
Introduction

Asynchrony means being “out of sync.” Gifted kids are more advanced than kids of their chronological age, which represents one type of asynchrony they experience. In addition, there can be discrepancies between their mental age and their emotional and social development. Silverman (2002) stressed that for a gifted kid to have the mental maturity of a 14-year-old and the physical maturity of an 8-year-old poses enormous emotional and social challenges. Lewis Terman (1931), a pioneer in gifted education recognized this problem of asynchrony and said:

Precocity unavoidably complicates the problem of social adjustment. The child of eight years with a mentality of twelve or fourteen is faced with a situation almost inconceivably difficult. In order to adjust normally, such a child has to have an exceptionally well-balanced personality and to be well nigh a social genius. The higher the IQ, the more acute the problem. (p. 579)

Along with their asynchrony, the gifted have a unique perception of themselves and their world in comparison to their age mates. The gifted are sensitive, perfectionistic, and intense, and moral issues affect gifted students more deeply and at an earlier age than their peers. Gifted students may appear to be great kids and well adjusted, receiving good grades in school, but they still may suffer from feelings of inadequacy because their successes fall short of their ideals. This book addresses the unique perception of gifted students and suggests ways that great kids can become greater, thus easing the burden of being gifted.

The field of gifted education has focused on the theoretical framework of J. P. Guilford to understand the dimensions of gifted, and on the theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow to understand the need for gifted students to develop self-understanding and work toward self-actualization. This book emphasizes the use of Kazimierz Dabrowski’s Theory of Emotional Development, also known as the Theory of Positive Disintegration, in an attempt to clarify the intensities of gifted students, and to build an understanding of the five “overexcitabilities” as positive energy that can enable

the gifted to live lives deeply imbued with immutable values, and to have the moral courage to become their best selves (Silverman, 1993). In short, the five overexcitabilities are: (1) psychomotor, (2) sensual, (3) intellectual, (4) imaginal, and (5) emotional. Dabrowski's theory is being increasingly recognized in the field of gifted education as a means of building greater understanding of gifted individuals.

This book will be helpful for teachers, parents, and counselors, but most important for gifted students, as they read and recognize themselves on the pages. Chapters include case studies and practical suggestions, including a "Teacher Voice" representing a teacher's reflection on the material in the chapter. This is followed by a section called "Read On," "Log On," and "Reflect On" to extend the use and understanding of the material. Research is integrated into each chapter to build a foundation for the suggested activities and strategies that parents, teachers, and counselors can use with gifted students.

The introductory chapter discusses the unique perception of the gifted in the context of Dabrowski's five overexcitabilities, and introduces his concept of multilevelness. The second chapter deals with the need for gifted students to develop social skills and makes a distinction between socialization and social development, and how these terms are often used interchangeably. Socialization is a Level II function in Dabrowski's Theory of Emotional Development in which the individual goes along with the group, whereas social development represents a multilevel function in Levels IV–V in which the individual is seeking autonomy, responsibility, and authenticity.

The third chapter discusses perfectionism in gifted students, which Dabrowski viewed as a positive trait. A distinction is made between debilitating perfectionism and the positive side of perfectionism in seeking excellence. The fourth chapter addresses the need for gifted students to develop moral courage and suggests ways gifted students can learn to live deeply with immutable values.

The fifth chapter focuses on individuality and how gifted students can take charge of their lives to become aware of their gifts, and it suggests ways for gifted students to develop their unique individual qualities. The sixth chapter discusses the sensitivity and empathy gifted students have for others, as well as how they can build their capacity to be other-centered rather than self-centered. This chapter stresses the need for gifted students to alleviate their sense of helplessness that comes from their empathy for the suffering of others. Activities to develop and maintain their sensitivity and empathy for others are provided, including activism for gifted students.

The seventh chapter focuses on reflective thinking and its relationship to building a strong sense of self-efficacy in gifted students. The skills involved in changing one's thinking are addressed, with the use of the

computer as a metaphor for the brain and examples of gifted students who have used these skills are provided. The eighth chapter discusses the importance of gifted students developing their creativity and how they can further develop their creative ability in problem solving.

The ninth chapter discusses the importance of developing a sense of peace and tranquility, and it suggests ways gifted students can develop their ability to go within for “inner dialogue.” This chapter also explores the need for gifted students to walk away from controversy and to become an example for peace-making and conflict resolution. The tenth and final chapter discusses the importance of gifted students achieving balance in their lives to develop a sense of moderation to avoid the extremes in physical, mental, or emotional aspects of life, and the importance of identifying purpose and ways to live a meaningful life.

The intensities need to be viewed and presented positively to gifted children and youth as strengths to enable them to understand and value their gifts. Gifted students need the help and support of significant adults in their lives, their teachers and parents, and this book will help to build an understanding of the uniqueness of gifted students. The content of the chapters was selected to provide a window into the inner world of giftedness, including their unique perception, their need for social development rather than socialization, their sensitivity and empathy for others, their need for reflective thinking, their creativity, their need to experience peace and tranquility, and their need to achieve balance in their lives and to identify their purpose.

As a teacher of and a counselor to gifted students, a director of teacher training in gifted education, a national director of the Office of Gifted and Talented, and most important as a parent of a gifted son, I observed their uniqueness and their attempts to mask their giftedness to try and fit in. It is my intention that this book ease the burden of being gifted and enable gifted students to use their gifts to bring not only themselves, but society to a higher set of values and action.

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