

ISSUE

38

WorldTalentWeb NEWSLETTER

October 2025

A newsletter of the World Giftedness Center



ISSN
2709 - 0728

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WTW Newsletter October 2025 Editorial Penina Kiss & Jennie Quinn	02
A Reflection: Reimagining school spaces for autonomy in social-emotional domains. Sarah Fleming	04
The Underachievement of Gifted Students in Rural and Urban China: An Overview for International Educators Tongbin Zhang and Keri M. Guilbault	11
When Technology Becomes the Teacher: A Neurodivergent Learning Revolution Anne-Maree Brady	20
Fast Forward: Building a Better Future for Gifted Education 2050 19th APCG Conference Jeddah	25
Editorial Board WorldTalentWeb	28



October Editorial



WTW Newsletter October 2025 Editorial Penina Kiss & Jennie Quinn

Welcome to the latest edition of the *WTW Newsletter*. In this issue, we are pleased to share new insights in gifted education and talent development from three of our generous contributors. Before doing so, we pause to acknowledge, with deep sadness, the passing of one of our recent authors, close colleague, and dear friend, Bernadette Bentley.

A dedicated professional and tireless advocate, Bernadette had a remarkable ability to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of gifted students. Guided by an insatiable curiosity and a commitment to evidence-based practice, she consistently translated educational research into meaningful approaches that supported the gifted learners and professional communities she served.



Bernadette’s final WTW articles reflected her passion for, and commitment to, equitable identification processes in schools.

Bernadette Bentley (Newman) Born to eternal life 7 August 2025



Dubai 2022

One of our most enduring memories of Bernadette was when she represented the Sydney Catholic Schools team after winning the Global Gifted Education in Practice Award.

Traveling abroad for Bernadette was no small task. Watching her accept the award with grace and pride was a moment of both joy and gratitude, a testament to her courage, loyalty, and unwavering commitment to the field of gifted education and talent development.

We had the great privilege of working alongside Bernadette in Sydney, where the team of system leaders and education officers was instrumental in shaping the gifted education agenda across 150 schools. Her leadership in teacher professional learning, enduring support of gifted students, and personal dedication to her colleagues left a lasting impression.

Academic in Residence Program 2020; Nicole Shepherd, Dr Rena Subotnik, Penina Kiss, Bernadette Bentley & Jennie Quinn.



Beyond her professional legacy, Bernadette's intellectual curiosity, musical talent, and steadfast friendship enriched the lives of those who knew her. At the conclusion of her funeral service, a reflection was shared that perfectly captures Bernadette's generous spirit.

Afterglow

I'd like the memory of me
to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow
of skills when life is done.

I'd like to leave an echo
whispering softly down the ways,
of happy times and laughing times
and bright and sunny days.

I'd like the tears of those who grieve,
to dry before the sun;
Of happy memories that I leave when life is done.

—*Helen Lowie Marshall*

Bernadette leaves behind an afterglow of compassion, kindness, and service. We dedicate this edition to our dear colleague, and extend our heartfelt condolences to her family, friends and their much loved puppy-companion, Stravinsky.

In this edition, we are delighted to feature Sarah Fleming's reflections on autonomy in social-emotional domains, Tongbin Zhang and Keri M. Guilbault's exploration of underachievement among gifted students in China, and Anne-Maree Brady's parental perspective on practical strategies for supporting twice-exceptional learners.

We hope you find this edition informative.
We look forward to connecting with you again in the next edition.

Penina & Jennie



A Reflection: Reimagining school spaces for autonomy in social-emotional domains.

SARAH FLEMING

UNSW Doctoral Candidate & Primary Educator

Abstract

As teachers and school leaders, we have the privilege and responsibility to ensure that our environments respond to the needs of our learners, including those who are gifted. Across Australian primary schools, there are thousands of gifted students who are ready to walk alongside their teachers and educators, ready to redesign their schools as socially and emotionally supportive spaces.

One pedagogical strategy which can be used to achieve this is ‘autonomy support’. Autonomy support in social-emotional domains has been found to lead to higher levels of competence and wellbeing in broader student populations (Collie et al., 2024). A gap exists in the literature on the use of autonomy-support with gifted students, in social-emotional domains. In this article, I share a synopsis of my presentation at the Canberra Inaugural Gifted Awareness Week Symposium. During this presentation, I shared the stories of gifted boys with ADHD, from NSW primary schools, alongside implications for practice.

Introduction

Gifted education in Australia has a longstanding history. Notably, two bi-partisan senate committees in Australia, in 1988 and again in 2001, both determined that our community has a duty to help all children achieve their potential, particularly those who are gifted¹. However, these committees both concluded that gifted students are the most educationally disadvantaged population in Australia.

¹ (see the Report by the Senate select committee on the education of gifted and talented children (1988) and the Education of gifted children (2001) for the complete findings).

To collectively shift this narrative, teachers and school leaders must reimagine our schools as spaces which meet the social-emotional needs of gifted students, in addition to their unique academic needs.

To truly reimagine spaces, we must first consider the ways in which those spaces are experienced by members of a community. For authentic insight into this experience, we must foster conversation and collaboration with members of this community.

Within a school context, we may seek insight into the ways teachers, leaders, or parents experience changes over time. As teachers, we often seek insight into the ways our students experience school, with an underpinning goal of transforming our classrooms into places of motivation, learning, and engagement. However, the ways in which one member of a community perceives the environment can be vastly different to the ways in which others experience it.

Policy to Practice

The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented runs Gifted Awareness Week in Australia each year. The “Policy to Practice” theme in 2025 endeavoured to support educators to translate gifted education policy into practice, unlocking the potential of gifted students all over Australia. By drawing on research findings, my presentation illuminated the role that autonomy-support can play in wellbeing specifically.

It was during this presentation that I asked the question “If not you, then who?”. The purpose behind asking this question was to invite the audience to consider their role in translating policy to practice, in ways that are supportive of gifted and twice-exceptional students’ autonomy and wellbeing.



The Case for Reimagining

The poem titled “The Road Less Travelled” by Robert Frost, tells a story of two roads which diverge in a wood and the poet takes the one less travelled by, which they perceive makes all the difference. I suggest that as educators, we often walk the paths less travelled, particularly alongside our students. Sometimes, those pathways are not easy to identify, yet we endeavour to reimagine and to create new pathways, new ways of being in schools, with the overarching goal of making a difference to the lives of those we walk alongside.

