
Introduction to Twice-Exceptional and Special Populations of Gifted Students

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Since the publication of the volumes of the *Genetic Studies of Genius* (Terman, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1947; Sears, 1979) many have defined gifted individuals solely as those who had superior intelligence as measured by an IQ test. Such individuals were thought to be healthier, more popular, and better adjusted than their less able peers. More importantly, gifted individuals were those who could perform at high levels in all areas with little or no support. Acceptance of these stereotypical characteristics greatly diminished the possibility that there could be special populations of gifted students who were not “practically perfect in every way.” Entertaining the idea that someone could be gifted if they could not read, for instance, was irresponsible. The consideration that giftedness could be masked by gender, cultural, economic, or behavioral issues was similarly irrational.

With broadened definitions of giftedness promoted by researchers such as Renzulli (1978), Sternberg (1986) and Gardner (1983) as well as the birth of a federal definition of giftedness in 1978, the possibility of identifying gifted students from special populations became both plausible and promising. Seminal work by Joanne Whitmore (1980) and June Maker (1977) introduced

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the idea that students with special needs could indeed be gifted. About the same time Alexinia Baldwin (1978) and Mary Frasier (1980) were alerting the field to the issues of giftedness among the ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged youth. Since then, many concerned experts in the field of gifted education have turned their attention to special populations of students who have been typically underrepresented in gifted programs or whose needs have not been recognized or met. In 1988 Congress saw the need to promote the interests of gifted and talented especially those from at-risk special populations—economically disadvantaged, students with special needs, and students with limited English proficiency. To this end, Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act that has allocated millions of dollars to both researching the needs of these youngsters and developing means of reversing the increasing trend of inequity and lack of access to gifted programs.

Unfortunately, the increased attention has met with limited success in providing comprehensive programs for students who are gifted but challenged in some ways. (Baum & Owen, in press; Grantham, 2002). Not only are these populations at great risk for appropriate services but the number of categories of gifted students with challenges is multiplying. For instance, gender inequities i.e., gifted females, gifted males, and gay and lesbian students are a growing concern. Although much has been learned about the social and emotional issues that may impede the development of potential for these gifted students, services for these students are minimal. Additionally, special educators are finding giftedness among students who, until recently, have not been mentioned in the literature, i.e., gifted students with Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or Pervasive Developmental Disorders otherwise unspecified. Each new group of special populations manifests unique needs and requires complex solutions.

ISSUES FACING GIFTED CHILDREN FROM SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Far too many nontraditional gifted youngsters continue to be underrepresented in programs for gifted and talented. These youngsters often do not meet identification criteria or are considered for remedial services. Even though the research concerning the needs of these youngsters is considerable, these students lack appropriate interventions and programs. The *Gifted Child Quarterly* articles represented in this collection address one or more of the critical issues that face gifted students at risk, and suggest strategies for overcoming the barriers that prevent them from realizing their promise. The articles focus on three populations of students: twice-exceptional students—gifted students who are at risk for development due to difficulties in learning and attention; gifted students whose gender issues inhibit their ability to achieve or develop socially and emotionally; and students who are economically disadvantaged and at risk for dropping out of school. One or more barriers to development affect each of

these groups of youngsters. The most poignant of these barriers are identification strategies, lack of awareness of consequences of co-morbidity, deficit thinking in program design, and lack of appropriate social and emotional support. (Baum & Owen, in press; Chae, Kim, & Sun Noh, 2003; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Tomlinson, Callahan, & Lelli, 1997). The following questions tap into these barriers.

How can we identify gifted potential in nontraditional students? Special learning needs, cultural expectations, and issues of poverty greatly complicate the identification of gifts and talents among at-risk students. Traditional measures may not be reliable or valid for these special populations. Learning traits that are indicative of advanced abilities and creativity may manifest themselves negatively. Also, a lack of experiences and resources may depress cognitive development resulting in low or depressed scores on standardized tests. Traditional testing is not sensitive to these individual differences. Consequently, results can erroneously omit many youngsters with high levels of talent or academic potential from being identified as gifted. Several of the authors describe the challenge of identification and suggest strategies for improving identification through the use of nontraditional and more authentic strategies. (Baum, 1988; Baum, Olenchak, & Owen, 1997; Neihart, 2000; Spicker, Southern, & Davis, 1987).

