

Angelika Wilson Wipp

# Motivating the Gifted Underachiever

## Implementing Reward Menus and Behavioral Contracts within an Integrated Approach

by Earl S. Hishinuma, Ph.D.

**T**he Scene: End-of-the-Year Parent Conference

Teacher: "Thank you Mr. & Mrs. Jones (fictitious last name) for coming to the last parent conference of the school year. Please have a seat. I'm glad that John (fictitious name) could also make it to this conference.

"Let me start by saying that this school year was a struggle for John. As you can see from his report card, he earned two F grades, one in spelling, and one in writing. John's C and D grades were in reading, math, art, social studies, and P.E. He received just one A, and that grade was in science. We all know that John can do better; he just isn't reaching his full potential. I'm sure you've heard that before. John really needs to put in more effort; he's just not motivated except maybe in science when doing laboratory work like dissecting sharks and mixing chemicals. Oh, and I also have his standardized achievement test results; the tests were administered about a month ago. As you can see, all of his scores are well above average. In fact, he is excelling in most of his subjects."

Parents: "Why is it that John does so well on standardized tests and sometimes on classroom quizzes, but is just not able to earn higher course grades?"

We're getting tired of this year after year."

Teacher: "His grades are impacted by his lack of attention during class, incomplete class assignments, late completion of homework, and overall low standards for the quality of his own work. John knows this; we've talked many times before. A lot of this is really up to John. He really should be getting A's and B's in all of his subjects. I hope John takes more responsibility for his learning in the future."

Parents: "We know how you feel. We've been hearing the same old story ever since John entered kindergarten. Some teachers have called John unmotivated, irresponsible, and even lazy. But what we don't understand is that he can play video games at home for hours on end, and he will go through his baseball card collection and memorize the most irrelevant statistics. And he loves to solve brain teasers and play games that involve a lot of thinking. So what's going on? What can the school, and what can we, as parents, do for John?"

Teacher: "Well, let's ask John."  
John is fidgeting with his digital watch, wishing that time would go by much faster. The nearest parent gets John's attention by tapping him on the arm.

Teacher: "John, why don't you put in more effort? How can we help?"

John shrugs his shoulders to say "I don't know." Then, he immediately resumes playing with his watch.

### What Can Be Done?

The essence of this interchange should be familiar to most teachers for some of their students (see Cohen, 1990). Although the gifted/underachiever population is as diverse as any other group of individuals, the common theme is the student not meeting his or her potential as reflected by an academic measure of performance (e.g., class work; grades, homework production, quizzes, tests). This lack of productivity is not due to an inherent disability such as a learning disability or behavior disorder. Characteristics of the gifted/underachiever may include: high IQ and problem solving abilities, avoidance of rote and repetitive tasks, inconsistent completion of academic work, good oral performances rather than written products, variable test results, restricted or nontraditional interests, low self-esteem, low or too high self-standards, self-centeredness, difficulty functioning constructively in a group, unreponsiveness to typical social rewards

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such as praise and grades, and school-attendance problems (see Whitmore, 1980).

According to Cohen (1990), "Though more underachievers pervade the school system than all of the special education students combined, there are virtually no special services available to help them" (p. 3). This lack of programs for underachievers is at least partially due to our society's tendency to label the underachiever as being unresponsive and even lazy. These everyday "diagnoses" tend to thrust upon the student virtually full responsibility for "getting his or her act together," rather than to examine more closely the home and school environments to see if adjustments in the pupil's settings will in turn result in positive changes in the behavior of the student. In short, because there is no society-accepted "disability," the "problem" falls squarely on the shoulders of the student.

The view taken by this article is that (a) the difficulties associated with underachievement and gifted/underachievement should be addressed from an integrated-systems approach given the multi-faceted issues involved, and (b) specific interventions can be developed and implemented successfully with the goal of meeting the needs of these students. In particular, reward menus and behavioral contracts will be elaborated upon.

