

Counselling High Achieving and Creatively Gifted Children

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ABSTRACT Psychologists and educators have expressed widely divergent views on the nature of high achievers and the characteristics of creative and gifted children. This study sheds light on the nature and concept of high achievers as well as the creative and gifted children. Effort has also been made in this study to enumerate the characteristics of the gifted and creative persons. Finally, in this study, the counselling strategies to be employed to ensure that these Intellectual Wizards achieve higher in different areas of life and become more creatively gifted have been stated.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom of an individual may not be enough for him to tackle problems of his life. Hence, he needs to run for help to somewhere else. This is the major reason why going to Counsellors at times become inevitable.

A lot of people erroneously believe that counselling is an act of giving advice. Counselling is definitely more than advise-giving. Secondly, counselling involves something more than a solution to an immediate problem. In the words of Tyler (2007), counselling is supposed to maintain a personal stability in view of repeated changes and repeated challenges.

In the opinion of Warnath (2000), in a very conscious way the counselor also attempts to assist the counselee in recognizing the process he is going through in the learning, so that he will be better able to carry on the process himself in making future decisions. This is why Warnath calls counselling "personalized learning". Counselling, however, can be generally defined as an encounter between the counsellor and the counselee or client whereby, the counsellor uses the psychological skills he possesses to help the client come out of his problems. Anybody could be a client. A client could be a lawyer, an engineer, a carpenter, a cleaner, a person with visual impairment, a person with hearing impairment, a creative child, a gifted child, and the high achievers.

High Achiever

High achievers are those who perform brilliantly or excel in school ability or mental ability

test. These are the children who show potential for high ability and possess above average intelligence. They are cognitively superior to other children of the same chronological age.

Creativity

Creativity is one concept in psychological literature for which there is no widely accepted definition. It is a very complex subject. Nwazuoke (1996) is of the opinion that its complexity is underscored by the fact that psychologist, philosophers, writers, poets, researchers, have expressed widely divergent views on its nature.

According to him, psychologists and researchers have been known to use it synonymously with such terms as originality, imagination, innovation, novelty, intuition, exploration, invention, unusualness, divergent thinking, ingenuity, newness, discovery and uniqueness. In addition, creativity has been contrasted with conformity in thinking.

Torrance (2004) observes that creativity has been variously defined in the literature as a process or a product; and at times in terms of a personality or environmental situation. Akinboye (1982) is of the opinion that creativity has been characterized as being complex, transcending human capacity to conceptualize.

Nwazuoke (1989) stresses that after taking a comprehensive look at the explanations and or definitions of creativity offered by workers in the field, he was able to lease out three elements that underlie them. These are: the time and place perspective of creativity; the uniqueness or novelty of the product; and its utility to the individual and society. Based on the foregoing, he

therefore defined creativity as a complex behavior in which an individual utilizes his mental resources in such a unique way that a novel product which is adaptive to reality, emerges.

According to Nwazuo (1996), generally, definitions of creativity have the following elements:

1. The process of inventing something new.
2. Thinking of new ideas that are useful
3. Heightened perception of our surroundings resulting in a unique outlook
4. The ability to make connections from various pieces of information in a novel way, and to bring these ideas to a fruitful result.
5. New ideas, improvements, innovations are all forms of creativity.
6. Invention or expression of that which is both useful and original to the Creator.
7. Mental process.
8. Usually the presence of a problem to be urgently solved.
9. Creative solutions usually have implications beyond their immediate uses (Melvin 1979; Nwazuo 1989)

Having taken a comprehensive look at the explanations and/or definitions of creativity offered by workers in the field, Adedun (2004) has been able to marry everything together to come up with his own unique definition. Adedun sees creativity as being marked by the ability or power to create; to invest with a new form, to produce through imaginative skills, to make or bring into existence something new.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATIVE PERSONS

Nwazuo (1989) is of the opinion that creative behaviour is not the monopoly of any group of persons. He stresses that the trait creativity has been found to be naturally distributed in the populations of the world. In other words, it is not the preserve of any community or culture.

