

Highly-Gifted Children's Social and Emotional Needs Do Matter

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Abstract

In this study, I am agreeing with former professor at Purdue University, Jean Sunde Peterson, that highly gifted children do have social and emotional needs. I have contributed to her study by presenting a five-step focus group in order to improve victimization against gifted children in schools. I believe that if my intervention group is implemented, gifted children will understand about themselves and know how to avoid conflict with their peers. Additionally, the rates of victimization against gifted children will decrease within time. I will also explain how this program is aimed to help highly gifted children's peers understand their social and emotional needs.

Keywords: HGC (highly-gifted children), SEN (social and emotional needs), academics, schools, victimization, bullying, vulnerability, giftedness, gifted

Experience

Similarly to many others, I was picked on a lot by others while growing up. I was only in the second grade of elementary school when I noticed it was challenging for me to “fit in” with other classmates. It all started when my fellow classmates would make fun of the way I would grip my pencil because it was unusual to them. My teacher responded to the bullying by calling my parents in for a meeting. After addressing the situation, she offered to get me one-on-one lessons after school. I ended up taking the lessons where they attempted to change my grip on the pencil. Looking back at the situation, I never saw a problem with my writing. In fact, I loved the way that I gripped my pencil because it was unique. I realized that I attempted to change because I felt pressured to be what society perceived as “normal.” I drove myself crazy attempting to change the way I write, but I never ended up being able to succeed it.

My advice I give is that you can't change something that can't be fixed. I believe that if you are unique, then you should embrace it instead of being ashamed of it. If children were more educated by their teachers about uniqueness, they would less likely see it as a problem. Sadly, I became the main target for bullying because I valued emotions more heavily than the average child. Although my teacher wasn't impressed by my handwriting, she was shocked by how empathetic I was for my classmates.

It wasn't until many later years that I realized that having empathy wasn't a weakness, but that it was one of the most amazing traits a human can have. On the contrary, people who bully others are less likely to have empathy for the victim. If bullies understood what empathy is, they could possibly change for the better and stop bullying other children with natural abilities.

Based on previous research, gifted students tend to be more vulnerable to bullying compared to learners who are not considered as gifted. According to NAGC, children are gifted when their ability is significantly above the norm for their age. (*Lewis & Rivera, 2012*) I developed professional skills at a very young age which include drawing, singing, acting, and photography. I didn't "fit in" because not many other children shared the same interests, at least as a child. Currently, there are gifted children in schools who are being misunderstood by both teachers and students who often results in neglect and bullying.

Career Goals

Before my freshman year started, I always had a feeling that I would major in Media Communications because I value every aspect of human interaction and enjoy it. I minor in History because of my passion for researching the past of our world and how life evolved on Earth. I transferred from RCC to Purchase College, SUNY because of its' good reputation with the arts and welcoming arms for Communication students. It is a well-trusted program, and I have been kindly assisted by my advisors for my time being here so far.

As a Media Communication major, I want to help make a difference through communication in the future. The Communications field is broad, and it continues to develop sporadically as new technology evolves, making it a high demand for businesses and individuals. Following my graduation, I hope to further my education by getting my Master of Science in Media Management. As I prosper academically, I strive to start an organization of my own against bullying and to help others who are traumatically affected by it.

Introduction to Study

The focus of my study is to research in depth about differentiation in instructing education for gifted children. Due to my past experiences of life, I am determined to find a way to ease bullying towards high-achieving children in classrooms around the world. As I continue to research my topic, I will comprehend the specific ages of gifted children who affected by bullying the most, what kind of negative impact it has on them when they become adults, and what psychological factors are implied by it.

I am determined to examine how children feel emotionally as they are picking on others and why they promote aggressiveness against a highly-talented classmate. I chose this topic because I have always wanted to help make a difference for every child who feels underestimated. Since I had a lack of support from my prior educators, I am determined to support these children myself. I believe that if more people were educated about gifted children, there would be less bullying taking place in schools around the world.

