

Gifted Children and Social Relationships

Kimberly A Mula, PsyD, Paulette Janus, LCSW, & Danette Palomar, LCPC

We know that gifted children demonstrate human potential and achievement that far exceed what would be expected based upon their chronological age. Yet what do we know about their social and emotional development? How do their rapidly developing cognitive abilities affect their development in other areas? What are the differences between gifted children and their non-gifted peers in these other areas of development? A myriad of research has explored whether or not gifted children demonstrate greater difficulties in the areas of social and emotional adjustment compared with their non-gifted peers.

Initial research indicated opposing views. Terman (1925, 1947) found a lower rate of difficulties in gifted children than in the general population. In contrast, Hollingworth (1926,1942) found that people with extremely high scores on intelligence tests demonstrated greater difficulties than people with high or average scores. Subsequent research has continued to result in differing views.

The discrepancies in the literature may be contributed to the answer not being a yes-no dichotomy but rather a spectrum. Neihart (1999) speculated that giftedness does impact the social and emotional adjustment of gifted children, adolescents, and adults. Yet, whether the impact is positive or negative depends on the type of giftedness, the educational fit, and personal characteristics. It has also been postulated that there are more within group (i.e. gifted children) differences than between group (i.e. between gifted children and non-gifted peers) differences (Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2007). Within this context, this article will examine whether or not gifted children experience more or less difficulties within social relationships. Rather we will examine how gifted children develop friendships, the unique challenges posed by their giftedness, and how parents, teachers and other adults can help gifted children overcome these challenges and thrive socially.

Friendship Development

Alward (2005) states that we are all social beings who possess an innate need to relate to and to respond to others. Everyone has witnessed infants, children and teens seeking out interactions with others, turning their heads to look toward a familiar voice, smiling when they see someone they enjoy interacting with and building close relationships with their family. It is only logical that through this need for interpersonal contact, peer relationships develop.

Friendships are essential in order to help children grow not only socially but also emotionally (Alward, 2005). Peer relationships help children learn how to problem solve, regulate their emotions, seek help and support as well as how to trust and be trusted. As they grow, children's concepts of friendship grow and develop based upon their experiences and interactions with family members, other adults and peers. In this respect, Gross (2006) postulated five stages of friendship development.

Stage 1: "Play partner" – In this stage, a friend is viewed as someone to play with and to share toys.

Stage 2: "People to chat to" – progressing into this stage, friendships are no longer defined solely by play. Rather, a sharing of interests and conversations related to those interests become important.

Stage 3: “Help and encouragement” – In addition to shared interests, a friend is now viewed as someone who offers support, help, and encouragement, although the child does not yet recognize the importance of providing support in return.

Stage 4: “Intimacy/empathy” – In this stage, the child now recognizes the aspects of both giving and receiving support and encouragement.

Stage 5: “The sure shelter” – This final stage marks the realization that friendship is a long-lasting and emotionally deep connection filled with mutual interests, respect, support and trust.

Through this framework, we can understand not only how children develop friendships but also how giftedness can impact this development. Let’s now examine these challenges.

Challenges for Gifted Children

Asynchronous Development

Many but not all aspects of gifted children’s development occur at an accelerated rate. It is important to understand that while a gifted child’s cognitive skills are developing rapidly, their bodies and most likely their emotions as well are developing on a more age appropriate continuum. This out of synch or asynchronous development occurs when a child’s intellectual development proceeds on a trajectory that is outside of the norm while physical, social and/or emotional development does not (Tolan, 1999). Silverman (2002) noted that the asynchrony of development often intensifies as a child’s intelligence increases resulting in an even greater divergence between mental and chronological age.

