

“... Now his perception and memory were perfect. With one quick look you and I perceive three wine glasses on the table; Funes perceived every grape that had been pressed into the wine and all the stalks and tendrils of it's vineyard. He knew the forms of the clouds in the southern sky on the morning of April 30, 1882 and could compare them in his memory with the veins in the marbled binding of a book he had seen only once, or with the feathers of spray lifted by an oar on the Rio Negro on the eve of the Battle of Quebracho... I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very good at thinking. To think is to ignore (or forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract.. In the teeming world of Ireneo Funes there were nothing but particulars...”

- Jorge Luis Borges  
Funes The Memorius (1944)

## No Simple Gifts:

Meeting the Complex Emotional  
Needs of Gifted Children

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## Goals of presentation

- Discuss theories regarding the social/emotional development of high achieving children.
- Discuss some of the emotional and behavioral concerns common to these children.
- Leave time for Q and A regarding these and other issues involving gifted kids

## Who is “gifted”?

- Children may be high achieving in:
  - Mathematics/ Logical Reasoning
  - Language
  - Arts
  - Social skills
  - Physical/Kinesthetic skills
- Many children in more than one domain
- Can also be skilled in some and delayed in others
- Not always captured by standardized testing

## Theory of gifted “overexcitabilities”

- Kasmirez Dabrowski was a polish psychiatrist
- Worked in the years after World War II
- Saw pattern of behavioral and emotional intensity in gifted individuals
- First to suggest that giftedness reflects a personality style as well as cognitive ability
- More recently this work has begun to be evaluated empirically and has received support

## Dabrowski’s overexcitabilities:

- Psychomotor
- Sensual
- Imaginational
- Intellectual
- Emotional

## Psychomotor OE

- Psychomotor OE kids need less sleep, have more energy, talk faster, gesture more
  - “Anything worth doing is worth doing to excess”
- Different from ADHD in that it tends to be goal directed not disorganized (Silverman, 2000)

## Sensual OE

- Oversensitive to textures or sounds or smells
- Also appreciation for music, art, or touch
- Intense reactions to certain sounds or textures
- Colic and food allergies more common among the gifted (Silverman, 2000)
- Research suggests this more common in gifted adults than typical adults though not clear it has panned out in kids (Silverman and Ellsworth, 1980)

## Imaginational OE

- Creativity, visual imagery, intense fantasy life
- Gifted kids more likely to have imaginary friends and have more of them than typical (Rogers, 1986)
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  of gifted kids have imaginary friends in early childhood (Webb 1982)
- Imaginational OE consistently found to be higher in gifted kids in research

## Intellectual OE

- Curiosity, concentration, introspection, sustained intellectual effort, love of learning
  - The core personality trait of the “intellectual”
- May or may not present itself in school
- Tends to perpetuate and increase the child's giftedness more than any other trait
- Almost all gifted children perceived by parents as asking exceptionally probing questions when young.

## Emotional OE

- Emotional depth, attachment, intensity, morality
- Also sensitivity, self-criticism, anxiety, perfectionism
- Often first thing noticed by parents of gifted kids
- Research consistently finds to be high in gifted children and adults
  - They are also more focused on empathy and justice
  - They have more coherent and explicit value systems than less gifted
  - They are more cautious on average and more likely to suffer from anxiety

## Implications of Dabrowski

- His work creates a framework for understanding development of high achieving kids
- “Depathologizes” many of these behavioral manifestations of giftedness
- Shows us that behaviors that appear maladaptive in one context can be adaptive in another.

## “Asynchronous development”

- Kids may be advanced in some intellectual areas but not others
- Many advanced intellectually but not socially
- Judgment lags behind intellect as well
  - “How can a child who is so smart lack such basic common sense?”
  - Discrepancy seems to reduce with age.
  - Judgment may just be maturational

## “Multipotentiality”

- Gifted kids can also struggle with issue of “multipotentiality”
  - Ability to do so much it makes it difficult to choose one thing
- E.g. Gifted students change majors more often in college
- Younger children often “overprogram” themselves and distracted from schoolwork by outside interests

## Peer relation problems

- These noted as early as 1920's by Hollingworth though often denied by other researchers
- Numerous studies have now confirmed at least self-perception of social problems for gifted kids
- Problems more clear cut for highly gifted
  - Gross (1993) reports 80% of highly gifted said they felt intensely isolated and had to monitor behavior to "fit in"
- Question is whether problems are a function of child's giftedness or an associated psychiatric syndrome

## Highly focused interests

- Highly focused interests
  - A "sizeable minority" of gifted children have interests that are "almost obsessive in their intensity and focus" (Winner, 1996)
  - Often these begin very young
  - Can switch from time to time, evolve slowly or remain fixed for years.

## Summary

- Gifted children have unique character traits that influence the expression and development of their emotional gifts
- Intellectual giftedness often appears in some areas and not in others
- Social development and emotional maturation appear to be independent of IQ.

## Resources:

- Hoagies gifted education page
  - <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>
  - Hosts mirror of former ERIC clearinghouse on gifted and disabilities
    - <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/index.html>
- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted
  - <http://www.sengifted.org/>
- National Association for Gifted Children
  - <http://www.nagc.org/>

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## Questions...

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