



Interview Article

Interview with Hanna David on being the educator and counselor of a gifted child post-pandemic

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Abstract

Although this interview is a little late, it is important in terms of revealing the useful, practice-based and evidence-based ideas of Hanna David, an expert in guidance and counseling for the gifted, about the ongoing impact of the pandemic phenomenon. I selected the most important questions for the interview. Hanna David shared the answers to these questions with the right information with all her sincerity. The themes that occur when I turn them into themes are as follows; Homeschooling for Gifted, Its Popularity in Future, Pandemic Damage Report on Gifted Children, The Pandemic's Lessons for Gifted Educators and Psychologists, Change in Career Plans of Gifted Children, Recommendations for Families with High Sensitive Gifted Children. With Hanna David's solution-oriented approach, I summarized the suggestions for families, education and psychologists for gifted children after the pandemic in the conclusion section.

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Introduction

The pandemic proc negatively affected both general education and gifted education. In this process, perhaps there were only those who preferred homechooling. The pandemic made families and students question many issues, from the form of learning to its purpose. The change of trends in the economy has changed the order of importance in the professions. This situation led to differentiation in the career preferences of gifted children. After these observations, many studies were carried out. However, the issue of what to do after the pandemic has remained on researchers, educators and families as a homework.

We need to strengthen our predictions about the psychology of gifted people and their career plans, and guidance for their families and teachers, in order to address the question of what to do in the future.

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Photo1. Professor Hanna David doing yoga and meditation

Journal of Gifted Education and Creativity can also start an important academic and pedagogical discussion with my interview with Professor Hanna David, one of the most important researchers and practitioners in the world in the field of gifted guidance and counseling for readers, researchers (I wish her a long and happy life with the Photo1 she sent stating that she never neglected sports). Hanna David is an academic and psychologist who is incredibly productive, loves life, is a great observer and analyzer, her critical thinking skills are very strong. He has published many books and articles on the guidance and counseling of the gifted. I would also like to thank him for supporting each of her views with arguments in my interview. I presented my interview thematically.

Homeschooling for Gifted, Its Popularity in Future

Dr. Hasan Said Tortop: In my opinion, homeschooled gifted children were much better prepared for the pandemic conditions than any other group. Is your experience consistent with this observation of mine?

Professor Hanna David: I do not have an opinion about "who was better prepared for the pandemic" or even "was there any way to be prepared for the pandemic" at all. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that many works have been published about the influence of the pandemic both on children who were prevented from going to school for long periods – googling "covid-19" and "school-children" gives 1,050,000,000 results, and somewhat less about the pandemic's influence on children who were homeschooled – googling "covid-19" and "homeschooling" gives 490,000 results, I have not found any reliable, large-enough quantitative study that statistically comparing these two groups. While there have been many studies examining the experience of children with leaning disorder, emotional difficulties and physical limitations during the pandemic (e.g. Kouroupa et al., 2022; Mazza et al., 2020), comparing the influence of the pandemic on children from poor backgrounds and children from higher socio-economic status (e.g. Andrew et al., 2020; Cattani et al., 2021; Eivers, Worth, & Ghosh, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Villadsen, Conti, & Fitzsimons, 2020), or the general problems of forced homeschooling (e.g. Champeau et al., 2020).



All children have gone through the very difficult times of lockdowns, social distance, a variety of health-limitations as well as restrictions influencing social and family connections. To these outer conditions inner negative feelings should be added: a feeling of threat on one's personal freedom, fear of becoming ill, even seriously ill or dying (e.g. Jones & Huges, 2022). Children were afraid of infecting older relatives, especially grandparent if they are sick (e.g. Idoiaga, 2020), their anxiety increased when experiencing a close family member who was seriously ill, sometimes fighting for life for quite a while, sometimes giving up to the pandemic (e.g. Sowden, Selman, & Borgstrom, 2020).

