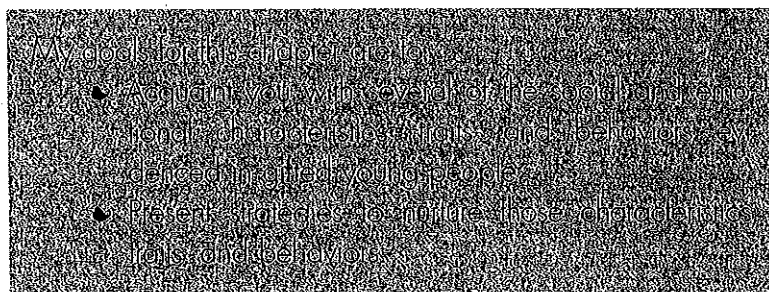




CHAPTER 2

Social and Emotional Characteristics and Traits of Gifted Young People: Part I



Recently my neighbor invited me to join him at his 6-year-old son's soccer match. As I sat in the stands and soaked up the sun on a beautiful autumn Saturday morning, I enjoyed watching a teenager negotiate with his younger brother. The little 6-year-old had arrived for the match wearing pants. When he realized all of his teammates were wearing their official soccer shorts, he announced in tears that he was not playing and wanted to return home. His older brother came to his support by reassuring him that playing in his pants would not be a problem. I smiled to

myself as I listened in on the conversation between the two brothers. I heard the older brother explain, "Actually, Josh, it's better to have long pants on. You can do skids and you won't wreck your knees. If those other kids had thought about it, they'd be wearing long pants too." As he started to roll up the cuffs of his little brother's pants, he said, "These look so cool. Man, you look like David Beckham!" This supportive pep talk from the older brother apparently made a difference. Josh was convinced that his older brother knew what he was talking about, and he joined his teammates on the field.

I turned to my neighbor seated next to me in the stands and commented on the kindness of the older boy and how sensitive he had been in dealing with his brother's feelings. I did not realize that Josh's mother was within hearing distance of me. Mrs. Warner beamed as she explained to me that those were her two sons. Proud that she was raising sensitive children, she smiled and pointed out that parenting these children included memorable moments as well as challenges. She went on to tell me about her older daughter who years before had been in the same soccer league. With another smile she reflected on one experience when she and her husband were cheering from the sidelines, "Come on, Emma, get the ball! Come on, Emma, take the ball away. Come on, go in there and get the ball!" Four-year-old Emma came running to her parents on the sidelines in tears and announced, "That's not nice. You're supposed to share." Her mother pointed out, "To my daughter, it was all about taking turns. To her, that's what soccer was about. The thought of taking something away from another child was simply unacceptable."

I continued chatting with Mrs. Warner, and she was pleased to share stories of her talented children. She told me about the older son who at age 13 spent time every day processing through the events of his day with a stick. At age 3, Nate had discovered that particular sticks had a special quality about them that enabled him to relax, to think quietly about whatever issues were on his mind, and to think creatively about far-away places and adventures that occurred through his vivid imagination. Gifted with a learning disability, Nate returned every day after school and would walk outdoors for long periods of time processing his thoughts as he waved his stick in different directions. His family kept a stick handy in the family car, and his extensive collection of favorite sticks is under his bed. Both his parents and siblings understand how significant these sticks are to this highly creative boy; however, not everyone has appreciated this about Nate.

Mrs. Warner pointed out that when Nate was 6 he thought intuitively that Steven, his best friend, might understand how he used the stick to

support his imagination. He asked Steven, "When you see a stick, what do you pretend it is? What do you think of?" Steven responded, "I just see a stick. I think it's a stick!" That evening, as Mrs. Warner was tucking her son into bed, he was sobbing over his conversation with his best friend. "Mommy, nobody gets me. Nobody else plays with sticks. They all play with toys. What's wrong with me?" Teary-eyed, Mrs. Warner whispered, "It's not always easy being a parent of this type of child."

Later we were joined by other soccer parents in the bleachers, and Mrs. Warner pointed out to her friends that she was chatting with a university professor interested in gifted children. Parents were happy to share stories but several had questions and concerns and wanted advice from me. One father described how Kate, his 7-year-old daughter, was excited about her upcoming birthday party. Her parents had agreed that she could hold her party at the local roller skating rink but she was worried that she would not be the best roller skater at the party. As the birthday girl, Kate could not deal with the thought that she might actually fall. To prevent herself from this potential embarrassment, she insisted that dad take her to the rink for several weeks to practice her roller skating in preparation for the party. As this father described their roller skating practice sessions, he smiled, shook his head, and said, "She is so intense! She stresses over everything."

Another mom shared with us how her 6-year-old daughter Janna commented at dinner, "Mom, several days ago on the playground Chelita said Jennifer was acting like a brat. Mom, I'm nice to her at school, but I really don't like her. She stomps her feet and points her fingers at kids and she's mean to them. I try to be nice to her, but I really don't like her." This mother was intrigued with how Janna had been processing through these school playground "events" for several days and was struggling with how to interpret the recess bully's behavior. She was concerned with how much time her child spent focusing on these issues and wondered if Janna was overly sensitive. She appreciated that her daughter recognized that the schoolyard bully needed friends and attempted to be kind to her. She reassured Janna that she was right and explained, "You can be nice to her at school, but you don't have to be best friends with her." This mother pointed out that she appreciated that her daughter was empathic, yet she wondered just how this quality within her would serve her with other bullies she may encounter in her life.

Much of what these dedicated parents saw in their children are what teachers have described for many years as traits, behaviors, or characteristics related to the social and emotional development of the gifted students in their classrooms. These classroom teachers are joined by researchers and

theorists in the gifted education community who maintain that gifted children do exhibit certain social and emotional characteristics and traits that are accompanied by concomitant needs. Others who study the psychology of gifted individuals argue that gifted children do not necessarily have characteristics that are unique; however, the cultural contexts in which gifted children are immersed strongly influence their experiences of growing up gifted. Whether or not gifted learners have unique affective characteristics has been an area of debate for decades, and both lines of thought should be considered.

A comprehensive review of research was conducted by a task force of educators, psychologists, and researchers from the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002). This report revealed a limited research base on which to draw conclusions about whether gifted students have unique social and emotional characteristics and traits. The NAGC task force concluded that there was no evidence that gifted young people were more vulnerable or flawed in their social adjustment. Rather, they noted that many gifted young people have assets that, when supported, may actually augment their ability to overcome adversities and utilize their talents to achieve personal fulfillment. The task force members called for educators to respect the unique and varied characteristics related to giftedness seen in young people.

To continue the dialogue and illuminate our understanding of the role of these characteristics and their interaction with contextual influences, I dedicate three chapters of this book to this discussion as a way of providing a balanced examination of this important issue. In this chapter and the one that follows, I discuss social and emotional characteristics, traits, and behaviors seen as assets within gifted young people. Chapter 4 offers an examination of the contextual influences that may shape how young people experience their giftedness.

My objective for this chapter is to describe these characteristics and explain how they may influence a gifted young person's life. I draw examples from my former gifted students, and I share examples passed on to me by other teachers and parents. I also highlight examples from biographies of gifted individuals. Throughout this discussion, I provide theoretical and research support for what the gifted education community has learned about these positive characteristics, traits, and behaviors. I conclude the chapter by sharing teaching and counseling strategies and methods for nurturing these traits and characteristics and supporting the behaviors.

Several researchers and authors have reviewed the gifted education literature examining the affective development of gifted students and have

TABLE 3

Social and Emotional Traits, Characteristics, and Behaviors Evidenced in Gifted Students

- High expectations of self and others, perfectionism
- Internal motivation and inner locus of control
- Emotional sensitivity, intensity, and depth
- Empathy
- Advanced level of moral maturity with consistency between values and actions
- Strong need for self-actualization
- Highly developed sense of humor
- Self-reliance

provided lists of social and emotional traits, characteristics, and behaviors evidenced in gifted learners. I have drawn from the work of Clark (2002); Silverman (1993a); Reis and Sullivan (2009); Ferguson (2009); Davis, Rimm, and Siegle (2011); and VanTassel-Baska (1998) in determining the list shown in Table 3 that guides the discussion of this chapter and the one following. The first four items from the list will be discussed in this chapter, and the rest will be presented in Chapter 3.

Social and Emotional Traits, Characteristics, and Behaviors Evidenced in Gifted Students

High Expectations of Self and Others—Perfectionism

Perfectionism is defined as “a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable” (Merriam-Webster, 1998). For many years perfectionism has been a personality characteristic commonly associated with gifted children. Several leaders in gifted education have maintained that perfectionism is one of the most critical issues related to giftedness. Others have indicated that gifted and talented students struggle with perfectionism more than other children do. Psychologists and educators have long been concerned about perfectionism in gifted students because it can be manifested in many forms, some that are valued by society and others

that are not (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999; Greenspon, 2002; Silverman, 1989; Troxclair, 1999). This issue has received extensive attention by a number of contemporary researchers within the gifted education community (i.e., Nugent, 2000; Parker, 2000; Parker & Adkins, 1995; Parker & Mills, 1996; Schuler, 2000; Siegle & Schuler, 2000; Speirs Neumeister, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). Moreover, the difference between striving for excellence, labeled *healthy perfectionism*, and the compulsive striving for unrealistic and unattainable goals, labeled *neurotic perfectionism*, became the focus of constructive debate amongst several researchers in a special issue of the *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education* edited by Maureen Neihart and Bonnie Cramond (2000). The debate centered on whether perfectionism is a positive characteristic that should be nurtured within gifted students or a problem that needs to be cured. The discussion also focused on whether or not perfectionism is a one-dimensional or multidimensional construct.

The gifted education community has benefited from the work of psychologists Hewitt and Flett (1991), who proposed a model to explain perfectionism as a three-dimensional interpersonal construct. These researchers saw differences in the ways perfectionists direct their energies. They described self-oriented perfectionists as individuals who establish high personal standards for themselves and measure themselves according to those standards, often highly critical of their efforts and products. Other-oriented perfectionists are individuals who demand very high standards of others in their lives, while socially prescribed perfectionists believe that others in their lives maintain very high standards for them. Clinical psychologists describe individuals from their practice who match these profiles. To illuminate how these differences manifest themselves in young people, consider the following composites from the work of clinical psychologist Monica Ramirez Basco (1999).

Celeste is a self-oriented perfectionist. Mrs. Rushmore, Celeste's seventh-grade teacher, has recognized her artistic talents and her strong interpersonal skills. As a result, Celeste has two important responsibilities related to the seventh-grade historical pageant. She has been assigned the job of designing backdrops for the theatrical production as well as publicizing the event to the local community. Celeste has enjoyed creating beautiful posters advertising the historical play. Many of her parents' friends and teachers at school have commented about the effectiveness of her posters, which are visible throughout the community. Celeste and her team of set designers also are enjoying creating backdrops that will add authenticity to the stage. Mrs. Rushmore has raved about their work and commented to Celeste how proud she is of her efforts. As the seventh graders prepare for

the pageant, Celeste also is busy designing handmade invitations to send to important community leaders. She is proud of how historically authentic these individualized invitations appear and is having fun with calligraphy and experimenting with various parchment papers.

All of Celeste's hard work pays off and on the evening of the pageant, Mr. Bearce, the eighth-grade social science teacher turns to Celeste in the lobby of the school auditorium and asks her if Mrs. Huntington, the president of the local historical society has arrived. Mrs. Huntington is a good friend of Mrs. Rushmore and has always been supportive of the many historical projects she has undertaken with her middle school students. Celeste instantly feels sick when she realizes she has forgotten to send Mrs. Huntington an individualized invitation.

"Mr. Bearce, I totally forgot to invite her. How could I be so dumb? What am I going to do? Mrs. Rushmore is going to be so upset with me. Mrs. Huntington is bound to hear about this and she'll be hurt. This could even affect her friendship with Mrs. Rushmore. I'm such a doofus! How can I ever face my teacher again? I may as well forget about my A in history class. Mrs. Rushmore will never trust me again."

Although Mr. Bearce attempts to assuage her feelings, Celeste avoids Mrs. Rushmore and keeps herself hidden backstage. What will she say to her teacher? Feeling miserable, she spends the evening berating herself and thinking of many excuses she could use to explain her faux pas to Mrs. Rushmore.

Celeste is a self-oriented perfectionist who is unable to accept her mistakes. She spends her days worrying about what others will think of her, and her mistakes are constantly blown out of proportion. Her mistakes cause her stress and sleepless nights and she withdraws from other people. She has trouble forgiving herself, for in her mind it is acceptable for others to make mistakes but it is not OK for her to be less than perfect.

Pablo is an other-oriented perfectionist. He acknowledges his talents and feels good about his abilities but his problem is that he often feels completely frustrated with others who let him down. Pablo excels in the classroom and in student leadership. As president of the sophomore class, he appoints his classmates to committees responsible for fund-raising efforts to help support a local homeless shelter. As he arrives home from school one afternoon, his mother sees that he is furious with his friends Sergio, Jessica, and Morgan, who have "dropped the ball again" in not contacting a number of potential sponsors for an upcoming dance marathon to raise funds for their worthy cause. Pablo spends an afternoon in a sullen mood

and takes his frustrations out on his younger siblings. When his mother attempts to help, he shuts himself in his bedroom and continues brooding.

Pablo cannot understand why his friends cannot follow his directions. He realizes that his friends' intentions are good, but they simply do not take care of things in time, and again the burden falls on him. He is tired of the daily excuses from Sergio, Jessica, and Morgan. Even when they do contribute, Pablo thinks their work is not up to par and that his friends simply do not care enough. It frustrates him so much that he decides he would rather do the work than deal with their procrastination and "lame excuses."

The other-oriented perfectionism seen in Pablo causes him problems in his relationships. When he attempts to point out his frustration in a polite way to his friends, it invariably causes tension and conflict. Pablo has tried to expect less of others in his life, but continues to struggle.

Heidi is a socially prescribed perfectionist. Several years ago, I was intrigued with a *Sports Illustrated* article featuring the story of Heidi Gillingham, a college basketball player for Vanderbilt University. Anderson (1993) described the college career of this young woman, who had gained the adulation of the Vanderbilt fans and was crowned homecoming queen. At Vanderbilt, Heidi, a 6'10" All American from Floresville, TX, was the tallest woman playing college basketball. As soon as Heidi made her first basketball team in seventh grade, many people in her community expected the squad to win "simply because *that tall girl* was on it" (p. 68). Heidi pointed out that she really never enjoyed playing basketball during high school: "I felt people expected me to be this basketball goddess. I felt like I had to be perfect, but I could never measure up" (Anderson, 1993, p. 69).

Heidi had also struggled with this issue in other areas of her life as a young adolescent. She admitted that as a teenager she had torn up a 4-H sewing project 10 times before being satisfied with her final product. As an honor student, she continually rewrote papers for days until the day they were due. Anderson (1993) reported that even making a phone call to a hair salon to arrange an appointment required meticulous preparation to ensure all would go perfectly. Heidi admitted that before dialing, she wrote out what she planned to say on the phone, followed by all the possible responses from the hairdresser (Anderson, 1993).

When Heidi began playing college ball for Vanderbilt, no matter how much she practiced, there inevitably would be a missed shot that frustrated her tremendously. She also compared herself constantly to another leading player on the team: "Wendy seemed to make every single shot and get every rebound, and I couldn't see any improvement in myself" (Anderson, 1993, p. 70). She explained, "It got to the point where I hated the game. I

realized I had always played because I was tall and society expected tall people to play basketball. I really had a bad attitude" (p. 70).

