

# GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS QUARTERLY

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My Understanding of the Internet's impact has expanded by reading Nicholas Carr's book entitled, **The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains** (2010). Well, it is clear from his book that the Internet is doing a great deal to our brains, and much of it is not helpful for in-depth learning and creative thinking. Carr begins by saying: "I can feel it too. Over the last few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory." (Kindle Locations 158-59)

All educators of the gifted should read this book. The author covers a wide array of intellectual, technological and brain science research that is impressive in its historical perspective. It demonstrates how the type of thinking embodied in "surfing the web" is very different from the sequential thought and reading culture first developed during ancient Greek civilization. He begins his book by discussing Marshall McLuhan's famous analysis of modern communications technology, and its impact upon the human mind. Regarding this analysis, Carr said, "What both enthusiast and skeptic miss is what McLuhan saw: that in the long run a medium's content matters less than the medium itself in influencing how we think and act." (Kindle Locations 125-26). Some statements McLuhan made in his book, **Understanding Media** (1964), resonate today with the serious problems created by current technologies such as the Internet, cell phones, and computer games:

"The medium is the message."

"The electric technology is within the gates and we are numb, deaf, blind and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed."

●Joan Smutny has written many articles for *GEPO* on such topics as early childhood education, gifted advocacy, differentiating the gifted curriculum and encouraging creative thinking. She is the

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Director of The Center for Gifted in Glenview, Illinois, and has managed large enrichment programs for gifted students in the Chicago metropolitan area for many years. She has published many books on educating the gifted and advocacy issues. Her latest publication is: **Manifesto of the Gifted Girl** (2010, Royal Fireworks Press). Please see my discussion of this book at: <http://bit.ly/cHEXTf>. Her article concentrates on encouraging gifted students to realize their full creative potential.

●Linda C. Neumann is the editor and co-publisher of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter* ([www.2eNewsletter.com](http://www.2eNewsletter.com)). This bi-monthly publication is aimed at parents, educators, advocates, and other professionals who help twice-exceptional children reach their potential. She is also the author of the Spotlight on 2e Series, booklets that explore the combination of giftedness and learning deficits in children. Her article covers the characteristics of 2e students and presents some excellent ideas for educating them.

●Professor Joan Freeman, Ph.D., is a world expert in the lifetime development of gifts and talents. She is Founding President of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA), Honorary Fellow of the College of Teachers, Visiting Professor at Middlesex University, London, and founder of the Tower Education Group (UK), a think tank of experts. Joan has written two government reports, 17 books for scholars and parents, hundreds of academic and non-academic publications, has given presentations in most parts of the world, and is often in the media. For more details on Professor Joan Freeman see [www.joanfreeman.com](http://www.joanfreeman.com). I contacted her to write a summary of her latest book, **Gifted Lives, What Happens when Gifted Children Grow Up** (2010, Routledge), because I was impressed with her extensive longitudinal and case study research which is sadly lacking in most current studies of the gifted.

●Michael Walters concludes this issue with an essay on the science fiction writer, Ray Bradbury.

**Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D. Publisher**

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## **“What Do I Want to be When I Grow Up?”** ***Empowering Gifted Students to Create their Own Future***

**Joan Franklin Smutny    The Center for Gifted    Glenview, Illinois**

The inspiration for this article came from a conversation I had with a waitress at a Thai restaurant. She had just started college and when she discovered that I taught creative writing to gifted students, her eyes lit up and she said, “Oh I wanted to write once, how wonderful you teach that!” I asked her what she was studying and she lowered her eyes and sighed. “Well, I wanted to study English because I love literature and writing, but my parents want me to get a job, so I’m training to be a nurse.” My heart sank a little. I suggested that she might keep on with her education after she receives her nurse’s training. I told her not to let go of her dream even if it seems that, for right now, she has to postpone it.

Through years of contact with families from other countries, I’ve come to know the sadness of gifted students who feel pressured to follow their parents’ advice on education and career. The fields of choice tend to be medicine, business, computer science, engineering, law. The young person who cherishes the arts, loves the written word, cares more for natural science than medical, or the one who thinks the study of mathematics could be better explored through teaching than finance, often faces enormous pressure and resistance in his/her family and community.