In my view, the main factor that differentiated between those who were emotionally – sometimes seriously – negatively affected and those who returned to their "former" lives with less difficulties had to do with their emotional strength. This had been proven mostly among adults (e.g. Martínez-Martí, 2020; Mazza et al., 2020) as well as among children and adolescents (e.g. Gayatri, & Irawaty, 2022; Glynn, 2021).

Emotional strength, or resilience, is not necessarily connected with the school system, school success or social popularity. Sometimes the family choice of homeschooling is related to the child's feeling that she or he "does not fit in", that teachers do not understand them, that school prevents them from learning, that school classes are too easy, their pace is too slow. Indeed, in many such cases the homeschooled child, who had been used to social isolation on a daily basis, did not suffer as much as others from the pandemic isolation. But in many other cases, a few of which I met in my clinic shortly after the last Israeli lockdown, it was the other way round. One such example is of a girl who refused to leave home for many weeks after the last lockdown, and as she did not have to go to school prior to the pandemic, her parents delayed treating her fears as they were thinking: "in time, she would get used that it is ok to meet other people outside". Only when there was no improvement in the child's situation, the parents understood that something was very wrong. Even at this stage, the parents blamed the child's curiosity for their child's problem. As the girl liked to read about illnesses and medicines long before the pandemic started, they assumed that her "knowing too much" was the cause of her developing agoraphobia.

Pandemic Damage Report on Gifted Children

Dr. Hasan Said Tortop: What are the main areas, both social-emotional and educational, that gifted children had suffered from during the pandemic and as result of it?

Professor Hanna David: It is hard to divide the main areas in which gifted children were negatively affected because of the pandemic into clear-cut sections, as there are mutual connections among academic advancement, academic curiosity, or academic learning in general, and one's social-emotional situation. However, in order to be able to properly treat each of the problems that either resulted from the covid-19 lockdowns, isolation and fear, as well as the actual illness and in many cases death of beloved ones, let us focus on the main two areas that gifted children – sometimes like every other children and sometimes in particular – have suffered because of the pandemic: the social-emotional and the educational outcomes.

Goggling "online learning during covid-19" and "gifted" has given over 18 million results; limiting them by adding "journal article" to the search-words gives "only" about 3 million... Adding "meta-analysis" to the search words decreases the results to about 166,000, published in educational journals and books. Looking closer at some of these studies reveals that a very tiny percentage are indeed meta-analyses; there are many interviews of families of homeschooled children; many case-studies, many opinions, and many speculations. For example: Shemesh (2021), who has interviewed three homeschooling families, found that while one 4-child family and another 2-child family did not mention any special difficulties caused by the pandemic, the third family experienced additional difficulties because of the limitations they had to obey to, such as not using the library, which had been a substantial educational source before the corona pandemic started, or being prohibited to meet friends, which was extremely difficult for their children as they did not meet them online on a regular basis, when school transformed to online learning.



There is no quantitative study that can help estimate the rate of gifted children that experienced major educational losses because of the pandemic, neither is there data about those who have suffered none. Neither is there research about those who used the "corona-time" as an opportunity to further advance their studies, learn new things, or get deeper in subject matters that had interested them. In my country, there is not even formal data about the number of gifted children who were homeschooled; the only data officially released by our ministry of education is that between the 2020/2021 academic year and the following one the increase of homeschooled children was 38% (Trabelsi-Hadad,

24/8/2021). But as the number of those children had been just about 500, any assumed number of gifted among them would be too small to come to significant conclusions, let alone describe differences between those who were homeschooled and those who were not.

Gifted children who either learnt in special classes for the gifted and their social circle was mainly or fully composed of their school peers, had, in many cases, suffered from isolation due to the pandemic. In special gifted classes, both in my country and in many others, children from a comparatively large geographical area are put together and when there are no opportunities to meet peers on a daily basis, social connections are harmed. In addition, when school is cancelled altogether, or online classes substitute just a small part of the regular schedule, the academic advancements are falling behind, and boredom is quite common (about the boredom of the gifted see, for example, Feuchter & Preckel, 2022; Precke, Götz, & Frenzel, 2010; Tardy, 2016). Furthermore, while for children with learning disabilities and emotional or behavioral problems online learning was especially complicated, and they needed a lot of accommodations and modifications during the pandemic (see, for example, Cohen, 2021), e-learning quite often suited gifted children and adolescents even better than face-to-face learning.

