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ASYNCHRONY

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From the President's Desk

Newenka DuMont, CGCC President



When my oldest was born, I had a copy of *What to Expect: the First Year* by Heidi Murkoff, which was how I planned to track my daughter's development. The book had a chapter for each month and in each chapter was a discussion of what baby might be able to do, should be able to do, and must be able to do that month. Within a few months I had to page ahead several chapters to find new things for my daughter, as she had exceeded most of the "might" items for her current month.

At the time, I assumed that the book didn't want to worry new parents, when in fact my daughter's development was not proceeding according to "plan." As I learned about four years later, she was on a gifted trajectory. When a child doesn't follow the "plan," dissonance is the result: dissonance in those around the child and dissonance within the child. Both forms of dissonance can create problems for gifted children. The latter is said to result from asynchronous development.

There are many strands in which children develop as they mature including language skills, cognitive ability, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, emotional regulation, social awareness and ability, and physical development. The manifestation of the asynchronous development varies greatly, depending upon the child's relative strengths and weaknesses.

Perhaps she has taught herself to read long before her little fingers can handle a pencil. What she wants to write are books, what she is able to write is a short sentence. In frustration she refuses to write at all, and thus her fine motor skills don't develop and she falls further and further behind.

Or perhaps she is a budding scientist with underdeveloped social skills who selectively breaks family or school rules just to see what happens. The result is a constant struggle for her parents and perhaps eventually a diagnosis of oppositional defiant disorder.

Or perhaps she is a highly socially aware early reader who mimics her classmates at school by reading haltingly leaving her teacher completely unaware of her precocious reading abilities and her mother puzzled by the books sent home for homework.

Or perhaps she is dyslexic, but has found that by listening carefully and asking good questions she can get through school without ever reading, leaving her undiagnosed until the workload becomes so difficult that she simply cannot keep up.

Or perhaps she is an unchallenged first grader and calculates that she has 11 more years of "this" before she can be released from school, tossing her into an existential crisis.



Or perhaps she is a preschooler with excellent reasoning and interviewing skills, which lead her to conclude that death is inevitable. Yet she lacks the emotional maturity to handle this reality, resulting in unexplainable tears, tantrums, and anxiety.

In each of the above situations, an informed parent can go a long way to correctly assessing and addressing the underlying problem rather than the overt symptom. This is why we have chosen to focus this year's journal of the Chicago Gifted Community Center on Asynchronous Development.

In our featured article, Rhonda Stern discusses accommodations for the asynchronous learner in the educational environment. Sheryl Stroller shares thoughts on perspectives parents can take to work with their child's asynchrony, and Judith Whal brings tools for working with gifted children and advocating for them in schools. If you are interested in further reading on asynchrony, see the resources listed at the end of the journal.

Newenka DuMont
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“Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.”

The Columbus Group, 1991

WHAT IS ASYNCHRONY?

The Columbus Group’s definition equates giftedness with developmental asynchrony characterized by different inner experiences. *Asynchrony refers to differences in the rate of growth between different aspects of a person’s development such as the intellectual, emotional, and psychomotor.* For example, a gifted child may be intellectually similar to average developing ten-year-olds, emotionally similar to six-year-olds, and have the physical coordination of a four-year-old. This asynchrony results in a misfit not only between different aspects of the child’s self but also with their physical environment and the expectations of family and society at large.

“If development is perceived as a life-long process, giftedness can then be understood as producing atypical development throughout the lifespan in terms of awareness, perceptions, emotional responses, and life experiences. This places the gifted individual developmentally out of sync both internally, in relation to the different aspects of development, and externally, in relation to cultural expectations.”

