

Social and Emotional Aspects of gifted and talented children

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It is common that every country is in search for gifted persons as leaders. Especially, when there are crisis and conflicts. Conflicts that caused by the difference in demands, needs, interests, believes, or when there is a change. Everybody asks for leaders, good leaders to solve all the problems and make innovations for the society. However, not everybody ever thinks of how we can have these good leaders.

There are many cases in the world that inappropriate educational process be implemented for the gifted education. For example, we may set up goals to develop many scientists and identify students that we believe they will be the future scientists. But results from several projects in the program do not meet the objectives, or some students are misidentified. While a little genius scientist is not recruited into the program, or students find the program not challenging enough to meet their curiosity. Considerable amount of money and efforts may have already been spent for the program, but we may not succeed as we wish.

Such cases will repeat if we are not aware of psychological and emotional processes of gifted persons. Many educators need to learn more about how the genius learn and make he genius. From fact finding, they may be much different from what people think or believe. We have some interesting reports form some studies that some gifted persons with IQ over 180 do not want to do difficult tasks, tasks that need many people involvement, one just

expressed that he wanted to be genitor, another case said she would just wanted to be a common house-wife. Therefore, to be a leader in any fields, he/she needs to have psycho-emotional strength. Many gifted persons require more guidance, more emotional supports.

Several misconceptions about gifted children still exist, for examples, they are sometime thought as a privilege group and as "gifted" they must be able to solve own problems and made own adjustment in any situations. In fact, they are in needs of assistance and appropriate guidance from adults and hence, they are disadvantaged. Silverman (1993), also stated that "The result is that the educational needs of the gifted and highly gifted are usually neglected, which in turn affects their morale, motivation, social relationships, aspirations, sense of self-worth, and emotional development, counseling for the gifted is needed to help these students cope with society's attitudes toward them, as well as to help them find their ways through an educational system that is not designed to optimize their progress". Those misunderstanding lead to mis-measure, mis-use, mis-treat of giftedness.

From the studies, for example, at the special education clinic, Srinakharinwirot University, although we found some of the gifted could perform and mix well socially, but there are also some cases having problems on social and educational system adjustment, and then developed into a so called "Educational Sickness", both physically and mentally. There are, for examples, asthma on Sunday & Monday morning, sharp stomach upset, over eating, refusing to go to school, etc. Some of them, attending the regular schools, end up in leaving the schools or drop out from schools. Such academic and memory oriented education do not meet the needs and potentials of the gifted and tends to create more pressure and make the gifted and talented feel "failure" (the Center for the Gifted and Talented, 1998).

This "failure" has impact on their self-confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, low motivation to success. Some start to develop maladjustment behavior and difficulties in social and emotional adjustment, some feel lonely, and some exhibit psychosomatic syndrome.

Result of the research studies in the schools, under the projects by the Center of the Gifted and Talented in Thailand, has indicated that gifted children have some unique psychological pattern, different from non-gifted children. Most of the problems are as follows:

1. Low self-esteem
2. Low social skills
3. High stress and frustration
4. Afraid of being failure and be perfectionist
5. Lack of self-confidence
6. Likely not to complete the subject (Phothisuk et al., 1999).

The roots of the problems may come from

1. Family background
2. Children's own physical, intellectual and emotional conditions, such as brain functioning, learning processes, impairment, defect in endocrine glands, etc.
3. Pressure from others' expectations
4. Educational system, and
5. Mistreatment.

The major mistake of treating the gifted arises from the misunderstanding of their nature, the structure of their thinking, their feeling, and psychological aspects. When problems occur, the teachers, educators, psychologist always consider them same as those regular cases. To deal with children having special needs, it is a must to understand their unusual sensitivity, feeling and very complicated thinking structure, as well as their perceptions. Roeper

(1982) stated that "Giftedness is a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences".

Moreover, Kazimierz Dabroski (1902-1980), owner of Dabroski's Theory, was a psychiatrist in Poland who dared to help Jews from the Nazi. He was tortured and forced to withdraw from professional practice. His theory did not developed from animal experiment, but from suffering, deep sorrow, death, injustice of human. With his high enthusiasm in trying to find meanings of humankind, he found that many creative people had fought for their dignity, self honored. Many of them had been diagnosed as "psychoneurotic". In his opinion "they only have different development from others". (Dabroski, 1964). We might call this syndrome as asynchronous development.

Recent research, on the relationship of highly gifted and brain functioning, found that the structure of gifted persons' brain has more dendrites and more glial cells. And they relate to the speed of their thinking processes and their curiosity and often lead to conflict within oneself. They are not abnormal, but they need suggestions to learn how to screen their interests and learn how to process things in systematic forms, or more creative patterns.