Yet, this problem does not belong exclusively to immigrant communities. Gifted students from all sectors of society struggle to find their path to the adult world, and they often face conflicting advice and influences that make the process overwhelming. The remainder of this article explores the areas where gifted students need the most assistance.

### **Adult and Peer Expectations**

Counselors often recognize that with exceptional ability can come exceptional pressure. Sensitive young people who so easily internalize the attitudes, wants, and needs of adults, peers, and society in general, have a difficult time juggling these demands with their own hopes for the future. Perfectionism, a common trait of gifted achievers, added to the fear of disappointing loved ones can cause prolonged indecision and confusion (Stewart, 1999). You will find these students delaying decisions as to which colleges to apply to, which offer to accept, what major to choose; in some cases, they continuously change and agonize over their choice of majors, and later, question whether to stay or transfer to another university.

At the core of this problem is the fact that these students never felt free to discover what they wanted nor received enough encouragement to explore their interests in depth. Asked about their dilemma, they will respond, “Well, my Dad said I should probably go to Penn State” or “All my friends are applying to one of the top ten schools” or “My counselor says focusing on theater may not be practical.” Some gifted adolescents would rather conform to others’ expectations than embark on the harder path of discovering the kind of study and work programs that would most support their goals (Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000). But many pay the price later on. When the gifts and aspirations they’ve denied re-assert themselves, they feel pulled from the path they forced upon themselves, uncertain where to turn next.

This is a sad situation that can only be rectified if those who feel most invested in the future of gifted students assist them in discovering their core interests. Parents, teachers, and other significant adults whose support the students need can alleviate their struggle considerably by helping them to explore their gifts, consider carefully the consequences of different choices, and sharing (without imposing) their own wisdom and experience. Counselors often have a balancing act to perform. On the one hand, they need to free gifted students to claim their own education and career preferences. On the other hand, they can only accomplish this by reaching out to the families who also need guidance in supporting (rather than micro-managing) their loved ones’ first steps into the adult world.

### **Individual-Centered Guidance**

The pressures gifted students feel from parents, peers, or admiring teachers tend to pull them away from themselves. Therefore, guidance and counseling need to focus on the individual. Young gifted people need to ask themselves: “What do *I* feel about the options presented? What is *my* vision for the future? What do *I* love? What are *my* unique abilities and talents and in what kind of environment do *I* feel happiest as a student and a person?” Career counseling often restricts itself to finding appropriate colleges or training programs, and too many students make choices about their futures without really knowing what these choices mean in terms of actual work or lifestyle (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000). At a most basic level, exploring future education and career is not a

“this or that” decision, but a “Who am I?” process that evolves over a lifetime. Gifted students need to feel free to explore a wide range of fields in different ways—not only in the classroom, but in nature, in art studios, in athletic centers, in observatories.

Understanding career planning in this larger sense, parents, relatives, older friends, and mentors can play as much a role in guiding gifted students as does the high school guidance counselor. One of the challenges gifted learners have is an abundance of interests, all equally tantalizing. “I don’t know what to do, I’m interested in everything!” is a commonly expressed dilemma. Yet, a young person who has a passion for number theory and also loves to write need not feel any conflict between these interests if she can accommodate them in her plans for the future. According to Berger (1989), the problem facing gifted students like this is not necessarily multi-potentiality, but the lack of decision-making skills. They need tools that will help them look at the dimensions of their lives that matter most to them—their gifts, loves, life-goals, and even leisure activities (Stewart, 1999).

By concerning themselves almost entirely with academics, conventional career counselors tend to overlook the creative, emotional, and social dimensions of gifted students (Berger, 1989; Peterson, 2000). Most see the selection of a college or university as the desirable end goal for the counseling process, when it is actually just the beginning. “Career counseling is an extension of talent development and should be action oriented, constructivist, and related to other aspects of school and life” (Greene, 2003). Ideally, it is a process that began early, with parents and other adults exposing children to different worlds for them to explore and discover—environmental science, astronomy, art, architecture, ornithology, literature. Over time, the growth of their talents, interests, and life goals evolves naturally, and planning for education and career unfolds from this life-long process.

### Special Populations

Guiding gifted students needs to include a sensitivity to the different needs of special populations. Three examples follow that illustrate this: culturally different; girls; and creative learners.

