



AUTHOR: Karyn L. **Gust**

TITLE: Assessing the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted

SOURCE: **Gifted Child Today Magazine** v19 p38-40 S/O '96

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited.

The Children's Self-Report and Projective Inventory (Ziffer & Shapiro, 1992) is a relatively new instrument for assessing the social/emotional functioning of all children, including the gifted and talented. The CSRPI is an individually administered, multi-method inventory for children ages 5-12. Although this instrument was designed for all student populations, the CSRPI has been especially useful in assessing the social/emotional needs of gifted and talented students seen at the Ball State University School Psychology Clinic. Many of the parents and teachers of the gifted with whom I work have found the CSRPI useful in better understanding the social/emotional needs of the students assessed. The following article consists of background on the CSRPI and one study outlining its use.

## **THE CHILDREN'S SELF-REPORT AND PROJECTIVE INVENTORY**

In its entirety, the CSRPI consists of eight components utilizing self-report and projective measures. These components include the following (Ziffer & Shapiro, 1992).

### **FOUR DRAWING TASKS**

\* Color How You Feel: After a brief introduction on what a variety of colors symbolize, the child is asked to color in a silhouette of a person's body representing him or herself using the colors (yellow = happy, red = angry, blue = sad, green = worried) that best indicate how he or she feels most of the time.

\* Color How Others Make You Feel: The child is asked to color the silhouettes of different bodies, each representing an important person in his or her life, according to how each individual makes him or her feel the majority of the time.

\* Draw a Child in the Rain: The child is instructed to draw a picture of a child in the rain, which can indicate how he or she perceives and reacts to environmental stress.

\* Kinetic Family Drawing. The child is instructed to draw a picture of everyone in his or her family doing an activity together, which aids in understanding how the child perceives his or her family.

### **TWO SELF-REPORT MEASURES**

\* Critical Items: The child is asked to respond to a series of 40 statements that indicate serious clinical concerns. Examples of these concerns include, but are not limited to: self-esteem, sadness/depression, anger/hostility, family relationships, peer relationships, view of school, and coping ability.

\* Perceived Competence: The child is asked to respond to 30 items that indicate the child's view of his or her effectiveness, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses.

### **TWO VERBAL PROJECTIVE TASKS**

\* Sentence Completion: The child is asked to finish a series of sentences, which can total 45, that have beginnings but no endings. Responses to these sentences can provide insight into a child's thoughts, attitudes, outlook, perceptions, and feelings about a variety of topics (e.g. family, school, peers).

\* Projective Story Cards: The child is shown a variety of cards with pictures on them. He or she is asked to tell a short story about each picture describing the situation and what the people involved are thinking and feeling. These stories can provide information about the child's self-image, parental or sibling relationships, thoughts and feelings about school, peer relationships, view of his or her teacher and self as a student.

## **A CASE STUDY: CHRIS**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Chris is a 7-year, 5-month-old male residing with his natural parents and 4-year-old sister. His parents referred him for evaluation for an assessment of his learning capabilities. Specifically, they were interested in whether Chris would qualify for a gifted and talented program and which schools in their area would provide the best services. His mother reported that Chris' language development milestones were advanced; he spoke his first word at approximately seven months old and put several words together at one year of age. She further indicated that Chris has repeatedly tried to accomplish tasks before he was ready, such as "trying to walk before he was physically able."

At the time of evaluation, Chris was attending a private school where he received regular first-grade instruction with supplemental assignments given to him by his teacher. His parents reported that Chris saw these extra projects as "dumb and boring" and subsequently disliked school. Chris corroborated this by stating that he tries to miss school by getting ready slowly.

His parents indicated that Chris is an "intense" child who can be "overly sensitive" about the welfare of himself and

others. He repeatedly worries and talks about "very adult things," such as war, ecology, pollution, and death. He also becomes very upset if he feels others are talking about or "picking on" him. Chris engages in highly imaginative activities, such as pretending he was Batman for several months at the age of four, engaging in detective activities, and working on building a trap for his room (i.e., a cap gun would go off when his door opened). He also "goes on binges where he focuses on an idea or activity for weeks on end." For example, he had a previous interest in watches (i.e., different kinds, functions). When disciplining Chris, his parents stated that they must provide him with the reasoning behind rules before he will comply. Chris was additionally characterized as having a few, close friends.

