Affective Development

Volume 23, Issue 3

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.....and more!

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Affective Development

Between the Lines

Publisher's Perspective

Dorothy Knopper

In the book, *Parent Education: Parents as Partners (*Knopper, D. 1997*),* I include the following:

One of my sons asked, "Is parenting easy or hard, and is it fun?"
My response was: All of the above—easy, hard, and fun.

The characteristics of gifted children cause the parenting experience to be intense, sensitive, fast paced, frustrating, challenging and joyful.
> **(Open Space Communications, p. 52)**

More recently, in the book ***On the Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Children*** (Cross, T.L., 2011), a whole chapter is devoted to: *Competing With Myths About the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Students.* The myths follow:

• Myth 1: Gifted students should be with students their own age.
• Myth 2: Gifted students should be in same-age heterogeneous classes.
• Myth 3: Gifted students should be perfectly well-rounded.
• Myth 4: Being gifted is something you are just born with.
• Myth 5: Everyone is an expert in giftedness.
• Myth 6: Adults know what gifted students experience.
• Myth 7: Being too smart in school is a problem, especially for girls.
• Myth 8: All kids are gifted/no kids are gifted.
> *(***Prufrock Press, pp. 14-20***)*

And finally, we re-visit someone very special in our field: "The Creativity Man: E. Paul Torrance" and his ***Manifesto For Children:***

1. Don't be afraid to fall in love with something & pursue it with intensity.
2. Know, understand, take pride in, practice, develop, exploit, & enjoy your greatest strengths.
3. Learn to free yourself from the expectations of others & to walk away from the games they impose on you. Free yourself to play your own game.
4. Find a great teacher or mentor who will help you.
5. Don't waste energy trying to be well rounded.
6. Do what you love and can do well.
7. Learn the skills of interdependence
> **(G. W. Millar, Ablex Publishing, 1995, p. 124)**

Strategic Programming for Early University Entrants: Creating Support for Socio-Emotional Needs

Julie A. Lancour

The Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars at the University of Washington, Seattle, houses two early university entry programs and has been welcoming academically advanced young students since 1977. The two programs, the UW Academy for Young Scholars and the Transition School/Early Entrance Program collectively admit approximately 50 new students each year as freshmen at the UW. These freshmen range in age from 12 to 16 and all have left the relatively known (if academically unchallenging) world of middle or high school and entered the adult learning environment of the university.

From the fourth floor classroom windows the sounds of Drumheller fountain swooshing and splashing could be heard by a group of 12 early university entrance students as they sat around a conference table struggling to blow up balloons. It was an exceptionally warm October afternoon on the campus of the University of Washington (UW), and these students from the Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars (Robinson Center) were engaged in a workshop on stress reduction. The students were being instructed to describe their current sources of stress and to blow those stresses into the balloon. Then they were asked to identify any factors in their life (e.g. exercise, relationships, fun activities) that were helping to reduce their stress, thus lessening the burden and the size of their balloon. Sudden outbursts of laughter at attempts to get the balloons to inflate were followed by the distinct silence of shared understanding, empathy, and even surprise as students described struggles with academic as well as interpersonal and family issues.

This session was the first of six in a series called *Resiliency Training*, a pilot project designed to support early university entrants as they take on the socio-emotional challenges and adventures of their sophomore and junior year at the UW. As the Academic Counselor and Counseling Services Coordinator for the Robinson Center, watching these students engage with the balloons and stress reduction exercises, I was excited to see the potential of this new endeavor. *Resiliency Training* is the latest addition to the Robinson Center's intrusive academic counseling model and related student support services.

Intrusive Academic Counseling

Intrusive academic counseling is a model that utilizes early intervention and relationship building as means of encouraging students to be actively engaged in their academic and social communities. Earl first introduced the intrusive model as a method of purposeful interventions aimed at increasing retention and student motivation (1998). The model's interventions are counselor driven rather than student driven, and at the Robinson Center this means that students have required academic counseling meetings before classes begin, and twice more in their freshman year and once again in their sophomore year. At first read this may sound Draconian. However, the students in the UW Academy for Young Scholars (Academy) and the Transition School/Early

Entrance Program (TS/EEP) respond positively to these meetings and frequently request to meet more often. Part of the curriculum of this model involves a series of open ended questions designed to address the students' academic and socio-emotional needs. For example, during the first term meetings for freshman, I inquire about the progress of courses and level of workload, as well as questions such as:

• Are you enjoying your experience so far?
• You recently dropped out of middle/high school to enroll in college early – was that a good decision?
• Do you feel this program is the right fit for you?
• How are your parents adjusting to having a full time college student?
• What types of non-academic activities are you becoming involved in or are you interested in becoming involved in?

Identifying Basic Psychological Needs

These questions represent one of the methods that the Robinson Center utilizes to assess three fundamental psychological needs of adolescents: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy can be thought of as the need to feel empowered and to have an active role in one's decisions or behaviors, competency as the need to feel effective and useful when engaging in activities, and relatedness as having a sense of belonging or feeling connected. These needs are drawn from Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 1985, 2000) and specifically LaGuardia and Ryan's expansion of the theory to adolescents (2002), which holds that adolescent development in general and the development of intrinsic motivation in particular is supported and enhanced when these basic psychological needs are met. In our academic counseling and supportive services we are guided by the wisdom of Cross who eloquently reminds us that when we work with highly capable students we must remember that they are indeed children or adolescents first and their developmental and psychological needs are not superseded by their giftedness (Cross, 1997). By focusing on these three core components the Robinson Center has developed academic programming that supports the socio-emotional well-being of our students.

Autonomy

When new Robinson Center students begin their transition into the University of Washington it is crucial that they perceive a sense of control over their own behavior. They are entering an adult learning environment that expects mature behaviors such as making independent decisions, seeking out help, and completing work with minimal guidance. University instructors will not remind students when homework is due or when exams are scheduled. Attendance is rarely taken in university courses and no one calls home when a student misses a class. Grades are not tracked online or even sent home at the end of the term, and if students do not understand the material, they must seek out the instructor during office hours. These are new experiences and responsibilities that many college freshmen often struggle with, and that early entrants and their parents can find overwhelming.

Supporting Student Autonomy

In an effort to prepare students and parents for this new environment and to clarify the new roles each of them will have, the Robinson Center staff intervenes early and often as students prepare to enter the University of Washington and throughout their first two years of study. As students are applying to the UW Academy for Young Scholars (for students currently in 10th grade) and for the Transition School/Early Entrance Program (for students under age 15), considerable efforts, including interviews with parents and students, and assessments by current teachers and counselors, are made to ensure that the choice to accelerate to university is the desire of the student and not only of the parent(s). This is a significant demonstration of student autonomy, or the sense that they have control over their own decisions, and it is crucial to student success in these programs.

Once students have been selected to enter university early, they meet individually and in small groups with the Academic Counselor and/or the Assistant Director of the Academy and EEP. These meetings are designed to introduce early entrants to the new responsibilities that will be placed on them and to the vast array of educational options now open to them. During these academic counseling meetings, students are asked to:

• Identify what they expect to get out of college in their first term, first year, and in their undergraduate career as a whole. (This question is asked of first and second year students.)

• Name courses that might lead them to a major interest and courses they want to take just for fun.

• Think about the experiences they would like to have and identify what would disappoint them if they were not able to do them.

• Practice and role play asking for help or assistance from a professor.

• Consider the person(s) in their life that they could call upon when they are feeling stressed, worried, unsatisfied, upset, or challenged beyond their capacity.

• Prepare coping strategies for being academically challenged in a setting where they are no longer the smartest person in the classroom and to prepare for grades that are not all straight As.

These are a few of the activities that early entrants at UW are asked to engage in during their academic counseling meetings. Students are required to attend these meetings prior to entering the university, twice during their first year and once during their second year. Most students opt to visit more often and are always welcome to make appointments or to drop in with quick questions as needed.

Purposeful Parent Support

To parents reading this, a big question may be: Do parents attend these meetings with their students? The answer is no, as we expect (and teach) our students to be full participants in the planning of their undergraduate careers and we treat them as traditional aged students, who would not bring a parent to an advising meeting. This is not to say that we do not involve parents. In fact, parents are crucial to the work that we do with early entrants and we partner with them through the academic year so they can best support their student. We at the Robinson Center believe that to support the academic and socio-emotional needs of our young scholars, we must collaborate with parents and assist them with this radical transition as well.

We invite all parents of new students to celebratory events marking the transition out of middle/high school and into university as well as a new parent orientation that goes beyond the transitional parent orientation that the UW offers to parents of all freshmen. The celebratory events are similar to a graduation ceremony and provide a public and symbolic end to middle/high school and a launching off of a new educational adventure. The parent orientation allows us to share with parents the experiences of parents who have already taken this path, outline our expectations of them and what they may expect of the Robinson Center staff, as well as provide an opportunity for parents to form a support community. During the first year we host two parent check-in events (one in the first term and one in the second) so parents can reconnect with us and each other and we can address issues that are impending (midterm and final exams, students' quest for independence, first term grades) and academic opportunities (research,

study abroad) as well as answer questions in an open and relaxed forum. By continuing to help our parents understand what is expected of their young university student we feel the students' needs for autonomy will also be nurtured and supported.

