

Understanding the Rainforest Mind The Social-Emotional Needs of Gifted Children



Paula Prober, M.S., M.Ed.
www.rainforestmind.com
541.683.7167

Rainforestmindedness

- Intense
- Colorful
- Sensitive
- Fragile
- Multi-layered
- Overwhelming
- Complex
- Creative
- Misunderstood



“One of the greatest gifts a counselor [parent, teacher] can give gifted young people is an appreciation of their sensitivities, intensities, and passions. Feeling everything more deeply than others do is both painful and frightening...there is often a secret fear, *‘There must be something wrong with me...maybe I’m crazy, nobody else seems bothered by this but me.’*”

Linda Silverman

Equity and Elitism Issues

- All children have gifts and are gifts. Not all youngsters are gifted if that means advanced developmentally, wiser than their years, more complex mentally/ emotionally/ spiritually.
- Gifted children are not better humans, they’re just different from the norm in certain ways.
- Gifted children come from all cultural, ethnic and socio-economic groups. Educators need to be aware of their biases so they don’t overlook certain children.
- Gifted children will not automatically succeed in life. They need special services in school and understanding at home.

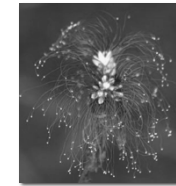
“One of the marks of true genius is a quality of abundance. A rich, rollicking abundance, enough to give indigestion to ordinary people.” C. D. Bower

What’s going on in the head, heart, mind and spirit of the gifted child?



Social/Emotional Issues

- Perfectionism, procrastination, fear of failure, high expectations/standards, pressure to achieve
- Existential depression
- Empathy, guilt/responsibility for saving the world
- Sensitivity, intensity, worry
- Not fitting in, loneliness, few friends
- Multipotentiality
- Inappropriate curriculum; inadequate challenge in school



“I make all these mistakes that no one seems to notice. They tell me I’m the best trumpet player they’ve heard in years but I know how much better I could sound. What I play is crap and they don’t hear it.”

Intrinsic Perfectionism

Harmony
Beauty
Balance
Justice
Precision



“I didn’t see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me...It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.”
Steve Jobs

Perfectionism--intrinsic

- Understand and appreciate the need for “perfection”
- Maintain high standards but don’t impose them on others
- Hold onto your ideals and your ability to reach them
- Prioritize assignments so some skim the surface and some go in depth
- Find mentors who will give you more detailed and complex feedback
- Find other gifted people who share your drive for perfection

“I feel enormous anxiety when someone asks me to do something I’ve never done before and don’t know if I can do well, fast and the best...I’m afraid that I’m not as smart as everyone says. I know what I write won’t be good enough so I don’t even start.”



Perfectionism--extrinsic

- Don't over-react to achievement
- Less praise, more encouragement
- Emphasize process, not product
- Excellence, not perfection
- Specific feedback
- Break projects down into smaller steps
- Model permission to make mistakes; see benefits of failure
- Flexible deadlines; fewer assignments
- Provide more challenging work; teach study skills
- Talk with your inner critic/ procrastinator

Reasons for Procrastination

- Fear of failure/Lack of confidence: If I did it at the last minute and it wasn't good, it's because I didn't have time
- Overwhelmed by pressure to be smart/ expectations; fear of disappointing others
- Overwhelmed by the need to thoroughly research out of curiosity and the mind's ability to think of many possibilities
- Doesn't know how to take one step at a time or to prioritize what's important
- Can get an 'A' anyway
- Used to getting answers fast and never learned how to study something difficult; if it's difficult, that means I'm not smart
- Becomes a pattern over time

Help for Procrastination & Underachieving

- See ideas for perfectionism
- Find challenging, interesting curriculum/ projects where students have to work hard, think, problem solve, be creative and struggle; REPLACE the regular assignments with these
- Group TAG kids together for some classes/ activities (cluster group with certain teachers)
- Read biographies of bright people who had to struggle to find success (see Halsted's book for resources)
- Encourage the study of a musical instrument, tai chi or something that takes time to master
- Consider acceleration, cyber-options, early college entrance

"I need to help people. I can't stand to see people suffer...I can feel their suffering in my heart...I worry a lot. What can I do to make a difference? What's the meaning of my life?"



Existential depression--
Saving the world/ Empathy

- Listen, reflect feelings, you don't have to fix it
- Read, write, draw--encourage expression of feelings
- Help child take some action
- What can you control? What can you not control?
- Encourage time in nature
- Encourage exploration of spiritual beliefs

"I used to be very emotional. I cried a lot...was also very sensitive to noise, textures and smells. I didn't like birthday parties because they were so chaotic."



Sensitivity/ Intensity

- Appreciate sensitivities as strengths, not neuroses
- Adjust environment
- Breathe deeply, yoga, meditation
- Read Aron's *The Highly Sensitive Person*
- Set limits, boundaries, say 'no,' leave early
- Take care of yourself
- Know that you're not crazy
- Use the fire hose/ garden hose signal



"I just want someone to care, to think with me, to ask questions. I feel like such a freak...I just want to be normal. I just want to have friends. I'm so lonely."

