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PERMISSION TO BE GIFTED: HOW CONCEPTIONS OF GIFTEDNESS CAN CHANGE LIVES

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Introduction

No conception of giftedness or talent works in a cultural vacuum, which is why an international overview in this area of human development can cut across many assumptions (Freeman, 1998). A cross-cultural view picks up a wide variety of international templates for the identification and education of the gifted and talented, which are sometimes entirely opposing. The wider view can demonstrate unrecognised stereotyping and expectations, and illustrate the often serious effects of social influences on opportunities for the development of high-level potential and its promotion throughout life. Although cultural nuances are complex and their dynamics difficult to define, it is clear that excellence can come from widely differing special educational provision, or from no special educational provision at all. Whatever the cultural conceptions of giftedness, they are influential in their actualisation, in the acceptability of both the individual and the abilities, i.e. who may be gifted and who may not, and which abilities may be considered as gifts and which may not.

Context is all in the identification of giftedness because 'gifted' is an adjective, a description, so the recognition of individuals who are seen as meriting that term depends on comparisons. Even in the same town, for instance, a child in a competitive-entry school may be seen as of only modest ability, though could be admired as gifted in a non-selective school. But how each individual reacts to their classification as gifted is also dependent on personality and home support. This was highlighted by a 37 year-old woman in Freeman's British 30-year study of gifted and non-gifted children, who told of the distress the label "gifted" had caused her, largely because of her unsupporting low socio-economic background (Freeman, 2001). She felt she could never live up to the expectations of the image, as she saw it, and had felt a failure until she had children: they did not know about the label, she said, and loved her for herself.

How concepts affect choice of the gifted and talented

The choice of children as gifted depends neither on their high-level potential nor even their manifest excellence in any field of endeavour. Selecting for giftedness depends on what is being looked for in the first place, whether it is tested academic excellence for formal education, innovation for business, solving paper-and-pencil puzzles for an IQ club, gaining entry to a summer program for the gifted and talented or competitive athletics for one's country. Choice as gifted without testing could be affected by, for example, the interaction between the personalities of everyone concerned, what the children look and behave like, the agreed definition of giftedness, or even the percentages of ethnic representation demanded by educational authorities. Parental choice is beset by cultural stereotypes, usually meaning that two boys are chosen for every girl; a strangely stable gender proportion found all over the world, from Britain to China (Freeman, 2003). Choice by age-peers is affected by fashion, stereotypes and popularity (Gagné, 1995).

There are perhaps 100 definitions of 'giftedness' around, almost all of which refer to children's precocity, either in psychological constructs, such as intelligence and creativity, but more usually in terms of high marks in school subjects (Hany, 1993), though in formal school education, social or business talents are rarely considered. How teachers perceive and thus identify the gifted has been seen to vary considerably between different cultures. For example, estimations of the percentages of gifted children taken from more than 400 secondary teachers in Germany along with 400 in the USA were compared with those of 159 teachers in Indonesia (Dahme, 1996). The German teachers recognised 3.5% of children as gifted, the Americans 6.4% and the Indonesians 17.4%. Yet even within the USA, percentages of the child population identified as gifted by teachers vary between 5% and 10% across the states (OERI, 1993). It is to be expected that the definitions and special facilities provided by educational authorities would have some effect on teachers' estimations of how many children are capable of taking them up.

There can also be wide variation between teacher judgements and objective measures. Individually, teachers' attitudes towards the very able vary greatly; some feel resentment while others overestimate bright youngster's all-round abilities, as was found in a Finnish-British survey (Ojanen & Freeman, 1994). But teachers have been found to judge the highly able reliably, in that they will continue to pick the same kind of children (Hany, 1993). In Germany, Hany (1995) found teachers biased in their judgements, in that they would choose pupils who were most like their expectations, and did not fully consider the basis of comparisons or non-obvious characteristics. Creativity was not usually seen as an aspect of giftedness, and emotionally, the gifted were often expected to be playful, arrogant, uncontrolled and even disturbed. The teachers often kept a mental image of a gifted pupil who would have exceptionally good logical reasoning, quick comprehension and intellectual curiosity – in combination with good school grades. Individual gifted pupils were often vividly remembered by teachers, who would use those characteristics to identify others.

