

Chapter 14

The Inner World of the Young and Bright

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Abstract William James (1902) made the connection between intensity of character (ardor) and moral action more than a 100 years ago. In the 1960s and 1970s, when cognitive psychology supplanted behaviorism, moral development was seen as development of moral judgment through reasoning. However, reasoning does not guarantee that behavior will follow the dictates of reason. Behavior follows what one believes and feels to be right rather than what one thinks is correct. Emotional rather than cognitive development is the key to congruence between moral motivation and behavior. Dabrowski constructed his theory of emotional development from the study of lives of gifted and creative people. The theory provides insight into emotional life of the gifted and into what motivates moral action.

Keywords Character development · Emotional development · Emotional giftedness · Emotional intensity · Emotional life themes · Emotional sensitivity · Emotional tension · Empathy · Entelechy · Extraversion · Giftedness · Imagination · Introversion · Intuition · Mirror neurons · Multilevel disintegration · Overexcitability: psychomotor, sensual, imagination, intellectual, emotional · Positive maladjustment · Psychological types · Psychosynthesis · Self-actualizing

14.1 Giftedness as Energy

Gifted children tend to be more active than regular children displaying higher energy level, whether physical, intellectual, or emotional. Prodigies are examples of an extraordinary concentration of mental energy. The energy of the electric current in the nerve tissue becomes interest, passion, sustained effort, perseverance, creative

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flow, ecstasy, caring, compassion, or spiritual experience. A greater than average intensity, sometimes very great and extreme, makes for experiencing life at a high pitch. Countless sensations of extended range of hue and nuance, thoughts racing and tumbling over each other, often on many tracks at once, memories, desires, and a rich tapestry of feelings produce a multidimensional apprehension of the world, one's life and its possibilities.

The excess of energy Dabrowski called *psychomotor overexcitability* because it has to be discharged using one's muscles whether, for instance, to release the bottled up steam after sitting still or throwing oneself into action. For example, a gifted 16-year old girl said: "I get filled with energy when I need that energy. And, of course, I release it by doing the thing that got me excited in the first place" (Piechowski 2006, p. 40). Psychomotor overexcitability differentiates between gifted and nongifted students (Ackerman 1997; Bouchard 2004; Tieso 2007). Overexcitability stands for the capacity of being stimulated to a high degree and sustaining it for extended period of time.

Sensory experience for gifted children, and adults especially, tends to be of a much richer quality because so much more detail, texture, contrast, and distinction is coming into awareness. What is pleasant is liked with a passion, what is unpleasant is disliked intensely. Dabrowski called it *sensual overexcitability*. For example, in the words of a 16-year old: "I seem to notice more smells than a lot of other people. I love dark, musty smells and earthy smells, herbs and things like that. I love the smell of clean air in spring and tree blossoms and things and the smell of clean bodies, esp. hair" (Piechowski 2006, p. 48). When sensual overexcitability joins with emotional overexcitability, the experience becomes much richer and more meaningful. For example, a 17-year old girl said, "I like yellow for it seems warm and full of joy" (Piechowski 2006, p. 46). In an intimate relationship sensual and emotional elements go together.

14.2 Intellectual Energy

Intellectual overexcitability is the characteristic by which gifted children are most often identified. In a happy turn of phrase, Frank (2006) said that intelligence is about the ability to solve problems, but overexcitability is about the passion for solving them. When the emotional and mental energies meet, the mind supplies the energy of sustained concentration while emotional energy drives interest (passion). Interest is one of the basic emotions (Izard 1971).

Intellectual energy has certain consequences: relentless questioning, critical thinking, and evaluation. For instance, gifted adolescents responded to the question, *What gets your mind going?* by mentioning the irresistible attraction of brain teasers, logical puzzles, theories and controversies. More significantly, some have mentioned "challenging anything accepted by society," their way of resisting conformity: "One good thing [is that] I try to think about my beliefs – political and religious – so that I won't believe things just because my parents do"

(Piechowski 2006, p. 64). This may lead to a crisis in families with rather strict and orthodox religious faith or political adherence. Gifted adolescents are likely to question the foundations of their faith, and may find it wanting. To a highly gifted young person doubts about beliefs present themselves almost inevitably, consequently they may precipitate a crisis of worldview, in other words, a moral crisis.

The price of questioning can be twofold. One, in environments that do not value questioning one quickly meets with resistance and even rejection. Two, self-questioning may create self-doubt and the fear of going crazy: "I probably spend too much time thinking about my own thinking, analyzing myself and analyzing the analysis. I sometimes psych myself into thinking I am going crazy" (Piechowski 2006, p. 63). It may be interesting to note that the great Sir Francis Galton tried thinking paranoically and was startled how quickly he became paranoid.

