Talent development: Accommodating the social and emotional needs of secondary gifted/learning disabled students

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Abstract

The population of students in secondary schools who are concomitantly gifted and learning disabled is especially at risk for poor academic performance. Often, their sense of self has been damaged by schools' overemphasis on their disabilities at the expense of efforts aimed at enhancing their strengths. Using student cases and a review of literature as a foundation, this exploration advocates the development of individual student talent as a philosophical theme for schools to accommodate the social and emotional needs among gifted/learning disabled youth. Descriptions of several educational innovations and reform components, likely to enhance talent development, are included as additional means for examining the critical relationship between self esteem and academic success.

> If you can look into the seeds of time,
> And say which grain will grow and which will not,
> Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
> Your favours nor your hate.
> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I(3)

Gifted students with accompanying learning disabilities (gifted/LD) represent a certain "untidiness" that gifted education has heretofore largely tried to avoid. Each exceptionality, giftedness and learning disabilities, is predicated on constructs that continue to be questioned in the literature. Gardner (1993) examined the limitations of definitions that continue to be utilized in gifted and talented education, while Mercer, King-Sears, and Mercer (1990) marveled at the numerous geographically-based distinctions dictating ways in which students can qualify for learning disabilities programs. The seeming contradictions in terminology, "gifted" versus "learning disabilities," has created philosophical difficulties for many educators. The notion that giftedness can be hidden from recognition, masked by problems experienced in traditional learning venues, has only recently received much attention. With this growing awareness, teachers and parents must grapple with a decade of initiatives gauged at improving academic achievement for all students. Despite the fact that the identification of giftedness continues to be, for the most part, "tidily" assessed via *a priori* psychometric measures, with program inclusion continuing to hinge on whether students have satisfied statistical criteria for admission (Abeel, Callahan & Hunsaker, in press), few would argue that many students beyond the limits of the criteria can benefit from the stimulation of much of gifted programs' activities. Moreover, there is reason to believe that inclusion in such activities promotes academic achievement among a number of students who typically do not perform effectively in school (Baum, Owen & Dixon, 1991; Olenchak, 1990, 1993).

In addition to influencing identification of students for access to gifted programs, this "tidy" approach has been extended to the assessment of school practices. While a paradigm shift continues to redefine the nature of giftedness by broadening perspectives about the range of human potential (Coleman, 1992; Gardner, 1993), schools persist in using quantitative means for assessing their successes and failures. This approach reduces the scrutiny of school practices to numbers on achievement tests and other quantitative results, thus reinforcing the use of numerous, perhaps inappropriate, practices. These practices continue so long as they appear to be "working" for a majority of students. In this case, quality is confused with quantity, and the individual needs of each students are not of strong consideration (Wagner, 1993). As a result, many students, who are gifted and who experience an array of learning disabilities, become trapped by this quantitative vacuum and are disenfranchised by inappropriate education al practices. These students are unable to be included in specialized gifted programs due to their failure to "measure up" on psychometric assessments and are unable to achieve academically because classroom practices are aimed at the success of the majority of students and not at satisfying individual needs. Whenever students feel disenfranchised, feelings of negative self-esteem may result, and these emotions may lead to a wide variety of negative behaviors that ultimately produce educational dysfunction and, more critically, social and emotional difficulties.

THE THREE FACES OF GIFTED/LD

The predicament for gifted/LD students is not a simple as it may seem, however. Superficially, it would appear that gifted/LD students would become entrapped in the philosophical and definitional dilemma surrounding the terms, "gifted" and "learning disabled." In actuality, however, the quandary encompasses three scenarios that are related to the school practices for special-

ized program inclusion, gifted, LD, or otherwise. Particularly as identificational systems for special educational services continue to rely on psychometric assessments, students' actual needs are likely to be overlooked by teachers and parents in one of three ways, each student being able to:

- satisfy neither the criteria established for gifted programming nor those utilized for LD identification;
- satisfy criteria for inclusion in gifted programs but not for LD assistance; or
- satisfy criteria for LD identification but not for gifted programs.

Each of these scenarios, while quite different, can have similarly devastating effects that contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement for the students involved.

