

# Calibrating Your Gifted Compass: A Primer for Parents on the Characteristics of Giftedness and Talent

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# Context: Paradigm Shifts and the Gifted

“When we are at **work**, we ought to be at **work**. When we are at **play**, we ought to be at **play**. There is no use trying to mix the two.” – *Henry Ford*

“People **rarely succeed** at anything unless they are having **fun** doing it.”  
– *Southwest Airlines Mission Statement*

**The Conceptual Age/Knowledge Economy** requires creativity; empathy; happiness; meaning; critical thinking; problem solving; effective communication; metacognitive abilities (sound habits of mind) and collaboration.

**Providing manifold opportunities** for students to be creative and collaborative, playing important and more interdependent roles in the creation of their own learning environments that address their cognitive and affective needs.

## Brian Bits: Wisdom from the Ancients

*In ancient Egypt, when humans were preserved through mummification, **the brain was discarded**-viewed as a **superfluous** organ. It was believed that the heart was the center of all emotion and learning.*



# Brain Bits: The Cocktail Party Effect

How  
much  
do you  
retain?



# The Gifted Brain: Volcanic Flow



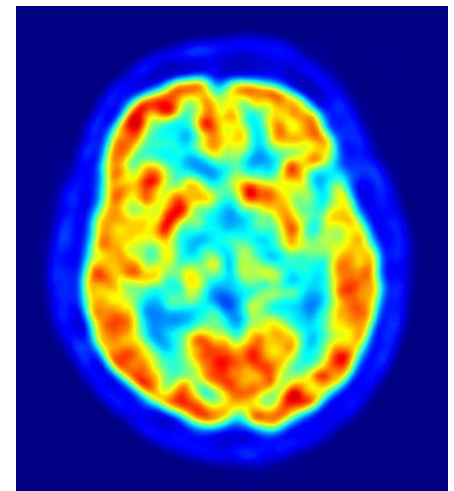
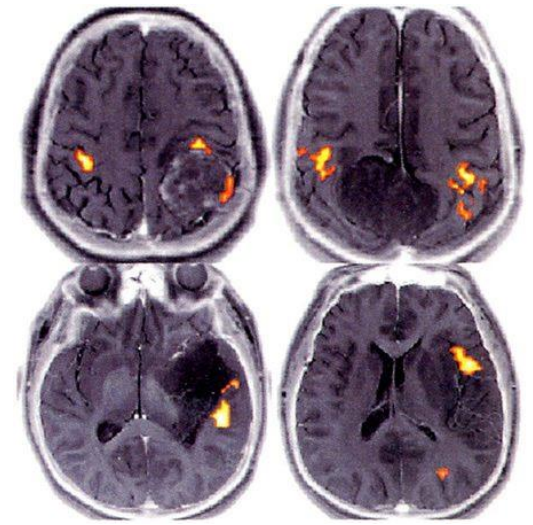
*The gifted brain is much like a volcano on the verge of eruption.*

*Chaotic, swirling, yet somehow controlled unconsciously seeking order and release.*

*The same neurochemistry that fuels all we love about our gifted and talented students cognitively also tends to wreak tremendous affective havoc.*

# The Gifted Brain

- Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRIs) show 'brain on fire' in gifted individuals
- Gifted individuals are multimodal thinkers
- Great integrators and organizers of multiple senses and modalities
- "Hypersensitive" brains



Source: [newhorizons.org](http://newhorizons.org)

# The Gifted Brain



- Enhanced sensory awareness that can be further cultivated through experience and training
- Both initial impressions and later recollections are unusually vivid
- Increased memory efficiency and capacity
- Multimodality: making connections that others do not

**Source:** *newhorizons.org*

# The Gifted Brain

- Associational thinking; organizational skills; analytical thinking
- However:
  - Sensory, emotional and memory overload
  - Personal disorganization
  - Distractibility
  - Mental fatigue
  - "Analysis Paralysis"
  - Burnout



*Dinner is ready!*



# The Gifted Brain



- Incidental learning
- “Cognitive Flypaper”
- Information wealthy—  
need resources to facilitate thinking processes (the brain thrives on process) – not an abundance of information
- Metacognitive training, rumination and reflection
- Practical application

# Remember...

- All learning activates the 'survival' mechanism
- The chemistry of praise and feedback
- The lightning-fast processing involved in gifted and talented individuals and the incessant 'what ifs'?



*The 'gifted brain' is akin to a volcano on the verge of eruption, always trying to make sense of circumstances and solve problems in the world that surrounds it*

## One Word Says it All: **INTENSITY**

Giftedness has both intellectual and emotional elements that are complex, multifaceted and layered.

Intensity impacts every aspect of the lives of gifted and talented individuals. They tend to 'go all out' in just about everything.

It is not that they feel more than the non-gifted, but experience these feelings rather vividly and deeply. This is an experience that can prove alarming and warrants our attentions.

