

Applying Positive Psychology to Support the Development of Gifted Children

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Received: 14 December 2024 | Accepted: 6 March 2025 | Published: 30 March 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajbs.2025.7.1.1>

Abstract: *Gifted children face unique challenges, including social isolation, anxiety, and underachievement. Positive psychology offers interventions like mindfulness, resilience training, and strengths-based approaches to support their well-being. However, critics caution against oversimplifying their needs. By combining differentiated instruction, socio-emotional support, and evidence-based practices, educators and parents can help gifted children thrive and achieve their full potential.*

Keywords: Gifted children, positive psychology, socio-emotional support, resilience, differentiated instruction

1. Introduction

Gifted children are often seen as exceptional, with a unique set of skills and talents that sets them apart from their peers. However, with this exceptionality comes a set of challenges that can affect their emotional and psychological well-being. Despite their above-average intellectual abilities, gifted children may struggle with social and emotional issues such as perfectionism, anxiety, and underachievement. These challenges can often go unnoticed or misunderstood, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

In recent years, positive psychology has gained attention as a potential solution to these challenges. Positive psychology is a relatively new field that focuses on promoting well-being and flourishing in individuals rather than just treating mental illness or dysfunction. It seeks to cultivate positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and purpose, and accomplishment, all essential for a healthy and fulfilling life. Positive psychology interventions could provide the tools they need to overcome their unique challenges and develop into well-adjusted and successful individuals.

However, the use of positive psychology with gifted children has not been without controversy. Some critics argue that it may reinforce the idea that gifted children are inherently better than their peers or constantly put too much pressure on them to perform at their highest level. Some experts also argue that positive psychology interventions may not be enough to address the complex and multifaceted challenges gifted children face.

Despite these criticisms, many educators and mental health professionals have embraced the potential of positive psychology for supporting the development of gifted children. By focusing on their strengths and providing them with the tools they need to overcome their challenges,

positive psychology interventions could be an effective way to help gifted children achieve their full potential and lead happy, fulfilling lives. This article will explore the concept of positive psychology and its potential to support the development of gifted children. It will also examine these children's challenges, and the interventions developed to improve their well-being. By understanding these issues, parents, educators, and mental health professionals can better support the happiness and success of gifted children and help them reach their full potential.

2. Discussion

2.1 Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a field of psychology that focuses on the study of positive experiences, traits, and emotions to improve well-being and life satisfaction (Seligman, 2000). Positive psychology differs from traditional psychology, which focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. The field of positive psychology has expanded to include the study of happiness, positive emotions, character strengths, resilience, and positive relationships.

Positive psychology has also been applied to the field of education, with a focus on promoting positive emotions and character strengths in students (Froh et al., 2009). Positive psychology interventions in schools have been shown to improve academic performance, reduce behavioral problems, and promote a positive school climate (Suldo et al., 2009).

Overall, positive psychology is a growing field that offers promising interventions for improving well-being and promoting positive emotions and relationships. Its applications in various settings make it a valuable tool for improving the lives of individuals and communities.

2.2 Gifted Children

Gifted children are those who show exceptional ability or potential in one or more areas of intelligence, creativity, or talent (National Association for Gifted Children, 2023). Giftedness is a complex phenomenon that is not always easy to identify, but may be observed through a combination of cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional characteristics (Silverman, 2021).

It is important to identify and support gifted children in order to maximize their potential and prevent underachievement or social and emotional difficulties (Silverman, 2021). Gifted children may benefit from specialized educational programs, such as acceleration, enrichment, or mentorship (Assouline et al., 2015). These programs can provide the appropriate challenge and stimulation that gifted children need to reach their full potential.

In addition to academic support, gifted children may also benefit from socio-emotional support. This includes opportunities to develop positive relationships with peers and adults, as well as the development of resilience and coping skills (Seligman, 2000). Parents and educators can play an important role in providing this support by creating a positive and supportive environment that values the unique abilities and needs of gifted children.

Identifying and supporting gifted children is crucial for their academic and socio-emotional development. Collaboration between parents, educators, and mental health professionals is essential for providing these children with the appropriate support and resources.

