Understanding Underachievement

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Abstract

Up to 50% of gifted children underachieve at some point in their school career; therefore, it is an important issue for parents and educators to address. Underachievement affects children from high as well as low socioeconomic groups. It affects urban as well as rural students. In this chapter, I review factors associated with underachievement and suggest strategies to address the underachievement of gifted children. While no single strategy works with all underachievers, a combination of counseling and instructional interventions show the greatest promise.

Understanding Underachievement

Underachievement involves a set of complex issues that vary across students. Individuals underachieve for a number of different reasons, and no single intervention effectively reverses underachievement for every individual. As a group, underachievers differ more from each other than achievers differ from each other (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a, 2003b). Siegle (2013) reviewed categories of underachievers

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proposed by Rimm (1997), Heacox (1991), and Mandel and Marcus (1995) and suggested that they fall into 17 different types of underachievers. Therefore, any list of characteristics of underachievers will contain items that fit some, but not all underachievers. Educators and parents often view underachievement synonymously with low motivation. Although underachievement often is the product of low motivation, low motivation and underachievement are not the same. In this chapter, I define underachievement; provide reasons why children identified as gifted might underachieve; and share promising theories and solutions to address it.

Over a quarter century ago, Emerick (1992) noted:

> The gifted underachiever has been described as one of the greatest social wastes of our culture. Beyond social cost, however, there are personal wastes as well---opportunities for advanced educational experiences and personal development are thwarted by academic underachievement. Today, there is no problem more perplexing or frustrating than the situation in which a bright child cannot or will not perform at an academic level commensurate with his or her intellectual ability. (p. 140)

Emerick's statement brings to light two value issues related to underachievement. First, do individuals have an obligation to society and themselves to develop their talents? Is it alright to "get by" without achieving high levels of performance? Second, who determines what talents individuals should develop? Is a highly gifted

mathematician who chooses a career in music an underachiever because she did not develop her mathematics ability? In some sense, whether an individual is underachieving is "in the eye of the beholder" and what the beholder values. Many underachievers report that they are doing "just fine" and want those who are pressing them to perform better to "get off their back." As Reis and McCoach (2000) noted, "Labeling a student an underachiever requires making a value judgment about the worthiness of certain accomplishments. A teacher may believe that reading *Huckleberry Finn* is more worthwhile than mastering a new video game, but a child may not" (p. 156). Peterson (2001) cautioned that educators and parents should not make future judgements about individuals based on problems experienced during a specific period of time or during some developmental stage. She also suggested that students who are achieving at something should not be a concern. Peterson noted that underachievement becomes an issue when it limits what an individual wants to do. For example, mediocre grades become an issue when a student wished to attend a prestigious university. Therefore, educators and parents must address under performance behaviors that limit future options.

What Is Underachievement?

Underachievement in gifted children is difficult to define for two reasons. First, the field of gifted education has not agreed upon a common definition for giftedness. Second, researchers and practitioners define underachievement differently. Readers will find a discussion of what giftedness is and how to identify it in Chapters 1-3 and 12 of this handbook. For the purpose of discussion, I will use the National Association for Gifted Children definition developed by a panel of respected practitioners and eminent scholars in the field and approved by the NAGC Board of Directors in 2010:

> Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains

include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

> The development of ability or talent is a lifelong process. It can be evident in young children as exceptional performance on tests and/or other measures of ability or as a rapid rate of learning, compared to other students of the same age, or in actual achievement in a domain. As individuals mature through childhood to adolescence, however, achievement and high levels of motivation in the domain become the primary characteristics of their giftedness. Various factors can either enhance or inhibit the development and expression of abilities.