Educators should be obligated to take more action against gifted children being victimized by their peers, and do the best they can to limit it. It has come to my attention that several children have committed suicide at very young ages due to bullying in classes. (*Diaz, T. 2017*) I am very troubled by the current situation for our generation about bullying in classrooms and concerned with how there isn't enough being done towards preventing it. I believe one of the leading causes of bullying is not enough education about what it can do to a gifted learner's emotional state. A huge issue in the Academics field is that too many students are not receiving the proper curriculum and assistance from schools. As a result of this, many gifted learners are not able to reach their full potential academically, and some even left emotionally shattered by it even when they are adults. For a change, administrators and other influences must adjust how

they perceive gifted children. I plan to help children receive educational equity with my proposal.

Along with bullying, I hope that teachers will also educate the importance of having empathy for one another, especially peers of the gifted. I always noticed a roadblock in education about having compassion when I was one of the only children who could exemplify it. The children I grew up with that would single me out seemed to lack empathy and were aggressive not only towards myself but other classmates as well. Children who are aware of what compassion is might help defend a victim who is being bullied. With that being said, I am confident that my presentation will spark a change in how experts and teachers approach bullying. Children must learn about certain aspects of bullying and how to prevent aggressive behavior. There are various forms of harassment which sometimes result in a domino effect. We must realize the other factors that may cause a child to start bullying their classmates and how to ease it. If bullying were contained in the classroom, cyber-bullying would be less severe.

Literature Review

You may have heard the term “gifted” to describe a talented person at least once in your lifetime. A gifted person may have several personality traits, especially involving intense emotions and feelings that they cannot necessarily control from time to time. The term overexcitability has been coined to describe the several characteristics of the highly gifted. These social and emotional aspects of the gifted may perhaps set them apart from others. Prior psychotherapists have been misdiagnosing giftedness as a “mental disturbance,” which led to biased perceptions towards gifted people themselves. As a result, these individuals may end up feeling uncertain about their career path and with feelings of ambiguity. A person who has

several talents are often confounded by their peers and society, which can describe why several gifted children are misinterpreted. The issue with the victimization of HGC has led to my two research question, “How can educators and professionals provide an effective learning program for gifted children and their peers?”

Gifted Children's Emotional and Social Needs

Several arguments have been reviewed about gifted children needing more attention to their social and emotional needs (SEN), especially in an educational setting. (*Fornia et al. 2001*) focused on the discipline surrounding the internal and external factors leading up to the emotional and social struggles faced by the gifted. They discuss that sensitivity is one of the first noted aspects in regards to giftedness. According to *Fornia et al. (2001)*, HGC can notice small changes in the environment and are aware of their own unique gifts. However, this perception may lead to self-esteem issues due to perceiving themselves as different from their peers *Fornia et. al (2001)*. In retrospect, this may cause result with underachievement and other psychological issues if not focused on by professionals and instructors.

Jean Sunde Peterson, an expert at studying giftedness, argued against the myth which states, “Gifted and talented individuals do not have social and emotional needs.” (*Peterson, 2008*). She claimed that characteristics associated with giftedness are often viewed inappropriately by helping professionals. As a result of neglect, professionals are left to question about the emotional and social needs of a gifted child themselves. She explained how positive stereotyping of talented and skilled individuals may lead to dangerous implications. In hindsight, several parents and educators of gifted individuals assume they are aberrant if they don't express their needs.

Gifted Education at Stake

Various researchers have made it aware that education for the gifted may be at risk with several reasons to support their argument. "Not only is a profoundly gifted child likely to have no intellectual or interest peers at school or in the community, but schools may not be receptive or accommodating to highly able children." (*Peterson, 2009*). Additionally, (*Ash et al., 1998*) have studied past researchers work and notice that research exploring the psychological well being of academically gifted children and concluded that there were several years of adverse outcomes academically.

Peterson states that children may not reveal vulnerabilities and their doubts to coaches, teachers, and their parents. These types of actions make them more at risk for not receiving enough guidance in an educational setting. She also interpreted how children who had no prior attention to developing skills may even have a hard time transitioning to college. They may possibly be unprepared for this stepping stone in life considering the loss of K-12 school structure or different academic expectations *Peterson (2009)*. In other words, being unprepared for educational endeavors can hold a gifted child back from being aware of their real potential.

