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Research article

Evidence-Based Practice and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)

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Abstract. Effectively translating research into practice—and ensuring that practitioners can both implement findings and provide feedback on their real-world relevance—is a vital yet complex endeavor. In today’s fast-paced research environment, where new studies emerge rapidly and policy decisions are expected to be evidence-based, the gap between scientific knowledge and educational practice is becoming increasingly pronounced. Unfortunately, the field of education offers limited guidance on how to facilitate this kind of two-way exchange. In the absence of such structured translation, misconceptions can take root—among both researchers and practitioners—fueling persistent misunderstandings. This narrative review addresses several enduring myths in gifted education that have emerged from this disconnect. These myths, often grounded in outdated or misinterpreted research, have contributed to the formation of self-fulfilling prophecies in gifted and talented education (GATE), reinforcing inequities and limiting student potential. Some of these beliefs have become deeply embedded in educational culture, making them exceptionally resistant to change. The paper concludes with a call to action: to foster more deliberation and reciprocal communication among researchers, educators, and families. Only through such collaboration can we dismantle entrenched myths, correct misunderstandings, and ensure that the most current and accurate research insights lead to meaningful, equitable practices in classrooms and beyond.

Keywords: Gifted and talented education (GATE), evidence-based practice, self-fulfilling prophecies, educational decision-making, research-practice gap

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Introduction

There is no definitive global count of students enrolled in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs due to varying definitions, policies, and data-collection methods across countries. In the United States alone, about 6% of public-school students—roughly 3 million—participate in such programs. Internationally, countries such as Australia, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, and Russia have developed their own approaches, ranging from decentralized systems to limited national policies. While exact numbers are unavailable, conservative estimates suggest that tens of millions of students worldwide may be involved in gifted education through formal programs, selective schools, or enrichment initiatives. In fact, according to the most recent global estimates, there are approximately 2.4 billion children under 18 worldwide [data.unicef.org]. Of these, the 5–18 age group—which typically participates in gifted services—comprises about 1.7–1.8 billion children. Applying the U.S. estimate of 6% to this global population suggests that up to 105 million children worldwide might be involved in various programs for the gifted and talented.

Similarly, there is currently no comprehensive global estimate of the total cost of GATE programs worldwide. This is primarily due to the high variability in program structure, funding models, and national priorities across countries. Most gifted education programs are funded at local or regional levels, and many countries do not track or report spending in a standardized way. In the United States, for example, gifted programs (e.g., enrichment, single-subject or grade acceleration, magnet, and standalone programs) are typically funded by state, district, or family budgets, with no federal mandate for consistent funding. Costs can include specialized staff, curriculum development, testing, and enrichment activities. A basic cost-benefit analysis suggests that while enrichment programs are relatively inexpensive, more intensive interventions such as acceleration or specialized schools can be significantly more costly, with the financial implications varying across students, families, and educational institutions.¹ Specifically, Warne's analysis of the available sources (Assouline et al., 2015; Bui et al., 2014; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Kim, 2016; Klugman, 2013; Miravete, 2023; Warne, 2017a, 2017b; Warne & Liu, 2017) indicated that full-grade acceleration offers the greatest academic and financial advantages for students. For parents, participation in gifted education programs typically has a minimal or neutral financial impact—unless their child skips a grade and assumes a larger share of college expenses earlier than expected. The financial implications for schools are more variable: enrichment programs, single-subject acceleration, and specialized or magnet tracks can lead to widely differing costs and benefits. Even full-grade acceleration presents a mixed picture—while it can result in significant savings for state governments, local school districts often face financial losses when students advance grades ahead of schedule.

¹ Warne, R.T. (2023, October 25). *The costs and benefits of gifted programs*. Retrieved November 10, 2025, from <https://russellwarne.com/2023/02/22/who-benefits-from-gifted-programs/>

Globally, the cost of GATE programs likely ranges from hundreds of millions to several billion dollars annually, depending on the scope and scale of implementation. However, without centralized data, this remains an informed approximation rather than a precise figure.

Correspondingly, given the substantial number of children served by GATE programs and the high costs these programs entail, it becomes critical to ensure that the resources invested are directed toward the most effective, evidence-based practices in both assessment and instruction. This raises an essential question: What do we actually know about such practices within the context of GATE?

Evidence-based education (EBE) is an approach that combines rigorous research with professional expertise to improve teaching and learning. It relies on empirical evidence—such as randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews—to identify what works, while integrating educators' judgment to adapt strategies to local contexts and individual needs. EBE emphasizes data-driven decision-making, using student performance data to refine instruction, and helps schools avoid unproven trends or myths, such as learning styles. By applying proven methods, EBE enhances student outcomes, promotes accountability and transparency, and bridges the gap between research and classroom practice. In essence, it ensures informed choices that maximize learning through the synergy of solid research and professional insight. EBE practices are verified through a systematic process that includes, in the USA, consulting trusted databases like What Works Clearinghouse, WWC ([WWC | Find What Works!](#)), Evidence for the Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA ([Home—Evidence for ESSA](#)), and, in the UK, the Education Endowment Foundation, EEF ([Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)), which rate programs based on rigorous research standards. Educators also review peer-reviewed studies in academic sources such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycInfo, and PubMed, focusing on research that uses experimental designs, control groups, and replicable results. Additionally, credible programs provide documentation, including research summaries, citations, and outcome data. Finally, evaluators ask critical questions about the program's research support, replication, alignment with educational theory, and measurable, culturally relevant outcomes to ensure validity and effectiveness.

