

Responding to the Roller-Coaster Ride of Social/Emotional Growth

A Presentation By
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Over, Under, Inside Out: That's a great way to describe the roller-coaster emotions of gifted learners! The question is: *How can we effectively address this roller-coaster experience?* Dabrowski's *Overexcitabilities* provide an excellent framework in which to view gifted individuals and their emotions. But little has been done to help teachers bring this rich and important concept into the classroom to help gifted learners better understand who they are and their unique characteristics. By modifying the strategy of bibliotherapy and by using the growing sophistication of picture books, we can help gifted students understand and relate to their characteristics and guide them into a better understanding and celebration of self. By connecting Dabrowski, picture books, and gifted learners' love for reading, we have a **fast track** on which we can guide our gifted learners to a celebration of self and to positive social-emotional growth..

Goals for this session:

1. Provide a "working list" of Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities as related to this presentation;
2. Review the importance of meeting social emotional needs of the gifted learner;
3. Review the elements of picture books and their relationship to the Overexcitabilities;
4. Describe a process of relating picture books to the overexcitabilities by adapting the strategy of bibliotherapy;
5. Share books related to each of the Overexcitabilities

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Before, we begin with the Overexcitabilities, it is important to note that Kazimierz Dabrowski's (1902-1980) *Theory of Positive Disintegration* or as it is sometimes referred to as the *Theory of Emotional Development*, is much more than just the concept of the Overexcitabilities. Two basic concepts form the foundation for this theory. The first is **Developmental Potential**, which includes three factors: Personal Characteristics (talent, specific abilities and high general intelligences), the Concept of Overexcitabilities, and the *Third Factor*: Capacity for

self-directed emotional growth, self-determination, and autonomy. This third factor is not necessarily seen in all individuals but is readily seen in most gifted individuals.

The second concept is **Multilevelness or Levels of Development**, which may be the most important aspect of Dabrowski's work and deals with the process of intergrowth. Five levels have been defined. I recommend the Daniels and Piechowski (2009) book for a good introduction to Dabrowski.

Goal One (1): A Working Dabrowski List:

For brevity and clarity, I have chosen to use the list of Dabrowski's Over-excitabilities (OEs) created by Stephanie Tolan to guide us in our discussion. This list suggests the "criteria" for connecting picture books with the OEs.

Dabrowski's Over-excitabilities: A Layman's Explanation

by Stephanie S. Tolan

Dabrowski talked about OEs - over-excitabilities ("superstimulatabilities"), and how the gifted are extremely sensitive in a variety of areas. It's a stimulus-response difference from the norms. It means that in these five areas a person reacts more strongly than normal for a longer period than normal to a stimulus that may be very small. It involves not just psychological factors but central nervous system sensitivity.

The five areas are:

Psychomotor

This is often thought to mean that the person needs lots of movement and athletic activity, but can also refer to the issue of having trouble smoothing out the mind's activities for sleeping. Lots of physical energy and movement, fast talking, lots of gestures, sometimes nervous tics.

Sensual

Here's the "cut the label out of the shirt" demand, the child who limps as if with a broken leg when a sock seam is twisted. Also a love for sensory things -- textures, smells, tastes etc. or a powerful reaction to negative sensory input (bad smells, loud sounds, etc.) These kids tend to be sensitive to bright lights (squinting in all the family photographs, etc.), harsh sounds. A baby who cries when the wind blows in his face, for instance; a toddler who cries at the feel of grass on bare legs and feet. Another important aspect of this is aesthetic awareness -- the child who is awed to breathlessness at the sight of a beautiful sunset or cries hearing Mozart, etc.

Imaginational

These are the dreamers, poets, "space cadets" who are strong visual thinkers, use lots of metaphorical speech. They day dream, remember their dreams at night and often react strongly to them, believe in magic (take a long time to "grow out of" Santa, the tooth fairy, elves and fairies, etc.).