This thoughtful definition notes that giftedness can involve aptitude as well as competence and that, ultimately, as individuals mature they must achieve. Gifted underachievers would be those individuals who fail to ultimately develop their potential. McCoach and Siegle (2003a, 2003b) suggested, "The key features that distinguish gifted achievers from gifted underachievers are the goals they set for themselves and effort they put forth to achieve these goals" (p. 151). The traditional definition of underachievement is a discrepancy between potential and performance (Reis & McCoach, 2002). How each is measured produces a different type of underachiever (Rimm, 2008a). Within the field of gifted education, educators often have measured potential with an IQ test and achievement with achievement tests or grades. Underachievement would be a discrepancy between the IQ and either grades or achievement test scores. However, achievement test scores can also be considered a measure of potential and grades the measure of performance. Emerick (1988) conducted some of the early research on gifted underachievement. She proposed six different discrepancy combinations:

- High IQ score and low achievement test scores
- High IQ score and low grades
- High achievement test scores and low grades
- High indicators of intellectual, creative potential and low creative productivity
- High indicators of potential and limited presence of appropriate opportunity for intellectual and creative development

Whatever the combination, a number of factors need to be considered when making comparisons between potential and achievement. Some gifted students do not want to appear smart, so they avoid demonstrating their ability. Students can be test anxious, and not perform to their full potential (Moore, 2006). Twice-exceptional students may be dyslexic or have a learning disability that interferes with demonstrating their ability. Grades do not always reflect what students know or have learned.

The discrepancy between high IQ and low achievement scores can exist for a number of reasons. Individually administered IQ tests require less reading than achievement tests. Therefore, gifted students with a reading disability may perform lower on the achievement assessment. Moon and Hall (1998) warned that gifted students who are underachieving should be screened for a learning disability. Rimm (2008a) also suggested that a gifted student may be experiencing test anxiety when taking achievement tests that results in lower than expected achievement scores. She also suggested that unchallenging curriculum can lead gifted students to demonstrate defensive patterns through which they avoid achievement, thus resulting in poor achievement test scores. Others (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003) have also reported unchallenging curriculum can lead to underachievement.

Grades often do not reflect what students know, so that discrepancy between grades and IQ can be misleading. Gifted students may choose not to complete homework assignments, which results in lower grades. "Homework completion, another indicator of academic engagement, appears to be a struggle for many gifted students who underachieve and/or choose to leave high school" (Landis & Reschly, 2013, p. 230). Some believe that students who manage to learn new material each year and perform well on their achievement tests, but do not complete and do poorly on classroom work, could be considered "selective producers" instead of underachievers (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002).

The discrepancy between high achievement test scores and low grades is particularly troubling for educators and parents. Although grades are less reliable than standardized measures of academic achievement, they are an indication of a student's current level of achievement within a classroom environment. In addition, to some extent, grades also reflect students' motivation. The largest longitudinal study of underachievers conducted to date (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992) highlighted the importance of classroom grades. McCall et al. found that 13 years after high school, the educational and occupational status of high school underachievers paralleled their grades in high school, rather than their abilities. They also found that underachievers appeared to have greater difficulty completing college and remaining in their jobs and marriages than other students did. Therefore, gifted students with low grades are an area of concern.

Students can demonstrate their giftedness with behaviors not captured with test scores. Educators often use rating scales, such as the Gifted Rating Scales (GRS; Pfeiffer & Jarosewich, 2007) and the Scales for Rating the Behavior Characteristics of Superior Students (SRBCSS; Renzulli et al., 2010) to identify behaviors indicative of giftedness. Educators should be concerned about students who demonstrate the behaviors associated with giftedness on these scales but who are not achieving.

Emerick's (1988) last category is one that is receiving considerable attention. Schools and society do not afford students of poverty and those from underrepresented groups the same educational opportunities as their more affluent and dominant culture peers. For example, the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch in a school is negatively related to the percentage of students identified as gifted (National Center for Research on Gifted Education, 2016). Failing to be identified or attending a school without a gifted program limits these students' opportunity to achieve their full potential. These involuntary underachievers underachieve through no fault of their own. In Germany, Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2006) found gifted underachievers, children with low achievement motivation, and gifted girls were at higher risk to be overlooked as gifted. Therefore, they were less likely to develop fully their talents…in

effect…possibly becoming involuntary under-achievers. The definition of achievement in a particular subculture may differ from that of the dominant culture. Additionally, researchers and educators may need to adjust their views of both giftedness and underachievement when attempting to both identify and address underachievement within a culturally diverse student population.

