What hurdles must be overcome by gifted children and adolescents?

Abstract

Through our 19 years of clinical experience working with intellectually gifted children, adolescents and adults, along with the results of four surveys completed by individuals referred to our practice, we highlight the importance of early detection and educational intervention. Such intervention is often difficult to put in place. The specific nature of gifted individuals, including a level of sensitivity that leaves them prone to misunderstandings, all too often prevents those around them from taking the appropriate measures. Given that this is the case, early detection of their intelligence, along with early diagnosis of any associated disorders, are all the more vital. Such disorders often come to light too late on as they are concealed by the child's intelligence. A psychological assessment is therefore often needed to help make any necessary adjustments to their education or arrange any necessary counselling (either educational or psychological therapy) as early as possible.
The aim of these interventions is to prevent the child from failing and to give them the opportunity to become more socially assertive, which will in turn raise their self-esteem. The 17% failure rate observed in our latest survey is a counter-intuitive and unexpected outcome and one which is often extremely upsetting given these individuals' superior intelligence.

Keywords: intellectual giftedness, sensitivity, education, learning disorders

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Introduction

This article presents our current understanding and experiences of working with intellectually gifted children and adolescents, from both clinical experience at our practice and data collected through two initial surveys (2001*, 2011*) which questioned parents of intellectually gifted children and adolescents who had undergone psychological assessments, plus two further surveys of adolescents (aged 16 and above) and adults (2015-2016).

These surveys aimed to find out how the referred individuals had progressed, and discover to what extent the measures proposed had actually catered to their needs. Clearly therefore, we cannot comment on those gifted individuals who are not referred and who continue to go undetected, many of whom probably cope extremely well without the need for psychological assessment or without exhibiting signs of being intellectually gifted or high potential individuals. However, we know that others for whom no provision is made can experience a much tougher journey through life, as reported by a number of our respondents who were not tested until adulthood.

1. Historic perspectives

The recognition of gifted individuals is not a recent fashion, contrary to some opinion. According to Pereira-Fradin (2006), even in Ancient Greece, Plato considered that intelligence was not equally distributed and that children required education suited to their abilities.

Mandatory education, while an obvious step forward, has tended to assign children to academic years on the basis of their year of birth, give or take a month. Such a system has been adopted despite the evidence of early intelligence tests devised by French psychologist Alfred Binet (Binet-Simon Intelligence Scale, 1905). These suggested that for some students, an alternative system of assignment might be necessary, as such students were considerably above average intellectually. While little progress has been made over the course of a century in terms of the education offered to intellectually gifted students, it is actually these children's ability to adapt—or indeed over-adapt—that has meant that their needs have been side-lined and that some are still considered to have impaired development, while their intelligence goes undetected. In other words, children's ability to adapt may in fact be detrimental.

Termann's longitudinal study of gifted individuals (1925), which found that most subjects were successful both academically and professionally with relatively few problems, painted an incomplete picture of such children. Specifically, it did not consider less studious children, with an initial sample consisting of pupils identified by their teachers; quite understandably, teachers considered those pupils who were top of the class. We now know that somewhere between 17 and 30 per cent of students identified as being intellectually gifted—30% according to data from AFEP, a French association for gifted children (2000)—have emotional or learning difficulties and that some do not achieve their expected potential or the potential that they themselves might have hoped to achieve.

2. Different manifestations of intellectual giftedness

Intelligence is a key factor—but not the only factor—in how an individual functions. Intellectual giftedness is not an illness. But nor does it prevent a child from experiencing psychological disorders or learning difficulties.
There are thus many factors that may come into play:

- Managing one's emotions
- Sensitivity or hypersensitivity
- Relational intelligence
- Interpersonal intelligence
- The presence of other talents
- The occurrence of associated psychic disorders
- The occurrence of associated learning difficulties (especially dyslexia, dysphasia, dyspraxia and ADHD).

Individual and family history also plays an important role in supporting this intellectual talent.

While intelligence always sits at around 9.5-10 on a scale from 0 to 10 given different intellectual profiles, the salience of other factors varies by different amounts, meaning that in reality, "intellectually gifted" is not a homogeneous category. Simply for the sake of brevity, we will continue to use the term "intellectually gifted" and the singular term "giftedness" in the remainder of this article.

Intelligence, curiosity, a need to understand, a sense of justice, lucidity and empathy are, broadly speaking, traits shared by intellectually gifted children. This intelligence, which makes intellectually gifted individuals acutely perceptive of those around them, also makes such individuals particularly sensitive, even though it is not a defining trait per se. According to Elaine Aron*, some 20% of the population may be described as hypersensitive, while just 2-5% are intellectually gifted. Sensitivity is thus not a sufficient condition for determining that a person is intellectually gifted, and only an extremely high level of intelligence can be used as an indicator of intellectual giftedness. Even if all gifted individuals were indeed hypersensitive, it would still not be sufficient as a means of defining such individuals, as they are not the only sensitive or hypersensitive individuals. Intelligence is thus both a sufficient and necessary condition for categorising such individuals.