**Culturally Different.** The waitress in the Thai restaurant illustrated the challenge faced by many gifted students from other parts of the world. A number of cultures do not value individual aspirations over those of the community or family. Because of this, advisors must tread carefully in intervening in matters that involve cultural or religious differences (Greene, 2003). I have seen gifted individuals struggle mightily between the enticement of fields they love and the occupational goals that their family and culture find more acceptable. “All I want is to act but my Dad would have a fit!” a young Indian student once confided. Another: “My parents struggled so hard to make it here, so how can I say—ok, thanks but I’m going to do what I want now.” Caring teachers, friends, and counselors have to respect the students’ concerns while at the same time giving them hope that they can hold onto what they love and find a way to reach for their dreams. Counselors also need to reassure worried parents by correcting misconceptions, sharing practical information about the options available to their loved ones, and exploring different ways that they can strengthen their children’s decision-making.

**Girls.** Gifted girls and young women have made significant strides over the past decade in part due to concerted efforts to address inequity and bias in academic institutions and fields (Smutny, 2007). Yet, young talented women still struggle to make decisions, especially when the adults in their lives express strong opinions about what they should do. Sensitive girls are particularly susceptible to others’ feelings when their circumstances are uniquely challenging. A young woman will say, “I can’t go to a school too far away from home because my family needs me” or “I don’t want to be the only Latina in the engineering program; my Mom said I might be lonely” or “the thing I love the most is the thing my foster family says should be a hobby, not a career.” Despite all we have accomplished, young women still run the risk of becoming “other-centered”—taking cues as to what they should do or be from influential adults and peers. This is not always the case, of course, but many girls struggle to hold onto their core values and goals while they plan their futures. A recent study pointed out the particular need of young women in the fields of math and science. Talented females reportedly have problems in the “pure” math and science fields because these fields are too narrow in focus and fail to explore relevant application to conditions or communities they care about (Vanderkam, 2005). A young woman with exceptional ability in science, for example, may find more fulfillment in an environmental studies program where she can apply her expertise toward ends that affect local communities and that utilize more of her talents and interests.

**Creative.** Creatively gifted students face special challenges when they explore further education and career choices. Most are constitutionally incapable of approaching any goal without testing limits, questioning assumptions, or challenging conventions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and therefore they sorely need guidance that supports less orthodox career goals (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Creatively gifted individuals often feel off kilter, not like other people, and have suffered from the cajoling of friends and relatives who think they’re off in the clouds, not quite walking with their feet on the ground. They need support in understanding and accepting their creative nature and not internalizing the attitudes of others. Advisors can make a difference in simply affirming all their different quirks, interests, idiosyncrasies, their seemingly “crazy ideas,” and guiding them to latch onto the things in their lives

that they feel most passionate about. What do they love? What can't they live without? What would be their ideal environment to study in? To live in?

A brilliant student I knew felt pressured to apply to a top ten university and felt like her academic abilities had put her in a straight jacket. She didn't want to go to a conventional university environment where everyone would be "studying their heads off all the time, just like I am now!" While working with a sensitive coach and conversing with parents and others, the young woman ended up entering Bard College at Simon's Rock before she finished high school. This college offered early entrance, had small classes, provided more independent study opportunities, a greater emphasis on discussion (rather than lecture), and in every way suited this highly creative student's nature. She thrived in the environment.

### Stopping the Drift

Too many of our most promising students lack any kind of map to help them navigate their futures. The "gifted adrift"(Greene, 2003) do not create their futures. They either close off possibilities they should consider due to an early self-directedness that makes them *think* they know what they want, or, they jump onto a ship that appears to be heading in a direction they *should* go. In a recent study, only 13% of the high schools represented in a survey provided adequate counseling services for gifted students making important decisions about future education and career opportunities (Sytsma, 2000). The result is that gifted students go to the regular career counselor at their school who directs them to suitable colleges and universities, and then they, with their parents and others, try to figure out on their own what path to take (Peterson, 2000).

