

Affective Curriculum in Gifted Programs

Jean Peterson, Ph.D.
Purdue University
jeanp@purdue.edu

Current Realities

- **Reactive** attention
 - eating disorders
 - obsessive-compulsive disorder
 - extreme perfectionism
 - schizophrenia
 - ADHD
 - oppositional defiant disorder
 - depression
 - suicide
 - school dropout
 - substance abuse
 - underachievement
 - tragedy
- **Proactive** attention
 - to social and emotional concerns, "normal development"
 - almost nonexistent in programs for gifted students

Lack of Attention to Affective in Programs

- Understaffed programs
- Time constraints
- Training—emphasis on unresponsive school environments, not on social and emotional concerns
- No knowledge of strategies
- Gifted students not seen in terms of "normal" development, not seen as needing help re: development, assumed to be able to apply abilities to meet personal challenges, not seen as having a "social/emotional self," only talents/performance

An affective curriculum

- Discussion (small or large group)
- Processing the process
- Listening/Responding skills
- Being "in the moment"
- Non-academic; non-competitive
- Embedded in core curriculum

Strategies for Addressing Affective Concerns

- Creative use of non-class times
- Meeting over lunch + borrowing 15 minutes from next class
- Advisor/advisee, homeroom, community time
- Scheduling gifted kids together daily for homeroom
- Co-facilitating classroom sessions, small groups with the school counselor
- Sharing pertinent information about giftedness with the school counselor
- Asking school counselor for catalogs (group curriculum)
- Structured (not "therapy") discussion, using available curricula
- Writing assignments with an affective dimension
- Books, videos—discussion, journal responses
- Journaling (re: literature)
- Intentional content related to social/emotional development in language arts
- Giving gifted kids a chance to talk about "growing up"—non-academic life

Discussion Groups

- Co-facilitate with school counselor—learn the techniques.
- (Counselor can facilitate groups alone.)
- Group by ability level AND age.
- (Benefit: Counselor becomes aware of gifted kids' needs.)
- Gifted kids can develop skills in articulating concerns—will benefit future relationship
- Gifted kids don't trust non-gifted with concerns.
- Groups offer chance to remove façade of invulnerability, ask "dumb" questions, find support during difficult times, affirm strengths, provide information, sort out stressors, find common ground with others.
- Groups can accommodate nonmainstream kids, underachievers, superstars, risk-takers, risk-avoiders—a wide range of gifted kids.

A Study of Negative Life Events during K-12 Years (at graduation): Examples of Most Stressful

- **Overcommitment**

"I'm in too much stuff. While they're all things I like to do, the demands on my time are incredible. I feel as if I can't do one thing well because I have to move on to the next thing. I can't practice my violin as much as I want because I have to write 3 articles for newspaper, but I can't do it after school because I have to work and I don't have time on the weekends because I have a tennis match, a 3-hour youth symphony rehearsal, and somewhere in there—my homework. And where is my social life?"

- **Injury/Illness/Accident:** football injuries; asthma, Type 1 diabetes diagnosis; dog diagnosed with bone cancer; crashing my car
- **Rejection:** not getting into Yale, All-State Orchestra, advanced soccer team, concert choir; being rejected by a girl

Most Stressful Events, Situations

- **Transitions:** changed churches; first day of middle school; starting a new school; moving across town; going to high school; "Challenge Center kids (MS) went to different schools"
- **Peers:** Bullying—"multiple boys ridiculing me" (6th gr.); "one boy fighting/mocking me" (K-3); "trying to find a group of friends"; "being rejected by a girl I really loved"; "shuffling between friends, trying to find where I belong"; "friendship problems"; "had few/no friends"; "being anti-social due to lack of knowledge in such areas."
- **Family:** father's alcoholism; parents' fighting; divorce; "being sent to drug rehab unnecessarily"; "parents grounding me and taking things away due to poor grades"; aunt's refusal to communicate with family"
- **School:** (besides references to ACT, SAT, AP pressures "because of the great importance put on these tests by most people); "learning to write cursive"; large projects; competition with peers; "my group and I needed to finish a movie and right toward the end of editing, we lost all our footage."

