



Newsmagazine

THE ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN OF ONTARIO

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.Gifted Boys and Gender Issues

By: Jane Langille

In the last issue we explored gender issues that may be experienced by gifted girls. This time it’s the boys’ turn! Gifted boys have many of the same struggles with gender issues as average boys, but their high intellectual ability, intensity, and heightened sensitivity give these issues a different spin. This article will outline the many problems that may be encountered by gifted males and provide some important advice for raising your sons to help them achieve their potential.

In the book *Smart Boys*, authors Barbara Kerr, Ph.D. and Sanford Cohn, Ph.D. present an exploration into determining why so many of Dr. Kerr’s gifted male classmates from 1969 did not achieve greater potential. In their follow-up study, these authors found that the men had an overall lack of concern for eminence and uncertainty about chosen vocations. They reviewed another study done by Dr. James Alvino in 1988, where it was discovered that the gifted males suffered from limited self and role-identities, as well as limited rights and capacities to express emotions. The boys in this study felt closer to their mothers than their fathers and feared their fathers’ expectations. Fifty percent of the boys felt that it was necessary to hide their intelligence and two-thirds admitted to problems of fitting in with other boys. Perfectionism was also an issue, as was the success trap – the problem of putting success ahead of happiness.

Kerr and Cohn outline several other issues gifted boys may face. First of all, boys who are gifted carry a special burden to develop and prove their masculinity while at the same time developing their intellectual gift. There can be an early pressure to compete in athletics, an attempt to ensure the masculinity of the gifted boy so that he is not stereotyped as a nerd. “Kindergarten redshirting” is the practice of delaying a child’s entrance into kindergarten by a year to give him extra time to mature, which could well be required in some cases but for some bright little boys, can be more reflective of the parents’ motive to ensure that the child has a physical advantage in sports or has an edge against potential bullying at recess. In fact, bright boys may be better off entering kindergarten earlier than average boys, especially if they are showing signs of being ready, for example previous preschool experience or early reading precocity (Gullo & Burton, 1992).

In his book *Real Boys*, William Pollack discusses the unspoken rules that all boys must learn to assert their masculinity, called “The Boy Code”. Pollack is a clinical psychologist and a director of the Center for Men at the Harvard Medical School. He describes the four tenets of the code as: “The Sturdy Oak” or the need to be stoic, stable and independent, never needing help from others; “Give ‘em Hell” or the imperative to engage in risky, daring behaviour and act tough and macho; “The Big Wheel” or the need to achieve leadership, status, dominance and power; and “No Sissy Stuff” or the credo to never show dependence, warmth, sympathy or demonstrate emotional responses to another male. While all boys may be subjected to “The Boy Code” as they grow up, it becomes particularly...Continued pg3

President's Message

As another shiny new year begins, we are continuing to work together to advocate for our gifted children. ABC Ontario has sent a letter to the new Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy, to outline ABC's mission and objectives, to inform him about ABC's support and participation in the development of program standards, and to request a meeting. You can find a copy of the letter on our web site. You will also find that our webmaster has updated the look and content of the site. We are pleased to offer past articles from the ABC Newsmagazine from the last year, accessible to any site visitors. We hope these will be a helpful resource for parents and educators alike. Visit the web site often to see updates in the "New" section.

ABC is an all-volunteer organization and would not exist without the generosity of our volunteers. We are pleased to announce that four new volunteers have stepped forward to work on the Provincial Executive. As well, four ABC members were elected as school board trustees in the November 2003 Municipal Elections. See page 7 for details.

In this issue of the Newsmagazine we feature the topic of gender issues as experienced by gifted boys, following on the article in the last issue about gender issues for gifted girls. We also outline the Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) Process which may be of interest to parents of gifted secondary students. Have a look at the upcoming events calendar, because the London Chapter is hosting the Annual General Meeting this year in May and we look forward to seeing you there.

Carol Ann Sloat
President, ABC Ontario

ABC Ontario Elections for 2004-2006 are coming soon !

If you are willing to volunteer over the coming two years, please contact Elizabeth Buckingham, Chair of the Nominations Committee by sending an email to nominations@abcontario.ca.