14.3 Imagination

Gifted children tend to have excitable *imagination* that is especially rich, abundant, and surprising in creative individuals (Piechowski 1999). With imagination a whole universe of unlimited possibilities opens up to us. Imaginal experience can be real and remembered as such, "as if it really happened."

The subject of invisible friends (imaginary playmates) has not received much attention in gifted literature other than noting that gifted children tend to have many more such companions than other children (Terman 1925; Hollingworth 1942/1977) and that creative adolescents often keep them from childhood (Davis 2003; Piirto 2004). That children distinguish pretend play from everyday reality is well established (Singer 1975; Singer and Singer 1990). However, the role of invisible friends in social development, in gaining sense of competence and overcoming fears, though studied in regular children, has not received much attention in regard to gifted children. Imaginary companions usually are not secret but they do belong to the child's own world. Attempts on the part of adults to interact with them swiftly lead to their disappearance by natural or unnatural means (Taylor 1999). Imaginary playmates are real to the child and one may wonder whether the experience is accompanied by sensations of sound, warmth, or touch that are felt. The answer is that it is.

Cohen and MacKeith (1991) examined 64 accounts of imaginary worlds. The degree of elaboration – creation of histories, languages, multiple characters (in one case as many as 282), and the early age when they are begun (six or seven or even younger) – indicates that the young weavers of these worlds were highly gifted. The experience of being in an imaginary world can be "as real as real." For example: "I also had a magic boat in my youth for a while. It had an outboard motor but I found that too noisy. I've never been clever with engines and there were always problems about petrol, so I discarded the idea" (Cohen and MacKeith 1991, p. 57).

Imaginary is usually taken to mean *not real*. But imaginary playmates and imaginary worlds are lived with the full range of sensory experience and vivid memory. The brain appears to make little distinction between something that is

vividly imagined from something that is experienced from an outside sensory input (Damasio 2003). Therefore, to allow for the “as real as real” quality of experience, a more fitting term is *imaginal* (Singer 1975; Watkins 1990).

14.4 Emotional Energy and Funneling of Emotional Tension

Emotional overexcitability, manifested in a wide range of emotions and feelings, addresses the passionate nature of gifted and creative people – their emotional intensity. But it is emotional sensitivity that moves to compassion, caring, and responsibility. The significance of deep and perceptive feeling lies in *empathy as a way of knowing*, another little explored ability of the gifted.

Gifted children are often misunderstood exactly because they can be so greatly stimulated and because they perceive and process things differently. Their excitement is viewed as excessive, their high energy as hyperactivity, their persistence as nagging, their questioning as undermining authority, their imagination as not paying attention, their persistence as being disruptive, their strong emotions and sensitivity as immaturity, their creativity and self-directedness as oppositional disorder. They are the wild tall poppies that many forces conspire to cut down to size (Gross 1998).

The concept of overexcitability suggests that the overall picture of an individual’s personal energy is worth investigating. Certain situations impede the natural flow of this energy. For a naturally active person inactivity leads to a buildup of energy, which presses to be discharged. For a naturally active mind a boring day at school, or at a meeting, has to be worked off by engagement in an intensely absorbing mental task, otherwise sleep won’t come (Tolan 1994). Emotional tension also builds up energy which then seeks release in nervous habits, sensual easement of tension (e.g. drinking, eating, shopping, sex), or excessive worrying. Nervous habits and workaholicism are a psychomotor way of funneling of emotional tension, the sensual way lies in oral compulsions, among others (Piechowski 2006).

14.5 Emergent Themes

The varieties of expressions of each overexcitability have been collected from open-ended questionnaires (Piechowski 2006). While quantitative studies are good for group comparisons and catching general trends in the data, it is the content of responses that reveals the quality of experience and features of emotional life (Piirto 2004).¹ The expressions and manifestations of overexcitability have been

¹ Three different studies provided 158 OEQs (open-ended) with a total of about 5,000 responses from 79 boys and 79 girls, ages 9–19; the majority were teens (? ?; Piechowski and Colangelo 1984; Piechowski and Miller 1995). The first study used an OEQ with 46 questions, subsequently replaced by a 21-item open-ended OEQ.

listed in a number of sources (Cline and Schwartz 1999; Piechowski 1991, 2003, 2006; Piirto 2002, 2004; Silverman 1993).

