



# BRIGHT IDEAS

Volume 1: Issue 2

**SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:**

**Pages 1-3**

The information presented in this section of BRIGHT IDEAS is an adaptation of a paper entitled "Gifted Kids at Risk: Who's listening?" By Patricia A Schuler (2003)

The full article can be found at :

[http://www.sengifted.org/articles\\_social/Schuler\\_GiftedKidsAtRiskWhosListening.shtml](http://www.sengifted.org/articles_social/Schuler_GiftedKidsAtRiskWhosListening.shtml)

- \* Intellectual and Personality characteristics of the Gifted
- \* Problems faced by some at risk students
- \* Behaviours related to anxiety

**Page 3**

Reflections: What can we do?

**Page 4**

> **Ten things NOT to say to a Gifted Student:**

Adapted from a work shop presentation given by Dr. Nancy Heilbronner, University of Connecticut, CONFRATUTE 2009

## SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENT

**"Bright kids are not better, yet they are different; and because they are, they face different issues."** (Schuler, 2003)

According to Schuler, there are two prevailing yet paradoxical myths about gifted children and adolescents:

**Myth 1: They do not have problems; somehow they can handle difficulties on their own.**

**Myth 2: Some of their characteristics are perceived as pathological.**

To dispel such misconceptions, we must better understand the gifted: their intellectual and personality characteristics, the manifestations of high ability, and the specific problems and issues they face.

Silverman (1993) presents lists of the interrelated intellectual and personality characteristics of giftedness that may be found across all talent domains:

**Intellectual Characteristics**

**Personality Characteristics**

Exceptional reasoning ability	Insightfulness
Intellectual curiosity	Need to understand
Rapid learning rate	Need for mental stimulation
Facility with abstraction	Perfectionism
Complex thought processes	Need for precision/logic
Vivid imagination	Excellent sense of humor
Early moral concern	Sensitivity/empathy
Passion for learning	Intensity

- Giftedness impacts a child's psychological growth and well-being through the relationship among these characteristics, the type of giftedness manifested, the degree of giftedness (above average to profound), and how well the needs of the child are being met.
- A child or adolescent that is identified gifted may demonstrate high ability in all areas; however very often it is specific to certain domains ie. mathematics, verbal, spatial, interpersonal, music, or kinesthetic. The gifted student is often criticized when academic performance isn't high in EVERY subject.
- It is important to know what attitudes, values, personality temperament, and life experiences a gifted student brings to school. The culture and values of the school and community will also impact whether a gifted child or adolescent feels invited to participate as a positive contributing member.
- Research consistently shows that many gifted children and adolescents have the capacity for intensified thinking and feeling, as well as vivid imaginations

## BRIGHT IDEAS

"Being different" in ability and personality characteristics may lead to higher expectations, jealousy, and resentment by adults and peers. Specific problems that may result can be external or internal:

- Difficulty with social relationships
- Refusal to do routine, repetitive assignments
- Inappropriate criticism of others
- Lack of awareness of impact on others
- Lack of sufficient challenge in schoolwork
- Depression (often manifested in boredom)
- High levels of anxiety
- Difficulty accepting criticism
- Hiding talents to fit with peers
- Nonconformity and resistance to authority
- Excessive competitiveness
- Isolation from peers
- Low frustration tolerance
- Poor study habits
- Difficulty in selecting among a diversity of interests (Silverman, 1987)



*Repeatedly they hear the message "It's okay to be smart, but it's better if you are something else we can accept as well."*

So what happens when a gifted adolescent is "just smart" and is trying to survive in a perceived anti-intellectual environment? Options may include: conformity (working hard to be "average" or "normal"), withdrawal (isolation or alienation), depression (blaming themselves), aggressiveness (blaming others), or continued nonconformity. Higham and Buescher (1987, p. 29) call this the "cultivated weirdness act" whereby a gifted adolescent makes individual statements which say, "Okay, I'm different -- just let me show you HOW DIFFERENT I can be."

