

# Psychology in the Schools special issue on the gifted

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Much has changed in the world, as it has in education and school psychology, since the start of the new century. And most futurists recognize that change is occurring at an increasingly rapid, almost breathtaking, pace as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. We have seen rapid global weather changes, sudden and often inexplicable political shifts in how countries govern—both in the United States and internationally, and grand transformations in the use of social media, economic indices and predictions, technological advances, and even approaches to child-rearing and parenting. Most recently, we are dealing with a novel coronavirus pandemic that has challenged the public health, economic, political, and social fabric of societies across the globe.

One area of focus that has not been part of this revolution of change is the gifted field and gifted education. For a number of reasons, some rather nicely described in the lead article by David Dai, the field of gifted education and the practice of serving the gifted in the schools has not enjoyed appreciable change for almost 100 years (Neihart, Pfeiffer, & Cross, 2016; Pfeiffer, 2013, 2018). This lack of change in how we understand and serve this unique, special needs, group of students in the real-world of the schools is not due to a lack of research or innovative best practices literature published in the gifted journals. It is simply that innovation—which is affecting so many fields of human endeavor today—has not gained much traction or attention in the schools or in school psychology. This is the *la raison principale* for this special issue: to provide readers of *Psychology in the Schools* with a sampling of the most recent and most exciting new ideas, research findings, federal policy, curriculum and instruction, ways to identify, conceptualize, motivate, challenge, and understand the unique social and emotional world of gifted students.

The contributors to this special issue are a group of recognized authorities in their respective areas of research, writing, practice, and advocacy for the gifted. It has been my immense privilege and great pleasure to bring together and work with as guest editor this eminent body of authors to share their latest thinking, research, and deep experiences working with the gifted.

In 2011, two colleagues and I conducted a national survey sent out to over 2,000 members of NASP. Our findings were published in this very journal (Robertson, Pfeiffer, & Taylor, 2011). The main findings that we reported include the following noteworthy points:

- Gifted students in the schools are among the most underserved special needs population in American schools and are some of the most underperforming high ability students in the world, ranking last in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Algebra, and Geometry among 13 other developed countries.

- Only half of the NASP members who participated in the survey reported receiving training in the assessment of the gifted, and less than half reported receiving training in the characteristics of the gifted. Perhaps more telling, 37% reported receiving no training in gifted assessment, characteristics of the gifted, curriculum, and instructional methods for the gifted learner, unique socioemotional needs, or the “twice exceptional” student.
- More than half of the respondents indicated that their graduate training dedicated “little” time to the gifted student, and 37.4% reported that their graduate programs dedicated “no” time to learn about the gifted.
- In terms of present practice, more than half of the survey participants (66.2%) reported “never or rarely” conducting gifted evaluations; only 17% reported consulting with teachers about gifted students, and the great majority of respondents rated their level of expertise in consulting with teachers on curriculum or instructional needs for gifted students as “low.” Finally, only 9.5% of the respondents rated their expertise in screening or identifying gifted students as “high.”

As readers can surmise from the above findings, many school psychology training programs dedicate little if any time to introducing future practitioners to the unique needs, characteristics and psychoeducational best practices in working with gifted students. And not surprising, a great many practicing school psychologists either do not often serve and/or feel ill-equipped to serve gifted students in the schools. This helps explain why school psychologists are not at the vanguard or taking the lead in serving this fascinating, challenging, special-needs population (Pfeiffer, 2013, 2015, 2018).

There are, as you might suspect, other sociocultural, political, and even philosophic reasons for why the change in serving the gifted student has been very slow to take hold in the schools. Many of the authors in this special issue touch upon the various reasons, including Dai, Stephens, Shaunessy–Dedrick, Siegle, Wiley, and Dixon and Worrell. The crucial point is that “innovation waves” in our understanding of, and in the provision of cutting-edge and evidence-based services and programs for the gifted has lagged behind (Pfeiffer & Shaughnessy, 2020). This special issue was conceived with the gracious and enthusiastic support of the Editor-in-Chief of *Psychology in the Schools* to help begin to rectify this situation within the profession of school psychology and encourage and motivate trainers and practitioners to promote innovation in how we serve gifted students in the schools. I hope that you enjoy and are intellectually and professionally encouraged and even inspired by the articles in the special issue.

## ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR

Steven Pfeiffer is a popular speaker on how to raise successful and psychologically well-adjusted bright kids. Prior to his tenure at Florida State University, Professor Pfeiffer was as a Professor at Duke University, where he served as Executive Director of Duke's gifted program, Duke TIP. He also served as Director of Devereux's Institute of Clinical Training and Research, headquartered in Villanova, PA. Dr. Pfeiffer has worked as a pediatric psychologist at the Ochsner Clinic and Medical Center in New Orleans, and as a clinical psychologist in the U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps. Author of over 200 articles and book chapters, he is the lead author of the *Gifted Rating Scales*. For many years an advocate for children's social-emotional needs, Dr. Pfeiffer has testified at the White House and before the Italian Parliament. Eminent scholar Alan Kaufman of Yale University Child Study Center considers Dr. Pfeiffer, “Among the small group of the world's leading experts in the (gifted) field...”

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