



Using Socioemotional GPS: A Primer for Parents of the Gifted and Talented

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A Gifted Child Speaks

Just because gifted kids or any kids are different doesn't mean we are wrong or bad. Just because we aren't average, doesn't mean we are bad. Gifted kids always seem to stand out and get singled out. It sure seems safer and better to be average and be like everybody else in school.

Socializing in school just sucks because most often nobody seems to understand what I am talking about. It always seems to be over their head or they don't understand what I'm talking about so I need explain it to them, and then I get called a know-it-all. It makes me misunderstood.

From crushingtallpoppies.com



“ I can't concentrate with all the ideas going round in my head”

Understanding the Gifted Using Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*

In many ways, the gifted and talented are akin to the imprisoned featured in Plato's *Allegory*. Their perceptions are shaped by shadow, distortion and exaggerated interpretation emerging from their unique neurobiology and socio-affective characteristics.

Thus, one of the most important duties an parents of the gifted have is to help bring them into daylight and offer them a quality of life with a lesser degree of anxiety and intensity.

The same neurochemistry that fuels all we love about the gifted in the classroom and at home can wreak havoc internally. That is why counseling the gifted takes all the king's horses and all the king's men.



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



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
- Isolationism

Characteristics of the Gifted: Anything Look Familiar?

- Individual versus group identity
- Less interested in physical competition (but not always true)
- Depression
- Questions authority
- Overexcitability
- Underachievement
- Anxiety
- Boredom
- Withdrawal
- Hypersensitivity

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

Traditional Characteristics	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse/Gifted	Low Socioeconomic / Gifted	Twice Exceptional
Ability to learn basic skills quickly and easily and retain information with less repetition	May require more repetition or hands-on experiences at an introductory level	Lack of opportunities and access to school-readiness materials may delay acquisition of basic skills	Often struggle to learn basic skills due to cognitive processing difficulties; need strategies in order to acquire basic skills and information
High verbal ability	May have high verbal ability in native language; may rapidly acquire English language skills if they possess academic skills in their home language	Lack of opportunities may delay the development of verbal skills	High verbal ability but extreme difficulty in written language area; may use ways and at inappropriate
Early reading ability	May demonstrate strong storytelling ability and ability to read environmental print in home language	Lack of access to reading materials may delay acquisition of reading skills	Frequently have reading problems due to cognitive processing deficits
Keen powers of observation	May display high levels of visual memory or auditory memory skills	Strong observational skills, which are often used to “survive on the streets”	Strong observation skills but often have deficits in memory skills
Strong critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills	Strong critical thinking in primary language; often solve problems in creative ways; particularly interested in solving “real-world” problems	Excel in brainstorming and solving “real-world” problems; strong critical thinking ability; rapid decision-making skills	Excel in solving “real-world” problems; outstanding critical thinking and decision-making develop compensatory skills
Long attention span — persistent, intense concentration	Long attention span — persistent, intense concentration	Persistent in areas of interest usually unrelated to school	Frequently have attention deficit problems but may concentrate for long periods in areas of interest

Traditional Characteristics	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse/Gifted	Low Socioeconomic / Gifted	Twice Exceptional
Questioning attitude	Some culturally diverse children are raised not to question authority	Questioning attitude which may at times be demonstrated in a confronting or challenging way	Strong questioning attitude; may appear disrespectful when questioning information, facts, etc. presented by teacher
Creative in the generation of thoughts, ideas, actions; innovative	Often display richness of imagery in ideas, art, music, primary language, etc.; can improvise with commonplace objects	Strong creative abilities	Unusual imagination; frequently generate original and at times rather "bizarre" ideas
Takes risks	Degree of risk taking may depend upon the familiarity of the situation based on different cultural experiences	Take risks often without consideration of consequences	Often unwilling to take risks with regard to academics; take risks in non-school areas without consideration of consequences
Unusual, often highly developed, sense of humor	Humor may be displayed through unique use of language and responses	May use humor to become "class clown," to deal with stressful situations, and to avoid trouble	Humor may be used to divert attention from school failure; may use humor to make fun of peers or to avoid trouble
May mature at different rates than age peers	Accept responsibilities in the home normally reserved for older children	Often mature earlier than age peers since they must accept responsibilities in the home which are normally reserved for older children or even adults; inexperience may make them appear socially immature	Sometimes appear immature since they may use anger, crying, withdrawal, etc. to express feelings and to deal with difficulties
Sense of independence	May be culturally socialized to work in groups rather than independently	Circumstances often have forced the student to become extremely independent and self-sufficient	Require frequent teacher support and feedback in deficit areas; highly independent in other areas; often appear to be extremely stubborn and inflexible