For some gifted adolescents, seeking special environments, positive or negative, where they can be accepted and excel helps them to deal with the lack of empathy, loss of intimacy and rejection. This may intensify their own lack of tolerance for others, and they may choose overt anti-social and/or suicidal behaviors. Add to that an everyday stream of acceptable violent messages in the media and video games, inappropriate educational opportunities, lack of parental awareness or supervision, role conflicts, community apathy or stagnation, and possible mental illness, and should we be surprised that horrible, tragic incidents occur?

Repeatedly, we see factors for children and adolescents who are at risk for emotional difficulties stated in the press. Dirkes (1983) provided symptoms of undesirable levels of anxiety in gifted children, including:

- decreased performance
- expressed desire to be like teen-agers
- reluctance to work in a team
- expressions of low self-concept
- excessive sadness or rebellion
- reluctance to make choices or suggestions
- extremes of activity or inactivity
- a change in noise or quietude
- repetition of rules and directions to make sure that they can be followed
- avoidance of new ventures unless certain of the outcome
- other marked changes in personality. In addition, we find other danger signals for gifted children and adolescents that indicate they may be seriously depressed or suicidal
- self-imposed isolation from family
- self-imposed perfection as the ultimate standard, to the point that the only tasks enjoyed are the ones completed perfectly

- deep concern with personal powerlessness
- narcissism -- total preoccupation with self and with fantasy
- unusual fascination with violence
- eating disorders
- chemical abuse
- rigidly compulsive behaviors (Schmitz & Galbraith,1985)

Educators, parents, and counsellors may not be able to detect the stress burdening gifted children and adolescents. Some gifted children and adolescents cover up their symptoms of sadness and depression in order to fit in. Still others fear admitting to distress, because they may be perceived as less than perfect and not in control of their lives. Too many straight A gifted students, who are a "pleasure to have in class," speak of their anguish because of peer and adult rejection. The intensity of their pain and anger is hard to imagine.

## REFLECTIONS:

### What actions can we take to help gifted kids at risk?

- **Become more aware of the characteristics, needs and issues of gifted children.** They need help in "being different." The lack of empathy and rejection by others, including adults and peers, is commonplace for many of these children. According to Thom Buescher, "Lack of empathy and intimacy lead to poor coping skills, and those provide the momentum for intolerance... the precursor to violent acts." Too many gifted children and adolescents suffer in silence, or seek negative ways to express their frustration and anger. Teasing and humiliation must be stopped. Empathy and intimacy are needed so that emotional sensitivity doesn't become emotional disturbance.
- **Become aware of the strengths, weaknesses and learning styles of all your students** so that you can better differentiate instruction for gifted students, (including enrichment, special programs, mentorships) Review the learning styles inventory completed by all students to take into account learning styles (Sharron Drummond; program department).
- Work through the resource teacher in your school and/or parents to better understand how to meet their social and emotional needs. Use the I.E.P. or give feedback to help develop an I.E.P. that takes into account what you've learned about the student.
- Provide opportunities for the student to feel like they belong (classroom, school, board and out of board). For a comprehensive list check "out of board enrichment opportunities". If you know of other special programs that are not listed, please forward that information to Special Education coordinator so they can be shared with other schools
- Use some of the classroom enrichment strategies listed in n BRIGHT IDEAS September 2011 edition posted [www.lkdsb.net/enrichment1](http://www.lkdsb.net/enrichment1) The Nova Scotia Board of Education has an excellent resource on line that addresses many issues related to teaching gifted students.  
[http://www.ednet.ns.ca/pdfdocs/studentsvcs/Gifted\\_Education\\_and\\_Talent\\_Development.pdf](http://www.ednet.ns.ca/pdfdocs/studentsvcs/Gifted_Education_and_Talent_Development.pdf)
- Work through the Program Department for ideas that are subject specific. (the out of board opportunities list also has ideas for subject specific programs).
- Let them know that they are more than their achievement or academic ability. If you sense sadness, rejection, or anger, speak with your child or find a counsellor at the school, board or within the community to help. (Christine Davenport's from the Psychology Department has an excellent Fall Newsletter entitled [Building Positive Relationships with Students](#).)
- **Educators, reexamine your own attitudes and beliefs about gifted children and adolescents, especially those who are highly creative and may be comfortable in their nonconformity.** Resist the urge to "Geek Profile." Open the lines of communication, and LISTEN, really listen to what bright kids are saying -- about themselves, their values, their interests. Become aware of how schools can be the most restrictive and stressful places for bright kids. Help gifted students develop appreciation for the similarities and differences between themselves and others, teach social skills if necessary, and show how to solve problems in creative and positive ways. Become aware of the resources within the community that helps kids at risk.



