

COMMUNICATOR

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE GIFTED

VOLUME 31, NO. 4, FALL 2000

ISSUE HIGHLIGHT

HIGHLY AND PROFOUNDLY GIFTED CHILDREN

The number of highly and profoundly gifted children in the nation is very small in comparison to other populations within our educational system. However, their needs are very distinct as are the services required to meet these needs. Among the many questions we explore in this issue are:

Who are the highly and profoundly gifted?

How do we recognize and identify them?

How important is radical acceleration?

Is homeschooling a desirable option?

Should these children enter college early?

What are their social and emotional needs?

What resources can parents and educators use?

What is available on the Internet?

UPCOMING ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Spring - Examining Issues in Gifted Education

Summer - Professional Development

Fall - Social Science

Winter - Special Needs of Minority and English Learner Students

Defining the Few

What Educators and Parents Need to Know About Exceptionally and Profoundly Gifted Children

BY ANNETTE REVEL SHEELY AND LINDA KREGER SILVERMAN

"Can I raise him properly?"

"This is going to cost a lot of money."

"Is she smarter than we are?"

Guilt.

Shock.

Denial.

New respect for the child.

These are real reactions from parents after learning that their child is exceptionally gifted (Edwards, 1987).

Who are the exceptionally and profoundly gifted?

People who are exceptionally gifted are as different from moderately gifted individuals as the moderately gifted differ from the average. Traditionally, each standard deviation (SD) from the norm represents a different group to be served. While in the past, there was no consistency in delineating the highly gifted ranges, a new nomenclature is developing that takes into account the burgeoning number of children found who score in the upper regions. Until recently, "profoundly gifted" was a term used to denote scores of 160 or above. However, it is now being reserved for individuals who score above 174, at the 5th SD above the norm.

115-129 mildly gifted

130-144 moderately gifted

145-159 highly gifted

160-174 exceptionally gifted

175+ profoundly gifted

Theoretically, according to the normal curve of probability, there should only be one person with an IQ of 160 in a group of 10,000 people and only one in a million with an IQ of 180. However we are finding many more children in the last two decades than would have been anticipated if intelligence followed the normal curve.

What do we know empirically about these children? In a study of 241 exceptionally and profoundly gifted children, with IQs ranging from 160 to 237+, Karen Rogers and Linda Silverman (1997) found the following patterns:

See DEFINING THE FEW, 36

DEFINING THE FEW

Continued from 1

- Boys and girls in the group had the same mean IQ.
- Over 99% of parents reported that their children learned rapidly, had extensive vocabularies, excellent memories, and reasoned well.
- 97.9% of parents reported that their children were curious.
- 96.1% of parents stated that their children were mature for their ages at times.
- 95.9% of parents said that their children had excellent senses of humor.
- 94% of these children were described as having a long attention span and being alert as infants or toddlers.
- 90% of parents described their children as "sensitive."
- 79% of parents stated that their children had high energy or activity levels.

From our clinical experience, we know that in families of exceptionally gifted children we find deep and complex people. They tend to have heightened capacities for experiencing not only extreme highs and lows of life, but also extraordinary awareness of details and subtleties. For people in this range, life tends to be rich with sensations and awareness. At times it can be too much. Often described as "highly sensitive," many exceptionally gifted children experience physical sensations to a much greater degree than other children. Forty-four percent of the children in Rogers and Silverman's (1997) study had a heightened sensitivity to clothing tags and other tactile sensations. Many parents of exceptionally gifted children report having to find socks without seams. Their children are so conscious of feeling the seam with their toes that they can't concentrate in school. While not all exceptionally gifted children experience tactile sensitivity, many do have problems with light, sound, or smells.

Children in this range may not understand what it is that makes them

different from other children their age but they know they are different. Other children are often intimidated by their mature vocabulary. Other children don't laugh at their sophisticated jokes. Other children don't share their interest in advanced and complex pursuits. Rogers and Silverman (1997) found that exceptionally gifted children had significantly lower social self-concept compared to their confidence in their academic ability. It can be very difficult for these children to find true peers. They tend to be more comfortable with children who are much older than they or with adults.

Academically, exceptionally gifted children react to school in a variety of ways. Some thrive when radically accelerated. One 9-year old child we know spends part of his day at an elementary school and part of his day taking Advanced Placement courses in a high school. He is very happy with this arrangement. A large percentage need to be homeschooled because few public school systems are able to meet the needs of these unusual children. Fortunately, there are more resources now for homeschooling exceptionally gifted children than ever before, especially with the increase in distance learning on the Internet. Young children can now take high school and college level courses online.

Many exceptionally gifted students do well in private gifted schools, especially schools that are willing to create an Individual Education Plan for the student. And there are those children whom no one would suspect are exceptionally gifted. They have found such a bad fit in school that they get poor grades and become behavior problems. We know of one exceptionally gifted high school student who nearly dropped out of high school, even though his ACT score was the highest his school had ever seen. Elizabeth Meckstroth (1995) stated that, "These students may find little meaning in classroom activities and resist waiting for classmates to catch up...Sometimes they may counter unstimulating environments

by disruptive acting out, passive withdrawal or psychosomatic stomachaches, headaches, etc."

Why is it important to identify exceptionally and profoundly gifted children?

Educators who work with children of subnormal intelligence find that knowing a child's IQ range helps with placement decisions. Children who are mildly developmentally delayed (IQs between 50 and 75) are able to be educated with special modifications. Children with IQs between 25 and 50 can be trained in specific tasks (Maloney and Ward, 1979). And children with IQs below 25 will typically need custodial care. Differences within the extremes exist at both ends of the IQ continuum.

