DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 691 EC 232 118

AUTHOR	Rimm, Sylvia B.
TITLE	Why Bright Children Underachieve: The Pressures They Feel.
INSTITUTION	Indiana State Dept. of Education, Indianapolis. Office of Gifted and Talented Education.; Purdue Univ., West Lafayette, IN. Gifted Education Resource Inst.
PUB DATE	24 Aug 87
NOTE	15p.; A monograph prepared for the Leadership Accessing Program.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Development; Child Rearing; Educational Therapy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; Individual Needs; Locus of Control; *Parent Child Relationship; Prevention; Self Concept; *Stress Management; *Stress Variables; Student Needs; *Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; Theories; *Underachievement

ABSTRACT

The paper considers pressures on bright children and the relationship of such pressures to underachievement. It gives specific suggestions on the prevention of underachievement to both parents and teachers. Pressures often felt by gifted children include pressures to be brilliant, to be creative, to do something spectacular, to find oneself, to be popular, to be good, to be the best sibling. Noted is a relationship between underachievement and a lack of personal locus of control in which students do not internalize the relationship between effort and outcome. A quadrant diagram illustrates relationships between effort and outcomes resulting in either achievement or underachievement. Six recommendations for parents include consistency in setting effort and outcome goals for children, modeling effort and satisfaction of accomplishment, and emphasis on the positive. Seven recommendations for teachers include challenging gifted children in basic skill areas, teaching divergent thinking processes, and maintaining a positive classroom environment. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

● Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kathryn S. Keirouz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Policy Notification Statement

It is the policy of the Indiana Department of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap, in its programs or employment policies as required by the Indiana Civil Rights Act (I.C. 22-9.1), Title VI and VII (Civil Rights Act of 1964), the Equal Pay Act of 1973, Title IX (Educational Amendments), and Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

Inquiries regarding compliance with Title IX may be directed to the Human Resources Director, Indiana Department of Education, Room 229, State House, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2798, or to the Director of the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC; **H. Dean Evans, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.**

WHY BRIGHT CHILDREN UNDERACHIEVE: THE PRESSURES THEY FEEL

BY
SYLVIA B. RIMM, PH.D.
FAMILY ACHIEVEMENT CLINIC
OCONOMOWOC, WI

A MONOGRAPH PREPARED FOR THE
LEADERSHIP ACCESSING PROGRAM

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS
PATRICIA B. STAFFORD, MANAGER

IN CONJUNCTION WITH

PURDUE UNIVERSITY
GIFTED EDUCATION RESOURCE INSTITUTE
JOHN F. FELDHUSEN, DIRECTOR

Copyright 1987
Indiana Department of Education

INTRODUCTION

This manuscript by Dr. Sylvia B. Rimm deals with the critical problem of underachievement among bright students. Our nation's resources of talent are threatened by the failure of these students to realize their full potential if ways are not found to reverse the underachievement syndrome.

Dr. Rimm begins this monograph with a review of the major causes of adolescent stress particularly as they relate to the gifted and talented. The presentation is supported by an abundance of anecdotal material drawn from Dr. Rimm's own experiences as a clinician working with bright adolescents.

Pressures can, of course, have positive effects and evoke adaptive behavior, but in some cases stress evokes dysfunctional behavior. Rimm points out that a major cause of dysfunction in adolescents is *lack of* self efficacy or an internal sense of personal control. She presents a theoretical model for the relationship between effort and outcomes. The major variant in her model, the Underachievement Syndrome, occurs when the gifted youth has reasonable goals, but the processes for achieving the goals are not effective; or when both the goals and processes have become defective. In the latter case, neither the youth nor his/her family expects significant outcomes in school nor do they press for effective school performance.

The students who function most effectively are those who are able to set reasonable goals and to marshal learning behaviors which lead to effective accomplishment of the goals. Youths who are not able to set reasonable goals, but who are able to function successfully, nevertheless, in the school setting make-up the fourth variant.

