



Interview Article

An interview with Hanna David: reflections on counselling gifted children

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Abstract

Professor Hanna David has a lot of work in the field of gifted guidance and counseling, both practically and academically. The interview with her will provide a broad perspective to practitioners and researchers. In this interview; counseling settings for the gifted, important tips on individual and family counseling for the gifted, how to provide emotional support for the gifted child, the use of humor as a door opener in counseling for the gifted, the difference of online and face-to-face consultation for the gifted, changes for the gifted in the counseling paradigm compared to the past, future predictions in counseling, ways to preserve the counselors' emotional integrity, advice to gifted counselors, currently focused on consultancy fields, social and emotional needs of gifted, competencies of our gifted teachers, pursuing Interviews were conducted on the issues of gifted children' interests, role of the mentor in gifted education, teachers to follow the academic journals and conferences about the gifted issues.



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Interviewers: What prompted you – drove you initially to work with able children in a counselling setting?

Hanna David: My interest in giftedness in general and in working with able children in a counseling setting in particular goes back to the 60ies, shortly after my youngest brother was born. When he was one-year old, and I turned 12, my mother started working as the post-office mistress in the new neighborhood we moved to. Four days a week, when the post office had afternoon opening hours, it was my task to take care of Shmulik.

I was too young to hang around with other mothers of nannies, so I took him with me everywhere, such as to the grocery store, or to watch TV with our neighbors: my parents could afford to buy a television for the first time only a decade later. But my favorite choice for spending my babysitting hours was at Lily's, my friend's. While I came from a 4-child family, Lily had just one sister. Her frequent begging to add another sibling to the family did not help, even when she promised to take care of the baby "even if it is a boy". Slowly climbing the 3 floors to Lily's with my baby brother rewarded us when halfway up the stairs we already smelled her mother's cookies, but the person who made me understand that my brother was gifted was her father. Mr. Cohen was an excellent teacher who really loved children. He was always at home in the afternoon, preparing for the next day's classes or correcting exams. But he loved to play with Shmulik, explaining scientific phenomena, such as boiling water, or white clouds that do not produce rain. He was also the first to ask the 2-year-old Shmulik numerical questions, and somewhat later taught him to recognize numbers.

When Shmulik was three-year old he started going to the Cheder, a religious kindergarten for Ultra-Orthodox Jewish children. I still spent most afternoons with him, but as he was a fluent reader at 4, from that age he would/could

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already spend long hours reading his own books, while I was studying, doing my homework, reading, or writing for the youth magazine I had been publishing since I was 15.

But it was not until I turned 14 when I first heard the term "IQ". My grade 9 physics teacher, a new immigrant from the US, said after the first examination, that two-thirds of the class failed, that he could not understand why it happened as "the average IQ of this class is about 130". He did not use the word "gifted", I am sure he did not know it in Hebrew, but I found its meaning in an old English dictionary my father had bought while serving in the British army in World War II. At that time "an average IQ of 130" did not make any sense to me, as I did not feel the girls around me were exceptionally smart. But 30 years later, when I taught the course "the gifted child in the general classroom" to in-service teachers, I met the didactic instructor of the college who had been one of my peers who had been expelled from school at the end of grade 10 because of her poor grades. Only then did I realize that if only 48 girls were accepted to my high school from the whole country, it must have been highly selective and many of my school mates could have been labeled "gifted".

Being surrounded by gifted people, both in my family (see, for example, David, 2019a; n.d.) and my community – was a trigger for being more and more interested in high ability, creativity and talent. But being a mother was the last brick in my decision to be a counselor for the gifted and talented. Almost 40 years ago, when my first-born son was just 2:8 years old, we were walking on the side-road with his younger, 4-month-old brother, trying to roll the baby-carriage from the diagonal curbstone to the zebra crossing. He stopped me then, asking: what is written on the curbstone? I answered: "for mother and baby".

In Hebrew, "for" is just one letter combined with the nouns "mother" and "baby"; "mother" is a 2-letter one-syllable word, "Em"; "baby" is a 5-letter two-syllable word: "Ti-Nok", so my son asked: how come mother is big and she 'has' such a short word, while 'baby' is short and 'has' a long word? I then told him that each word is a combination of syllables, the minimum one, and each syllable is composed by one, two or three letters [that is the maximum in Hebrew]. He then pointed at the common letter, "lamed", which means "for"; and asked about the names of the letters composing both words. On that day he learnt 8 of 22 Hebrew alphabet letters, one of which is an ending-letter.²

Since that day I looked for information, literature, and actual advice whenever possible because my son's curiosity grew rapidly, and there was no one who could answer my questions. Yinon's mathematical understanding was something I had never experienced before; I answered his questions and participated when he wanted to involve me in his mathematical "games". It started at about age 2, with counting the floors while the elevator of our building was going up and down, and went on as at age 4 he asked me: is zero the average of plus infinity and minus infinity"? (for more examples see, for example, David, 2012). As to Yinon's verbal interest and curiosity – I had some help from my next-door neighbor, an experienced elementary-school teacher, who gave me some first- and second grade booklets, and encouraged me to give them to my son even though the kindergarten teacher had a negative attitude towards "premature teaching" (e.g. David, 2011, 2014a). But at the back of my mind there was always a constant fear: I did not want my son to become a younger version of my older brother, whose development was very uneven. For example: because he started learning at the preparatory class at age 4, he missed two years of kindergarten. Not being very interested in painting and other arts and not being exposed to these areas he never knew the differences between green, blue and turquoise.

