

frustrated when the ideas in her mind exceed the subtlety of language and composition she needs to express them. An ELL with artistic or creative talent may still feel hampered by a lack of skills—for example, in oral expression (language arts), spatial movement and design (math), and color combination (science). While building skills, teachers can also release the talents that these students have so they can experience their strengths. It is a delicate balance between skill instruction and talent development, but it is the only way to avoid the frustration gifted ELLs experience when they focus too much on deficits and not enough on talents and abilities. These gifts are the foundation stones for building their lives.

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Ethical Issues in Educating and Counseling the Gifted¹

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In contrast to the situation in most Western countries, the area of giftedness has not been accepted in Israel as a sub-discipline of educational psychology, but rather as primarily an educational discipline. As a result, many of the people in charge of education of the gifted – teachers, headmasters and headmistresses, school counselors, supervisors, decision makers at both the municipal and the national levels, and policy-makers – have practically no knowledge about the psychological or didactical aspects of giftedness. I have analyzed many consequences of this situation. For example: the inability of untrained teachers to respond to gifted children's needs (David, 2011); not taking emotional-psychological-social components into consideration as a potential cause for dropping out of gifted programs (David, in press b); and the inadequacy of the decision-making process concerning the type of education for the gifted (David, in press a).

The present situation, where nonprofessionals at all levels are in charge of education for the gifted, is also the main reason for severe ethical problems concerning the emotional, social and familial needs of the gifted child. This article concentrates on Israeli examples. At this stage of formulating an ethical code for counseling the gifted, each country must take into consideration its own circumstances, legal facts and the balance of power in the triangle of parents, school, and the authorities.

Ethical problems already appear in the identification process when *confidentiality* is compromised, and the privacy of gifted children continues to be violated later as well: in the attitude of the school staff to the gifted child in the regular classroom, in the teachers' room and during parent-teacher meetings. As policy-makers in the area of giftedness are just bureaucrats, though they may be high-ranking officials, they are not obliged to follow any ethical code. In this article, I will discuss the importance of ethics in teaching and educating the gifted. The article intends to raise the awareness of ethics in gifted education, and to stress the need for an ethical code recommended to anybody who identifies, teaches, instructs, or nurtures the gifted, counsels gifted children and their families, and develops programs for teaching staff.

The Reasons for Non-Ethical Behavior Concerning the Gifted

In Israel, the area of giftedness has no legal constraints and rules, let alone laws. When there is no consensus regarding what is allowed and what is forbidden, there are attempts, in many cases, to act without adequate knowledge, or even when the "knowledge" in question is wrong, namely – when instead of knowledge there are beliefs, opinions and prejudices perceived as solid facts. Every area of knowledge dealing with humans has gone through this phase at its beginning. Giftedness became a subject of public interest about 100 years ago just a short time after psychology began to be accepted as a scientific discipline.

Psychology had no ethical rules at its beginning. For example, before any clear rules were established regarding the prohibition to treat family members or personal friends, it happened quite often that psychologists treated their relatives. Among these was Freud himself, who analyzed his daughter Anna before she herself became a psychoanalyst (Anna Freud, 1895-1982; 2009), and Anna Freud herself treated her friends' children. However, while in psychology this situation has changed, no real changes have occurred in the study of giftedness during all these years. Up to now, many theoreticians and educators are involved in questions such as: Who is gifted? Is education for the gifted necessary? What is the role of the IQ in identification of the gifted? It seems that such questions are of equal interest among both laymen and experts.

It might very well be that the main reason for the lack of ethical rules in the field of giftedness is the lack of awareness on the part of many individuals of the need for such rules, especially for confidentiality. People with no knowledge of the psychology of the gifted, even when they teach gifted children, are usually unaware of the potential damage that might be caused when confidentiality of gifted students is compromised. It might be argued that the reason for this situation has to do with the fact that in Israel people in charge of giftedness in the education system are educators rather than mental health experts, social workers or counselors. But that contrasts with what happens with special-needs children, where clear rules regarding their exposure are applied, or at least – it is known they should be applied, even when such rules are not a part of the legal system.