2.3 Challenges for Gifted Children

One of the main challenges for gifted children in school is the lack of appropriate academic challenges. Gifted children often find themselves in a classroom where the curriculum is geared towards the average student, leaving them unchallenged and unengaged in the learning process. This lack of intellectual stimulation can lead to boredom, disinterest, and underachievement (Subotnik et al., 2011). Furthermore, when gifted children are not challenged academically, they may develop negative attitudes toward school and learning, which can have long-term consequences for their academic and career aspirations (Gagné et al., 2015).

Another challenge for gifted children is social-emotional isolation. Gifted children may struggle to connect with their peers due to differences in interests, maturity levels, and intellectual abilities. This social-emotional isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Cross & Cross, 2015). Additionally, gifted children may struggle with perfectionism and high expectations, which can lead to stress and anxiety (Webb et al., 2007)

Gifted children face challenges in the school system's identification and assessment processes. Identifying gifted children can be a complex process that relies on a combination of test scores, teacher recommendations, and behavioral observations. However, these processes are unreliable, and gifted children may be overlooked or misidentified (Colangelo & Wood, 2015). Moreover, gifted children may not receive the appropriate educational interventions and support due to insufficient funding and resources dedicated to gifted education (Makel & Plucker, 2014).

Finally, gifted children may struggle with the pressure to conform to societal and cultural expectations of success. Gifted children may face high expectations from parents, teachers, and peers to achieve academic success and fulfill their potential. This pressure can be overwhelming and may lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and burnout (Gross, 2009). Moreover, gifted children from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds may face additional challenges navigating societal and cultural barriers to achievement (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 1998).

2.4 Criticism of the Use of Positive Psychology

The use of positive psychology in the development of gifted children has been subject to criticism, and this document will explore some of these criticisms.

The use of positive psychology in the development of gifted children may lead to a one-dimensional view of giftedness. Positive psychology interventions focus on enhancing positive characteristics, such as creativity, perseverance, and optimism, while downplaying the importance of other aspects of giftedness, such as intellectual abilities and academic achievement (Silverman, 2021). By emphasizing the positive aspects of giftedness, positive psychology may overlook gifted children's complexities and challenges, such as academic underachievement and social-emotional issues (Assouline et al., 2015).

Another criticism of positive psychology in the development of gifted children is that it may promote a narrow and homogeneous definition of well-being. Positive psychology interventions often promote happiness, satisfaction, and positive affect, which may not be applicable or relevant to all gifted children, especially those from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Makel & Plucker, 2014). Moreover, pursuing happiness and positive emotions may not align with the intellectual and emotional intensity that some gifted children experience (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999).

Furthermore, positive psychology interventions may perpetuate the deficit-based model of giftedness. The deficit-based model of giftedness views giftedness as a problem to be solved rather than a strength to be nurtured (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). This approach may focus on remediation rather than enrichment, limiting the potential of gifted children.

The use of positive psychology in the development of gifted children may lead to the commodification of well-being. Positive psychology interventions often rely on standardized assessments and interventions that may not consider the individual differences and nuances of gifted children's experiences (Wechsler et al., 2017). Furthermore, promoting well-being through positive psychology may become a marketable commodity, with the risk of commercialization and exploitation of gifted children and their families (Makel & Plucker, 2014).

2.5 Suggestions for Gifted Children Development

Gifted children have unique needs that require specialized educational programs and interventions to support their intellectual, creative, and emotional development. Here are some recommendations for improving the overall development of gifted children:

