

# Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Students

Parent Part C of the  
Competencies  
Collaboration

Once a student is identified as gifted, determination of services is required. Questions about rigor and enrichment, cluster grouping in a classroom, acceleration, and grades are major discussions among parents and teachers. However, the affective needs of the gifted student are not as frequently considered.

What are the social and emotional issues of the gifted student?

How can these needs of the gifted student be addressed?

Our kids are normal. They just aren't  
typical...

Jim Delisle

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# Overexcitabilities

## Dabrowski's Theory

- Kazimierz **Dabrowski**, Polish psychologist
- Identified five personality characteristics or intensities, which he called "overexcitabilities" or "supersensitivities," which affect the way a student experiences the world
  - Psychomotor oversensitivity
  - Sensual oversensitivity
  - Intellectual oversensitivity
  - Imaginational oversensitivity
  - Emotional oversensitivity

These students may have:

- Higher than average response to stimuli
- Reactions that are over and above average in intensity, duration and frequency
- Not all gifted students have overexcitabilities, but there may be more people with overexcitabilities in the gifted population than in the average population
- Children do not grow out of these supersensitivities. A child with intense emotional feelings will experience the same depth of emotion as an adult.
- Emotional overexcitability is most commonly seen in gifted students

# Emotional Overexcitability

- The primary manifestation of this intensity is exceptional emotional sensitivity.
- These students have great emotional depth and strong attachments to people, places, and things. There is a deep concern for others, but they may also have intense self-criticism and anxiety.
- They may be accused of being melodramatic or overreacting, but these emotions are very real for them.
- **Telling an emotionally intense student to ignore teasing or not let the teasing bother him is impossible advice for the student to follow.**

## Emotional Overexcitability

- They may have a strong sense of responsibility, but that may also create stress and anxiety or feelings of failure and guilt.
- These students may experience existential depression (depression over basic concerns about death, poverty, homelessness, war, diseases, etc.)
- These students may have intense empathy for others, including animals, and may choose to be vegetarians.
- They may have an acute sense of justice/injustice.



“It’s not fair!”

## Possible characteristics of students with emotional overexcitability

- Extremes of emotion
- Anxiety
- Feelings of guilt and sense of responsibility
- Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
- Timidity and shyness
- Loneliness
- Concern for others, empathy
- Strong memory for feelings
- Heightened sense right and wrong, of injustice and hypocrisy
- Problems adjusting to change
- Depression
- Need for security
- Physical response to emotions (stomach aches caused by anxiety, for example)

## Parenting strategies for all overexcitabilities

- Help students develop strategies for recognizing stress reactions and coping with stress.
- Help students understand their own behaviors and how their behaviors impact others.
- **The emotions of these students are real. Your molehills really are their mountains.**

# Perfectionism

## **Perfectionism:**

A tendency to regard anything less than perfection as unacceptable; especially setting unrealistic, demanding goals along with regarding failure to achieve them as unacceptable and a sign of personal worthlessness.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/perfectionism>

“In a positive form, perfectionism can provide the driving energy which leads to great achievement”

(Roedell,1984,p.128 as cited by Silverman, 2000, p.58)

# Behaviors of Perfectionism

- Depression
- Nagging feelings of “I should”
- Shame and guilt
- Desire for face-saving
- Procrastination
- Self-deprecation
- Poor risk analysis

# Reasons for the Association of Giftedness and Perfectionism

- Lofty goals requiring conceptual thinking
- Setting standards appropriate to mental age rather than chronological age
- Relationships with older friends
- Failure-avoidance as a consequence of lack of challenge
- Striving for perfect performance and for artificial rewards (grades) instead of mastery/learning (a performance vs. learning orientation)
- Perfectionistic teachers and competitive peers
- Introversion

- Schuler, 2000

# Attributes of Healthy Perfectionists

(Seigle & Schuler, 2000)

- An intense need for order and organization
- Self-acceptance of mistakes
- High parental expectations
- Use of positive coping strategies with their perfectionist tendencies
- View of personal effort as an important part of their perfectionism

