

STUDY ON SECONDARY FACTORS ON GIFTEDNESS OF CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

Isolation is one of the main challenges faced by gifted individuals, especially those with no social network of gifted peers. In order to gain popularity, gifted children will often try to hide their abilities to win social approval. Strategies include underachievement (discussed below) and the use of less sophisticated vocabulary when among same-age peers than when among family members or other trusted individuals. The isolation experienced by gifted individuals may not be caused by giftedness itself, but by society's response to giftedness. Plucker and Levy have noted that, "in this culture, there appears to be a great pressure for people to be 'normal' with a considerable stigma associated with giftedness or talent." To counteract this problem, gifted education professionals recommend creating a peer group based on common interests and abilities. The earlier this occurs, the more effective it is likely to be in preventing isolation. As a result of isolation, gifted children show deficiencies in social valuation and mentalization .

Review of literature

Perfectionism is another issue for gifted individuals. It is encouraged by the fact that gifted individuals tend to be easily successful in much of what they do.

Healthy perfectionism refers to having high standards, a desire to achieve, conscientiousness, or high levels of responsibility. It is likely to be a virtue rather than a problem, even if gifted children may have difficulty with healthy perfectionism because they set standards that would be appropriate to their mental age (the level at which they think), but they cannot always meet them because they are bound to a younger body, or the social environment is restrictive. In such cases, outsiders may call some behavior perfectionism, while for the gifted this may be their standard.

"Perfectionism becomes desirable when it stimulates the healthy pursuit of excellence."

Unhealthy perfectionism stems from equating one's worth as a human being to one's achievements, and the simultaneous belief that any work less than perfect is unacceptable and will lead to criticism. Because perfection in the majority of human activities is neither desirable, nor possible, this cognitive distortion creates self-doubt, performance anxiety and ultimately procrastination.

The unhealthy perfectionism can be triggered or further exaggerated by parents, siblings, school comrades with good or ill intentions. Parents are usually proud and will praise extensively the gifted child, on the other hand siblings, comrades and school bullies will generally become jealous of the intellectual ease of the gifted child and tease him or her about any minor imperfection in his work, strength, clothes, appearance, or behavior. Approach—positive reinforcement from parents, or negative reactions from siblings and comrades for minor flaws—will push these kids into considering their worth to their peers as equal to their abilities and consider any imperfection as a serious defect in themselves. The unhealthy perfectionism can be further exaggerated when the child counter-attacks those who mocked him with their own weapons, i.e. their lower abilities, thus creating disdain in himself for low or even average performance.

There are many theories that try to explain the correlation between perfectionism and giftedness. Perfectionism becomes a problem as it frustrates and inhibits achievements.

D. E. Hamachek identified six specifics, overlapping types of behavior associated with perfectionism. They include:

- Depression
- A nagging "I should" feeling
- Shame and guilt feelings
- Face-saving behavior
- Shyness and procrastination
- Self-deprecation.

Underachievement

There is often a stark gap between the abilities of the gifted individual and his or her actual accomplishments. Many gifted students will perform extremely well on standardized or reasoning tests, only to fail a class exam. This disparity can result from various factors, such as loss of interest in classes that are too easy or negative social consequences of being perceived as smart. Underachievement can also result from emotional or psychological factors, including depression, anxiety, perfectionism, or self-sabotage.

An often overlooked contributor to underachievement is undiagnosed learning differences. A gifted individual is less likely to be diagnosed with a learning disorder than a non-gifted classmate, as the gifted child can more readily compensate for his/her paucities. This masking effect is dealt with by understanding that a difference of one standard deviation between scores constitutes a learning disability even if all of the scores are above average. In addition, many gifted children may underachieve because they have grown to believe that because of their intelligence, things should always come easily to them, and thus may lag behind their non-gifted peers in the work ethic required to learn things that don't come immediately to them. One apparently effective way to attempt to reverse underachievement in gifted children includes educating teachers to provide enrichment projects based on students' strengths and interests without attracting negative attention from peers.

Depression

It has been thought in the past that there is a correlation between giftedness and depression or suicide. This has generally not been proven. As Reis and Renzulli mention,

"With the exception of creatively gifted adolescents who are talented in writing or the visual arts, studies do not confirm that gifted individuals manifest significantly higher or lower rates or severity of depression than those for the general population...Gifted children's advanced cognitive abilities, social isolation, sensitivity, and uneven development may cause them to face some challenging social and emotional issues, but their problem-solving abilities, advanced social skills, moral reasoning, out-of-school interests, and satisfaction in achievement may help them to be more resilient. Also, no research points to suicide rates being higher in gifted adolescents than other adolescents. However, a number of people have noted a higher incidence of existential depression, which is depression due to seemingly

highly abstract concerns such as the finality of death, the ultimate unimportance of individual people, and the meaning (or lack thereof) of life. Gifted individuals are also more likely to feel existential anxiety.