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ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN OF ONTARIO
2 BLOOR STREET W.
SUITE 100-156
TORONTO, ON M4W 2G7
(416) 925-6136

www.abcontario.ca
[Email: abcinfo@abcontario.ca](mailto:abcinfo@abcontario.ca)

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Gifted Boys and Gender Issues (...continued from page 1)

problematic for gifted boys who may suffer from internal turmoil when they attempt to live by the Boy Code while at the same time being full of emotional sensitivity and intellectual intensity. They may grow to resent the fact that their intensity cannot be directed toward intellectual or creative activities if they are to prove they are 'real boys'. Pollack also asserts that other external societal myths keep gifted boys from expressing their true selves. The first myth is 'Boys will be boys', which assumes that there is a direct link from testosterone to aggression to violence and that there are few things parents or educators can do to shape boys' behaviour. The second myth is 'Boys *should* be boys', perhaps even more insidious than the first myth because it implies that boys must fulfill the masculine stereotype. The third myth is that 'Boys are toxic', due to their lack of emotional awareness and their destructive behaviour to the social environment'. This myth implies that boys are unfeeling barbarians who need to be grouped with girls to be civilized.

Another important issue explored by Kerr and Cohn is that of underachievement. One of the most important findings across a number of studies of underachievers is that the vast majority are male. Kerr and Cohn have given the name 'Bartleby Syndrome' to the pattern of behaviours they have found common in a particular type of underachieving gifted boy, one who exhibits a puzzling pattern of congenial refusal to do homework or complete tasks which 'he would prefer not to do'. They have recognized Bartleby-like behaviours in gifted boys starting between the third and fifth grade. The boys are usually friendly and mild-mannered and seem to have no particular motivation for underachievement. The authors assert that the underlying cause may be the need for these boys to establish their independence by making their own decisions and resisting the wishes of authority figures. As well, by the third grade, gifted boys who continue to excel academically begin to be teased by other boys, so the cost for intellectual achievement rises. Finally, this may be a tactic for the boys to separate themselves from the girls, who may be starting to be more assertive in class. In general, underachieving gifted boys have several common issues: they are more socially immature in that their emotional judgment lags their intellectual development; they have more emotional problems, which tend to be more long term in nature than situational; they engage in more antisocial behaviour, however they are not sociopaths as they have an inherent need for profound thought; and they have lower self-concepts, i.e. they are convinced of their own inability to succeed.

There are many things parents and educators can do to help gifted boys develop their own sense of masculinity while developing their intellectual gift. Thomas Hebert published an article called 'When Bright Boys Play Sports: How Parents Can Help'. He advises parents who are unable to convince their non-athletic son that his life is not miserable simply because he does not do well athletically. If he is passionate about sports, parents should consider encouraging non-competitive sports or suggest that their son apply his intellectual talents to sports in a creative way, such as becoming the sports writer for the school newspaper. It is recommended that the choice of the sport belongs to the child, as many young men speak out if they are not enjoying a sport selected by their parents and only tolerate the sport until they are old enough to exert their own influence and then drop it for good. As well, parents should remember that there is nothing wrong with not playing a team sport. The most important thing is that boys are enjoying themselves and are developing some self-esteem regardless of the sport, from the solitude of long-distance running, to the more social sports of golf, tennis and skiing, to the camaraderie of team sports.

William Pollack asserts in *Real Boys* that parents should refuse to subscribe to 'The Boy Code' and recognize that there are many ways that boys develop into worthy men. Boys are not just victims of their hormones and their behaviour can be shaped by those who care about them. Kerr and Cohn provide ideas for intellectual challenge, emotional support and spiritual guidance to help gifted boys achieve their full potentials as gifted men. Starting with help for the very young gifted boys, schools should consider instituting early identification programs for those in preschool and kindergarten. Parents should understand the hazards of kindergarten redshirting for gifted boys. Ideally, gifted education programs should be created to challenge gifted boys before the 'Bartleby Syndrome' sets in. Mentors and advanced training are very important in leading gifted boys to explore and excel in their chosen professions. Mentors can be either male or female. Of interest, Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso were both mentored by Gertrude Stein, and eminent psychotherapist Carl Rogers was mentored by Leta Stetter Hollingworth, considered the 'mother of gifted education'. In terms of overcoming underachievement, Kerr and Cohn recommend 'hipping it in the bud'; help the boy discover topics and areas of interest, model achievement through their own behaviour, and working with educators to ensure an education which is stimulating, appropriate, challenging and flexible.

Overall, the goal is to help gifted boys achieve a secure masculine identity together with a strong identity as gifted individuals.

References

Kerr, Barbara A. Ph.D. and Sanford J. Cohn, Ph.D., (2001) *Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood & The Search for Meaning*, Great Potential Press, Scottsdale, Arizona, www.giftedbooks.com.

Pollack, William (1998). *Real Boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. Holt: New York.

