessed with making mistakes. Rice, et al. also note that “in its maladaptive form” perfectionism can be linked to “psychological and physical problems including depression” (p. 524).

Rice, et al. (2006) argue that although perfectionism is more evident in gifted populations than general education; this does not necessarily mean that perfectionism is problematic. Likewise, some speculations view perfectionism as a possible factor leading to an increased risk for suicide. Perfectionists also seem to struggle with relationships, perhaps increasing the chances of gifted students being isolated.

The Opposing View

While some researchers believe giftedness has major social and emotional hurdles for students, the opposing view should also be discussed. Research has shown that giftedness comes with its share of benefits (Peterson, 2006; Shaunessy, et al., 2006). Peterson states that “characteristics associated with giftedness mitigate the negative effects of adversity: problem-solving abilities, a sense of humor, moral regard, and involvement with a talent or hobby” (p. 45).

A study published in 2006 by Shaunessy, Suldo, Hardesty, and Shaffer attempted to “compare the school and psychological functioning of 122 gifted and high-achieving students to that of 176 general education students educated in the same school” (p. 76). The study was conducted at one school where all students within three categories shared a building. Two instruments were used to gather data, one being a scale measuring school climate and the other being a questionnaire measuring self-efficacy.

The outcome of the study was that gifted children and high achieving students were less likely than regular education counterparts to affiliate with negative peers. There was no difference in feelings of loneliness, peer rejection, isolation or bullying. In fact, the high achieving and gifted students reported experiencing a better school climate and enjoying happiness with their friends (Shaunessy, et al., 2006.).

In a comprehensive study, Mueller (2009) explored a question educators have been asking for years. Do gifted adolescents struggle with depression more than their regular education counterparts? The sample used in this study was a purposeful sample of 1524 gifted and nongifted students ranging from 12 to 19 years old. There were slightly more males than females used in the study. The subjects were predominately White (75.6%) with the remainder being Black, Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander and other. There were 762 nongifted students and 762 gifted students. Instruments used to gather data were a 19 item self-reporting scale that measured “depressive symptoms” (p. 6). Students reported how many times during the past week they felt ‘sad’ or ‘happy’ or ‘depressed’ (p. 7). Results of the scale indicated that gifted children reported feeling less ‘depressed’ than nongifted students (p. 11). The researchers then explored the “moderating effect of personal (self concept), family (parent-family connectedness) and school level (school-belonging) protective factors on depressive symptoms” in both gifted and nongifted students (p. 9). The results indicated no significant difference between the two groups in all three categories. However, gifted students were found to experience significantly less symptoms of depression than their regular education peers. The three most significant implications from this study were: (1) gifted

students were significantly less depressed than their nongifted peers; (2) gifted Hispanic students were significantly more depressed than gifted White students, even with the presence of protective factors; and (3) for both gifted and nongifted students, “the protective factors were significant negative predictors of depression” (p. 11).

Depression and Suicide Ideation

With recent media attention concentrating on teenagers committing horrendous acts of violence, there has been unwanted attention placed on the gifted population. This newfound attention has allowed some to suspect that gifted children are unstable and struggle with depression. According to Cross, Gust-Brey, and Ball (2002), the suicide rates have increased drastically since the 1950’s being considered the second leading cause of death among adolescents. In “virtually every age group,” the rate of suicide has continued to increase over the “past four decades” (p. 247). In researching suicide in gifted adolescents, Baker (1995) examined 146 students from 3 subcategories: students who were classified as “exceptionally gifted,” “academically gifted,” and “academically average”. The purpose of the study was to compare the prevalence of depression and suicide in gifted students and their regular education peers (p. 218). The study indicated that “academically able and exceptionally able students are not distinguishable from average students by differences in levels of depression or suicidal ideation” (p. 222). Although the study suggests that the academically gifted adolescents are not more susceptible to depression than regular education peers, this does not mean they are less depressed. “The implications of this finding are that educators of the gifted can expect to find approximately 10% of their high school-aged students experiencing clinically significant levels of depressive symptoms” (p. 218).

A comprehensive four year psychological autopsy completed by Cross, et al. (2002) on the suicide of a gifted student may allow one to examine the psyche of a gifted child dealing with depression. A psychological autopsy is a study used to “assess a variety of factors, including behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and relationships, of an individual who is deceased.” This particular study tracked the child throughout his 21 years of life, looking for significant “events,” “stages” and “milestones” (p. 251). The researchers used interviews and archival information (e.g., diaries, notes, journals, suicide notes) to obtain data (p. 251). Once they conducted numerous interviews with parents and friends of the victim as well as examining archival information, they looked for commonalities or themes “that may be valuable in the prediction of suicide within similar populations” (p. 251). The results indicated that the victim struggled with anger, depression, rage, mood swings and “poor impulse control” (p. 252). The victim shared three common themes with others who committed suicide: “romantic relationship difficulties, self-esteem difficulties (either by exaggeration or self-condemnation), and isolation from personal capability of disconfirming irrational logic” (p. 252). He also had warning signs in several categories, such as behavior problems and withdrawal.

When looking at this case and comparing it with three other case studies of suicide, Cross, et al. (2002) found commonalities such as overexcitabilities; expressed polarized, hierarchical, egocentric value systems; engaged in public discussions of attempting suicide; and expressed behaviors in agreement with Dabrowski’s Level II or III of Positive Disintegration (p. 252).

