

THE SUBTLE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE GIFTED

Melanie K. Irvin

Eastern New Mexico University, USA

E-mail: Melanie.irvin@enmu.edu

ABSTRACT

As the landscape in education is changing rapidly, gifted students' unique needs are lacking appropriate attention to the social and emotional aspect. The social and emotional development of gifted students are neglected and in turn more problems arise for this population. The need for recognizing and acting upon the social and emotional needs of the gifted is in dire need. The phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" is a reminder for everyone to find better solutions to attend the social and emotional needs of the gifted and talented. The gifted students social and emotional needs are vital components for counselors, teachers, gifted coordinators, and parents to collaborate for the betterment of the child.

Keywords: *subtle social, gifted students, social and emotional aspect*

INTRODUCTION

Gifted and talented (GT) has an increased amount of problems and challenges. Compared to their peers, gifted and talented students have unique social and emotional needs. Included within the needs of GT are self-awareness, social, family, and educational issues. For this population to find full social and emotional development, counseling is a major component of need. Counselor, parents, teachers, and gifted coordinators are at the forefront of support for our GT students.

WHAT IS GIFTED AND THE NEEDS OF GIFTED?

As time revolves, so does the meaning of gifted and talented. The various descriptions, as well as theories, of gifted and talented can cause chaos within the gifted population. Many tend to flock toward the notion of gifted meaning advanced abilities such as intellectual ability, academic achievement, visual and

performing arts, leadership ability, and creativity. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) reflects that “students with gifts and talents perform—or have the capability to perform—at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains.” According to Kamenetz (2015),

“One of the most popular definitions, dating to the early 1990s, is “asynchronous development.” That means, roughly, a student whose mental capacities develop ahead of chronological age. This concept matches the most popular tests of giftedness: IQ tests. Scores are indexed to age, with 100 as the average; a 6-year-old who gives answers characteristic of a 12-year-old would have an IQ of 200.”

“Giftedness has an emotional as well as a cognitive substructure: Cognitive complexity gives rise to emotional depth.” (Silverman & Baska, 2000, p. 3) The one size fits all approach does not fit most children within today’s society much less the gifted child. As the gifted population tends to have a different uniqueness upon each individual, the definition and needs of gifted and talented vary. The educational needs differ as well as cognitive and language abilities; learning styles; motivation and energy levels; personalities; mental health and self-concepts; habits and behavior; and background and experience. According to Schmitz and Galbraith (1985) “Talents and strengths among the gifted vary as widely as they do with any sample of students drawn from a so-called average population.” (p. 13)

Many areas of need are sought by our gifted and talented children. Coleman (1996) states,

“Often our attention to gifted students focuses on their academic needs for advanced content and added rigor within the curriculum. While these needs are important and must not be overlooked, we must also attend to the social and emotional needs of our gifted students.”

As many individuals focus solely on the academic side of things for the gifted, this leaves out very important areas of need such as social and emotional needs. Peterson (2006) states, “According to scholars, highly able students potentially have social and emotional concerns that may be related to characteristics associated with giftedness, and which are best addressed with counseling responses that consider the impact of giftedness.” (p.49) Anxiety, sensitivity, perfectionism, and underachievement are a few of the topics which affect gifted students through social and emotional needs.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DABROWSKI’S THEORY

Kazimierz Dąbrowski and his theory of positive disintegration (TPD) has made a mark within the gifted and talented population through personality

development, emotional development, and moral development. “Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration is an emotion-centered, nonontogenetic, five-level theory of personality development where the experience of all emotions is essential for the process of growth,” as stated by Harper, Cornish, Smith, and Merrotsky. (2016, p.37) Piirto (2010) states, “The influence of the Dabrowski theory on our field has been rather mystical and spiritual, as evidenced by the almost rabid and ideological devotion of those who take it up and who use it as an explanation for the way gifted and talented children are.” (p. 85) Mendaglio (2019) states, “In the absence of a comprehensive theory of giftedness, Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) offers a significant contribution to gifted education by providing provocative concepts that shed light on the affective aspects of gifted persons while simultaneously requiring an examination of our notions of giftedness itself.” As individuals seek for new perspectives and counseling approaches, Dabrowski’s work within the gifted and talented field is a key component in search of social and emotional needs of this population.

