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## The negative effects of labeling on intellectually identified gifted children and suggested strategies for alleviation

Paula A. Swalla  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## The negative effects of labeling on intellectually identified gifted children and suggested strategies for alleviation

### Abstract

Concern over special education labels has existed for more than twenty years. Labeling has been found to have both positive and negative effects on those labeled as gifted. This paper reviews the research on the negative effects of labeling a child gifted and suggested strategies to alleviate these negative effects. Research indicates that the label gifted has more positive than negative effects on the majority of children labeled; however, the research also identifies a number of adverse consequences which merit consideration and possible alleviation.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF LABELING  
ON INTELLECTUALLY IDENTIFIED GIFTED CHILDREN  
AND  
SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR ALLEVIATION

A Research Paper  
Submitted to  
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
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Master of Arts in Education  
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by  
Paula A. Swalla  
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7/12/89  
Date

William Waack  

---

Director of Research Paper

7/12/89  
Date

Marvin Heller  

---

Graduate Faculty Advisor

7/12/89  
Date

Marvin Heller  

---

Graduate Faculty Reader

7/20/89  
Date

Roger A. Kueter  

---

Head Department of Curriculum  
and Instruction

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Introduction to the Problem

Concern over special education labels has existed for more than 20 years. Educators and psychologists have labeled in order to obtain special services for deserving children. Yet, according to some, the categorization itself may prove harmful. For example, even with the hope of special educational services, parents and educators have expressed concerns that labeling a child may cause social isolation, snobbishness in the child, or a retaliation from teachers who do not understand the needs of a gifted child.

This labeling issue presents several unanswered questions to researchers, educators, and advocates of the gifted movement (Robinson, 1986). She has expressed her concerns with the following questions:

What are the overall effects of the label? Does the label do more harm than good? What do children think about their gifted label? Does labeling have only short term effects or does it have any long term effects on the child? (p. 11)

Hobbs (1975) discussed the main dilemma associated with the labeling of children. He observed that the classification of school learning disabilities, whether based on cognitive or emotional factors, is a necessity in order to provide special services for children who cannot learn in a regular classroom. He believed that the problem with labeling was that the student becomes identified with the learning disability. This, then, may shape the way others interact with the student and influence that student's self-perceptions.

The effects of labeling a child gifted becomes even more problematic. These children are labeled because they possess certain behaviors or characteristics which deviate from the norms of society (Becker, 1963); however, the deviation is a positive one. That is, they are considered "above normal" in intelligence, creativity, and leadership. Unfortunately, however, their positive qualities do not guarantee them acceptance or appreciation (Robinson, 1986). For example, Clark (1983) views the problem of labeling a child gifted as one that may negatively affect both the home and school life of the labeled child. She explains: "Labels create expectations. . . . If we label children gifted to improve their



educational experience, then we have an obligation to keep the negative aspects of labeling from becoming a major effect" (p.317). Thus the gifted label presents both positive and negative effects. However, there seem to be major concerns about the adverse consequences of the labeling process, and it is those consequences that this study will examine.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to review the current literature on the labeling of intellectually gifted children. It will focus on the following questions: (a) What are the negative effects of labeling on children identified as intellectually gifted? and (b) What strategies have been identified to alleviate the negative effects of the label?

### Definitions

In order to provide understanding and clarity to the terms that have special application for this study, the following definitions are provided.

Labeled Gifted Children - Those children, ages 5 to 17, who have been formally identified to receive special

services because of unmet needs in their regular learning environment.

Self-Concept/Self-Esteem - The composition of all the beliefs and attitudes one has about one's self. For the purpose of this paper, self-concept and self-esteem will be used synonymously.

Family - A group of individuals who live under one roof and usually under one head. This can be a mother, father, and several siblings; or a mother and siblings; or a father and siblings.

Significant Others - Individuals other than the immediate family who are in direct contact with a gifted child and who influence the way he or she interacts with the world, e.g., peers and teachers.

#### Limitations of the Study

This paper will be limited to a discussion of the negative effect of the label gifted. It will be limited by age, to include those gifted children between the ages of 5 and 17. It will be limited to include a discussion of those children who have been formally identified as gifted and who receive special services in their individual learning environments. Finally, this study will be limited to a review of the

literature from 1969 to 1989, with a few significant references made to the time period of the early 1960's.

