

# **Current Research on the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted and Talented Students: Good News and Future Possibilities**

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A recent summary of research produced by a task force of psychologists and educational researchers associated with the National Association for Gifted Children and the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented indicated that high-ability students are generally at least as well adjusted as any other group of youngsters.

Some of these issues emerge because of a mismatch with educational environments that are not responsive to the pace and level of gifted students' learning and thinking.

Suggestions are provided for assessment and educational programming based on students' strengths and interests that may result in helping talented students realize their potential.

In summary, current work suggests that gifted and talented students are a very diverse group of individuals who have ability, in one or more domains, that is sufficiently advanced and requires changes in the school environment, such as the instructional curriculum and teacher behaviors.

For example, several schedule changes were made for Andy—a talented student, such as cluster grouping him into classes with a few other academically talented students. A gifted specialist also worked with Andy and several other students on a regular basis, encouraging more supportive relationships between Andy and other students.

Some talented and gifted students face social and emotional issues deriving from their academic advancement in comparison with their age peers that makes them appear different in school and/or with their social groups.

Some may have fewer friends, and in order to feel accepted and make more friends, talented students may deny their academic needs to satisfy social needs.

The situation can be even more awkward for those students who are extremely talented and who have few peers, as they may become less socially adept, more introverted, and more inhibited and lonely.

Current research has identified common areas of psychological vulnerability experienced by some gifted students such as perfectionism, underachievement, and indecision about which of several talents to pursue.

Perfectionism is another common area of psychological response that can affect many talented and gifted students, and it generally involves holding very high standards for one's performance, which can produce both very negative or highly positive outcomes.

Underachievement is widely regarded as one of the most pervasive problems affecting gifted and talented students, and can result from multiple sources such as under-challenging schools, peer pressure for conformity, social isolation, and family dysfunction.

Recent incidents of school violence by bright young people have suggested that gifted youngsters may be at special risk for delinquent behavior, but research evidence to date suggests the opposite—that gifted students evidence less delinquency than average students.

Social and emotional issues may be experienced by gifted and talented students who are members of specific groups, such as gifted females, gifted students with learning disabilities, or individuals who are highly creative.

Gifted Black students encounter more barriers to racial identity development than do White students, particularly when they feel they must choose between academic success and social acceptance.

Students who are creatively talented in the arts may not fit in or excel academically in traditional educational settings.

Finally, gifted students with learning disabilities are often misunderstood because their giftedness can mask their disabilities and their disabilities can camouflage their talents. Gifted students with attention-deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity are at risk for difficulties with social and emotional adjustment.

Various counseling formats have been recommended for working with gifted students who need additional support, ranging from psychoeducational formats like affective curricula delivered by teachers as one component of a comprehensive gifted program to more traditional therapeutic interventions such as group counseling, individual counseling, and family counseling.

In addition to direct counseling, several preventative strategies can be used to address the affective needs of gifted and talented students.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model was originally created as a programming model for gifted students, but it has also been used as a talent development approach to provide enriching learning and affective experiences for all children.

The SEM has three major goals: developing talents in all children; providing a broad range of advanced-level enrichment experiences for all students; and using the ways that students respond to these enrichment experiences as stepping stones for follow-up advanced learning for children with high potential and demonstrated gifts and talents.

The SEM uses three components to accomplish these goals: The Total Talent Portfolio; Curriculum modification, including a system of curriculum compacting; textbook analysis and curriculum mapping; and expanding the depth of learning to enable students to learn something they select in an advanced manner, and Enrichment teaching and learning.

The procedure involves defining the goals and outcomes of a particular unit or segment of instruction, determining and documenting which students have already mastered most or all of a specified set of learning outcomes, and providing replacement strategies for material already mastered through the use of instructional options that enable a more challenging and productive use of the student's time.

The Continuum of Services in the SEM. The SEM includes an integrated continuum of services for talented and gifted students that can also be applied to other students.

A teacher-rating instrument that is both valid and reliable such as the Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students-Revised Edition can also provide insight into student abilities and talents.

Although SRBCSS has traditionally been used to identify students for special services, it can be useful in a TTP as a way to gain insights about student strengths.

Building educational experiences around student interests is probably one of the most effective ways to guarantee that enrichment practices will be provided for students.

While including learning style preferences in the TTP is important, teachers should understand that most students will vary their preferences according to subject and age and so this component should be used to help teachers consider how learning can be more enjoyable for students if opportunities are provided to enable them to work within their area of preference occasionally.

The portfolio should travel with a students from year to year and should serve as the basis for understanding the complete picture of individual student strengths and accomplishments.

One of the biggest challenges for the future is to help to provide opportunities for gifted and talented students to realize their potential and to emerge as confident, positive leaders and problem solvers.