

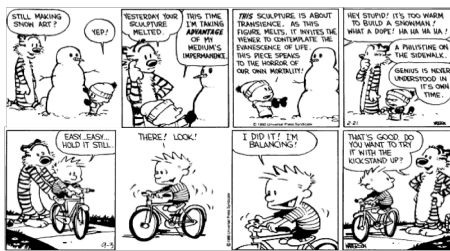
Overexcitabilities and the Gifted Learner

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Asynchronous Development

- ▶ Core of the gifted child
- ▶ Gifted kids may develop at an unexpected pace compared to typical children
- ▶ Areas of overall development:
 - ▶ Physical
 - ▶ Emotional
 - ▶ Cognitive
 - ▶ Moral
 - ▶ Spiritual
- ▶ Gifted kids may develop at an uneven pace within themselves

Asynchronous Development



Example

- ▶ Child A - age 8:
 - ▶ Physical - typical age 8 size/weight/motor skills
 - ▶ Emotional - age 10 in understanding, age 8 in expression and control
 - ▶ Cognitive - age 12
 - ▶ Moral - age 14
 - ▶ Spiritual - age 12
- ▶ How does this affect child's internal world?
- ▶ How does this affect the child's relationships with classmates?
- ▶ How does this affect the child's relationships with adults?

Overexcitabilities

- ▶ Heightened sensitivities to input
- ▶ Common among gifted individuals
- ▶ 5 areas
 - ▶ Intellectual
 - ▶ Imaginational
 - ▶ Sensory
 - ▶ Psychomotor
 - ▶ Emotional
- ▶ May lead to misdiagnosis various psychological or developmental disorders
- ▶ Helping student cope with OEs can improve behavior and relationships
- ▶ Sweaters

Big Bang Theory - Sweaters



General OE Strategies

- ▶ Explain what OEs are and how they might be experienced
- ▶ Find ways to make them useful
- ▶ Start with stress and OE management early in childhood
- ▶ Keep behavior awareness an ongoing dialogue

Intellectual OE

Benefits

- ▶ Seeks the truth and fairness
- ▶ Planner and organizer
- ▶ Observes details
- ▶ Asks questions
- ▶ Particular areas of intense interest - "passions"
- ▶ Constantly connecting different bits of information
- ▶ Grasps abstract ideas quickly and earlier than expected

Challenges

- ▶ Questions may appear to be insubordinate
- ▶ May get hyperfocused on a particular activity or topic
- ▶ May seem unorganized/chaotic
- ▶ Hard to turn off mind
- ▶ May cause sleeping problems

Intellectual OE Strategies

- ▶ Encourage enrichment opportunities and advanced classes as available
- ▶ Provide time to explore areas of passion/interest and support action plans to do so
- ▶ Provide explanations for decisions as appropriate
- ▶ Don't assume questions are the same as questioning authority
- ▶ Teach how to find answers to own questions
- ▶ Guide from a cognitive-behavioral point of view
 - ▶ Use questioning to help student analyze behavior or situation
 - ▶ Use reasoning to help student develop a plan

Imaginational OE

Benefits

- ▶ Make believe friends
- ▶ May pretend play later in childhood than classmates
- ▶ Developed sense of humor
- ▶ Retells stories or TV shows verbatim and then recreates with unique twist

Challenges

- ▶ Exaggerates
- ▶ May worry more than usual
- ▶ Asks odd questions that seem out of place
- ▶ Daydreaming
- ▶ May have trouble turning it off for bedtime or school
- ▶ ADD a common misdiagnosis because of this

Imaginational OE Strategies

- ▶ Teach and reinforce the difference between reality and fiction/imagination
- ▶ Establish reality before they exaggerate it
- ▶ Encourage opportunities for dance, drama, visual arts, and/or music
- ▶ Recommend writing contests or video contests
- ▶ Tolerate unusual questions without assuming it is questioning authority
- ▶ Talk through "what ifs" in new or anxiety-provoking situations

Psychomotor OE

Benefits

- ▶ Talks a lot and quickly
- ▶ May not need as much sleep as expected
- ▶ Competitive
- ▶ High energy

Challenges

- ▶ Fidgets or has nervous habits
- ▶ Competitive
- ▶ Physical expression of emotions
- ▶ Repeated, almost compulsive, actions
- ▶ ADHD and OCD a common misdiagnosis because of this

Psychomotor OE Strategies

- ▶ Provide clear behavioral guidelines and ways to express emotion
- ▶ Model and practice before hand
- ▶ Use a timer to keep on task as needed
- ▶ Allow for physical breaks during long tasks or events
- ▶ Encourage an athletic or active outlet
- ▶ Counsel child through winning AND losing
- ▶ Have something physical for student to do during class

Sensory OE

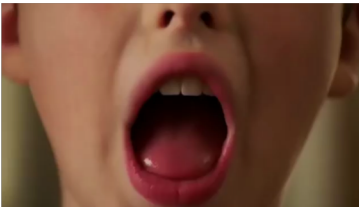
Benefits

- ▶ Heightened awareness to input from the senses
- ▶ Drawn to visual art, music, or dance
- ▶ Vivid memory of sensory-based experiences
- ▶ Awareness of details
- ▶ Refrigerator

Challenges

- ▶ Less of a filter to extra "stuff" compared to others
- ▶ Constantly touching things, especially fabrics or textures
- ▶ Picky eater due to intense flavors or textures
- ▶ Irritated by seams or tags in clothing or particular fabrics
- ▶ May be bothered by bright lights or noises
- ▶ ADHD and Sensory Integration Disorder a common misdiagnosis because of this

Young Sheldon - Refrigerator



Sensory OE Strategies

- ▶ Work with child to find modifications that adapt to the sensory problem
- ▶ Silent headphones in class or doing homework or use of an iPod for music
- ▶ Alternate seating or lighting
- ▶ Study carrel to reduce visual distractions
- ▶ Talk about this with the students so they know what they are experiencing and how it relates to others
- ▶ Discuss appropriate responses to stimuli

Emotional OE

Benefits

- ▶ Sensitive to other's words or actions
- ▶ Empathetic and considerate of others' feelings
- ▶ Exceptional memory rooted in the emotional experience

Challenges

- ▶ Feelings can be easily hurt
- ▶ Anxious or unwarranted guilt
- ▶ Extreme moods that swing back and forth
- ▶ Worried about others' feelings and empathetic
- ▶ Physical response to emotions
- ▶ Bipolar disorder and Asperger's syndrome a common misdiagnosis
- ▶ Secondary trauma

Emotional OE Strategies

- ▶ Use a "reset" to help wind down extreme emotional displays
- ▶ Keep communication open and don't assume
- ▶ Search for books with a strong emotional component and message to help teach coping skills within home reading
- ▶ Model and practice socially accepted responses to different emotional experiences
- ▶ Find activities or social situations that are small groups or partners rather than large groups
- ▶ Guide from a relational or positive psychology standpoint
- ▶ Explore emotion before moving on to action
- ▶ Use cause-effect thinking and help separate feelings from reality
- ▶ Teach students to anticipate emotional responses

Application

- ▶ Think of your child.
- ▶ What overexcitabilities might be at play?
- ▶ How might you provide support to your child?

Resources

- ▶ *Living with Intensity* by Susan Daniels & Michael Piechowski
- ▶ *Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students* by Christine Fonseca
- ▶ *Smart Teen's Guide to Living with Intensity* by Lisa Rivero
- ▶ *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children and Adults* by Edward Amend, James Webb, et al.
- ▶ SENG Resource Library - www.sengifted.org
