

## Review Article

# The role of counselors in education of gifted students

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### Abstract

In educational settings, the importance of counseling and guidance services is increasing steadily. One of the roles of school counselors is helping all students to strengthen their developmental tasks while recognizing their own talents and interests. This is also current for gifted students. In other words, despite myth as gifted students do not need guidance, gifted students have unique guidance needs. School counselors have many roles regarding various aspects of gifted education. The counseling and guidance services for gifted students can be examined in three categories as educational, career and personal / social. Within these categories, counselors should meet not only the needs related to the developmental period of the student, but also unique needs of gifted students. This study aims to discuss the role of school counselors in the education of gifted students.

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## Introduction

In the literature, there is not a consensus on the definition of giftedness. However, Renzulli (1986) who is a pioneer in giftedness define gifted as individuals having above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment while applying these three traits to one or more domains by combining them. It is a fact that gifted students are not a homogenous group. In other words, gifted students may be superior in different fields. For all that, gifted students have some common traits. First of all, since gifted children's cognitive developments are faster than their peers they are extremely curious and motivated for learning. Furthermore, they have extraordinary energy especially while they are engaged with a favorite activity (Özbay, 2013).

Asynchronous development is an adversity that gifted children face. Since gifted children develop asynchronously, there are discrepancies between their cognitive, physical and psycho-social development. The discrepancies within their development get higher parallel to their intelligence quotient (IQ) scores (Sak & Bal Sezerel, 2018). Because of this, they may have some problems in their psychosocial world, especially who have IQ scores more than 150 (Öpengin, 2018). This means although they are emotionally children, their cognitive development is faster than their peers. Thus, they may face some problems in their interpersonal relations (Armstrong et al., 2019; Özbay and Palancı, 2011). Furthermore, they are at risk of social isolation (Kearney, 1992).

School counselors play an important role in education of all students including gifted students. Counseling services help all students to make a balanced and healthy adaptation to the environment while developing their potential in line with their own talents and interests. The final aim of counseling is helping the individual to reach self-realization by

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making realistic decisions (Kepçeoğlu, 1994). However, there are many myths about gifted individuals which prevent them from being understood, accepted and get appropriate service. Thus, the myths are qualified as destructive by Silverman (2012). One of the common myths is they can be successful without any help. But, despite myth as gifted students do not need guidance, gifted students have unique guidance needs for self-realization.

### **Counseling Services for Gifted Students**

School counselors have many roles regarding various aspects of gifted education. The counseling and guidance services for gifted students can be examined in three categories as educational, career and personal / social (Öpengin, 2018). Within these categories, counselors should meet not only the needs related to the developmental period of the student, but also unique needs of gifted students.



**Figure 1.** Categories of Counseling Services for Gifted Students

Wood (2009) conducted a research with 153 gifted adolescents, in order to determine the counseling concerns of gifted. Participants reported concerns related to perfectionism, fear of failure, social acceptance and multipotentiality. This study reveal that counselors in schools play essential roles in academic, career and personal/social development. In addition, providing information and perspective regarding acceleration to their parents and educators are also among the duties of counselors (Wood et al., 2010). Similarly, Altun and Yazıcı (2018) determined the counseling needs of gifted students in Türkiye, based on their parent's views. The data were collected from 606 parents by the Problem Detecting Inventory for Gifted and Information Form. According to the data, parents of gifted children face some problems about family life, personality traits and school. As a result, the parents participating the study emphasized the importance of counseling services for gifted students. Parallel to this finding, Kennedy and Farley (2018) propose group counseling interventions for social challenges due to asynchronous development.

### **Educational Counseling Needs of Gifted Students**

The attitudes of counselors towards gifted students, may effect the quality of their work. In this context, Kaya and Tortop (2020) conducted a study to investigate the attitudes and opinions of counselors about education of gifted students. According to the results, the average of the total scores of the counselors' attitude towards gifted education is 3.6 which is evaluated as slightly positive attitude. Also qualitative data show that counselors are aware of the problems related to education of gifted students and they suggest solutions in that sense.

