



Review Article

Main issues in counselling gifted children and youths ¹

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Abstract

Counselling gifted children and their families is of extreme importance for the future of science, technology, the financial situation of individuals, families, communities, countries and continents, and the ability to fight against hunger, poverty, lack of good-enough water and air-pollution, as well as improve the situation of those in need. It is of no less importance for the well-being of the young generation of scientists, artists, politicians, and as we have recently very well understood – health care professionals of all levels and in charge of all tasks responsible for our future and the future of the next generations. Good, supportive counselling those who help all these aims means navigating the gifted in the path that will make them materialize their gifts.

In order to make this happen it has to be kept in mind that there is no "prescription" that can be followed, neither "a set of recommendations". Each gifted child or adolescent is unique; every one of them is entitled to her or his "haute couture" dress or suit perfectly suited for them. However, here are some of the main issues most frequently discussed by parents, teachers, counsellors and psychologists of gifted children: The social situation of the gifted child/adolescent, Is there a "right time" for teaching a young child reading and writing? Mathematics? Science?, Class-skipping and the gifted child, Pros and cons of revealing the child's giftedness to the kindergarten- or school-teacher, Dealing with the boredom of the gifted child in the school system, Is there a "most appropriate" class or school for the gifted student?, Afternoon activities for the gifted child: How many are "too many"?, Sibling-relationships in the gifted family, Parental authority and the gifted child, Planning the future education of the gifted adolescent. These are just a few of the issues I have been asked about for over three decades – mainly by parents and the team-members of the 55+ enrichment programs operating in Israel for gifted children. In this article I am to discuss – though in a nutshell – all of them.

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Introduction

Chapter 1. The Social Situation of The Gifted Child and Adolescent, and Their Relationships with their Peers

The social situation of the gifted child and adolescent is always mentioned when gifted children or adolescents are discussed (e.g. David, 2019a; Cross, 2017; Hébert, 2011; Persson, 2007; Rinn, 2018). Usually, it is the very first question people want to know about gifted children. As there is no solid quantitative research about this widely discussed issue, I think that the origin of this question is the perception that there is some "natural justice" in the universe, and thus, if someone has received a gift of supreme intelligence, this person "must" have some problem. As many of the gifted of all ages are introvert (e.g. Bates, & Rock, 2004; Burruss, & Kaenzig, 1999; Dossey, 2016), and no less have a variety of interests, quite a large number of gifted children are not very active socially. As a result, quite often they are perceived as having social problems, while in fact they prefer to be isolated, sometimes estranged to their peers, not spend with others whom they find not interesting enough, not challenging, even boring. Thinking that your class-

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mates are boring is not necessarily a prejudice or arrogance-related: being gifted means, in most cases, having high verbal abilities. A person with high verbal abilities expresses themselves more accurately than others, can read more complicated texts, understand conversations among professional adults when still young, and in many cases is not willing to listen to what is perceived by them as dull and inarticulate.

It can thus be concluded that as being gifted means usually having high level verbal abilities, gifted children have higher prospects to establish good relationships with others. Verbal abilities are the basis of social connections, as we all, starting from age 2 or 3, use words for communication. A gifted child, even when very young, has usually a larger vocabulary than their peers; can express themselves more clearly, and if they don't suffer from behavioral or emotional problems – will choose, usually at a much younger age than expected, to speak rather than get involved in physical acting-out. Such a child will often be praised by kindergarten- and school teachers and instructors, which will also contribute to their social status. Kindergartners and children in grade 1 and 2 usually want to be friends of their peers who are liked by the teacher, so the liking of the teacher contributes to the gifted child's social popularity.

Language proficiency is an advantage that contributes to the social life of gifted children also in the long run: they tend to establish deep, sincere connections once they find suitable friends; in many cases they cherish long-life-relationships; many of them even find their life-partner while still very young, get married at a young age and live a stable, comfortable life during which they have good prospects to materialize their gifts, as has been shown in the Terman's studies as well as others' (e.g. [Burks et al., 1930](#); [Cox, 1977](#); [Janos, 1987](#); [Oden & Terman, 1968](#); [Seago, 1975](#); [Sears, 1977, 1984](#); [Terman, 1925, 1954a, b](#); [Terman & Oden, 1935, 1947, 1959](#)).

So why is there such a gap between the actual reality and the false image about the social situation of the gifted child?

Many gifted children feel very good in various social situations, like to belong to several social circles, initiate social parties, conferences, family-gatherings and the like. However, many others, especially the highly gifted, do not. Some of them practice "being social" while still young, and later feel as if it is "a waste of time", or think: "why am I doing it if it is not interesting?" This change of behavior seems, for many parents and educators, "a deterioration of the social situation", and worries them. Quite often it happens that both [rents and educators feel they "must" "solve" the "social problem" of the gifted child, while there is actually no such problem.

