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Contents

Foreword 7

A. PERSONAL TALENT, INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL ABILITIES

Sidney M. Moon
Developing personal talent 11

Daniela Ostatníková, Zdenek Putz, Jolana Laznibatová, Monika Dohnányiová, Janette Okkelová and Karol Pastor
Salivary testosterone levels in children: Relation to their IQ scores 22

Heidrun Stöger and Albert Ziegler
Living in harmony? Causes of deviation among different indicators of giftedness 30

George Manolitsis
Predicting high reading ability from kindergarten: The role of metalinguistic skills 34

Anne McKeough and Randy Genereux
Transformations in narrative thought during late childhood and adolescence: A comparison of average and exceptional story writers 38

Kirsi Tirri, Petri Nokelainen and James R. Campbell
A cross-cultural study of computer literacy among the academic Olympians 42

Dalia Cohen and Shoshana Rosemarin
Analytical aspects of musical and numerical memory 45

Dimitrios Stamovlasis and Georgios Tsaparlis
Some psychometric variables contributing to high ability and performance in science problem solving 50

István Czigler, János Horváth, László Balázs and Júlia Weisz
Non-verbal abstraction and central executive function: High versus average intelligence 54

Zoltán Kondé and István Czigler
Mathematical giftedness and information processing 58

Afonso Galvao
Motivation to learn: The case of professional orchestra players 62

B. MORALITY, EMOTION, SOCIAL GIFTEDNESS, VALUES

Kirsi Tirri
Morality and high ability 69

Leila Pehkonen, Sinikka Inkeroinen-Huhta and Kirsi Tirri
The moral reasoning of gifted adolescents 78

Buket Yakmaci-Güzel
A comparison study about overexcitabilities of Turkish 10th graders 82

Michael C. Pyryt
Social giftedness: Historical, psychometric and educational perspectives 86

Marion Porath
Understanding and fostering social giftedness in early childhood 89

Jane Piirto
"I live in my own bubble": The values of talented U.S./Ohio adolescents before and after September 11, 2001 92

Endang W. Riyanto and Franz J. Mönks
Social competence of Indonesian gifted adolescents 95

C. NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Ioannis Paraskevopoulos
Education for creativity and giftedness/talent in Greece 101

Lianne Hoogeveen, Janet G. van Hell and Ludo Verhoeven
Academic acceleration in Dutch schools 112

Lucie Novotna and Jitka Sejvalová
Education of the gifted in the Czech Republic 116

Shlomit Rachmel and Rachel Zorman
Enhancing gifted students as path breakers. The Israeli experience 119

D. TEACHERS AND TEACHER TRAINING

Wilma Vialle and Siobhan Quigley
"The teachers we want": Exploring the views of gifted students 125

Sofia A. Theodoridou, Costantinos M. Kokkinos and Aggeliki M. Davazoglou
Identifying the superior learner: Comparability of student teachers' perceptions of the behavioral characteristics of normal and superior pupils 129

Zipora Oshrat and Tsafrira Shur
Training teachers of gifted children 133

Deborah Eyre and Helen Wilson
A national training programme for gifted and talented co-ordinators in schools 135

E. PROVISION FOR THE GIFTED IN ORDINARY SCHOOLS

Deborah Eyre
Structured tinkering: Improving provision for the gifted in ordinary schools 141

Athanassios Tsiamis
An attempt to incorporate enrichment activities into mainstream education.....151

Hana Levitte and Dan Wolff
Mixed-ability classes as a means to advance gifted students in junior high and high school 155

David Coates
Making science more challenging for gifted elementary school children: A school based action research project 159

Karil Lowke
An integrated programme for curriculum differentiation 162

Aleksandra Tokarz
Procedures for stimulating motivational mechanisms in the development of creative abilities and creative attitudes at school 165

Jean-Luc Patry, Klaus Unterrainer, Günter Wageneder and Sieglinde Weyringer
Situation specificity in teaching in enrichment classrooms - A study with the lesson interruption method 168

László Balogh, László Balla, Kálman Nagy and Evá Szombathy
Development of high ability pupils aged 10-14 172

F. SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Ronny Erez
Meditations on the realization of an educational vision. Israel Arts and Science Academy.....177

Bernd Säring
Concept formation in open experimental environments: Elements of a science curriculum for gifted high school students 190

Füsun Akarsu
INANC experience 193

Muhsin Ogretme
The effect of differentiated physics instruction on 9th grade gifted learners 196

Seokhee Cho and Hyunchul Cheong
Customized curriculum development for the gifted in special science high schools 200

SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF INDONESIAN GIFTED ADOLESCENTS

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Gifted adolescents encounter the same developmental issues as all adolescents although these are complicated by the special needs and characteristics of being gifted. Allen & Fox (1979) described the affective problems faced by gifted adolescents, such as environmental, interpersonal and intrapersonal problems. Environmental problems arise in a school milieu where lack of a sufficiently challenging or interesting curriculum leaves the child feeling bored, resentful, hostile or uninvolved. Environmental problems also arise when teachers, students and others accept mediocrity, do not recognize excellence and even denigrate outstanding performance. Interpersonal problems stem from the gifted child being perceived as "different" with the consequence that peers, teachers, and adults may not accept the gifted student's unique qualities. This may cause the student to also reject and deny his/her potential. Finally, parents, teachers, and other adults may have unrealistic expectations regarding performance and behavior. The intrapersonal problems of the gifted are those of self-concept, self-acceptance and self-esteem which may lead to developing appropriate coping strategies or developing dysfunctional behavior responses.

