

# Supporting our Advanced and Unique Learners: “They’ll be okay...or will they?”

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Greater Dane Advanced Learner Network

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# What is an advanced learner?

Typically called “gifted,” “talented,” “highly intelligent” or a “significant outlier” in one or more of 5 domains:

- General Intellectual
- Specific Academic
- Leadership
- Creativity
- Visual and Performing Arts
- (Psychomotor)

# What does “gifted” mean?

- Just as the word “intelligence,” it is a “social construct”
- Perception of an individual, group or idea that is constructed through cultural or social practice
- Therefore, different cultures believe different things about giftedness and/or intelligence

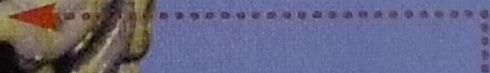
# What causes it?

- Depends on your culture
  - Western culture: 50% nature-50% nurture
  - Eastern culture: born with unlimited potential; achievement is 100% due to hard work
- Appears to be related to dendritic branching and complex neural networks in the brain, which facilitate faster, more complex processing





Since the first atom bomb was created using Albert's  $E = mc^2$  equation, many countries have built these powerful bombs. The Doomsday Clock is a worldwide symbol of atomic danger — the closer the hands are to midnight, the closer the world is to destruction by atom bombs.



Albert's brain weighed about the same as the average man's, but the portion that deals with visualizing and mathematical thinking was 15 percent wider.

- **Nature**: you are born with a fixed “amount” of intelligence due to genetics
- **Nurture**: Someone else wants to you have it and supports you with opportunity for it
- **Hard work**: either you want it for yourself or someone else provides serious support/pressure(?) for you to exert high degrees of effort (growth mindset)



# Some truths:

- Children do not make a conscious choice at birth to be “gifted” or not
- Gifted children may make a conscious choice sometime in their lifetimes not to “look” or “act” gifted
- Like many things in life, giftedness can be a double-edged sword

...[the widespread belief that] “gifted children take care of themselves...consigns a very large number of gifted children to fall by the wayside in despair and frustration... and schools too often fail to recognize or support high talents—and, worse, reject them into mediocrity.”

Martin Seligman, President, 2007  
American Psychological Association



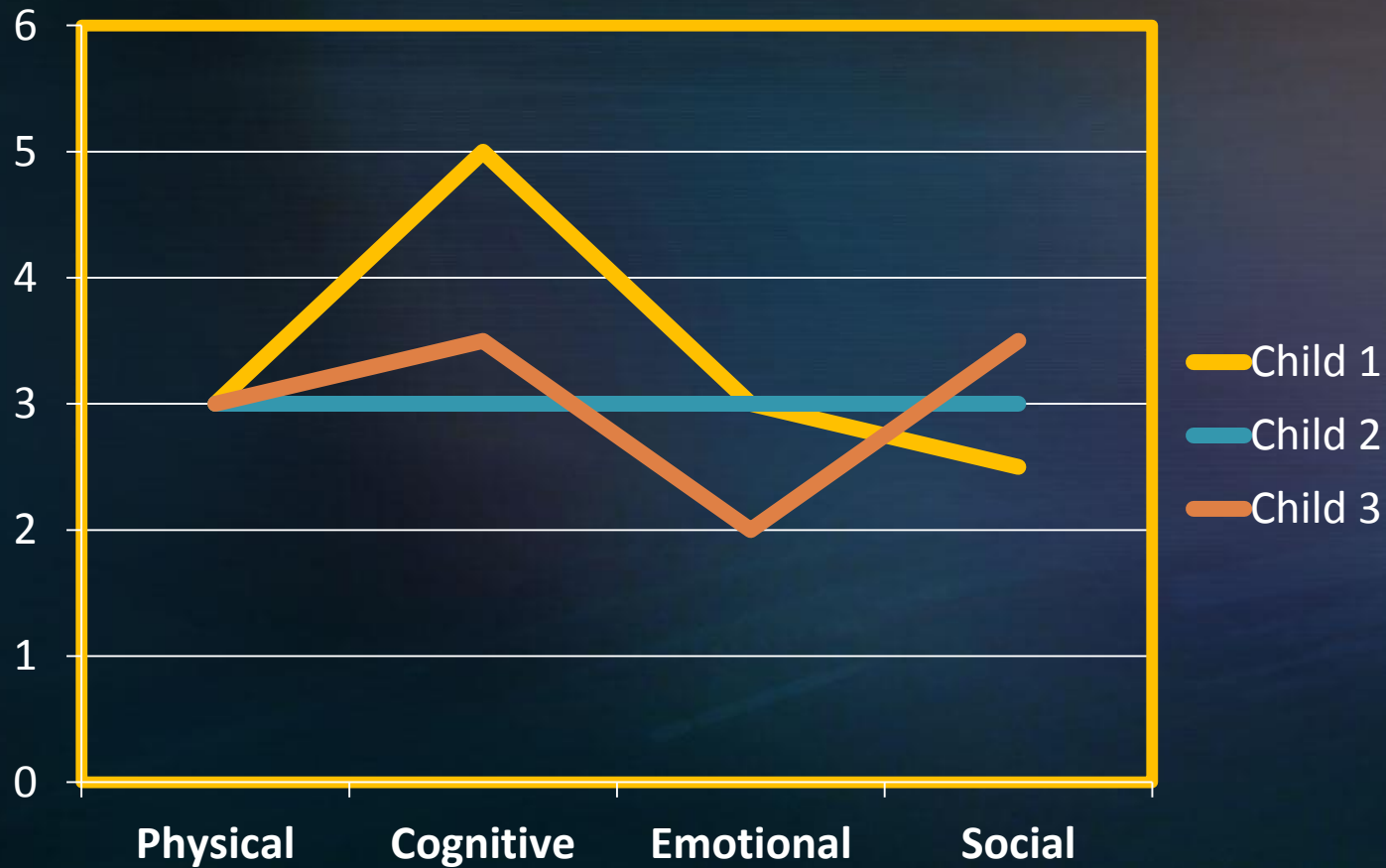
“Although gifted students possess exceptional capabilities, most cannot excel without opportunities, guidance, challenge and support. They need assistance academically, and they also need assistance emotionally—through understanding, acceptance, support, and encouragement. They need adults who understand their unique abilities, and they need advocates to help them develop those abilities.”

