

FROM
COUNSELOR

To
Counselor



Helping Gifted Children

Reach Their Potential

By Cynthia Marie-Martinovich Lardner

As my mentor Annemarie Roeper stated recently, “I used to say the heart is my favorite subject. It is my only subject.” Mrs. Roeper has touched the hearts of many gifted children and adults in her 85 years. As co-founder of The Roeper School, she dedicated her life to working with gifted children and their families and is renowned for her humanistic, working educational model, in which individuality, integrity, and fairness are valued.

Mrs. Roeper, along with a myriad of other professionals, have found that the gifted, whether child or adult, have a unique set of needs.¹ As children, they are often called “asynchronous” because their emotional and intellectual growth do not always fall on the same side of the proverbial bell curve. In reality, however, they are really not asynchronous, but are integrated for who they are.

Whether child or adult, this segment of our population, which some argue includes the top 15 percent of the bell curve, are generally more emotionally sensitive.² Sadness is sadder. Happiness is happier. Injustice and immense beauty often evoke strong feelings. These intense feelings, if not acknowledged and accepted, can lead to pain and confusion, feelings of being different or not normal, and difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships. Learning to cope internally and respond to others makes all the difference, as emotional intelligence, not IQ, is the dominant factor in predicting overall success.

Unfortunately, gifted children have long been intellectually, socially, and emotionally under-served. When most of us were growing up, there were few, if any, gifted programs. In fact, while schools had IQ or aptitude scores, which determined placement in advanced classes, these scores were rarely given to parents. Parents were provided only with achievement scores, showing what had been learned. If students became bored or disinterested due to a lack of challenge, or had a learning disability or attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADD/ADHD), their achievement scores might have been depressed and not indicative of their true potential.³

Today, little has changed. Our exceptional learners are still being educated in the regular classroom, oftentimes with little curriculum differentiation, few pull-out programs, and scant opportunities to form necessary relationships with similar peers. The controversial, new Federal No Child Left Behind Act merely sets a parentally unenforceable goal of a “year’s work in a year’s time.” Ironically, the only instance in which gifted children have any legal rights is if they are “twice blessed,” which is another phrase for “dual exceptionality.” This means a child is not only gifted but also has a learning disability or ADD/ADHD.

In this instance, there may be a legal right to an *appropriate* education.⁴ This may occur in up to as many as one out of six gifted individuals.⁵ However, as many of these children learn compensatory skills allowing them to function as average and as most teachers have no training in this area, identification of these children is unlikely. In the event that identification occurs and the handicap qualifies under the statutory definitions, there now seems to exist an enforceable legal right to an *appropriate* education, which must occur in the least restrictive environment. This presents a conundrum for school dis-

Fast Facts:

- The Mean or Average IQ of an attorney is 127.
- An IQ of 130 is the traditional gifted cut-off.
- Gifted individuals are not supported intellectually, socially, or emotionally.
- Few specialists in Michigan work with the gifted.

tricts, which, until fairly recently, functioned in a bifurcated manner: either you were gifted or handicapped, but certainly not both. Now, faced with severe financial constraints and increasing accountability, serving gifted children, especially those twice blessed, has become a formidable challenge.

As a result, caring for our gifted children is a responsibility that we, as parents, must meet with little institutional assistance. Speaking of these “star” children, Mrs. Roeper stated that they are “more dependent on parents, because no one else understands and supports them.” Mrs. Roeper observed that these children “redefine parenthood,” yet few resources are available to help parents support their children.

Why is all of this important to you, my current colleagues? Because the mean, that is the mathematical average, IQ of attorneys hovers around 127. This means that many of you are gifted or fall within the superior range of 120–130.⁶ Over the last 10 years, I have spoken with many gifted adults who, as children, had trouble adjusting socially and emotionally. Childhoods were painful periods during which they felt misunderstood or that they were not normal. School was boring. Illegal drug usage was commonplace. Many encountered legal difficulties. If there was an unidentified learning disability or ADD/ADHD, things were worse.

Hopefully, most adults can reconcile or maturely move beyond their youth, either through therapy or by falling into a homogenous group, which, in our instance, might be a philanthropic commitment, a bar committee, law firm, or even membership in MENSA. These social affiliations allow for acceptance of a person for who he or she is at the core. This is important because, as previously stated,

current research shows our emotional intelligence, not IQ, is the dominant factor in predicting our success.