It might be that the reason for this leniency towards revealing a child's giftedness in general, and the level, sphere, or intensity of giftedness in particular is grounded in the tendency to think that "the gifted will take care of themselves." Sayings such as: "I expected more from YOU" or "If you are gifted, how come you did not get an A in the exam" stem from ignorance in the field of giftedness. They might be perceived as insults when coming from a teacher the child respects and appreciates, and by whom the child is sometimes deeply influenced, and cause long-term harm since perfectionism is quite common among the gifted (Chan, 2009; David, 2009). There are even teachers who themselves use, among other descriptions, the term "nerd" when referring to a gifted child. This verbal connotation is well known in English-speaking countries, where "gifted" has become a synonym of "nerd" (e.g. Bilger, 2004; Definitions net, 2011). The combination of the innate drive towards perfectionism and the teachers pushing towards a "perfect A score" might have severe consequences for the mental health of some gifted children.

Lack of Research-Based Knowledge as a Potential Reason for Ethical Problems in Gifted Counseling

In contradiction to many other areas of psychology and education, where it is clear to everybody that special knowledge is needed in order to express a professional opinion, "everybody has something to say" in the gifted area. Many professionals from a variety of health and education fields, who sometimes have tremendous influence on parents regarding their children, have adopted the habit of volunteering their opinions about gifted children even when not asked. These individuals have no professional knowledge in too many cases, whether psychiatrists or counselors, teachers or heads of government departments. Thus, quite often what they say contradicts the findings of

existing studies. But the parents are impressed by the "expert" title attached to these persons, and accept their false opinion as absolute truth.

Some of the prejudices expressed by these "professional experts" are strengthened by their choice of words. For example: early entrance or grade skipping, both neutral terms in English, are described in Hebrew quite often as "pushing the child" – an expression with a negative connotation. The very frequent use of the word "ripe," meaning "mature enough," as in the claim: "the child is not ripe for..." is employed mainly by teachers and counselors to prevent participation in suitable activities of a talented child who might be somewhat younger than the mean age of children in that group. The proper, accurate phrase would be, as used in English (and in many other languages): "There are gaps among the various abilities of the child as is the case among most young gifted children, especially in cognitive and emotional abilities."

Much worse are the claims that "the child loses his or her childhood," "the child misses the opportunity to be a child," "what is important is not giftedness, but rather being a 'Mensch' (good human being)" or "grades are of no importance – what matters is being socially accepted." The first two claims might make the child believe that there is a contradiction between being a child and satisfying one's curiosity, getting answers to bothersome questions or in general – leading an interesting life. The last two might make the child think that his or her special abilities are of no importance, that giftedness is not something to be glad about; and that maybe it should even be hidden. Having to deny such an essential part of yourself is cruel to anybody. For a child, it is destructive.

Because of lack in education and knowledge regarding giftedness among professionals in education and counseling, many of them tend to rely too much upon their own experience, as well as upon the experience of those close to them. For example, of the many hundreds of pre-and in-service teachers I have taught in the last 15 years in four teachers colleges and one university, I met but a few teachers – and not even one kindergarten teacher – who had recommended early entrance or grade skipping. On the other hand, all kindergarten teachers without exception recommended that at least one child should remain in kindergarten for an extra year rather than start school at age six (the legal, proper time in Israel).

In one of the cases, a kindergarten teacher had recommended for several years that about 30% of children in her class repeat the last year of kindergarten. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the Israeli Ministry of Education (1977) set special rules for the practice of repeating a grade, the number of teachers who have ever employed this practice was dozens of times higher than that of teachers recommending grade skipping. The most common explanation for this recommendation was "I met a boy who skipped a grade and later suffered socially." It was quite clear that the teachers' attitudes, opinions and beliefs played a substantial role in their professional choices, leaving no room for research-based knowledge about grade-skipping or early entrance to school.

Ethical Problems Resulting from Parents' Behavior

Many parents contribute to the problem of unethical behavior regarding their gifted children. In the last 20 years, since I started working on all aspects of the psychology and didactics of giftedness, I have confronted problematic behavior of many parents whose children had been chosen for participation in gifted programs.