How does co-morbidity challenge traditional methods of intervention? Lack of understanding of the consequences of two diverse sets of traits obscures identification and often contributes to inappropriate diagnosis and programming. Researchers have supported the idea that gifted students from special populations have needs that are different from their more traditional gifted peers and from peers with similar challenges (Baum & Olenchak, 2002; Bernal, 2002). These special gifted youngsters have unique needs and require interventions that speak to both their gift and their challenge. Too often, one trait can disguise the other. Or worse, the lack of recognition of all facets of the circumstance can elicit complications far different than the issues attributed to one or the other trait. Ignorance of the duality of characteristics has led to underidentification as well as misdiagnoses. This theme is explored in several of the included articles (Baum, Olenchak, & Owen, 1998; Neihart, 2000; Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Reis, 1987; Spicker, Southern, & Davis, 1987).

How do we design comprehensive programs for special populations of gifted students that go beyond deficit thinking? Because prevailing policies focus on remediation, gifted students with poor learning strategies, behavioral difficulties, or academic deficits may not be considered for talent development but instead be placed in restrictive environments that focus on deficits. Many of the included articles describe the characteristics of particular special populations of gifted students and suggest promising practices in response to a lack of appropriate programs to address the needs of these youngsters. These approaches incorporate talent development where skills in self-regulation and compensation are provided

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within the context of challenging and enriched curricula (Baum, 1988; Neihart, 2000; Reis, 1987; Reis, McGuire, & Neu, 2000; Renzulli & Park, 2000; Spicker, Southern, & Davis, 1987).

Is counseling support needed for gifted students to cope with cultural and environmental influences or biases that negatively impact their development? Several articles in this collection reveal social and emotional concomitants of the coincidence of giftedness and other more debilitating characteristics. The authors identify issues of lack of self-efficacy, poor self-regulation and motivation, depression, low self-esteem, underachievement, and depression to be severe among this population of students. These authors promote focused attention to the social and emotional needs of these youngsters and suggest specific strategies including the need for professional counseling. (Baum, Olenchak, & Owen, 1998; Peterson, & Rischar, 2000; Reis, 1987; Renzulli & Park, 2000).

MANIFESTATION OF ISSUES FOR GIFTED STUDENTS WITHIN SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Each of these barriers has a unique relationship to the three populations of students targeted in this collection of articles: twice-exceptional students, students with gender-related issues, and economically disadvantaged students. The following section summarizes the issues for each population and provides a summary of the authors' ideas, concerns, and suggestions.

Twice-Exceptional Students

The first set of articles focuses on students who are twice exceptional. Like many gifted students these youngsters are highly knowledgeable and have talents in particular areas. They can think critically, pursue topics, and create solutions to problems. However, these same youngsters often are overwhelmed by special learning difficulties that thwart their development and obscure their gifted potential. Faced by educational practices and policies that may confuse and complicate appropriate diagnosis coupled with the prevailing emphasis on remediation over talent development, programs for these students are often inappropriate or lacking (Baum & Olenchak, 2002). Further exacerbating the issue is a general ignorance of the social and emotional implications of the coincidence of giftedness and specific disabilities.

Two articles emphasize the needs of students who are both gifted and learning disabled. Baum (1988) explores the necessity of identifying and nurturing students' gifts and talents at the elementary level. The article evaluates the results of an enrichment program designed to meet the dual needs of these youngsters. The program, based on the *Enrichment Triad Model*, resulted in students improving in both self-regulation and achievement. When students were allowed to pursue and create in areas of interest, they were willing to put

forth time and effort to create high-level products. During the course of their creative pursuits, they learned compensation strategies such as time management, organization, and ways to communicate that aligned with their strengths.

Reis, McGuire, and Neu (2000) extend this theme with their presentation of the results of a qualitative study focusing on the strategies bright students with learning disabilities use to achieve success at the university level. These students all attended a program at the university designed to assist students with learning disabilities. This program provided essential support to students including offering appropriate compensation strategies to offset problematic deficits. The findings of the study indicate that these students had not learned compensation strategies in their special education programs during elementary and high school years, nor, in most cases, were they involved in gifted programs. Thus, they had extremely negative attitudes about school. Through their participation in the university program they found multiple strategies that worked for them and developed their ability to focus on their talents rather than being overwhelmed by their deficits. The authors suggest that programs for gifted students with learning disabilities focus on teaching self-regulation rather than remediation.