Intellectual

Here's the usual definition of "giftedness." Kids with a strong "logical imperative," who love brain teasers and puzzles, enjoy following a line of complex reasoning, figuring things out. A love of things academic, new information, cognitive games, etc.

Emotional

This includes being "happier when happy, sadder when sad, angrier when angry," etc. Intensity of emotion. But also a very broad range of emotions. Also a need for deep connections with other people or animals. Unable to find close and deep friends (Damon and Pythias variety) they invent imaginary friends, make do with pets or stuffed animals, etc. Empathy and compassion. A child who needs a committed relationship will think herself "betrayed" by a child who plays with one child today and another tomorrow and refers to both as "friends." This is also the OE that makes the kids susceptible to depression.

Dabrowski believed emotional OE to be central -- the energy center from which the whole constellation of OE's is generated.
[Emphasis added]

Highly gifted people tend to have all five of these, but different people lead with different OE's. The engineer types lead with Intellectual, the poets with Emotional and Imaginational, etc. But variations in the levels of the individual OE's explain a great deal about the temperamental differences we see!

These five describe the unusual intensity of the gifted as well as the many ways in which they look and behave "oddly" when compared to norms.

[Written for *Hoagies' Gifted Education Page*, February, 1999]

Goal Two (2): Meeting social emotional needs of the gifted learner.

- ◆ Why is sharing the OEs important?
 - *It is unfortunate that the stronger these overexcitabilities are, the less peers and teachers welcome them, unless they, too, are gifted. Children exhibiting strong overexcitabilities are often made to feel embarrassed and guilty for being 'different.' Criticized and teased for what they cannot help, they begin to believe something is wrong with them.*

Michael Piechowski
 - We should recall Judy Galbraith's *Eight Great Grips of Gifted Kids*:
 - Number One (1): *No one explains what being gifted is all about – it's kept a big secret.*

When we are willing to explore the social and emotional needs of the gifted from their viewpoint, we are most effective in leading them to thrive and survive the challenges that accompany high potential.

Judy Galbraith
 - To guide gifted individuals in understanding one's self;
 - To provide one explanation of why they are "different";
 - To aid them in understanding others;
 - To provide a tool for their own growth.
- ◆ Do gifted students have qualitatively different needs from their peers?

- The argument about whether gifted individuals have qualitatively different needs from their peers is beyond the scope of this presentation. However, I am persuaded by the arguments that **they do indeed** have qualitatively different needs especially in the area of emotional and social development.

*Giftedness has an emotional as well as a cognitive substructure: cognitive complexity gives rise to emotional depth. Thus gifted children not only **think** differently from their peers, they also **feel** differently.*

Linda Silverman

- Perhaps, a better way to express our concern and to avoid this issue is “What are the cultural and emotional *issues* of gifted adolescents?”
- With this said: Silverman builds an impressive case that the gifted do have qualitatively different needs:
 - A basic characteristic of the gifted is their intensity and an expanded field of their subjective experience.
 - It is not a matter of degree but of a **different quality** [emphasis added] of experiencing life:
 - Vivid
 - Absorbing
 - Penetrating
 - Encompassing
 - Complex
 - Commanding
 - In short: a way of being quiveringly alive.

(Piechowski as quoted by Silverman, p. 3)

- Annemarie Roeper defines giftedness by focusing on the emotional side: *Giftedness is a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perception into intellectual and emotional experiences.*

(Roeper as quoted by Silverman, p.3)

This then requires our response to deal with a unique set of emotional needs.

- ◆ *Since exceptional children of all types are significantly different from the norm; therefore they fail to achieve without modifications.* (Silverman, p. 7)
 - Since many, if not most, of our gifted students’ educational needs are often not met and neglected, the result can be an emotional storm that affects their:
 - Morale
 - Motivation
 - Social relationships

- Aspirations
- Sense of self worth
- Emotional development

(Based on Silverman, p. 10)

- ◆ For guidance in meeting these needs, I suggest we look at:
 - Dabrowski who has developed the only psychological theory specific to the development of giftedness and creativity;
 - The strategy of bibliotherapy; and
 - Picture books.