### An Integrated Approach

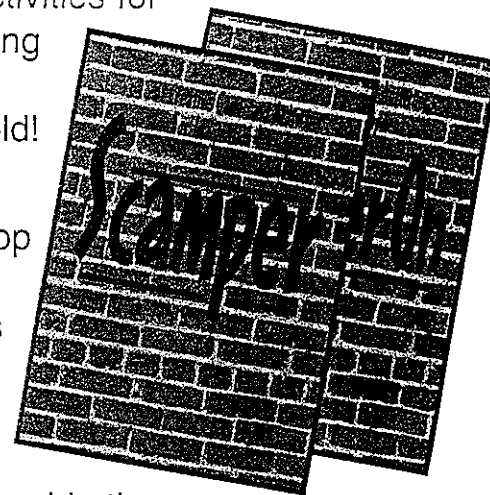
From the fields of education and psychology, growing attention in the past few decades has been paid to the underachiever and gifted/underachiever (e.g., Butler-Por, 1987; Cohen, 1990; Griffin, 1988; Kornrich, 1965; Mandel & Marcus, 1988; Rimm, 1986; Supplee,

*continued on page 32*

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1990; Whitmore, 1980). A recurring central theme is that the gifted/underachiever cannot be viewed in isolation from his or her home, school, and social settings. The following factors all need to be considered in developing a well-rounded and appropriate plan of action for the gifted/underachiever:

- Comprehensive and ongoing assessment;
- Teacher attributes;
- Curriculum and instruction;
- Social-emotional development and counseling;
- School philosophy and procedures; and
- Parenting and the home environment.

noticed by the teacher because the student is not performing up to teacher expectations for the class. However, for the gifted/underachiever, under-identification may be more prevalent because the giftedness may be masked by grade-level performance (e.g., Hishinuma, 1990; Whitmore, 1980). In addition, the possibility of a learning disability or behavior disorder must be ruled out in an effort to develop an appropriate program for the student. For these reasons, referral for comprehensive testing may be a prudent choice. On a daily basis, more subtle academic and social-emotional strengths and weaknesses should be ascertained as well. For example, does the gifted/underachiever have the prerequisite skills necessary to perform a given task? Are the teacher-determined assignments too easy or too difficult for the pupil? Further assessment are prerequisites appropriate

ments should be done throughout the school year to monitor the progress made by the student with adjustments incorporated as needed.

### Teacher Attributes

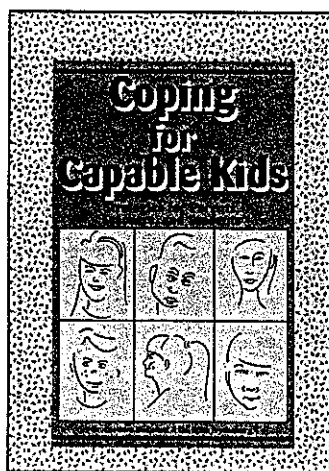
The attributes of the teacher are important factors in the success of the gifted/underachiever. The teacher is the professional who will have the most first-hand, daily social contact with the student in the school setting. The programs developed and implemented by the teacher should make an impact on the pupil on academic and <sup>1</sup>social-emotional levels. The teacher should be realistic about what he or she can accomplish in the classroom and school environment, but should also be as innovative as <sup>2</sup>possible in the techniques utilized to improve the services provided to the gifted/underachiever. *Realistic expectations by teacher*

### 1 Comprehensive and Ongoing Assessment

In most cases, the underachiever is

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the strengths of  
the individual

### Curriculum and Instruction

A critical component to a successful, comprehensive program for the gifted/underachiever is devising and implementing appropriate curricula and instruction. In general, most experts recommend that the teaching methods consist of hands-on, applied, and exciting activities that tap the strengths (i.e., higher-level thinking skills) of the gifted/underachiever (e.g., Supplee, 1990). Instructional formats can be greatly enhanced through strategic diversification: increased student-teacher feedback (e.g., see Heward, Gardner, Cavanaugh, Courson, Grossi, & Barbetta, 1995, for an example of using response cards), group and class discussions, games, videos, plays, computer projects, enrichment activities, student-teacher agreed-upon independent projects, academic-interest centers, and field trips (e.g., Supplee, 1990). The benefits of a more varied curricular approach are not only increased learning, retention, and application skills, but also added motivation for the student to perform well. In most situations, the teacher wants to take full advantage of the motivating properties of his or her diverse, hands-on, applied, and interesting teaching methods. Such techniques will decrease the need for more externally based and artificial means of enhancing student performance.

