

Impact of School Environment on Socio-Affective Development: A Quasi-Experimental Longitudinal Study of Urban and Suburban Gifted and Talented Programs

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Abstract : This study used two psychological scales to examine the level of social and emotional intelligence and moral judgment of over 500 gifted and talented high school students in various academic and creative arts programs in a large metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. For decades, numerous models and programs purporting to encourage socio-affective characteristics of adolescent development have been explored in curriculum theory and design. Socio-affective merges social, emotional, and moral domains. It encompasses interpersonal relations and social behaviors; development and regulation of emotions; personal and gender identity construction; empathy development; moral development, thinking, and judgment. Examining development in these socio-affective domains can provide insight into why some gifted and talented adolescents are not successful in adulthood despite advanced IQ scores. Particularly whether nonintellectual characteristics of gifted and talented individuals, such as emotional, social and moral capabilities, are as advanced as their intellectual abilities and how these are related to each other. Unique characteristics distinguish gifted and talented individuals; these may appear as strengths, but there is the potential for problems to accompany them. Although many thrive in their school environments, some gifted students struggle rather than flourish. In the socio-affective domain, these adolescents face special intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental problems. Gifted individuals' cognitive, psychological, and emotional development occurs asynchronously, in multidimensional layers at different rates and unevenly across ability levels. Therefore, it is important to examine the long-term effects of participation in various gifted and talented programs on the socio-affective development of gifted and talented adolescents. This quasi-experimental longitudinal study examined students in several gifted and talented education programs (creative arts school, urban charter schools, and suburban public schools) for (1) socio-affective development level and (2) whether a particular gifted and talented program encourages developmental growth. The following research questions guided the study: (1) How do academically and artistically talented gifted 10th and 11th grade students perform on psychometric scales of social and emotional intelligence and moral judgment? Do they differ from their age or grade normative sample? Are their gender differences among gifted students? (2) Does school environment impact 10th and 11th grade gifted and talented students' socio-affective development? Do gifted adolescents who participate in a particular school gifted program differ in their developmental profiles of social and emotional intelligence and moral judgment? Students' performances on psychometric instruments were compared over time and by type of program. Participants took pre-, mid-, and post-tests over the course of an academic school year with Defining Issues Test (DIT-2) assessing moral judgment and BarOn EQ-I: YV assessing social and emotional intelligence. Based on these assessments, quantitative differences in growth on psychological scales (individual and school) were examined. Change scores between schools were also compared. If a school showed change, artifacts (culture, curricula, instructional methodology) provided insight as to environmental qualities that produced this difference.

Keywords : gifted and talented education, moral development, socio-affective development, socio-affective education

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