



AFRICA AND EDUCATION

2030 AGENDA

Edited by:

J.A. Ademokoya

R.A. Aderinoye

Tolulope V. Gbadamosi



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J.A. ADEMOKOYA
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Abstract: *The paper examined the meaning and concept of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations. It must be noted that the broad goals are interrelated though each has its own targets to achieve. The paper further discussed the role gifted and talented persons can play in realizing the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals. The reasons why gifted students need the help of school guidance counsellors were stressed, while the way to meet these needs were elaborately discussed. Academic, career/vocational, social and affective needs of gifted students and areas for which they may require specialized assistance were also presented. The counselling strategies to be used in meeting these needs were pointed out. A conclusion was drawn and recommendations were made.*

Keywords: Gifted and Talented Students, The 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development, Counselling Needs.

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda can also be referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. They are also known as the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations. The broad goals are interrelated though each has its own targets to achieve. The total number of targets is one hundred and sixty nine (169). The SDGs cover a broad range of social and economic development issues. These include poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanization, environment and social justice.

The goals were developed to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015. Unlike the MDGs, the SDG framework does not distinguish between “developed” and “developing nations. Instead, the goals apply to all countries. “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” including its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets was adopted on September 25, 2015 by Heads of States and Governments at a Special United Nations Summit. The Agenda is a Commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030 world-wide, ensuring that no one is left behind. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was a landmark achievement, providing a shared global vision towards sustainable development for all.

The 2030 Agenda itself consists of 4 sections namely: a Political Declaration, a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, means of implementation and a framework for following and review of the Agenda. The scale, ambition and approach of the Agenda are unprecedented. One key feature is that the SDGs are global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account national realities, capacities and levels of development and specific challenges. All countries have a shared responsibility to achieve the SDGs, and all have a meaningful role to play locally, nationally as well as on the global scale.

In addition, the 2030 Agenda integrates in a balanced manner the three dimensions of sustainable development-economic, social and environmental. The 2030 Agenda is also indivisible, in a sense that it must be implemented as a whole, in an integrated rather than a fragmented manner, recognizing that the different goals and targets are closely interlinked. The 2030 Agenda is based on the concept of global partnership, supported by a comprehensive approach to the mobilization of all means of implementation, and is complemented by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which is an integral part.

The role gifted and talented persons can play in realizing the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations cannot be overemphasized. Every nation, without exception, depends on its gifted and talented persons for economic and technological advancement. Therefore any nation or country that is being transformed economically and technologically can be said to have been totally delivered from poverty and penury. Furthermore, such a nation could be referred to as having achieved Sustainable Development which the 2030 Agenda is all about.

Gifted and talented students are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programmes and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school programme in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination. General intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts and psychomotor ability.

It is generally believed that gifted and talented students are very brilliant, smart and exceptionally intelligent and as such, do not need the services of guidance counsellors in schools. This particular notion prompted the researcher to examine the gifted and talented students and the 2030 Agenda and shed light into areas where these students need the services of school guidance counsellors. Finally, the way and manner those needs could be met were also looked into.

Meeting the Needs of Gifted Students through Counselling

Most recently, special conferences, seminars and workshops designed to help guidance counsellors and other support services personnel to better meet the needs of high ability students, have been offered by colleges and universities, state boards of education, professional organizations (such as the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and Supporting the Needs of the Gifted (SENG)) and independent professional development providers.

However, the vast majority of both elementary and secondary school counsellors today are unaware of the unique guidance and counselling needs of the gifted and talented students they serve, and are unable to provide the types of specialized services that these students require. The primary cause of this deficit appears to be the reported lack of attention that school counsellor training programmes give to the gifted and talented as a special population. According to a 2005 study of nationally accredited graduate programmes in school guidance counselling (Peterson and Wachter, 2012), the preparatory curricula for most programmes provided little, if any, information concerning the characteristics, social and emotional development, or differentiated counselling needs of gifted students. Clearly, without any educational

background or training, few practicing school counsellors may have sufficient knowledge about the special guidance and counselling needs of gifted and talented learners to be effective with this population, and may be unaware of the complexity of related concerns and unequipped to respond appropriately to them (Peterson, 2012).