For examples:

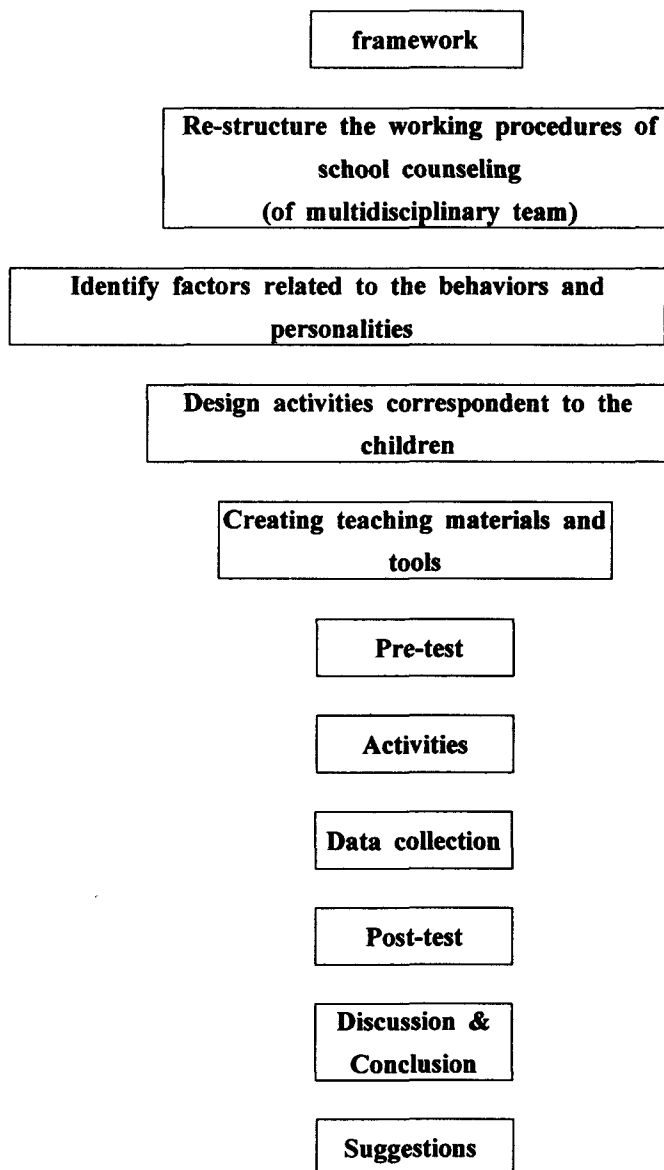
Case-1 : Somsri, girl, aged 11, IQ 154, dropped out of school due to frustration, social maladjustment, and complaining of school boresome, zero grade point average.

Case-2 : Wirat, boy, aged 9, IQ 162, very high performance in computer, mathematics, language, while poor on right brain functioning requirement such as spatial ability and social adjustment, also has some defect in his cerebellum which affects his physical balancing.

Case-3 : Chai, boy, aged 5, diagnosed as hyperactive and autistic, per school report - not able to attend class or cooperate with classmates, likes wandering, especially doing things outside classroom. After the interview and psychological tests, it has been found that he is extremely gifted and has very high interest and knowledge in finance and banking, at macro and micro levels, even better than some general adults. He is neither hyperactive nor autistic. Only he is mistreated and mis-diagnosed.

These three cases are only a few examples. However, this indicated that schools, teachers, psychologists, etc., could not work independently. There should be mechanism for specialists to work as a team. A multi-disciplinary team, with psychological aspects consideration, should be created. Such team should include: teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, parents.

Moreover, schools should strengthen program that focuses on affective domains and not only academic domain. The program should provide services that will develop, improve and support the affective needs of the gifted and talented. Various types of activities can be carried out to enhance the psychological and guidance program, such as group counseling, group dynamic, group activities, etc., in addition to the individual service. One good example of such services, from projects by the Center for the Gifted and Talented, is to create a program to assist and develop good personality for these children (see figure).



From the test results, problems are prioritized and activities are selected for these children. The various activities had made significant improvement to the children, which can be seen in the post-testing and from the children themselves. The following are comments from some students:

Q1: What do you think of group dynamic participation?

Answer:

Student-1 : At the beginning, I was worried, since I did not know the others. But now, I enjoy it very much; I like this project very, very much.

Student-2 : I feel I am more confident and more independent and I have many thoughts.

Student-3 : I have more friends, aware of self-esteem. In the past, I had many weaknesses, and I have less weakness now.

Q2: What benefits do you have from the group dynamic participation?

Answer:

Student-1 : stress release, able to make my opinion, group participation, and many things more.

Student-2 : I learn the difference between the others and myself.

Student-3 : I learn to work with others, eager to express myself, reduce my weakness and gain strength. (Office of the National Education Commission, 2000).

In conclusion, to achieve the goals of having "*intelligent, good and happy*" children, educators must pay more attention to affective needs and problems of the gifted, as much as they do in the academic area or on special talents. A mechanism or system, with various aspects, such as, a multidisciplinary team, services which will enhance students to strengthen their affective domains, etc., must be developed or created to provide opportunities for the children to understand themselves and build their good nature and personalities.

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