Yet children selected by high grades in school will be different in many ways from others who have gymnastic potential, and the creatively gifted are often less comfortable and less conforming in conventional school settings than scholarly youngsters who are more likely to be seen as gifted (Freeman, 1995; Sternberg and Lubart, 1999). If children are chosen

subjectively by teachers and parents, even if the choices are further refined by tests, the selection will be different from those chosen entirely by tests.

Cultural conceptions set up barriers to the development of high-level potential, especially if that potential is not in the curricular mainstream. The barriers are potently effective by undermining children's developing sense of self-worth and thus their courage to devote themselves to an outcome which may not be acceptable (Dweck, 1999). Subotnik put it succinctly: "in order to be gifted, that is, to be exceptional, as one matures, one needs to be increasingly active in one's own development." (Subotnik, 2003, p.15). An unacceptable goal need not only be e.g. criminal, but, could be, for example, a boy with fine-art aspirations in a rough family. Satisfaction with a moderate performance, apparently suitable for one's perceived place in life, does not bring excellence. The major obstructions to the realisation of gifted potential are socio-educational, and they exist everywhere in the world in different forms. They can be summed up in just three powerful and overlapping, aspects; 1) morality, 2) gender and 3) emotion.

1) Recognised giftedness depends on accepted morality

There is a tangled thread of morality which winds through concepts of giftedness. Cognitive-developmental morality measures, such as the stages promoted by Piaget (1948) or Kohlberg (1984) in his tests of moral development, correlate positively with high IQ scores and high-level educational achievement (Freeman, 2002a). Yet an overview of international research by the Italians, Pagnin & Adreani (2000), could not find any recognisable relationship between high cognitive ability and *actual* behaviour, but state rather that it is a basis for "coming to a justified agreement … shared by those concerned." (p.481). The American, Rothman (1992) pointed out that "IQ explains but little in the development of moral reasoning" (p.330). It is as though the intellectually gifted know what is expected as answers on the tests and are able to perform the necessary intellectual acrobatics to score highly, but may not choose to abide by the answers they write down. Yet in some societies, such as those which are strong adherents of Islam, received morality is itself a form of giftedness and gifted cognitive ability may be seen as largely irrelevant. In Muslim Malaysia, for example, success in education is specifically outlined in government policy as "a belief in God and high moral standards" (Adimin, 2002. P. 26), and in many such countries unquestioning submissiveness to the Koran and priestly edicts is seen as the true gift. As there is an estimated 1.3 billion Muslims, one sixth of the world's population, conceptions of giftedness are clearly varied and must be recognised.

The West is not exempt from its assumed relationship between received morality and giftedness. The basic idea is that the higher the IQ the more moral the scorer, which also influences who may be recognised as gifted (as presented by e.g. Galton, 1869; Jensen, 1998; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Yet many top-ranking Nazis were intellectually gifted and beautifully cultured, which did not stop them from behaving immorally (Zilmer, Harrower, Rizler & Archer, 1995). Because of this implicit association, youngsters with high IQ scores can anticipate entry to leadership courses (at least in the USA). From earliest childhood, the gifted leader is supposed to show enthusiasm, easy communication, problem-solving skills, humour, self-control and conscientiousness, as well as very high intelligence (Sisk, 2001). But of course, the students are not being offered leadership tutoring *per se*, but leadership within the received moral structure.

On the other hand, some claim the gifted are morally more fragile, so that educational frustration will direct them to crime more than less able youngsters (George, 1992), or that they have "nothing in common" with other children, to the extent that if forced to mix they may become emotionally ill or socially misbehave (Gross, 1992). But in spite of some strong beliefs of a relationship between morality and giftedness – positive or negative - the only evidence lies in paper and pencil morality tests, an association based on the shared Western, largely Protestant, morality the tests tap. Although in real life there is no measured evidence of a relationship between morality and gifts in either children or adults, those who are able to respond in the way of the dominant morality are more likely to be chosen as gifted. There are often special allowances, though, for highly creative people, such as Pablo Picasso or Ernest Hemmingway, who fit the model of the wild "Bohemian" artist.

2) Gender affects gifted development

Internationally, concepts of gender provide a clear and relatively easy measure example of socio-educational permission to be gifted. Most obviously, gender achievements in countries where girls are not allowed any education beyond puberty, if at all, will grossly exaggerate the apparent differences in native ability between the sexes. Heller & Ziegler (1996), in an international review of research on gender differences in mathematics and natural sciences, failed to find any reliable evidence that girls are inherently less able than boys. Consequently, they suggested that girls and boys can act as experimental controls for each other to gauge the power of social effects, eventually best seen in career outcomes. They pointed out, for example, that even on present tests of spatial abilities at which boys do better, one would expect only twice as many male engineering graduates as females, whereas there are 30 times as many. In the USA, Wilson, Stocking, and Goldstein (1994) reported that female and male adolescents generally selected courses that followed traditional gender stereotypes, males generally preferring mathematics and science.