In addition, many younger gifted children are social leaders, especially in kindergarten where quick understanding, self-expression ability and good performance are highly appreciated, so quite often the gifted child becomes a group leader. But when older, especially during adolescence, and even more often in adulthood, gifted people do not like in most cases to commit to the role of a leader. During the last decades quite a number of programs have been suggested in order to help gifted children and youths become social leaders (e.g. [Karnes & Bean, 1996](#); [Matthews, 2004](#); [Ogurlu, & Sevim, 2017](#)), but they have not proved to be a success. There are even studies showing that having an extremely high IQ is a disadvantage for a political leader... One of the main reasons the gifted population in general is not enthusiastic about leadership in many countries is that leaders need to love being with people; the gifted prefer, in many cases, to do other things.

But it seems that the main reason of the common belief about "the social problem of the gifted" is the human tendency to pay attention to the exception, to generalize from the irregular, from what stands out – to the general. We do not pay much attention to the gifted children who fit well, to the gifted youths whose life seem full of activities, who have many friends, to the gifted family whose members live in harmony, each of them develops their own interests, hobbies, sport-, art- music, etc. But we are fascinated by stories we have heard, movies or TV programs we have watched, or the few gifted people we have met – sometimes it was just one gifted person – who was unwillingly isolated, to the poor misfit. Most gifted people who have just a few friends are at least as happy as the gifted or the non-gifted whose social circle is much larger.

In addition, in many cases the number of friends needed has to do with the giftedness level. Usually when a child is highly gifted he or she needs a smaller number of friends for socialization-practicing, develop emotionally, and I general – feel good. But finding suitable friends is not always easy for the gifted child. When young, profoundly gifted children have quite frequently to make compromises, become friends with children they would not have chosen had they had an opportunity to spend time with children of the same- or similar cognitive level. When young, the child's opportunities to meet such children are limited; they usually meet other children in kindergarten or school, in the neighborhood they live, or among their family members. If they are lucky enough, as were the daughters of the Brontë family, for example (see, for example, [Hancock, 2013](#)), they have a large nuclear family with many gifted siblings, they do not suffer from isolation. But if they are not, isolation of young children can cause future difficulties. If a child

does not have at least one friend with whom they can practice mutual relationships, they might struggle in establishing relationships in the future due lack of both experience and proficiency.

Many gifted children have recently found online friends. This option has been existing for at least 20 years, but before the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic it was not considered satisfactory by parents, educators and counselors. Without intending to getting into the philosophical issue of "can online mates be considered 'real' friends?" there is no doubt that the social situation of a gifted child or adolescent who maintains connections with others, with whom they share interests, thoughts, aspirations or feeling, to whom they show their art, music or literature, is better than that of others who have neither actual friends nor online mates. In my experience, a child can be quite well adjusted if they have just one friend with whom they meet, while at the same time create a circle of online mates.

In summa: if a gifted child does not have friends it is NOT because of their giftedness; certainly not because of the "others": peers who do not accept gifted peers socially. Sometimes the gifted child lacks basic social skills, such as delaying gratification or being good losers. As for delayed gratification, we have all heard about the 1972 Stanford marshmallow experiment initiated by Walter Mischel. An excellent example of examining who is a good loser is my 1990 experience with the Tel Aviv University chess club. The club was willing to accept young players of all ages, but prior to registration each child has to play one single game when an instructor was watching. In all cases the child lost, as the instructor chose an opponent who was a better player than the new candidate. However, the decision whether to accept the child depended on the candidate, who was sometimes just 4-year-old. If they managed to wipe their tears (metaphorical or actual), and ask to stay for another game – they were accepted. But if they continued weeping and could not be consoled, or did not cry but rather argued and made excuses for their loss – they were not. When you want to be a good chess player, you lose most of the time during the training sessions, as the better you become – you wish to play against someone who is on a higher level. But if you perceive your loss as a failure rather than an opportunity to learn – you will remain a bad loser, and your loss will be not only of the game but also of friends.

Chapter 2. Is There a "Right Time" for Teaching a Young Child Reading and Writing? Mathematics? Science?

The question whether there is a "right time" to teach a child to read and write, or maybe to do math or science, is of particular importance not only for counselors but also both for parents and teachers of young children. The reason for asking it is that while there is an almost-general consensus of teachers and counselors against teaching "too young" children, the fact is that many gifted kindergarten-children can read, some can also write, and very many can already do third grade math. Educators' attitude towards reading, writing and doing math depends also on the child's age: while more educators eagerly object to it when the child is 3 or 4-year-old, and certainly at a younger age, some comply with it, though do not recommend it for 5-year-old. As there are many "preparing to school" programs for 5-year-old, reading and writing, as well as doing math and science are sometimes perceived as an "investment in the child" future, which is a "proof" of their parents' dedication. Thus teaching 5-year-old is usually not publicly criticized, and kindergarten teachers or counselors who object to it cannot fight against it.