Kerr & Cohn, 2001

*Smart Boys*

# The primary stumbling block...

Asynchronous development



# Large knowledge base, good memory, early development of abstract thinking

- Do well on tests
- Learn quickly
- No need to reteach
- Most teachers like them, especially in primary and elementary grades
- Can be fun for adults to talk to them
- Remember what parent or teacher may forget or dismiss as not important
- Can easily derail a lesson with facts they want to share
- Other students may not know or care what these students are talking about or have no point of reference on which to build
- Can be perceived as a “know it all” or worse

# High level of language development and verbal ability

- Make their needs and wants known easily
- Do well on tests
- Understand adult communication easily
- Fun for adults to converse with
- Can be funny and playful with words
- Can be very manipulative
- Can challenge adults
- Other children may not understand them
- Others may ostracize them
- May use sarcasm and/or bully others



# Advanced comprehension

- Can easily infer
  - Can read and understand advanced materials
  - Can understand relationships and communication between others
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  - Can understand relationships and communication between others

# Unusual emotional depth & intensity

- Can understand deeply
- May empathize, connect with and support others
- Can appreciate beauty fully
- May be able to write and speak to persuade
- May be perceived by others to “not act his age” (i.e. be a “crybaby” or “sissy”)
- “May bear enormous loads of accumulated feelings, concerns about death, love, loneliness, deep caring for others, excruciating self-scrutiny”

Daniels & Meckstroth in  
*Living with Intensity*  
Daniels & Piechowski, 2009

# Tendency toward Perfectionism

- Student works hard to achieve
- Student checks work/ edits
- Student learns how to create excellent products/performances
- Student pays attention to detail, takes pride in product
- Homework/classwork can take inordinate time
- Writer's block, test anxiety
- Anxiety & depression
- Procrastination
- Paralyzing perfectionism
- Need to be perfect can spiral into debilitating problems
  - Addictions
  - Eating disorders
  - Self-harm

# Other general issues...

- Feeling different, being perceived as different
- Isolation
- Feelings of inadequacy, especially socially
- Idealism & concerns with morality & justice
- Lack of understanding from others
- Relentless evaluation of self/others
- Unrealistic expectations of self/others
- Hostility of others toward abilities of advanced learners



# The Microsystems Effect



# The Impact of Parenting Styles

- Authoritarian: obedience & proficiency, but children rank lower in happiness, social competence & self-esteem
- Authoritative: children who are happy, capable and successful (Maccoby, 1992)
- Permissive: children who rank low in happiness & self-regulation; more likely to experience problems with authority and school performance
- Uninvolved: rank lowest across all life domains, tend to lack self-control, have low self-esteem & less competence than peers