Goal Three (3): The Literary Genre of Picture Books:

- ◆ In general, the use of illustrations in picture books fall into three basic categories:
 - To provide decoration to break up the text – in “chapter books” often found at the beginning and at the end of chapters;
 - To amplify the text – provide visual clues for the text;
 - To provide information important to plot, theme, etc in a non-textual way: the most sophisticated use of illustrations. The illustration is integral in “telling the story.”

Why do picture books matter? Of course part of the reason is because they're books, but the heart of the matter is right there in the name; it's the pictures. Before they read words, children are reading pictures. In picture books, the illustrations work in concert with the text in a way that is unique among art forms.

David Wiesner

- ◆ What do we look for in evaluating illustrations in picture books?
 - *The Visual Elements of Illustrations and Picture Books*
 - Line
 - Color
 - Space
 - Shape
 - Form
 - Texture
 - Composition
 - *Artistic Styles*
 - Realistic art
 - Impressionistic art
 - Expressionistic art
 - Abstract art
 - Surrealistic art
 - Primitive and Folk art
 - Cartoons
 - *Artistic Media*
 - Collage

- Print making
 - Photography
 - Painting
 - *In addition:* The tools used in each media will also affect its look, e.g. size and texture of the brushes, use of sponges, etc.
 - *I am sure that you recognize that these “elements” are elements of the graphic arts.*
- ◆ An Observation:
- These “techniques” of illustration speak directly to both *Sensual OE* and *Imaginational OE* and perhaps when taken as a whole to *Emotional OE* as well
 - In the *Sensual OE*, we have the response to color; to line; to shape; to texture and to composition – in short a response to graphic art.
 - In the *Imaginational OE*, our students often respond with visual images in both their “heads” and in an artistic media.
 - The *Emotional OE* is brought into play with the overall response to the illustrations as individuals interpret the interaction of the elements within the illustrations. For example: *There Are Those* by Nathan Levy and Janet Pica – the opening “Read-aloud.”

Goal Four (4): Adapting the Strategy of Bibliotherapy.

- ◆ **Bibliotherapy**, a counseling technique adapted for classroom use, has become a popular strategy in dealing with gifted students. Since many of our gifted students are avid readers, bibliotherapy is a most effective way to respond to their affective needs. Adderholdt-Elliot and Eller have very effectively described this strategy:

Bibliotherapy is a tool for helping people deal with their problems through reading novels or stories about characters that possess similar problems. Because reading appeals to the imagination, bibliotherapy provides an interaction between the readers and the story of novel, which can be less threatening than direct confrontation.

(Adderholdt-Elliot and Eller, 1989)

- ◆ **Bibliotherapy Defined:** Bibliotherapy is guidance in solving personal problems through selected readings. It may be either:
- Therapeutic: A problem exists.
 - Preventative: A shared concern or issue prompts an interest and is addressed before a problem exists.
- ◆ **Why Use Bibliotherapy?**

1. Uses student strength area
2. Gifted students are often avid readers
3. Developmentally an appropriate tool for counseling teens
4. “Defuses” a problem by showing that it is a shared and/or a common problem
5. Can be used to explain problems
6. Can be used to solve problems.

◆ **Steps in Bibliotherapy**

1. **Identification:** The individual recognizes the novel’s conflict as a real situation.
2. **Catharsis:** The individual recognizes that s/he has the same problem.
3. **Insight:** The individual identifies possible solutions
4. **Application:** The individual applies the insights to his/her own life.

◆ **Using Bibliotherapy**

1. Establish a climate of trust, respect, and caring.
2. Plan structured thematic units using literature that addresses the affective needs of gifted students.
3. Plan structured activities that provide for student responses to their feelings, such as the use of journals and the “Temperature Taking Activity.”*
4. Know your students and know children’s and young adult literature.
5. Recognize that there are some problems that you as a teacher or even a counselor are not equipped to handle and be ready to refer to a physician, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

***Temperature Taking Activity:**

Ask “How do you feel (select one or more) physically, intellectually, and/or emotionally?”