The themes that emerged from review of the responses give a fairly good picture of the many dimensions of inner life of gifted children and adolescents (Piechowski 2006). A sampling of themes is presented in Table 14.1. Yoo and Moon (2006) developed a 47-item inventory of problems identified by parents of gifted children requiring counseling. Quite a few of the items in their inventory

Table 14.1 Themes in research on the inner lives of the gifted

Piechowski (2006)	Yoo and Moon (2006)
Intensity and sensitivity	Hypersensitivity
High personal energy – physical and mental	
Funneling of emotional tension: psychomotor: nervous habits sensual: eating, drinking, etc. intellectual: a mind that can't slow down imaginal: doomsday scenarios emotional: excessive worrying (expecting the worst)	
Sensual delights: appreciation increases with age	
Intellectual energy interest as a basic emotion the role of empathy in intellectual probing passion for finding and solving problems relentless questioning and its consequences: resistance in others, self-doubt in one-self testing assumptions and beliefs: adolescent crisis of worldview spatial thinking	Low self-esteem
Imaginal experience is imagination valued or source of annoyance? imagistic thinking, e.g., metaphors precise visualization: spatial and vivid absorption: experiencing with full sensory engagement communication with nature invisible friends (aka imaginary companions) imaginary worlds how real is a self-created reality?	
Emotional experience emotional intensity as “too much” predominance of positive affect friendships transcend stereotypes affectional bonds with family, animals, and places the self in adolescence: elusive, fragmented, multiple, or confident sense of responsibility: the burden of “the gift” being different perfectionism entelechy empathy and a calling to action empathy as a way of knowing triggers of conflict resistance to compulsion anger, insecurity, and self-consciousness coping with depression coping with fears coping with death	Pressure to meet expectations sense of being different perfectionism conflict with teachers, fighting with peers noncompliance anger/frustration depression isolation, loneliness anxiety, fearfulness recent loss/grief suicidal ideations
Typology of emotional growth rational–altruistic (“judging” or J) emotional–introspective (“perceptive” or P)	
Emotional giftedness the high end of emotional intelligence	
Spiritual giftedness facility for transpersonal experience	
Multilevel development unilevel vs. multilevel developmental process	

identify similar themes, for instance, hypersensitivity, anxiety and fearfulness, low self-esteem (self-doubt), pressure to meet expectations (burden of “the gift”), perfectionism, conflict with teachers or classmates, noncompliance (resistance to compulsion), depression, loss and grief (coping with death), and so on.

14.6 Intensity and Sensitivity

Emotional overexcitability is about what stimulates the person’s feelings and emotions. It is further differentiated into emotional intensity and sensitivity. Emotional *sensitivity* corresponds in many ways to emotional intelligence, the ability to perceive and respond to nuances of emotion and feeling in others, in oneself, and in group interactions. It may be so acute that it becomes hypersensitivity. Emotional *intensity* (passion) is about the amount of energy being expressed. With some people the intensity of their expression is so great that it may be felt as a pressure wave. Intensity of concentration, and their passion for a subject or talent, distinguish gifted children; as one of them said: “A passion is something that rules your life. You want to know everything that there is to know and you want to be the best at it. An interest is something that is cool, and you would like to know more, but if you don’t that’s okay too” (Schultz and Delisle 2006a, p. 90).

Emotional life of the gifted encompasses so much that only a few selected themes can be discussed (Table 14.1). In the responses to the OEQ positive feelings predominate. The dominant affect tends to be love, compassion, caring, optimism, appreciation of beauty, and the like. Bonds of deep affection involve parents and siblings, pets and favorite places, whether it is grandma’s house, an orchard, a spot by the river, or backstage of the school theater.

The role of contact with nature in our emotional well-being has received very little attention. With the worsening environmental condition of the planet and growing urbanization, the opportunity for children to spend time in nature and explore it has all but vanished (Louv 2005).

Younger children have much empathy for the natural world. They empathize with a wilting plant, a tree whose limb is cut off, a crushed spider, and rise in indignation against maltreatment of living things. We belittle it by calling it animism because we don’t see the moral imagination of the child who identifies with what is living and seems sentient. This feeling is extended to stuffed animals or any objects of which the child is especially fond. When we grow up we still do it, too, when we identify with our car or piece of jewelry (Piechowski 2006).