### Social-Emotional Development and Counseling

In attempting to increase the motivational level of the gifted/underachiever, a more incremental-intervention approach, ranging from fostering awareness to providing tangible rewards, may be useful. For example, an elaborate behavioral-contract system may not be necessary. The student may alter his or her behavior "merely" due to

*continued on page 34*

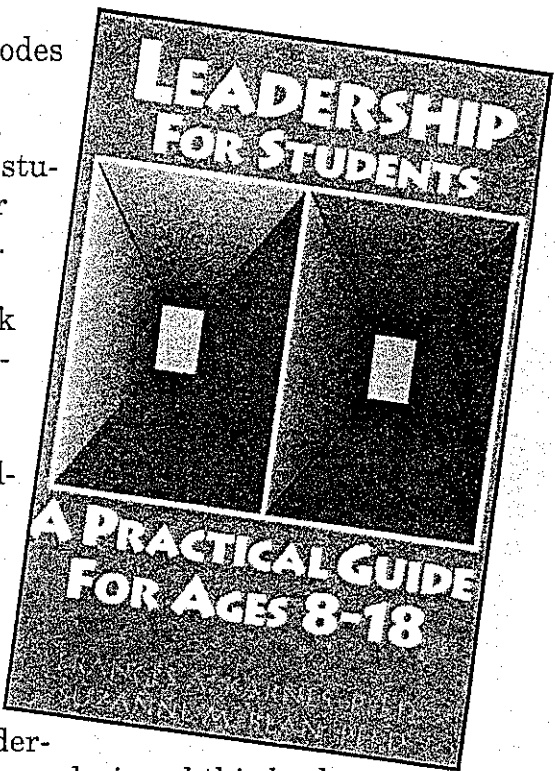
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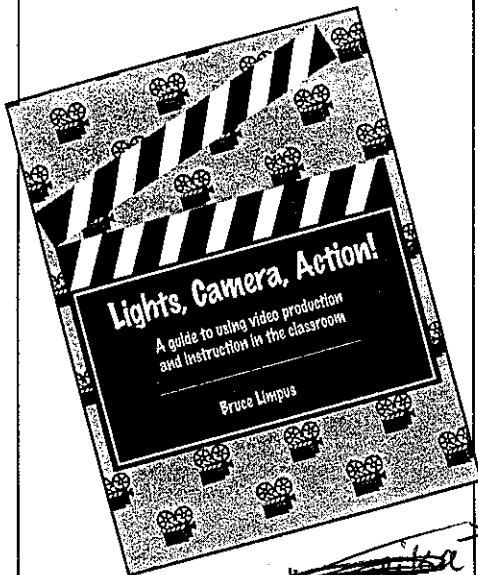
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the following gradient of interventions: make the student aware of the natural consequences of his or her behavior, **implement an informal self-monitoring and self-reinforcement system**, or formalize the self-monitoring system and link improvements to specific rewards. The present view is to utilize the least obtrusive means of altering behavior.

Intricately tied to motivated performance is the social-emotional development of the gifted/underachiever. Issues of self-concept, coping skills, and peer relations can indirectly or directly impact the student's productivity both in and out of the school setting. Benefit may be found in not neglecting the oftentimes simple, but effective methods of counseling for the gifted/underachiever (e.g., Hishinuma, 1993; Yoshimoto & Lundell, 1992). For instance, lack of homework timeliness and quality may be due to an unstructured home environment rather than poor study skills. Interventions may be more effective if family-related concerns are addressed first. In addition, counseling the student in the school environment might enhance self-concept (see Canfield & Siccone, 1993; Canfield & Wells, 1976; Siccone & Canfield, 1993), teach coping skills (e.g., how to cope with a boring lecture), and improve social skills (e.g., how to deal with being teased, how to interact with students with different interests). The availability of a school counselor will also influence the interventions taken.

Additional attention may be necessary for more persistent or severe difficulties in behavior and social-emotional development. Table 1 (see page 45) delineates behavioral characteristics associated with disorders that may be encountered by the teacher. If significant behaviors are suspected, an appropriate school official should be consult-

ed and a comprehensive evaluation should be considered (if not already conducted). If confirmed by a qualified professional or multidisciplinary team, appropriate services outside the school setting (e.g., medications, psychotherapy, etc.) may be necessary to complement in-school programs.