### Summary

This chapter introduced the issue of labeling and its negative effects upon gifted children. It presented the purpose of the review of literature, operational definitions, and limitations. Problems and concerns of those in the field of gifted education were introduced, as well as a rationale for this review.

## Chapter II: The Negative Effects of Labeling On Intellectually Gifted Children

A major purpose of this study was to ascertain the negative effects of the label gifted on children identified as intellectually gifted. This was achieved by completing a review of the literature in the field of gifted education.

In order to discuss adequately the labeling issue, the review was limited to information published between 1969 and 1989. A comprehensive list of sources was compiled as the result of a search of The Education Index and The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. An ERIC search was also completed.

Three general areas emerged in which the negative effects of the label gifted seemed most prominent. These were (a) self-concept/self esteem, (b) family interactions, and (c) interaction with significant others such as teachers and peers. Each of these areas will be discussed in a separate section.

### Self-Concept/Self-Esteem

People involved in educating gifted children, and the children themselves, differ in their assessment of the effect of being labeled gifted. Some believe that

It creates a positive "self-fulfilling prophecy"; others believe that it generates stress created by perfectionism, negative attitudes toward school, and underachievement (Jenkins-Friedman & Murphy, 1988). Others are likely to react differently to children labeled gifted, and such gifted children will probably view themselves differently. Labeling results in patterns of behavior and experiences which lead to a life pattern very different from those of nonlabeled children (Guskin, Okolo, Zimmerman, & Peng, 1986).

Given the often cited link between self-perceptions and a host of outcomes such as interpersonal relations, motivation to achieve, and later life performance, researchers have focused on aspects of self concept as an indicator of adjustment to the gifted label (Jenkins- Friedman & Murphy, 1988).

One might assume that, for high-IQ children, conceptualizing oneself as different from agemates would lead to a positive self-concept. However, a feeling of difference may also foster a sense of loneliness and isolation, with the suspicion that "something must be wrong with me" (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985). In addition, self-concept and peer

relations have been observed to be negatively affected when gifted children are made to stand out (Gallagher, Greenman, Karnes, & King, 1960).

Janos, Fung, and Robinson (1985) continued a follow-up study of 271 gifted children from the Puget Sound region, ages 5.6 to 10.6. The original study was conducted at the Child Development Research Group at the University of Washington during the years 1974 through 1979. Their research subjects were a group of children participating in a longitudinal study on early identification of intellectual precocity.

In 1981-1982, an effort was made to contact the families from the original subjects who had been tested at least once. The 271 children for whom responses were received constituted the sample. These gifted children were asked, "Do you feel different from other children?"

All data analyzed in this study were obtained from questionnaires mailed to parents and children. The children were asked to complete the 80-item Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1969) which was designed for research on the development of children's self-attitudes and correlations of these attitudes. Children also

completed an instrument which gave reports of their friendships. Finally, as a question which was considered to tap an aspect of self-concept, children were asked whether they thought of themselves as being different from other children.

Almost 40% of the children said they thought of themselves as different, over half of them stating that they were superior in some way to their agemates. Even though only four worded the difference in a manner which might be interpreted as being negative, it is very interesting to note that self-esteem scores for the group that saw themselves as different from agemates were significantly lower than those of children who did not. Additional findings also reported somewhat more difficulty in the children's relationships with agemates.

Bryant (1989) conducted a survey in 1988 of 54 gifted children ages 13 to 15 in a junior high school in Boulder, Colorado. Her survey was a questionnaire designed to explore students' perceptions about being gifted and their preferences among school-based programming options. Almost all of the students felt positive about their academic success (89%) and were glad to be smart (98%). An interesting result was that

the statement, "My classmates think I'm a nerd", seemed true of about one-third of the students. Another interesting finding was that girls at all levels felt greater respect from girls (84%) than from boys (54%). The answers to the questionnaire revealed that the "nerd" image and female view of self are definite problems that need to be addressed.