We must reimagine the pathways our schools offer toward social-emotional wellbeing.

To achieve greater wellbeing, one needs competence in social-emotional domains. It is essential that primary school educators use effective support strategies to develop pathways towards social-emotional competence. Notably, the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration outlines that primary school is an important part of a child’s journey socially and emotionally, where they can develop “strategies to manage themselves in different situations” (p.13). Additionally, as educators, we have the privilege and responsibility to create new pathways for our students, including pathways towards wellbeing which support gifted children to manage themselves socially and emotionally, in a variety of situations.

Furthermore, when we reimagine spaces as places of reflection on feelings and experiences, we may be able to support gifted students to feel more secure in these spaces (Wolfgang & Snyder, 2022).

The case for reimagining our school settings rests heavily on the existing research corpus. More than fifteen years ago, Jean Sunde Peterson wrote that a “lack of opportunity for gifted students to discuss concerns related to social and emotional development potentially contributes to vulnerability” (p. 282, 2009).

Opportunities for gifted students to discuss affective concerns are important, particularly in relation to gifted students with ADHD. For example, research has found that gifted students with ADHD can experience both social and emotional conflict at school. Emotional conflicts may include feelings of shame, tension, and confusion (Gentry & Fugate, 2018; Reis et al., 2014). Social conflict with teachers and peers for gifted children with ADHD may include experiences of social rejection (Mayes & Moore, 2016; Moon et al., 2001).





Understanding Social Emotional Autonomy Support

When a teacher supports a child to act with an awareness of choice, with self-control in social-emotional domains, and with volition, they are providing social-emotional autonomy support (Collie, 2020). For example, if a teacher explains what possible choices may be available for a child to successfully solve a conflict, supports them to implement their preferred choice, and offers a meaningful rationale for why these are appropriate choices, they are being autonomy-supportive.

This type of social-emotional support requires those providing the support to consider the child's perspective in each situation (Collie et al., 2024; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). The benefits of autonomy-support for broader student populations are illuminated by the findings that when a child perceives autonomy-support, they experience a lower prevalence of negative affect (Cheon et al., 2018; Collie, 2021).

My Research

Through a phenomenological methodology, I immersed myself in the stories and experiences of five young, gifted boys with ADHD. They were in the upper years of NSW Primary Schools, in Australia. My study focussed on their social-emotional lifeworld, particularly their experiences of supportive practices for autonomy, in their school, home, and community contexts. Whilst there is an extensive corpus of research on autonomy-support (see Collie (2021); Collie (2022); Collie et al. (2024); Reeve and Cheon (2021) for recent research), it had not yet been considered for gifted boys with ADHD in primary school.

The stories shared with me illustrated the great complexity in a child's social-emotional lifeworld and the tension, conflict, and isolation that gifted students with ADHD can experience without adequate social-emotional support. In contrast, there were stories which illustrated how autonomy-supportive practices can empower a gifted child with ADHD to navigate their lifeworld successfully.

Insight to Implications

The following section endeavours to translate the insight from my research findings into actionable and practical steps for reimagining spaces for autonomy in social-emotional domains. These suggestions are an overview of some possible avenues to reimagine spaces for autonomy and wellbeing.

Questions to Ask when Reimagining for Autonomy

Students Questions to ask:

- How can we invite students to share their experiences of school more often, in authentic and supportive ways? (e.g. how do our gifted students feel about ____)?
- When can we provide scaffolded support which encourages conversation around a students' perspective?
- How can we support the social-emotional autonomy of gifted students in our classrooms?

Classroom/School Questions to ask:

- What resources and learning experiences form our social-emotional learning program?
- How does our social-emotional learning program support the development of competence and student progress along the Personal and Social Capabilities Continuum?

System Questions to ask:

- What professional learning opportunities does our system provide for teachers and school leaders in gifted education?
- Is there a Gifted Education team established at a system level and how do they support teachers in meeting the social-emotional needs of students?

Strategies to Encourage Greater Autonomy in Social-Emotional Domains

Students

- Reimagine school spaces with gifted and twice-exceptional children. Empower them to share the social-emotional experiences they have of their school contexts. Student voice is essential in the reimagining of school settings.
- Seek student perspectives on social-emotional decisions which directly affect their experiences of school.
- When supporting students to resolve conflict, try and see the situation from their perspective and consider possible solutions.



Classroom/School

- Create learning environments which encourage conversations around social-emotional experiences.
- Invite students to advocate for support with resolving social-emotional conflict.
- The Personal and Social Capabilities Continuum (Australian curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2025) can be used with students to create a pathway toward greater social-emotional competence, throughout their schooling.
- Establish formal social-emotional learning programs within classrooms to meet the needs of gifted students. Research has previously identified that schools with a formal SEL program (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2012) and an emphasis on growth mindsets, positively influence gifted students. For those who are twice-exceptional, strengths-based approach (Baum et al., 2014) has been found to positively influence their wellbeing and schooling experiences.

System

- Provide tailored professional learning for classroom teachers and school leaders to develop an understanding of the unique characteristics of gifted students; their affective needs; the different domains of giftedness; and ways to meet the social-emotional needs of gifted students.
- Establish Gifted Education Officers to lead initiatives which support schools to meet the academic and affective needs of gifted students.

Conclusion

Albert Einstein reportedly said that “Imagination is more important than knowledge”. Whilst there is no doubt that professional knowledge, experience, and expertise is highly valued and necessary when leading gifted education programs, I argue that so too, is imagination. With imagination we can forge new paths, create new spaces which nurture gifted children to flourish academically and affectively.

Which leads me to return to the question “If not you, then who”?

You might be the teacher or leader who can reimagine spaces for autonomy in social-emotional domains. By using our imagination in combination with our knowledge and experience, and in collaboration with our students, we can collectively redesign schools as spaces that support social-emotional autonomy for gifted children with ADHD.

And if not you, *find who*.

Author’s note: The findings of my research have been submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals. References to these research articles can be provided following publication.