### School Philosophy and Procedures

The school's philosophy and resulting procedures may impact the services developed and implemented by the teacher in his or her classroom. School policies and procedures that provide consistency across classrooms and courses allow for a predictable environment for the gifted/underachiever. For example, consistency in classroom management and homework policies across the school aids the student in adjusting to the expectations of the school. In contrast, inconsistencies in school-wide policies make the situation more difficult for the gifted/underachiever because the student must keep track of and adjust to the different and idiosyncratic rules for each teacher, classroom, and course. For instance, if one teacher attempts to motivate the student to complete homework assignments by contacting the pupil's parents, and another teacher tries to handle all homework issues within the parameters of the school, then one could expect the student to be somewhat confused. In the end, one system may be more effective than the other, but the two systems may also work against each other in the long run. In general, this type of inconsistency in homework policy will be to the detriment of the gifted/underachiever.

Ideally, the school-wide philosophy and procedures should be supportive of the gifted/underachiever. For example, teacher in-services could focus on such topics as informal assessments, curriculum development, instructional game

teacher cooperates and  
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= differences  
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formats, computer and technological applications, motivational techniques, and counseling methods related to the gifted/underachiever.

### Parenting and the Home Environment

Although the emphasis of this article is on what can be done in the school setting, factors associated with the home and family will likely affect the characteristics of the gifted/underachiever and what interventions may be effective in the classroom. For instance, if a behavioral contract is entered between a teacher and student, but the ultimate reward is already being provided in the home environment, then the outcome will almost assuredly be disappointing. Therefore, at a minimum, parent-school communication, collaboration, and mutual support are essential components to successfully motivating the gifted/underachiever.

### Reward Menus and Behavioral Contracts

Reward menus and behavioral contracts have been used in many different types of environments, including schools, in an effort to increase the motivational level and performance of individuals. Seven general steps are needed to develop and implement a behavioral approach that enhances gifted/underachiever motivation.

#### Step 1: Target Behaviors

The first procedure in this seven-step process is to identify and target the behaviors in question. Different aspects of a behavior can be addressed: frequency, duration, and intensity. In addition, it is important to note that in targeting undesirable behaviors (e.g., daydreaming in class), there should be equal emphasis on selecting desirable

behaviors as well (e.g., attending). The combination of rewarding productive, desirable behaviors while attempting to eliminate undesirable behaviors is the most effective method. Positive behaviors to target may include: being on time to class, being prepared for class with all necessary materials, turning in homework assignments on time, turning in homework of quality, working on class assignments without teacher prompting, making eye contact with the teacher, taking notes, working independently, participating in class discussions, and recording homework assignments. Undesirable behaviors may include: being tardy to class, attending to events outside of the classroom, talking and distracting peers, doodling instead of taking notes, and rushing out of the classroom without recording the homework assignment.

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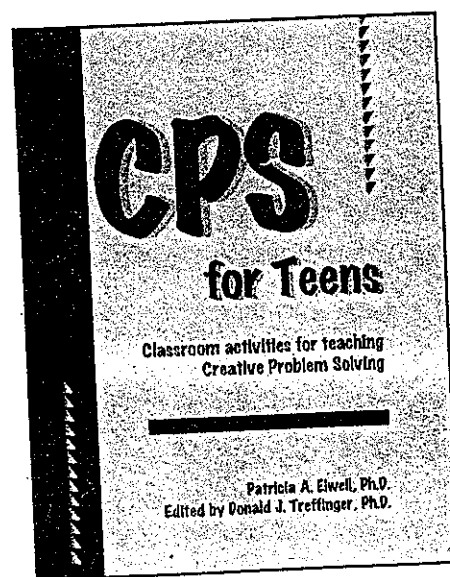
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works only if the student who has the money has been deprived

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Step 2: Obtain Baselines

When formal research is conducted, (quantification) of the targeted behaviors is important in order to determine if progress is being made by the student. Although such standardized observational procedures are helpful in conveying an accurate picture of the pupil's behavior, the teacher may not have the resources to collect behavioral data on such a precise level. However, the teacher should obtain some sense of a "baseline" of the behaviors in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the behavioral program. This baseline could be as simple as knowing that the student comes to school four out of five days, or turns in his or her homework only about once every five days.

Step 3: Determine Positive Rewards and Consequences

The third step is to determine the possible rewards and, if necessary, the mild negative consequences that may be used to increase motivation. One flexible and effective means of fulfilling this step is to construct a reward menu (or reinforcer menu) for each student in need of a more structured approach (e.g., Alberto & Troutman, 1990; McCartney, 1989), and perhaps for the entire class. A reward menu consists of a list of reinforcers from which the student may select based on an agreed-upon point system. The contents of the reward menu may be determined using two complementary methods: (a) have the student respond to open-ended questions, and (b) have the student select from an already made-up reward menu of potential reinforcers.