EBE in GATE focuses on applying research-supported strategies to identification, curriculum design, and instructional practices. Systematic reviews and guides, such as *Best Practices in Gifted Education* (Robinson et al., 2007), highlight 29 evidence-based approaches, including curriculum compacting, flexible grouping, inquiry-based learning, and early literacy interventions for precocious readers. Programs like the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, SEM² (Renzulli & Reis, 2021), and enrichment pedagogy emphasize differentiation, interest-based learning,

² SEM is an approach that aims to foster engagement and talent development for all students, not just those formally identified as gifted. It provides enrichment opportunities schoolwide through three components: Type I activities introduce students to new topics and experiences; Type II activities build skills in thinking, research, and communication; and Type III activities involve independent or small-group investigations of real-world problems. By emphasizing differentiation, student choice, and interest-driven learning, SEM creates an environment where every learner can pursue advanced-level work aligned with personal passions.

and project-based approaches, all backed by longitudinal studies showing positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes. Research also stresses the use of equitable identification methods to include culturally diverse and low-income learners, as well as support for twice-exceptional students. There are numerous models of giftedness, such as the Actiotope Model of Giftedness, AMG³ (Ziegler & Stoeger, 2017), and the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent, DMGT⁴ (Gagné, 2013). There is also work emphasizing using psychological science and empirical research to guide policy and practice (Subotnik et al., 2011). While numerous theories and models address giftedness, talent development, cognitive ability, and intelligence—each emphasizing different priorities and outcomes—the Talent Development Mega Model, TDMM⁵ (Subotnik et al., 2023) stands out for its robust research foundation and practical relevance. It offers valuable guidance for educational leaders and administrators in shaping budgetary and programmatic strategies that yield meaningful benefits both in the short term and over the long haul, for individuals and society alike. Overall, EBE in gifted education bridges research and practice by promoting empirically validated, adaptable strategies that maximize talent development across diverse contexts.

Yet Dai and colleagues (2011) argued that the absence of a well-defined disciplinary structure in gifted education has led to fragmented research, with a lack of conceptual precision, methodological rigor, and clear evaluative standards. In response, scholars have long emphasized the need for a sustained and coherent research foundation, along with the development of evidence-based practices to guide the education of gifted and talented learners (Dai, 2017; Hernández-Torrano & Kuzhabekova, 2020; Lee & Gentry, 2023; Parker et al., 2010; Walsh et al., 2012). As Jolly and Kettler (2008) note, regardless of specifics of the argument, the field recognizes that systematically examining its research is essential for identifying priorities and effective practices. Echoing this view, VanTassel-Baska (2018)

³ AMG is a systemic framework that views giftedness not as a fixed trait but as the result of dynamic interactions between an individual and their environment. Rather than focusing solely on innate ability, AMG emphasizes that exceptional performance emerges from a person's "actiotope"—the totality of their actions and the surrounding environment. This model highlights co-evolution: individuals adapt their actions while environments provide resources and opportunities, creating a feedback loop that fosters talent development.

⁴ DMGT distinguishes between giftedness (natural abilities or aptitudes) and talent (systematically developed skills in specific fields). According to DMGT, giftedness refers to exceptional potential in areas such as intellectual, creative, socio-affective, or sensorimotor domains, while talent emerges when these natural abilities are transformed through developmental processes like training, practice, and environmental influences. The model also emphasizes catalysts—intrapersonal factors (e.g., motivation) and environmental factors (e.g., family, education)—that facilitate or hinder this transformation.

⁵ TDMM is a comprehensive framework developed to conceptualize giftedness as a dynamic, developmental process rather than a fixed trait. Rather than focusing solely on early indicators of potential, the TDMM emphasizes the progression from potential to competence, then to expertise, and ultimately to eminence in a specific domain. It integrates insights from research on giftedness, talent, expertise, and high performance, highlighting the importance of domain-specific abilities, access to learning and mentoring opportunities, and the development of psychosocial skills such as motivation, resilience, and self-regulation. The model underscores that talent development is influenced by both individual characteristics and environmental factors, and it advocates for equitable access to resources and support systems that nurture talent across diverse populations and domains—including academics, the arts, sports, and professions.

contends that a structured, long-term research agenda is critical for advancing the field and integrating ideas into policies and practical applications.

Bridging the gap between academic research and practical application in education is both a thrilling and challenging endeavor. Innovations born in academia often take time to influence classroom practice, partly due to the complexity and cost of implementation. Engaging with educators to determine which research findings are immediately actionable, which require further observation, and which may be less relevant is a nuanced process—especially when misconceptions are widespread (Heyder et al., 2018). Translating scholarly insights into usable strategies requires a distinct expertise—one that neither researchers nor practitioners inherently possess. This translation process also highlights areas of the field that remain underexplored or underdeveloped, pointing to opportunities for further inquiry. Notably, there is no standardized method for distilling research into practitioner-friendly guidance.

