

The vulnerabilities of gifted and talented students: socio-cognitive and affective issues¹

As vulnerabilidades das altas habilidades e superdotação: questões sociocognitivas e afetivas

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ABSTRACT

Dealing with giftedness involves a complex and systemic view, given the heterogeneity of this group. Gifted and talented children and youngsters may have different educational and emotional needs, resulting from their cognitive complexity, greater response intensity, emotional sensitivity, vivid imagination, unique interests, personality characteristics and conflicts that differ from their peers. In response to this complexity, gifted and talented individuals may exhibit maladjusted social behaviors, hostility, aggression, low self-concept, insecurity, frustration, anger, and feelings of inadequacy. When not recognized and worked on, these characteristics can take the individual to a position of vulnerability and socioemotional risk. It is important to have a greater understanding of the gifted person's cognitive, emotional, affective, and social world, in order to reduce the vulnerabilities of this group, bringing awareness about their specific way of acting in the world. Clarification of the differentiated affective characteristics of these students and their specific needs can help parents and teachers to outline an environment more suitable for their development.

Keywords: Gifted and talented students. Vulnerabilities. Cognitive and socio-affective characteristics.

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RESUMO

Tratar do tema das altas habilidades e superdotação envolve um olhar complexo e sistêmico, dada a característica de heterogeneidade deste grupo. Crianças e jovens com altas habilidades e superdotação podem ter necessidades educacionais e afetivas diferenciadas, resultantes de sua complexidade cognitiva, maior intensidade de resposta, sensibilidade emocional, imaginação vívida, combinações de interesses únicos, características de personalidade e conflitos que destoam dos seus companheiros de idade. Em resposta a esta complexidade, pessoas com altas habilidades podem exibir comportamentos sociais desajustados, hostilidade, agressão, baixo autoconceito, insegurança, frustração, raiva e sentimentos de inadequação. Quando não reconhecidas e trabalhadas, tais características podem colocar o indivíduo em posição de vulnerabilidade e risco socioemocional. Torna-se importante um maior entendimento do mundo cognitivo, emocional, afetivo e social da pessoa superdotada, de forma a diminuir as vulnerabilidades deste grupo, trazendo consciência sobre a sua forma específica de agir no mundo. O esclarecimento das características afetivas diferenciadas destes alunos e de suas necessidades específicas pode ajudar pais e professores a delinear um ambiente mais adequado ao seu desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Altas habilidades e superdotação. Vulnerabilidades. Características sociocognitivas e afetivas.

Introduction

The second decade of the 20th century brought a great deal of interest in the non-cognitive aspects of intelligence, in view of the attempt to gain a broader understanding of the complex issues surrounding human cognitive abilities. Researchers agree (GARDNER, 1983; SHAPIRO, 1997; RENZULLI; REIS, 2014; STERNBERG, 2009) that the concept of intelligence as a single, singular measure of competence has slowly given way to the understanding that humans have a set of core competencies or intelligences, that they exist in different proportions in different people, and that, along with emotional, personality, and motivational aspects, they are more predictive of success in adulthood than traditional IQ measures.

Each child, regardless of ability, has his or her own personality characteristics that, due to the situation or environment in which he or she

lives, lead to certain social and emotional needs². Gifted and talented children, however, may have additional affective needs resulting from their cognitive complexity, greater intensity of responsiveness, emotional sensitivity, vivid imagination, unique combinations of interests, personality traits, and conflicts that are different from peers of their age (BURNEY; NEUMEISTER, 2010; NEIHART *et al.*, 2002; SILVERMAN, 2005). Thus, they react more sensitively in an environment that is indifferent to their abilities, skills, and specific cognitive needs. It has already been pointed out by several authors (ALENCAR; VIRGOLIM, 2001; BUTLER-POR, 1993; VIRGOLIM, 2003; WINNER, 1998) that these reactions, when directed to the external world, may express themselves as inappropriate social behavior, hostility and aggression towards authority figures, parents, teachers, or in acts of social delinquency. And when directed to the internal world, they take the form of negative self-concept, insecurity, frustration, and anger for not achieving perfection, as well as the feeling of being inadequate and different. On the other hand, developing self-awareness, problem-solving, and decision-making skills can help them understand their feelings and make constructive choices for their lives.