Parents of children younger than 5 who already read, write, or do math are criticized not only by professionals but also by other parents; this attitude contributes to the persistence of the opinion against "teaching young children". In my opinion the main reason for this attitude is jealousy. Comparison of children's achievements are unavoidable, and many parents who realize that such a comparison does not present their children as the brightest bulb, "blame" the parents of the child who reads of "teaching them". Instead of admitting that their child did not reach the developmental stage essential for reading, they insist that they are "against teaching a kindergartner".

The fact is that in almost all cases when a child who is just 3 and is interesting in letters, words, the structure of a sentence the parents are not "to blame". In my experience even when a 4-year-old starts reading, or doing math, it is the child rather than the parent who initiates the learning of reading or writing, asking number-questions or the names of geometrical shapes. The questions might appear when being busy with everyday activities, such as climbing the stairs, taking the elevator, or even walking along the street – when suddenly the child is interested in the difference of the stairs number between the first and the second floor, or in walking on one side of the street while announcing the even buildings' numbers in an ascending order and then walking back on the other side, while announcing the odd numbers in a descending order. The questions are usually presented unexpectedly, such as when a 5-year-old asks when shopping with her mother in the local supermarket: "why is it necessary to put a sign of an arrow when the word 'EXIT' is written so clearly on the sign?", or when at the entrance to a public toilet the child wants to know, why there are three rooms: one with the word "women", the other with "men", and the third with nothing written but with a wheelchair picture... One of the most frequently question asked by pre-school children is about word-length:

pointing at one word they have just acquired, let us say "mosquito", they ask: "why is the word 'mosquito' so much longer than 'dog'? dogs are much bigger than mosquitos? "

There is always an option of not answering the child, or even worse – telling them that they are too young to understand the answer which they will get when "you are in school", "you are 6, or 7", or "when your teacher thinks it is it time to learn it". But each of these answers is not recommended. The inner message of each of them is: "you need not ask such questions", "we do not have time or patience for you or for your questions", or " you better get busy doing age-appropriate thigs". Such answers not only depress the child's curiosity; it also has a potential to "kill" their motivation to learn, while ruining the relationship between the child and the parent.

All parents should adopt one important rule: any question asked has to be answered. There are many questions whose answers cannot – and should not – be given when the child is not ripe yet, when they might shake them mentally or make them feel shame or guilty. Such questions should get but partial answers, but would not be perceived as lies. But when a child is striving to learn, to expand their knowledge, to widen their horizons – there is no reason why they should not get full answers. Questions about letters, words, the universe or its atoms, numbers or shapes shows that the child had acquired literacy, as well as scientifically and mathematically knowledge. So how can exact facts taught to a curious child interfere with their well- being?

As for worrying about other people's opinion about "teaching the child": I have never met a parent who refused to play ping pong with their 2-year-old, or to let their 3-year-old football. Why should the attitude towards helping the child who asks about what is considered "learning" be different? All children learn all the time. Before starting formal school their life is not divided between playing- and learning-time. They learn while playing, alone or with each other, and when they play, they learn about the world around them: about natural and social rules, about their own present abilities how to be a better climber, how to run faster, how to share things with others and how to overcome disappointments and obstacles. This brings us to another question related to school.

Chapter 3. Grade-skipping and the Gifted Child

Unfortunately, I do not know the answer to the frequently asked question whether it is "good" or bad" to skip a grade; whether it "should" or "should not" be done. Let us turn to history and try to learn from known facts about people who skipped at least one grade while in school.

Grade-skipping was much more popular in the past than it is now; it is also much more popular in underdeveloped- than in first-world countries. Surprisingly, or maybe not so, it happens much more often when gifted education is non-existent or is offered but to a very limited sub-population, mostly for the wealthier, more educated, and higher in the occupational ladder. These facts arise many questions, such as: "is grade-skipping a substitute means for education suitable for the gifted?"; "why has grade skipping been limited in highly industrial countries?"; "is grade-skipping practiced more frequently in some countries as means of saving expenses on those who leave school earlier than was expected?".

These questions, as well as many others, are of great importance. However, as a counselor I am interested only in one question regarding this issue: does grade- skipping contribute to the well-being of the child or adolescent, is it harmful to it, or maybe it is neither?

For many decades both philosophers, other theoreticians of education as well as child-psychologists, counselors and teachers have argued about the pros and cons of grade-skipping. In many countries, mine included, there are two distinctive opinions: the vast majority of mental-health- and education professionals are against grade-skipping, and a small majority stands for it. Thus, when the question of grade-skipping is discussed, and the parents need to find an educational psychologist who will diagnose the child in order to decide whether to recommend skipping or not, choosing a psychologist randomly for diagnosis will most probably result with no recommendation for grade-skipping. During the last 30 years I have received countless telephone-calls from parents starting with: "I want my child to skip a grade, and I call YOU because you are pro-skipping". Time and again I have to clarify that the fact that I wrote a few papers about grade-skipping does not make me a skipping-devotee. Making this mistake is not the parents' blame: being used to the very popular Israeli opinion, which altogether negates grade-skipping, makes them believe that if a professional is not against it – they must be in its favor.