Summer Affective Curriculum PK-4

Content/Activity	Purpose
Emotional Temperature	Expressive language; connection
Rhythm Game	Ability to handle new experiences
"Smart"; 13 Intelligences	Consider many ways . . . (Identity)
Passions; being "too much"	Normalize perceptions; Identity
Paper hat (newspapers): strengths	Affirm strengths; Identity devel.
Mood Range	Expressive language; Emotions
Parts of Me (50 listed on a sheet)	Embrace social/emotional strengths
Worries; Worry-meter	Expressive language; normalize
Changes (activity sheet)	Developmental changes: normal
Magazine cover (drawing of future)	Connect strengths with future
Paper airplanes (put worries on)	Control, Not Control; "agency"
Filling the Bucket (compliments)	Social—practice giving/receiving

Summer Curriculum, PK-K, cont.

Card game (questions, directions)	Expressive language; connections
Perfectionism (activity sheet)	Self-reflection; Identity; connections
Self-talk (create a mantra for self)	Cognitive control
Relaxation activity	Develop a cognitive coping strategy
Career (activity sheet, résumé)	Connect education to career
Stress (activity sheet)	Sort out stress; differentiate long . . .
Somatic sense of feelings	Self-awareness; recognize feelings
Giving Myself Permission	Develop personal agency
Jenga game (with # on block)	Expressive language
Storybook (stress, worries, fears)	Normalize feelings
My Story (activity sheet)	Expressive language; connection
Endings / Exit Interview	Expressive language; support

Summer Residential, Grades 5-6

Warm-Up: Emotional Temperature Who lives at your house?	
Best Advice	High Ability/Intelligence: what does it mean? (in-group differences)
Influencers	Being "Interesting"
Uniquenesses and Similarities—among school peers, in this group;	Needs
Personal Strengths & Limitations	Asking for what we need
Changes—What is Different This Year for you?	Worries: Worry-meter
Upcoming Changes?	Paper Planes (have paper handy)
How do you "do change"?	Resumé
Bullying (what do they see in hall, classroom, restrooms, busline, neighborhood, siblings?)	Finding Satisfaction
How Others See Us	Filling the Bucket
Being "known" (important?)	
Bubbles—outside? (Letting Stress Go)	Having Fun: What does that mean? Individual preferences?
<small> Boldface: From TALK WITH TEENS ABOUT WHAT MATTERS TO THEM Other: From THE ESSENTIAL TO TALKING WITH GIFTED TEENS (e-book) </small>	

Summer Residential, Grades 7-8

13 Intelligences (Activity)	How are you similar/different (anyone else)? How are you different from them? Seen as a robot? (focus on performance) Three Selves When I Was at my Best
Emotional Temperature; Mood Range	How are you different now from 2 years ago? Who is most interested in you personally? Who is most concerned about your doing well? Courage
Stress (Activity Sheet) Fear, Worry, and Anger	Family Roles (activity) Future Day Fantasy
Encouragers & Discouragers Who "sends negative messages"? positive?	Questions about College (3 x 5 cards?) What <i>personal</i> skills developing NOW will help?
Who Can We Lean On?	
Uniquenesses/Similarities	Coping with Stress; Models of coping; How?
Expectations, Wishes, and Dream Images (include Career, but not the activity sheet)	Future Lifestyle and Gender Expectations
What is Maturity? Satisfaction in Life	Family Values
Change and Loss (activity) Endings	An Informal Assessment

Summer Residential, High School

Do the Stereotypes Fit? What Defines Us? Test scores? Messages? Three adjectives for you (by others, self) Sensitivity (Activity), Intensity, Perfectionism (Activity), Control; Making Mistakes Permission (Activity)—in smaller groups	13 Intelligences (Activity) Emotional Temperature Mood Range; Mood Models Stress (Activity Sheet)—squiggle lines Worry (Worry-ometer)
Rating My Self-Esteem (Activity) What influences? What messages are sent? The Dark Side of Competition; Compliments: Getting/Receiving Them	Influencers Going to Extremes: "Too" . . . Small Talk & Social Graces Socially: Where Comfortable/Uncomfortable? Where feel control? No control?
Change, Loss and Transition—past and present (Activity: Experiencing Loss) My Story (Activity)	Needs Asking for What we Need (based on activity sheet) Life Satisfaction: What is it? How get it?
Asking "Dumb" Questions About College; What You Already Know About College; Choosing a Career (Activity: Career Needs)	Change/Endings: Anticipating It Filling the Bucket Separate, but Connected (Leaving Home)