The disconnect between research and practice is so pronounced that fields like medicine have introduced “translational research” to address it—a model that fosters a two-way exchange between theory and practice. In education, this approach can help debunk persistent myths that thrive in the absence of mutual understanding. Importantly, misconceptions exist on both sides: practitioners may misinterpret research, and researchers may hold unrealistic assumptions about classroom realities. Thus, translational efforts must be reciprocal, aiming to clarify and correct misunderstandings wherever they arise. While this paper focuses on misconceptions within educational practice, the misconceptions held by researchers themselves remain a topic for another discussion.

There is a well-established connection between educational myths and self-fulfilling prophecies, as documented in both sociological and psychological research. In this context, a *myth* refers to a widely accepted but often unverified belief about students, learning, or teaching—such as the notions that “intelligence is fixed and unchangeable” or that “Gifted students don’t need support—they’ll succeed on their own.” These beliefs, though not grounded in evidence, can shape educators’ expectations and behaviors in powerful ways. A *self-fulfilling prophecy*, a concept introduced by sociologist Robert K. Merton (1948), describes a false assumption that, through its influence on behavior, becomes true. In schools, this often unfolds through teacher expectations and the labels assigned to students. For instance, if a teacher believes that students from a particular neighborhood are high-achieving, they may—consciously or not—offer those students more encouragement, challenging material, and positive feedback. Students, in turn, may internalize these expectations, increasing their motivation and performance, which then appears to validate the original belief. This cycle reinforces the myth and perpetuates systemic biases.

This dynamic is closely related to *labeling theory*, which posits that individuals tend to conform to the expectations associated with the labels they are given (Brigandi et al., 2018). In education, labels such as “gifted,” “creative,” “underachiever,” or “troublemaker” can significantly influence a student’s academic path and self-concept. Myths function as cognitive shortcuts, simplifying complex

realities but often at the expense of accuracy and fairness. When these myths become institutionalized, they can shape policies and practices—such as ability grouping or access to gifted programs—in ways that reinforce inequities. In the field of GATE, these dynamics are especially pronounced. Myths about who is “gifted” often rest on narrow or biased conceptions of intelligence and potential. The Pygmalion effect—where high expectations lead to improved performance—and its counterpart, the Golem effect—where low expectations result in poorer outcomes—together illustrate the powerful influence of teacher beliefs on student achievement. When educators assume a student is capable and likely to succeed, they often provide more support, encouragement, and challenging opportunities, which can boost the student’s confidence and performance. Conversely, when expectations are low, students may receive less attention or fewer opportunities, potentially leading to disengagement and underachievement. These dynamics underscore how educator perceptions, even when based on unfounded assumptions or myths, can shape student trajectories in profound and lasting ways. To counteract these self-fulfilling cycles, it is essential to engage in reflective teaching, use data to inform decisions, and commit to equitable talent development. Translational research, which bridges the gap between academic findings and classroom practice, plays a critical role in identifying and dismantling these myths before they become entrenched in educational systems.

This commentary is structured as an exploration of enduring myths in the field of gifted education—misconceptions that have often emerged from misinterpretations or oversimplifications of research findings. We aim to examine how recent scholarship has challenged and dismantled these myths and to invite further dialogue between researchers and practitioners. In preparing this paper, we relied upon leading journals in the field of giftedness, including *Gifted Child Quarterly* (National Association for Gifted Children), *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* (Association for the Gifted), *Talent Development and Excellence* (International Research Association for Talent Development and Excellence), *Roeper Review* (Roeper Institute), *High Ability Studies* (European Council for High Ability), and *Gifted and Talented International* (World Council for Gifted and Talented Children). The specific myths addressed here are drawn from a series of concise articles published in *Gifted Child Quarterly* in 1982 (15) and 2009 (19), or counted differently by other authors (Grigorenko, 2010; Winner, 1996). By revisiting these misconceptions through the lens of current research, this commentary aims to serve as a bridge between scholarly inquiry and classroom practice, and to spark meaningful conversation about the future of gifted education—both in research and in real-world application.

Myth 1: Giftedness Has a Single, Fixed Definition—You Either Have It or You Don’t

One of the most persistent misconceptions in gifted education is the belief that giftedness is a singular, innate trait—something a person either possesses or lacks. This myth, rooted in Lewis Terman’s early 20th-century work (1925), has

proven stubbornly resistant to change, despite decades of research challenging its assumptions (Lubinski, 2016). At the heart of this myth are several flawed ideas: that giftedness is purely hereditary and evident from birth; that gifted individuals are a uniform group; and that a single, universal definition or test can reliably identify them. These ideas ignore the substantial diversity among gifted learners and oversimplify the complex interplay of cognitive, motivational, cultural, and contextual factors that contribute to talent development. Current research has consistently demonstrated that giftedness is not one-dimensional. Scholars have identified numerous dimensions of variability among gifted individuals, including differences in cognitive abilities, motivation, cultural background, educational experiences, and domains of achievement (Reis & Renzulli, 2009). As such, reducing giftedness to a high IQ score—regardless of how selective the cutoff—remains both scientifically unfounded and educationally limiting (Borland, 2009), even though the practice persists (Warne, 2016).