When the covid-19 pandemic started, many gifted students had already been used to online learning. For example, in my country high school children who were accepted to the Israeli Open University (Higher Education in High School, 2022) could have chosen online instruction rather than face to face years before the covid-19 pandemic started. However, while before the pandemic online instruction was not available in all courses, during the pandemic and since then all courses have been offered online, so gifted students who learn both in high school and at the open university improved their access to higher education during- and after the lockdowns in comparison to the pre-pandemic times.

On the other hand, academic learning of many other gifted children and youths suffered during the pandemic; in some cases, it was altogether interrupted. Children who, prior of the pandemic, had participated in enrichment programs for the gifted (for the list of the enrichment programs for gifted and excellent students see Enrichment centers for gifted and excellent students, 2022) had no alternative when these centers were closed, and when they opened, after a few months, they functioned online until the end of the 2021/22 school year, which had limited their participants from meeting their peers, and also limited their instructors who could not use laboratories, go to field trips for natural studies, visit museums, higher education institutes, or be present at cultural events. The instructors could not close monitor their students, in some cases could not even see their faces if the students chose not to open their cameras this online alternative (about the debate regarding opening the camera during a zoom class meeting see, for example, Remote learning during the covid-19 pandemic, 2021).

The Pandemic's Lessons for Gifted Educators and Psychologists

Dr. Hasan Said Tortop: What have both educators and psychologists learnt by teaching gifted children and treating them during the pandemic: Can it be successfully applied during "regular" conditions? What should not be adapted when no limitations of social distance and both on-line learning and therapy are not necessary any longer?

Professor Hanna David: Both educators and psychologists have learnt about gifted children and adolescents a few new things:

- Children and adults should get exact information when available, including the answer "I do not know" or "we do not know yet", rather than "do not worry" or "everything will be ok at the end" or "I am in charge, so you rather do not read/think/talk too much about the pandemic".
- Limiting a gifted child's access to the media does not help reducing fears. Blaming "screens" for disobedience, unhealthy eating or bed sleep habits is just "an easy way out". Special times, such a pandemic, needs special efforts, special tactics, special ways to "get into" children's mind and heart. Anybody who had thought "one the pandemic is over things will be ok again" had made a big mistake. While it is very easy not to discipline, not to insist of a regular daily habits, assignments, obligations, it is extremely difficult to "go back to normal" after the leash had been released.

- As both educators and psychologist know, many parents had not been able to keep home regulation in order during the pandemic. Thus, it is their role to balance this situation by being very careful about keeping them. For example: not to agree to teach or conduct a therapeutic meeting (whether online or face-to-face) when the child is not properly dressed, had not washed their face or brush their hair. Being strict also applies for parents; many of them find it hard to re-adapt to the therapeutic boundaries that had been summarized during the intake meeting, but due to the pandemic have been blurred; many parents find it hard stop to approaching teachers whenever they thought it was necessary in their opinion, as had been during the lockdowns, and limit themselves to certain times and certain amount of calls and texting.

These few rules should be the basis of helping gifted, as well as non-gifted children with issues of self-discipline, class discipline (for educators) and counseling borders (with therapists), discipline, and health – focusing on food, physical education and exercise. Special focus should be paid to optimal use of screens, whether they are used for learning or entertainment. Each family has their own standards, their own criteria about the time their children should be allowed to use screens and the allowed purposes of screen using. Educators should not get involved in this issue, but therapists should, as quite often they have to solve child-parent disagreements, including children's complaints about screen limitations while parents complain about not obeying them. One way of helping families who struggle with issue might help parents define their demands very accurately and force them.