Loneliness--Relationships

- Bibliotherapy: *Some of my Best Friends are Books*, J. Halsted
- Cluster group in classroom; counseling/ interest groups
- Look everywhere, various ages
- Find mentors
- Help with basic social skills in groups with other TAG kids
- Introverts need alone time
- Do what you love and look for friends there
- Build a spiritual practice-- Spend time in nature
- Tango

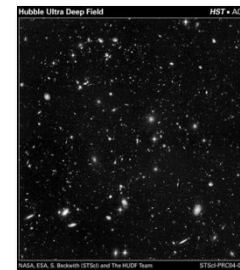
“They say I can do anything I want, like that’s a great thing. But all I feel is pressure and anxiety. How do I choose just one thing?”



Multipotentiality

- You don’t have to have just one career
- Try many things, experiment, be ok with curiosity
- Know your values, needs, priorities; craft your careers
- Prioritize decisions and projects
- Look for meaning; Consider self-employment
- Grieve over choices you didn’t make
- Resource: *Cool Colleges* by Donald Asher

“I was supposed to sit still and fill in the blanks when what I wanted to know was the size of the universe.”



Schooling

- Be a persistent active positive advocate.
- Visit the classroom and help out. Talk about what you appreciate.
- Meet with the teacher and describe your child's abilities and love of learning.
- Get to know the more sensitive, creative and flexible teachers and ask for them.
- Consider home schooling, cyber options, acceleration and early graduation.
- Your child deserves an appropriate education.

Recommendations for Teachers

- Use Gardner's multiple intelligences model so that children accept that everyone has strengths and weaknesses and are receptive to the idea that different children will have different assignments based on their learning needs.
- Assume that your gifted students aren't lazy even if they're not doing the work. Talk to them individually and listen closely to what they say. Then let them help you work out a plan that both of you can live with.

Recommendations for Teachers

- Have flexible deadlines, open-ended assignments, projects, interdisciplinary activities and less rote learning and memorization. Differentiate curriculum.
- Be enthusiastic about your subject(s) and share that passion with your students.

Recommendations for Teachers

- Know that you don't have to have all the answers to their questions. Just love the questions and love the kids and guide them to places where they can find their own answers.
- Appreciate their curiosity! Remember that you can make a big difference in these children's lives just by believing in them, challenging their curious minds, and opening your heart.

Resources

- Halsted: *Some of my Best Friends are Books*
- Delisle/Galbraith: *When Gifted Kids Don't Have all the Answers*
- Neihart/et al: *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children*
- Kerr: *Smart Boys*
- Reznick: *The Power of your Child's Imagination*
- Burka, Yuen: *Procrastination*

Resources

- Kurcinka: *Raising your Spirited Child*
- Daniels/Piechowski: *Living with Intensity*
- Fonseca: *Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students*
- Sher: *Refuse to Choose*
- www.sengifted.org
- Rivero: *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens: Living with Intense and Creative Adolescents*

Resources for Nourishing your Soul

- *Jump Time*-- Jean Houston
- *Soulcraft*-- Bill Plotkin
- *Conscious Dreaming*-- Robert Moss
- *Fire in the Soul*-- Joan Borysenko
- *Traveling Mercies*-- Anne Lamott
- *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*-- John Welwood
- *Daily Afflictions*-- Andrew Boyd
- TED.com
- *The World is as you Dream it*-- John Perkins

Loving the Odd Child

© 2006 Anne Allanketner
from *Spells of Mending*

The everyday child needs socks and sandwiches
Her hair combed, yes.
And time to play, people to love.
The everyday child needs constant care
From you so keep her warm and kindly
sheltered, nourished, held.

But it's caring for the odd one, which makes us
whole again, after long confusions, blundering
and wishing she was normal.

Love that little odd child, and you will flower
 in unexpected ways, veering off the path
 that others gave you, to carve new and tender
 territory in the mysterious, dark wood.

Give that little odd child what she needs
 A softer lamp light, all day at the zoo
 Art supplies for breakfast, an early
 Exit from the loud party.

Maybe she wants things you think are strange
 But just believe in her, let her hold those
 Tiny tree frogs, let her climb down off your lap
 To gather strange objects, her weird collections.

Her need for books, her fear of people
 crushing plants, her awkward dislike of
 your friends, her terribly low
 pain threshold.

Gather each of these up in time, and kiss them.
 Then put them down in front of her, loved.
 This is the new path, taking you away
 From normal and towards your SELF.

Towards the life you deeply long for
 Towards the odd work, the odd lover, the odd house.

You were afraid that if you gave into her,
 There would be no end to it
 And that is true
 For the odd child is a wild and tempting
 Shamanis, who given an inch with rise up
 Dancing and gather you in her arms and sing
 Her throaty off key melodies as she
 Winds her way through the wood and steps

Into her odd place in the bright and peopled world.
 There she will shift the balance in some small
 and significant way that only she can understand
 having changed you so completely into yourself
 she is unafraid to reinvent the world.

Understanding the Rainforest Mind
 The Social-Emotional Needs of Gifted Children



Paula Prober, M.S., M.Ed.
www.rainforestmind.com
 541.683.7167