Rimm offers an abundance of illustrations and guidance throughout the monograph. School personnel, especially counselors, should find it a valuable resource in dealing with stress among gifted students, with student goal-setting, and with underachieving students.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sylvia B. Rimm is a psychologist who specializes in working with gifted and creative children who are not performing well in school. She directs the Family Achievement Clinic with offices in Oconomowoc, Watertown, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She has taught courses in the area of Gifted and Talented and Creativity at Mount Mary College; is author and researcher of several internationally validated creativity instruments, including GIFT, GIFFI, and PRIDE; and two inventories for the identification of underachievement patterns (AIM and GAIM). A book, coauthored with Gary A. Davis, *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, was published by Prentice-Hall. Her new book, *Underachievement Syndrome: Causes and Cures*, was published by Apple Publishing Company and was chosen by Macmillan Book Clubs as a December selection. She speaks and publishes nationally on family and school approaches to working with gifted and creative children.

ERIC
Full Text Provided by ERIC

WHY BRIGHT CHILDREN UNDERACHIEVE:

THE PRESSURES THEY FEEL

Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D.
Family Achievement Clinic
Oconomowoc, WI

ERIC
Full Text Provided by ERIC

Why do half of gifted children underachieve (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1984)? Why are between 10 and 20 percent of high school dropouts in the very superior ability range (Nyquist, 1973; Whitmore, 1980; Lajoie and Shore, 1981)? What do the case studies of anxiety, suicide, and eating disorders communicate to us about very bright children's feelings and pressures about perfectionism and competition (Dean, 1975; Milgram and Milgram, 1976; Tetenbaum and Houtz, 1978)?

Parents have been blamed too frequently and too easily for the pressures felt by bright children. It is time to take a fresh look at the stresses that these children describe and the reasons for these stresses. It is time to relieve parent guilt, and instead, guide and support the wary mothers and fathers of these children. They indeed must cope with their own pressures in their efforts to parent very bright children appropriately.

What do children and adolescents say about their feelings and stresses? What do parents say that will permit us to understand and counsel these bright young people in a way that will help them toward making positive contributions to society while living personally fulfilling lives? First, I will categorize the main pressures with which bright children seem to struggle. Next, I will describe the apparent origins of those pressures. Finally, I will summarize some recommendations to parents and teachers that can be used to help children function productively in school and at home despite their feelings of stress.

The Main Pressures

The pressures which young children feel are rarely self-described. They are usually unable to explain the reasons for their behaviors. If they do offer explanations, they may be in the form of shallow verbalizations. By the time they reach the teen years, bright children who come to counseling divide into two main groups: 1.) those who are defensive and will rarely acknowledge their insights to counselors and 2.) those who act equally defensive at home and in the classroom, but who are eager to understand their problems and pressures. This second group of young people are extraordinarily open and insightful in counseling sessions. Keys to understanding children's pressures frequently come from them. Behavioral observations by parents and teachers provide additional evidence that troubled bright children and adolescents experience many similar pressures despite varying capabilities and willingness to discuss these feelings.

The Pressure to Be Brilliant

The intense sense that one must be smart and smartest all the time shows itself in many ways. It shows in the child whose enthusiastically waving hand indicates that he will willingly monopolize class discussion with his display of brilliance and also in the child who "puts others down" as dumb or stupid in order to feel sufficiently intelligent. It shows in the six-year-old who tells me she knows how to spell "enthusiasm" before she enthusiastically says, "hello." It shows in the youth who rushes through his work to be done first because for him smart has come to mean "quick and easy," and the one who cannot get started on a writing assignment because she cannot find a topic perfect enough to write about. It shows in the young person who argues endlessly with parents and teachers and appears to be completely blind to another's point of view. That young person despairs in frustration when he is not permitted to act on his line of reasoning and supports his despair with such statements as:

> I believe in reason. If I have won an argument, I am right. Since I am right and reasonably so, it is impossible for me to see that my parents can make me do what is unreasonable and, therefore, wrong.

Similar arguments occur frequently, and these children find it difficult to see that others may be either reasonable, right, or have different, equally correct opinions. In these cases, these children's pressure for intelligence is equated with their pressure to be powerful or always to win by use of what they believe is their reasoning power.

The pressure to be extremely intelligent may be an important motivator for children's learning, but when that pressure is extreme and when children have not learned the appropriate processes, efforts and excitement that go into learning, they invent and discover inappropriate activities to *avoid* learning. These exercises in avoidance temporarily protect them from feeling dumb, but cause many new problem behaviors which make these youth feel more and more worried about their own intelligence and, thus, adversely affects their self-confidence.