Career Development

- Career development needs to be addressed **much earlier** for gifted kids than others their age.
- Intense **anxiety** about choosing a career, and what it will involve, can appear at a young age.
- Career guidance can help to **guard against premature foreclosure** on a career path.
- Career **"fit"** should be emphasized (**personality, needs, values, interests—** in addition to ability)

Group Projects (Social!)

- Academic competitions
- Research projects
- Creative projects

Incorporate "play"
into these inherently social endeavors.

A Secondary-Level Program: Affective Dimensions in All of Them

- Future Problem Solving
- Noon-hour philosophy class
- Classical music appreciation
- Spanish, French, German teaching in elementary schools
- Mime
- Dance
- Collaboration with art teacher re: competitions
- Breakfast Club for poetry
- After-school Creative Writing
- National History Day
- Sign language
- Sign-language teaching
- After-school lectures
- Career-shadowing (1 day each)
- Independent Study
- College courses
- AP classes
- Small-group independent study/research in classes heterogeneous re: ability
- Test-outs for computing
- Test-outs for English II
- Test-out for Government
- Engineering Field Trips
- Private music instruction
- Nobel Conference in MN
- Chinese

Speakers

- After-school lecturers—from universities, medical centers, mental health agencies—with extra credit from classroom teachers
- Single-event speakers about the **"burdens of capability,"** developmental issues—counselors, social workers, psychologists
- **Mental-health professionals** interacting with small discussion groups or classroom groups.

Speakers, Lecturers: Beyond the Curriculum ("horizontal")

- Constitutional law
- Career artists
- Religions of the world
- American Indian culture, music, humor
- The language of the corporate world
- **"Living in the Age of Anxiety"** (series of 13)
e.g., depression, anxiety, teen pregnancy, the future of immunology, eating disorders, health and wellness, substance use, meditation, stress, biofeedback re: stress

Career Development

- **Beyond interests and abilities**—personal characteristics, personal values, personal fit in various career environments!
- **School counselor** can provide information.
- **Career programs** online
- **Emphasis**—NOT on “deciding,” but on becoming aware of personal needs, as related to potential career contexts.
- **Career-shadowing** (1 full day) experiences (Every math star shouldn't be an engineer!)
- **Field trips** to see engineering, professionals applying science (or communications, or art) majors
- **Panels of adults** with at least two career changes

Affective Component in Core Curriculum, grade 1 (“Overcoming”)

A Chair for My Mother by Vera Williams

- Materials: Mood Meter (to recall their mood during the event)
- Standards: Achievement identity; interact with diverse peers; model respect for diversity; product-based assessments re: progress; social needs
- Objectives: Listen, give opinions, interact positively, recall “a hard time”
- Rationale based on: Maslow; theories about stress, life crisis (Ch. 1, 2 in Social-Emotional Curriculum; Peterson, EGTWGT: “My Story”; Erikson)
- Engage: What do you think about the story?
What happened to the girl, her mom, her grandma?
How did they make it through such a tough time?
(Children tell their “story.”)
- Reflection: How did you feel when you told your story?
How did you feel when you listened to someone else?
How do you feel about how you handled that tie?
What will you try to remember the next time something bad happens?

Affective Lesson in Core Curriculum: Grades 1, 2, 3

DEALING WITH ANGER: *The Day Leo Said I HATE YOU!* (Harris)

- **Rationale:** addresses feelings through the arts; asynchronous development, lack of opportunity to discuss emotions or social issues; support for creative gifted kids; idiosyncratic manifestations of giftedness
- **Warm-up:** ask if ever angry, ever said something mean when angry
- **Discussion:** What do you understand about Leo being angry? How did he deal with anger in a way that “didn't work” for him? How do you think he felt when he said, “I hate you”? How do you think his mom felt?
- **Activities:**
Anger worksheet (situations they get angry about; what they do)
Discussion group (3-5 children): sharing, listening, respecting feelings
Whole class: negative and positive ways to deal with anger; effects of keeping anger in. Who to talk to. Ways to calm down.
Anyone who didn't share to write a note to the teacher about it.
- **Project Options:** (re: expressing anger; story/poem/song; write/perform a skit; draw/paint a picture; create a comic strip; make a poster.