Hebert, Thomas P. *When Bright Boys Play Sports: How Parents Can Help*. Excerpt from *Parenting for High Potential* (June 1998). National Association for Gifted Children, www.nagc.org/Publications/Parenting/sports.htm.

The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Process

The Prior Learning and Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process is the formal evaluation and credit-granting procedure in Ontario secondary schools where students may obtain credits for prior learning. Prior learning is defined as including the knowledge and skills acquired in both formal and informal ways, outside the secondary school experience. Students may be evaluated against the expectations of the provincial curriculum policy documents and earn credits towards their secondary school diploma. There are two components of the PLAR process, one called “challenge” and the other called “equivalency”. The “challenge” process involves assessment for the purpose of granting a credit for a Grade 10, 11, or 12 course. The “equivalency” process would apply in cases where the student has moved from another jurisdiction..

This PLAR process may be of interest to gifted high school students. According to the Ministry of Education’s Policy/Program Memorandum No. 129, released July 6, 2001, all school boards are responsible for developing and implementing PLAR policies and procedures that are consistent with the provincial policy. All credits granted through the PLAR process must represent the same standards of achievement as credits granted to students who have taken the actual courses. The PLAR process is free: boards cannot charge a fee. All of the specific details about requirements and responsibilities of school boards and principals can be found at <http://mettawas21.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/129.html>.

It is important to note that the challenge process is not a method for students to improve a mark in a course for which they have already earned a credit, nor as a way to obtain a credit for a course that they have previously failed. Students may challenge for credit only for Grade 10, 11, and 12 courses in curriculum policy documents. Further, students may earn no more than four credits through the challenge process, including a maximum of two credits in any one discipline. Here’s the clincher – “Students may challenge for credit for a course only if they can provide reasonable evidence to the principal that they would be likely to be successful in the challenge process in accordance with criteria established by the ministry in OSS, section 6.6, and in this memorandum (Policy/Program Memorandum No. 129), and to policies and procedures established by the board.” In cases where there is disagreement with the decision of the principal, the parent or an adult student may ask the appropriate supervisory officer to review the matter. Students may use certificates or other records of accomplishment earned outside the school as reasonable evidence of eligibility to challenge for credit for a related course within the curriculum. Finally, a student must challenge for credit for an entire course, whether it is a full or partial credit course.

At the web site noted above, you will also find the application form which is submitted to the school principal. There are other things here that parents and students should be aware of before considering the PLAR challenge process. A passing or failing mark from a challenge for credit for a Grade 11 or 12 course will be entered onto the student’s Ontario Student Transcript. A passing or failing mark or a withdrawal for any Grade 10, 11, or 12 course will be entered on the student’s PLAR tracking record and is maintained in the Ontario Student Record. The PLAR challenge process includes formal tests, balanced between written work and demonstration, as appropriate for the subject, worth 70% of the final mark. Other types of assessment make up the other 30% of the final mark. As part of their application, students must write a paragraph of 100-200 words stating why they want to challenge for credit for a particular course. Further, they must submit evidence supporting their application, which could include: letters of recommendation from teachers familiar with the course applications; a portfolio of relevant work; proof of successful relevant experience in a supervised setting; proof of independent learning in a relevant area; a videotape, audiotape or CD-ROM with samples of relevant work; or proof of successful completion of any identified prerequisite courses.

Calendar of Upcoming Events in 2004

February 21—Provincial Council Meeting, hosted by the Hamilton Chapter. This meeting is for Executive Members, Chapter Presidents and SEAC Representatives. Confirmed details about the date, location and time can be found at www.abcontario.ca.

March 27—Provincial Executive Meeting—for executive members only

May 1—Annual General Meeting, hosted by the London Chapter. This meeting is for all members and will include the election for executive members for the two year term 2004-2006. Becky Hurwitz is the AGM Co-ordinator and is planning robotic Lego © activities for children. More details about registration and programs to follow closer to the date—check the ABC Ontario web site at www.abcontario.ca.

May 15—Joint Provincial Executive Meeting - for outgoing and incoming executive members, this will be the great parking lot box shuffle, bring your muscles !

Book Reviews

TEACHING GIFTED KIDS IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM: Strategies and Techniques Every Teacher Can Use to Meet the Academic Needs of the Gifted and Talented: Susan Winebrenner, Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2001, Minneapolis, MN, ISBN 1-57542-089-9, www.freespirit.com.

