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*Original Paper*

## The Challenge of Meeting the Intellectual and Social Needs of the Gifted

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### Abstract

The intellectual needs of the gifted are occasionally met in the regular education classroom. However, there are a wide variety of intellectual realms and domains that need to be addressed- that are not often focused on in the regular education classroom. This paper delves into this issue with some minor recommendations for teachers and parents.

### Introduction

The gifted child sits in the back of the classroom and is bored. He or she has heard about the American Revolution, they have read about the American Revolution, they know the main people in the American Revolution, they understand the causes of the American Revolution and they know who won the American Revolution. So they are reading Harry Potter- which is hidden behind their American Revolution textbook.

The teacher believes that they are doing “enrichment“ because he or she calls on the gifted child to respond to some “higher order question” such as “Can you compare and contrast the American and French Revolutions”. The child answers and the teacher believe that he or she has delivered enrichment, and they pat themselves on the back and move on to the other students- some with attention deficit disorder, some with a learning disability, some with depression and emotional disturbance and one student who is waiting to be tested and evaluated for special education.

Back in 2010, Waggoner and Shaughnessy posed the question in an article “How Rich is your Enrichment Program” There are many states and districts that practice “enrichment” but the quality and quantity of those programs is suspect. Enrichment is often seen, as an alternative to acceleration or grade skipping.

Let us take a look at some of the intellectual realms that gifted students need to explore!

1) Higher Order thinking skills- evaluation, synthesis, integration, compare and contrast- all of the various realms of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational Objectives. Gifted students like to be challenged, they like to discuss, debate, explore all sides of an issue and whether or not the teacher has the time for in depth robust discussions is another matter with the demands placed on teachers nowadays.

2) Critical Thinking Skills- This goes along with the above but from a different angle- students may be asked to criticize their own thinking and to take criticism from the teacher- and this is not really easy for some students that are emotionally sensitive or who are always right- so to speak when teachers ask lower level knowledge questions. Students should be asked to evaluate all aspects of an article, look at short term and long term ramifications and repercussions of every issue and look at the credentials of the writer (students and teachers can check me out on the Internet to see that I am legitimate)

3) Scientific Reasoning- Some student LOVE science fairs, science projects, experiments and when science fair rolls around they are estatic! They will criticize the hypothesis, look at the subjects- then look at the data- if any-and form some conclusions. They may mock and ridicule the work of others and this is where teacher intervention is imperative. Teachers have to help the student understand that some of their peers have time limitations and other priorities. Now, not all teachers are inclined towards

science- but science is increasingly becoming part of our post COVID world. Students are now aware of germs, bacteria, viruses, and vaccines and want to learn more about biology, microbiology, chemistry and the like.

4) Agriculture - In some parts of the United States, gifted students are children of farmers- they want to learn about breeding, they want to learn about crops and crop rotations, They are eager to be sensitive to livestock, ag marketing and management, commodities composted cattle manure and perhaps spraying. Teachers may have little to no knowledge of this realm and be perplexed by student questions. Surely the teacher will refer them to the Internet- but often that results in exasperation and frustration.

5) Spiritual - Some students do attend a church, a mosque, a place of worship every Sunday or Saturday or day of worship. And these students have questions- about good and evil, life after death and the list goes on and on. Teachers naturally are not inclined to delve into this realm as there is supposed to be separation of church and state. But after school closes at 3:00 p.m. teachers may want to simply listen and understand the concerns and questions that some students have and do so in a respectful manner.

6) Mathematical Interests - Some gifted students are “mathematically precocious” and are accelerated perhaps to a higher level of math in their school or they could conceivably be taking online classes thru the Internet online. Now, here is the dilemma- the instructor on the other side of the screen may not really be trained to work with mathematically precocious and may not have the skills to support and encourage the student and may be baffled by the questions posed in the Discussion Board. Further, the student may not have the same mathematical interests as other advanced math students.

7) Mentoring. Paul Torrance (1984) as well as others have written on the importance of mentoring. His book “Mentor Relationships: How they aid creative achievement, endure, change and die” still remains a classic. There are informal mentor relationships and formal mentor relationships and male to male as well as female to female relationships and there are intricacies to each one of these. There is an excellent book edited by Shaughnessy (2013) regarding the current status of mentoring and mentor relations and mentor programs around the world.

8) Technology - With the advent of the Internet and lap tops and search engines, gifted students may be interested in learning via this modality and it is also important for them to be exposed to these venues. Some students are already familiar and learn rapidly, others have a different learning curve. But we must prepare students for the future as well as help them learn about the past.

9) Philosophical Reasoning - Teachers will often find that gifted students look at the big pictures of the world and life. They may want to examine the meaning of life and what occurs after death and what makes for a good life. Typically, high school curriculums do not offer a course in philosophy- but teachers can refer students to appropriate acceptable authors and books.

