

ABSTRACT SOCIALS MITHS IN GIFTEDNESS

From *Mentor Psychopedagogic Center* we check commons and differentials elements about initial consultation motives and expectatives created when parents come.

The highest percentage of initial consultation motives are parents who wants to know if their children are gifted and obtain an adequate psicopedagogic response, but with the diagnosis we note that only a 51 %, approximately, really are.

We will apprise social expectatives about «giftedness» mith and how it still differ from children reality. We will comment the responses and counseling we offer to correct this problem.

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SOCIAL MYTHS IN GIFTEDNESS

In the ten years that we took working in the *Gabinete Psicopedagógico Mentor*, we have had occasion to take care of great amount of demands related to the subject of the giftedness and the high abilities. Of them we have been able to observe certain common or coincident elements on the expectations generated from a partial or slanted knowledge of this phenomenon.

In this work we mainly question the social influence of archetypes or myths that condition the arrival to the center of parents worried about certain conducts differentials in their children, when compare them with other children. We are talking about conducts that are considered own of somebody with high abilities, like, for example, a greater rapidity in the assimilation of learnings, or an eagerness of knowledge beyond the limits that the school offers.

One of the most habitual questions that we find is: «My son has a learning or conduct problem. He will be gifted?». Why is related to something so negative the

fact to be gifted, when any logical approach to the subject says to us that the high abilities are in itself a positive resource and not as much a difficulty of the subject?

Our experience has taken to us to determine that a strong influence of social type exists (mass media, professionals few versed in the subject, etc.) and that one is latent behind the reason for counseling that takes to the parents to look for answers, but what answers?

We have stated that half of the families who look for aid because they think that his son is gifted, in fact he is not; and the other half that it is, only in a small percentage a direct or indirect relation between high abilities and some type of difficulty exists, specially related to the development of its potential in the school environment, as it could be the rate and quality of the learning, difficulties of communication with his companions and/or their professors, etc. We think that this situation requires of a deeper analysis.

For this reason, next we will classify the type of influences that we have been able to observe and the answers or expectations that these parents look for and that already we can advance that all of them almost have as a background a social fear to accept the differences, as well as ignorance on the world of the high abilities.

TYPE OF INFLUENCES

- *Influences of mass media.* Generally, in journalistic articles, discussions, monographics, etc., in television and radio, the exposition that is offered to the public includes a vision quite sensationalist on the subject. Except for honorable exceptions, due to an eagerness to impact, the classic image of the gifted one that appears is very slanted or is far away from reality. In general lines, this image usually is the one of a boy who spends the day bottled in his studies (typical «bookworm»), with few friends, who is a «know-all», that has an intellectual quotient superior to 130 and, mainly, that due to the boredom that the classes of repetitive type suppose to him, he is lead to a loss of interest of everything what has something to do with the school and for that reason arise problems of scholastic failure. Further on we will analyze these data.
- *Influences of some professionals dedicated to the giftedness.* Also we have observed that some people who dedicate themselves to this subject, reinforce the idea previously exposed of mass media (at least in Spain). If not, from where do they get this slanted information? Colleagues who continue pleading for the notion of the gifted one like a being with problems and, therefore, need to be diagnosed as rapidly as possible to avoid future misfortunes and/or the idea that giftedness is equal to have a I.Q. superior to 130, when almost everybody knows that if we remained only with this score (and it depends on the test), as much, it can give an approach to an academic talent, but does not consider neither the creativity nor the fluidity in the interconnectivity

of the different aptitudes, which we considered basic for the diagnostic. This takes us to question the following: if confusion exists at the time of delimiting what is giftedness or what is academic talent, with the consequences that carries in the type of intervention, how it is not going to reaffirm the stereotype socially or, in other words, this confusion in the general population?

