

A Fundamental Study To Understand Gifted Underachievers

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Abstract : Underachievement among gifted students is a paradox that frustrates educators because of the significant disparity between students' potential and their performance. Complicating the issue is the highly individualized nature of the underperformance, which must take into consideration factors of student's culture, socio-economic status, motivation, and the environment. Once these factors are considered, both the intellectual and affective needs of the gifted underachiever must be examined and supported in order to try and bridge the gap between known ability and actual performance. Underachievement, especially for gifted students, continues to be a paradox that confounds educators as they grapple with attempts to understand why students with such significant levels of ability fail to achieve their full potential. Compounding the problem are that: (1) an articulate definition of what gifted underachievement is does not exist; (2) identification process of underachievement among gifted students are not universal and (3) factors which potentially influence and cause underachievement are multifaceted. This article will explore who are gifted students and why do gifted students who seem capable of outstanding performance fail to realize their potential. So, for the better future prospects of the country we need to identify and understand the basic fundamentals and channelize their energy in a positive way.

Keywords: Gifted students, underachievement, gifted underachievers

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of ability or talent is a lifelong process. In the context of present day race for superiority among the great nation of the world, the importance of creatively gifted has been well recognized in the progressive countries. "Gifted children are national and global resources who have the potential to enrich us in multifaceted ways. Gifted children are the assets of incalculable value to the society. In-fact for every nation they are regarded as the most precious human-capital resource. They are future representations of modern technological innovations, cultural shifts and leading the nation in developmental sectors like business, health, care, law, education, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. All students require opportunities to learn, grow and be challenged to strive for excellence. Our government is implementing several plans to cater the needs of special education children. But much emphasis is being given to the education of learning disabled, physically deprived and mentally retarded children; therefore, neglecting the equally important needs of gifted students. But gifted children are the forgotten students in the class. Hoover-Schultz (2005) concluded that the processes of defining underachievement, To meet the needs of gifted students, parents and teachers should familiar with the unique needs and developmental characteristics of gifted students; understand the differences between high-achieving, gifted students and gifted underachievers.

1.1 GIFTED STUDENTS

Various terminologies have been used to describe gifted children such as: creative, extremely talented, prodigious child, precocious, gifted, child prodigy, supernormal students, bright students, mentally superior children, genius, mentally exceptional, child of superior intelligence and abnormally intelligent children.

Hildreth in 1966 beautifully mentioned, "Gifted children were invented, not discovered." The concept of giftedness had a long history in the field of education and psychology. It goes back to when the term, gifted child became popular in 1917 or 1918 and was used in many reports as early as 1912 and 1913. In America, brilliant students caught the special attention in 1957 when the Soviet Union launched the satellite named Sputnik (world's first artificial satellite) (as cited in Fazel, 1996). Worldwide approval, support and recognition for education of talented became popular in 1980s and 1990s. The concept of education for the gifted originated in India, when the Radhakrishnan commission (1948-49) made a strong plea for making special provisions for education of the gifted and talented who would take leadership positions in various walks of life in independent India. Giftedness has been traditionally associated with intellectual superiority- a very high intelligence quotient score on standardized test of intelligence. At one time some states a Stanford- Binet intelligence quotient of 130 or better as the criterion for entrance to educational programs for gifted students (Gallagher, 2008). Hanvick (1953) classification indicated that an I.Q. of 125 was an approximate point for determining admission to classes for the intellectually superior children. The normally bright child has been considered to have a minimum I.Q. of 110. An able or gifted says Gowan (1955), "Is one whose rate of development, with respect to time, on some personality variable of agreed social value is significantly larger than the generality." By this definition, we could have reference to the top two percent or even to the top ten percent of a given high school class depending on the particular frame of reference. The term academically talented, which is gaining currency in educational circles, is defined by Conant as the top 15 to 20 percent of high-school students, "the group who should be going to college". The definition of giftedness has been given from different angles. Some psychologists emphasize the importance of superior endowment, others on exceptional performance of the individual in different walks of life. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential in any of the following areas:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude

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3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability.