Let us go back to history and look at the life-histories of the Nobel laureates. Almost all of them skipped at least one grade; quite a number skipped more than one. While they all materialized their giftedness, receiving the highest possible public recognition for their achievements, almost all of them had a long happy marriage, more children than the average families from a similar background, they lived longer and were healthier than others belonging to same

age-group. All these facts are not a "proof" for any advantage of their early grade-skipping, but it is at least a reinforcement of the assumption that grade-skipping does not result in long-lasting damage of any life aspect.

But while there is not answer to the general issue of pros and cons of grade-skipping, there is a definitive one for each child whose parents or educators deal with it: if the child is assessed for skipping, and if the conclusion of the professional chosen due to their expertise is that the child should skip a grade or enter school early – it is better for the child's well-being to follow this recommendation. A professional who comes to the conclusion that the child should skip a grade takes into consideration all social, emotional physical as well as cognitive aspects involved, rather than prejudices, half-truths and false beliefs.

Without getting to exact details of assessment for grade-skipping, or the "ripeness diagnosis, one must remember that there are quite good criteria for examining the child's readiness to skip a grade. For example: when observing the child from the physical and physiological points of view, the diagnostician keeps in mind that small boys tend to suffer among physically bigger boys; in many cases they are even bullied. Thus, the psychologist will be reluctant to recommend grade-skipping for a physically small boy even if he is mentally, emotionally and socially developed. On the other hand, big, especially fat girls tend to feel as outsiders both among "regular-size" girls and boys. Gifted girls whose puberty is precocious (see, for example, David, 2019b) should more often be recommended for grade-skipping as they tend to suffer from their double exceptionality; grade-skipping does not make either their giftedness or puberty disappear, but rather relieve the inconvenience they cause.

Before making the final decision about grade-skipping an important question has to be asked: is the skipping going to help closing the gap between the cognitive and the emotional developmental level of the child? The answer should be positive in order to decide for skipping. Closing this gap helps any child or adolescent build their emotional spine; it is, in a nutshell, the main aim of counseling in general and in counseling the gifted in particular. Grade-skipping is means of the counselor's toolbox; not using this tool because of some philosophy or belief is unprofessional, and in a conflict with the Hippocratic Oath.

Chapter 4. Pros and Cons of Revealing the Child's Giftedness to the Kindergarten- or School-Teacher

Revealing the child's giftedness to the kindergarten teacher or to the school-teacher is quite risky. I have already mentioned that they might be reluctant to hear about the child's giftedness. When the teacher is still an enigma to the parents, especially at the beginning of the school-year, it is recommended neither to reveal the giftedness nor to discuss it with anybody else in school, including the parents of the child's peers. After getting to know the teacher a little better, mainly two things have to be taking into consideration 1. Is the child going to benefit from their teacher's new knowledge? Is the label "gifted" going to make their life in school more interesting? More satisfying? Is the teacher going to be more emotionally supportive to them? 2. Assuming that the teacher knows the child is gifted and fully aware of the fact that such a child needs higher-level learning and more challenging assignments. Is the teacher able to offer the child any help in fulfilling their needs? If the answer is "no" to both questions, there is no reason to reveal the child's giftedness to the teacher.

Furthermore, there is a risk that by revealing the child's giftedness to a teacher that cannot help them the child's social and emotional situation will be deteriorated. A teacher that feels overwhelmed because of her difficulty to handle the class, to prepare the materials needed, or to be in charge of all her own tasks might react negatively towards both the gifted child and their parents. So it is better to save the efforts to "explain" her something which is beyond her ability to handle, something she cannot adjust to, or control (David, 2011).

Parents should keep in mind that highly professional teachers, who are both aware of the cognitive needs of the gifted child and are willing to "run the extra mile" in order to supply these needs, will probably identify the child's giftedness without parental help (about such teachers see, for example, David, 2015). Such excellent teachers will most probably approach the parents for discussing the child's giftedness...

In summa: In most cases revealing the child's giftedness to the teacher is not recommended. When the teacher has a gifted child or she had been diagnosed as gifted, such revealing would probably not be necessary, as her personal interest in giftedness will probably serve as lever for a fruitful cooperation between her and the parents of the gifted child. But in all other cases, unless the parent is sure that the teacher both wishes to help their gifted child and has the means required for it, it is recommended not to reveal the child's giftedness and lower all educational expectations.

Chapter 5. Dealing with the Boredom of the Gifted Child in the School System

Another issue that counselors of gifted children have to solve, as many children and parents need an answer to it, is the boredom of the gifted child in the school system.