However, numerous studies have shown that an active depressive state impairs cognition because it retards neurogenesis in the hippocampus Professional attitudes toward giftedness

Grobman discusses how some exceptionally and profoundly gifted individuals may unconsciously create deficits as a way of closing the asynchrony gap. Certain researchers, such as Stephanie Tolan, postulate that the attribution of controversial disorders such as "ADHD" — which other authors have argued has not been proven to exist by any means other than subjective behavioral analysis— to gifted individuals arises from a misguided tendency to pathologize that which we don't understand. Tolan also discusses that identifying as attention deficient has become fashionable in young adults. Although the diagnosis of ADHD is controversial, it is considered legitimate by organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association. Diagnostic criteria for ADHD have been established by the World Health Organization (in the ICD-10) and the American Psychiatric Association (in the DSM- IV)

Talented students at the secondary level

What types of changes and support are needed to better enhance the development of talented adolescent students? Feldhusen (2003) addresses two major shifts in thinking needed to further the advancement of adolescents. Feldhusen proposes abandoning the program concept and the labeling of students as gifted. Programs are usually limited in time and are pull-outs that offer non-researched projects. The education of youth demands a wide diversity of experiences in accelerated courses plus extracurricular activities. Students may be served better when labeled talented instead of gifted. The term talent shows potential and suggests a developing ability.

Changes and support are embedded in Feldhusen's Purdue Pyramid Model of Talented Development which facilitates learners in developing a personal strong foundation based on talented learners accepting themselves as legitimate human beings to the ultimate potential of realizing their commitment to the full development of one's ability and talent. Parent support is also critical in the development throughout the teenage years. Feldhusen stresses the importance of parental support. Parents provide financial and emotional support, guidance and motivation, and are a sounding board.

Heritability of giftedness

Intelligence, which is a major component of giftedness, is influenced through a complex interaction of combinations of many genes and many different environmental contexts. Intelligence is a general cognitive ability that supports the fact that most reliable measures of cognitive abilities intercorrelate in some way. It is generally agreed that giftedness may have a genetic component.

Research on families has typically shown a correlation of about .45 in scores of g for parents, children, and siblings. Adoption and twin studies have also provided many valuable insights into the genetic component of intelligence. Studies of first degree relatives adopted apart show a correlation of .22, which is about half that of relatives who live together. Adopted children who are not related but reared together show a correlation of about .23 to genetically unrelated parents and siblings.

Material and method

Heritability from adoption data is 44% for families, 52% for fraternal twins in a shared environment, and 72% for identical twins reared apart. The existing data for identical twins reared apart has been collected from studies conducted in adulthood and because heritability studies show that adults have higher heritability results than children, this number may be inflated. The question of whether intelligence has a genetic component has been confirmed through numerous studies. More research is necessary to determine the exact processes by which genetic dispositions interact with the environment.

Some children are born with innately high levels of intelligence. These children are often labeled gifted or talented. Many researchers have investigated the early characteristics of gifted children. Hollingworth (1942) reported that 78 percent of the teachers agree that early detection of giftedness can be possible during early development. Children as young as preschool age tend to seek out highly stimulating environments. According to Raine, Reynolds, Venables, & Mednick (2002) increased stimulation seeking at age 3 years is associated with an increase in cognitive and scholastic test performance later in development. The advantages of identifying intellectual abilities of gifted children at an earlier age will allow educators to place them in the developmental classes that encourage and promote exploration in the domain of their giftedness.

Tannenbaum claims that the environment plays a major role in the nurturance of giftedness or higher intelligence. Giftedness and talent require a special environment just as special education would. The environment must be enriching and encouraging which will allow the child to mature through experience

and exploration. The environment must facilitate creative activity in a developmentally appropriate manner which would call for classrooms to be designed for developmental levels as opposed to age or grade levelling. This type of environment with differentiated learning could result from acceleration, lateral enrichment, and special grouping. Also, a developmentally appropriate environment for the gifted child will reduce behavior problems among preschoolers due to an increased engagement and internal motivation for learning. Furthermore, it is behavioral exploration of the environment that is indicative of the child's intellectual ability later in life. The child's innate motivation to engage in physical activity (hands-on learning) marks a curiosity which motivates task persistence. The increased physical exploration in a social play environment and goal-directed behavior in the stimulating environment facilitate superior cognitive functioning. In addition, gifted children will become high achievers when their interests are piqued by doing what they are innately motivated to do, empowering them to continue trying new skills. Furthermore, when gifted or talented children are supported by educational staff, their community, peers and families, they have higher possibilities to develop their cognitive abilities.

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