Neither Abilities Nor Disabilities Are Identified

Students who employ their abilities to develop their own compensatory strategies for making their disabilities are also endangered in traditional schools. These young people manage to work at grade level by working diligently to create mechanisms for "handling" their learning difficulties. Unfortunately, as so much of their energies are allocated to compensation techniques and to their difficulties, little verve remains for working with their talents and gifts. "In essence, their intellectual ability hides the disability, and the disability disguises the gift" (Baum et al., p. 16, 1991).

Although such students can develop frustration like their previously-noted counterparts, this face of gifted/LD is less likely to result in overt problems. While there is a tendency to want to "oil the squeaky wheel," concern for these students should not be erased simply because their needs are less demonstrable. Students whose needs have not been identified, whether those needs are associated with giftedness or learning disabilities, represent perhaps the worst educational predicament: failure of schools to individualize. Such oversights result in the underservice of both potentialities and disabilities, eventually leading to the underdevelopment of the student involved. Even if schools had collectively grown callous to the point of ignoring each pupil's individual needs in favor of concentrating on a majority of students, there is a problem. At a time when society cries out for skilled people who are relatively self-assured, the possibility that *any* student's educational needs may be overlooked places the future of the whole of society in jeopardy (Southern Growth Policies Board, 1986). While there may be a tendency to concentrate on what is good for the majority, it is critical to keep in mind that societies are, in fact, comprised of individuals, each one warranting at least some degree of personalized attention in the educational process.

Only the Gifts are Identified

Some gifted students with learning disabilities are able to satisfy requirements for inclusion in gifted programs because they secure intelligence test scores at a sufficiently high level to qualify for services. Others are able to become involved in such programs because they tend to obtain above-average achievement test scores, they consistently earn high grades in school, or they meet other identification criteria delineated by local and/or state programs for the gifted. In any even, once they are labeled as gifted, they instantly become subjected to all of the expectations typically extended to such students. Many teachers often expect assignments to be completed at a consistent level of excellence without regard to the nature of the assignment or to the needs of the students. A number of parents, convinced that the gifted label represents omnibus talents, become perplexed when their gifted child does not perform equally successfully on everything, both in an out of school.

Gifted students, themselves, frequently adopt feelings of flawlessness. Having been taught that they have such extraordinary abilities, they come to feel responsible for superior achievement without regard to context or content. Such students are especially prone to internalized conflicts relating to perfectionism and may become quickly frustrated with tasks that don't come easily. worse, for students with what Baum et al. call "subtle" learning disabilities (1991, P.15), or learning difficulties that do not appear until middle school where there is increased emphasis on comprehensive independent reading and writing assignments, the realization that "there is something wrong" may be difficult for everyone to grasp but hardest of all for students themselves. Perfectionism can, in small does, help to fuel excellence and stimulate individuals to ever higher levels of development (Dabrowski, 1970; Silverman, 1990). However, because it is the most overlooked personality characteristic of all those associated with bright individuals (Whitmore, 1980), it more often expands unbridled and without a realistic sense of "when to be satisfied." The destructive aspect of perfectionism can lead bright youth to believe that the only attempts worth making are those that end in matchless achievement. At such times that superb performance is unattainable, such students may resort to negative social and emotional behaviors.

Particularly during the elementary years before fourth grade, tasks in school tend to be grouped around acquisition of basic skills that students are asked to demonstrate in a variety of ways. Frequently, bright elementary students can employ outstanding

verbal skills or other talents to accomplish tasks for to work around them, these strengths serving to disguise latent learning disabilities (Baum & Owen, 1988; Boodoo, Bradley, Frontera, Pitts & Wright, 1989; Olenchak, 1993). Such behavior manages to hide any difficulties, but it also helps to maintain others' positive perceptions of these students. If one is viewed as "gifted," the commonplace view among teachers, parents, and even university researchers that is transmitted to and instilled in the students themselves is that there should not be/cannot be concomitant learning problems (Mendaglia, 1993). The outcome, of course, is a group of students who somehow know they are not quite as "gifted" as everyone believes but who cope by using their strengths as compensation.