- 1) **Implement differentiated instruction:** Gifted children have advanced knowledge and skills and may become bored or disengaged in traditional classroom settings. Teachers can provide differentiated instruction by offering more challenging content and assignments, incorporating project-based learning, and allowing students to work at their own pace (Tomlinson, 2014).
- 2) **Offer acceleration opportunities:** Gifted children may benefit from acceleration opportunities, such as grade skipping or subject acceleration, to ensure they are appropriately challenged (Assouline et al., 2015). Acceleration has been shown to positively affect academic achievement, social-emotional well-being, and long-term success (Colangelo et al., 2004).
- 3) **Provide enrichment programs:** Enrichment programs can offer gifted children opportunities to explore new areas of interest, develop social skills, and engage with like-minded peers (Vantassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). Examples of enrichment programs include summer camps, mentorship programs, and competitions. These interventions have been shown to enhance academic achievement, particularly in mathematics, among gifted students (Paunesku et al., 2015). For instance, a study by Yeager et al. (2019) found that a growth mindset intervention increased the math achievement of high-ability students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 4) **Address social-emotional needs:** Gifted children may experience heightened sensitivity, perfectionism, and social isolation, which can affect their overall well-being and academic success (França-Freitas & Prette, 2014). Teachers and parents can provide support by offering counseling services, fostering positive peer relationships, and encouraging positive self-talk. Strengths-based interventions focus on identifying and nurturing individuals' character strengths and virtues, such as curiosity, creativity, and perseverance. These interventions have been shown to enhance creativity and achievement among gifted students (Proctor et al., 2010). For instance, a study by Park and Peterson (2009) found that a strengths-based intervention enhanced the creativity of gifted students.

- 5) Foster creativity: Gifted children often exhibit exceptional creativity, and nurturing this creativity can lead to innovative thinking and problem-solving skills (Abdulla Alabbasi et al., 2021). Teachers can foster creativity by providing opportunities for divergent thinking, allowing for open-ended projects, and incorporating art and music into the curriculum.
- 6) Encourage independent learning: Gifted children may strongly desire autonomy and independence in their learning (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018). Teachers can encourage independent learning by providing opportunities for self-directed learning, allowing for choice in assignments, and providing access to advanced resources and technology (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018).
- 7) Use of mindfulness interventions: has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety among gifted students (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness interventions involve the practice of paying attention to the present moment without judgment, and have been shown to enhance well-being among diverse populations (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). For instance, a study by Van De Weijer-Bergsma et al. (2012) found that a mindfulness intervention reduced stress and anxiety among gifted children.
- 8) Enhance the resilience and adaptability of gifted children: Positive reframing interventions have been shown to enhance the coping strategies of gifted students (Reis & Renzulli, 2004). Positive reframing interventions involve the practice of looking for positive aspects in challenging situations and have been shown to enhance resilience and well-being among diverse populations (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). For instance, a study by Dweck and Leggett (1988) found that a positive reframing intervention enhanced the adaptive strategies of gifted students.

In conclusion, improving the overall development of gifted children requires specialized educational programs and interventions that address their unique needs. Teachers and parents can support gifted children's intellectual, creative, and emotional growth by implementing differentiated instruction, acceleration opportunities, enrichment programs, social-emotional support, creativity development, and independent learning. Positive psychology interventions have been shown to improve well-being and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Examples of positive psychology interventions include gratitude journaling, mindfulness meditation, and acts of kindness. Positive psychology interventions can be used in various settings, including schools, workplaces, and mental health clinics, to promote positive emotions, enhance relationships, and improve overall well-being.

3. Conclusion

Positive psychology and gifted children have great importance to society as they can have significant implications for the well-being and success of individuals, as well as for society. Gifted children can make significant contributions to society, and it is, therefore, important that we provide them with the support they need to reach their full potential. Additionally, gifted children who do not receive adequate support and intervention may experience negative outcomes, such as underachievement, mental health issues, and difficulty adjusting to adulthood.

Research has shown that positive psychology interventions can effectively promote the well-being and success of gifted children. For example, a study by Park and Peterson (2009) found that a positive psychology intervention, which focused on developing character strengths and

virtues, was effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression in gifted high school students. Similarly, a study by Suldo et al. (2009) found that an intervention based on social and emotional learning was effective in reducing anxiety and depression and improving academic achievement in gifted elementary school students.

In addition to the potential benefits for gifted children, positive psychology interventions can also have broader societal implications. By promoting the well-being and success of gifted children, we can help ensure that they are able to make meaningful contributions to society. Gifted individuals have been shown to have the potential to make good contributions to fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (National Association for Gifted Children, 2023). By providing them with the support and resources they need to develop their talents, we can help ensure that they can reach their full potential.

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