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Resources & ideas for parents & educators of gifted children

# Talent

Center for  
Talent  
DEVELOPMENT®

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

"My child seems very sensitive and has strong reactions to things – she cannot stand the scratchy labels in her clothes. Is she too emotional? Should I worry?" These (and similar) questions perplex the parents of gifted children every day.



In "Amplified & Misunderstood" (right), the authors stress taking a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of gifted children including simultaneously nurturing multiple aspects of their identity. Such an approach will not only develop the cognitive abilities of gifted children but also their social and emotional characteristics so that they become psychologically healthy, lifelong learners.

Parents need to listen to and observe their children so as to comprehend their interests, capabilities and needs and then work to open doors of opportunity. One student whose family has taken this comprehensive approach to gifted (and lifelong) learning with her is Marissa Campbell, profiled in "Ms. CTD." With the very strong support of her parents, Campbell applied to the Project EXCITE program in grade 3. She was accepted into this Center for Talent Development (CTD) program and has participated in a variety of CTD programs ever since. She says that the skills she has learned in her CTD courses, like how to work as an effective team member on a group project, have helped her be successful during the academic school year.

It is important to remember that attending to the development of a positive self-concept or identity, self-esteem or self-confidence can be as important – if not more important – than attending to a child's intellectual abilities.

*Paula Aleszinski-Kubicki*

## Amplified & Misunderstood:

### Positive Gifted Identity Development & the Role of Parents

By Paula Wilkes, PhD,  
& Mark Szymanski, PhD

Positive gifted identity development is a dynamic process that is both nourished and diminished by interactions with family, peers, school and culture. All of those interactions impact self-perception and ultimately the child's identity. By understanding a gifted child's innate personality traits, and by teaching them to use good habits of mind, parents can nurture a positive identity development process that can lead to the child becoming an emotionally healthy lifelong learner.

**Center for Talent Development:**  
*Why have you chosen to focus on sensitivity, perfectionism, introversion/extroversion and curiosity, the four amplified ways of being?*

We focus on those amplified and innate ways of being because they are often misunderstood. From a young age, many gifted children hear negative comments such as: "You're too sensitive!" "Why are you so shy?" "Can't you sit still for more

than a minute?" "Don't be such a perfectionist!" "Stop asking so many questions!" Parents who do not understand their gifted child's amplified ways of being may unknowingly respond in ways that have a negative impact on self-perception.

Helping gifted kids understand, modulate and make effective use of their amplified ways of being will enhance their academic growth and social development and will become the foundation of a positive gifted identity. A positive gifted identity will increase the chances that existential depression and other emotional crises often faced by gifted children can be dealt with in a healthy manner.

**CTD: Can you explain what you mean by sensitivity?**

Many gifted children are highly sensitive and intense. That sensitivity may include a strong sense of justice as well as empathy for people and animals. Kazimierz Dabrowski outlined five specific areas in which a gifted child could exhibit "overexcitability" (what we are referring to as "amplified ways of being") as a natural, organic trait of his or her giftedness.

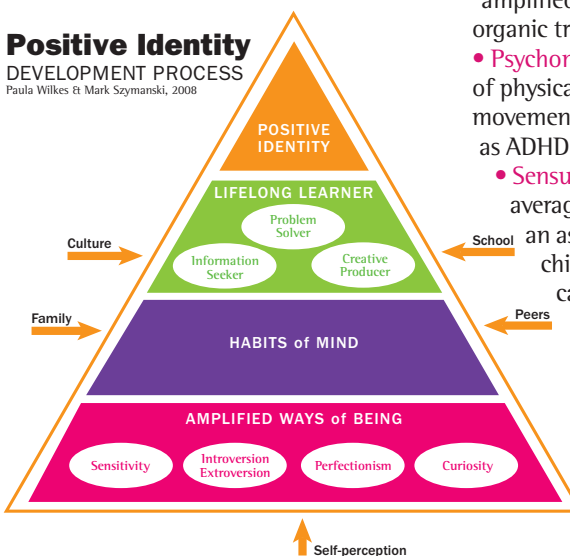
- **Psychomotor** – This includes a surplus of physical energy or rapid speech and movement. It can often be misinterpreted as ADHD.

