

Considerations for *Not* Ungifting the Gifted Underachiever

Jennifer Ritchotte, Ph.D.

University of Northern Colorado

An Important Question

Should only
students who
achieve be
classified as
gifted?

(Passow, 1981)



One Might Respond...

- * Their district's definition of giftedness puts an *emphasis* on achievement and/or academic performance.
- * Other more motivated students may be more deserving of gifted programming.
- * The “typical” gifted student should be highly self-motivated.

Giftedness = Achievement

Giftedness is not straightforward to define

- * Passow et al. (1955)
 - * Giftedness is the *potential* for superior achievement in any area of study that is valuable to society.
- * Renzulli (1978)
 - * Gifted students are *capable* of developing such traits as task commitment, above-average ability, and creativity.
- * Sternberg (1999c)
 - * We can *nurture* a student's successful intelligence by capitalizing on his/her strengths and finding ways to compensate for his/her weaknesses

A Consideration

- * Gifted underachievers most likely have the potential for superior achievement.
- * They may require extra help to develop other aspects of giftedness like task commitment and the components of successful intelligence.

Make Room for “High Achievers”

- * Once a student is labeled “gifted,” can or should that label ever be taken away?
 - * Is giftedness episodic?
- * What if gifted programming options were made available to high achieving students or students who demonstrate potential for high achievement?

A Few Considerations

- * As Callahan (1982) argued, there do not need to be winners and losers in gifted education.
- * The focus should be on whether or not children's needs are being met by the general curriculum, and on ensuring that enrichment and special programming are available to those who need them.
- * A more challenging curriculum could reverse underachievement.

The “Typical” Gifted Student

- * The “typical” gifted student does not exist.
- * The characteristics of a gifted child depend on the gifted child.
- * Davis, Rimm, and Siegle (2011) caution that “sometimes teachers make the mistake of assuming that gifted children who are not self-directed, persevering, and motivated should not be considered gifted” (p. 43).

A Consideration

- * “Underachieving or troublesome gifted students are too easily eliminated from gifted programming” (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011, p. 43).
- * Efforts should be made, instead, to target the source(s) of the students’ underachievement and develop individualized interventions based on this information (Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012).

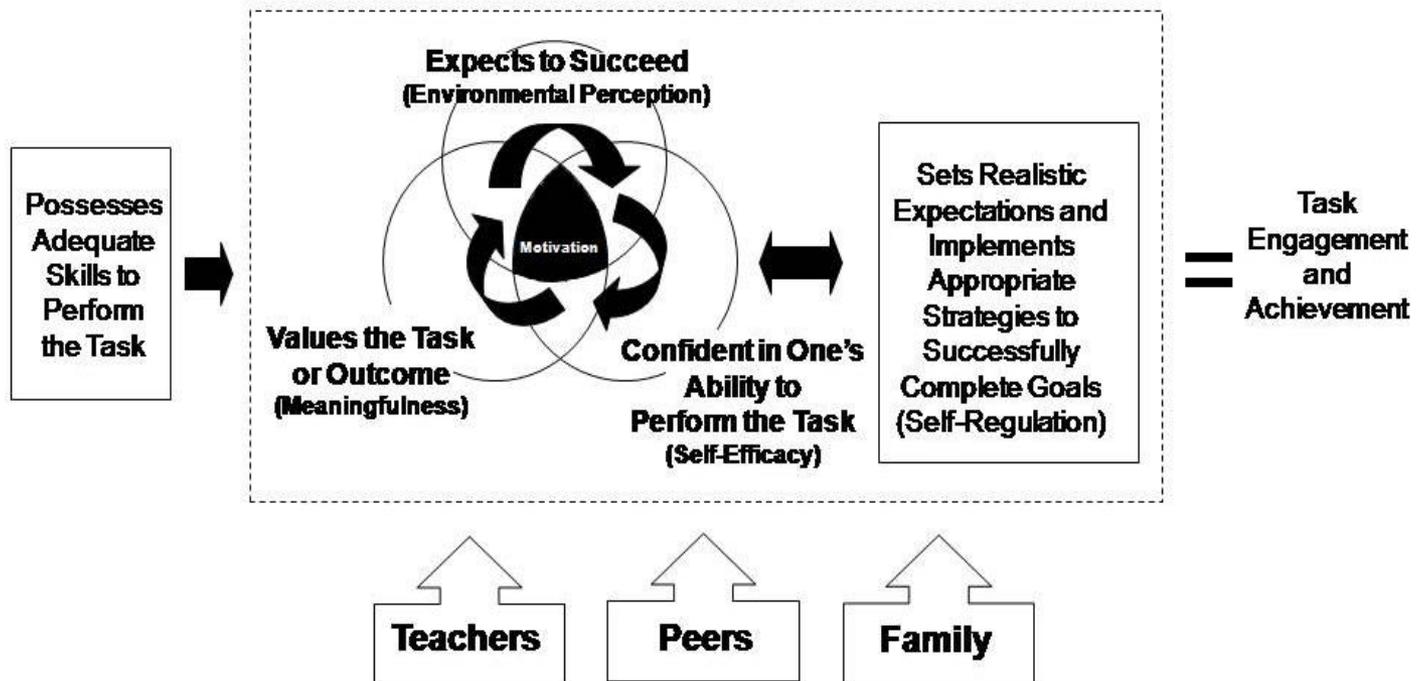
Keep in Mind...

