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Two Definitions of Giftedness

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (ESEA).

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (The Columbus Group, 1991).

Other Definitions

Misdiagnosis: Occurs when observed behaviors are deemed pathological (or diagnostic) even though they are better explained by giftedness or its associated characteristics.

Missed Diagnosis: Occurs when a diagnosis is actually present; problems are misattributed to “quirks” or giftedness rather than the disorder.

Twice-exceptional (2e) individuals evidence exceptional ability and disability, which results in a unique set of circumstances. Their exceptional ability may dominate, hiding their disability; their disability may dominate, hiding their exceptional ability; each may mask the other so that neither is recognized nor addressed. 2e students may perform below, at, or above grade level. They require specialized methods of identification, enriched educational opportunities, and simultaneous supports to ensure success and well-being.

Common Characteristics of Gifted Students

- Strong verbal abilities
- Rapid acquisition, retention, and access to information
- Enhanced attention
- Strong curiosity
- Complex and creative thinking skills
- Strong imagination and creativity
- Sensitivity and intensity of emotions

Overexcitabilities

- **Psychomotor**: Heightened excitability; Active and energetic; Love of movement for its own sake; Surplus of energy [Rapid speech; intense physical activity; need for action].
- **Sensual**: Heightened experience of sensual pleasure or displeasure [Seeing; smelling; tasting; touching; hearing]; Aesthetic pleasures [Appreciation of beautiful objects, words, music, etc.].
- **Intellectual**: Heightened need to seek understanding and truth, to gain knowledge, to analyze and to synthesize; Curiosity; Keen observation; Probing questions; Problem solving; Logic.
- **Imaginational**: Heightened play of the imagination; Rich association of images and impressions; Frequent use of image and metaphor; Detailed visualization; Capacity for living in a world of fantasy.
- **Emotional**: Heightened, intense positive and negative feelings; Extremes of emotion; Complex emotions; Identification with others' feelings; Strong affective expressions strong attachments.

Common Myths about Gifted Students

- All children are gifted.
- Gifted students don't need help; they'll do fine on their own.
- Most teachers receive training on gifted Issues
- Gifted students make everyone else in the class smarter by providing a role model or a challenge.
- That student can't be gifted; he has poor grades or he has a disability.
- Gifted students are happy, popular, and well-adjusted in school.
- Gifted education requires abundant resources.
- Our district has a gifted program; we offer AP and IB Classes.
- Gifted education programs are elitist.
- Acceleration placement options are socially harmful for gifted students

Strategies for Keeping Kids Motivated

- Assess possible reasons for the apparent lack of motivation.
- Start where the child is.
- Reward even the slightest movement in the right direction.
- Catch them doing "something right."
- Try to transfer motivations and tie tasks into the child's life and interests.
- Reinforce frequently enough to maintain the new behavior.
- Expect achievement and create challenge; consistent success leads to the quickest mastery, but continual success does not promote persistence.
- Focus on the process, not just the product.
- Use anticipatory praise.
- Help the child to learn to reward himself/herself.
- To motivate students, use quotations and stories of famous people who have failed.
- Emphasize that delaying gratification can produce great results.
- Provide advanced and complex material at a faster pace—raise expectations rather than lower them.
- Find mentors and other role models for students; use biographies if local resources are limited.

Mostly Do's (and a few Don'ts) about Gifted Children

- DO be aware of myths and your personal beliefs about gifted children.
- DO talk about "being gifted" and what it means to them.
- DO help them identify and accept their talents and strengths as well as their weaknesses.
- DO provide learning experiences by allowing natural consequences.
- DO listen to gifted children.
- DO challenge your students and provide encouragement for intellectual risk-taking.
- DO make "failure" acceptable in certain situations to help combat perfectionism.
- DO value uniqueness and communicate acceptance.
- DO model what you want.
- DON'T use a child's ability to point out shortcomings ("You're so smart, why can't you...?").
- DON'T expect a gifted child to be gifted in all subjects and make all A's all of the time.
- DON'T use sarcasm with young gifted children because they may not understand it as such.
- DON'T alienate parents or teachers of gifted children because we are all on the same side.