Gifted adolescents describe friendships in terms of intuitive connection and mutual understanding on a deep level. Friendships transcend gender stereotypes and are as easily formed between boys and girls as between boys only or girls only. Introverted and nonathletic gifted youngsters have a particularly difficult time finding friends – they are a minority (nonathletic) within a minority (gifted), which may be further compounded by any degree of “geekiness” (Anderegg 2007; Tannenbaum 1962).

Being intense is an ineradicable part of the gifted self. To most people being intense means “too much,” creating an obvious challenge to find friends of similar level of intensity and passion. When asked how they see their own self (identity), some said that their self is unknown, elusive, or hidden; some described themselves in opposites. For example, a 16-year gifted girl said: “For every adjective I can think of there is one that contradicts it entirely: artistic but can’t write neatly (so you’ve seen), lovable, yet a bitch; shy but loud, mature but silly, calm but ‘spastic,’ together yet ready for a nervous breakdown” (Piechowski 2006, p. 174). Others saw themselves as competent yet highly self-aware and weighed down by the burden of “the gift.” For example, a 17-year old boy said this about himself (Piechowski 2006, p. 178):

I am an existence perched in a precarious balance above the abyss of failure, sorrow, despair, and everything else associated with people of misfortune. I am held up by a few slender supports, among them self-confidence and a few raw talents and abilities. Forces weighing down on these supports. . . are the responsibility accompanying ability and the expectations of others. . . . The supports have bent but not broken, dipping into the chasm, but always rebounding with renewed strength.

Struggles with self-doubt, low self-concept, and lack of self-acceptance are common. In adolescence the self keeps changing – awareness of having many selves, or even being split into a thousand fragments, is not unusual. It’s part of emotional growing and developing one’s identity, which may be intensified in the process of multilevel development.

Because they are aware of the larger picture and their frame of reference may be the whole universe, gifted adolescents may feel as a little “insignificant human speck in the vast universe trying to make something of itself but will probably not succeed” (words of a 15-year old, Piechowski 2006, p. 172). But they can also feel predestined for their mission in life, an inner imperative called *entelechy* (Lovecky 1990). In such cases the qualities of will and self-determination become prominent and will clash with compulsory demands and authoritarian commands.

For gifted young people it is not always easy to admit being talented. The expectations of others for gifted children “to fulfill their potential” (as if one could know what that is) create pressure that is an unwelcome burden, because already one of the outstanding dominant traits of most gifted young people is a feeling of responsibility. Expectations and pressures from others rob them of their own initiative only to make the responsibility weigh all the more heavily on their shoulders. They are well aware of it. The question, who owns “the gift,” is rarely considered (Clark 2005).

14.7 Sense of Fairness and Empathy: A Natural Response

The value of working for the common good is something gifted children understand readily. One teacher of the gifted said this about the difference in teaching gifted and regular students:

One thing I have not realized until I returned to the regular classroom was that gifted students' heightened ability to perceive connections meant that I extensively used their empathy for others to teach broad concepts at a depth I find difficult to even start to address with my current classes. The empathy made the abstract very personal. Most of my current students cannot get beyond their own narrow world, and for some, not even beyond their skins. (Frank 2006, p. 166)

Gifted children's quick empathic response to the needs of others, their misfortunes and tragedies has been well documented (Lewis 1992; Lovecky 1992; Piechowski 2003; Roeper 2004, 2008; Silverman 1994; Waldman 2001) yet, obviously, it is not true of all gifted children. The statement quoted above shows the gifted students' capacity for empathy as a way of knowing. Sense of fairness and empathy are strong feelings that compel a person to act – to offer help when help is needed, to oppose injustice, to redress wrongs suffered by innocent persons. It's the essence of moral action.

The capacity for empathy as part of gifted children's intellectual makeup is something that deserves more attention. We have come late upon the knowledge that rational thought is ineffectual without feeling. In a study of individuals who showed a curious defect – an ability to solve moral problems through reasoning but inability to respond to emotionally charged pictures of human suffering – a lesion was found that severed the connection between the reasoning and feeling functions of the brain (Damasio 1994). A patient with this type of lesion remains unimpaired on tests of intelligence, moral reasoning, and the like. The impairment is revealed in the lack of emotional response to human tragedy and the inability to arrive at a decision when given the choice to exercise preference for, say, Wednesday versus Friday for the next appointment. In Damasio's view, this exposed the error in Descartes' saying "I think therefore I am" instead of "I feel therefore I am," and, one might add, "Because I feel, I can evaluate my reasoning." Evaluation as a process of appraisal involves feeling to decide that something is more desirable or less desirable than the alternative (Bowlby 1969). Centuries of placing reasoning above feeling now seems a pretty foolish enterprise since one cannot work properly without the other.