Comparing gifted gender achievements, even between the cousinly relationship of the USA and Britain, highlights some highly statistically significant differences between which gender may be permitted to be as gifted and in what subject areas (Freeman, 2003). In Britain, the academic achievements of gifted girls at school are now surpassing those of gifted boys in virtually all areas of study and at all school ages, including mathematics and the hard sciences, though excluding physical education (Arnot, Gray & Rudduck, 1998; DES, 2000). This phenomenon, the reversal of conventional notions of gender achievement, is also growing in other parts of Europe and Australia, though not in Germany or Italy. The reasons for the British changes are probably two-fold:

- greater female confidence in their abilities, i.e. changing concepts of who may be seen as gifted in what subject areas
- changes in the style and content of school curriculum and assessment methods, i.e. fewer short-term memory examinations, such as multiple choice, and greater reliance on long-term dedicated project-based work.

In the USA, though, the gifted gender picture is quite different. For example, in mathematics, science and vocational (male type) aptitude scales, "talented" 17 year-old boys scored 8-10 times more frequently within the top 10 per cent (Hedges & Nowell, 1995). For several tests, no female managed to score at all in the top three per cent. However, the researchers found the talented boys to be at a profound disadvantage in literacy skills, by as much as a year and a half. They concluded that there are innate unalterable gender differences. Other American

work, notably by Benbow and her team, (e.g. Lubinski, Benbow & Morelock, 2000), found the same "robust gender differences" in mathematical reasoning ability in favour of boys, which they have found to be longitudinally stable. Winner (1996) writes that when girls start school in the USA, they are identified in the same proportions as boys for gifted programmes, but as they get older, there is a striking fall in the proportion of girls. Although girls make up half the gifted population in kindergarten, this proportion, she writes, shrinks to less than 30% at junior high school and even lower at high school. Thus, it seems that in the USA, conceptions of giftedness and gender are more specifically associated with subject areas than in Britain. These concepts of who may be gifted, and in what areas, patently affect the individual careers of men and women, and their achievements and earning power across the life-span.

3) Expected emotional development affects the choice of children as gifted

Around the world, lists of the supposed characteristics of gifted children are given to teachers to help them in selection for special educational provision. As these lists are based on local conceptions the characteristics vary widely. Many are concerned with the presentation of the child's self, such as manners, articulacy and appearance. They can be entirely negative, as in this *complete* list (Northamptonshire County Council, UK, 1994, p 15).

> "Prefers friendship with older pupils or adults.
> Excessively self-critical.
> Unable to make good relations with peer groups and teachers.
> Emotionally unstable.
> Low self-esteem, withdrawn and sometimes aggressive."

Indeed, this negativity is widespread. Plucker & Levy (2001) describe the life of the gifted and talented in the USA as beset with emotional problems, such as "depression and feelings of isolation" and they suggest that the appearance of contentment is false, recommending preventative therapy. American gifted girls especially, have been found to be more depressed than equally able boys, often underestimating their abilities because of conflicts between of success and 'femininity' (Luthar, Zigler, & Goldstein, 1992). Yet at least as much evidence provides the entirely opposite picture; the gifted being at least as emotionally well balanced as any others. For example, a recent study of over 220 gifted and non-gifted American children in their first year of high-school concluded that the gifted saw themselves as being more intimate with friends, took more sports-related and danger-related risks, and felt that they were at least as good in social-skills as their non-gifted peers: their teachers agreed (Field, Harding, Yando, Gonzalez, Lasko, Bendell and Marks, 1998). Freeman's 30-year study in Britain found that it was the labelled gifted who had more emotional problems than the identically able but unlabelled gifted (Freeman, 2001, and see below).

It seems as though emotional development as part of the concept of giftedness, rather depends on the cultural stereotype and the research methodology. And if emotional development forms part of the conceptual guide for selection, there will be wide variation in who is seen as gifted along the spectrum of what is seen as emotionally normal to emotionally disturbed. American work has shown that teachers trained to see through the myths are better at finding the gifted (Hansen and Feldhusen, 1994). And fortunately, many teachers can be very perceptive, spotting and nurturing talent which others or tests may miss. Such intuitive, inspiring teachers are lauded in creative literature, if not recognised in statistical tables.

