

**A CROSS – CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE SOCIAL AND  
EMOTIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING GIFTED LEARNERS :  
YEAR 9 – YEAR 12.**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Dynamic classrooms emerge from the fact that modern day classes have mosaic of learners, each with their own-harnessed synergies. The definition of gifted and talented learners has undergone significant changes over the decades. Gifted and talented learners are those who manage to camouflage the emotional and social needs they have with their high ability with curriculum subjects. The classroom culture and dynamics does play a significant role as these learners experience a variety of spells of aloofness. Also, sometimes classroom interactions may not give these learners an opportunity to build on their cognition, but may stagnate their existing knowledge leading to boredom in classrooms. Strategies that these learners may need to entail to thrive in these dynamic classrooms have been discussed in this paper. The role of the teacher, parents and school is diagrammatically represented to showcase their importance as social agents in the lives of these learners. This research has a cross-cultural flavor as it was pieced together at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne. My reflections from my work experience from India and variety of literature used has also helped me shape this research to contemplate on the social and emotional issues faced by these learners as a global teacher. The importance of accelerated programs for these learners seems to be an obvious choice to keep these learners engaged during school interaction. Hence, using an accelerated program within a social circle would be the most beneficial for these learners. Feedback from parents could not only serve as a good reflection base for

teachers and stakeholders but also be used as input to revise practices for these learners in a school.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Purpose**

As an established reflective practitioner in India, I very often contemplated over the concept of differentiation. Initially when I began my teaching career, my planning encompassed highlights of differentiation in the light of special students who sort extra help or guidance in the classroom. Tassel-Baska (2015) clearly summarizes that the reason for this phenomena is the existence of a well-developed and professionally consensual approach to special education. However, I soon realized that although I focused my practice over differentiation, I was still unable to address the needs of the whole class. There was still a small percentage of students who in my opinion were either not challenged enough or were not given efficient and ample opportunity to showcase their talent and creativity through the classroom activity. Hence, my teaching instruction made their existing skillset redundant.

Teaching for differentiation definitely should incorporate these students who are sometimes referred to as ‘gifted’ or ‘talented’. Catering to the gifted students in the class is truly accounting for inclusiveness in a classroom environment. At the preliminary stage, as a teacher if I want to cater to their needs, I should be aware about their needs. The best way to get to understand this is by building a value – added relationship with these learners.

Sometimes, the most daunting task for a teacher in a classroom is the identification of the gifted learners. Moreover, classifying a student as creative or gifted and planning instruction to cater for both could be a major challenge without the pre-requisite knowledge about these areas in the classroom.

The classroom dynamics is influenced greatly by social and emotional factors. As teachers, not catering to gifted learners brings us to have a very niche realization about their social and emotional needs.

Renzuilli (1992) argues that as teachers we need to explore a new research paradigm that helps us create demanding learning situations that would place a premium on creative productivity for these learners to avoid redundancy. Hence, the major purpose of this research is to be able to identify the gifted learners in a classroom and as a teacher to be able to generate a value –added curriculum that truly can address an inclusive classroom. Also, to go a step ahead and focus on addressing the social and emotional factors that influences these learners. These findings can then be correlated to the academic performance and social well being of the gifted learners.

### **1.2. Significance**

The major aim of classroom direction and activities is to develop life skills and livelihood skills among the variety of learners in the learning environment. Hence, while addressing holistic development and differentiation it becomes very significant to observe the social and emotional growth of all the learners in the class. This research is significant as it draws on cross-cultural approaches towards the social and emotional issues of gifted learners. It would help to assess learners' attitudes towards academic achievement on a broader context. These observable findings would help me gain an expertise for my future classroom interactions.

### **1.3. Delimitations**

Gifted learners usually account for a very small population (N) and hence cannot contribute to a substantial sample space. The reliance of this research is based on narratives and case studies, which is a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study.

### **1.4. Research Questions:**

- What are the major social issues faced by gifted learners?
- What are the major emotional issues faced by gifted learners?
- How do these social and emotional issues affect the performance of gifted

learners?