Labeling someone as an underachiever is a value judgement. Should we identify individuals as underachieving because they choose not to perform in areas that they do not value and that are not of interest to them? It is unrealistic to expect gifted students to achieve at the highest level universally. Some gifted students do not put forth effort in areas that do not interest or are not important to them. However, they do excel in other areas that they enjoy and value. "The gifted students who should be of greatest concern to educators and parents are those failing to achieve in *any* productive area" (Siegle & McCoach, 2013, p. 379).

Factors Associated with Underachievement

Gender

Gifted underachievers tend to be male. Over a variety of studies across time, researchers identify underachieving gifted boys at two to three times the rate of gifted girls (Gowan, 1955; McCall, 1994; McCoach & Siegle, 2001; Matthews & McBee, 2007; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996). Females have higher GPAs in school (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005), enroll in college at higher rates (Conger & Long, 2010), and have higher graduation rates (Conger & Long, 2010). However, the ratio of male to female underachievers may be exaggerated. Part of the imbalance may be that underachieving gifted boys tend to draw more attention to themselves by acting out. Some have suggested that many gifted underachieving females are possibly being overlooked (Siegle & McCoach, 2013). Therefore, educators and parents must be alert to possible underachievement with females as well as males.

Peers

Ryan (2001) found that students select friends who have similar levels of academic self-efficacy and achievement. She also found "students' peer group context in the fall predicted changes in their liking and enjoyment of school…and their achievement over the school year" (p. 1135). In other words, students' attitudes and achievement become more like those of their friends. Individuals' behaviors are not only influenced by their acquaintances, but also by their acquaintances' acquaintances (Fowler & Christakis, 2010). Berndt (1999) found that students seemed to more closely resemble their friends at the end of the school year than they did at the beginning of the school year; students' grades decreased between fall and spring if their friends had lower grades in the fall. Kindermann (1993) found that even at the beginning of the year, fourth and fifth grade students tended to affiliate with classmates who shared similar motivation orientations, and they reorganized their peer groups throughout the year to preserve their motivational composition.

Being popular is an issue for many adolescents. Rimm (2005) found that middle-school students worried that appearing to work hard in school would put them into an unpopular "nerd" category. Several studies suggest peer groups significantly influence student achievement (Henfield, Owens, & Moore III, 2008; Schultz, 2002). In fact, underachieving gifted adolescents have reported the peer group influence was the number one obstacle to their achievement (Clasen & Clasen, 1995).

Possible Causes of Underachievement

The literature generally suggests a variety of possible causes of underachievement: an initiating situation, excessive power, inconsistency and opposition, inappropriate classroom environment, competition issues, perfectionism, and value conflicts. Events in students' lives can alter their achievement patterns. This might be a change in the family structure, such as a new sibling, parent divorce or marriage, or a move to a

new school. Parents and educators who are aware of these potential pitfalls can potentially prevent or lessen their impact (Rimm, 1995).

Bestowing adult status on a child at too young an age may contribute to the development of underachievement (Fine & Pitts, 1980; Rimm & Lowe, 1988). Young people who experience excessive power at home can have difficulty adjusting to a school environment in which they have limited choices.

Gifted students who receive conflicting messages from parents, conflicting messages from parents and teachers, or conflicting messages from gifted specialists and classroom teachers may justify reasons not to achieve. For example, students may hear their parents discuss the parents' discontent over the way the school is addressing the student's gifted needs. A gifted specialist may share with students his concern about how their classroom teacher is not addressing their academic needs. Each of these scenarios provides the child with ammunition that can be used as an excuse for not producing his or her best work.

Rimm and Lowe (1988) studied the family environments of 22 underachieving gifted students. In 95% of the families, one parent emerged as the disciplinarian, while the other parent acted as a protector. Often, opposition between parents increased as the challenger became more authoritarian and the rescuer became increasingly protective. Mandel and Marcus (1995) describe the "wheeler-dealer underachiever" who is impulsive and demands immediate satisfaction and instant gratification—traits that are not conducive to reading a book or working on a project. These students often have parents who strongly differ on their views of their child's behavior and what do to about it. Parents of underachievers also tend to be either overly lenient or overly strict (Pendarvis, Howley, & Howley, 1990; Weiner, 1992), or may vacillate between lenient and strict.