## Attributes of Negative or Dysfunctional Perfectionists

- Anxiety about making errors (May stop trying to achieve out of fear of making a mistake)
- Extremely high or unrealistic standards for self (Self-esteem rises and falls depending on latest academic performance)
- Perceived excessive expectations and criticisms from others (Distrusts positive comments)
- Questioning their own judgments
- Lack of effective coping strategies
- Need for constant approval
- Doesn't reward improvements
- Inability to accurately judge risks or consequences
- Desire to "save face"

## Gender and Perfectionism

- Perfectionism may look different in males in females due to societal expectations ---how it “plays out” in their lives
- Girls – tend to over-commit, are expected to be well-behaved and polite, agreeable and focus on relationships (“Hermione”)
- Boys – expected to be protective, risk-taking, competitive, be the hero (“Harry”)

# Games Perfectionists Play

- Mood Roller Coaster  
(happy, sad, happy)
- It's All About Numbers  
(quantity not quality)
- Obsessing About the Future  
(what's next?)
- Pining Over the Past  
( "if only...." )

--- adapted from Adderholt & Goldberg, 1999

## Games Perfectionists Play, cont.

- Telescopic Thinking  
(highlight mistakes, ignore all else)
- Goals Run Your Life  
(ignore health and friends)
- Nothing But the Best  
(constant do-overs)
- All-or-Nothing  
(have to “have it all” )

--- adapted from Adderholt & Goldberg, 1999

# Perfectionistic Thinking

- Mind Reading (what happens when you assume....)
- Probability Overestimations (doom, gloom)
- Tunnel Vision (miss the forest for the trees)
- Interpersonal Sensitivity (need approval)
- Rigid Standards and Inflexibility (rules, rules)
- Excessive Need for Control (correcting others...)

- Adapted from Anthony & Swinson, 1998

## Coping with Perfectionism

- Learn how to mentally filter thoughts, focusing on successes instead of mistakes
- Concentrate effort on the things that really need the extra attention
- Reevaluate current standards by comparing to set criteria used by others (Set realistic goals)
- Celebrate successes
- Develop the capacity for constructive failure; present performance sets the tone for future improvement (Learn from mistakes.)
- Develop self-concepts separate from products
- Look closely at current level of self-acceptance and surround yourself with positive situations and positive people
- Recognize that commitment to excellence is a lifelong struggle

# What Parents and Teachers Can Do to Help

Adapted from work by Betty Meckstroth

## *Convey courage*

- “I know you can try it!” Transformation comes by trial.

## *Reward experimenting*

- Encourage students to try a skill out without being committed to high performance. Sometimes, its worth is in the learning experience. Adept students especially need to accept the value of practice, experimentation, and persistence. Risking an attempt is about motivating themselves and persisting in the face of frustrations.

## *Expect progress, not perfection*

- Finished may be better than perfect!

## *Applaud persistence*

- Successful people keep on working at something even when their efforts are not immediately rewarding. Learning to delay gratification is essential for personal success and satisfaction.

### *Break the task down into small, attainable goals*

- Sense of failure comes from inappropriate goal setting. Inch by inch, it's a cinch. Yard by yard, it's hard.

### *Acknowledge learning*

- Expect progress, not perfection. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Ask, "What did you learn while you were doing this?" "What might you try next time?" "How might you do it differently next time?" Ask, "What's good about it?"

### *Discover meaning*

- "What were you thinking about while you decided which colors to use?"

### *Honor time invested*

- "You gave a lot of your time to this. It must have been important to you."

# Existential Depression and Giftedness



- Gifted students may experience existential depression or angst (depression over basic concerns about death, poverty, homelessness, war, diseases, meaninglessness, etc.).
- Young gifted students may be especially susceptible to this depression because of their perceived inability to alleviate the injustices and problems of the world.

# Helping a Student Who is Depressed

(Webb, et. al., 2007)

1. Notice how long the student has been depressed; do not dismiss depression as “a stage.”
2. Listen: express extra support and concern that you want to help make life more enjoyable.
3. Accept the concerns.
  - Try to see the depression and underlying anger from the student’s point of view
  - Do not minimize the intensity of the student’s feelings: do not say, “You shouldn’t feel that way,” and avoid saying that he/she has nothing to be worried or depressed about.
  - Support the student: leave the door open to alternative ways the student sees himself or the situation

4. Give emotional support.

- Use books or movies that depict characters dealing appropriately with issues such as aloneness or depression. (Be aware that some gifted students withdraw into books to avoid action.)