This article aims to understand the social-cognitive and affective vulnerabilities of gifted and talented students. Clarification of this issue and of these students' specific needs can help parents and teachers to design a more appropriate environment for their development. This is a bibliographic study that is based on acknowledged references in the area of giftedness and talentedness (NEIHART *et al.*, 2002; RENZULLI; REIS, 2014; SILVERMAN, 1993, 2002, 2005, 2009; STRIP; HIRSCH, 2000; WEBB *et al.*, 2007; VIRGOLIM, 2003, 2018; VIRGOLIM; PEREIRA, 2020) and in recent research focusing on the issue of vulnerabilities of gifted students.

Understanding giftedness

Brazilian legislation conceptualizes gifted and talented students as those who “demonstrate high potential in any of the following areas, either alone or together: intellectual, academic, leadership, psychomotricity, and arts. They also show high creativity, great involvement in learning and accomplishment

² In this text the terms children, youngsters and young people are used without differentiation as to age group or gender.

of tasks in areas of their interest” (BRASIL, 2008). This definition mirrors the conception of giftedness given by Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis in their Theory of the Three Rings (RENZULLI; REIS, 2014), for whom giftedness is the confluence of three factors, graphically represented by three intersecting rings: (a) the *Above Average Ability* ring highlights the abilities that the student presents above the average of his peers (not necessarily much above average), in any area of knowledge; (b) the *Commitment to Task* ring highlights the factors linked to intrinsic motivation, persistence, concentration and perseverance in the specific area in which the student shows interest; and (c) the *Creativity* ring highlights, in turn, independent and original thinking, humor, imagination and attitudes linked to the divergent and non-conformist personality of the student.

Renzulli (1988) considers that giftedness and talent have both genetic (*gifted*) and environmental (*talented*) components, using the expression *gifted* and *talented* to express this duality. Consistent with this theoretical stance, Virgolim (2019) uses the expression in Portuguese *altas habilidades* and *superdotação* with the same meaning, that is, representing two aspects of the same phenomenon. While the term “giftedness” refers to the innate and genetic aspects of intelligence and personality, the term “talented” emphasizes the aspects that are shaped, modified, and enriched by the role of the environment (family, school, culture)³.

Dealing with the issue of talentedness and giftedness involves a complex and systemic examination, given the heterogeneity of this group. Thus, it is noted that giftedness is present in all economic classes and in all ethnicities; that behaviors of giftedness may become evident at any age; and may also be present as a dual specificity, along with sensory, physical, intellectual, learning, and other developmental disorders (LOVECKY, 1993; STRIP; HIRSCH, 2000; VIRGOLIM; PEREIRA, 2020). Differences also arise due to their interests, learning styles, levels of motivation and self-concept, personality traits, learning pace, and especially their specific educational needs. Understanding giftedness involves understanding the culture in which gifted children live, with regard to those aspects that society values and identifies with; their immediate family, in its web of inter-relations and connections with them and the outside world; and the gifted individuals themselves, with their potential, interests, and emotional and affective peculiarities. Educating gifted individuals is not a simple task, and

3 The author is aware of the terminology used by current legislation, as either “talented or gifted”. In this text the terms *gifted*, *high ability* and *talent*, as well as the expressions “talented/gifted”, “talented or gifted” and “talented and gifted” are used with the same meaning.

one must understand that what is valid for one child may not be appropriate for another (CROSS, 2005; ROBINSON, 2002; VIRGOLIM, 2007).

Talented and gifted people stand out with respect to their peers in at least one area of knowledge. Thus, depending on the area of their dominance of potential (verbal or logical-mathematical, artistic, psychomotor, or leadership, for example), these students may exhibit characteristics such as (SABATELLA, 2013; VIRGOLIM, 2007; VIRGOLIM; PEREIRA, 2020): ease and speed in learning; high level of energy and curiosity; complex and unusual ideas for their age; motivation with topics of their interest; interest in challenges; rich and advanced vocabulary; good memory; abstract, verbal or numerical reasoning; creativity; divergent and original thinking; preference for working alone; preference for the company of older people; empathy and concern for the feelings of others; leadership skills; great sensitivity and a highly developed sense of justice; inclination to perfectionism and self-criticism.