Classrooms do not always provide intellectually stimulating environments for gifted and talented students to thrive. Many gifted students underachieve by default; they simple do not receive the academic content or instruction

necessary to reach their potential. Regular classroom time is often unproductive for gifted learners. Fredricks, Alfeld, and Eccles (2010) found that regular classes, as compared to gifted education and advanced classes, tend to undermine, rather than support, a passion for learning. Many gifted elementary school students already know as much as half of the material to be covered in their current grade prior to the start of the school year (Reis et al., 1993). The majority of gifted students spend 80% of their time in regular education settings instead of in specialized programs designed to meet their unique needs (Westberg, Archambault Jr., Dobyns, & Salvin, 1993), yet 61% of classroom teachers have not received training in meeting the needs of advanced students (Robinson, Shore, & Enerson, 2007). Matthews and McBee (2007) found that school-year GPA, something that normally would be indicative of underachievement, was not a significant predictor of gifted students' achievement in a summer program designed to meet their intellectual needs. The researchers concluded that programs that successfully address the academic and social needs of gifted children can reverse many underachievement behaviors. Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) reported five C's contributed to gifted students' satisfaction with their learning environment: control, choice, challenge, complexity, and caring. They sought control to give them choice over what and how they learned. They sought intellectual stimulation through content that was challenging and complex. Finally, they sought a caring teacher who was interested in them and their learning.

Students must learn to function within a competitive society (Rimm, 2008b); at the same time, overly competitive situations can also be detrimental. Gifted students who view giftedness as a fixed mindset may be particularly at risk in competitive and academically challenging situations (Dweck, 2000, p. 23). Makel, Snyder, Chandler, Malone, and Putallz (2015) found that many academically gifted adolescents view intelligence as malleable (incremental view) and giftedness as fixed (entity view), while few viewed giftedness as malleable and intelligence as fixed. Gifted students with a fixed mindset may be reluctant to

risk their "giftedness," something they see as set, by performing poorly in competitive and challenging situations. For these students, not performing is less risky than performing and failing. For them, every difficult task is a test of their giftedness, and many become underachievers because they are simply not willing to take that risk. For some, this means not completing the assignment. For others, it means procrastinating and then hiding behind statements such as, "I could have done better if I had more time." Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter (2009) found a strong relationship between procrastination and underachievement.

Because of their fixed mindset, many gifted students do not see their effort as playing a part in their achievement. Siegle and Reis (1998) reported that while the teachers' ratings of middle school gifted students' ability ($r = .81$) and effort ($r = .80$) were similarly associated with the quality of work these students produce, gifted students' ratings of themselves were not. Overall, gifted students' responses showed a stronger relationship between their perceived ability and the quality of work they reported they did ($r = .72$) than between their percieved effort and the quality of work they reported they did ($r = .34$). The authors contemplated whether these students believed their success was more contingent on their natural ability than the effort they put forth or whether they were simply reporting that they were not being challenged and therefore did not need to work hard to produce quality work. Neither of these proposed scenarios is positive, and both could contribute to student underachievement. Wu (2005) noted that Chinese culture deemphasizes giftedness as an innate ability and emphasizes the concept of talent performance. In that culture, gifted children need to take responsibility for developing their gifts.

Some research (Siegle, Rubenstein, Pollard, & Romey, 2010) showed that first semester achieving gifted college students can believe that ability is important in doing well without developing a fixed entity view. The researchers noted that "although some researchers have cautioned against recognizing student ability at the peril of diminishing the importance of effort, educators and parents should not be fearful of discussing the role ability plays in gifted students' performances, while also emphasizing the importance of hard work and perseverance" (p. 92). Perhaps gifted achievers are able to appreciate the role ability plays in high performance without being paralyzed by it, while gifted underachievers view ability as a possible limiting factor in their success (Siegle & McCoach, 2013).