There are parents who hide from their children the fact that they had been selected by the school to take the "stage B" giftedness examinations administrated by the Szold Institute (David, in press b) – examinations intended to identify percentile 97 as well as percentile 98.5 children of the upper 15% of grade 2 or 3 children (ibid). There are no statistics on these parents, but from my experience as a counselor for families of gifted children, I know that this phenomenon is not negligible. Such parents find it hard to deal with the possibility that their child could be chosen for a gifted class or a gifted enrichment program. In some cases, they are "against elitism" and in others they are afraid that once their child is labeled as gifted, they would have to offer special treatment which they feel they are unable to do.

Some parents believe that if their child is not identified as gifted he or she will simply "stop being gifted." There are also parents who are so afraid of failure, meaning that their child will not receive the "gifted" label after the examination that they would rather make sure by not sending their child to the examination. A minority of parents, whose older child was sent to the giftedness identification examinations, but did not "pass" them, believe that if the other child is identified as gifted, the one labeled "non-gifted" will be harmed. David et al. (2009) have shown that

sibling relationships are not necessarily harmed in case of one sibling identified as gifted and the other not, regardless of the birth-order. Nevertheless, the belief that these relationships must be harmful seems deeper and certainly much more widely accepted than the findings of quantitative research.

Regardless of the reason, the result is that the child who belongs to percentile 85 or higher level in cognitive abilities ("stage A") is prevented from getting information about further testing. As a result, the child might suffer from deterioration of motivation, lack of belief in one's own abilities, and even from a feeling of failure – knowing that he or she gets good grades, but not knowing there is a good reason for that: high cognitive abilities. Children might believe that their peers are much smarter, and self-perception as an intelligent person will contradict the known results of the first stage of the giftedness examination, and will be perceived as false.

There are parents who do send their children to the "stage B" examinations, and when they receive positive information concerning eligibility for these examinations, they hide it from the child. If the child asks about the answer, the parent says it was negative. Such behavior might destroy completely the child's trust in parents once the "secret" is discovered; thereby losing the main source of support. Indeed, the program offered by the Israeli Ministry of Education does not suit many of the gifted children identified as such (David, 2008). For example, many young gifted children feel they would rather stay in their regular classes than move to a gifted class operating six days a week. Indeed, most parents in some municipalities who have an opportunity to send their children to such a class prefer to turn down the offer (David, in press a). However, the parents' decisions should be made known and explained to the child.

Furthermore, the correlation between the "gifted" label and the actual IQ in Israel is compromised because giftedness is determined not only by the relative intelligence of the child (when comparing it to age-group peers) but also by the geographical zone of residence. Belonging to percentile 97 or higher usually means having a much higher IQ when living in a town among high socio-economic peers than: when living in a small village of low socio-economic families; new immigrants from under-developed countries (David, 2008); or in a peripheral settlement. In order to form a gifted group in these situations, there is a need to include children from much lower percentiles than is the case in big cities in the center of Israel (David et al., 2009).

While the "gifted" label results in many cases of high expectations – some quite unrealistic – from the teachers, the parents and even the child, there are too many children who have to live with the "non-gifted" label. In Israel, about 15% of the children are chosen for the second stage of the giftedness examinations and only about 1.5% are entitled to a gifted education. The number of those who receive the label "non-gifted" is ten times higher than that of the children who are labeled as "gifted." Some of the potential consequences of labeling an intelligent 8-9 year old child as "non-gifted" are discussed elsewhere (David, in press a). However, it is widely agreed that such an adjective includes acknowledgement of failure, although the child has not failed in anything. The child is most probably talented and intelligent, but did not suit the rigid threshold for being chosen in the municipality in a certain year. Or, if the child is a boy, he was not accepted to a certain gifted program because of affirmative action intended to include at least 40% girls in all gifted programs.

One typical example of such a case is an 8-year old boy I see on a regular basis because of social problems. At age 6 he had his IQ of 147 measured as part of full psycho-diagnostic examinations. Even unaware of this fact, all were certain at his school that he would qualify for the enrichment program for the gifted in his town. After he "failed," one of his teachers told his mother that among the four children sent to "stage B" of the Szold examinations, all teachers thought this child had the best prospects to be accepted. The teachers put all bets on him, and many lost a lot of money "because of him." Note: The preceding sentence is a bit unclear to me. Maybe the concept of "gambling" on a child, as it is used here, should be explained. This example shows not only that gambling openly on a child's prospects of being accepted to a gifted program was considered acceptable at the school, and that teachers did not even think there was any violation of the child's rights in doing so.