The following questions may be posed to the gifted/underachiever in an open-ended format:

Tangible rewards:

- What kinds of things or items in

school and at home do you like? This can include things to eat or drink, school supplies, toys, games, and so on.

- If someone gave you \$1, what would you buy?
• If someone gave you \$10, what would you buy?

Social rewards:

- Who are your best friends? What kinds of things do you like to do with your classmates? What kinds of ways do you like others to know that you did something positive?

Activity rewards:

- What kinds of activities do you like to do in the classroom?
• What kinds of activities do you like to do outside of the classroom?
• What kinds of activities do you like to do at home?
• Do you have any hobbies? If so, what are they?

Table 2 (see page 46) is an already-prepared sample reward menu that can be modified based on the student, teacher, and school in question. The items and activities listed can be a starting point for the gifted/underachiever.

Individualization. The reward menu will have greater effectiveness the more the contents are determined by the student and subsequently approved or disapproved by the teacher. For example, the activity of going out to lunch recess is a positive reward for most students. However, for many students who lack social skills, interacting with their peers during lunch recess may actually be an aversive event. Similarly, collecting insects may be extremely motivating for one gifted/underachiever, but may be quite repulsive for another. Therefore, although empirically based ratings of reinforcer strength should be considered (e.g., Fantuzzo, Rohrbeck, Hightower, & Work, 1991), the teacher must focus in

on what is reinforcing for that particular gifted/underachiever.

Class menu. The concept of a reward menu can be extended to the entire class as a whole. For example, the class would be able to select rewards based on class achievements. However, the teacher should be careful in applying what will amount to "group contingencies." If not done with a distinct strategy in mind, such a program can instigate difficulties in peer relations when class goals are not met due to any one particular student or small group of pupils. In addition, group contingencies that allow for only one mischievous student to "wreck" the rewards of the entire class may give undue attention and attention to the one student.

Therefore, structuring for success for the entire class is a prudent strategy along with taking into account students who may have difficulty contributing to a group contingency.

Resistance to deprivation-satiation effects. One very distinct advantage of using a reward menu is that the wide selection of reinforcers greatly decreases the chances of the student becoming tired of all of the rewards at the same time. For example, tangible reinforcers such as food and drinks are generally rewarding only to the extent that the student has been deprived of these items. Once the pupil is satiated or "full" (e.g., after lunch), food may no longer be an effective reinforcer. With the inclusion of social and activity-based rewards, the probability becomes low that the student will become tired of all of the reinforcers on the reward menu.

Step 4: Set Realistic Goals When Linking Behavior to Rewards and Consequences

The fourth step is to solidify a realistic point system linking the behavioral continued on page 44

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goals to rewards and consequences. Each behavioral goal should be worth a certain number of points. Likewise, each item on the reward menu should be assigned a certain number of points in order to be "bought" or attained. Although the student should provide input in the process, the teacher should have the last say. This step is one of open discussion, but the process should not turn into a negotiation where the student and teacher are equals. The teacher is in control, but willing to hear out the student on suggestions. Successfully completing this step can be a delicate matter. If the point assignments are too liberal, the student may earn so many of the items on the reward menu that he or she may not "put out" as much as desired. If the point system is too stringent, the student may not attain enough success and may not respond constructively to the program.

However, at the beginning, there are advantages to setting up behavioral goals that are almost guaranteed to be met thus resulting in the gifted/underachiever being rewarded and feeling successful. This structuring of success should increase motivation to attain future higher goals. For example, one goal might be to improve homework timeliness by going from turning in only one assignment on time in a given week to two or three. Although such a goal may seem trivial in light of the ultimate objective of, say, 90 or 100 percent, the expectation on the student's part is to improve twofold or threefold in a week's time frame, which is considerable.

In addition, in an effort to structure for success, behaviors may need to be broken down into more manageable units. For example, instead of targeting the global and complex behavior of completion of a term paper, the teacher may consider breaking down the term-

paper task into more manageable behaviors: have the student determine the topic, collect five resources, take notes for each resource, organize the notes, complete the introduction, write the first half of the body, finish the second half of the body, complete the conclusion, produce the bibliography, proof and double check the draft, and complete and turn in the final version. Each of these more specific behaviors could be made a goal and rewards could be provided accordingly. Part of the difficulty for the gifted/underachiever is that the rewards of completing a term paper are traditionally provided on a very delayed basis in comparison to the initial behaviors.