Another study that reported negative effects in relation to self-concept was completed in 1988 by Hersey and Oliver. They completed a survey that elicited information regarding students' feelings about the label gifted. Six hundred students grades four through twelve, who had been identified for special education programs for the gifted in Kansas, completed the survey. The results of the survey produced some very interesting responses. Three of the questions asked and their responses were as follows:

1. What problems, if any, have you had as a result of being labeled "gifted"?
  - 15% I get teased.
  - 45% My parents expect more from me.
  - 47% My teachers expect more from me.
  - 18% My friends treat me differently.
  - 24% I feel different about myself.



2. Would you be more comfortable in the program without the label "gifted"?

13% Definitely

26% Maybe

33% Not sure

3. If possible, give some examples of problems you've had that are related to the label "gifted".

Selected responses:

"I expect more from myself than is possible to achieve sometimes."

"Parents will sometimes say that I'm not doing the work that I'm capable of; a rather common thing."

"Some of my friends are Jealous and so they treat me differently."

"People look on me differently. I don't like being treated differently."

From these responses it would appear that labeling students as gifted is perceived negatively by these students (p. 34).

According to Perry (1986), researchers and counselors report depression, destructive perfectionism, and underachievement in many of the 2.5 million gifted students. Webb (1985) presents the reason for these negative behaviors when he states it is "because the gifted see themselves as different, not fitting in, and living in a world that isn't designed for them" (p. 5).

Gifted children, because of their personal high expectations, can have an overly demanding image of self. Leroux (1986) pointed out that because of special interests not always relevant to peers, bright children may have feelings of alienation. When this alienation is combined with intense emotional reactions and reduced self-image, a potential for psychological dysfunction may occur.

Striving to succeed becomes the struggle to obtain unattainable possibilities. Delisle (1988) stated that "The gifted child may turn to extremes: drugs, dropping out of school, the abandonment of family and peers, or even suicide" (p. 42).

In summary, the studies done by Janos, Fung, and Robinson (1985); Bryant (1989); and Hersey and Oliver (1988) point to the fact that, while most gifted

children do indeed have positive self-concepts, some gifted children do have negative self-concepts and are affected adversely by the label gifted.

#### Family Interactions

While the gifted label affects the gifted child's perception of himself or herself in a negative manner, it also affects the relationships of the labeled child with his or her family. It can place pressure on a child to perform in a manner consistent with new expectations brought on by the label. It can create a jealous relationship among siblings. It can arouse doubts in the parent's ability to cope with the exceptional child (Fisher, 1981).

Fisher (1981) conducted a study of the effect of labeling on gifted children and their families. She interviewed 12 sets of parents of "highly gifted" (over 130 I.Q.) children. Half had been formally labeled as gifted and were being served in a special program, and the other half were not labeled and not in the program. Her data indicated that the effect of the label is largely influenced by (a) the parents' perceptions of their child, (b) the parents' perceptions of what it means to be gifted, and (c) whether the parents agree with the school's evaluation of their child.

According to Fisher, it appeared that when parents perceived their children as different in some way prior to identification, the result was a different parental treatment of the child and an encouragement to respond to this new perception. She also found in her research that the identification of giftedness encouraged parents to be more tolerant of unusual requests and/or behavior. Parents inferred that their gifted children were "entitled" to be given a wider birth, more opportunities, and more allowances.

However, for families who did not perceive their child to be different prior to identification of their child's giftedness, the label was objectionable. The parents indicated that the label placed an unwanted burden on them and their child. They equated giftedness with oddness, with superior achievement, and with problem children. One parent reported the label had a divisive effect on the family causing him to question whether one child was "superior" to another.

Fisher also found that when there was agreement between parents' perceptions and the school's designation, the label still had a disruptive effect on families where there were non-gifted siblings. Prior to the labeling, parents felt they were able to "finesse"

the situation in such a way that each child was provided with the appropriate attention.

In 1983 Cornell completed a research study that reported the impact of positive labeling on the family system. He selected forty-two families with first-born and second-born children between the ages of 6 and 11 from school records. In 22 of the families one or both children attended gifted school programs. The remaining 20 families comprised a normal control group in which both children attended a regular school program. These families were all located in communities near Detroit, Michigan.