5. Evaluate the level of depression and degree of risk.

Signs of serious or severe depression:

- Sudden changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Inability to concentrate
- Talk of dying or preoccupation with death
- Giving away valued possessions
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Recent loss of social supports
- Involvement with drugs or alcohol

## 6. Is suicide a possibility?

- If you have any idea or suspicion that the student might be considering self-harm or suicide, contact the school counselor immediately.

## 7. Take action.

- Depression should not be ignored. Consult with a professional counselor or doctor.

## Understanding Asynchrony

What is asynchrony (or asynchronicity)?

- “Not synchronized”
- Gifted students are *asynchronous* in that their physical development (chronological age), intellectual development (intellectual abilities or mental age), and social/emotional development (social behaviors) do not develop equally at the same time. A seven year old gifted student in second grade may have an intellectual ability equivalent to a 10-year-old, and be able to read on a fifth grade level, but may behave like a six year old at times.
- **Just because a gifted student may have exceptional intellectual maturity does not mean that he always displays emotional maturity!**

## Dealing with Asynchronous Development

- Recognize that a student's emotional and social development will not always match his or her intellectual development. Before responding to an emotional outburst or concluding that the student is immature, stop a moment and remind yourself of the student's chronological age.
- Understand that asynchronous development creates special needs. Gifted students need emotional support, as do all students, but they also need advanced intellectual stimulation. A gifted first grader who can discuss black holes may still need a comforting hug.
- Recognize that gifted students may not get their emotional, social, and intellectual needs met by the same peers. They may be able to socialize to a degree with students their own age, but will also need opportunities to interact with other gifted students, older students, or even adults. Teachers should make every effort to provide those opportunities.

Carol Bainbridge

## Multi-potentiality

- In general, MULTI-POTENTIALITY refers to a student's ability to excel in more than one area.



# Multi-potentiality

## PROS:

- The student has his/her choice of numerous, viable career paths; at times, unrelated.
- The student might excel equally in both science and dance, math and music, and/or history and theater.

## CONS:

- The student might experience great conflict when selecting a career path or in making choices.



## Strategies for assisting students

- Make sure students have the opportunity to explore many kinds of careers
- Help students start thinking early about what kinds of careers they might enjoy (elementary school is not too young!), and then explore what the college requirements for those careers might be
- Make sure students keep their options open – take pre-requisite courses for multiple career paths, if possible

## Gifted Underachievement

There are at least three underlying themes in the definition of gifted underachievement:

- Underachievement as a discrepancy between ***potential*** achievement and actual achievement.
- Underachievement as a discrepancy between ***predicted*** achievement and actual achievement.
- Underachievement as a failure to develop or use potential.

# Causes of Underachievement

- Low self-esteem
- Poor self-efficacy
- Avoidance behaviors
- Rebellion
- Perfectionism
- Poor functioning in competition

- Gifted students can be underachievers for a variety of reasons, including:
  - Wanting to hide their giftedness so as not to be different from their peers or social group
  - Different priorities than the teacher (“neatness” is generally not a priority for gifted students)
  - Frustration with lack of challenging material (“Why should I do this if I know it already?”)
  - Perfectionism
  - Deliberately failing is easier than admitting you don’t know something, because gifted students are supposed to know everything
  
- **Not all gifted students get A’s.**
- **Not all straight-A students are gifted.**
- **Gifted students are not always gifted in everything.**

# Personality Characteristics of Underachievement

- Low self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy
- Alienated or withdrawn; distrustful, or pessimistic
- Anxious, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, or distractible, may exhibit ADD or ADHD symptoms
- Aggressive, hostile, resentful, or touchy
- Depressed
- Passive-aggressive
- More socially than academically oriented
- Dependent, less resilient than high achievers
- Socially immature