What will we—the teachers, parents, relatives, and counselors who care about these students—do to help? Do we believe that once we point them in the right direction—give them the college information we feel is most suitable—that this will help them find their path? Surely, this is not enough. Guiding gifted students to make sound decisions happens over a lifetime. It must involve all of us if they are to know their own hearts and minds and not be so easily swayed by outside influences. Without this centering, they will submit to the strongest current in the stream—whether this be the pressure to apply to the most prestigious university or to follow the steps of parents or peers.

As a society, we are losing the gifts of our most talented populations by not attending to their need for self-discovery and fulfillment in the largest sense. I have seen young successful achievers become confused and lost, unsure of their career choices or majors because they have never allowed themselves the time or space to explore what they really value and love to do. Those of us who devote so much time and energy to educating and cherishing gifted children when they're young need to be sure that we are helping them at the most critical time of their lives. These young people need helpers who can guide them *back to themselves*—their own gifts, values, and life choices—all the things that belong at the center of every decision they make for their future.

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## 2e in Hard Times

**Linda C. Neumann Editor and Co-Publisher of *2e: Twice-Exceptional Newsletter***

Twenty years ago twice exceptionality was a concept known to a rather small community of people. There were no schools identified as specializing in teaching 2e students. There were few parents organizing to meet the needs of their gifted children with learning difficulties, and there were few classroom teachers who knew what to do for their struggling bright students. Fortunately, times and awareness have changed.

Today, if you Google the term *twice exceptional*, more than 150,000 entries appear directing you to articles, publications, schools, conferences, and even state-wide initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of these children. The progress made, while still only a fraction of the distance we need to go, has been heartening to those who care about this special population of gifted children. One concern now is, given the dismal state of state education budgets, the federal budget, and families' personal budgets, whether this progress can continue. An even more pressing concern is whether we will *lose* ground.

While no one can predict with certainty how our economic woes will play out in schools, it's probably safe to say that the downturn will take its toll; and plans for new programs and expanded services for these learners will suffer delays or disappear altogether. Is this outlook as bleak as it sounds? It doesn't have to be – not if we take what we have learned about 2e students and apply it in ways that are low cost, no cost, and potentially beneficial to all learners in a classroom.

### What We Know About 2e Learners

There is no single profile of a twice-exceptional learner because the causes and characteristics of twice exceptionality are so varied. 2e children can exhibit a wide range of traits, many of them typical of gifted children. Among the traits that 2e and other gifted children commonly share may be:

- Advanced vocabulary and use of language
- Intensity
- A high level of sensitivity to their emotional and physical environments
- A highly developed sense of curiosity
- An unusual sense of humor
- Keen observation skills
- Greater asynchrony than average children – in other words, a larger gap between their mental age and their physical age
- An ability to remember large amounts of information.

Unlike other gifted children, those who are twice exceptional have deficits that may interfere with their ability to perform the tasks that classroom learning requires. These deficits might include:

- Difficulty focusing attention on subjects or tasks not of their choosing
- Limited short-term memory
- Difficulty managing time
- Language-based disorders that can make reading, writing, verbal expression, and mathematics difficult
- Poorly developed fine or gross motor skills
- Processing disorders that make it hard to interpret visual or auditory information

- Difficulty interpreting social cues, such as facial expressions and tone of voice
- Difficulty organizing and interpreting information received through the senses.

The combination of exceptional strengths and weaknesses present in a twice-exceptional learner often leads to a child who is misunderstood. Parents and teachers can mistakenly attribute the child's inconsistent performance, disorganization, and inattention to laziness, carelessness, or disinterest. However, once the real cause is identified, giving these children the proper mix of challenge, support, and encouragement can enable them to work around their learning challenges and achieve like the gifted students they are.

### Ways to Meet the Needs of 2e Learners

In an ideal world we would have special programs, with specially trained teachers, aimed at meeting the individual needs of twice-exceptional students. In the real world few districts today have the resources available to offer this level of service. So what can teachers do to bridge the gap between the ideal and the real?

Teachers can use what research, program evaluation, and practice tell us about the characteristics of strategies that prove effective for teaching 2e children. The strategies should:

- Be creative and flexible
- Involve teamwork between gifted and special education teachers
- Give students the chance to interact with twice-exceptional peers
- Increase students' self-awareness by helping them gain greater understanding of their abilities, limitations, and learning style
- Build on the students' strengths, talents, and interests.