International differences in conceptions of giftedness

Although it is Sweden which hosts the Nobel Prize for world-class excellence, gifted children at school are barely recognised either there or in any of the other Scandinavian countries. But then, the standard of basic education in those countries is extremely high in world terms, such that not only do Scandinavian youngsters usually come around the top in international surveys, but in proportion to their size the countries produce as many world-class creatively gifted adults as anywhere. Yet across their Northern borders, Russian culture is associated with a passion for the promotion of talent and national pride in its high-achievers (Persson, Joswig & Balogh, 2000). Indeed, long before the Communist Revolution in 1917, gifted and talented children from all over the country were sent to Moscow and Saint Petersburg to high-level specialist schools, rich in tradition, in fields such as painting, ballet and music. In the USA, millions of dollars from educational authorities and parents support a multitude of gifted programs for children, and although there is no proportional shortage of world-beaters there either, it is far from sure how much of their success is due to any of those programs.

But where giftedness is recognised, there is a major split in its conception between Eastern and Western philosophy (Stevenson, 1998; Freeman, 2002b). The balance is between the relative effects of genetics and environment, and according concern and practical provision made for individuals according to those concepts. Understanding the two major approaches at either end of the spectrum throws a fresh light on what is normally regarded in the Western World as universal understanding about gifts.

The two ends of the spectrum of approaches to giftedness can be summarised roughly as follows:

- In the Far East, environmental influences are generally accepted as dominant. Every baby is seen as being born with similar potential; the main difference in children is in rate of development - which to a large extent is in the power of each individual to fulfil through hard work. However, some Far Eastern countries practice the Western idea of selecting children by high measured ability for special education (e.g. Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong).
- In the Western World, genetic influences are generally seen as dominant. Consequently, Western World children are assessed and tested to discover their aptitudes – the vast majority being seen as incapable of high-level learning and achievement, other than in egalitarian countries like Scandinavia or less interested ones like Italy.

The concept of widespread potential

Confucian views, first aired more than 2,000 years ago, continue to exert an influence on how achievement is regarded today in East Asian cultures. Although innate factors are recognised, the keys to progress in all aspects of life are seen as diligence, persistence and practice: along with the belief by both teacher and pupil that the latter is capable of the learning. The teacher's efforts therefore, are seen as critical to the pupil's success, rather than only the child's innate ability. Acceleration and special schooling in China are tiny in terms of its population of around 2.2 billion people: almost all extra education for the gifted and talented is by self-selection. There is no élite group whose status or privileges are defined in terms of inborn superiority; each one has to earn their place. In Japan, all primary-age

children are regarded as similar in potential so that differences in their achievement are due both to their hard work as well as the teacher's competence. The potential long-term rewards for the diligence these small children must shoulder are in their choice of secondary school, providing access to university, followed by a good career – and a good pension. It is possible that this style of learning is even enhancing the IQ scores of Japanese children, which are rising along with their improving academic work (Flynn, 1991).

In almost all international comparisons of children's achievements, those of East Asian elementary and secondary school pupils have been outstanding, even among the top performers. In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 1999), for example, "the top four of the 41 participating countries in mathematics, and three of the top four countries in science were from East Asia." (Stevenson, Lee & Mu, 2000, p. 167). Yet Chinese children show no special precocity in mathematics during their preschool years; differentiation in their accomplishments starts at school. Nor is this excellence limited to a few star performers, as in the Western model.

The concept of limited gifts

Internationally, the most frequently used concept of giftedness is that resulting from an appropriately nurtured base of high-level potential. The USA took the lead in this view in the early 1900s, putting energy, research and government commitment into the scientific study of giftedness, a century earlier than anywhere else. Those foundation concepts from the 1920s still affect practice, in the sense that abilities are seen as sufficiently measurable to use precise cut-off points for the selection of children. For example, the widespread Talent Searches in the USA select a band of students for gifted programs, based on the top-scoring 1% to 5% on tests, the students often being first chosen for these tests by teacher selection (Freeman, 2002b).