Looking back at Moshe's educational track it could be easily concluded that he had been robbed of acquiring central milestones, such as color-names, let alone painting ability, because of two-year deficit in fine- and gross motor-skills practicing. This was done for the sake of advanced theoretical learning, but while cognitive learning could have been offered to him later, he had never closed the gaps in basic skills he had been deprived of.

Being a mother had been the most enjoyable thing in my life. It made me confront my own past as a child who – until age 12 – did not have any girlfriends but rather spent all her out-of-school time with her older brother and his much older friends. I could also look back at myself as a teenager who went to a school where, for the first time, other girls had the same interests, were thinking as quickly and could express themselves – both in writing and orally – as precisely and fluently as myself. High school was also the place where some of the teachers opened new worlds for me: the world of mathematics and sciences, that of languages, religious thought, fashion and art. Also realized then that I had been a young adult struggling to find her place in the world that seemed to pass in slow motion while I was sprinting, running towards the next aim. But being the mother of three gifted children had also been the most

² Five of the Hebrew letters have a different version when appearing at the end of a word; they are called final letters. One of them is "mem", the last one in the word "Em", "mother".

challenging thing I had come across, and I felt it was my mission to be there for families encountering similar challenges.

Interviewers: How does your client group identify themselves to you?

Hanna David: My client group consist mainly of two groups: the majority are parents of gifted children and youths, and the minority are 18-20+-year olds who "found themselves in my writings". There are two more, numerically negligible groups: other-than-parents-family-members of gifted and talented children and youths, and school counselors, social workers and psychologists who seek advice either for themselves or for their clients.

The parents of the first group usually contact me after being referred to by someone who knows me or a family whom I had met professionally; some come across my name when reading "your book" or "your article".³ Some of the parents tell me that their child is gifted; they mean that she or he had "passed" the "stage 2" identification-for-giftedness test offered to all grade 2 or 3 Israeli children who had been referred to it by their teachers after taking the "first stage" giftedness examination (David, 2014b). Other parents tell me that "they are sure the child is gifted, was successful in the first examination,⁴ but "did not pass the second".

A minority of the parents "get immediately to the point": some tell me they need a proof that their child is gifted, and some others want me to contact the child's teacher, believing that if the teacher knows that the child is gifted, she or he will treat them accordingly. In these cases, I try to explain that my work is not labeling any child but rather helping solve their problems. I also explain, that in most cases telling a teacher that a certain child is gifted would not do them any good, as the teacher has not been trained either for teaching gifted children or helping them emotionally or socially. If the parents agree to open up and tell me about the child's or their own difficulties, problems or dilemmas, I suggest that they set a meeting with me. It is quite interesting, that when the mother is calling, she usually says she would call again after speaking with the father, but when the father calls, we set a date for the meeting right away.

The counseling session is carefully prepared both by me and by the parents: I read ALL materials sent to me prior to it, such as psychological assessments, compositions, math problems of science projects, various art works – recordings of music, theater performances or dancing, audio-recordings of all kinds, as well as descriptions of the child or adolescent, written by both parents. Quite often adolescents send me various materials directly and participate in counseling sessions with their parents. After that meeting it is up to the family and me whether to continue meeting with the child and the parents, set a plan just for parents' instruction meetings, usually when the child is still in pre-school, or "leave the door open" for future meetings when the parents feel it is necessary.

Interviewers: Is it fair to suggest that sometimes it must be difficult to tell when you meet a family group as to who is the person requiring the counselling? Do you for example work with family groups as well as with individual children?

Hanna David: Indeed, it is quite accurate that in many cases it is difficult to tell who is the person requiring counseling, but it is even more difficult to differentiate between the one mostly in NEED for counseling rather than the one requiring it (e.g. David, 2013a). It is not rare that the child identified as gifted is chosen as the "identified patient" (e.g. Hagan, 2018; Yermish, 2010), or the "symptom bearer"; in more severe cases, they are the family's scapegoat (e.g. Nelson Grau, 1985).

I never try to the setting of the family during the first counseling meeting, as in most cases the family's resistance should not allow them to acknowledge the situation. If the family chooses to start a long intervention with me this issue is also dealt with. But quite often even when the parents want me to meet the child on a regular basis, they are not committed to participate in the parents' instruction meetings, which is a "deal breaker" for me, and I refuse to start the process without the parents' full involvement. In some cases, the parents assure me they are committed to the process but shortly after I meet with their child for the first time either one- or both of them cancel their parents' instruction meetings time and again. In such cases I face a dilemma that I have not sufficiently solved yet: on the one hand, I can easily "get out of the contract", as it is not respected by one side. But on the other hand, the child who needs me should not be punished for their parents' behavior. Thus, if the child has not yet been attached to me, I tell the parents that it was not going to work. But in most cases the child wants to meet me again right after our first session, so I bite my lip and do my best to help the child.

There are, of course, many cases where the parents do understand that another sibling needs help more than the gifted one and seek help for them too. I never meet with two siblings at the same time, and very rarely – actually twice

³ In most cases they all refer to my Hebrew publications in the "Hebrew Psychology" web where I have been published massively during the last 15 years.

⁴ Screening the top 15-20% of the class population.

during the last 30 years – agreed to meet with a sibling years after their sibling's treatment was terminated. In all these cases I do my best to help the parents find a suitable therapist for the sibling. But when the main problem is the parents' relationship I warmly recommend, sometimes even push towards couple therapy. A comparatively easy-to-handle situation is when one of the parents has a learning disability that causes a lot of tension. In such cases I ask the parent to be diagnosed, and in most cases the parents are cooperative.

Interviewers: Working through the many layers of emotional trauma and distress must be very challenging in your journey to the heart of the child. Do you occasionally work in triage manner?