After about fourth grade and continuing through secondary school and into adult life, tasks typically are not longer of the kind that can be "worked around" through wit, charm, or other talents. Rather, teachers, parents, professors, and supervisors expect direct responses to assignments, and the nature of assignments often is related to lengthy, comprehensive, and independent written work, some or all of which students who have been masking learning disabilities are unable to complete. The ultimate result is a group of students who feel as though they are living a lie, but they do not understand why. The frustration in the individual students that is connected to this contradiction — label concern and can, in the worst cases, lead to serious situations related to social and emotional maladjustment, including dropping out of school and even suicide (Delisle, 1992; Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985).

Only the Disabilities Are Identified

Students, possessing a broad spectrum of talents and gifts that are not measurable using traditional means often employed in identifying students for gifted and talented programs, are subject to difficulties, too. This is particularly true when such students have satisfied criteria for involvement in learning disabilities programs, guaranteeing their participation in remedial activities designed to help them compensate for difficulties in learning. These students are likely to feel as though they "don't fit" the traditional school environment, yet aside from school, they may excel in a wide variety of activities. These students, whose gifts remain unrecognized, often comprise a significant proportion of high school drop-outs and secondary school behavior problems (Baum & Owen, 1988; Daniels, 1983; Franch, 1982; Suter & Wolf, 1987; Tannenbaum & Baldwin, 1983). For them, school becomes a source of failure and frustration in which they spend large amounts of time in disabilities-related activity "getting fixed" and little or no time developing areas of strength (Olenchak, 1993). In essence, school concentrates on their weaknesses rather then on their strengths.

When pupils exert the most effort in remedial tasks and on-task educational time is centered on remediation, the inferred message of school is that such students are abnormal or are, in some way, "broken" and require "repair." Perhaps even more significantly, due to the fact that learning disabilities have been grouped with programs for other types of special education as mandated by federal statute, bright students with learning disabilities often realize they have been placed in programs alongside students with much more serious learning, social, and emotional needs. Despite national efforts to include services for students with disabilities within general education classrooms, it is not uncommon for schools to locate segregated resource room programs for learning disabilities physically near those for students with behavior disorders or mental retardation (Harris & Schutz, 1986; U.S. Department of Education, 1990). In some other cases, resource room settings serve students across categories (without regard for disability), meaning that bright LD students may well be placed in resource environments with students who have differing needs (Adelmen, 1992). Again, the implied message is that bright LD students are very different from the "norm," requiring at least segments of school time away from their peers. Particularly during adolescence, when peer group identification is a pivotal component of self-esteem and self-identification, such placements can, in fact, shape how bright LD students view themselves and their relationship with the external world and its activities. As a result, while each of the three gifted/LD student groups is considered at risk of school and social and emotional difficulties, these students for whom only the disabilities have been recognized may be at greatest risk. For this group of young people, school has assumed a "curative" position in their lives with little or no opportunities provided for development of strengths and talents.

Secondary School and Social/Emotional Needs of G/LD Students

Superimposed on each of the three situation described above is the secondary school. Along with the remainder of education, secondary schools have been undergoing a metamorphosis in response to public outcries for improvement. In some cases, secondary education has attempted to transpose itself into settings that are less institutional and more individualized in their approach (Johnston, Bickel & Wallace, 1990; O'Brien, 1993; Versteeg, 1993). For potentially gifted secondary students with learning disabilities, the more personalized the educational setting, the better; individualization requires schools to know their students much more intimately than the traditional approach often permits. Unfortunately change is slow, particularly in

institutions like schools; in spite of efforts to focus more precisely on the needs of each student, the vast majority of schools, secondary and otherwise, continue to use the same group-type approaches that have been used for the decades prior to educational reform movements (Bell, 1993; Boysen, 1992; Goodlad, 1992; Midgley & Urdan, 1992; Muncey & McQuillan, 1993).

Schools Adhering to the Status Quo Filled with Students Who Are in Transformation

One of the greatest dilemmas confronting slow-to-change secondary schools in general is that they are filled with adolescents, who by virtue of their place in lifespan development, are constantly in a state of social and emotional flux. In mostly large-scale institutions, students are taught as if they were a single, homogenous group, with little effort toward accommodating educational needs of individuals who are in the midst of a multiple-year process in search of self-identity. These contradictions exist for *all* students enrolled in secondary education, but they become glaring when the needs of adolescent gifted/LD students are considered.

