

Closing the Achievement Gap and Promoting Greater Access to Gifted Education Programs

Joseph S. Renzulli
University of Connecticut

The American education system faces challenges of an achievement gap between middle class and low-income/minority students, as well as underrepresentation in gifted programs. Two strategies proposed: reevaluating assessment methods and implementing pedagogy to develop strengths and talents.

Problem 1: Assessment for Learning Vs. Assessment of Learning

This section discusses the difference between assessment for learning and assessment of learning, highlighting the importance of formative assessment and individual student data. It also explores the growing interest in non-cognitive skills and their relevance in talent development and job employment.

- Assessment of learning, also known as summative assessment, evaluates student content learning and academic achievement at the end of an instructional period.
- Summative assessments are formal, structured, and often used for comparing and remediating student performance.
- Assessment for learning, or formative assessment, is ongoing and flexible, gathering data to modify instruction and meet student needs.
- Formative assessment focuses on individual student data, including interests, instructional preferences, and co-cognitive factors.
- Non-cognitive skills, such as soft skills and social intelligence, are gaining importance in college admissions and job employment.
- These skills cannot be taught or evaluated in the same way as cognitive skills and add a new dimension to human potential.

Developing Students' Executive Function Skills

This section emphasizes the importance of developing students' executive function skills, which are challenging to place into a workable framework. These skills include goal setting, decision making, organization, persistence, time management, attention to details, self-assessment, communication, cooperation, collaboration, and negotiation.

- Executive function skills are challenging to categorize and understand.
- Simulations and project-based learning are effective ways to develop these skills.
- Providing real-world projects allows students to develop empathy and cooperative skills.
- Giving students a choice in their projects increases engagement and motivation.

- The Schoolwide Enrichment Model allows students to choose their roles in projects.
- Integrating executive function skills with academic learning improves outcomes.
- Direct teaching of executive function skills should be avoided.
- Emphasizing student-selected product genre and target audiences is important in project-based learning.

An Extension and Enhancement to Universal Screening and the Use of Local Norms

This section discusses the use of universal screening and local norms in identifying low-income and minority group students for talent development opportunities. It highlights the limitations of norm-based approaches that focus on comparing students rather than considering their individual strengths and interests.

- Universal screening tools favor traditional skills and creative thinking styles, which may not accurately reflect academic potential.
- Norm-based screening often results in more affluent, White students being designated as gifted.
- Current research is exploring performance-based assessment as a potential tool for universal screening.
- Teacher rating scales, analyzed using norms, are commonly used in identification processes.
- Supplementing norm-based approaches with additional information can help achieve greater equity in gifted education programs.

What Terman's Work Tells Us Today About Developing Gifts, Talents, and Behaviors in Young People

This section discusses Lewis Terman's longitudinal study on high IQ individuals and the importance of personality traits in achieving success.

- Lewis Terman conducted a famous longitudinal study on high IQ individuals.
- The study found that non-intellectual factors, such as personality traits, play a significant role in success.
- Persistence, integration toward goals, self-confidence, and freedom from inferiority feelings were identified as key traits for success.
- Personality factors are more important than intelligence in determining notable achievement.
- The study suggests the need to identify and develop these traits in young people.
- Assessment for Learning, through student-completed instruments, can provide valuable information for identifying and supporting students' needs.

Building A Multi-Criteria Identification Process

The assessment for learning traits can be integrated into a multi-criteria identification process by creating strength-based profiles for students. Information from teacher

observations and parent ratings should be included in enrichment team meetings. Culturally and linguistically diverse students and lower-income students should not be excluded based on test scores.

Like a Swiss Army Knife

The text discusses the need to shift from a labeling process to a talent development process in education. It emphasizes the importance of conducting universal screening based on interests, strengths, motivation, and other co-cognitive skills to provide appropriate services. The use of various assessment instruments, including online tools, is highlighted to ensure the recognition and development of talents.

Summary

This section discusses the personalized approach of Assessment for Learning, including the development of various instruments and tools to assess students' interests, learning styles, and perceptions of learning. It also addresses the challenge of underrepresentation of low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse, and twice exceptional students in talent development.

- Assessment for Learning is a personalized approach that focuses on students' interests, strengths, and preferred modes of communication.
- The section highlights the development of instruments and tools to assess students' executive functions, perceptions of learning at school, and enriched educational experiences.
- The underrepresentation of low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse, and twice exceptional students in talent development is a major challenge in education.
- The section emphasizes the importance of incorporating additional information gained through assessment for learning to provide equal access to talent development opportunities.

Part 2: A Change in Pedagogy Is Necessary to Promote the Strengths and Talents of All Young People

The achievement gap between advantaged students and those placed-at-risk is a major challenge in today's schools. Over 50% of immigrants, culturally diverse, and low-income children do not graduate from high school, and more than 30% of low-income students score at the lowest percentiles on national reading and math tests. This gap has led to negative consequences such as restricted opportunities for gifted and talented students, deskilling of teachers, and data manipulation by desperate administrators.

How Did We Get to This Place in Time?

The text discusses the ineffectiveness of various structural school reforms and the reliance on a low-level pedagogy that has not closed the achievement gap.

- Over three trillion dollars have been spent on school reform since the 1960s, but it has not made a significant impact.
- Various reform initiatives, such as smaller schools and charter schools, have not worked in improving student achievement.
- The focus on standardized tests and a prescriptive pedagogy has not closed the achievement gap.
- The reliance on drill-and-practice models for learning has led to the departure of many talented teachers from the profession.
- The search for quick-fix solutions through structural changes has not addressed the underlying issues in education.

Time for a New Approach

This section discusses the need for a counter-intuitive approach to education and the importance of learner-centered skills.

- The current approaches to education have produced poor results, suggesting the need for a different approach.
- Learner-centered skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, are crucial for success in a knowledge-driven economy.
- Compensatory learning models and endless reforms have not yielded positive outcomes.
- Motivationally rich experiences that promote student engagement and enjoyment are necessary in the curriculum.
- Extra-curricular activities that allow student choice and interaction with like-minded peers can lead to increased engagement and performance.

A Continuum of Learning and the Need for Inductive, Inquiry-Based Learning

This section discusses the significance of student engagement in learning and the negative consequences of a drill-oriented approach.

- Learning exists on a continuum from deductive to inductive approaches.
- Students who struggle are often subjected to repetitive practice material.
- The "drill and kill" approach to learning has negative effects on schools.
- There is a need to blend inductive and investigative pedagogy for at-risk populations.
- Middle-class parents are also dissatisfied with the drill-oriented curriculum.
- Student engagement leads to higher achievement, improved self-concept, and more favorable attitudes toward school.