Silverman and Baska (2000) states, Dabrowski’s theory emphasizes the role of emotions in human development, so since his death it has come to be known as “Dabrowski’s Emotional Development.”” (p. 12) As counseling is a key component within the needs of the gifted and talented population, the Dabrowski Theory acknowledges the pathway to seek assistance in attending to the needs of the gifted. “Counseling via a Dabrowskian perspective goes beyond the sphere of social adjustment and career planning; it focuses instead on the powerful force of inner conflict in the development of value structures.” (Silverman, 2000, pp. 12-13) “Leta Hollingsworth... was the first to contribute evidence indicating that gifted children do have social/emotional needs meriting attention,” (Colangelo, 1991, p.273). The social and emotional development of gifted and talented children need equal importance within cognitive development.

The effects of heightened emotional sensitivity and overexciteabilities, as noted by Dabrowski, highlight five different areas including psychomotor, intellectual, imaginal, sensual, and emotional. As Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is commonly conflicted with psychomotor areas “such students show a surplus of energy, drive, enthusiasm, and restlessness, marked by compulsive talking and rapid speech,” (Davis, Rimm, & Seigle 2011, p. 356). ADHD is commonly a factor which hides a child’s gifts and talents. “The emotional area includes intensely positive and negative feelings, with soaring highs and dark lows,” (p. 356). Such behaviors interfere with the healthy development in the gifted population and the importance of recognizing and counseling these areas are in great need.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

“In the United States, where equality of opportunity has long been the goal of our schools, gifted young people are frequently denied an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential,” according to Kerr and Miller (1986). As expressed by Coleman & Cross, 2005; Gross, 2000, 2004, “Gifted children’s academic and affective needs in the school environment have been found to be qualitatively different from the average child’s, due to their atypical academic and affective characteristics,” (as cited by Eddles-Hirsch, Bialle, McCormick, & Rogers, 2012). With the gifted population it is important to understand that academics and the social and emotional needs tend to go hand in hand. The importance of counseling is present and this includes the student, parents, and teachers as well. The correct formulation to reach the needs of our gifted is an important yet ignored factor within today’s educational setting.

According to Davis, Rimm, and Siegle (2011), “Gifted students need help with personal problems, social and family problems, and education and career-guidance problems.” (p. 369) “The social development of the gifted is paradoxical,” (Silverman and Baska, 2000, p. 291). “Social adjustment of the gifted has always been more of a concern to our society than these children’s self-concept, academic progress, or inner development,” (p. 292). As the need for the development of counseling programs is ever-so present, the advocating piece needs to become stronger. The job is an uphill battle and our gifted and talented population is counting on receiving the help and guidance needed to succeed.

Without guidance, the gifted and talented have difficulty learning their social roles and emotions. Schmitz and Galbraith (1985) states,

“Howard Gardner writes of the intrapersonal and the interpersonal intelligences. Intrapersonal intelligence concerns self-knowledge and the ability to discriminate among a range of emotions and needs, and to draw upon this knowledge to guide one’s actions. Interpersonal intelligence, in contrast, concerns knowledge of others, and the understanding of how other people’s behavior reflects their feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and needs... Without these forms of knowledge, individuals have difficulty mastering their social roles and maturing emotionally.” (p. 69)

As facing the social and emotional development in gifted children, there must be an alliance in developing programs to assist them. This alliance shall include students, parents, counselors, teachers, and the gifted coordinator.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Majid and Alias (2010) state,

“There are gifted children within the typical population and within the special population. They face various risk factors that could interfere and inhibit their optimal development. It could be contributed from the aspects of; environmental, emotional, learning disabilities as well as the learning abilities. Risk factors need to be addressed accordingly to prevent gifted children from becoming; underachievers, maladjusted, and live a socially and emotionally deprived life.”

The label which the gifted population have obtained sometimes sends out the wrong signal. Many people see the name gifted and assume that these children have no problems or needs. As there are many gifts within gifted, but so are there negatives of problems and risk factors.

As advocates for the gifted population, the goal is how to meet the social and emotional needs. According to Galbraith and Delisle (2015), “The degree of difference between the gifted and average student (whether an IQ score, music, language or chess playing) influences, by itself, the gifted student’s self-concept.” (p. 68). Silverman (n.d) states, “Gifted children have positive social development when they are respected in their families; when their parents value the inherent worth of all human beings; when they find true peers of similar ability at an early age; and when they interact with the mainstream after they have developed a strong sense of their own acceptability.” There are many factors which go into valuing the social and emotional needs of the gifted population. The school plays a big role with the development of the social and emotional needs of their students, but we must not forget the parent and family factor as well.