- Is social isolation a personal preference or a peer rejection among gifted learners?

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:**

### **2.1. Balance View**

Siegle (2015) summarizes how gifted and talented students are the greatest potential resource for advancing the nation in a globally competitive market. Also, he emphasized how a well-rounded human being would be able to use his/her gifts to the fullest of their potential. Hence, we as teachers need to focus on building strategies for the gifted learners to adapt in order to work around the problem of social adjustment. Gallagher's idea in this article portrays the importance of teachers trained in differentiating strategies and serving twice-exceptional students, those with gifts and disabilities.

Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline & Richards (2012) focuses on how self – concept and self – esteem could influence the abilities of the gifted learners. A positive self-concept could lead students into exploring their gifts more and hence achieving better academic and non- academic outcomes for themselves.

Cross, Coleman & Yonkers (2014) support the premise that intellectually talented students are affected by the perceptions of how other students view their abilities. Gifted learners develop a social cognition where they assess what others think of them. These assumptions sometimes may lead to low self-esteem issues among these learners.

Perrone-McGovern, Simon – Dack, Beduna, Williams, Esche (2015) found that Overexcitability was able to predict the level of emotional development among gifted learners. Hence, emotional dysregulation could be linked to problems with social or interpersonal relationships.

Coleman & Cross (2014) supported the notion that many but not all gifted learners experience giftedness as a social handicap. These learners do not think of themselves

as outstanding, however they fail to understand the reason behind their high grasping power. Most of these learners do not isolate themselves at the outset, but their social circles tend to give them a feeling of being different, which may sometimes lead to social isolation. Coleman & Cross (2014) recognize that teachers form a major part of the social circle of these learners. These learners are consciously aware and make this choice to mingle with teachers.

Pelchar & Bain (2014) summarizes the fact that gifted students are a socially vulnerable population. In general, bullying victimizes and secludes peers from a group of students. However, with the gifted learners bullying may get them to question the gifts they possess and more so sometimes get them to camouflage the existence of the gift. This could be done either for social acceptance or victimization avoidance. However, if these strategies fail to work the gifted learners begin to showcase mental health issues in subtle ways.

Tassel – Baska (2013) strongly opines that as the world becomes smaller in a small field like gifted education, cross-cultural research gives us a unique opportunity to understand top students and the interventions that are designed for them in a deeper way. The sample space for the gifted population in any geographical region is always going to be sparse. Hence, considering samples from different regions would help as a substantial base and also would serve to make conclusions about efficient interventions for gifted learners.

Gubbels, Segers and Verhoven (2014) states that the gifts evolve into talents through interaction with persons, events, environment and chance factors. Hence, developing interventions for gifted learners must account for the cognitive and socioemotional domain. This would help the gifted learners to use their full potential and explore their gifts completely.

## **2.2. Significance**

The significance of the literature is two-fold when social and emotional issues are considered. There is a population of gifted learners who get affected by the lack of

social relationships with their peers. However, there is also a population of gifted learners who may not be affected by social exclusion or rejection. These learners would be the ones who enjoy independent learning. These articles dawn upon me that as teachers the significance lies in identifying these social issues among the gifted learners and finding interventions to bridge the gap and help them develop as holistic learners inside and outside the classroom. The cross-cultural perspectives would definitely give us more insight into building more portfolios of gifted learners. The social well - being of these learners will scaffold their existing high-level intelligence. It would keep them motivated, focused and interested to work within the arena of their gifts.

### **2.3. Delimitations**

The academic research used as a reference for this study clearly identifies the sparse population of gifted learners to be the major limitation.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK):**

A qualitative methodology has been adopted for this study based upon interviews and case studies.