Hanna David: In my line of work, I must make quick decisions whether to meet the family or refer them to someone else. I also must be very quick in some cases that involve violence, usually school related. So though I prefer to start my journey to the heart of the child or the adolescent after deciding that they are capable of deriving the greatest benefit from it, actual life is quite often stronger than the best well-meaning intentions. For example: a father of a 15-year old girl called me saying: "my child had taken 10 paracetamol pills last week. She is at home now, with me, but I want to bring her to you". I urged the father to take his daughter to the closest mental health clinic. Had the father suggested that I worked with the psychiatrist, his highly gifted girl could have derived a great benefit; but as the father wanted an "immediate solution" my only option was to refer him to the place where they were to make a risk assessment and take full responsibility for her life.

When a child had been a victim of violence, but it is not a life-threatening situation, I meet the family immediately and do my best to help. One such case was of 5-year-old girl who had been tied by her kindergarten teacher: during our third meeting she was already acting out – showing me what the teacher had done to her using dolls, modelling material and painting. During this time, I helped the parents find another kindergarten for her, so she did not have to see the abusive teacher again. Another case was of a grade 1 student who was abused by his classmates who kicked him in the school yard while one of the teachers was watching, doing nothing. In that case it took a few weeks till the child started learning in a new school. During this time period he stayed at home and met me regularly. After transferring to the new class, he was happy, he still wanted to continue meeting me for many months...

But quite often things do not turn out the way I had thought they would, in spite of my best intentions. For example: a 12-year old boy whose parents started meeting me because of his runaway problem. Very soon he came by himself, and when asking how he arrived – there was no public transportation from his hometown to mine – he told me that he took a taxi because his parents "were too busy to drive me". During the first month we already started establishing a therapeutic alliance, but then I got a telephone from the parents informing me that they were going to spend the next 8 weeks in Switzerland and were looking forward to re-setting their son's meetings with me next September.

I was angry, disappointed, felt even cheated, but soon realized that the victim of this behavior was the child. Though I acted good willingly, and prioritized him in the selection process, being sure I could help him, it did not prevent the time-and energy waste I had invested. It is inevitable that from time to time things like that happen, namely, making a decision as to who is to be treated and sooner or later realizing that I had been mistakenly allocated my efforts in the wrong direction.

Interviewers: You work, if I may observe, in a particularly challenging and sometimes very dangerous environment – even before you meet a child. Do you find humour a 'door opener' in your work?

Hanna David: Humor is at least a "door opener" in my work; it is, in many cases, the main tool for penetrating into the brain, even to the soul of many parents who come to me as to their last hope, the last resource they can think of after many failed interventions with their troubled children (about an adolescent girl who first met me after several interventions see [David, 2013c](#)). During my career I had met some parents whose profession had to do with humor, such as a caricaturist in a main Israeli daily paper, or a well-known comic books writer. Speaking "their" language helped to make the initial connection, "breaking the ice" and establishing a therapeutic alliance, necessary when having to speak openly about the problems of their gifted child.

But not of less importance is the use of humor during therapeutic meetings with children and adolescents. As had already been mentioned, humor is a characteristic of many gifted children and adolescents (e.g. [Holt, Willard-Holt, 1995](#); [Shade, 1991](#); [Ziv & Gadish, 1990](#)). Almost all children I meet are verbally gifted, namely, they like word games, double meaning expressions, a good laugh about political characters who behave ridiculously, or schoolteachers who reveal their weaknesses by using certain words, expressions, forms of a sentence, high, poetic language in inappropriate class-situations. Teachers who blame students for being "disrespectful" when refusing to cover "vulgar" words with

"polite" euphemisms are usually laughed at by gifted students. Quite often the humor of the gifted is considered "unacceptable" in their class, and they are punished because of it.

In my clinic humor serves mainly as means to establish a therapeutic alliance between the already-disappointed-from-the-system child, and me, the older adult who can not only understand them but also sympathize with them. Furthermore, quite often I encourage children to laugh at their superiors, as being able to see the ridiculous side of a principal or a teacher helps tolerate school boredom, lack of challenge or even unjust behaviors.

Interviewers: Do you observe a difference in whether you face to face counsel or counsel through virtual meetings? Is one more effective than another and if so, how would you characterise the differences?

Hanna David: Face to face counseling is by no means preferred to virtual meetings, but cancellations of meetings, or delaying a meeting until "things settle down and I can actually see the counselor" might be not just worse than online meeting, but even dangerous.

When the first lockdown started in Israel, I was lucky; I first started working with skype in 2015, when my appointment at the European Commission in Brussels, as an Expert & Rapporteur for an evaluation of the Economic and Human Sciences panel switched to online work because of the November 2015 Paris attacks. It was immediately clear that the work had to be done, as too many individuals and research groups were waiting for our decisions about grants they were waiting for. So, for the first time we managed to complete the evaluation successfully without actual meetings. Thus, in March 2020, when the Israeli government had forbidden any out of the house activity, I was already experienced with online meetings by zoom, FaceTime or skype. I started regular therapeutic meetings right away (David, 2020a) and also online dynamic assessments (see the description of a 40-minute skype meeting with a 3-year-old girl, David, 2020b). Sometimes one of the participants was sitting in their living room and the other – in the study; in one case a couple with 4 little children preferred meeting me online while sitting in their car, as their house was too noisy and allowed no privacy... Most of the families preferred online meeting also during the military May 2021 operation: "Guardian of the walls" [Arabic: معركة سيف القدس meaning: "operation Jerusalem's sword"].