The fact that sensitivity and intelligence are regularly associated with one another means that such individuals, whether children, teenagers or adults, are different types of people and often misunderstood. Intelligence still receives less recognition compared to sporting talent, for example, and their sensitivity fails to be given due recognition because they are intelligent. With Descartes' famous adage, "I think, therefore I am", firmly engrained within us, we assume that the intellectually gifted ought to be able to control their feelings and emotions, keeping them at arm's length in a Cartesian separation of mind and body. In the words of Terrassier (1981-2006), intellectually gifted children exhibit *dyssynchrony* between intelligence and emotional experiences. This does not make intellectually gifted children "immature" individuals, but means that they are nonetheless still children. They have what Spinoza described as the joy of knowledge, connecting body and mind. In his impressive work, Damasio (2003) sets out the thinking of this great philosopher, who understood the importance of the body as the centre of one's feelings and emotions. This joy is experienced by intellectually gifted children, but its fervour often wanes, particularly when it comes to schoolwork, as the child grows older.

3. What are the difficulties faced by intellectually gifted children?
Our initial 2001 survey revealed a paradoxically high failure rate among extremely high ability children, in spite of the fact that most were studious individuals.

2001 observation (questionnaires sent to the parents of 90 children and adolescents referred to our practice):
57% good students,
14% failure rate among 3-18 year olds, but 16% among 7-18 year olds
Of those children experiencing difficulties, 91% were 12 and older.
30% under-achieving but not failing.

Definition of failure: students who had been held back a school year (termed "grade retention" in the US) and/or placed in an inappropriate stream by the age of 12.

2015 observation (75 adolescents and adults aged 16-55) referred to our practice, responding in person to our questionnaire:
17**%** had been held back at least one school year**.** It should be noted that this group of repeaters also includes adolescents with no other associated problems, extremely high IQs (Wechsler scores on the WPPSI III and WISC IV scales).

The 2001 survey revealed that, paradoxically, problems at school increased with age: among the 14-18 year olds referred, school performance accounted for 65% of reasons for referral, compared to 31% in the case of 7-9 year olds. At primary school, the most common reason was boredom and underperformance, often due to an undetected learning difficulty, primarily dyslexia.
Statistics from AFEP, the French Association for Precocious Children (Côte, 1997) also provide evidence for a similar increase in problems at school as children get older.

These difficulties are counter-intuitive given that they unexpectedly occur just as their education becomes richer.
Given these observations, we have striven to prevent these issues by detecting them at as early a stage as possible in order to avoid failure. Failure can be particularly distressing under the 3-stream selection system that Swiss pupils undergo at the age 12. Since 2001, we have also offered group therapy as a means to combat the social isolation experienced by some intellectually gifted children. This increases their assertiveness through interaction with peers, improving their self-esteem (see results at www.jankech.ch, Evaluation of Measures, 2011*). Such children's self-esteem is often undermined by their perceptiveness, sensitivity, failure to be acknowledged by those around them and/or difficulties at school. Self-esteem is often undermined by their lucidity, their sensitivity, the non-recognition of the entourage and / or the scholastic difficulties

Explaining educational difficulties—and pupil failure—among intellectually gifted children

René de Craecker, an Education scholar at Brussels University, writes:
"Group differences between gifted children and those of average intelligence are so obvious that the need for special educational measures to help gifted children is generally accepted. A number of authors state that, where such measures are lacking, it is gifted children who are neglected by schools and, relative to their intellectual resources, are also furthest behind" (de Craecker, 1951).

Coping with ease at primary school may prove detrimental for such students given an inappropriate education system in which they are able to "coast along" without actually embarking on a learning process. Intellectually gifted children successfully and effortlessly adopt a pattern of "understand, use, succeed".
Most children, on the other hand, follow a pattern of "understand, repeat, practise, use, succeed". This lack of repetition and practice (unnecessary for gifted children at primary school, and indeed often at secondary school), lulls them into an illusion that they can accomplish anything not only effortlessly but almost instinctively.
I have compared the intellectually gifted child to the hare in La Fontaine's famous fable *The Hare and the Tortoise*, in which the hare goes to sleep to avoid overtaking the tortoise and ends up arriving late at the finishing line. Boredom sends the hare to sleep and it is the tortoise whose steady perseverance wins him the race.
The reason for this lies particularly in education that is inadequate in terms of its complexity, pace and diversity. These children enter into what has been termed a state of "acquired inability" (Grubar,1997), leading them into a downward spiral towards failure, in which they fail to gain good marks due to their underperformance (in an education system such as that of Switzerland, this means that they are placed in a stream that is less appropriate for their intelligence), which leaves them worried. The fear of failure may put them off, causing them to avoid schoolwork and thereby reinforcing their inability by preventing them from embarking on an actual learning process. It is therefore vital to help them get out of this vicious cycle and into a virtuous cycle.