As a result of uneven development, gifted children may experience unique adjustment difficulties in various developmental areas (Knopper, 1999). This can result in a 6-year old child who functions as a 12-year old in math, an 8-year old in soccer and a 5-year old when he loses his favorite toy. Such asynchronous development can help to illuminate the process of gifted children developing friendships. Gross (2006) found that gifted children were often farther along in the stages of friendship development than their same age non-gifted peers. For example, while their peers were looking for play partners, gifted children were beginning to look for close and trusting relationships. Recognizing the uneven development experienced by gifted children, it is understandable that many of them may struggle to make or maintain friendships. Consider the experience of a 7-year old who loves to play Monopoly yet when she attempts to engage her same-age, non-gifted peers in this complex board game, her peers would rather play with dolls. Tolan (1999) sets forth that gifted children’s perceptions of peers are based on their own cognitive understanding of themselves and others. Therefore, they expect others to think, act, and speak as they do. When they realize that this is may not be the case, many gifted children are left frustrated and questioning why they are not “normal.”

This helps to understand why gifted children often befriend other gifted children or children who are several years older. These children are seeking not only intellectual compatibility but also a similar conception and expectation of friendship. This is similar to the process of children who are developmentally delayed tending to seek relationships with children several years younger. Therefore, it is important for parents, teachers and other adults to recognize that gifted children who have few friends within their same-age peer group do not necessarily have social difficulties. Rather,

these children may be gravitating towards others who match their developmental rather than their chronological age.

Besides understanding how such asynchronous development impacts both gifted children and other's perceptions of them, it is important for parents, teachers, and others to help such gifted children manage their uneven development. Parents, in particular, often find themselves acting as mediators between their child and the mainstream culture, especially other family members, teachers, and peers (Kearney 1992). Parents should focus on creating a strong and supportive family environment that allows for autonomy and independence as well as space for psychological and emotional growth. Parents and others should evaluate their expectations of gifted children and alter them according to development. It is easy to expect an intellectually gifted child to excel in all areas yet it is important to remember that this child may perform above average in reading and writing yet within the average range in mathematic. In the same manner, a child who is gifted athletically may have the emotional response to competition and losing that is more closely aligned with their chronological age. Therefore, expectations of gifted children should vary based upon their individual development level across various activities and academic areas.

In this same manner, gifted children should be encouraged to form social relationships with peers of various ages and to recognize that they may need several friendship groups to accommodate their uneven development. For example, the child who is gifted in math and an average athlete may benefit from being on a soccer team with same age peers and in a math group with children several years older.

Introversion

Research has indicated that gifted children tend to be introverted, preferring time alone, having only a few close friends, and often isolating themselves from others in favor of their talent (Gross, 2006). Introversion is not inherently a negative personality trait. It does not imply that a child is uncomfortable in social situations, nervous, apprehensive or even anxious. Rather, children who are introverted use their time alone to think, re-energize, be introspective, center themselves, and contemplate their thoughts and feelings (Sheely, 2010). Introverted individuals tend to want to stand back, observe activities and contemplate choices as opposed to only reacting to a situation or impulsively responding. This does not mean that introverted children lack social skills or do not seek out friendships. They can be sociable and enjoy engaging in discussion with others about a topic of personal interest. They can participate in small group activities as well as classroom projects. It only means that they are energized by ample time alone compared to their extroverted peers who are energized by large group activities. This preference for alone time or introversion is related to two aspects.

First, gifted children can experience large group activities as exhausting, draining their energy supply. Given that gifted children are cognitively more advanced than their same-age peers, attempting to "fit into" a large group setting can be difficult, as the difference between a gifted child and non-gifted peers becomes more obvious as the group size grows. In a larger group, the "norm" will most likely be children within the average developmental spectrum. So a gifted child may feel odd or not normal and they may choose to hide their talent in order to not stand out and be different. Second, gifted children may prefer to be alone to spend time developing their talent, as it is something that truly gives them pleasure. Winner (2000) suggests that when compared to non-gifted peers, gifted children leave school excited to play an instrument, practice free throws, complete

complicated math equations or write a short story. Again, this does not mean that they lack social skills. Rather, it is just one attribute of a developing individual who is dedicated to advancing their gift.