The parents of a very intelligent child not accepted to a gifted program must also deal with the fact that their child was labeled "non-gifted." They sometimes experience this fact as their own failure. In such cases there is a tendency to send the child to repeated giftedness examinations during several years, and every failure on these examinations intensifies the child's feeling of failure. Perhaps the repetition of "failure" can be avoided by indicating a "feeling of disappointment" or something similar.

Some parents insist that their child is gifted, and they are not willing to listen to the explanation about the Israeli definition of giftedness, a clarification that explains "why so many Israeli children who would have qualified for gifted programs in many other countries are considered non-gifted in Israel" (David, in press b). Such was the case of Eitan, a 9-year old boy whose parents came to me for counseling after they received the letter announcing their son was not chosen for the gifted program in their municipality. The father, who had great expectations for his first-born son, felt unable to accept this verdict. I asked him, "What do you think should be done now?" and he answered, "Eitan must skip a grade. He already knows 4th grade math, so there is 'no point' for him to remain in grade 4." I tried to explain to the father that being one year above or under the class level in one subject is within the norm. According to the father's own description, Eitan was happy in school, had friends and enjoyed learning many new things there, but the father did not accept my opinion. When asked "If you are referring to any problems Eitan has that have remained unmentioned until now, please share them with me," the father became really angry. "I do not think I need you. Reading your article about grade skipping (David, 2007) made me think you are not like all others. I will find somebody who is not against grade skipping and get the needed recommendation." Indeed, my article (ibid) on grade skipping was mentioned as a frequent option applied in gifted education abroad and almost never applied in Israel. But I never expressed any opinion in favor of grade skipping as a compensation for a father whose hopes of being "the father of a gifted child" had been dashed.

Unnecessary Exposure of Gifted Children in the Education System

The attitude towards children with special needs in the education system is based upon clear rules. It is strictly forbidden to reveal any identifying details; it is absolutely forbidden to expose any such child, even when older than 18. Everyone in the system is fully aware of the prerequisite that the children's needs have a priority over anything else, including research. However, when it might serve other children's interests, a school's public relations will probably benefit from such exposure. Or the child might benefit when exposure to the media helps to get what she or he needs in less time or with less effort.

When dealing with gifted children, the situation is extremely different. In all stages of the process of identification and nurturing of the gifted, there is a high probability that the child's needs will be sacrificed for the needs of the system, the teachers or even the parents. The term "privacy of the gifted child" is practically non-existent from the moment he or she is chosen by the school for "stage B" of the identification process through the labeling either as "gifted" or as "non-gifted." In addition, children's privacy is violated by the attitude of the school staff in the classroom, in the teachers' room and during meetings with the parents.

In all other examinations, information about each child's achievements remains confidential (whether international such as TIMSS and PISA, or national, like the matriculation examinations or the growth and effectiveness measures for schools) (Beller, 2010). However, the knowledge about who "passed" the first stage in the giftedness identification process usually becomes public from about December until June. This is when all children taking the second stage giftedness examinations receive an answer concerning whether they have been accepted or not. Unfortunately, parents who want their children to retake the giftedness examinations make this information in many cases open to their children's peers, the parents of these peers, and the school teachers.

As the majority of gifted children in Israel study most of the time in regular classes (David, 2008), the problematic attitudes of many teachers in these classes towards gifted children is of great importance. Because there is no ethical code, the teachers' attitudes stem from beliefs, personal traits, education, restraint, past experience, etc. Thus, many teachers believe that a gifted student has to teach weaker peers. Many teachers are unaware that gifted students might suffer when their abilities are openly mentioned, let alone discussed. They do not understand that high abilities have important connections to physical, emotional, and sexual development. In addition, most of the teachers do not know that a high level of sensitivity is one of the most typical traits of the gifted child. Thus, gifted children who find out that a teacher passed information about them to another teacher could go through a lot of suffering, and even feel they "have no place" in the class, sometimes not even in the school.