# Underachievement Reversal Strategies

- Fill educational gaps
- Provide interest-based projects
- Provide independent studies
- Involve parents
- Offer extracurricular activities
- Review IEPs if appropriate
- Provide mentors
- Provide group and individual counseling
- Provide bibliotherapy
- Crunch assignments and slowly expand
- Teach students self-regulation skills

## Self-Regulation Example: Time Management

- Set regular study periods
- Set realistic goals
- Use a regular study area
- Prioritize tasks
- Learn to say no to distractions
- Self-reward success

# Perfectionism's Cousin: Procrastination

- Procrastination is related somewhat to fear of failure but also to motivation/interest
- One research study and review of research suggests high levels of procrastination are related to low intrinsic motivation/high extrinsic motivation
- Increasing interest in activity or course material may decrease procrastination

- Senécal, Koestner, & Vallerand, 1995

# Tips for Procrastinators

- Allow more time than you think is needed
- Set flexible but realistic goals
- Break big projects into smaller ones
- Start something now, even if you don't feel prepared
- Realize that nothing can be perfect

--- adapted from Adderholt & Goldberg, 1999

## Tips for Procrastinators, cont.

- Begin with the most difficult or least enjoyable task
- Have fun without the guilt
- Keep a diary of your progress---list accomplishments and feel proud
- Remove distractions from work area
- Keep a list of projects you want to do if you use your time productively

--- adapted from Adderholt & Goldberg, 1999

*These tips might also work for parents who procrastinate!*

# Tips for the Parents of Students Who Procrastinate

- Encourage them begin projects and large assignments early
- Help them break large assignments into smaller pieces (i.e., outline, reference list, introduction, etc.)
- Praise the process----help them focus on effort and time spent on the process

## Tips for the Parents of Students Who Procrastinate, cont.

- Help them alternate between tasks they enjoy and tasks they dislike
- Encourage them to keep a journal of the things that make them proud of themselves; help them be specific
- Structure homework to limit distractions
- Encourage beating deadlines by providing extrinsic and intrinsic incentives

## Twice Exceptional Students

Identification of giftedness in students who are disabled is problematic. Standardized tests may be incomplete sources of information for these students and observational checklists may be inadequate for uncovering hidden potential in children who have disabilities. In addition, gifted children with disabilities often use their intelligence to compensate for the disability. This may cause both exceptionalities to become less obvious. The disability may appear less severe because the child is using her intellectual skills to cope, and that effort may hinder other expressions of giftedness. Research also shows that it may be difficult to distinguish between some behaviors that are characteristic of students with ADHD and other behaviors that may be characteristic of some gifted students.

## Suggestions on Serving Twice Exceptional Students

- If you suspect that a special needs student might also be gifted, make the referral!
- The Special Education teacher and the gifted teacher should work collaboratively to meet the needs of the student.
- A gifted teacher or specialist should be on the IEP committee. Accommodations on the IEP should be followed in the gifted classroom.
- Be organized and teach organizational skills to maximize student success.
- Ask for specific professional development if needed, such as for working with autistic gifted students or dyslexic gifted students.
- Compact and differentiate instruction to meet the intellectual needs of the student.

## Issues with Self-Esteem and Self-Image

Some gifted students may have a poor self-image or low self-esteem due to:

- Having an understanding of how little they do know compared to the world's body of knowledge – *they know how much they don't know*
- Frustration that they cannot solve the world's inequities and problems (supersensitivity to injustice)
- Feeling out of place socially, intellectually
- “Things were easy before; now they are difficult, so I must not be as smart as they said.”
- Fear of loss of image if they reveal fear or self-doubt
- Lack of validation from teachers (“If you are so smart, why can't you figure it out by yourself?” “You couldn't have done this by yourself; someone must have helped you.”)