References

- Australian curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2025). *Understand this general capability - Personal and Social capability*.
<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-general-capability/personal-and-social-capability>
- Baum, S. M., Schader, R. M., & Hébert, T. P. (2014). Through a different lens: Reflecting on a strengths-based, talent-focused approach for twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 58(4), 311-327.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986214547632>
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., & Ntoumanis, N. (2018). A needs-supportive intervention to help PE teachers enhance students' prosocial behavior and diminish antisocial behavior. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 35, 74-88.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.11.010>
- Collie, R. J. (2021). Instructional support, perceived social-emotional competence, and students' behavioral and emotional well-being outcomes. *Educational Psychology*, 42(1), 4-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2021.1994127>
- Collie, R. J. (2022). Social-emotional need satisfaction, prosocial motivation, and students' positive behavioral and well-being outcomes. *Social Psychology of Education*, 25(2-3), 399-424.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-022-09691-w>
- Collie, R. J., Martin, A. J., Renshaw, L., & Caldecott-Davis, K. (2024). Students' perceived social-emotional competence: The role of autonomy-support and links with well-being, social-emotional skills, and behaviors. *Learning and Instruction*, 90.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2023.101866>
- Department of Education Skills and Employment [DESE]. (2019). *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*.
<https://www.education.gov.au/indigenous-education/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>
- Eddles-Hirsch, K., Vialle, W., McCormick, J., & Rogers, K. (2012). Insiders or outsiders: The role of social context in the peer relations of gifted students. *Roeper Review*, 34(1), 53-62.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2012.627554>
- Gentry, M., & Fugate, C. M. (2018). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in gifted students. In *APA handbook of giftedness and talent*. (pp. 575-584).
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0000038-037>
- Mayes, R. D., & Moore, J. L. (2016). Adversity and pitfalls of twice-exceptional urban learners. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 27(3), 167-189.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202x16649930>
- Moon, S. M., Zentall, S. S., Grskovic, J. A., Hall, A., & Stormont, M. (2001). Emotional and social characteristics of boys with AD/HD and giftedness: A comparative case study. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 24(3), 207-247.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/016235320102400302>
- Peterson, J. S. (2009). Myth 17: Gifted and talented individuals do not have unique social and emotional needs. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 53(4), 280-282.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986209346946>
- Reeve, J., & Cheon, S. H. (2021). Autonomy-supportive teaching: Its malleability, benefits, and potential to improve educational practice. *Educational Psychologist*, 56(1), 54-77.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2020.1862657>
- Reis, S. M., Baum, S. M., & Burke, E. (2014). An operational definition of twice-exceptional learners. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 58(3), 217-230.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986214534976>
- Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children. (1988). *Report by the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children* (111 1988).
<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22publications%2Ftabledpapers%2FHPP052016002616%22>



The Underachievement of Gifted Students in Rural and Urban China: An Overview for International Educators

Tongbin Zhang and Keri M. Guilbault

Department of Advanced Studies, Johns Hopkins University

Abstract

This article examines the underachievement of gifted students in China, exploring how sociocultural, educational, and geographical factors contribute to this critical challenge. Gifted underachievers represent a paradox in education—these students have extraordinary potential yet fail to perform at expected academic levels. In China, where academic excellence is culturally revered and educational achievement is often equated with personal worth, gifted underachievement presents a significant yet underexplored challenge.

While extensively studied in Western contexts, Chinese scholars have only recently investigated this population, revealing unique dynamics within China's hierarchical, exam-oriented educational system.

China's performance-driven culture influences underachievement through intensive study schedules, standardized testing, and prioritizing conformity over creativity. Socioeconomic disparities exacerbate the problem, and the limited availability of gifted education programs across the country restricts access primarily to urban areas. Drawing on Western and Chinese scholarship, interventions are proposed to help identify, support, and re-engage gifted underachievers in the Chinese context.

Keywords: underachievement, gifted education, China, educational equity

Author Note

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Tongbin Zhang at tzhang63@jh.edu.

The Underachievement of Gifted Students in Rural and Urban China: An Overview for International Educators

The underachievement of gifted students is a topic of concern for parents and educators worldwide. In China, where academic performance is tightly linked to social mobility and national development, underachievement among gifted students poses an educational concern and a social and economic one. While the term “gifted underachiever” has been widely used in Western contexts, Chinese scholars and educators have only begun to examine this group in recent decades (Dai, 2017; Zhang, 2017).

This article aims to provide international gifted education professionals with an overview of the complex issue of underachievement among gifted students in China, describing the unique sociocultural, educational, and geographical factors contributing to this phenomenon. Drawing from existing literature and educational reports, this synthesis offers context for understanding this important challenge facing Chinese education.

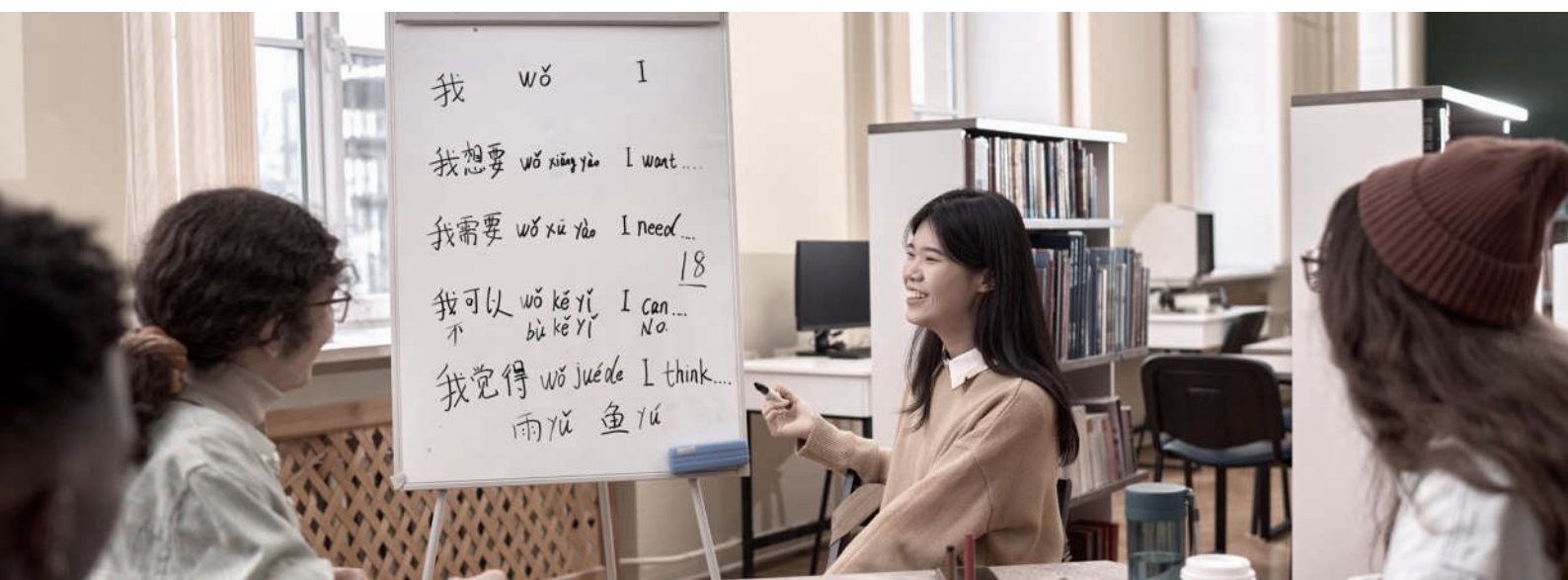
Understanding Gifted Underachievement in the Chinese Context