Traditional Characteristics	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse/Gifted	Low Socioeconomic / Gifted	Twice Exceptional
Sensitive	May be sensitive, particularly to racial or cultural issues	May be critical of self and others including teachers; can understand and express concern about the feelings of others even while engaging in anti-social behavior	Sensitive regarding disability area(s); highly critical of self and others including teachers; can express concern about the feelings of others even while engaging in anti-social behavior
May not be accepted by other children and may feel isolated	May be perceived as loners due to racial/cultural isolation and/or inability to speak English; student entertains self easily using imagination in games and ingenious play	Economic circumstances as well as his/her giftedness may isolate the student from more financially secure peers	May be perceived as loners since they do not fit typical model for either a gifted or a learning disabled student; sometimes have difficulty being accepted by peers due to poor social skills
Exhibit leadership ability	May be leaders in the community but not in the school setting; demonstrate "streetwise" behavior	May be leaders among the more non-traditional students; demonstrate strong "streetwise" behavior; often excel in brainstorming and problem-solving around social issues	Often leaders among the more non-traditional students; demonstrate strong "streetwise" behavior; the disability may interfere with ability to exercise leadership skills
Wide range of interests	Interests may include individual culturally related activities	Wide range of interests that are often unrelated to topics/ subjects addressed in school	Wide range of interests but student is handicapped in pursuing them due to process/learning problems
Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others	Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others	Persistent in areas of interest usually unrelated to school	Very focused interests, i.e., a passion about a certain topic to the exclusion of others — often not related to school subjects

If SE Neglected, Students May...

- Resist doing work or do work sloppily
- Become frustrated with the pace of the class and perceived lack of progress
- Ask embarrassing questions or question why things are done in a particular way
- Become impatient, blurt out answers
- Exhibit hypersensitivity to criticism
- Become bossy/rebel against routine
- Resist taking directions or cooperative learning
- Monopolize class discussions
- Become the 'class clown'
- Daydream or otherwise tune out

Perfect Thoughts

- Perfection and excellence are not one in the same.
- The path to excellence is meandering and messy. It is not straight.
- You may have to suffer through 25 drafts (or 'bombs') to get one good artifact. The journey means more than the end product.
- Remember Churchill: 'The maxim 'nothing but perfection' may be spelled PARALYSIS'

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**

Characteristics of Perfectionism

POSITIVE

- Reliable
- Responsible
- Dedicated
- Driven
- Persistent

NEGATIVE

- Critical
- Unrealistic
- Approval Seeking
- Prone to Depression
- High Anxiety

Perils of Perfectionism

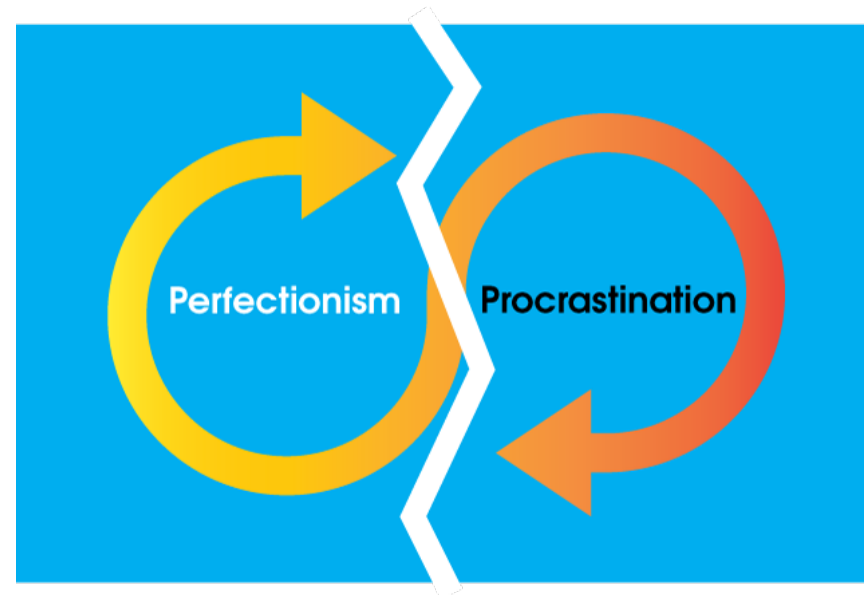
- **Performance paradox**
— anxiety over performance defeats performance
- **Undermines working memory**
- Influenced by parents' own **perfectionist tendencies** and **separation anxiety**
- **Consider:**
 - The perfectionist leads a **stressful** existence (self-critical; hiding mistakes; among others)
 - How does brain chemistry impact the learning potential of the perfectionist (**adrenaline, cortisol**)?

