

# High intellectual abilities as risk factors for school failure

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# School failure

## Investigation by C. Jankech 2001:

- ◆ 90 gifted (IQ  $\geq$  125) received psychological assessment
- ◆ Average age: 8 years (between 3 and 18 years)
- ◆ 35 girls and 55 boys
- ◆ 12% without problems (in relationship, school efficacy and behaviour)
- ◆ Average failure rate: 14%,  
(failure= repeating a year, bad section choice)

# Gifted school failure

**Study range, non representative:**

- **56% good pupils (not specially at top of class)**
- **14% failed, 11/12 in 11 or 12 years old group.**
- **30% underachievers not in failure group**

**Same data for ASEP: 14 % of failure between members of this association (165 children, average age: 8 )**

**Dr Marc BERSIER, psychologist, also found 16% failure for an average age of 9, but 17% of boys and 4% of girls.**

# Success and failures

## Association française enfants précoces/STATISTICS

School grade	Excellent/ good	Mediocre/ average	With difficulties
Nursery	100%	0%	0%
primary	75-85%	13%	2%
Secondary 7	60%	25%	15%
Secondary 8	40%	32%	28%
Secondary 9	33%	34%	33% <b>(A=16%)</b>

# Paradox

- ❑ Wechsler IQ has a high correlation with school success, especially with mathematics and reading/grammar (.55 and .65)
- ❑ Wechsler test was criticised as an instrument to value school adaptation but not to value intelligence (what is intelligence?)
- ❑ The question is: why do gifted children have more failures at school, than children with a high IQ?

# Reactions when facing inadequate teaching

- ▶ attention troubles,
- ▶ over-adaptation (especially for girls), a good solution in the short term but girls have more problems after adolescence and suffer more from depression
- ▶ restlessness like hyperactivity, after recognition high abilities evolve well.

# Reactions when facing inadequate teaching

- ✦ **Behaviour troubles: active or non-active opposition, are not real behavioural diseases like IC-D10**
- ✦ **Withdrawal**
- ✦ **Dislike of school**
- ✦ **self mutilation of high abilities” (J. Ch. Terrassier)**

# Gifted feelings

- ◆ Development is at a very high speed in the early years
- ◆ Disappointment at school: **he must wait**, listen to something he already knows, get adapted at a too slow rhythm (“I want to learn something that I don’t know”)
- ◆ When failure arrives: feelings of loss, an impression that he loses his abilities (“I became bad”, “lazy”, “without will”)

# Gifted feelings

- Perpetual choice for some gifted: **to be like peers or to be myself** (an intellectual, preferred pupil, enjoys talking with the teacher, do homework, read before the others, always has questions, has different and scientific interests...)
- **Seems to feel different when others look at him, that gives an incorrect self image.**

**There is great variability between gifted children**

# What did they say about gifted children in the 20th century?

R. de Craeker, prof pédagogie, Bruxelles 1951

“differences between gifted and average children, are so important that necessity to take special learning arrangements for gifted are generally admitted. Numerous authors affirm that when this arrangement doesn't exist, gifted are the children most neglected by their school and they are also the most retarded in accord with their real abilities.”

# Internal factors for failure

- Gifted suffer associated troubles (ADD, behavioural problems, personality problems, dyslexia...)
- High need to conform with peers (not show abilities, desires, opinions)

## External factors of failure, Relationship with teachers

- Some teachers don't accept a clever and sensible student, who is not the top of the class and consider him immature or denying his intellectual abilities
- Place reversal: pupil judges teacher, corrects teacher, give his opinion, and for some teachers difficult to accept.

# External factors for not succeeding, non-adapted teaching

- Denying abilities, forbidden to think (result of a forced slowing down)
- When rhythm and level are too low he will be bored and loose motivation

# The Pygmalion effect

Pygmalion negative effect (J.Ch. Terrassier):

- The lower the expectations of the teacher, the more the gifted child will be an underachiever
- This occurs at school, with teachers, peers and family
- Gifted child needs to conform to avoid being rejected

# Environmental expectations

So:

- If a teacher has a bad image of the child's intelligence, the gifted will conform to the teacher's expectations
- To be like his peers the gifted will reduce (conform) his abilities (self-mutilation)
- During all the school the conflict will be present between "be myself" or be "as the peers"

# Environmental expectations

Importance of social level:

J.Ch. Terrassier:

« the more the child's environment is unfavourable, the lower are the expectations of teachers, parents and friends »

# Environmental expectations

J.Ch. Terrassier:

« the child develops his self-image in accordance to the image reflected by an environment unable to recognise his abilities... resulting in intellectual inhibitions, linked to feelings that all intellectual expression is a source of guilt »

# Environment expectations

J.Ch. Terrassier:

"The successful gifted have a better self-image than the ones that fail"

"the self-image therefore becomes a critical factor in the deterioration or increasing of intelligence"