Competency

The two early entry programs at the Robinson Center were established under the guiding principle of providing highly capable students with an educational environment that has provided an "optimal match" for individual students. This match is optimized by providing a level of intellectual engagement that presents consistent challenges to keep students motivated, avoids the boredom associated with being under-challenged, and the anxiety that overwhelming challenges can create. The idea of providing an optimal match is similar to the second psychological need that is necessary for the development of adolescents' intrinsic motivation and competency. Competency is defined as "the need to feel effective in one's actions and capable of meeting the challenges of everyday life" (LaGuardia and Ryan, 2002. p. 195). Ryan described this need as an ongoing process that, unlike hunger, never reaches satiety. Rather, it continues to seek a sense of usefulness.

Allowing students to find their optimal match

The hunger imagery is very effective at depicting how competency functions. If your children were hungry, you would not insist that they eat only one type of food or always eat the same type of food you enjoy.. Encourage your children to try a variety of foods so they may enjoy good nutrition and do not miss out on any culinary delights. In the same way, we encourage parents not to insist that their children take only one type of course or a prescribed set of courses. Just as the food pyramid defines the items that make a healthy and balanced diet (many vegetable, fruits, whole grains) the liberal arts undergraduate core requires a variety of courses for a balanced degree (some humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and quantitative reasoning). Allowing early entrants to make decisions on what courses they should take supports their autonomy and ownership of their decisions. When our students own the decision of which courses to enroll in, it is my experience that they are more likely to take responsibility for the course outcomes, whereas when the course is mandated by a parent and the student struggles, they are not as likely to take responsibility for their performance or to do as well. In addition, by providing a support structure to help students explore interests and collect evidence that supports their decisions, competency is nurtured as well.

Strategic Programming Within the Classroom

The Robinson Center aims to further nurture student competency by offering a research seminar in the second term of students' first year at UW. The purpose of this course is to teach students how to make purposeful plans, to explore all academic and social interests they have, to learn more about themselves in the context of others, to take good risks, and to craft an undergraduate experience that best suits their goals and values. This seminar is optional for all first year students (to support autonomy), but parents are given a course syllabus just prior to registration and asked to talk to their student about taking the course, and first year students are encouraged to talk to students who have completed the course. Typically 85-90 percent of our first year early entrants take the course and of those, 90 percent recommend it to future students. Students in the course will practice writing personal statements as well as resumes and cover letters, take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Strong Interest Inventory and have their results interpreted by staff from the UW Counseling Center. They will determine what their major should be, investigate this major and file a report of their findings, and finally create a term-by-term course plan that outlines which courses they will take when. The students are guided through reflections on their long-term plans and encouraged to take good risks with their academic planning. An example of feedback encouraging good risk taking may include: encouragement to consider an experiential learning opportunity (study abroad, research, service learning), taking a term off for an internship, or to explore a double major in disparate disciplines. These plans are kept in the students' academic files and are reviewed during subsequent academic counseling appointments. In addition to the structure of those appointments, this seminar provides a context to support student competency needs in a comfortable social environment of their peers in the Academy and EEP.

Relatedness

The third basic need, according to LaGuardia and Ryan, focuses on students' ability to engage with, be accepted by, and feel a part of their community. The impact of the university environment on the social development of early entrants cannot be overlooked when considering the socio-emotional needs of our students. The intimate community of the Robinson Center and the larger opportunities of the university offer tremendous advantages to these intellectually curious scholars, yet at the same time present significant challenges for adolescents.

An Urgent Need to Belong

Adolescence is a developmental period that can be consumed with an urgent need to belong, fit in or be accepted. As parents and professionals know, this sense can be exacerbated for highly capable students who struggle to find both intellectual as well as social peers. Cross's (1997) description of the challenges that highly capable students face when trying to negotiate the misaligned intellectual development between themselves and their same aged peers in traditional school settings. These situations can impact students' feelings of belonging and can result in poor coping skills (e.g. "dumbing" themselves down, lying about their academic achievements to peers, or refusal to participate in the classroom) in order to try to fit in. Early entrants, while finding same aged intellectual peers within the Academy and EEP, face a variety of challenges while working to fit into the adult world of the university community. The Robinson Center works to assist our students in this endeavor.

Community building within the Robinson Center begins early, as new Transition School and Academy students participate in overnight camping trips designed to foster a safe and welcoming environment and encourage new students to get to know one another. Our students have at times experienced being the smartest person in the classroom and are now making the transition from being a big fish in a smallish pond to being a relatively small fish in a much bigger pond. The anxiety is palpable on the days that incoming students meet their new peers for the first time, and this is why the Robinson Center's staff arranges for the first group meetings to be of a social rather than academic nature. The Transition School students hike together, climbing up rough terrain to obtain the gorgeous vistas at Camp Casey; the Academy students don matching camp t-shirts and take the plunge on the rope swing that gives panoramic views of the Puget Sound at Camp Indianola. As the students pack up the vans and buses to head out on these adventures they are wary strangers, but a mere 40 hours later observers would assume these students have known each other for years.

Informal Strategy

This social support structuring continues as the new school year begins and new students get to know their older peers at the Robinson Center as they hang out in the RC Lounge and bake delicious treats in the Center's kitchen. The Robinson Center is known to throw the best Halloween parties (with the best costumes) on campus, and when March 14 (Pi day) rolls around, students bake splendid and complex pies. The community of the Robinson Center is the starting point for many students as they look for and create their new academic

and social groups. For some this is a launching off point for further integration into the university community such as research groups, associations with campus departments and majors, student leadership opportunities and foreign study. For others, especially first year students, it is a safe and welcoming home base that provides the necessary structure to support academic work in a more rigorous realm. As most of our students are commuters, the Robinson Center serves as a gathering place and social hub as well as the location of academic counselors and other Center staff.

With the Robinson Center's staff in such close proximity to the students we can engage both formally and informally with students throughout the day. This leads to dynamic interactions as the staff, while observing how early entrants are adapting to the new environment, develop relationships with the students and can intervene when they are struggling. Radical changes in a student's behavior or appearance can alert staff to a potential problem the student is having and allow us to intervene quickly. Since students are constantly meeting with and talking with staff members, this intervention can be done without drawing too much attention to the student. Another benefit of the intimate and relaxed ethos of the Robinson Center is that as the relationships develop between staff and students, students become more willing to seek out both academic and non-academic advice. This informal structure is actually a purposeful teaching tool that allows the staff to encourage students in the task of asking for help, a crucial skill for developing scholars. By working to provide a safe, welcoming, and supporting environment for early entrants to launch their academic careers, the Robinson Center staff strives to help our students feel that they belong.

Staying Resilient

Back in the classroom that held Robinson Center sophomores, juniors, and some difficult balloons, students will meet for the last session of *Resiliency Training*. Over the past six weeks these sophomore and junior early entrants have worked on stress reduction skills, examined their own values and how those values impact the decisions they make, and have taken a closer, more reflective look at how they perceive themselves in this academic setting. They have been guided through this process by professionals from the university's Counseling Center as well as their fellow peers who have volunteered for this seminar. As this is a pilot project, we will be debriefing the students about this experience, asking them if the program was helpful, and inquiring about what can be added or changed to

best fit their needs.

Evaluations and augmentations are essential to all of the support systems the Robinson Center has in place. As our intrusive academic counseling model and our outreach to parents work to support autonomy; as we assist individual students to find an optimal match in their undergraduate career in support of their competency, and as the hikes up the mountain side, rope swing adventures over Puget Sound and gruyere encrusted pear pie nurture a sense of belonging and relatedness, we continue to work closely with our students. This allows us to determine the best ways to meet their socio-emotional needs. By doing so we hope to nurture their autonomy, competency, and relatedness so they may thrive, excel, and thoroughly enjoy their undergraduate careers. ❖

For more information on the Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars please visit: http://depts.washington.edu/cscy/

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Julie A. Lancour is on the staff of the Robinson Center for Young Scholars. She has worked with adolescents in K-12, community college, and university settings.

Why Can't We All Just Get Along? Accepting and Supporting Affective and Cognitive Diversity in Creative Students

Bonnie Cramond

Bevin was not an ordinary little girl. Her daydreams were so vivid that she sometimes didn't hear other kids say hello. When she didn't respond, they assumed she was unfriendly. Later, because of a back problem, she had difficulty walking normally, so the other students called her "penguin girl" and other disparaging names. This cruelty was painful for Bevin, but her parents supported her emotionally and in her creative interests. When she wanted to make a stop-action film for a science project in 3rd grade, her father helped her make the film. Perhaps because they are themselves creative individuals (country music writers), they supported Bevin's differences and encouraged her creative ventures. In fact, Bevin drew from the pain of being a social misfit to writing a script for an animated file about a disabled robot who saves the day because of his difference.

Rather than isolate or ridicule creative individuals, we need to recognize that the very characteristics that enable creative people to think originally may cause them to be seen as different and even bizarre.

Personality Traits and Behaviors That Can Cause Creative Students Problems

So what are the kinds of behaviors that might be indicative of creativity, and how can parents and teachers know whether to encourage children's differences or encourage them to be more socially acceptable? Some of the behaviors indicative of a creative personality can be mistaken for ADHD, depression, Asperger's Syndrome, or other emotional or mental disorders, or the creativity may be confounded by these conditions.