The Pressure To Be Creative

Every reader has experienced that sense of wanting to create a product or activity in a unique or unusual way. You do know, therefore, in miniature, about the pressures that children feel to be different or to do something creative. Now, multiply those feelings of pressure to be different by 1,000 and you may have some sense of what some children feel when they get dressed in the morning, when they write a story or essay, or when they speak up in a class discussion. The inner sense that when one acts it must always be *unusual* is illustrated by statements such as these:

> I can't even brush my teeth in the same way two days in a row — how can I study in the same routine?
>
> If you could see the way I've fixed up my room, you could see that I was the most different even among my very different crowd of friends.
>
> I can't possibly hand my reports in on time. It always takes me longer to make them as unique as I want them to be.

Creative for these children is felt as unusual or different, but most important, nonconforming. They see no area in school sufficiently unique for their infinitely personal expressions of difference.

The Pressure To Do Something Spectacular

They want to be rock stars and great actors, professional football players and Olympic athletes, to be millionaires, but most of all, to be rock stars. When you ask them about their musical experience they report:

> I've just begun guitar. I'm not taking lessons because I think I can learn it on my own.
>
> or
>
> I'm going to get my guitar for Christmas.
>
> or
>
> I've been taking lessons for two years. (And their parents report that they never practice.)
>
> or
>
> I must like to play for myself, not for audiences.

The picture is clear. They strum their guitar occasionally and dream a lot of how they will be discovered and become great television stars and heroes.

They envision themselves as admired by teenage audiences and anticipate earning millions. They have no sense of the process or the practice involved. They do not understand the competition, but only imagine a magical deliverance.

In a series of therapy sessions, a very talented and insightful teenage young lady sensitized me to her pressure to do only the spectacular. In our intake session she discussed her musical talent with me. I noted that despite her vocal abilities, she had not selected any courses or extracurricular activities involving music. When I commented on that omission, she explained that she had decided not to follow a career in music since it was such a competitive field. Her response had not really answered my question so I explained further that I was suggesting pursuing music for the intrinsic enjoyment involved in participation. Her face went blank; she would not respond and did not want to talk further during that session.

I did not dare bring up music in our next session, but halfway through the hour, she volunteered the reason for the previous week's anger. She explained, "When you suggested that I do something just for the sake of doing it, I got so angry I couldn't speak. I can't even imagine doing something in which I cannot succeed spectacularly."

The Pressure To Find Oneself

A main task of adolescent development is to find oneself or to establish one's identity. For most young people, this is a stressful period. However, for very bright children who have been audience-centered and admired, there are special pressures. The audience which surrounded them for years becomes a portable burden which they carry with them as they perform in school or in their talent areas. Although they may not consciously remember the admiration of adults from birth, they cannot free themselves of the imagined pedestal upon which they feel anchored. Their portable audience notices and admires their every action, and they search feverently to detach themselves from their observers so that they can indeed find the individual within. Their fervent efforts at individuation puzzle the adults in their lives and cause the teenagers themselves anguish and depression as they swing back and forth between their habituated delight with applause and their new sense of separateness that comes from freeing themselves from audience dependence. Two examples follow:

> Dan's memories of audience dated back to his early Suzuki cello days. The praise he received from his mom, the plaudits he was accustomed to from his dad, uncles, aunts, and grandparents were forgotten, but the continuous applause which had come from his musical audiences right up to age 16 provided a clear message of his talent. Dan said he felt he was always on a pedestal. When Dan suddenly declared that he wanted to quit his cello, it puzzled his teachers and his parents. Dan described his feelings as his wish to find himself and not to perform for an admiring audience. For Dan there may well have been twin pressures — the need to separate himself out and the fear that despite his musical talent, he might not fulfill the spectacular destiny predicted by those who had continually praised his talents. Dan chose the guitar, and played it only for his own enjoyment in an effort to discern those activities which he truly enjoyed from those that had served to attract childhood adulation.
>
> Anne's attempts to become involved in self-fulfilling experiences which were not based on her pressures to perform for an audience brought her to her love of literature and reading. She chose a site which she enjoyed for its quiet natural beauty — a park along Lake Michigan. As she sat determined to be immersed in her reading, she found herself pondering her appearance to passing pedestrians: She wondered, "Do I look intellectual; does anyone know me; what are they thinking as they stroll by and why, oh, why can't I keep myself from thinking about an audience?" Anne felt furious with herself for attending to those who passed her and struggled internally with her helpless feelings of preventing herself from not thinking of impressions she was making on others.
>
> At a later date, Anne was hospitalized for bulimia. At first she refused to participate in group therapy. However, when she did get involved, her insights and her contributions brought immediate positive attention from her therapists and peers. She called me in desperate concern. Was she participating only because she again had an audience? I reassured her that it was all right for her to please an audience by her behavior as long as the main reason for her involvement in therapy was to understand herself and to help others with their problems. The pressure to find oneself after a childhood of audience-centered activity is confusing and difficult.