- *Influences of the professionals of the education.* Due to our own experience with them, for some teachers «it doesn't exist gifted children, but young sobrestimulated», or they have an opposite idea to the exposed one in previous points: «If he is gifted, he does not need aid or educative support». The first premise takes implicit that the giftedness is a purely environmental phenomenon. The second one, it estimates to adjudge to the boy a level of emotional maturity superior to which he really has, and, in addition, it is limiting a basic right of the student: to be developed based on its characteristics and educative necessities. Both ideas we considered that are erroneous and we think that what exists behind these ideas, the background, is a negation to a series of fantasies that occur in the teacher: mainly, the one of which «This boy is going to make me work a lot», when, in fact, this fantasy is not resistable with reality, and the one of which «If it has a high intellectual or cognitive level, also it has a high level of development of the personality», when, as Terrassier exposes in its «Asincrony Theory» (1985), what happens is exactly the opposite. Often, teachers have also the idea that if the student shows high abilities, but does not apply them, or he applies them with an inferior yield to which they would hope of him, for them it is not showing an internal conflict of the boy, but a negative attitude: «It is not that he cannot, since he is very intelligent; it is that he does not want».
- *Influences of politicians.* In general lines, the spanish politicians who take care of the educative subject accept the idea of the existence of the gifted ones, as well as the fact that they possibly need scholastic aids. Therefore, at first they do have worried to make laws that regulates the educative developement of these children, but at the time of putting them in practice, there is a lack of follow up and control in order to apply them correctly. With this we do not want to elevate this subject to the level of «national priority», but at least we vindicate an equal educative treatment to the one of those students who are disabled, because in the same way that they have special educative necessities, also some students with high abilities needs them.

TYPES OF ANSWERS THAT PADRES LOOK FOR

- «I wish he was gifted.»
- «I wish he was not gifted.»

When they come to our center, parents usually arrive with some or several from these preconceived ideas that we have just mentioned. At first, nevertheless, we

must say that we worked with a *slanted population*, because the presumed gifted ones we visit, usually have some kind of problem, or emotional, relational or educative, because if not, parents usually don't bring us the boy (although some exceptions exist, those of those parents who come by preventive interest).

Two facts occur in the boy: on one hand, he has a problem, and, on the other hand, he shows signs of a high intellectual development (that will have to be confirmed). The question that worries us is that they tie or they related in a causal way, that is to say, settles down a relation of cause-effect between these two facts, without having a minimum previous analysis (mainly, thanks to a correct information by the mass media, teachers, etc.). In this entailment, we can observe a necessity by the parents to find relatively simple answers to a question that, in fact, is much more complicated, and here we did not talk about specifically the high abilities, but the complexity of the general development of the boy.

Let us see with more detail these parents' expectations:

- «I wish he was gifted». Usually, we find this latent reason for counseling in those families or parents who look for an explanation of the behavior of the child who serves them for everything. For example, «Is he demotivated?» Sure, because he is gifted. «Does he fail?» Sure, because he is gifted. «Does he has bad behavior, or has no friends?» Sure, that is because he is gifted. And thus we could go on until finding a unic explanation for phenomenons that are indicating us many things. The function that exerts this type of idea is to appease the anxiety that can produce certain behaviors of the boy which they do not understand with a superficial analysis.
- «I wish he was not gifted». We have observed that this previous fantasy appears in those parents who, influenced by the social myths we mentioned before, think that if his son was gifted, in the future he would still have bigger problems than the ones he suffers at the present time, that is to say, it is magnified and feared the fact that giftedness is equal to problem. Peculiarly, many of the children of these families who do not wish that their son was gifted, usually are. Probably, these parents have a prediagnostic intuition more based on the reality of what they observe in the relationship with the child, in spite of these preconceived ideas.

FALSENESS OF SOCIAL MYTHS

As we have already aimed, the first of the social myths that it is clear that is false is the one that considers the gifted child as a «bookworm» that acquires high scores in everything, because if in something is characterized a boy with these characteristics is indeed in not needing to spend hours in front of a text to understand it and to remember it. This also can come from a confusion with the academic talent, that it is a form of complex talent in which the elevated resources of verbal, logical and of management of the memory type are combined. Being an interaction of resources, the great functions that are generated relates to the management of the

memory from organized verbal informations in a logical way. Therefore, they allow the storage and the recovery of any type of information that can be expressed verbally (or complemented in these terms) and that has a logical organization, which gives us aptitudes specially indicated for the formal learnings (or academic learnings) (Castelló and Martínez, 1998). But the fact is that gifted children have the potential to stand out in any area and in addition to these mental resources of the academic talents, they are also equipped with social, musical, motor or emotional intelligence, among others, as well as of remarkable creative aspects, and, what we think that is the element par excellence differential, the capacity to create interconnected networks to each other, which generates an approach to the knowledge different from the other types of high abilities.

