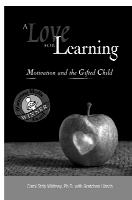
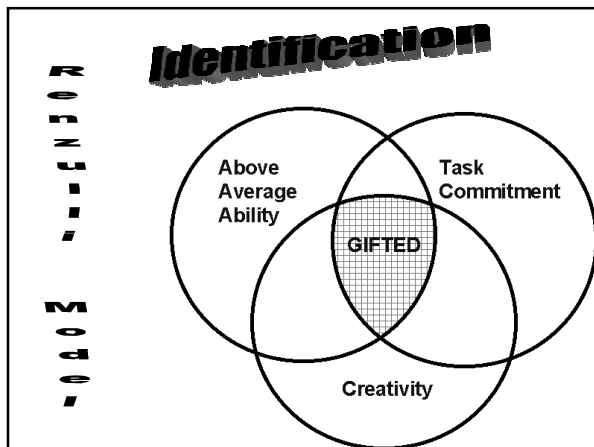


Motivation and Underachievement



James T. Webb, Ph.D.
Great Potential Press
P.O. Box 5057
Scottsdale, AZ 85261
(602) 954-4200
www.giftedbooks.com



Are Gifted Children Really Unmotivated?

Or Are they Just Not Motivated Where We Want Them to Be?

We know that they are intense!

Dabrowski Overexcitabilities and Motivation



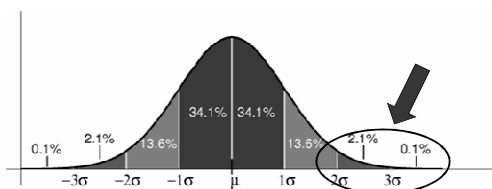
- **Intellectual** (Avid Reading, Curiosity, Asks Probing Questions, Concentration, Logic, Problem Solving, Theoretical Thinking)
- **Imaginational** (Fantasy Play, Mixes Truth and Fiction, Animistic and Imaginative Thinking, Daydreaming, Dramatic Perception, Use of Metaphor)
- **Emotional** (Concern for Others, Timidity and Shyness, Fear and Anxiety, Difficulty Adjusting to New Environments, Intensity of Feeling)
- **Psychomotor** (Marked Enthusiasm, Rapid Speech, Surplus of Energy, Nervous Habits, Impulsive Actions)
- **Sensual** (Seeks Sensory Pleasures Like Cuddling, Appreciates Sensory Experiences, Avoids Overstimulation)

There is no nature/nurture debate about motivation

- Children are not born unmotivated
- As preschoolers, they have an intense desire to learn
- Underachievement usually begins in the first few grades of school

How Do We Know a Child Lacks Motivation or Is Underachieving?

- There is a discrepancy between the child's school performance and some index or estimate of his/her actual ability



Despite the Underachievement:

➤ The child shows “flashes of brilliance,” high test scores, or other indicators of higher potential, but often is:

- Off Task
- Daydreams
- Procrastinates
- Doesn't complete work
- Refuses to do work
- Bothers other children
- Seems “lazy”

What could cause the underachievement in the areas that we are concerned with?

1. Physical Reasons for Lack of Motivation

(often factors in early grades)

- Vision problems
- Hearing problems
- Learning Disabilities - the child is disheartened because of a learning deficit or disability
- Reading Disorders
- ADHD - the child is distractible and impulsive, which hinders persistent academic work

2. Social and Emotional Reasons for Lack of Motivation

- **Poverty**
- **Complicated families**
 - The child is preoccupied with other concerns, such as family conflict
 - Families do not value academic achievement
- **Fear and Depression**
 - The child feels misunderstood or not valued, is discouraged and has a low self-concept or even depression
 - The child's energy is focused on survival and self-protection
 - It avoids risk-taking, since the child can say, "I really didn't try," and thus save face
 - It's easier to drop out than to fulfill other's expectations
 - It can get teachers or parents to lower their expectations

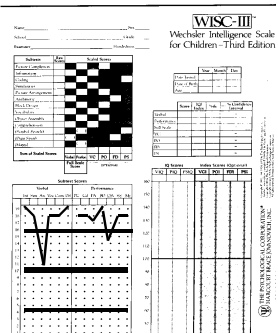
Social and Emotional Reasons for Lack of Motivation - continued