Perfectionism is an issue for many underachievers. One study found that gifted underachievers do not appear to suffer from many of the maladaptive behaviors associated with perfectionism such as concern over mistakes; rather, underachievers lack the high standards and organization associated with positive striving perfectionists (Mofield, Peters, & Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2016). Although gifted students are no more likely to suffer from perfectionism than other students (Adelson & Wilson, 2009), when students' self-worth is tied to their giftedness and high performance, behaviors associated with perfectionism such as procrastination, fear of failure, and dichotomous thinking may become issues that lead to underachievement (Siegle, 2013).

Finally, value conflicts between family, peers, and the school environment can limit student achievement. As stated earlier, negative peer attitudes often relate to underachievement (Clasen & Clasen, 1995; Weiner, 1992). The reverse can also be true. Positive attitudes about achievement and the future are essential for doing well in school. Mindnich (2007) found Latino students' background characteristics, including gender, generational status, and maternal education level, did not contribute to differences in Latino student achievement, while aspirations for future educational attainment significantly contributed to achievement. The value peers and family place on education plays a role in students' achievement.

Theoretical Models and Possible Solutions

Programs to reverse underachievement generally fall into two categories, counseling and instructional interventions, and often involve a combination of both. Therefore, counselors and

psychologists are in unique positions to help reverse underachievement by working with parents, teachers, and mentors to build underachievers' self-efficacy, teach resilience, help students balance achievement and social needs, help students to develop their strengths and accept weaknesses, and assist students to set realistic goals for success (Rimm, 2008b).

Fong, Snyder, Barr, and Patall (2014) examined the effectiveness of interventions to reverse underachievement. Their meta-analysis of 53 research studies suggested that interventions moderately improved achievement and psychological function. Interventions were most effective in elementary and middle school settings. The most successful interventions for improving achievement focused on instilling a value for learning.

Rimm's Trifocal Model

Rimm's (2008a, b) Trifocal Model has been successful in about 80% of the cases in which it has been used. The name springs from its three-way emphasis on school, home, and student. The model is based on the premise that underachievement is learned, and therefore it can be unlearned.

The model contains six steps. The first step of the model is conducting a comprehensive assessment of the student to document what the student is actually capable of achieving, to provide information about the student's learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses, and to determine what behaviors may be contributing to the underachievement. The second step is communicating to parents and teachers information from the assessment so that they are aware of the students' strengths and weaknesses and what factors may be reinforcing the underachievement.

The third step is changing the expectations of those involved in the situation. This includes helping the student recognize that he or she has the ability to be successful, helping parents set reasonable expectations at home, and helping teachers set realistic learning goals for the student and understand the student is capable of high achievement.

The fourth step is identifying achieving role models with whom the student can identify. Rimm emphasized "All other treatments for underachievement dim in importance compared with strong identification with an achieving model" (Rimm, Siegle, & Davis, 2018, pp. 255–256).

Students with a long pattern of underachievement will have skill deficiencies that need to be addressed, which involves the fifth step in Rimm's model. Fortunately, because they are gifted, gifted students can often quickly overcome these deficits with tutoring. The final step is making changes that support student achievement and discourage behaviors that feed underachievement. These may include adjusting to a more appropriate curriculum and learning environment, as well as addressing parent and teacher behaviors that may be reinforcing the student's nonproductive habits.

Snyder and Linnenbrink-Garcia's Maladaptive Competence Beliefs and Declining Value Beliefs Pathways

Snyder and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2013) proposed a developmental, person-centered theoretical approach to understanding underachievement. In their model, underachievement follows two pathways: the Maladaptive Competence Beliefs Pathway and the Declining Value Beliefs Pathway. In this model, students' early reactions to being identified as gifted and the challenge, or the lack of challenge, they encounter early in their school career can set them on one of the two pathways that ultimately become problematic as academic challenge increases. Some students' sense of identity becomes maladaptively tied to both their gifted label and their easily attained early achievement. When the curriculum becomes more difficult, these students may self-handicap and disengage to protect their gifted identity. Alternatively, some students are not maladaptive to their gifted label; however, due to insufficient challenge in school work, they fail to see value in academic work. By failing to develop a connection between effort and positive outcomes, they

set themselves up for disengagement and under-achievement as academic content becomes more challenging. Implications from this model suggest that parents and teachers should carefully consider how they discuss the gifted label, and educators should ensure gifted students encounter appropriately challenging curriculum early.