Methodology

Appropriate educational support allows gifted children to regain their enthusiasm and self-confidence when it comes to their schoolwork. Providing explanations which are illuminating and based on logic, one of their strengths, will raise their interest and enable them to take pleasure in their work. This is the point at which educators can introduce repetition, which children will persevere with as they see their marks increase.

2011 observation (106 children, adolescents and young adults who underwent psychological assessment, with a questionnaire sent to their parents): with educational measures and counselling in place, an 11% drop in failure rate was observed. Among those children who were failing, all had learning difficulties (dyslexia, ADHD, anxiety disorders).

- ⇨ Educational support, provided by somebody with a good understanding of intellectually gifted children, is therefore essential.
- ⇨ This avoids both failure and the need to isolate the child from those around them at school.

The above measures involved the intervention of a self-taught, talented education specialist who is well acquainted with intellectually gifted individuals ("L'Echec scolaire du

surdoué” [Academic failure of gifted children] http://www.jankech.ch/pdf/echecfr.pdf, Jankech & Anthamatten). The reason for this lies particularly in education that is inadequate in terms of its complexity, pace and diversity and has been working with us for over 17 years.
With his support, children successfully improved their attitude towards work (62%) and their marks increased (55%). Full results are available at http://www.jankech.ch/pdf/eval2011_en.pdf.

For adolescents where such provision is not possible, private schooling remains the preferred solution, given how vital it is to avoid inappropriate streaming.
Where schools have developed teaching that is tailored to intellectually gifted children, this means that these children have people around them who are understanding, compassionate and encouraging, restoring their self-esteem in a way that is vital to their progress.

The devastating effects of understimulation

A six-year-old child who had already skipped a year of pre-primary school puts it very clearly: “I’d like to go to school to learn something I don’t know”. Children complain about having to have knowledge repeated that they have already assimilated (e.g. children who can already read at the age of 4½ having to “learn to read” in their first year of primary school).

Children turn off, get distracted, and in some cases feel physically ill or will attempt to achieve perfection in the absence of anything more interesting to do.

We are all similar: if we find a particular task boring, our brain “switches off” and our concentration wanes. To achieve a state of “flow” or maximum attention, the level of the individual must match the complexity of the task.

Understimulation leads to boredom. While boredom can encourage creativity in moments of leisure when children are free to choose what they wish to do, boredom can become intolerable and detrimental in a classroom situation. And the child, who is not learning anything new, feels that they are not making progress but is forced to sit and wait patiently for education that is eventually suited to their curiosity and desire to learn.

Meanwhile, the child does not gain essential experience such as overcoming failure, putting in effort and practising and repeating more complex skills tailored to their abilities. These are all experiences that will enable them to adapt to secondary school and university later in life.

When they do get to a stage where they should be embarking on a learning process, they will not have developed the necessary cognitive tools. At that point, they will experience low self-esteem as they achieve average or even low marks.

Self-esteem among intellectually gifted children

Research conducted by US psychiatrists Ornstein and Sobel led to the conclusion that happiness is the privilege of those who can cultivate positive illusions and believe that they are more capable than they actually are. In short, a person who is lucid and overly realistic often has lower self-esteem. This ability for a person to believe that they are capable is important when it comes to maintaining their self-esteem. Hence, intellectually gifted children will often be dissatisfied as they are unable to accept failure and will readily think that their abilities are unsatisfactory at the first sign of lower marks or mistakes that they see as being unacceptable.

Their abilities are such that they are unable to tolerate even the slightest mistake when tasks are overly straightforward. They also feel that they have not done anything out of the ordinary. For this reason, it is important to put them in situations where they face challenges and complexity, as this gets them interested, motivated and able to develop cognitive tools for subsequent stages of their academic and professional careers.

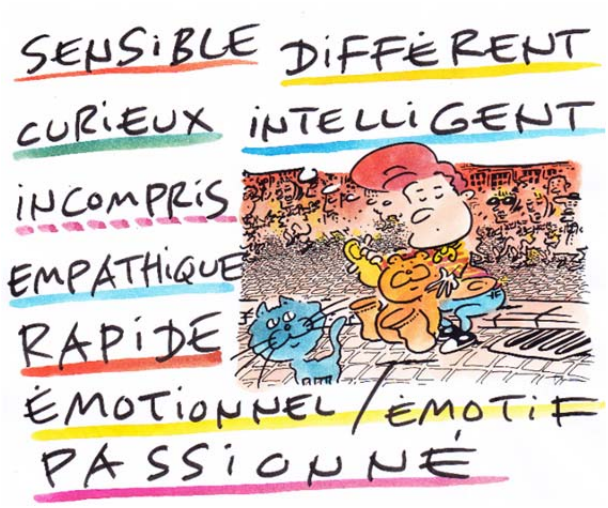
From being “different” to actual bullying

Children are the first to tell that another child is different in some way. Schoolchildren who do not “fit in” are liable to be teased. Gifted children often wish to avoid conflict and their sense of empathy leads them to be sympathetic rather than necessarily defending themselves out of fear of hurting others. Unlike children with low IQ, gifted children will also be envied. They will therefore keep a low profile to avoid being labelled a “know-it-all” by their classmates.