Gifted Children at Risk for Victimization

Multiple researchers have brought up the idea that the gifted are more likely to be a target of victimization. *Fornia et al. (2001)* hinted that sensitivity often leads to victimization because the perpetrator is aware of their sensitivity and may see vulnerability as an advantage of their own. Similarly, (*Pelchar et al. 2014*) noticed that a majority of researchers are concerned that these students may be perceived as vulnerable to others. (*Kim & Glomb, 2014*) introduced the idea of envy being the main explanatory mechanism for targeting a victim. Peterson

proposed that gifted children are especially vulnerable to the effects of bullying. She stated, "All children are affected adversely by bullying, but gifted children differ from other children in significant ways." She added, "Bullying in the gifted-student population is an overlooked problem that leaves many of these students emotionally shattered." (*Peterson et al. 2006*).

Peterson and her colleague Karen E. Ray proposed that HGC may be more vulnerable to victimization. After surveying 432 gifted eighth-graders in eleven states for their study, they found 67% of them had experienced bullying *Peterson et al. (2006)*. Victimization can hinder the gifted from reaching their full potential in schools because they are not emotionally prepared for it. One limitation of this study is the question of preventing victimization against these students. I believe more professionals should look into how they can aid prevention against bullying worldwide.

Conclusion of Literature Review

After analyzing prior literature that mainly focused on gifted children, I came to conclude that more needs to be done to protect their social and emotional needs. Gifted children should be emotionally prepared for transitioning to an educational environment. Due to the many outlying negative impacts on HGC, intervention programs for them are necessary. Not only will Intervention programs impact them educationally, but it will also support them emotionally.

Teachers should implement the study of bullying in their classes while educating children about giftedness. I am determined to discover the most effective strategy to prevent bullying towards HGC. If more people were educated about gifted individuals, the victimization rates of HGC would go down. If more people including family and peers of the gifted were aware of their SEN, the success rate of HGC individuals would go up.

Joining the Conversation

Most highly talented students start showing signs of natural abilities at a very young age. Along with these talents comes with overexcitabilities (OE), which are inborn intensities that indicate a heightened ability to respond to stimuli. There are five different types of OE, which include psychomotor, sensual, emotional, imaginational, and intellectual. (*Dgadmin, 2007*) In retrospect, not all gifted children will show the same exact signs of their abilities. It has been long noted by professionals that sensitivity, intensity, and overexcitability are the main characteristics of the highly gifted *Dgadmin (2007)*. Certain characteristics of HGC can be quite overwhelming to endure and are easily misunderstood by most of their teachers and peers. Although numerous high-ability children have been known for succeeding, it is prevalent for them to face underachievement in behalf of their SEN. From my perspective, the nurturing of giftedness is being neglected by a majority of teachers around the world. Many educators and parents can easily assume that their child they are educating does not need additional help. However, each research that I have reviewed have proved that myth to be wrong.

TYPICAL INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

- Unusually large vocabularies for their age.
- Greater comprehension of the subtleties of language.
- Ability to read earlier than most children, often before entering school.
- Highly developed curiosity and a limitless supply of questions.
- Ability to retain a great deal of information.
- Ability to learn basic skills more quickly and with less practice.
- Interest in experimenting and doing things differently
- Longer attention span, persistence and intense concentration.
- Tendency to put ideas of things together in ways that are not obvious and unusual. (divergent thinking)

Gift.fz199.com. (n.d.) breaks down the main characteristics seen in gifted children.

Many studies have been conducted in the past in regards to gifted children, but not enough is being done to protect their social and emotional needs. Despite the needs of HGC, “giftedness” is not to be confused with a mental disorder. HGC are often misunderstood by professionals and educators because of certain misconceptions about their peculiar characteristics. Their surroundings may also believe that they don't need any type of help, including educational support. HGC may face social and emotional issues because they present a greater maturity than others at a young age. As a result of this, these children are at a higher risk of facing social and emotional difficulties while growing up. While meeting these issues, they may end up feeling lonely and different from their peers. Additionally, neglecting the student will make them feel as if they have no one to confide in about their personal issues. They may appear as vulnerable by their peers, which puts them at higher risk of being a target of victimization.

There are various leading factors as to why gifted children end up being neglected by their school's education program. The issue with this topic is that giftedness is being focused on by professionals, but not enough teachers or peers of HGC. Additionally, it can be easily assumed that high-achieving children are overreacting when they express their needs. I hope that I can open up this conversation to those who aren't aware of gifted children's SEN with my proposal.

