

Presentation Topics for Linda Silverman

Keynote Addresses and Full-Day Presentations

Each of the following topics is designed as a 1¼- hour keynote address and can be expanded into a full-day presentation. As there will be insufficient time to take questions, it is recommended that the keynote address be followed by a Question and Answer period to enable interested participants to further explore the topic with the presenter.

UPSIDE-DOWN BRILLIANCE: THE VISUAL-SPATIAL LEARNER

The higher a child's IQ, the more likely that child is to be a visual-spatial learner. Validation studies with our *Visual-Spatial Identifier* have shown that over one-third of the students in regular classrooms are visual-spatial learners. Anecdotally, we have found that three-fourths of gifted children are visual-spatial. They take great intuitive leaps. They have highly active right hemispheres, enabling them to see the big picture. They often see the answer all at once in a great, "A-Ha!" They find step-by-step learning tedious. They need time to visualize how all the parts are related to a whole; they need to be allowed to reach conclusions in their own way; they may need more time to translate their mental images into words and numbers; they need more visuals and fewer words; they need more access to computers; their work needs to be evaluated separately for their ideas and their mechanics; they need other opportunities to demonstrate mastery besides writing assignments (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, photographic essays, dioramas, etc.); and visual-spatial learners need to be with like-minded peers.

THROUGH THE LENS OF GIFTEDNESS

Giftedness creates a different organization of the Self. It is a ground of experience that differs significantly from the norm. Yet, because gifted individuals look like everyone else and often can pretend to be like everyone else, they are usually judged by a set of standards based on the norm. Professionals recognize that those who are developmentally delayed have a unique set of characteristics and issues, but the set of challenges that face the gifted are not as clearly understood. Behaviors typical of the gifted population may be misjudged as dysfunctional, while significant weaknesses may go undetected: high abstract reasoning abilities often enable the gifted to compensate well enough to score within the average range. The asynchronous developmental patterns of gifted children suggest that certain deficits may enhance other aptitudes. The gifted Self is injured when its gifts are perceived as defects. Diagnosticians, school psychologists, therapists and educators need to be aware of what is characteristic of gifted individuals in order to recognize what is atypical for this population, rather than comparing the gifted to norms for the general population.

THE UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING OUT-OF-SYNC

When giftedness is defined as asynchronous development, it is not limited by ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic status, or geographical or political boundaries. In all cultures, there are children who progress through the developmental milestones at a more rapid rate than their peers. The brighter they are, the more uneven their development is likely to be—intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally. They are also likely to be out-of-sync with their age-mates and with age-related cultural norms. Certain intellectual and personality characteristics accompany asynchrony: sensitivity, intensity, curiosity, perceptiveness, complexity, reflectiveness, and perfectionism. These characteristics are lifelong and differentiate the experience of gifted individuals from birth to maturity.

WHY DO WE NEED GIFTED EDUCATION?

Why do we need gifted education? Because gifted children learn differently from their age-mates, and they suffer when their learning needs are ignored. Because it is wrong to thwart the intellectual growth of any segment of our school population. Because our democracy, as well as our position as a world leader, is being endangered by substituting socialization for education. Our two competing American ideals—*excellence and egalitarianism*—have become out of balance. However, as Abraham Lincoln reminded us, we cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. Bringing the top down does not bring the bottom up. All children have the right to learn new concepts in school every day. As educators, we have a moral obligation to respond to individual differences, including those of the gifted.

THE TWO-EDGED SWORD OF COMPENSATION: HOW THE GIFTED COPE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

At least one-sixth of the gifted population suffers from hidden learning disabilities. Gifted children mask unusual weaknesses by using their extraordinary abstract reasoning abilities to compensate. But compensation is a two-edged sword: It helps an individual to adapt, but it also prevents accurate diagnosis and recognition of disabilities by oneself and others. While modality strengths can be counted on consistently, compensation requires extra energy and tends to be unstable. Fatigue, illness, poor diet and stress all rob the person of sufficient energy to be able to compensate. In this session, effective strategies will be shared for finding and serving gifted children with learning disabilities. Early identification and intervention, as well as assistive technology, are keys to success for twice exceptional children.