- Robinson (2004) showcases through case studies of various students that acceleration of some type (Grade skipping, Early Graduation, Credit by examination) improves the gifted learners social and emotional adjustment. They tend to nurture their gifts rather than camouflage them to avoid social rejection.
- Vanderbook (2006) summarizes interviews from participants who were gifted and took up to the IB (International Baccalaureate) program. These students express how the structure of the program is self-paced. The participants emphasize on the quality of teachers at the IB program. The teachers were very passionate about their subject and could transact the same in a very creative manner. The teachers possessed characteristics that the learners wanted to emulate at some point of their life. Hence, the students could associate with their teachers inside and outside the classroom. The teachers served as a major emotional support system as they

connected with their students on an individual basis. These gifted learners expressed how their peers served as academic and emotional support throughout the program. Most of the tasks had students work in pairs and groups and hence help them to collaborate efficiently to produce high quality work. The hidden curriculum of the IB program (mission statement) is one, which bears significance of being able to communicate and build valuable social relationships.

- Callahan, Cunningham & Plucker (2010) puts together individual cases of how males and females consider their gifts differently and hence may have different strategies to deal with social issues they encounter. One case in this article speaks of a girl whose parent is training her to be an independent individual. This kind of parenting gets her to believe that she is a capable human being. Hence, she explores her gifts by herself without feeling socially excluded at all.

- Interview from a special educator in India (Hill Spring International School, Mumbai)

Alisha Dias is an experienced Special Educator from a school in India. She exclaims how gifted learners feel redundant in an inclusive classroom. She also emphasizes how as teachers, coordinators and stakeholders we need to address learners in an inclusive environment and how the gifted learners tend to be the fallouts of this system. Hence, the need to focus to building infrastructure and amenities for the gifted minds of the class should be the priority of every school, even though the population of these learners tends to be sparse.

- Case – Study of a gifted learner in India (Hill Spring International School, Mumbai)

This learner was gifted with the knowledge of computers. He spent most of his free time understanding different concepts of computer science. The major problem faced by this learner in a class with his peers was that the topics being taught were not too appealing to him as he already had more and enough experience about it. If there

were a topic that appealed to him he would ask recurring questions. The learner enjoyed solitude in his snack and lunch breaks. However, this was the outcome of the fact that he was a higher emotional level compared to his peers. He shared a very close camaraderie with his teachers. He expressed gratitude towards his teachers as they treated him with respect and envisioned his maturity as a tool to explore his own gifts and talents.

- Hebert & Beardsley (2001) explains the life-experience of a gifted student named 'Jermaine' in the rural areas of Alabama. This article articulates the importance of solitude and autonomy to build a strong knowledge base of creativity. Jermaine did not work with learners of his age but at the same time had natural avenues to reflect on the inner dynamics of a creative life. This environment helped him ascertain his self-identity, which was a multi-layered one indeed. Jermaine in his testimony mentioned the impact of a teacher who guided him and took special interest in his success. He also stated how the relationship with his older siblings and neighbours who served as informal mentors had potentially changed in life.
- Scheibel (2010) sources a variety of acceleration programs for the gifted learners. She also summarizes how acceleration is a double-sided enrichment program for these learners. She articulates that these learners struggle to have social and emotional connections with peers of their age, as their emotional maturity is considerably higher. The acceleration programs help them mingle with older peers. There seems to be less rejection and more acceptance from the older peers as their cognitive abilities match with the gifted learners in most academic and non-academic tasks assigned to them.

#### **4. CONCLUSION:**

In this research, I have referred to articles where social and emotional issues of the gifted learners have been addressed under different contexts or different cultural environments. Hence, it can be concluded that acceleration programs and activities provide for a variety of avenues to the gifted learners in cognitive and emotional



arenas. An accelerated environment enables students the balance between social acceptance and personal preference of solitude. Personal solitude is an important element to build on the knowledge base of creativity. For these learners, teachers are the major social agents of their lives as they take on the journey to explore their talents and gifts. This kind of cognitive and social instruction would help improve the well - being of these gifted learners. This quality driven instruction between teachers and the learners will generate all-round and balanced learners.