Attempt to put yourself in the shoes of a highly-gifted seven-year-old student in the third grade. This child has many interests that are associated with her talents. Her teacher started to notice her characteristics shortly after a week of teaching her new class. The teacher was quick to see that she felt an extreme amount of empathy for her peers and enjoyed making them happy.

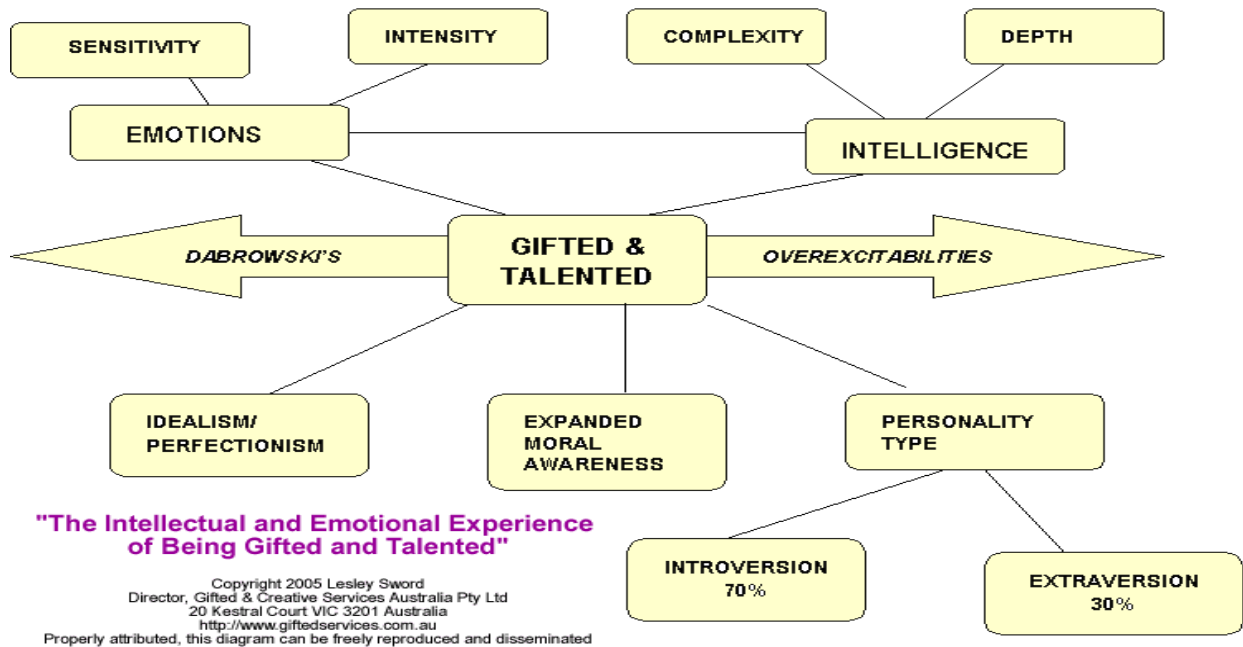
Whenever her classmates seemed to be in low spirits, she is right there to help them back up and knows how to do so. She will go out of her way to show her appreciation for her classmates being her peers by gifting them with art, making bracelets, and sharing her snacks.

The HGC stood out to the teacher in comparison to her peers because of the unique actions that she took while in the classroom. Additionally, she loved to sing and make other people happy with her performances since she was a toddler. On top of that, she won her school's yearly annual art show after submitting her pop-up art. Although this child competed with one of the most artistic children in her grade, she won based on her creativity and imagination.

Even though being highly gifted has its' pros, it also has its' cons. This child struggles with remaining friends with her peers because they were quick to notice that she was "different" from them. She is aware of being treated differently but doesn't quite understand why. While having multiple talents and interests, she has a hard time focusing on only one of them, which leads to her distraction at school. Although concerned, the educator doesn't know exactly how to help her excel in her grade and keep her on the right track.

This HGC's social and emotional struggles in the classroom highlights the fact that there's a possibility that teachers will notice a child who is innately gifted based on their actions that take place in their class. After making this presumption, other steps can be taken to protect Sophia's social and emotional needs. It can be very challenging for a HGC to balance life tasks on their own due to their needs. Therefore, it's essential for an educator/guardian to help nurture

the child's needs, especially if they are gifted in certain areas.