Adolescent gifted/LD students, amidst developing self-perception, are mired in a confusion generated by the controversy related to their dual exceptionality. This is true whether the exceptionalities have been formally identified or not. Researchers, teachers, parents, and the students themselves are bewildered by their situation. These students even are likely to make statements illustrating contradiction about *themselves*; "How can I be dumb and smart at the same time?" is illustrative of the internal conflict most gifted/LD students are likely to feel (Mendaglio, 1993). Such internal confusion, fueled by the self-examination that occurs among all adolescents and ignited by schools that fail to meet individual needs creates a fragile situation for gifted/LD students. Clay, a 10th-grader enrolled in a well-regarded high school, best summarized this peculiar set of paradoxes about dual exceptionality, self-identity, and his school:

> "I can't really understand how it is that I can be so good at some things and so unbelievably bad at some other things. How come my work in chemistry is really great, but I need so much work on reading? I wonder a lot whether I am just a fraud, or maybe I should be a weirdo in a circus...but this school really doesn't do me much good. I spend so much time on my reading and trying to get better that my science just takes a back seat most of the time. I guess they think everybody here is just the same and can do the same quality of work in everything."

A Case for Something Different

Testimonials like this one are rather easy to find as secondary schools are filled with students who seem to live each day as if it were a puzzle. They are searching for remedies for their weaknesses, attempting to locate stimuli for their strengths, and all the while are experiencing internal battles in pursuit of their personal identities. It is no winder that students ensnared in such a predicament begin to question everything about their labels, about their schools, and even about themselves.

As discussed previously, one major issue is the identification system itself. To be identified as gifted and also as learning disabled requires students to jump through two separate hoops of criteria, each set established as if the labels mattered more than the services made available to students satisfying criteria for those labels. As a Wyoming teacher so eloquently stated, "Just because a students doesn't quite make the magical cut-offs for identification doesn't mean that kid's needs are going to go away." Schools must being to look at students' needs, whether cut scores or other seemingly definitive data are satisfied or note, and determine if the risk of serving those needs is greater than *not* serving them. To serve needs, however, requires schools to get to know pupils on a level other than psychometric, one in which students are known on an individual basis rather than as a group, as unique beings rather than as carbon copies of each other. Nowhere is this more critical than at the secondary level when each student's individuality is so endangered.

A second important concern for gifted/LD students is the availability of services. As Clay, the 10th-grader mentioned earlier, noted:

> "When I get a change to get really excited about something in school, I want that to last. Usually what happens is that I'll just get really involved in something that I am good at and interested in when the bell rings and I have to go off to work on something I'll *never* be good at. I know I need to learn lots of different things, but why is so much of school like it was for Pavlov's dogs? The bell rings, and we're off and running to something else...whether what we were doing before the bell was important to *me* doesn't ever matter because we're programmed to go by the bells. The class after the bell might be something that is like beating my head into a wall over and over and over...it could be like in some classes where the teacher talks *at* us instead of *to* us."

If schools are to bother to discover the individual needs of their students, it only makes logical sense to create a mechanism through which services to meet these needs can be provided. Traditional secondary school components like bell schedules,

lectures that are devoid of authentic teacher-student interaction to masses of students, and little opportunity to individually gauged instruction will have to be replaced.

Finally, a crucial issue related to the education of students with concurrent gifts and learning disabilities is their affective development. This is frequently almost wholly neglected in the secondary school setting. As suggested earlier, secondary schools are often driven to "make the grade" by reducing drop-out rates, effectively handling disciplinary concerns, demonstrating successful placement in the vocational world as well as in institutions of higher learning, producing higher test scores of all kinds, and balancing extracurricular successes with more academic ones. Even the most staid comprehensive secondary schools typically offer counseling services, though such opportunities may be restricted by the availability of counseling professionals and work expectations placed on them. Furthermore, such services may, of necessity, be aimed at college admissions, vocational selections, or disciplinary concerns, with fewer opportunities available for more therapeutic involvement of students with counselors or psychologists. For secondary gifted/LD students, access to counseling is important if the paradoxes of their situation are to be addressed effectively. While counseling with a trained professional is most advantageous, schools can develop alternative arrangements to permit students' affective needs to be addressed.

Steps Toward Accommodation

Given the previous discussion of the nature and plight of secondary gifted/LD students, the following includes consideration of a number of strategies that can be utilized by teachers, counselors, parents and students. While it is not the intent to offer an exhaustive list of strategies, several foundational points are mentioned for consideration.

