

Presentation Topics for Linda Silverman

Keynote Addresses and Full-Day Presentations

Each of the following topics is designed as a 1¼- hour keynote address and can be expanded into a full-day presentation. As there will be insufficient time to take questions, it is recommended that the keynote address be followed by a Question and Answer period to enable interested participants to further explore the topic with the presenter.

UPSIDE-DOWN BRILLIANCE: THE VISUAL-SPATIAL LEARNER

Most people think in words; however, one-third of the student body thinks in images, and this percentage is growing. School was designed for auditory-sequential, left-hemispheric students who process in words. High achievers are advanced in reading, writing, spelling, calculation and memorization, and perform well under timed conditions. Visual-spatial learners are gifted in right-hemispheric abilities, such as imagination, visualization, intuitive knowledge, multi-dimensional perception, science and technology, holistic thinking, creativity, artistic expression (music, dance, art, drama), and emotional responsiveness. These gifts are vital to employment in the 21st century and need to be nurtured. Specific strategies for identifying and teaching visual-spatial learners have been drawn from the new book, *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*.

INTENSITIVE! INTENSITIES AND SENSITIVITIES OF THE GIFTED

The terms most descriptive of the gifted population are *intense* and *sensitive*—in short, *INTENSITIVE!* Over the last 40 years, my colleagues and I have conducted numerous studies of gifted children, adolescents and adults, and have found that the gifted population experiences heightened intensity throughout the lifespan. Emotional responsiveness has emerged as such a common thread among nearly 5,000 children brought for assessment of giftedness that it can be considered a *qualitative indicator* of high intelligence. Our studies of exceptionally gifted children and adolescents reveal that the highest IQ ranges are characterized by profound emotional depth, sensitivity and intensity.

THE UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING OUT-OF-SYNC

When giftedness is defined as asynchronous development, it is not limited by ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic status, or geographical or political boundaries. In all cultures, there are children who progress through the developmental milestones at a more rapid rate than their peers. The brighter they are, the more uneven their development is likely to be—intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally. They are also likely to be out-of-sync with their age-mates and with age-related cultural norms. Certain intellectual and personality characteristics accompany asynchrony: sensitivity, intensity, curiosity, perceptiveness, complexity, reflectiveness, and perfectionism. These characteristics are lifelong and differentiate the experience of gifted individuals from birth to maturity.

WHY DO WE NEED GIFTED EDUCATION?

Why do we need gifted education? Because gifted children learn differently from their age-mates, and they suffer when their learning needs are ignored. Because it is wrong to thwart the intellectual growth of any segment of our school population. Because our democracy, as well as our position as a world leader, is being endangered by substituting socialization for education. Our two competing American ideals—*excellence and egalitarianism*—have become out of balance. The school reform movement of the '90s embraced a radical form of egalitarianism in which *excellence* was sacrificed. However, as Abraham Lincoln reminded us, we cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. Bringing the top down does not bring the bottom up. All children have the right to learn new concepts in school every day. As educators, we have a moral obligation to respond to individual differences, including those of the gifted.

THE TWO-EDGED SWORD OF COMPENSATION: HOW THE GIFTED COPE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

At least one-sixth of the gifted population suffers from hidden learning disabilities. Gifted children mask unusual weaknesses by using their extraordinary abstract reasoning abilities to compensate. But compensation is a two-edged sword: It helps an individual to adapt, but it also prevents accurate diagnosis and recognition of disabilities by oneself and others. While modality strengths can be counted on consistently, compensation requires extra energy and tends to be unstable. Fatigue, illness, poor diet and stress all rob the person of sufficient energy to be able to compensate. In this session, effective strategies will be shared for finding and serving gifted children with learning disabilities. Early identification and intervention, as well as assistive technology, are keys to success for twice exceptional children.

INSIDE OUT: UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Intricate thought processes and complex emotions are held in delicate balance in the gifted individual. Idealism, self-doubt, perceptiveness, excruciating sensitivity, moral imperatives, desperate needs for understanding, acceptance, love—all impinge simultaneously. Gifted children develop more asynchronously than others, and often feel unable to relate to age-mates. When they are forced into a mold that doesn't fit, they begin to experience their differences as deficits. All who interact with them must understand their characteristics and overexcitabilities. Then they can learn to appreciate themselves and develop their own unique paths. We will explore the emotional needs and social realities of gifted children and discuss ways to nurture their full development.