At the other end of the bell curve, mildly, moderately, highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted children also have special identifiable needs and differences. The higher the IQ, the greater the need for differentiated services. Children who are mildly gifted may be able to do well in a regular school, taking honors classes and enrichment courses. Moderately gifted children may do well with a one-year grade acceleration. But children who are exceptionally gifted will likely have a difficult time in school and will need special support to maintain their academic motivation (Gilman and Revel, 1999). These students may also need preventative counseling to help them cope with being so different from their age peers. They will certainly need academic guidance to know what options, such as early college entrance, are available to them.

In addition, when a child is found in the exceptionally gifted range, a variety of unique opportunities become available. For example, one nonprofit charity, the National Gifted Children's Fund, provides financial support for specific educational needs. Another institute, the Davidson Foundation, provides its Young Scholars with comprehensive, ongoing support in academic, social, and emotional areas. Such organizations are

blessings to families struggling with meeting the extraordinary needs of these children.

Difficulties in identifying exceptionally and profoundly gifted children

Imagine that your child's school is going to measure her height and to do so, the school will use a yardstick that is nailed to a wall in the nurse's office. Children shorter than one yard are accurately measured. But if your child is taller than 36 inches and the school has no other way to measure your child above and beyond the yardstick, the school may only be able to tell you that she is 36 inches tall or perhaps they will say she is "at least 36 inches."

This example may seem absurd, but IQ tests follow this procrustean policy. They are not designed to capture the full range of abilities among the most intellectually advanced children. Wechsler tests, such as the WPPSI-R and the WISC-III only go up to a score of 160 (Wechsler, 1989; 1991). And the Stanford-Binet, Fourth Edition only goes up to 164 (Thorndike, Hagen, & Sattler, 1986). Even those who design these tests admit that they are not intended for use with children at the highest levels of intelligence. Elizabeth Hagen, one of the authors of the Stanford-Binet, Fourth Edition, said that "the upper one percent of individuals is not usually well differentiated by our present tests" (Silverman, 1986, p.171).

Assessment of the exceptionally and profoundly gifted

So how are exceptionally and profoundly gifted children identified? The current practice for those who work with the gifted is to start with a recently normed test. If the child scores at the 99th percentile or greater on at least two subtests, retesting is suggested on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Form L-M, an older test with a much higher ceiling. It has been our experience that a number of children who score in the mod-

erately or highly gifted ranges on current IQ tests, sometimes score as much as 30, 50, and even 90 points higher on the L-M.

The L-M is the only test available at this time for use with children "at the extremes of mental ability" (Riverside, 1999). John Wasserman, Ph.D., Director of Psychological Assessments at Riverside Publishing has said that the Form L-M is a good option, "given the dearth of intelligence tests with sufficient ceiling to assess extremely gifted children" (personal communication, December 23, 1997). Fortunately, the next version of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, the Fifth Edition, due in 2003, is expected to have a higher ceiling.

Finding an achievement test (a measure of academic skills) to be used with exceptionally gifted children can also be an arduous task. The Gifted Development Center chooses to use the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement-Revised because of its ceiling of 200. The Woodcock-Johnson, Third Edition is due out in the fall of 2000, the first achievement test to have a ceiling of 300.

If parents suspect that their child may be in the exceptionally gifted range, it is highly advisable that the testing be done by professionals who have experience in assessing exceptionally gifted children. There are few test administrators in this category but they can be found at the Hoagies Gifted Website: www.hoagies-gifted.org/psych.htm. Test administrators who have little or no experience with children in this range may misunderstand the child or misinterpret the test results.

These children may be, as Betty Meckstroth (1995) puts it, "Statistically Insignificant," but they do exist, and there seem to be more children in this range than we would expect. Their needs are different from the moderately gifted. It is not always easy to identify exceptionally and profoundly gifted children, but it is important to try. With the right support, they can realize their extraordinary potential and thrive.

References

- Edwards, S. (October 20, 1987). POGO Parents' reactions to identification of their gifted kids. (Available from the Gifted Development Center, 1452 Marion Street, Denver, CO 80218)
- Gilman, B. & Revel, A. (1999). Current use of the Stanford-Binet, Form L-M. *Highly Gifted Children*, 12(4).
- Maloney, M. P. & Ward, M. P. (1979). *Mental retardation and modern society*. New York: Oxford Press.
- Meckstroth, E. (1995, Fall). Statistically insignificant. *Counseling & Guidance*, 5,(3).
- Riverside Publishing (1999). *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Form L-M*. 1999 Assessment Catalog, 19, Chicago: Author.
- Silverman, L. K. (1986). An interview with Elizabeth Hagen: Giftedness, intelligence, and the new Stanford-Binet. *Roeper Review*, 8, 168-171.
- Rogers, K. & Silverman, L. K. (November, 1997). Personal, medical, social, and psychological factors in 160+ IQ children, National Association for Gifted Children, 44th annual convention, Little Rock, AK. (Available online at: www.gifteddevelopment.com.)
- Thorndike, R. L., Hagen, E. P., & Sattler, J. M. (1986). *The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale: Fourth edition*. Chicago: Riverside.
- Wechsler, D. (1991). *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Third edition*, Manual. San Antonio: The Psychological Corporation, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Wechsler, D. (1989). *Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised*, Manual. San Antonio: The Psychological Corporation, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. ■
- ANNETTE REVEL SHEELY, M.A.** is an associate at the Gifted Development Center in Denver, CO. She also has a counseling practice in Boulder, CO.
- LINDA KREGER SILVERMAN, Ph.D.** is the founder and director of the Gifted Development Center in Denver, CO. She is a licensed psychologist, a noted author, editor, researcher and lecturer on all aspects of giftedness.