Strategies for the Secondary Classroom

Due to the great social and emotional risk of emphasizing areas of weakness over those of strength, it is particularly helpful for teachers to design a plan for personalized attention to reflect each gifted/LD student's areas of interest and ability. Consequently, while it is common for teachers to work with individualized education programs (IEPs) for accommodating exceptional students' identified areas of weakness, a similar approach should be designed for addressing gifts and talents. In some states and school districts in which IEPs for gifted students are already required, this will simply entail each teacher's diligence in making certain to balance efforts towards remediation with those aimed at developing talent. In the majority of schools, however, IEPs for giftedness are unknown. In these schools, the guidelines utilized in the development of IEPs for serving student disabilities can also be observed in fashioning an IEP that promotes the gifted aspect for each gifted/LD student. Regardless, the IEP must:

- reflect a careful assessment of student needs (strengths and difficulties);
- be designed by a team of professionals who know the young person and who work cooperatively with the student's parents to create a plan for matching school provisions and services with identified student needs; and
- contain clearly articulated goals and objectives stated so that progress in attaining them can be evaluated.

In practice, most secondary teachers will have neither the time nor inclination to crate systematic IEPs for each gifted/LD student, but the guidelines can be translated in such a way that their implementation is not particularly burdensome. In developing a careful assessment of the student in question, it would be helpful to obtain a broad view of the pupil's various talents. Examination of test scores and grades can perhaps provide some initial clues about possible areas of strength, as can analyses of summaries of psychological evaluations that may have been completed about the student. Consistency of grades over time in various subject fields can reveal areas of strength; the cumulative record of Clay, the student mentioned previously, reveals a consistent history of above-average to superior performance in virtually all science classes each marking period, commencing in third grade.

Even more importantly, teachers should be keenly aware of their students' interests and should especially plan to attend to areas the students spend time and energy on *outside of school*. Interest has often been the most important variable for steering gifted students toward outstanding accomplishments, and the value of developing school activities that mirror individual interests has been shown to be particularly critical for success with gifted/LD pupils (Baum, Own & Dixon, 1991; Emerick, 1989, 1992; Olenchak, 1991; Whitmore, 1988). Among this author's own adolescent clients, interest areas have been cited by students as serving as "havens of success" and "islands in my own, personal ocean of frustration."

Obviously, then, it is sensible for secondary teachers involved with the gifted/LD to discern pupil interests. While there are many formal and informal, commercial, and teacher-made interest inventories, the most useful means for learning about secondary students is to talk with them. Although some will be quick to relate their vocations and avocations dir3ectly, keeping in mind that many gifted/LD youth have reason to be skeptical of schools, it is often more successful to structure an indirect

activity in such a way as to reveal both school-related and external interests. Such activities can include open-ended scenarios in which students describe either in writing or orally (refrain from focusing on response channels that are weakened or are not preferred based on the nature of the learning difficulty) how they might approach a problem or how they would elect to spend their time; popular "if I could take anything with me to a deserted island," or "I found a day to spend time on something I like to do," or "I was asked by someone I had never met to describe how I would solve some problem, and I chose a problem in ______" can be good conversation starters. In addition, teachers can survey their students about interests; on Ohio high school teacher customarily polled her students using a listing of potential activities that could either take place during school or supplant parts of school periods, using a survey form entitled "If I Ran the School…" More stimulating means for assessing interests might involve:

- having each student select one film from a diverse list, including descriptions of the plots and characters and then allowing each one to view his or her choice;
- assigning students an on-going journal activity in which they are responsible for explaining what sorts of things they do each week outside of school, in exchange, for which *you guarantee complete confidentiality*; or
- working with students on community service projects that address real-world circumstances aside from school, or serving as an adviser to students as they tackle in-school service concerns.

While none of these methods is fool-proof and all of them are predicated on open, honest, and trusting teacher-student relationship, the type and breadth of information teachers can glean from their students about interests is very useful. It is important that students be helped to understand that, in return for their trust, teachers will use the information they acquire in a manner that will ultimately prove positive to students; hence, once teachers have insight regarding students' diverse interests, it is vital that such information individually serve to shape curricula and school activities in some manner. Imagine the effect on self-esteem among customarily disenfranchised students who suddenly feel as though schools were willing to accommodate *them*!