Discussing the boredom of the gifted child in the school system has many points of view: that of the child, of the parent, of the teacher and of the counselor (David, 2018). They all have one common nominator: boredom is something that is "just there"; it cannot be denied, it does not "get better with time", or "disappear" when learning more or getting deeper into the subject. When a child says that they are bored, or when the teacher feels that her student is not interested in what goes on and rather does something else – the child is bored. Too often when a child is bored they are told to "have patience; if you just wait it is going to be interesting". Such a promise is an empty discourse; one should never promise things they cannot fulfil, and by doing that the teacher loses what had been left of the trust built with the gifted child.

Quite often a school counselor meets a gifted child after such promises have been made. In such cases the first task would be re-gaining the child's trust; this can be achieved by telling the plain truth to the child, namely, that most classes would probably be boring. It should also be explained that there are partial solutions that can ease the life of the child both during school-time and in the afternoons. In my experience, even 7-year-old, especially when highly gifted, not only understand this "bitter truth" but are willing to go along with it. Many parents, as well as teachers think, that the truth should be presented to children in small doses. I have found that gifted children with no behavioral problems respond positively to the truth, and trust the person who does not try to "protect" them by covering it, while trying to "soften" the truth is an act perceived by many gifted children as lying due to their tendency to "see in black and white" (about moral sensitivity: see Silverman, 1994; Roeper, & Silverman, 2009).

The first task of the counselor of a gifted child is to make them adopt a new perspective of their boredom: rather than think it is all negative, realize that while one has nothing to do, it is possible to ruminate about abstract issues, new ideas, or anything that the child is interested in. In the modern school many children have been taught to believe that boredom is a "major enemy", while gifted children, especially gifted girls, need "time alone" (e.g. Burruss, & Kaenzig, 1999; Olszweski-Kubilius, Lee, & Thomson, 2014; Zorman & David, 2000). The boring hours can be of use to every gifted child as "time alone" under certain circumstances.

But aside from teaching the gifted child how to deal with boredom, which is a crucial part of self-regulation instruction (on the importance of self-regulation for gifted children see, for example, (Housand, & Reis, 2008; Oppong, Shore, & Muis, 2019; Stoeger, & Zeidner, 2019; Tortop, 2015), gifted children can develop their ability to negotiate and compromise by discussing "doing other things in the classroom" with their teachers. When the child is very young, it is usually the parent who is involved in the negotiation, while the child learns "how coming-in-terms works". One such example is of an ADHD 6-year-old who had just started grade 1. As she had been reading at age 4, her mother told the teacher that in order to prevent the child from interrupting her peers, it would be easier to let her read during most of the day. Without mentioning the child's giftedness but rather her disability, the teacher agreed and let her read for the first 4 hours every day, during which she used to finish 3-4 books. Then, before the end of the school day, she joined her peers in painting, gym, the singing- or the choir class, or the woodwork workshop. Another example, is of a first grader mathematically gifted child (on mathematical giftedness in early age see, for example, David, 2002, 2012a, 2020a). The boy was allowed to take math with grade 4 students, which was convenient for the teacher who preferred this solution to his boredom problem rather than let him do his math work in her class. In that case the solution worked just for a few weeks: very soon the child had already acquired the math he was to be taught during the whole year, as once he had the textbook he learnt it by himself. This 6-year-old returned to his grade 1 classroom, and the teacher decided to let him do math at his own pace; his parents were responsible for checking his homework and making sure he took an exam each time he started learning a new subject.

These are just two of the very many potential solutions aimed to help the child to deal with their boredom in the classroom. In doing that many components have to be taken into consideration, such as the class-size, the availability of the space needed in order to the child do their own work, or the society of which the school belongs to: whether it is more cooperative or more individual (e.g. Dwairy, 2002, 2004a, b; Dwairy, & Menshar, 2006; Dwairy, & Achoui, 2006; Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, & Farah, 2006a, b; Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, Farah, Sakhleh, Fayad, & Khan, 2006). In more cooperative society it would be much harder for any teacher to teach a gifted child in a different way or at a different pace than in individual society, so it would be hard to recruit her for helping the gifted child in her classroom. Blaming the teacher for the child's boredom will never help, but as long as the adults in charge – mainly the parents and sometimes also the teachers – are willing to face this problem, there are ways to ease it. The main role of the counselor in such cases is to serve as the mediator between the child, sometimes directly and some other times – through their parents, and the school, usually presented by the teacher.

My "secret weapon" when it is hard to come to terms with the teacher, who insists about rules, the equality principle, or the jealousy that the classmates might feel towards the gifted child, is "the coffee-house invitation". In such cases I suggest to parents who need the teacher's cooperation for their gifted child to invite her for a coffee in a neutral place; a meeting over coffee and cake helps quite often to soften even the more rigid teacher who prefers to do things "by the book". However, the "coffee meeting" should be initiated by the parents at an early stage. In cases when the parents meet me after an "explosion" with the teacher, namely, after they had complained about her, blamed her and vice versa, I invite the teacher for a coffee, and leave the location for her to choose. Only after she agrees I ask politely if the parents – usually one of them – can also join us. Many overworked teachers are not used to be treated this way, so when I approach them it increases their readiness to accept unusual solutions to problems such as the boredom of the gifted child during classes.