Blass (2014) states,

“Gifted students are a diverse minority group with high intelligence and talent whose needs are often unrecognized and unmet. It is believed that this group of students, from a range of backgrounds, socio-economic statuses and abilities, may experience a range of social-emotional difficulties, including peer exclusion, isolation, stress, anxiety, depression and destructive perfectionism.” (p. 243)

The social-emotional well-being of any student is a steppingstone for healthy development of all children. Environmental factors are not all to blame when looking at the social and emotional development of the gifted. “Gifted students are at particular risk of underachievement and social-emotional difficulties due to the many characteristics involved with giftedness,” (Blass, 2014).

As advocates search for ways to improve the counseling needs for gifted students in the areas of social and emotional needs, there are many factors to

consider as triggers which indicate the gifted to having some type of issue. Cross, Andersen, Mammadov, and Riedl Cross (2017) state “Social and emotional development represents the changes over time of two separate but related constructs that reflect characteristics, interactions, interpretations, and related behaviors in the lives of people that lead them to becoming adults.” (p. 78) “Consequently, being gifted in school settings tends to be replete with issues that may affect students’ social and emotional development.” (p. 85) “The endogenous characteristics of asynchronous development, personality, perfectionism, excessive self-criticism, and multipotentiality are unique to this population. Only by recognizing the significance of their exceptionalities in context can educators adequately support the social and emotional development of students with gifts and talents.” (p. 89)

ACADEMICS

The academic needs of the gifted intertwine with social and emotional needs. The social and emotional needs of the gifted reflect their academic performances in certain areas. “Cooperative learning skills, effective communication, personal responsibility in decision-making, as well as advanced math are some examples of what can be taught through learning strategies in effort to develop stronger social emotional development,” (Elmore & Zenus, 1994). Dunn states as cited by Solow (2016), “While gifted students are developing at one speed intellectually, it does not necessarily mean that their social and emotional capacities will be developing at the same speed.” Many factors need to be addressed when seeking counseling techniques for the gifted population.

“If gifted children are to achieve their potential, social and emotional aspects of giftedness must be recognized and developed, for functioning in one area requires functioning in others.” (Lovecky, 1992). Cross (2014) states, “Since the creation of public schools, people have been willing to risk the psychological well-being of our students by engaging in educational practices that are malnourishing our gifted students.” Within the educational realm, experts need to take a stand and advocate for the gifted. “Years of academic neglect may not only impinge on talent development but may also impact the social and emotional development of the gifted child,” Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, Rogers, and McCormick (2010). Berlin (2009) explains, “Giftedness was perceived as an advantage in terms of personal growth and academics but, at the same time, was perceived as having strongly negative social implications.”

The academic aspect for gifted is part of their social and emotional development. “Meeting the cognitive, emotional, and social needs of young, culturally and linguistically different (CLD) children in an inclusive classroom can

be a challenge.” (Uresti, Goertz, and Bernal, 2002, p.27). The Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) developed over 25 years ago as an intervention to meet the needs of advanced students within the classroom setting. “The goals of the intervention were to increase thinking and socialization skills in ways that simultaneously increased test scores and overall academic performance — all without extra drill or teaching to the test.” (Pogrow, 2005). According to Cox (n.d.),

“Teachers can use Bloom’s Taxonomy as a guide in working with gifted students and as a way to engage all students at all levels. Bloom’s Taxonomy provides teachers with a way to provide higher-level thinking skills in their most gifted students. Teachers can use a combination of both lower-order as well as higher-order thinking skills to keep even their most advanced students on their toes. The great thing about this strategy is that it can be used with all students, gifted or not.”

SCHOOL, STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COUNSELORS

There is a great responsibility to the gifted and talented population. It takes a partnership between the school, students, parents, counselors, and teachers to meet the needs of the gifted. Berlin (2009) states, “Significant research exists to document the changed perception that occurs in teachers, family members, and peers when children are identified as gifted.” Van-Tassel-Baska (1990) states, “It is imperative that other personnel be responsible for a broad range of counseling needs.” As the partnership binds together, the importance of preparation to counsel the gifted begins.

Many gifted students struggle with internal and external factors. Some these factors include self-esteem, guilt, perfectionism, control issues, unrealistic expectations, impatience, friendship issues, attention and organization issues. “Gifted students are also at risk for underachievement, which is hypothesized to be due to social or emotional factors, or a lack of challenge, support, motivation, or engagement,” according to Kennedy and Farley (2017). “One of the challenges that gifted youth may face involves asynchronous development, which describes the concept that gifted youth are likely to be developmentally advanced in some areas, but not all,” according to Kennedy and Fairly (as cited in Cross & Cross, 2015; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Zeidner & Schleyer, 1999; Zeidner & ShaniZinovich, 2013). Gifted students want to fit in with their peers and usually find themselves hiding their uniqueness.