Affective Component in Core Curriculum: Grade 4

WIDE AWAKE (movie)

- Standards: social interaction; self-awareness; self-efficacy; group participation; coping skills
- Rationale:
Focus on loss, forgiveness, friendships—universal concerns
Hebert and Hammond (2006) *Guided viewing of film with gifted students, GCT, 29*
(www.thesource4ym.com); Peterson, EGTWGT: discussion questions related to relationships
- Objectives: self-understanding, including about what is valued in relationships, how loss is experienced, how to cope with feelings, relating to feelings of the main character
- Engage: journaling (not to be turned in) about qualities of friends, favorite family member; someone they “don't like”; share the qualities; don't name anyone; discuss a personal “influencer”; times when it's hard to ask for help; adults they would/would not ask for help; ways to ask for help

Affective Component in Core Curriculum: Grade 7 (Lang. Arts)

STRESS (2 days)

- **Objectives:**
Students will be able to articulate awareness of stress levels.
Students will be able to define stress based on their own perspective.
Students will be able to recognize sources of stress in their lives.
Students will be prepared to help classmates devise coping mechanisms.
- **Methods:**
Whole-group and small-group discussion; individual activity; writing
- **Resources:**
Don't Sweat the Small Stuff for Teens: Carlson.
Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens – Peterson (“Sensitivity” activity sheet)
- **Activities:**
Warm-up: “What causes stress in your life?”
Discuss: how stress affects daily life, performance, mood, attitudes
Read: Carlson chapter; Ask: topic already on the board?
Create: personal list; identify top 3; write paragraph—coping strategies
- **Evaluation:** None? (personal thoughts and feelings; compliment to “norm”)

Stress, continued (gr 7)

- **Warm-up:** Children ask, in small groups: “What thoughts from the first day?”
- **Read** another chapter: Discuss potential “overwhelming” and brainstorm strategies for coping
- **Ask:** “How does sensitivity affect our awareness? How might it increase stress level?”
- **Write:** discoveries from discussion, a personal definition of stress, strategies for coping
- **Evaluation:** Whether written product addressed the assignment

Affective Components in Core Curriculum: Grades 11-12

Persuasive Writing: Eating Disorders

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate principles of persuasive writing.
- Students will be able to produce coherent and focused text, a well-defined perspective, and a tightly reasoned argument.
- Students will be able to articulate concerns related to eating disorders, as well as be knowledgeable about resources.

Materials and Methods:

- Discussion groups; online resources; persuasive essay organizer; *Essential Guide for Talking with Gifted Teens* (session—eating disorders)

Activities:

- Research the topic (or be given articles)—4 sources (with proper citation form); discuss, using EGTWGT questions, in groups of 4; use organizer to write arguments with supporting evidence; write a letter to self/someone (as an assignment); read essay aloud to group; groups choose best to be presented to class.

Affective Curriculum: Contributing to the School Climate

- . . . which values **learning, many kinds of intelligence, diversity, harmony, and learning about the self**
- **Fliers for lectures** can contribute to this atmosphere.
- **Teachers become aware** of and sensitive to the affective concerns of gifted kids.
- **Draws attention to “burdens of capability”**
- **Combats negative perceptions** of gifted education
- **Emphasizes NEEDS**
- **Can be somewhat open** to entire school, without less quality
- **Decreases arrogance,** since 4.0 does not = stellar affective expression

Affective Curriculum

- Gaining **skills** in articulating concerns and discovering **commonalities** with peers might be critical to sound **mental health** for some struggling with serious issues.
- **ALL** gifted students can gain from attention to affective concerns. Even future relationships and quality of life across the lifespan may be enhanced.