The ups and downs of giftedness: the other side of the coin

Some physical, behavioral, or emotional characteristics of gifted and talented individuals may make them more vulnerable to bullying at school, as Dalosto and Alencar (2016) point out. Bullying is a form of violence that can take place explicitly (through physical or verbal aggression) or covertly (such as showing indifference or isolating someone). According to those authors, bullying, used as a way to cause suffering and anguish to victims, finds fertile ground in the gifted, due to their greater emotional sensitivity and intensity allied to social skills that are not so well developed. Not surprisingly, some may feel out of tune, weird, inept, and angry (SILVERMAN, 2009; STRIP; HIRSCH, 2000), evidencing their emotional and social immaturity.

The qualities and characteristics peculiar to the gifted are thus seen as only one side of the coin, showing, on the other side, attributes that are not always looked on favorably by teachers or parents and that can lead to the vulnerability of the gifted. Chart 1 shows the two sides of this issue, which Strip and Hirsch (2000) call “the ups and downs of giftedness”:

CHART 1 – THE UPS AND DOWNS OF GIFTEDNESS

| THE UPS AND DOWNS OF GIFTEDNESS | | |
|---|--|--|
| STRONG ASPECTS | THE OTHER SIDE | POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES |
| <i>Show a greater level of understanding than peers of the same age</i> | Think their peers' way of reasoning and understanding is "silly", and express their opinion to them. | Peers avoid them; adults perceive them as too talkative. They lose friends. |
| <i>Verbal skills advanced for age</i> | They talk more than their classmates, who do not understand what they are talking about. They always want to talk, not giving others a turn. | Peers perceive them pretentious and superior to others, and exclude them. They become isolated. |
| <i>Creative thinking</i> | Solve problems in their own way, not the way taught by the teacher. | The teacher feels threatened, perceives them as disrespectful of the figure of authority, and decides to repress them, which sets the stage for rebellion. |
| <i>Thinks quickly</i> | They get bored easily with routine and may not complete their tasks. On the other hand, they may finish their activities quickly and wander around the room, looking for things to do. | The teacher may think that they are inattentive, negative, or have behavioral problems, and are a bad influence on their peers. |
| <i>High level of energy</i> | Can be very distracted, starting several tasks and not finishing any. | They may get worn out trying to accomplish too many projects at once. Their high energy may be mistaken for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Medication may be suggested to "calm" them. |
| <i>Great power of concentration</i> | Sometimes spend too much time on a project; get lost in the details and miss deadlines. | Low grades, since assignments are not completed, which causes frustration for the child, its parents, and teachers. |
| <i>Thinking at the adult level</i> | Adult-level thinking is not accompanied by adult-level skills, such as diplomacy. May say things in a rude or disconcerting way. | Both peers and adults may find them rude, offensive, and tactless, and begin to avoid them. |

SOURCE: *Helping gifted children soar* (STRIP; HIRSCH, 2000).

The possible problems commonly associated with the characteristics of talentedness and giftedness require careful attention by teachers, since they favor conflicting socioemotional experiences in the course of their schooling, when their needs are not understood (VIRGOLIM; PEREIRA, 2020).

Socio-affective characteristics and vulnerabilities of the gifted

Clark (1992) argues that the more expressive and accentuated the ability demonstrated, the greater the degree of intensity and energy presented, and the greater the complexity of these individuals' thinking. However, some traits appear consistently in this group, varying in intensity according to the level of ability and IQ found; Clark emphasizes that, when not recognized and worked on, they may place the child in a position of vulnerability and socio-emotional risk.