- * “Because the factors that influence the development and manifestation of underachievement vary, no one type of intervention will be effective for the full range of underachieving gifted students” (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

Dissertation Research

Achievement-Orientation Model

Del Siegle and D. Betsy McCoach



The Voice of Gifted Students

- * A teacher's job is one of the most important careers in society because it helps shape young children into the adults they will become. If gifted students are not achieving to their potential, be encouraging. Do not disown them and say, "If at first you don't succeed, give up." To take away the gifted label is to teach that giving up is acceptable. –Katie*

The Voice of Gifted Students

- * *Natural aptitude or appreciation is not something that can be given or taken away. Why then, can a gifted label be slapped on a student like a sticker and just as easily ripped off? A love and proclivity for learning is stronger than adhesive. -Gracie*

The Voice of Gifted Students

- * If a student has not reached their full potential in a gifted class, a general class is certainly not going to allow them to grow significantly, but is rather going to provide them a comfortable zone where they can cruise along with solid grades but without inspired thinking.*

-Brianna

The Voice of Gifted Students

- * Removing a student from gifted programming on the grounds that he/she is not achieving would imply that his/her success in the program is impossible. It sends an unintended discouraging message which tells the student: "You cannot do it now, so you never will." Exiting from the program removes the chance for the student to ever begin achieving and may do irreparable damage to the student's motivation to try outside of the gifted program as well. –Elizabeth*

The Voice of Gifted Students

- * I was removed from the gifted math program in eighth grade. In sixth grade I had listed math as one of my favorite subjects because my teacher had shown me how to appreciate it. However, in eighth grade I developed a considerable distaste for it, as I felt that the school had given up on me. Taking away my gifted label only delayed my progress in math and made me feel frustrated. –Alayna*

The Voice of Gifted Students

- * *I think those who took the label away didn't believe in me, so ultimately I stopped believing in myself. –Geoff*

References

- * Callahan, C. M. (1982). Myth: There must be “winners” and “losers” in identification and programming! *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 26, 17-19.
- * Davis, G. A., Rimm, S. B., & Siegle, D. (2011). *Education of the gifted and talented* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- * Passow, A. H. (1981). The nature of giftedness and talent. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 25, 5-10.
- * Passow, A. H., Goldberg, M. L., Tannenbaum, A. J., & French, W. (1955). *Planning for talented youth: Considerations for public schools*. New York: Teachers College.
- * Reis, S. & McCoach, B.D. (2000). The underachievement of gifted students: What do we know and where do we go? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 44, 157.
- * Renzulli, J. S. (1978). What makes giftedness? Reexamining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60, 180-184, 261.
- * Ritchotte, J. A., & Rubenstein, L. (in review). The underachievement of gifted middle school students. Submitted to *Gifted Child Today*.
- * Rubenstein, L. D., Siegle, D., Reis, S. M., McCoach, D. B., & Burton, M. G. (2012). A complex quest: The development and research of underachievement interventions for gifted students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 49, 678-694.
- * Siegle, D., & McCoach D. B. (2005). *Motivating gifted students*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- * Sternberg, R. J. (1999c). Successful intelligence: Finding a balance. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 3, 436-442.
- * Terman, L.M. (1925). *Mental and physical traits of a thousand gifted children (I)*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.