- **Dependency and Enmeshment**
 - It's a way for the child to get extra attention
- **Anger and Rebellion**
 - It's a way of rebelling in which parents can't win if a child goes "on strike" in a passive way
 - The child can take control away from parents or teachers, and express anger at them
- **Friendships and Peer Pressures**
 - It is an attempt to fit in with peers who do not value academic achievement

3. School Reasons for Lack of Motivation

- **The child is in a toxic classroom**
- **The child is educationally misplaced**
- **Insufficient attention is given to asynchronous development**

Asynchronous Development



School Reasons for Lack of Motivation - continued

- The child has poor study habits or has not learned ways to organize material
- The child has not learned resilience and persistence
- The tasks at hand just do not seem relevant or important to the child's life

Six Basic Guidelines

- Create an environment that promotes achievement and motivation
- Avoid power struggles
- Develop a positive relationship
- Provide stimulation, interest, and challenge
- Establish appropriate goals and subgoals
- Build on gradual success

Specific Strategies

- Assess possible reasons for the apparent lack of motivation
- Start where the child is
- Transfer motivations by tying the tasks into the child's life
- Catch them doing "something right," and use successive successes
- Reward even the slightest movement in the right direction
- Frequency is more important than duration or amount
- Use anticipatory praise
- Vary your praise and recognition (write notes, etc.)
- Recognize accomplishments; encourage attempts
- Focus on the process, not just the outcome
- Expect achievement

Specific Strategies (continued)

- To establish a longstanding habit, recognize accomplishments in varied ways and at various times
- Promote resilience by creating challenge
- Consistent success leads to the quickest mastery, but continual success does not promote persistence
- Encourage, rather than criticize; avoid sarcasm and ridicule
- Avoid "referential speaking"
- Avoid punishment, particularly harsh/inconsistent punishment (there is a "spread of effect")
- Remember, personal relationships are the most important motivators
- Help the child to learn to reward himself/herself

Strategies (continued)

- Though we may start with extrinsic motivators, the goal is intrinsic self-motivation
- Nurture self-management skills
 - Listening to others
 - Time management
 - Patience and tolerance for frustration
 - Completing tasks
 - Goal setting

Goal Setting

- > Use the Socratic teaching method
- > Use fantasized anticipation ("What if . . ? Then what would happen?")
- > Explore the worst possible outcome; best possible outcome; most likely outcome
- > Help set short-term, intermediate goals
 - Write them down
 - Adopt a specific action plan
 - Take an action
 - Reward themselves for the attempt

Paul Torrance's study of teachers who made a difference to gifted children:

(From classic research by Professor Paul Torrance)

About people who made a difference to gifted children:

(From classic research by Professor Paul Torrance)

- > "She conveyed a powerful feeling of my ability to comprehend and to do things, and it seemed that I was able to share this excitement with her. She understood it, welcomed and enjoyed it herself which left me with a sense that learning is exciting and something that's good to share."

About people who made a difference to gifted children:

- "She encouraged active participation with others, asked lots of questions, and accepted all answers without humiliating me; she helped me feel competent, even while I was trying something new."

About people who made a difference to gifted children:

- "He encouraged us to fall in love with something, and some of us are still pursuing it as the center of our future career image."
- "He gave individual encouragement and focused privately on my own needs; he conveyed that it's important to him that I succeed and that I like myself."

Lessons From People Who Became Eminent

From *Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More Than 700 Famous Men and Women* (Goertzel, Goertzel, Goertzel, & Hansen, 2003)



- As children, most of them disliked school and schoolteachers
- Their families valued learning, and the children loved learning
- Homes usually were full of books and stimulating conversation

Lessons From People Who Became Eminent

Findings from *Cradles of Eminence* (continued)

- Their parents held strong opinions about controversial subjects
- These children learned to think and express themselves clearly
- All had learned to be persistent in pursuing their own visions and goals
- The parents often were pressured by others to have their children conform to mediocrity

Lessons From People Who Became Eminent

Findings from *Cradles of Eminence* (continued)

- Their parents, particularly mothers, were highly involved in the lives of their children, even dominating
- Many had difficult childhoods
 - Poverty
 - Broken homes
 - Physical handicaps
 - Parental dissatisfaction
 - Controlling or rejecting parents

What Can You Do about It?



- Our gifted children need you to be energy givers!
- You are more influential than you realize
- Remember the inoculation ratio of 1 to 7
- We must preserve hope for others
- So you must nurture yourself and your own motivation