Over the first quarter of this century, researchers have made significant strides in developing more nuanced, inclusive, and domain-specific methods for identifying giftedness. These include innovative assessment tools that go beyond traditional IQ tests, such as new theory-based assessments (Chart et al., 2008), performance-based tasks (Belova, 2022; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007), and culturally responsive rating scales (Gentry et al., 2015; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008). Despite these advances, widespread adoption in practice has been slow. Many educational systems still rely heavily on standardized intelligence and achievement tests, prioritizing efficiency and familiarity over innovation (Mandelman et al., 2010). While some researchers (Lubinski, 2009) continue to advocate for traditional psychometric approaches, the broader field increasingly supports diversified, theory-driven identification methods. The ongoing challenge is to develop tools that are not only scientifically sound but also practical and scalable for use in real-world educational settings. Addressing this challenge remains a central focus of contemporary gifted education research.

The belief that giftedness is a fixed, innate trait—something a person either has or doesn't—can lead to powerful self-fulfilling prophecies in education. When educators rely heavily on narrow definitions of giftedness, often based solely on IQ scores, they may unintentionally limit opportunities for students who don't meet those criteria. These students are less likely to be identified for enrichment or advanced learning, which can result in lower expectations, reduced motivation, and underachievement. Over time, this reinforces the original assumption that they are not gifted, even though they possess talents that traditional measures overlooked.

To break this cycle, an inclusive, developmental approach to identifying giftedness is crucial. This involves using various assessment tools—such as performance-based tasks, culturally responsive rating scales, and domain-specific evaluations—that capture the diverse ways talent can manifest. Focusing on growth, potential, and context instead of fixed traits allows educators to recognize and nurture a broader range of abilities. By moving from a binary view of giftedness to a more dynamic and equitable model, schools can better support all students and prevent the limiting effects of outdated myths.

Myth 2: Gifts and Talents Are Inborn and Easily Identified Early in Life

A long-standing myth in gifted education is the belief that giftedness is entirely innate and can be reliably detected in early childhood. While the field's origins were indeed rooted in efforts to understand the nature of giftedness, current research shows a much more nuanced and ongoing debate (Ackerman, 2014). Scholars continue to explore the interaction between genetic predispositions (Issurin, 2017; Phillipson et al., 2023; Thompson & Oehlert, 2010; Zheng et al., 2025), such as genetic markers for sports achievement (Bıçakçı et al., 2024; Mijaica et al., 2025; Psatha et al., 2024; Webborn et al., 2015; Yao et al., 2025) and environmental influences (Dunn et al., 2025), such as deliberate practice and opportunity (Ericsson et al., 2007), in the development of talent. Rather than settling on a purely biological explanation, the field increasingly acknowledges that giftedness emerges through complex, dynamic interactions over time (Ackerman, 2014). Recent studies have focused on identifying potential in very young children, even at the preschool level (Conejeros-Solar et al., 2024; Johnsen, 2024). However, these efforts are still in early stages, focused primarily on developing appropriate tools and gathering longitudinal data. What is clear from existing research is that early identification, while potentially useful, does not guarantee the successful realization of a child's abilities. The path from early promise to long-term achievement is rarely straightforward. It includes multiple steps (e.g., talent detection, identification, development, and selection). It is shaped by a host of factors—including educational experiences, personal development, and life circumstances—making it essential to approach early identification with both caution and a long-term, developmental perspective.

Believing that giftedness is innate and can be reliably identified early in life can lead to powerful self-fulfilling prophecies. When educators assume that only those who show early signs of giftedness are truly capable, they may overlook students whose talents emerge later or in less conventional ways. Children who are not identified early may be denied access to enrichment opportunities, advanced instruction, and high expectations—limitations that can hinder their development and reinforce the perception that they lack ability. Meanwhile, those labeled as gifted early may face pressure to meet high expectations, potentially leading to anxiety, fixed mindsets, or disengagement if their development doesn't follow a predictable path.

To address these effects, educators should adopt a developmental view of giftedness that recognizes talent as dynamic and influenced by context, opportunity, and support. Identification should be ongoing and flexible, allowing students to demonstrate potential at different stages and in diverse ways. Schools can implement inclusive practices that provide all students with access to challenging learning experiences, regardless of early labels. Emphasizing growth, effort, and resilience over fixed traits helps create environments where a wider range of students can thrive and where early assessments inform rather than limit a child's educational journey.