This understanding of introversion can help to explain why gifted children tend to have several close friendships, rather than a large social network. Considering how stressful gifted children find the friendship building process to be, it makes sense that they would prefer to enjoy a few close, mutually satisfying relationships, which is the hallmark of Gross' (2006) fifth stage of friendship development. Sheely (2010) suggested that once a gifted child has a few positive peer relationships they may lose interest in developing new relationships. However, it is equally as possible that it may not be a lack of interest but rather a satisfaction with the quality of their current peer relationships. A reluctance to engage in the process of finding other children to relate to and to interact with can be frustrating.

Let's consider how parents, teachers, and others can help those with an introverted personality style. It is important to recognize that positive characteristics of introversion and accept these children for who they are rather than attempt to change them into extroverts. Recognize that gifted children tend to be more private, prefer time alone, and often rely on several close friendships. Through acceptance, gifted children learn that introversion is perfectly normal and does not need to be cured (Sword, 2003). Provide gifted children with opportunities for self-expression and encourage participation in small group activities, particularly with other gifted children to enhance social acceptance and self-esteem. As these children begin to feel more accepted and to feel more confident about who they are, they will interact more with others, even non-gifted peers, and more actively participate in group activities or projects (Sword, 2003).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is defined as a desire to do things in an exact manner, with no errors and to the highest possible standard. Some common characteristics associated with perfectionism include attention to detail, an innate drive to achieve the highest standards, complete commitment to the task at hand, a fear of never being good enough, and frustration when these goals cannot be achieved. Like introversion, perfectionism is not an inherently negative personality characteristic. Contrarily, there are many benefits of striving for excellence.

Roedell (1984) sets forth that perfectionism in its positive form provides an individual with the motivation, energy and drive to achieve. Given their strong cognitive abilities, gifted children are able to visualize and foresee potential outcomes and limitless possibilities. This encourages them to set lofty goals and work tirelessly to achieve their high expectations. Examples of this process include, an artistic teen working diligently to perfect her brush stroke or a child whose passion for math motivates him to attempt to solve increasingly challenging equations for hours at a time.

Gifted children can positively use this energy to motivate them to set higher standards of accomplishment, to exert greater effort to achieve their goals and to commit to a project seeing it through to completion.

Perfectionism poses a challenge to friendship development and social acceptance in several ways. The first is related to the anxiety that often accompanies perfectionism, an anxiety driven by the fear of not being able to achieve said perfection. Greenspon (2010) elaborated on this idea suggesting

<http://afgfamily.com/gifted-children-and-social-relationships/>

that perfectionism is “a relational issue” where an individual seeks to secure acceptance by others by being perfect. Perfectionists are driven by their belief that only complete perfection will result in friendships and ultimately social acceptance.

The second difficulty arises when gifted children or teens begin to punish themselves for not achieving their goal. This frustration often occurs in the form of negative self-talk involving statements such as “you will never be good enough”, “you are not as smart as you think” or “just wait until everyone realizes you are a fake.” It also takes the form of all-or-nothing thinking, meaning that things are either perfect or horrible with no in-between. This internal dialogue then generalizes to all aspects of the child’s world. For example, they believe that because they did not achieve perfection, they are stupid, will be completely unsuccessful, or will never be good enough. Such self-perceptions can have a significant negative impact on the self-esteem of a gifted child or teen, leading them to feel even less confident and secure in their social interactions.

Third, perfectionism can impact peer relationships when gifted child or teen also set unrealistic expectations of others, particularly their same-age, non-gifted peers. If a 10-year old child is able to write at a high school level, he/she can become frustrated when working on a group project. Conflicts may arise if that gifted child is not able to understand why their fellow classmates are not able to contribute at such a level.

Finally, striving for perfectionism to the exclusion of other activities, particularly social ones may hinder a gifted child’s friendship development. If that artistic teen attempting to perfect her brush stroke spends hours upon hours on that activity to the exclusion of others, she will not have the opportunity to engage in social interactions and develop friendships.