Cross (2011) states, “For the psychoeducational evaluations, my rationale is based on the potential benefits derived by the families by learning about the nuances of their child’s abilities.” When families learn about the gifts and talents of their gifted child, it gives a better understanding of what the child is going through.

After the families obtain a better understanding, the parents can work with the teacher to help provide the needs of the gifted child in the classroom setting. According to Lovecky (1992).

“Parents of gifted children often must devise their own means of understanding problems and issues that arise from their children's giftedness. There are few guidelines to follow for children who differ from average children not only in intellectual development, but also in social and emotional development. It is not uncommon for gifted children to find that age peers do not share their interests, play by different rules, and appear to engage in pastimes, such as teasing, that many gifted children find puzzling and painful”.

Classroom educators have the unique role of being a teacher of the gifted. Teachers take on many roles within the classroom and one of those roles is counselor. According to Silverman, Van Tassel-Baska, and Baska (2000), “A knowledgeable and sensitive teacher working with the gifted in a group setting can, however, successfully address some of the significant affective needs of gifted students” (p. 184). The teacher’s perceptions of student abilities need to be well rounded due to the differences and needs of each individual child. “Teachers’ perceptions of students labeled as gifted and talented often correspond to the level of teacher training in gifted education or teachers’ beliefs regarding diversity,” Berlin (2009).

School counselors are specially trained to implement comprehensive, developmental programs that promote and enhance student achievement and to provide assistance in academic, career, social and emotional domains. Both Cross (2004) and Silverman (1993) state that proactive counseling programs for gifted and talented students are invaluable because of the positive effects on their psychological and social development. Kennedy and Farley (2017) states, “Counselors working in schools may primarily focus on students with below-average achievement, or who are at risk for falling behind academically.” This is an unfortunate idea for gifted children. Many gifted children have many needs just as any other child, thus shows the importance of the partnership with the teacher and counselor.

CONCLUSION

As we look toward the blueprint to gifted student success, the social and emotional development must be addressed. As we seek to continue and explore the possibilities of excelling gifted students, the need for guidance and counseling must be configured into the equation. For all students are to receive an equitable education, it is their rights to receive an education based on their needs. Our obligation as advocates for the gifted need to continue working toward meeting

the needs of social and emotional development while continuing with an excellent academic schedule. The partnership between school, student, parent, teacher, and counselor will be the key to gifted student success.

REFERENCES

- 1) Berlin, J.E. (2009). It's All a Matter of Perspective: Student Perceptions on the Impact of Being Labeled Gifted and Talented. *Roeper Review*, 31(4), 217-223. DOI: 10.1080/02783190903177580
- 2) Blaas, S. (2014). The Relationship Between Social-Emotional Difficulties and Underachievement of Gifted Students. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 24(2), 243-255. DOI: 10.1017/jgc.2014.1
- 3) Colangelo, N. (1991). Counseling gifted students. In N. Colangelo & G. A. David (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp.271-284). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- 4) Coleman, Mary Ruth (1996). Recognizing Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Students. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, Vol. 19, Issue 3. DOI:10762175, 19960101
- 5) Coleman, L.J., & Cross, T.L. (2005). *Being gifted in school: An introduction to development, guidance, and teaching*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- 6) Cox, J. (n.d.). Teaching Strategies for Gifted Students. Retrieved from <https://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-gifted-students>
- 7) Cross, T.L. (2014). Social Emotional Needs. *Gifted Child Today*, 37(4), 264-265. DOI: 10.1177/1076217514544032
- 8) Cross, T.L. (2004). On the social and emotional lives of gifted children: Issues and factors in their psychological development (2nd ed.). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, Inc.
- 9) Cross, Tracy L.; Andersen, Lori; Mammadov, Sakhavat; and Cross, Jennifer Riedl, "Social and emotional development of students with gifts and talents" (2017). School of Education Book Chapters. 14. <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/educationbookchapters/14>
- 10) Davis, G.A., Rimm, S.B., & Siegle, D. (2011). *Education of the gifted and talented*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- 11) Dunn, A. (2016). Social Emotional Development's Effect on Academic Achievement of Children with Special Needs. Retrieved from <http://docplayer.net/57718207-Social-emotional-development-s-effect-on-academic-achievement-of-children-with-special-needs.html>
- 12) Eddles-Hirsch, K., Vialle, W., Rogers, K.B., & McCormick, J. (2010). "Just Challenge Those High-Ability Learners and They'll Be All Right!". The