Interest information can assist teachers in designing a wide variety of activities that can stimulate gifted/LD students to improved social and emotional dispositions in the school setting, but it is crucial such activities have been intentionally structured for success. Asking a gifted/LD student with disgraphia, like Clay, to write a plan for using times reserved for school study halls, in order to further the development of his interest in chemistry, would be tantamount to assigning him an additional remedial exercise. If the goal is to utilize interest dada as a basis for making school more personally strength-based and invitational (Purkey & Novak, 1984), teachers must be careful to avoid placing requirements on students that contain aspects which can be rapidly construed by gifted/LD adolescents as either potentially negative or weakness-oriented. This then amounts to turning the strength into a punishment.

In addition to discerning pupils' strengths and examining students' interests, secondary school classrooms can instill a student-centered atmosphere by practicing the class meeting concept that was popularized in the past for improving classroom communication (Bruner, 1960; Rogers, 1969). Teachers establish a regular time period of approximately 10-15 minutes on a weekly basis during which students review the week that has passed and offer their personal assessments and insights regarding *any* aspect of the classroom, school, or life in general. The purpose, of course, is to inspire communication among students with teachers. Though time will be required for students to appreciate this opportunity for its intent, teachers must be prepared to be open themselves in their contributions to the group, as well as to accept criticism without becoming defensive and to recognize when negative remarks might be turned into insightful alterations of the classroom and its organization. Once students realize their contributions to class meetings are valued and occasionally perhaps serve as reasons for classroom modifications, the atmosphere for students, particularly those who have come to feel abandoned by the educational system, will be improved markedly. For gifted/LD students, such an environment may offer the singer outlet in their adolescent lives for personalized reflections, even if they never contribute to group discussions themselves.

Finally, secondary school teachers can assist gifted/LD students by providing them with instruction and practice in a variety of important thinking skills. These skills include those inherent in Talend Unlimited (Schlichter & Palmer, 1993), Creative Problem Solving (Feldhusen & Treffinger, 1985), and Future Problem Solving (Torrance, 1978). Having been extensively examined, each of these programs has been shown to enhance students' ability to employ various types of cognitive skills. Within each of these programs, students are exposed to a number of techniques that are useful in improving one's independent ability to think through dilemmas encountered in life. These "power skills," or strategies for personally seizing control over seemingly uncontrollable dilemmas, can be particularly helpful in showing gifted/LD students ways for coping with school and life in general. While the appropriateness of such programs for the gifted/LD population may seem obvious, research has supported the notion; Coleman (1992) reported that planned problem resolution strategies were more frequently employed by gifted/LD students than by average/LD students.

Talents Unlimited has been shown to improve students' self-esteem (Chissom & McClean, 1993), while Future Problem Solving

has provided an important mechanism for underachieving gifted students to instigate reversals for academic problems (Rimm & Olenchak, 1991). Due to the need for problem solving techniques and to the critical nature of self-esteem concerns and underachievement among gifted/LD students, teachers involved with such students in secondary schools would be well-advised to integrate at least some of these instructional programming methods into their instruction within the framework of the classroom. By focusing on gifted/LD students' individual needs and interests and by providing them time to develop communication and coping skills, teachers are much more likely to find themselves serving as developers of talent versus deliverers of lessons.

Approaches to Counseling

While a thorough discussion of counseling strategies for use with gifted/LD students is reported by Mendaglio (1993), several important points should be considered her prior to developing any counseling program for this special population. First, consideration of the affective side of education for gifted/LD students is an absolute requirement of any comprehensive secondary school. As discussed above, many middle and high schools, by virtue of their organization and structure, often distance themselves from individual needs of students. For students who are severely at risk of failure, this oversight cannot be tolerated, and there is little question that gifted/LD students are imperiled by academic failure and accompanying social and emotional concerns. While teachers and classrooms can employ many approaches likely to improve self-esteem and ultimately to decrease the risk of failure for gifted/LD students, the fact remains that these young people need greater affective attention than required by other students (Whitmore & Maker, 1985). A consistent counseling program should serve to complement efforts in the classroom by allowing gifted/LD students a haven for analyzing and discussing problems on a *personal* level.