Underachievement in gifted students is typically defined as a discrepancy between potential and performance that persists over time and is not caused by a learning disability (Reis & McCoach, 2002). These students with high intellectual ability often fail to achieve at levels commensurate with their abilities. In China, definitions of giftedness have traditionally emphasized academic excellence, particularly in mathematics and language, as measured by standardized assessments and teacher recommendations (Beijing No. 8 High School, 2015).

As a result, underachieving students are often overlooked in gifted identification processes, creating a “hidden” population.

Underachievement is typically measured using several criteria:

- A difference of at least one standard deviation between intelligence test scores and school grades (Siegle, 2018)
- Evidence of declining academic performance over time despite high cognitive ability (Reis & McCoach, 2002)
- Disengagement from school-related tasks and goals (Reis & McCoach, 2002)



In the Chinese educational context, where grades serve as the dominant currency of academic success, such discrepancies are often attributed to laziness or poor attitude rather than viewed as symptoms of a broader mismatch between student needs and school structures. The standardized assessment system used to identify students with advanced cognitive ability may be too narrow for capturing diverse talents.

The Chinese Gaokao exemplifies this challenge—a single high-stakes exam that determines university admission while potentially overlooking many talented students who struggle with timed assessments or whose abilities do not align with this particular exam format.

Sociocultural Context of Gifted Education in China

China's educational system is fundamentally hierarchical, exam-oriented, and performance-driven. The Gaokao, the national college entrance examination, serves as the ultimate measure of a student's academic worth and determines university placement, career trajectory, and even social mobility prospects. This examination carries such weight that employers often value undergraduate degrees from top universities more than graduate degrees from elite institutions, viewing the Gaokao as more authoritative than graduate entrance exams.

From early childhood, Chinese students are immersed in a culture characterized by rote memorization, long study hours, cram schools, and high-stakes testing. For example, grade 12 students commonly spend more than 10 hours daily in school learning and preparing for the Gaokao. Schools prioritize test preparation, often at the expense of creative, inquiry-based, or differentiated instruction approaches that benefit gifted learners. In this environment, gifted students who do not conform to expected achievement patterns may fall through the cracks as they are overlooked or misunderstood.

Although there has been a recent shift, traditionally, the cultural approach to teaching in China emphasizes what some researchers describe as a “suppressive” style, placing greater emphasis on criticism while minimizing praise (Preidyte, 2024). Teachers may express concern that excessive encouragement could foster arrogance in students. Even when internally acknowledging a student's good performance, educators might still communicate that it falls short of expectations. This approach can particularly affect highly sensitive children, potentially leading to insecurity and self-doubt (Borton et al., 2005).

Creative or divergent thinkers may feel stifled and alienated in rigid classroom settings. Fortunately, there has been a growing interest in creativity and critical thinking in classrooms, but it will take time for this shift to be widespread.

Cultural expectations further complicate the issue. Gifted students who underachieve may be viewed as violating fundamental Chinese values about effort and achievement. Teachers and parents often interpret underachievement as a character flaw or lack of effort rather than recognizing it as a sign of unmet educational needs or emotional distress (Cai, 2024). This cultural lens can prevent appropriate identification and intervention for struggling gifted students.



Geographic Disparities in Gifted Education Access and Quality

China's educational landscape reveals stark disparities between urban and rural contexts. The system prioritizes urban centers, where schools benefit from greater funding, specialized programs, and well-qualified educators. Urban students have opportunities to attend elite institutions and participate in extracurricular programs that nurture their talents. In contrast, rural schools struggle with limited budgets, outdated curricula, and shortages of certified teachers. Some remote rural schools resort to hiring their alumni as teachers, even without formal teaching credentials, while urban schools typically require strict qualifications before hiring.

The Chinese school system divides institutions into two categories: key schools and regular schools. The classification depends on educational quality, university admission rates, and other competitive factors. Key schools typically have better educational resources and offer graduates better prospects for admission to top universities (Xie & Zhang, 2020). These key schools tend to concentrate in urban areas, creating additional geographic inequality.

Admission to selective secondary schools is based on the high school entrance exam, Zhongkao, which appears equitable on the surface since all students take the same standardized test. However, socioeconomic factors can influence student preparation and performance on such assessments. Students from higher-income families may have access to better-resourced primary and middle schools, private tutoring services, and enriched learning environments. Conversely, students from lower-income or rural backgrounds may attend schools with fewer resources and have limited access to supplementary educational support. These differences in educational opportunities and preparation can affect performance on standardized assessments, potentially creating disparities in secondary school placement despite the uniform testing format.

Access to specialized gifted education programs remains severely limited. According to Zhang (2017), only ten schools in mainland China offer gifted education programs, typically located in economically developed areas such as Beijing, Tianjin, or Shanghai. Gifted students' educational rights lack legislative protection, making specialized programs more of a privilege than a guaranteed service. This geographic concentration means many gifted students remain unidentified or under-supported, particularly those in rural or less developed regions.

Educators across different settings may also struggle with identifying giftedness appropriately, especially since professional learning in gifted education is not nationally mandated and is left up to the cities and provinces (Zhang, 2017). Some mistake giftedness for academic compliance rather than recognizing creativity or advanced cognitive abilities. Teachers may overlook students who exhibit unconventional thinking, instead favoring those who excel at rote memorization. This misidentification prevents gifted students from receiving the tailored instruction they require.

Unique Challenges by Educational Setting

Rural Educational Environments

Gifted students in rural China face significant obstacles that hamper their academic and personal growth. A major problem is a lack of educational resources and financial support. The scale of educational neglect in rural areas is substantial—in 2020, 2.42 million children under 18 living in rural regions were not attending school (Lyu et al., 2024). Gifted students in these areas may remain completely unidentified, lacking any opportunity to develop their exceptional abilities.