Given these challenges, it is important for parents, teachers and others to help gifted children channel their perfectionism in a positive and constructive manner, particularly as perfection at everything is unattainable and impossible. Defining and understanding perfectionism is a first step, helping gifted children to recognize the difference between idealism and perfection. Explain that idealism is based on their own unique personal vision of what is possible with planning, practice and dedication to work to their fullest potential. Stress that idealism does not equal perfection. And help them to recognize that different people have different potential in varying areas, which encourages them to develop empathy and realistic expectations of their non-gifted peers, particularly when working on group projects.

It is equally important to emphasize the process of learning and what is gained through the experience of completing a project as opposed to the outcome. Encourage gifted students to attempt to play a new piece of music or to solve a complex math problem with the goal of learning rather than achieving excellence. Remind these children that learning occurs as a result of practice and exposure. Help them to set realistic expectations for themselves and to embrace their missteps, reinforcing the idea that mistakes lead to learning and great discoveries, as well as increased success. Applaud persistence and express pride in their attempts rather than focusing on their achievement. In a similar manner, parents and teacher can help gifted children learn to emotionally accept losing, particularly as gifted children’s perceptions of these concepts are skewed. Again, they may feel that a 95% on an honor’s level math test is a failure. Helping gifted children with this can be achieved by playing games of chance such as Rock, Paper, Scissors or the card game War. As gifted children begin to feel comfortable with not always winning or succeeding, they learn to manage their thoughts and feelings that arise as a result. They can become gracious losers who can recognize that

their talents still exist even in the face of defeat. And they will be less likely to give up when faced with a task or activity that is challenging.

Another way to help support gifted children modulate their perfectionist tendencies is to encourage them to break down tasks into small attainable goals. Gifted children can become overly focused on the big picture and frustration can arise as a result of attempting to achieve impossible goals. Setting small goals encourages a gifted child to prioritize tasks, set time line, and remain focused on the task at hand as opposed to getting caught up in their idealized visions of the outcome of a project. In addition, setting realistic goals increases the likelihood of success, which will encourage the gifted child to set and work towards the next small goal rather than giving up on the whole when one part is not perfect.

Emotional Intensity

Emotions provide information about and lend meaning to internal and external life experiences. People learn about both themselves and others through emotional responses such as happiness, joy, pleasure, and sadness. Research on the emotional development of gifted children has resulted in mixed viewpoints. Some studies have found that gifted children are more vulnerable than their nongifted peers to emotional difficulties such as anxiety, phobias and depression, while other studies have found no such difference (Keiley, 2002). Like other characteristics related to giftedness, it is most likely that gifted children have the same emotional experiences as their nongifted peers yet experience these emotions differently as a result of their giftedness.

In his theory of the emotional development of gifted children, Dabrowski (1972) described this difference, which he referred to as overexcitability. He defined overexcitability as a widespread and heightened awareness of one's environment, which can lead to overstimulation. He set forth that the talents and cognitive capabilities of gifted children heighten their emotional reaction when they interact with the world. In a similar manner, Sword (2003) set forth that emotional intensity in the gifted is not a matter of feeling more than other people rather it is a different way of experiencing the world that is vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, and commanding. This emotional intensity is often manifested in deep, empathic connection to others and to things. For example, gifted children can be moved to tears by listening to their favorite classical composure responding to the complexity of the melody and use of tempo. Others experience intense emotional reactions to natural disasters, such as hurricane Katrina, as their high intellectual capacity allows them to recognize the impact of wide spread destruction on the environment as well as its' inhabitants. As a result, gifted children often have a strong sense of moral and social justice. It becomes challenging for gifted children with such emotional intensity to relate to their non-gifted peers. They can become disappointed in and frustrated with others who do not feel as deeply, not understanding why others are not as affected. They can feel odd or different when others do not share their views. Imagine an 8-year old who is so distraught over the destruction raged by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan yet his fellow 8-year old peers are not even aware of the disaster. Again, gifted children are challenged to build relationships with same age peers who can often be puzzled or confused by their advanced points of view.