An interviewer presented the research as a "study of the relationship of the family environment to children's school achievement" to avoid biasing the parents by expressing an interest in giftedness. Mothers and fathers were interviewed individually about their relationship with each of their children, and, in a separate section of the interview, were asked about their subjective conception of "giftedness" and how it might apply to each of their children. During the parent interviews each child who was old enough to read completed the Children's Personality Questionnaire (Porter & Cattell, 1979) Form A.

Cornell found in this study that the label enhanced the child's status in the family and affected the parents' perceptions of the child. The perception of parents was mixed since both parents did not always agree on the accuracy of the label. When both parents agreed that the child was gifted, they had a positive reaction to the child. When one parent disagreed with the label, the reaction toward the child was mixed and usually more negative. When both parents disagreed with the gifted label, the label was typically perceived as negative.

Sapon-Shevin (1987) examined the attitudes and beliefs of 27 parents who had been informed that their child had been identified as gifted/talented. Her findings showed that, although the parents' responses to the identification differed significantly, the process of labeling brought about significant changes in the perception of a majority of parents sampled. Two-thirds of the parents surveyed said that knowing that their child was gifted would lead them to alter their expectations for their child, some positively and some negatively.

It appears that a child's perception of his or her own giftedness is very influential in shaping parental

treatment and attitudes. Any difference in parental treatment may be apparent to the children. This perceived difference in parent-child interaction could, in turn, be an important determinant of how the children will feel about themselves, each other, and how they will interact (Grenier, 1985).

There also seems to be some evidence that the label has negative impact on non-gifted siblings. When there is a public recognition given to one child, it is reasonable to expect that the siblings who are not recognized are going to have to make some adjustments to the situation (Colangelo & Brower, 1987a). A sibling who feels at a disadvantage and outperformed by the other is likely to instigate aggression and introduce friction (Tesser, 1980).

Grenier (1985) conducted a study in which she examined the relationships within families where only one of two children had been labeled gifted. Twenty-seven pairs of labeled/nonlabeled siblings completed a forced-choice questionnaire investigating the relationships between siblings. These siblings were from ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds in the Montreal area.

The questionnaire was designed to explore six areas in the siblings' relationships: comparison and competition, cooperation, perceived parental treatment, self-image, communication, and friction.

She found that for unlabeled siblings, competition had a distinctly negative impact. A less able child would avoid situations of cooperation when there was much competition since situations would place him or her in a position of negative comparison and threaten to damage self-esteem. Negative correlations between competition and general relationship indicated a less able sibling would tend to reduce closeness and identification in the presence of much competition.

The highest scores for friction and aggression were reported by both labeled and nonlabeled groups when the labeled child was older. Not only did both groups report more friction in this condition, but they also reported similar amounts.

Grenier's summary captures the essence of the study:

Labeling appears to have an effect specifically in the areas of competition and comparison.

Competition seems to affect the labeled sibling positively while negatively affecting an unlabeled



sibling. Labeling appears to interact with only one variable: when the labeled child is oldest, both siblings perceive more friction in their relationship. (p. 167)

Cornell's (1983) research, which was cited previously in this section, also found sibling relationships to be negative. A major finding of the study was that the nongifted siblings of gifted children were significantly less well-adjusted than other nongifted children. The nongifted siblings of gifted children could be described as significantly less careful of social rules, less outgoing, more easily upset, and more shy and restrained. Also, the siblings were significantly more excitable, impatient, intense, tense, and frustrated.

Cornell reported in the same study that in families with one gifted child and one nongifted child the gifted child was more highly recognized than any other family member. In rank order, the mothers were consistently second, followed by the nongifted child and the father. He concluded that: "The individual child singled out as gifted appeared to enjoy an especially prominent status in the family" (p. 333).

These findings seem to raise concerns about the possible adverse effects on siblings of labeling one child in the family as gifted. For example, labeling one child in the family as gifted implicitly labels the sibling as nongifted. The nongifted sibling therefore may feel less favored in the family.

A questionnaire distributed by Gogul, McCumsey, and Hewett (1985) provided an insight into sibling brother/sister relationships. The intent of the survey was to determine information which could be used in educational planning for home and school.