Counseling

Implications from studies presented in this literature review suggest that more work is necessary at the school level to help children, gifted or not, deal with depression. These students need to be evaluated by counselors to ensure that their needs are met. “In general, their counseling needs may be outside of the awareness of teachers and school counselors until one of the well endowed suddenly underachieves in middle school, drops out of college, develops an eating disorder, or commits suicide” (Peterson, 2006, p. 45). Educators need to be more proactive in making sure students demonstrating any signs of depression are taken seriously. Being proactive will ensure that there will be little or no “red flags” left unnoticed. Proper training for teachers and staff is advisable. Baker (1995) suggests that educators should be aware that 10% of their students could be suffering from depression. The study also suggests that teachers need to have training in “recognizing and intervening with depressed students in their classroom.” Not only do people in the education profession need training in these areas but so do students. Students could greatly benefit from strategies teaching them how to handle stress and use coping mechanism for difficult situations (p. 223).

Conclusion

Do gifted students struggle with depression to a greater or lesser degree than their regular education counterparts? Due to conflicting studies, it is hard to form a judgment supporting either view. The literature reviewed thus far indicates that most researchers cannot find causal relationships supporting one or the other. Although some studies have stated that variables like perfectionism could play a role in the relationship, research is too inconclusive to state that perfectionism causes depression in gifted adolescents. Limited studies have been performed to understand whether depression significantly affects gifted students. However, the literature does recommend that more “personnel preparations at the secondary level for teachers, administrators and guidance counselors should include information and strategies to support the emotional and cognitive development of intellectually and academically gifted and high-achieving students” (Shaunessy, et al., 2006, p. 87). Educators need training to help them identify the signs of depression. They also

need training which teaches them how to meet the needs of every child in their class. Making sure that each student's needs are met, and that he or she feels connected to the class is an effective way to demonstrate the student's worth within the school.

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Jeff Shaara: Gifted Writer of Military Fiction

Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“ ‘Gentlemen, I agree that this operation carries risk, but the greatest risk is to the enemy. We must not forget that the purpose of the airborne operation is to disrupt and destroy the enemy behind his beachfront fortifications. . . .’ ” spoken by General James M. Gavin, from **The Steel Wave** (2008, Ballantine Books, p. 65).

In 2009 Jeff Shaara completed his series on the European Theatre of World War Two. The first book was **The Rising Tide** (2006, Ballantine Books). It was about the campaigns in North Africa and Sicily – the combat teaching academies for American and British armed forces where generals such as George Patton and Bernard Montgomery (British) learned their craft, skills and strategies. They learned how to use paratroopers and armored forces as important aspects of military warfare. The second book was **The Steel Wave** (2008, Ballantine Books), a novel describing the successful landing on Omaha Beach (June 6, 1944) that was the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany. This military achievement was a major joint project of American and allied armed forces that ranks among the most successful accomplishments of planning, training, coordination and logistics ever performed on a military level. The third book, **No Less Than Victory** (2009, Ballantine Books), was the agonizing account of the bravery, dedication and determination that stopped the Nazi counter-offensive near the French, Belgium and Luxembourg borders. The “Battle of the Bulge” was waged in the worst winter conditions in modern European history.

We are now at a crucial juncture regarding historical memories of this period, 1942-45. Everyday there is erosion of eye witness participants as indicated by obituaries. Jeff Shaara's books are constructed upon the memory of individuals who experienced these struggles. He writes what can be described as living history, a style of historical fiction that makes archival accounts more relevant to future generations. What gifted students should grasp is that these events were not movies or television shows, but humanity in action. Furthermore, it is important for them to comprehend the experiences of the people that fought, suffered and made the supreme sacrifice.

Shaara demonstrates how each of the specific military goals was a series of personal challenges that demanded the highest intellectual, psychological and physical abilities. A good example is the opening account in **The Steel Wave** about a group of British commandos on a scouting mission on Omaha Beach. Their mission was to collect rocks and soil samples so that engineers could estimate the physical landscape. Here is a part of Shaara's description of the commandos' foray: "Their mission was absurdly simple: Gather samples of the sand and rock on Omaha Beach. . . . If that silt was too soft to support the weight of trucks, tanks, and other armored vehicles, an amphibious landing on Omaha Beach simply wouldn't work." (p. 8) "On this night, Dundee's mission had much more to do with engineering than combat, the men armed only with their knives, since any weapons fire was certain suicide." (p. 9)

The author also gives another account of intellectual ingenuity that successfully duped the Nazi military elite into believing that the landings were going to be at Calais and not Normandy. This subterfuge took a great deal of trickery. Specific parts of England and Scotland were deceptively designed as if they were sites for the future invasion of Occupied France. General Patton played a role in this deception as if he was a movie star supervising dramatic military war games. Nazi reconnaissance planes observed General Patton and reported this misinformation to their general staff. Because of this major deception, the Nazis neglected their defenses in the Normandy area.

Gifted students will benefit from Shaara's books by seeing the myriad of skills and expertise necessary to accomplish this enormous victory, and they will learn that we all stand on the shoulders of democracy's gifted giants.

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