Even when online meetings are much lesser effective than face to face meetings, which is the case, for example, with children who struggle to concentrate while sitting in front of a screen, this option is usually better than canceled meetings. I have observed it mainly in families where the parents had first objected to online counseling meetings, because of their bad experience with online learning in school, saying: "the child does not learn anything by zoom in school". My suggestion has been "just give it a try with me; we can set for a 25-minute meeting if 50-minute period is too much". This suggestion had turned out very successful – in all meetings the child did not need to stop the meeting after the first 25 minutes... another idea that has been working very well is let the child what wants to show me various object from their everyday lives, including their room, their yard, their toys, and tell me anything they wish about them. Though in all classical therapy methods the process takes place at the therapist's clinic, and the patient does not expose the counselor to their physical life, being flexible about the location and allowing the child to direct the conversation through objects that have not been prepared in the turns out to be quite successful in many cases. When the traditional frame of the clinic is not there anymore, the child "re-creates the clinic" and shares it with the counselor, and new options, new possibilities are made, which are to be warmly embraced by the counselor.

In order to be able to feel free, potent and comfortable, the therapist needs to be very flexible and creative during online sessions, especially with younger children. During the covid-19 pandemic many children at all ages have been used to spend many hours in front of screens; among their various activities was learning on one side and watching porno on the other. The therapist who sets a meeting with a child needs many a time "tear" them from their game or their video. In some cases, the child or adolescent, whose regular life had been turned upside down, fails to get up for the meeting, and the therapist has to wake them. Even when the child had managed to be in front of the screen on time – it happens quite often that the child is still half asleep, wearing pajamas, their hair uncombed.

Quite often with ADHD children the counselor discovers that they also had neither eaten nor taken their medication, and thus struggle to concentrate or even behave properly. The therapist must tolerate such conditions quite often. Another problem stems from the fact that many parents are not around or are just busy doing their own things and are not available to sort computer-related problems, such as the bad sound of a camera that needs to be replaced. All these problems are unique to online meetings, and thus the counselor must be both flexible and creative and also confident enough to solve not just their own computer-related problems but also those of their patients.

Some of the main problems of online parents' instructions meetings adults are quite similar, but others are not. For example: silence is a tool therapists use quite often when dealing with a difficult subject; in some cases, the therapist waits a while until the patient speaks; in others – the patient chooses to close their eyes while the therapist

watches them sitting, walking, or lying on a sofa. When one needs to sit in front of a screen most of such actions or behaviors are not possible. For example: silence is interpreted in most cases as a frozen picture rather than as reflection-time...

Technical interruptions are quite common during online meetings both with children and their parents. They usually break the sequence of the conversation, in many cases when they occur in the middle of a painful, or even difficult conversation the preference is not to return to them, and the "magical moment" of discovery, the revealing of an important issue, fact, or thought is gone. Other interruptions occur from time to time during online sessions, such as the entrance of a family member into the room, shouts or cries heard from another part of the house, or a telephone ringing sound. The clinic which had "moved" to the client's house cannot be sterile, and thus the meetings are prone to a variety of disturbances.

I have found that being equipped with three possible means for online meetings – zoom, FaceTime and skype minimizes the possibility of serious interruption of any meeting. It also minimizes the pre-mature termination of interventions during a time when emotional support is most necessary.

Interviewers: During the time you have been working with able young children what changes in the issues you and the young learner working together have had to focus on?

Hanna David: During the last 35 years that I have been working with able students, major changes have occurred in all issues relevant to the lives of these children and adolescents. Some of these changes have been a part of global changes in relationships between the individual and society, changes in the world political situation, in family structure, globalization of economics and its influence on relocation, women's participation in the workforce in general and in high prestige, highly-paid positions in particular, and many more. Other change had to do with the social, economic, political, religious-related and population-changes in Israel. Here are some of the main domains where major changes have occurred.

- Social supportive environment. When I started working as a tutor of gifted students, back in the 60ies, the social environment towards giftedness was very supportive and excellence was encouraged. The title: "the best student" was an honorary one. Gifted students were not yet labelled – public giftedness tests started in Israel in the 70ies, and thus more talented children and adolescents were not entitled to special learning settings. Nevertheless, many high-ability children skipped a class, even two, and some others found areas of interest on their own. A positive aspect of this situation was that social problems of the gifted were not perceived as an educational or psychological issue; no "educational assumptions" about difficulties that might have been connected to giftedness or a result of it were presumed, the gifted were not bullied or even called by insulting names, as had the case been later. As a result, a substantial part of my work had to do with intellectual and professional issue, most social problems were solved when the child or the adolescent started participating in a course, or a professional track even when the other participants were older, and the only main issue of my work had to help the gifted overcome their sensitivities.
- The exclusion of many sub-populations was a negative result of the fact that the gifted were identified only among children from higher SE status, children of educated parents, mostly born in Israel or descendants of European countries. Most Israeli children were excluded, among them: children living in the economic and geographic periphery of Israel; Arab children, particularly Druze; Ultra-Orthodox children, especially girls, children of immigrants, especially of those arriving from Arab countries, and ALL children with disabilities. My work in this area was 100% educational. At both roles – as teacher and college instructor I pushed towards better understanding the essence of giftedness and helping the in- a well as pre-service teacher understand that the gifted children nurturing. Teaching in a peripheral college confronted me with a special challenge: persuading my students that giftedness could have been found in all places, and it was their task to reveal its existence, to help the parent understand that their child needed special education, and in some cases to help them uncover their own giftedness.
- The gender aspect. Back in the 60, almost only boys participated in the "race towards excellence". That included the choices that talented girls made for their school track, during their compulsory army service, and in the job market. This situation had gradually changed, and girls' aspirations, along with those of their parents, have been now similar those of boys'. But in "real life" there are still very large gender differences in materializing ones' talents; the gender issue bothers all the girls I meet at my clinic. It starts while still very young: I recall a grade 1 girl who worried about being "too fat"; a 16-year old who was the only one in her gifted class participating in the most prestigious Israeli acceleration program, and the girl who was just to get

drafted and was about to refuse volunteering to the piloting track, considered the most challenging in Israeli army, especially for girls, as she did not want a 10-year obligation, saying "It is too long for a girl who needs to think about starting a family". While in last two decades of the 20th century I had to encourage girl in school- and academia-related matters, these doors have widely opened since. The main problem of the gifted girl is social connections, conventions, and prejudices. My key role is helping her a strong enough spine in order to make it possible to follow her own heart.

