
An Overview of the Gifted and Talented Middle School Students

This essay describes how “gifted and talented” students are defined, how they are discovered, the problems they face and some of the myths about them.

I Introduction

When we speak of “gifted and talented” children, we think of musical prodigies, exceptional mathematicians, and young scientific geniuses. But are these definitions accurate? And what sort of problems face gifted children?

This paper defines “gifted and talented” children, how they are recognized, some of the myths about them, and the problems they face. The references refer to middle school students.

II Defining “Gifted and Talented”

Gifted and talented (the two words are used together) students are defined as “persons of exceptional promise whose capabilities predict contributions of lasting merit in widely varying fields.” (“Information for Parents of Gifted and Able Learners,” PG). Gifted and talented students come from all backgrounds, economic levels and ethnic groups. Their talents and abilities for high achievement are so exceptional that they require special programs to meet their educational needs. (“Information for Parents of Gifted and Able Learners,” PG).

III Recognizing Gifted and Talented Students

While stellar academic achievement and a love of learning are two of the most common criteria used to define gifted and talented students, there are other signs as well. These indicators include advanced language development, advanced comprehension, sophisticated thought processes developed at an early age, unusual ability to comprehend and manipulate abstract ideas and to process information, exceptional problem-solving ability, advanced facility in moral and ethical matters, advanced sense of judgment, and the ability to retain a great deal of information and learn at a rapid rate. (“Information for Parents of Gifted and Able Learners,” PG).

Obviously, gifted and talented students excel in all areas, most of which are not strictly academic, such as moral judgment and a strong sense of justice. They have facility in all areas

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of life.

IV Mythology

Myths about gifted and talented students abound. Some of those I found include these beliefs: gifted students are all part of a homogenous group; gifted students don't need help; their futures are assured; they are self-directed and confident; they are naturally creative and don't need encouragement; and their abilities are always welcomed and prized by their families. ("Common Myths about Gifted Students," PG).

None of these is true; gifted students are still students, which means that although they may be very bright, they are still teenagers, still wrestling with the social and emotional problems that teens face. Although they may do well academically, and sometimes that isn't true, either, they are first and foremost students, not miniature adults, and should be treated as such.

IV Problems

The main problem these young people face is that schools do not provide them with material that challenges them. They perform at a much higher level than others of their age, and they require special programs. If a school district doesn't have the financial ability to create these programs, these students may not fulfill their potential. The word "challenge" occurs frequently in describing the programs for these students.

In addition, these students face problems that, oddly enough, may not bother less talented students. These problems include feelings of being "different," confusion about being gifted, heightened self-expectations sometimes leading to perfectionism, and uneven emotional development. In some cases, gifted and talented children become underachievers, drop-outs, or take their own lives. ("Information for Parents of Gifted and Able Learners," PG).

VI Conclusion

Gifted and talented students face a unique set of problems stemming directly from the fact that they are exceptional. Schools recognize the need to provide challenging and sophisticated programs for them, but the students themselves may ironically find that their own emotional reaction to their gifts is uneasiness, a feeling of not belonging, unhappiness and even suicide.

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