Myth 3: Giftedness Follows a Straight Path to Success

A common misconception in gifted education is the belief that once a child is identified as gifted, their path to success is assured and linear. This myth suggests that early recognition of talent guarantees a smooth trajectory toward high achievement. However, research has consistently shown that outcomes for gifted individuals vary widely (Lubinski et al., 2006). Some students disengage, underachieve, or even drop out of school or their area of talent, while others succeed in ways that are either expected or entirely unanticipated. Longitudinal studies, including those examining early talent search programs like those initiated by Julian Stanley, reveal that giftedness does not immunize students against academic or personal challenges (Lee et al., 2008; Swiatek, 2007). Life events, mental health, and educational environments all play significant roles in shaping outcomes (Peterson, 2009; Peterson et al., 2009). Recent research has increasingly examined the complex, non-linear development of gifted individuals, emphasizing how participation in gifted programs can alter a student's trajectory and how mass media stereotypes of intellectual giftedness contribute to stigmatization (Bergold et al., 2021). These experiences can influence self-perception, motivation, coping strategies, and peer relationships—sometimes in ways that hinder rather than help (Cross & Swiatek, 2009). For instance, some students may feel isolated or pressured, leading to burnout or disengagement (Pfeiffer, 2021). As a result, scholars are now examining the unintended consequences of gifted education, recognizing that these programs, while designed to support talent, can sometimes contribute to underachievement. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating more responsive, flexible, and supportive educational pathways that acknowledge the diverse and evolving nature of giftedness.

The belief that identifying a child as gifted ensures a smooth, upward trajectory toward success can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies that are both limiting and harmful. When educators and families assume that gifted students will naturally excel without ongoing support, they may overlook signs of struggle, disengagement, or emotional distress. This assumption can result in reduced attention to the evolving needs of gifted learners, who may feel isolated, pressured to meet unrealistic expectations, or unchallenged by rigid programming. These conditions can lead to underachievement, burnout, or even withdrawal from the domain of talent—outcomes that contradict the original belief but appear to validate it when students fail to meet expectations.

To counter this, educators must recognize that giftedness does not guarantee consistent or predictable success. A more effective approach involves supporting gifted students with flexible, responsive programming that evolves as their needs change. This includes fostering resilience, teaching coping strategies, and creating environments where students can explore interests without fear of failure. Regular check-ins, mentorship, and attention to social-emotional development are essential. By acknowledging the non-linear nature of talent development and providing sustained, individualized support, schools can help gifted students navigate challenges and realize their potential in diverse and meaningful ways.

Myth 4: Gifted Education Should Operate Independently from General Education

A common misconception in the field is that gifted education should function as a separate, fundamentally different system from general education (VanTassel-Baska, 2009). This belief assumes that the needs of gifted learners are so distinct that they require entirely isolated structures, curricula, and policies. However, in practice, gifted education is deeply embedded within the broader educational landscape, and it is shaped by the same national and local policies that govern general and special education (Mandelman et al., 2010), even though it continues to emphasize individualization (Cooper, 2009; Maker et al., 2023). For example, accountability measures introduced through legislation like *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), ESSA, and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA) have significantly influenced how gifted programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated (T. R. Moon, 2009; Scot et al., 2008). These influences include increased reliance on standardized testing (T. R. Moon, 2009) and the adoption of tiered intervention models, such as front-loading (Briggs et al., 2008), which mirrors the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) framework used in special education. Rather than existing in isolation, gifted education often reflects the prevailing trends and pressures of the larger educational system. This interconnectedness has led to both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it has encouraged more inclusive and data-driven practices; on the other, it has sometimes constrained the depth and creativity that are hallmarks of high-quality gifted instruction. The myth that gifted education can or should be entirely separate from general education overlooks the reality that systemic reforms, policy mandates, and educational equity debates inevitably shape how gifted services are delivered. Recognizing this interdependence is essential for designing gifted programs that are both responsive to broader educational goals and tailored to the unique needs of advanced learners.

Self-fulfilling prophecies emerge when educators, policymakers, or communities assume that gifted programs are elitist or inequitable. This belief can lead to reduced investment in gifted education, limited access for underrepresented students, and a reliance on narrow identification criteria (e.g., standardized test scores). These practices, in turn, reinforce disparities and confirm the perception that gifted education serves only a privileged few. Students from marginalized backgrounds may be overlooked, and those who are identified may not receive the kind of rich, differentiated instruction they need to thrive.

To address these effects, equity-focused strategies must be embedded in gifted education. These include: (1) broadening identification practices to include multiple measures and culturally responsive tools; (2) implementing front-loading approaches, where all students are given access to advanced learning opportunities before formal identification; (3) aligning gifted education with inclusive instructional models, such as talent development and RTI-inspired tiered supports; (4) training educators to recognize and nurture potential in diverse learners, especially those

historically underrepresented in gifted programs. By reframing gifted education as a tool for equity rather than exclusion, schools can ensure that talent is identified and cultivated across all communities.

Myth 5: There Is a Single Best Way to Teach Gifted Students

A persistent myth in gifted education is the belief that there exists a universally ideal program or instructional model that works for all gifted learners. This “silver bullet” mindset (Callahan, 2009) assumes that one curriculum or teaching method can effectively meet the diverse needs of all students identified as gifted (Kaplan, 2009). In reality, the field is marked by a wide array of instructional models and curricular frameworks—ranging from acceleration and differentiation to enrichment and talent development—many of which lack rigorous, independent evaluation. While some models, such as the Integrated Curriculum Model, ICM (VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2003), the Multiple Menu Model, MMM (Renzulli et al., 2000), and the Parallel Curriculum Model, PCM (Tomlinson et al., 2002), are frequently cited, the empirical evidence supporting their effectiveness remains limited and often developer-driven. In addition, the issue of program implementation fidelity is a potential moderator of the intended benefits (Brigandi, 2019; Missett & Foster, 2015; Moon & Park, 2016).