Rather than quit the team, she listened closely to her coach Jim Foster, who succeeded in convincing her that perfection was not expected nor possible. He made her understand that Hall of Fame players only make half of their shots. Heidi reported, "He made me realize that my perfectionism was actually hurting my game" (Anderson, 1993, p. 70). Eventually, she learned to be kinder to herself and managed to keep more realistic self-expectations. She concluded, "I decided that I was going to play basketball because that's what *I* wanted; not what society wanted" (Anderson, 1993, p. 70).

With Celeste, Pablo, and Heidi, we see perfectionistic behaviors that may serve them well, as well as other behaviors that are detrimental to their emotional well-being. Their perfectionism may help them develop high standards, perseverance, and talents; however, we see evidence that this trait is not always an asset. Within these three cases are examples of mind games that perfectionists play, described by Adderholdt and Goldberg (1999) below:

- ☛ *Mood swinging between "highs" and "lows."* A perfectionist sets a goal, reaches it, and all is well in the world. When a goal is not met perfectly, feelings of low self-esteem set in and the individual becomes emotionally drained.
- ☛ *The numbers game and all-or-nothing thinking.* A perfectionist may never be satisfied with the number of accomplishments achieved. All-or-nothing thinking is evidenced in the student who receives a report card filled with A's but remains frustrated because of one B.
- ☛ *Focus on the future, pine over the past, and telescopic thinking deal with goal setting that is not healthy.* The behavior of focusing on the future can be detrimental in that the individual does not take time to enjoy a successful outcome, but simply directs his energies to reaching the next goal. When a perfectionist pines over the past, she cannot let go of what might have been, what she could have done better, or how a project might have been improved. Telescopic thinkers look at goals not met with a magnifying glass and enlarge them. In looking at their successes, they use the wrong end of the telescope, often minimizing them and treating them as insignificant.
- ☛ *Putting your goals first.* An unhealthy game some perfectionists play is placing their achievements and goals ahead of family, friends, and personal physical and emotional health.
- ☛ *"Getting it right."* The game of "practice makes perfect" taken to the extreme does not enable an individual to let go of a project.

The challenge for educators and counselors working with students who struggle with perfectionism is to help them understand how it might be channeled so that it enables them to reach their goals as well as enjoy the process. Basco's (1999) perspective may help these individuals understand the double-edged quality of this characteristic:

The reach for perfection can be painful because it is often driven by a desire to do well and a fear of consequences of not doing well. This is the double-edged sword of perfectionism. On the one hand, it is a good thing to give the best effort, to go the extra mile, and to take pride in one's performance, whether it is keeping a home looking nice, writing a report, repairing a car, or doing brain surgery. It is commendable to attend to details, care about what others will think about your work, and constantly strive to do your best. On the other hand, when despite great efforts you feel as though you keep falling short, never seem to get things just right, never have enough time to do your best, are self-conscious, feel criticized by others, or cannot get others to cooperate in doing the job right the first time, you end up feeling bad. (p. 5)

Rather than view perfectionism as a double-edged sword, researchers in counseling and social psychology, as well as in gifted education, have come to understand perfectionism as a multidimensional trait that influences *adaptive* behaviors such as working hard, striving for achievement, efficacy, conscientiousness, organization, and structured work habits (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hamachek, 1978; Schuler, 2000; Speirs Neumeister, 2004b, 2004c), as well as *maladaptive* behaviors such as anxiety, underachievement, and the mind games perfectionists play described by Adderholdt and Goldberg (1999).

As a clinical psychologist, Linda Silverman (1989) maintained that perfectionism drives adaptive behaviors and views it as a desirable characteristic. Her perspective, to some educators and counselors, may be refreshing in that she sees perfectionism as a driving force in a gifted individual's personality that propels that person to pursue higher goals. She described it as an energy that must be channeled in positive directions rather than a problem that needs to be fixed. Silverman (1989) added the following:

The problem, however, may be in our attitudes toward perfectionism, rather than in the characteristic itself. We laud Michelangelo

for his search for perfection and Marie Curie for hers. We are proud of the achievements of our Nobel Laureates, our Olympic champions, our world-class scholars and artists. All of these individuals spend endless hours perfecting their knowledge, working harder than their colleagues, never satisfied with less than their best, pushing themselves beyond their own limitations. They command our respect and admiration. Why, then, do we denigrate this quality in gifted children or in ourselves? . . . The characteristic itself is neither good nor bad, it just is—and it is part of the gifted person's life equipment. If you harness your perfectionism to work for you, rather than letting it control you, you can change the world. (p. 11)

Silverman (1989) maintained that educators need to help young people appreciate the trait rather than be ashamed of this quality. Moreover, teachers can help them to understand that it serves a useful purpose. She argued that gifted young people need to allow themselves to be perfectionistic in activities that really matter to them, rather than in everything all at once. She also believed that gifted young people should maintain high standards for themselves but not impose them on others, focus on their successes, continue striving when their first attempts are not successful, hold on to their ideals, and believe in their ability to reach their goals.

Internal Motivation or Inner Locus of Control

Locus of control is a theoretical construct to explain the degree to which an individual perceives a relationship between his own behavior and the outcome of that behavior (Rotter, 1966). A person who assumes control or responsibility for the events in his life is said to display an internal locus of control. Internal motivation or an inner locus of control has been documented in the gifted education literature. Researchers have seen evidence of this trait in gifted young people (Goldberg & Cornell, 1998; McLaughlin & Saccuzzo, 1997; Yong, 1994). Researchers are interested in exploring this quality because a better understanding of it and how to nurture it within students would enable educators to support gifted under-achievers, for example.

In my dissertation research with six gifted high-achieving males in an urban high school, I saw evidence of this quality. An internal motivation enabled them to overcome adversity in their lives and to remain focused on reaching their goals (Hébert, 2000a). One young man named Matteo

referred to this drive as an "inner will," an important part of his identity. His explanation of this quality and its significance in his academic achievement in physics is representative of the six males in the study:

It sounds off the wall, but it's an internal will. For example, if I am curious about something and I want to learn about it, like my science fair topic—cold fusion. I didn't care if the material I needed was radioactive or not. I said to the professor, "Send it to me in a lead bottle UPS. I'll pay the shipping!" Nothing is going to stop me. I am going to do this experiment. If I get this inner drive pointed toward academics, I'll do well. That's basically it. It's like a driving force. If I find some reason to motivate myself to push for something, I'll do it. (Hébert, 2000a, pp. 102–103)

Matteo was an energetic young man who had been recognized for his creativity, curiosity, and sharp intellect in third grade, when he was recommended for a self-contained gifted and talented class. Following an unsuccessful experience in that setting, Matteo's fifth-grade teacher recommended that he be scheduled into a less accelerated program because he was having difficulty with the fast-paced class. Matteo was upset at the time with the school's decision. However, he connected with a sympathetic teacher who helped him with his organizational skills, and he vowed that "he would prove them wrong." He earned grades of A's and B's from that time on and left his middle school with three academic awards, which he proudly received in a school assembly, vindicated on the final day of school.

During his freshman year of high school, he marched himself into his guidance counselor's office and requested to be placed in honors classes again. His request was granted, and Matteo remained there all through high school. Matteo was one of the most active students in his high school. Elected president of his junior class, he campaigned on a platform to eradicate student apathy. Throughout the year, with determination and hard work, he managed to involve his peers in class fund-raising projects and in planning a memorable prom. Besides playing trombone in the school band, playing tennis, and running cross-country, he was elected to the National Honor Society, the Student Council, and a number of executive boards that governed statewide student engineering organizations. In addition, Matteo was involved in a number of specialized summer enrichment programs designed to raise the aspirations of high-ability students from inner city high schools.

After several summers of studying engineering, Matteo decided to

pursue a college degree in civil engineering and environmental studies and, because of his family's economic hardships, he decided the most practical way to accomplish his goal was through the U.S. Air Force Academy. Matteo's plans for the Academy consumed him as he prepared for the application process. His daily schedule involved getting up at 5 every morning to run and lift weights to get in better shape. He described the Academy as a "ticket" to his dreams, yet he did not necessarily see himself pursuing a career with the military. He explained his plans in his unique, analogous speaking style:

The military is the way I will get my goal. The question is whether I will keep the car. I will have been enjoying the joy ride for all it's worth, but I am not sure if I will be staying with the Air Force. That's what will have gotten me the engineering degree. It's kinda' like staying on the bus after New York and deciding whether or not to continue on to Baltimore. I may make a career out of it. I might hate it. I don't know. I'll see down the road. (Hébert, 1993, p. 198)

I found this inner locus of control within a second population of gifted males when conducting a research study of gifted African American males in a predominantly White university. Internal motivation emerged as part of the belief in self that was evident in the participants. Several highlighted an awareness of internal motivation that was naturally incorporated into their views of self. One participant named Caleb was a charismatic young man who typically rushed from one campus meeting to the next scheduled event in his hectic daily calendar. Whether his journey across campus took him to the university's newspaper office, where he worked as an advertising director, to the gym for cheerleading practice, or to a meeting of a competitive team of advertising majors preparing for a regional competition, he was definitely a "man on the move." Caleb had arrived at the university with a Presidential scholarship in hand. Coming from a small industrial city, he had built an impressive high school résumé and was prepared to study engineering. As a sophomore, however, he realized he needed a career in which his creativity could flourish and, therefore, changed his major to advertising. Eventually he was recognized as one of the leading students in his department and went on to win prestigious awards and the respect of his professors and peers. How he saw himself as an achiever reflects an inner drive:

I've always known that I have things to do in life. I've known I have the brains to achieve. I've known that I have something different; it's always been a gut feeling. It's something inside of me that I can't explain. I feel if my hands are idle, there's something wrong. I want to achieve constantly. I don't ever want to "peak." (Hébert, 2002, p. 37)

In an interview with Caleb during his senior year, he described his preparation for his future in the aggressive advertising industry. A strong competitiveness was part of his identity. Again, he noted an internal drive that enabled him to excel:

On Saturday nights, I'm the one going to Barnes and Noble and reading up on advertising books. I'm constantly asking my professors to borrow their books and reading to get ahead. I'm the one who, instead of going to parties, is sitting at the computer for hours learning everything I can learn about new computer software. I'm driven to compete. It's in my nature. (Hébert, 2002, p. 37)

A second participant, John, came to the university from an inner city high school as a scholar-athlete. He arrived on campus with an impressive set of credentials that included involvement in athletics, many extracurricular activities, Advanced Placement coursework, and an internship in a law firm. His high motivation enabled him to pursue dual undergraduate degrees in English and psychology. John's explanation for his success was similar to Caleb's in that he provided evidence of an inner drive that was an important part of his belief in self. His ultimate goal was to earn a doctorate, and he described his strong motivation:

It's an inner drive, an inner motivation that's heightened by the desire to never be poor again. It's something inside of you that says, "Okay, if you quit, this is what happens." I can say, "Okay, I want to quit now because I'm tired. Quit now, and I'll have to get up at 5:00 in the morning, I won't have time to proofread the paper—turn it in—probably get a C. 'Ding!' Don't quit!" . . . I say it's an inner drive, it's an ability to say to yourself, "Okay, you can stop, but here are the consequences of stopping." And somehow that makes you want to keep moving. (Hébert, 2002, p. 37)

John did not stop moving. He went on to earn his master's degree in

secondary education and eventually a doctoral degree in higher education. Today, he serves the university in an administrative capacity facilitating leadership programs for talented culturally diverse students. University administrators have expressed no doubts that John helps to foster an internal motivation in the students with whom he works.

Emotional Sensitivity, Intensity, and Depth

The trait of sensitivity is characterized as "a depth of feeling that results in a sense of identification with others" (Lovecky, 1993, p. 38). Sensitivity involves passion and compassion. Lovecky (1993) maintained that passion involves "the depth of feelings that colors all life experiences and brings an intensity and complexity to the emotional life" (p. 38). Within sensitive children, there exists a depth of feelings that influences their daily life experiences as they form strong attachments to people and places in their lives. They cannot bear to see others suffering. They can be easily hurt emotionally and may be acutely aware of the needs and emotions of others. Sensitive children can be hard on themselves, and they do not forgive themselves easily if they happen to hurt another person's feelings. They are often intensely self-analytical and self-critical. Young people who experience life through these sensitivities later join the Peace Corps or become poets, investigative reporters, peace activists, and protectors of wildlife; therefore, educators and counselors need to support and nurture this sensitivity within young people. Silverman (1993a) contended that the expression "too sensitive" must be eliminated from our vocabularies: "In a world that lacks sensitivity, those who are perceived as 'overly' sensitive may have exactly the degree of sensitivity that would be required to find a solution to homelessness or to save the planet from self-destruction" (p. 63). To provide a better understanding of how emotional sensitivity interacts with intensity and emotional depth, I offer an example of a young gifted child named Cameron described here.

Cameron: Living with emotional sensitivity, intensity, and depth. Melinda, a student I once worked with, became intrigued by several of the theories we studied concerning the psychosocial development of gifted children. As part of her coursework, she chose to reflect on parenting experiences with her son Cameron. As she pursued theoretical readings, she maintained a journal in which she connected the theories with many of the challenges and joys she and her husband had experienced as parents.

Melinda realized that she and her husband were in for an interesting journey as parents when Cameron, at 18 months, recognized, out of order,

the letters of the alphabet and was able to spell out traffic and store signs. As an infant, he memorized nursery rhymes and would amuse himself during naptime by reciting the rhymes. Melinda discovered that he had taught himself to read when, at age 3, during his first visit to the dentist's office, he read a book he had never seen before to the receptionist and his surprised parent. As a kindergarten student, during his first trip to the school library, Cameron requested a book by Edgar Allan Poe. Much to his dismay, he was allowed to check out a picture book with no words. His fascination with kindergarten soon dissipated, and he announced to his parents that he "wasn't going to be coloring any more big red R's." Instead, he seemed to think it his duty to visit and help other children with their work. Melinda highlighted how his sensitivity, intensity, and advanced moral development were evidenced during this first year in school:

Coming home from school on the bus presented Cameron a few problems. When older children realized that he could read, they teased him by having him read inappropriate words. Not knowing what these words meant, he obliged them. Cameron was curious as to why other children would do this. Soon, he became friends with these older children, and the situation was resolved. However, Cameron was very upset one day when another child was the object of teasing. As soon as he came into the house, he began to cry. He told us about the teasing and explained that he just couldn't understand how one person could be mean to another.

Cameron's intellectual growth flourished and the intensity of his interests in a wide variety of subjects grew. Occasionally in math, Cameron would complete every third or fourth problem, pointing out that because the problems were essentially the same, he was wasting his time doing all of them. This time, he said, could be spent learning other more important concepts. By sixth grade, Cameron's parents decided to enroll him in the Roeper City and Country School in Bloomfield Hills, MI, an academic environment in which he could flourish. Cameron took the SAT as part of the Midwest Talent Search Project during his first year at Roeper. His combined scores were above 1200. His verbal score was 670. Cameron was one of nine students to score above 630 verbal before the age of 13. For this he was invited to Evanston, IL, to attend an awards ceremony and receive a scholarship to attend Northwestern University's summer program. Although Melinda and her husband were proud of their son's accomplish-

ments, she described how they were at times concerned for their son as a result of his intense approach to many areas of his life:

Cameron had always loved to learn, and we saw this intensify greatly. This intensity did cause some problems. Cameron began placing a lot of pressure on himself. Much to our dismay, he would overcommit himself. He would take extra classes, become involved in lots of extracurricular activities, and write papers that would reach a minimum of 20 or 30 pages. He just seemed to drive himself. We tried to discuss this with Cameron, and we consistently met with the response that this was what he wanted to do, there was just so much that he was interested in. We did try to see that he had more balance in his life. Unfortunately, I don't think that we were too successful in our efforts. We did convince him to take a summer off and not attend a summer program. He did this; however, the following summer, he asked to enroll in a summer class at a local university. He was 14 at the time. Cameron took a literature class and enjoyed the reading; however, he was most dismayed that class discussions were superficial and other university students were not really serious about the work.

