

Effects of School Culture and Curriculum on Gifted Adolescent Moral, Social, and Emotional Development: A Longitudinal Study of Urban Charter Gifted and Talented Programs

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Abstract : Using two psychometric instruments, this study examined social and emotional intelligence and moral judgment levels of more than 300 gifted and talented high school students enrolled in arts-integrated, academic acceleration, and creative arts charter schools in an ethnically diverse large city in the southeastern United States. Gifted and talented individuals possess distinguishable characteristics; these frequently appear as strengths, but often serious problems accompany them. Although many gifted adolescents thrive in their environments, some struggle in their school and community due to emotional intensity, motivation and achievement issues, lack of peers and isolation, identification problems, sensitivity to expectations and feelings, perfectionism, and other difficulties. These gifted students endure and survive in school rather than flourish. Gifted adolescents face special intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental problems. Furthermore, they experience greater levels of stress, disaffection, and isolation than non-gifted individuals due to their advanced cognitive abilities. Therefore, it is important to examine the long-term effects of participation in various gifted and talented programs on the socio-affective development of these adolescents. Numerous studies have researched moral, social, and emotional development in the areas of cognitive-developmental, psychoanalytic, and behavioral learning; however, in almost all cases, these three facets have been studied separately leading to many divergent theories. Additionally, various frameworks and models purporting to encourage the different socio-affective branches of development have been debated in curriculum theory, yet research is inconclusive on the effectiveness of these programs. Most often studied is the socio-affective domain, which includes development and regulation of emotions; empathy development; interpersonal relations and social behaviors; personal and gender identity construction; and moral development, thinking, and judgment. Examining development in these domains can provide insight into why some gifted and talented adolescents are not always successful in adulthood despite advanced IQ scores. Particularly whether emotional, social and moral capabilities of gifted and talented individuals are as advanced as their intellectual abilities and how these are related to each other. This mixed methods longitudinal study examined students in urban gifted and talented charter schools for (1) socio-affective development levels and (2) whether a particular environment encourages developmental growth. Research questions guiding the study: (1) How do academically and artistically gifted 10th and 11th grade students perform on psychological scales of social and emotional intelligence and moral judgment? Do they differ from the normative sample? Do gender differences exist among gifted students? (2) Do adolescents who attend distinctive gifted charter schools differ in developmental profiles? Students' performances on psychometric instruments were compared over time and by program type. Assessing moral judgment (DIT-2) and socio-emotional intelligence (BarOn EQ-I: YV), participants took pre-, mid-, and post-tests during one academic school year. Quantitative differences in growth on these psychological scales (individuals and school-wide) were examined. If a school showed change, qualitative artifacts (culture, curricula, instructional methodology, stakeholder interviews) provided insight for environmental correlation.

Keywords : gifted and talented programs, moral judgment, social and emotional intelligence, socio-affective education

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