The Pressure To Be Popular

Parents call it "well-adjusted," and they see that goal as more important than "being gifted." Elementary teachers call it good peer relationships and frequently prioritize it ahead of intellectual challenge. If bright children internalize these messages, they do typically adjust well in elementary school and do not appear pressured. They learn to enjoy the comforts of social acceptance and play down their own intellectual differences. In being careful not to appear too smart, they minimize their use of extensive vocabulary. This facade of "good adjustment" by minimizing talents and challenges causes them a different pressure by preadolescence. Adjustment translates to popularity by then, and becoming adjusted to peers forces children into a value system that may differ significantly from what their parents and teachers earlier described as social adjustment. Depending on the peer environment, the popular message may mean athletics, student government, drama, and music or it may mean alcohol, drugs, and/or sexual promiscuity. It almost always means emphasis on appearance, clothes, and peer musical taste. It never means being a "geek" or a "nerd." It does not mean getting all A's or study and excitement about learning. The value system which fits in with popularity also includes very intense pressure. Popularity is typically a comparative perfectionistic goal and one rarely feels popular or pretty enough.

Beth's desperate concern with popularity centered mainly on clothes and appearances. Her efforts to be attractive and admired for being pretty were extended by her family involvement in "Miss Teen" pageantry. Academic goals were set acceptably at B's and C's while weight control and fashion took over as priorities. Beth spent hours with makeup and mirrors, determined to be attractive. Although her reflection satisfied her before she left home, she felt depressed at parties and with friends as she invidiously compared herself to every other female in attendance and fell short of her competitive standards for beauty. Normal friendships took on the pressure of beauty contests and her obsession with weight and thinness propelled her toward eating disorders rather than learning or productive creativity.

Scott had struggled with his loneliness as long as he could remember. He always had some friends, but his memories of torment by other kids overshadowed his recall or normal peer relationships. When he entered a large junior high school from his small elementary school, he felt great aloneness. In gym class his modesty and inexperience caused him to hesitate about pulling his pants down in the boy's locker room. The word spread immediately and the entire locker room chanted at him. He was in tenth grade when he described the experience, but his intense pain remained alive and was part of his drive and determination to be socially accepted, almost regardless of personal or intellectual cost. Although his reputation of "geek" remained, he persevered most at social acceptance. Intellectual excellence was a low priority and school performance was at best erratic.

The Pressure To Be Good

The good little girls or boys who do most everything that mom and dad and teacher expect internalize not only a set of moral values, but also an intellectual dilemma. Their sense of expecting themselves to do things right, perfectly, and correctly all of the time easily restricts production, encourages procrastination, and initiates continuous critical self-evaluation. As perfectly good little children, they function well in workbooks, spelling, and multiple choice assignments, but are easily stymied by creative writing assignments and divergent thinking activities. They "bite off less than they can chew" for fear that difficult tasks will result in something less than perfection. As competition increases and perfection becomes less attainable, they may attempt very difficult tasks so that they can cushion their incomplete work with defensive responses like "I could have done it if I studied, but it didn t really hold my interest." Alternating between accomplishment of the simple and avoidance of appropriate challenge they are prevented from building an inner sense of personal control which would stabilize their self-esteem. Their confidence is approval-centered and is based precariously on the evaluation and continuous feedback of others. Their dependence on the opinions of others makes them susceptible to alternating positive emotions and depression. They are vulnerable to any criticism by relatively unimportant others and their sense of being a "good" person is precarious. The tears that come with childhood criticism will continue to frustrate them in adolescence and adulthood if their pressures to be good and perfect and to please everyone are not dealt with.