Second, due to the complex nature of concurrent giftedness and learning difficulties, it is imperative that counseling programs involve representatives from *all* of the adult groups affiliated with each students: parents, teachers, and if possible, adults involved with the student but who are external to school itself. This latter group might be comprised of employers, coaches, scout leaders, and others who have a significant degree of interaction with the gifted/LD students. Though secondary-aged students grow increasingly independent of adults, it is usually wise to include adults in any counseling agenda, for adults can frequently and unknowingly exacerbate problems the gifted/LD student may be experiencing. The counselor can assist adults by suggesting methods for dealing with the students in ways that might be likely to diffuse the emotional effects of the dual exceptionality: maintaining open communication, preserving positions of respect for everyone, and enhancing the student's self-efficacy for both social and academic situations.

Finally, counseling placement must be gauged, like academics, on an individual basis. Although group counseling situations can be extremely helpful in that they permit students to realize that peers may experience problems similar to their own, some gifted/LD students need individualized counseling. Moreover, some types of counseling therapy, if they are to produce the desired results, necessitate one-to-one sessions. Increasing numbers of secondary schools proudly proclaim their group counseling efforts, and these are, in face, to be commended; but for secondary-aged gifted/LD students who have lived through year-after-year of frustration associated with school, group settings simply do n to permit the kind of thorough self-examination often needed for positive emotional change to be instigated (Olenchak, 1991). In many instances, however, group counseling should accompany and support individual efforts and, perhaps after progress has been make, can supplant individual sessions altogether.

Parents and Students Working Cooperatively

After a young person has experienced a significant period of difficulty related to concomitant giftedness and learning disabilities, rapid amelioration will not be forthcoming; often, lengthy periods of frustration succeed in damaging self-esteem and in reinforcing an internalized belief that "something is wrong with me." Rather, for students who have attained secondary-school status and for whom school continues to be unrewarding, parents and students must come together as a single, working unit. Regardless of the situation, educational or otherwise, parents must serve as the ultimate advocates for their own children.

Certainly, it is generally easier for older adolescents to begin to speak for themselves, but this is not necessarily the case for younger adolescents or for gifted/LD students of any age. Keeping in mind that, to feel comfortable with expressing one's own needs, one must feel secure and confident. Self-efficacy for such tasks may have never been allowed to develop through prior experience, and this need for such experience becomes the primary role for parents of secondary gifted/LD youth. Every opportunity to support the young person as he or she speaks out regarding self-identified needs must be provided within the home. Although a good counseling program can assist, there is no replacement for a home setting in which bright students with learning problems are encouraged and assisted by parents to express themselves openly and confidently.

Unfortunately, many secondary schools, due to the organizational arrangements noted above, provide few opportunities even

for the most self-assured adolescent to discuss self-identified needs. In such circumstances, it is parental obligation to advocate for the child. While studies of parental involvement in formulating IEPs have consistently revealed poor rates of active participation (Singer & Butler, 1987; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell & Laksy, 1988), it is not only the parents' legal right but responsibility to work directly with educators in developing appropriate programs for their children. Whether formal IEPs addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted/LD students exist or not, parents must provide teachers and schools with the kind of home-based information useful for creating school programming that can truly benefit the students concerned. Consequently, a cooperative relationship between parents and their gifted/LD students is critical for an open flow of communication to exist with the school; otherwise, parents may well develop misconceptions themselves regarding the effects of schooling on their children and may, subsequently, convey them to educators in such a way as to make incorrect assumptions leading to incorrect decisions about the school program. Quite frankly, assuming placement in a school that is even remotely concerned about individual student affective needs, open communication between parents and their children eventually nurtures open communication among parents, their children, *and* the school.

School Reform

Notably, many of the issues previously discussed relate to problems in the schools' ability to concentrate on the particular educational plight of each individual gifted/LD students. However, a number of recent alterations in secondary schools, while not targeted specifically at the needs of gifted/LD students, have improved opportunities for them to develop socially, emotionally, and educationally.