- **Sensual** – What is "normal" to the average person can be seen or felt as an assault to the nervous system of a child with amplified senses. This can include amplified reactions to sights, sounds, smells and touch (such as scratchy labels). On the other hand, children with amplified senses may be quite moved by sensual beauty.

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### Positive Identity DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Paula Wilkes & Mark Szymanski, 2008



### WHO SAID THIS ?

“All the world is a laboratory to the inquiring mind.”

Answer at <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/resources/newslettersolutions>

## Amplified & Misunderstood: *continued from page 1*

- **Emotional** – Some gifted children may be seen as “drama queens and kings” because of their amplified reactions to experiences that are either highly enjoyable or unpleasant. While often seen as overreactions, these responses are often within the “normal” range for emotionally sensitive children.

- **Imaginational** – Vivid imaginations taken to an extreme can cause these gifted kids to seem like perpetual day-dreamers. At times they may seem like they have a hard time distinguishing between reality and fantasy.

- **Intellectual** – Getting wound up about new ideas and experiences is a common amplification experienced by gifted children. They love to try new puzzles and challenges in their areas of expertise.

### CTD: How might amplified introversion or extroversion be misunderstood by parents and teachers?

Gifted children frequently display amplified introversion or extroversion. Extroverts are energized when they are engaged with others. They process their ideas through interaction; as a result, they are often seen as too talkative and unable to wait their turn during a discussion. Introverts, on the other hand, are energized when they are alone. They process their ideas internally; as a result, they don't have a great need to share their ideas with others. Gifted introverts may go unnoticed by teachers who see them as shy or slow thinking and withdrawn.

### CTD: What impact does perfectionism have on gifted development?

There are actually two different types of perfectionism – intrinsic and extrinsic. **Intrinsic perfectionism** is a positive trait when it challenges children to extend their understanding and skills. It is a nega-

tive trait when it interferes with the learning process, leads to debilitating procrastination or results in social and emotional difficulties.

**Extrinsic perfectionism** is not an organic trait. It is inappropriately created and nourished by parents and teachers. When young gifted children are praised for their perfect papers, their large vocabularies and their ability to read chapter books at a young age, they believe they are “worthy” when they are capable of doing extraordinary things. This can cause them to be embarrassed, angry and/or fearful when they are faced with a challenge that doesn't allow them to demonstrate perfection. Extrinsic perfectionism can be debilitating because it doesn't allow gifted kids to take risks.

### CTD: If curiosity killed the cat, what does it do for gifted kids?

Curiosity helps gifted kids discover their passions and stumble upon new discoveries. This amplified way of being can manifest itself in a variety of ways including asking lots of questions and needing to touch and explore things of interest. While curiosity may have killed the cat, it gives life to gifted kids. This amplified desire to seek information should be nurtured to support and encourage behaviors that lead to lifelong learning.

### CTD: What first steps can parents take to support the positive identity development of their gifted children?

Let your children know you love and understand them. Help them learn to modulate and make effective use of their amplified ways of being. Be an advocate! Share this information with other people. Gifted children deserve to be amplified and understood. ●



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Mark Szymanski, PhD, is an associate professor in the College of Education at Pacific University in Oregon. His research focuses on learning and technology in the classroom, and supporting the learning, social and psychological needs of gifted students. Szymanski taught high school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Szymanski can be contacted at [markszy@gmail.com](mailto:markszy@gmail.com)

## Positive Gifted Identity Development Resources

- Habits of Mind web site ([www.habits-of-mind.net/](http://www.habits-of-mind.net/))
- MindWare Games ([www.MindWare.com](http://www.MindWare.com)) (Flow Experiences)
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