In order to help and support gifted children's challenges with emotional sensitivity, parents and teachers should normalize these experiences. It is important to teach gifted children that their heightened response to their surroundings is a unique and normal part of who they are. If emotional intensity is framed as a positive attribute, gifted children can begin to understand and value their

emotions. With such understanding, gifted children can recognize and accept the differences between themselves and their non-gifted peers, rather than feeling that they are odd or strange or that their peers are oblivious or noncaring. Such understanding is also important for non-gifted children for the same reasons.

It is important for gifted children to have a space where they feel comfortable discussing their emotional responses. This may be through discussion with parents, adults, or other gifted children or it may be through writing, art or music. Discussing or expressing such thoughts and feelings helps gifted children to accept their emotions valuing them as opposed to rejecting them. And it also helps gifted children to begin to see the connection between their feelings and actions and to recognize that their actions have both positive and negative consequences. In this manner, a highly sensitive gifted child may benefit from volunteering or in some way giving back to others and their community. Through involvement with faith communities, charitable organizations, or scouting, they can help relieve some suffering within their communities, learn empathy and gain the satisfaction of being part of the solution.

The Gifted Label

Given that attributes such as perfectionism, introversion and emotional intensity can impact the social development of gifted children in both positive and negative ways, how we understand gifted children can significantly influence both how they see themselves and the perception of others. The way giftedness is defined and explained to children and to those peers and adults around them is quite important, particularly as there are both positive and negative messages from society about giftedness.

Once children are labeled as gifted or talented, this often changes how others perceive them as well as how they perceive themselves. Being defined as gifted can impact a child in a variety of ways both positive and negative (Moulton, Moulton, Housewright, & Bailey, 1998). Positive identified by gifted children include a sense of accomplishment and feelings of being unique. Gifted children and teens identified negative aspects such as being the victim of teasing, feeling different from others, social isolation and having increased pressure and expectations from parents and teachers. For example, an 11-year old who is a gifted pianist may embrace her talent, feeling proud of her abilities, whereas her parents or music teacher may raise their expectations and push her to achieve even more once they are aware of her talents.

It is vital that gifted children and teens are given the opportunity to ask questions about their talents, to comprehend the exact nature of extent of their abilities, and to adjust to their gifts. Think of the relief they must feel when someone finally explains why they are reading several grades above their level, can play the piano like Mozart, or throw a ball at 95 miles an hour. With such information, gifted children can begin to understand what it means to be gifted and to recognize that it is a normal part of who they are. And in turn, they will feel more comfortable with themselves and within social interactions.

In the same manner, it is important to define and talk about giftedness with teachers, parents, and non-gifted peers. Assumptions about gifted children can lead them to minimize or even hide their talents in attempts to avoid too high expectations or to be perceived by others as normal (Delisle & Galbraith 2002). Again, understanding giftedness normalizes the gifted child. If a teacher is able to recognize that gifted children tend to socialize with older children as a result of asynchronous

development, that teacher will be less likely to label that child with social difficulties. Peers may be less likely to tease if they are encouraged to understand and appreciate the unique individual differences of others.

Identity Formation

How we explain giftedness also impacts identity formation, which is the process whereby an individual works to unify and integrate all aspects of self into a cohesive whole answering the question, “Who am I?” Many believe that this process begins in early childhood with a quest for autonomy and a need to separate from parents and become independent. The process continues in middle childhood with children developing a sense of who they are, accepting their individuality and growth, and seeking intimacy and acceptance in peer relationships (Gross, 1998).