*This can be extremely devastating to students!*

## Issues with Self-Image, cont.

- Overly high expectations can be paralyzing (“There is no way I can get into Harvard, so I won’t even try”; “I would rather fail on purpose than try and then fail”)
- Having to hide intelligence--
  - So as to not appear conceited or arrogant
  - So as not to be teased: “teacher’s pet” or “know-it-all” or “smarty-pants” or “nerd” or “geek”
  - So as to fit in – you can’t use advanced vocabulary with peers who do not understand it
- Cognitive dissonance – seeing but being unable to do anything about the “way things are” vs. the “way things ought to be”
- Athletic honors are seen as more important/getting more recognition than academic honors; academic honors are less (and sometimes not at all) valued

*Intelligence is part of who you are... you should not have to hide your identity!*

## Gifted Boys Sometimes...

- Are pressured to demonstrate athleticism with peers. They learn that athletic ability makes intelligence acceptable.
  - Act out when bored; bully others
  - Learn best through movement, action, and tactile activity
  - Hide creativity and sensitivity to fit in
  - Interrupt and demand more attention from others
  - Blame teacher or subject for bad grades
  - Become less involved in leadership opportunities as they progress through school
  - Pursue careers in math and science areas
- And sometimes, not so much. The point to remember is that it is not always easy to be gifted, and students may deliberately try to hide their giftedness, especially if they are being teased about it.



## Gifted Girls

- Gifted girls are faced with numerous, complex choices that affect the course of their lives. Issues seem to be particularly problematic in the middle school years.
  - Cultural stereotyping
  - Gender roles
  - Conflicting messages
  - Lack of role models
  - Declining confidence in abilities
  - Conflicting expectations from teachers and parents
  - Peer pressure to hide abilities and intelligence

# Suggestions for Meeting the Needs of Gifted Girls

(Kerr, 1994; Silverman, 1993)

- Communicate with parents:
  - The abilities of their daughter
  - Importance of math and science for higher education and careers
  - Encourage them to identify and address the sources of gender bias
- Organize peer support groups for girls
  - Math and science clubs
  - Connect them with other girls who share their same interests
- Avoid praising girls for their neatness or behavior
  - Point out examples of their excellent work and achievements
  - Correct them if they attribute their accomplishments to luck

## Suggestions for Meeting the Needs of Gifted Girls, cont.

- Provide and encourage opportunities to use leadership abilities
- Provide role models and mentors from nontraditional careers
- Discuss gender stereotypes and the mixed messages that society broadcasts about femininity, intelligence, and achievement
- Provide a safe environment for girls to share confusion and fear
- Recruit girls to participate in advanced courses and extracurricular activities related to math, science, and technology

## Suggestions for Meeting the Needs of Gifted Girls, cont.

- Provide counseling that includes career options and balance
- Support early gifted identification and programming
- Provide opportunities for independence and risk-taking
- Read biographies of eminent women
- From kindergarten to grade 12, use spatial reasoning strategies to build skills needed for math and engineering

## Teasing/Bullying *...and the Gifted Student*

**Teasing** is actually another form of criticizing and harassment. Although bullying is not the same as teasing, both could include direct, verbal criticisms. The student who teases is usually putting others down. Although bullying and teasing are similar, bullying is on-going and sustained, and intended maliciously.

**Gifted students** are too often the targets of teasing and bullying. At times it may be less obvious...name-calling, intimidation, or social isolation. Failure to recognize this problem can sometimes cause the victim to become emotionally and/or socially devastated. Some gifted students who are teased may be left with feelings of anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and sometimes violence.

## Teasing/Bullying

- Adults must closely monitor areas or situations to prevent opportunities for teasing.
- Help gifted students to know each other and their peers.
- Be a confidant and take reports of teasing/bullying seriously.
- Encourage gifted students to report acts of social aggression against them.
- Take a stand – Support from teachers and parents is important.

*Video:* Verbal Bullying and Teasing - Reflections

[http://teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video\\_id=217672](http://teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=217672)

*Which intervention steps were used? How can the teasing be prevented in the future? Who should be punished? How?*

# Teasing/Bullying ...*intervention strategies*

Retrieved from <http://specialed.about.com/cs/behavioraldisorders/a/teaser.htm>  
*Dealing with The Chronic Teaser. November, 2012.*

- School-wide intervention strategies are the most successful with eradicating the problems of teasing/bullying.
- The teaser needs to be taught about differences among students.
- Find out why the teaser teases and educate the student about the harmful consequences.
- Teach what to do in the event that you witness teasing.
- Teach the skills for dealing with the teaser.
- Teach that teasing will not be accepted and will not be tolerated in the classroom.
- Teach the student that is getting teased to provide the teaser with a response they're not expecting. [not violence]
- Students need to be part of the solution and or consequences.
- Reinforce that it's not the student but what he/she did that upsets you.