Of course, not all creative individuals have similar personalities. Although some research has found that there are some similarities within domain—for example, creative artists tend to be more emotional than creative scientists—there are still individual differences. In fact, Csizentmihalyi (1996) and Esyneck (1995) concluded that creative individuals tend to have contradictory personality patterns, resulting in complex and often paradoxical behaviors. For example, Csikszentmihalyi has claimed that creative people have high energy, but are often quiet and at rest; are smart, yet naïve; combine playfulness and discipline; alternate between imagination and reality; are both extraverted and introverted; humble and proud; rebellious and conservative; passionate about their work and objective in evaluating it; exhibit both traditional masculine and feminine characteristics; and experience both great suffering and enjoyment because of their sensitivity and openness to experience. Perhaps it is no wonder

Why Can't, continued

that such unpredictable people can find difficulty in gaining acceptance from others!

Thus, the point of this article is not to reduce the complexity of personality to a simple list for all creative individuals. However, in addition to their changeability, creative people's intensity can cause problems for them.

For example, like Bevin, Frank Lloyd Wright and Robert Frost were given to such deep reveries that they often did not realize that others were talking to them. A creative child, capable of vivid visualization and complex thoughts, may often be lost in thought and unaware of the outside world. Yet, to the teacher, parent, or child who is trying to communicate, it may feel like being ignored. Such behavior may be interpreted as rude, "stuck up," or disobedient.

Such focused concentration is one type of intensity that can be misunderstood, but there are others. For example, there has been much debate over the years about whether creative individuals tend to be introverts or extraverts. As indicated earlier, Cskiszentmihali (1996) saw introversion and extraversion as traits that are both paradoxically exhibited by creative individuals. However, recent research (Cheng, Kim, & Hull, 2010) has given more credence to Eysenck's (1995) conclusion that, whether introverted or extraverted, creative individuals tend to be at the extremes. Extreme tendencies on either end of the continuum can be frustrating and annoying to adults and peers.

Other intensities may be expressed as single-minded preoccupation with a topic or question, extreme and seemingly inappropriate emotionality; extra sensitivity to stimuli; and physical excitability. Some of these are clearly related to the overexcitabilities described by Dabrowski (as cited in Lind, 2001) as indicative of potential: intellectual, imaginational, emotional, sensual, and psychomotor. The overexcitabilities indicate a heightened sensitivity in these areas, which may have positive and/or negative manifestations. Intellectual overexcitability is expressed as curiosity and motivation to learn and know, but children with a high level of this may be seen as too intellectual as they may spend much more time on learning than on other

things. Also, the drive for information and truth can lead them to appear nosy and critical of others.

Imaginational overexcitability is clearly related to creativity, but children who have overactive imaginations may get in trouble for seeming to be unable to separate truth from fiction, or lying. One such student, Marla, was seen as a liar in middle school because she could weave such convincing and complex stories. She told all her teachers and classmates that her family had left Lithuania to seek religious freedom. She was so convincing that the faculty was surprised to meet her mother who had a south Louisiana accent and didn't even know where Lithuania was. Rather than punish Marla for her creative inventions, the faculty referred her to a creative writing class at the local university, after which her tall tales were confined to the pages, and she became an accomplished writer.

For example, a sensual overexcitability may give one the sensitivity to taste the difference in fine wines, feel the difference between qualities of silk, or detect subtle differences in light that enable different photographic exposures. However, it may also make one too particular about tastes, irritated by labels in clothes, light sensitive, and susceptible to headaches.

Such sensitivities may be expressed in many ways that can be misunderstood and irritating to others. For example, the child who is preoccupied with the Titanic may take the interest to the extreme so that it is all he wants to talk about, think about, and experience until his curiosity is sated and another "passion" takes over. The intensity and exclusiveness of this interest separates it from an ordinary interest that any bright child might display; such intensity and exclusivity also make it hard for others who get sick of the topic early on.

Extreme emotionality makes others very uncomfortable, whether the emotions are positive or negative. Intense negative emotionality is often unbearable, and will quickly alienate others. Intense emotionality is what gives rise to the stereotype of the "artistic personality." When a symphony conductor gets angry because the sound in a concert hall is not right, or an actor storms off of a set over artistic differences, people generally consider that part of the price of genius. Artistic perfectionists become frustrated when their work is impeded and may lash out in anger. However, children who exhibit such behaviors are not given such latitude. Because they have

not yet established themselves as creative individuals, they are not given the leeway of the artistic personality. That is not to say that children should be allowed to have temper tantrums and misbehave. However, if we understand that the anger arises from the frustration of the creative process, we may be better able to tolerate it and help the child express it appropriately.

> "Intense emotionality is what gives rise to the stereotype of the "artistic personality."

Other triggers for frustration, anger, sorrow, and discomfort may be external stimuli. The individual who is sensitive to noise and light, for example, may find today's modern large schools with bright artificial lighting too distracting and uncomfortable to concentrate. A child who is extra sensitive to sounds and touch may seek to be alone and away from other children on the playground, thus isolating herself when she really wishes to have a friend.

Psychomotor overexcitability may be manifested in adults by rapid speech, smoking, nail biting, or any number of nervous tics that express excitability in a physical way. Psychomotor overexcitability may also give individuals the high energy to work long and hard, organize things, and pursue their creative passions with zeal. Children are more likely to fidget, jump, and run. Such behavior in a school setting is seen as problematic, and such active children can be diagnosed with ADHD. Not yet able to sublimate their physical excitement in more acceptable ways, they risk being medicated out of it. Productive creative individuals learn to use their energy to fuel their work, but children who have not yet learned how to harness that energy may dissipate it in unproductive, and even annoying, ways.

Bevin Carnes, the creative misfit in the introduction to this article, was thrown out of preschool for singing and swaying. Robinson's book, written with Aronica (2009), has related the story of another little girl, eight-year old, Gillian Pyrke, who was constantly in trouble in school because of late assignments, poor handwriting, and low test scores. School personnel finally prevailed upon her mother to take Gillian to a psychologist. The psychologist watched as Gillian tried to sit still as he interviewed her mother. He asked her to wait for a few minutes while he talked to Mrs. Pyrke outside of the office. He turned on the radio for Gillian as he and Mrs. Pyrke left the room. Then, he told Mrs. Pyrke to look at Gillian through the window. Gillian was dancing to the radio music. The wise psychologist told Mrs. Pyrke that Gillian was a dancer, that if she was allowed to pursue her destiny, she would not have such troubles. Her mother enrolled her in dance school. Gillian Pyrke grew up and became Gillian Barbara Lynne, ballerina, actor, director, and choreographer for works such as *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*.

Unusual Interests, Strange Questions, and Variant Viewpoints Can Alienate

Unpredictable, paradox, and intense behaviors can cause creative children to be seen as weird, unfriendly, or pathological. But, personality differences and unusual behaviors are not the only things that can cause problems for creative individuals. They also tend to think and see the world differently from other students. Offbeat observations, unusual interests, strange questions, and variant viewpoints are usually not well tolerated in schools.

How the teacher reacts to students' comments will determine to a large extent how the students react. The teacher whose comments or body language indicate that unusual questions are unacceptable opens the questioner to derision from the class. On the other hand, the teacher who welcomes original viewpoints, unusual questions, and alternative ideas shows respect for creative thinking and diverse cognition.

Why Parents and Teachers Should Champion Creative Children

The most obvious reason that we should not only accept, but also nurture creative children is for their own good. Torrance (1980) found that creative children could retain their creativity throughout their lives if they had at least one person to encourage them. Children who are not supported emotionally by the important adults in their lives suffer. Highly sensitive creative children no doubt suffer greatly. In fact, one hypothesis about the correlation between emotional disturbances and some kinds of creativity is that the creative individuals become emotionally disturbed because of the way they

are viewed and treated by the world (Ludwig, 1996).

From the time children start school, they learn that they are expected to dress a certain way, talk a certain way, and think a certain way to be accepted. Those who think differently, who actually dare to have original ideas, often find themselves marginalized. Torrance said that as soon as you have an original idea, you are a minority of one. That is because as soon as you have an original idea, most people rush to tell you what is wrong with it. These are the Murder Committees—they murder ideas before they are given a chance.

You know them. They frequent faculty meetings, board meetings, and are the gate-keepers of the world. They say, "It won't work;" "It'll be too expensive, difficult, easy, …" Sometimes they kill an idea wordlessly with just a look, or by ignoring what was said. Worse, they often kill the creativity of the person with the idea.

How Parents and Teachers Can Support Creative Children

We can take some lessons from the Carnes Family, Bevin's parents, who successfully supported her creativity, as well as from other parents and teachers who have enabled creative children. Some ideas are:

1.   Allow the child freedom of expression. Bevin's parents noted that when Bevin was a toddler, if she wanted to wear a bucket on her head, they allowed it. Children often choose to express their individuality through their hairstyles, clothing, and room decorations, some of the few areas in which they feel they have some control. It is reasonable to set limits due to decency, safety, and hygiene, but allow children some freedom within those limits.

2.   Encourage and enable the child's creative explorations. Providing materials, lessons, transportation to performances, and access to good teachers can help a child realize a dream. In the film, Bevin's father can be working the camera as Bevin moves the planets around the sun for her stop-action video.

3.   Accept the child's quirky behavior. Although we all must learn some social skills to fit in, we do not all have to be the same. Help other children and adults see unusual behaviors as part of that child's unique personality. Be an advocate for the child and enlist other advocates. It took one faculty member to see Marla as creative rather than sinister and convince the other teachers so that the connection could be made with creative writing.