(Baum, Cooper, & Neu, 2001; Nielson, 2002; Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, & Shevitz, 2002)

The last point is especially important to note. Twice-exceptional students thrive in a learning environment where their giftedness is recognized first, not their disability. Despite the difficulties they may have in reading, writing, or attending to the task at hand, these children must be allowed to engage in work that both challenges them and appeals to their talents and interests (Baum, 2004). One study (Sternberg, 1997) showed that when teachers gave assignments that matched 2e students' particular interests and abilities, those students out-performed their brightest peers in terms of focusing for extended periods of time on complex projects.

However, to be successful, 2e students need support to minimize the effects of their disabilities or deficits and to move them toward self-confidence and independence in learning. One essential form of support that these students, and all students, require is *encouragement*. Another form of support that benefits 2e learners is *compensation strategies*. These might include:

- Problem-solving approaches
- Time-management skills
- Organizational techniques
- Note-taking and study skills
- Social skills training.

*Accommodations* comprise a third way of supporting the 2e learner. These may be given informally, on an as-needed basis, or they may be formally put in place through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or other type of plan. Some common accommodations are:

- Use of assistive technology such as electronic spellers, audio books, reading pens, and scanning and reading software
- Extended time on homework and tests
- Reduced homework
- Guided notes or a note-taker.

Some additional examples that especially benefit twice-exceptional students are:

- Breaking assignments into parts with completion checks
- Conducting organization checks
- Weighting test grades higher than daily work
- Compacting curriculum
- Allowing a student to test-out of daily assignments or required classes.

(Collins, 2008)

### **Making it Work in the Regular Classroom**

In the absence of special programs for 2e students, how can teachers meet the needs of these students in the regular classroom, especially when time and resources are tight? Teachers can, with the characteristics and needs of this population in mind, use existing tools and strategies to their best advantage. Perhaps foremost among these is *differentiation*. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, “differentiation is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that values the individual and can be translated into classroom practice in many ways” (Tomlinson, 2000). Teachers who differentiate instruction offer options to all of their students in at least four different areas:

- What they learn (content)
- How they learn it (process)
- How they demonstrate their learning (product)
- Where they learn best (environment).

(Baum et al., May, 2009)

By differentiating content, teachers can give students the chance to immerse themselves in an area of special interest. For a 2e learner, this might mean an opportunity to probe a topic on a deeper level than the others in the class or to be accelerated in one or more subjects.

In differentiating process, teachers can give students choices that relate to their learning styles and preferences. A 2e student who has difficulty with auditory processing, for example, might choose a PowerPoint presentation over a lecture. One who struggles with reading might take advantage of a chance to work with manipulatives instead of reading a chapter.

By giving all students options in the work products they produce, teachers give 2e students opportunities to work around their deficits. For example, a student who struggles with writing might be able to create a non-written work product that showcases his/her talents. The product might be a video, a constructed model, a musical composition, or a piece of artwork instead of a term paper.

By providing differentiation in the learning environment, teachers can offer opportunities for movement and more or less involvement with others. For instance, 2e learners who struggle to remain in their seat might have the choice to stand some of the time or to sit on an exercise ball. Those who are easily distracted might choose to work in a quiet corner of the room.

Having opportunities to build on their strengths and develop their talents is a motivating experience for all students, and especially for those who are twice exceptional. According to faculty members at Bridges Academy, a school for 2e learners, “some of the skills students lack show dramatic development when practiced within the context of assignments and projects within the gift area. Furthermore, students are more likely to accept instruction and feedback on their deficits, and to push themselves through the practice of a difficult skill when the effort is related to a project they want to finish... Many deficits can and must be addressed; but they should be addressed creatively and, preferably, in the context of the strength, not at the expense of the development of the gift” (Sabatino, 2009).