Morelock, 1992

Resourcing the Asynchronous Gifted Learner in Elementary School

By Rhonda Stern

There is a voice inside of you
That whispers all day long,
“I feel that this is right for me,
I know that this is wrong.”
No teacher, preacher, parent, friend
Or wise man can decide
What’s right for you—just listen to
The voice that speaks inside.
Silverstein, p. 38

I’m not sure I realized the enormity of the task of working with gifted and talented elementary students when I started my career midyear in 2000. For the first time as a teacher, I encountered a range of asynchronous student “voices.” There were slews of students who had plenty to say and an equal number of those who sat quietly or read. A few moved around the classroom, unable to sit on their chairs or rest on the rug. One girl carried an imaginary eraser named “Sonny” and had no problem interrupting class to tell Sonny something. These 5-11 year-old-students who came for weekly enrichment appeared to be all over the map, and I had to figure out how to engage them on a variety of levels.

My title was gifted resource teacher, and I learned, over time, that it is easier than it appears to resource the asynchronous gifted student in elementary school. This paper will explore asynchrony as it relates to

the teacher’s role of creating a safe and open learning climate, in depth and complex learning experiences, and methods through which students can be appropriately challenged.

Understanding asynchrony

Many classroom teachers and parents nod when I raise the issue of asynchrony, but few fully grasp its meaning. In its simplest form, asynchrony conveys a sense of unevenness. In the context of gifted and talented education, asynchronous development means that the student’s intellectual level is well beyond her chronological age. Indeed, the student may display physical behaviors that suggest that she’s younger than her chronological age. Imagine an eight-year-old boy capable of interpreting Shakespeare who skips down the school hallway. For those not trained in the field of gifted and talented, it’s hard to reconcile this asynchrony. According to Silverman (2000), the definition below takes into account “the internal experience of” gifted students (p. 3):

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner

experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (Silverman, 2000, p. 3).

Thus, an elementary student can cognitively function at a high school level in one moment, and have a tantrum like a preschooler in the next.

Know thy student

Education is a service industry, and it is incumbent upon teachers to support learners in every context. Therefore, to help gifted students develop optimally, school staff must endeavor to get to know the whole child. This involves building a relationship with the student and his parents. In my second placement, I had the tools to do that. One of my jobs was to give students an interest survey. The interest survey was part of a screening process for the identification of the highly gifted. Once I realized how helpful the interest survey was, I gave it to all of the students with whom I worked. Overall, students were asked to



“Though merely a first grader, she vividly described the sculpture, including the angst on the ballerina’s face. Not surprisingly, when I looked up from my notes, I noticed that this first grader [...] had slipped her thumb in her mouth.”

explain what they did in their free time, their favorite books, books they might write, people they admired, favorite classroom subjects, travel interests (to and including the moon), things they might invent to make the world a better place and anything else they fancied. If the student had superior intellect, I would not get cursory responses. Student responses to writing prompts also shed light on their needs, interests, and personalities. As many can imagine, provocative questions expose a student’s ability to think critically and creatively; writing also taps into a student’s vast knowledge base. I knew that I was dealing with a precocious first grade student when her prompt was on Degas’ Little Dancer, a sculpture. Though merely a first grader, she vividly described the sculpture, including the angst on the ballerina’s face. Not surprisingly, when I

looked up from my notes, I noticed that this first grader, I’ll call her Jane, had slipped her thumb in her mouth.

Asynchrony. Yes, I was getting a sense of the huge variance between Jane’s chronological age and her intellectual age. Jane had let me enter her fantasy world, a world embellished in art and dance. Just from one conversation about a writing prompt, I learned that I could extend the curriculum to meet her needs by introducing her to varied artistic works (perhaps even drama), offering her the option of learning vocabulary words from aesthetic domains, and by making connections to geometry or the rhythm of composition. As part of our screening process, I met with Jane’s parents who shed more light on her intensity and sensitivity, but also expressed concerns about

her executive management skills. I was getting a better picture of the “inner” Jane.