- Help students understand how to respond to different kinds of bullying behaviors:
  - Aggressive bullies are likely to abuse physically and without hesitation, may steal or break things. **Report to an adult immediately.**
  - Taunting bullies are verbally abusive (calling names, making jokes, teasing, etc.). **Walk away; don't react; report to an adult.**
  - Indirect bullies spread rumors, exclude others, and harass their victims whenever possible. **Stand up to them; avoid their "friendship."**
  - Cyber-bullies harass other kids through instant messaging, e-mail, and any other electronic means. **Forward the message to an adult; block them; don't post any personal information or photos.**
- **Help students understand that reporting bullying behavior is not "tattling" but is preventing potentially serious trauma.**
- When bullying occurs, sitting by silently and not reporting it makes someone as guilty as the bully.

# Understanding Cultural Issues



Gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) may express some social and gifted behaviors differently than our cultural norms. Often CLD students follow hidden rules unknown to classroom teachers. Hidden rules are unspoken cues and habits of a group (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). While there are differences among individuals, there are often similarities within cultural groups. The following two slides provide examples.

## **Typical U.S. School Culture**

- The focus is usually on the individual.
- Independence is usually valued at school.
- Analytical endeavors are usually emphasized.
- School personnel expect parents to be partners with teachers in the education of children.

## **Some Diverse Cultures**

- The emphasis is often on the group.
- Cooperative problem-solving may be the norm
- Strengths in creative endeavors are often emphasized.
- Teachers may be viewed as having the sole responsibility for academic education.

## Ways that teachers can become more culturally aware, sensitive, and competent

1. Analyze personal attitudes and perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse students
2. Acquire accurate cultural information about these students (e.g. customs, traditions, and values)
3. Acquire ongoing staff development to understand their social, emotional, and academic needs
4. Infuse multicultural teaching strategies, materials, and resources into all subject areas and topics as often as possible
5. Avoid stereotypes (of course)
6. Have high expectations for all students, including them in advanced groups and differentiating instruction for them as needed

## Please help find these underserved students! Make a referral if...

There are many cultural differences in the way gifted students show evidence of their talents. We are looking for evidence of critical thinking, abstract reasoning, and intellectual creativity.

- Does this student ask thoughtful questions?
- Does this student give creative, insightful, or unusual responses?
- Does this student provide interesting details or seem unusually observant?
- Is this student good at seeing relationships, connections, and “the big picture”?
- Does this student have a large vocabulary or seem to know a lot of information?
- Is this student ESL, but is learning English (and the nuances of the language) very quickly?
- Does this student rarely do homework or turn in assignments, but still seems to understand the material?