Another major benefit of individualizing instruction through differentiation and strength-based teaching is an increased acceptance of individual differences. Twice-exceptional students are perhaps doubly vulnerable to feeling the effects of being different. An environment that focuses on developing students’ strengths rather than fixing their weaknesses, and where differences among students are accepted as normal, gives 2e learners a sense of belonging. Frequently, when gifted and 2e children have academic difficulties, too little attention is paid to how well they fit into their learning environment and to what extent they feel like valued members of the learning community. However, establishing a good fit and having a sense of belonging are essential in order for a child to learn. (Baum et al., July, 2009)

### **Conclusion**

Hard times place additional burdens on our schools and our teachers; but while there may not be money for new programs and new approaches, some of the old ones may be able to serve 2e learners well. Perhaps it just takes a shift in perspective from looking at what’s wrong with these kids to looking at what’s right with them and building on that.

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## Gifted Lives

### What Happens When Gifted Children Grow Up

Joan Freeman Middlesex University London

When Maurice Fisher wrote me that he found Gifted Lives "... a wonderful study which the field has needed for many years ... and how it is uniquely different from the approaches taken by American researchers." I could not resist his request to write a paper for Gifted Education Press.

I've had some moving reviews for the book, such as this one in Psychology Today by Joseph Cardillo –

... should you decide to read this book (which I hope you do) that you will get the feeling that you are amidst the deepest, most humanitarian, and sensitive encounter with giftedness that paper and print can offer ...

#### Why is this book so different from all the others I have written?

The answer, I believe, is that it is true to life. I've written this one with my heart as well as investigative science at my elbow. It is not a collection of lists or numbers, or a reshuffling of adjectives to describe gifts and talents. There is no theory illustrated with a diagram. My own interpretations of the accumulated deep evidence help to draw out the threads of what has happened in the lives of 20 of the sample, for most of their lives. Each one has been chosen to illustrate an aspect of being gifted and talented.

I believe this study is unique in the world. It is the only one I know of which started out with precisely matched control groups, not just using the general population for comparison. At the same time, it is also the most in-depth study I know of. The combination of hard data in the testing and calculating of variables, along with countless hours of my own life interviewing and talking has brought an extraordinary insight into what it is to be gifted, and how being so affects everyday life. The people involved are all British, but I believe their experiences are widely pertinent, especially in the Western world.



## **A Longitudinal Study**

The main advantage of longitudinal studies of gifts and talents is to watch the development of behaviour, to see the effects of different kinds of upbringing and education on children as they grow up. With careful observations, it should be possible to promote what appears to have been successful and discard the mistakes. The main problem with such studies, though, is that long-term research is always old-fashioned because it started a long time ago when things were different. With the benefit of hindsight one might say – I wouldn't start from there if I were you.

Around the world, most children selected as gifted and talented children are chosen by their teachers, high grades in school, IQ scores or other forms of attainment, as a recent world-wide overview clearly shows (Freeman, Raffan & Warwick, 2010). But we also know that giftedness may take many different forms and appear at different times in life, so that future gifts may not be recognisable right now (Subotnik, Kassin, Summers, & Wasser, 1993). Remember Grandma Moses. This means that theories and educational programmes designed for children identified as gifted because of their precocity in conventional areas may well miss those whose gifts do not fit.

The long-term view is also useful for examining the justification for special educational provision for the gifted. How, I wonder, will practice of the theory of Multiple Intelligences fare? And then there is the movement for the super-gifted, the millennium Indigo Children with special powers. Will it last?

It's time someone followed up the really long-term outcomes of special provision for the gifted, whether in or out-of-school hours, and in a scientific manner. For example, a UK review of international research on Accelerated Learning found little evidence of its effectiveness (Comford Boyes, Reid, Brain, Wilson, 2004). Not only was the programme found to have a placebo effect but it was also "voraciously marketed". Yet for so many schools it is the programme of choice for the gifted and talented.

## **My Study**

In 1974, I questioned why some children were labelled as gifted while others – of identical measured gifts – were not thus labelled. My investigation has involved more than three decades of testing and in-depth interviews with the individuals their parents and their teachers in their school and home environments. Most importantly, I found that children labelled as gifted are likely to be different in some respects from identically gifted children who are not labelled as such.

My Target group was 70 children aged between five and 14, described as gifted by their parents, mostly without testing, all of whom had joined the National Association for Gifted Children (UK). Each Target child was matched with two comparison children. The first comparison child was measured as identically gifted – though not labelled as such; the second comparison child was taken at random. Each of these triads, also matched for age and gender, was in the same school-class, providing a common experience both educationally and from the same social population. The essential difference between the Target and first comparison child was whether or not they bore the label of 'gifted.'