Tannenbaum (1998) pointed out that we tend to look at giftedness only in positive light and that we leave out gifted people who do harm, whether on a small or large scale. For a gifted person without emotional overexcitability there is no imperative to feel compassion or to be moved to altruistic action. To be effectual, morals and ethics need the engine of the heart. One-sided, harsh emotions like ambition, striving for power, ruthless competition, a drive to win at all cost (without regard for cost to others) can be found in gifted people lacking compassion and caring. There is no lack of examples: a secretary's of defense fascination with precision bombs, a Nobel Prize winner making inappropriate remarks about female brains, financial whizzes and manipulators bringing ruin on thousands of people, amoral presidential advisers, writers and film makers depicting violence and evil for their thrill value, and the list goes on.

14.8 What Causes Conflict for the Gifted

Being gifted inevitably leads to conflict. Gifted adolescents described their conflict with those who brag, are insensitive and irresponsible. Clearly, these behaviors offend their empathy, caring and sense of fairness. A frequently mentioned conflict arises with teachers who do not accept students' views, their knowledge, and their questions, in short, teachers who do not show respect for their students (Piechowski 2006; Schultz and Delisle 2006a, b).

Being forced to act against one's will raises *resistance to compulsion*, a much overlooked but very basic phenomenon (Seligman 1975; Piechowski 2006). Gifted students, and the creative ones especially, react very strongly and viscerally when they are denied choice and respect. Procrastination, refusal to work, as well as learning difficulties are born from this kind of resistance. Also being forced to adhere to a belief one has not chosen. The students then assert, by any means possible, their self, individual identity, right to be heard, respected, and given choice (Roepers 1998). In such situations resisting to be dominated could be viewed as taking a moral stance to preserve one's integrity.

They have fears. Holding to a high standard for themselves they fear making a fool of themselves. Those who are introverted and emotionally sensitive tend to lack self-confidence and suffer agonies when having to speak in front of an audience. They fear not doing well, of not being the best (many are those who feel they have to be the best), they fear failing in their responsibilities, not fulfilling their goals. As one boy said, the list of possible failures is pretty frightening (Piechowski 2006).

They also think of death, a subject that has received too little attention in gifted literature and in school. As one boy said, "can't ask questions related to life, only the textbook" (Schultz and Delisle 2006a, p. 53). Grant (2002, p. 13) observed, "the important topics in educating gifted children are self, meaning, sex, relationship, community, life, purpose, ethics, spirituality – the Most Important Things in Life," subjects that are for the most part avoided. Thinking of death makes some gifted children delve into the meaning of their role in life. Encountering violent death of others – by accident and murder – forces such questions with even greater urgency. Not all are afraid of death. Some expressed curiosity about the process of dying and wished to be able, when the time comes, to be conscious of their own dying and making the transition into the great unknown. Others, however, feared the finality of death and especially of their parents and loved ones more than their own. As for explanation of what happens after death they are divided between those who accept standard explanations offered by religion and those who don't (Piechowski 2006).

Gifted adolescents prefer to cope with their problems on their own. In a study of bullying, Peterson and Ray (2006) found that rather than report it and ask for help, gifted students chose to handle it themselves. Sometimes it meant to just grit their teeth, endure, and not complain. This may explain why despite their overexcitabilities, the suicide rate of gifted young people is not higher than their nongifted counterparts (Cross 1996; Cross et al. 2006).

14.9 Emotional Giftedness

Emotionally gifted children have deep empathy and respond to the needs and hurts of others (Roeper 1982). Such children cannot rest until they have set things right for others. This is especially noteworthy when the other is a stranger or someone disliked, e.g., when a child makes a special effort to be friendly to the class bully as did one 10-year old girl. Intimidating others, she explained, was his way of covering his own insecurity. Another girl, upset over her teacher's unfair treatment of a classmate, took her own paper, tore it into pieces and threw it into the wastebasket to show her moral outrage at the teacher's prejudice. There are also mediators and peacemakers. Terry, a gifted 9-year old was a natural leader but he often held back when he worked in groups to allow others to shine. One day he defended an "at risk" student, a boy who received a black eye in a wrestling tournament. The other boys teased him about the incident and embarrassed him. Terry told them, "you all know it was an accident so drop the subject." His tone was so sincere and authoritative that the boys ceased their teasing.

To be emotionally gifted is to dare to act on one's awareness. If there are hungry people one feeds them and makes sure they won't go hungry from now on. If one sees someone in distress one offers relief. Unfairness and injustice call for defending people's rights. Strongly felt caring becomes the motivation for altruistic behavior.