Limited technology access compounds the problem. Students in rural areas have limited access to online learning platforms, virtual mentorships, and other digital resources that could foster intellectual curiosity and resilience (McCormick & Guilbault, 2024). Additionally, rural families typically prioritize meeting basic needs over educational enrichment, leaving gifted students with minimal academic support outside school. These combined factors create formidable barriers to identifying and nurturing rural gifted students.

Urban Educational Environments

Despite having access to superior resources, gifted students in urban areas face distinct challenges rooted in cultural and psychological pressures. China's intensely competitive academic culture creates enormous stress, particularly in metropolitan cities like Beijing and Shanghai (Dai et al., 2016). The expectation is often on gifted students to achieve perfect scores, be the best in competitions, and be admitted to the best universities. These pressures frequently lead to perfectionism, a common contributor to underachievement (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2019). Perfectionism manifests as a fear of failure, causing some students to avoid challenging tasks or lead to disengagement (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2019). Urban gifted students may actually limit their intellectual development by avoiding advanced coursework due to fear of imperfect results.



Parental expectations further intensify these challenges. As students juggle rigorous school schedules with additional tutoring sessions arranged by ambitious parents, the constant pursuit of excellence can also lead to emotional burnout. Urban parents often invest heavily in their children's education, enrolling them in multiple after-school and weekend programs.

Despite their good intentions, this intensive scheduling leaves little time for creative exploration or self-directed learning. Students who study intensively for an extended period may lose sight of the value and meaning in their education, which can inhibit their natural curiosity. These students may experience emotional burnout or lose motivation over time, resulting in underachievement despite their resource advantages.

Recommended Practices and Interventions

Addressing gifted underachievement in both urban and rural Chinese contexts requires comprehensive approaches. A national policy framework for gifted education in China is needed to provide more explicit guidance on identification, teacher preparation, and program development. A consistent and inclusive approach is needed nationwide. Based on foundational research from international contexts, several strategies may prove beneficial:

1. Strength-Based Assessment and Identification

Schools should adopt multidimensional approaches to gifted identification beyond intelligence or achievement test scores to include creativity, problem-solving abilities, leadership potential, and motivation. Tools such as observational checklists, teacher nominations, student portfolios, and performance-based tasks can uncover hidden talents. Students with high potential should be monitored when signs of underachievement emerge so that interventions can be implemented immediately (Guilbault & McCormick, 2023).

2. Differentiated and Enriched Instruction

Gifted underachievers benefit from curriculum modifications that align their readiness levels and interests. Effective strategies include curriculum compacting to eliminate repetitive content, project-based learning to foster autonomy and creativity, and interest-based enrichment clusters to spark intrinsic motivation.

3. Social-Emotional Support

Counseling services should specifically address perfectionism, self-esteem issues, and coping skill development. Group counseling and mentorship programs, including virtual mentoring options, can help gifted students connect with peers who share similar experiences. This support may prove particularly valuable for students in rural areas with limited local resources. Teachers should also integrate social-emotional learning into their curricula, teaching students how to manage stress, embrace failure, and set realistic goals (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2019). School leaders can support educators by providing training on the social-emotional characteristics of gifted learners, especially those who underachieve.

4. Family Education and Outreach

Schools should organize workshops to help parents better support their gifted children at home. Schooling is just a small portion of their time; students spend most of their time with their families. These programs can also promote healthier attitudes toward success and failure, emphasizing effort over outcome and well-being over prestige. Parent education should include practical strategies for creating supportive home learning environments and fostering open communication with their children. Educating parents about their children's need for balance, such as giving them time to play, create, and rest, can also help relieve their child's stress. Encouraging open communication and emotional support is essential.

Conclusion

Underachievement among gifted students in China is a multifaceted challenge shaped by resource disparities, cultural pressures, and emotional factors that vary significantly between rural and urban contexts. Rural students face neglect due to inadequate educational infrastructure, untrained educators, and limited resources. The geographic concentration of quality educational opportunities creates significant disadvantages for rural gifted students, who may remain completely unidentified and unsupported. This lack of resources can hinder their academic performance and future opportunities, creating a significant gap compared to students from urban areas with better educational infrastructure. Students from rural areas often feel inferior because of their rural backgrounds, and the significant information gap between them and their urban counterparts even makes it difficult for them to pick a college major (Wang, 2022). Despite access to superior resources, urban students encounter intense academic competition and perfectionism that can impede or limit their potential. The pressure-driven environment in China's major cities requires particular attention to fostering emotional resilience and balanced development of students attending schools in urban areas.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic approaches, including equitable resource distribution, comprehensive teacher training, and robust social-emotional support systems. For international educators working with Chinese students or collaborating with Chinese institutions, understanding these contextual factors is essential for developing effective support strategies. Success in fostering China's next generation of innovative thinkers depends on creating educational environments that recognize and nurture diverse forms of giftedness while supporting the unique needs of students across all geographic and socioeconomic contexts.



References

- Beijing No. 8 High School (2015). 北京八中少儿班招生常见问题及解答 [Frequently asked questions and answers on enrollment of experimental classes of Beijing No.8 High School]. Available at <https://www.no8ms.bj.cn/cms/ccjy/seb/sezscjw.html>.
- Borton, J. L., Markowitz, L. J., & Dieterich, J. (2005). Effects of suppressing negative self-referent thoughts on mood and self-esteem. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24(2), 172–190. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.24.2.172.62269>
- Cai, F. (2024). Teachers' perceptions of young gifted children in China. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 36(1), 37–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X241287851>
- Dai, D. Y., Steenbergen-Hu, S., & Yang, Y. (2016). Gifted education in Mainland China: How it serves a national interest and where it falls short. In D. Y. Dai & C. C. Kuo (Eds.), *Gifted education in Asia: Problems and prospects* (pp. 51–76). Information Age Publishing.
- Dai, D. Y. (2017). Gifted children and gifted education. In Q. Wu, Y. Hu (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (in Chinese, pp. 127–157). East China Normal University Press.
- Guilbault, K. M., & McCormick, K. M. (2023). Underachievement of gifted learners in school. In K. H. Collins, J. J. Roberson, & F. Piske, (Eds.), *Underachievement in gifted education: Perspectives, practices, and possibilities* (pp. 25–41). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003369578>
- Lyu, L., Mei, Z., Yan, F., Wang, X., & Duan, C. (2024). The status of rural children left behind in China: 2010–2020. *China Population and Development Studies*, 8(2), 97–111. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42379-024-00159-2>
- McCormick, K. M., & Guilbault, K. M. (2024). Thriving amidst the pandemic: Teaching gifted students online and the role of adaptation and innovation. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 35(2), 199–229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X231220052>
- Mofield, E., & Parker Peters, M. (2019). Understanding underachievement: Mindset, perfectionism, and achievement attitudes among gifted students. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 42(2), 107–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016235321983673>
- Preidyte, K. (2024, January 31). Innovative teaching methods in China. Hatching Dragons. Available at <https://www.hatching-dragons.com/blog/innovative-teaching-methods-in-china#:~:text=In%20China%2C%20there%20is%20a,success%20in%20the%20modern%20world.>
- Reis, S. M., & McCoach, D. B. (2002). Underachievement in gifted and talented students with special needs. *Exceptionality*, 10(2), 113–125. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327035EX1002_5
- Siegle, D. (2018). Understanding underachievement. In S. I. Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Handbook of giftedness in children* (2nd ed., pp. 285–297). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77004-8_16
- Wang, Z. (2022, December 7). Why China's rural students can't go home. #SixthTone. Available at <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1011839>
- Xie, G., & Zhang, Y. (2020). School of golden touch? A study of school effectiveness in improving student academic performance. *Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 7(7), 2–22 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-020-00118-7>
- Zhang, Z. (2017). Gifted education in China. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1–12 <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1364881>

