



STRATEGIES FOR REVERSING UNDERACHIEVEMENT AMONG GIFTED STUDENTS

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Abstract

Identification of gifted and talented students is not much difficult, as they can outwardly display their ray of excellence but what about those students who are gifted and talented but are not getting good grades or are not engaged in school? These students are termed as gifted underachievers. Student underachievement is a complex and persistent problem which can be described as a discrepancy between ability and performance. The underachievement of academically gifted students is an area of concern and disheartenment for many parents, teachers, educators and counselors. Its big challenge of how to identify these students and what type of strategies should be implemented to get them engaged in school and achieving to their fullest potentials? Underachievement of gifted and talented has received considerable attention in research literature and educators must explore the various reasons for these students' underachievement if they hope to help reverse it. Reversing underachievement among these students requires intensive efforts on the part of teachers, parents, educators, policy makers, and counselors, as well as a partnership with them. In this paper, efforts have been made to define the concept of underachievement among the gifted and talented learners and will provide some strategies for reversing underachievement among said students.

Introduction

The gifted and talented students of a population are the students who should grow up to be our forerunning politicians, businessmen, scientists and artists to name a few. If we are not identifying, recognizing and developing the potentials of high ability students in schools, we let down our future generations (Scobie-Jennings, n.d.). Gifted children think differently, feel differently, have unique academic and socio-emotional needs and therefore, require different treatment (Bain, Bliss, Choate, & Brown, 2007). If they are not provided different treatment and strategies then they are on high risk of underachievement. Gifted underachievers are defined as those students who have a large discrepancy between potential and performance i.e. their gifts are not effectively developed into talents. Havighurst (1977) explained that the students whose academic performance declined considerably than their expected scores from intelligence test are termed as gifted underachievers.

It may seem difficult to reverse a long-standing pattern of underachievement

as it is a long term and complex problem. Unfortunately, there is no single intervention that will ameliorate underachievement for all gifted students. To date, interventions aimed at reversing the underachieving behaviors of gifted students have been inconsistent and inconclusive (Ritchotte, Rubenstein & Murry, 2015). Best approach is the commitment from different parties like home and school to work consistently toward a specific intervention strategy targeting the major cause of the student's underachievement.

Strategies for reversing underachievement

When gifted students begin to underachieve, it becomes increasingly difficult to break that pattern. To create an effective plan to reverse gifted underachievement, the field of gifted education must look closely at the research based practices (Ritchotte, Rubenstein, & Murry, 2015). There are models or strategies which have proven to be very effective and successful. As mentioned earlier parents, teachers, society as well as student alone are unable to reverse underachievement pattern so for better results it is require collaboration between the school and the student's family in the implementation of a series of steps.

There are some important points which should be taken into account while implementing strategies and interventions like (a) Ensure that definitions of underachievement should be reliable and valid (b) Interventions should enhance academic and social self-perceptions, self-esteem, self-concept (c) It should improve students' skills in time management, studying, organization of work and taking tests (d) It must involve family members as partners in the educational process and lastly it should address school-related factors, including teachers and counselors with gifted and multicultural training to meet both academic and affective needs of gifted students. This training should include strategies for improving student-teacher relations, teacher expectations and the classroom climate (Donna & Antoinette, 1997).

Counseling and instructional interventions: Reis & Greene (2014) mentioned two broader categories of intervention namely counseling and instructional interventions which are linked with reversal of underachievement among gifted students. They mentioned counseling interventions as one of the most used interventions in literature which facilitates gifted underachievers by making alterations to family and student's personal dynamics. These interventions may further include individual, family and group counseling. Nearly in all counseling situations, the goal of counselor is not to force gifted underachiever to become a more successful student, but rather main focus is to help the student to decide whether success is valued as a desirable goal and if so, to help change counterproductive habits (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Butler-Por, 1993). On the other side, they mentioned placement in part-time or full-time special classrooms of gifted and talented underachievers as the most well-known instructional interventions (Whitmore, 1980). Such type of classrooms facilitates educators and teachers to alter their traditional classroom organization which ultimately creates favorable environment for student achievement. Also, in these classroom settings, gifted

students are encouraged to make use of different learning strategies and to take initiative for self-directed behavior (Reis & McCoach, 2000)

