

## **ASYNCHRONOUS DEVELOPMENT IN GIFTED STUDENTS**

Asynchronous development means simply, out of sync. Gifted students often develop cognitively at a much faster rate than they develop physically and emotionally. This discrepancy creates unique problems. Although their emotions and bodies may be in sync with their age peers, academically gifted students' minds function more quickly and at higher cognition levels. The gifted child may appear to be many ages at once. He may be eight chronologically as he rides his bike, twelve while playing chess, and fifteen while working through his algebra homework.

The student may look like a whiz-kid in the classroom and be inept at fine motor skills. Adults who see outstanding intellectual skills that need stimulation can't understand why the student cries easily or has no organizational skills. Friendships are often a concern for students with asynchronous development. They may select playmates at their intellectual age, feeling out of sync with their chronological classmates. Intellectual age mates understand their jokes and function at the same level on games they play. In some situations, gifted intellectuals may try to dominate play because they know how the game "should" be played. Yet, in physical play, they may prefer students of the same chronological age.

Kathi Kearney (1992), an expert on asynchrony, works with families who have children with asynchronous development concerns. When families discover great discrepancies between cognitive, emotional and social development, Kearney emphasizes the importance of parents and other adults acting as "multi-level mediators" in order to effectively help the child through varying circumstances.

Linda Kreger Silverman (1997), a licensed Colorado psychologist and expert on needs of gifted students, has focused on problems associated with asynchronous development. With emphasis on developmental differences, she warns that emotions can't be treated separately from intellectual awareness or physical development. The gifted student functions as a whole. Oftentimes there is, however, a need to fine-tune individual 'parts' of the gifted child in order to develop appropriate, acceptable behavior.

Gifted guru Stephanie S. Tolan (2003) complements Silverman's research. Society often values the products of gifted children's special mental capacities, while traits that come with those capacities are not. We cheer at accomplishments, such as putting good thoughts into a winning essay, but call the same child who reacts emotionally to war a neurotic. Gifted students have an acutely heightened awareness of most everything, so they recognize the turmoil within themselves when they do not react with equal ease to all things. These students need affective training to help them understand themselves and the fact that they may not be emotionally ready to deal with issues their cognitive brains discern.

Janis Pridemore

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF ASYNCHRONOUS DEVELOPMENT IN GIFTED**

- The asynchronous student acts different ages in different situations.
- The student may look like a loner or introvert in the classroom because he sees himself as different from his age peers or he may be domineering, seeing himself as the only person in the classroom who really knows how to do a task.
- The student may be an avid reader, using the societally acceptable mode of retreat for escaping from reality through books.
- A gifted student may exhibit a rare sense of humor and understand sarcasm, which causes others to think the student is a smart aleck when, in fact, the child's intellectual level is much more advanced than other students his/her age. Yet in the social context, the student doesn't realize he is being offensive because of his asynchronous development.
- Asynchronous development intensifies as IQ increases.
- Twice-exceptional are at greater risk for asynchrony.
- Uneven development may cause the child to feel out-of-step with societal norms.
- Many gifted children have one set of age peer friends and another set of intellectual peers. (Walker, 2002)

## **COUNSELING ASPECTS OF ASYNCHRONOUS DEVELOPMENT**

- The gifted student may "see through" a counselor who tries to direct them. Open discussion may be a better route to take with gifted students. The counselor can direct the conversation but allow it to flow freely through the students in the direction that they desire.
- Parents who are considering grade-skipping need to evaluate their child's possible asynchronous development in the physical and socio/emotional areas.

- Bibliotherapy may be an option, to see how others have suppressed their tendencies to want to be perfect all the time.

## **FAMILY CONCERNS WITH ASYNCHRONOUS DEVELOPMENT**

- Parents need to offer love and support for all the child's endeavors, including those areas where growth and maturity are less developed.
- Parents need to encourage the child to try all things, taking baby steps. Often the child will shy away from doing things he/she is afraid of doing poorly. The child may be fearful that others will make fun of him/her.
- Parents need to act as mediators and listen to the child and get the child's perspective about school, play, and other social situations. Conversations may help guide the child to comprehend how and why he/she should respond to different situations in certain ways.
- Role play scenarios so s/he can visualize actions from several different perspectives. Then discuss feelings.
- Parents can facilitate the child's interests by arranging times for play with both older and same-age playmates.
- Parents who want to consider acceleration or grade skipping need to consider both academic and physical/emotional ages.