- The level of religiosity. Back in the 60ies, many Orthodox, and even Ultra-Orthodox children who showed high ability in many areas, not only in religious subjects, had an opportunity for good education. For example: Since I was 15, I had been preparing many dozens of Ultra-Orthodox school-age boys, who had but limited secular education in their Ultra-Orthodox Cheders and elementary schools, for high school entrance examinations. The parent of these boys wanted them to get a good matriculation certificate, in order to be able to be entitled to higher education and later integrate successfully in the work force. Since the 80ies this tendency had made a substantial turn: Ultra-Orthodox schools stopped teaching even basic arithmetic and elementary English at about grade 5, and thus nearly blocked the possibility even of gifted students to fill their educational gaps later.

Some changes occurred in the beginning of the 20th century, but they were relevant mainly for girls in the Ultra-Orthodox sector. Single-sex tracks opened in Academic colleges – not just in teachers' colleges, as had been before. Ultra-Orthodox educated women started filling positions in public-service institutions, which could have motivated many younger females in this sector. The door for gifted girls had opened slightly, but not so much for boys.

No wonder that except for one case, the opening of a gifted class in the Ultra-Orthodox sector (see [David, 2013b](#)), where I was in charge of the selection of boys to this class, in the last 20 years I met a family for a counselling session only once.

- Areas of interest have substantially changed among the gifted in the last 50 years. Until the 80ies, there were some "classical" professions that gifted children and adolescents had shown deep interest in. While most boys wanted to know more, to become professional, or practice in areas mainly connected to science, medicine, mathematics and engineering. Gifted girls showed interest, in many cases, in social sciences, especially psychology and sociology, as well in the humanities and languages. But there were also quite a number of girls that wanted to "make it" in areas perceived as masculine, and vice versa. Some of the gifted of both genders wanted to become lawyers; quite a number had later admitted that studying the law was very boring and not creative but almost everybody who had been admitted a law faculty had successfully graduated; many had become great lawyers and noticeable judges.

Since the 90ies the study of computer science had become very popular, and its popularity had been increasing since. Many gifted children of both genders have also been interested in brain sciences, but not just in its scientific aspect – their aspiration is also "to make money of it". In the last decade there has been a growing tendency – more frequent but not solely among girls – to "make it" in [social] medias. Some, the more artistic ones, present their work, e.g. songs, melodies, funny or other videos in order to get more and more views, likes, and recommendations; others learn "to be there" in social media events, to publish a lot whenever possible, to edit written texts, videos and photos, etc., activities they find more rewarding than arduous work even if they are fully capable of doing it very well. The parents of such children and adults, who quite often complain that the adolescent "wishes to give away their giftedness for the sake of nothing", consist of a very large percentage of those approaching me. In many cases when they do, it is already too late as the child or the adolescent gets much more self- and social satisfaction from the web than they could have received by being an "exemplary student".

- The issue of immigration from Israel has gradually become one of the main ones among almost all adolescents I have recently met. 40 and even 30 years ago it was quite clear for almost all the gifted I met and their families that they did not even think of the option of immigration. Indeed, leaving for post-doc was popular, a necessary step needed in order to get a position in Israel when returning to it, after two years. Since about the beginning of the 21st century gifted adolescents and young adults do not necessarily see their future in Israel. This started with Israelis in the silicon-valley in the last decade of the 20th century and continues until now. In addition, many young PhD's, who had moved their families to the US for a post-doc position have not returned to Israel due to lack of academic positions, the political unstable position, dissatisfaction with the

social-economical system, and the extremely high living expenses in Israel in comparison to the salaries⁵. In addition, public education system in Israel is not satisfactory for the gifted, while private gifted education does not exist.

These two phenomena have influenced my work with many individuals and families. On one side, When I counsel a family with a teenager who is about to get a university while still in high school or a young adult who is about to get their degree, I talk with them about their future and many a time prepare them for the opportunity to move to Europe or to the US for the PhD rather than wait and plan the move for the post doc. As for the Israelis who wish to return to Israel – until the covid-19 pandemic they used to meet me during the summer vacation in order to learn more about the academic opportunities of the gifted children once they are back. Since the pandemic all these counselling sessions have been online.

- Parents' involvement in the identification of giftedness process has become much more intensive, and the preparation for the "giftedness tests" have turned to be a business that involves a huge amount of money. On the other hand, there has been a decrease in parents' wish to push towards excellence, which had been much more common back in the 70ies, 80ies, and at some degree even during the 90ies. It looks as if the main aim of many parents has gradually increased in the giftedness label of their children, rather than in supplying them with good, suitable education that will answer both their academic and emotional needs. Counselling to such families is sometimes quite frustrating, as I do my best to persuade the parents that knowledge is important per se, that being good at literature is not of less importance than becoming an investment counsellor, and even if their daughter can be accepted to a faculty of medicine, they should hear her when she says she wants to be a writer. Needless to say I am not always successful, and many gifted youngsters still decide for the "most well-paid profession" rather than to the one their heart seeks.