4.   Help the child learn about his or her own needs and learn ways to meet them in the least obtrusive ways. For example, a child who has trouble with sound sensitivity may be able to wear earplugs or sound muffling earphones at some times. A child who has difficulty with bright lights might be allowed to wear sunglasses or a cap. We should remember that reasonable accommodations should be available to children according to their needs. Children need to learn to understand what their own needs are and how to advocate for themselves.

5.   Help the child learn how to behave in socially acceptable ways without denying sincere emotions. For example, it is all right and natural to feel frustration when a project is stymied, but it is not all right to yell, hit someone, or storm out of the room. The child should learn how to leave the situation calmly, breathe slowly, etc. to get her frustration under control.

6.   Provide a safe space where an emotional child can calm down. Be supportive and caring and allow the child to go to his room, or go to a place in the room or the restroom to get control. One mother rocked her distraught young child everyday when he came home from school over-stimulated and needing to unwind. Another came to realize that her daughter's daily crying jags in her room when she came home from school were her way of releasing tension. We can help our children learn more effective ways to release tension—exercise, meditation, or even a punching bag, but we shouldn't deny the emotion or the need to express it.

7.   Share movies, books, and stories about creative individuals who have had sensitivities and intensities that were part of their creativity. Share these with everyone so that they can learn to be more accepting.

If we can recognize some behaviors that may be unusual as part and parcel of the creative child's personality, get the child to recognize and accept herself, and advocate for others to do so, we will go a long way to helping creative children lead happier lives. If we can also help creative children to use their sensitivities, intensities,

and unusual ways of looking at the world to fuel their creativity, we will enable them to hold on to and nurture their creativity. If we can help them to learn to understand and advocate for themselves as well as to use some social skills to interact with others in as positive ways as possible, we will smooth the way for them in the world.

The lesson we have learned in agriculture is that diversity better ensures survival. Whether in plant cultivation or animal husbandry, we know that a diverse or deep gene pool gives a population a higher chance of surviving any adversity. We all need to learn to celebrate diversity in its many forms so that the Bevins, Camilles, Franks, Roberts, Gillians, and Marlas, of the world can be optimally happy and productive. ❖

Bonnie Cramond is a professor and graduate coordinator in the Department of Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology at the University of Georgia. She has published numerous articles, a book on creativity research, and teaches classes on giftedness and creativity.

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Teaching Emotionally Immature High School Students

Pamela Curtis

How do you teach gifted students whose emotional age trails their chronological age?

How can teachers integrate those students into their classes so that they mature while not detracting from the learning of the other students?

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJ) is a Governor's Regional Magnet School, known throughout the United States for its innovative programs and the caliber of its students. It was rated the best public high school in the nation three times by *U.S. News and World Report.*

TJ is not strictly a school for the gifted; no IQ test is required nor do students have to be identified as gifted. All students residing in the northern Virginia counties and cities served by the school are eligible to take the entrance test, and some applicants come from families who are moving to the area from other states or foreign countries. Admission depends on scores on an entrance test covering math, science, and language arts, as well as letters of recommendation from teachers and a student-written essay. Competition for entrance to TJ is as fierce as for the best colleges and universities.

TJ students are supposed to have interest and ability in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) areas and most do, but many are "Humanities types;" the typical TJ student, good at many things. They are bright, some scarily so, and are glad to have been admitted. Most are 13 or 14 years old. Some students do not want to leave their old friends and neighborhood schools and are enrolled against their preference by parents who value TJ's educational opportunities and safe environment. Each year TJ admits students who have already been diagnosed with various learning disabilities, Asperger's Syndrome or other conditions requiring special accommodations in the classroom.

I have taught at all four grade levels at TJ, and for the past nine years, have been in the Integrated Biology, English, and Technology (IBET) program that is required for all 9th graders. Students spend approximately 80 percent of their time in each of the three courses on the kind of material expected in honors level classes, and 20 percent in groups doing original scientific research culminating in the writing of a scientific article and the presentation of findings at an annual symposium that is part of a day-long, school-wide celebration of student research in all areas.

Set the Tone Early

The transition from middle to high school can be an insecure and trying time for any student but especially for those who are less emotionally ready than others. Schools can ease this transition in various ways. For instance, at TJ, even before school begins in September, counselors and teachers often meet with parents whose children have special needs, and it has been my experience that those meetings are extremely helpful to everyone concerned. TJ also invites all entering students and their parents to an orientation on the Friday before school starts. At this orientation, while administrators and others are talking to the parents, students meet briefly with each of their new teachers after which each student receives a Big Sibling, a sophomore, junior, or senior volunteer who will act as mentor and security system during that freshman's first days of high school.

Orientation aside, on the first day of school each team of three IBET teachers and the team's representative from Student Services (counselor) is confronted with 75 to 80 unfamiliar students who could come from as many as 40 different middle and intermediate schools. My team has always begun the "socialization" process for everyone on that first day, and differences among students surface quickly. Activities on that first day include each student's introducing herself to her first class, working in a randomly assigned group planning a brief presentation in the next class, and finally presenting the group's skit or report to the three assembled classes at the end of our three-period IBET block of time. Students leave their first day in IBET with several barriers broken, having already made an "oral report," met several classmates, and participated in a working group.

That first day we teachers observe students' behavior as they speak and work. Shyness, difficulty following directions, unwillingness to listen to others, and eagerness to dominate the group are some of the characteristics that become apparent as well as positive qualities such as encouraging and inclusive behaviors, supportive comments, and wonderful friendliness. The recommended activities immediately make it clear that

in your classroom or your child's classroom, cooperative, kind, and creative behaviors are valued and expected. Leave the lectures on classroom etiquette and passing out books for later.

I cannot overstate the value for parents and teachers of working closely with a guidance counselor when dealing with emotionally immature youngsters. At TJ, each IBET's 75-80 students are assigned to one counselor who moves up through the grade levels with these students, getting to know them well. If we teachers observe problems in class, we can call on the counselor's help immediately. For instance, our biology classes study molecular biology using a college level textbook, and for many students this class is the first that has demanded that they do anything more than listen to get an A. Meltdowns after tests and quizzes can occur among students with little experience with academic disappointment. When a student begins to cry or shows other signs of distress, a counselor who really knows the student is only a phone call away.

Have Students Work Closely Together

Many of the assignments at TJ involve working in groups, a situation that can be taxing for less mature students and for those who must work with them but can also result in tremendous emotional growth. In English classes, students work in reading/writing groups on writing assignments, in informal classroom groups on short-time tasks, and in longer-lived groups on important projects. The IBET research groups last all year, and the grades students receive for their groups' work count in all three classes. Most students quickly realize that they need to find ways to function effectively in these groups.

Among the techniques used at TJ to foster effective group relationships is the Myers-Briggs Temperament Inventory (MBTI) that has been used for 50 years by government, private industry, and the military to teach people more about themselves and about how they relate to others. The MBTI is NOT a personality test; rather it can help students understand how they prefer to take in and process information, relate to other people, and show themselves to the world. We have found that the better students understand themselves and their peers, the better they get along.

Teaching, continued

An example of how the MBTI results and activities improved one student's behavior occurred with Lisa, a girl who began the year by alienating everyone in her class with her complaints that others were stupid and unfair and with her dramatic outbursts when things did not go her way. Once, Lisa shocked everyone with a full-blown temper tantrum when I handed back a paper with a lower grade than she expected. Although Lisa's emotions were often beyond her control, the analytical part of her mind functioned well. She digested her MBTI results and eagerly participated in learning about the MBTI types of her classmates. Lisa wrote a long and revealing entry in her journal that culminated in her admission that she had always assumed that people who thought and behaved in ways that were not natural to her were stupid, even defective. She realized now that they were only different, and that she might be able to understand these differences. Lisa made such obvious efforts to control her comments and outbursts that other students relaxed and gradually warmed to her.

> "Once an atmosphere of trust between students and teachers is established, students will be more likely to inform teachers when a problem arises in a group."

Through sharing their thoughts, opinions, and background knowledge, students usually develop respect for each other. If teachers carefully monitor classroom groups, they can quickly intervene if a student shows disrespect or fails to act responsibly. I think that this careful monitoring is the key to the effective use of groups. I have even resorted to assigning grades to reading/writing groups when I thought some students were slacking off during group time or were being negative instead of constructive. It was amazing how quickly those students began to take seriously the tasks I had given them. Of course teachers cannot monitor groups working outside of class, but they can keep progress logs where they would record the date of each group meeting, the tone of the meeting, and what the group accomplished. Once an atmosphere of trust between students and teacher is established, students

will be more likely to inform teachers when a problem arises in a group.

Working in groups allows students to learn from each other, and, in classes full of bright students, chances are that some student may know more about the topic at hand than even the teacher. Teachers may have the advantage in experience, but teachers of the gifted need to become comfortable with young people who know a great deal. When choosing reading material for my classes, I would sometimes pick novels or poems I had not yet read so I could read and study with the class and discover the work with my students. This method also enabled me to model the processes I use when coming to understand literature, and it kept classes fresh. Bored teachers have bored students who may act out in immature ways.