This is the revised, expanded and updated edition of a best-seller which offers practical strategies and techniques that have been tested in thousands of classrooms. The author provides a blueprint for teachers who wish to excite and entice gifted students to be active learners within the regular classroom setting. Winebrenner also explains the myth of elitism and why gifted children need modifications. Permission is granted for individual teachers to photocopy over 50 reproducible pages, for example "The Learning Contract" which specifies the agreement between the teacher and the student regarding expectations and working conditions for alternate activities. Winebrenner feels that differentiation and extending should be encouraged, as gifted children need regular opportunities to struggle to learn rather than being stifled by sitting in classes they could easily teach themselves. Three great example strategies are the "Compactor", "Most Difficult First Strategy" and my personal favourite for high verbal children, the "alternate spelling strategies", which excuses them from the weekly spelling test and monotonous word game activities if the y score at least 90% on a pre-test, while providing them with alternative, more advanced vocabulary and activities.

THE MYTH OF ABILITY: Nurturing Mathematical Talent in Every Child: John Mighton, House of Anansi Press Inc., 2003, Toronto, ON, ISBN 0-88784-693-9, www.anansi.ca.

John Mighton's new book outlines the strategies he has developed as the founder of JUMP (Junior Undiscovered Math Prodigies), an educational charity which provides free tutoring to elementary-level students. The author's belief, based on observations of hundreds of students, is that with proper teaching and minimal tutorial support, a grade 3 class should be easily performing at the grade 6 or 7 level in mathematics. Mighton says that "nothing focuses the attention of children more sharply than the feeling that they are meeting a series of challenges and succeeding brilliantly". His point of view on teacher's guides to instruction in mathematics is that they focus too much on the negative without offering positive instruction strategies to help children understand the underlying concepts. His method breaks concepts down into steps, builds confidence through praise along the way, and relies on the overarching belief that all children can achieve mathematical excellence. Six units from the JUMP teaching manual are included in this book so teachers can work through these with their students and then see how they can adapt the approach to teaching any kind of mathematics. More information about starting a tutoring program modelled on JUMP can be found at the web site www.jumptutoring.org.

Gifted Conference for Educators

EDGO-TAGO (Educators of the Gifted of Ontario—The Association for the Gifted of the Council for Exceptional Children of Ontario) are hosting a conference for all educators called "Enrich and Be Enriched".

When: Friday, April 23, 2004—full day from 9:00am to 2:45 pm.

Where: Catholic Education Centre, Toronto Catholic District School Board, 80 Sheppard Ave E., Toronto

Plan: The plan is to have many experts representing enrichment opportunities at the elementary and secondary levels. All presenters and organizations work province wide. The conference has been designed so that participants will have the opportunity to hear and/or meet almost all of the presenters.

Cost: \$15 for members, \$40 for non-members (which includes a membership valid until September 2005)

Registration Deadline: Monday, April 19, 2004

More details: check the EDGO-TAGO web site for highlights of the day, updates and any changes to content at www.geocities.com/edgotago/.

Web Site Suggestion

The Centre for Gifted Education at the University of Calgary offers an online archive of their newsletter called *CGE News*. Browsing through the Spring 2003 issue was insightful as the CGE has launched an online graduate program in gifted education. The first course was called ‘Conceptual Issues in Gifted Education’, designed to provide advanced study of issues such as identification, developing thinking and creativity skills, and empowering special gifted populations such as women, underachievers, and those with dual exceptionalities. This past fall, Dr. Sal Mendaglio offered the online graduate course called ‘Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Students’. The objective of the CGE is to offer a Masters Degree in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning with a focus on gifted education. Find out more information at www.ucalgary.ca/~gifteduc/.

Congratulations !

In the Municipal Elections held on November 10, 2003, the following ABC members were elected as Trustees for their school boards as follows:

Carol Ann Sloat : ABC Ontario President , SEAC Representative—Grand Erie District School Board

Jennifer Hlusko: ABC Halton Chapter President, outgoing SEAC alternate—Halton District School Board

Caroline Smith: ABC Simcoe Chapter President, outgoing SEAC Representative—Simcoe County District School Board

Robert North: outgoing SEAC alternate—Simcoe County District School Board

May We Introduce...

Over the last few months, four new volunteers have joined the ranks of the Provincial Executive of ABC Ontario.

Elizabeth Buckingham was appointed Secretary. Elizabeth is the SEAC Representative for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

David Croome was appointed chair of the SEAC Committee. David is the ABC Peel Chapter President as well as the SEAC Representative for the Peel District School Board.

Steve Antonsen was appointed chair of the Resource Committee. Steve is a member of ABC Peel Chapter.

Rosann Lacalamita was appointed chair of the Chapter Development Committee. Rosann is a member of the ABC Waterloo Chapter.