Broadly speaking, literature on definitions of giftedness can be classified into some categories namely whether they are conservative or liberal; single- or multi-dimensional; and whether they are based on potential or performance McCall (1994). According to this said criterion, following definitions can be added here to understand the meaning of gifted student. Most inclusive definition of giftedness is by the U.S. Department of Education (1993), which states: Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience or environment. These children and youth exhibit high capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata and in all areas of human endeavor. Gifted students have always been considered as students who are at the upper end of the bell curve in academic abilities. At this upper end the bell curve tail can continue for a considerable distance representing increasingly extreme difference (Peterson, 2000).

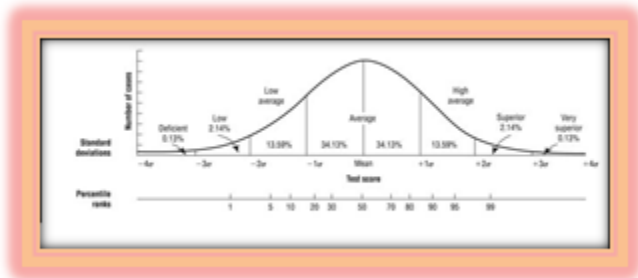


Figure 1.1 : Distribution of low average, average and high average (gifted) students

According to Gagne's (2003) differentiated model of giftedness and talent (DMGT) gifted students are those whose potential is distinctly above average in one or more of the following domains of human ability: intellectual, creative, social and physical to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers. Renzulli's (2003) model encompasses three elements: above-average intelligence, a high level of task commitment and creativity. He proposed that these traits may be demonstrated in general or specific performance areas.

- (1) Above average abilities– top 15 percent of intellectual aptitude
- (2) High levels of task commitment- a learner's ability to take energy and concentrate it on a specific task
- (3) High levels of creativity– person's ability to produce original, novel and unique ideas or products.

The interaction of these three basic clusters of human traits may result in gifted behaviors in general and specific performance areas.

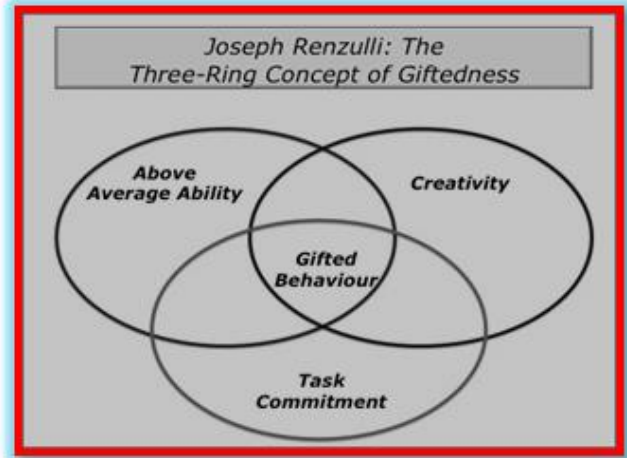


Figure 1.2: Three ring concept for gifted students, n.d., Retrieved from

<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart13.html>

It is clear that gifted children do not constitute a homogeneous group for two obvious reasons: a) even though they have high IQ scores, there are still great differences in levels and patterns of abilities, and b) the wide diversity of interests and experiences among these any particular ability. Having ignored the fact of great diversity, we have been attempting to treat the gifted education ally as a group, i. e., we have assumed that all possess a common set of characteristics. (Pielstick, 1963)

1.1.1 Characteristics of gifted students

“Research indicates, however, that a majority of teachers have little specific knowledge about this group of children (Archambault et al. 1993). Having lack of awareness about the characteristics and instructional requirements of high ability students, teachers are at a disadvantage. Classroom teachers can broaden understanding of gifted students by having knowledge of the general characteristics intellectually gifted children exhibit. Characteristics in the cognitive and affective domains most commonly appear in general classroom behavior and, therefore, may be observed by the classroom teacher (Manning, 2003).