In what concerns to the assumption of scholastic failure in that the gifted children will fall necessarily if an adapted treatment in the school does not occur them, we must analyze also this, because we have been able to verify that this fact has a greater tendency to occur more in academic talents than in gifted, since it would be consequence of a higher rate of learning that would cause that the student get diminished his motivation by this one in the measurement in which ordinary curriculum explain subjects that the academic talent already knows, or teacher dedicates more time than the one this type of students need, falling then, little by little, but more and more, in the apathy or boredom towards everything that means scholastic learning, and that unconcern could take them towards a scholastic failure. On the other hand, most of the simple talents (verbal, mathematical, space, artistic, etc.) can also show this boredom, but because of a different reason: the lack of motivation towards the moved away curriculum of their area of talent, but the cases of giftedness usually do not become bored (beyond which any student becomes bored), since the work of connection and organization already occupies and motivates enough to them.

With regards to the relationship difficulties, mainly with the other children of their same age, it is a characteristic more related to aspects of personality and social abilities. For that reason, a great variability exists depending on each person, although it can be accentuated mainly in intellectual profiles that tend towards the little flexibility, specially when the creativity is not one of the strong points of that person. For that reason, the logical, mathematical and academic talents usually are the ones who have the highest risk to have socialization difficulties, and still more if they turn out to be introverts, or competitive or discriminatories attitudes have been fomented to them (Castelló and Martínez, 1998). On the other hand, an added problem exists when the level of language and vocabulary is very superior to the one of their companions, since instead of improving, it makes worse or it makes difficult the communication with them (Martínez, doctoral thesis).

With respect to that always the gifted ones acquires very good notes in everything, it turns out to be that we will only be able to wait for a scholastic high performance in the academic talents or in the precocious students in the first years of its cognitive development. Nevertheless, the gifted ones will not necessarily get good marks, or will have the same yield in all the subjects, because although they have potential to emphasize in any area, usually occur a greater motivation towards some field of specific knowledge. Anyway, as we have already explain, they don't usually present scholastic problems, neither of low yield nor of demotivation.

TO CORRECT PARENTS' BASELESS EXPECTATIONS BASED ON THESE MYTHS

The desire to have a gifted son as the answer to all the bad things that distresses him includes the fear to that he is not it and vice versa. When parents come to our center, our task is to lead back these expectations towards a more realistic vision on the boy, sometimes even before the diagnosis has been formed:

- The reason for consulting is usually a difficulty or a conflict at some moment of the development of the boy
- It is observed a remarkable development in one or more cognitives areas.
- We try to undo the equation with which the family comes between the previous points while diagnostic elements are not sufficiently solid to confirm, to reject or to modify this hypothesis. Our interest is centered in changing the previous labelling that has made the family or the school by a psicodiagnostic.
- Psicodiagnostic. The diagnostic tools offer the possibility of understanding, more than to label. We consider that to conclude a diagnosis sentencing that «his son is gifted» or «his son has an I.Q. superior to 130» socially reinforces that slanted idea. To label generally closes the door to the knowledge and, therefore, it conditions and limits the type of intervention that has to be done (it is when we find directions standard), whereas to try to understand, habitually, it opens them.

Sometimes, according to what we have been able to observe, the confusion, coming from the gathered information, with what certain people go to a center specialized in high abilities, is so that a justification for serious mental illness with important thought failures can be looked for in the giftedness. If at popular and journalistic level the idea of the «crazy genius» is fomented, for example, it is not strange that we end up finding disorders of psychotic order when the person came looking for a possible giftedness as an explanation for his problems.

Finally, we would like to clarify again, in case we have not made it clear already, that we cannot speak of a direct correlation between types of personality, mental pathology and high intellectual abilities. Therefore, who are announcing these ideas (we repeated, unfounded) are creating unnecessary anguish or anxieties in the parents, and we only have to remember that if somebody believe in these interrelations (we mean a professional) it is possibly because he has been in contact with a biased sample of population, as the one we have in the *Gabinete Psicopedagógico Mentor*, but without considering this fact, and, therefore, thinking that all are equal or that it will happen the same to all of them.

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