Adults need to protect those children affected and prevent isolation and low self-esteem. But bullies must also be dealt with, as they will tend to develop antisocial behaviour into adulthood. According to Olweus, school bullying is a predictor of violence in adulthood (especially domestic violence).

Over-adaptation
Over-adaptation describes the way in which some children may give in to the expectations of those around them to the point that they are no longer aware of who they are, what they want or what they like. Some intellectually gifted children will therefore blend into the crowd, not daring to be themselves. This is especially common in girls.
We must therefore allow children to assert themselves, while fostering a safe environment in which children who are different are not the target of bullying.

4. How intellectually gifted children see themselves: we asked them to state five adjectives to describe intellectually gifted children (2015 Survey)



Top ten adjectives that those surveyed in 2015 associate with intellectually gifted individuals.

Illustration by Pecub

“SENSITIVE DIFFERENT
CURIOUS INTELLIGENT
MISUNDERSTOOD
EMPATHIC
QUICK
EMOTIONAL / EMOTIVE
PASSIONATE”

5. Why do intellectually gifted children face these hurdles?
The association between sensitivity and intelligence is a key cause of misunderstanding. It can mean that parents and teachers fail to take steps to help gifted children, hindering their ability to develop in a congenial manner over the course of their school career. In some cases, this may lead to failure.
Clear as it is that sensitivity is not a sufficient condition for identifying intellectual giftedness, it is equally important that sensitivity is borne in mind so that such children receive the necessary understanding and support.
The more sensitive the individual, the stronger their emotional response will be, particularly in view of their differences with others, the learning activities they are offered and the failure of adults to understand their situation.
There are clearly huge differences among intellectually gifted individuals in how they manage their emotions. Excessive control of one’s emotions is just as harmful as not controlling them at all. Each individual will take a particular route, but it appears clear that those who
are overly rational and hold back their emotions are just as likely to reach breaking point as those who fail to find a way to stand back and put things into perspective.

Sensitivity and emotions, 2015 (opinions of adolescents and adults on difficulties experienced in managing their emotions):

Adults: 16% think they often have difficulties managing their emotions (37% often + very often)

Adolescents: 15% very often (52% often + very often, retrospective judgement in the case of adult respondents)

Children: 14% very often (51% often + very often). Respondents are asked to make a retrospective judgement about their childhood.
25-27% consider that they have been very sensitive throughout their life.
33% think that their emotions were very intense in childhood, 28% in adolescence and 26% in adulthood.

- ⇨ Managing emotions improves with age, but for 14-16% it is and remains difficult.
- ⇨ Sensitivity therefore appears to be common and hypersensitivity is not a trait found among all intellectually gifted children referred to our practice. It is a trait that we find among approximately one third of gifted children that we have encountered.

Factors reported in our 2016 survey (Sensitivity of gifted children based on E. Aron's questionnaire, used with permission of both the author and publisher *Editions de l'Homme*)

Signs of sensitivity
85% Highly aware of their environment both socially and emotionally, as well as from other perspectives, e.g. an ecological perspective (29% very aware)
86% Report that they feel strong artistic emotions (34% very intense)
70% Conscientious (21% extremely conscientious)
86% Perfectionist (29% very perfectionist)
67% Sensitive to others (situations of rivalry, competition, working while observed by others), with 25% very sensitive
74% Report that they were seen as "shy" during childhood

- ⇨ Sensitivity to their environment, those around them, other people. Hence, largely a positive trait.
- ⇨ Hypersensitivity in these areas affects 21-34%.