Violation of the privacy of gifted children is sometimes quite severe when their parents meet their teachers. While in school counseling, there are clear rules as to when not to give information to the parents, where gifted children are concerned there is a silent agreement that it is always good, even necessary, to provide any information to parents. As a result, a gifted child who wishes to keep things to her- or himself and is an introvert (Ziv, 1990) is twice exposed by parents and teachers.

Violation of Gifted Children's Privacy in Academia and the Media

A case of violation of the most basic ethical rules is: presenting case studies of gifted children at national and international conferences while violating their privacy – either when revealing details that might expose their identity, or when showing interviews with or without the parents' consent. Such is the case very often in conferences when a crowd of hundreds of people watch a film, sometimes when the child is very young. The presenter might have been the child's counselor, examiner or advisor. Even when the children's parents give the presenter written permission to do this, there is no justification for a psychologist who is well aware of issues of children's privacy to use such materials.

A television researcher working for one of the largest commercial Israeli channels has recently called me, asking to give her names and addresses of gifted children who have gone through an intervention process with me. When I told her this was unethical, she simply said, "If you are unwilling to do this, maybe you can give me the name of an expert who might agree." Such a request shows very clearly the level of ignorance in regard to children's rights and the attitude regarding their privacy. We certainly do not expect such a phone call from a researcher doing a program on Down syndrome children.

An extreme example of exposing gifted minors to media publicity is the "super-gifted" project of the Israeli Ministry of Education. The Israeli Ministry of Education has announced a new aim: to help produce future Nobel Prize winners. In a series of official announcements and newspaper interviews (e.g. Bahur Nir, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2010), as well as in a documentary shown by the Israeli national TV channel, Ms. Rachmel (head of the department of gifted education in the Israeli Ministry of Education) has argued that nurturing the super-gifted in order to have more future Nobel Prize winners in Israel "is an 8-year dream coming true" (Bahur Nir, 2011). The wide exposure of these "super-gifted" children included personal and familial private details of the 14 identified youths. Details were given about their parents' marital status, many of which they would rather have kept unrevealed, the financial situation of the family, the religious views of each parent, or the ethnic origin of the children (all minors). These students were exposed not only unethically, but also to such a level that would have been considered illegal in most countries (Morrow, & Richards 1996).

The misuse of the children's names and photos, and the unexpected way in which some of their families were exposed in the media are unethical (Bahur Nir, 2011). Even the use of the term "super-gifted" is highly problematic. In professional literature, there are studies about the use of the term "gifted" – many of which have shown a high correlation between using this adjective and the level of psychological, social, and emotional adjustment of the child or the youth (Berlin, 2009; Freeman, 2006). However, there is no research on the influence of using the term "super-gifted" because of a simple reason: Such research has never been conducted because all researchers have been quite convinced that using this term might have a negative influence!

Summary

Sometimes I am asked, "Why is privacy of gifted children so important?" In school, the concept of privacy only applies to special education children – children who have been diagnosed as having learning disabilities, mental illnesses or physical limitations. The privacy of these sub-populations is taken care of through rules adopted by medicine, psychology, school counseling and social work. Unfortunately, the privacy of gifted children has no legal basis, while the high level of sensitivity of gifted children makes them vulnerable.

According to Miller (1997), the gifted child is a sensitive child. Even if we do not accept this definition, "sensitivity" is a trait that appears in all lists of characteristics of gifted children (e.g., Colangelo & Davis, 2003). Thus, each thoughtless utterance, even a meaningless phrase about the child's abilities or potential said by parents, might have a negative influence. When a child hears in school various opinions about giftedness in general and his or her abilities in particular, this might be much more harmful.

An ethical code is needed because the psychology of the gifted has not been recognized yet as an accepted field. Additionally, most people who are teaching and counseling the gifted are not experts in this field. This code would mark the line between what is allowed and what is forbidden in all stages from the identification process through psychological and didactical support, and from early childhood to adulthood. Without such a code, we are sentenced

to be judged by teachers and clerks who have neither knowledge nor training or experience in the field of giftedness, which might result in grave consequences for many gifted children.

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Of all the words yet spoken,
none comes quite as far as wisdom,
which is the action of the mind
beyond all things that may be said.

Wisdom is the oneness
of mind that guides
and permeates all things.

Heraclitus –From *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, Translated by Brooks Haxton. Viking, 2001.