Strongly felt empathy moves quickly to action. Heather Tobis Booth, co-director of Citizen Action in Chicago recalled how, when she first encountered injustice, she reacted instantly (Witty 1991):

I was in first grade at P.S. 200. I arrived in the schoolyard one morning and saw a little black boy named Benjamin surrounded by some other kids. They were picking up stones and starting to throw them, because they believed he had stolen this girl's lunch money. I ran up to him and stood beside him. And they stopped. I remember thinking something like "you don't treat people like this."

Compassion may move a youngster to personal sacrifice. A highly gifted high school student decided that after graduation he was not going to the university but to work with the homeless.

There are many preteens and early teens who take up social action on behalf of others, actions that become large scale operations extending over many states, or even many nations. For example, raising thousands of dollars for deaf and blind children, victims of abuse, sending over 100,000 books to African children, providing suitcases for children going into foster homes, providing kid packs for children victims of domestic violence whose parents are in jail, are only a few of the ingenious, effective organizational efforts that are motivated by compassion in these very young people (Lewis 1991; Piechowski 2003; Silverman 1994; Waldman 2001).

Emotional giftedness represents the high end of emotional intelligence. Mayer et al. (2001) devised ways of measuring components of emotional intelligence. In one of their tests they asked teenagers how they handled emotionally difficult

situations: “Think about the last time you were out with some friends and they wanted to do something you were uncomfortable with.” Mayer et al. hypothesized that emotionally gifted adolescents will resist going along with unsavory intentions of their friends. The results confirmed the hypothesis. Consequently the concept of emotional giftedness was validated. The biological basis of emotional giftedness becomes open to research with the discovery of mirror neurons. These neurons are engaged in empathy and understanding the moods and intentions of others. They are more strongly activated in people who score higher on an empathy scale (Gazzola et al. 2006).

Emotional giftedness at advanced level of development is represented by Eleanor Roosevelt, Etty Hillesum, Peace Pilgrim, Paul Robeson, A. J. Muste, Bishop Tutu, all profoundly spiritual persons, and can be also found in case studies of self-actualizing people (Brennan and Piechowski 1991; Mróz 2002; Payne 1987; Piechowski 1990). In their research on moral commitment, Ann Colby and William Damon studied 23 moral exemplars who dedicated their lives to the poor, world peace, civil rights, ethics in business and in medicine, sanctuary movement, and the like (Colby and Damon 1992). They found that those who were moved to action by compassion had an easier time keeping a peaceful heart than those who were fighting social injustice. In other words, being inspired by altruistic love appears to diminish conflict and friction. Fighting for social justice makes conflict and friction unavoidable.

The first piece of research exploring the application of Dabrowski’s theory to the personality of a teacher of the gifted is Frank’s (2006) study of an inspirational teacher. The criteria of multilevelness applied by Frank revealed an authentic individual, thoughtfully and deliberately engaged in a teaching grounded in the moral foundation of his advanced level of development. The effectiveness of this teacher lay in his Socratic method as an empathic and moral education that can be called teaching for life in the truest sense.

14.10 Positive Maladjustment

Mayer et al. (2001) realized that the young people in their study who took a stand in opposition to peer pressure displayed what Dabrowski named *positive maladjustment*. Positive maladjustment is a term for opposition to unethical behavior and moral compromise, self-interest and prejudice. It means standing by one’s ideals and having the fortitude to stand alone (Dabrowski 1970). When empathy and sense of justice inspire action to help and protect others then emotional giftedness and positive maladjustment overlap (Piechowski 1997a). Resisting peer pressure for drugs, sex, and subversive acts are examples of positive maladjustment in which empathy and caring play a lesser role.

Standing by one’s beliefs and ideals is not uncommon for gifted teens. Here are two examples (Piechowski 2006). A 16-year old gifted student was asked the question *How well do you like being all by yourself?* She replied:

Depends – all on the circumstances. I can take standing alone – if I have to. I spent 7 years of my life (almost 7) as a social outcast because I refused to conform to some demands of my society or couldn't conform to others – I'm not at all likely to be afraid of ostracism now.