Perils of Perfectionism

- Strong sense of purpose and high ideals
- Methodical and detail oriented
- May come across as **critical and/or judgmental**
- Inner critic may impact relationships with others
- Frustrated with those who **do not 'pull their weight'**
- **Prevents seeking out challenging experiences**
- Frequently deal with **self-esteem issues**
- Self critical and seek out (positive) feedback – **almost obsessively as a means to bolster self worth**
- Vulnerable to depression and intense anxiety
- Externalize **feelings—harsh** on those around them
- **Reduces 'playfulness' and creativity**

'Perfection' At What Costs?

- Depression
- Performance anxiety
- Test anxiety
- Social anxiety
- Writer's block
- Obsession
- Compulsiveness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Loneliness
- Impatience
- Frustration
- Anger



The best project is a done project. We know perfectionists focus on outcomes not processes, act in fits and spurts and only find temporary satisfaction in achievements because there is always more to do.

A Vicious Cycle

PRAISE



PRAISE

'Feel good
Chemistry'

Obsession



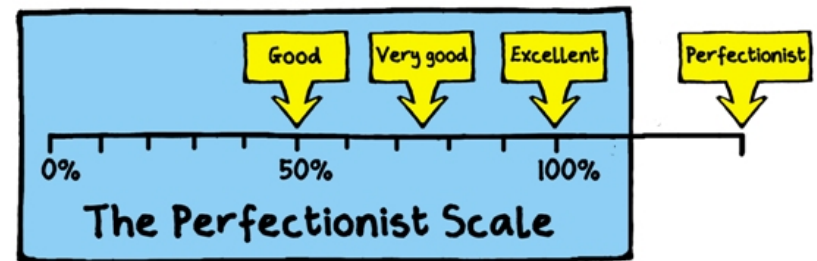
Exaggerated
Expectations

Stress
Chemistry

'Hitting the Wall'



UNDERACHIEVEMENT



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www-the-square-peg.com

Many iterations...

Perfectionism

To consign children to the pursuit of perfection is to **trap them in an illusion**. Like the **anorexic literally dying to be thin**, **perfectionism consumes more and more of the self**. Among the many paradoxes of perfectionism is yet one more: **It is ultimately self-destructive to devote all one's psychic resources to oneself**.—*Hara Estroff Marano*, quoted in *Psychology Today*

A Perfectionist Speaks

'Where is the script? Someone tell me how to be an adult and do things just right.'

- Soak up knowledge like a sponge and **never make a mistake.**
- **Know exactly who you are and don't ever change** because that makes you fickle and wishy-washy.
- **Everything you do gives people an impression about you** and that impression is all that matters.
- **You are what other people say you are.**
- **Always look to men and never be a leader** because you're not strong enough.
- You are only as beautiful on the inside as **people think you are on the outside.**

Working with Perfectionism

- Learn to embrace mistakes and celebrate failure
- Explain shortcomings of 'all or nothing' perspective
- Emphasize your role as promoting learning versus as an evaluator
- Explain how perfectionism can be counterproductive (appeal to the rational side, not the emotional)
- Understand where students are coming from—telling them to 'loosen up' won't do the job
- Everyone makes mistakes
- The objective is not to eliminate perfectionism, but to guide it in a positive direction
- Help with setting priorities
- Empathy and self-awareness

Working with Perfectionism

HOW TO PRAISE

- Reward process and effort, not always the result
- Praise efforts with specificity (I really see you were able to connect x with y versus 'you are brilliant!')
- Rely on intrinsic versus extrinsic (material) rewards

HOW TO CRITIQUE

- Solicit self-appraisal with supporting evidence
- Ask what is needed to achieve sought after objectives
- Ask what might be done next time to improve results
- Understand the nature of mistakes and failure as information, not fixed outcome

Assets and Challenges: 2E

ASSETS

- Creativity
- Thinking Ability
- Long-Term Memory
- Abstraction
- Problem Solving
- Insight
- Sophistication
- Giftedness may be enhanced by the presence of a learning disability