As attorneys, with an average IQ of 127, we are likely to have gifted children because there is a direct correlation between a child's IQ and that of his or her parents. As an infant, your child may have had fine motor skills, allowing the creation of elaborate artwork, inventions, or construction projects, or exhibited precocious verbal skills. Gifted children often enter kindergarten reading. Perhaps you wasted money on clothes your son or daughter refused to wear because they were itchy or the seams or fabric bothered them.⁷ Once in school full time, your child might have always known the spelling words on the pretest. Your child may have complained of being bored, while the teacher complained that your child was bouncing off the walls and always blurting out answers. Behavior associated with giftedness includes an infinite number of possibilities, entirely dependent upon the individual child.

Having been one of these children, and then having given birth to four more, I have had no choice but to confront many of these issues. Rushing to leave in the morning, I have tried four or five pairs of socks on my youngest two children before stumbling upon one that was acceptable. I have advocated in the public schools for my children and others. Private schooling has been

utilized. I have had two children grade advanced. As each event occurred, I learned more about myself, more about my children, my peers, my colleagues, and, not to sound trite, life in general. In fact, working for and advocating on behalf of the gifted has become a passion.

When one finds one's passion, one should pursue it.

Fortunately, there is a great deal of room for me to pursue this passion. Although in Michigan there are several psychologists experienced in testing children for giftedness, there are few professionals with any significant experience in on-going counseling, consulting, program design, in-service school training, advocating, speaking, and other services benefiting gifted children or adults. I hope to fill at least a small part of that void. Currently, I am pursuing a Master's degree in Counseling and, ultimately, plan to obtain my doctorate. My legal career, with its emphasis on advocacy, a working knowledge of the legal system, and strong writing and oral presentation skills, will be a nice stepping stone into my new career. ♦

Cynthia Marie-Martinovich Lardner has been a member of our State Bar for 20 years and a member of the Publications and Website Advisory Committee for over a decade. She is currently a Master's level counseling student at Wayne State University. While earning this degree, she coaches and advocates on behalf of gifted children. She serves as a Board member of on the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education and an officer for the Macomb County-based Advocates for Developing Academic Potential.

Linda Silverman, Ph.D., whose research was extensively cited in this article, will be speaking on April 23–24, 2004 at MSU's Kellogg Center at a conference sponsored by the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education. The conference's theme is "The Non-Traditional Gifted Student." This conference is appropriate for parents as well as educators. For further information, contact the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Children at (616) 365-8230, or bluebird@iserv.net.

FOOTNOTES

1. Giftedness is classically defined as having an IQ of 130 or above. To put things in perspective, an IQ of 100 is average. The most comprehensive websites on giftedness are www.hoagiesgifted.org and <http://www.ditd.org/public/>. The Michigan Alliance for Gifted Education also maintains a website at <http://www.migiftedchild.org/>.
2. At least one well-known researcher, Linda Silverman, Ph.D., feels that the top 15 percent of the bell curve require special educational services. An excellent summary of the comprehensive Silverman study may be accessed at <http://www.gifteddevelopment.com>.
3. IQ or intelligence quotient is a measurement of aptitude or potential. Achievement tests are measurements of what has been learned by an individual. One can have a high aptitude yet have low achievement scores. For resources on testing go to <http://groups.msn.com/ADAP/testingresources.msnw>.
4. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Warren, G. Cumberland School District, Case No. 97-cv-00946 (1999), found a public school system liable for private school tuition when the school district failed to meet the needs of two children who were gifted and had learning disabilities.
5. Silverman's study (n 2) involved 4,000 children over a 22-year period. It concluded that one out of six children in the study group had a learning disability or ADD/ADHD. This number may be higher or lower in a different sample group.
6. *Supra* n 2.
7. Many gifted children are intensely "sensual." In younger years, this may manifest as a strong reaction to certain clothing items, especially those with large seams or not made with the softest of fibers. Socks, seams, and labels usually create the biggest battles. Further information on the sensual, psychomotor, imaginative, emotional, and intellectual aspects of gifted children can be accessed at http://www.sengifted.org/articles_social/Lind_OverexcitabilityAndTheGifted.shtml.