# Self esteem

- The gifted child needs support and comprehension but often receives criticism, raised attitudes against him and he is the not normal child (statistical mean) less accepted at school (prejudices)

# Self esteem

- The gifted sees himself as different from his peers and thinks that he's not a normal person and undervalues himself
- He clearly perceives his limits

# Self esteem

- Scared of failure, he can develop preventative behaviour, evading tasks in which he had failures (negative conditioning) and increasing the circle of failures.
- He frequently has a very low self esteem

# Intellectual functioning and learning difficulties

- Trapped by his speed, especially when he is very intuitive
- He can't make efforts, and sometimes have a bad organisation
- Needs to find sense, can't apply recipes (will say often "I don't understand" only because it didn't make sense)
- He must find logic in everything to be interested in it

# Intellectual functioning and school difficulties

- His attention will be lower if tasks are too simple
- Sometimes his results will be lower, without having real troubles but he will be perceived as “lazy”, “a dreamer” and “slow”.

# Intellectual functioning and school difficulties

➤ Boredom, loss of motivation,  
intellectual self-mutilation:

He is performing under his level of  
intellectual ability,

He will need an “intellectual  
resuscitation” to find once more  
motivation (J. Siaud-Facchin, F)

# Dyssynchronia

- ◆ **To accept gifted child means: accept different gaps between his real age, his mental age, his social maturity, his emotional maturity, his motor maturity**
- ◆ **When gifted play, you will hear “he isn’t mature”**
- ◆ **If he doesn’t want to play but only want to learn, you will hear “he’s not normal”**

# Dyssynchronia

- ◆ **A Gifted child is firstly, a child like the others but he has different intellectual abilities, he most probably played when he was younger, and developed at a higher speed**
- ◆ **Gaps will exist throughout his life, but especially in childhood and adolescence**
- ◆ **During adolescence the gap will be greater.**

# School arrangements

- ❖ **Replace equality values by equity values.  
The first step to accept school arrangements for gifted**
- ❖ **it means changing the values that have founded public schools and concern all social groups.**

# School arrangements

- ❖ **Favour individual solutions rather than standard solutions. Individual assessments are necessary**
- ❖ **Inform teachers, and directors about child's particular functioning, including both intellectual AND global.**

# Different kinds of school arrangements

- **Knowledge enrichment**
- **To deepen knowledge (for these 2 solutions, special classes for gifted are needed for a few hours per week)**
- **Acceleration (to skip a class, to do shorter cycles)**
- **Individual support by specialised teachers (specially for gifted with associated troubles)**
- **Course exemptions for extra-school enrichment (external courses to school)**

# Teaching adaptations

## Individual pedagogical support, objectives:

- **Overcome fear of failure, fear of difficulties (adults can't imagine this fear for very high IQ pupils)**
- **Find once more desire and pleasure for intellectual work**
- **The necessary conditions to make efforts**

**This individual support is pedagogical and therapeutic.**

# Teaching adaptations

**Why they often have fear?**

**A young teenage boy told us:**

**I'm very bad at mathematics;**

**Because it's no longer instinctive, "I must think about it"**

**(to have to think about = I'm not good at it)  
he has never thought so much before!**

# Psychotherapy

**Specific for gifted who suffer a form of psychopathology associated:**

- **Individual psychotherapy**
- **Family psychotherapy**
- **Psychodrama**

**Not medical:**

- **Art-therapy**
- **Child groups with a focus on a special activity**

# Psychotherapy

- **There's no standard solution, for each child we must find the specific way to support them**
- **Teaching adaptations are frequent necessary, both can be conducted simultaneously.**

# Acceleration

- ❖ To decide, it's necessary to take into account:
  1. Intellectual abilities: calculate compensated IQ
  2. Global psychological functioning (emotional management, motivation)
  3. Social adaptation: relationship quality, ability and desire to be different from peers (younger)
  4. Distinguish family expectations and child's learning needs

# Acceleration and family expectations

- ❖ Enormous expectations can be the result of a parent's need to satisfy his own unaccomplished project
  - ❖ Parents can also try to resolve their passed conflict with school and put the child into a loyalty conflict
1. Acceleration must resolve a child's real needs

# Acceleration and family

Acceleration supposes that the parents will support:

- ❖ Extra school work (remedial work, especially in secondary school)
- ❖ The gifted child could lose confidence during the adaptation period and get stressed, parents must support him, so manage their stress

# Acceleration and family

=>without family support it would be very hard for a gifted child to skip a school level

Especially if the school can't compensate family problems by a teacher who is more comprehensive, sensitive and supportive

# Compensated IQ (J.C. Terrassier)

- ❖ Calculate compensated IQ with a year more:  
To skip a school year IQ must be at least 115  
so the gifted child will keep a good advance  
in the higher level  
=> Calculate IQ using the same standards as  
the future peers

# Skipping a year at school and personality

- If gifted suffers psychotic or borderline :
  1. Incapacity to distinguish me of not/me
  2. Incapacity to distinguish reality/imaginary
- ⇒ Severe difficulties in relationships
- ⇒ Intellectual difficulties (restlessness, attention) when he loses control

# Skipping a year and personality

**Psychotic or borderline:** acceleration is a risk

- ❑ Gifted can find refuge in intellectual problems to avoid relations and emotions
- ❑ With new peers and/or more difficult task he can feel prosecuted, and develop an “as if” personality, withdrawal attitude, self mutilation in emotional feelings, become restless. . .

