Instruction

Regular reading instruction based on grade-level texts is often too easy for gifted readers and may not improve their reading ability. Long-term exposure to unchallenging instruction may cause gifted readers to become complacent or lazy because they may be accustomed to being rewarded for doing work that is easy for them. Texts slightly above their current reading level, along with diagnostically based instruction, will provide appropriately challenging experiences in the students’ zone of proximal development and enable them to make further growth. Because of their advanced strategy use, these students need high-interest texts geared toward their ability level that are challenging enough to require them to purposely practice the use of advanced metacognition. Higher-level questioning, particularly in challenging texts, will help them develop these advanced cognitive skills. These learners should also be encouraged to work on long-term projects that allow them to apply information and skills learned in their reading.

Although their talents are specific to reading, their instructional needs are like those of all gifted students who require adequately challenging curriculum, training in the use of higher-order thinking skills, and time to meet with other learners of similar cognitive ability. Curriculum compacting is advocated as a way to eliminate previously mastered content and can be used to allow time for advanced study of text, such as that provided in the Great Books or Junior Great Books program. Teachers may need to provide varied grouping structures, including cluster grouping, cross-grade grouping, and within-class grouping to effectively meet the needs of their gifted readers.

Recent studies indicate, however, that little is done to provide gifted readers with adequately challenging curriculum, causing their school experiences to be analogous to those of their non-gifted peers. Though the nature of literacy continues to change rapidly because of advances in technology, advanced instruction in technological literacy such as blogging, searching, and critical reading is also lacking. Whether the needs of gifted readers are met depends on teachers’ ability to differentiate the materials and process in their reading instruction to provide challenges.

Elizabeth A. Fogarty

See also Classics/Great Books; Elementary School, Literature Curriculum; Language Arts, Curriculum; Middle School, Literature Curriculum; Precocious Reading; Secondary School, Literature Curriculum; Talented Readers

Further Readings


Girls, Gifted

Gifted girls are a population with high ability, cognitive characteristics, and complex affective needs that left unaddressed may reduce their academic achievement in school, jeopardize their creative contributions to the world around them, and significantly impair their personal journey toward self-awareness and actualization. Academic research studies during the past century provided longitudinal data to dispel a distorted view of the gifted as socially inept, physically weak boys, although research on gifted girls only began in the 1980s with Barbara Kerr’s, Sally Reis’s, and JoAnne Smutny’s writings. Research study recommendations included accelerated and enriched school curricula for gifted boys and girls. At the federal government level, officials responded to 20th-century world events by recognizing the value of the gifted men and women to the country. U.S. officials commissioned educational reports, enacted policies to improve educational opportunities and established policies for gifted education, all of which included girls. However, long-held
cultural and societal expectations that inculcate values, beliefs, and behaviors continue to limit academic achievement and place barriers on talent development for girls who may hide their giftedness through a variety of coping strategies. Girls with extraordinary abilities from low socioeconomic status and ethnic groups remain unrecognized and receive little or no assistance to realize their exceptional talents. Encouraging trends and practices that effectively nurture gifted girls include parents, schools, and communities that support gifted girls’ needs with ongoing encouragement, understanding, and appropriate challenge resulting in holistic development at the personal level and beneficial contributions to society. This entry describes the history, the characteristics, and the findings of research on gifted girls.

**Coming Out of the Kitchen**

Two eminent educational researchers who emerged in the 1920s significantly challenged prevailing views of gifted girls as homogeneous in intellectual ability and well-suited primarily for homemaking responsibilities. At Stanford University, cognitive psychologist Lewis Terman countered the *early ripe, early rot* view of precocious children and dispelled myths of social ineptness, physical inferiority, and mental instability to provide a profile of well-adjusted social skills, above-average height, and capable leadership abilities. Terman began the classic longitudinal study *Genetic Studies of Genius* work in 1921 with 1,528 11-year-olds (856 boys and 672 girls) who scored 135 or higher on the newly developed Stanford-Binet IQ test. In addition to repeated IQ measures, Terman collected data on gifted children’s personal interests, family life, and other nonintellectual areas. Rather than burning out precocious abilities at a young age, he found the gifted children emerged successfully as high-achieving adults who made productive contributions to society. Still in progress with the aging *Termites*, as they’re called, results indicate many of the grown-up gifted girls in Terman’s study became professional career women who remained unmarried or married later in life and either did not have children or raised fewer children. Although he held a view of inherited intelligence that placed greater emphasis on genetics than environment in developing gifts and talents, Terman advocated early identification of gifted, accelerated study, differentiated curriculum, a focus on student interests, and specialized training for teachers of the gifted.

Leta Hollingworth, an educational psychologist at Columbia University, challenged cultural and societal limitations for women throughout her life and conducted large-scale gender research to disprove the implications of the variability hypothesis applied to mental ability: that men demonstrated a wider range of mental abilities and therefore achieved eminence or required institutionalization in greater numbers than did women who possessed a more static range of intellectual ability. Examining 1,000 newborn boy and 1,000 newborn girl babies, Hollingworth found more similarities than differences between genders, indicating the possibility of great accomplishment for girls given similar educational and career opportunities as boys.