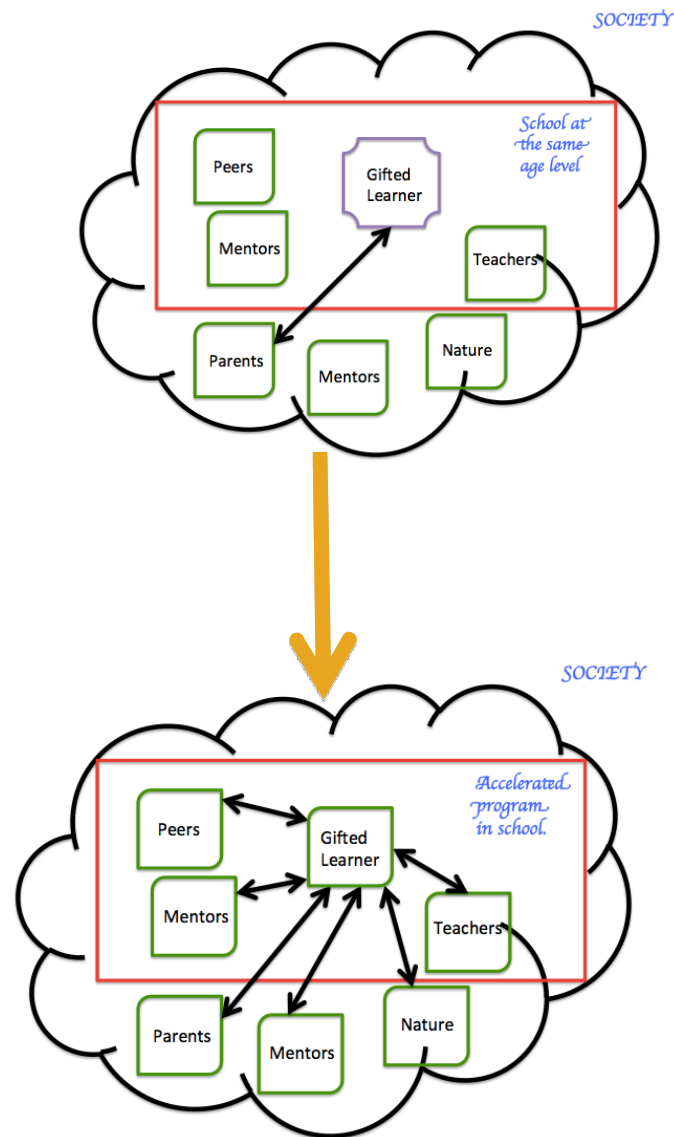


Figure 4:Effect of an accelerated program on gifted learners social and emotional well - being

This diagram depicts the finding of this research article. The first part of the figure establishes the fact that gifted learners feel socially excluded with almost no social connections in a class with peers of the same age level. The gifted learner is shown to be a social misfit. However, when these learners are moved to an accelerated class, they express more zeal to make social connections as they are working with other learners of the same cognitive ability. The second figure also expresses how the gifted learner no longer feels like a social misfit among the other social agents they encounter.

#### **4.1 What impact will this have on my teaching?**

As a teacher I would try to incorporate these strategies as a part of my instruction in class and interaction with the gifted learners.

- Implement a research-based curriculum that is more open-ended. This will help gifted learners in the class apply their knowledge to novel situations and produce innovative solutions.
- Try to identify students with gifts in the class. Accounting for these learners and inducing a plan within lessons that will help stimulate their thinking.
- Find other gifted students, specifically the ones who share similar interests. Give them opportunities to work cooperatively and collaboratively. (Across grades)
- Consider parent input for these learners.
- Address the counseling needs of these learners to support emotional growth and promote social well - being.

#### **4.2 Future Directions**

During the journey of this research I came across gifted learners who may also have ADHD. Although they have excellent skills with a particular topic of interest their attention span may not help them achieve their best. Hence, it is important to identify this condition within the population of gifted learners. Going a step further, as teachers we need to find interventions that could materialize in a classroom setup to help these learners combat their attention needs.

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