Source (in part): SENG, 2015



# INTENSITY begets...

- Emotional extremes that may change frequently
- Body mirrors (headache, nausea, rapid heartbeat)
- Inhibition, timidity, shyness
- Feeling of being 'out of control'
- Concerns about death and depressive moods
- Feelings of inadequacy, inferiority
- Obsessive attachments

# Socio-Emotional Issues and Causes



- **Asynchrony:** chronological age, and social, emotional, physical and intellectual development are out of sync with one another
- Difficulty **finding friends with similar interests, ability, drive**
- Lack of challenge
- Question of “fit” within larger school society

*Just wait until he hears about that A -*

## Brain Bits: In Praise of the Tortured Adolescent

*In most adolescents, the part of the brain that processes emotions (the limbic system) is fully operational, whereas the regions responsible for thinking, reflecting and controlling emotional response (located in the prefrontal cortex) are still developing.*

*This is why many middle school students overtly display emotions inappropriately in the classroom (through pained sighs, rolling eyes and blank looks).*

*A fully developed prefrontal cortex enables most adults to consciously dampen their emotions.*

Source: [ascd.org](http://ascd.org)



# Characteristics of the Gifted: Anything Look Familiar?

- Emotional intensity/deep emotional reactions
- Well developed senses of justice and fairness
- Strong sense of empathy, with both children and adults
- Interest in advanced subject matter/materials (can't seem to understand why age peers are not interested)

# Characteristics of the Gifted: Anything Look Familiar?

- Mature, highly developed sense of humor (dry wit, satire)—prefers verbal over visual humor
- Enjoys spending time with older children (even young adults)
- Different conceptions and expectations of friendships than their peers
- Strong attachments to a few friends (versus having many friends and acquaintances)
- Social pressures to moderate achievements in front of peers
- Perfectionism

*Source:* Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2008



# Characteristics of the Gifted: Anything Look Familiar?

- Enjoy complexity
- Can be flexible thinkers
- Creative and original thinkers
- Can see relationships easily
- Enjoy hypotheses, what ifs, etc.
- Enjoy problem solving
- Are keen on aesthetics
- Engage in fantasy, role playing
- Intellectual curiosity

# Characteristics of the Gifted: Anything Look Familiar?

- Have a keen understanding of synthesis of ideas
- Skeptical, critical, evaluative
- Quick to understand underlying principles
- Have a readily accessible mental database of facts and ideas
- Can think abstractly

# Do You...

- Think in terms of 'all-or-nothing?'
- Have strict 'rules' about how you or others should act?
- Hate feedback?
- Believe your successes are flukes and determined primarily by luck?
- Beat yourself up?
- Define yourself by your accomplishments, which you rate with increasingly high standards?
- Have no time for you?

# Perfectionism Explained

- A personality disposition associated with **striving for flawlessness and setting impossibly high standards**
- In **moderate** cases, it can be positive. In **extreme** cases, it is highly destructive
- Archetypes:
  - **Self-oriented** (avoid personal failure at all costs)
  - **Other-oriented** (judgmental and critical of others)
  - **Socially prescribed** (others hold them to higher standards, can never live up)

# Perfectionism Explained

- Rooted in a sense of **conditional acceptance**: if one cannot be perfect, one cannot be acceptable to people (and self)
- A relational issue that **is highly dependent upon interaction** with and perceptions of others
- Our world is guided by series of **emotional convictions** about ourselves and others
- The substance of these convictions is determined in an ongoing way **by our attachments to others**

# A Vicious Cycle

PRAISE



## PRAISE

'Feel good  
Chemistry'

Obsession



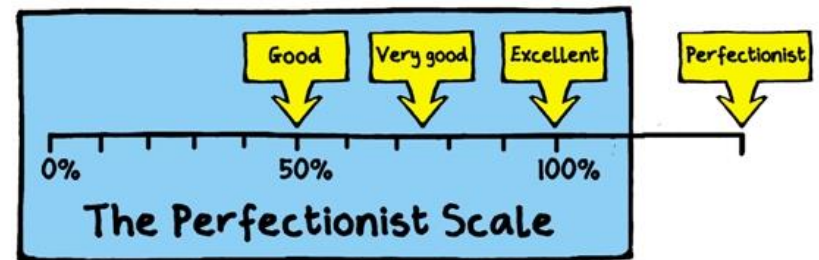
Exaggerated  
Expectations

Stress  
Chemistry

'Hitting the Wall'



## UNDERACHIEVEMENT



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[www-the-square-peg.com](http://www-the-square-peg.com)

*Many iterations...*

# Addressing the Needs of Gifted Students



*Could have downloaded it to your Kindle.*

- Creating a “**safe**” environment for gifted pupils (remove the spotlight/ **predictable world** during chaos )
- **Resiliency**/stick-to-it-tiveness
- Teach stress management and time management skills
- Teach **pro-social skills** and encourage non-academic activities
- *Bibliotherapy* (dates back to Ancient Greece)—using books to solve problems, address issues

# Addressing the Affective Needs of Gifted Students



- Allow for time and non-threatening environment to **discuss those issues confronting gifted pupils** (expectations, perfectionism, etc.)
- Emotional/Rational
- Working with the gifted is an epiphany based process—and they remain miles ahead!
- **LOVE** them, **REASSURE** them—appreciate difference



# Comments and Questions

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# Contact Information

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