# Skipping a year and personality

## Psychotic or borderline:

- ⇒ Prefer differentiation in the same class or special class, individual programs or psychotherapeutic centre, it depends on the severity of the problem
- ⇒ There is no standard solution

# Skipping a year and A.D.D.

If gifted child suffers attention and hyperactivity problems:

- ❑ Acceleration can be difficult
- ❑ but without teaching adaptation boredom will increase restlessness

# Skipping and A.D.D.

- ⇒ favour variety and activities that can be interesting for the gifted child, so he must pay complete attention
- ⇒ Teachers counselling to bring the child back to his work

# Skipping and dyslexia

If child suffers of dyslexia:

- speech treatment is necessary, even if the school doesn't ask it
- prefer individual help and enrichment by extra school activities

# Skipping a year and dyslexia

Dyslexia hides high abilities and high abilities hides dyslexia:

- ❑ Before the fifth grade, gifted children don't really need to read completely to understand and their good memory can hide their incapacity to read
- ❑ A pupil who can not read, will be considered second-rate

# Skipping a year and behavioural disease

- ❑ Stressful and anguishing situations favours increased acting out and must be avoid
- ❑ But:
  - 1) boredom favours restlessness;
  - 2) a big difference between child's ability and teaching level: a risk of restlessness and acting out.

# Behavioural disease

We must try to choose a teacher who can contain ( by arousing intellectual curiosity and recognition of child's abilities) his antisocial behaviour, and be able to guarantee a reassuring space, but also be able to have authority.

For a gifted child who has behavioural problems, a good professional adaptation would be the best guarantee of integration into society. We must permit them to reach the highest studies in accordance to their intellectual capacities.

# School arrangements

Collaboration with school directors and teachers is necessary. Without them, nothing is possible

Associations can be mediator in negotiations with school (e.g. ASEP (association suisse des enfants précoces) they can provide information for teachers to introduce the problems associated with gifted child.

# Negotiation with school

Because gifted children give a different image at school:

- ⇒ School/family conflict
- ⇒ The 2 images are real because there is a different adaptation in the two different situations

# Negotiation with school

One child for two different images:

- ⇒ A clever pupil who's not the best, will be seen by the teachers as “lazy, opponent, arrogant, intolerant”
- ⇒ We must try to change this bad image to recognise gifted child

# And if the child has no problems?

- ❑ An early detection gives indications to guide education and school career to try to avoid difficulties
- ❑ If detection arrives at adolescence (sensitive moment for learning problems), it may be difficult to help an adolescent who has lost motivation

# Adolescence

- ❑ Needs to be like the peers
- ❑ More used to rationalise than as a child
- ❑ Generation conflict with adults
- ❑ Identity transformation, questions about self, doubts. . .

# Adolescence crisis

❑ He/she doesn't want to study anymore :

My experience:

- ❖ If the adolescent finds one more time the pleasure in learning, he will find desire for studies and motivation
- ❖ He can't accept the loss of success, especially if:
  - 1) at primary school he was a good student
  - 2) He keeps intellectual curiosity and future intellectual objectives



# Adolescence crisis



Objective: Maturity exam enables real professional choice, it is adapted to his abilities and ambitions, we must try to help gifted to reach it.

# Adolescence

Adolescence conflict:

To become autonomous from parents but always needing them, their support, and their positive reinforcement

=> don't think that he/she is autonomous, that he doesn't needs adults, that he really knows what he wants, that he really can make a real choice.

# Educational objectives for children and adolescent HG

- ❑ Preserve child's self esteem by an adapted and supportive environment
- ❑ Estimate if he/she is in a situation of intellectual overcapacity at school (depends on the environment)
- ❑ Can he/she establish authentic relationships with peers?

# Risks: individual risks

- Depression
- Character change
- Headlong reaction
- Renunciation of their abilities, intellectual self-mutilation

# Risks: social risks

- Social exclusion
- Search for distraction or compensations:
  1. Drugs, leading to self-destruction, or depression, suicide
  2. Criminality, leading to social destruction

# Risks: failing at school

J. Ch. Terrassier:

50% of intellectually precocious children are  
lead to fail at school

Mme Siaud-Facchin: More than twice the  
gifted fail at school