> Robby loved creative writing until sixth grade. His first place prize in a city wide essay contest ended his school writing career. His sense that he could never match the perfect quality of his prize essay prevented him from any further writing in his junior high school years. His reason or rationalization was that he had lost interest in writing.

Ron, a ninth grader, described his own insights about his mother's response to his receiving an A.

> Mom gets so excited when I receive an A that it makes me feel like I have to get an A again to please her. Then I'm afraid I won't be able to do that well again so I stop working. Sometimes I wish she would hardly notice it so I wouldn't feel so pressured to please her.

To please other people becomes more important than to think critically, and the childhood dilemma of being the "good person" in the middle, trying to make all relationships happy ones, easily prevents the "good" girl or boy from moving forward for fear of hurting someone or making a potential mistake.

The Pressure To Be The Best Sibling

> Mom, it's too bad that David didn't do his math. If he doesn't understand it, I'll be happy to work with him.

Winning siblings have a subtle way of keeping their less successful brothers or sisters in their losing positions. The pressure to be the best sibling is felt and expressed as much by the winner as the established loser. However, the expression of that need to feel smarter, better, and more successful is typically shown more subtly and acceptably by the child with the all A report card than by the sibling in the less favored academic position. Although typically fewer than ten IQ points separate the winner from the lower, achievement-oriented habits and a traditional order of success in the family maintain an image that one child is academically gifted and the second is not gifted at all, or that one child is the good child and the other is the troublemaker or frivolous one.

Dramatic changes in one family member typically affect school performance or social performance of the other sibling. An upward reversal of underachievement by one brother may easily precipitate a downturn in achievement for a competing brother. When the rebellious sister decides to become "good" again, it is not surprising to see a dramatic negative change in the former "good" sister. In clinical work, therapists are typically prepared for the family effects of changing children's roles within the family, but parents are frequently surprised by dramatic changes in their formerly non-problematic children. It is almost as if one child plays the role of the scapegoat for other family members. To all children in the family, the competitive pressures are real, although most children do not deal well with their underlying feelings of sibling competition.

When Pressures Cause Underachievement Syndrome

Pressures can be positive. Motivated achieving gifted students typically feel pressures. When does stress become dysfunctional for gifted children? Under what circumstances do they become habituated to the defense mechanisms that prevent productive accomplishment and lead to Underachievement Syndrome (Rimm, 1986)?

The underlying characteristic that reveals itself in most studies of underachievement (Davis and Rimm, 1985; Whitmore, 1980; Fine and Pitts, 1980) is a lack of personal locus of control. That is, underachievers do not internalize the relationship between effort and outcome, process and product. they do not own their sense of efficacy. They will say, "The teacher gave me that grade," "I got lucky," or "I must be dumb," rather than "I studied hard and earned that grade," or "The test was harder than I expected so I will prepare better or differently in the future."

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between efforts and outcomes and points out how the appropriate relationship will support achievement motivation even in children who feel the pressures that are typically imposed on gifted children. Quadrant 1 shows that appropriate relationship which fosters an achievement orientation. Quadrants 2, 3, and 4 show unbalanced relationships which destroy locus of control and initiate defensive and avoidance patterns which foster Underachievement Syndrome.

In Quadrant 1, which represents achievement, these children may have internalized pressures to be bright, creative, good and approved of by others, but their pressures represent realistic possibilities. These children enjoy and value attention, but they are not "attention addicted" or dependent on continuous approval. Intelligence and creative production, moral behavior, and positive peer adjustment are appropriate and realistic goals if not carried to impossible extremes. These children may drive and pressure themselves toward A's, toward unique idea production, and toward approval by adults and friends, but they also feel a sense of instrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction with their accomplishments. They continue to set goals higher, but those goals represent potentially attainable achievements. They also demonstrate appropriate effort. They have learned to work hard. They understand perserverance. They have appropriate skills, including strategies for thinking, study, and creative production. Perserverance and intrinsic enjoyment of challenge are already part of the process, and easy tasks are accomplished quickly in order to pursue more challenging activities. These children achieve as long as they continue to see the relationship between process and outcome (Rimm's Law #12, p. 307, 1986).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFFORT AND OUTCOMES