Tips for Addressing Perfectionism in Gifted Students

- Convey courage to try
- Encourage risk-taking
- Reward attempts & persistence
- Expect progress, not perfection
- Occasionally give students permission to be messy, late, or incomplete
- Encourage reflection on how past accomplishments made the student feel
- Discuss both strengths AND weaknesses when reviewing individual differences
- Use leveling to help a student judge the effort needed on assignments
- Acknowledge learning
- Help students set priorities
- Reflect on the value of mistakes
- Honor time invested not outcome

Thinking Errors and Automatic Negative Thoughts

The way we think can influence the way we feel and act. Errors in thinking or unrealistic thoughts, often called Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs), can lead to problems in the way we feel about and respond to events in our lives. Often with children, thinking errors can interfere with their emotional well-being and their interpersonal interactions. When children experience these “**B.L.U.E.**” **Thoughts**, it is important to find alternate ways of thinking that are more rational and realistic.

1. **Blaming others:** Attributing negative outcomes to others’ actions. This typically involves assigning malicious or unkind intent on the behalf of others.
2. **Looking for bad news:** Always finding the negative aspects of a situation, even if they don’t really exist. In looking for bad news, individuals ignore the positive aspects of a situation.
3. **Unhappy guessing:** When trying to determine why an event occurred, the individual gives more stock (or complete stock) to negative options. In interpersonal interactions, the individual makes negative assumptions about how others perceive him or her.
4. **Exaggerating:** Similar to all-or-none thinking, exaggerating involves thinking about events in extreme terms, making small issues large ones.

Explanatory Style

Explanatory Style describes the way one thinks about events and their causes. There are three crucial dimensions to explanatory style that a child uses to explain why good or bad events happen to him or her.

Permanence: When will this occur?

Always or never ←←←←←→→→→→ Sometimes or Recently

Pervasiveness: Where will this occur?

Global and General ←←←←←→→→→→ Local and Specific

Personalization: Whose fault is it anyway?

About Me? ←←←←←→→→→→ About Something Else?

A Path to Intervention

- **Develop a relationship with the student**
 - Support and encourage
 - Separate the child from the giftedness and/or disability
 - Understand and accept the student's giftedness
 - Explore the nature of the student's twice-exceptionality, if applicable
- **Communicate: Parents, teachers, student**
 - Work together to plan and intervene
 - Listen to concerns
 - Support parents and teachers; don't try to convince them
 - Take concerns seriously, but not personally
- **Know what it takes to succeed in a classroom or work environment**
 - Recognize the skills necessary for success
 - Explore whether these skills play to the student's strengths or weaknesses
- **Provide specific, concrete interventions and accommodations**
 - Start small with one idea
 - Focus on managing expectations and developing perseverance
 - Balance remediation of weaknesses with empowerment in areas of strength
- **Monitor and reinforce progress over perfection**
 - Reinforce small success as a stepping stone
 - Always remember the relationship with the student is the key

Case Study

John was referred for evaluation due to school problems. He is active and restless, frequently out of his seat, and often asking questions that only slightly relate to the topic at hand. He is an excellent reader, often preferring to read rather than to listen to teacher lecture or instructions. His grades are average, but everyone (parents and teachers alike) believes that there is "more" there.

John acquires information quickly and retains it. As a result, he receives excellent test grades, but only sometimes completes homework and in-class assignments, again preferring to read or to work on the designs of his special projects. These special projects are numerous and very important to John. He spends hours at home delving deeper into the ancient civilizations, mythology, and outer space—anything that will provide information to assist his projects' development.

In school, John's peers describe him as "different." He has an incredible vocabulary that others his age have difficulty comprehending. As a result, his age peers tease him. John prefers spending time with older children because they understand his language. However, John's small stature and young age make him a target for teasing among older kids as well.

John is not very interested in sports or other outdoor activities. He has always considered himself clumsy. This has also hindered his peer relationships because he is sometimes teased about his lack of coordination. John enjoys games, but not your average games. He likes complex games with numerous rules and he enjoys organizing people for these games. However, many do not understand or have the desire or patience to play with John, even if they are somewhat interested in the game. John may have a few friends, but he seemingly prefers independent activities such as his projects.