In 1922, Hollingworth began an 18-year study with gifted students in New York City public schools with 50 7- to 9-year-old students with IQs higher than 155 in Special Opportunity Classes at P.S. 165. Equally divided into higher (IQ median 165) and lower (IQ median 146) groups, gifted boys and girls progressed at their own paces through the standard curriculum then received enriched (history of civilization, biography, French, music, writing, and field trips) rather than accelerated instruction in an educationally homogeneous class setting. Hollingworth found special challenges for gifted girls in overcoming attitudes about girls as the mentally inferior gender and disinterest in the traditional play habits of girls. With its emphasis on real-world application, Hollingworth encouraged an expanded range of talent development for gifted boys and girls, which helped dispel the myth that capable students will succeed in the regular curriculum without special assistance or opportunities.

Hollingworth established the P.S. 150 Speyer School in 1936 for 175 gifted boys and girls aged 7 to 9 years old. Further expanding the enriched curricula, the Speyer School created *Evolution of Common Things* units that students themselves helped develop and assemble. Yielding nearly two decades of research data, the Speyer School and Hollingworth’s previous studies with gifted children resulted in almost 40 published studies and produced the first gifted textbook, *Gifted Child:*
Their Nature and Nurture. Although she believed heredity influenced giftedness, Hollingworth embraced the role of environment and education in developing gifts and talents, a vital position that placed gifted girls on a level playing field with gifted boys. Hollingworth herself demonstrated unusual capacity in her rise to eminence despite numerous obstacles and opposition faced as a lone female voice advocating for gifted girls.

Golden Age of Gifted Girls
Academia provided empirical evidence demonstrating the existence of exceptional gifts and talents in girls, and the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920 gave women the right to vote and solidified the Women’s Rights Movement’s earlier advocacy for admission to higher education institutions denied at the time as harmful for women. Legislation enacted by the federal government following World War II stimulated educational benefits for men and women veterans through the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, and the National Science Foundation Act in 1950 provided funding for the gifted through research and education in math, science, and engineering. Following the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the U.S. federal government mounted an energetic effort to provide advanced classes in math and science for gifted boys and girls in response to the perceived endangerment of U.S. democracy during the Cold War.

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 recognized outstanding students through the NDEA Title V Guidance, Counseling, and Testing; Identification and Encouragement of Able Students provision. In 1972, the Marland Report issued a multilayered definition of the gifted and talented that protected gifted girls by virtue of inclusion and established the Office of Gifted and Talented in the U.S. Department of Education. The 1983 Nation at Risk report promoted enrichment and accelerated curriculum for gifted students. In 1988, the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) established funding for research centers, funded grants for underrepresented populations in states and issued grants for program implementation in states. Although government agencies promoted excellence for gifted girls, the report National Excellence: The Case for Developing America’s Talent in 1993 forecast concerns about America’s talented youth as a quiet crisis. Since the early 1990s, the National Science Foundation’s Gender Equity programs for women and girls has been a leader in funding research and creating policy on the education and guidance of girls who are gifted in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Belief Barriers and Roadblocks to Success
Although academic research and government appropriations for gifted boys and girls paved the road to success, deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and societal attitudes about achieving gifted girls created roadblocks not easily overcome. Kerr reviewed the internal and external barriers to success for gifted girls in Smart Girls, Gifted Women first published in 1985. In 1992, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published an extensive study, How Schools Shortchange Girls, to address serious concerns about the impact of schools on the self-esteem and career aspirations with 3,000 boys and girls in Grades 4 through 10. Although boys and girls both experienced a decrease in self-esteem during their teen years, girls’ self-esteem dropped more deeply. The study found girls enrolled in math and science courses maintained higher self-esteem and career aspirations. Rather than a closing gender gap, the AAUW report found increased gender inequities in schools with behaviors that included teachers calling on boys more frequently than girls, reinforcing assertive behavior more readily in boys than in girls, evaluating written work from boys for creativity and writing from girls for neatness, and providing time and guidance to boys when solving problems but giving the correct answer to girls. When girls repeatedly encountered these behaviors throughout their school experiences, the increasing loss of self-esteem and confidence formed a sharp contrast to the buoyancy they possessed earlier during their primary grade years.

Environmental influences create tension in career choices for gifted girls who feel they must choose between career expectations and family responsibilities. Karen Arnold studied valedictorians in Illinois who entered college in the early 1980s and found most of the young women planned to interrupt their professional careers to raise children,
whereas none of the young men planned a professional leave of absence to care for children. Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart conducted an ethnographic study during the late 1970s and early 1980s with high-ability college students and concluded the young women accomplished status through relationships with high-profile young men. These young women lowered their career goals and accepted marginalized jobs after graduation because of a culture of romance that prioritized relationships rather than academic accomplishment in their thoughts and conversations.