Melinda concluded her journal in my graduate class with a poignant memory of her son as an elementary school child that remains with her. Her description of Cameron underscores one particularly special quality within her son:

A friend once asked me what of all of Cameron's achievements and awards made me most proud. It really isn't the outward signs of his success. Rather, it was when Cameron was in third grade and a new girl arrived in his class, a child in a wheelchair. The other children did not talk to her. As Cameron told me with tears in his eyes, "I did, Mom." As we continue to deal with the difficult aspects of Cameron's emotional development, I continue to focus on that memory. Yet, I cannot help but find it ironic that what I perceive as Cameron's greatest gift is the one that has the potential to cause him the most difficulty.

In Cameron, we see evidence of sensitivity, intensity, and empathy coming together. However, it is important to realize that sensitivity and empathy are related traits, but they do not necessarily appear together within the

same child. For example, some gifted youngsters may be extremely sensitive to criticism, with their feelings becoming easily hurt; however, they may not necessarily be in tune with the feelings of others. Teenagers may be protective of younger children and the elderly, yet they may not be concerned about the feelings of their siblings or peers in school. In each young person varying degrees of these characteristics may interact with other qualities and traits. In the case of Cameron, he lived with three powerful traits that strongly influenced his daily experiences and how he viewed his world. Cameron was fortunate to have two loving parents who supported the development of these characteristics. Melinda and her husband also were lucky to have Cameron in their lives.

Empathy

For several decades, psychological research has examined the question of why people help others, even at considerable costs to themselves. What does this behavior tell us about our capacity to care? Researchers have focused on the claim that empathic emotion evokes altruistic motivation—the motivation to improve another human being's welfare. Empathy is formally defined as "an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else" (Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, 2002, p. 485). If another person is thought to be in need, then empathic emotions such as sympathy, compassion, soft heartedness, and tenderness, and empathic emotions evoke altruistic motivation to help the person.

In examining empathic emotions, Batson and colleagues (2002) have identified seven related concepts from which empathy should be distinguished: knowing another individual's internal state, including thoughts and feelings; assuming the posture of an observed other; coming to feel as another person feels; projecting oneself into another's situation; imagining how another is feeling; imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place; and being upset by another person's suffering (pp. 486–488). Several of these concepts are highlighted in the example of an empathic young boy I describe next.

Several years ago, I taught a graduate course in gifted education in Fort Worth, TX. As part of the course I required a journal of weekly reflections. I asked students to make connections between the theoretical readings in the course and their observations of one particular child in their own classroom. A first-grade teacher named Laura became intrigued with the Dabrowski theory and how it helped her to understand one young boy

named Jacob. Early in the semester, Laura submitted a poignant journal entry about her student:

Jacob's mother shared a new story about her son this week. She mentioned that one day when they were driving down Camp Bowie Boulevard he saw a homeless man with a sign asking for food. He turned to his mother when he saw this and said, "Mom, let's go get him a hamburger and some French fries." His mother told him that they were in too much of a hurry to go out of their way to buy a hamburger for that man. Jacob in turn told his mother, "We are not in so much of a hurry that we can't go through the drive through. That's why they have drive throughs, for busy people who don't have a lot of time!" Sarah said she went directly to McDonald's and bought a hamburger, fries, and a Coke, and Jacob got out of the car himself and delivered the man the food.

Laura reflected on Jacob's compassionate nature and his concern for the well-being of others. She pointed out how he had the insight to know what others might be thinking and feeling. Laura saw it as her job to help Jacob and others like him by giving them an appreciation for their sensitivities and passions. She continued in her journal:

I believe that Jacob's mother did a great thing by taking him to McDonald's and giving that man a hamburger rather than down-playing his emotions and making him feel silly. I hope that I've given him a sense of good feelings too. His mother told me that he has a list of people that he prays for each night, and at the beginning of the year, I was on the bottom of that list. Sarah pointed out that he always puts his teacher on the list, but she said they rarely make it higher than #10. This week I was told that I had passed God on the list! I have somehow made it to #1. I suppose that I have made a difference in his life. My question now is can I live up to this? This is quite an accomplishment!

Laura continued to enjoy this highly sensitive first grader in her classroom. Each week she had delightful stories to share with our class about her experiences with Jacob. That year Laura announced to her students that she was engaged to be married in June. As a result, she had another story about Jacob to share in her journal:

I will begin this week with the wonderful gift that I received from Jacob. In the morning he brought me a note from his mother, which I did not have time to read at that moment. So like all the other notes, I set it on the table to be read at 9 when the children went out to P.E.

Minutes later Jacob came to me with both hands behind his back. "Miss Laura, I have a surprise for you!" His eyes were beaming. "Close your eyes and hold out your hands!" I did as I was told and when I opened my eyes there was a gold and diamond bracelet in my hands. Costume jewelry, of course. I hugged him and I told him how much I loved it and I put it on immediately. He then told me that it was for my wedding day. He said he had bought it because it was petite like me and would be perfect on my wrist and it could be "my something new." I was astonished to say the least and very touched. I told him, through tears, that I would be sure to wear it.

The children went out to P.E., and I read the note from his mother. Sarah shared with me that he had purchased the bracelet for five dollars at a neighbor's garage sale with his allowance money and he insisted that I had to have it. Just as I finished reading the note, his mother walked through the door of my classroom with a big smile on her face.

The first entry in Laura's journal is a vivid example of empathy within Jacob, and her reflection highlights his emotional sensitivity. Her journal represents the experience of one teacher with one child in Fort Worth, TX. Imagine how many more young children like Jacob there are in our classrooms. Jacob as a first grader was a sensitive child. My guess would be that as a middle school student he continued to respond empathically to the needs of others. By the time he reached high school, I would predict that he would be taking on the causes of those less fortunate. He would become the high school senior who observes discrimination within his school setting and responds by writing passionate editorial commentaries in his school newspaper. By the time he reached college, he would have developed leadership skills he needed to organize others to correct injustices at the university. Children like Jacob become the individuals who follow in the paths of Mother Theresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

I once was browsing in an airport newsstand and came upon a magazine for teenagers with a cover story entitled "Twenty Young People Who

Will Change the World." As someone interested in keeping up to date about talented adolescents, I quickly purchased the magazine and made a dash to catch my flight. I was delighted to read that the subjects were all teenagers who were making a difference in their communities by addressing real problems through social action projects. In each case these were young men and women with deep sensitivity and empathy for the plight of others. Allow me to introduce two of them.

Jourdan Urbach of Roslyn, NY, discovered that music can be a powerful healer. He was playing his violin for a group of hospitalized children, and as he was performing, a young girl who had long been unresponsive suddenly began to move, much to the delight of her doctors, who came rushing into Jourdan's bedside concert. The young gifted violinist and student at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York City founded Children Helping Children, a charity that uses music to brighten the lives of children in hospitals and raise funds for medical research. At that time, the young violin virtuoso headlined benefit concerts at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall and helped to raise more than \$200,000 for hospitals and charities across the country. Jourdan's sensitivity to the plight of others was evident when he was interviewed by a journalist and discussed his efforts: "If a cause touches something inside you, there is no doubt that you'll be successful in making a difference. There is no age requirement for doing something extraordinary" (Mascia, 2006, p. 119).

A second teenager featured in the magazine was Lindsey Williams of St. Joseph, MO. As a sixth grader she read in her local newspaper that the region of the country in which she lived was suffering increased shortages in food due to severe drought. Food pantries were struggling to keep up with the demand. Lindsey explored planting techniques in environmental journals and designed a new irrigation system for small-scale farming that enabled her to produce two and a half times as many vegetables as the more traditional methods. Shortly after, she was harvesting enough vegetables to fill several food banks with fresh produce.

By the time Lindsey was a high school senior, she had donated more than 35,000 pounds of fresh vegetables and provided families throughout her region of Missouri with nutritious meals. This gifted young woman described an experience at a local food bank, "This little boy picked up a tomato, and his eyes got as big and round as that tomato. He looked at me and was like, 'Can I have this?' At that moment, I knew I was making a difference" (Beiles, 2006, p. 117).

Recently, Renzulli, Koehler, and Fogarty (2006) described the work of a fifth grader named Melanie, who noticed that a partially sighted first-grade

boy on her school bus was being harassed and teased about his thick eyeglasses. As Melanie came to know Tony better, she learned that although he had access to special textbooks for his school subjects, there were no books in the school library that he could read. First, Melanie, with the support of her enrichment teacher, organized a group of the school's bigger, well-respected boys and girls who met Tony at the school bus in the morning, escorted him to the cafeteria, and talked with him before school started each day. Next, Melanie organized students who served as a team of authors and illustrators in creating a collection of large-print big books focused on Tony's interests in sports and adventure stories. What transpired as a result of Melanie's work was significant. As the project progressed, Tony's attitude toward school changed remarkably. He became a celebrity within his school, and other students began checking out books from Tony's special section of the media center. Melanie's efforts in responding to support this young child resulted in the development of sensitivity to human concerns among a number of children. When interviewed about her work, Melanie explained simply, "It didn't change the world, but it changed the world of one little boy" (Renzulli et al., 2006, 16).

Young people like Jacob, Jourdan, Lindsey, and Melanie have helped me to realize that children have changed since I began my work in gifted education in the early 1980s. Other educators and counselors have agreed with me in that they too have seen evidence of changes in children's sensitivity and awareness of societal issues. As an enrichment teacher, I worked with elementary and middle school students as they pursued their passionate interests in ballet, veterinary medicine, sports history, dinosaurs, and the Middle Ages. In my most recent visits to gifted education classrooms, I have observed that gifted students are immersed in pursuing many more projects that address serious societal concerns. Since the events of Columbine High School, the attack upon the World Trade Center, Hurricane Katrina, and problems in the Middle East, young people are asking questions about the larger world and are wanting to make it a little bit better through their contributions to the greater good. Just several years ago a student in my enrichment resource room wondered whether the *Hartford Courant* really had an accurate pulse on the cartoon-page readership by featuring Garfield cartoons rather than Spiderman comics. Although that may have been an intriguing question to some 9-year-olds then, young people today are asking questions about global warming, the energy crisis, and the plight of the underclass in this country.

I celebrate this change. I join Joseph Renzulli and his colleagues (2006) in calling for educators to reflect deeply on how they can support these

efforts "to encourage a new generation of students to use their gifts in socially constructive ways and seek ways to improve the lives of others rather than merely using their talents for economic gain, self-indulgence, and the exercise of power without commitment to contribute to the improvement of life and resources on the planet" (Renzulli et al., 2006, p. 23).

Strategies to Nurture the Social and Emotional Characteristics in Gifted Students

Guide Gifted Students to Self-Understanding Through Literature

Having reviewed several of the characteristics, traits, and behaviors that serve as assets to gifted young people in their social and emotional development, I describe below a number of strategies and methods that educators and counselors may find helpful in nurturing and supporting these qualities in their students.

I have long been a proponent of using literature to facilitate discussions with students about their issues or concerns. I believe that authentic interactions with literature contribute to overall affective growth. Such an approach is referred to as bibliotherapy, defined as the use of reading to produce affective change and to promote personality growth and development (Lenkowsky, 1987). Another popular definition is Lundsteen's (1972): "getting the right book to the right child at the right time about the right problem" (p. 505).

I am reluctant to use the term *bibliotherapy* simply because I do not want to raise concerns among parents and administrators that I am doing something I am not qualified to do as a classroom teacher. I am not a therapist; however, as a practitioner, I can facilitate good discussions with young people about good books. In doing so, I can help them draw parallels between their experiences and those of the main characters in the books. I also can help them listen to their classroom peers as they share their feelings about personal experiences related to the focus of the lesson. Such an approach is simply an attempt to help young people understand themselves and cope with problems by providing literature relevant to their personal situations and developmental needs at appropriate times.

I want to emphasize the term *developmental*. My objective is to help guide gifted students to reach self-understanding. In conducting such dis-

cussions in classrooms I focus on issues that many gifted students experience—perhaps more intensely and in different ways. Educators or counselors may want to consider using this approach to help students reflect on how or whether the social and emotional characteristics and traits described in this chapter are evident in their own lives. Literature can help young people appreciate their emotional sensitivity and intensity. Good books can help them develop more realistic self-expectations. For others, a book's message regarding the role of resilience in overcoming adversity may be helpful. In addition to supporting these characteristics, other developmental issues such as establishing and maintaining friendships, dealing with parental and teacher expectations, determining healthy self-expectations, and coping with peer pressure are concerns I would feel comfortable dealing with in public school classrooms. More serious concerns, the types I would label "grit your teeth issues," would be reserved for counselors. Teachers of gifted students using this approach believe that reading can influence thinking and behavior, and that guided discussions about selected books can focus on specific needs of students. Such an approach attempts to address concerns of young people before concerns become problems, providing needed information and understanding for facing the challenges of adolescence.

Halsted (2009) proposed that literature can easily engage gifted students emotionally. The therapeutic experience begins when young people pick up a book and discover characters very much like themselves. This interaction is known as identification, and the more gifted students have in common with the people they meet in their books, the closer the identification process. With that identification comes a tension relief, or catharsis, an emotional feeling that lets gifted children know they are not alone in facing their problems. As they enjoy a story, they learn vicariously through the book's characters. They gain new ways of looking at troublesome issues, and insight evolves. With this new insight, changed behavior may occur as they confront real-life situations similar to those experienced by the characters in the books.

McKay and Dudley (1996) proposed that most people have within them the resources to heal themselves. Emotional upheavals experienced by sensitive young people may paralyze their ability to access this valuable resource. Therefore, the use of appropriate literature may be helpful in getting gifted students through their hurt feelings, enabling them to reach down into their personal reservoirs and find answers to troubling questions. In essence, the book, in and of itself, is not therapeutic. The therapeutic effect depends on the response of the readers to that literature as it is

facilitated through group discussion, and the change takes place within the student (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1986).

In any discussion of a high-quality literature with gifted students, the goal of the discussion is to have participants share their feelings and listen closely to themselves as well as each other. In a group discussion, it is important that the students leave the classroom with an awareness that others have experienced the same feelings. Under the guidance of a knowledgeable and empathic teacher or counselor, a group discussion can bring about the universality of experience—a feeling of “we are in this together.”

Teachers and counselors who facilitate such discussions are responding to their need to incorporate meaningful follow-up activities. Such activities might include creative writing, journaling, writing song lyrics, writing raps, designing television commercials, role-playing, creative problem solving, cartooning and other art activities, or self-selected options for students to pursue individually (Hébert & Furner, 1997; Hébert & Kent, 2000).

In conducting the follow-up activities, I have discovered that the more enjoyable they are, the more effective they are. I emphasize enjoyable because I have found that as young people are engaged in something enjoyable they are more apt to continue discussion among themselves about the issues talked about earlier with the group. During this time the students continue to provide each other with supportive feedback. For example, as boys are engaged in an artistic activity, a teacher may overhear comments such as, “John, I didn’t know that Butch Mulligan used to pick on you, too, back in second grade. It made me feel better to hear that I wasn’t the only kid he bullied.”