Educational counseling for gifted students should focus on motivation and underachievement. Motivation is the key for success. Similarly, lack of motivation lead to underachievement. The first educational problem that gifted students face is unexpected underachievement which is defined as the discrepancy between potential and actual performance that persists over time and is not a direct result of a learning disability (Reis & McCoach, 2000). As seen in definition, underachievement is a problem that should be solved in order to fulfill the potential of gifted. Peterson and Colangelo

(1996) stated that underachievement often begins in middle school, because of an unchallenging middle school curriculum which is boring for gifted students (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). In this context, self-regulation can be the solution of underachievement. Also motivating the gifted students and cooperating with their parents are important.

### **Career and Personal / Social Needs of Gifted Students**

In the literature, multipotentiality is stated as a primary concern for career planning of gifted students (Clark, 1992; Silverman, 1993). Most of the gifted students have multipotentiality which can make choosing a career difficult. Multipotentiality can be defined as the ability and preference of a person, particularly one of strong intellectual or artistic curiosity, to excel in two or more different fields (Greene, 2003). For this reason, many of the gifted students experience indecision and stress in the career choosing process. This situation can cause them focusing on popular professions. However, popular career decisions disappoint them in the future.

Some gifted children have an extremely focused career interest from a very early age that is named as “early emerges” by Marshall (1981). According to Kerr (1991) especially for talented students in artistic fields, focusing the field and choosing career in early ages is essential for life success. In this context, early emergence should be thought as an opportunity by counselors and teachers. Counselors should help these students make a detailed plan for training and education leading the career goal.

In a study conducted by Sürücü et al. (2015) in Türkiye about the career development of gifted and talented primary school students were examined according to gender, grade, income, the educational level of parents and field variables. The study was carried on 136 gifted and talented students attending Science and Art Centers, whose ages are between 12 and 15. According to the results, the curiosity/exploration scores of female students were significantly higher than the scores of males. The information and planning subscales and career development scale scores of sixth grade students were significantly higher than scores of the seventh grade students.

In a recent study Eker (2023) examined the effect of the future readiness psychoeducation program on gifted students' career decision-making competencies and future expectations. 32 7th grade students participated in this experimental study. According to pre-test and post-test scores, after the implementation of career development program, career decision-making difficulties of gifted students reduced.

### **Social and Emotional Development**

As mentioned before, gifted children have unique social and emotional needs due to the mismatch between speed of their cognitive, the psychological and social development areas (Morelock, 1992). Perfectionism, sensitivity and failing to meet the expectations of parents may cause social-emotional problems, such as low self-confidence (Özbay and Palancı, 2011). In this context, they may need social support and professional help to overcome these problems.

Gifted students may not receive the emotional and social support of a peer group because of asynchronous development. Kearney (1992) mentioned the risk of social isolation in case of placing these children in heterogeneous, rigidly age-graded classrooms in school with no opportunity to associate with gifted peers for academic and social activities. Furthermore, Greenspon (2000) draws attention to the fact that the asynchronous development may cause emotional vulnerability. According to Peterson (2009) unless the opportunity is given for gifted students to discuss concerns related to social and emotional development, this may contribute to vulnerability. The role of the counselors is to guide the gifted students and their parents to create academic and social activities for better adjustment.

### **Conclusion**

Since gifted people are identified as in the top 2% of society according to cognitive properties, they are like rare precious metals. Gifted students differ from their peers in terms of cognitive development features which causes unique counseling needs (Öpengin, 2018). In this context, counselors should be aware of their characteristics such as creativity, perfectionism, high memory, long attention span, sensitivity and asynchronous development.

The counseling and guidance services for gifted students can be examined in three categories as educational, career and personal / social (Öpengin, 2018). Within these categories, counselors should meet not only the needs related to the developmental period of the student, but also unique needs of gifted students. First of all, the counselors help gifted

students to fulfill their potential. Thus, motivating the students and helping to solve underachievement problems are essential. Career planning is an important issue that counselors take role. Finally, counselors should help them for social support and professional help in terms of social and emotional development.

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