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Problem Solving model

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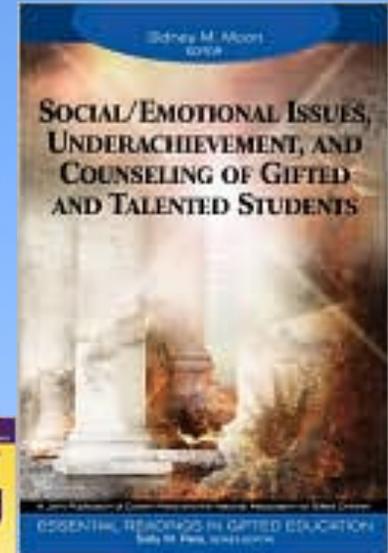
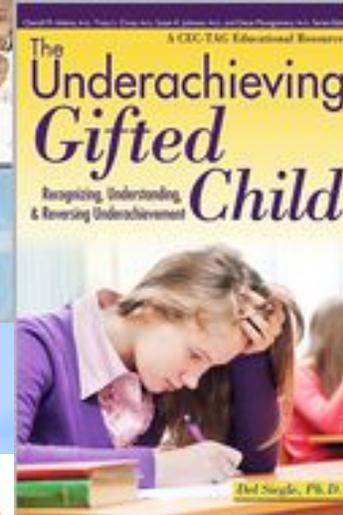
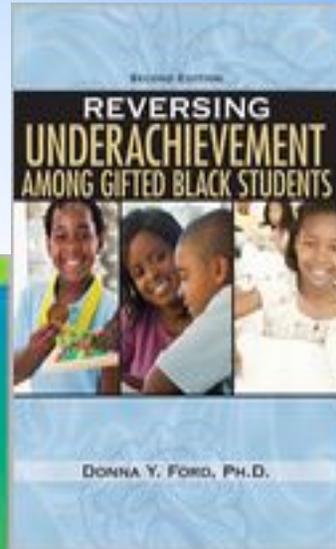
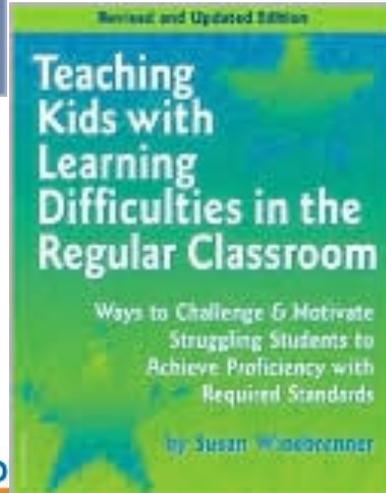
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Ziegler, A., Ziegler, A., & Stoeger, H. (2012).

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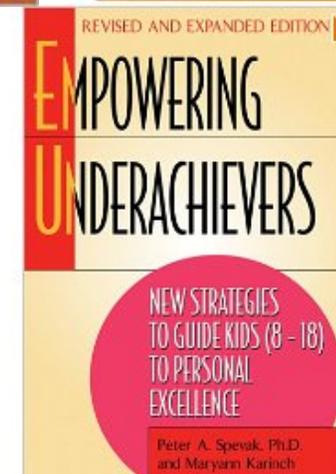
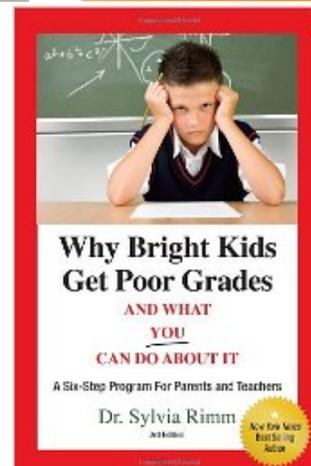
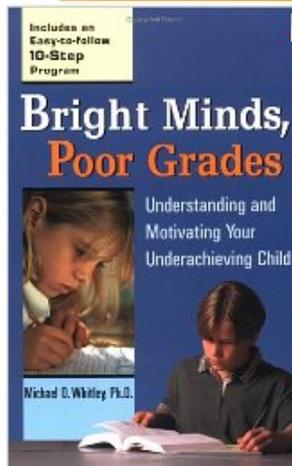
# Informative Readings



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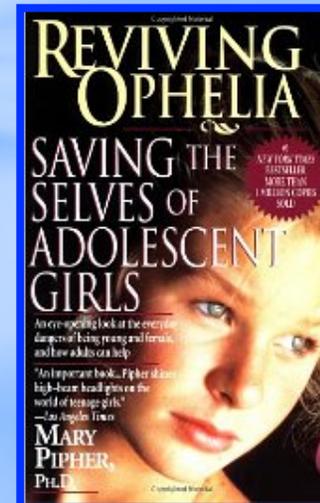
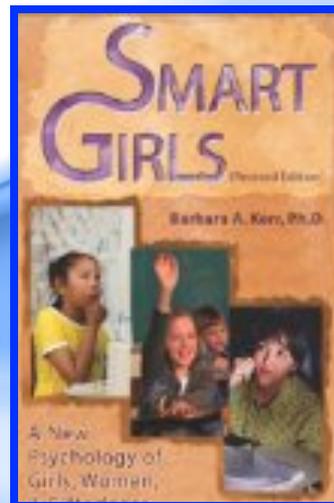
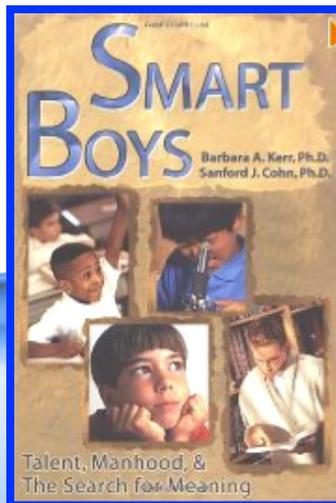


