

Underachievement

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- If during the first five or six years of school, a child earns good grades and high praise without having to make much effort, what are all the things he doesn't learn that most children learn by third grade?

Definition of Underachievement

- Severe discrepancy between *expected achievement* (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and *actual achievement* (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations)
 - Reis and McCoach (2000)

- Speculation ranges from 10% to more than 50% of the gifted population are underachievers.
 - McCoach and Seigle (2008)

- Onset typically occurs in middle school and persists through high school
- Thirteen years after high school, the educational and occupational status of high school underachievers paralleled their grades in high school, rather than their abilities.

- McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer (1992)

Characteristics

- Use reading, tv, and video games as escapes from doing homework
- Have creative ideas but they are rarely brought to closure
- Use defenses such as "school is boring"
- Disorganized
- Low academic self-perceptions
- Low self-motivation
- Low effort toward academic tasks
- Negative attitudes toward school and teachers
- Daydream and dawdle

- Lose assignments and don't turn in work
- Poor study skills
- Some are perfectionistic and don't finish their work
- Some are interested in speed, zipping through their work with little interest in quality

"But, Eugene, it's not enough to be gifted. We've got to do something with our gift."



Internal Locus of Control

- Lack of personal control over their educational success
- Don't believe they can reach goals even if they work harder (lack of self-efficacy), so they avoid challenges
- Set goals too high or too low – they guarantee failure

Competition

- Many have highly competitive feelings, but they may not be obvious.
- They quit if they think they can't win
- Poor winners and poor losers

Rimm's Laws

1. Children are more likely to be achievers if their parents join together to give the same clear and positive message about school effort and expectations.
2. Children can learn appropriate behaviors more easily if they have models to imitate.

3. Communication about a child between adults (referential speaking) within the child's hearing dramatically affects children's behaviors and self-perception.

4. Overreaction by parents to children's successes and failures leads them to feel either intense pressure to succeed, or despair and discouragement in dealing with failure.

5. Children feel more tension when they are worrying about their work than when they are doing that work.
6. Children develop self-confidence through struggle.
7. Deprivation and excess frequently exhibit the same symptoms.

8. Children develop confidence and an internal sense of control if power is given to them in gradually increasing increments as they show maturity and responsibility.

9. Children become oppositional if one adult allies with them against a parent or a teacher, making them more powerful than the adult.

10. Adults should avoid confrontations with children unless they are sure they can control the outcomes.

11. Children will become achievers only if they learn to function in competition.
12. Children will continue to achieve if they usually see the relationship between the learning process and its outcomes.

Rimm (2004)

Pressures Gifted Underachievers Internalize

- Pressure to be the smartest
- Pressure to be different
- Pressure to be popular
- Pressure to be loyal

How to Reverse Pressure

- Refrain from using words like “smartest” and “brilliant”
- Emphasize “hard work” and “good thinking”
- Instead of reassuring underachievers of their brilliance and creativity, it’s better to admire their hard work ethic.

Relationship Between Effort and Outcomes

		+ Outcomes -	
+ Effort	+	Quadrant 1 + + Achievers	Quadrant 2 + - Underachievers
	-	Quadrant 3 - + Underachievers	Quadrant 4 - - Underachievers

Rimm (2004)

Quadrant 1

- High Effort, High Outcomes

- Feel bright, creative, and approved of by parents and teachers
- Motivated to learn
- Extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction
- Set realistic high goals, work hard, and persevere

“Children will continue to achieve if they usually see the relationship between the learning process and its outcomes.”

Quadrant 2

- High Goals, Low Effort
 - Set goals too high, may be in competitive environment
 - Sometimes parents set goals too high
 - Learning disabled children or those with unusual learning styles fit here
 - Feel dumb

Quadrant 3

- Low Effort, High Outcomes
 - Most typical dilemma for gifted
 - Not sufficiently challenged so being smart means doing things easily
 - Hit brick wall when faced with real challenge
 - Remedies: challenging work, accelerated or enriched curriculum, homogeneous grouping, differentiation

Quadrant 4

- Low Effort, Low Outcomes
 - Advanced stage of underachievement – happens for children in Quadrants 2 or 3 over time
 - Given up reasonable goal setting
 - Parents and teachers begin to doubt abilities
 - Difficult to reverse and may be therapeutic help