Author Bios

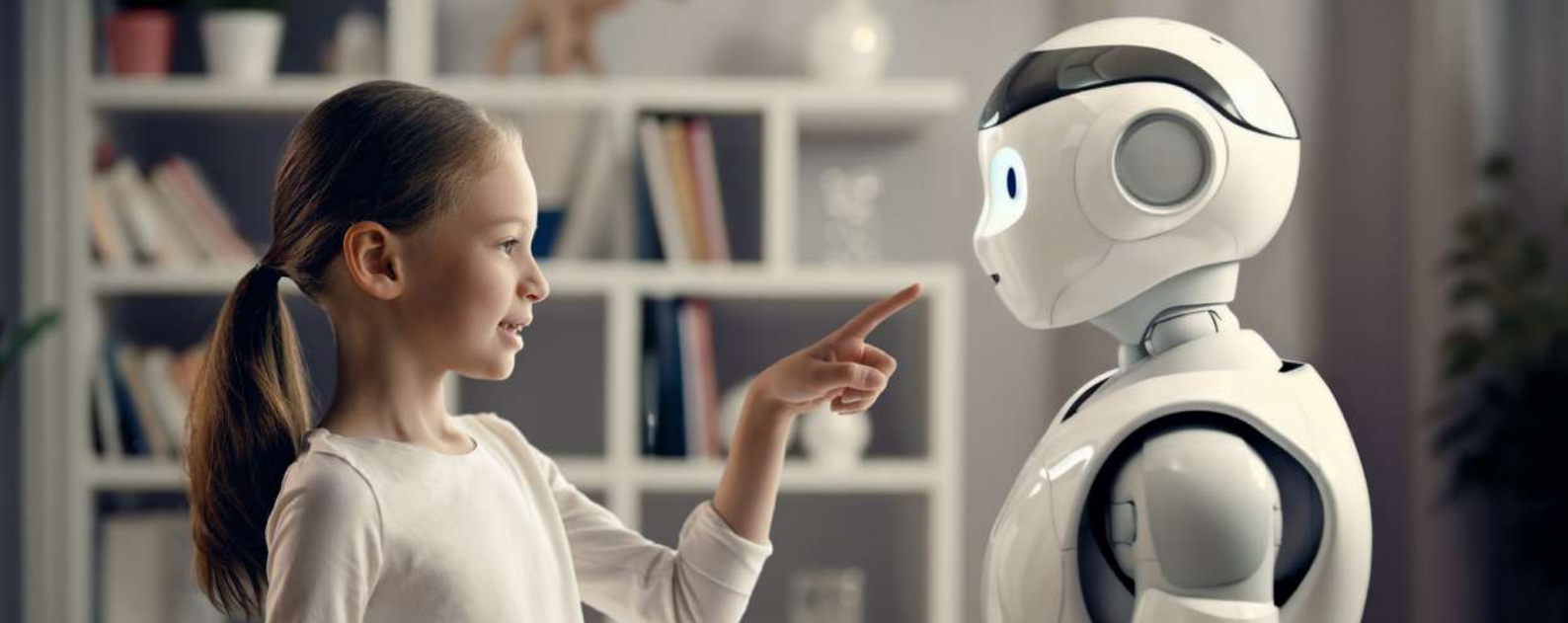
Tongbin Zhang, M.S.Ed., is a doctoral student in the Doctor of Education program at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, focusing on Creativity, Advanced Learning, and Twice Exceptionality.

She earned a Master of Science in Education from Johns Hopkins University and a Bachelor of Science from the University of Delaware.

Keri M. Guilbault, Ed.D., is an associate professor of gifted education at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) School of Education.

She is a Delegate to the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children and directs the Study of Exceptional Talent at the JHU Center for Talented Youth.





When Technology Becomes the Teacher: A Neurodivergent Learning Revolution

Anne-Maree Brady
Parent / Educator

Picture this: every parenting article tells us that social media is rotting our children's brains. Studies show 8th and 10th graders spend 3.5 hours daily on social media, with platform use linked to 9% increased depression and 12% increased anxiety (Murthy, 2023). We're told screens destroy attention spans. But what if the very technology everyone fears became my neurodivergent son's pathway to literacy, confidence, and academic success?

The Stark Reality of Social Media's Dark Side

The concerns aren't unfounded. Research shows strong negative associations between excessive social media use and emotional distress in children aged 10-15 (Ricci et al., 2022). American teens using social media over three hours daily face twice the risk of negative mental health outcomes (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2024). The platforms are designed to be addictive, and frequent use can increase irritability, anxiety, depression, and focus problems.

Every parent knows this research because it's terrifying. We see our children glued to screens and panic.

My Reality: A Single Parent's Educational Dilemma

As a single parent raising two children while working two jobs, I face unique challenges that many families experience.

As a primary school teacher specialising in Gifted Education with passion for neurodiverse children, I thought I had educational answers. But with my son James, who has ASD Level 2 and ADHD, every traditional approach failed spectacularly.