Moreover, programs not designed initially for gifted learners, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate⁶ (IB), are frequently used to serve this population, despite limited research on their suitability (Gallagher, 2009). These programs often replicate the same patterns of underrepresentation seen in traditional gifted programs and are sometimes perceived by students as overly stressful or misaligned with their learning needs (Burney, 2010). It is worth highlighting that gifted students often view AP and IB programs as imperfect environments for their learning needs. While these programs may not fully align with their preferred modes of engagement or intellectual curiosity, they are generally perceived as more stimulating and appropriate than the standard curriculum offered in regular classrooms (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). In other words, gifted students recognize the limitations of AP and IB yet still regard them as a step up from the typical educational experience. Interestingly, despite their advanced abilities, gifted students report experiencing AP and IB programs in much the same way as their non-gifted peers—namely, as academically rigorous, demanding, and often stressful (Shaunessy & Suldo, 2010). However, what distinguishes gifted students is not the intensity of the stress they feel, but instead how they manage it. Their coping mechanisms tend to differ, reflecting distinct psychological and cognitive profiles that influence how they navigate high-pressure academic environments (Shaunessy & Suldo, 2010). This nuanced understanding underscores the importance of designing learning environments that not only challenge gifted

⁶ The Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation has added the International Baccalaureate (foreign agent) to the register of undesirable organizations on August 15, 2025 (Министерство юстиции РФ внесло «Международный бакалавриат» (иноагент) в реестр нежелательных организаций с 15.08.2025 г.).

students but also support their emotional and psychological well-being (Neihart, 2007). It also calls for a more differentiated approach to curriculum and instruction within advanced academic programs, ensuring that they are not merely more difficult but genuinely enriching and responsive to the diverse needs of gifted learners (Dare & Nowicki, 2019; Neihart, 2007).

While the field has generated general principles about effective gifted instruction—such as the importance of challenge, flexibility, authenticity, and systemic support—there is no one-size-fits-all solution (Hockett, 2009; Sisk, 2009). Instead, effective gifted education requires thoughtful, research-informed decision-making that considers individual learner profiles, local contexts, and evolving educational goals (Adams, 2009; Gentry, 2009; Kharkhurin, 2016; Kharkhurin et al., 2024; Robinson, 2009; Tomlinson, 2009). As the field of gifted education continues to grow, researchers are increasingly focused on evaluating the tangible impact of gifted programs on students' academic outcomes. Studies (Gavin et al., 2009) have sought to determine how these specialized programs contribute to the educational attainment of gifted learners. Simultaneously, there is growing interest in uncovering the psychological mechanisms that underpin giftedness, including cognitive and emotional processes (Duan et al., 2010), as well as the motivational factors that drive gifted students to excel (Fredricks et al., 2010). Another important line of inquiry examines how individual characteristics—such as gender—affect decisions regarding program placement (Preckel et al., 2008).

Although research on effective programming for gifted and talented students has been a central concern since the inception of the field, it remains a vital and ongoing endeavor. Recent syntheses in the literature suggest that when thoughtfully aligned, the guiding principles of general and gifted curricula share more similarities than differences. Hockett (2009) emphasizes that high-quality curricula—regardless of the educational setting—should be authentic, outcome-driven, responsive to individual differences, and intellectually challenging. Moreover, both general and gifted education frameworks are increasingly expected to integrate current research and leverage technological advancements. One such advancement is the growing emphasis on distance education within gifted programs. While this mode of delivery holds promise for expanding access and flexibility, Wallace (2009) notes that empirical evaluations of its effectiveness in gifted education remain limited. This gap underscores the need for further research to assess how digital learning environments can best support the unique needs of gifted learners.

When educators or policymakers believe there is one ideal program or instructional model for all gifted students, they may adopt a narrow, standardized approach to gifted education. This can lead to the exclusion of students whose learning styles, cultural backgrounds, or areas of strength don't align with the chosen model. As a result, these students may feel disengaged, unsupported, or misidentified, which can hinder their academic growth and reinforce the false belief that they are not truly gifted. Over time, this rigid approach can limit innovation in programming and perpetuate inequities in access and outcomes.

To counter this, gifted education must embrace flexibility, diversity, and responsiveness. Educators should be encouraged to select and adapt instructional

models based on student needs, local context, and emerging research. This includes using a variety of evidence-informed approaches—such as enrichment, acceleration, project-based learning, and talent development—rather than relying on a single curriculum. Ongoing professional development, collaboration between general and gifted educators, and inclusive program design are also key. By recognizing that gifted learners are a heterogeneous group, schools can create more personalized, equitable, and effective learning environments that support a broader range of talents and trajectories.