This diagram covers Dabrowski's study about OE and breaks down how it is involved in the intellectual and emotional experience of the gifted.

Jean Sunde Peterson is a former professor in the Department of Educational Studies and director of school counselor preparation at Purdue University (*Free Spirit Publishing., n.d.*). Beforehand, she was a gifted-education teacher who offered several opportunities to the highly gifted. Peterson has mainly focused on studies that provide a deeper insight on HGC and their struggles with their OE and being a target of victimization in schools. I was inspired by her study and I believe her argument is valid in regards to the gifted. Peterson is a professional in the educational field who firmly believes that all gifted children have SEN, despite the clinical and empirical literatures that disagree with her teachings. Peterson has impacted the gifted community by providing them with social and emotional support throughout her research and guidance.

I strive to help Peterson and her colleagues spread the word about HGC's social and emotional issues. After addressing this situation, I believe that the risk of victimization in HGC will decrease, especially if they learn how to approach the boundaries that are causing vulnerability in their emotions. I myself had faced traumatic situations in elementary school as a child. Being a gifted student myself, I am able to understand what gifted children do not have and what they need from the educational system. I ended up feeling very lonely growing up while going to public schools because I didn't get the nurturing that I desperately needed.

HGC Intervention Focus Group (After School)

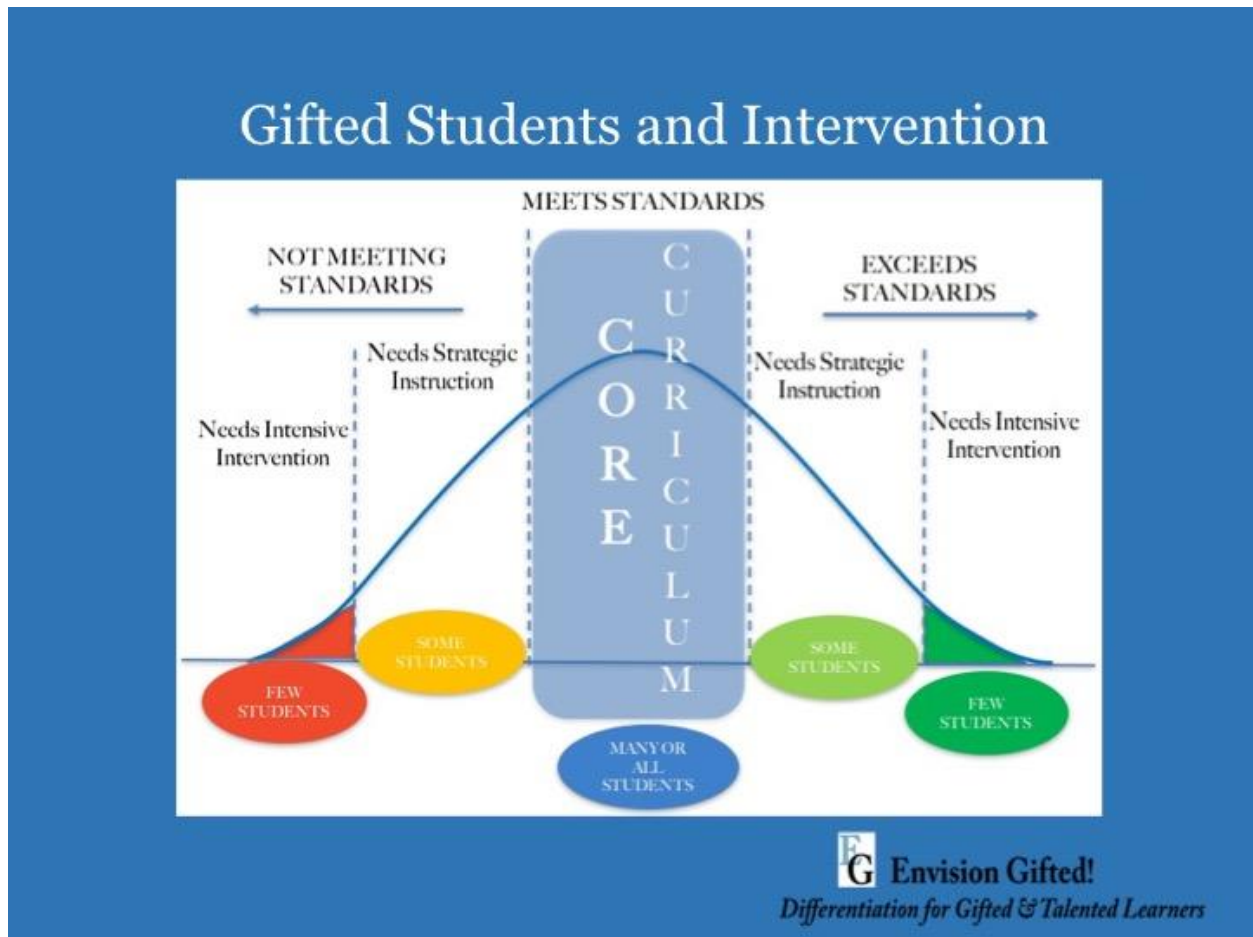
I am proposing to create an advanced intervention program for high-ability children who need support in regards to their SEN to answer my thesis question. This plan is essential because a majority of HGC struggle to feel positive at school because they feel different from others. All professionals, including teachers, should be aware that highly talented students have SEN. If most professionals and teachers focused on providing a supportive program for HGC, they would less likely be a target of victimization at schools. With the support of a focus group, gifted children will know how to cope with their issues in regards to relationships with their peers and teachers. Once they encounter a situation they are uneasy about, they will know how to handle it. I believe that a constructive plan that guides these kids would benefit their SEN in the long run.