I have also learned, in conducting these lessons, that effective follow-up activities can be either collaborative or private. Providing students a choice of working in groups or alone addresses their individual learning styles. Moreover, I have discovered that when discussions involve students engaging in serious self-disclosure, private journaling as a follow-up activity provides time to “process” their feelings. I have come to believe that the follow-up activities are as important as the group discussion, and I have found that the more hands-on the follow-up activity, the more boys will talk. Engaging in hands-on activity is critical for young men to feel more comfortable in discussing their feelings. Girls appear to have fewer problems with talking. With these points in mind, guided discussions centered on affective concerns can be enjoyable while providing a time for solid introspection.

In selecting high-quality books to use with this approach, I believe it is important to reflect on Charles Smith’s (1986) reminder to educators when

using books therapeutically. He points out that children trust their teachers when selecting books, and therefore teachers must remain mindful of their influence. He explains, "Along with this trust comes a responsibility for the teacher to select books of great worth that provide rich metaphors and help children understand themselves and others, books that touch the heart" (Smith, 1986, p. 45). To support educators and counselors in their search for books that "touch the heart," I have included an annotated bibliography of literature appropriate for grades K-12 in Appendix A. The collection includes picture books, chapter books, and young adult novels that can be used to address social and emotional development. In addition, I provide educators and counselors with a sample lesson plan below, featuring a picture book by Mem Fox.

A sample lesson. Fox's (1985) *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* touches the heart. This classic picture book presents a poignant story of a young boy named Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge who lives next door to a home for the elderly. Wilfrid becomes a favorite visitor at the home as he develops warm relationships with his neighbors. He grows to have a favorite there, Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper, because she has four names just as he does. Miss Nancy is 96 years old, and Wilfrid learns from the residents at the nursing home that his friend Miss Nancy has lost her memory. He searches for memories for his beloved friend because she has forgotten hers. He carries a basket of trinkets to Miss Nancy, and as they share the basket together, the simple objects the young child has gathered for the elderly woman bring to her mind many fond memories, which she shares with her little friend. The beauty of the relationship between the young child and the woman is one that is appreciated by children who are sensitive to feelings involved in a special friendship.

Themes/Key Concepts

- ☛ Sensitivity and empathy in gifted young people
- ☛ The beauty of an important friendship
- ☛ Respect for the elderly

Possible Introductory Activities

- ☛ Discuss what it means to be sensitive to the feelings of others.

Selected Passage to Be Used in Discussion

- ☛ "What a dear, strange child to bring me all these wonderful things," thought Miss Nancy. Then she started to remember.

Menu of Possible Discussion Questions

- ☛ What did you like about Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge?
- ☛ Why do you think Wilfrid told Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper all of his secrets?
- ☛ What do you think was special about the things that Wilfrid included in his basket for Miss Nancy?
- ☛ Why do you think Miss Nancy enjoyed the gifts from Wilfrid so much?
- ☛ Has there ever been a time in your life when you had a special friend like Miss Nancy? What did you do for that person? How did that make you feel?
- ☛ Why do you think this special friendship was important to Wilfrid and Miss Nancy?
How have your special friendships been important to you?
- ☛ If a sensitive boy like Wilfrid joined us in our classroom, how do you think he would be treated? Why?
- ☛ How do you think sensitive qualities help children? Have you had experiences in which your sensitivity has helped you? What happened?

Menu of Possible Follow-Up Activities

- ☛ Plan a basket of simple yet special things to share with an important friend.
- ☛ Write and illustrate a poem about an important friendship in your life.
- ☛ Create a classroom mobile that captures the lesson learned through *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*.
- ☛ Write a letter to Wilfrid's parents about their special son.
- ☛ Design classroom posters celebrating sensitivity in your classmates.
- ☛ Use your private journal to write a letter to Wilfrid to let him know how you feel about what he did for Miss Nancy.

Examine Biographies of Gifted Individuals

Along with reading high-quality literature and facilitating discussions that address affective concerns, teachers and counselors should consider examining biographical materials with gifted students. The late Mary Frasier maintained that a carefully selected biography could strongly influence the life of a gifted child (personal communication, September 1998). She pointed out that the person whose life story is being shared through

biography may serve as a role model for intelligent young people and assist them in reflecting upon issues that require analysis in a safe environment. In particular, I have found that using biographies with gifted young men is consistent with what they enjoy reading (Hébert, 1995b). Studies of adolescent book selection have indicated that reading preferences of boys change as they grow older, with young men selecting less fiction and more nonfiction in the middle and high school years (Langerman, 1990). The gifted education community has maintained that encounters with biographies or autobiographies can have positive effects on gifted students (Flack, 1993; Hébert, 1995b, 2009; Hébert, Long, & Speirs Neumeister, 2001; Piirto, 1992; Robinson & Butler Schatz, 2002). Flack (1993) noted the critical importance of identification through both biography and autobiography: "Identification occurs when young readers discover that they are not singularly alone in either their dreams and aspirations or their loneliness, frustrations, and disappointments" (p. 2).

Educators who use biographies and autobiographies to support social and emotional development with gifted young people have a variety of options. Counselors may select a biography to read with a student and conduct one-on-one discussion sessions with the child. Some teachers offer classroom collections of biographies, hoping that students might self-select a biographical work, read it, identify with the subject, and discover a quiet reassurance. Others may prefer to organize a discussion group with a plan of sharing passages from a biography and having students consider thought-provoking questions focused on an important issue. Other teachers may incorporate biographical materials in the curriculum and have students share their thoughts and feelings concerning important issues through a reflective journal. Regardless of whether the biographical collection is offered, a discussion group is formed, or a writing experience is suggested, what is most important is that the teacher or counselor be prepared to listen closely to the feeling responses of the students and be prepared to support them emotionally. To support teachers and counselors who want to address affective development using biographies and autobiographies, a bibliography of appropriate biographical materials for use with gifted students is provided in Appendix B.

Connect Gifted Students With Collegiate Role Models and Friends

One of the finest examples of supporting the affective development of gifted students that I have known of was a program designed and facili-

tated by my colleague and friend Dr. Helen Nevitt. In her role as a faculty member at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, MO, Helen was assigned to be the faculty advisor to the Governor's Scholars Program. The Governor's Scholars are a group of highly capable students, many of whom were identified as gifted during their K-12 school years and a large number of whom were National Merit Scholars. They represented fewer than 2% of the university student body, a highly selective group entering with a complete 4-year merit-based scholarship.

As coordinator of the Governor's Scholars Program and a professor of gifted education, Dr. Nevitt decided to connect the university scholars with gifted education teachers throughout Cape Girardeau and the surrounding area. She sent groups of Governor's Scholars into elementary, middle, and high school gifted education classrooms to conduct 90-minute panel discussions focusing on their own experiences growing up gifted. Dr. Nevitt advertised the availability of the students to local gifted education coordinators, and interested teachers contacted the university to request a visit from a group of scholars. Helen organized the Scholar Outreach groups in such a way that each group had various types of giftedness represented. For example, a business administration major who was happy to present himself as the math whiz of the group accompanied an artistic student and perhaps a scholar-athlete. Helen encouraged the university students to focus on the following objectives in their session:

- ☛ To present themselves as examples of academically successful gifted students who are comfortable with themselves as gifted individuals.
- ☛ To discuss negative influences they have been exposed to in their lives.
- ☛ To share strategies for dealing with those negative influences.
- ☛ To demonstrate that they have found friends and intellectual peers through participation in a program with other high-ability students.
- ☛ To encourage the younger students to enjoy areas of their lives beyond academics.
- ☛ To illustrate that maintaining high academic performance can result in significant college scholarships (Nevitt, 1997).

Dr. Nevitt discovered that young gifted students were mesmerized by the college students who visited their classrooms. The university students shared the trials and tribulations of growing up gifted and provided the children and teenagers with helpful advice for addressing affective concerns. Typical themes in the discussions were coping with a peer group that did not appreciate their intellectual orientation, dealing with teacher and

parent expectations, pursuing passionate interests, and developing important friendships with like-minded students.

A delightful surprise evolved during one of the first outreach group sessions. The younger students asked to exchange e-mail addresses with the college students, and Dr. Nevitt and the K-12 gifted education teachers watched as the Governor's Scholars became "e-mail pals" with their young gifted friends. Without having planned it, Dr. Nevitt and the teachers had found wonderful mentors for social and emotional development. The messages the university students were delivering to the younger students were the same as those delivered by teachers and parents; however, there appeared to be something magical about getting advice from "an awesome college kid who cares about me." The e-mail exchanges typically lasted for an academic year.

Dr. Nevitt reported that the university students benefited from the experience in that they learned more about themselves and became more comfortable with their giftedness. The younger students also became more comfortable with their giftedness, showed a new willingness to advocate for themselves, improved their classroom performance, and showed more enthusiasm for the gifted education program. Dr. Nevitt also indicated that parents became more supportive of their children and reported an increased understanding of the latter's intensity and emotionality.

Since moving from Missouri, Dr. Nevitt has shared this Scholars Outreach Program model with many other gifted education teachers. By simply making an appropriate connection with the community, she was able to provide many gifted students with important life lessons from an older student and friend.

Facilitate Social Action and Community Service Projects

While I was teaching at the University of Alabama, I had a delightful opportunity to watch a group of sensitive young people address a societal need through creative productivity. I supervised graduate students in gifted education as they taught mini-courses in a summer enrichment program. One group of gifted elementary students were involved in a mini-course in home design and construction. Under the guidance of their dynamic teacher, Berri Byington, these children spent several weeks planning, designing, building, and painting a miniature house, which eventually evolved into a playhouse. They decided to donate their finished product to a local shelter for abused children. Along with putting math and science concepts to work, these gifted students responded to a need in their community.

I also was fortunate to work with Wilma Cook, a fifth-grade teacher at Eastland Elementary School in Fort Worth, TX. Students at Eastland were taught not to touch the empty crack cocaine bags and needles that sometimes littered the school grounds. Wilma's students became concerned when they noticed that gang graffiti covered their school on Monday mornings. Each week they watched school personnel clean it off, but returned to find the building covered again. In response, Wilma's students launched a campaign to get rid of the gang graffiti and to urge students to stay out of gangs. Their efforts included an anti-gang rally. The students asked local grocery chains to supply lunches to be served during the rally. They contacted a local television station as well as the local newspaper. They called upon their favorite radio station to host the rally. They invited speakers from the local police force and the school district's central office. On the day of the rally, students led the student body in anti-gang cheers and performed skits and rap songs. Wilma and her colleagues delighted in the students' response to messages delivered that day. For example, Albert Clark, a fifth grader, rhymed, "My name is Albert and I'm here to say that gang graffiti is not the way!" (Bond, 1994, p. 23A). Following the rally, the fifth graders drew up a petition calling for an end to gang activity in Fort Worth. It was eventually signed by 1,432 students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. The fifth graders appeared before the school board and presented the petition to both the school superintendent and the mayor. Wilma's students also wrote an oath promising never to join a gang and persuaded all 68 fifth graders in the school to sign it, a courageous act in a community dominated by the Crips and Bloods, who some students realized might retaliate for such bold action.

Wilma Cook was an educator who was in tune with the emotional needs of her students. Often listening to their concerns, she was able to channel their energies in a positive direction and guided them to an appropriate outlet to address an important problem. Addressing community problems is an excellent way of supporting the social and emotional characteristics and traits of gifted students. Educators are increasingly asking children and adolescents to address societal issues through their work. Community service projects often are aligned with the required curriculum in a school, and many inspirational educators like Wilma Cook undertake campaigns and causes that bring about positive changes.

One such inspirational teacher is Barbara Lewis, a national award-winning author and educator who teaches young people how to think deeply about the world around them and to solve real problems. Her students at Jackson Elementary School in Salt Lake City, UT, have addressed prob-

lems with hazardous waste in their community, initiated several laws in the Utah state legislature, helped to fight crime, and tackled environmental problems in their state. Related to her work in facilitating service projects, Barbara has published some of the best educational resource materials available for teachers interested in helping their students address concerns through social action projects or service learning. The following four books published by Free Spirit are highly recommended: *The Kid's Guide to Social Action* (1998), *Kids With Courage* (1992), *The Kid's Guide to Service Projects* (2009), and *What Do You Stand For?* (1998).

In addition to Lewis's work, Elizabeth Rusch (2002) has authored *Generation Fix: Young Ideas for a Better World*, published by Beyond Words. In this book, teenager Zachary Ebers created a "Breakfast Bonanza" following his visit to a food pantry in St. Louis, MO. When he noticed the shelves of the food pantry were stocked with cans of vegetables, baked beans, and SpaghettiO's™, Zach became concerned that children there were not receiving an adequate breakfast. He organized a large group of friends to be cereal-drive coordinators responsible for helping to publicize the drive, collecting the cereal, and helping to deliver it. He succeeded in involving 18 churches and schools throughout St. Louis. Within the first 2 years of the program, Breakfast Bonanza collected more than 5,000 boxes of cereal for food pantries in St. Louis.

Rusch (2002) also highlighted the efforts of Joshua Marcus of Boca Raton, FL. Joshua learned of the poverty in his community when his mother took him to visit a day-care center in a neighborhood of migrant farm workers. His experience with that visit opened his eyes to the needs of local children. When he learned that they needed school supplies to begin kindergarten, Joshua took action. He began a program he called "Sack It to You," whereby he conducted major fund-raising efforts with local businesses. He bought school supplies with the money raised. After his older brother moved out of the house, the Sack It to You backpacks and school supplies took over his bedroom. Joshua organized parties where his friends, in an assembly-line operation, filled backpacks with supplies and then delivered them to 17 agencies throughout Boca Raton. Over 5 years, Joshua raised more than a quarter of a million dollars to supply backpacks filled with school supplies to children from low-income families.

In Rusch's (2002) book we also meet Shifra Mincer, a sixth grader who spends her afternoons at a soup kitchen in the basement of Hebrew Union College in New York City. While there, she serves as the seamstress for homeless people who stop by for meals. While they are eating, Shifra mends their jackets, shirts, pants, and blouses. Shifra intends to continue

work as the soup kitchen's seamstress until she graduates from high school. She explained that volunteering for others less fortunate really makes her feel good, especially if she has had a stressful day at school or received a low grade on a test. "When I'm sewing there, I really can't do anything about school. I really have time to completely forget about any problems. And I see people who have a lot more problems than me" (Rusch, 2002, p. 89). Shifra has realized that her efforts at the soup kitchen have influenced her life in multiple ways. She pointed out, "Volunteering takes a lot of my own time, but you get so much more back. My life is so different from what it used to be. So much fuller . . . Whatever you put in, you get double back" (Rusch, 2002, p. 89).

Encourage Mentorships

Helen Nevitt's approach of connecting gifted collegians with younger students is a realistic model for K-12 schools. Educators have long maintained that mentorships in the classroom can enrich the lives of gifted students at many levels. Mentoring involves a one-on-one relationship between a young person and an older individual who is an expert in a field or has knowledge about a particular topic. In a mentoring relationship, shared passions, common interests, or career interests serve as the foundation of the relationship. Mentors and their young protégés work as partners as they explore a common passion, interest, or career. These explorations have provided differentiated instructional experiences for gifted students, facilitated research projects, and exposed intelligent young people to a variety of career possibilities (Purcell, Renzulli, McCoach, & Spottiswoode, 2001; Roberts & Inman, 2001; Siegle, McCoach, & Wilson, 2009).