To be true to oneself may indeed require a person to stand alone at times. The following is a reply to *What situations bring you in conflict with others?* A 16-year old girl said:

My opinions are quite different from other students my age. This many times brings conflict between someone in my class and myself. For example, many kids in my class don't think drinking is dangerous and I do. I don't believe in it and I believe it is a waste of time. This sometimes causes a hassle. Another thing my classmates disagree with me on is styles. Many students buy clothes because they are "in style." I don't. If I like them I get them, if I hate them I leave them at the store "in style" or not! (Piechowski, 2006, p. 209)

14.11 Fostering Emotional Growth as Character Development

Examining emotional life leads to the question of how to give it proper attention and help cultivate it. One way is to lead psychosynthesis exercises, or any other guided imagery designed with similar focus. Psychosynthesis techniques are designed for personal and spiritual growth (Ferrucci 1982). Among the principal elements of personal growth are: training one's will as an executive faculty (i.e., operating by choosing a course of action rather than forcing oneself), training for concentration, learning about different parts of one's personality, finding one's inner authority and guidance from within, working toward a synthesis of conflicting parts of oneself, practicing a sense of purpose (Piechowski 2006, Chapter 20).

I have been leading psychosynthesis exercises for a number of years, first with undergraduate students, then with gifted children aged 10–17 (Piechowski 2006, Chapter 20). Gifted children, with very few exceptions, have great capacity for detailed visualization and absorption in the imaginal experience. These techniques have also been adapted for elementary age children (Fugitt 2001; Murdock 1988). Another way of attending to emotional life is through group process devoted to emotionally charged issues. In a safe space, where no judgment or criticism is allowed to interfere with the process, teens discuss feelings, family, relationships, and the future (Peterson 1995).

14.12 Emotional Growth and Psychological Types

Jung's (1971) concept of psychological type identifies four continuous personality dimensions from extroversion to introversion (E–I), from sensation to intuition (S–N), and from thinking to feeling (T–F). One would expect these dimensions to correspond to the overexcitabilities, for instance thinking to intellectual or feeling

to emotional. However, there is very little correlation between overexcitabilities and these dimensions (low correlation for sensual and imaginal with F, and no correlation for psychomotor, intellectual, and emotional). The reason is this: the Jungian dimensions are different constructs from overexcitabilities. They refer to *habitual* ways of dealing with the data of experience, the overexcitabilities refer to the *heightened* capacities for both apprehending and generating the data of experience (Lysy and Piechowski 1983). A further distinction into judging (J) and perceiving (P) was introduced by Myers and Myers-Briggs (Myers and Myers 1995). There is a significant correlation (.37) between imaginal overexcitability and type P (Lysy and Piechowski).

The gifted are evenly divided between extroverts and introverts (Hawkins 1998; Cross et al. 2006). The higher the level of giftedness, the frequency of both the intuitive (N) and the perceiving (P) type rises dramatically (Meckstroth 2006). The highly gifted Rhodes scholars are more than ten to one intuitive, and type P is close to twice as frequent as type J. In the general population of high school students it is just the opposite: the intuitive type is about five times less frequent than the sensation type (Myers and Myers 1995). This is one significant source for the gifted feeling “different,” consequently not fitting in school – their predominant type is opposite of that of mainstream students and teachers (Cross et al. 2006). The prevalence of the intuitive type is consistent with higher frequency of multilevel developmental potential among the gifted.

Myers and Myers (1995) described the “judging” type as oriented toward action by personal executive power of will and choice, while the “perceiving” type as oriented toward embracing experience: “The judging types believe that life should be willed and decided, while the perceptive types regard life as something to be experienced and understood” (p. 69). From analysis of responses rated as emotional overexcitability two types of emotional growth have been identified in gifted adolescents: rational–altruistic and introspective (Piechowski 1989). They correspond exactly to the judging/perceiving distinction. Thus one validates the other as the two typologies were derived independently.

The rational–altruistic type so far has not been analyzed into internal components. The introspective type has eight intrapersonal components. Although on the surface people of the J type, being organized and planful, fit society’s yardstick for defining a “good citizen” they are nevertheless capable of deep inner life (Lysy and Piechowski 1983; Piechowski 2006). Schools clearly prefer J type students because they tend toward achievement and tend not to buck the system unless their logical thinking and strong sense of fairness see a violation of basic principles and rights.