Honor student voice

Ongoing teacher-student dialogue and-teacher parent dialogue is an excellent start for meeting the unique needs of the gifted child. Experts in gifted education and beyond urge educators to talk less and listen more: “we should listen respectfully to what children offer as expressed needs” (Noddings, 2003, p. 247). Gifted teachers can learn a great deal from student’s post unit reflections. Classroom discussion and conferencing are also invaluable sources of information. As Greene (1995) wrote “I think we in education have a particular responsibility...to include within it...newcomer’s voices” (Greene, p.



56). To Greene (1995), creativity and critical thought are central to self-actualization. She believes that students must be given the opportunity to steer their academic journeys, enabling students to maximize their potential and personal satisfaction and position themselves to contribute to society.

Provide a positive learning climate for students

While curriculum is critical to learning, the asynchronous child also needs a safe environment in which he can explore, play imaginatively, and collaborate with his intellectual peers. Many of my former students congregated in my classroom during lunch, working puzzles, coloring, building with Legos, or just chatting. Lunch-recess is a stressful time for gifted

children who often have trouble relating with their same age peers. Thanks to parent support, we were able to provide group challenges during lunch, most notably Lego Mindstorm and writing groups. The music teacher sometimes let gifted students write compositions and play them for their peers. This worked to one student's benefit. His same age peers were so impressed by a composition that he had played earlier that morning, so when he burst into tears after being eliminated in foursquare later that day, no one teased him.

To help students deal with the emotional intensity that comes with asynchrony, affective issues have been infused into the content areas. Ruckman's (1988) interdisciplinary unit, "Encounter with the Eminent, introduces students to famous figures and also allows students to

draw personal parallels with those figures," (VanTassel-Baska, 1988, p. 104-9). Using open-ended questions and higher ordered thinking, students study "characteristics and achievements" of the eminent, their interests, influences on their lives, their educational backgrounds and their personal problems. One of my primary students had a deep interest in the military and was thrilled to study—and reconfigure—artillery designed by Da Vinci.

Broaden the curriculum for asynchronous students

Gifted students need originality and a flexible delivery of instruction. Thus, teachers need to

"Create curriculum that integrates subject matter which allows for and, indeed encourages—original

thought, that develops intellectual risk-taking, and that requires full engagement of the intellect, world view, social/emotional aspects, and moral reasoning.” (Daniels and Piechowski, p. 71)

For many years, science units created by the Jason Project (still in existence) provided the foundation for a significant part of the gifted and talented curriculum in my former district. Jason sent research teams, consisting of students, teachers, and scientists (some from NASA) to explore various regions globally. Every year, the curriculum was based on a new location, and for a good part of my tenure, I attended teacher-training run by Jason staff and scientists.

Thus, my students and I studied issues arising from the Polar Regions, the Channel Islands, the Rainforest, and Mars. The materials were interdisciplinary, with recommended novels, links to mathematical problems, and scientific experiments. Over the years, my students had the opportunity to choose areas of study related to these scientific umbrella topics. Jason staff differentiated the curriculum, with teachers free to make adjustments. Students working independently or with peers built solar ovens, researched deforestation in the Rainforest, and studied the geological evolution of the Channel Islands.

Teachers need not be reticent to pilot curriculum responsive to student needs. Students in my former District benefitted from complex units created by the gifted teachers. We wrote integrated units incorpo-

rating the works of Mildred Taylor, Martin Luther King, Frederick Douglass, and John Russell. These units required deep understanding of symbolism, literary devices, literary themes, historical timelines and perspectives, and complex vocabulary. Geared to the highly gifted, these units were well above grade level, contained novel materials, and matched student intensity and curiosity.

Differentiating for asynchronous students

The central point is that gifted students must be given challenging work as most are working well above grade level. According to Daniels and Piechowski (2009), “schools have yet to recognize that these children come to school already knowing a great deal” (p. 44). Nonetheless, at many schools, students continue to sit in class listening to information they’ve previously learned. Part of the problem is that asynchrony can mask ability. If a child has tantrums in class or has trouble with small motor skills, the classroom teacher may hold him back from participation in gifted programming. One primary team refused to send a highly gifted student to gifted programming because his cursive writing was not up to the classroom teacher’s standards.