While gifted children generally have certain advantages over their non-identified peers (e.g., greater resilience), there are certainly challenges and areas of vulnerability that they must address, such as: perfectionism (SCHULER, 1999); procrastination, stress, and difficulties in relations with siblings and peers (DESLILE, 2006; WEBB *et al.*, 2007); asynchronous development (PALUDO, 2018; SAKAGUTI, 2017; SILVERMAN, 2002, 2009); adult expectations, identity conflicts and social isolation (GILLESPIE, 2009; ROEDEL, 1984), motivation, internal control locus and the need for self-realization (HÉBERT, 2011; PIECHOWSKI, 2008); overexcitability and emotional intensity (DABROWSKI, 2016⁴; MENDAGLIO, 2008; PIECHOWSKI, 2006); empathy, justice, and moral concern for others (GILLESPIE, 2009; HÉBERT, 2011; ROEPER, 2000), as well as a great sense of humor, defiance of authorities, and creative thinking (HÉBERT, 2011; LOVECKY, 1993; STRIP; HIRSCH, 2000).

Learning is not a purely cognitive phenomenon, but rather a process that is intertwined with the emotional functioning of the individual in a specific context, with the power to aid or inhibit learning. When feelings are blocked, the child may have difficulty processing what he/she learns intellectually (GILLESPIE, 2009; SHELTON; STERN, 2004). Expectations about their academic performance or their gender, the cultural expectations of their parents, teachers and peers, the education the child receives, in addition to the personal characteristics of the gifted person leading to stress and vulnerability if not properly managed (NEIHART, 1999; SILVERMAN, 2005; PIECHOWSKI, 1997; ROBINSON, 2002). On the other hand, Piechowski (1997) suggests that the vulnerabilities of the gifted person may result in growth toward self-awareness and self-fulfillment.

In this text we will highlight seven traits most frequently pointed to in the literature that lead to emotional vulnerability, emphasizing the role of these characteristics in the healthy development of the gifted individual: divergent

4 Work originally published in 1964.

and creative thinking; perfectionism; perception and insight; introversion versus extroversion; internal locus of control; asynchronous development and overexcitability.

Divergent and creative thinking

Although there is great variation in affective and personality factors among creative people, they are seen as being open to new experiences, persevering, nonconformist, independent both emotionally and intellectually, prone to thinking and acting with originality and imagination (NEIHART; OLENCHACK, 2002).

Students who think in a divergent manner are often seen as a problem at school and even in their families. Lovecky (1993) points out that they are generally negatively reinforced for asking a lot of questions, being curious, coming up with unusual answers to problems, and preferring individual work to group work. Children who think divergently have difficulty with the organizational scheme of adults who think linearly, as they tend to see things holistically and make intuitive leaps to correct answers.

In addition, decision making and priority setting are also made difficult by their tendency not to rank their thoughts and feelings by importance, organize ideas in a certain sequence, or focus attention on a specific point. Divergent thinkers like to follow the novelty of an idea and see where it leads and what pattern they follow. However, in the eyes of adults they seem rebellious, unmotivated, inattentive, and dissatisfied. They often feel alone, without anyone to understand their uniqueness (LOVECKY, 1993).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism can be seen either as a positive trait that should be cultivated or a problem that should be corrected. Schuler (2002) differentiates between two types of perfectionists: (a) the healthy perfectionist, who has an intense need for order and organization, but demonstrates self-acceptance of his/her mistakes, good acceptance of others' expectations, and a positive way of dealing with his/her perfectionist tendencies; he/she is someone who perceives personal effort as an important part of the process; (b) and the dysfunctional perfectionist, who exhibits a constant state of anxiety about making mistakes; sets extremely high and unrealistic goals to achieve; perceives the high expectations of others as excessive criticism; questions his/her own judgments; exhibits a constant need for approval; and demonstrates ineffective strategies for coping with the demands of the environment. While dysfunctional perfectionism paralyzes,

healthy perfectionism authorizes and empowers, constituting an important force for success and achievement at school. Sabatella (2013) reflects that the gifted need support to persist, despite constant awareness of failure. Hamacek (1978) draws attention to dysfunctional family environments, where parents show non-approval or inconsistent approval of the child's performance; and where they express approval only when conditioned on the child's own performance. In Hébert's (2011) view, educators need to help children and young people to appreciate their traits of perfectionism; to allow themselves to be perfectionists in those activities that are important to them; to maintain high standards for themselves and not for others; to focus on their own success and persist even in failure; to be confident in their ideas and their ability to achieve their goals; to take pleasure in their accomplishments and see their setbacks as a form of learning; and to channel their efforts into what is most motivating or important to them.