A further surge in the final quarter of the 20th century was encouraged by reports such as the *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), alerting the nation to an educational slide into mediocrity, as well as the TIMSS study (1999) which showed that in mathematics at 8th grade, American students were rated 19th out of the 21 countries studied. This worryingly low standard, compared with other developed countries, provides some understanding of US concern and industry in special education for the gifted and talented. By 1990 all American states had enacted legislation and had policies for gifted students in place, and although these policies are mostly mandatory, over a decade later provision is far from even. Where the basic standard of education is lower there seems to be a greater need to provide extra help for those with the most promise; to 'rescue' the brightest children.

Across the centuries, however, Western Europe has always recognised some individuals as capable of a higher level of functioning as most others - from the philosophers of Ancient Greece to the present day - influencing world history. But unlike the USA, there has never been a concerted effort across large areas to promote gifts and talents, until the European Council (a body for inter-governmental cooperation between 25 European states), recommended special educational provision for gifted children (Council of Europe, 1994). It did, though, bow to Political Correctness by insisting that this should "in no way privilege one group of children to the detriment of the others" (p. 1). There is still a fierce political struggle in Western European education between the ideals of élitism and egalitarianism.

The UK and the USA provide the closest comparison of ideas of giftedness. Until 1998, when the UK government announced that 'gifted and talented' were the terms of choice, there had been a strong aversion to those terms among teachers, with their implications of fixed abilities and unearned privilege. This produced a thesaurus of circumlocutions, such as 'more able' or 'very able', or quite simply 'able'. In line, although the American Marland Report was published in 1972, the UK equivalent by Freeman was not published until quarter of a century later (Freeman, 1998). Yet perhaps there is general agreement either side of the Atlantic that provision is inconsistent, geographically biased and associated with both the reality and the fear of élitism.

These different concepts of giftedness, whether limited in the Western view to a tiny proportion of the population, or spread more widely in terms of potential in the Confucian view, inevitably make a difference as to who is given access to opportunities to develop excellence.

Conceptions and practice

Unfortunately, scientific evidence as a basis for any educational action is not usual in any part of the world. Typically, published research reflects that of the culture and language of the population on which it was done. In many edited books (e.g. Spain, France, Italy, Russia, the USA) every paper reflects that culture, without mention of the world outside, other than perhaps North America. It is important, though, to know the approach taken to any study, because this "grounds" the work in a specific epistemological stance in which data are perceived and analysed, and from which general conclusions are drawn.

In spite of considerable searching of the literature and questioning of practitioners, this writer has not yet found a single scientific comparison between specific gifted programmes, either cross-culturally or within one country. Nor has there even been a comparison between one aspect of such a program and any other, whether in school or out. As a result, it is hard to be precise as to what type of provision would be the most appropriate and effective in any given cultural situation. International comparisons are generally made between varied approaches in terms of competitions (e.g. the Mathematics Olympiad) or surveys such as TIMMS (1999). National advances and economic success can be surveyed and compared in terms of education, such as that by Lynn & Vanhanen (2002) of 60 countries, who identified a positive correlation between assessments of national mental ability and real gross domestic product. The countries of the Pacific Rim, they found, had a notably rising high IQ and a commensurate economic growth.

In whatever manner the gifted are selected for special provision, the outcome is most likely to be positive. It is not, after all, surprising those carefully selected, bright, keen children will learn more than those who have not experienced extra programmes of any kind, whether because of the extra education and/or the 'Hawthorn Effect'. Indeed, it would be strange if there was no positive change. This means that raw comparisons between the achievements of potentially equally able youngsters who have attended a particular scheme, and of those who have not, do not provide reliable evidence of which aspects of that scheme are the most efficient.

The growing trend around the world is to offer non-selective open-access to very high-level learning opportunities, so that no keen youngster is turned away without even a chance of

attempting it. This is seen in the Children's Palaces of China, which provide non-selective, inexpensive, high-level out-of-school education for youngsters who are prepared to put in the effort. Children's Palaces are essentially learning centres of a very high standard, accommodation varying from a converted house to a purpose-built skyscraper. They are a thriving and integral part of the Chinese education scene, working across the arts, sciences and technology. The clustering of resources across different disciplines also enables children to discover activities they did not know existed. (Personal communication, Prof Jiannong Shi Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences).

A very different, but equally open, approach is taken by the American Renaissance Quest Camps, which are designed for the whole family, offering the educational means and support to take interests to any height. In Israel, The Technological Centre for the Galilee offers extremely high-level self-selected science (Brumbaugh, Marchaim & Litto, 1994). The centre works with the local comprehensive school, from which teenagers have been invited for more than 18 years to work on their own projects under supervision. Youngsters design and conduct work on original problems for which there are neither existing answers nor (often) methods, continuing to work with the data back at school. The youngsters' work can reach masters degree standard. The cost is low and largely supported by the state.