Situations like these call for the gifted teacher and/or parents to step in to advocate for the student, as not only do classroom teachers frequently lack a true understanding of asynchrony, they focus on student deficits rather than student

strengths. It’s not hard to ascertain a child’s readiness level. According to Silverman “true potential for specific academic work in mathematics and verbal areas can be discerned better by administering an off level test [above grade level], standardized on older populations” (p. 195). Still another way is to assess learning through pretests. I am not a fan of chapter pretests, because if students make careless computational errors in one unit pretest, their mistakes may keep them from participating in gifted programming for the entire school year. The year-end pretest provides a better challenge and a better picture of the student’s knowledge. Other useful tools to assess readiness include the John’s Basic Reading Inventory and the Key Math Diagnostic Assessment.

So many teachers have asked me how to pretest in Social Studies. Frankly, it’s not necessary. The asynchronous learner can advance through open-ended study and problem-based learning. The more creative the teacher, the more transformational student participation may be. Take, for example, Brian Schultz’ classroom. He taught students at a school in Chicago’s Cabrini Green. As part of a Project Citizen campaign, Schultz’ students decided to ask the city of Chicago to follow up on promises to rebuild their dilapidated school. Students co-created the curriculum, preparing action plans, lobbying, letter writing, investigating, and conducting a media campaign. Essentially, students worked at all different intellectual levels and challenges. Although the City refused to build

a new school, student efforts brought about significant repairs. Schultz (2007) was thrilled with students' academic gains and the impact of their efforts: "no longer silenced, these fifth graders articulately voiced a counter narrative as a result of their determination and fortitude" (p. 80).

Students benefit greatly when teachers go beyond the one size fits all curriculum. In debate forums, students have tackled relevant and timely civic issues like gun control (Hess, 2002). Mock trials are another way in which to get students motivated about learning. In our district, we found that growth increased dramatically when students were challenged at appropriate levels.

The asynchronous elementary, gifted student can be appropriately resourced. Still, unless parents and gifted teachers closely scrutinize her educational journey, she runs the risk of being held back because she's complicated and different. Gifted teachers must build relationships with classroom teachers to give classroom teachers a better understanding of the asynchrony of the gifted child. Counselors can be very helpful here. Even at an early age, parents and teachers must teach students to politely advocate for themselves so that their academic needs are met. "Only through appropriate education can one empower individuals to take charge of their destiny rather than submit to the powerful" (Kane, 2009, p. 193). As Silverstein (1996) realized, an empowering and challenging academic career requires respect for the student's inner "voice."

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About the Author:

Rhonda Stern has been in the field of gifted and talented education since 2000. She is also a certified mediator and an attorney, and taught mediation at Chicago-Kent College of Law for eight years. In terms of her career in gifted and talented education, Stern taught in Highland Park, Illinois for nine years and then established a private practice working with gifted, talented, and twice exceptional students. Starting in 2013, Stern began working on a doctorate in Curriculum Studies at DePaul University

Stern sits on the board of the Chicago Gifted Community Center. She also is a member of the Networking Committee of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children. Stern has published numerous articles on gifted and talented issues as well as issues arising in general education classrooms. Stern lectures on subjects relating to gifted education and general education. She has presented at a variety of conferences, including American Education Research Association/John Dewey Society in April of 2016.

Reflecting on Asynchrony

By Sheryl Stoller

Mirror, mirror, on the wall
The human brain's ability to imagine is a handy tool for creating a magic mirror. Our Gifted and GLD, Gifted with Learning Differences, children can desperately use that tool to deflect any image that does not match what they know to be good about themselves. We, the parents, may see ourselves in this description as well.

When a child has an arena in which she naturally excels without effort, and in which she soars with effort, she experiences a gap between the gifted arena and every other arena. The gaps are the asynchronies. Every attempt at a task that does

not result in immediate gratification the way it does in the gifted area communicates he has failed. Those failures signal danger - there is the risk of the failures easily and quickly taking root as "I am a failure."