Questionnaires were sent to all states in the United States. A total of one thousand thirty-nine were returned. Their findings indicated that over half of the sisters were considered competitive or antagonistic toward gifted siblings, and less than half of the brothers were considered competitive or antagonistic toward their gifted siblings.

Twenty families were used in a study by Ballering and Koch (1984). Each child in the family was given the Bene-Anthony Family Relations Test (FRT), a sociometric device which allows the respondent to assign positive and negative effects to his or her relationships with all family members. Their research

results indicated that the sibling relationship differed from the perspective of gifted and nongifted children in two ways. First, gifted children perceived less positive effect in their relationships with their gifted siblings and more negative effect in their relationships with nongifted siblings. Second, nongifted children perceived their relationships with other children in the family more positively than did gifted children.

In conclusion, studies done by Fisher, Cornell, and Sapon-Shevin report results which seem to suggest that when a child is labeled gifted, the parental treatment of the labeled child is different. This difference can take many forms. It can allow for a wider range of opportunities for the labeled child, or it can encourage parents to tolerate unusual requests and behavior.

Other studies cited have investigated the relationship of labeled gifted children to siblings not labeled as gifted. They indicate that nongifted siblings may be less well-adjusted and somewhat withdrawn.

### Significant Others

The adverse consequences of being labeled as gifted extend beyond family interactions. Such a label can also affect relationships with significant others: those individuals outside the immediate family who are in direct contact with the gifted child and who influence the way he or she interacts with the world.

First of all, the "public" identification of a child as gifted sometimes causes problems in the school environment in respect to the relationships with peers and teachers. When a child is labeled gifted, peers are likely to assume automatically that they are nongifted, and that they have been left out in some fashion (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1986). As one child noted, "I was told too many times in the wrong company that I was smart. The wrong company. . . is my peers. . . . I hated being at the head of the class, Naturally, my peers hated me too" (p. 151).

Although many teachers do attempt to foster support and acceptance of gifted children, there are teachers who apparently resent them and who purposely ridicule them. They go out of their way to make life difficult for gifted children and to make them less acceptable to their peers (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan,

1986). One gifted child offered the following commentary:

I've fortunately outgrown the bullies-in-the-schoolyard stage, not that I didn't have my share...of problems with them as a younger child. With my age and maturity come newer bullies, infinitely more cunning and resourceful; I'm referring to those teachers who assume that I can handle any amount of homework they choose to give me at any given time. (p. 152)

This section will examine the relationship of peers and teachers to the child who has been labeled gifted and the negative effects of the gifted label on their relationships. Very few studies were discovered that address this particular issue; however, the limited research findings did provide some insights.

The study completed by Janos, Fung and Robinson which was cited previously in this review elicited the results of the perceived relationship of gifted children to their peers. Of 238 children who responded, 88 (37%) thought of themselves as being "different" from their agemates.

Children who saw themselves as different more often reported that they had too few friends and that

being smart made it harder to make friends. Children who saw themselves as different reported that their friends were younger or older than themselves and that they rarely played with other children.

Guskin, Okolo, Zimmerman, and Peng (1986) sent questionnaires to 295 students in summer programs for 9-15 year old academically gifted and artistically talented students, asking for their perceptions of the causes and consequences of being so identified. Students responded to 20 open-ended questions in which their opinions of being gifted and talented in general and their personal experiences with labeling and educational programs were investigated.

Subjects were asked, "How do other people such as friends, teachers, and parents treat you differently because of your special abilities?" Negative reactions were reported by 14% of the respondents, two-thirds of these (9.3%) by peers. The researchers stated that although most of the students do not report negative consequences of the label, they seem very aware of the potential for rejection if they are set apart as elite.

Hershey and Oliver (1988) stated that the following generalization has been supported by literature: "Peers of gifted students are influenced by

the label gifted, but only a small percentage of gifted students are bothered by the negative attitudes of their peers" (p.33). Ford (1978) found that gifted children wanted to be in gifted programs, but only if it did not lead to conflict with peers.

Turning to the school environment, Cramond and Martin (1987) cited several studies (Pidgeon, 1971; Sutherland & Goldschmid, 1974; Tannenbaum, 1962) that indicate that teacher attitudes and expectations can influence gifted students' performance and self perception.