CHALLENGES

- Appropriate Self Expression
- Organizational Abilities (complicating factors)/Study skills
- Short-term Memory
- Sense perception (distractibility, etc.)
- Social Interaction
- Self Esteem
- Uneven Academic Abilities
- Moving from 'head to paper'
- Auditory and/or visual problems

2E: Socioemotional Characteristics

- More pronounced during adolescence
- Experience and express frustrations related to brain/body control
- Humility
- Unusual persistence
- Negative reactions to first schooling experiences (painful memories—often accused of being lazy)
- Stubborn/obstinate
- 'Street smarts' do not translate into classroom
- Highly sensitive to criticism, especially in areas of deficit
- Highly impulsive
- Unusual intensity of focus
- May use humor (or even bully) to distract from areas of deficit

Working with Dual Exceptionalities

STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

- Specific instruction in organization
- Choice in where to work, subject to disruption (comfort)
- Employ assistive technologies in specific areas of need
- Teach 'meta-skills' (time and self management)
- Focus on experiential learning versus wholly instructional

STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

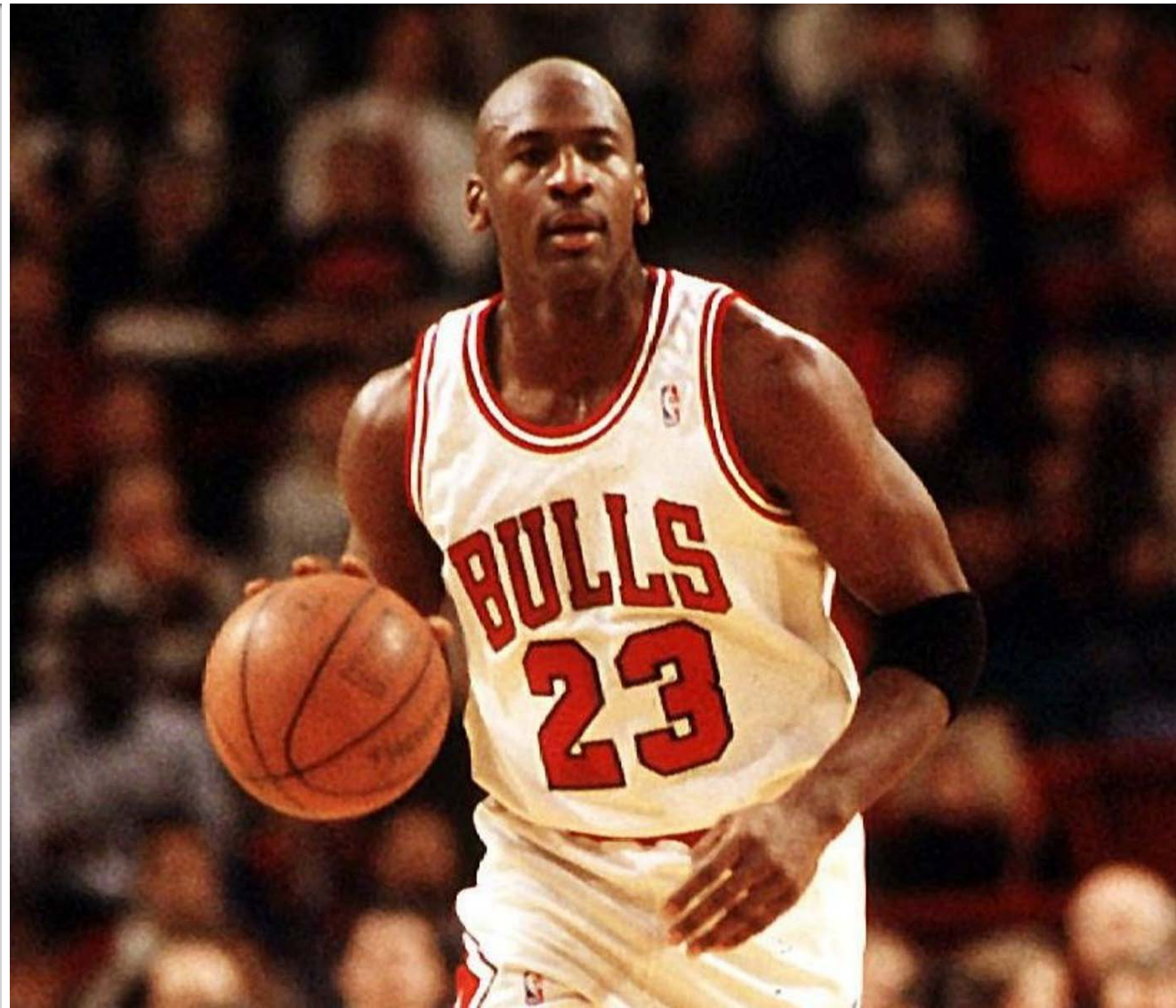
- Afford broader choice in product (how to showcase knowledge)
- Collaborate with other teachers and support providers
- Accommodations are designed to facilitate learning (versus workload)
- Mitigate impacts of learned helplessness