As can be deduced, the point system offers great flexibility. Another advantage is that implementation of the program can be done with minimal disruption to instruction. In fact, elaborate classroom systems can be developed including those that incorporate math, consumerism, economics, and banking (e.g., Adair & Schneider, 1993). For example, each student could have a savings or checking account. Deposit slips and checks could be mass produced with scratch paper. Interest from the accounts could be calculated. The stock market could be integrated into the activities whereby pupils are able to buy and sell stocks. A class or school "store" could be created as a central location for many of the rewards. Periodic "auctions" could be held for the highly desirable, one-of-a-kind rewards (some donated by parents). Students could volunteer for various "occupations" such as bank teller, store cashier, stock broker, and auctioneer. And woven throughout this economic organizational structure could be the point system.

Although taking away points, a form of punishment called "response cost," would be one additional way to

increase flexibility in the system and enhance student motivation, a more positive approach is suggested at first. This positive orientation along with ignoring undesirable behavior or applying very mild forms of punishment (e.g., time out) may be sufficient to change behavior to a desirable level. In addition, natural consequences should be utilized to a greater extent than artificial consequences because the message to the student will be less vindictive and will likely foster generalization of behavior to other environments where actual natural consequences also exist.

**Step 5: Determine Means of Record Keeping, Feedback, and Cashing In**

When agreements are reached on the points assigned to behavioral goals and rewards, a behavioral contract is forming. As part of the behavioral contract, the method of record keeping, of providing feedback to the student, and of "cashing in" points and obtaining rewards should be solidified.

**Record keeping.** There are many techniques for record keeping. The teacher should select the most effective, accurate, and least cumbersome method. Stars, check marks, tallies, and numbered points can be utilized to keep track of the points earned. The records can be kept on an index card on the student's desk, in a specific folder on the teacher's desk, or if done in a positive manner, on the class bulletin board. Whenever possible, the student should be allowed to assist in the record-keeping process with the teacher being able to verify the information as needed. When a class-wide point system is implemented, perhaps the last five to 10 minutes per day can be utilized for record keeping. This will be time well spent given the benefits of improved student performance.

**Feedback to the student.** Feedback to the



student on how many points earned is an important component to a successful program. In general, the more immediate this feedback is to the gifted/underachiever, the more effective will be the behavioral program. One way to maintain immediate feedback, but not burden the teacher with this sometimes laborious task is to have the student become more involved in the record keeping. However, the record keeping and feedback should not interfere with the student's performance in the classroom setting.

3) *Cashing in.* The method of cashing in points should be diverse and flexible, but not to the point of interrupting instructional time. For example, the teacher may set the following time

frames for cashing in: just before the start of the school day, after the completion of in-class assignments, in between class periods, during the first five minutes of lunch, and immediately after school. For a class-wide system, a short amount of time could be devoted daily or weekly to access the class store or to conduct a class-wide auction.

Finally, to decrease any misunderstanding concerning the intricacies of the behavioral contract, the student should be asked to paraphrase back to the teacher the exact details of the agreement. Although such a contract can remain on an oral level, jotting down the main components would not be a bad idea just in case future reference is needed to the contract. As part of any

contract, the student should clearly understand that the teacher has the right to modify the contract at any time, although when this is done, the teacher should explain the reasons to the student rather than invoking a seemingly arbitrary rule. Ideally, the contract can be put on hardcopy and signed by all parties involved including the student and teacher, and, where appropriate, school counselor, principal, and parents (see DeRisi & Butz, 1975).