James lit up around screens but shut down with books. Traditional reading approaches led to meltdowns and tears. I was fighting against his natural strengths, breaking both our hearts.



The Breakthrough: Flipping the Script on Technology

I made a decision against expert advice: instead of viewing technology as literacy's enemy, I made it the pathway to literacy. I stopped fighting James's love for screens and started harnessing it. Knowing he wanted to be a YouTuber, we compromised—yes, but only if the content had educational purpose.

This aligns with research showing that when technology is used purposefully for educational goals, extraordinary things happen. Studies demonstrate students in technology-enhanced classrooms outperform those without technology. MIT's analysis of 126 studies confirms educational software designed to develop specific skills shows enormous promise.

We created JamesExplainsEdu, and something magical happened. The child who once hid under tables when asked to read was now confidently researching, scripting, and creating educational content while developing traditional literacy skills through structured collaboration.

Our Collaborative Learning Method: A Family Affair

Our approach follows a carefully designed process transforming spelling instruction into engaging content creation:

Step 1: Discussion and Understanding - James and I explore spelling rules through genuine conversation where he asks questions and makes connections.



Step 2: Collaborative Script Development - We draft scripts together, sometimes using AI tools for brainstorming, but core content comes from our discussions.

Step 3: Word Detective Work - James shines here, investigating examples and exceptions like a word detective with infectious enthusiasm.

Step 4: Material Preparation - James takes ownership of visual aids and props, reinforcing understanding while developing organisational skills.

Step 5: Teaching and Filming - James teaches spelling rules whilst his 11-year-old sister Kate and I film him. Kate has become integral to our production team, operating the camera with remarkable skill and enthusiasm. Having his sister behind the lens provides James extra comfort and confidence—there's something profoundly supportive about having your sibling believe in your work enough to actively participate.

Kate isn't just passively holding a camera; she's genuinely invested in James's success. She notices when he's explained something particularly well, suggests better camera angles, and celebrates each video with genuine pride. This family collaboration transforms what could have been a solo endeavour into a proper team effort. Kate witnesses James's growth in real-time, strengthening their sibling bond beyond typical family dynamics.

The Power of Real Audience Engagement

What truly drives James's motivation is watching subscriber numbers climb. Every new subscriber represents someone who values his teaching, creating a tangible feedback loop. When subscribers increase after challenging spelling rule videos, it validates his effort to master concepts thoroughly.

This isn't vanity—it's authentic motivation. James knows if he makes mistakes, his audience notices. Growing subscribers create responsibility no worksheet could. The technology didn't replace traditional literacy—it motivated him to master it. His spelling improved dramatically because he wanted to teach correctly. His reading comprehension soared through passionate understanding of linguistic patterns he was explaining to real people choosing to learn from him.

The Motivation Factor: When Learning Has Purpose

Here's what doom-and-gloom research misses: when technology is used purposefully, it becomes the most powerful motivational tool. Research consistently shows educationally purposeful computer use correlates with higher student engagement and GPAs (Chen et al., 2010).

Stanford researchers found properly implemented technology produces significant achievement gains and boosts engagement, particularly amongst at-risk students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). They emphasise interactive learning, using technology to explore and create rather than "drill and kill," and the right teacher-technology blend.

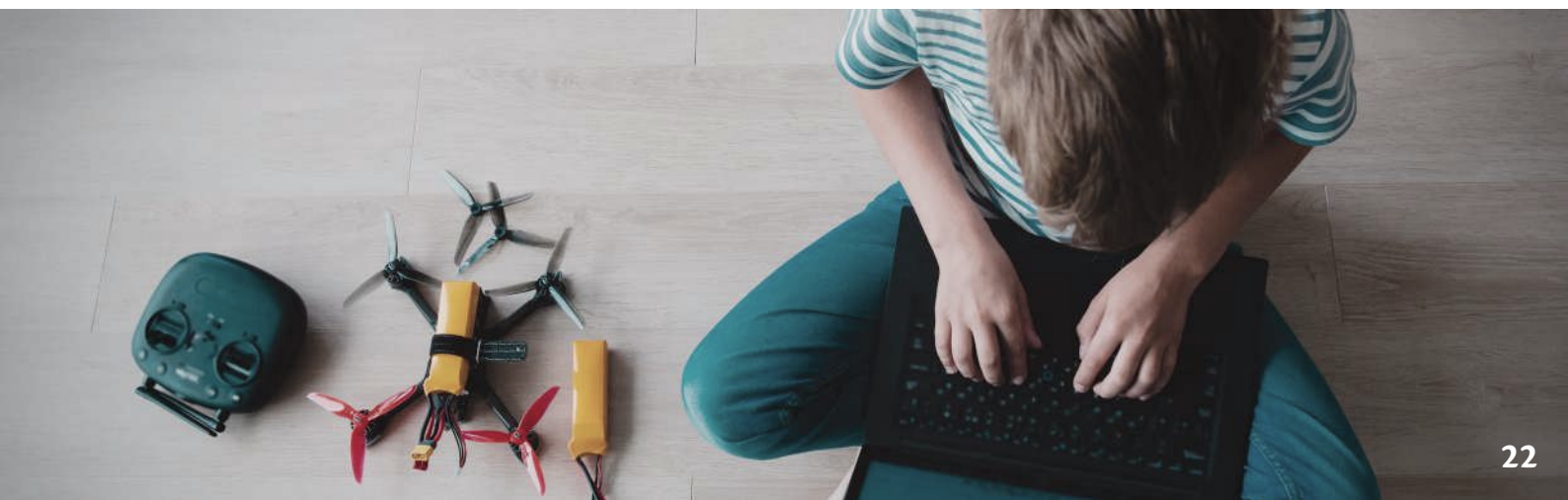
James doesn't spell correctly because I force worksheets—he spells correctly to teach accurately to his audience. The social media platform research calls harmful became the reason James willingly practised every academic skill I'd tried teaching for years.

What the Research Misses: Context Matters

Studies that terrify parents typically measure passive consumption—endless scrolling, comparing, mindless browsing. They don't account for creative, purposeful use where children are producers, not just consumers.

James isn't passively scrolling TikTok for hours (though yes, sometimes that happens too). He's actively creating, researching, writing, and sharing knowledge. He's building digital literacy skills for an increasingly digital world.

The difference between harmful and beneficial technology use isn't just time limits—it's purpose, creativity, and active engagement versus passive consumption. Technology-supported personalised learning improves academic outcomes by enhancing motivation and supporting metacognitive skills development.