THE DISAPPEARING GIFTED GIRL

An equal number of gifted boys and girls are found from early childhood until the age of 12, even in the upper regions of giftedness—beyond 180 IQ, but gifted girls gradually disappear. The first hurdle is preschool or kindergarten. Fourth grade presents another set of challenges. But pre-adolescence and adolescence are the most daunting of all. During this complex period of development, giftedness must struggle to survive amidst strong societal messages that undermine gifted girls' confidence and motivation. Valued for their appearance rather than their abilities, gifted young women often abandon their aspirations as they learn to adapt to traditional feminine roles in society. Without support to bring their dreams to fruition, gifted young women settle for less than they can be. Life in the 21st century requires full development of female potential. In this session, learn strategies for achieving this elusive goal.

REVERSING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Underachievement is like a skin rash: It can be caused by many different conditions, and calls for comprehensive diagnosis before an effective treatment plan can be put in place. Boys show symptoms earlier than girls, and often suffer from hidden disabilities. Girls may become underachievers during pre-adolescence due to social pressures to conform to feminine roles. If they develop a regime of excessive dieting, they will lack sufficient physical energy to support intellectually demanding work. The major symptom of underachievers is refusal to complete written assignments. Often, this situation can be ameliorated through use of a keyboard. A mismatch between teaching style and a student's learning style can also lead to underachievement. Concrete strategies will be offered to enable these children to be successful in the classroom.

Evening Parent Presentation

HELP! MY CHILD IS GIFTED!

Gifted children are expensive and time-consuming. They usually need less sleep than you do, ask more questions than you can answer, want 100 percent of your attention 24 hours a day, have obsessive hobbies, are unstimulated by the school curriculum, react intensely to everything, endlessly long for a best friend who understands them completely, hold perfectionistic standards for themselves and you, want to know the meaning of life when other children only want to know how to whistle, and keep their bedrooms in a condition you can never show company. In order to be the perfect parent, you need unlimited funds, unlimited patience, an encyclopedic mind, and someone to sleep for you. In this session, we will be discussing such issues as parents as identifiers of giftedness; birth order effects; understanding introversion, perfectionism, intensity, and sensitivity; and the need for parent advocacy. You will receive an owner's manual, "Guidelines for Parents of the Gifted," which contains suggestions for harmonious family life. There will be a question and answer period, but I don't have all the answers. ***Trust Yourself!*** No one knows your child better than you do.

Breakout Sessions

Each of the following topics is best addressed in a 2-hour double-session and can be expanded into a full-day presentation. Most of the keynote addresses can also serve as 2-hour break-out sessions.

PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism comes with the territory of giftedness and is its least appreciated aspect. Impossible dreams are realized, unrealistic goals achieved, insurmountable obstacles surmounted by individuals whose vision is a more powerful reality than the limitations most of the world accepts as real. The drive for excellence only visits those who have the capacity to attain it. Perfectionism is a function of asynchrony, as a more advanced mind sets more advanced goals. Personality type plays a role as well: introverts are more likely to be perfectionists than extraverts. Environment can exacerbate this trait. When schoolwork is too easy, the only challenge a gifted child can create is accomplishing it perfectly. Perfectionism has the potential for propelling one toward unparalleled greatness or plummeting one into despair. The secret to harnessing its energy is learning how to set priorities. Hints for channeling perfectionism will be provided.

COUNSELING NEEDS OF THE GIFTED

Gifted individuals not only think differently from their peers; they also feel differently. Certain personality characteristics are associated with the experience of giftedness throughout life: sensitivity, intensity, curiosity, perceptiveness, complexity, and perfectionism. Gifted children are born with more intense reactions to various types of stimuli—“overexcitabilities.” Their asynchronous development makes them feel out of sync with children their own age and with age-related expectations. Counseling is needed to assist gifted children in dealing with their intense emotional lives, their heightened awareness, and their difficulties fitting in. A broken child is hard to mend; counselors educated in dealing with the psychological needs of gifted young people can save lives.

WISC, SBL-M, WPPSI, WJ – WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN? INTERPRETING TEST SCORES OF GIFTED STUDENTS

There is more perplexity in the assessment of gifted children than in the assessment of any other population, due to surprising discrepancies in the IQ scores they attain on various tests. Average children and developmentally delayed children usually obtain consistent IQ scores on different instruments. However, a profoundly gifted child can score 120 on one IQ test and 220 on another—a difference of *100 points*! Test results of gifted children with learning disabilities are even more difficult to interpret. This session is designed for parents, teachers and others who want to understand the meaning of test results of gifted, visual-spatial, learning disabled or twice exceptional children.

DABROWSKI'S THEORY: THE PATH TO ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT

Giftedness traditionally has been defined as achievement or potential for achievement. Kazimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychologist and psychiatrist who studied the gifted and creative, developed a theory of advanced development ensuing from the innate “overexcitabilities” of the creative individual. Dabrowski’s Theory offers a framework for understanding the ways in which the unique characteristics of the gifted transform their life paths. Their rich, turbulent, intense inner worlds potentially can lead to greater awareness of the pain and suffering of others, higher levels of moral concern, higher expectations of themselves, and greater commitment to serve. Advanced development in adulthood is the result of the interplay of internal and external forces in childhood.