Being Open to the Subjective Experience of Development

- If you develop program components that focus on social and emotional development, be prepared to **listen** and respond.
- If you develop these components, reflect on your own feelings about exploring the social and emotional world, on **your biases** about achievement and underachievement, and on your comfort level with the subjective world of kids.
- **Exploring the social and emotional realms is much less “controllable”** than content-driven academic activities.

Discussion Groups— the “Content” is from the Kids.

A Challenge for Counselors?

- Prevention-oriented group work
- Development-oriented group work
- Group work *without* a common issue
- Group work focused on “growing up”
- Group work as preparation for employment, marriage/partnership, parenting, friendship, self-care
- Group experiences as socialization
- Group work recognizing the social dimensions of “problems in living”

Developmental

- Focused on “normal development”
- Filling gaps related to social/emotional development
- Helping with developmental “stuckness”
- Providing a chance for students to connect with others ABOUT development
- Providing even best friends a chance to talk ABOUT development in new ways
- Providing psychoeducational information

Goals & Objectives

To develop listening skills	To develop skills in expression	To discover shared concerns	To enhance self-esteem
To gain insights	To break down stereotypes	To explore identity issues	To reduce stigma of “counseling”
To increase self-awareness	To develop social skills	To develop coping skills	To develop trust
To learn to give & receive compliments	To learn to give & receive feedback	To learn how to deal with ANGER	To learn how to deal with STRESS

Goals & Objectives, continued

To learn how to deal with FEAR	To learn how to deal with ANXIETY	To learn how to deal with WORRY	To learn how to deal with perfectionism
To understand AUTHORITY	To learn how to lean for HELP	To understand TRANSITIONS	To develop skills in SELF-ADVOCACY
To learn to appreciate PEERS	To learn to appreciate TEACHERS	To learn to appreciate TEACHERS	To learn how to deal with “THE SYSTEM”
To share developmental concerns	To learn to articulate feelings	To discover commonalities	To develop compassion for others

Fears of Teacher-(Co-)Facilitators

- Not the usual “curriculum”—with content
- More ambiguity
- Less control
- Not “problem-solving”
- Different sense of accomplishment
- Discomfort with affective concerns
- Fear of what might be heard, asked for
- Fear of not knowing what to say, do, advise
- Fear of “bombshells,” tears, behavior

Guidelines

- Consistently nonjudgmental listening is crucial.
- Every student has a need to be heard, and groups help to meet that need.
- Avoid major changes in group composition once the group begins.
- A regular and intense, even if relatively short-duration, group series is preferable to an infrequently meeting, longer series.
- Group size should be relatively small. How small???
- Confidentiality must be firmly established at the outset, even though group members should understand that it cannot be guaranteed.

Advantage of Some Structure

- Everyone is required (unless they “pass”) to say something in each session (via “go-rounds”).
- Dramatic, crisis-prone group members are less likely to dominate.
- Inappropriate directions can be “reined in,” by guiding the group back to the “focus.”
- Sometimes difficult topics can be explored comfortably when there is the “distraction” of some brief paper-and-pencil activity at the outset.

Important to Keep in Mind

- A focus (not just “hanging out”)
- Developmental topics
- A “one-down” facilitator
- Open-ended questions
- Emotional “bombshells”
- “I’m going to tell you something I’ve never told anyone before.”
- Mandatory reporting
- The possibility of depression, suicidal ideation, trauma, eating disorders, OCD, anxiety, substance abuse, PTSD

Becoming a Group

- Stroking/Norming when desirable behaviors happen
- Scaling (1-10): “Where do you think your group was today—if the following is a ‘good group’?”
 - Respect for everyone—no put-downs
 - Eye contact and respect for whoever is speaking
 - Listening when someone else is talking
 - Avoiding talking about someone not present
 - Responding to each other, not just to the leader

Assumptions

- All students need to be taken seriously, heard.
- Shy students also want to be recognized.
- All students need support, no matter how strong and successful they might seem.
- All students feel stressed at times.
- All students are sensitive to family tension.
- All students feel angry at times.

More Assumptions

- All students feel socially inept and uncomfortable at times.
- All students worry about the future at times.
- All students, no matter how smooth and self-confident they may appear, need practice talking honestly about social and emotional concerns.
- All students wear a façade at times.