How Parents Can Help

- **Understand the law** and the responsibilities and rights therein (see resource list for references)
- **Understand that performing tasks may be tiring and frustrating** (even if they have been performed successfully in the past without issue)
- **Understand 'hitting the wall'**
- **Work collaboratively with teachers and school personnel** to promote cohesion and consistency of support
- **Attend to the needs of siblings** (where appropriate) with empathy and honesty
- **A little love** goes a very long way
- **Take care of yourself too** — it can be exhausting for you!

Try and Try Again—no, really!

The national media frequently remind us that resilient individuals are successful because they push their limits and learn from their mistakes. Babe Ruth is known for his batting prowess, but he struck out nearly twice as often as he hit homeruns. Michael Jordan has said, "I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and I missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." (SENG, 2017)



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

Improving Resilience

- **Improve frustration tolerance** (lengthen the fuse—pause before reacting)
- **Use the great 'thinking brain'** (rational approach to emotional problems)
- Form a **realistic view of self and abilities** (and reinforce)
- **Scaffold and support weaknesses** (offer structure in building abilities) – break things up
- **Set up opportunities for success** (cognitively and emotionally addictive—build competence and confidence)

Getting Gifted Off Your Chest: Proactive Strategies for Emotional Readiness

- **Active listening** versus questioning or informing (power balance)
- **'Attending'** to the speaker and affirming **attention** to needs (complete physical connection and affirmation of what one hears)
- **Summarizing** what one hears and **resisting the urge to 'fix'** – being *heard* is often more important than being 'fixed'
- **Avoiding unsolicited self discussion or disclosure.** The listener must be 'taught' by the speaker as the former may have not experienced feelings with same intensity
- **Facilitated heterogeneous small group discussions** designed to identify commonalities; promote affirmation; develop skills in articulating concerns; and provide information about available resources

Proactive Strategies for Emotional Readiness

- **Entering the world** of the gifted person with fidelity and without judgment
- **Facilitated group projects** that encourage and enhance collaboration and resiliency by incorporating structured 'downtime' to play and socialize
- **Speakers and panels** to address specific socioemotional concerns or anxieties about postsecondary education/career
- **Parent mutual support groups**— not solely to support the needs of students, but to serve as resources and sympathetic ears (can be, but do not necessarily have to be facilitated) – informal and formal
- **College and career advisement** that does not focus on selection, but upon process ; 'goodness of fit'; cultivating support; developing resiliency – not to mention diverse options available

Addressing the Affective Needs of Gifted Students



Could have downloaded it to your Kindle.

- Creating a “safe” environment for gifted pupils (remove the spotlight)
- Infuse flexibility and challenge
- 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

- Be aware that with the gifted talents present over time
- Model the behavior you wish to see take place
- Reinforce engagement and learning at home—but not 24 hours per day
- Provide opportunities for down time
- Use integrated, holistic and practical (real-world)
- Push out of comfort zone
- Use of moral dilemmas (contextually grounded—what would you do?) to empower broader viewpoints and choice



Addressing the Affective Needs of Gifted Students

"Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained."

- Marie Curie



Photo Courtesy of Shutterstock

- Help to make connections—not just academic—but human: students with similar and divergent interests, mentors, etc.
- Allow for time and non-threatening environment to discuss those issues confronting gifted pupils (expectations, perfectionism, etc.)
- Provide opportunities for self-reflection and understanding, academic and otherwise
- Work with teachers and school to address the needs of gifted and talented
- Teach courage and resiliency