Self-Regulated Learning: Self-regulated give details of a process of taking control of and evaluating one's own learning and behavior. It is an integrated learning process, comprising of the development of a set of constructive behaviors which affect one's learning. Good self-regulation can be developed by systematic use of the self-observation i.e. monitoring and recording one's own performance, self-judgment i.e. to compare the performance with goal or standard (e.g. re-examining answers, checking procedures; rating answers in relation to answer sheet, another person's), Self-reaction i.e. personal processes like goal-setting and metacognitive planning, self-administered criticism or praise, memorizing, rehearsing, structuring the environment or task and asking for help (Reis, & Greene, 2014).

The Prism Metaphor Model: This model is one of the most popular models for reversing underachievement among gifted students. Baum et al (1995) carried out research and developed this model using Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (specifically Type III enrichment). The goal of Type III enrichment is:

- To provide golden opportunities for students to become actual investigators of real problems through suitable means of inquiry and to bring their findings to bear on real-world audiences.
- Main focus of Type III enrichment is to prepare students to become producers of creative products through the collection of raw data, use of higher order problem-solving techniques and application of research strategies or artistic procedures.

Teacher who apply this intervention should have high degree of familiarity with student's academic record and personal life which can be obtained through use of interest surveys, students essays on their feelings about school and informal interviews between the teacher and the student, teachers should focus on management plan with students and accordingly provide necessary recourses and strategies for these students.

Baum et al further mentioned that past efforts to reverse underachievement probably used the wrong lens to focus the problem i.e. it just concentrated on study hard, do homework, get good grades and please teachers. The approach described by them suggests a prism metaphor as mentioned in figure 1. They furthermore explained as real images are formed when rays of light are reflected in a mirror; something different happens when this ray of light is passed through a prism. Not only does it change direction, which is the goal of reversing underachievement, but it also takes on qualitative differences. The result is a spectrum of color that is critically different from the light energy that originally entered this special environment. This mysterious phenomenon is similar to one observed when students pursue their own investigative experiences (Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995).

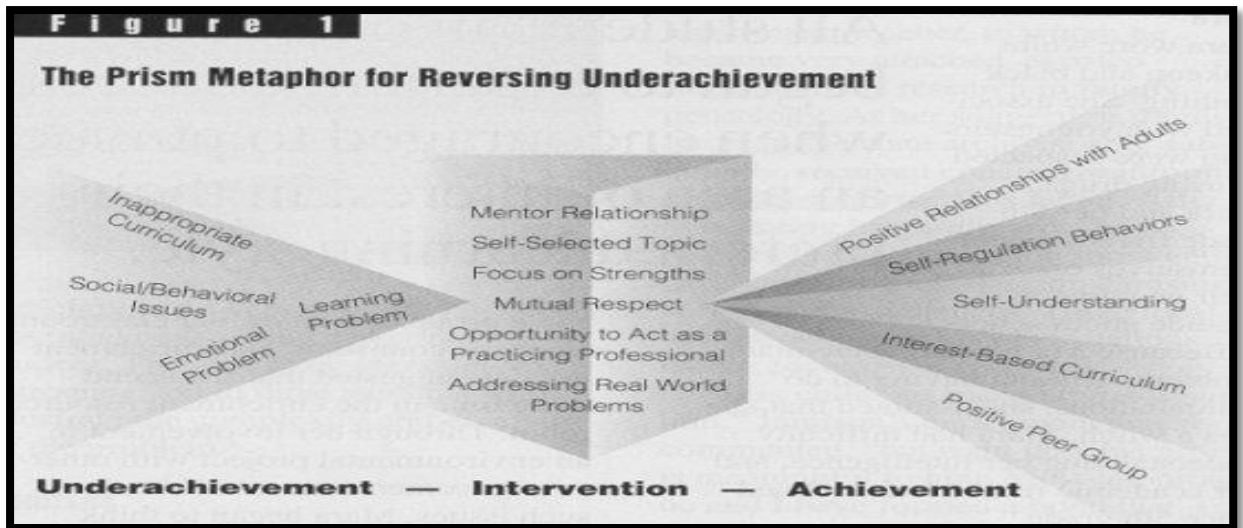


Figure 1: Prism Metaphor for Reversing Underachievement

The figure 1 depicts the transformation from underachievement to achievement which is based on the interrelationship of variety of factors. Central point of this model is to identify reasons and factors of underachievement, intervening using Type III enrichment which proved through Baum et al (1995) research to lead to eventual achievement by students previously identified as underachieving gifted and talented students. Researchers believe the Type III experience uses positive interaction between student abilities, interests, learning styles and supportive student-teacher relationships to transform underachievement into achievement.