Apart from a lack of preparation in how best to provide guidance and counselling services for gifted and talented students, Peterson (2013) noted that school counsellors may also “have attitudes and biases that preclude trusting relationships, and therefore effective work with them”. For instance when asked how he worked with high ability students, one veteran school counsellor responded that bright students do not really need counsellors for much of anything because they are smart enough to figure things out for themselves. This attitude seems to be quite pervasive. According to Lovecky (2013) and Peterson (2013), the common myth among educators, counsellors, school psychologists and even mental health professionals, is that gifted and talented students do not require any additional guidance or special assistance because of their high abilities. The inability and possible resistance of school counsellors to provide appropriate guidance and counselling services for gifted learners is an issue which has long been overlooked, and which presents a frustrating educational and developmental dilemma: if school counsellors cannot or will not provide the kind of specialized support and guidance in academic, career/vocational social and emotional domains that gifted and talented students truly need, then who will?

According to Colengelo (2012), no counselling professional is likely to have as much contact with gifted and talented students as the school counsellors. Due to the nature of their roles, school counsellors are uniquely qualified to provide the types of services and resources that can benefit these students. School counsellors are specially trained to implement comprehensive, developmental programmes that promote and enhance student achievement and to provide assistance in academic, career, and personal/social domains. Since school counsellors are in a position to form open, trusting relationship with students, they can provide individual nurturing and support or offer group counselling assistance covering a variety of topics. They can also monitor students' academic progress and provide guidance with appropriate course selection, career planning, post-secondary school education options, special programmes and enrichment opportunities. In addition to their direct contact

with students, school counsellors can provide resources, share information, and work collaboratively with teachers and parents to help meet the specific needs of exceptional students.

Peterson (2013) observed that having exceptional ability does not exempt even the brightest children “from formidable challenges as they navigate through the school years”. Since parents or other family members may not have the necessary background and because teachers of the gifted usually do not have the training required to assist students with affective, career, or psychosocial concerns, school counsellors can be key figures in responding to and serving those needs. Both Cross (2014) and Silverman (2013) asserted that proactive counselling programmes for gifted and talented students are invaluable because of the positive effect on their psychological and social development and because support and guidance can help these students find their way through a public education system that is not necessarily designed to maximize or promote their success.

Why Specialized Services?

Although definitions of “giftedness” vary to some extent, most tend to convey that the development and experience of gifted children is unique and significantly different from that of non-gifted children. One popular definition by the Columbus Group (2014) even suggests the need for specialized counselling by saying that “Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counselling in order for them to develop optimally”.

Social and emotional difficulties may arise because of gifted children’s asynchronous or uneven development, exceptional abilities, notable talent, and can be especially problematic during the teenage years. Moon (2012) reported that “Counselors who work with gifted children and adolescents agreed that these young people have unique social and emotional issues related to their giftedness. The most common counseling needs of this population is assistance in coping in a society that does not always recognize, understand, or welcome giftedness”.

While gifted children are generally reported to be as socially and emotionally adjusted as their non-gifted peers and share many of the guidance and counselling needs common to all students, current literature points out a variety of areas and conditions for which they may require special assistance. These include: depression (Neihart, 2012, Silverman, 2013), emotional intensity and heightened sensitivity, feeling different from others (Coleman and Cross, 2011; Cross, 2011), perfectionism (Schuler, 2012), social isolation (Silverman, 2013), social skills deficits and peer relationship issues (Moon, Kelly and Feldhusen, 2017), and stress management problems (Moon, 2012; Webb, 2014). Cross (2014) adds that the social and emotional needs of gifted children are not static, but are greatly influenced by the environment in which the child exists and the culture in which he or she is immersed. An additional concern then is that these issues alone or in combination, can complicate other types of problems and situations that school counsellors frequently encounter on the job, such as parent separation or divorce, an unstable home life, personality conflicts, grief, behavioural issues, or motivational deficits. Some difficulties may be further compounded in students with dual or multiple exceptionalities who may not have effective coping skills, or who may already be cognitively or affectively overwhelmed in school (Silverman, 2013).

Academically, the intellectual abilities of gifted students differ both quantitatively and qualitatively from average children (Cottrel and Shaughnessy, 2015). They learn at a faster pace, think or process more deeply, and require less repetition or practice to master assigned material, thus, warranting greater educational challenge in their course work (Coleman and Cross, 2011). However, if left academically unchallenged, these students can become bored and exhibit disruptive behaviours. Lack of goals, motivation or direction, and failure to develop self-regulatory strategies can impact the academic performance of high ability students for a variety of reasons (Siegle and McCoach, 2012). Gifted and talented learners may also feel pressure to live up to the expectations of parents, teachers and other significant adults in their lives and many have a fear of failure, experience frustration, and underachieve in school (Schuler, 2012; Silverman, 2013).