What are the signs that intellectually gifted individuals seek new experiences? 2016 survey (16-75 year olds)
84% like the unknown
91% like to investigate as soon as they see something unusual
94% like exploring a new field
67% are drawn to and thrilled by art
67% enjoy being in a new place that they are not familiar with
67% like to be explorers
67% would like to experience strong feelings at sport

Sensitivity associated with a yearning for new experiences (and even "thrill-seeking")

While they are sensitive, even hypersensitive, intellectually gifted children also seek new experiences, be they aesthetic, intellectual or indeed sporting in nature.
The combination of being sensitive and stepping out of their comfort zone in search of new experiences can sometimes cause issues, particularly in children who get bored at school but are reluctant to embark on new subject areas, afraid that they will not succeed. Their lucidity and sensitivity may therefore make them overcautious or even lead to inhibition in extreme cases.
From pre-primary school onwards, gifted children face a lack of understanding by adults, who interpret their sensitivity as a sign of immaturity and will often curb their desire to take risks. The
negative Pygmalion effect (or Golem effect) described by Terrassier (1989-2006) therefore plays a part from very early on. Terrassier's pioneering work into provision for intellectually gifted children in France highlighted that if those around the child have low expectations or deem them to be incapable, the child will in turn conform to those expectations and will be more likely not to succeed. This negative outlook may lead to over-conform and suppress their emotions.
"They can't skip a year because they're not mature enough" is a common misconception, whereas in reality, the pupil in question is simply sensitive and emotional. They are likely to remain that way for some time, especially if they are denied the opportunity to gain the types of experience that will expand their horizons and allay their fears.
"They won't be able to handle the test because they're too anxious" is also a common fear, when what such children actually yearn is the new lease of life that an IQ test will bring: it is a task that they will take pleasure in accomplishing, precisely because the test sets them brand new, untaught challenges. Their issue is with the type of learning they receive at school rather than logic, reasoning or comprehension.

6. The development of gifted children and adolescents is considerably more complex in the presence of associated learning disorders

In these cases, it is not the child's intelligence per se that causes issues, but rather the fact that it may conceal other disorders. Gifted children may adapt to disorders over time, compensating for and masking the difficulties in question. Conversely, such difficulties may also hide their extremely high intelligence which, as a result of their disorder, may go undetected if the child is unable to make use of their intelligence at school.
Early intervention in the form of both educational measures and therapy is often the only way to guarantee a successful outcome.
Associated disorders such as dyslexia or ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder, which may or may not be accompanied by hyperactivity) are the main reason for pupils being placed in an inappropriate stream at the end of Year 8. If appropriate educational support is offered in Year 8, children avoid being placed in general ability streams, except for some children exhibiting associated disorders. Thankfully, many gifted children with dyslexia and/or ADHD do get through selection with appropriately timed intervention.

Understanding the interactions between intellectual giftedness, learning disorders and the traits of the individual

Being intellectually gifted may conceal any associated disorders. And vice versa, those disorders may then have a huge psychological impact on a child who is otherwise lucid, intelligent and sensitive.
The discrepancy between understanding and achievement that is caused by these children's learning difficulties will be a continual source of frustration, to such an extent that they will no longer believe in their own abilities. The situation is particularly upsetting to a

dyslexic child in a school system with multiple languages on the curriculum, where low marks in several language subjects serve as a continual reminder of their disorder.
A child with ADHD who is continually called out, reprimanded or even derided for their oversights or ease of distraction will have a particularly hard time, firmly believing that they meet neither adults' nor their own expectations. They may even reach a point of feeling emotional deprivation.
This tendency is all the more common for sensitive children faced with a torrent of negative comments. Conflictive behaviour thus serves as a form of defence, enabling them to deal with their situation psychologically but opening the floodgates to further misunderstandings. In addition to being labelled as "immature" due to their occasional inability to manage their emotions (as is common in ADHD sufferers, especially those who are impulsive and restless), they will be seen as provocative or impertinent. Hence the importance of obtaining a diagnosis as early as possible to avoid these vicious cycles and misunderstandings: otherwise, the negative image with which such children are tarnished can be a heavy burden for them to bear.
Nonetheless, it is important to remember that such diagnoses are not easy to make. When they are young, intellectually gifted children may cope academically despite their disorder, thanks to their superior intellectual ability, whereas difficulties at school are usually what would alert those around them to the issue or disorder in question.
This leads us to a further reason why such disorders are often inadequately detected: at primary school, children cope—or even thrive—and their difficulties are kept at bay. But these difficulties will mean they fail to cope at a later stage, when their learning becomes more complex. This is particularly damaging in the case of dyslexic children, for whom early intervention could prevent their disorder from becoming more detrimental and avoid them being wrongly placed into an academic stream where their cognitive needs will not be catered for. Some children, recognising their own aptitude for mathematics, will think that it is not even worth trying to spell correctly, or that they dislike reading because they are lazy.

Restlessness, lack of attention and impulsiveness may begin to cause problems in adolescence and even into early adulthood. When teachers, parents and peers and are not there as a guiding force, these youngsters are often at the mercy of their whimsical, wandering minds. It is therefore vital for parents and teachers alike to keep a look out and understand when it is time to take action. It is important to explain to such children how their mind works, because they forget that they have huge abilities (they will judge themselves on their school marks), but they must understand that these are tempered by an attention disorder or dyslexia.