14.13 Multilevel Development

Theories that address moral development tend toward a “progression from rigidity, self-absorption, and dependence on authority to more sophistication, flexibility and independence as mature persons” but differ as to “what causes movement from

one stage to the next” (Tannenbaum 1998, p. 99). For Dabrowski true moral development begins with the experience of inner conflict between lower and higher levels in oneself. The lower levels contain all that one finds in oneself unbecoming, even disgusting and reprehensible. The higher levels contain all that one finds desirable and ideal. It is a “multilevel” conflict. This concept of “multilevelness” can be applied to almost any behavior and human phenomenon. Its great value lies in making possible to sort out experience and behavior according to level. For instance love on a low level will be possessive, dominating, and controlling, while love on a high level will be nonpossessive and with the highest regard for the object of love (Dabrowski 1977). The theory found confirmation in cross-cultural validation of overexcitability profiles and in several empirical tests (Falk et al. 1997, 2008; Piechowski 1975, 2008).² Dabrowski linked the potential for multilevel development with the strength of emotional, intellectual, and imaginal overexcitabilities.

For the understanding of emotional growth of gifted children, the distinction between a unilevel and a multilevel developmental process is the most relevant (Piechowski 2008). In *unilevel process* values are relative rather than universal, inner conflicts are recycled rather than resolved, relationships with others do not have a steady footing. Trying every new trend, following fads, being guided primarily by others’ opinions is an individual without a psychological center. The shifting nature of the person’s identity depends on the circumstances. Such is often the self of an adolescent. When the process intensifies it becomes *unilevel disintegration*.

A change comes when the person begins to tire of this state of affairs with its meaningless emotional treading water and growing malaise. The search for a way out starts with the realization of the possibility of a more meaningful focus in life. A sense of higher and lower in oneself opens new horizons. Sensing the possibility of something higher in oneself engenders the feeling of inferiority, not to others but toward oneself. It is an inferiority before one’s unrealized, more evolved and ideal self. Soon this feeling of inferiority toward oneself is followed by an array of inner currents and rifts with descriptive names like disquietude with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, positive maladjustment, and so on. What they all have in common is the vertical axis of self-evaluation, that judges the distance from the higher in oneself, which attracts, and grows a stronger reaction against the lower in oneself, which repels. Dabrowski firmly believed that moral exemplars share human values that are universal. His theory details out the process of development through inner transformation (Dabrowski 1967).

When we can spot in a young person an inner dialogue, self-judgment, distress over a moral conflict, we have in front of us a *multilevel* process. The intro-

² Additional empirical support comes by way of a positive correlation (.44) between the Jungian intuitive type (N) and developmental level, and that all five overexcitabilities correlated with developmental level: psychomotor .26, sensual .31, intellectual .57, imaginal .38, emotional .59 (Lysy and Piechowski 1983). Furthermore, on detailed scrutiny, Dabrowski’s construct of Level IV corresponds exactly to Maslow’s description of self-actualizing people (Piechowski 2008). When two independent sets of observations and constructs converge, we can be confident that a real phenomenon has been identified.

spective emotional growth mentioned earlier, has eight components, which help recognize the specifics of the multilevel emotional development in adolescents. They are: (1) awareness of growing and changing, (2) awareness of feelings, interest in others and empathy toward them, (3) occasional feelings of unreality, (4) inner dialogue, (5) self-examination, (6) self-judgment, (7) searching, problem-finding, asking existential questions, and (8) awareness of one's real self (Piechowski 1989; 2006). The values in such a process can be both individual and universal; the feelings toward oneself can be rife with inner conflict or they can be showing an emergent self-direction; feelings towards others will be sincerely democratic and displaying awareness of interdependence. In cases of intense inner conflict, suffering, inner seeking, and depression, the process becomes *multilevel disintegration*. This process may become very deep and may be misunderstood. How to read the signs and how to assist through counseling has been described elsewhere (Jackson et al. 2009; Jackson and Moyle 2009).

Let me close with an example of a boy awakening to the realization that competition in which there are winners and losers clashes with the virtue of caring, a distinctly moral concern. Here are replies, two years apart, from a boy confronted with asking himself, *Who am I?* When he was 15 he wrote: "I feel that I am a person who is on the earth that is destined to use his abilities and talents to his fullest. This is simply what I think I really am." He gave it much thought over the next two years. At 17 he recognized a moral conflict between getting ahead and being considerate of others (Piechowski 2006, p. 210):

The answer to this question has changed over the past few years. A few years ago I was a person who wanted things for himself. Now I am trying to change that person to a person who wants to contribute to others and the world not just himself. Obtaining this type of person in this world is not that easy. The one thing that is a roadblock is competition. Not necessarily losing to other people, but beating them. How can I compete to get into medical school when a doctor is supposed to build people's confidence and restore their sense of security? The process is self-defeating.

It is not hard to see that this kind of thinking guided the lives of Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Paul Robeson, Peace Pilgrim, Bishop Tutu, and many others who follow their inner voice.

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