INTROVERTS AND EXTRAVERTS: DIFFERENT REALITIES

We live in an extraverted society with extraversion being considered the norm for appropriate social adjustment for all. The introverted minority is rarely understood and appreciated. Within the gifted population, there are as many introverts as extraverts, and in the highly gifted population, there are far more introverts. Many well-meaning individuals try to “cure” this trait in children and may inadvertently do damage. It is essential that anyone working with the gifted have an understanding of this personality type. Extraversion and introversion will be compared, and techniques for parenting, counseling and teaching introverts will be shared.

THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED CHILDREN

There are different levels of developmental advancement, just as there are different levels of developmental delay. Mildly, moderately, severely and profoundly delayed children require different types of interventions; so do moderately, highly, exceptionally and profoundly gifted children. The broader a school district's definition of giftedness, the more at risk highly gifted children will be—even within gifted programs. The number of exceptionally gifted in the population is much larger than anyone imagines; low ceilings on tests prevent their detection. Personality and learning characteristics will be discussed, along with strategies for identification, program development and instruction.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GIFTED: THE DISCOVERIES OF LETA HOLLINGWORTH

Leta Stetter Hollingworth was the foremother of gifted education. She wrote the first textbook, taught the first course, was the first counselor of the gifted, conducted 30 studies, created exemplary programs, and developed a set of educational principles that are still relevant. She was concerned with the special “perplexities” of adjustment faced by gifted children. In her writings, we find insights into the nature of these issues, how they affect children at different levels of ability, and solutions that could be implemented today. She believed in “emotional education” for the gifted. A visionary whose wisdom was nearly lost for half a century surfaces as an inspiration for the 21st century.

IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF GIFTED LEARNERS

This workshop addresses screening, assessment and identification of gifted students. Early identification of children with special needs enables early intervention. Differences in scores obtained on various instruments are much greater for the gifted than for any other population. Alternative methods of identification are discussed, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of various instruments. Participants will learn how to interpret test data to facilitate differentiated programming.

Presentations for Teens

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GIFTED?

Being gifted isn't easy. It means experiencing a lot of things more intensely than others, never being able to turn your mind off, asking questions nobody else seems to ask, nothing ever being simple, seeing things differently from most other people, getting your feelings hurt easily, always fighting injustice, having high expectations for yourself, fearing that you can't live up to other people's expectations, and wondering sometimes if you're a Martian. It helps to find others who see, think and feel like you do, and it helps to have parents and teachers who understand and accept who you really are so that you don't have to hide.

AM I A VISUAL-SPATIAL LEARNER?

Most people learn in a step-by-step fashion from easy to hard, but some people seem to learn all-at-once without taking steps. Visual-spatial learners think in images rather than words, so they “see” concepts and relationships as a whole. Once they see the picture, they understand the concept permanently. They don't learn much from drill and practice. Some visual-spatial learners are excellent at mathematics, science and computers. Others are highly creative, and excel in art, music, drama or dance. Still others are gifted mechanically, emotionally or spiritually. Many visual-spatial learners have difficulty listening, spelling, learning foreign languages, memorizing things that are unimportant to them, or paying attention in subjects they don't like. Some struggle to translate their pictures into words, and hate writing. In this session, you will learn more about your own learning style and, if you're a visual-spatial learner, you will gain some strategies for success.

“ARE WE TOO MUCH?” – DABROWSKI’S RESPONSE

Gifted people of all ages are often perceived as “too sensitive,” “too perfectionistic,” “making things too complicated,” “too intense,”—in short, “too much” for other people. Dr. Kazimierz Dabrowski saw these traits as positive indicators of potential for higher level moral development in adult life. Dabrowski was a Polish psychiatrist and psychologist who studied creative teens. He noticed that some of them couldn't sit still, some were highly sensitive, some had incredible imaginations, some loved intellectual challenges, and some had sharper senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste or touch. Through neurological tests, he determined that these gifted and creative young people were “superstimulatable,” meaning that they had stronger neural reactions to various experiences than other people. Dabrowski's concepts have been translated into English as five “overexcitabilities”: psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual and emotional. In this session, we will discuss these overexcitabilities and their implications.

Brief Bio: Linda Kreger Silverman is a licensed psychologist and director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development in Denver, CO. A prolific writer and popular presenter, her books include *Counseling the Gifted and Talented* and *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*. Her website is www.gifteddevelopment.com.