Provide as Many Choices as Possible

Gifted students are creative; teachers do not have to think of all possible ways to satisfy an assignment. Teachers can determine the parameters and then get out of the way. For instance, all TJ 9th graders read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* during the fourth quarter of the year and produce a "dramatic essay" wherein a group asks a question or poses a theory about the play and presents its analytic answer using staged scenes from the play as evidence to support the analysis. Students are free to set their scenes in whatever time period or locale they choose, and they can cut unneeded lines from scenes, use costumes as they please, etc. One year the best group in all my classes contained "Larry," a young man who had struggled all year with personal relationships. An Asperger's kid, he was often blunt and impatient with other students, interrupted classes, and was disrespectful to teachers. The LD Specialist had worked with him, the counselor saw him often, the parents met frequently with his teachers, and we had all tried hard with Larry to limited effect. He was impervious to my "teacher stare," a glare that usually stops students' unwanted behavior instantly. Larry's Shakespeare group was reluctant to work with him until one morning when he suggested that they present their narrative in rap and recited a sample he had written. The result was not a miracle—Larry was still difficult—but the gain in mutual respect among those students was gratifying to all. The class chose Larry's group to be the one to perform again before other classes, and Larry's

fame as a clever rap poet spread. By the time Larry graduated, he had a circle of friends, some of whom were from that Shakespeare group.

Another year, "Simon," a withdrawn student who professed a dislike for English and rarely spoke in class, changed as a result of a choice on an assignment. In this Advanced Placement English class (I asked Simon why he had chosen AP Literature if he didn't like English, but he declined to answer), I had my students choose an author, read one or more of the author's works, and write a paper on what they had read and an original piece in that author's style. After rejecting many suggestions, Simon settled reluctantly on Kurt Vonnegut and, to my amazement, read all 23 of his novels. The other students were equally astounded as they had been well satisfied to read two or three books or one really long one. Simon struggled to write about such a huge field of novels, so we met several times for him to report on his reading and thinking. The more he read, the more enthusiastic he became, and he urged his classmates to read Vonnegut. Although Simon's written results were not spectacular, the change in his classroom behavior was, and he finished the year as one of the most active and respected participants in the class.

In another activity that provides student choice, 9th graders give Book Talks in which they present books they have enjoyed, both fiction and nonfiction, to groups of classmates. Students then choose a book to read from those that have been presented, read the book and then meet a month later in small groups to discuss it with other students who have read the same one. I have seen this activity introduce new authors, topics, historical periods, etc. to students to a degree that would be impossible for a single teacher to achieve. The process allows students to display their strengths and gain respect from their classmates. Making choices helps students to mature as they learn from the results of their own actions.

It should be obvious that I believe that interactions with classmates can smooth rough edges from less mature students. Positive peer pressure is usually irresistible to all but the truly antisocial high school student. Teachers must be vigilant, however, and intervene

quickly when necessary. I cannot count how many brief hall conferences I have had with students over the years, covering everything from unguarded coughing to rude comments and emotional outbursts. I have also concluded from watching thousands of young people travel through high school that great emotional growth often occurs in the summer between 9th and 10th grades, especially in boys. In the long run, time may be the best treatment for emotionally immature students; parents and teachers may just have to hold their breaths and wait. ❖

After 20 years of substitute teaching, volunteering in her children's classrooms, and teaching French at the International School in Manila, P.I., **Pam Curtis** began her English teaching career in Fairfax County, Virginia. She taught gifted students in grades 9-12 for over 30 years before retiring.

Finding Their Voice, Claiming Their Path: How Gifted Girls Become Strong Women

Joan Franklin Smutny

Reports on the growth and achievement of gifted girls and women in the past decade have been encouraging. Certainly, more women today feel encouraged to achieve, assume leadership, and pursue careers formerly dominated by men (Phillips, 1998). The women's movement and the programs it inspired have helped promising girls plan and act on deeply held interests and aspirations for careers (Gassin, E.A., Kelly, K.R. & Feldhusen, J.F., 1993). During the past decade, gifted females have also entered the fields of math and science in greater numbers, earning 46% of biology PhD's and filling more than half of medical school classes (Vanderkam, 2005).

Yet, such gains do not signal the end of gender bias in our society by any means. Gifted females continue to struggle with societal pressures, inequities and expectations (see Kerr, 1997; Rimm, 2001; Gilligan, 1993; Reis, 1998). Even in the fields of math and science where their numbers have increased, gifted women have not always found the institutional culture open to their different values, interests and ideas, which, among other things, would make these fields more relevant to human needs and conditions (Thom, 2001). Contributing to these fields presents unique challenges in how they perceive themselves. Anita Borg of the Institute for Women and Technology reported that a female colleague, a PhD engineer at Compaq once confessed the following: " 'I want you to know that the first time I met you was the first time in my life that I ever felt like I was both a woman and an engineer at the same moment' " (in Thom, 2001, p. 87).

Yet, struggles such as these often go unacknowledged in society. "Talk show authors bemoan the idea that attention to concerns of girls and women has impeded the education and guidance of boys," Kerr observes. She continues:

"Sex role stereotypes are dead, they say, and now we must attend to the business of educating in a gender free society. As is true with the reports of the ends of any social trends that make people uncomfortable, these reports of the death of the gender gap are greatly exaggerated. The gender gap is alive and well in gifted education, in research about giftedness, and in the lives of gifted girls and boys. Prescribed gender role behaviors that dominated in the first part of this century continue to hold the power to bias education and research, and to restrict the psychological and life choices of gifted girls and boys, men and women" (2000).

Perhaps the greatest challenge for gifted girls today is not academic achievement but social and emotional well being (Smutny, 2008). "She's a good student," a mother once said happily of a highly gifted 4th grader I had taught. "She does her work on time, gets mostly A's. We're proud of her." I tell this mother what

an imaginative writer her daughter is and ask if she enjoyed reading her fractured fairytale. The mother's eyes seemed blank, almost uncomprehending. "Pretty bizarre," her mother smiled, clearly not impressed. The response made me cringe. I had taught this child for several years and each summer, she had come to me panting for new opportunities to write, scribbling poems and ideas for stories on any scrap of paper she could find. From my conversations with her parents, I felt they were more pleased with outward signs of achievement than with her creative work, which they sometimes felt bordered on the bizarre. Her parents did not really *see* her or understand her unique imaginative world. I wondered how she would fare later in life, and if this gift would slip from her grasp with no one by her side to mirror back to her the value and worth of her passion for writing.

The Struggle of Gifted Girls: A Lifespan View

The social and emotional struggles that gifted women have later in life often begin earlier—in the elementary and secondary years (Reis, 2002). Particularly in adolescence, girls develop a sense that if they are too free and open, they could lose their connections with peers, even with their own friends. Self-confidence and self-acceptance decline markedly during the middle school years (AAUW, 1992; Reis, 1998; Kerr, 1997; Rimm, 2001). On the path toward young adulthood, many gifted girls learn to dissociate themselves from their own real thoughts, feelings, and interests (Gilligan, 1993). This dissociation is the beginning of the end for a number of young women and often goes unnoticed. As Barbara A. Kerr (1997, p. 173) has observed: "A society that wastes female brilliance has made it the norm for gifted women to lead an average life, and gifted women have largely adapted to that norm."

When we think about the needs of gifted girls, therefore, we have to take the long view of their growth and development over time. For while the seeds of a problem may begin in early or middle grade school years, they may not show themselves until the girls, now young women, step into the world. Incremental declines in self-confidence and self-knowledge whittle away their expectations. A young girl becomes more concerned about gaining the approval of a teacher or parent than following her own dreams; a college student turns down a scholarship to support the career of her husband; a mother agrees to postpone the opening of a treasured art studio because her in-laws need her help. Somehow, somewhere along the line, they give their lives away.

In many gifted girls I have seen, a deeply felt ambivalence emerges: on the one hand, a stirring within the soul to explore their abilities and aim for the high peaks; on the other, a need to belong to a community (of peers, parents, neighborhoods). This "debilitating tension" (AAUW, 1992) becomes the condition under which they try to unfurl their powers to the world. They digest images from television, print and internet sources; they observe women around them—how they talk to men, what they sacrifice, how they navigate difficult relationships, how freely they live their lives. Women in the curriculum—their absence or presence—speaks volumes about the world that awaits them. Is there a place for their passionate love for photography or their dream of exploring the wintering grounds of the Painted Bunting?

> *"The social and emotional challenges girls and women face as they navigate the shifting terrain of education, career, and family relationships are real."*

The social and emotional challenges girls and women face as they navigate the shifting terrain of education, career, and family relationships are real. For many gifted women, a time comes when they see the coercive nature of social arrangements and gender bias and wonder what led them to this point. An old echo from the past floats back, calling them. They remember the days when they used to sit in the branches of the old apple tree and create imaginary adventures across the globe. They wonder: Was I destined for nothing more?

Support for the "Different Drummer in Gifted Girls"

Without intervention from caring, engaged adults, gifted girls run the risk of settling for a life other than the

one their gifts call them to (Smutny, 2008). The "different drummer" within themselves—the beat that once told them what they loved and wanted to be—becomes barely audible by the time they enter college. Only then do we ask: What happened? Where did we go wrong in preparing this student for her life as an adult woman? What support system, what skills and experiences will better enable our most able girls to navigate the rougher waters where they feel they may not belong or should not travel?