Chapter 6. Is There a "Most Appropriate" Class or School for the Gifted Student?

Almost 50 years ago, when I was studying for my teacher's license in physics and mathematics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I had to take the course: "the educational meaning of teaching science". The professor was the late Yeshayahu Leibowitz, an Israeli Orthodox Jewish public intellectual and polymath. He was professor of biochemistry, organic chemistry, and neurophysiology at the Hebrew University, as well as a prolific writer on Jewish thought and western philosophy. At that time, he was 70 years old, very young and energetic for his age. I still remember the very first sentence of his first lecture: "there is NO EDUCATIONAL MEANING to teaching science".

As I am also approaching 70, I feel an urge to shout aloud: "there is no such thing as "the most appropriate class for the gifted child". But instead of shouting I am just saying it now.

Unfortunately, the belief that "there is a better place for my gifted child" has caused many harms to many families of gifted children. For example: about 15 years ago an Ultra-Orthodox 9-child family, needed my help for their 10-year-old son. After being bored for four years in school they sent him to an out of town, where, they had been promised, the child would have been able to choose classes, skip the less interesting subjects and those he had already mastered, and learn at his own, accelerated pace. The new school was not religious; the child was the only one in the whole school who was wearing a yarmulke, the Jewish head-cover, so he not only behaved differently but also looked as "not belonging". But after the first semester the child, who had taken the more challenging classes, had nothing left to learn there, so he left the school and returned to his old, local one, along with his siblings and former religious friends. Had the parents known that the solution for the cognitive needs of the child would not be answered in that school, he would not have been pulled him out from his neighborhood, his childhood friends, and his basketball mates, but rather look for optional ways to enrich him at home, while relieving his school-boredom.

Another example goes back to the 80ies; it is about a state-religious family whose 8-year-old daughter could choose to stay in her religious school and participate in the local enrichment program for the gifted once a week, or transferring to the regional grade-3 gifted class, which was a part of a secular school. The parents opted for the second, and she left her local, religious school, commuted every morning over an hour to school and then back home. But she could not participate in any of the social activities as all of them took place during the weekends. On Sabbath, the holy day of Saturday, starting on Friday afternoon, no religious family drives, so the girl stayed at home. The girl could neither eat at her friends' houses, as their kitchens were not Kosher. When still in grade 3 or 4 she could not even explain her "food problem", as her friends had not yet heard about the food restrictions in Judaism... Only when they were a little older she solved the food problem by eating her preciously prepared food when occasionally visiting a friend, and managed to schedule weekdays social activities. In that case the child's cognitive needs were finally answered, but it took quite a long time and no less patience.

It can thus be concluded, that each school- or class choice has its advantages and disadvantages, its pros and cons.

Chapter 7. Afternoon Activities for the Gifted Child: How Many are "Too Many"?

Most gifted children are used to hear during their childhood, adolescence and even adulthood, that they are "too active", that they "do too many things", they are "obsessive" or even worse. The intensity of the gifted child has been widely discussed (e.g. Ackerman, 1997; Bouchet, 2005; Brennan, & Piechowski, 1991; Daniels, & Piechowski, 2009; Guthrie, 2019; Piechowski, 2006; Piirto, 2000), but it is still considered, many a time, a characteristic that should be hidden, should be "calmed" – especially, but not solely – for girls. An intensive gifted child or adolescent can accomplish a lot, can achieve highly in many subject-matters and life-areas, and they might be able to do it while still quite young. However, it is perceived by most other people, who are much less intense, as something that should be "calmed".

Let me start with an example taken from my own life: when quite young I used to speak very quickly, as if I was afraid my thoughts would run too quickly without leaving me time to express them vocally. When I started teaching, 48 years ago, my students complained of my speaking too fast. I apologized for my problem, promised to make an effort to speak slower, and asked the students to help me by raising their hands each time I needed to slow down. This was my first lesson about intensity, when reality forced me to apologize for something I had not thought about as my fault. That was also the first time I understood that even problems that are connected to personal characteristics that can hardly change, such as speech intensity as a part of general intensity, can be solved.

The next time I realized I was speaking too quickly was just a few years later, in 1979, when I gave my first presentation in an international conference. My subject was the Yiddish in the Responsa literature, a subject I find up to now fascinating. However, being just 26 years old, and presenting my study in English in front of a crowd of much older scholars, aroused my excitability, and "pushed me back" to my comfort zone of speaking very quickly. I finished my presentation in 8 minutes; nobody could understand anything, but most of the crowd was too polite to comment about it. The exception was a comparatively-young German scholar, who approached me and said: "Fraulein Ehrenstein [I used my maiden name; at that time "Fraulein" was not considered offensive yet...], from the few words I could grasp, your presentation seemed very interesting, but as you spoke so quickly, I could not understand most of it. Will you please send me the full version?"