### **There is Heterogeneity among Gifted**

1) Teachers need to be aware that there are intellectual differences and teachers need to be sensitive to intellectual test scores. For example, the WISC-5 (Wechsler, 2014) has five domains reflecting different types of intelligence and different strengths. Those realms are Fluid Reasoning, Working Memory, Processing Speed, Visual Spatial and Verbal Comprehension.

A good hour with a competent diagnostician or school psychologist will help the average teacher with understanding and comprehending the complexities of the gifted student. Students may have very high scores in certain areas and relative weaknesses in others

2) On the other hand, the student may be musically inclined and be part of the local band or symphony or be taking piano or guitar or flute lessons. Their lives may be consumed with their next performance and next rehearsal and they could care less about the American Revolution. For more on this, see Shaughnessy (2023) as the musically talented present their own set of challenges.

3) Creative- Some student seem distracted, teachers believe the student may be ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) (and at this point in time- 2023- I am not sure this author has to explain what ADD means

and the challenges those students have in the classroom. But, I digress. The student may be involved with writing a short story or poem or the next chapter of the Harry Potter saga. Or they may be scientifically creative and looking forward to the next science fair.

4) There is a vast heterogeneity of interests among the gifted students- some are rock collectors and will be later taking geology in college. Some are interested in butterflies and living things- later becoming veterinarians and yet others are interested in bacteria and viruses-understandable in this age of post COVID. And upon reading the papers lately it seems variants of COVID 19 are still with us.

5) Different learning styles abound with gifted children. Some are happy with the traditional lecture formal- others prefer independent study in the school library or online

Some are sequential learners and others more simultaneous learners or processors. Some are concrete and others more abstract. Teachers may have to do a quick Internet search on the different “learning preferences” or different learning styles.

6) Personality- All too often neglected, teachers need to be sensitive to the personality of gifted children which is quite different than the average or “normal” child. Some may be quite outspoken (as they are perhaps looking to flex their intellectual muscles. Yes, gifted children are different and some have what Paula calls “rain forest” minds. Her book provides excellent insights to parents and teachers about those gifted kids- or even those kids who have missed the 130 IQ cut off for giftedness. We have all heard the words---perfectionists, procrastinators, overly sensitive, book lovers, geeks persnickety (I like this word) and empathic. Teachers also have gifted kids that are too emotional, too dramatic and sometimes quite insightful. These kids may be readers or overly preoccupied with mollusks (like Piaget was as a child) or concerned with undersea life like Cousteau. Prober has an excellent resource at [www.RainforestMind.com](http://www.RainforestMind.com).

7) Birth Order - An often neglected factor in giftedness is the idea of birth order. Very simply first-born children- (gasp!) are different! The birth order factor has been written about for ages, yet its application to gifted education has been minimal. But, second born children are different than third born and they are different than only children. Motivation varies. This is so important that it must be repeated- motivation varies. And, in this post Covid environment, mental health needs are becoming increasingly part of our daily educational and motivational discussions.

8) Some sensitive areas are out there that need to be mentioned in passing. There are gifted children who have been adopted. One must search the literature to find out if anything has been written about gifted children who have been adopted. Some are quite happy and some are in a constant state of apprehension and worry about their biological parents and their biological siblings- and if there are any. Much of this is not verbalized to the teacher and for many adopted children, these issues remain with them to adulthood.

9) Emotional and Affective Issues- There are some children who feel and experience life and what life offers more deeply. They grieve more deeply and some may feel these students to be too “dramatic”. They may become angry at what they see as unfairness of injustice. Often these children need support or simply a listening ear.

Effectively understanding the influence of gifted learning and people with exceptional abilities has been documented in history, and for the past century, scholars have sought to define, understand, and explain giftedness through theories and empirical investigations built on earlier work regarding learning development that meets the academic and social emotional needs of the gifted learner (Lind et al., 2021).

Discerning and addressing the social and emotional needs of the gifted learner through the lens of DREAM is:

Defining what the social and emotional needs as a gifted learner are;

Recognizing that these students have specific and broad needs that help them to be more efficient and productive in the learning and social environment;

Enriching those needs and skills for improved productivity, efficiency, and overall well-being

essential to the healthy learner;

Assessing a clear plan for both short-term and long-term goals while being able to

Measure the progress of the learner.

Social emotional learning has been investigated, however may need to be synthesized in a way that allows for a better understanding of the influence of social emotional support in the gifted environment with the promulgation for supplemental enrichment with social emotional support to meet the gifted students specialized needs.