A five-step progress will be implemented in the program to improve the victimization of HGC in schools. In the first part, I plan to distribute tests worldwide that will test giftedness at ten different elementary schools. After analyzing the test results, I will help determine what group each student falls into. There will be three different kinds of intervention groups that will

best fit each HGS' SEN. After meeting up in these groups after school, these kids will feel much more positive about their school experience and will continue reaching for their long-term goals.

Lastly, I hope this program will inspire HGC to prosper in school without giving up and falling through the cracks of society. It's very common for high-ability students to feel confused about their future career which is why they should receive a differentiating instruction in their education. This feeling of uneasiness often leads to the individual giving up on their career goals. This program is set up to avoid that from happening to children. It will give them enough time to plan out their future without feeling left behind. This program will also help raise awareness that giftedness is not a mental problem and no gifted student is alone. Below is a diagram that explains how students who both reach and do not reach standards of curriculum core still need support.

John Hopkins Center for Talented Youth in Baltimore, Maryland is one of the many gifted programs for both teenagers and children. This center provides multiple options for parents who have gifted children and want to help maintain and nurture their education. Some of the provisions include talent search, summer programs, family programs and online programs. (*Gifted and Talented Programs - Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth., 2018*). Analyzing this kind of program inspired me to expand my aid for HGC in the future. I discovered that there are several people out in the world who faced similar experiences as me that want to help prevent that in talented children. Parents share their stories about their own experience while enrolling their child in the program. I enjoyed the fact that parents are just involved in this type of process just as much as their children are.



Griffith, M. (2017, June 18)

Above is a chart is an estimate about where a majority of students meet the standards of core curriculum, do not meet it, and exceed the standards. This diagram also points out that both overachievers and underachievers need intensive intervention and strategic intervention. To elaborate, just because a child is highly gifted, does not mean they will always meet the standards of core curriculum in a school system.

1. Testing

Several HGC have been previously analyzed by professionals as perfectionists, which is why it may be difficult for many to open up about struggling with school. Testing students on their high-abilities not only will allow them to open up about their issues but will let

professionals know who needs their assistance and in what specific kind of areas. The test will be provided at several different schools, including both public and private in order to receive unbiased test results. The test will consist of two parts which on two different aspects of giftedness.

After evaluating the test results, there will be three different categorical groups that best fit the child's struggles. Additionally, the fourth group (control group) would consist of the students that did not fall into the giftedness spectrum. However, they still fall into a group so that they can be educated about giftedness and about the children who struggled academically because of it. With that being said, children that are unaware of giftedness have a chance to better understand why some of their peers may think and act differently than them. Most importantly, this will motivate more students to be more accepting of differences in their peers. With doing so, I believe the rates of victimization will decrease because these kids will know what their high-ability peer is encountering. Being proactive against bullying will go a long way for the better of their futures.