Since exceptional talent or high ability does not necessarily translate into insightful college and career planning, gifted students may also require special assistance in these areas. Many gifted students have difficulty with multipotentiality, finding it difficult to narrow down their career choices

simply because they are capable of doing so many things extremely well (Greene, 2012; Silverman, 2013). Such indecision in career selection may be manifested in avoidance or delay in career decision-making or frequent change of college major and may result in extended post-secondary education or completely dropping out of college (Frederickson, 2016; Green, 2017). Gifted students who have made early, perhaps premature, career choices may actually limit further exploration of other career possibilities and may not consider the important elements of thoughtful planning, persistence, financial dependence, or self-sacrifice that may be involved. Career exploration for gifted students can also be affected by uncontrollable factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, value conflicts, or chance events (Greene, 2012).

Summarily, research confirms that the degree to which the educational needs of the gifted are met is a significant factor in their overall social and emotional development or adjustment (Colangelo, 2012). From their works with educational institutions nationwide, Davidson and Davidson (2014) reported that schools that meet the needs of gifted learners have many things in common including the recognition of their special career planning and counselling needs. For school counsellors and other support services providers, it seems clear that gifted and talented students would be better served in school settings if their unique academic, social, emotional and career planning needs were addressed through specialized guidance and counselling services adapted to meet those needs, and designed to provide appropriate interventions and support.

A Mission for the Counselling Profession

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Ethical Standards (2014) and most state standards for school counselling professionals, one of the primary roles of school counsellors is to promote the educational development of all students. Specific responsibilities to students mentioned in the ASCA standards include concern for the educational, academic, career, personal, and social needs of every student. Clearly, providing for all students includes gifted and talented learners. Yet, how are school counsellors to provide the specialized guidance and support services that these students require if they have little or knowledge of their characteristics or their unique academic, social, emotional or career needs?

Another interesting feature of the ASCA Ethical Standards (2014) and many state support services programme standards is the recommendation that school counsellors have knowledge of current and relevant literature, research and resources, and that they acquire educational or training experiences to increase their awareness or skills in working with diverse populations, including those with special needs. The ASCA also issued a revised position statement in 2017 concerning gifted and talented programmes which includes the recognition that gifted and talented students have unique and diverse needs, and the ability of professional school counsellors to meet those needs is imperative. Further, the school counsellor's role should include assisting in identifying these students, promoting the understanding and awareness of special issues that may affect them, collaborating with other school personnel to maximize their educational opportunities, and advocating for the inclusion of activities that address their social, emotional, academic and career needs.

In addition to the ASCA Ethical Standards, The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) advocated that (as part of gifted education programming), a plan be designed "to recognize and nurture the unique socio-emotional development of gifted learners" and further advised that awareness of these needs and of best counselling practices are essential (Landrum, Callahan and Shaklee, 2011). Beyond just gifted education programming, Colangelo (2012) stressed that "Gifted students need the assistance and nurturing counselors can provide. It will be a sign of effective schooling when counselors regularly use their skills and expertise with gifted and talented students in their schools".

What has become clear from the literature is that gifted and talented students are a population that are exceptional and should be entitled to school guidance and counselling services. It is important not to confuse the apparent lack of experience or training in how to provide specialized guidance and counselling services to gifted learners with a lack of legitimate need for those services to be provided. It is the professional responsibility of all school counsellors to become familiar with relevant literature, pursue appropriate and necessary training or education and find or create ways to more effectively meet the academic, career, social and emotional needs of the gifted and talented students they serve. In this way, school counsellors can better ensure that they are indeed working to meet the needs of all students; a mission that is ethical in practice, long overdue and definitely necessary.

Conclusion

Counselling gifted students and their families is one of the most challenging and rewarding functions for a counsellor. Gifted students have tremendous variability not only in their cognitive capacity, but in their affective development. While there are clearly common themes to the social-emotional issues confronting gifted students, there are profound individual differences among gifted students. The business of school counsellors is to help young people recognize who they are, make decisions, and develop their potential. Gifted students need the assistance and nurturing which counsellors can provide. It will be a sign of effective schooling when counsellors regularly use their skills and expertise with gifted and talented students in their schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby given to the government, parents and teachers of the gifted:

- The state and the federal governments should ensure that an adequate number of school guidance counsellors are posted to all primary and secondary schools in the country.
- From time to time, the government should organize trainings for school guidance counsellors whereby professionals in the field of gifted and talented education train the school counsellors about the characteristics of gifted students, as well as their needs and aspirations. Through this, the school counsellors will discover that gifted students also need counselling in so many areas.
- Gifted students (as well as their parents and teachers), must also be educated to cancel the erroneous belief that high ability/gifted students are so smart that they can always solve all their problems without the help of any school counsellor. By so doing, their parents and teachers will always refer gifted students to the school counsellors when the need arises. The gifted students themselves will also know the type of cases they can take to the school counsellor.

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