Effort	Outcomes +	Outcomes −
+	**Quadrant 1** + + Achievers	**Quadrant 2** + − Underachievers
−	**Quadrant 3** − + Underachievers	**Quadrant 4** − − Underachievers

Quadrant 2 represents underachievers whose process or efforts are appropriate, but whose goals or outcomes are set either too low or too high. In the case of goals being set too low, these children have internalized a message from parents or society or from their peers that being "smart" is not as important as being well-adjusted or popular. They do not want to be "geeks" or "nerds" because intellectual accomplishment is less valued than beauty or athletic prowess. Some parents specifically promote the notion that "book learning is not as important as common sense" and that in some way these are mutually exclusive forms of intelligence. That anti-intellectual message is most strongly delivered by parents who have not participated in advanced education and, thus, do not see its value. Culturally disadvantaged urban and rural parents frequently give this message in defense of their own low intelligence and accomplishment.

The "too high" goals or outcomes may come in a highly competitive school environment where, despite the child's excellent intelligence and study skills, good grades are not attainable. If, in fact, parents do set expectations beyond children's abilities, and of course some do, this too will have the impact of "too high" goals.

If goals are set too low, children discontinue making appropriate efforts. If goals are set too high, children may give up in desperation because they do not believe that any amount of effort will make a difference.

Quadrant 3 causes Underachievement Syndrome when achievement outcomes are set reasonably, but process is not learned appropriately. That is, parents, children, and schools all value good grades and school performance. Report card grades initially reflect excellent performance. Children tend to feel positively about school, but effort or process are not sufficiently challenging. Children learn that achievement is easy, that success is readily attainable, and that learning and study are effortless. Occasionally they may comment on boredom or lack of challenge, but as long as grades continue to be high they exhibit no problem behaviors. Unfortunately, they do not develop the good habits of perseverance or how to deal with challenge or intense study. At some point in their academic development, curriculum material becomes more complex or the student population becomes more competitive, or both. Their goals continue to be appropriate, but they have not learned the processes or efforts required to produce the expected outcomes. Some students will learn more appropriate processes and adjust to further effort. Others will hide behind their threatening feelings, worrying that they are not as smart as they would like to be and inventing a whole group of rituals and excuses which prevent them from making efforts. Procrastination, incomplete assignments, disorganization, and careless work become the typical symptoms which initiate Underachievement Syndrome for these students. They will change only when gradually persuaded or forced to take the risk to find that they are indeed as capable as they had hoped.

Quadrant 4 represents the most advanced stage of Underachievement Syndrome. It results after children described by Quadrants 2 or 3 have not functioned as achievers for a period of time. Quadrant 4 underachievement takes place when children's efforts and skills show such extreme deficiencies that they have given up on reasonable goal setting. Teachers rarely identify these children as gifted because their intelligence or creativity are no longer exhibited in the classroom. Even parents begin to doubt their children's abilities. They may refer to the past when they recall that their children were smart, but at this point they often have given up on appropriate goals and are willing to settle for their children earning a high school diploma. Quadrant 4 underachievement is most difficult to cure and frequently requires outside therapeutic help.

What Parents and Teachers Can Do

Parents and teachers can and do make a difference in helping gifted children cope with the pressures that they internalize early. A summary of recommendations for parents and teachers (Rimm, 1986) will help to target the ways in which Quadrant 1 achievement can be supported at home and at school, and Underachievement Syndrome can be prevented.

Parent Recommendations

The recommendations to parents may appear to be simple and obvious. They are, however, very difficult to carry out in real practice. Since they are based on clinical experience with hundreds of parents, they are not theoretical, but empirically derived. Parents who have been able to carry out these recommendations have found parenting to be more pleasant and have discovered their children to be more productive and happier.