Knowing that gifted children’s development is advanced, it is possible as Gross (1998) suggests, that they begin their development of self-identity earlier than their non-gifted peers. How does this advanced development impact their self-identity and how they view themselves and their roles at home, school, and within the community? As children develop, they gain an awareness of their opinions, interests, abilities and achievements as well as that of others. This awareness is related to developmental rather than chronological age. Most children of 7 or 8 are developing their sense of self through increased independence while gifted children of the same age are developing their sense of self through seeking peers acceptance.

While everyone hopes their children will develop a sense of self based on their true, unique characteristics this is not always the case. Coleman (1985) suggests that gifted children realize quite early that other people’s perceptions change when their talents become evident. Gifted children are often faced with the challenge of being open about their talents and facing peer rejection or conditional acceptance. For example, a 10-year old gifted child who is writing at a high school level may embrace her talent and have ambitions to become a novelist; yet, she may face teasing and rejection from her same age peers who cannot perform at such a level.

For some gifted children, especially intellectually gifted individuals, this challenge can become too overwhelming and they choose to hide their gifts in exchange for social acceptance. Gross (1998) postulates that to be accepted within a peer group that values conformity to social norms, gifted children and teens may mask or hide their talents by developing alternative identities believed to be more acceptable. In the above example, the gifted child may choose to write at a less sophisticated level and even possibly abandon her dreams of becoming a novelist in order to gain peer acceptance. In order to fit in, this mask forces gifted children to conceal or deny their love of learning or their passion for arts or music. Staying true to their drive for excellence and innate need to learn and achieve means sacrificing relationships with peers who may be resentful of their talents and abilities. Difficulties arise when assuming such a fake identity is successful and leads to social acceptance by non-gifted peers. Gifted children may be reluctant to assume their true identity, preferring to keep the alter ego. This will occur if they believe that fundamental parts of themselves are intolerable to peers. If this should happen, gifted children will ultimately lose their sense of a true and genuine self. So, how can gifted children form their self-identity, be true to themselves, and celebrate their gifts and talents? Parents and teachers of gifted children need to help them understand that they do not need to hide their talents and skills for the sake of building friendships. In fact, the opposite is true. Gifted children need help and support in understanding that they can have different types of friendships. By defining the difference between true friends and those who are acquaintances or

superficial friends, gifted children can recognize that they do not need to hide their talents but can openly share themselves with their best friends.

It is also important to encourage all children to focus on common interests rather than differences in order to promote empathy and acceptance of others. It is essential that parents and teachers create opportunities for gifted children to socialize rather than feel compelled to hide behind a mask.

School Support

Another way to help gifted children feel secure, supported, and accepted is through proper classroom or subject placement. This is particularly important for friendship development and self-identity. Academic acceleration enables gifted children to be themselves, to feel accepted by peers and teachers and to develop genuine friendships. By skipping a grade or becoming involved in advanced study programs, gifted children find peers with whom they can relate (Rogers, 2002). They share similar thoughts, feelings, ideas, hopes, and dreams. They are no longer the “nerds” whom everyone wants to cheat off of or the children who resist answering questions because others may think they are the “teacher’s pet.” Without proper school support, gifted children may remain guarded, cautious, and hesitant to connect with others, fearing they will be rejected due to their talents.

Traditionally, acceleration is viewed as grade-skipping and this is one option for gifted children. For academically gifted children, moving up a grade diminishes the gap between their abilities and that of their classmates. However, such a form of acceleration is by far not the only choice. In fact, academic acceleration can occur in a wide variety of ways including early entrance to elementary, high school or college, enrollment in two academic levels such as taking college courses during high school as well as completing courses via examination. Olszewski-Kubilius and Limburg-Weber (1999) outline the common acceleration programs offered by elementary and secondary schools. One type of acceleration is referred to as classroom clustering. This occurs within the heterogeneous classroom whereby gifted children are grouped together to learn at an accelerated rate that differs from their peers. While teaching students at a different level within one classroom can be a challenge for teachers, this is a good option for gifted students who seek to remain with their same age peers. By staying with their same age peers, many believe that gifted children not only gain academically but also continue to enhance their social skills.