In my work with gifted students, I successfully matched them with elderly retirees who had tremendous expertise, much wisdom, and plenty of love, and time to share with my students. I will always be grateful to Mrs. Howard, a delightful woman associated with the Audubon Society who worked with Melissa, a third grader with a passionate interest in robins and cardinals. Under Mrs. Howard's guidance, Melissa developed a board game on birds that other elementary students enjoyed for years. I also was relieved when I found Mr. Bernier, a retired electrical engineer who came to my classroom each week and worked with Stephen on an engineering project I never quite understood; however, I will long remember how much I enjoyed watching them explore electronics together. In my observations of mentor and mentee, I saw much more than an older gentleman sharing his knowledge, expertise, and passion for electronics with a sixth grader

who remained fascinated. I saw what Tomlinson (2001) referred to as a "mentor of the spirit—of the heart." She maintained that "powerful mentorships help prepare young people to live with greater purpose, focus, and appreciation at a younger age by drawing not only on the knowledge of the past, but on its wisdom as well" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 27).

Through this relationship, Stephen had an excellent role model. The relationship certainly boosted his self-esteem as he developed new expertise under the tutelage of a kind, elderly gentleman. With Mr. Bernier, he felt comfortable sharing his intensity and his passion for learning. Moreover, he benefited from a heart-warming friendship that continued through his high school years. With this attentive listener, Stephen could share his hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

Gifted high school students have derived significant benefits from mentoring programs. One excellent example is the Pinnacle Project funded by the American Psychological Foundation (APF), organized by APF's Center for Gifted Education Policy directed by Rena Subotnik. The Pinnacle Summit brings together gifted adolescents who participate in a weeklong mentorship program designed to cultivate their talents. Each student has the opportunity to work with an eminent scholar or practitioner in his or her field of interest. The weeklong Pinnacle Summit is unique in that it brings together established, emerging, and potential talent in intra- and interdisciplinary ways. Each day of the summit provides the students with opportunities to meet, talk about their interests, and develop a plan for the coming year. The week also includes roundtable discussions that facilitate the exchange of ideas among various disciplines. In addition, each of the masters gives a lecture to the entire group and the summit culminates with the students presenting what they learned from their individual team meetings and the projects they have planned for the coming year.

David Sonnenborn, a participant in the Pinnacle Project with an intense interest in political TV journalism, described his experiences at Bard College at Simon's Rock working with journalist Philip Scheffler, executive editor of *60 Minutes*, and Kay Lim, an associate producer of the television show. David explained that his work with Scheffler began every morning with a copy of *The New York Times*, which served as a lifeline for the mentor and his protégé isolated in rural Massachusetts and removed from television sets and the Internet. David noted that the black-and-white newspaper was central to their morning meetings as Mr. Scheffler taught him about journalistic integrity, the Pentagon Papers, the right to a free press, the Vietnam War, and the cracking of the tobacco industry and shared his insights from more than 50 years in journalism. Although his

mentor was a giant in his field, David explained, "... he took him under his wing as his student" (Subotnik, 2003, p. 15). Kay Lim joined them as someone who had started in TV journalism more recently and also offered her candid opinions of her field. As a result of his work with his mentors, David returned to his high school and wrote, directed, and edited a news documentary on the topic of character education and teaching ethics in the classroom.

Today, I am proud of what I accomplished during that period, but much of the expertise and encouragement necessary to make the film I owe to Mr. Scheffler and Kay. Not only did they frequently keep me on task, their constant accessibility and willingness to drop anything to help me was more than comforting—it got me through the project. They helped me focus on the important aspects of the story and guided me through each step involved in writing a script. Despite a lack of time on all of our parts, we finished the documentary, and with it, the entire program suddenly came to fruition. But, even if we never did complete a project, the confidence and excitement that my mentors instilled in me this year would have been reward enough. (Subotnik, 2003, p. 16)

The benefits of mentoring programs on the affective development of gifted students surpass any academic or career focus. Researchers and practitioners have reported increased self-confidence and self-awareness in students (Nash, 2001; Siegle et al., 2009); commitment, empathy, and self-trust (Tomlinson, 2001); increased responsibility and a future-mindedness (Purcell et al., 2001); and positive self-image (Davalos & Haensly, 1997; Goff & Torrance, 1999).

Numerous descriptions of mentoring programs for gifted students are available to educators (see Hébert & Olenchak, 2000; Hébert & Speirs Neumeister, 2000; Purcell et al., 2001; Roberts & Inman, 2001). Each of these reports includes evaluative comments from young participants similar to David Sonnenborn's reflections above. The following statement from a high school student who participated in a summer mentorship program at the University of Connecticut is representative of what many have reported and highlights the benefits of mentoring that are related to the social and emotional development of gifted young people. This message should inspire educators and counselors to consider establishing such programs:

The most important thing my mentor has done for me is to listen, answer my deeply held questions, and share his passion. Living in a dark world where few peers or teachers care about anything deeply takes its toll on the weary traveler. Seeing how active and invigorated my mentor is has given me inspiration to go home, rekindle my goals, and live my life to its fullest. (Purcell et al., 2001, p. 24)

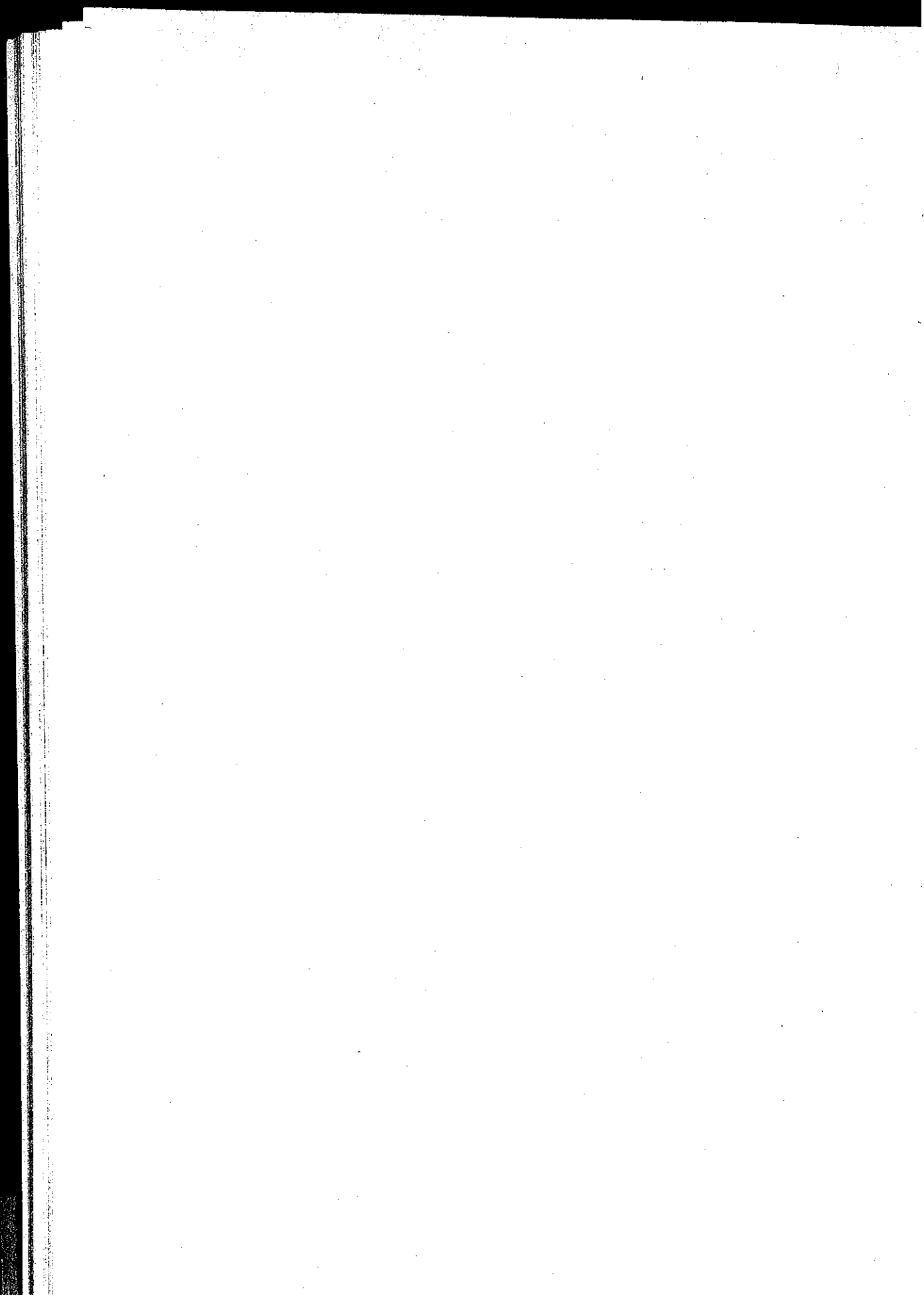
For Further Thought and Discussion

- ☛ Imagine that Heidi Gillingham, the collegiate basketball player, visited your high school students in a gifted education seminar. What message would you hope she would deliver to your students? Why?
- ☛ What is the significance of the Hewitt and Flett (1991) multidimensional model of perfectionism for educators and counselors working with gifted students? How might an understanding of this model support their practice?
- ☛ How might educators and counselors help gifted students develop an internal locus of control?
- ☛ What advice do you think Cameron's parents should offer to parents of other gifted boys?
- ☛ What can educators, school counselors, and parents do to nurture the empathic qualities of gifted young people?

Resources to Expand Your Thinking and Extend Your Support to Gifted Students

- Adelson, J. L., & Wilson, H. E. (2009). *Letting go of perfect: Overcoming perfectionism in kids*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Adderholdt, M., & Goldberg, J. (1999). *Perfectionism: What's bad about being too good?* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
- Daniels, S., & Piechowski, M. M. (Eds.). (2009). *Living with intensity*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Greenspon, T. S. (2007). *What to do when good enough isn't good enough*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
- Halsted, J. W. (2009). *Some of my best friends are books* (3rd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

- Isaacson, K., & Fisher, T. (2007). *Intelligent life in the classroom: Smart kids and their teachers*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Lewis, B. (1998). *The kid's guide to social action* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
- Piechowski, M. M. (2006). *"Mellow out," they say. If only I could: Intensities and sensitivities of the young and bright*. Madison, WI: Yunasa Books.
- Rusch, E. (2002). *Generation fix: Young ideas for a better world*. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words.





CHAPTER 3

Social and Emotional Characteristics and Traits of Gifted Young People: Part II



My goals for this chapter are to:

- Acquaint you with several more of the social and emotional characteristics, traits, and behaviors evidenced in gifted young people.
- Present strategies to nurture those characteristics, traits, and behaviors.

In my work at the University of Georgia, I have had many opportunities to come to know graduate students through reflective writing assignments in my courses. In a class that I teach on underachievement in high-ability students, I asked students to share their personal journeys as K-12 students. I received a reflection from Christopher that beautifully illustrated a number of issues upon which teachers and counselors of gifted students may want to reflect. Christopher's reflection, "A Letter to My Kindergarten Teacher," follows here:

Dear Miss Jan,

I still cannot color inside the lines. No matter how hard I try, the crayon always seems to wander over that thin black line as if of its own accord. I recently found myself sitting Indian style (Do you still use that term?) on the floor next to my daughter's art table, vainly attempting to color in Strawberry Shortcake's little red hat. While my 5-year-old was admonishing me, I suddenly remembered you and that ubiquitous frowny-faced stamp that frequently ended up on my paper.

It seemed fitting that I write to you as I begin the next step in my academic development because it was with you that it all started. I admit to being less than enthusiastic about my first day of kindergarten. If my mother tells the story correctly, I threw up twice that morning, once in the bathroom and once out the car window as we pulled up to the school. My mother insists that it was excitement that tied my stomach in knots, but in truth it was you: your shiny black hair and severe smile that reminded me eerily of the villain from the children's book *Miss Nelson Is Missing*.

From the beginning, I was outmatched. My pictures were always scribbled, my letters invariably were written backwards, and I could never seem to find my place on the carpet before your infernal buzzer went off. I vividly remember being kept in from recess one day because of a picture I drew of my mother. Being a kindergartener, I felt like my portrait captured the very essence of everything I loved about my mother. As recess wore on, I was forced to sit and look at my masterpiece in an attempt to determine what exactly I had done wrong. As the other children returned triumphantly from games of kickball and tag, I realized with a certain clarity what was wrong with my picture. I had forgotten to give my mother hair. It was then that I decided, as much as a 5-year-old can decide anything, I was not cut out for this school business.

First and second grade were a little better. I was terminally messy and unorganized, and my teachers seemed to take that as a sign that I was unfit for any sort of education. First grade presented me the unique challenge of [D'Nealian] pads. Squeezing my as yet unperfected letters into the confines of those little dotted lines seemed impossible. In second grade I was responsible for keeping up with my own lunch card. My mother must have tried hundreds, if not thousands, of ways to ensure that I made it to the

lunchroom with that little blue card, but invariably I would reach the lunchroom without it and with no clue as to where it had gone. My teacher even went so far as to drill a hole in the wall behind my desk and insert a hook to hang my card on. Still, I was left to the mercy of the lunch lady three out of five days a week.

Imagine my surprise when, in third grade, I was tested for the gifted program. It must have been the ease with which I mastered third-grade multiplication tables, for that was my sole academic accomplishment in 3 years of schooling. I was taken to the library where an older lady with a perpetually bored expression asked me a series of questions. Three weeks later it was determined that I did not need any special services; or at least not those kind. My mother, however, disagreed, and I was tested again. To this day, I don't think I was placed in the gifted program because of any raw talent or untapped potential. I think they simply got tired of testing me.

My first week in the small group of boys and girls pulled out for special instruction was wonderful. We played games and spent time in the computer lab. I remember you walking by that first week and how I wanted more than anything to shout your name so you would know what had become of me. There was an immediate shift in the way my teacher treated me too. Whereas before I was thought to be unfit to learn, now it seemed as if my teacher thought she might be unfit to teach me. Messy assignments went unremarked. Gold stars started appearing on the top of my papers. It was as if someone had reached down and blessed me in the eyes of the school.

I continued to carry the mysterious blessing of being gifted through fourth grade, and by fifth, I had begun to think I actually belonged, even excelled, at school. Ms. Chapman put an end to all that. She shared your shiny black hair and severe smile. In fact, the two of you were so similar that I remember thinking that perhaps she was your long-lost older sister.

Ms. Chapman taught in themes. The first half of the year we spent studying the Middle Ages, and the second half we immersed ourselves in marine biology. We got to do things I never would have expected at school, like dress up as kings and princes and have a medieval feast, and take a 3-day field trip to the beach. Still, like you, Ms. Chapman loved art and was very particular about the art her students created. Along with every assignment, there was a picture to color. In retrospect, I'm sure Ms. Chapman thought she was

being nice by allowing us to color, but for me it was kindergarten all over again. I was sure you and Ms. Chapman were conspiring against me.

In due time, I went to middle school, which was like most middle school experiences, filled with awkwardness and anxiety. The only high point was when I was allowed to take advanced math classes, and because I was awkward and anxious anyway, I ignored my better judgment and became a mathlete. The T-shirts were cool, and I was sure the team's coach, Mr. Weeks, must have been directly related to Einstein. I also joined the band and began to discover that not all art was created in crayon between sharp black lines.