#### Step 6: Implement and Modify the Program

The sixth step is to actually implement the program. When implementing the program, however, emphasis

*continued on page 46*

Table 1

### Behavioral Characteristics for Possible Referral for Comprehensive Testing and/or Mental Health Evaluation

#### Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

##### *Predominantly inattentive type*

- careless errors, distractibility, lack of sustained attention, poor listening skills, difficulty following through, poor organization, avoidance of difficult tasks, loss of things, forgetfulness

##### *Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type*

- Hyperactive — restlessness, difficulty remaining in seat, physically active, difficulty playing quietly, "on the go," excessively talks
- Impulsive — blurted out answers, difficulty awaiting turn, interruption of others

#### Anxiety-Related

- restlessness, ease in being fatigued, difficulty concentrating, ease in being irritable, muscle tension, sleep disturbance

#### Conduct Disorder

- aggressiveness, property destruction, deceitfulness, theft, serious violation of rules

#### Oppositional Defiant Disorder

- temper loss, arguments, defiance/refusal of adult requests, deliberate annoyance of others, ease in being annoyed, external blame, anger/resentfulness, spitefulness/vindication

#### Depression

- interest/pleasure loss, change in eating habits & weight loss or gain, change in sleeping patterns, energy loss, feelings of worthlessness, diminished ability to think/concentrate, suicidal ideation

Note: Adapted from the American Psychiatric Association (1994).

## Possible Individual and Class Reward Menu

### Tangible Rewards

#### food

candy, raisins, fruit, popcorn, cookies, chips, crackers, drinks  
water, cold water, juice, milk, soda

#### school stationery

pencils, pens, erasers, notepads, stamps, and pads

#### "little" things

stickers, toys, Frisbees, balls

#### high-interest items

magazines, comics, books, magnets, music compact discs, computer disks

#### larger items supported by parents

calculators, inline skates, video games, dark glasses

#### money-based rewards (e.g., work study, allowance)

### Social Rewards

social praise from class, teacher, school counselor, principal

display of work on bulletin board, hallway

grades, awards, certificates

study time with friends

choice of where to sit in class

free time to "talk story" and socialize

group discussions and decisions

group leader

"auction" conductor

peer tutor/teacher, peer counselor

"special" time with teacher, counselor, principal

"assistant" or expert for the teacher (e.g., teacher's assistant, computer assistant)

positive note home to parents

### Activity Rewards

#### academic, educational

read, tell/listen to stories

make or play games, solve puzzles

engage in hands-on activities such as Lego Logo, models, kites, rockets, jewelry making

conduct science experiments (e.g., dissection, microscope)

use of computer, video equipment

utilize "centers" of interest

select and watch videos

go to the library, go on field trips

design an area of the class

earn "passes" for homework and tests

#### arts

draw, color, paint; make clay pieces, craft items; listen to music; plan a humorous skit

#### physical sports

more recess time, swings, tag, kick ball, dodge ball

#### celebrations

have a party, be excused early

## Motivating the Gifted Underachiever

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must be made on the fact that the teacher is monitoring the student's behavioral progress, evaluating the effectiveness of the program, and continually considering changes to the system. Very few programs can be spelled out in detail from the start and result in the desired outcomes without any modifications to the system.

However, if the gifted/underachiever has been structured for success from the start, the student should attain most of his or her behavioral goals early on. Positive rewards should be accompanied by social acknowledgments as well (e.g., "You really did a nice job!"). Aside from minor reminders of the conditions of the contract, no warning, threats, or intimidating statements should be made to the student. The agreements have already been determined and in the process of paraphrasing, the pupil has already confirmed to the teacher the understanding of the terms. Any type of negative consequences should be implemented in a matter-of-fact manner with minimal embarrassment to the student.

In the course of executing the program, loop holes should be closed and as the student's behavior improves, expectations should be increased in reasonable increments. However, the teacher should expect "two steps forward, one step back" given the complexity of human behavior.

### Step 7: Increase Maintenance, Generalization, and Intrinsic Motivation

When considering developing a behavioral program, the ultimate goal for most students, gifted/underachievers included, should be to eventually wean them off of such a structured system especially if tangible rewards are a large part of the reward menu being selected. However, such a weaning

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Removing student from contract situation = gradual process

but important: independence responsibility

process should be done systematically and strategically. Behavioral expectations should be gradually increased in response to successful attainment of previous goals. Rewards should be provided on a more intermittent and delayed basis. For example, if the initial behavioral goal was for the student to earn one point by remaining on task for 10 minutes, the next modified goal might be for the student to earn two points by remaining on task for 20 minutes. If the student is successful in both cases, the same amount of reward is actually earned. However, the greater expectation is in the duration of on-task behaviors. In addition, the student should be guided increasingly toward social and activity-based rewards. Self-monitoring and self-reinforcement methods should be incorporated.