Have students respond in their journals using this writing prompt formula:

My temperature is...

That is my (physical, intellectual or emotional) temperature because...

Goal Five (5): Connecting the Books and the Overexcitabilities: A Book List Created for this Presentation:

Imaginational: Dreamers and Visual Thinkers

Where the Wild Things Are (1963) by Maurice Sendak.** (HarperCollins Publishers)
1964 Caldecott Medal Winner.

Imagine A Day (2005) by Sarah L. Thomson; illustrated by Rob Gonsalves. (Atheneum Books)

Sector 7 (1999) by David Wiesner*** (Clarion Books)

June 29, 1999 (1992) by David Wiesner*** (Houghton Mifflin Company)

Tuesday (1991) by David Wiesner*** (Clarion Books) 1992 **Caldecott Medal Winner**

Intellectual: *Love of things academic*

Mosque (2003) by David Macaulay.*** (Houghton Mifflin Company)

Song of the Water Boatman & Other Pond Poems (2005) by Joyce Sidman; illustrated by Beckie Prang (Houghton Mifflin Company) **2005 Caldecott Honor Book.**

You Can't Take a Balloon Into the Metropolitan Museum (1998) by Jacqueline Priess Weitzmann and Robin Preiss Glasser (Dial Books for Young Readers) Note: There are three books in this series: *The National Gallery* (2000) and *The Museum of Fine Arts* (2002).

Emotional: *Connections*

Bink & Gollie: Two for One (2012) by Kate DiCamillo and Alison McGhee; illustrated by Tony Fucile (Candlewick Press)

Outside Over There by Maurice Sendak (1981) by Maurice Sendak** (HarperCollins Publisher)

Dreams: A Tale of Wonder, Wisdom & Wishes (2004) by Susan V. Bosak (TCP Press)

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale (2004) by Mo Willems (Hyperion Books)
2005 Caldecott Honor Book.

Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identify (2007) by Mo Willems (Hyperion Books)
In terms of imaginary friends don't forget Calvin & Hobbs! A gifted kid and friend if I ever saw one!

Sensual: *Love for sensory things*

I See A Song (1973) by Eric Carle (Thomas Y. Crowell Company) I use this one with Jean-Pierre Rampal's recording of *Colors of Autumn* played on panpipes.

Many Luscious Lollipops: A Book about Adjectives (1989) by Ruth Heller (Grosset & Dunlap) From Heller's series on language: all are appropriate for this and other OEs.

The Boy Who Spoke Colors (1993) by David Gifaldi; illustrated by C. Shana Greger (Houghton Mifflin Company)

Psychomotor: *Physical energy and movement*

Giraffes Can't Dance (1999) by Giles Andreae; illustrated by Guy Parker-Rees (Orchard Books)

"Slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly," said the Sloth (2002) by Eric Carle (Philomel Books)

Kites Sail High: A Book about Verbs (1988) by Ruth Heller (Grosset & Dunlap)

Notes:

- ◆ *I have arbitrarily selected titles that are my "special" and personal favorites.
- ◆ **Maurice Sendak: Revolutionized the genre of picture books
- ◆ ***Any title by this author/illustrator would fit this OE.

- ◆ All of these titles address OEs other than the ones under which they are listed. In my studies, I have found that the more OEs addressed by a book – the richer that book is! Titles are listed under a specific OE to provide a quick reference for a specific OE for those addressing a particular OE or issue.
- ◆ For a three years plus stint, I wrote a column for NAGC’s *Teaching for High Potential* titled *Books, Books, and More Books!* The purpose of this column was to encourage the use of picture books in the **secondary** gifted classroom.
- ◆ **More books and connections are listed below.**

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of a former colleague, Dr. Barbara Hunt, now at the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith. Some notes of this presentation are based on a co-presentation that we presented at NAGC: *Through The Looking Glass: Another Approach to Dabrowski*.