## Informative Readings

Kerr, B., & Cohn, S. (2001). *Smart boys: Talent, manhood, and the search for meaning*. Tucson: Great Potential Press Inc.

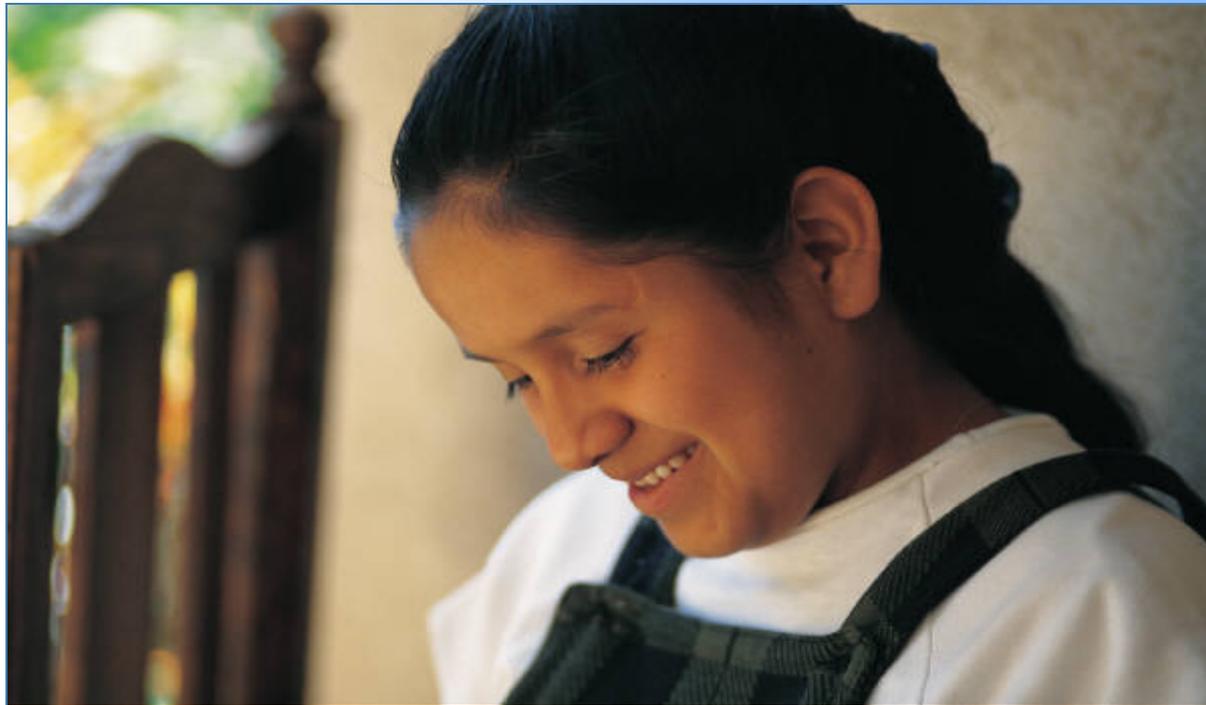
Kerr, B. (1997). *Smart girls: A new psychology of girls, women, and giftedness*. Tucson: Great Potential Press Inc.

Pipher, M., & Ross, R. (2005). *Reviving ophelia; saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Riverhead Trade.



“Education cannot be effective unless it helps a child open up himself to life.”

Maria Montessori



If this presentation has been helpful to you, or if you have suggestions for improvement, please email your comments to [gifted@hampton.k12.va.us](mailto:gifted@hampton.k12.va.us).