### Closing Comments and Summary

The teacher is up against a formidable task. Typically, the gifted/underachiever has displayed a life-long pattern of "not meeting his or her potential." The teacher is tasked with turning this student around (along with meeting the needs of 25 or 30 other students), but realistically, has access to a restricted range of reinforcers that may or may not be potent and effective enough to change the student's behavior. For example, in contrast to the rewards available in the school setting, the gifted/underachiever may have access to the following at home: in-line skates, bicycle, own private bedroom equipped with one TV set for watching regular shows and one for playing video games, portable video games, compact disc player, computer, printer, and telephone with conference-call capabilities. In the school environment, the teacher may be offering rewards such as stickers, rubber stamps,

and five minutes of computer time. The discrepancy in the availability of reinforcers between the home and school must be factored in when setting behavioral goals. This set of circumstances can be discouraging to the teacher.

However, the teacher should be fully cognizant that the school environment also offers reinforcers that are less likely to occur in the home including social and activity-based rewards. Taking full advantage of these is a key to motivating the gifted/underachiever. The additional advantage of using social and activity-based reinforcers is that these rewards are usually intrinsically based to begin with, which increases the likelihood of maintenance and generalization to other environments.

More fundamentally, a common criticism of using rewards, especially external or tangible ones, is that we are essentially bribing the student. Because this is a frequent concern and will often lead parents and teachers not to consider using techniques such as those proposed in this article, the issue is addressed here (see Axelrod, 1983). First, the present view is not to utilize tangible rewards if the student in question is self-directed and intrinsically motivated. In general, do not "fix" something that is not broken.

However, for the gifted/underachiever who has been counseled and provided services that are appropriate for the student, but is still not responsive to the school's programs, a more structured behavioral approach may be warranted. In this regard, two relevant definitions of "bribe" are provided by *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1983). The first definition states, "a price, reward, gift, or favor bestowed or promised to induce one to commit a wrong or illegal act" (p. 226). For instance, if someone pays a government official to do some thing illegal in order to benefit from this

act, then this would fall under the first definition of bribe. Clearly, the reward provided to a student for being on task or for turning in homework on time cannot be considered as a bribe because the behaviors in question are neither wrong nor illegal, and in fact, are productive and prosocial in nature.

The second definition of bribe is as follows: "anything given or promised to induce a person to do something against his wishes" (p. 226). This definition is what concerns most people and makes them philosophically against providing rewards for expected behaviors. Many parents feel that they should not have to bribe and pay their children to behave appropriately (e.g., children should keep their rooms neat and clean, etc.). Likewise, teachers may feel that they should not bribe or give rewards such as toys for being on task or for homework production. Although this definition of bribe technically applies in these cases, adults may be providing students with a double standard. In particular, most adults would not work without pay; yet, we expect students to attend school and perform at a high level for 13 straight years (i.e., kindergarten through the 12th grade) without so much as a penny.

For some groups of students like gifted/underachievers, such an arrangement is a set up for failure. The typical rewards provided by teachers and schools may not be potent enough or provided on as an immediate basis to maintain the effortful behaviors that are required. If we wish to be effective with the gifted/underachiever, we must at times recognize how ineffective the environment is for such a student. Giving 100 percent of the responsibility to the student and waiting for more natural consequences to "kick in" (e.g., not being accepted into college, not being able to get a job, etc.) may be high

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prices to pay that are out of proportion to the relatively manageable programs that can be developed and implemented in the earlier years of schooling.

Determining how to motivate the gifted/underachiever can be a frustrating process if there appears to be no effective alternative. Many teachers have not had the necessary training to tackle such a formidable task. The usual methods such as teacher praise and grades may not suffice for the gifted/underachiever. A multi-faceted and integrated approach was put forth whereby the following factors were considered to be important in their interactions and influence on motivation: (a) comprehensive and ongoing assessment, (b) teacher attributes, (c) curriculum and instruction, (d) social-emotional development and counseling, (e) school philosophy and procedures, and (f) parenting and the home environment. One particular technique to increase motivation was delineated. Seven steps to developing a behavioral contract, which included how to devise a reward menu, were introduced. Motivating the gifted/underachiever can be a complicated process requiring knowledge of many areas including classroom management, counseling, and behavioral contracting. The best methods are those that are individualized and take into account the unique attributes of each and every gifted/underachiever. Behavioral contracting within an integrated system of services provides the teacher with a positive means of motivating the gifted/underachiever. ☛

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