

Monday April 14, 2008  
Child prodigy: Two sides of genius  
Stories by S.S. YOGA

Parents who wish for their child to be a prodigy might rethink that dream if they take recent media reports to heart. British citizen of Pakistani-Malaysian heritage Sufiah Yusof, a 13-year-old mathematical genius, now works as a social escort. She also offers “extras”, according to a report from *News of the World*. Another prodigy, Australian pianist David Helfgott, had to deal with an abusive and overbearing father; Helfgott suffered a major mental breakdown. But he was able to achieve a breakthrough.



David Helfgott

Very few scientific studies have been done on prodigies; Dr Feldman and his colleagues did one in 1991. He notes that there are some fields in which child prodigies are more frequently found. Music is the most common, and Mozart has been considered as the most gifted. Chess has contributed such names as Bobby Fischer. Another science noted for producing prodigies is mathematics.

But such cases are rare in creative domains like writing, dance and philosophy. Dr Feldman has proposed that children can compete in fields that are highly structured with clear rules, like music and mathematics. But disciplines which need experience and abstract thinking, such as writing, would be more difficult to master.

Alissa Quart – a prodigy – said in a *Time* magazine article that prodigies are found more in quantitative than in qualitative fields. Contrary to popular opinion, an exceptionally high IQ does not mean being a prodigy. In another *Time* article, Australian educational specialist for gifted children Maria McCann said that many creative children don’t necessarily register high IQs because they don’t do well in standardised exams.

Parents play a vital role, says Ellen Winner, psychology professor and author of a book on gifted children. In her research, she has found that parents of gifted children provide stimulating environments for them. Interestingly though, parents of prodigies are often involved in the same or related fields as their children. Picasso’s father was an artist, Mozart’s father a musician, and Vaslav Nijinsky’s parents were dancers.

“To send a child to university at seven is like you are not regarding him as a human being, but as a performing monkey,” a psychologist said. But Ainan’s father, Valentine, said it would be unfair to allow his son’s mind to stagnate. “Imagine you are the strongest man in the world and you’re asked to lift something small like a banana. It’s like asking him to deny his true nature. Well, it’s the same with a child prodigy.” However, American violin virtuoso Itzhak Perlman, often considered a prodigy, said in a New York Times interview that there are parents who want to achieve success through their child.

Quart writes that “the over-cultivated can develop self-esteem problems and performance anxiety.” An extreme example cited was Brandenn Bremmer who entered college at age 10. In 2005, aged 14, he committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. He had told Quart in an interview: “America is a society that demands perfection.”

The concern about developing the child’s talent in one area leads to neglect in other areas. The early 20th century piano prodigy Erwin Nyiregyhazi could not even tie his shoe laces when he was 21. However, not all prodigies are like that. Terman’s studies showed that many of his subjects went on to make phenomenal contributions to society. History provides us with numerous examples: Physicist Isaac Newton, double Nobel Prize winner Marie Curie.

I COMPREHENSION (15 POINTS)

A Are these sentences TRUE or FALSE? JUSTIF. (3 pts)

- 1 Helfgott's father had a negative impact on his son's future career.  
.....  
.....
- 2 All parents agree that sending their gifted children to a prodigy school is inhuman.  
.....  
.....
- 3 Some prodigious people find it difficult to adapt themselves to their own society.  
.....  
.....

B Answer these questions with information from the text. (3 pts)

- 1 What makes children excel in some domains?  
.....  
.....
- 2 Why don't children usually show a high level of intelligence?  
.....  
.....
- 3 When can parents affect their children's mental abilities in a positive way?  
.....  
.....

C Find in the text words and expressions that mean the same as the following. (3 pts)

- 1 bossy, authoritarian (para 1): .....
- 2 domain (para 2) .....
- 3 concerned, implicated (para 3) .....

D What do the underlined words refer to? (3 pts)

- 1 one (para 2) .....
- 2 they (para 4) .....
- 3 them (para 5) .....

E Complete these sentences with information from the text. (3 pts)

- 1 Sufiah Yusof, a 13-year-old mathematical genius, not only works as a social escort, but .....
- 2 There are parents who want to achieve success through their child. So, .....
- 3 The child's talent can be developed in one area. However, .....

**II LANGUAGE (15 POINTS)**

**A Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the words between brackets. (3 pts)**

- 1 I hope people will be (courage) ..... enough to speak out against this injustice.
- 2 He had the (audacious) ..... to say I was too fat.
- 3 She was even less (enthusiasm) ..... about going to Spain.

**B Put the verbs between brackets into the correct form. (3 pts)**

- 1 I needn't (go) ..... home yet – it's still early.
- 2 Such things ought (not be) ..... allowed.
- 3 We're really looking forward to (see) ..... you again.

**C Fill in each blank with the right word. (3 pts)**

passion	outstanding	careless	obstinate	vigour	timidity
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- 1 It was ..... of me to leave the door open.
- 2 He worked with renewed ..... and determination.
- 3 Lionel Messi is one of the most ..... players in history.

**D Rewrite the following sentences using the connectors between brackets. (3 pts)**

- 1 He never seems to have any money. He has a good job. (**and yet**)
- 2 His wife was present. I said nothing about the problem. (**because of**)
- 3 He works as a doctor. He writes novels in his spare time. (**besides**)

**E Match each sentence with the function it expresses. (3 pts)**

	Sentence	Function
1	Their marriage was a mistake, if you ask me.	a Agreement
2	There is still much to discuss. We shall, therefore, return to this item at our next meeting.	b Opinion
3	'Nobody will oppose it.' <i>'I should think not!'</i>	c Effect d Disagreement

**III WRITING (10 POINTS)**

In Morocco as in any other country around the world, there are some talented people such as footballers or musicians. They have certain inborn qualities and powers that are amazing. But the problem is that they are not given the opportunity to improve or use those talents in a way that can serve their society.