Interviewers: In an increasingly challenging world environment how do you imagine the future for supporting the well-being and mental health of able children?

Hanna David: In my future view, supporting the well-being and mental health of able children will be a concept familiar in all schools, municipalities, mental health centers for children and adolescents and the ministry of health of the country of state. Licensed counselors will be knowledgeable in psychology of the gifted as well as in teaching strategies for gifted students – at list in one area of knowledge, so they would be able to help the gifted in psychological and educational issues. Gifted children will not be identified by one single exam but rather by a variety of ways: it will include the opinion of at least one educator and one psychologist who know the child, a portfolio of the child's work, medals or other honorable mentions the child had won, an estimation of the child's creativity, the demonstration of characteristics typical of the gifted, such as persistence, being able to rise after failing, mature behavior, attitude towards others, self-inspection ability, etc.

Gifted disabled children should be treated by professional experts of both giftedness and disabilities. It is highly recommended that these professionals be knowledgeable visual- or other art, music, dancing, the theater, in addition to a scientific or humanistic subject matter.

Interviewers: I imagine sometimes you will hear difficult things from those you counsel. Who do you talk to? How do you protect your emotional integrity?

Hanna David: I hear "difficult things" from both children and adolescents and their parents, on a weekly basis. It is certainly the hardest part of my work, but knowing that many people, including too many who are in charge of the children's mental health, are not able to handle such things, while I believe I do, keeps me going. I use several means to protect myself; first of all, I take into consideration my own health- and familial situation at that time.

Protecting myself is, first of all, being most careful not to cross the border of law, even when the child's interest might be questioned. For example: more than once a child under 10 told me about their sabotaging the computer system of their school by inserting a virus". In one of these cases the child demanded, prior to his confession, that I signed an obligation not to tell anybody what he was about to confess about. I told him that I was willing to sign that document if the fact that I was to hear was not going to endanger him or anybody else. He said that it did not and agreed that if I proved to him that it endangered anybody, I would tell his parents about it. At the end it was not. Though I resented his act I was glad that he gave me access to something he did not want anybody else to know, enabled us to discuss the subject in length and I finally made him promise he would not do it again.

⁵ In 2021 Tel Aviv had the highest cost of living of any city in the world!

Another case was of a grade 3 child learning in a gifted class who told me that some of his classmates had a habit of watching porn-videos. I explained him that this might lead to a real danger, as pedophiles could have discovered who was watching these videos and contact the children. The child agreed that I spoke with his mother about it; she spoke with several other parents from that class and together they approached the teacher, counselor and the headmistress in order to decide about the next steps. In this case, though I could not promise it, the child's identity was not exposed and his fear of being labeled as "snitch" did not come true.

Working in the public sector confronted me with more extreme incidents. For example: a 5-year-old girl told her kindergarten-teacher that she had been raped by a young man from her village. When I, in my capacity as the municipal psychological, was called to the kindergarten, it was already known that the man had hurt two more girls at about the same age. The teacher, who had no knowledge about legal or psychological procedures, had already questioned the first girl, and thus compromised the future investigation. My immediate task was to calm the kindergarten teacher, who was very agitated, and inform the appointed officer-of-law for child and adolescent affairs, urged him to urgently open a police file against the suspect-rapist. But to my surprise, nothing happened: the suspect was not arrested, and the child got no treatment. It turned out that as the child's testimony was compromised, the kindergarten teacher had to testify instead, and she refused to do that saying: "I live in this village and if I testify against the son of X, I'll be banned". This incident had moved me badly, to the point I hardly slept for a whole week.

The main thing that I have learnt during my long counseling career that there is no "maximal protection" – there will always be cases that will hurt me deeply. But I also learnt but in many others, I will be responsible for a real change in children's lives. Knowing that is my main source of power, helping me go through the hardest incidents, the most severe cases of abuse. I know I will never let them conquer me.

Being helped by professionals is another means of self-protection. During several periods of my life, I have been helped by older and more experienced psychologists and psychoanalysts whom I was seeking advice and support. As years pass by, I am becoming the older person, whom younger professional need help from. But getting old confronts me with many personal complicated situations, connected mainly to illness and death, and here, again, I am the "strong person".

Quite often I do not even get the opportunity to process my own losses. One such situation has recently happened, when during 8 days I had to go through a heart catheterization and the loss of my mother. 4 of my older patients – aged 16-19 as well as their parents knew about my heart catheterization, none knew about the death of my mother, as I felt it would have been "too much" for them to digest. Such situations are extremely difficult and cause a lot of stress. There is no remedy for series illness and death, but Pilates – I got my instructor's license at age 65 – and Yoga are of great help.

Interviewers: What guidance would you offer to those who are beginning their journey in counselling young people? What would you suggest they avoid and what would you recommend as an approach to forming an effective partnership between the counsellor and the counselled.

Hanna David: My first advice to those beginning their journey in counselling the gifted is: do it if and only if you love gifted children and hope to get up every morning challenged in a new, creative way.

My second piece of advice – do not do it if you are not ready to train for a marathon. If you are – take into consideration that the way to become a good counselor is exceptionally long. If you do not love learning, if you are not a flexible person, or you are not willing to constantly admit to your clients – even if they are 5-year-old, that you do not know – please, reconsider your decision.

My third piece of advice – which is no less important – be honest. Gifted children and adolescents need you to be honest not only about your strengths but also – maybe particularly – about your weaknesses and disadvantages. If admitting them to yourself is hard for you, just leave the whole thing. I can assure you it is going to be much more difficult when you have to tell a 7-year-old that you do not know what the Fibonacci numbers are.