Renzulli and Reis's Schoolwide Enrichment Model

In a study of university freshman honors students, Siegle et al. (2010) found that in 15 different talent areas (from leadership and music to mathematics and writing) there was always a significant, positive relationship between students' interest in a talent area and their assessment of their skill in that area. Students who reported being interested in an area tended to do well; those with lower interest also had lower self-reported achievement. Playing off students' interests is a key to increasing passion for learning in schools. Fredricks et al. (2010) suggested that an intellectually stimulating and challenging environment can be created by the following:

> Cognitively complex tasks that are both meaningful and challenging and allow youth to pose and solve real-world problems can help accomplish this goal. Providing opportunities for students to incorporate their outside interests and future plans in their schoolwork is also likely to be beneficial. Finally, teachers should give youth some choice over the types of activities they work on and some control over how they complete these activities. (p. 27)

Fredricks et al.'s suggestion mirrors the Type III activities found in the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Reis & Renzulli, 2009). Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert (1995) used Type III activities with 17 gifted underachievers ages 8–13. Eighty-two percent of them made positive gains during the course of the school year and in the following year. Hébert and Olenchak (2000) also found a plan of strength and interest-based strategies reversed the underachievement.

Type III Enrichment activities are academic investigations that focus on (a) personalization of interest, (b) the use of authentic investigative and creative methodology, (c) problems without predetermined correct answers, and (d) development of a product with impact on one or more intended audiences (Reis & Renzulli, 2009).

Type III investigations are a component of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM; Renzulli & Reis, 2014) and the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977) and are often the result of an interest sparked through the student's participation in a general exploratory activity (Type I Enrichment) and involve training in cognitive and affective skills (Type II Enrichment). Research on students who engaged in Type III Enrichment suggests a relationship between students' early and subsequent interests (Westberg, 2010), postsecondary school plans (Hébert, 1993), career choices (Delcourt, 1994; Starko, 1988), goal valuation (Brigandi, Siegle, Weiner, Gubbins, & Little, 2016), levels of self-efficacy (Schack, Starko, & Burns, 1991; Starko, 1988), and ability to self-regulate (Hébert, 1993).

Siegle and McCoach's Achievement Orientation Model

The Achievement Orientation Model (see Fig. 16.1; Siegle & McCoach, 2005b) posits that beliefs and values students hold toward themselves, given tasks, and achievement itself influences what tasks students seek, and whether they are able to obtain them. In the model, students' self-perceptions in three areas (self-efficacy, goal valuation, and environmental perceptions) interact to motivate them to self-regulate their behaviors and subsequently engage and achieve.

The model is based on motivation principles and has been used to reverse underachievement (Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012). Self-efficacy beliefs answer the question, "Am I smart enough?" Students must believe they have the skills to perform a task before they will attempt it. For example, students must believe they are capable in mathematics before they will attempt a difficult math problem. If they believe that mathematics is too difficult, they are unlikely to put forth appropriate effort. Therefore they must believe they can learn the material if