Perception and insight

Perceptiveness and insight are traits that appear as results of a high standard of reasoning, vocabulary, and sophisticated thinking that gifted people can exhibit. This ability presents itself as ease in grasping multiple aspects of a situation simultaneously and quickly understanding the essential elements of a problem (LOVECKY, 1993; SILVERMAN, 1993). High perception of details can lead them to see hidden patterns and meanings in what they see, read, or hear; and to understand the meaning behind what other people say, especially when it comes to lack of truth and justice. For perceptive children, the search for truth and the need to understand justice and fairness may come first, leading them to show little tolerance of foolish, trivial, or unfair behavior by others. They therefore need their perceptions and insights to be validated, recognized in their truth, and oriented towards understanding how others think and feel (LOVECKY, 1993; SILVERMAN, 1993).

Introversión versus extroversión

Awareness about the characteristics of introverted people provides important information about how talented and gifted individuals interact in the world. Some common misconceptions are found in society; for example, many think that being introverted is something to be modified or changed in order for an individual to develop leadership and sociability; and that being shy or fearful in social situations is to be introverted. However, Sisk & Kane (2015) state that introverted people can be sociable, just as extroverted people can be shy. Unlike people with phobia and shyness, introverted people socialize easily, although they

often prefer not to. Introverted people need to be respected for being introverted; they need time to reflect, time to let their emotions make sense before they are verbalized, time to ponder possible solutions to a problem, whereas extroverted people organize their thoughts by verbalizing (SILVERMAN, 1993).

To understand the difference between introverted and extroverted people, Silverman (1993) recommends looking at the source from which they seek energy. While extroverts get energy from people and objects in the external world, introverts seek energy from within themselves. The author lists the following differentiation, which can be seen in Chart 2:

CHART 2 – DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN BEING EXTROVERTED AND INTROVERTED

| EXTROVERTED | INTROVERTED |
|--|--|
| Derive energy from interaction with others | Derive energy from within themselves |
| Feel energized by other people | Feel drained by other people |
| Have the same personality both in public and in private | Have a persona and an inner self (show the best of themselves in public) |
| Open and confident | Need privacy |
| Think out loud | Rehearse mentally before speaking |
| Like to be the center of attention | Hate being the center of attention |
| Learn by doing | Learn by observing |
| Feel comfortable in new situations | Feel uncomfortable with changes |
| Make many friends easily | Loyal to the few close friends they have |
| Absent-minded | Capable of intense concentration |
| Impulsive | Reflective |
| Like to take risks when in groups | Afraid of being humiliated; remain quiet in large groups. |

SOURCE: Silverman (1993, p. 69-70).

Internal locus of control

The degree to which an individual perceives the relationship between his or her own behavior and the results of that behavior is called locus of control (according to Julian Rotter's social learning theory). A person with internal locus of control assumes control or responsibility for the events in his or her life; on the other hand, someone with external locus of control feels that external factors have a greater control in his or her life, and is more affected by criticism and praise. The belief that one is in control of the controllable aspects of life is psychologically healthy (HÉBERT, 2011; SAYLER, 2009). Internally oriented gifted students attribute their success to their effort in the activity in

question; however, those who are externally oriented attribute their success to luck, teaching, teachers, and other external events, rather than their own efforts or motivation to learn. The gifted child who develops an external locus of control may feel lost when not given directions by others; and may blame his/her teachers, parents, other students, or external events and circumstances to justify poor performance. On the other hand, those with an internal locus of control are more likely to feel responsible for the consequences of their actions, especially when they can work at their own pace. According to Saylor (2009), taking control of one's actions facilitates academic achievement and encourages optimal psychological development, including toward healthy perfectionism and acceptance of one's giftedness.