Of the whole sample, 170 children scored at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Raven's Matrices. Their Stanford-Binet IQs ranged from the 46 children with less than 120 IQ to 18 children with above 160 IQ, and 13 knocked their heads on the test's ceiling of 170 IQ. Family finances ranged from very poor to very rich.

Unexpectedly, this long view has demonstrated the unreliability of memory, either when the same incident was independently described by children and parents or recently when as adults the subjects remembered their childhoods. I had, after all, audio-recorded all their words at the time. There was no fudging the facts. For example, one woman grade-skipped by three years had spent a great deal of her time at Oxford University young, friendless and in tears, but 20 years later remembered that time as very happy. I did not disillusion her. The police are familiar with this problem of memory distortion, but researchers and biographical writers seem strangely unaware of it.

## **Some Findings from the Freeman Research**

### ***The Label***

The children labelled as gifted were usually treated differently, whether positively or negatively, and naturally they were aware of adult expectations. Parents might tell me, for example, that their child was too clever to play with others of the same age – in front of the child. Fathers especially could be very forceful in pushing their gifted children. Several lads rose to the challenge, obtaining doctorates in their early twenties, but always at a social cost to themselves. Peering down a microscope or calculating complicated mathematics is not a recognised tactic for making friends.

The big surprise was the emotional effects associated with the label. As children, those labelled gifted had a far higher incidence of emotional problems ( $p < .01$ ) when compared with the two others in the same school class – the unlabelled gifted children and the random controls. Although the labelled and unlabelled experienced identical teaching, parents of the labelled children made

significantly ( $p < .01$ ) more complaints about school provision. Teachers were in accord with parental views on the children's behaviour.

The long parental interviews in their own homes disclosed that the labelled gifted children with emotional difficulties had significantly more difficult domestic circumstances, such as parental divorce or other matters which would disturb most children. Their parents would often describe how their child was typically gifted, difficult and with poor peer relationships. They sometimes looked to me for sympathy, as an expert on symptoms of giftedness who must agree.

Some of the labelled grew up to feel they could never live up to gifted expectations and became big fishes in small ponds. That way they avoided the threats of being seen as less than the gifted person they had been labelled. Precocity, extremely high IQ scores and grades, as well as grade-skipping were definitely not a reliable passport to grown-up high achievements for my sample. School and the workplace are not the same thing at all, except perhaps for those who continued in a similar path, such as teachers and academics.

The important finding for all studies of gifts and talents is that if one only looks at those who are labelled gifted without careful comparisons, the results may not be typical of all gifted children – only of those identified by whatever the local criteria may be.

### **Influences on Success in Life**

In terms of conventional success in life such as high examination marks, rising up the corporate ladder or making money, the primary building blocks were always keenness and hard work, allied with sufficient ability, educational opportunity and an emotionally supportive home. High level creativity, though, as seen in creative adult accomplishments demanded a particular type of personality which is relatively independent of others' opinions.

For so many in the sample, it struck me constantly that if I had stopped my research at the conventional research points, usually a stage in education, the picture of a life in progress would have been very different. Leaving school, for example, a student could be seen as a failure, but a few years later would move into a different sphere and gleam with success. I certainly could not have guessed at some of the long-term outcomes.

Whether conventional and rule-abiding or constantly knocking against constraints, children usually carried their personal style through to adulthood. Maybe there were no tortured geniuses in this sample, because poor home circumstances, such as a constant change of "uncles" or money worries, did nothing but harm to the possibility of adult success.

A clear warning against too much academic pressure emerged from the research. Some gave their all, including their peace of mind, to strive for high grades, so that their healthy emotional development, including the freedom to play and be creative, was severely curtailed. The worst affected were the accelerated boys specialising in science who missed out on social relationships. Many of them tell me in their mid-forties that they still regret the loss of their childhoods. Of the 17 subjects who had been grade-skipped, only one has fared better in the long-term and several fared less well than had been expected. Grade-skipping usually seemed OK at the time, but thirty years later, it did not seem to have been worth the sacrifices the individuals inevitably had to make of childhood pursuits.