BREAKTHROUGHS IN ASSESSMENT OF THE GIFTED

Dramatic changes in test construction have rendered Full Scale IQ scores meaningless for large numbers of gifted students. In August, 2005, the first symposium on assessment of the gifted was held in New Orleans in conjunction with the World Council for Gifted Children. In June, 2006, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) appointed what was to become the first Task Force on IQ Interpretation. In November, 2007, the NAGC Task Force conducted a study of 334 gifted children from 8 sites on the WISC-IV and discovered that the General Ability Index (GAI) is a better representation of high abilities than Full Scale IQ scores. In January, 2008, NAGC issued a position statement on the selection of gifted students with the WISC-IV, which is particularly useful in identifying twice exceptional, culturally diverse and visual-spatial learners. Based on the same study, in February 2008, Pearson Assessments posted extended norms for the WISC-IV to enable the identification of exceptionally gifted students. In March, 2009, a second symposium on assessment of the gifted brought even more awareness to the testing industry. As a result, the new IQ tests currently being developed will be more appropriate for the gifted and have large validation samples of exceptionally and profoundly gifted children. It is essential for all who rely on intelligence tests to be aware of these new breakthroughs and the research on which they are based.

THE UNIQUE INNER LIVES OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Intricate thought processes and complex emotions are held in delicate balance in the gifted individual. Idealism, self-doubt, perceptiveness, excruciating sensitivity, moral imperatives, desperate needs for understanding, acceptance, love—all impinge simultaneously. Gifted children develop more asynchronously than others, and often feel unable to relate to age-mates. When they are forced into a mold that doesn't fit, they begin to experience their differences as deficits. All who interact with them must understand their characteristics and overexcitabilities. Then they can learn to appreciate themselves and develop their own unique paths. We will explore the emotional needs and social realities of gifted children and discuss ways to nurture their full development.

REVERSING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Underachievement is like a skin rash: It can be caused by many different conditions, and calls for comprehensive diagnosis before an effective treatment plan can be put in place. Boys show symptoms earlier than girls, and often suffer from hidden disabilities. Girls may become underachievers during pre-adolescence due to social pressures to conform to feminine roles. If they develop a regime of excessive dieting, they will lack sufficient physical energy to support intellectually demanding work. The major symptom of underachievers is refusal to complete written assignments. Often, this situation can be ameliorated through use of a keyboard. A mismatch between teaching style and a student's learning style can also lead to underachievement. Concrete strategies will be offered to enable these children to be successful in the classroom.

On Gifted Females

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GIRLS GONE?

What happens to gifted girls? Gifted boys are more visible, even in the preschool years. They come to school eager to learn something new, and if they already know what is being taught, they may become disruptive or withdraw. But gifted girls blend. They often pretend that they can't do things so that they will fit in better with the other girls. Gifted boys are at risk for being held back in Kindergarten if they cannot relate socially to children whose development is less advanced. Gifted girls are chameleons--they treat school as a social experience. Myra Sadker wrote, "Girls are the only group who begin school scoring ahead and leave behind, a theft occurring so quietly that most people are unaware of its impact." Parents, as well as teachers, are more likely to recognize giftedness in boys and to miss it in girls. As a result, gifted girls often slow down their natural rate of learning and give up their dreams.

WHO CARES IF I'M SMART, AM I THIN ENOUGH?