Picture Books Connected to the Overexcitabilities

CODE FOR DABROWSKI’S OVEREXCITABILITIES: Psychomotor (P); Sensual (S); Intellectual (IN); Imaginational (I); & Emotional (E)

NOTE: The overexcitabilities will be ranked in order of most expressed to less expressed overexcitability in the picture books.

ABC Books: (S, I)

Geisert, A.	<u>Pigs from A to Z</u>
A Getty Museum Alphabet.	<u>A is for Artist</u>
Pelletier, D.	<u>The Graphic Alphabet.</u>
Sandved, K. B.	<u>The Butterfly Alphabet</u>

Textless Books: (I, IN, S, P)

Anno, M.	<u>Anno’s Journey</u>
Goffin, J.	<u>Ah!</u>
Goffin, J	<u>Oh!</u>
Weitzman, J.	<u>You Can’t Take a Balloon Into the Metropolitan Museum</u>
Wiesner, D.	<u>Sector 7</u>
Wiesner, D.	<u>Tuesday</u>

Picture Books:

Base, G.	<u>The Eleventh Hour</u> (I, S, E)
Base, G.	<u>Animalia</u> (I, S, E)
Bunting, E.	<u>Smoky Nights</u> (E, IN)*
Carle, E.	<u>“Slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly,” said the Sloth</u> (S, IN, I)
Chesworth, M.	<u>Archibald Frisby</u> (P, IN)

Clement, C.	<u>The Voice of the Wood</u> (IN, S)
Davis, D.	<u>Jazz Cats</u> (S, IN, I, P)
Ehlert, L.	<u>Color Zoo</u> (S, I)
Falconer, J.	<u>Olivia</u> (P, I, S, IN)
Falconer, J.	<u>Olivia Saves the Circus</u> (P, I, S)
Fleishman, P.	<u>Weslandia</u> (P, I, S, IN)
Fox, M.	<u>Koala Lou</u> (E, I)
Gifeldi, D.	<u>The Boy Who Spoke Colors</u> (I, E)
Hollin C. H.	<u>Paddle to the Sea</u> (IN, S)
Lepscky, I.	<u>Leonardo da Vinci</u> (IN, P)
Lionni, L.	<u>Frederick</u> (IN, E)
Lithgow, J.	<u>Farkle McBride</u> (P, I, IN)
Lithgow, J.	<u>Micawber</u> (IN, I)
Lobel, A.	<u>Fables</u> (IN, I)
Macaulay, D.	<u>Castle</u> (IN, S, I)*
Macaulay, D.	<u>Black and White</u> (I, S)
Moss, L.	<u>Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin</u> (P, I)
Munsch, R.	<u>Munchworks</u> (P, E, I, IN)
Munsch, R.	<u>Love You Forever</u> (E)
Rathmann, P.	<u>Officer Buckle and Gloria</u> (I, E, S)*
Rylant, C.	<u>Dog Heaven</u> (E, I, S)
San Souci, R. D.	<u>The Talking Eggs</u> (E, I, S)*
Say, A.	<u>Grandfather's Journey</u> (E, IN)*
Scieszka, J.	<u>The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs</u> (I, P)
Scieszka, J.	<u>The Frog Prince Continued</u> (I, E)
Sendak, M.	<u>Where the Wild Things Are</u> (I, S, P)
Sendak, M.	<u>Really Rosie</u> (I, P, S)
Seuss, Dr.	<u>Green Eggs and Ham</u> (I, P, IN)
Shannon, D.	<u>A Bad Case of Stripes</u> (E, S)
Simont, M.	<u>The Stray Dog</u> (E, P)
Sis, P.	<u>Starry Messenger</u> (IN, S)
Van Allsburg, C.	<u>The Mysteries of Harris Burdick</u> (IN, E, I, S)
Van Allsburg, C.	<u>The Wreck of the Zephyr</u> (IN, E, I, S)