In these above examples, the concept of giftedness is neither fixed nor the children preselected, allowing the possibility of unrecognised gifts and talents to emerge and grow with provision and encouragement, fuelled by the motivation of all concerned.

The Western model of diagnose-and-treat for educating the gifted and talented is in direct opposition to the Eastern model of open access, though both concepts operate across the world. Each reflects a social construction of identity and developmental potential. It is not always easy for educational practitioners to see the effects of unrecognised assumptions about gifts and talents, and it would not seem wise to copy any educational action directly from one culture to another without recognising and adapting to the inevitable differences in background and outlook. Not only does a wider view challenge the unrecognised dominant conceptions and educational effects, but it can offer support to educational providers who aim to make changes. Yet, each individual life and its opportunities is unique, and so the most pertinent approach must remain holistic and long-view, seeing gifts and talents in terms of individual patterns within a culture (Baltes, Staudinger & Lindberger 1999).

Freeman's Thirty-Year Study

In 1974, the writer took a sample of 72 children identified as gifted by their parents (with minimal testing) who had joined the National Association for Gifted Children (UK) on their behalf (Freeman, 2001). Each of these children was matched for age and gender with two comparison children – the first was a non-recognised but identically able child, and the second was taken at random, each trio from the same school class, varying from a music school to a non-selective school. They were originally aged between just five and 14 years-old, two boys to every girl. The sample contained 210 children, 210 sets of parents, 61 head teachers and 61 class teachers.

The children were tested in their schools and homes on a wide variety of measures including Stanford-Binet IQ, personality, musical ability, and general creativity, and they and their parents interviewed with open-ended newly-designed questionnaires in their homes. The class-teachers completed a standardised questionnaire on the children's behaviour in class, and they and the head teachers were interviewed in the schools. The children's environmental circumstances were rated. At all stages, the interview data was rated for statistical analysis, as well as being audio-recorded and transcribed for further interpretation. The home- and school-based information proved to be very much richer than that which can ever be obtained from a ticked postal-questionnaire, a telephone interview, or an entirely school-based project.

<u>Stanford-Binet IQs of the whole sample</u>

- 65 between IQ 97-120
- 63 between IQ 121-140
- 82 between IQ 141-170 (of whom 16 scored IQ 170).

This is still an on-going investigation, in which the sample is still being traced and contacted for the 30-year follow-up. What follows is an overview of how it looks now, with regard to most of the labelled and unlabelled gifted.

Early bases affect the life path

This research has shown that strong pressure to conform to expectations – positive or negative – has affected the sample's life paths for decades. The greater the individual inclination to accept that pressure, the less he or she is likely to stand out in terms of excellence and gifts into adulthood. In general (but not always), those with an exceptionally high IQs, say within the top 1%, did much better than those with merely a very high score, say within the top 10%. The least successful had remained with less mature and effective, shorter-term cognitive techniques, like rote-memorising their lesson-notes at school, and rarely looking things up or using other resources.

The idea that the recognised gifted should be more advanced in school achievements than their age-peers was current among teachers. Youngsters who were identically able, yet not labelled as gifted, were under much less pressure, and benefited in their growing up both socially and in the breadth of their learning and activities. Some (especially boys), appeared to subdue their personalities in their striving for high grades, so their healthy emotional development, including the freedom to play and be creative, had been severely curtailed (as Sternberg and Lubart have also described, 1995). In fact, such pressure sometimes had the opposite effect from what was intended; the worst affected being the accelerated boys

specialising in science. They could miss out on the healthy development of social skills and relationships, and their self-images were poor. All work and no play not only makes Jack a dull boy, but a sad and lonely one too. Today in their late thirties, many regret the way their childhood was spent in heavy study. The respect of others is important to the developing young person: when the gifted received it, allowing them enough responsibility to make many of their own discoveries and decisions, they were able to lead more satisfying lives.