By high school, I realized that while I usually had the answers the teachers were looking for, I could rarely find the piece of paper on which they were written. I was lucky enough, however, to find a number of teachers who placed high value on test scores rather than organization, and I began to excel again in math and English. High school seemed mostly easy, and I was overjoyed to find out that I could choose the classes I was to take. I enrolled in challenging classes in areas I felt were my strength. I also continued to study music, feeling there was something about the symmetry of music that reminded me of math class.

I graduated an honor student and was accepted to all of the universities I applied to. Being a native of Athens, GA, I chose the University of Georgia and began working on a philosophy major the summer after I graduated from high school. That fall I was an English major. By winter I was thinking history, and in the spring the call of South Campus led me to become a mathematics major. Three years and an undisclosed number of majors later, I entered the College of Education. After 4 years of college, I was still 2 years away from any degree, so I left, feeling as though my time of study had been a useless and expensive endeavor. I came to your school shortly after dropping out of college. I stopped by your room and sat in one of the tiny chairs and felt like all those years before: I was not cut out for this school business.

I worked in corporate audit and loss prevention for nearly 4 years where I had the opportunity to supervise a number of high school dropouts. Most of them reminded me of myself during the times when school seemed like a daunting task. It made me realize that the only difference between them and me was a few intermixed years of academic success. I could have easily tired of failing

if not for the teachers who had been able to see the ability hidden behind the poor organization. I tutored a number of my employees for their GED and even helped several of them fill out applications for community college.

It was then that I returned to school to become a teacher. I loved my time in teacher education as it provided me with the freedom to pursue topics that I felt were useful to me. I'm currently working on my master's degree and I'm sometimes filled with the anxiety that marked my first day of kindergarten. I imagine getting papers returned stamped with little red frowny faces and being kept in during recess. I try very hard to focus on successful experiences, because I know how much failure can affect my own chance of success as well as how others see me.

I hope that you are well and you've gotten rid of that frowny-faced stamp. When I'm able to color in the lines, I'll send you a sample.

Sincerely,
Christopher Pendley
Kindergarten Class of 1984

I am delighted to report that Christopher is a middle school math teacher who is also pursuing an advanced degree in gifted education. I also want to report that I have never stamped his papers with a frowny-faced red stamp, nor have I kept him in during recess. I celebrate that a teacher with his experiences and sensitivity will soon be working with high-ability students who may be facing the same challenges Chris faced as a student. I share Christopher's letter with my readers, with his permission, because within his message I see evidence of several significant social and emotional characteristics of gifted students that I address in this chapter. Christopher's story highlights the importance of moving toward self-actualization, a highly developed sense of humor, and resilience. These three traits, along with an advanced level of moral maturity, are the focus of this chapter. I begin this discussion with a compelling story of the development of moral maturity in one man's life.

Advanced Levels of Moral Maturity With Consistency Between Values and Actions

John Robbins grew up in affluence. As the son of Irving Robbins, the cofounder of Baskin-Robbins, he grew up in a home where an ice cream

freezer had 31 flavors in it. He and his friends enjoyed a swimming pool shaped like an ice cream cone, and he played with his cats named Orange Sherbet and Marshmallow. In 1968, when his uncle (and father's business partner) Burt Baskin died from a heart attack at the age of 51, he struggled to understand how this could happen to such a young man. Robbins remembered his uncle as "a very big man who ate a lot of ice cream" (Levin-Epstein, 2006, p. 66). When John approached his father about the connection between his uncle's ice cream consumption, weight, and heart failure, his father brushed off the issue, explaining, "His ticker just got tired and stopped working" (Levin-Epstein, 2006, p. 66).

As a college student at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s, John Robbins realized that he could not sell his family's product if there was a possibility that it adversely affected people's health. He announced to his father that he could not maintain the family's business because he had to live and work according to his personal values. This decision caused a serious rift between father and son, and today he realizes that, although he has reconciled with his father, he does not plan on inheriting any of the family's ice cream fortune.

For the past 20 years, John Robbins has authored several best-selling books on health, vegetarian diets, and the environment. His book, *Diet for a New America*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and sold more than a million copies. As a result of the response to the book, he started EarthSave International, a nonprofit organization with more than 40 chapters throughout the country. This group educates the public about foods that are healthiest for people and best for the environment. A more recent book, *Healthy at 100*, synthesizes the healthy eating practices of the world's longest living people and features citizens from small villages in Ecuador, Pakistan, and Russia. The child who enjoyed a freezer with 31 flavors of ice cream today enjoys a diet of organic fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, soy products, and some fish. Robbins maintains that he has more energy than when he was 21 and celebrates his healthy heart (Levin-Epstein, 2006).

This snapshot of John Robbins's experience highlights the role of moral development in the life of a successful individual making important societal contributions and serves as a backdrop for the following discussion of moral maturity as a characteristic of gifted students. Morality has been defined as "a set of internalized principles or ideals that help an individual to distinguish from right and wrong and to act on this distinction" (Shaffer, 2000, p. 353). The major theories of moral development have focused on various components of morality. Psychological theorists have emphasized

the affective component, or the significant moral affects. They maintain that young people are motivated to act according to their ethical principles, to experience positive affects such as pride, and to avoid negative moral emotions such as guilt or shame. Cognitive-developmental theorists have focused on the cognitive features of morality, or moral reasoning, and have found that the ways children think about right and wrong changes developmentally. Social learning theorists have considered the behavioral component of morality by examining whether children's actions are consistent with their moral standards when tempted to violate them (Shaffer, 2000; Steinberg, 2005). Implicit in definitions of morality is the understanding that morally mature young people do not follow society's dictates simply because they expect tangible rewards or fear punishment for breaking society's rules. Instead, they internalize moral principles they have learned and conform to those ideals even when adults are not present to enforce them. Internalization, the shift from externally controlled behavior to behavior driven by internal standards and principles, is viewed as a crucial milestone in moving toward mature moral development (Shaffer, 2000).

Evidence of advanced moral maturity in gifted children and teenagers has long been reported in the gifted education and psychology literature (Boehm, 1962; Janos, Robinson, & Lunnenborg, 1989; Kessler, Ibrahim, & Kahn, 1986; Passow, 1988; Vare, 1979). High-level moral thought and evaluation are often observed in gifted adolescents (Piechowski, 1997). Colangelo (1982) found evidence of this in moral dilemmas described by gifted teenagers. Howard-Hamilton (1994) measured moral reasoning using Rest's (1986) Defining Issues Test (DIT), a well-documented measure of moral judgment, based on Kohlberg's theory. Howard-Hamilton found that gifted adolescents received scores on the DIT above the norm for their age range. Narváez (1993) also conducted a study using the DIT and found precocity in moral judgment within a population of high-ability, high-achieving middle school students. Clinicians have described gifted young clients who have exhibited sophisticated moral thinking (Lovecky, 1993; Silverman, 1993a). From these reports we learn of gifted young people who follow their ethical principles when faced with dilemmas and will not follow the crowd if it means compromising their values. They experience a high level of compassion. They transcend societal norms, having internalized their own moral code of ethics.

A powerful example of this was Steven Cozza, a Boy Scout in Petaluma, CA. Although he himself was not gay, Steven became so outraged by the Boy Scouts of America's policy of discrimination that he founded, at the age of twelve, Scouting for All to end discrimination against young gay

males (Piechowski, 2003). Steven's behavior was consistent with his value system. His actions were aligned with his beliefs. One of the finest examples I have encountered of this internal consistency between a gifted adolescent's actions and values is the story of Frank Daily in Lewis's (1992) *Kids With Courage*.

On a cold November afternoon in Milwaukee, Frank was traveling home after school on the city bus, feeling rather dejected. Wearing a brand-new pair of Nike sneakers, the high school freshman was pondering what he would do after learning that afternoon that he had not made the junior varsity basketball team. Feeling dejected, he stared out the window of the bus as new passengers climbed aboard.

A pregnant woman dressed in tattered clothing boarded the bus and fell backward into the seat behind the bus driver. Frank immediately noticed that she was in her stocking feet. When the bus driver looked over his shoulder and hollered, "Where are your shoes, lady? It ain't more than 10 degrees out there" (Lewis, 1992, p. 83), the woman explained that she couldn't afford shoes because she had eight children, and she was more concerned about their having shoes. She pointed out to the driver that she believed that the Lord would provide. She made a request to ride the bus awhile so she could keep warm.

When the bus came to the end of the line, Frank waited until everyone else had disembarked. He proceeded down the aisle of the bus with his sneakers in his hands. He approached the pregnant mother and handed her his new basketball shoes, looking down and saying, "Here, lady, you need these more than I do" (Lewis, 1992, p. 84). As he hurried to step down from the bus, he managed to step into a puddle, but he did not mind because he wasn't feeling cold. The woman remained on the bus crying and called out her thanks to Frank. She turned to the driver and exclaimed, "See, I told you the Lord would take care of me" (Lewis, 1992, p. 85). Lewis (1992) reported that the young basketball player never saw the woman again, and on that cold dreary November day in Milwaukee, as he walked home in his stocking feet, he hardly felt the cold street beneath him. On that day the grayness had lifted for him.

Another poignant example of moral maturity is the story of Wade Edwards, a popular fifth grader in an elementary school in North Carolina. Wade came to know a young African American girl named Alyse Tharpe when she was bused to the elementary school from an economically disadvantaged and predominantly African American neighborhood. Alyse had a difficult time finding her place in a school where many other young girls from more privileged situations arrived every day dressed in crisp lit-

tle smock dresses and wore ribbons in their hair. She felt isolated. Wade noticed that Alyse always ate lunch alone, and this troubled him. He stood up from his own crowded table of popular friends, came over to Alyse, introduced himself, and asked if he could sit with her. During lunch on that first day, he taught her how to play table football, and although he beat her at a game he knew very well, she later returned the favor by teaching him an outdoor game that she enjoyed. This special friendship remained constant all through elementary school (Edwards, 2004).

Wade Edwards had much in common with a fourth grader named Anne. Deidre Lovecky (1992) described a day when Anne's class was planning a Valentine's Day celebration. In preparing for the event, the classroom teacher directed her students not to deliver any valentine cards to Jimmy, the "problem child" of fourth grade. When Valentine's Day arrived, Anne promptly delivered the largest Valentine card she could find to Jimmy's desk. It was the only card he received that day. Anne did not open her cards during the class party because she had a plan. She waited until the she and the teacher were alone in the classroom and then discarded her cards unopened in the teacher's trash can. Lovecky (1992) reported that the young girl and her teacher stared at each other, and the child then left her classroom without saying a word. As a result of this show-down, the teacher changed her attitude toward Jimmy.

The above vignettes of Steven, Frank, Wade, and Anne highlight qualities associated with moral maturity. They are evidence that young people and children are capable of internalizing moral principles they have learned and conforming to those ideals even when adults are not present to guide them. Teachers can support those qualities through school experiences designed to strengthen moral principles.

Strong Need for Self-Actualization

For several decades Abraham Maslow's (1954) work concerning self-actualization has been examined by many and has since become widely accepted. Maslow's developmental theory posits that one's physiological needs, and a need for safety, love, and self-esteem, must be met in a hierarchical order if an individual is to reach self-actualization. Understanding self-actualization, the process by which an individual becomes what he or she is capable of being, is important to fully understanding the developmental needs of gifted individuals.

The research base on the self-actualization of young gifted individuals is growing as researchers continue to experiment with multiple instru-

ments for measuring these traits in various populations of students. Several studies have examined the occurrence of self-actualization in gifted students. Lewis, Karnes, and Knight (1995) found that gifted elementary and middle school students scored higher on measures of self-actualization than did nongifted students. Karnes and D'Illio (1990) also reported a significant relationship between self-esteem and self-actualization with gifted children. More recently, Karnes and McGinnis (1996) found a significant correlation between measures of self-actualization and inner locus of control of gifted middle and high school students. In a study of 140 high school students, Pufal-Struzik (1999) found that gifted students achieved a higher level of self-actualization than the control group did. In addition, the gifted students who had a sense of self-actualization had a higher level of self-acceptance. Moreover, a strong need for intellectual stimulation also characterized the students who had a sense of self-actualization.

These findings are consistent with a qualitative research study a colleague and I conducted. We studied gifted university students involved in an honors program in a small technological university in the Southeast (Hébert & McBee, 2007). The purpose of our investigation was to examine the impact of the honors program on the intellectual, social, and emotional development of the participants. One of the major findings in this study was a strong drive to achieve self-actualization, which we labeled "hunger for growth." All of the participants expressed a desire for self-actualization. This included valuing knowledge and education for its own sake, wanting to bring one's personal behavior into closer alignment with universal ethical principles, and desiring to overcome weaknesses. This drive was often expressed as a fixation with philosophical, religious, or political questions that had great emotional significance rather than being simply intellectualized abstractions. For example, one participant named Dawn expressed this hunger for growth as early as high school. She explained that the first thing she did when she acquired a driver's license was to join the local community singers' group. A classical music lover, she wanted to be part of something that was both challenging and beautiful. When the group performed Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Dawn described feeling "absolutely enthralled" by the experience. Much of Dawn's commentary centered around her concept of "the other world," and she described how she spent most of her life feeling conflicted about this hunger and even tried to cover the resulting behaviors:

There's a fear of giving yourself to it [the other world] totally, knowing what the interpersonal result of that is going to be, but fear of

not doing it because you know what that would mean for you. Like selling yourself short, or selling out, or even offending the other world somehow by not giving in to it totally. (Hébert & McBee, 2007, p. 145)

Although Dawn's hunger was largely spiritual in nature, Isaac's was intellectual. He read voraciously in his spare time. He enrolled in courses to satisfy his curiosity and paid little attention to his grades. Upon completion of his bachelor's degree in English literature, Isaac contemplated earning another degree in other fields, such as biology or philosophy, so that he could have another intellectual position from which to "triangulate off to figure out what is reasonable and what is not" (Hébert & McBee, 2007, p. 145).

Once given a structure from which to address this need for self-actualization, as well as a teacher to guide the process and an understanding and supportive peer group, many of the students in the honors program participated in a personal development program referred to as "mentor," which required a substantial commitment of time and energy. Under the guidance of the honors program director, 40 to 50 highly motivated students wrote journals on at least a weekly basis, usually focusing on personal events in the students' lives and philosophical, intellectual, political, or spiritual issues. The journals were shared with the honors program director and the other students participating in "mentor" via e-mail. One participant's commitment was reflected in copious journaling and reading: "It was no big deal for me to sit down and write three journals a night. I mean from 1:00 to 4:00 a.m. most every night" (Hébert & McBee, 2007, p. 145). In addition to the journaling, students attended meetings in which groups discussed developmental issues faced by college students. At other times, the meetings might have focused on discussing pieces of literature, art, or poetry; discussing a difficult book; debating current issues; or viewing a provocative film. Fortunately, the gifted collegians in this study found their "oasis" in the university honors program. Their hunger for growth was "nourished" when they arrived on campus and connected with others whose views of becoming self-actualized were consistent with their own.