According to Robinson (1989), most school personnel appear to be relatively neutral in their reactions to the gifted label. Unfortunately, neutrality is difficult to interpret. It may mean indifference. For example, teachers seem to be fairly neutral-to-positive toward the gifted label. They react more strongly to a child's effort or lack of it in the classroom. Labels become important to teachers when they appear in conjunction with a student's desire to achieve or with a child's race and socioeconomic status.

School counselors and psychologists, like unlabeled siblings, are affected negatively by the gifted label (Delullo, 1984). These two groups of school personnel are least likely to express positive

attitudes toward special programs for the gifted. Because little or no information about gifted students is included in their professional preparation programs, their negative attitudes are predictable (Robinson, 1989).

There are few studies within the time limits set by this researcher that adequately predict the effect of labeling on the relationship of the intellectually gifted child with peers and teachers. The studies that are cited here seem to suggest that the child who has been labeled as gifted will at times deal with the negative attitudes of peers, teachers, and counselors because of that label.

#### Summary

This chapter reviewed literature which revealed the negative effects of the label gifted on the child so identified. The review was limited to an examination of three aspects:

self-concept/self-esteem, interaction with family members, and relationships with peers and teachers.

While a majority of the studies indicated more positive than negative effects, they did identify a number of adverse consequences which merit consideration for possible alleviation.



## Chapter III: Strategies to Alleviate the Negative Effects of the Label Gifted

### Introduction

This chapter presents some strategies identified in the literature review as effective strategies to alleviate the negative effects of the label gifted. The identified strategies have been grouped according to four categories: (a) Strategies to alleviate the effect of labeling on self-concept/self-esteem, (b) Strategies for parents, (c) Strategies for teachers, and (d) Strategies for peers.

### Strategies to Alleviate the Effect of Labeling on Self-Concept/Self-Esteem

It should be evident that one of the first priorities in educating the child who has been labeled gifted should be to discuss the multitude of issues relevant to giftedness past, present, and future. Galbraith (1985) states that by opening up such topics for discussion, gifted children feel more comfortable and secure about themselves.

One's beliefs determine the action and the perceptions of the world and other people. Clark (1983) stated that awareness and understanding of who

the gifted are may have the most effect on determining the quality and direction of gifted children's existence.

Perry (1986) believes that while books and other informational programs about giftedness for children are not the remedy for all concerns, they can definitely make a contribution toward children's understanding and acceptance of themselves as gifted learners. With proper information and support, the day will come when children acknowledge their giftedness as a matter of fact.

According to Dellisle (1985), the guidance and counseling of gifted individuals must become a fundamental component of any educational program for persons who are identified as "gifted". Beginning in the primary school years and extending into adulthood, an organized series of lessons and experiences can be directed toward understanding self, others, and the world in which one lives. He continued by stating that such preventive interventions can serve as a form of "insurance" toward the fullest personal development of our society's most able citizens.

Although the strategies are limited in number, one can surmise from those cited that an understanding of

self and giftedness is imperative to help lessen the negative effects of the label gifted.

### Strategies for Parents

Adjustment to the outside world is a two-way process. The world has to adjust to the gifted child, and the child has to adjust to the world. As a result, parents need to play the role of mediators as these two universes come together (Johnson, 1985).

Parents must develop positive attitudes so children feel comfortable about their giftedness. They have a responsibility to see giftedness as a good thing, even with the frustration that can come with it (Prichard, 1985).

Their understanding of giftedness will affect how they relate to their own "gifted" child, how they relate to other non-labeled children, the demands they make of schools, their potential for affecting wide reaching changes within the public schools, and their potential for collaborating with other groups also seeking change (Sapon-Shevin, 1987; Prichard, 1985; Johnson, 1985).

Fisher's (1981) data indicate that the label itself is not inherently anxiety-producing or anxiety reducing. Rather, it is the individual parent's

interpretation of what the label means for the child and for the whole family which affects the power attributed to the label. She feels that parents need an opportunity to share with each other and with informed educators what are the realistic expectations, what is the experience of older successful high achievers, and how much time should be allowed for individual learning and talents. They need help in interpreting what the label means and how other families cope with the designation. Parents can find help and support from parent support groups.