- Impact of Social Context and Challenging Instruction on the Affective Development of High-Ability Students. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22(1), 106-128. DOI: 10.1177/1932202x1002200105
- 13) Eddles-Hirsch, K., Vialle, W., McCormick, J., & Rogers, K. (2012). Insiders or Outsiders: The Role of Social Context in the Peer Relations of Gifted Students. *Roeper Review*, 34(1), 53-62.
DOI: 10.1080/02783193.2012.627554
 - 14) Elmore, R.F., & Zenus, V. (1994). Enhancing social-emotional development of middle school gifted students. *Roeper Review*, 16(3), 182-85.
 - 15) Galbraith, J., & Delisle, J. (2015). *When gifted kids dont have all the answers: how to meet their social and emotional needs*. Minneapolis: Free spirit Publishing.
 - 16) Gross, M.U.M. (2000). Exceptionally and profoundly gifted students: An underserved population. *Understanding Our Gifted*, 12(2), 27-34.
 - 17) Gross, M.U.M. (2004). *Exceptionally gifted children* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge.
 - 18) Harper, A., Cornish, L., Smith, S., & Merrotsy, P. (2016). Through the Dąbrowski Lens: A Fresh Examination of the Theory of Positive Disintegration. *Roeper Review*, 39(1), 37-43.
DOI: 10.1080/02783193.2016.1247395
 - 19) Kamenetz, A. (2015, September 28). Who Are The 'Gifted and Talented' And What Do They Need? Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/09/28/443193523/who-are-the-gifted-and-talented- and-what-do-they-need>
 - 20) Kennedy, K., & Farley, J. (2018). Counseling Gifted Students: School-Based Considerations and Strategies. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 10(3), 361-367. DOI: 10.26822/iejee.2018336194
 - 21) Kerr, B.A., & Miller, J. (1986). *Introduction*. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 64(9), 547-547. DOI: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.1986.tb01198.x
 - 22) Lovecky, D.V. (1992). Exploring social and emotional aspects of giftedness in children. *Roeper Review*, 15(1), 18-25.
DOI: 10.1080/02783199209553451
 - 23) Majid, R.A., & Alias, A. (2010). Consequences of Risk Factors in the Development of Gifted Children. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 7, 63-69. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.010
 - 24) Mendaglio, S. (2019, January 12). Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration: Some implications for teachers of gifted students. Retrieved February 20, 2020, from <https://www.sengifted.org/post/medaglio-dabrowski>

- 25) Peterson, J. S. (2006). Addressing Counseling Needs of Gifted Students. *Professional School Counseling*, 10, 43-5. DOI: 10.1177/2156759x0601001s06
- 26) Piirto, J. (2010). 21 years with the Dabrowski Theory: An autoethnography. *Advanced Development Journal*, 12, 68-90.
- 27) Pogrow, S. (2005). HOTS Revisited: A Thinking Development Approach to Reducing the Learning Gap after Grade 3. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(1), 64-75. DOI: 10.1177/003172170508700111
- 28) Silverman, L.K., Van Tassel-Baska, J. & Baska, L. (2000). Counseling the gifted & talented. Denver, CO: Love Pub.
- 29) Silverman, L.K. (n.d.). Social Development in the Gifted. Retrieved from <https://www.gifteddevelopment.com/psychological-needs/social-development-gifted>
- 30) Silverman, L.K. (Ed.) (1993). Counseling the gifted and talented. Denver, CO: Love Publishing Company
- 31) Schmitz, C.C., & Galbraith, J. (1985). Managing the social and emotional needs of the gifted: a teachers' survival guide. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
- 32) Uresti, R., Goertz, J., & Bernal, E.M. (2002). Maximizing achievement for potentially gifted and talented and regular minority students in a primary classroom. *Roeper Review*, 25(1), 27-31. DOI: 10.1080/02783190209554194
- 33) VanTassel-Baska, J. (Ed.) (1990). *A practical guide to counseling the gifted in a school setting* (2nd ed.). Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.
- 34) VanTassel-Baska, J. (1991). Teachers as counselors for gifted students. In R. M. Milgram (Ed.), *Counseling gifted and talented children: A guide for teachers, counselors and parents* (pp. 37-52). Norwood, NJ: Ablex
- 35) What is Giftedness? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/what-giftedness>