Asynchronous development

Asynchronous development, a term coined by Linda Silverman, leader of the Columbus Group of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, in Colorado (USA), highlights the inner world of the gifted child and their vulnerability due to the disparities between their mental age and chronological age (SILVERMAN, 2009). Although it is a relatively recent way of looking at giftedness, its roots are found in the work of Leta Stetter Hollingworth in the 1920s and 1940s, who was already referring to the complex psychological issues that arise from disparities between a child's mental age and chronological age. In defining giftedness as asynchronous development, Silverman (2002) calls attention to the complexity of the individual's thought process; to the intensity of their sensations and emotions; and to the awareness that the gifted individual has as a result of the union of these factors. Thus, in that author's view, asynchrony is an inherent trait of giftedness; it results from uneven development and the feeling of not fitting into the norms of society, which causes the individual to be brought to a position of social and emotional vulnerability.

Two studies in the Brazilian context, however, contextualize the issue of asynchrony and take the onus of lack of synchronicity off the individuals, placing it instead on their context. Sakaguti (2017), when researching gifted children and their families, concluded that asynchrony originates in the lack of otherness in relationships, which treat the gifted individual as vulnerable, maladjusted, or problematic. Her data showed that asynchrony might not be an integral part of the gifted person, as Silverman posits, but rather only a part of children who grow up in a dysfunctional family, without support or validation of their gifted identity. Following the same line of thought and theoretical basis, Paludo (2018) conducted a study into the so-called asynchronous relationships in a group of gifted children randomly chosen from a special program for

giftedness, focusing on the relationships of friendship they formed at school. Her results showed asynchronous development to be a relational factor, which was perceived only in children who had difficulty making friends. Thus, asynchronous development can be understood to relate to the sensitivity and vulnerability of the child or adolescent who are not accepted by their family, school, or society; social relationships permeated by dysfunctionality and non-acceptance of the personality traits of the gifted person. Thus, the inefficiency of the social context to meet the cognitive, emotional and social needs of the gifted would be the true factors responsible for the manifestation of asynchronous development (VIRGOLIM, 2018).

Overexcitability

The emotional intensity with which children experience their experiences has been systematically noted among talented and gifted students. The term “overexcitability,” coined by Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski, author of the Theory of Positive Disintegration (DABROWSKI, 2016), refers to an intensified and expanded way of experiencing the world, in a person’s psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginative, and emotional areas (PIECHOWSKI; COLANGELO, 1984; MENDAGLIO; TILLIER, 2006). The prefix “over” in the word overexcitability is meant to convey that this is a special way of responding, experiencing, and acting in the world that is heightened and noticeable by its characteristic forms of expression. Daniels and Meckstroth (2009) point out that each form of overexcitability in some way provides the energy or fuel that contributes to the development of the child or young person’s talent, as well as bringing advantages and challenges that fundamentally shape their further development. The theory argues that overexcitability in each of these five areas is genetically inherited, and therefore appears very early in development; and because these forms of overexcitability are linked to the child’s temperament characteristics, they need to be stimulated in a nurturing and accepting environment. These areas are described in Chart 3 (VIRGOLIM, 2018).