Resource programs are also a type of acceleration, which typically involve scheduling time during a gifted child’s school day where he or she leaves the traditional classroom setting for a set period of time for advanced academic instruction. This resource time can be provided daily or weekly and can focus on a single subject or on multiple subjects, depending upon academic needs. Such an environment provided gifted children with much needed interactions with intellectual, artistic, or musically inclined peers of various ages with whom they share common interests and skills. This allows gifted children to feel comfortable with their talents and to develop close, deep friendships that may not be possible with their same age peers. At the same time, remaining with their same age peers allows gifted children to enhance social skills in general such as problem solving and developing realistic expectations of others.

Another option for gifted children is being placed in a homogeneous gifted classroom. Within this classroom setting, gifted students receive accelerated classroom instruction and enrichment experiences. One example of this is in high school advanced placement classes. There will still be

some grade level variance among the students but not to the degree that is often found in traditional heterogeneous classrooms (Olszewski-Kubilius & Limburg-Weber, 1999). Such classroom placement increases the interactions between children who are experiencing their environment in a similar manner. They can form intimate friendships with others whose perceptions, academics, talents, and personalities match. Accordingly, they can feel socially accepted and comfortable with their talents and increase their self-esteem.

Considering all the options parents must choose from with respect to educating their gifted children, how do they come to a sound and thoughtful decision? The best fit for gifted students is an environment where they feel comfortable with the teacher and other students and where the learning meets their developmental needs. It is important for parents and teachers to consider the ability level of gifted children. This does not only mean their intellectual gifts, but also their problem solving, their interactions with older peers, and their ability to seek help and support from others. Again, parents and teachers can provide support and encouragement to all students, pointing out that individual differences are to be celebrated rather than altered or changed to fit the classroom or societal norm. Also, gifted students need to be encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings about their school experiences as opposed to keeping them bottled up inside. Understanding the student, therefore, becomes the basis upon which every decision about the children's education rests. Parents and teachers must work together and consider the options carefully in relation to the child's individual needs, academically, socially, and emotionally.

Conclusion

Given how giftedness uniquely impacts friendship development, problems such as perfectionism and introversion can pose challenges for gifted children interacting with their same-age peers. Yet, this is something that they must do. Gifted children can feel odd or different from other students leading to low self-esteem. They can become frustrated with the developmental differences between themselves and their peers and develop unrealistic expectations of others, leading to conflict. They can hide their talents, underachieve, or withdraw. They can feel misunderstood by others, even the adults surrounding them. However, these need not be so.

It is important to help gifted children develop and maintain friendships while also embracing the talents that are part of them. Parents, teachers and other adults should help gifted children recognize that they can be drawn to different people for a variety of reasons. For example, gifted children may have different friends with whom they can discuss math, play chess or go to an art museum. Involving them in extracurricular activities, social clubs, or study groups enables them to discover this on their own. Such activities encourage gifted children to develop friendships through teamwork, cooperation, and shared experiences. They are able to develop social skills such as introducing themselves, starting conversations and asking questions about others' interests. They also learn how to problem solve and reduce conflicts and interpersonal differences while still maintaining their peer relationships. These skills are important for gifted children to be able to develop friendships with both fellow gifted children and non-gifted peers alike.

It also helps to remember that gifted children can learn just as much from their negative peer interactions as they do from their positive experiences. We should all rather see the children we know happy and emotionally secure; yet, negative or uncomfortable social experiences can enable children and teens to recognize the qualities of healthy, respectful, supportive and encouraging friendships. Those who are the ones who are flexible, find common interests with others, actively

listen to conversations, ask questions regarding others', actively listen to conversations, ask questions regarding others' interests, have empathy, and are emotionally available (Lovecky, 1995). As the parents, teachers and counselors in their lives, we are in a position to help gifted children successfully navigate these challenges, developing relationships, and celebrate their talents and gifts.