### **TEST/BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATIONS**

When Chris walked into the clinic, his gregarious personality was very much evident. Chris had been told by his parents that he would spend the next two Saturdays in this place, "to find out what things were easy for him to do and what things were more difficult for him to do." To translate, he was going to be assessed for giftedness. In order to immediately impress the examiner with his knowledge, Chris sat down in the waiting area and told me about the novels he was currently reading, which included *The Silver Chair* and *The Very Scary Almanac*. Following this brief discussion, I informed Chris that I would need to talk with his parents for a short time to clarify certain information. Chris indicated that this was understandable, so he remained in the waiting area as his parents and I moved to a room across the hall. However, it was during this interview that Chris' nature changed. First, he became curious about what was going on without him and repeatedly tried to eavesdrop on the interview. When that failed, Chris then became angry with both his parents and me for talking behind his back.

When testing began, I decided to build rapport with Chris by asking him to complete the drawing tasks on the CSRPI. During the initial administration of the "Color How You Feel" and "Color How Others Make You Feel" drawing tasks of this instrument, Chris scribbled red on the page and spoke loudly about why he was angry with these people (i.e., "they yell at me," "they take my stuff," and "they send me to my room"). He also informed me that if he had another silhouette to color on the "Color How Others Make You Feel" task, he would color me the deepest shade of red. And, perhaps more startling was his family drawing, because it depicted his parents pointing a gun towards him. When questioned about the drawing, Chris stated that his parents had not done this yet, but "probably planned to" in the near future. The drawings were greatly influenced by Chris's anger that his parents and I were talking about him. When these drawings were readministered during the second testing session, they did not display anger to the same degree. For example, Chris' colors were primarily yellow, and he completed a more traditional family drawing, that of his family watching television.

### **INTERPRETATION OF THE CSRPI**

During the first day of testing, Chris' behavior and drawings indicated the possibility of a heightened level of overexcitability. Dabrowski initially addressed this characteristic which has since been applied to the gifted and talented. Overexcitabilities have been referred to as "the enhancement and intensification of mental activity much beyond the ordinary" (Piechowski, 1991, p. 287). The facets of overexcitabilities demonstrated by Chris were intensity and emotional sensitivity. Piechowski (1991) described this phenomenon as:

The intensity of emotional reactions, especially in children, may sometimes be difficult to understand, especially when they strike seemingly out of the blue and the child is strongly upset over "nothing." It requires considerable patience and knowledge of the child to see that this "overreaction" comes from the child's sensitivity and need for his or her own order of things to be preserved (pp. 287, 289).

Chris' frustration with being left out of my conversation with his parents manifested itself in anger towards those around him. Therefore, it was necessary to allow time for Chris to deal with his sensitivity and for me to regain perspective.

Chris also completed the other portions of the CSRPI. His responses on the perceived competence scale indicated that Chris feels very competent in academic and social endeavors. Projective story cards and sentence completion responses stressed his dislike for school. For example, when completing the sentence "Something I will never do is," Chris stated "set my school on fire even though I hate school."

### **SUMMARY**

For the parents and teachers I work with, the CSRPI has been a useful tool in gaining insight into the social and

emotional world of their students. Awareness of this and other potential ways to gain insight into the child's world can aid in one's appreciation for considering the social and emotional needs of the gifted. In the case of Chris, the CSRPI allowed me to identify his potential overexcitabilities and intensity of feelings about school. But, more importantly, through the CSRPI, I was able, for a brief period of time, to enter the life of one gifted child.

Added material

## **REFERENCES**

Piechowski, M.M. (1991). Emotional development and emotional giftedness. In N. Colangelo & G.A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp. 285-306). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Ziffer, R.L., & Shapiro, L.E. (1992). *Children's self-report and projective inventory*. Narberth, PA: Psychological Assessment Services.

WBN: 9624504914006