In the sections that follow, I have outlined some of the most effective strategies for helping gifted girls and young women re-claim ownership of their lives and future. I credit the many gifted girls I have taught and known, as well as their teachers, families, and counselors for this list.

There is, of course, some overlap between the three sections. Yet they stand as three distinct areas of need for gifted girls and women:

• The need for emotional and spiritual resiliency.

• The need for supportive and responsive learning experiences.

• The need for a vision and hope for the future.

I. Emotional and Spiritual Resiliency

Notice your attitude and behavior

Do you: encourage girls and women in the same way that you do boys and men? Make assumptions about suitable activity, interests, or goals for girls? Question the validity of girls' interests, ideas, or convictions? Do you respond to girls' questions in the same depth or detail as the boys' questions? Do you encourage girls to assume leadership in group projects? Do you actively discourage sex-role stereotyping for boys and girls? Do you monitor gender bias in your students and discuss it with them when the need arises?

Be alert to the internal saboteurs of gifted girls

Key challenges faced by gifted girls are these: self-criticism, censure, premature judgment. Share stories from your own struggles and achievements in life. A gifted child who doubts her own worth is often relieved by the discovery that her teachers or parents have stumbled, fretted and scrambled their way to achieving their goals. Teach gifted girls to make friends with mistakes. Point out your own and show how you learned from them.

Applaud originality, risk-taking, and boldness

Show admiration for those times and situations where gifted girls have been true to their own ideals and interests. Give students credit for trying a new approach to a research project, even if it falls short of goals. Celebrate instances when gifted girls defend a point of view or a cause that diverges from other strong voices in the class.

Be firm about careless criticism or censure from peers

Create a supportive environment for free thinking, particularly when it comes to open-ended assignments. Express the value you place in boldness, innovation, or originality by sharing what is unique about different students' work. Venturing outside the box can then become a standard in the classroom—with the assurance that censure or ridicule will not be permitted and students will not be "marked down" if their efforts fail to achieve a specific outcome.

Provide feedback that targets the emotional needs of gifted girls

Focus on the strengths of their work first; then identify the areas where they can make improvements. Drawing their attention to *specific* aspects of their assignment or project that strike you motivates them to persevere. They can see and feel the worth of their writing, study, or mathematical formula. This helps them become less driven toward perfectionism and more able to revise or refine their work. Adults can help by maintaining a healthy balance between affirmative support and practical guidance.

Encourage gifted girls to choose a role model

This woman can be from any time period, any country, any circumstance. Girls can select a woman for as long as they like, learn her story, her struggle, and her achievement. Stories of significant achievement always inspire students to think about their own struggles differently. The Women's History Project has excellent posters and other materials on great women that you can weave into almost any unit of study.   Talk about these women—their lives, what their words mean, how they lived, how they survived, what they became.

II. Supportive Learning Experiences

Minimize competition

A number of gifted girls retreat into mediocrity in competitive settings. Try to use strategies such as learning groups, hands-on activities, independent projects, and creative thinking processes to reduce competition and minimize the conflict gifted girls feel between their talent and their need to belong. Reducing the competitive edge also helps girls from cultures that don't value the emphasis on individual achievement and success that characterizes much of American society.

Arrange for gifted girls to work together

Gifted girls thrive in small groups or pairs where they can network with other girls who have similar abilities and interests (Research for Action 1996, p. 82). The very process of collaboration helps to foster a sense of belonging and can change the whole perspective they have about themselves. On the other hand, isolation tends to feed into a girl's suspicion that she's an oddity and makes her more susceptible to adverse social pressures.

Use compacting through learning contracts

Compacting frees gifted girls to advance in areas where they are strong without drawing undue attention to themselves (Winebrenner 1992). This practice is ideal for girls who may feel self-conscious about their abili-

ties and do not want to be pulled out for a separate program. Learning contracts also encourage girls to set their own pace and create their own activities and projects, thus giving them needed experience in directing their own interests.

Integrate thinking styles

For gifted girls, it is important to integrate levels and types of thinking within single subjects. For example, math classes can have applications to real world problems (global warming) or to art (cubism). Art lessons can become the medium for analyzing history which can then be related to literature and so forth. Abstracting content from any meaningful context causes it to lose significance as well as adaptability to different fields. Gifted girls need opportunities to integrate different thinking styles to research a subject or solve a problem.

Develop leadership ability

Having girls lead a debate team is not the only way for them to progress. In fact, putting them in charge of projects that they feel ill equipped to do can sometimes suppress the very qualities you want to elicit. On the other hand, helping gifted girls find their own voice and stand strong in the validity of that voice, whether in writing, speaking, debating, sketching, dramatizing, or inventing *is* leadership. Thinking about their interests or particular talents, how might they be comfortable sharing this with others? How could they collaborate with others like her? In what new contexts might these gifts provide them with an opportunity to communicate on a larger level?

Awaken the imagination and artistic sensibility

Creativity and the arts provide rich, multi-media sources for exploring expressive style and personal vision. Whenever possible, explore the work of women artists, authors and sculptors (e.g., through books, museum exhibits, galleries, readings by women authors). For many gifted children, the arts have provided the only path for them to discover their own ideals and values.

Integrate the contributions of women into the curriculum

The exclusion of women from the curriculum reinforces low self-esteem (Kerr 1997). Expose gifted girls to biographies, autobiographies, poetry, magazines, web sites, and blogs that express the richness, variety and significance of female achievement in all fields. Integrate the inventions, compositions, designs, writings, and discoveries of women into math, science, literature, social science, and art units. Focus on their *process*— their approach, the questions they posed, their thinking, the steps they took, their discoveries, and so forth. Include the works of minority, bilingual, multicultural girls and women from around the world.

III. Vision and Hope for the Future

Provide mentoring and career counseling

Gifted girls need to open their minds to the different ways they can use their unique abilities and interests. Mentoring experiences and counseling help gifted girls think more flexibly about their options. As was once explained to me by a gifted college student, "It was my parents who helped me figure out ways that I could combine my love for the entertainment world with my interest in economics—that I didn't have to choose between the theater and the bank." This is a large issue for many gifted girls and young women who thrive in learning situations that involve hands-on research, cross-disciplinary study, long-term mentoring and applications to real-world problems (Thom, 2001).

Seek venues for gifted girls to display, produce, or perform

When gifted girls contribute to real, in-the-world projects, plays, or exhibits, they begin to visualize a future. A girl I knew volunteered in a wildlife rehabilitation center at 15 and realized that by sharing her skills in computers and photography, she could improve the web site for the rehab center. The center so respected her work that she ended up posting her own photographs of rehabilitated animals on the web site. She remembered this as a pivotal moment in her young life: "That was the first time I realized that once you get into a place that's open to what you have to give, you find yourself using other parts of yourself that you didn't think would apply. Here I was at the rehab center because I was a kid scientist, but once I got there I saw that I could also use my skills in photography and computers."

Empower gifted girls to find their own path

Gifted girls do not always feel free to pursue their real interests or to strike out on the path less traveled. A discouraging remark is enough for some to question their goals and dreams for the future. Provide opportunities for students to imagine their futures—to try on the role of a scientist, an author, a detective, a teacher. Invite gifted women and men from different fields to share a project or problem they are currently working on. Provide time for students to ask how they entered their fields and how they prepared for them.

Locate resources beyond the school

Gifted girls can find opportunities for publishing and networking beyond the confines of school or home. There are organizations that seek writing, photography and artwork from children and young people. Science and math sites on line invite girls to participate in studies and research. Jane Goodall's Roots and Shoots program (*www.rootsamdshoots.org*) can become a highly rewarding connection for enterprising gifted girls (as well as boys) who want to initiate larger school and/or community projects.

Involve gifted girls in endeavors that benefit others

Many gifted girls have a keen interest in applying their expertise to alleviate a real problem, and teachers and parents can help them find appropriate venues. Examples could include: volunteering in animal or environmental organizations; reaching out to communities through art and science projects; becoming an intern at a small business or a local organization that is providing new opportunities to the community.

Ask girls to imagine the future

If they could do anything in the world, what would it be? It's better sometimes to ask what they would like

to *do* rather than *be*; many gifted girls have a range of interests and abilities and don't want to choose between them. Encourage daydreaming and far-reaching goals. Begin this in their youngest years. Share books about different careers. Have them paint/sculpt/sketch their dreams; have them create a book of dreams that they can continue to add to as they get older.

"To Thine Own Self…."

When, through pressure, anxiety, and the need to fit in, female students start seeing themselves through others' eyes, they begin to drift from their true nature. They look to others to tell them who they should be—how to identify themselves, what ideals or values to adopt, what choices to make. Nothing is more vital to the future of gifted girls than helping them stay connected to their own passions and interests. As the guiding adults in their lives, we can help them develop the knowledge, skill, and experience they will need to realize their goals and aspirations. This kind of support will empower them to address barriers to their achievement and follow a path that is truly theirs.   ❖

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Joan Franklin Smutny is founder and director of the Center for Gifted at National Louis University and editor of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children Journal. She is the author of many books on gifted education for teachers and parents.