- Process and retain large amounts of information
- Comprehend materials at advanced levels
- Curious and have varied and sometimes intense interests
- High levels of language development and verbal ability
- Possess accelerated and flexible thought processes
- Early ability to delay closure of projects
- See unusual relationships among disciplines or objects
- Adept at generating original ideas and solutions to problems
- Persistent, goal-oriented, and intense on topics of interest
- Form their own ways of thinking about problems and ideas

- Learn things at an earlier age than peers
- Need for freedom and individuality in learning situations
- High desire to learn and seek out their own interests
- Abstract thinkers at an earlier age than peers
- Prefer complex and challenging work
- Transfer knowledge and apply it to new situations
- May prefer to work alone
- May be early readers
- May possess high energy levels and longer attention spans (Clark 2002; Silverman 2000;)

- b) Arbitrary partitions- middle group eliminated: Discrepancies are determined by contrasting extreme groups in achievement aptitude distributions and by eliminating a middle group.
- c) Relative discrepancy splits: Grade point average and aptitude predictors are ranked independently. Under and Over achievement are determined by the discrepancy between the sets of ranks
- d) Regression model selection: A regression equation is used to predict achievement from IQ measures. Under and over achievement are then determined on the basis of the discrepancy between actual and predicted achievement

2 UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Possessing unique potential, this young person is expected to not only pass regular required courses but to excel beyond his peers. When this does not occur, it is a source of great frustration for parents, teachers and most importantly the student (Winton, 2013). This situation often leads to undesirable social or personal behavior. It is truly a great social waste to have a gifted child who either can't or will not work up to his ability. Counseling and rehabilitating these young people presents a challenging and important problem for teachers and support personal. Gifted have same human problems and emotional concerns as everyone else, yet some describe themselves as unintelligent, lazy, daydreamers, unorganized, having no friends and needing to improve their appearance. They have absentee problems. They get suspended from school. They make D's and F's not just in P.E., but in maths, reading comprehension, handwriting and particularly in spelling. According to Policy and Implementation Strategies for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students (Revised 2004), Underachievement is defined as a discrepancy between a student's school performance and some index of the student's natural ability. The problem of underachievement can be compounded by inadequate identification procedures, resulting in the problem of 'invisible underachievement'. According to Wellingtons (n.d., as cited in Bindu, 2007) the guess that a child is an underachiever is not enough because guesses even by professionals have been proved to be wrong by researchers. So, there should be proper statistical techniques for the identification of gifted underachievers. Some statistical techniques given by experts are as follows: Farquhar & Payne (1964) have found that all the statistical techniques now in use could be classified as follows:

- a) Central tendency splits: under and overachievement are determined by dichotomizing a distribution of combined Aptitude and achievement measures.

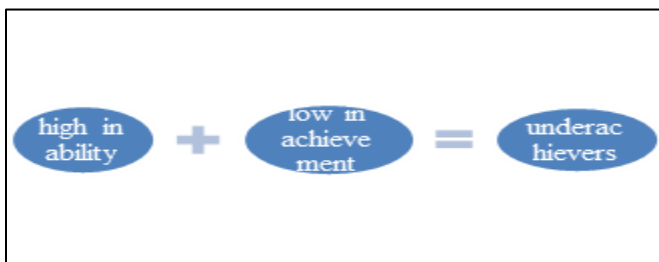


Figure 1.3: Underachievers

3 GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

The underachieving gifted child represents both society's greatest loss and its greatest potential resource. There is a wide breach between their potential and performance. Slowly and steadily they lose their spark which becomes the matter of concern for teachers and parents as they are likely to be the next generation's innovators and leaders. Underachievement in gifted students has perplexed educators and parents for decades. Researchers are continually looking for information about the nature and patterns of gifted underachievers that will enlighten those concerned. Perhaps the most puzzling group of gifted underachievers are those students who have high scores on standardized achievement tests but perform poorly in the classroom. Achievement tests are usually tests of knowledge and are closely tied to curriculum: therefore, the student who receives high scores on achievement tests is likely to possess the precise knowledge that is needed in the classroom. For some reason, the student does not, or will not, display that knowledge (Colangelo et al (1993) proposed three hypotheses to explain this form of underachievement. The first, in keeping with Anastasi's hypothesis, is simply that the test score is wrong and that measurement error is the problem. The second hypothesis is that the student is a closet learner; who is motivated to learn at home but does not perform within the structure of the school. The third hypothesis is that the student is bored: too angry or depressed about the dullness of repetitive material to perform in class but happy to have an opportunity on a challenging achievement test to show the extent of his or her knowledge.