Myth 6: Gifted Students Have It Easy and Face Few Challenges

A widespread but misleading belief is that gifted and talented students lead effortlessly successful lives, free from the struggles that affect their peers (S. M. Moon, 2009). This myth assumes that high ability naturally shields students from academic, social, or emotional difficulties. However, emerging research increasingly questions this idea, highlighting the unique pressures and vulnerabilities that gifted students often face (Peterson, 2009; von Károlyi, 2020). Studies have shown that being labeled as gifted or participating in accelerated programs can sometimes lead to social isolation, strained peer relationships, and increased anxiety (Aljughaiman & Tan, 2009). For instance, some students report a decline in social status or lower-quality friendships after being placed in gifted programs, while others face increased stress from the pressure to meet high expectations (Hoogeveen et al., 2009; Schapiro et al., 2009). Despite these findings, the research base remains limited and sometimes contradictory. Some studies suggest giftedness may be a risk factor for mental health challenges, while others propose it offers protective benefits (Mueller, 2009). What is clear, however, is that gifted students are not immune to emotional or psychological difficulties, and their needs are often overlooked due to assumptions about their resilience or self-sufficiency (Precke & Brüll, 2008). As a result, there is a growing call within the field for more comprehensive research on the self-image of gifted students (Belova, 2024) and the development of targeted counseling and support strategies (Martin et al., 2010; Wood, 2010), not only for children themselves, but also for their families (Briggs et al., 2008; Morawska & Sanders, 2009). These approaches should not only address the students themselves but also involve families and educators in fostering environments that support both the intellectual and emotional well-being of gifted learners.

When educators, parents, or peers assume that gifted students are naturally resilient and free from emotional or social difficulties, they may overlook signs of stress, anxiety, or isolation. This belief can result in a lack of support systems for gifted learners, who may then struggle silently with perfectionism, peer rejection, or pressure to meet high expectations. As these challenges go unaddressed, students may disengage, underperform, or experience mental health issues—outcomes that contradict the myth but are often misinterpreted as personal shortcomings rather than systemic neglect. This cycle reinforces the false belief that gifted students don't need help, perpetuating a lack of appropriate support.

To break this cycle and counter this self-fulfilling prophecy, educators and caregivers must recognize that giftedness does not exempt students from emotional or psychological challenges. Schools should implement social-emotional learning supports tailored to gifted learners, including counseling services that address perfectionism, identity development, and peer relationships. Professional development for teachers can help them identify and respond to the unique social-emotional needs of high-ability students. Additionally, involving families in these conversations ensures a more holistic support system. By acknowledging the complexity of gifted students' experiences and providing proactive, empathetic support, educators can foster environments where gifted learners thrive both intellectually and emotionally.

Myth 7: Only Aptitude and Achievement Can Be Measured in Giftedness

A persistent and limiting belief in gifted education is that only cognitive aptitude and academic achievement are measurable. At the same time, other critical dimensions of giftedness—such as creativity, leadership, and practical intelligence—are too subjective or elusive to assess reliably. This myth has led to resistance against broadening identification criteria, despite growing evidence that these “non-traditional” traits are both essential to understanding giftedness and measurable through well-designed tools (Gentry et al., 2015; Grigorenko et al., 2008; Lubart et al., 2010; Treffinger, 2009; Wai et al., 2022). While educators often cite the difficulty of assessing these traits in practice, this skepticism may stem more from logistical and systemic constraints—such as time, cost, and training—than from actual limitations in measurement science (Friedman-Nimz, 2009). In reality, researchers have developed and validated a variety of instruments to assess these broader facets of giftedness. Studies have demonstrated that creativity, leadership, and practical problem-solving can be evaluated using structured tasks, rating scales, and performance-based assessments. The challenge lies not in the impossibility of measurement, but in translating these tools into everyday educational practice in ways that are feasible and scalable. Overcoming this myth requires a shift in mindset: recognizing that giftedness is multidimensional and that meaningful identification must reflect this complexity. Doing so opens the door to more inclusive, equitable, and accurate approaches to identifying and nurturing diverse forms of talent.

When educators and systems believe that only traditional metrics—such as IQ scores and academic achievement—can reliably measure giftedness, they tend to exclude other important traits, such as creativity, leadership, and practical problem-solving, from identification processes. This narrow focus reinforces the idea that giftedness is limited to a specific academic profile, leading to the under-identification of students whose strengths lie outside conventional domains. As a result, students with exceptional abilities in non-academic areas may be overlooked, under-challenged, or misperceived as average, which can suppress their motivation and development—ultimately confirming the false assumption that they are not gifted.

To counter this, schools and educators must adopt a broader, research-informed understanding of giftedness that includes multiple dimensions of talent.

This involves integrating validated tools for assessing creativity, leadership, and practical intelligence into identification systems. Professional development is essential to help educators recognize and value diverse expressions of giftedness, especially in students from underrepresented backgrounds. Additionally, schools should invest in flexible, performance-based assessments and rating scales that capture a wider range of student strengths. By expanding the definition and measurement of giftedness, educators can create more inclusive and equitable pathways for recognizing and nurturing all forms of exceptional potential.