There are, of course, many non-scholastic routes to satisfaction in achievement, such as the woman of IQ 170 who has always been empathetically gifted. Throughout school she was effectively the class counsellor, the one to whom the others brought their troubles. She gained a psychology degree and further qualifications and now cares with love and deep satisfaction for the down-and-outs of her city, being neither well paid nor recognisably a high-flyer. In statistical terms, she was a failure as a low-earner. But what wonderful achievements she found every day in the people she helped.

Generally, whether labelled or unlabelled as gifted, those with an exceptionally high IQ did much better in life than those with an average score, whatever their original socio-economic level. The most successful had found personal ways of organising their powerful mental abilities; they were more aware and made more efficient use of their personal learning styles.

Social hurdles could seem insuperable. Of course, no university has the power to direct the lives of its students, nor would it be ethical, but without some help, especially for those whose home cannot provide it, the final link in a delicate situation can be lost.

Emotionally, because of the precise ability comparisons in the methodology, it was possible to see that no matter how 'profound' the gifts, and how inadequate the education, the extremely gifted people had absolutely no more emotional problems than others in the same circumstances.

To support the development of gifted potential most effectively throughout life, it is important to follow indicators such as personal interests. Using children's precocity as the prime identifying feature of gifts and talents could be responsible for what is often called 'burn out,' which may be due to age-peers catching up or the gifted simply losing interest. For sure, being a gifted child is not at all the same thing as being a gifted adult.

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## A Halloween Celebration of the Gifted Writer, Ray Bradbury\*

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“. . .He let all kinds of new theories drop in lazy pebbles down his mind, turning, throwing out dull flashes of light. . . .” From **The Martian Chronicles** (1950, Bantam, p. 46) by Ray Bradbury

It is fitting that we consider the literary contributions of Ray Bradbury, since it is the Halloween season. He is a writer of a literary genre that blends Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Social Commentary. The book I will be discussing is **The Martian Chronicles** (1950). On the surface it is about the impact of the Earth people on the Martians. It is amazing to read the social issues that Bradbury examined in a book which he wrote in the late 1940s. These issues included xenophobia, militarism, the dangers of the nuclear arms race, racism, the fear of intellectual dissent, and restrictions placed upon dissent.

The entire book is a series of interlocking short-stories, but two stories in **The Martian Chronicles** are particularly relevant to the gifted sensibility. The first story is “April 2000: The Third Expedition.” Bradbury expressed many traits of the gifted in this story by fusing literary fiction with scientific and social philosophy. The Martians deceived and executed Earth explorers by distorting their imaginations and emotions. The key emotional power they used was nostalgia. Through mass hypnosis, the Martians created a village that resembled a small American town, and convinced the Earth people that they had contacted their departed loved ones. The resulting nostalgia seduced them into euphoria. While the Earth people visited their departed relatives, the Martians massacred them as they slept.

The next story I bring to your attention is “April 2005: Usher II” – a precursor to Bradbury’s **Fahrenheit 451** (1953). In the 1950s there was a campaign against individual creative achievements in certain American and Soviet political areas. For example, Congressional committees in the United States investigated Communists in the movie industry. Most of the allegations were unsubstantiated but they still resulted in thousands of writers, actors and directors blacklisted from working in their fields. In the Soviet Union there were persecutions of thousands of writers, scientists, artists, musicians and academics who did not kowtow to the mandates of the Communist Party’s Central Committee. “April 2005: Usher II” is about William Stendahl who fled Earth and traveled to Mars because The Society for the Prevention of Fantasy and The United States Department of Moral Climates burned his extensive personal library. On Mars he built a copy of Edgar Allan Poe’s **The House of Usher** (1839). He lured members of the investigating committees into visiting his Usher House with the purpose of dismantling it, but then he had them killed by living through Poe’s stories, e.g., “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Premature Burial.” Mr. Stendahl described these events as “ironical revenge.”

\*Written in October 2010.

Bradbury was influenced both by popular culture such as the horror films of his youth (Dracula and Frankenstein) and by the French essayist, Michel de Montaigne. He was mentored prior to the publication of **The Martian Chronicles** by the following writers he met by chance: Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley and the radio dramatist, Norman Corwin. So let's celebrate Halloween with the gifted by enjoying Bradbury's stories and novels.

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