If the child accepts that image created by the asynchrony(ies) as being a failure, one response is to slip into depression. The survival mode's "freeze" response hijacks the system.

When our child does not accept that image, the survival mode kicks into high gear because the survival of his identity is at stake. For those with a default survival mode

setting of "fight", the speed, range, and power of the fight response is extreme, almost impressive. For those with a default survival mode setting of "flight", the anxiety-driven effort and time put into fleeing from failure is a super-human drive for the highest level of achievement possible - also almost impressive.

But we parents serve our children better when we see under the surface. That perspective can help us circumvent the very human mirroring response of mimicking their emotions and behaviors with complementary responses. Fear begetting fear; anger, anger; sadness, sadness.





“We parents serve our children better when we see under the surface.”

Under the surface

Any attempt at a task for the “fighter” and any mistake for a “flight-er” that does not bring an immediate positive feedback loop becomes a frontal attack on identity that triggers a full-blown counterattack or anxiety attack.

Human nature is on steroids in a gifted child with asynchronies. Children who are gifted in every arena - every cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual arena - are rare, or nonexistent. Therefore it is likely that asynchrony affects virtually every person with an area of giftedness.

Working with the realities of the asynchronies and of human nature on steroids in our gifted and GLD children, parents will be equipping their gifted children to flourish.

What can we do?

Notice the asynchronies.
Name them.
Claim them.
Calm them .
Reframe them.
Plan.
Do.
Finish.

Sheryl Stoller is a PCI Certified Parent Coach®, Certified SENG-Model Parent Group Facilitator – Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted, and mother of three extremely intense, gifted, GTLD children who were affected by asynchronous development and who are now flourishing young adults. Drawing on her professional and personal experience, Sheryl specializes in coaching parents of the gifted and of GTLD children with intense behaviors and emotions. Through their collaboration with Sheryl, parents develop personal customized approaches, including in

key areas such as: de-escalating and preventing reactive anger and worry in both their children and themselves; modeling and guiding their children in effective life skills; and recapturing joy and love on their parenting journey. Sheryl works with parents of gifted/GTLD both through her private practice, [Stoller Parent Coaching](http://www.stollerparentcoaching.com), and through [The Center for Identity Potential](http://www.stollerparentcoaching.com). Sheryl invites you to visit her at her website <http://www.stollerparentcoaching.com> for more about her gifted specialty as a coach and speaker, and to contact her directly at sheryl@stollerparentcoaching.com or (708) 358-8289.

Understanding Giftedness in Young Children

By Judith Whal

Toddlers and young children are an incredible joy and can be a bit difficult at times. At one moment they can be laughing and enjoying themselves then like a flip of a switch, they can be on the floor in a tantrum. Understanding this behavioral change in your child can be confusing and frustrating. Now imagine what's happening with your gifted child. Your five-year old gifted child in one moment could be discussing with you how to bring about world peace and then throwing himself on the floor because he didn't like the way you helped put his shoes on.

Like all small children, gifted children are exciting, curious, and exhausting! But it's more with gifted children. Their curiosity is never ending. They are never satisfied with the answer given. Gifted children operate on different level and in an asynchronous way. They can develop quicker in academics and language skills on the one hand and slower in the socialization with their peers on the other hand. Most often we see a young gifted child as a mini-adult. We put expectations on our young four- or five-year old to act in a way similar to the way they converse and feel deeply about the world. However, we must understand their asynchronous behavior in order to fully understand

what they are going through.

When a gifted child acts out, it is important to stop and remember their chronological age. Gifted children can engage in conversation with adults in a charming and mature way. They most often relate to adults or older students because of the information that can be provided to them, but they can often have a difficult time relating to peers of their own age. Even though their academic and worldly understanding may be advanced, they still need comfort and hugs from those around them. They have a need to feel accepted from others just like their peers. When seeking out friendships with children of their own age, a gifted child may feel frustrated. It's hard to understand at a very young age why others aren't developing the same as you. Your child may resort to physical contact because she does not understand why the other children will not play the way she wants to.