Another population of twice-exceptional children is students who are gifted and creative but are simultaneously hampered with attention difficulties. Baum, Olenchak, and Owen, (1998) explore the issues surrounding the coincidence of ADHD and giftedness. This dual classification has been increasing in recent years causing some concern about a possible overidentification of ADHD among gifted students. This may be due to delicate interaction between characteristics of gifted or creative students and the demands of the learning environment. The article suggests that in some cases the environment for gifted students can be somewhat hostile, exacerbating the appearance of ADHD-like behaviors. One example is teachers' reluctance to adapt to the pace and depth of learning for gifted students. This article provides guidelines and approaches for determining appropriate diagnosis and offers suggestions for helping these twice-exceptional youngsters succeed. Again, appropriate diagnosis will depend on first assuring that the learning environment aligns to the students' gifts and talents.

Another twice-exceptional population of gifted students that is drawing attention is gifted students with Asperger's Syndrome. Neihart (2000) discusses appropriate diagnosis of this special group of youngsters. She posits that these students may appear like highly gifted children who are a bit "quirky." She suggests that their behavior, however, can be confused with learning disabilities or attention deficits precluding appropriate diagnosis and appropriate interventions. Neihart presents typical characteristics of students with Asperger's Syndrome and distinguishes them from gifted behaviors. Neihart concludes that these students, like learning disabled students, benefit greatly from social skills training and other kinds of strategies that will help them to compensate for learning difficulties. Finally, similar to the needs of all twice-exceptional youngsters, these individuals with the appropriate support can rise to eminence because of their exceptional gifts and talents.

Gifted Students With Gender Issues

The next set of articles targets gender issues that contribute to the underachievement of gifted females and the perilous journey of development for students who are both gifted and gay. Unlike the students who are twice exceptional, where their disabilities in learning may impede their development, these gifted youngsters are thwarted by the social and emotional milieu (Reis, 1987). The special challenge faced by both gifted girls and the gay population is to forge a trail to success through unfriendly environments where expectations favor gifted straight males in subtle and not so subtle ways.

Reis (1987, 1998) describes the factors contributing to the underachievement of gifted females and suggests that underachievement for gifted girls can be regarded as a failure to meet expectations in school and later in life. For gifted women, underachievement may equate with an inability to reach professional benchmarks set by men in myriad professions or the perception that achievement, as defined by men, equates with successful careers, without taking into account that giftedness in women may need to be redefined. Inappropriate standards provide inappropriate comparisons. She identifies cultural stereotyping, fear of success, lack of planning, perfectionism, and the need to prioritize goals in accordance with values as contributing factors to a pattern of underachievement in women of high potential. The article concludes with the call for future research to define the specific emotional, social, and cultural influences affecting achievement and happiness for gifted females so that appropriate interventions and guidance programs can be provided.

Peterson and Rischar (2000) summarize some of the challenges faced by students who are gifted and gay and describe the emotional turmoil faced by these young people whom they describe as "doubly different" (p. 241). The world is particularly hostile for these youngsters. First admitting their sexual preferences to self and others is extremely difficult. They may find no safe haven where they can explore their feelings in a nonjudgmental forum. Next, their giftedness itself can make them even more sensitive to the trials and tribulations they must face to find peace. In a qualitative study with 18 gifted young adults who identify themselves as being gay/lesbian/bisexual, the authors found that these students feel alienated and marginalized by both their giftedness and sexual orientation. They describe mostly negative school experiences where the attitudes of both teachers and peers were hurtful. They admitted to severe depression and thoughts of self-destructive behavior. Peterson and Rischar (2000) explain how sexual development identity may impact normal development in other areas. The article concludes with specific strategies for aiding these students in accepting and acknowledging who they are and for establishing a school climate of acceptance, compassion, and appreciation of diversity.

Economically Disadvantaged Gifted Students

Many populations of gifted students are thwarted in their development because of poverty and lack of experiences (Oreck, Baum, & McCartney, 2000;

Slocum & Payne, 2000). The final set of articles examines economic influences on personal development. Rural and urban students are included. The first article examines the issue of identifying gifted students from poor rural areas; the second targets the population of gifted dropouts. While there are a multitude of issues surrounding both these situations, chief among them are economic factors.

Spicker, Southern, and Davis (1987) discuss the effects of rural living, sparse populations, poverty, non-urban acculturation, experiences and traditional values that impact both identification of gifted youngsters and finding the resources to develop their gifts and talents. They explain that the problem of poverty often impedes development of children with respect to language, perception, curiosity, and self-efficacy. Issues of poverty also interfere with the youngsters building healthy attitudes about school and learning. These factors contribute to the impoverished students' inability to fare well on standardized tests of ability or achievement. Even if these students are identified as gifted, lack of resources and support by the family and school challenges the development of the gifts and talents of these special youngsters. Spicker, Southern, and Davis (1987) conclude by suggesting strategies for counteracting these difficulties. Some examples include using alternate identification procedures, increasing teacher awareness of the nature and needs of this population, locating community resources, and connecting with other districts to share resources and link students to appropriate peers.