Characteristics of gifted underachievers proposed by different researchers

Characteristics of Gifted Underachievers	Proposed by Different Researchers
• low academic self-perceptions	Freedman, 2000; Matthews & McBee, 2007; Supplee, 1990; Whitmore, 1980
• low self-efficacy	Siegle & Mc Coach, 2005b
• low self-motivation and low effort toward academic tasks	Albaili, 2003; Baslanti & Mc Coach, 2006; Lacasse, 1999; Matthews & McBee, 2007; Mc Coach & Siegle, 2003b; Rayneri, Gerber, & Wiley, 2003; Weiner, 1992
• external attributions	Carr, Borkowski, & Maxwell, 1991; Siegle & Mc Coach, 2005b
• low goal valuation	Baslanti & Mc Coach, 2006; Freedman, 2000; Lacasse, 1999; Matthews & McBee, 2007; McCall et al., 1992; Mc Coach & Siegle, 2003b

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> negative attitude toward school and teachers 	Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen, & Maxey, 1993; Ford, 1996; Mc Coach & Siegle, 2003b; Rimm, 1995
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low self-regulatory or metacognitive skills 	Carr et al., 1991; Krouse & Krouse, 1981; Yu, 1996

Source: <https://books.google.co.in/books?isbn=0415881498>
Identification of Gifted Underachievers

To identify gifted underachievers can be arduous for two major factors. Firstly, as there exists no universally acknowledge framework to define giftedness. The subject of gifted education has never established a consensus on either a theory to define or on the process of identification of gifted children. Secondly, there surrounds a lot of disagreement on how to define underachievement. Some apply the colloquial expression while attempting to identify gifted underachievers. Some parents whose child does not score as expected consider him as an underachiever without having a formal diagnosis. Now the point is which standards, expectations, or values should be applied to identify whether a child is underachieving or not.

There are numerous problems associated with current identification practices of giftedness. These are:

- Gifted students are most often identified by standardized intelligence and achievement tests. Test bias, lack of validity, and poor reliability make standardized tests ineffective for identifying and assessing giftedness students.
- Although there are many definitions and theories of giftedness, but no nation have adopted the contemporary and inclusive definitions.
- Most gifted students are served in the regular classroom. More often than not, teachers have received little or no training in gifted education. This lack of training can inhibit their effectiveness at identifying and educating gifted students.

Parents, teachers, and counsellors play an important role in identifying and working with gifted underachievers. Naturally, parents observe their children's progress on a daily basis, so they are often the first to realize that a child's achievement has begun to decline. Parents are also able to recognize changes in their children's attitudes toward school and learning. As teachers and counsellors have ready access to students' files, they may be able to identify clues to early difficulties which gifted students might be experiencing. Information about behaviours, achievement, course selection, attendance, and tardiness can be used to identify student's early underachievement pattern so that its prevention can occur timely and there would not be any requirement for remediation for underachievement. For example, gifted underachievers missed more school and more often tardy and selected fewer demanding electives than gifted achievers (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996). Unfortunately, till high school, teachers may be unaware that chronically underachieving students were actually "gifted." Long-term academic underachievers may have knowledge and skills deficits and may show no signs of intellectual promise in the classroom.

Factors Responsible for Gifted Underachievement

The researches which highlight the issue of academic underachievement among high ability or gifted children date back to Conklin (1940). He also examined in his researches on gifted students who have high IQ, but their academic performance was very low. Even after more than fifty years of research in the area of underachievement among gifted children, the issue is still an unresolved matter. As early as 1955, John Gowan (1955) defined underachievement among gifted students as "one of the greatest social wastes of our culture". Lack of meaningful learning, frequent absent from school or truancy, low academic performance, distressing behaviour, low self-esteem, negative home issues, and low socio-cultural background are also some of the obvious reasons for some children who underachieve or fail in their academic performance. In addition to the risk factors, inappropriate curriculum and content is another long-standing problem that these gifted children encounter on a daily basis, which causes underachievement in gifted or high potential students. This deficiency of meaningful learning is a strong predictor of why most gifted children fail to achieve. The hundreds of hours spent each month in classrooms in which students rarely encounter new or challenging curriculum, the boredom of being assigned routine tasks mastered long ago, the absence of classroom discussion, and the inconsistency of content to children's ability lead to resentment on the part of many of the gifted students. This results in increased rate of dropout rate students in schools, as these students believe that this is the only way they can address this problem effectively. Some environmental situations such as limited opportunities to learn as a result of poverty, discrimination, or cultural barriers; due to physical ailment or learning disabilities; or due to motivational or psychological problems, some gifted individuals with exceptional abilities may not demonstrate outstanding levels of performance. Identification of these students should emphasize on their abilities rather than relying only on demonstrated achievement. To develop their potential and realize optimal levels of performance, these children will need challenging programs and additional support services. It is reviewed that parents of gifted underachievers were either overly lenient or overly strict (Weiner, 1992). In a qualitative study of gifted urban underachievers, the family dysfunction that characterized the lives of the gifted underachievers contrasted the happier home lives of the gifted achievers (Reis et al., 1995). Gifted students tend to underachieve when they encounter with lack of support from parents and inadequate educational opportunities to nourish their abilities and talents. Gifted students who belong from low socio-cultural background are particularly more vulnerable to underachievement. These students become involuntary underachievers, as they do not have appropriate learning support to nurture their skills and abilities. Reis and Mc Coach (2000) examined the multiplicity of negative factors that held responsible for underachievement of many gifted underachievers. The most commonly appearing causes are as follows :