These are issues that we need to help advocate for understanding in the schools. We need to help teachers recognize the individual child's needs and guide him to the appropriate behaviors. There are many ways to do this. Start with having the adults near the children when playing. When a child reacts

in a negative way, give her the tools to react positively. Use a "bug and a wish." The child says, "It bugs me when you....and I wish" This way of teaching conflict resolution gives both children an understanding of what is happening and power to resolve the problem. Have the children work together to find a game to play away from the other kids with adult supervision so they can find common ground without arguing. Provide a place for the children to go and find a resolution away from the group equipped with comfy seats, picture books on socialization, and perhaps coloring tools to express their feelings.

Sometimes, young gifted children will find that "babyish" behavior is interesting. Some gifted children will begin to revert to "baby-talk" or develop their own language to explore imaginative play for many years. Many gifted children will find that pretending to be something they are not, like an animal or king, is a nice break from the academic information they can quickly understand and retain. It is necessary to allow children to explore a variety of types of imaginative play without demanding expectations to act like a mini-adult and show social maturity. When looking at a child that prefers the company of an adult, we want to



engage that child in conversation and feed their energy. However, we must also be careful to not isolate him from his peers. It is the job of teaching professionals to help the other children understand that each child is different and has needs and expectations that are different from the rest of the group.

It is helpful for parents and adults that are involved in a gifted child's life to understand and help advocate for the young gifted child. Understanding the many aspects of gifted children can be a difficult undertaking but necessary. It is important to continue advocating for those involved with gifted children to fully understand their needs outside of others in the group.

Judy Wahl is a graduate in Elementary Education from Loras College in Dubuque, IA. She has been in the education field for more than 15 years. Currently Judy works in Chicago, IL as an Independent Educational Consultant, Gifted Coordinator for Roycemore School in Evanston, IL, as well as a private tutor in the areas of reading, writing, math and enrichment activities. She is the owner and director of an after school program called Sprout Gifted, that focuses on the individual needs of the gifted child and aids in developing social and emotional behaviors as well as challenge gifted children to explore areas of interest and reach outside their comfort zone in areas they may not be comfortable. Sprout Gifted is open to all gifted children in the Chicagoland area grades K-5 and operates out of St. Matthias School on the Northside of Chicago and out of Roycemore School, Evanston, IL.



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Email info@chicagogiftedcommunity.org to get in touch.

“The key to coping may well be acceptance - acceptance that the asynchronous development which is a hallmark of intellectual giftedness is normal for that child’s individual developmental trajectory. With that kind of acceptance comes not only a deeper understanding of the resulting asynchrony in the family life cycle, but a celebration, as we recognize the uniqueness of the individual and the diversity and power of family life to transform and to mediate as well as to comfort and protect.”

Kathi Kearney, 1992

Further reading:

[*Giftedness: The view from within*](#) by Martha Morelock, 1992

“This article by Martha Morelock introduces the Columbus Group’s definition of giftedness as asynchronous development. The reader is also given a developmental picture of giftedness that extends beyond achievement. The author focuses on giftedness ‘from the inside out,’ demonstrating how advanced cognitive development shapes the rest of the personality.”

[*The Construct of Asynchronous Development*](#) by Linda Silverman, 1997

Exploring the history of the term asynchrony, Silverman discusses how asynchrony affects different aspects of the self and the relationship between the gifted person and society.

[*Life in the Asynchronous Family*](#) by Kathi Kearney, 1992

Kearney details how the asynchrony of a gifted child - or entire family - affects the family in every sphere. She explains not only daily life and navigation of larger systems but also how asynchrony manifests and affects the family emotionally and financially as children leave early for college or attain higher degrees.