

# Taxonomy of affective curriculum for gifted learners

A framework for providing social-emotional learning to gifted children

As the demand for adequate social-emotional learning grows globally, in the United States there has been an emphasis on the power of affective education. Dr Derek Cavilla, from the University of Central Florida, has developed a framework called Cavilla's Taxonomy of Affective Curriculum for Gifted Learners, which aims to help gifted learners achieve their potential through the power of social-emotional learning. Through this method, gifted children learn a willingness to view failure as opportunity and the ability to set meaningful goals.



In recent years, social-emotional learning has emerged as an important component of school education. Indeed, research indicates that affective development may be as critical as intellectual growth to students' education. However, there is a lack of practical guidance for teachers on how best to deliver social-emotional learning, despite evidence that its integration into school curricula can improve academic performance. The need for an affective curriculum that encompasses social-emotional learning is even more acute for gifted learners. These gifted children tend to have high emotional intensity and moral awareness, but they may also experience frustration at the repetition and rigidity of their school curriculum. This may have a counter-effective outcome in terms of the student's overall performance, causing them to lack motivation and focus.

The taxonomy developed by Derek Cavilla aims not only to address this problem of underachievement of gifted learners, but goes much further than that and strives to enable them to maximise their opportunities while being able to make moral and ethical judgements. In short, its purpose is to give the

gifted student the highest levels of both cognitive and emotional intelligence. To date, there has been a lack of support for affective growth, and this, Cavilla observed, can often lead to poor impulse control and a tendency to lose emotional control as a result of the lowered self-esteem that comes with underachievement.

Indeed, over time, this may lead to more serious mental health issues such as depression. Some students may even be observed to have learning disabilities or a behavioural disorder. Although most gifted learners do grow into successful, healthy and well-adjusted individuals, we should question our definition of the concept of 'success', as this is often measured purely in terms of a person's intellectual abilities. Cavilla argues that, by not taking into account social-emotional development, educators are not looking at the whole picture and therefore gifted learners are not reaching their full potential. Research indicates that gifted learners have a greater ability to develop social-emotional capacity. So, emotional and cognitive development would seem to go hand-in-hand; by nourishing one aspect, the other also becomes enhanced.

## TAXONOMY OF AFFECTIVE CURRICULUM FOR GIFTED LEARNERS

The framework for social-emotional learning developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) served as a basis for Cavilla's proposed taxonomy of affective curriculum for gifted learners. The journey

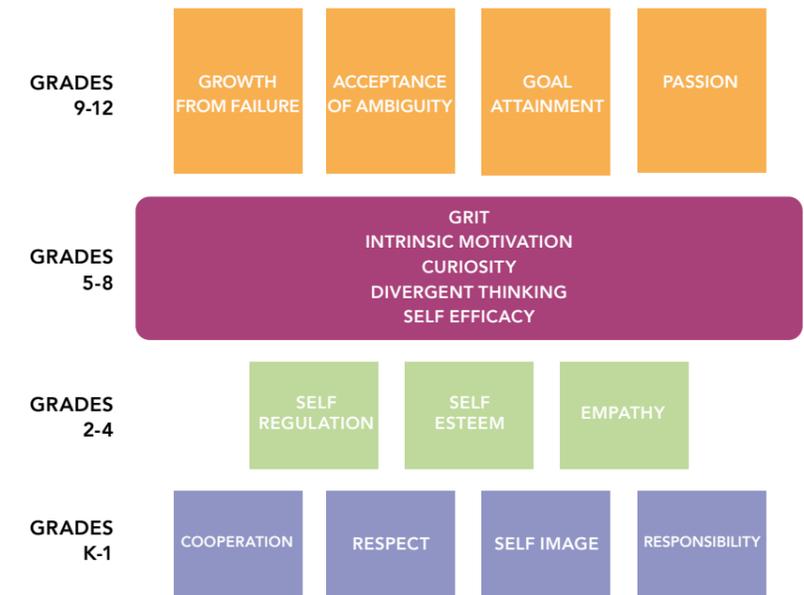
begins in the early years of a child's education, in kindergarten. Social skills such as cooperation and responsibility can be developed at this age, as can the importance of respect.

Learning respect for the school environment and for those providing learning can help students to see themselves as important participants in the setting and to behave appropriately towards others in it. In addition to cooperation, respect, and responsibility, self-image is an important construct for gifted learners who should accept that their giftedness is a positive. If viewed in this light, it will help the gifted learner to feel valued and included, enabling them to develop the intellectual and affective skills to become a well-rounded individual capable of reaching his or her full potential.

In the CASEL framework, each of the four skills at level 1 (cooperation, respect, responsibility and self-image) are linked to one or more of five pillars: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship management. The application of this in a learning environment helps students understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. For gifted students, the development of these competencies can help them see themselves as a successful participant within the developmental process.