The problems of gifted adolescents in Indonesia are even more difficult, considering that an appropriate educational system for them is not yet available. In fact, the problem is not only with the educational system but also because there is not enough social support from family and peers. Furthermore, Indonesian society, especially in Semarang and Yogyakarta, has a Javanese cultural atmosphere with its conservative values. Koentjaraningrat (1999) suggest that courtesy is strongly oriented towards having community members develop thoughtfulness and intense solidarity. Javanese culture believes that human beings should abide by the prevailing moral standards, capable of inhibition, which creates conflict for gifted adolescents which causes them to withdraw from social encounters.

Social competence of gifted adolescents. The most general definitions of social competence refer to adaptive functioning in which environment and personal resources are used to achieve desirable developmental outcomes within interpersonal contexts. Factors which act as facilitators and inhibitors of developing social competence also affect gifted adolescents. Several decades of research with gifted individuals have barely scratched the surface as far as psychological and social development are concerned. Educators and parents have become more aware of the need to nurture the social and emotional development of gifted adolescents in addition to meeting their intellectual needs. Generally, peer groups are central to adolescents' experience and provide the adolescents with a basis for evaluation of who he/she is and how well he/she is doing. Adolescents do pressure each other to conform (Sheifert & Hoffnung, 1991). Webb *et al.* (1982) indicated that adolescence is the period for establishing close friendships. This is also true for gifted adolescents. The availability of possible friends and intellectual peers is often a problem for gifted adolescents.

focused on the second component of Thorndike's definition and provided evidence of convergence between peer nominations and teachers' ratings of social ability.

Another important contribution was the work of the social intelligence research group at the University of Kansas in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Friedman, 1978; Pyryt, 1978, 1985; Pyryt & Friedman, 1980). Friedman (1978) compiled a list of competencies that are characteristic of effective interpersonal communicators. These competencies have led to the development of unidimensional self, peer, and teacher rating scales that are relatively independent of intellectual ability in its traditional sense (Pyryt, 1985; Pyryt & Friedman, 1980).

Psychometric challenges. Measurement problems are related to difficulties in conceptualizing the construct. Measures of social intelligence have been criticized for lacking both convergent and discriminant validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Keating, 1978; Pyryt, 1978; Thorndike & Stein, 1937; Walker & Foley, 1973). Assessing social giftedness also requires a focus on the situational and relational contexts in which an interaction occurs. There is also a perceptual component to social intelligence since individuals may differ in their judgments about the effectiveness of a communication. To ensure confidence in ratings of social giftedness, it would be advantageous to have multiple observers doing the ratings. Since social intelligence develops over the lifespan, one must take the age or developmental stage of an individual into account when assessing social functioning.

Enhancing social giftedness. In keeping with the second component of Thorndike's definition of social intelligence, social giftedness can be conceptualized in terms of competencies and behaviours that demonstrate the ability to act wisely in social situations (Pyryt & Romney, 2002). Each social skill has a knowledge component and a performance component. The knowledge component incorporates the information necessary for effective utilization of a social skill. The performance component involves displaying those skills in a social interaction. The relationship between social knowledge and social performance is dynamic. Social knowledge influences social performance. The analysis of one's social performance enhances social knowledge.

There are numerous ways to assess both social knowledge and social performance. One of the simplest techniques is the use of rating scales in which a behaviour such as "responds empathically when interacting" is rated along a continuum. Rating scales can be developed to elicit self, peer, teacher, and observer perceptions. Consensus among raters leads to greater confidence in the reliability of the evaluation of a person's social skills. The items on rating scales can be converted into checklists just by changing the continuum of rankings to a dichotomy (i.e., presence or absence of a behaviour). Sociometric techniques can be used to assess social giftedness by having peers nominate individuals who demonstrate effective interpersonal behaviour. Hypothetical scenarios requiring an individual to suggest ways for coping with an interpersonal problem would be another way to understand an individual's social skills repertoire. The scenarios can be taken a step further by engaging an individual in role-playing how they would behave in a given situation. Finally, observation of behaviour in real world settings would enable more definitive assessment of social performance skills.

Any social skill that has been assessed can be enhanced through a three-stage process of modelling, rehearsal, and coaching. Educational facilitators can model effective use of a

particular social competency. Students should be given the opportunity to rehearse social performance interactions through role-playing activities. Educational facilitators can provide feedback and support (coaching) by observing of how a student performs in role-play and real life situations.

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