The Professional Impact: Changing My Teaching Practice

Working in Gifted Education taught me intelligence comes in many forms, but living with James showed me learning paths are equally diverse. As a teacher, I now bring this understanding to my classroom. When I see children struggling with traditional methods but thriving with technology, I remember James.

This isn't abandoning traditional literacy—it's expanding our definition of literacy development. I still teach phonics, grammar, and comprehension, but I also help students create digital stories and use technology to demonstrate learning meaningfully.

Beyond One Family's Story: A True Team Effort

Our experience shows the conversation about children and technology needs nuance. Yes, unlimited, purposeless screen time can be harmful. Yes, platforms can exploit developing brains. But technology can also be a tool for learning, creativity, and connection when used thoughtfully.

What makes our approach particularly powerful is that it has become a true family affair. Kate's involvement as videographer has created a support system extending beyond parent and child. She's witnessed every breakthrough, celebrated every milestone, and played an active role in James's educational journey. This collaborative dynamic has taught both children valuable lessons about teamwork, supporting family members' unique strengths, and working together towards common goals.

For neurodivergent children especially, technology can provide alternative pathways to traditional skills, motivation to engage with learning, platforms for showcasing unique strengths, communities where they feel understood, and opportunities to teach others whilst building confidence—all whilst surrounded by family members who believe in their potential.

A Revolution in Neurodivergent Learning

Educational content creators are part of a revolution in neurodivergent learning. Every video that breaks down complex topics into engaging, accessible explanations proves neurodivergent minds aren't broken—they're brilliant.

We hope this provides inspiration for every parent who's been told their child "doesn't fit the mould," validation for every teacher who's wondered if there's a better way, and encouragement for every neurodivergent learner who's felt like they don't belong.

The future of education isn't about choosing between technology and traditional learning—it's about using both thoughtfully to help every child discover their potential.



References

Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marín, V. I., & Händel, M. (2021). Emergency remote teaching in higher education: Mapping the first global online semester. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 18(1), 1-24.

Carle, A. C., Jaffee, D., & Miller, D. (2009). Engaging college science students and changing academic achievement with technology: A quasi-experimental preliminary investigation. *Computers & Education*, 52(1), 133-140.

Chen, P. D., Lambert, A. D., & Guidry, K. R. (2010). Engaging online learners: The impact of Web-based learning technology on college student engagement. *Computers & Education*, 54(4), 1222-1232.

Darling-Hammond, L., Zieleszinski, M. B., & Goldman, S. (2014). Using technology to support at-risk students' learning. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

Major, L., Haßler, B., & Hennessy, S. (2021). The effectiveness of technology-supported personalised learning in low- and middle-income countries: A meta-analysis. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(5), 1935-1964.

MIT J-PAL North America. (2019). What 126 studies tell us about education technology. MIT News.

Murthy, V. H. (2023). Social media and youth mental health: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

National Center for Biotechnology Information. (2024). Social media has both positive and negative impacts on children and adolescents. NCBI Bookshelf.

Ricci, M., Palombi, T., Mammarella, N., Corsi, C., & Di Domenico, A. (2022). The use of social media in children and adolescents: Scoping review on the potential risks. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(9), 5470.



The 19th APCG 2026

Fast Forward: Building a Better Future
for Gifted Education 2050



Jeddah Awaits!

19th Asia-Pacific Conference on Giftedness (APCG) 2026

Hosted by the University of Business and Technology (UBT)

Save the Date!



When? February 07–11, 2026



Where? UBT Venue, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia



Paper
Submissions
Open





CALL FOR ARTICLES

We would like to invite you to write an article for the WorldTalentWeb newsletter. The theme and writing style are open for the author to determine.

Articles could take the shape of an interview with a specialist in the field, a report on research or a recent event, a book or resource review etc. The guidelines for the article are listed below.

Please submit your article to the following email: WorldTalentWeb@ha.ae

Guidelines for submitting an article for the WorldTalentWeb newsletter:

1. A submitted article should be between 800 to 2000 words, not including references.
2. WorldTalentWeb newsletter caters to the international community and thus, all articles should be written in English.
3. American or British spelling is accepted.
4. All non-native English speakers should make sure to check their articles for language accuracy before submitting them.
5. The article should be in Times New Roman font, size 12 pt.
6. Authors should avoid using footnotes.
7. Authors should adhere to the APA style and/or formatting guidelines provided in the APA Manual, 7th Edition.
8. The article should be submitted with embedded photos, and tables, and figures if relevant.
9. The article should be submitted as an email attachment as a Microsoft Word document.
10. Articles should be word-processed and single-spaced with 1 inch (2.54 cm) at the top, bottom, left, and right of every page as per the APA 7th edition requirements.
11. Authors should strictly observe the copyrights-requirements and cite the work of others correctly.
12. Relevant permission should be obtained if photos of people are used. An email giving permission to use photos publicly is sufficient.
13. Authors should include their full name, title, institutional affiliation, and a high-resolution color photo.
14. If an article was published before elsewhere, then only submit a summary of the original document with acknowledgment.
15. Authors are encouraged to use supportive pictures.
16. The editorial team reserves the right to edit articles accepted for publication.



WorldTalentWeb **CALL FOR ADVERTISING CONFERENCES**

Looking to share your conference with the world?

Send a brief description of the conference to:

WorldTalentWeb@ha.ae

(not more than 70 words)

"The WorldTalentWeb newsletter's team is very happy to advertise your conference."



WorldTalentWeb **EDITORIAL BOARD**

Editors:

- Penina Kiss, Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese
- Jennie Quinn, SCS Australia

Co-editor:

- Dr. Sadiq Abdulwahed Ismail, Hamdan Foundation, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Advisory Board:

- Prof. Abdullah M. Aljughaiman, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia
- Csilla Fuszek, The Association of Hungarian Talent Support Organizations (MATHETSZ), Hungary
- Dr. David Rempel, IUBH International University of Applied Sciences, Kenya
- Dr. Jamal AlMehairi, Hamdan Foundation, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- Prof. John Munro, The University of Melbourne, Australia
- Dr. Khalifa A. Al Suwaidi, Hamdan Foundation, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- Dr. Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Northwestern University, US

WorldTalentWeb NEWSLETTER

October 2025

A newsletter of the World Giftedness Center



The WorldTalentWeb newsletter is bimonthly published by the World Giftedness Center (WGC) of Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation for Medical and Educational Sciences.
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