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## TAXONOMY OF AFFECTIVE CURRICULUM FOR GIFTED LEARNERS



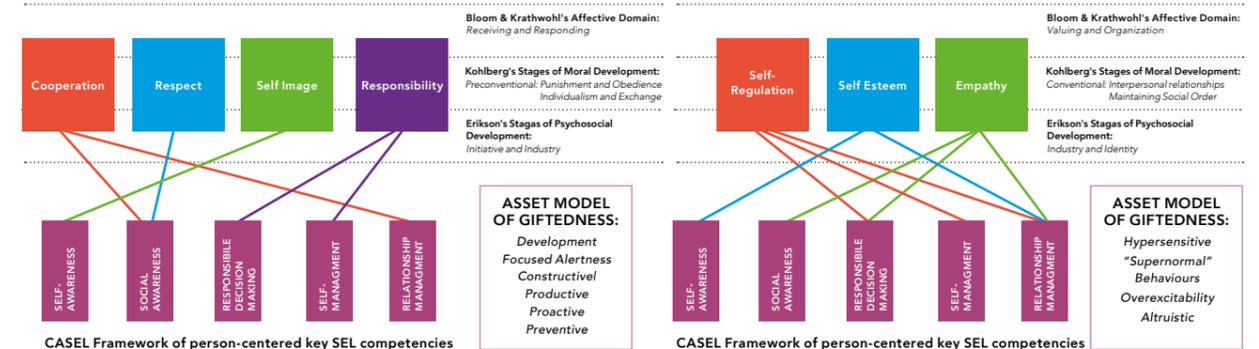
Cavilla's taxonomy of affective curriculum begins in kindergarten with basic social skills. As students progress through their school career, the taxonomy adapts with the changing needs of gifted learners.

**The need for an affective curriculum that encompasses social-emotional learning is even more acute for gifted learners.**

needs of gifted learners. At level 2 (US grades 2 to 4), students move on from the acceptance of their role as a learner to managing their behaviour, impulse control and time management and to begin learning self-regulation. They will also begin to develop a sense of self-esteem, realising that their giftedness is a positive aspect of their personality and sense of self. The construct of empathy also begins to develop, encompassing the

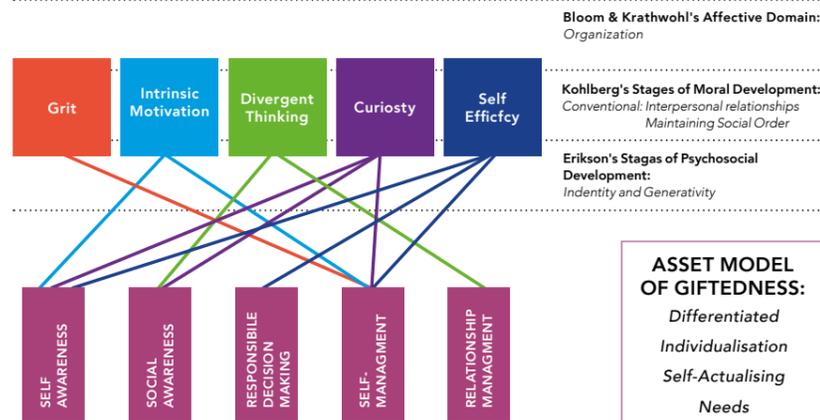
skills of cooperation and respect learned earlier. Gifted learners may already have a well-developed sense of empathy and this will help them in learning decision-making skills, by enabling them to consider others.

At level 3 (grades 5 to 8), aspects such as grit, intrinsic motivation, curiosity, divergent thinking and self-efficacy become important. As students learn that perseverance and passion can help them



Each of the four skills children learn at level 1 (kindergarten - grade 1) are linked to one or more of five pillars. This is supposed to help students to apply their skills in a learning environment.

As the students reach level 2 of their school careers (US grades 2-4), the taxonomy of affective curriculum adapts with the changing needs of gifted learners.



**CASEL Framework of person-centered key SEL competencies**

At level 3 (grades 5 to 8), the focus shifts to the student, with the teacher becoming more of a 'coach' than an 'instructor'. At this stage, skills like grit, intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy become important.

achieve their goals, they become excited and confident about their achievements. Divergent thinking means that students learn how to come up with a range of solutions to problems. Self-efficacy refers to the expectation that the student will be able to achieve a task. Overall, for gifted students, the focus of an affective education shifts from external to internal,

as a result of frustration and confusion at the advanced academic expectations put on them.