Federal Funding and Gifted Programs

Heather Kwolek

Emily learned how to read at age 4. In 2nd grade, she was tested using the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, Second Edition. She had a reading comprehension of 4th grade, but her ability to read words was on the 9th grade level, along with her ability to express herself in writing. Emily was not only talented with words; she had the ability to reason through math problems on the 5th grade level. Throughout elementary and middle school, she continued to soak up knowledge like a sponge. She was excited to learn, and eager to befriend the other students. Her teachers, while most often glad that Emily already knew the material being covered, were unable to provide her with appropriate curriculum and pay attention to the other students. So Emily languished, bored and inattentive, by herself. She learned quickly that the other students did not appreciate her differences. By the time Emily was in high school, she had rarely been given appropriately challenging curriculum, and she had learned to mask her abilities in order to fit in and make friends. She struggled to understand, however, why her friends never shared her interests.

Emily is a gifted child, but because of lack of funding in her school district, the only education tailored for gifted students that she ever received was a pullout program for a few hours a week–far from enough to meet her needs. She had little chance to meet other gifted students and realize that she was not alone. Unfortunately, this scenario is all too typical of the gifted child. The federal government should mandate and provide gifted education and funding to schools so that no children have to experience the extreme boredom and constant feeling of being an outsider, or "different." Gifted children should learn in school instead of wasting their time and the teacher's time.

For the purpose of this paper, "gifted children" will be defined as children with an IQ of above 115 (Gross, 2000). Some people believe that it is "elitist" to say that a child is gifted, because all children are gifted in one way or another. The problem is in the understanding of the word "gifted" and the connotation that comes along with it. A gifted child is one who is very intelligent and may not be challenged by the schoolwork given to her. A gifted child is *not* necessarily a well-behaved child, or even a child who is doing well in school. Many gifted children, because they already know the material, refuse to do their work, and thus end up failing. Saying that a child is gifted is not elitist. Every child has his own gifts and talents. Some are in the realm of academics, whereas others are talented in athletics, music, art, or leadership. People are not equally talented in all fields. If differences are recognized, their work and education can be tailored to them and be productive as well as more interesting.

Oftentimes, people think that gifted children can take care of

themselves and do not need any help to succeed.. How wrong this is. Gifted children are still children first, and they do not always have the experience to help solve their problems. Gifted children also have unique struggles that the majority of children do not have, many of which stem from asynchronous development. One of the major areas gifted children struggle in is forming friendships, not because they are socially inept, but because friendships develop based on similarities in developmental stages, which relates more closely to mental age than to chronological age (Gross, 2001). As Osborn puts it, "...the 5-year-old with an 8-year-old mind who can play chess, build complex architectural constructions and play games with rules may have difficulty finding another 5-year-old who can be a building partner, a chess companion and a willing participant in complex games." Gifted children often need adult help to navigate problems such as these. When adults fail to understand the peculiarities of the gifted child and so do not provide extra support to help them form good friendships and navigate emotionally complex subjects such as war, the children suffer for it.

Of course, the most obvious need the gifted child has is for appropriate education, a void that can only be somewhat filled by voracious reading. Still, even if they find something to supplement their classroom education, the child still has to sit through boring, unnecessary classes in school every day. Why are these programs lacking, if academically talented youth would greatly benefit from them? They are lacking because there is little to no funding, and there is no federal mandate that services need to be provided for gifted students (Gardner, 2008).

A federal program dedicated to gifted and talented students is the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act, a program designed to fund research initiatives in the area of gifted students (2008). It provides competitive grants to school districts and states, if overall funding for the act each year is above $7.5 million, but its primary focus is on research. Unfortunately, one sees that there is little funding for gifted students through the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act when one compares the amount of funding given to this program to the amount of funding given to programs to help children who are behind academically or below grade level, such as in the No Child Left Behind Act.

Gifted students get the short end of the straw, as the disparate amount of funding shows:

Since it was passed in 1988, the law [Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act] has languished in the shadows, producing a congressional appropriation of a paltry $9.7 million for fiscal year 2006. Only half of the states offer additional dollars. In sharp contrast, Congress allocated $23.7 billion for fiscal year 2006 to fund the No Child Left Behind Act to bring all students up to minimal proficiency. (Gardner, 2008)

What must a gifted student, bored or feeling like an outcast and a freak, think when they learn this? It sends the message that academically gifted students aren't worth as much as other children, and that their abilities are not valued or important. The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act is almost like a slap in the face to a gifted student. It is a simple pittance to keep them mollified, while not doing much to improve the gifted child's life.

Other than the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act, there is no federal mandate about giftedness, so everything is left up to individual states. However, many states do not require identification of gifted students, much less any support or classes or enrichment for them. Twenty five percent of states provided no funding whatsoever for gifted education and resources in 2008 (Nagel). Without funding from the federal government or the state government, local governments are left to raise the money for any programs they wish to implement. And when budgets are so tight that students are going to have to start paying for their uniforms and such to be on athletic teams, or so tight that art and music classes are being cut because the school cannot afford the teachers, who is going to suggest that money be given to the gifted students? Popular belief is that gifted children are just fine and can take care of themselves, despite the fact that that belief is quite wrong.

Gifted students need support from caring adults who have been trained in the special needs of gifted children. They also need special education that can cater to their specific needs. As the economy is struggling now, the federal government should mandate gifted education so that the nation's brightest students are not left behind and forgotten, as they are some of the first cuts to be made when it becomes necessary to cut programs, if they have a program in the first place. Secondly, because funding is so hard to come by now, the federal

government should provide funding to state and local governments for gifted education programs.

As things stand currently, gifted students are an underserved, often misunderstood population. They are being forgotten and left behind in the current educational system. This needs to stop. In order to do this, the federal government needs to mandate services for gifted students and provide funding to carry them. ❖

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Heather Kwolek is a junior in high school who loves to learn. A Montessori school student through 3rd grade, she found gifted programs lacking when she entered the public school system, thus her strong interest in gifted education and its funding.

Building Bounce-Back Kids

Lou Lloyd-Zannini

Sometimes I'm just a little slow on the uptake. Though I'll usually credit that to the fact that I'm becoming a chronic overachiever, sometimes I miss stuff because it's just too obvious (though I must admit that typically I have an amazing grasp of the obvious). That was the case with the material for this column. Let me explain.

About five years ago, I coauthored a book with some colleagues, and soon started taking the material on the road, speaking at conferences and doing inservice trainings for schools. A number of times, folks said to me, "Gee, Lou, what you're talking about applies to [fill in the blank], too." What was fascinating to me was that each time, the blank was filled in differently, but what the population mentioned made perfect sense. But it was a couple of years ago, when my bride of twenty-plus years said to me, "Well, they're right, you know!" and the lights came on.

What was I talking about? Building resilience–that ability to push through hardship to success, to rebound from failure, and to "keep on keepin' on" when things seem impossible. Though initially my coauthors and I had written our book for classroom teachers to use to work with at risk students, and our initial audiences were those teachers, the reality soon became apparent to me that there were a lot more folks who needed to build some "bounce-back power" than just young children at risk.

More startling still, at least to me, was that it seemed the place where I was beginning to see the problem becoming ever more obvious was in the field of gifted education/talent development. Initially I was surprised. Why would our most capable learners not be evidencing resilience in their learning and living?

Needless to say, I can't stay away from a good mystery, and soon, I started to ask everyone I knew who worked with gifted kids if they were seeing what I was seeing: gifted kids who were opting out of attempting things–often out of fear of failure, or giving up when they hit a bump in the road to accomplishment. Their answers were usually affirmative. I knew I was on to something, but would people rather avoid the embarrassing little secret than address it? After all, these are gifted kids we're talking about.

Once again, I figured the best way to get the answer was to ask the question. So a couple of years ago, I started to submit proposals for sessions at conferences for parents and teachers of the gifted. The first nibble was from a national conference, which put the session into a roundtable/poster slot. Reactions to the material from parents and teachers told me that I was on track, so I kept revising and creating material and submitting proposals. Since then, I've presented new material to parents, teachers, and gifted kids themselves at a half dozen conferences, as well as inservices and parent group meetings. And do you know what? Based on the feedback that I continue to receive, lots of our gifted and talented kids need help building their resilience.

When you think about it, resilience really is critical to success. If

we are afraid to try something, we'll never master it, no matter how cognitively bright or talented we are. And if experiencing failure throws our experience into "park" rather than causing us to shift into "overdrive," then we'll never get to the point where we celebrate success. We're destined to failure. Who wants their kids to be failures? Not me! And surely, not you either!

In today's world, when striving for mediocrity can seem like too large a task to even consider, how *do* we "failure-proof" our kids? What can we do to assist them in building their resilience, so that when the going gets tough, they keep going, and when they fail at something, they see it as a new opportunity to succeed? How can we help them to become bounce-back kids?

Obviously, the answer isn't absurdly simple. If it were, you wouldn't still be reading this article, would you? But, believe it or not, it's not so awfully complex either. Basically, failure proofing our kids requires us to do three moderately simple but often difficult things: We need to give our children appropriate amounts of freedom to try new things; we need to help them be responsible for their choices and actions; and when they fail, we need to help them learn to reframe failure. Let's take a moment to look at those a little more closely.

Give your child appropriate amounts of freedom to try new things. Mom and dad, teacher, whoever you are, some of you may choke on what I'm about to say: Don't take the easy way out and do things for your children that they can be doing for themselves. And don't "rescue" them when something they're attempting goes wrong—unless, of course, it's clearly putting them into imminent danger or harm. Kids need to have the freedom to fail if they're ever going to learn how to turn failure into success.

