
Development of the Emotional and Social Needs of Gifted Individuals

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Many educators do not believe the emotional and social needs of gifted individuals are being met. Staff members of the Division of Educational Studies at the University of Northern Colorado have developed an approach for meeting these needs through the use of seven separate categories. Each category provides a description of an important component of affective education for gifted individuals. The categories are then defined and selected resources described. This approach is designed to help educators select the appropriate materials to be used in the affective domain with people who are gifted.

For many years, educators have been interested in the educational needs of a diversified group of students labeled as gifted and talented, but little emphasis has been placed on the emotional and social needs of these students (Whitmore, 1980). Treffinger, Borgers, Render, and Hoffman (1976) indicated the need for educators to "become more concerned about 'affective' factors in learning and development. A comprehensive approach to differentiating instruction for the gifted must involve values, feelings, personal growth, and interpersonal relations" (p. 47).

During the past 4 years educational leaders in the field of gifted education have begun to come together to discuss emotional and social needs; the Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) conference, sponsored by Wright State University, has been held yearly in different locations throughout the United States. Providing counseling and psychological services for gifted and talented individuals continues to be the emphasis of this conference.

According to Joyce Van Tassel, director of the Area Service Center for Gifted Education in the southern suburbs of Chicago, approximately 45% of gifted students with IQs over 130 have grade point averages lower than C, whereas among high school dropouts, 14% had IQs over 130 (Johnson, 1981). Van Tassel also stated that, "Clearly, something is wrong. Many gifted students have problems that are not simply academic but social and emotional, and those problems prevent them from taking full advantage of their potential" (Johnson, 1981, p. 27).

Gifted children are vulnerable from a social perspective. Many become isolated and do not deal adequately with others in their environment. The problems of social development often center on the intellectual disparity between gifted children and their nongifted peers (Chen, 1980).

In addition, gifted children often lack self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, they do not develop into competent, contributing people. There are new approaches being developed to help facilitate the growth of the total gifted individual who has needs in the cognitive, emotional, and social domains (Roeper, 1982).

In response to the diverse needs of gifted and talented individuals and because of the needs expressed by educators and parents, professors at the University of Northern Colorado developed the Summer Enrichment Program for the Gifted and Talented in 1978. Students from 18 states and from Canada attended the initial program (Betts, 1980). Two 14-day residential sessions are conducted each summer, with approximately 350 students attending each session.

As a result of the program, it has become evident that there is an intense desire on the part of gifted and talented students to learn more about themselves, their problems, and their relationships with others, including gifted and nongifted peers, siblings, parents, and teachers. A curriculum is being developed to provide a system of activities to aid gifted and talented students in developing positive skills, concepts, and attitudes. This system will allow parents, teachers, counselors, and psychologists the opportunity to develop a preventive approach for meeting the emotional and social needs of gifted students. After a thorough analysis of the activities that have already been used effectively, the staff of the Division of Educational Studies at the University of Northern Colorado established the following seven categories for curriculum development as necessary for the emotional and social growth of gifted individuals.

AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, AND ACCEPTANCE OF SELF

Specific activities that provide gifted and talented individuals with opportunities to develop a greater awareness, understanding, and acceptance of self are essential for positive growth. *Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting and Experiencing*, a book written by Stevens (1971), gives teachers, psychologists, and parents specific activities to help gifted students nurture a greater awareness of self, others, and the world around them. Change and growth, however, are the result of awareness and personal understanding. Gifted students are often uncomfortable with themselves and need more experiences to develop a better understanding and acceptance of self. *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide for Ages 11-18* (Galbraith, 1983) and *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide for Ages 10 and Under* (Galbraith, 1984) can be used with individual students, groups of students, and parents. These books provide a foundation for the understanding and development of giftedness. They also contain activities in the areas of awareness, understanding, and acceptance of self that provide opportunities for understanding and accepting the differences of being gifted.

AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, AND ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS

Gifted individuals can be critical and intolerant of others who do not possess similar skills and attitudes. Activities that help them become aware and accepting of different approaches to living are valuable in helping them become more accepting of the differences between people. *SAGE: Self-Awareness Growth Experiences, Grades 7-12* (Kehayan, 1983) can be useful in increasing the awareness necessary for social interaction and can enhance students' abilities to understand and accept other people. Throughout the book, emphasis is placed on individual differences and on each person's right to be different. Additional resources addressing this category include the *Affective Education Guidebook: Classroom Activities in the Realm of Feelings* (Eberle & Hall, 1975) and *Affective Direction: Planning and Teaching for Thinking and Feeling* (Eberle & Hall, 1979).

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Each individual is called on daily to interact with a variety of people, ranging from family and friends to teachers and counselors. This category of activities is divided into four areas.

Communication Skills

Skills such as reflective or active listening and congruent sending are necessary for effective communication. Role playing and communication analysis are positive methods for the development of communication skills. *The Art of Helping* (Carkhuff, 1983) is an excellent introduction to effective communication for teachers and counselors who wish to teach these skills.

Interviewing Skills

Having the skills to successfully interview people about their lives and interests provides gifted students with new techniques for exploring and understanding their worlds. Role playing demonstrates effective interviewing skills and how they can be developed. *Asking Questions, Finding Answers* (Draze, 1979) provides information and activities to help students in interviewing.

Discussion Skills

Many gifted students do not know how to participate effectively in group discussions. The ability to discuss actively topics of interest will aid students in their synthesis of information and in their ability to work with others in an effective manner. A model for positive group discussions and group roles and memberships is provided in *Learning Through Discussion* (Hill, 1977). A more theoretical approach for the educator is *The Dynamics of Discussion: Communication in Small Groups* (Jones, Barnlund, & Haiman, 1980).