CHART 3 – FORMS AND EXPRESSIONS OF OVEREXCITABILITY

| |
|--|
| PSYCHOMOTOR |
| <i>Excess energy</i> |
| <i>High neuromuscular system excitability</i> |
| Rapid speech, marked enthusiasm, pursuit of intense physical activity (e.g., playing games and fast-paced sports), pressure to act (e.g., organizing activities), strong expression of will, marked competitiveness. Love of movement; ability to be active and energetic; restlessness; difficulty in standing still. |
| <i>Psychomotor expression of emotional tension</i> |
| Compulsive talking, chattering; impulsive actions; nervous habits (tics, nail biting), working compulsively (workaholic). Pursuit of psychomotor outlets to relieve emotional tension. |
| SENSORY |
| <i>Increased sensory capacity, esthetic pleasure</i> |
| Pleasure in seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing; and sex. Desire for comfort, lust, beauty; pleasure in being admired and noticed; pleasure from taste and smell, from the esthetics of things. Delight in the sight of beautiful objects, the sounds of words, music, shape, color, and balance. |
| <i>Sensory expression of emotional tension</i> |
| Overeating; compulsive buying; masturbation; pleasure in being the center of attention. Pursuit of sensual outlets to relieve emotional tension. |
| INTELLECT |
| <i>Intensified mental activity</i> |
| Curiosity, concentration, capacity for great intellectual effort; avid reader; highly critical; acute sense of observation; ability to plan to the smallest detail. Passion for investigative questions and problem solving; enjoy challenges and difficult problems. Persistence in asking challenging questions, eagerness for knowledge and analysis, preoccupation with logical and theoretical problems. Reflective thinking; pursuit of understanding and truth; moral thinking; independence of thought. |
| IMAGINATION |
| <i>High ability to play using imagination</i> |
| Richness of association of images and impressions, perceptiveness; use of images and metaphors in speech and writing; high creativity, invention and fantasy; vivid imagination; great sensitivity. |
| <i>Ability to live in a world of fantasy</i> |
| Frequent use of magical thinking, fairy tales, creation of a private world, imaginary companions, dramatization. |
| <i>Imaginative expression of emotional tension</i> |
| Use of animistic images, mixture of reality and fiction, elaborate dreams, illusion and fantasy; fear of the unknown (although they like the unusual). Low tolerance of boredom; need for novelty. |
| EMOTIONS |
| <i>Intensified feelings and emotions</i> |
| Positive and negative feelings, extremes of emotion, complex emotions and feelings, identification with others' feelings; awareness of the wide range of emotions. |
| <i>Somatic expression of emotional tension</i> |
| Stomach ache, heart palpitation, flushing, sweaty hands. |

(Continue)

CHART 3 (conclusion)

| |
|---|
| <i>Strong affective expressions</i> |
| Inhibition (shyness, bashfulness), enthusiasm, ecstasy, euphoria, pride; strong affective memory; shame; feeling of unreality; fears and anxieties; feelings of guilt; preoccupation with death; depressive tendency and suicidal thoughts. |
| <i>Ability to have strong emotional bonds and deep relationships</i> |
| Strong emotional and affective bonds with people, living things, and places; affectionate bonds with animals; difficulty adjusting to new environments; compassion; responsiveness to others; sensitivity in relationships; loneliness. |
| <i>Very differentiated feelings about oneself</i> |
| Inner dialogue and self-judgment |

SOURCE: Virgolim (2018).

Virgolim (2018) points out that forms of overexcitability, as personality traits, are not valued socially, as they are perceived as nervousness, hyperactivity, anxiety, neurotic temperament, excessive emotionality, traits that our society finds it difficult to live with. However, Dabrowski (2015⁵, 2016) believes that these manifestations are positive, because they have the potential to lead to the development of the personality in its most complete form. However, these children need to be understood in their uniqueness. Virgolim (2018) reflects that they need to be challenged and given opportunities to engage in tasks that require greater mental effort; to have a nurturing environment where their imagination can be accepted and exercised; that their need for esthetics, balance, and knowledge can be harmonized with the pleasures coming from the senses; that they have the opportunity to express their feelings and share their affective world with the people around them; and to feel that simply sharing can lessen their anxieties and the feeling of being the only person in the world to feel in such a way.

In conclusion

Considering the goal of understanding the social-cognitive and affective vulnerabilities of talented and gifted students, we note first of all that not all gifted children present the vulnerabilities described in this text. None of these characteristics is inherent to giftedness and none of them automatically

5 Work originally published in 1967.

predisposes these individuals to social maladjustment or unhappiness. In most cases, the vulnerabilities found in talented and gifted people arise from the discrepancy between their level of development and societal expectations. As information about the needs of highly gifted children becomes more widespread and societal expectations become more attuned to the realities of gifted development, the degree of vulnerability of these children decreases (ROEDEL, 1984).

Awareness, however, is not enough. Promoting the development of highly gifted children requires a commitment to creating support systems to help them accept their abilities. Such support systems include appropriate educational programs; systematic affective education, including social skills training and positive self-concept development; planned efforts for curricular adaptation and enrichment; and adults and mentors acting as role models, providing guidance and nurturing. Without these avenues of support, extraordinarily advanced skills can become a tremendous burden, rather than the foundation of a creative and productive life.

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Text received on 06/17/2021.

Text approved on 08/23/2021.