Given prevailing cultural stereotyping for smart girls and environmental roadblocks to achievement, gifted girls may adopt a posture of invisibility as a coping mechanism for the pressure of high expectations and feeling disconnected, alienated, or different from others. The *Horner effect* or *fear of success syndrome* describes a pretense of lesser ability from otherwise capable girls who hold back correct answers or full engagement when competing with boys as an avoidance of rejection strategy. The *imposter phenomenon* affects girls who discount their achievement by attributing their academic success to luck or external factors rather than to their own efforts. These girls live in fear that someone will discover what they consider intellectual fraud rather than high ability and effort. The *Cinderella complex* demonstrates a dependency as girls wait for their princes to rescue and care for them.

Although gifted girls may receive high grades in school, underachievement concerns persist with increasingly lower levels of performance when compared with their overall potential or self-belief of what they may accomplish. Conversely, when gifted girls adopt a superwoman approach to success in all areas of their lives, perfectionism may hinder their achievements when they fail to set attainable goals for themselves. Ever-increasing levels of accomplishment performed compulsively to attain perfection derail a more balanced approach to excellence in achievements. As gifted girls consider roles traditionally found in career, wife, and mother, psychological androgyny describes the complex interaction of masculine characteristics and feminine qualities needed to attain equilibrium in their chosen fields of accomplishments.

Lower socioeconomic status may determine the level of accomplishment as gifted girls from more affluent homes and backgrounds may possess financial resources and support structures and expectations less available to impoverished families unfamiliar with college scholarship opportunities and professional career preparation. Karen Arnold, Kathleen Noble, and Rena Subotnik developed a model of female talent development that consider distance from privilege and power. The distinct characteristics of ethnic populations influence achievement with cultural values, support systems of encouragement, and family expectations of caregiving and housekeeping. Asian girls may receive continual support for achievement in math and sciences. Self-esteem among Black girls remains strong during the teen years because of ongoing support in their families. Identification of Hispanic girls for gifted programs may require alternate assessment instruments sensitive to their intellectual and creative abilities to avoid underrepresentation.

**The Best Is Yet to Come**

Parents, schools, and communities that listen without judgment to the dreams of gifted girls and challenge them toward their goals provide an ethic of caring needed by gifted girls to reach their potential. Rather than perspectives based on deficit models or pathology, positive psychology may provide a framework of strength-based support needed for successful adjustment. School programs that promote affiliation with female groups such as Girl Scouts, that build high-quality library offerings to satiate voracious reading habits, that encourage mentorships, and that provide research opportunities send gifted girls messages of hope and inspiration to attain excellence. In-service training for teachers on the diverse characteristics and needs of gifted girls help build the resilience needed to persevere through difficult circumstances encountered on the road to achievement. Healthy competition with reasonable risk-taking, creative guidance with those who may wish to remain invisible, and innovative research ensure a brighter future for gifted girls.

Connie L. Phelps

*See also* Eminent Women; Hollingworth’s Studies of Highly Gifted Students; Sex Differences in Creativity; Sex Differences in Mathematical and Spatial Ability; Talented Girls, Mathematics; Women, Gifted
Further Readings


GLOBAL ISSUES

The global approach to gifts and talents offers perspectives that can cut right through unrecognized cultural assumptions. It shows differences in attitudes about who might be seen as gifted, and how those who are considered gifted should be treated. Parent organizations for the gifted exist in most parts of the world; because adequate support for the specialized education for these children is widely lacking in schools, parent organizations have become the major force for advocacy of gifted. Internationally, organizations such as the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children and the European Council for the Highly Able work on a voluntary basis to coordinate and communicate experience and research findings. This entry describes global cultural differences, specifically differences between Eastern and Western views, and cross-cultural research.

Global Cultural Differences

Factors such as economics, beliefs, and politics strongly influence global cultural differences. Identification of the gifted and talented, in particular, focuses on what is most esteemed in a society. Religion, for example, is the major influence in directing the everyday lives of millions outside the Western world, and interpretations of holy writings often determine what children may and may not learn. In the Western view, non-Western parts of the world instruct children in nonrational ways. There, fate, in the form of a god, gods, or holy men, will decide an individual’s life-path. This means that children’s exercise of free will, following one’s own interests to reach excellence, or questioning what one is taught, is unacceptable.

In the Western world, old-style schooling involving corporal punishment, dividing curricula into boys’ and girls’ subject areas, and didactic instruction has largely gone. This is not the case elsewhere. For example, the daughters of the Taliban are not the only girls forbidden education beyond the minimum; this is equally true in many other regions, such as Pakistan, where illiteracy among women is the acceptable norm. The concept of giftedness in such societies is more likely to be one that is morally and socially approved than any quality based on personal achievement.

All children grow up in families, although in developed countries, the term indicating the basic unit in a society varies widely. The term family now includes a high and growing percentage of families headed by a single woman (one-third of all in the United Kingdom) and some with same-gender parents. In the United States, many more high achievers come from two-parent compared with one-parent homes. But in other parts of the world, families may be extended and organized in a hierarchy of age and gender. Three generations under