Conflict Reduction Skills

The ability to reduce conflicts with other people effectively is a skill that can be taught. Because conflict cannot be avoided but can be handled in a positive manner, activities that provide different styles of conflict reduction or resolution need to be modeled and taught to gifted individuals. Role playing conflicts from their own lives gives these individuals opportunities to learn new and more effective techniques. *People Skills: How To Assert Yourself, Listen To Others, and Resolve Conflicts* (Bolton, 1979) is an excellent source for all areas of interpersonal skills, and material is included that is quite appropriate for the development of conflict-reduction skills.

GROUP PROCESS AND INTERACTION SKILLS

A person with a good understanding of the dynamics of group process has additional insight into how to work effectively with others. In *Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?* (Powell, 1969), group games and roles are defined. An understanding of these roles and games can be useful to gifted individuals. Additional sources for the understanding of group processes are *Group*

Methods To Actualize Human Potential (Otto, 1973), *Group Process in the Classroom* (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1971), *Magic Circle at School* (Ball, 1972), and *Developing Effective Classroom Groups* (Stanford, 1977).

CREATIVITY

Creativity is an integral component of the concept of giftedness. Students need opportunities to comprehend the dynamics of creativity and how creativity relates to them. *Creative Thinking and Problem Solving in Gifted Education* (Feldhusen & Treffinger, 1980) is a valuable guide for developing an approach to teaching creative thinking and problem solving. Useful sources for teaching creative thinking and problem solving include *Developing Creativity in Children: An Ideabook for Teachers* (Schaefer, 1973), *Developing Creativity in the Gifted and Talented* (Callahan, 1978), *Scamper: Games for Imagination and Development* (Eberle, 1971), *It's a Gas to be Gifted: Or CPS for the Gifted and Talented* (Noller, Treffinger, & Houseman, 1979), and *CPS for Kids: A Resource Book for Teaching Creative Problem Solving to Children* (Eberle & Stanish, 1981).

RELAXATION AND VISUAL IMAGERY

The ability to relax is becoming increasingly important as life becomes more stressful and complex. The technique of relaxation can be introduced and integrated into the category of creativity. *The Centering Book* (Hendricks & Wills, 1975) and *The Second Centering Book* (Hendricks & Roberts, 1977) provide teachers and parents with a rationale and activities for relaxing and becoming more aware of abilities to understand themselves. *Progressive Relaxation Training: A Manual for the Helping Professions* (Bernstein & Borkovec, 1975) provides new methods of relaxation; *Sweet Dreams for Little Ones* (Pappas, 1982) gives specific activities to be used with young children. *Put Your Mother on the Ceiling* (DeMille, 1973), which is appropriate for building children's imaginations during the preschool and primary years, is also useful.

PROBLEMS OF BEING GIFTED

Not only do gifted individuals have the emotional and social needs of their chronological peers, they also must deal with the problems manifested from their giftedness (Whitmore, 1980). Thus, the staff has established a complete category for developing an understanding of the problems of being gifted.

People who are gifted must have an opportunity to be together, not just for activities and classes that help them meet their cognitive needs but for time to develop emotionally and socially. Ongoing support groups for the total growth of gifted students must be an established component of programming for this special group. A safe, nonthreatening environment is necessary for them to discuss the problems they face in being gifted. Excellent sources that address the problems of being gifted include *Problems of the Gifted Child: I. Q. 150* (Bridges, 1974), *Raising Your Gifted Child* (Flowers, Horsman, & Schwartz, 1982), *How To Help Your Gifted Child* (Ginsberg & Harrison, 1977), *On Being Gifted* (Krueger, 1978), and *Giftedness, Conflict, and Underachievement* (Whitmore, 1980).

NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE

The categories above provide the foundation for the development and acceptance of self, the understanding and acceptance of others, the interpersonal skills necessary for positive interaction, the importance of creative and problem-solving abilities, and the understanding of problems that must be approached in a positive manner. The approach would be incomplete, however, without the category of nurturing environments and people. Roeper (1982) indicated the importance of the development of self-regard through a positive environment. Self-actualization develops more naturally when the individual is in a positive environment, surrounded by nurturing, facilitative people. Thus,

the goal of parents and educators is to provide the environment and the people necessary to support the emotional and social development of gifted individuals. Adults who are gifted, fully functioning, independent people must become the role models for gifted children. These people need to interact with, support, and communicate with the gifted, both formally and informally. To become what one is capable of becoming is better understood when the individual perceives it within others. Nurturing comes from adults with similar abilities and interests. Gifted adults can facilitate through their life-style as well as through their involvement.

Activities are also essential, not only for a "preventive approach" but for the nurturing and enhancement of gifted individuals. *One Hundred Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom* (Canfield & Wells, 1976) and *The Growing Person* (Shallcross & Sisk, 1982) present specific activities to enhance the educational environment of people who are gifted. Another good source, *Guiding the Gifted Child* (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982), may enhance the family environment.

SUMMARY

An approach for meeting the emotional and social needs and for facilitating the growth of gifted individuals is being developed at the University of Northern Colorado. Emphasis has been placed on seven categories of activities in the affective and social domains that are necessary for ongoing development. Activities have been selected from each area to be presented throughout the school years. A single activity or cluster of activities within one category will not provide the experiences necessary for continual growth. Gifted individuals will become the leaders of tomorrow only if people take the time and energy to nurture them today.

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