Addressing the Affective Domain

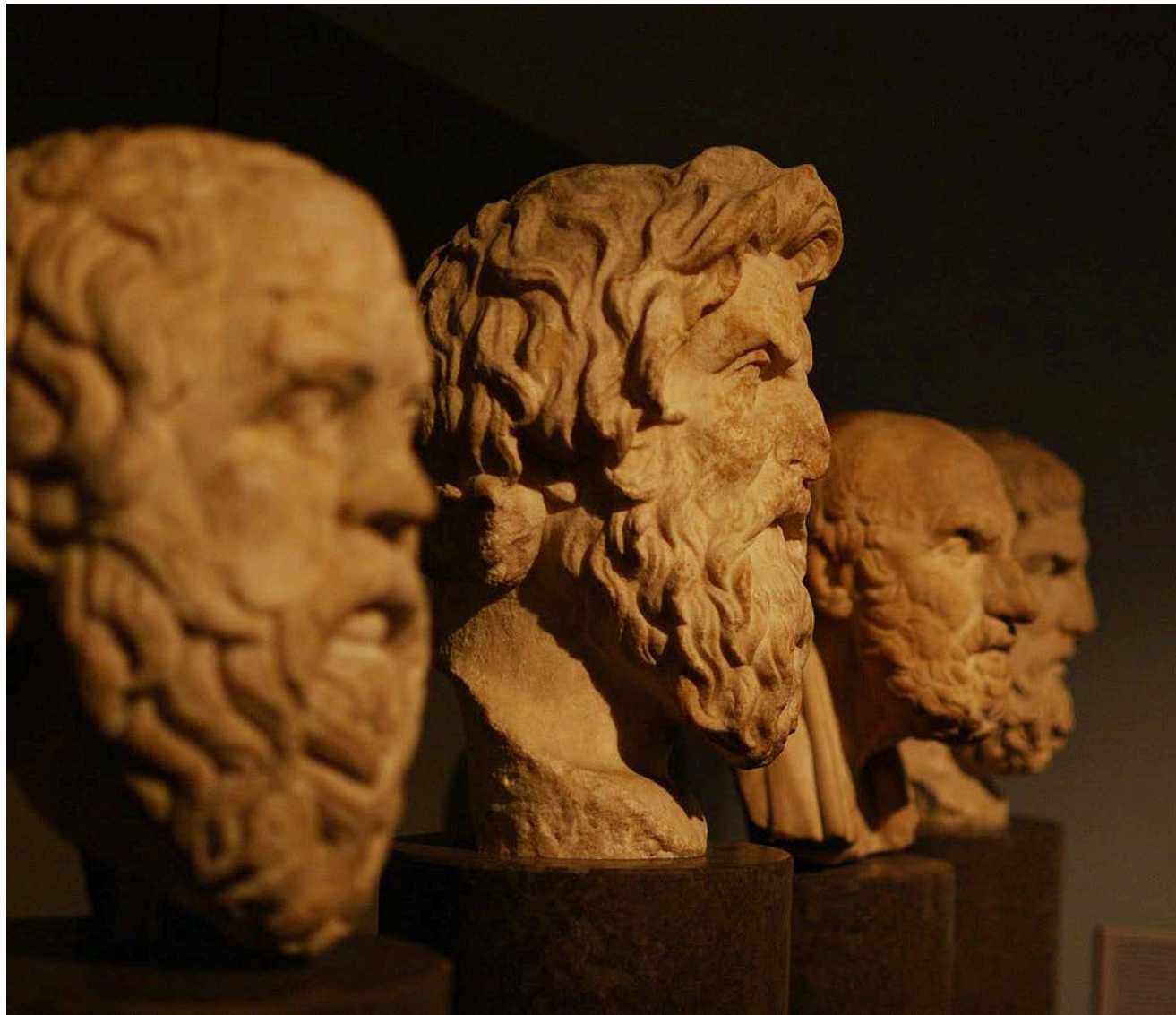
- Within and across subject matters and the curriculum
- Individualized value systems
- Attitudes, beliefs and values
- Interest and appreciations
- Persistence, independence and self-concept
- Feelings, emotions, and awareness of self and others
- Interpersonal relations and humanitarianism
- Curiosity, risk-taking, complexity, and imagination
- Character education and leadership

Corollary to Plato's Allegory and the Gifted: Back to the Cave

'He would bless himself for the change, and pity [the other prisoners]" and would want to bring his fellow cave dwellers out of the cave and into the sunlight'

This suggests that the onus is upon those of us who have gone into the light to return to liberate those paralyzed with anxiety or distorted expectations and impressions. For many, the cave is safe, because it is controlled and represents routine. Routine frequently means freedom from ambiguity-related anxieties.

We work together to show those we care for most that whilst embracing new challenges in not panacea, it is both rewarding and uplifting.



Comments and Questions

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