These reforms include flexible scheduling that permits schools to offer additional exploratory classes, specialized counseling events, and greater time for students to meet individually or in small groups with teachers. Furthermore, some secondary schools continue to experiment with multiple age/ multiple grade/ multiple needs grouping arrangements, teaching teams, and formal adviser/advisee relationships. In reality, however, a number of these supposed "reforms" actually have been attempted previously but were often judged to be inappropriate or inadequate in some way (Martinello & Cook, 1994). Such often premature conclusions about changes in schools may well have evolved because of the piecemeal nature in which they were implemented and the fragmentary approach attributable to the absence of a central philosophical theme (Fullan, 1982).

In fact, the individual needs among learners can fill this void as a theme for developing school reform, schools designing and implementing innovations with a single guiding principle: that schools should create programs as dictated by student needs, both collectively *and* individually. Although it may seem impossible to structure secondary schools in a manner that heightens the role of each pupil to that of crucial factor in determining programs, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) (Renzulli & Reis, 1985; Renzulli, 1993) can serve as one system for repositioning student needs as the keystone in the developmental process of school programs.

Structured about three types of enrichment, each aimed at stimulating students to develop their individual talents through creative productivity, this model for school reform has potentially positive effects for secondary gifted/LD students. While SEM is targeted at arousing gifted behavior, or behaviors similar to those typified by people who we would all agree behaved "gifted-like," there is not requirement that the target audience be identified *a priori*. Rather, by virtue of the nature of students interaction with materials, mentors, topics, and other enriched stimuli within the school environment, students actually identify themselves as creative producers. As students begin to demonstrate the types of behavior associated with giftedness, observable through their responses and interactions with a variety of stimulating group activities, the needs of individual gifted learners emerge.

It is as this point that the distinction between educational treatment of a group, as described early in this paper, and individual needs-based education of the gifted also emerges, each learner's reaction to enrichment stimuli serving to identify needs among individual students. Some students will not become excited about or involved in potentially creative production, while others, as indicated by their gifted-like behavioral responses to group enrichment activities, will reveal to teachers the exact direction their personally tailored program should take.

Even more importantly, the entire school organization and its purpose shifts from learning of lessons to development of talent in *all* learners. Though not every students will behave in a gifted fashion, *every* student benefits from exposure to a wide variety of enrichment activities that serve to make school more student-centered than has been the case traditionally. Development of each student's talents to whatever level they can be stimulated becomes the primary *raison d'être* of schooling.

The SEM approach to school improvement is likely to have monumental effects on gifted/LD students' social and emotional status. Through previous studies have not examined secondary-aged populations on a large scale, there is ample reason, based on the increased self-esteem and academic productivity found among gifted/LD students through middle school, that inclusion

in SEM would have positive effects for older secondary gifted students with learning difficulties (Baum, 1984; Baum, 1988; Baum & Owen, 1988; Olenchak, 1993). SEM, in fact, is founded on the very components needed to serve secondary gifted/LD pupils that were mentioned above: open communication, orientation toward student strengths and interests, affective educational and counseling programs, and participative role of parents. While overall school change requires time, time that may not be available as gifted/LD students founder in schools, it seems only appropriate that schools embark on the reform process with an eye cast toward the needs of this special group of young people. Whether schoolwide enrichment or some other student-based reformation is adopted, secondary schools simply cannot continue to expect gifted students with dual sets of needs to "fit in" without specialized accommodations for *both* strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, secondary schools must begin to emphasize the strengths among this population while reducing emphases on the weaknesses.

CONCLUSION

The paradoxes presented by secondary students with coincident giftedness and learning disabilities warrant increased attention. Although the literature base is not inconsequential, there have been few replications of earlier studies upon which to base definitive conclusions for practice. Even more basic, educators and researchers must begin to acknowledge that, whether the constructs delineated by the gifted/LD label make logical sense or not, the fact remains there are students who personify the characteristics associated with this identification. Acknowledging and developing talent, the most important aspect of protecting the social and emotional needs of gifted/LD adolescents, was summarized by Clay after he had been recognized by a local newspaper program for meritorious service as a community drug abuse hotline worker:

> "I always felt like I was different from everybody else in the world, and I am. It used to be that this difference I felt was negative, everyone else didn't have to fight as hard as I did to succeed in school. Then, one day, I realized that I was no more or less different than anyone else — that we're all different...that we all have something to offer. It just took some different kinds of real experience to show me it was okay to be who I am...that I don't always have to be on the receiving side of help but that I have the ability to help others, too."

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