The demand of "calming down" is not just about speaking. Counselors of gifted children hear it frequently in questions about afternoon activities, the school-load, sports, music – practically all possible interests and activities. A series of studies delivered by Milgram and her associates (e.g. [Milgram, 2003](#); [Milgram & Hong, 1999](#)) has shown, that gifted children and adolescents are usually engaged in many more extra-curricular activities than the non-gifted. So when parents ask: "can my child participate in afternoon activities every single day of the week, sometimes in two" the answer would be, in most cases, "YES". What might be "too much" for one child, will probably be "not enough" for another. Parents have an important role in making sure their child eats well, sleeps well, and in general – seems satisfied. But by no means can they judge "how much is too much" for their child.

A final important remark: many studies have shown, that parents treat gifted boys as if they need more intensive leisure-activities differently than gifted girls ([David, 2019b, 2020b](#)). For example: boys are sent to accelerated math programs in a much higher rates than girls (e.g. [David, 2008](#)); boys are encouraged to have more hobbies than girls, many more boys than girls take multiple advanced subjects in high-school. Intense girls are perceived by society with much less tolerance than boys, but it is the parents' role to encourage their gifted girls to materialize their giftedness rather than hide – even be ashamed – of it. The counselor's role is to encourage the parents to let go prejudices and old-fashioned public opinions, so they can support both their gifted girls and boys.

Chapter 8. Sibling-relationships in the Gifted Family

As in many other subjects related to gifted children and adolescents, there are many prejudices about bad sibling relationships between the gifted child and his or her siblings. Many parents go as far as denying their gifted children the opportunity to participate in special programs for the gifted, as they are afraid of the deterioration of the siblings' relationships due to jealousy. In the last 30 years I have met too many adolescents and adults who were not told they had been diagnosed as gifted when children; when confronting their parents about it they were usually told that "had you been told that you were gifted, it would have been difficult to treat you and your brother/sister equally, and we believed that all children should get the same opportunities".

The perception about sibling relationships are damaged when only one sibling is gifted, has been based on beliefs, superficial observations and opinions rather than solid research. In my country, to the best of my knowledge, only one full-population study had been conducted on sibling relationships in the gifted family, and it revealed that the giftedness of one sibling had no influence of the sibling relationships ([David, 2013](#); [David, Gil, & Raviv, 2009](#)). Thus, the belief of many parents that giftedness per se is the reason for bad sibling relationships is baseless.

This belief results, in many cases, in overcompensation of the non-gifted sibling, which has, by itself, high potential for feelings of injustice. In addition, many parents tend to claim that "if one child is gifted in mathematics or has exceptional verbal abilities, the other is gifted in sports". This utterance is not necessarily true. The intellectually gifted child can also be gifted in sports, and her sibling might not be gifted at all. False expectations have a high potential for causing bad relationships; this might be the case when one of the children has versatile gifts and the sibling does not show any special talent.

But it should also be taken into consideration that giftedness is highly hereditary (e.g. Rimm, Siegle, & Davis, 2018), so that when one child in the family is gifted, prospects are high that her or his siblings are gifted too. Findings from large samples have shown that

Brothers and sisters are usually within five or ten points in measured ability. Parents' IQ scores are often within 10 points of their children's; even grandparents' IQ scores may be within 10 points of their grandchildren's. We studied 148 sets of siblings and found that over 1/3 were within five points of each other, over 3/5 were within 10 points, and nearly 3/4 were within 13 points. When one child in the family is identified as gifted, the chances are great that all members of the family are gifted (Silverman, 2009).

Even among children with IQ of 170-194, usually occurring between 1:100,000 and 1:1,000,000, there was an extremely high percentage of families with two or more siblings in this range (Silverman & Kearney, 1989).

In addition to the fact of IQ similarity among siblings, there is an additional problem connected to the IQ-gap assumption: the questionable validity and reliability of giftedness identification. In my country the "giftedness tests" are neither valid nor reliable, and in many cases children with an IQ higher than 160 were diagnosed as "non-gifted" (e.g. cases studies, David, 2010, 2012b). When parents prevent their child who was diagnosed as gifted from getting the educational stimulations they need, while the sibling who had not been identified as gifted does get enrichment and support, the blunt discrimination would most probably be the reason for negative feelings rather than the giftedness per se.

Chapter 9. Parental Authority and the Gifted Child

Many parents of gifted children find it hard to discipline their gifted children. It is also a popular opinion, both among parents and scholars, and as *Vox populi, vox Dei* ["the voice of the people is the voice of God"], it is our task to examine this saying and find why do so many people think of it as absolute truth, and what should be done in order to prevent it.