It is opined in the literature that creative persons have at least above average intelligence (Nwazuo 1996). It is, however, worth mentioning that some non-creative persons may be highly intelligent. Nwazuo stresses further that creative persons generally have average or above average level of intelligence, ideational fluency, discriminating observations, superior memory, ability to synthesize disparate ideas, cognitive flexibility, and the production of unusual but appropriate ideas. He concludes that

creative persons show preference for unstructured complex experiences.

Curiosity is another peculiar characteristic of creativity. Tucker (2001) observes that creative persons are interested in finding out “why” and “how” things happen the way they do. Creative children also have radicalism as one of their traits. Creative children usually admit self-views, which are unusual and unconventional and are strongly motivated to achieve in situation which call for independence. They are, however, commonly accepted to be non-conformists and single-minded.

According to Coleman (1979), openness to new experiences is another trait that describes creative persons. He defines openness to new experiences as “a tolerance for conflict and ambiguity in thinking and a rejection of the notion that one has all the answers. Nwazuo (1996a) observes that this trait explains why creative children are easily adaptable to novel situations. Nwazuo (1996b) further stresses that perseverance to achieve in the face of overwhelming odds is a peculiar trait of creative persons. According to him, they are known to be task-oriented and usually work hard and endure for long to achieve results. He further states that creative persons have the courage to follow their own convictions and are generally risk-takers.

In conclusion, it is the view of this writer that highly creative people could be said to demonstrate many of the following traits:

- Extremely high intrinsic motivation to be creative in their field;
- Self-discipline and dedication to their works;
- Deep belief in the value of what they are creating; and
- Dedication to high standard of excellence.

Creative people are also insightful and often think divergently, have extensive knowledge of the particular area of expertise and profound commitment to the creative endeavor. Finally, creative persons are also known to be flexible thinkers and they seek novel situations and imagine many possibilities. They also have positive self-image of themselves.

Gifted Children

Giftedness involves the notion of being cognitively superior to the majority of members of a particular group. The gifted are believed to have a lot of gifts and talents which other children of their age do not possess. Consequently,

they are very superior to other children of the same age.

A person can be said to be gifted and talented provided he excels in several areas of interest. For instance, a person can combine academic excellence with brilliant performance in music ability such as in producing and performing music. In line with the above, Hanahan et al. (2007) conclude that these terms interact with one another to produce the various combinations of giftedness.

According to Marland (1972), a gifted child is someone who has the superior ability to perform better than members of his age group in any of the following areas either singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual abilities,
2. Specific academic aptitude,
3. Creative or productive aptitude,
4. Leadership ability,
5. Visual and performance art,
6. Psychomotor ability.

Based on the argument on what is known about people's remarkable achievements, it suffices to define giftedness in line with (Renzuli 1981; Ries 1981; Smith 1981) who refer to the gifted as those who show potential for high ability, high creativity and high task commitment. The reason for this is that these three clusters of behaviour are characteristics necessary for any worthwhile gifted activity.

In general, gifted children may be described as those who possess above average intelligence and are recognized for their remarkable performance in specific and general abilities which include academic and talent areas.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Physical Characteristics: The gifted children are generally superior to their mates physically. They are usually more robust, taller, bigger, stronger and heavier. At birth, gifted children weigh heavier than their counterparts. They learn to sit, crawl and walk earlier than their mates.

Educational / Intellectual Characteristics: Most gifted children learn to read before age of three years. Some even teach themselves to read. They are accelerated from one class to another. They graduate younger, participate more in extra-curricular activities than their peer groups. They perform very well in all school subjects to the extent that they are being referred to as all-

rounder. Educationally, they are more interested in sciences and in abstract subjects as literature, debate and history. They perform wonderfully in standardized intelligence tests.