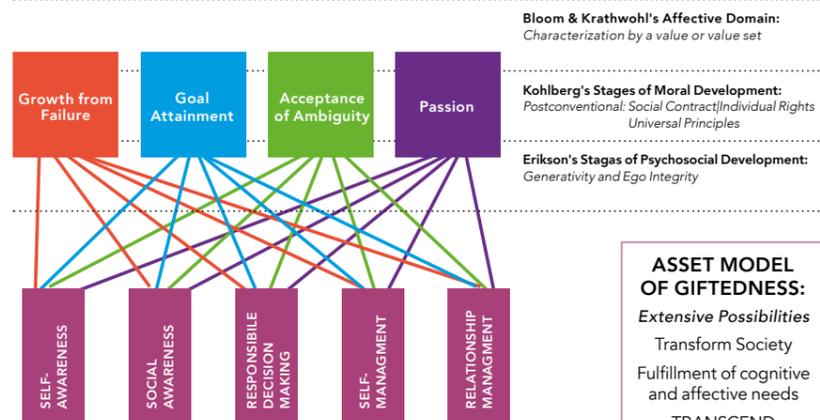
At the final level, which encompasses grades 9 to 12, attributes such as growth from failure become important as the student starts to see failure as an opportunity for growth. Acceptance of

**ASSET MODEL OF GIFTEDNESS:**  
Differentiated Individualisation  
Self-Actualising Needs

**Educators should help gifted learners become leaders, not only for themselves but for society and humanity as a whole**

with the skills of self-awareness and self-management becoming critical. Effectively, the focus shifts to the student, with the teacher becoming more of a 'coach' than an 'instructor'. At this stage, 'grit' is important as gifted learners must overcome the obstacles that may arise

ambiguity is also important, as is goal attainment and passion. The ultimate goal of the taxonomy of affective curriculum is to enable gifted learners to apply the knowledge, resources, and potential impact of his or her passion to his or her field of study, organisation, or society at



**CASEL Framework of person-centered key SEL competencies**

At the final level, which encompasses US grades 9 to 12, attributes such as growth from failure, goal attainment, acceptance of ambiguity and passion become most important.

**ASSET MODEL OF GIFTEDNESS:**  
Extensive Possibilities  
Transform Society  
Fulfillment of cognitive and affective needs  
TRANSCEND

large. This has important potential impacts on the progress of society as a whole.

**CONCLUSION**

While social-emotional learning has been shown to increase academic performance and improve students' self-image, when the student is gifted, the potential benefits of social-emotional learning become even greater. It can mitigate the struggles some experience due to the disconnect between the student's psychological and actual age. There have, therefore, been calls to consider the particular needs of gifted learners in terms of teaching both an academic and affective curriculum. It has also been suggested that social-emotional learning has an economic benefit in terms of increasing the earning potential of individuals with highly developed social-emotional skills.

The most important consequence at the end of the learning journey, however, is the gifted learner (with highly developed emotional, moral and social skills) him or herself, and the impact they can have on the way society functions. Currently, emotional and moral intelligence are valued by modern corporations and organisations, as much as, or even more than academic performance. Perhaps it would be useful to change the definition of 'giftedness' to incorporate social-emotional aspects as well as just intellectual ability. This would lead to gifted education automatically including affective education aspects, which may lead to greater social equity. The framework presented by Cavilla offers a basis for helping achieve this.

Dr Derek Cavilla presents this new definition of giftedness, which incorporates not only the impact on the individual of intellectual and affective development, but considers the impact on society at large, since the gifted individual with well-developed social-emotional skills exhibits 'qualities of personal leadership, empathy, respect, and an appreciation for both humanity and the world that we share'. Educators should help gifted learners to reach their potential to become leaders with these qualities, not only for themselves but for society and humanity as a whole. To have such an impact on the world means that we need to remove the barriers that currently exist in education that prevent gifted learners from reaching their full potential.



**Behind the Research**  
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**Research Objectives**

Dr Cavilla's work helps gifted and talented learners develop social and emotional skills.

**Detail**

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**Bio**

Dr Cavilla's research focuses on how to maximise students' success through social-emotional learning (SEL) and how to better identify and support underachieving and twice-exceptional students. He has held various roles, including: fifth grade teacher, high school English teacher, university professor as well as school-based administrator in both Florida and California.

**Personal Response**

**What led you to examine social-emotional learning in gifted learners in particular?**

From my first days as a teacher, I noticed that my gifted students were significantly more sensitive to comments made toward themselves and others — often resulting in outbursts or total shutdowns in the classroom. These intense emotional reactions were unlike their same age peers and required significantly more time to resolve. My empathy for these students drove me to study the foundations of affective (social-emotional) education in my graduate studies. Since then, I have been able to support students, teachers, and, perhaps most importantly, their parents to better understand the critical need to help gifted children better understand the reasons why they may feel different from their peers as well as how to develop coping strategies to alleviate the struggles of asynchronous development.