*Too many straight A gifted students, who are a "pleasure to have in class," speak of their anguish because of peer and adult rejection. The intensity of their pain and anger is hard to imagine.*

# TEN THINGS NOT TO SAY TO A GIFTED STUDENT

Adapted from workshop presentation given by Dr. Nancy Heilbronner, University of Connecticut, CONFRATUTE CONFERENCE for Gifted 2009



## 9. "You should try to make more friends!"

Gifted children have varying needs for socialization; some need more, some can be happy with a good book and one or two friends. Often social, emotional, intellectual and physical abilities may develop at varying rates.

- Let them be the guide, perhaps there is no need
- Offer Enrichment opportunities
- May need several different peer groups i.e. Intellectual, emotional, social

## 7. "You're so smart, smart, smart! We love you!"

When approval is linked with performance, child feels that people love them because they are smart, not because of who they are (particularly dangerous for female student and can actually lead to under-achievement). Student starts to feel like imposters, attributing success to luck rather than talent.

- recognize things outside the classroom (sports, humour, being a good friend)
- Praise effort



## 3. "Why don't you draw the lines straighter?"

Rigidity in expectation sometimes quashes creativity

- Encourage academic and creative risks
- It's about improvement with attempts
- "colouring outside the lines" can bring about interesting rewards



## 2. "It's not your fault!"

Sometimes it IS their fault and they have to take responsibility.

- Get all the facts, both sides of the story
- Do not judge
- Importance of recognizing both successes AND faults/failure
- Focus on improvement

## 10. "Don't be silly . . . why are you so afraid of everything?"

According to Dabrowski, gifted children have heightened sensitivities in several areas, some of which are imagination and emotion. Imaginations can spin facts into "what if" scenarios sometimes drawing incorrect or illogical conclusions.

They are very conscious of global issues and can feel helpless as far as being able to do anything about it

## 8. "No more questions!"

Sometimes gifted students are forever asking questions; sometimes not at the most appropriate times. Asking good questions and knowing how to find answers is an essential part of intelligence. Sometimes gifted students get the message that it is not okay to be that curious. Home, friends, and even schools sometimes subtly interact to discourage children from asking too many questions, from being too smart, from wanting too much.

- Parking lot...questions answered in half an hour?
- "1,2,3.." Ask three people before you ask teacher (good for all)



## 6. "You're good at so many things—you can be anything you want!"

Many gifted students exhibit multiple talents and are reluctant to give up any activity. Well meaning parents and teachers support multipotentiality because they believe it makes the child a better candidate for university applications.

- By the time students get to high school, they NEED to focus, help them narrow their choices based on one or two passions
- "Major accomplishment in most fields requires a devotion of concentrated time and energy"

5. "Don't you want to be a doctor?" We often want the best for our students but we have to be careful not to pigeon-hole students into things that WE think are good for them. It doesn't have to be the word "doctor"; we need to help them understand gifts and interests they possess, not gifts you want them to develop.

- Encourage them to try new activities through various opportunities
- If a passion develops, support it!
- Be an opportunity maker, facilitator or guide, rather than a director.

4. "You're so smart! This should be easy for you!" There is an assumption that gifted kids are good at everything. Not all are! Sometimes they are very good in some areas and not in others.

- Advocate for these students, particularly when teachers or others might say "...there are kids way smarter in my class" or "...are you sure they are gifted?"
- Consider the needs of students who are GLD or have other disabilities



**Golden Rule:**  
Identification procedures should match services available

**1. "If it's hard, you can always stop." Encourage students to STAY IN THE STRUGGLE ; to deal with successes and failures.**