Conclusion

In this brief overview, we outlined the major recent directions in giftedness research, particularly as they relate to enduring myths and the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecies. The current landscape is notably diverse, with multiple, sometimes divergent, lines of inquiry. Despite this complexity, two foundational pillars continue to anchor the field: the identification of giftedness and the development of appropriate instructional practices.

Has the field evolved since 1982, or even since 2009? The answer is both yes and no. There is a clear continuity with earlier frameworks—many of the same questions and challenges persist. However, the field has also made incremental progress, resolving certain longstanding issues and refining its conceptual and methodological tools. At the same time, new tensions have emerged, reflecting shifts in educational policy, societal expectations, and the evolving understanding of human potential.

The persistence of earlier misconceptions reminds us that meaningful change—especially when it involves dismantling deeply ingrained beliefs—takes time. As researchers continue to identify and deconstruct myths surrounding giftedness, they are also developing strategies to counteract the self-fulfilling prophecies that often accompany these myths. These strategies include several key components:

1. **Bias awareness:** Encouraging educators to critically examine their own assumptions and beliefs about students' abilities.
2. **Data-informed decision-making:** Promoting the use of multiple, diverse measures to assess student potential and monitor progress.
3. **Student agency:** Empowering students through goal-setting and self-assessment, fostering a sense of ownership over their learning journey.
4. **Collaborative feedback loops:** Establishing systems that facilitate ongoing dialogue between teachers and students, allowing for adaptive and responsive instructional practices.

Research has shown that meaningful change in educators' practices—particularly in alignment with the principles of gifted education—requires both substantial pre-service preparation and sustained in-service support (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). Importantly, dismantling myths is not solely about changing behavior; it also involves a deeper transformation of beliefs and conceptual understandings.

Despite these challenges, change is occurring. There are numerous examples of educators effectively nurturing giftedness and talent, even in resource-constrained environments, when supported by sound pedagogy and professional expertise (Adams, 2009). The field is gradually moving away from reductive definitions and one-size-fits-all approaches, toward a more nuanced appreciation of the diversity of abilities and achievements. As more educators begin to integrate research findings into their daily practice—however incrementally—we can hope that many of the old myths will eventually be retired.

As for the new tensions, while some may be specific to national contexts—such as the influence of policies like NCLB, ESSA, and IDEIA in the United States—they nonetheless reflect broader, global questions about the relationship between general and gifted education. These tensions highlight the need for ongoing dialogue about how best to serve diverse learners within increasingly complex educational systems.

Gifted education programs can produce a variety of outcomes, generally grouped into four categories: academic gains, financial implications, social and emotional effects, and additional impacts such as increased motivation, personal fulfillment, or enhanced status. It is essential to recognize that self-fulfilling prophecies can have a positive effect when aligned with well-considered priorities in a specific GATE implementation. Once again, one size does not fit all.

This overview is, of course, shaped by our own professional lens and priorities. In compiling it, we have sought to synthesize current research and translate its implications for practice. We now invite responses from fellow researchers and practitioners alike. A reciprocal exchange—a two-way translation between research and practice—may well be the most effective path forward in advancing education for gifted and talented learners.

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Обзорная статья

Доказательная практика и самосбывающиеся пророчества в образовании одаренных и талантливых учащихся (GATE)

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Аннотация. Эффективное внедрение результатов научных исследований в практику и обеспечение того, чтобы практики могли не только применять научные выводы, но и предоставлять обратную связь относительно их значимости в реальных условиях, явля-

ется важной, но сложной задачей. В современной динамичной исследовательской среде, где новые исследования появляются быстро, а политические и образовательные решения должны основываться на доказательствах, разрыв между научным знанием и образовательной практикой становится все более заметным. К сожалению, сфера образования предлагает лишь ограниченные рекомендации относительно того, как организовать такой двусторонний обмен информацией. При отсутствии систематического механизма трансляции знаний как среди исследователей, так и среди практиков могут укореняться ошибочные представления, которые подпитывают устойчивые недоразумения и заблуждения. Рассмотрены несколько распространенных мифов в области образования одаренных детей, возникших вследствие этого разрыва между наукой и практикой. Эти мифы, часто основанные на устаревших данных или неверной интерпретации исследований, способствовали формированию самосбывающихся пророчеств в образовании одаренных и талантливых учащихся (Gifted and Talented Education, GATE), усиливая неравенство и ограничивая потенциал обучающихся. Некоторые из этих убеждений настолько глубоко укоренились в образовательной культуре, что оказываются исключительно устойчивыми к изменениям. Статья завершается призывом к действию: необходимо развивать более глубокое обсуждение и взаимный обмен мнениями между исследователями, педагогами и семьями учащихся. Только благодаря такому сотрудничеству можно преодолеть укоренившиеся мифы, исправить распространенные заблуждения и обеспечить, чтобы наиболее актуальные и достоверные научные данные становились основой содержательных и справедливых образовательных практик как в школьном классе, так и за его пределами.

Ключевые слова: образование одаренных и талантливых учащихся (GATE), доказательная практика, самосбывающиеся пророчества, принятие решений в образовании, разрыв между исследованиями и практикой

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