Let me start with a "real life example". In one of my lectures to parents of grade 3 or 4 gifted children who just started participating in local enrichment programs for the gifted, the very first question was about parental authority. It was asked by the mother of tweens, a boy and a girl of 8, both participating in the program. She said, that when her son took a shower, he would leave the bathroom floor wet, the cloths spread all over, and the towel in the living room. There were also loud demands, such as: "will someone bring me a towel", and "did anybody see my underwear?" But when his teen sister took a shower there are always enough towels, the floor remained dry and nothing is forgotten. "Why don't you make your son clean everything after every single time he takes a shower?" I asked. The answer was "isn't it like that with boys? Are girls not 'naturally' tidy?" Only when I said "no", looked at her and waited till she processed my answer, I knew she started to understand that It was up to her whether her son would become an inconsiderate man, someone who waits for others to do things for him, or a person whose friends and family would be able to rely on.

Parental authority starts from the very basic instructions even a toddler must follow, such as not getting close to open fire or any electric instrument. It goes on to order-following, and as the child grows up – parents must insist that their child would follow the "house laws". This has nothing to do with the child's intelligence; gifted or not – as long as the child lives in their parents' home, the parents are in charge of setting the rules and are responsible for discipline the child.

The main difference between the gifted and the non-gifted regarding parental authority has to do with the age each new rule is presented and the explanations the parents supply. Unlike what many parents think, when the child is gifted, especially profoundly gifted, they can and should be disciplined at a younger age. For example: if a 2-year-old understands why it is dangerous to cross a road alone, or to run while crossing it, they should be praised every time they wait by a red traffic light and say aloud: "we are waiting for the green light". As for the explanations needed: the higher the IQ of the child is, the child needs less explanations. Children must get some explanations along with new rules or laws, especially when they include prohibitions and limitations. But when the child is not gifted, quite often the parent needs to repeat both the prohibitions and the reasons for them. When the child is gifted, on the other hand, too many explanations might start long discussions and arguments, and encourage controversy. If the parent is drawn to it the child might think that the law is negotiable, and possibly will be motivated to disobey future instructions and house-laws. Here is an example of what parents should NOT do in order to achieve parental authority.

A few years ago I taught a "Blockseminar", a 6-day intensive course on developmental issues of children and adolescents at the university of Klagenfurt, Austria. In order to have the students involved more deeply in the material

I asked each student to give an example of an incident, a case or a memory connected to parental authority – either from their own childhood or from others'. A 24-year-old Masters' student told us that when he was in grade 12, his mother had forbidden him to use his personal computer for half year because during the first semester of that year he did not obey her law of "no computer before finishing all school tasks". One of the other students asked how had the mother known he had not obeyed her, and the answer was: "she was not satisfied when she saw the half-year school reports so she assumed it was because of the computer's games".

I did not want to tell my student what I thought about the incident, but the other students were not as reluctant. They unanimously came to the conclusion that this act of the mother was not about parental authority, but rather imposing an un-proportional punishment because of an unproven "sin".

Chapter 10. Planning the Future Education of the Gifted Adolescent

Gifted children are very different from each other. Looking through the narrow IQ window, namely, defining giftedness just by measured verbal and mathematical-logical intelligence, the range of their IQ is usually about 70 points. During this conference we heard that in Saudi Arabia the minimal IQ for being eligible to be included in a gifted program is 120; in many countries it is 130; in my country – Israel – where giftedness is not measured by IQ either in the Jewish and most Arab sub-populations, there is an IQ criterion for Bedouins – the Nomads who live in the Negev, the desert and semi-desert region of southern Israel: a minimal IQ of 125. There is no upper-limit to the IQ of children who are accepted to gifted programs, but most IQ tests normally-used have a ceiling of about 160 (e.g. David, 2014a,b, 2016). However, as known from previous diagnoses, there have been children whose measured IQ was over 190 (e.g. Silverman, 2009). Thus, in many groups of gifted children the IQ range is about 70 points; most of the children are closer to the minimum of the minimal cutting point, while the minority, the profoundly gifted, are usually quite different from most of the others regarding their interests, abilities, gifts, and many personality traits (David, 2020c).

As a result, the only answer to the question about planning the future of the gifted child is "it depends on the child". There are gifted children who know, at a very early age, what they are interested in, even what profession they are to choose – and their life track is with accordance with this childhood plan. Others do not know until their late teens, sometimes until much later, what to choose, as they are good at many areas and interested in more.

Thus, the parents have one major role in helping to plan their child's future: NOT to push towards any profession, subject, or learning track. Parents should suggest to their gifted as well as non-gifted children to experience a variety of afternoon activities, courses, special programs, learning materials and everything they can financially and emotionally afford in order to satisfy their children's curiosity, motivation, and ambition to learn. But the final decision what to choose is not theirs, but their children's; as, according to Gibran Khalil Gibran (Arabic: جبران خليل جبران.) (1883-1931), the notable Lebanese-American writer, poet, visual artist and philosopher had stated, their children do not belong to their parents. Here is his famous poem:

On children And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of Children. And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

* * *

These are just a few of the issues I have been asked about for over three decades – mainly by parents and the team-members of the 55+ enrichment programs operating in Israel for gifted children. In this presentation I am to discuss – though in a nutshell – all of them.

THANK YOU!!!

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