References

- Alward, M. (2005) Friendship: An important part of your child's development. Retrieved on August 22, 2011 from www.googobits.com
- Coleman, L.J. (1985). *Schooling the gifted*. Menlo Park. Addison-Wesley
- Dabrowski, K. (1972). *Psychoneuroses is not an illness*. London, England. Little Brown & Co.
- Delisle, J. & Galbraith, J. (2006) *When gifted kids don't have all the answers: How to meet their social and emotional needs*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.
- Greenspon, T. (2010). *Tips for Parents: Perfection*. Davidson Institute for Talent Development. Retrieved on June 1, 2011, from www.davidsongifted.org.
- Gross, M. (1998) 'The "me" behind the mask: Intellectually gifted students and the search for identity. *Roeper Review* 20 (3), 167-174.
- Gross, M. (2006). *Tips for parents: Gifted children's friendships*. Davidson Institute for Talent Development. Retrieved on June 1, 2011, from www.giftedserives.com.au
- Hollingworth, L.S. (1926). *Gifted Children: Their nature and nurture*. Oxford: Macmillan.
- Hollingworth, L.S. (1942). *Children above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet: Origin and development*. Oxford: World Book.
- Kearney, K. (1992). Understanding Our Gifted. *Open Space Communications*. July/August 4 (6) 8-12.
- Keiley, M. (2002). Affect regulation and the gifted. In M. Neihart, S.M. Reis, N.M. Robinson and S.M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (pp. 41-50). Washington, DC: Prufrock Press Inc.
- Knopper, D. (1999) Social/Emotional Considerations in young gifted children: In J. F. Smutny (Ed), *The young gifted child; Potential and promise, an anthology*. (pp. 340-346). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Lovecky, D. (1999). Highly gifted children and peer relationships. *Counseling and Guidance Newsletter*, 5 (3), 6-7.
- Moulton, P., Moulton, M., Housewright, M., & Bailey, K. (1998). Gifted & Talented: Exploring the Positive and Negative Aspects of Labeling. *Roeper Review*, 21 (2), 153-154.
- Neihart, M. (1999). The impact of giftedness on psychological well-being: What does the empirical literature say. *Roeper Review*, 22 (1), 10-17.
- Olszewski-Kubilius, P. & Limburg-Weber, L. (1999). *A research based primer on terminology and education options for gifted students*. Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University.
- Roedell, W. (1984) Vulnerabilities of highly gifted children. *Roeper Review*. 6 (3) 127-130.

- Rogers, K. (2002) Effect of Acceleration on gifted learners. In M. Neihart. S.M. Reis, N.M. Robinson and S.M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know.* (3-12). Washington DC: Prufrock Press Inc.
- Sheeley, A. (2010) *Tips for parents: gifted children and friendship.* Davidson Institute for Talent Development. Retrieved on June 1, 2011, from www.davidsongifted.org
- Silverman, L. K. (2002). Asynchronous Development: In M. Neihart. S.M. Reis, N.M. Robinson and S.M. Moon (Eds.), *The social and emotional development of gifted children; What do we know.*(pp. 31-37). Washington DC: Prufrock Press Inc.
- Sword, L. K. (2003). *Emotional intensity in gifted children.* Davidson Institute for Talent Development. Retrieved September 3, 2011, from www.giftedservices.com.au
- Terman, L.M. (1925). *Genetic studies of genius.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Terman, L.M., & Oden, M. (1947). *The gifted child grows up: Twenty-five year's follow up of superior group.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Tolan, S. (1999). Beginning Brilliance: In J. F. Smutny (Ed), *The young gifted child; Potential and promise, an anthology.* (pp. 165-181). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Vialle, W., Heaven, P.C.L., & Ciarrochi, J. (2007). On being gifted, but sad and misunderstood: Social, emotional, and academic outcomes of gifted students in the Wollongong Youth Study. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 13 (6), 569-586.
- Winner, E. (2000). The origins and ends of giftedness. *American Psychologist*. 55 (1) 159-169.