In addition, it is crucial that you admit that you do not know everything. Indeed, it is highly recommended to be educated at least in one subject matter, but there will always be someone who knows something that you do not. You are not expected to know it all; you are required to admit it.

You are to set an example to your clients and be sure – they are to know who you are as soon as they know how to read, which might be even at age 4. As much as you are trying to keep your private life to yourself, it is not going to work. The first time one of my children told me something about my life that had never been published, was also the first time I heard the term "dark-net". So, if you think you can change the truth just a little bit, or you are afraid something about you will be exposed, please back off. Many gifted children and adolescents will seek your help after

being failed by many adults, such as educators, mental health professionals and family-members, including parents. You will be able to establish a therapeutic alliance with the gifted and their parents only if you are 100% honest with them.

Please, be aware of your limitations, too often parents seek help by a giftedness expert rather than call a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist believing "everything is because my child is gifted" (e.g. David, 2020c). If you are unable to refer potential patients to other professionals due to vanity, omnipotence or else – counseling the gifted is not your thing. You do not want to endanger anybody, nor do you wish to have a burden which is beyond your power to carry.,

Be aware of cases of problems that are too difficult for you emotionally. Indeed, it is not always possible. Such had been the case when a couple who lost their gifted child during his military service was sent to me by an officer who had been familiar with my work. As I did not want the parents to know that their story was "too close" to my own (Dedication, David & Wu, 2009) I met with them. But in most cases a counselor who is aware of her limitations can refuse to meet with parents whose case causes her a high level of distress. In my case the "red line" is anorectics. I am quite good at identifying potential to anorexia, even diagnosing it, both among girls and among boys, but at a very early stage of my work I had realized that anorectic youngsters make me feel very bad, so I had questioned my ability to help them. It does not really matter where it comes from – one of my former psychologists suggested that the roots of this extreme discomfort was being a second-generation holocaust survivor. Whether she was right or not – I recommend that anybody who starts working with any population – especially with the gifted, who are more sensitive than the in general, will be able to say "no" some situations rather than drag interventions whose end is doomed.

Interviewers: What are you working on now?

Hanna David: Since I have retired from teaching career, I have been working both as a counselor of the gifted and their families and as a writer – of books and scientific papers in a variety of subjects connected to the gifted: psychological and social problems, conflicts in the gifted family, mainly in families with double exceptionalities, educational problems underachievement of adolescents who had been identified as gifted but failed to materialize their giftedness. This includes young people who have already dropped out of school, others who are at the verge of drop-out, and some who have failed – mostly for the first time in their lives – in academia. I also work from time to time as a counselor for lawyers or families who need professional advice in issue such as class-skipping, entrance to certain schools or programs, or helping home-schooled students at all stages. During some of the parents' instruction meeting I occasionally help in matters such as finding a new professional path, or helping the parents reveal their own disability. Such had been, for example, the case of a system developer in a very successful startup, who had been exposed to the world of giftedness during the intervention process with me, and currently works as a counselor of the gifted. Another noticeable case is that of a father who had realized in one of our parents' meetings that he might have also had ADHD, took the MOXO test and started medical treatment that enabled him to fully materialize his own financial giftedness.

My scientific work includes currently finishing my part in a book I write with Prof. Eva (David & Gyrmathy, in preparation), a few collaborative works with theoreticians and practitioners, the preparation of a few presentations for future meetings and conferences, and posting both in my blog (David, 2020-) and in the "Temporary sanity" (2022) one of the Hebrew Psychology web.

Interviewers: What do you see as the current social and emotional needs of the gifted?

Hanna David: In my opinion, the most important emotional as well as social need of the gifted is the feeling that she or he is not alone, that there are others who understand them, both peers and adults. Intellectual and creative needs are also to be fulfilled, but a leading role is not just to satisfy the need of learning, knowing, but the need of social connections. Social problems of the gifted child have started being an educational issue only after education had become compulsory all over the world; prior to the second half of the previous century gifted children did not spend most of their time with peers of the same age, doing solely what the teacher had ordered them to. Often, they could learn with older children, in exclusive learning settings, by family members or adults who were carefully chosen by their parents. Having to "go to work" – the child's or adolescent's school – every day, for many hours, where they are to "learn" new things, but are offered subjects they have already mastered, deepens the feeling of loneliness the gifted feel. Furthermore: it happens quite often that the gifted child or adolescent is mocked, even bullied; in other cases, she or he learns that it would be better to hide their giftedness, and thus they learn to deny their own self, as giftedness is a substantial part of them, not a single characteristic that can easily be pushed aside or denied.

One of the main solutions to the "loneliness problem" is allowing, even encouraging a much more flexible school system, including the possibility of participating in special programs for the gifted, as well as free entrance to university-

based programs to whoever wishes to participate. When broadening the circle of potential peers, whether older or younger, initiating activities of all kinds for families with gifted children, opening access to university courses for everybody interested, not just to a certain-age-students who had been identified as gifted at a certain age by a certain test, any gifted child or adolescent will have a better opportunity to find others who share the same way of thinking, same interest, or both. This might alleviate – if not completely solve, the feeling of loneliness so many gifted children and adolescents feel.

Interviewers: The needs of the gifted are many- but are the competencies of our gifted teachers up to the challenge?

Hanna David: No, they are not. In Israel teachers do not have to take any courses in didactics for the gifted or psychology of the gifted, and it has been found in many studies, teachers' attitudes towards the gifted is far from being positive (e.g. [David, 2011, 2014a](#)). In fact, in a study of the 3-year program for future teachers of the gifted. [Vidergor & Eilam \(2010\)](#) found, that there was no difference between teachers who finished successfully this track and who did not take it.