Very early in life, gifted children show indications of superior intelligence as demonstrated in quick understanding; insatiable curiosity; retentive memory; large vocabulary and so on. They show very high interest in reading and they like reading adult / advanced books.

Social and Emotional Characteristics: Socially, gifted children are lively and are admired by their peers. Sharing the same opinion Coleman (1985) and Fultz (1985) observed that the gifted feel happy within themselves, especially when they are challenged academically to use their abilities to the fullest. They have wide and varied interest and are positive in their approach to life. They are very honest, trustworthy, sincere, obedient and humble. They hardly cheat and like to help or serve others. As a group, they enjoy stable emotions and are psychologically balanced; and better adjusted in adulthood. They often show commitment to their groups.

Summarily, gifted children are academic giants described as "all rounder" physically – they are robust, taller, stronger and heavier. Socially – they are amiable, popular, honest, trustworthy, dedicated and committed thus possessing leadership qualities. Emotionally – they are stable, enjoy good health and are better adjusted in life.

COUNSELLING STRATEGIES TO HELP HIGH ACHIEVING AND CREATIVELY GIFTED CHILDREN

Though high achieving and creatively gifted children are well-known for their brilliant performance in several areas of interest, yet, they need counselling if their superiority in several areas of life is to be maintained. Furthermore, it has been established that the high achieving and creatively gifted people are capable of launching the society into the much desired technological age. It stands to reason that counsellors should understand their role in helping them to achieve higher in different areas of life and to become more creatively gifted.

There are times when high achieving and creatively gifted child is either neglected or ignored by his or her peer groups, parents or teachers when they seem to be too curious. As we know that curiosity is one of the characteristics of such people, therefore, when they are neglect-

ed or ignored this way, they are negatively affected and the result is to withdraw or keep to themselves.

The counsellor should step in here and talk with such a child. The child should be helped to understand that to withdraw or keep to himself or herself is to deny his or her gift. The peer groups, parents and teachers also need to be educated by the counsellor that curiosity is one of the traits of high achieving and creatively gifted children and in order to help them they need to satisfy their curiosity.

Furthermore, one of the characteristics of high achieving and creatively gifted children is that they learn faster than their mates. The implication is that most of the time when a teacher is repeating certain points for the sake of emphasis they feel bored and engage themselves in other activities. The counsellor should make the high achieving and creatively gifted children to understand that at all times, they must always concentrate on what the teacher teaches them. If they don't, they are likely to have problem with their teachers who may accuse them of being rude or not conforming to the norm. The counsellor's duty again is to advice the teacher in this type of situation to embark upon enrichment programme so as to cater for the needs of these exceptionally brilliant students in the class.

As stated earlier, having positive self – image of themselves has been implicated as a characteristics feature of the above mentioned set of children. This attribute can easily make them to run into problem with people around them as they can easily mistake this trait for pride. People often refer to them as being proud and therefore keep a distance from them. It is the duty of the counsellor to encourage the creative children to remain undaunted and continue to have positive self - image of themselves. Although, they must also be counselled to show courtesy to people and also to be humble at all times. Continuous having of positive self-image of themselves will always make them to be high achievers and will never develop inferiority complex in the midst of their peer groups.

One of the physical characteristics of these children is that they are more robust, taller, bigger, stronger and heavier than their mates. There is need for the counsellor to talk to them so that they will not bully and take undue advantage over their mates who are smaller in stature. They must always be encouraged to use their big stature positively and not to oppress others.

CONCLUSION

Since the creative thrust and aggressiveness of children identified as creatively gifted could be put into constructive and destructive use, it becomes absolutely necessary for the counsellors to reward more of the constructively creative actions and condemn the destructive ones. If as stated above, the duties of the counsellors are well discharged, the high achieving and creatively gifted children will be made to be more useful to themselves and the society.

Conclusively, since it is the belief of everybody that it is these high achieving and creatively gifted people who are capable of launching the society into the much desired technological age, the efforts of the counsellors will have positive effect and this noble dream would be realized in no distant future.

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