



Module 5: Social and Emotional Issues of Gifted Children in School

Welcome to this module on social and emotional issues affecting gifted children in school.

The social and emotional lives of children impact on their schooling. In this video, I want present some key social and emotional issues for gifted children.

Social Issues

Most children tend to socialise normally within the school environment. While there are hiccups along the way, by and large most children adapt to a school world which is built to cater to the norm.

Gifted students socialise just like other children so long as they have opportunities to interact with like-minded children.

Sadly most regular schools do not provide opportunities for gifted to children to socialise. This is partly because the population of gifted students may be dispersed throughout the school and be of different ages and therefore less likely to meet.

But it may also be because the school does not recognise, deliberately or otherwise, the needs of gifted children and so cannot respond to their social needs in school. As a result of this gifted children can end up appearing as loners or antisocial.

Both of these constructs become self-fulfilling prophecies. The perception that a child is a loner makes it less likely that other children will want to interact with them. The overall result of this is the experience of isolation felt by the gifted child. In a worst-case scenario is this isolation can lead to depression.

While there is a higher proportion of introverts among gifted children, introversion should not be mistaken for an antisocial outlook. Different people derive their energy different sources and interactions. Extrovert people derive energy from their interactions with other people but they also need time when they can be on their own. Introverts on the other hand will pick and choose the

times when they will interact with other people but they will often recharge their batteries by finding a quiet space to be on their own.

Every child needs to feel like they belong. Gifted children will also seek out groups to belong to. However, in some schools, this can be a futile exercise. One of the key benefits of the summer programme in Centre for Talented Youth in Dublin City University was the social opportunities gifted children had to mix with one another.

Gifted Girls

In a secondary school environment it is particularly important to note the presentation of girls who are gifted. Towards the end of primary school and as girls grow into teenagers, there is increasing pressure on them to conform to the norms of the cohort around them. The desire to fit in places them under pressure not to be seen as smart as boys and this means that gifted girls will often dumb-down their performance in school.

Stereotypes about 'appropriate' subjects for girls and 'appropriate' career options can be a powerful disinhibitor for gifted girls and can prevent them rising to their potential. While this is changing, it is changing slowly. Teachers can be powerful allies to girls as they explore and exploit their intellectual ability.

Emotional Issues

A key characteristic of gifted children is asynchronous development. This occurs where a child's intellectual, emotional and physical development do not align.

In general, a 6-year-old child has the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a typical six-year-old child.

As discussed in module 4, a gifted child of 8 may have the physical development of an 8-year-old, the intellectual development of a 12-year-old and the emotional sensitivity of a 6-year-old. The mismatch between the physical development of the child and their intellectual ability can result in frustration. A child who has rapidly successive ideas but cannot write them down fast enough may become very frustrated and upset. One minute a child may be arguing with a skill of a lawyer and another minute throwing a tantrum typical of a two-year-old.

At a second level, the hypersensitivity of the gifted child may manifest itself in frustration at the gap between their adult knowledge of the world and their emotional understanding which may be still immature. A sense of powerlessness to the change of obvious injustices can also lead to frustration.

Gifted children also tend to be quite moralistic and exhibit a fairly black and white understanding of how the world 'should' work. Without effective guidance, the disconnect between their moral stance and the reality can lead to early cynicism. At a primary level, this disconnect coupled with a gifted 's

sensitivity can result in a lot of tears shed for those less fortunate than themselves.

George Betts and Maureen Neihart have produced a series of profiles of gifted and talented children which describes groups gifted children according to a number of attributes including Feelings and Attitudes, Behaviours, Needs, Peer and Adult Perceptions, Identification, Home support and school support.

The groups identified were named:

- 'The Successful' who tend to get on well in school;
- 'The Creative' who are often viewed as rebellious;
- 'The Underground' who desire to belong and so hide their talents;
- 'The At-Risk' who may need alternatives to mainstream school;
- 'The Twice Exceptional' who require very specific intervention to succeed in school; and
- 'The Autonomous Learner' who is driven by intrinsic motivation and will succeed with the right guidance.

There is a link to the revised profiles below this video. While the profiles are generalisations, I was able to recognise many of these students in my own practice and the profiles helped me reconsider children I had previously discounted as gifted.

In the next video, we will look at approaches to meeting the academic needs of gifted children in school.

References

Lovecky, D.V., (1992) Exploring Social and Emotional Aspects of Giftedness in Children, *Roeper Review*, 1992 15(1) 18-25 accessed at <https://sengifted.org/archives/articles/exploring-social-and-emotional-aspects-of-giftedness-in-children>

Betts, G., & Neihart M. (1988) Profiles of the Gifted and Talented Accessed at http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10114.aspx

The Profiles were included in the NCCA's Guidelines for Teachers for Exceptionally Able Students published in 2007. The Profiles were updated in 2010. The link below the video is to the 2010 revised profiles.