Many gifted students feel misunderstood by peers and general education teachers. Advanced social and emotional support may be assessed for gifted students on the fringes of the schoolwide gifted community (especially those that are twice-exceptional) who are otherwise overlooked unintentionally by administrative and general education system. This is because social and emotional support is not easily measured by those lacking the appreciation for the needs of the gifted student in a complex milieu of data-driven infrastructures.

Susan Daniels and Michael Pete Piechowski, in their book “Living with Intensity” (2009), suggest that because of their complex processes, gifted children are often misunderstood, or they are not understood at all.

Gifted children experience pressure, anxiety, and stress from two disparate sources: their environment and themselves. Both educators and students need to feel valued and safe with self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills. Social emotional learning refers to explicit instruction and learning approaches that help students acquire skills and attitudes in five competency domains to include self-awareness, self-management relationships skills, social awareness and responsible decision-making noted for short- long-term academic success, and positive social and behavioral adjustment.

Betts and Kercher (1999) in his narrative regarding individual development dimensions, strongly suggests that gifted learners need cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills, concepts, and attitudes to develop into lifelong and autonomous learners. Betts (2004) echoed these same sentiments. Pulitzer Prize recipient Matt Richtel in his book *Inspired, Understanding Creativity* (2022) has noted that “Creativity is disruptive.”

Creativity, and by default critical reasoning means, changing how we relate to the world and go through our day-to-day lives and means changing how we relate to the people around us. Hayashi et al. (2022) note that social emotional development is often defined as the first step in connecting with the gifted learner and not just for academic information, but really looking at those social emotional aspects within an inclusion classroom.

This is essentially where gifted students are handling those interactions with non-gifted peer and really working through, not just lessons in the academic classroom, but encountering ways to deal with big emotions and big feelings over things, and also helping to connect with what is going on in the general education classroom.

Renati et al. (2022) noted in a recent study that the characteristics which help define the gifted child often include high levels of sensitivity with a heightened sense of morality and integrity that is intertwined in the social emotional framework of addressing the needs of gifted students, making them more vulnerable to stressors and anxieties.

Gifted children have intense emotional reactions to events and situations that frustrate them. Teachers of the gifted and general educators must continually advocate for gifted kids, and make sure that their social emotional needs are being met. In a recent study, numerous gifted kids have said that “they want the challenge of advanced and rigorous curriculum” and yet still need both social and emotional support to face those challenges. The authors recommend school wide social-emotional support to address the needs of gifted students by recognizing the holistic social and emotional needs that allow the gifted learner to make healthy student connections. Measured strategies connect the unique needs of each individual learner to meet their social needs outside of just being in the gifted classroom. Teachers

of the gifted design and implement programming for the gifted learner which requires planning for essential elements including strength-based instructional approaches that teachers use to enrich, engage, and connect to learners based on the acquired knowledge of each students' interests, passions, and academic strengths.

As our world expands in the support of critical thinking, as creative and reasoning beings, it is essential to embrace and catapult the social and emotional needs of the gifted learner to new horizons and broadened explorations in this complex world of globalization and ubiquitous social networks. Understanding and addressing the social emotional needs of the gifted student while helping learners understand themselves is essential.

A teacher of the gifted noted, "Gifted students often have deep emotions, and they have very complex thoughts that they can't explain. I feel like I'm their voice of reason when I talk to the general education teachers where they may not understand the student who is young and is acting out." (In Bryant, 2023)

Learning preferences play a major role in development, validation, and addressing the social emotional support needed by gifted students which are various and complex. Advocating for student's social emotional needs helps them find their voice to ask for their needs to be met so that they feel empowered. Gifted students often feel involved and concerned about perceived injustices and social problems that do not typically affect elementary level learners, such as poverty, war, and violence.

The majority of students in our classrooms need social emotional support to help them understand how their reactions with others affect connections that they make to other peers. Gifted students often require this social emotional support from the school wide community and family to be well-adjusted socially and emotionally. Gifted and high-ability talented students often need a myriad of advocacy and social emotional support, and it is vital to note that there is a range of recognition necessary in addressing these needs. Advocacy starts with the family and letting them know the teacher of the gifted student is there to assist in all aspects of the learning community. The teacher of the gifted works collaboratively with the general education teachers and parents to empower gifted students to be independent and autonomous. Often teachers and parents of gifted learners are preoccupied with the differences and intensity of their student or learner respectively and must dig into the core of the child for needs to be heard, and addressed.

Awareness for the support of social emotional needs that the gifted student requires is necessary for their development. It is essential to understand how the brain works differently for the gifted student to be able to productively engage in society.

Social emotional support does not just apply at school, but at home ensuring that the gifted learner is challenged, and has felt the opportunity to be a part of the vast world around them. Recognizing, enriching, and thoughtfully measuring the defined social emotional needs of gifted pupils should be at the forefront of our framework of advancing and assessing the social and emotional needs of the gifted student.

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