Table 1.5: Factors responsible for underachievement among gifted students

School Factors	Family Factors	Personal Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excessive absence Boredom; Lack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear Behavioural Expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor Mental health Emotional Disturbances

<p>of Acceleration Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum Mismatched to Student's Needs • Clash Between Instructional Style and Learning Style • No Extra Curricular Involvement • Peer Group Issues • Unreasonable Teacher Attitudes • Poor Academic Environment and Peer pressure • Negative attitude towards schools and teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorganized Family Environment • Lack of Parental Support or Emotional Involvement • Parental Unpredictability; Mixed Messages • Low Emphasis on Education or Work • Differing Parenting Styles Between Mom & Dad • Excessive Independence given to children, or Excessive control Retained by the Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural Disturbances • Poor Self-concept • Perfectionism, or Fear of Failure • Depression • Learning Disability (ADHD Most Common) • High- ability students can have learning problems or attention deficits of various types that effect of cause underachievement. (9Reis & Mc Coach, 2000) • Lack of self regulation and study skills or lack of motivation. (Mc Coach & Siegle, 2003; Siegle & Mc Coach, 2005) • Aggression • Self-perception • Frustration • Experience feeling of inferiority.
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Source:<http://www.fultongifted.org/doc/Gifted%20Underachievement%20Handbook.pdf>.

Siegle and Mc Coach (2005) noted that although peer achievement levels had a relation to students' academic achievement, it was unclear whether the choice to associate with other non-achievers was a cause or a result of gifted students' underachievement. It is believed that in the vast majority of cases, the underachievement of bright students occur for one of the following three basic reasons:

- i) An evident underachievement problem has more serious cognitive, physical, or emotional issues.
- ii) The underachievement is symptomatic of a mismatch between the student and his or her school environment (Siegle & Mc Coach, 2005).
- iii) Underachievement arises from a personal characteristic such as low self-regulation, low self-motivation, or low self-efficacy (Reis & Mc Coach, 2000;).

4 CONCLUSION

Underachievement among gifted is a complex phenomenon, usually stemming from multiple interwoven causes. Through this study we tend to identify the roadblocks that are derailing the gifted students to realize their path of academic success. There are many problems that the gifted students are facing today. Identification of the gifted children poses a problem to teachers and education professionals because they are not a homogeneous group. The typical picture of the highly able child is of a hard-working pupil who diligently completes work and is perhaps known as the class "swot" or "brain box". In reality the picture is much more complex than that. Alongside the gifted achievers are those who - despite their gifts and talents - persistently underachieve due to boredom, lack of interest, or crippling perfectionism. Also, gifted children have special learning needs; on the other side, their higher

I.Q. level doesn't exempt them to face the emotional and developmental conflicts of the adulthood. In fact they are more liable to suffer in academic, social and emotional fronts. If their specific educational needs are not met then they lose interest in studies resulting in their frustration, a loss of self-esteem, boredom, laziness, mediocrity and underachievement. As we know that by not realizing their needs a grave injustice is being done to them. It is in our own self-interest to therefore foster their talents so that they might enhance the cultural, material and economic well-being of civilization.

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