Highly Developed Sense of Humor

In an interview following his disappointing loss in the 2000 presidential election, former vice-president Al Gore said, "Humor is a healing balm and one of the highest expressions of the human spirit" (Stieg,

2006, p. 96). Educators and counselors concerned about the social and emotional development of gifted young people can appreciate Gore's wisdom, for they realize the role humor may play in the life of a highly intelligent or talented young person. Creativity researchers have consistently found that many gifted students have an advanced sense of humor (Davis, 1998; Gross, 2000; Renzulli et al., 2001; Torrance, 1969). Bleedorn (1982) maintained that the mental processes of humor and creativity are interwoven and inseparable. She proposed that a person's sense of humor was an important part of an individual's personal identity, and that gifted young people were "entitled to the satisfaction of laughing with others who share their style and level of humor" (Bleadorn, 1982, p. 33). Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1982) suggested that gifted children are able to develop a rather sophisticated sense of humor quite early and are able to recognize absurdities in everyday situations. They maintained that a sense of humor helps gifted students handle stress, especially if they are able to develop an ability to laugh at themselves in stressful situations and maintain a sense of perspective. VanTassel-Baska (1998) indicated that a sense of humor and the ability to play with ideas is evidence that gifted children can interpret their world in ways that may reduce threats and defuse painful experiences.

Researchers in gifted education and psychology have reported some important findings regarding giftedness and humor. In a groundbreaking study, Janus (1975) discovered that many professional comedians and comedy writers were highly intelligent, with scores on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) ranging from 115 to 160+ and a median score of 138. Fern (1991) successfully identified 13 child humorists and found that more than half of them scored in the above-average or superior range in their respective group intelligence tests and related achievement subtests. She noted that the children who scored in the upper ranges were producers of humor rather than being exceptional in performing humorously. Shade's (1991) study of verbal humor in gifted elementary and middle school students found that the gifted students performed significantly higher in spontaneous mirth and comprehension of humor than did the general population group in his study. Shade's findings supported the long-held assumption that gifted children have a healthy and sophisticated sense of humor. Ziv and Gadish (1990) also studied a group of gifted adolescent humorists and found that they were more extroverted, more creative, and lower in their needs for social approval than nonhumorous students. The association of this trait with high ability has remained strong throughout decades of research, and many checklists used for identifying giftedness in children include having an advanced or unusual sense of humor.

Teachers who are attuned to these characteristics make a significant difference for many gifted young people when they recognize and nurture these qualities within their students. In examining the lives of popular contemporary humorists, I have discovered that well-known comedians today were recognized for their talents early in their education and received support from their teachers to use their special talents in significant ways. Comedian Jay Leno described his early school experiences as a bright underachiever who was a problem in the classroom until several teachers channeled his comic energies in the right direction. In his autobiography, *Leading With My Chin*, Leno (Leno & Zehme, 1996) reflected on those teachers:

For some unimaginable reason, a handful of my teachers didn't give up on me as a hopeless moron. Mr. Robicheaud, my history teacher, never doubted that I had a brain that was actually functional. He always made me want to rise to any challenge. Same with Ms. Samara, my homeroom teacher. And my English teacher, Mrs. Hawkes, urged me to take her creative writing class. I figured, "What the hell, sounds easy!" But it wasn't—at first, anyway. One day, after class, she took me aside and said, "You know, I always hear you telling funny stories to your friends in class. You should write down some of those stories and we can make that your homework assignment." Hey, it sounded better than poetry! So I gave it a try and—amazingly—it turned out to be the first time I ever did homework where I wasn't waiting for Ricky Nelson to come on TV. I actually enjoyed it. I'd spend hours writing a story (usually about something stupid that happened at school), reading it to myself, crossing out things that weren't funny. I'd do four or five drafts, then hand it in. Suddenly, it was fun to go to class and stand up to read my funny story—and, best of all, to get some laughs. I was always grateful to Mrs. Hawkes for that. (p. 189)

Another teacher who made a huge impression on Jay Leno was Mr. Walsh, who was often assigned to the library to oversee detention duty. Leno confessed that he spent time there almost daily. This gentleman enjoyed the mischievous Leno and his jokes and Jay therefore spent plenty of time entertaining him. Leno recalled, "Tell him the simplest joke and he'd break up. Everything was *hilarious* to this man" (Leno & Zehme, 1996, pp. 55–56). As a result, Leno came to detention prepared with new material. Eventually, the teacher who was amused by the young comedian

suggested that Jay should consider going into show business. Today, Jay Leno remains grateful to Mr. Walsh.

Another comedian and actor well known for his humorous antics is Jim Carrey. His story is filled with adversity and helps us understand what Al Gore meant when he described humor as a "healing balm." The youngest child in his family, Jim Carrey took on the burden of providing comic relief to a troubled family. A native of Canada, he was born into a working-class family that lived a transient lifestyle driven by his father's struggle to stay employed. Carrey learned that he could make his sense of humor work for him in a number of ways. With his humor, he reached out for friendship. As a young child, Carrey was enrolled at the local Catholic school, where, he recalls,

I was quiet. I didn't have a friend in the world until I started hamming it up at the back of the class. That was an important lesson. I realized that I needed to do something silly and make people laugh, and they would want to talk to me. (Knelman, 2000, p. 9)

The young boy also relied on his comic diversions to save his parents from giving into despair. With both parents suffering from chronic depression, Carrey's comedy provided the antidote the family needed. His mother was often bedridden with illnesses real or imagined, and young Jim took on the challenge of amusing her and cheering her up. One of her favorite routines was his imitation of a praying mantis, which he performed in his underwear at her bedside (Knelman, 2000).

Along with entertaining his sickly mother, he loved to entertain himself in front of a mirror and discovered that he had a gift for mimicry. For new material, he turned to his favorite TV shows and movies. He practiced doing impressions of John Wayne and the Riddler, his favorite character from *Batman*. Once he learned to make his face look like someone famous, he discovered that he could imitate voices and could mimic singers. He perfected the art of grinding his pelvis in an Elvis Presley style. He also discovered that he could get his revenge on annoying teachers and relatives by imitating them for the amusement of others. His father encouraged his son's behavior but his mother constantly warned him that he was going to the devil. When she could not tolerate his antics, she sent him to his room, but he didn't mind because he then had a great time in front of his mirror (Knelman, 2000).

He got into the habit of spending long hours alone, either in his bedroom or in a tiny closet he had cleared out to become his sanctuary. It

was there he practiced performing impressions, wrote poetry, and enjoyed painting and drawing. For this young boy, creativity and humor became cathartic. In discussing his childhood ritual, he later described it as a trance-like concentration: "I was so lost in it, it was like being in the womb. It was like meditating; I didn't care about anything" (Knelman, 2000, p. 13). A significant event occurred in Carrey's life in third grade. He described a defining moment that strongly influenced his path in life:

It started out at the back of 3rd grade music class at Blessed Trinity. I was aping this record, and the teacher called me out. "If you're so funny young man, why don't you show all of us?" So I did. The next thing I knew I was starring in the Christmas pageant as Santa doing a song-and-dance routine I'd come up with. And in the middle of the routine I looked down at the principal, Sister Mary John, a very serious person I respected greatly, and she was literally on all fours on the gymnasium floor in her full habit, laughing. After it was over, she got up and said, "Your friend wants to be a performer when he grows up—what do you think of that?" The place went crazy. That's when I said to myself, "Whatever it takes to get this feeling again—and again, and again—I've gotta do." (Costello, 2005, p. 252)

Later in his school experience Carrey's family discovered that he was dyslexic. His teachers and parents realized that he learned to compensate by developing an exceptional memory. Fortunately, when he reached seventh grade at St. Francis School, he had a lucky break. His teacher was Lucy Dervaitis, a woman who viewed teaching as a calling that embraced the challenge of reaching children other teachers viewed as hopeless. Ms. Dervaitis became his soul mate. From day one, she found him to be a delightful little character, and he was so thrilled to win the approval of this important adult authority figure. She recalled, "I never found him a serious behavior problem. I don't even remember giving him detentions. I thought it was great that this funny little guy was showing such talent at a young age" (Knelman, 2000, p. 15).

It became clear that the young comedian craved attention. He loved amusing his classmates with impersonations of some of the teachers at St. Francis. Many teachers would have viewed this behavior as rebelliousness that had to be crushed, but Ms. Dervaitis took a different approach. She invited him to put an act together for the class. Carrey was thrilled, as he would be allowed to share his performance at the end of the school day as

long as he did his work and behaved well the rest of the time. This was the breakthrough he needed.

The acts for Ms. Dervaitis's class would typically include an impersonation of Elvis in his late Vegas period or John Wayne. For the class, the comic routine was a break from math worksheets and language arts. Whenever the other students became bored, they would petition Ms. Dervaitis to let Jim deliver his comic routine. His advanced humor was shared in other ways as well when he discovered that he had talent as a cartoonist. A caricature of Ms. Dervaitis losing control of the class and handing out detentions is an example. Today, the cartoon is a cherished item in the teacher's box of memories (Knelman, 2000).

Resilience

Several definitions and descriptions of resilience have been offered in the research literature. Resilience has been described as a protective mechanism that modifies an individual's response to a risk (Rutter, 1981, 1987) or as adjustment despite negative life events. Neihart (2002) defined it as "the ability to achieve emotional health and social competence in spite of a history of adversity or stress" (p. 114). In a comprehensive review of research literature, she reported that studies of resilient children found that they share traits with gifted children: intelligent curiosity (Anthony & Cohler, 1987), self-efficacy (McMillan & Reed, 1994), a positive explanatory style (Dai & Feldhusen, 1996), a healthy sense of humor (Hébert & Beardsley, 2001), and problem-solving ability (Masten & Garmezy, 1990).

Resilience was a significant finding uncovered in a major research study on gifted teenagers. I joined a team of researchers from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented who conducted a 3-year study of 35 ethnically diverse high-ability high school students who either achieved or underachieved in their urban setting (Reis, Hébert, Diaz, Maxfield, & Ratley, 1995). Many of the high-achieving participants in our study demonstrated resilience by overcoming problems associated with their families, their school, and their environment. Most of the achievers involved in the study came from homes affected by poverty; family turmoil caused by issues such as alcohol, drugs, and divorce; and other family dysfunction problems. As one participant indicated, "My family story is filled with eyebrow raisers" (Reis, Hébert, et al., 1995, p. 147). Other achievers had relatively calm and peaceful homes. All of the students in the study, however, lived in a city plagued by violence, drugs, poverty, and crime. Jorge described the difficulties experienced by teenagers in his urban high school:

There are people who come to this school every day so they can get a warm meal and a safe place to stay. Some people come from a house where it is twenty degrees inside. They didn't sleep well that night because of the yelling next door. These people come to school every day and they still manage to shine. They work their hardest. So what if they don't wear the latest designer jeans. (Hébert, 1993, p. 274)

Matteo, another participant, eloquently reflected on the resilience of so many of the achieving students and the pain many of them feel despite their ability to achieve in the urban environment:

You can never be prepared for it. When someone kicks you down, it hurts just as bad. I was talking to a friend yesterday who is a diabetic. He said, "You can't tell me that you can learn to deal with pain. I am a diabetic. I have a fear of needles. I take a shot three times a day. That needle hurts just as bad the first time as it does today. It still hurts the same. You just learn how the pain feels and you get accustomed to it. That's why some people lose. They may be stronger people but it still hurts every time they lose. Any time you get kicked down, it still hurts." (Reis, Hébert, et al., 1995, p. 166)

The gifted individuals profiled in the study survived in the city and excelled in their high school. They ignored drug dealers, they turned their backs on gangs, they avoided the crime in their neighborhoods, and they went on to become valedictorians, class presidents, star athletes, and scholars. Some went to Ivy League schools, others attended the most selective colleges in the country, and they all wanted to make a contribution to society. The courage and resilience displayed by these young people seemed remarkable, and yet they simply accepted their circumstances and appreciated the opportunities given to them. One participant, Nicki, came from a family whose problems probably would have overwhelmed some young people. Her family had persistent financial problems, her father battled alcoholism, her parents had divorced, and her mother was bitter. Yet, rather than giving up, she examined her life through her writing and won a \$10,000 scholarship in a statewide essay contest sponsored by a large insurance company. Her essay, titled "The Stranger," detailed her troubled relationship with her alcoholic father and her eventual understanding of his love for her. An excerpt follows:

We entered the house like one might enter an unknown country, with silence and apprehension. The stranger isn't there. Upstairs, my mother set foot in my room and stood gaping at my bed. A look of ire and vexation was plastered on her face. That's when I noticed it too. Carved on the wooden head post of my bed were the words, "I love you." The dark surface of the wood was scratched so it looked as if the words were a different color. I kept staring at this message from the stranger. While my mother was distressed, I was glad. Some light spewed into my dark head. One empty question was answered. (Reis, Hébert, et al., 1995, p. 113)

Nicki's career plans were to become an urban educator. She applied to several prestigious New England colleges and was accepted by all of them. She received substantial college scholarships and decided to attend Boston College. As a high school senior, she looked forward to college and starting a new chapter of her life.

Strategies to Nurture the Social and Emotional Characteristics in Gifted Students

Having reviewed several more characteristics, traits, and behaviors that serve as assets to gifted young people in their social and emotional development, I describe below a number of strategies and methods educators and counselors can use to nurture and support these qualities in their students.

Use Guided Viewing of Film

Just as rich literature and enlightening biographies have the potential to nurture the affective development of young people, high-quality movies also can be helpful in guiding gifted students. Using movies to facilitate discussions about social and emotional issues has been referred to as guided viewing of film (Hébert & Hammond, 2006; Hébert & Sergent, 2005; Hébert & Speirs Neumeister, 2001, 2002). Using movies to guide gifted students toward self-understanding has numerous benefits. Movies have the potential to enrich and influence the lives of gifted young people in constructive ways. A good movie can become a meaningful metaphor for the essence of a young person's dilemma (Berg-Cross, Jennings, & Baruch, 1990). When an appropriate movie is combined with discussion

and supportive follow-up activities, gifted students may view their situation through a more positive lens, enabling them to appreciate multiple aspects of difficult situations. With movies playing an influential role in contemporary society and functioning as an important part of the culture of children and teenagers, gifted students may be receptive to the notion of discussing sensitive topics through popular movies (Hébert & Hammond, 2006; Hébert & Sergent, 2005).

Teachers and counselors may implement guided viewing of film to address a variety of issues. Supporting gifted students by helping them understand the social and emotional traits and behaviors highlighted in this chapter and the previous chapter is one approach. In addition, films present many developmental affective issues that teachers or counselors may want to address, such as friendship, identity development, peer pressure, and parental and family expectations. Sharing these movies with students can reinforce prosocial messages that are part of the regular curriculum, while simultaneously enabling an educator or counselor to meet curricular or guidance objectives.

Teachers and counselors should also keep in mind the notion of facilitating guided viewing sessions with small groups of students struggling with a specific issue such as perfectionism, giftedness combined with a learning disability, or underachievement. In discussions, they may find more comfort in a setting where there are only students present who have shared similar experiences. There may also be times when it is appropriate to conduct guided viewing sessions with single-sex groups for films that sensitively address gender-specific issues. To support teachers and counselors considering guided viewing, a sample lesson is included below and an annotated bibliography of films for use with gifted students is provided in Appendix D.

An example of guided viewing. The following discussion presents an example of how a teacher or counselor might use *Ellen Foster* (Erman, 2002), a Hallmark movie, in facilitating guided viewing sessions with gifted elementary students. The movie is based on the best-selling novel by Kaye Gibbons and is the story of a gifted, resilient young girl who is left alone following the death of her mother. She draws inner strength from loving memories of her mother when she is forced to move from relative to relative in search of a family to replace her deceased mother and abusive father. Her wealthy and bitter grandmother eventually takes her in; however, Ellen's life in her grandmother's household becomes even more emotionally desolate than before.