Interviewers: Are there instances where gifted kids just need to be left alone to pursue their own interests?

Hanna David: Yes, there are. Here are some examples.

- A 7-year-old gifted girl who is the best student in her class wishes to pursue her goal: being a champion in rhythmic gymnast. She has expressed her school boredom time and again, there is no suitable learning system for her, while in order to become really exceptional in the sport she loves, she has to practice every day for the whole afternoon. Taking into consideration that a rhythmic gymnast must start while still very young, it is clear both to her and her parents that she might not be the best student in her classroom, neither will she have any time or energy for learning science, participating in any other creative or intellectual activity, or even participate in all social activities initiated by her school mates. But this girl has a dream which she has good prospects to materialize; I would recommend her parents to encourage to pursue her goal.
- A 14-year-old boy who has not been accepted to the local gifted classroom is an excellent programmer who had already started working in a start-up company. The parents are worried because their talented son has given up the prestigious physics-math track offered by his school and insisted that as he already knew what he wanted, they should allow him put a minimal effort in schoolwork and let him continue working in the same place. I would recommend the parents to be as tolerant with their son as possible, as there are good prospects he is to do both: make money while becoming more professional in his field of interest, while still being a school student and at the end being entitled to the matriculation certificate.
- A 15-year-old girl has just started her university math track (about two such Israeli tracks see [David, 2019b](#)). The teachers in her school call her parents every time she does not show in school because participating in university classes is more important for her. The parents fail to explain the school staff that their daughter is happy doing math, while in school she feels she just wastes her time. In such cases, which occur in various versions not rarely, I suggest that the parents notify the school principal that they are to let their child continue her formal learning in another, more permissive school. In most cases this notice work, and the girl continues to skip school classes in order to participate at the universities classes. But when it does not, I help the parents find another high school, sometimes in a different town, in order to help their daughter, materialize her dream.

Interviewers: What is the role of the mentor in gifted education?

Hanna David: The role of the mentor in gifted education is of great importance. In some cases, she or he is the only person the gifted child or adolescent feels close enough to emotionally. Sometimes the mentor's task is both social and intellectual: introducing the child to a new subject area while making it possible for them to meet others who share the same interests helps enormously. But even if the mentor's main role is helping the gifted find an area of interest, a subject matter to "fall in love with" ([Kerr, 2014; Zorman & David, 2000](#)); or choosing among the many interests, when the gifted is versatile (e.g. [Kerr & Sodano, 2003](#)), it is of great assistance. Pursing your goal might lead to find other people who become your friends, as has been the case in some University-based Israeli programs for gifted high school students (e.g. [The Odyssey Program at Tel Aviv University, 2021](#)).

Interviewers: There are many journals and conferences about gifted- do they really help the classroom teacher?

Hanna David: No, they do not help teachers in my country. Almost 30 years ago, when my first publications dealing with gifted students were published, I was sure that teachers would be interested in reading them. Thus, I published three of them in Journals whose target audience was schoolteachers, teachers in academic teachers' colleges, and policy makers in the field of education. My first publication was named "Educating gifted children in regular or special classes?" (David, 1997), it was published in a journal which "focuses on theory, research and practice regarding teacher education and professional development. The journal is designated for teacher educators, lecturers and students who are engaged in the field of teaching and education" (The Mofet Institute, 2022).

A year later it was re-published in a textbook of the Open University (ibid). The textbook consisted mainly of translated from English articles; mine was one of the 3 written in Hebrew, which had made me think that it would be read by many. On that year I also published: "Mathematical giftedness" (David, 1997b); this time in a yearly of the teachers' college where I was teaching. My article: "Five gifted children in one classroom: A case study" (David, 1999) was uploaded to the DAAT [=knowledge] web immediately after its publication, and since then was re-published once more in Hebrew and twice in English (ibid). More than 20 years have passed since then, during which many hundreds of families have met me, informing me about their child's difficulties in school.

But only two school teachers were willing to meet with me in order to help gifted children in their classes – all others required "information about the child" which, by both by law and ethics, I am forbidden to supply. My trials to meet with the whole school staff in order to answer their questions about gifted children have also been always refused. I met teachers and headmistresses only when the issue in question had to do with the child's behavior – in most cases my "role" was to defend it and try to persuade the teacher to let the child do more challenging tasks rather than the ones given to the rest of the children. In most of these trials I have failed.

I have also discovered, that though my writings in "Hebrew Psychology" (2022) web reached more than 750,000 readings (in January 2022), and there are many hundreds of people who follow each of my personal webs, teachers consist of a very small minority of my readers. To the best of my knowledge, none of these teachers is Israeli. I am disappointed, even sad, but I have already come to terms with this situation.

As for the influence of conferences on teachers: the situation is very similar to that of publications. Teachers in my country do not participate in activities aimed for enriching their knowledge about the gifted. For many years I had been trying to change this situation, but after my last trial I have ceased... In 2005 I had founded the Israeli Society for Research on and Promotion of Giftedness and Excellence and served as its head for two years. While about 80 researchers, university staff members and therapists participated, there was not even one schoolteacher who wished to be a member. Obviously, Israeli teachers – whose English is not sufficient in most cases – do not participate in non-Hebrew conferences and meetings.

Interviewers: What have we neglected to ask?

Hanna David: I do not think you have neglected any relevant subject.

Thanks a lot for this enjoyable interview. Answering the questions was stimulating, and gave me an interview to look inside myself, to look back at my life, and realize how much is still there for me to do!

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