2. Categorical groups

As previously stated, not each gifted child will share the same signs of their abilities or share the same abilities. With the help of a two-part test, I am able to break down the specific categories that best fits each HGC. Three categorical groups will be formulated based off the calculated test results. Each group will cover different situations in regards to bullying individuals with giftedness. With doing so, these individuals can discover how they can relate to each other in relation to their SEN. The mentors will be responsible for providing solutions to what gifted children struggle with the most. While teaching about the topic giftedness, the

teachers will also get children to work together in groups to come up with solutions that will combat victimization.

3. Group Meetings

After each child is assigned to the categorical group, they will attend three separate meetings with other children who had similar test results. The course will be completed in a span of three weeks which gives students time to retain what they have learned about giftedness and victimization. In these courses, they will learn about vulnerability, how to improve that issue, and what steps are required in order to overcome their obstacles in an educational setting. This plan is called an intervention focus group for HGC because these children will have the chance to improve their SEN in order to prevent victimization. With that being said, HGC will express their past experiences as a high-ability individual. Each student will share their stories with each other, both the ups and downs. Along with that, they will research about giftedness and write down what they could relate with. For the control group, they will have meetings about how victimization can affect others. Teaching children about what bullying can do to both the victim and the perpetrator will most likely diffuse victimization in schools worldwide.

4. Mentor Meeting

A meeting between each mentor involved in this study will be orchestrated after their three weeks of educating HGC children. The teacher who taught the control group will explain how their class viewed giftedness while the other groups will explain what their classes covered. This program will eventually progress year by year after teachers discover what the main implications behind gifted education are. At the meeting, the mentors should cover what they learned themselves at the focus group sessions and how they will accomplish what they learned in their

own classrooms. This meeting will help benefit teachers in the long run about how they approach victimization against children who are gifted. Researchers *McCoach & Siegle (2007)* both highlighted the idea that those who train gifted students must reexamine the effectiveness of their training for that child. They explain how Americans have historically held attitudes towards not only gifted children but their education as a whole. Meetings with each teacher would diffuse this type of attitude towards gifted children.

5. Follow-up and Test

At the last meeting of the courses, there will be a follow up test given to every student involved in the study. Each student will be tested on what they learned and what they took from the meetings. After reviewing the test results, I will have an effective ground base for the following intervention program. I hope that these kids will take what they learned from this program with them as they continue to prosper academically. I truly believe that these test results will show a decrease in victimization amongst HGC.

Conclusion

Children with high abilities are beneficial to this world and should be noticed for it. A gifted child could possibly grow up and end up curing a deadly disease. Gifted adults should not feel miserable about their prior education and should still receive support at any point in their life. If HGC are aware of their social and emotional needs, they will be able to combat bullying and know their limitations. I hope that peers of the gifted will feel sympathetic for their SEN and will avoid bullying children who appear as vulnerable.

Take technology entrepreneur, Elon Musk, for example. In a recent interview, he states how his education was not best fit for his mindset, but he still never gave up on his expertise of



engineering. While growing up in South Africa as a child, Musk was bullied for expressing innate talents. Despite getting picked on, he had a dream to advance humanity for the better of our future. Fast forward 20 years later, he became CEO of both Tesla and Space X. Musk is a pure example of being a successful gifted

person who never gave up on his talents. In response to disagreeing with the current U.S. education system, he created a “laboratory school” called Ad Astra for young HGC ranging from ages 7-14 years old (*Holley, P., 2018*). Class reform should be pushed for especially noticed the several outcomes of poor education.

HGC’s SEN are being neglected by professionals which increases the risk of victimization for them worldwide. However, there are enough supporters who provide social and emotional groups for the gifted to make a defiant change in how people perceive giftedness. The complexities of giftedness are more common in this world than people observe, and our generation has a chance to evaluate the SEN of the highly-gifted. Gifted children of color are a target of being overlooked by their peers and society. With that being said, this program would support gifted children of every color. I believe the amount of gifted supporters will increase throughout the years if support groups remain prominent. Teaching every child about the value of friendship will have a tremendous impact on their adulthood and how they perceive those who are gifted.

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