Parents are expected to fulfill many roles. One of the most important roles, however, is that of communicator. Prichard (1985) states that parents and gifted children may find the effectiveness of their communication with each other and with others an ally. All communication offers opportunities for misunderstanding, but, more importantly, it also offers chances for a positive, helping exchange.

Ehrlich (1985) states that part of the joy of learning for the child labeled as gifted lies in sharing the discoveries with someone who cares and understands. This sharing becomes an essential part of the child's experience. It provides opportunities for

socializing, relaxing, and intellectual growth. Parents become the prime targets as listeners and conversationalists. Family participation in group discussions, at the dinner table or leisurely get-togethers, can create ideal situations for the gifted to engage in more advanced thinking and talking than is usually possible for them with their age peers.

Based on the data presented in the studies cited, it may be stated that several strategies can be used to alleviate the negative effects of the label gifted on parent/child relationships. Parents must support their gifted child's abilities, as well as understand the concept of giftedness to ensure that the needs of their gifted child are met. Information and support can be obtained from parent support groups and other parent networking.

#### Strategies for Teachers

According to Jenkins-Friedman and Murphy (1988), teachers need to encourage gifted students to develop positive self images, to grow affectively as well as cognitively, and to see themselves as capable individuals. In the affective domain, they suggest that it would be useful to help gifted students become more "self objective" and self accepting. For example,

providing opportunities for gifted students to learn from (relative) failure in a psychologically safe environment could promote growth while protecting their self images.

As discussed earlier, helping the gifted child become aware of the meaning of giftedness can help him or her feel less alienated. Teachers can incorporate activities into their lessons which enhance the social and emotional development of gifted children. Betts and Nelhart (1985) have listed seven categories of curriculum development necessary for the emotional and social growth of the gifted individual in the classroom. These include:

- 1) Awareness, understanding, and acceptance of self.
- 2) Awareness, understanding, and acceptance of others.
- 3) Interpersonal skills:
  - (a) communication skills;
  - (b) interviewing skills;
  - (c) discussion skills; and
  - (d) conflict reduction skills.
- 4) Group process and interaction skills.
- 5) Creativity:

(a) creative thinking and problem solving;

and

(b) relaxation and visual imagery.

6) Problems of being gifted.

7) Nurturing environments and people. (p.18)

However, according to Galbraith (1985), another component must accompany that awareness: gifted children need adults to increase their odds for meeting peers with similar interests. It is in these groups that many gifted children make their strongest and most valued friendships.

School programs for the gifted students are an ideal place to meet others who think and learn as they do. Robinson (1989) has several suggestions for teachers of gifted programs about how to maximize the positive effects of the gifted label.

1) Select a name for the gifted program carefully.

Names which carry the connotations of growth and development rather than connotations of being first, fastest, or at the top of the heap are preferable.

2) Opt for the use of the term talented rather than gifted in school documents and publicity. Talented or able learner appears to evoke fewer stereotypes than gifted.

- 3) Beware of critics who would abandon all special services to these children because of negative effects of the gifted label. Talented learners need differentiated school services to reach their potential. The issue is how to maximize the benefits and minimize the disruption.  
(pp. 35-36)

Cramond and Martin (1987) state that the education of teachers about the needs and characteristics of the gifted can be successful in changing attitudes about the gifted child. They reported that the most positive results have been shown when a course on the gifted child was taken.

The literature review has identified a number of strategies to alleviate the negative effects of the label gifted on teacher/child relationships. They include educating teachers as to the characteristics and needs of the gifted child, developing curriculum that will enhance social and emotional growth, and promoting the development of positive self images.

#### Strategies for Peers

The importance of positive peer relationships should not be overlooked. The literature cited no specific strategies to alleviate the negative effects



of the label gifted on peer relationships. However, strategies identified as part of teacher/child relationships might well be adopted to peer interactions. Also, one might assume that educating peers about the needs and characteristics of the gifted child would aid in the understanding of those children labeled as gifted.