Rimm’s Trifocal Model: Drawing on both clinical research and years of experience working with families, Rimm has developed a Trifocal model. The Rimm Trifocal model (1995) provides an easy-to-apply framework for intervention in schools and clinics. The philosophy of this model is based on the fact that underachievement is learned and therefore achievement can also be learned. According to Rimm (2010)

“At the family achievement clinic, we reverse underachievement in roughly four out of five children by using a three-pronged approach called the Trifocal Model, which focuses on the child, the parents and the school.”

This model consists of six steps, which are briefly described below:

Step	Goal	Achieved by
Assessment of skills and abilities	To find out the nature and extent of the student’s underachievement	Using tests, observation, inventories and questioning
Communication	To get parents, teachers, and students to work together	Meeting to discuss issues and exchange information with respect and without blame
Changing	To change the expectations of the	Set realistic goals and express

expectations	students, parents and teachers to match a new level of achievement	confidence in student's ability to meet them
Identification	To find a good role model for the student	Selecting a positive and achievement-oriented adult with whom the student can identify
Correction of Deficiencies	To overcome any skill deficiencies that might exist	Providing short-term tutoring
Modifications at home, school	To make the changes at home and school needed to stop student's manipulative behavior	Reinforcing achieving behaviors

Some research studies related to reversal of underachievement among gifted students

The field of gifted education must look closely at the research based practices. In this article, only few studies have been mentioned which provided beneficial strategies for reversal of underachievement. Emerick (1992) investigated that some students are able to reverse their academic underachievement without the assistance of formal interventions. She found several factors and mentioned that student understanding his or her underachievement behaviors, developing self-confidence and changing his or her perception to see school as a matter of personal responsibility and a source of satisfaction were major factors. Coleman and Freedman (1996), in their effort to find working interventions for college undergraduates, found that interventions should focus on time management and study skills, relaxation and meditation techniques, career and goal identification. Ritchotte, Rubenstein & Murry (2015) conducted study on gifted underachievers of middle class students with the aim to create an effective plan to reverse gifted underachievement. They used Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA) technique to accomplish this task. FBA major focus is on collection of data, observations and information to develop a clear understanding of the relationship of events and circumstances that trigger and maintain problem behavior. This technique suggest following basic steps (a) verify the seriousness of problem, (b) establish a team and define the problem behavior (i.e., behavior must be defined in observable, measurable, and objective terms so that data can be collected) (c) collect information on the function of the behavior, (d) hypothesize and verify the function (e) develop and implement an intervention plan that is function-based (i.e., satisfies the needs of the underachieving behavior function (f) evaluate fidelity in implementation and effectiveness of the intervention plan and (g) modify as needed. Bain, Bliss, Choate & Brown (2007) studied the perception of teachers regarding gifted students and concluded that lack of training of pre service teachers for identification and intervention of gifted underachievers is major area of concern. Studies of perceptions among pre-service and in-service teachers have found that teachers hold preconceived and erroneous notions regarding the nature of gifted children and their academic and emotional needs. Pre-service teachers were found to believe that gifted children would excel in school without receiving any special

services, rarely experience frustration with failure and can effectively be served within the regular classroom setting

Suggestions to Assist Teachers

Apart from above mentioned models and research studies, the main focus of this article is also to provide some useful techniques which helps teachers to deal with gifted underachievers. it is recommended that before to put a tag of underachievement for gifted student there is need to determine the main problem. Teachers should apply their roles as researchers to see the dynamic nature of the underachievement problem and provide strategies as needed. Teachers and educators have to decide first if the student is really underachievement or he/she has some learning and mental problems and then this can help to solve the problem. After applying suitable tools and techniques for identification of these students; the further step of teachers would explore the student's interests, concerns and hobbies by discussing relevant books or articles etc (Renzulli, Baum, Hebert & McCluskey, 1999). They should be available to talk with students about personal as well as academic topics.