Today's models weigh 23% less than average women. Super-skinny teen stars, such as Lindsay Lohan and Nicole Richie, are the role models for desirable appearance. Eating disorders are at an all-time high among adolescents, claiming thousands of lives. Pictures of girls in third-grade textbooks have gotten relentlessly thinner, while the weight of the boys depicted has not changed in over 90 years. Valued for their appearance rather than their abilities, gifted young women often aspire to an underweight conception of beauty, rather than academic excellence. Some bright girls eat barely enough to keep them alive, let alone provide sufficient caloric intake for complex mental work. Life in the 21st century requires full development of female potential. In this session, strategies will be discussed for achieving this elusive goal.

A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE OF GIFTEDNESS

Galton equated giftedness with eminence. This is a masculine perception that favors males. Galton's half-cousin, Darwin, proposed the variability hypothesis to explain why very few women are eminent. According to the variability hypothesis, males are presumed to be more variable in intelligence; therefore, more males are at the extremes of intelligence (e.g., gifted), whereas women tend toward the mean. In 1914, Leta Stetter Hollingworth completely discredited this hypothesis. Research for 100 hundred years has demonstrated that there are at least as many gifted girls as boys—even in the highest IQ ranges. Men now disparage IQ tests. Hollingworth offered a feminine perspective that includes girls, the economically disadvantaged and the culturally diverse. These groups have little opportunity for eminence. Yet, internationally, the field still defines giftedness as the potential for eminence. This presentation discusses masculine and feminine conceptions, the development of gifted girls, and barriers for girls from culturally diverse and low socio-economic circumstances.

IMPOSTERS? WOMEN WITH RIGHT-HEMISPHERIC GIFTS

Highly successful women often feel like imposters waiting to be unmasked. Our intuitive powers are our greatest asset, but they fail us when we're asked the burning question, "How do you know that?" Intuition is not accepted as real knowledge. Seeing the big picture, sensing when someone is being deceptive, feeling when an action is imperative, predicting outcomes, responding passionately, multi-tasking, and synthesizing information from a vast array of unrelated sources, are all essential for success in the 21st century. Yet, these gifts of the right hemisphere have been denigrated for most of our lives, while the cool, linear, analytic, sequential facets of the left hemisphere have been unduly lauded. Leonard Shlain proposes that the right hemisphere, the home of imagery, is essentially our "feminine side," and that it has long been under the domination of our overly developed "masculine" left hemisphere. However, these neglected abilities have begun to be valued in industry. They need to be celebrated; they are critically important to the salvation of our planet.

Evening Presentations for Parents

IF OUR CHILD IS SO SMART, WHY AREN'T OUR LIVES EASIER?

Gifted children are expensive and time-consuming. They usually need less sleep than you do, ask more questions than you can answer, want 100 percent of your attention 24 hours a day, have obsessive hobbies, react intensely to everything, endlessly long for a best friend who understands them completely, hold perfectionistic standards for themselves and you, want to know the meaning of life when other children only want to know how to whistle, and keep their bedrooms in a condition you can never show company. In order to be the perfect parent, you need unlimited funds, unlimited patience, an encyclopedic mind, and someone to sleep for you. In this session, we will be discussing such issues as coping with the characteristics of giftedness; siblings and birth order; understanding introversion; underachievement; and keys to successful parenting. You will receive an owner's manual, "Guidelines for Parents of the Gifted," which contains suggestions for harmonious family life. There will be a question and answer period, but I don't have all the answers. ***Trust Yourself!*** No one knows your child better than you do.

ALLOWING YOUR CHILD TO REACH FOR THE STARS

What does "reaching for the stars" mean to you? Those who go for the gold are driven by perfectionism, intensity, overexcitabilities—traits that often can be unnerving for parents. Impossible dreams are realized, unrealistic goals achieved, insurmountable obstacles surmounted by individuals whose vision is a more powerful reality than the limitations most of the world accepts as real. The drive for excellence only visits those who have the capacity to attain it. This drive has the potential for propelling one toward unparalleled greatness or plummeting one into despair. We will discuss ways of channeling this powerful energy. Those who reach for the stars have parents who believe in them, who accept their intense personalities, and who support their passions.