Those gifted children who suffer from exclusion by their peers may need help in gaining a balanced view of their own self-worth in a social as well as intellectual context. Gifted children who are not fortunate enough to find congenial peers may require long-term support, while they, their parents, teachers, and other professionals plan aggressively for their eventual joining of a social group (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985).

#### Summary

This chapter presented strategies identified from the literature which may help to alleviate the negative effects of the label gifted. These are limited in number and focus primarily on strategies to improve self-concept, to develop positive parental attitudes and communication, and to provide teacher-created learning environments which are psychologically safe and secure.

## Chapter IV: Summary/Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

### Summary/Conclusions

The purpose of this study has been to review the current literature on labeling to ascertain the negative effects of such labeling on intellectually gifted children, as well as to identify strategies to alleviate those effects. The review is primarily limited to those sources published between 1969 to 1989.

Holistically, the research indicated that the label gifted has more positive effects than negative effects on children so labeled; however, research also identified a number of adverse consequences which merit consideration. They are: (a) the negative effects of the label gifted on the self-concept/self-esteem, (b) family interactions, and (c) interaction with significant others such as teachers and peers.

An analysis of these studies on labeling revealed that labeling can have a negative as well as a positive effect, upon the self-concept/self-esteem of the intellectually gifted child. These children may have overly demanding images of self and feelings of alienation which can result in a reduced self-concept.

The literature review also indicated that the labeling of the intellectually gifted child can produce either negative or positive family interactions. Once the child is labeled as gifted, however, he or she tends to be treated differently. This different treatment may allow for a wide range of opportunities for the labeled child, or it can encourage parents to tolerate unusual requests and behaviors. Some parents feel that the label places an unwanted burden on them they equate giftedness with oddness, superior achievement, and problem children. The research showed that different treatment parents exhibited toward the gifted child can and does have an adverse effect on the relationship between the gifted child and his or her nongifted siblings. In fact, nongifted siblings may become less well-adjusted and somewhat withdrawn.

The literature also revealed some negative effects of the label gifted on the relationships of labeled children with significant others, those individuals outside the immediate family who influence their interactions with the world. While limited in scope and number, some research studies seemed to suggest that the labeled child will at times have to deal with the negative attitudes of peers and teachers simply because of that label.

The literature which was reviewed provided a limited number of strategies aimed at alleviating the negative effects of labeling, as gifted, the child with superior intellect. The major strategies were related to improvement of self-concept, development of positive parental attitudes and communication, and provision for teacher-created learning environments that will promote and support the gifted child.

It became clear from this study that the label gifted, when attached to intellectually gifted children, can have negative or positive effects upon their personal development and interaction with others. It is also clear that further research and identification of strategies to alleviate the negative effects are needed. Most important, however, is a general recognition that the label gifted has an unpredictable effect upon the child. This recognition is the first step in dealing effectively with the challenge it presents to parents and educators.

#### Implications for Further Research

This review of literature has attempted to reveal the status of research related to the perceived negative effects of the labeling of gifted children and the presence of strategies to alleviate the negative effects of the label gifted on those children. One result of the study has been the identification of some

areas where further research on the topic of labeling is needed.

First of all, continued empirical studies to explore the effects of labeling on the self-concept of the labeled population would prove especially helpful. For example, research might investigate how teachers in schools form their expectations about children labeled gifted. There also is a need for longitudinal or cross sectional labeling studies which investigate the effects over time (Robinson, 1986).

Additional research is needed on parental responses to the labeling process. Further investigation is needed to determine the most appropriate processes for informing parents of their child's giftedness. Parents frequently alter their expectations of their child upon learning that he or she has been labeled gifted. These alterations can be positive or negative (Sapon-Shevin, 1987).

Research should be pursued concerning the negative effects of the gifted label on family dynamics, particularly from the viewpoint of the gifted child's interactions with siblings. As suggested by Colangelo and Brower (1987a), such research should include comparative studies on both the immediate and long-term effects of these relationships.

Few strategies have been identified to help peers and teachers combat negative feelings toward the labeled child. Educating teachers about the needs and characteristics of the gifted is an important part of a program and can be successful in changing attitudes of teachers. There is a need for effective intervention strategies and research to identify the characteristics of such strategies (Cramond & Martin, 1987).

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