

Media Themes and Threads

Carolyn Callahan, Editor

The focus of this special issue of the *Journal of the Education for the Gifted* is on the social and emotional development of gifted students and the associated needs of these students. Accordingly, we have elected in these reviews to focus on a selection of books and classroom materials available to teachers and to the students themselves.

The first two books reviewed (*The Gifted Kids Survival Guide: Guide II* and *Perfectionism: What's So Bad About Being Good*) are designed to be read by gifted students themselves. The first deals with topics which range from those arising from the typical questions and experiences of gifted students to issues more painful and even life-threatening. The third book reviewed (*Managing the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted: A Teacher's Survival Guide*) is designed to give teachers a general background in those social and emotional needs as well as to suggest actual strategies and activities for helping teachers deal with the social and emotional needs of the gifted most effectively.

The final two items reviewed are teaching/counseling materials designed to help students deal with stress. The first, *Pileup*, is a card game which is designed for students as young as five years old or for adults of any age. It focusses on the development of coping mechanisms. The second item is a cassette tape package which provides relaxation exercises reported to be appropriate for all ages.

As you will see from our reviewers' comments, the quality of available materials in this area runs the gamut in terms of appropriateness, usefulness and effectiveness. As editor, I would like to caution all of our readers that dealing with these issues in gifted students requires considerable skill and expertise for which the provision of a set of materials or a book will not substitute—no matter how good the materials may seem. We all need to be very aware of those issues where our own expertise is appropriate and those times when a counselor or psychologist is the most appropriate professional to deal with a topic or a problem faced by a student. Keep this in mind as you read the reviews which follow.

James Delisle and Judy Galbraith (1987). *The gifted kids survival guide II*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

One of the complaints gifted children often have about "being gifted" is that no one explains to them what being gifted means. Gifted children are familiar with some of its opportunities and frustrations, but are frequently left in the dark as to its implications. To fill this void, Free Spirit Publishing has produced a series of *Gifted Kids Survival Guides*. They are written for gifted children in language that children can understand what being gifted means. The subject of this review, *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide II*, is a sequel to the original *Gifted Kids Survival Guide* and is intended for students ages eleven to eighteen years. The new survival guide, according to the authors, is a response to requests from readers of the original survival guide for more information about giftedness.

The new guide, like the original, is not divided into chapters. It is, however, organized into five major sections that discuss issues parallel to those in the original publication.

The first section, entitled "Intelligence: Tests Don't Tell It All" includes a brief history of conceptions of intelligence and intelligence testing. Issues concerning intelligence testing are discussed, also. The history mentions Lombroso, Galton, and Terman. It gives greater discussion of the more recent works of Howard Gardner and Robert Sternberg. The essential point of the history is to tell gifted students that there are diverse perspectives on what intelligence is. The bias of the authors toward explanations of intelligence as multifaceted is apparent. The criticism of intelligence testing is centered on three points: the validity of specific test items, the bias of tests against culturally diverse populations, and the misinterpretation of test results. Under this last point, the authors point out that some people mistakenly believe that being "better at" means being "better than." To conclude this section, the authors warn gifted students to be cautious about labels because what we actually know about the brain and intelligence is fairly limited.

The second section, entitled, "A School Survival Handbook," discusses achievement and aptitude testing. Included is an explanation of grade equivalent scores that would be beneficial to teachers and parents as well.

The remainder of this section is comprised of suggestions of how students may "take charge" of their education. Paradigms are provided by which students can rate their schools. Caution should be

used in applying these paradigms to judging schools since they tend to oversimplify some basic educational issues (i.e., focus on process or product). Discussions of students' rights and how to assert them are provided; alternative ways that high schools could meet the needs of gifted students are suggested; and strategies for implementing decisions are given. One excellent strategy suggested is a contract students can use to guide themselves in effecting school change. An example contract is provided.

The third section, entitled "Whose Life Is It, Anyway?" deals with career decisions, perfectionism, and sexism. The discussion on perfectionism is one of the finest aspects of the entire book. Goal-setting; handling pressure, failure, and criticism; and pursuing excellence are discussed. The presentation of differences between perfectionism and pursuing excellence is especially insightful.

The fourth section, entitled "Growing Pains," features discussions about self-respect, social relations, and adolescent suicide. It is in this discussion of adolescent suicide that this book takes a particularly courageous step forward. Adolescent suicide is a taboo subject for some people. As one gifted high school student said to me in an interview, "The administration won't talk about it; the counselors won't talk about it; the teachers won't talk about it!" Delisle and Galbraith do talk about it. They discuss why gifted students may seem particularly prone to suicide (failures, pressure, frustration, heightened sensitivity to "adult" problems). They discuss self-acceptance as a preventive measure and instruct students in an easy to remember method called REALITY (Respect, Evaluate, Act, Listen, Investigate, Take, Yourself) for cases in which students may have to intervene with a friend. They do not suggest that students become mini-counselors. They do suggest they be friends who know how to help and where to get help.

The final section, entitled "Gifted People Speak Out," is probably the most disappointing section of the book. Two gifted individuals—one a 25-year old male, the other a 19-year old female—reflect on their experiences as gifted high school students. Their messages are up-beat, positive, and full of excellent hind-sight. I believe it would have been more helpful to gifted students to have current high school students discuss how they were surviving or successfully handling the exigencies of high school life.

I found *Gifted Kids Survival Guide II* to be written in a personable, though sometimes colloquial, style and in language that was aimed directly at the intended adolescent audience without being patronizing. The book is invitational in tone (the authors even in-

vite their audience to write to them). Scattered throughout the book are pithy quotations to consider, activities to complete, and bibliographies for further reading.

I was concerned, however, with one aspect of the language. After indicating the concern gifted students have with being labeled gifted, the authors make the assumption that gifted students wouldn't mind being called GTs. Thus gifted students were referred to as GTs through much of the book. I cannot imagine these students would like being called GT anymore than they like being called gifted.

Nonetheless, I would recommend this book for reading by adolescent gifted children, particularly those who are feeling pressured and frustrated. Parents, teachers, and counselors should read the book also. Not only will they find it a valuable tool in helping gifted students, but they will find information useful to themselves as well.

Finally, I would recommend that the authors write another survival guide. While the volume reviewed here touched on issues of sexism (mostly in career planning) and racism (mostly in testing), I have not found in the guides sufficient talk about being gifted directed to the special needs of diverse gifted populations. Gifted students who face the additional challenges of prejudicial treatment because of their sex, race, socioeconomic status, or handicapping conditions would be well served by a guide addressing their questions.

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Adderholt-Elliott, M. (1987). *Perfectionism: What's bad about being good?* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Contrary to stereotypical perceptions, gifted students are not necessarily predisposed to an atypical number or kind of social-emotional problems because of their heightened abilities and talents. However, by virtue of their giftedness, able children may be more susceptible than their nongifted peers to certain types of problems. Miriam Adderholt-Elliott writes primarily about one such problem in her book, *Perfectionism*.

Dr. Adderholt-Elliott discusses the combination of giftedness and perfectionism in young adults. Though the author does not suggest that giftedness and perfectionism are highly correlated, she fre-