Achievement Orientation Model

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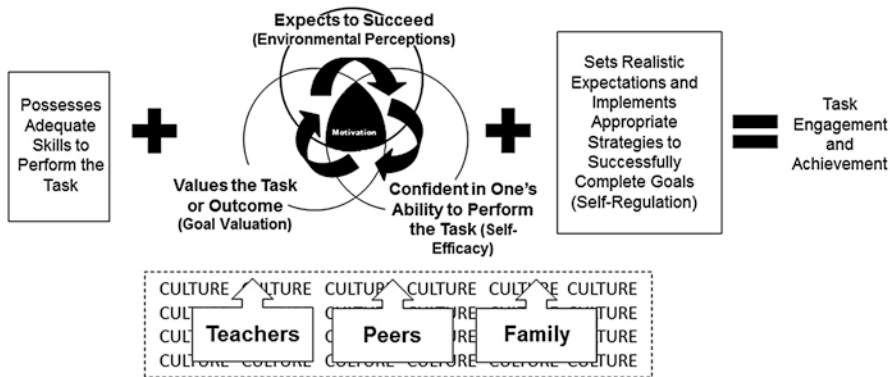
they try. Goal valuation beliefs answer the question, "Why try?" There are two basic reasons that students engage in a task; either they enjoy the activity or they value the outcome or byproduct of the activity. Many students are not motivated to achieve in school because they do not value the outcomes of school, nor do they enjoy completing schoolwork; therefore, they see little value. To reverse underachievement that stems from not seeing purpose in the work, educators must build into students' school experiences activities and content that students value. Environmental perception beliefs address the question, "Can I be successful here?" Students must view their environment as friendly and likely to provide positive outcomes for them. Students who possess positive environmental perceptions believe their home and school environments support their efforts. Their perception of the friendliness of their surroundings has an impact on their academic attitude and behavior (Siegle & McCoach, 2005a).

Students must possess positive affect in the areas of self-efficacy, goal valuation, and environmental perceptions. The intensity of their positivity in the three areas need not be equally strong, but it must be positive. If any of the three do not meet a "threshold" value, students may fail to be motivated and subsequently underachieve.

Intense positivity in one of the three areas does not compensate for negativity in one of the other areas (Siegle, McCoach, & Roberts, 2017). However, beliefs and values are not sufficient. It is the addition of the self-regulation metacognitive process that ultimately results in achievement (Brigandi, 2015).

Although there is no silver bullet to address underachievement, educators who implemented combinations of the following strategies have successfully addressed underachievement for many students:

- Explain the purpose for lessons and assignments.
- Help students set short and long-term academic goals.
- Help students see beyond the present activity to the long-term benefits it produces.
- Tie assignments to "real-world" situations.
- Learn about student interests, and integrate these interests into schoolwork.
- Offer students authentic choices about the ways in which they learn and show mastery of the material.
- Offer instruction at levels that are optimally challenging.
- Build opportunities for immediate feedback into classroom activities.

- Work with students to help them articulate their reasons for choosing or failing to put forth effort in a class.
- Develop portfolios of student work and periodically share it with students to help them recognize their growth.
- Encourage students to compete with themselves by charting their own progress.
- Recognize student growth by complimenting specific skills and drawing attention to the student's role in developing the skills.
- Discuss with students the obstacles they believe are keeping them from doing well and what options exist for them.
- Listen actively to resolve students' concerns.
- Provide opportunities for students to interact with more challenging and interesting material.
- Evaluate what study skills are needed to be successful.
- Help students organize their work and study time.
- Encourage self-monitoring skills that review distractibility, delayed gratification, and awareness of performance avoidance.
- Help students plan school work tasks.
- Stay positive and do not give up, all of us are works in progress.

Conclusions

Some students naturally reverse their underachievement during later high school years; others do not. Others reverse their underachievement when they encounter a caring teacher or mentor. Still others reverse their achievement when they encounter a more healthy environment (Peterson, 2001). Just as gifted underachievers differ in their reasons for underachieving, so do strategies for helping them achieve differ from one student to another. Research on achieving students suggests that successful students believe that they have the skills to be successful, see purpose in what they are doing, and trust those around them who support their efforts. They also set realistic expectations and self-regulate (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a, b).

Schultz (2002) noted that gifted students are often seen as defective merchandise in need of repair" (p. 204). He suggested that educators move away from this perspective of working on students and move to a perspective based on working with students. Working together, parents and educators can help students build an achievement-oriented attitude. However, as Whitmore (1986) noted over a quarter a century ago, "The final choice, obviously, is the child's; he or she must want to change and believe effort will be rewarded by sufficient success and personal satisfaction" (p. 69).

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