Two Main Causes

- Environmental causes
 - Unchallenging classrooms
 - Peer pressure
 - Isolation from classmates
 - Family dynamics

- Factors within the individual
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Externalizing issues including rebellion and nonconformity
 - Learning problems
 - Deficits in self-regulation
 - Social immaturity

Reis and McCoach (2002)

Influences: Family

- Inconsistent parenting techniques
 - In 95% of families, one parent emerged as the disciplinarian and the other acted as a protector.
 - Parents tend to be overly lenient or overly strict – or may vacillate between the two,
 - Bestowing adult status on a child at too young of an age may contribute.

Influences: Peers

- High-achieving peers have a positive influence on gifted students who begin to underachieve. The reverse is true as well. One study showed that 66% of high ability students named peer pressure as the primary force against getting good grades.
- Studies show that friends' grades are very similar by the end of the year.

Interventions

- Counseling interventions
 - Individual, group or family
 - Concentrate on changing personal and/or family dynamics that lead to underachievement
 - Coping with frustration

■ Instructional interventions

- Enrichment-based approaches targeting student strengths
- Rimm's Trifocal Model
- Basic study habits
- Participate in part-time or full-time classes for gifted underachievers
 - Smaller class sizes
 - Less conventional teaching strategies
 - Student choice
 - Affective education

Eleanor Roosevelt said,

“The surest way to make it difficult for children is to make it easy for them.”

Why not take the easy road?

- There's plenty of time to work hard later, right? **WRONG!**
- Challenging, enriching courses in school make a prepared, committed, and interested student in college.
- Participating in a challenging learning environment prepares students for the academic curiosity and commitment necessary to succeed in a university setting.

Misconception 1: I have a great GPA; I won't have any trouble getting into college.

- Congratulations! But you're going to need more than a good GPA to get into and pay for your dream school. You may get into college, but you could have trouble staying there.
- Colleges look closely at your transcript, not just your GPA.
- If you have not challenged yourself in high school, chances are you won't know how to study when you go to college!

Colleges want to know...

- Did you take the most challenging classes your school offered?
- What kind of extracurricular activities are you involved in?
- Do you have leadership experience on your team or with your organization?
- What does the commitment to your classes and activities say about your success on a college campus?

Academics and Activities: Can you do both?

- FFA, 4-H, Basketball, Speech Team, Boys and Girls Club—How can you be involved at your high school or in your community?
- A person who has organized a recycling drive for the Science Club is more impressive to a college than someone who showed up to a few meetings.
- It is important to find a balance between being involved in your school and community while taking challenging courses.

Misconception 2: If I take a harder class and get a lower grade, there goes my scholarship money.

- Harvard Admissions says, "There is no single academic path we expect all students to follow, but the strongest applicants take the most rigorous secondary school curricula available to them."
- Centre College looks primarily at the "quality of the high school coursework."

Misconception 3: I don't need to take honors or more difficult classes prior to AP classes.

- Foundation classes prepare you for the advanced thinking you will be asked to do in an AP or college class.
- Every time you challenge yourself in an academic environment, you become more prepared for and more likely to succeed in future scholarly endeavors.