7. The challenge of adolescence
Individuation, key at this stage of development, involves a phase of self-assertion; conflicts with those around them—parents in particular—are inevitable.
Both parents and teenagers must accept that they are who they are: teenagers will sometimes be rebellious, while parents will seem strict, and above all less tolerant. This is a change that will need to be worked through. Both will wonder, respectively, what has become of their once studious, well-behaved child, or their once sympathetic parents…
Generally speaking, it is beneficial to let youngsters take responsibilities, broaden their sphere of influence and set them back on track if they are struggling to achieve the same success as they did previously. Failure can be deeply upsetting for them, as they may feel that they are losing their abilities. In reality, they still possess those abilities but are just less able to use them, due to the aforementioned effect of "acquired inability". Boredom persists, despite their lower marks. Punishing or depriving them will not prevent the types

of failure that parents may have experienced in their own childhood and wish to avoid for their teenage child; they will not understand and will feel rejected.

8. Gender differences: girls do better

Gender differences exist, be they innate or acquired (and indeed, they are probably both). Girls do better and are four times less likely to fail. So much so that the Swiss canton of Vaud once introduced a higher grade requirement for girls switching to the academic stream *(pré-gymnasiale)*. This form of discrimination has since been outlawed by the Federal Tribunal. There are currently more girls entering the academic stream and going on to university. According to an article in Le Monde*, 18% of boys fail their basic secondary school exams *(brevet)* in France. The issue of boys' failure to engage with school is not one that is confined to gifted children. All Western school systems face this issue of how to motivate boys and prevent them from failing.
And when pupils have such abilities, failures are unexpected and can be truly traumatic in some cases.

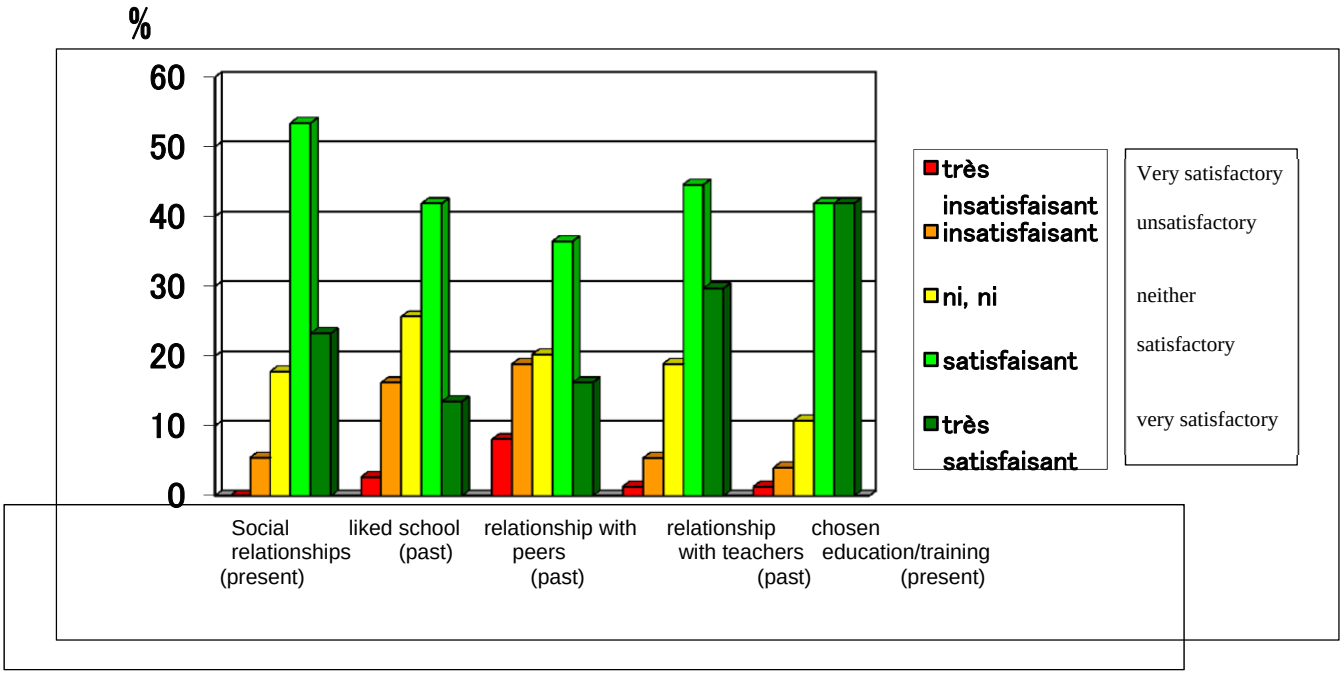
These statistics cannot disguise the fact that girls may also suffer if their marks fall, and they are therefore more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety and depression: they are as keen to do just as well as before and are more likely to be perfectionists. But they are not always able to learn, and experience the same boredom at school as boys do. They are more docile, work harder and keener to please those around them. In our 2001 survey, there were 35 girls to 55 boys. Girls' IQ was higher, as a good degree of boredom is required before they feel uncomfortable. Currently, we are seeing an equal number of girls and boys referred to our practice.
Our experience shows that you should not be reluctant to have girls tested, even if they appear to be coping. They will be encouraged by the result and their feeling of ill-being significantly reduced. Detecting their high intellectual potential will give them direction. It will increase their chances of getting back on track, of returning to their "true self", thanks to a more meaningful perspective, regained self-esteem and more positive self-image.
It should further be noted that diagnosing associated disorders is more difficult in girls given their considerable adaptive efforts. For example, they often suffer from ADHD without hyperactivity and work extremely hard, meaning they often go undetected.
This phenomenon is observed in practice for most disorders found in girls. Of course, this observation is a general trend only, and we do also find boys who make huge efforts to adapt, sometimes to the point of physical exhaustion.