For Students

ACHIEVEMENT, UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND OVERACHIEVEMENT

Being called an “underachiever” is actually a compliment! It means that people believe you are capable of more than your marks show. It is much worse to be called an “overachiever,” which means that you aren’t that smart, you just work hard. Boys are more likely to be called underachievers and girls are more likely to be called overachievers. Boys and girls underachieve for different reasons. Boys who start underachieving in the first few years of school often have problems with writing. This can be solved by using a keyboard for assignments. Girls tend to underachieve in adolescence; they hide their abilities so that they will fit in with the other girls. Excessive dieting can also cause underachievement, as it causes lack of sufficient energy for intellectual work. Boys and girls can also underachieve if there is a mismatch between the way they learn and the way they are taught. Visual-spatial learners often have difficulty listening, spelling, learning foreign languages, memorizing things that are unimportant to them, or paying attention in subjects they don’t like. They don’t learn much from drill and practice. Once they see the picture, they understand the concept permanently. Image-thinkers may be highly creative in art, music, drama or dance. Or they may be future mathematicians, scientists, computer specialists, surgeons or engineers. In this session, you will learn about your learning style and how to overcome underachievement

For Corporate Executives

Winning the War for Talent

There is currently a war in industry for attracting and keeping talented employees. International investment firms pay millions of dollars to train recruits who fail to produce or leave the company before they become productive. To address this talent drain, many executives now have the added responsibility of “talent management” in their companies. Are those of greatest promise recruited or overlooked? How can the most able be attracted to the organization? What does it take to keep a rising star in a corporation? How can talented individuals be found within the organization? What are the characteristics of those with greatest potential? What can a corporation do to develop talent and dedication.

For Psychologists

ISSUES IN PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH THE GIFTED

Many gifted adults—the walking wounded—feel estranged and lonely, not realizing it is their own giftedness that is at the heart of this experience. Many have never been identified at all; others feel that they only “used to be gifted” in childhood and that they outgrew it when they left school. Most feel that there is something wrong with them that is not fixable. They struggle constantly between integrity and accommodation, viewing all of life as a complex set of ethical dilemmas. When giftedness is removed from the realm of recognized achievement, it becomes clear that it is a form of atypical development, analogous to retardation, which leads to unique experiences throughout the life cycle. Gifted children and adults are asynchronous. Asynchrony is uneven development, advanced cognitive complexity, and heightened sensitivity and intensity, leading to unusual awareness and the consequent feeling of being out-of-sync with others on the planet, as well as within oneself. Psychotherapy with the gifted not only involves different issues, it also involves different goals and a more complex relationship with the therapist. It is essential that gifted individuals come to terms with their differences and the impact their giftedness has had on others' perceptions of them and their own self-perceptions. This discussion may be as worthwhile for the self-development of the therapist as for his or her clients.

USING TEST RESULTS TO SUPPORT CLINICAL JUDGMENT

Clinical judgment is the basis for diagnosis in medicine. Test results are useful within the context of other information obtained, such as presenting symptoms, medical history, family history, and patient interview. The test results themselves are of limited value unless they are interpreted by a skilled clinician who has had experience with the presenting problem. Yet, in diagnosing giftedness, too often the test results are expected to be able to do the job alone. Clinical judgment, if used at all, is subservient to the numbers. As in medicine, accurate assessment of giftedness is dependent upon the skill and experience of the examiner in interpreting protocols of gifted children within the context of all the other information obtained.

Breakout Sessions

Each of the following topics is best addressed in a 2-hour double-session and can be expanded into a full-day presentation. Most of the keynote addresses can also serve as 2-hour break-out sessions.

PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism comes with the territory of giftedness and is its least appreciated aspect. Impossible dreams are realized, unrealistic goals achieved, insurmountable obstacles surmounted by individuals whose vision is a more powerful reality than the limitations most of the world accepts as real. The drive for excellence only visits those who have the capacity to attain it. Perfectionism is a function of asynchrony, as a more advanced mind sets more advanced goals. Personality type plays a role as well: introverts are more likely to be perfectionists than extraverts. Environment can exacerbate this trait. When schoolwork is too easy, the only challenge a gifted child can create is accomplishing it perfectly. Perfectionism has the potential for propelling one toward unparalleled greatness or plummeting one into despair. The secret to harnessing its energy is learning how to set priorities. Hints for channeling perfectionism will be provided.

COUNSELING NEEDS OF THE GIFTED

Gifted individuals not only think differently from their peers; they also feel differently. Certain personality characteristics are associated with the experience of giftedness throughout life: sensitivity, intensity, curiosity, perceptiveness, complexity, and perfectionism. Gifted children are born with more intense reactions to various types of stimuli—"overexcitabilities." Their asynchronous development makes them feel out of sync with children their own age and with age-related expectations. Counseling is needed to assist gifted children in dealing with their intense emotional lives, their heightened awareness, and their difficulties fitting in. A broken child is hard to mend; counselors educated in dealing with the psychological needs of gifted young people can save lives.

THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF HIGHLY GIFTED CHILDREN

Highly gifted children (above 145 IQ) are often at risk in our schools. As definitions of giftedness broaden, they may even be neglected within gifted programs. The number of highly gifted in the population is much greater than imagined; current assessment procedures severely underestimate IQ scores in this range of abilities. Personality and learning characteristics will be discussed, along with strategies for identification, program development and instruction.

DABROWSKI'S THEORY: THE PATH TO ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT

Giftedness traditionally has been defined as achievement or potential for achievement. Kazimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychologist and psychiatrist who studied the gifted and creative, developed a theory of advanced development ensuing from the innate “overexcitabilities” of the creative individual. Dabrowski’s Theory offers a framework for understanding the ways in which the unique characteristics of the gifted transform their life paths. Their rich, turbulent, intense inner worlds potentially can lead to greater awareness of the pain and suffering of others, higher levels of moral concern, higher expectations of themselves, and greater commitment to serve. Advanced development in adulthood is the result of the interplay of internal and external forces in childhood.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT VS. SOCIALIZATION

Socialization, which means adapting to the needs of the group, is very different from social development, which indicates concern for the welfare of others. The former may result in alienation from one's inner self, while the latter leads to self-actualization. Our aim for the gifted should be good social development rather than socialization.

WHAT DO GIFTED CHILDREN NEED?

Gifted children need to be allowed to progress at their own pace through a rigorous curriculum. Their social and emotional development depends on their developing close friendships with *true peers* who are like themselves. The instructional variables and strategies most effective with gifted learners will be discussed, along with specific suggestions for atypical learners. Most of all, they need teachers who care about them and are willing to adapt the curriculum to their learning needs.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF THE GIFTED

Early identification is beneficial to gifted children and their families. It promotes parental understanding, home stimulation, and appropriate school placement. Many people are unaware that gifted children can be accurately identified during the preschool and primary years. Information is presented on signs of developmental advancement in young children and methods of assessment during the early years.

GIFTEDNESS AS ASYNCHRONOUS DEVELOPMENT

The construct of giftedness as asynchrony has a strong theoretical foundation in the works of Hollingworth, Terrassier, Dabrowski, and Vygotsky. It is a child-centered perspective that can guide parenting, teaching and counseling of gifted children. Asynchrony is comprised of uneven development, complexity, intensity, heightened awareness, risk of social alienation, and vulnerability. It is not a source of envy any more than its mirror image, retardation. When giftedness is equated with potential for success

in adult life, it engenders backlash from those who feel that they are denied equal opportunity in the competition for fame and fortune. Asynchrony is not a competitive concept: More asynchrony is not better! Giftedness as asynchrony offers both an understanding of the inner experience of gifted individuals throughout the lifespan and a sound framework for responding to the developmental differences of this group.

IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF GIFTED LEARNERS

This session addresses screening, assessment and identification of gifted students. Early identification of children with special needs enables early intervention. Differences in scores obtained on various instruments are much greater for the gifted than for any other population. Alternative methods of identification are discussed, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of various instruments. Participants will learn how to interpret test data to facilitate differentiated programming.

INTROVERTS AND EXTRAVERTS: DIFFERENT REALITIES

We live in an extraverted society with extraversion being considered the norm for appropriate social adjustment for all. The introverted minority is rarely understood and appreciated. Within the gifted population, there are as many introverts as extraverts, and in the highly gifted population, there are far more introverts. Many well-meaning individuals try to “cure” this trait in children and may inadvertently do damage. It is essential that anyone working with the gifted have an understanding of this personality type. Extraversion and introversion will be compared, and techniques for parenting, counseling and teaching introverts will be shared.

PERSONALITY TYPES AND LEARNING STYLES

Jungian personality types will be explored as they are described by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: Introversion and Extraversion; Intuition and Sensing; Thinking and Feeling; Perceiving and Judging. We have found intriguing relationships between introversion, intuitiveness and giftedness. We have also studied learning styles and have found that highly gifted children, creative learners, underachievers, gifted children with learning disabilities, and children with attention deficit disorders are non-sequential learners. The atypical learning styles of non-sequential learners will be addressed and specific techniques will be suggested for teaching and parenting these children more effectively. Participants will also learn about their own personality type.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GIFTED: THE DISCOVERIES OF LETA HOLLINGWORTH

Leta Stetter Hollingworth was the foremother of gifted education. She wrote the first textbook, taught the first course, was the first counselor of the gifted, conducted 30 studies, created exemplary programs, and developed a set of educational principles that are still relevant. She was concerned with the special “perplexities” of adjustment faced by gifted children. In her writings, we find insights into the nature of these issues, how they affect children at different levels of ability, and solutions that could be implemented today. She believed in “emotional education” for the gifted. A visionary whose wisdom was nearly lost for half a century surfaces as an inspiration for the 21st century.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING VISUAL-SPATIAL LEARNERS

The higher a child’s IQ, the more likely that child is to be a visual-spatial learner. Validation studies with our Visual-Spatial Identifier have shown that over one-third of the students in regular classrooms are visual-spatial learners. Anecdotally, we have found that three-fourths of gifted children are visual-spatial. They take great intuitive leaps. They have highly active right hemispheres, enabling them to see the big picture. They often see the answer all at once in a great, “A-Ha!” They find step-by-step learning tedious. They need time to visualize how all the parts are related to a whole; they need to be allowed to reach conclusions in their own way; they may need more time to translate their mental images into words and numbers; they need more visuals and fewer words; they need more access to computers; their work needs to be evaluated separately for their ideas and their mechanics; and they need other opportunities to demonstrate mastery besides writing assignments (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, photographic essays, dioramas, etc.). This session will focus on strategies for reaching these learners.

TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS WITH VISUAL-SPATIAL GIFTS

How can a child be both exceptionally able and “dis-abled”? This appears contradictory. However, advanced abstract reasoning (giftedness) can be combined with deafness, blindness, cerebral palsy, manic depression, etc. Over one-sixth of the gifted population suffers from learning disabilities that impact left hemispheric skills: reading, writing, spelling, calculating or organizing. In many cases, right hemispheric skills, such as artistic talent, empathy and intuitive knowing, are enhanced. These big picture thinkers flourish in the classroom when they are taught through visual-spatial strategies. They need more time to translate their mental images into words and numbers; more visuals and fewer words; access to computers; an emphasis on concepts instead of skills and opportunities to demonstrate mastery in other ways beside writing assignments. Their visual-spatial gifts are prized in the 21st century workforce.