Viorst, J.	<u>Absolutely Positively Alexander, The Complete Stories</u> (E, IN)
Viorst, J.	<u>The Tenth Good Thing About Barney</u> (E)
Willard, N.	<u>The High Rise Glorious Skittle Skat Roarious Sky Pie Angel Food Cake</u> (I, E)
Wisniewski, D.	<u>Golem</u> (IN, S, E) *
Yolen, J.	<u>Merlin and the Dragons</u> (IN, E, I)
Zelinsky, P. O.	<u>Rapunzel</u> (S, IN, E)*

(* **The Caldecott Medal Award**

Young Adult Literature

Since I read extensively in this genre, I have created a representative list of fairly current “Books Read and Recommended” that has been modified it for this session. I have also included my Top Ten Favorite Books with appropriate OE connections

Anderson, Laurie H.	FEVER, 1793 [E,P,IN]
Avi	THE GOOD DOG [I,E]
Barron, T. A.	THE WINGS OF MERLIN: Book 5 [I,E] [<i>The Lost Years of Merlin Series</i>]
Bloor, Edward	TANGERINE [E,IN,S,P]
Brashares, Ann	THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS [E,S]
Brenaman, Miriam	EVVY’S CIVIL WAR [IN,E]
Cooper, Susan	GREEN BOY [I,E]
Creech, Sharon	LOVE THAT DOG [I,E,S,IN]
Dickinson, Peter	THE ROPEMAKER [Printz Honor] [E,I]
Frank, E. R.	AMERICA (Content and Language Alert) [E,S]
Haddix, Margaret	TAKE OFFS AND LANDINGS [E,IN]
Hesse, Karen	STOWAWAY [IN,E]
Horvath, Polly	EVERYTHING ON A WAFFLE [Newbery Honor] [E,S,P]
Korman, Gordon	NO MORE DEAD DOGS [E,S,P,I,IN]
Hobbs, Will	WILD MAN ISLAND E,IN,I,P]
Howe, James	THE MISFITS [E,IN,I,S]
Le Guin, Ursula	TEHANU [I,E]
Lynch, Chris	FREEWILL [Printz Honor] [E,S]
McCaffrey, Anne	THE SKIES OF PERN [IN,I]
Menick, Stephen	THE MUFFIN CHILD [I,E]
Myers, Anna	STOLEN BY THE SEA [E,IN]
Myers, Walter Dean	BAD BOY [E,P,S]
Na, An	A STEP FROM HEAVEN [Printz Medal] [E,IN,S]
Nelson, Marilyn	CARVER [Newbery Honor] [E,IN,S]
Park, Linda Sue	A SINGLE SHARD [Newbery Medal] [E,I,S]
Paulsen, Gary	CAUGHT BY THE SEA [E,IN]
Taylor, Mildred	THE LAND [E,IN,S]
Whitlinger, Ellen	THE LONG NIGHT OF LOU AND BREE [E,I,IN]
Wolff, Virginia Euwer	TRUE BELIEVER [Printz Honor] [E,S]
Yolen, Jane	THE PICTISH CHILD [I]
Zindel, Paul	NIGHT OF THE BAT [I,E]

Top Ten List of my “All Time Favorites”

Caroline Cooney	WHAT CHILD IS THIS [E]
Robert Cormier	FADE [E,I]
Brian Jacques	SALAMANDASTRON [I]
Lois Lowery	GATHERING BLUE [E,I,S,IN]
Gary Paulsen	DOGSONG [E,IN]
Katherine Patterson	BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA [E]
Cynthia Rylant	THE VAN GOGH CAFÉ [I,S,E]
William Sleator	INTERSTELLAR PIG [I]
Stephanie Tolan	WELCOME TO THE ARK [E,IN,S,I,P]
Cynthia Voight	A SOLITARY BLUE [E,IN]

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