Despite the obstacles she faces, Ellen becomes determined to find a

new mother. She experiences warm, nurturing families around her and yearns to be part of one. This intelligent young girl takes her situation into her own hands and designs a plan to provide her happiness. In the end, Ellen's strength and determination enable her to free herself of her dysfunctional relatives and the emotionally traumatic events of her childhood. In the process, she discovers that the meaning of family is more than simply being related. It is being loved.

Educators will find that *Ellen Foster* is an appropriate movie to use with gifted students, because it features an emotionally sensitive and intelligent young girl with whom many gifted children can identify. Ellen applies her giftedness to solve her problem and overcome tremendous personal adversity in her life. Her harsh environment may be similar to the home situations of many gifted students from difficult backgrounds. Children from all cultural backgrounds can appreciate Ellen's story and take away lessons that can be applied to their own lives. The film highlights a number of developmental struggles of gifted children and provides educators with material appropriate for classroom discussions that can enlighten all involved. Key issues that emerge in *Ellen Foster* include developing resilience, finding emotional support from people in one's life, applying intelligence to solve life's challenges, and having a strong belief in self.

In my work with guided viewing, I have found it helpful to break up a movie and incorporate discussions along the way. A natural break can often be found approximately every 30 minutes. Questions can be infused according to the content of each section. Spacing the film into segments allows students to reflect on elements and thoughts that may be lost by the time the movie ends. Segmenting the film and debriefing segments helps students with shorter attention spans to remain focused, and such an approach allows the discussion to be broken up into a multiple-day plan, rather than requiring a 2-3-hour block of time.

With the key issues for discussion determined and the natural breaks in the movie identified, a menu of discussion questions to pose in facilitating the conversation with children can be prepared. Care should be taken in writing the questions, making sure to include introductory questions that appear nonthreatening to children, followed by more sensitive questions that focus on the problematic situations faced by both the movie characters and the children involved in the discussion. A sensitively crafted menu is needed for a conversation to be cathartic for gifted students. Several sample discussion questions for use with *Ellen Foster* are provided below:

- What challenges does Ellen face in her life? What do you think helps her cope with the difficulties she faces?

- ☛ Ellen enjoys her friendship with Starletta Douglas. How do Starletta and her parents support Ellen? Why is their friendship important to Ellen? Who are your important friends? How do they support you?
- ☛ During difficult times, Ellen enjoyed cutting out pictures of people from catalogues and creating paper doll families. Why do you think she did this? How might this have helped her? When you are having a difficult time, how do you entertain yourself? How does this help you?
- ☛ Although Ellen's grandmother does not treat her kindly, Ellen continues to treat her grandmother with respect and kindness. What does this say about Ellen? Why do you think she treated her grandmother this way? How might that have helped Ellen?
- ☛ Ellen is a smart young girl. How do we know this? How does Ellen use her intelligence to solve her problems? How do you use your talents to address the challenges in your life?
- ☛ Ellen is a strong girl. Some people would refer to her strength as "resilience." What did you see in the movie that indicated that Ellen was resilient? What lessons about resilience have you learned from Ellen? How might you apply these to your life?

Teachers and counselors should also consider using direct quotations from the movie as meaningful prompts for discussion. Several examples from *Ellen Foster*, accompanied by discussion questions, are provided below.

In an early scene in the movie, Ellen's mother, knowing that she will not live much longer, wraps her arms around Ellen and shares her feelings with her daughter in an attempt to prepare Ellen for life after she is gone. She reminds her daughter of her special qualities that will enable her to survive life's harshness:

You are my favorite person in the whole world. You're smart and you're strong and you can get along, no matter what happens. I absolutely know that. You'll remember I told you that, won't you?

Discussion questions that teachers or counselors might want to pose include:

- ☛ Why do you think Ellen's mother delivered this message to her?
- ☛ Do you think her mother's message helped Ellen? If so, how?
- ☛ Has there been a time in your life when someone you love gave you similar advice? Who gave you the advice? What was the advice?

In a poignant scene in which Ellen visits her mother's grave on the anniversary of her death, she talks with her mother about her supportive art teacher who has taken her into her home. She also spends some time chatting about how she is coping with being forced to live with her bitter grandmother. She attempts to assure her mother that she will survive:

I think the two of you would have gotten along real good. Maybe you're looking down on me and feeling thoroughly okay about me being her friend, but she ain't nothing like you. She can never be a momma like you, but she'd be my first or second choice, if you know what I mean. But don't you worry about me being with your momma. I'm gonna manage it one way or another. Like you used to say, "Nothing is forever, though it don't seem like it sometimes." I'm doing okay in school. Don't worry, okay.

Discussion questions could follow this prompt:

- ☛ Why do you think Ellen thought her mother would have enjoyed knowing her art teacher? Do you agree?
- ☛ What does Ellen think her mother might be worrying about? How does she try to reassure her mother? Why do you think she does this?
- ☛ Have you ever had an important relationship with an adult outside of your family? How did this person help you? How did your family feel about this person? How did that make you feel?
- ☛ Ellen reminds her mother of having said, "Nothing is forever, though it don't seem like it sometimes." Why does she reflect back on her mother saying this? How do you think this helps Ellen? Do you think this message from Ellen's mother is one you could apply to your life? How?

Later in the movie, Ellen has discovered a woman in her community who operates a foster home. She begins to plan a way to become part of the foster family, and thinking that the woman's name is Foster, she begins signing her school papers with the new name "Ellen Foster." When the school psychologist questions her about this she explains:

It may not be the name God or my momma gave me, but that's my name now. My old family kinda' wore out the other one and I figured I can start practicing my new name, of my new family, for when they are my family. Foster, it's a clean, fresh name.

To facilitate a discussion, a teacher or counselor might ask these questions:

- ☛ Why do you think Ellen changed her name? How do you think she was feeling?
- ☛ Has there ever been a time in your life when you also wanted a "clean, fresh" change? Did you do anything about that? If so, what?

The movie concludes with the following:

Every day I try to feel a little bit better about all that went on when I was little. It'll eventually get straightened out in my head. I came a long way to get here. That will always amaze me.

Appropriate questions for concluding the discussion are the following:

- ☛ What does Ellen mean when she says, "I came a long way to get here. That will always amaze me." Do you think Ellen is amazing? Why?
- ☛ Where do you think Ellen found her strength to cope with the difficulties she faced?
- ☛ What lessons have you learned from Ellen that you might apply to your life?

In my work with guided viewing of film, I have found that movies such as *Ellen Foster* elicit emotional responses. Therefore, it is important that facilitators design follow-up activities to allow students to process their feelings. These activities afford time for introspection and discussion of issues explored in the film. Moreover, during follow-up activities, students have time to offer each other emotional support and empathy. The following is a suggested menu of follow-up activities to be used with *Ellen Foster*:

- ☛ Pretend that you are Ellen Foster. Write a poem about overcoming difficult obstacles in life.
- ☛ The movie *Ellen Foster* has become a Broadway musical. Write the lyrics to a song to be performed in this new theatrical production.
- ☛ Pretend that Ellen Foster is being interviewed on a talk show. Design and role-play the interview.
- ☛ Write a short sequel to *Ellen Foster*. How will the next chapter of her life read?
- ☛ Design and illustrate a road map of Ellen Foster's journey.
- ☛ Create a collage of photographs that represent important lessons learned through *Ellen Foster*.
- ☛ Select a scene from *Ellen Foster* and adapt it to become a children's picture book.

- ☛ Ellen Foster writes a letter to an advice columnist asking for help. How does her letter read? What advice does the columnist provide Ellen? Write both letters.
- ☛ Reflect on the following prompt in your journal: What lesson stood out to you in the movie *Ellen Foster*? How might this apply to your own life?
- ☛ Ellen Foster has become an inspirational speaker to young people throughout the country. Write a speech that Ellen will present to your elementary school.

Nurture Resilience Through Extracurricular Activities Involving Social Action

In my dissertation research in an urban high school, I met Jorge, who spent many hours after school tutoring elementary school students struggling to learn English. Following his high school graduation, and with the support of his parents, Jorge pursued a degree in bilingual education to continue to help young children in his community. His dedication to them evolved from his ability to understand and appreciate their struggles. He explained, "I remember how I felt when I first came to this country from the islands, and I found myself feeling so alone in my new school. I was overwhelmed." He elaborated, "I decided to work with bilingual students because I knew I could relate to the problems they were facing." Today Jorge teaches young children; however, he collaborates with a high school teacher in his community in facilitating an afterschool club in which high school students tutor younger bilingual children. The high school students have reported that they benefit from this program more than they give.

Orlando was a friend of Jorge's and was another research participant who helped me to see the value of gifted teenagers becoming involved in community service. Linda Silverman (1993a) maintained that service is a need of gifted young people and I came to understand this as I watched students like Jorge, Orlando, and their friends. I saw that they experienced a deep sense of fulfillment once they discovered their paths of service. Orlando's schedule of classes may have ended at 3 p.m.; however, that was just the beginning of an action-packed afternoon. The remainder of his day was dedicated to serving others through a variety of student organizations. A deeply empathic young man, Orlando directed his talents and energy to philanthropy projects throughout his urban community. Through youth groups he was associated with, he visited convalescent homes and organized students to volunteer at drug rehabilitation centers and soup kitchens.

He also did volunteer work for the Salvation Army and worked as a tutor. He dedicated his weekends and summer breaks to Habitat for Humanity, helping to build modest homes for economically disadvantaged families.

Orlando's close friend Tania, an African American female, served as president of a student leadership group known as Common Ground. She described the group as an organization of teenagers from urban and suburban high schools who came together to discuss stereotypes and combat racism. She explained, "We're all about finding a common ground. This group teaches people about the ways they are all alike." Tania pointed out that through this group she felt she could make a difference for others because she had experienced racism as an urban teenager.

Students like Jorge, Orlando, and Tania remind educators of the value of extracurricular activities involving community service. As a teacher or counselor works with gifted students and observes social and emotional characteristics such as moral maturity, sensitivity, and empathy, a rather natural approach to supporting those qualities is to encourage these young people to engage in extracurricular activities associated with causes about which they are passionate. Such groups serve as outlets for their moral maturity, sensitivity, and empathy. For gifted students, involvement in organizations that focus on service and social outreach addresses their strong need for consistency between their values and their actions. Through these efforts, they can apply their idealism and their strong ability to conceptualize and address societal, social, and environmental problems. Researchers exploring the impact of social-action projects and service-learning on moral development have reported positive results (Hart, Matsuba, & Atkins, 2008). Involvement in community service contributes to moral development by generating an interest in addressing authentic community problems and becoming effective voices for change (Hart, Atkins, & Donnelly, 2006).

In addition, it is important to understand that involvement in extracurricular activities producing tangible products or performances, such as building homes with Habitat for Humanity or the creation of a youth group such as Common Ground, builds a sense of accomplishment and success. Pro-social activities provide students evidence that something can be gained by persevering. Products also demonstrate that choices matter, effort does make a difference, and some adults value what young people do with their talents (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). Urban educators and researchers have consistently found that involvement in extracurricular programs in urban areas offers structure and predictability that might be

missing in other areas of life (Halpern, 1992; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Hébert, 2000a).

When students become involved in meaningful extracurricular activities, they develop relationships with adults who influence how they see themselves. Heath and McLaughlin (1993) noted that the most important contribution urban youth groups provide is an adult who sees them as young adults, cares for them as individuals, and serves as mentor, critic, or advocate. Resilience researchers also found that relationships with adults outside the family provided psychosocial support and served as a protective factor in stressful environments (Garmezy, 1985; Hébert & Reis, 1999; Jones, Bibbins, & Henderson, 1993; Rhodes, 1994; Torrance, Goff, & Satterfield, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1982).

Facilitate Moral Discussions

Educators concerned with the development of moral maturity in their students have a long tradition of teaching morals, values, and character. Discussions of social and moral dilemmas, real-life and hypothetical, are effective ways to help young people take the perspectives of others and contribute to their moral maturity (Hilderbrandt & Zan, 2008). Max Malikow's (2007) *Profiles in Character* is a book for teachers addressing the affective domain through serious class discussions centered on moral development. He recognizes the power of stories for promoting thoughtful discussions of the complex everyday dilemmas that real people face. Malikow presented a collection of 26 short stories designed to teach 17 universally admired virtues: adaptability, altruism, authenticity, compassion, courage, empathy, endurance, forgiveness, happiness, honesty, humility, integrity, loyalty, perseverance, responsibility, thoughtfulness, and wisdom. Each story can be read in 5 minutes and is accompanied by thought-provoking discussion questions and follow-up activities. Malikow believed that "Students need to talk and be heard" (p. xi) and by sharing and learning how others have arrived at certain perspectives in life, discussions centered on such serious topics can change how teenagers view important decisions they must make if they are to live lives of such integrity. Such teaching should serve as the foundation of any educational program for gifted teenagers.

Educators may also want to explore the work of Robert Coles to develop strategies and curriculum for supporting the development of moral maturity in gifted children. Robert Coles is a research psychiatrist for Harvard University and the author of *The Moral Intelligence of Children* (1997),

through which he shared how he used a powerful short story by Leo Tolstoy to teach the Golden Rule—the essence of empathy, so critical to any discussion of morality and of being a good person. He maintained that *The Old Grandfather and the Grandson* can be taught to anyone at any level, from elementary school to postgraduate school. Below is Tolstoy's story:

The grandfather had become very old. His legs wouldn't go, his eyes didn't see, his ears didn't hear, he had no teeth. And when he ate, the food dripped from his mouth.

The son and daughter-in-law stopped setting a place for him at the table and gave him supper in back of the stove. Once they brought dinner down to him in a cup. The old man wanted to move the cup and dropped it and broke it. The daughter-in-law began to grumble at the old man for spoiling everything in the house and breaking cups and said that she would now give him dinner in a dishpan. The old man only sighed and said nothing.

Once the husband and wife were staying at home and watching their small son playing on the floor with some wooden planks: he was building something. The father asked, "What is that you are doing, Misha?" And Misha said, "Dear Father, I am making a dishpan. So that when you and Mother become old, you may be fed from this dishpan."

The husband and wife looked at one another and began to weep. They became ashamed of offending the old man, and from then on seated him at the table and waited on him. (Coles, 1997, pp. 10–11)

Coles (1997) asked that we consider sharing such stories and that we ask young people for their interpretations. He encouraged educators to follow his example, sharing with children times in his life when he was so preoccupied with his own responsibilities and interests that he failed to respond to the people closest to him. When adults offer a forthright sharing of their experiences, students are more able to offer reflections of their own. Coles suggested that students write an essay about the Tolstoy story, about its personal meaning to them, and how they might imagine using it with their own children one day.

For Further Thought and Discussion

- Consider Christopher Pendley's letter to his kindergarten teacher. What evidence do you see in his story of the social and emotional characteristics highlighted in this chapter?
- What role does moral education have in gifted programs?
- How might the university students from the Hébert and McBee (2007) study inspire other gifted young people?
- How do the experiences of Jay Leno and Jim Carrey speak to gifted students today?
- How might educators and counselors support the development of resilience within gifted young people?

Resources to Expand Your Thinking and Extend Your Support to Gifted Students

- Canfield, J., & Switzer, J. (2005). *The success principles: How to get from where you are to where you want to be*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Coles, R. (1997). *The moral intelligence of children*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Lewis, B. A. (1992). *Kids with courage: True stories about young people making a difference*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
- Purkey, W. W. (2006). *Teaching class clowns: And what they can teach us*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.