In terms of conventional success in life, such as high examination marks, climbing the corporate ladder or making money, the primary building blocks were always keenness and hard work, allied with sufficient ability, educational opportunity and an emotionally supportive home. For the high achievers in adulthood, there was usually a mutually rewarding situation both at home and school, a feeling of comfort with their desire to learn, based on their parents' early pride in them as individuals. The most successful as adults were also more robust and sociable as children, and had an external support system of responsive schools, sometimes sincerely felt religion and a high IQ (rather in line with Sternberg's idea of Successful Intelligence, 1997). High-level creativity, though, as seen in adult careers, demanded a particular type of personality which enabled the individual to act independently of other's opinions. Whether youngsters were modest, conventional and rule-abiding, or constantly straining to change the world, they usually carried their personal style through to adulthood. The boy who gained his PhD at 21, for example, is now a professor. The artistic boy, who simply removed himself from school from time to time to write poetry and think, has become a very successful and sensitive international architect.

Poor emotional home circumstances, such as a constant change of "uncles", did nothing but harm to the possibility of adult excellence: no member of this sample proved to be a tortured genius in the 19th century mould. Although some early emotional problems, sometimes attributed to giftedness, proved to be those of childhood and simply vanished with maturity, early poor self-concept often took its toll in low ambition and continued low feelings of self-worth. In general, it was true that poverty disables and wealth enables. The boy born into poverty suffered in his cold house from ear, nose and throat infections and so missed a lot of school. In spite of his IQ of 170, he did not seem to have enough physical and mental strength to enjoy it. He became clinically depressed and is now living with his wife in modest circumstances. The identically able but rich gifted girl, though, took a year after her English boarding school to sample Harvard University (USA), seen as her rightful and natural progression, before entering Cambridge University (UK). She is now a highly successful businesswoman.

Negative social pressures virtually always had negative effects. Unfortunately, too many had learned from their circumstances and parental outlook that some of the good things in life, such as a professional career, were not for them, even though they had the ability to do almost anything. Yet they barely attempted to fulfil the early dreams they had described and opted for secure modestly-paid occupations. Unfortunately too, teachers sometimes seem to feel a need to put the liveliest and more creative youngsters in their "place". But there are, of course, many non-scholastic routes to satisfaction in achievement, such as the boy born to poverty who did not see white collar work as being for "the likes of me", went to work for the local electricity company and is now in charge of electricity for the South West of the country at the age of 34.

As William Shakespeare wrote in *Twelfth Night* – "Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before 'em?". The nagging question throughout this long study was why so many bright eager children had been obliged to struggle so hard to even partly realise their gifts. Far too much of their energy went into fighting their school regimes, and their teachers supposedly there to help them. Some gifts were more encouraged in schools than others, particularly science and mathematics, possibly because easily recognisable outstanding results could be more easily achieved in those subjects. Too many youngsters wasted time and energies following wrong channels because of poor educational guidance. At times, subjects told the writer that they'd known exactly what they had wanted to do, but were thwarted by school time-tabling or strong teacher opinion. One quiet girl at a high-powered school, for example, was told that biology was not for her; the teachers appeared to support those with stronger personalities. But she defied them by secretly entering a competition with her own biological research, and won. The school then recognised her potential and permitted her to study in the subject area of her choice. Her own initiative and hard work enabled her to be the success she is today as a (still determined) research pharmacist.

The social pressures which can diminish a growing child's feelings of worth were not helped much by the schools and universities they attended. For example, there was neither adequate preparation from her school, nor support from Oxford University for the gentle sensitive girl of IQ 170 who had made a mighty intellectual jump to get there from the wrong side of the tracks. Totally unprepared by her school and by her single mother, she found the social hurdles of this upper-class institution among people with far more money and experience than she could have imagined, shocked her deeply. She left in tears after just a few months for a very much more modest future than had been anticipated. Although educational institutions cannot be responsible for the infinite interactions of individual personality and ability, there is a great deal that hers could have done to help her, and indeed improve the care of their brightest students.

Being labelled as gifted was associated with sometimes complicated outcomes depending on the concepts underlying the labels. These could affect progress positively or negatively. Some young people rose to the challenge and thrived on it, while others felt they could never live up to the image, so in order to shine had chosen a career below their capabilities. Others simply ignored their potential, fitting in with the local culture which did not have a place for giftedness. People's memories were not always reliable, and many had retained very different impressions of their younger lives from what had been audio-recorded and transcribed.

It was crystal clear that high-level school-grades were not a passport to adult success. But it also seems that many influences on happiness and excellence are like love – it is possible to say how it feels and what happens because of it, but there is no sure recipe. What we do have is very clear information about what the gifted and talented need by way of support for excellence – a challenging education, high-level opportunities and someone who believes in them.

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