9. So what should be done?

With parental support (see "Feuille de route pour familles avec enfants HPI" ["The Way Ahead: A Guide for Families with Intellectually Gifted Children"], currently published in French only) and appropriate measures taken at school, it is possible to encourage risk-taking in early childhood in preparation for the challenges that children will face at secondary school and preparatory school. Supporting intelligence through appropriate streaming, accelerated education (skipping a year or grade), supplementary material (additional or more challenging content, or allowing students to do research projects), along with help in managing their sensitivity, remains the best solution. But it is a solution that can only be successful if those around the child believe in it. Otherwise, sensing the negative feeling of the adults around them, they will not be able to summon the necessary self-confidence to overcome any apprehension they may feel.
If nothing at all is done, then the message we convey is that they are not able, despite their ample abilities. We lead them down a route to boredom—or perfectionism, which remains their only challenge.

Given work that is too easy, children will often aim for perfection, whereas they will accept mistakes if given new, more challenging tasks.
We should therefore avoid conveying the following message:
“Scared of flying? Don’t worry: we’ll clip your wings, so you can’t take off.”
Alain Gauvrit* has compared the case of the intellectually gifted child to Baudelaire’s description of the albatross: “its giant wings prevent it from walking”, the celebrated French poet explains in his poem, “The Albatross”.
To be sure, the albatross must be shown how to walk. But those wings are there for flying and clipping them will lead to unhappiness.
Of course, the idea is not to do things against a child’s will. They should be listened to, even if they themselves do not have the final decision and it is ultimately the adult’s responsibility to assess the child’s achievement potential.
Generally speaking, when the child’s psychological assessment provides an intellectually gifted individual with an explanation of how they function, and they feel reassured and are more understanding and hence more accepting of themselves, they will be better placed to cope with stress in the face of new experiences, where their curiosity and keenness to learn will prevail. This will enable them to step out of their comfort zone.
It is important to avoid pressuring the child into achieving outstanding marks just because they are intellectually gifted. Even more so if they are not given the opportunity to feed their curiosity and we are reluctant to excuse them for their weaknesses or what are essentially just fears.
Stepping out of their comfort zone is often a source of apprehension for both adults and children (whether intellectually gifted or otherwise), in all walks of life. But such fear is difficult for adults to comprehend given their idealistic view of the child’s intelligence, which they often view as being “all-powerful”. In reality, it is important to convey to gifted children the notion that they cannot know everything, succeed at everything, understand everything, least of all at the first attempt, as they so often do in primary school.
Given that intelligence is associated with lucidity and sensitivity, children must be sure of their own abilities. They will rarely overestimate these; on the contrary, they will often think that they have an issue or are at least that they are different from other people. For this very reason, it is important to explain to them how they function as intellectually gifted individuals through psychological assessment, taking cognitive and emotional factors into account. To this end, we have written a booklet to explain things in more detail ("The Way Ahead: A Guide for Intellectually Gifted Children”, currently available in French only).

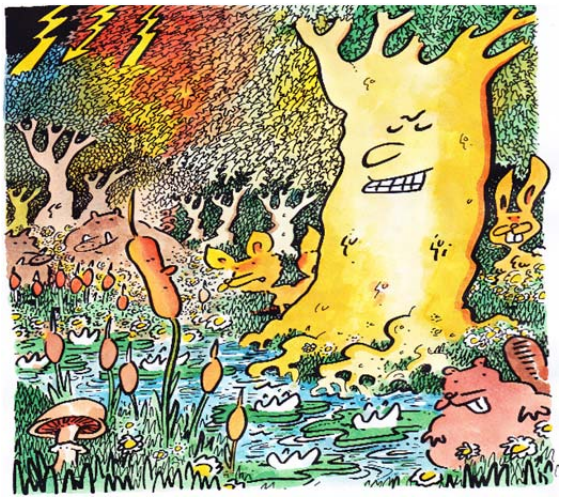
10. Positive outcomes: 2015 Survey (75 intellectually gifted subjects aged 16-55, 16% aged 16-17, 70.67% aged 18-30, 13.33% aged 30+).



