University-based affective education programs for primary and secondary school gifted students in Hong Kong: Impacts on their personal-social development

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ABSTRACT:
While abundant attention has been devoted to programs aiming at enhancing the cognitive development of highly-able/gifted students, there is relatively less effort contributed to the affective development of this group of students. Such imbalance between educational resources allocated to intellectual versus socio-emotional development might have far-reaching effect, especially given that highly-able/gifted students exhibit intensive emotions and behaviors, known as “overexcitability” (Dabrowski, 1966), and may experience maladjustment during their development. It is thus imperative to develop related programs to strengthen the affective development of highly-able/gifted students. This paper examined the impacts of a series of affective education programs, designed and implemented by the Program for the Gifted and Talented (PGT), Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, on the personal-social development of highly-able/gifted students at primary and secondary school levels.

Various data were collected at different stages of programs. Participation motivation, expectations and concerns of students and parents were investigated by self-reported questionnaires at the beginning of the programs. Self-reflective diaries of students were collected in some of the programs. Focus group interviews were also conducted to students and parents at the end of some of the programs to gather post-program feedback. Content analysis and pre- and post-test comparisons were applied to examine the impacts of these programs.

Overall, different types of programs designed by PGT were considered effective in improving the personal and social development of highly-able/gifted students from multiple analysis results. Enrichment courses focusing on or integrating with key elements of affective education such as self-understanding, emotional management, positive values and leadership development significantly improved students’ self-confidence and related interpersonal skills to a large extent. Peer mentoring scheme and service learning programs also demonstrated positive impacts on the personal growth for the gifted, including the increase in courage and skills of interacting with others as indicated by some students, higher level of empathy and more positive civic attitudes as reported by the students and observed by their parents. Parents also emphasized their children could incorporate the learned attitude, discipline and values into their learning and real life, resulted in sustained learning and growth. Sharing series by PGT gifted alumni helped the gifted youth plan their future study and career paths.

The lack of consensus about the framework of affective education for gifted students may cause difficulties in designing and implementing such programs. With various programs conducted at the individual and group levels, PGT illustrated how to integrate key elements of affective education into the university-based gifted education provision for primary and secondary school gifted students, and how such endeavor can really benefit their non-cognitive development and affect their cognitive functioning.

KEYWORDS:
Affective education; gifted; highly-able; Hong Kong; personal-social development; Program for the Gifted and Talented