Teachers should emphasize self-efficacy to build student motivation and give assistance to set short and long-term academic goals. Help students plan tasks to achieve goals as it develops a mindset that the task is doable. Young people are often reluctant to begin a task because they are unsure how to begin. Through planning, children can visualize a task coming to fruition. Small, short-term goals work better for younger students to avoid such frustration. It is essential that the goals should be meaningful to students and inquire about possible goals by keeping in mind that goal which adult value may have little meaning to children (Vygotsky, 1962). Show students that they can achieve by assigning small projects at first and building up in scope and complexity as the child's self-confidence improves (Pagnani, n.d.). Encourage and promote students' interests and passions as students are more likely to become engaged with material that is optimally challenging. Ensure that all students are challenged but not frustrated by classroom activities. Along with setting goals, use of positive reinforcement and praise should be preferred. Involve family members in substantive ways. Teacher's role is also prominent to build close connections with students' parents if possible, to understand students' home lives. It's duty of both teachers and parents to assess student work regularly and provide feedback to reach their desired goal. Main motto for these students should be to encourage students to pursue excellence, rather than perfection. Ritchotte, Rubenstein and Murry (2015) mentioned in their research article regarding the Project ATLAS (Autonomous Thinkers Learning as Scholars) which was implemented with middle school gifted underachievers focusing on the goal valuation component. The ATLAS intervention began with students assessing their short- and long-term goals and connecting those goals to school achievement. The students discussed how teachers are required to

meet these standards by showing them a variety of ways in which they might meet the standard.

Literature also shed light on negative characteristics on gifted underachievers. So, to recognize negative thought patterns and accordingly work on such patterns is also recommended. Many underachieving students find they have intractable thoughts that are negative – especially about homework and grades – freezing them into inaction. Therefore, it is important to stop this pattern. The student first has to identify what interferes with performance and then they should practice to learn to say, “Stop” (aloud or in her mind), to put an end to this train of thought. Some learners find a more specific action which works better, such as wearing a thick rubber band on one’s wrist. When the self-defeating idea occurs, they have to snaps her wrist with the rubber band, utilizing behavior modification to decrease and eventually to eliminate unwanted thinking patterns (Strop, n.d.). Further with constant motivation, reinforcement and with practice, students may be able to change their negative self-talk to positive one.

Negative self talk	Positive self talk
1. This is uninteresting and boring homework.	1. This homework is too easy and it should not take me very long to complete. Now, I have more time to spend on interesting activities.
2. I don’t like my class teacher	2. Though my class teacher is not great match for me, he/she will help me to understand a different learning style.

Strop (n.d.) further mentioned another way to deal with negative thoughts using affirmations on the part of student. Affirmations are positive statements that an individual says several times during the day which empower and encourage the students. Repetition can become second nature and they can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. ‘I am a capable person and can do homework if I decided to do it’ and ‘Grades allow me to reach my personal goals’ are some of examples of affirmations.

Alliance for reversing student underachievement (Rimm, 2010): Rimm, a prominent researcher in the field of gifted underachiever beautifully mentioned the meaning of ALLIANCE in the context of said students as follows:

- A- Ally with the student privately about interests and concerns.
- L- Listen to what the student says.
- L- Learn about what the student is thinking.
- I- Initiate opportunities for recognition of the student’s strengths.
- A- Add experimental ideas for engaging curricular and extracurricular activities.
- N- Nurture relationships with appropriate adult and peer role models.
- C- Consequence reasonably but firmly if student doesn’t meet commitments

E- Emphasize effort, independence, realistic expectations, how strengths can be used to cope with problems and extend possibilities patiently.

Conclusion

Research should examine the effectiveness of family oriented interventions, such as family counseling and home and school partnerships. No single intervention will work with all gifted underachievers as gifted achievers differ from gifted underachievers and gifted underachievers differ from each other. Change the student's perceptions and they need to know that education is most effective when engagement is high and stress is low. Understanding this, they can then learn how to recognize when they are having difficulty engaging in assignments and identify when/if they are under undue stress. Once they are able to recognize these barriers, they can learn how to become achiever again.

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