The greatest risk economically disadvantaged gifted students both rural and urban face is the failure to complete school and develop their potential. In the final article, Renzulli and Park (2000) argue that a major characteristic of the gifted dropout population is poverty. The authors claim that gifted students who drop out of school most often came from families with low social economic status and had parents with low levels of education. In addition, gifted dropouts tended not to participate in extracurricular activities, had low educational aspirations, and left school primarily for school-related or personal problems. Most of these youngsters did not like school, were failing, or had personal problems that required their attention like being pregnant or having to work. The authors recommend that schools and teachers need to identify potential gifted dropouts in the early grades so that they can provide challenging curriculum that aligns to students' strengths, styles, and interests. Schools need to provide enriched opportunities, counseling services, and opportunities for communicating with the families.

NEEDS, CHALLENGES, AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER

While each group presents unique issues, general themes repeat themselves as essential ingredients of providing appropriate services for the "doubly different" (Peterson & Rischar, 2000, p. 241). In other words, to effectively help students with two sets of needs (which at times may seem to conflict with each other) we may need to dually differentiate their experiences (Baum, Cooper, & Neu, 2001). On the one hand, we must remember that these students are gifted and

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need experiences to challenge their gifts. But at the same time, their unique situations may require modifications, accommodations, and additional services to nurture their academic, social, and emotional development. The following provides an overview of common needs facing gifted students at risk. The questions below each alert us to the challenges we must confront if we are to provide appropriate educational experiences for these special populations of gifted students.

Issue 1: These students require talent development experiences.

- Are the definitions of giftedness sufficiently broad to include these populations?
- Are identification strategies valid for the population?
- Are all talents valued and allowed expression?
- Are there sufficient resources to nurture the talent?

Issue 2: These students deserve learning environments that support their academic, social, and emotional needs.

- Are the students appropriately challenged in the regular classroom?
- Are they being taught in ways that accentuate their learning differences and styles?
- Have students been appropriately diagnosed for any learning needs?
- Have appropriate accommodations or modifications been provided?
- Are there opportunities to learn self-regulation strategies?
- Do the students have experiences with peers of similar issues and abilities?
- Are there appropriate counseling opportunities where students can explore their unique issues?
- Are there role models or mentors for these students with whom they can identify?

Issue 3: The families of these students should be aware of the unique needs of their children and how to meet them.

- Are there parent support groups?
- Are parents made aware of the unique gifts and talents of their children?
- Are parents provided with community resources to help them develop the talents of their children?
- Are parents provided with community resources to help them support the unique challenges the students may have in terms of learning or emotional needs?

Issue Four: Teachers and school personnel should be aware of the unique needs of these special populations of gifted students.

- Are there professional development opportunities where teachers and counselors learn about the needs of these students?

- Do teachers have resources both human and material to help them design and implement appropriate interventions?
- Do teachers have planning time to share ideas and develop strategies to meet the needs of these special youngsters?

Future Directions

As we enter the age of “No Child Left Behind” thinking, it would appear that the needs of these special populations of gifted students will be met. Unfortunately this is not the case. The methods sought under this federal policy are those scientifically proven to be effective to raise achievement of students. These strategies tend to be minimalistic and focus on basic skill acquisition rather than talent development. Furthermore, funds for talent development are always tenuous. The limited funds available are often allocated to provide services for more traditional groups of gifted students. Little funds, if any, are reserved for guidance and counseling except for students who are already in severe difficulty.

Currently many bright students from special populations are not identified as gifted because their unique characteristics prevent them from meeting traditional criteria. Some students who are diagnosed as having severe learning, behavioral, or attention problems are excluded from admission into a gifted program or from receiving talent development services. This may occur because professionals in special education are not always aware of the characteristic behaviors of gifted students or what happens when remediation is substituted for talent development (Baum & Olenchak, 2002). To worsen matters, procedures for identifying and accommodating gifted children with learning disabilities and other learning differences are changing. Students who are bright but achieve at grade level may fall through the cracks of being served at all.

Although this projection is bleak, it is a call to arms. It is imperative that we advocate for the needs of these students. Parents, educators, and professionals who care about these special populations need to unite and take a stand. They need to become politically active to draw attention to the unique needs of these students. Researchers need to conduct the experimental studies that can prove the efficacy of providing talent development and counseling services to these special students at risk.

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