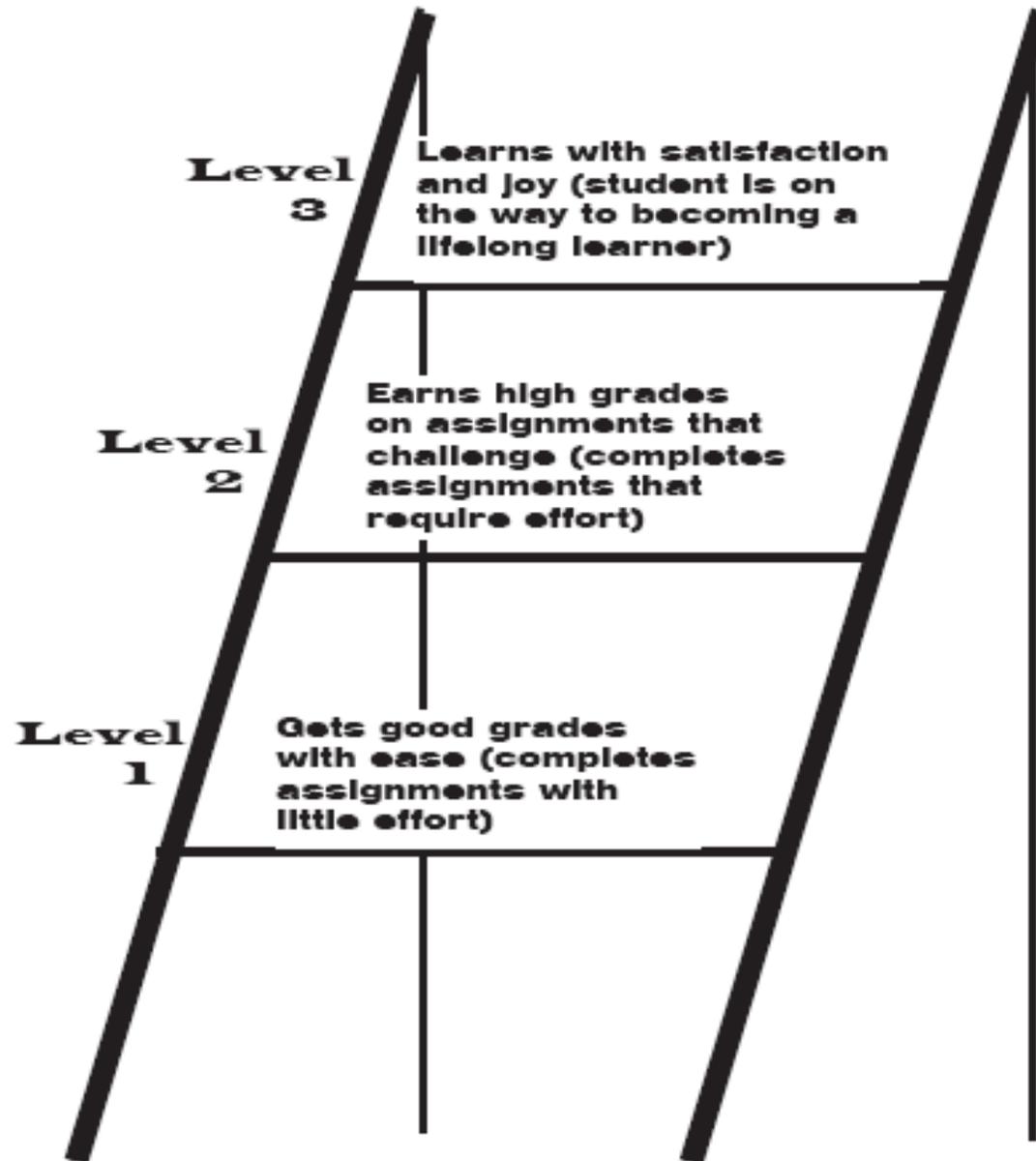
Misconception 4: AP might help me get into college, but it won't help me once I'm already there.

- An AP class gives you a chance to “take a college class for free.”
- AP and Honors classes teach you how to study, think, and ask questions – essential skills for a post-secondary educational setting.
- AP classes substantially improve your chances for successfully completing college.

Statistics show...

- College students who have not taken an AP class have a 33% chance of completing a Bachelor's Degree.
- College students who have completed one AP course have a 59% chance of completing a Bachelor's Degree.
- College students who have completed two or more AP courses increase to 76% their chances of attaining a Bachelor's Degree.

LEVELS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS



**Why would
you want
your child to
move up to
another level
of academic
success?**



**How do you facilitate
your child moving from
one level to the next?**



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Paula Olszewski-Kubilius believes:

“Parents should not shield or try to protect children from risks or hard work. Parents also need to allow children to experience the tensions and stress that rise from challenging ideas and high expectations.”

**HOW DO YOU
FACILITATE YOUR
CHILD MOVING TO
THE NEXT LEVEL
OF ACADEMIC
SUCCESS?**

- 1.** | **Don't rescue the child from a challenge. Instead support him/her.**
- 2.** | **Help find and support interests outside of school as well as in school that motivate and develop a work ethic.**
- 3.** | **Advocate for continuous progress and excellence at various levels of decision-making.**

Thomas Jefferson said,

**“I find the harder I work,
the more luck I seem to
have.”**