Help your child to be responsible for choices and actions. Part of making choices is owning them and the results of them. I often tell parents and teachers that life is a lot like one of those follow the numbers puzzles. The page had dots all over it, each one with a number nearby. All you had to do was connect the seemingly random dots by going from number to number, and suddenly, voilà, a picture magically emerged from the page. Folks, that's life. For our kids to see a series of events as anything other than chaos, we need to help them connect the dots. Then a coherent picture of reality will emerge for them.

The way we do that is to help our children see that every choice they make, every action they engage in, has a consequence. That consequence can be positive or negative, based on the nature of the decision, but whichever it is, it is **their** consequence. They "bought" it when they made the choice, and they "own" it free and clear. That ownership of the outcomes of our choices and actions is called responsibility, and until our kids learn it, they will never get past hardship or failure. Attempting to "protect" them from their responsibility disables them for real life.

It's hard, I know. Frankly, it takes more time to let kids do things on their own than it does to just do it for them. And it can be painful watching them mess up, and then have to handle the consequences of their decisions and actions. But if you want your kids to be independent, to be able to persevere through adversity, and to handle failure, then you have to give them the freedom to fail, and the responsibility to do for themselves what they can. The less you expect, and the more you protect, the less resilient they will be.

Be honest, do you really want to be the cause of your children's disability? I didn't think so. So give them age- and developmentally-appropriate responsibilities to do things that they can do for themselves, commend their successes, and when they're on a course to failure, don't intervene and rescue them. Let them fail.

Help your child learn to reframe failure. Early on in one of my other professional careers, I learned a lesson which has served me well both personally and professionally ever since, and it came from where I would least have expected to have learned a life-lesson! I was at a Tom Hopkins sales seminar, when Hopkins said simply, "I am not judged by the number of times I fail, but by the number of times I succeed; and the number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I can fail and keep on trying."

Over the years, I've shortened that a bit to my own mantra-of-sorts: "I never see failure as failure, but only as another opportunity to succeed." It's simple enough. Failure isn't fatal, usually. But fearing failure can be.

So help your child learn to reframe the reality, to see it from a different point of view, and thus to take control over it. Make failure just one more step to success. After all, when I fail, I've learned another good way NOT to do what I'm attempting. That can only lead to figuring out a better way. This is possibly the single most important skill we can help our kids to acquire–far more important than many of the academic and other skills that we seek to have them master because when they master this, they will be undaunted by failure, and on the fast track to success.

"Failure-proofing" our kids. It sounds good, doesn't it? So how do we do it? Are there strategies that might

be helpful in building resilience in our gifted/talented children, no matter what their age? I think so, and I'd like to propose ten to you: ten simple strategies that if you are caring and consistent in their implementation, will allow you to build bounce-back kids.

• **Use humor.** Laughter is great medicine, especially for dispelling stress when something isn't going right. Being able to laugh in a tense situation allows us to regroup and refocus, and thus persevere. It also eases tension. So find something funny in the midst of the madness, have a good laugh at the situation, and move on from there. Just remember to never poke fun at your child or to use sarcasm or deprecating humor. Those will only make things worse!

• **Collaborate/brainstorm alternatives.** Gifted or not, sometimes you just run smack dab into a wall. You don't even realize it's there till you feel the impact! Though you put thought and energy into finding a way over, under or around the wall, nothing seems to come to mind that will help. That's when we need to exercise the power that numbers can bring. We need to collaborate with someone else to think through, and maybe even work through, the dilemma. When your kids hit a wall, help them to find others who have a similar goal or task in mind, and pool ideas and energies with them. It's amazing what can come out of it.

• **Problem solve.** Just as surely as life occurs, problems happen. How we deal with them makes all the difference. When your children encounter a problem, encourage them to think critically about the situation. If they'll put some higher-order thinking skills to work for them, they'll be able to analyze what has and hasn't worked for them in similar situations in the past, and they'll be able to figure out how to approach the current situation so that they can deal with it successfully. Once they've made their plan, all that's left is going for it.

• **Switch lenses.** When photographers want to get a different view of something, they switch the lens of the camera. Doing so can modify the way the camera "reads" the subject. Lenses can pull in tight for a closeup, or back way off in a wide angle. They can pull one element out of context and bend or reshape it visually. It's the same with us when we find ourselves in a frustrating situation, or worse yet, when we seem to have failed at something. In those moments, we need to change our lens. Maybe we need to back off to gain perspective. Maybe we need to get really close up to see something we've missed. Or maybe we need to somehow change the way we perceive the shape of the

situation. Help your child to gain new perspective on situations by looking at them from a different point of view. Remember, whether one sees the glass as half-empty or half-full is entirely a matter of how one chooses to perceive its contents. Winners see what can be and go after it. Losers see what has been and complain. Resilience is far more about attitude than it is about aptitude.

• **Train for leadership.** If everybody thinks that anybody can do something and that somebody else will, usually nobody does. Train your child when and how to take leadership, and exercise it effectively. This is best done is small steps, in appropriate activities and places, with lots of successes along the way, but it starts with your initial decision to equip your child with the skills and attitudes that she will need to lead others. Of course, if goes without saying that if you want your child to be a leader, you'll need to model the behavior yourself. Leadership is best learned from example. Be a good one.

• **Use simulations to prepare for success.** Navy pilot friends assure me that they don't start flying F-22 "stealth" bombers by sitting in the cockpit of the multibillion dollar machine. They start in a simulator where they can crash as often as they need to without harming anyone or anything. It's the same in life. Authentic simulations allow our kids to determine their approach and practice their skills before they launch into new make-or-break tasks. They'll be amazed at how much their enhanced skills will help them succeed, and they'll feel comfortable in the situation because they've practiced for it. So when you can, help your child do mental and physical "walk-throughs" before taking on big challenges. It can be the difference between getting it right the first time, or doing it over and over until they do.

• **Set realistic goals.** In answer to the old question, "How do you eat an elephant?" the best answer is still "One bite at a time." It's the same with life. Whether it's big projects, college choices, or life plans, they all need to start with solid, reasonable, developmentally appropriate, observable, and measurable goals. To help your kids be resilient, help them to set long and short term goals and objectives, and then to move forward one goal, one objective, one step, at a time. Remember, reasonable and developmentally-appropriate goals keep life and its many tasks from being overwhelming and frustrating, things which can chip away at resilience. Measurable and achievable goals allow children to see progress, and encourage them to keep moving forward. They discover that if they stick with their plan, the results will usually be excellent, if not outright spectacular! When you consider that nothing builds re-

silience like success, and that great goals can lead to success, goal setting becomes a critical part of becoming a bounce-back kid.

• **Be assertive.** "Nice" has its place, but to avoid being mistaken for a carpet remnant, sometimes your kids will need to assert themselves. This doesn't mean being a bully, or shoving others around, or throwing tantrums if they don't get their way, but it does mean being able to state clearly what their needs and expectations are, and to stand firm in the face of those who would attempt to take control over them and their projects. To develop your child's assertion skills, first, model the behavior for them. Work with them to build assertive statements which communicate clearly and kindly, but firmly, that they will not be bullied or intimidated. At the same time, assist them in learning how to know when compromise is a necessary and good thing, and when it isn't, as well as how to say "no" nicely, but mean it.

• **Stay away from they who say "nay."** Okay, so the English teacher within me is choking on the grammar of this one, but the resilience builder is shouting, "ABSOLUTELY!" Negative people drag us down, and sap the energy that we need to stay in the fray and overcome. Avoid them at all cost! Flee when you see them approaching! Encourage your children to establish relationships with others who think positively, and who will help them stay focused on what can be done, rather than what can't. Peer pressure is a good thing only if it's positive, so stay away from negatives. This alone can change your child's life.

• **Teach negotiation skills, and model conflict resolution.** We can't always get our way, even if we are gifted/talented! In fact, sometimes, it's a good thing that we don't get our way– especially when we're wrong! Resilient kids have learned how and when to negotiate. After all, while some things just aren't negotiable, most are, and knowing that–and how to do it well–can go a long way in building long-term success. When we do find ourselves in a serious disagreement with another, it's imperative that we know how to resolve the conflict. Let your example teach your kids how to handle conflict appropriately. When they learn that it's okay to disagree, and they have the skill sets to resolve a disagreement rather than harboring resentment and anger, they're well on their way to lifelong resilience – and success!

• **Don't accept "I can't."** I've saved this for last, because those two little words will inevitably destroy your child's resilience if you accept them. When we get right down to it, there is precious little that most of us can't do when we put our minds and resources to the task. "I can't" usually means "I won't," and there's a profound difference between the two. Lately, I've noticed a trend: the old saying, "If at first you don't succeed…" is more and more often being completed with "give up." "I can't" is giving up. Along with "I'll try," that advance excuse which usually signals "I really don't intend to do this, but I want you to think I will," it will shred resilience. So unless the task is way beyond your child's physical or cognitive development, never accept "I can't."   Go instead for "I can, and I will."

There you have it in a nutshell: Ten strategies to help failure-proof your kids, and to build them up as bounce-back kids in a world which is more than satisfied to settle for "no way." May they revel in their accomplishments, and may you delight in their strength.   As StarTrek's Mr. Spock would say, "Live long and prosper." ❖

Lou Lloyd-Zannini is Associate Professor of Education at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he directs the Master Teacher Program. He is a parent of a gifted child.

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