While just 53% reported having satisfactory or very satisfactory relationships with their peers (during their school years), 75% categorised their relationships with teachers as satisfactory or very satisfactory. Relationships with teachers were therefore often easier than with school peers. Gifted children often turn to adults, who they see as a role model, identifying with them more easily than with children of their own age.
Conversely, 77% reported satisfactory social relationships at the time of taking the survey (adults and adolescents 16 years and older).
As children grow up, social relationships therefore improve considerably from their point of view.
It should be noted that almost 47% did not particularly appreciate school and 20% thought it was unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory.
As they grew up, 84% reported that they were happy with their choice of education or career.
Things improve in adulthood. Those who discovered their intellectual gift later in life often find themselves in a more difficult situation.
Early recognition is highly correlated (r=.001) with satisfaction with one's social relations in adulthood. This means that when parents present to us early on with the aim of determining whether their child may be intellectually gifted and gaining a better understanding of them and a better means of guidance, such children are more satisfied with their social relationships in adulthood than those identified later in time.

11. The resilience of intellectually gifted individuals

Given this positive and extremely encouraging outcome, we note that the cohort of gifted individuals who exhibited signs of difficulty were extremely resilient, thanks in particular to early detection of their intelligence.
They are like the reed in Aesop's fable of the Oak and the Reed, and will often bend rather than break.



Résilience des HPI

Comme le roseau ils plient car ils sont souvent sensibles.
Réagissent intensément, mais peuvent s'en sortir.

Dessin de Pecub

Gifted children's resilience

Like the reed, gifted individuals' sensitivity allows them to "bend with the wind", meaning they will often cope.

Illustration by Pecub

Conclusion

An intellectually gifted child or adolescent is a developing individual and deserves the same attention as anyone else. Given that these are no ordinary individuals, it is important, as early as pre-school, to make appropriate adjustments to deal with their heightened intellectual ability while also taking their sensitivity into consideration. Only by acknowledging how these individuals function—as people who are sensitive with a desire to step out of their comfort zone—can we help and encourage them to take risks rather than holding them back. This means embracing and valuing the "joy of knowledge" that is so vital to them.
We have highlighted the importance of taking appropriate educational measures from an informed perspective, as part of both their education and any supportive therapy.
Adults must aim to help them develop into who they are, while preventing them from failing and taking steps to avoid any social difficulties where necessary.
For those exhibiting disorders (whether psychic disorders or learning disorders or both), early diagnosis is crucial as it must be understood that for intellectually gifted individuals, their disorders are not likely to become problematic until adolescence or even later in life. This course of events is preventable if, as early as possible, we appreciate their potential at the same time as managing their issues.
Relying on their intelligence alone to get them back on track may thus prove detrimental and liable to put them under excessive pressure.
Since 1997, the prospects and educational provision for intellectually gifted children have taken a turn for the better in the Swiss canton of Vaud. But the Good Ship Education is a

large vessel that is slow to manoeuvre. With the country's new Mandatory Education Act (LEO), a more flexible selection system as opened new routes to keep our youngsters on course. But the issue of how to prepare pupils for this streaming process remains an issue at Primary level, and is a process that is often stressful for all pupils, not just those who are intellectually gifted.

Understanding these children and how they differ from others remains a challenge. They may go undetected, blending into the crowd, as their defence mechanisms cloud our judgement and mean that their intelligence may go unnoticed.

Good students, who stay out of trouble without necessarily coming top of the class, often receive no intervention unless parents refer them for testing. Thankfully, more and more teachers are encouraging them to do so. Indeed, this is the case for most intellectually gifted children (at least 57% of referrals according to our 2001 survey, and possibly more among those not referred). Despite their high marks, these pupils are still just as likely to have to repeat a school year, especially at preparatory school or university in our experience. Unnecessary repetition of a school year is something that is very hard to swallow.

It would appear sensible, therefore, to detect and nurture all forms of giftedness from a very early age, rather than having to take emergency measures later in life, or worse, waiting until it is too late to take such measures to get pupils back on track. From this point of view, early identification appears to offer the best hope of a smooth journey. This is exactly why parents refer their children to our practice: to arm themselves with the means to offer their children the best help they can, both socially and emotionally. This is contrary to the biased opinions of some, who view these parents as pushy and elitist, a view that is entirely at odds with our experience.

I will leave the final word to Marcel Proust, who declared that "the only true voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes". In other words, there is an increasing necessity to change the image that we have of such children, as this in turn has an impact on the image they have of themselves and on their success at school and in life. Understanding, support, acknowledgement and appreciation will all lead to better outcomes. This goes for all children, whether or not they are intellectually gifted.

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