# The Stigma of Giftedness Paradigm

- Being labeled can be limiting
- The *not too* messages
  - Study hard, but *not too hard*
  - Pursue academic passions, but *not too much*
  - Being gifted should *not take too much* time
  - If one must spend *too much time studying*, he or she must not be gifted

# Issues for young children

- “Redshirting” at kindergarten age
- Lack of identification of students in poverty who could benefit from accelerated learning/opportunity to learn curricula
- Advanced learners “hiding” skills when they are not observed in other children
- Lack of preassessment to upper limits
- Misdiagnosis of ADD or ADHD

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XN7lOteagI>



# Issues for elementary-age children

- Curriculum/instruction lacking rigor; requires no effort to achieve
  - Boredom, Inattention
  - Misbehavior—desire for novelty or anger
  - “Turning off” to school (even in Kindergarten)
  - View of school as “prison”
  - Development of fixed mindset
- Lack of interaction with like-minded peers unless clustered or grouped for instruction

# Issues for adolescents

- Identity formation
  - Non-acceptance of distinguishing attributes
  - Confusion about expectations of self & others
    - Praise from parents/teachers
    - Admonition from peers
    - “Most likely to succeed” (Kiss of Death)
    - Influence of poverty and culture
  - Big Fish Little Pond Syndrome
  - Hitting the Wall: Mindset issues

# Issues for adolescents

- Tension between acceptance by peers and desire for academic excellence
  - Higher rates of introversion among gifted
  - Perception by others as arrogant, loner, unfriendly
  - Time spent in practice, homework reduces time available for socializing

# Issues for adolescents

- Career choice
  - May be steered toward prestigious, high paying jobs
  - Exposure to careers needs to start early
  - Early Foreclosure
  - May be difficulty when son & father have same talents
  - Multipotentiality



# Gender Issues

## Females

- Culture of Romance vs expectation of achievement
- Androgyny
- Marriage, motherhood, career
  - Expectations
  - Reality
- Attribute successes to effort and failures to lack of ability

## Males

- Boy Code vs Androgyny
- Pressure to enter high-paying careers
- Socialized to pursue the “Perfect 10”
- Attribute successes to ability and failures to lack of effort

# Issues for CLD adolescents

- Deficit thinking (belief they are not capable, culture is not acceptable)
- Developing a positive racial identity and self-concept
- Association of academic achievement with “acting White” and fear that achievement will isolate one from family and friends
- Need mentoring to participate in higher education opportunities & professional life

# Cutting/Self-mutilation

- Inherently about the alleviation of pain
- Broader category of self-injury: 32% rate among American college students (2001)
- Academy for Gifted 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders: 5-7% (2007)
- DSM-IV-TR: borderline personality disorder, trauma, abuse, eating disorder, low self-esteem, perfectionism
- “Clear that gifted students are engaging in some, if not all, of these behaviors”

Cross in *On the Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Children*, 2011

# Addictions

- Many start as way to self-medicate
- Substance abuse
  - Alcohol, tobacco, street drugs
  - Energy drinks
  - Prescription medications
- Technology
- Gambling
- Sex



# Bullying

I contend that contemporary gifted students experience taunting, bullying, and generalized, threatening behavior in different ways than in the past.

T Cross in *On the Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Children*, 2011

# Rage

“I could never kill anyone or condone anyone who did kill anyone. But that I could, on some level, understand these kids in Colorado, the killers. Because day after day, slight after slight, exclusion after exclusion, you can learn how to hate, and that hatred grows and takes you over sometimes, especially when you come to see that you're hated only because you're smart and different...”

<http://slashdot.org/story/99/04/25/1438249/voices-from-the-hellmouth>

# Underachievement

- Influence of persons & personalities in microsystems
- High potential overlooked
- Poverty—lack of opportunities for enrichment
- Responsibilities to family (parentified child)
- Performance mindset
- Perfectionism
- Anti-intellectualism in US
- Anxiety and /or depression

# Depression & Suicide

- Disagreement regarding incidence
- Risk factors:
  - Anxiety & depression
  - Substance abuse
  - Family loss or disruption
  - Being friend or family member of suicide victim
  - Homosexuality
  - Media emphasis on suicide
  - Impulsiveness & aggressiveness
- If you suspect suicidal ideation, do something!



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Kerr & Cohn, 2001

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“They’ll be okay...  
or will they?”

*“Only with your help!”*

# An excellent resource to share...

- Misdiagnosing Gifted Children and Adults - YouTube
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt9KI1g4nsENov> Nov 24, 2013 ... The Psychology In Seattle Podcast - Hosted by Kirk Honda - 12-04-13 - Episode: Kirk interviews Lisa Erickson ...