1. Parents should be consistent in setting effort and outcome goals for their children. If one parent sets goals higher than the other, the child is likely to choose the easy way out and will learn the habit of avoiding challenging tasks.
2. Parents should voice respect for educational institutions and for teachers. Children will not work or learn in classrooms led by teachers who are not respected by their parents.
3. Parents should model effort, work, and satisfaction of accomplishment. Hard working parents who do not like their jobs are not good models for children. Children must see the joy of achievement in order to accept that as an appropriate role for themselves.
4. Parents should emphasize the positive. Fun family activities should take place daily even if time constraints limit the time that families can enjoy each other. Television zombiism is not an appropriate substitute for family interaction.
5. Parents should discuss efforts, problem solving strategies, creative thinking processes, and ways of dealing with failure experiences so that children learn the routes to achievement. Magical thinking, which delivers extraordinary success by luck and without effort, should be deemphasized.
6. Parents should encourage independence and reasoning in children, without giving them more power than they can handle. Although gifted children often sound more like little adults than children, they are children first. Their extraordinary vocabulary does not provide them with the wisdom of maturity. Parents should set limits, although children should be able to make choices and voice opinions within these limits.

Teacher Recommendations

Teachers may often feel that there is little they can do to make differences for students in their classrooms. The evidence supports the contrary. Adults frequently report that teachers and counselors were highly significant in their lives. Teachers see so many children that they often do not realize their impact on any individual, but children are exposed to comparatively few teachers. Teachers touch children's lives indelibly.

1. Be certain that gifted children are sufficiently challenged in basic skill areas. Their success is not a sufficient measure of challenge. The processes of learning to study and enjoying hard tasks are more critical than their apparent contentedness and excellence of grades. Doing things perfectly all the time is an indication that children are not sufficiently challenged.
2. Teaching divergent thinking processes should be part of basic skills for all children, but is particularly important for gifted children. It helps them to deal with their pressures toward self-criticism and perfectionism.
3. A positive classroom environment is as important as a positive home environment. Learning should involve a balance of routine skill work and joyful discovery. Memory and rote learning do belong in the classroom, but if they predominate, children miss the adventure of the learning process.
4. Learning to compete is an important component of the educational process. However, highly competitive classrooms actually discourage children's competitive competence. Team or group competition and personal or self-competition encourage confidence in dealing with winning and losing. Game play where children are not as ego involved gives teachers the opportunity to transmit the important messages of sportsmanship and to apply them to academic competitions.
5. Teachers should strive to maintain alliances with students. Confrontations with students in front of their peers do not encourage their achievement. Belittling children in class increases negative behaviors and increases problem peer relationships. Quiet one-to-one alliance communications are much more effective.
6. Teachers should make every effort to maintain positive and consistent communication with parents. They should assume that parents care about their children. Sensitivity to the pressures that parents feel will increase the support that teachers will receive from parents.
7. Gifted and creative children should always have a positive outlet and audience for their area of strength. They are more flexible and more confident when they are productively involved. Teachers should facilitate those outlets when possible.

Conclusion

Gifted and creative children internalize pressures easily. These pressures may cause school and mental health problems. Understanding these pressures is the first step to assisting them in the challenge of using their capabilities. Teaching the relationship between process and product, effort and outcomes, is the critical key to teaching bright children to achieve productively and to feel good about themselves.

REFERENCES

Davis, G.A. & Rimm, S.B. (1985). *Education of the gifted and talented.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Dean, R.S. (1975). Effects of self-concept in learning with gifted children. *Journal of Educational Research, 3,* 315-318.

Fine, M.J. & Pitts, R. (1980). Intervention with underachieving gifted children: Rationale and strategies. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 24,* 51-55.

Lajoie, S.P. & Shore, B.M. (1981). Three myths? The over-representation of the gifted among dropouts, delinquents and suicides. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 25,* 138-141.

Milgram, R.M. & Milgram, N.A. (1976). Self-concept as a function of intelligence and creativity in gifted Israeli children. *Psychology in the Schools, 13,* 91-96.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1984). *A Nation at Risk: The Full Account.* USA Research (Eds. & Publisher).

Nyquist, E. (1973). The gifted: The invisibly handicapped, or there is no heavier burden than a great potential. Paper presented at the National Conference on the Gifted, Albany, N.Y.

Rimm, S.B. (1986). *Underachievement Syndrome: Causes and Cures.* Watertown, WI.. Apple Publishing Co.

Tetenbaum, T. & Houtz, Jr. (1978). The role of affective traits in the creative problem solving performance of gifted urban children. *Psychology in the Schools, 15,* 91-96.

Whitmore, J.R. (1980). *Giftedness, Conflict, and Underachievement.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.