One of the most important lessons learnt during the pandemic and especially after it was that families whose parental authority was strong enough before the pandemic did not have to struggle as much in order to conduct a reasonable life during the pandemic and "get back to normal" after it. That had been true for gifted and non-gifted. Nevertheless, problems of discipline, limiting computer time, getting up on time and keeping personal hygiene start often much earlier among the gifted than among non-gifted. Parents, but also educators and psychologists should be aware of this fact, and pay attention to a young child who argues about any of these issues at a very early stage. Waiting because "the child is too young" might turn to be "waiting too long".

Change in Career Plans of Gifted Children

Dr. Hasan Said Tortop: Do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the view of gifted children about career planning, together with the family and the child? What are your own views about the appropriate careers for gifted children and youths?

Professor Hanna David: With your permission, I rather start with the second question: I have no views about the "appropriate" career for gifted children and youths. Relying both on my knowledge and many years of experience, doing what one loves should be the main – if not the only issue when having to choose a career. One's profession should be their passion; if it is – the way to success is much happier than doing anything because one "has to". In addition, when one's love is their career, their well-being improves (see, for example, Kelloway et al., 2010).

The views of many gifted children, adolescents and even adults regarding their careers have changed during the pandemic. Many professions, especially those who were most needed during the pandemic, such as teachers, nurses, or social workers, became much less popular. On the other hand, becoming computer programmers, engineers, or working in marketing, became much more popular. During the pandemic children of working in high-tech suffered less from parental absence than children of teachers, who did keep their jobs, but had to work from home, mostly online, and also be available to many students and their parents, while having also to take care of their own families. As many parents lost their jobs, for examples, everybody working in tourism, or entertainment, such jobs have lost their pre-pandemic attractiveness, while continuing you high tech job, in your own time, with no pressure and no threat of being fired became the most attractive area.

Recommendations for Families with High Sensitive Gifted Children

Dr. Hasan Said Tortop: What would you recommend to parents of high sensitive gifted children as a remedy who might help the impact of the pandemic?

Professor Hanna David: There is no way to reduce over-sensitivity; it is a characteristic of many gifted children, adolescents and adults. A child can be both emotionally strong and very sensitive; this is the right "mix" of the successful gifted person. But while sensitivity cannot be – and should not be "removed" – being a necessary characteristic for a rich social and familial life, as well as a necessary characteristic for many professions, building one spine can be done either by the parents and if needed – with the help of a counselor.

I warmly recommend parents of sensitive children to read about this characteristic of their gifted children (e.g. David 2017a, b, 2019). Knowledge is essential for understanding, and understanding a sensitive child is the first step to connect with them, and thus – to help them.

Conclusion

An interview with Hanna David, who has very important work in the field of guidance and counseling for the gifted, was waiting as a requirement. Thanks to Hanna David for her contribution. I suggest rereading the interview very carefully and taking notes. Some of the conclusions that can be drawn from the interview are as follows. There is no doubt that the pandemic has caused changes in instructional strategies in gifted education. The use of homeschooling or some internet-based applications has increased during the pandemic. However, Hanna David recommends investing in emotional support and resilience in gifted people. The inadequacy of homeschooling in this regard is well known. It will increase the importance of talent-based in all areas of education in the future. Talent development also requires sustainability. During the pandemic, many programs of gifted children were closed and their most important needs were cut. This situation both reduced their increasing intellectual desire and caused psychological damage as a result. Some feel the isolation deeply. In addition, gifted children with a disability experienced very serious social-emotional problems. It is important that gifted children are left free in their career choices. The pandemic has increased career planning for industries such as software. However, after these temporary changes after the pandemic, it is recommended to guide gifted children with appropriate pedagogical and psychological approaches. Hanna's "There is no way to reduce over-sensitivity" The sentence is quite remarkable. But there are also ways to learn to deal with high sensitivity. For these too, it is important to read research and good practices. Again, I repeat Hanna's suggestion. "I warmly recommend parents of sensitive children to read about this characteristic of their gifted children"

Thank you so much Hanna for this interview. I have known him since 2012. I am so glad to meet you that it is difficult to express. Hanna is unique in many ways; productivity, his hesitant and full support for all work on gifted education, his willingness to help gifted children and their families. My understanding of the mystery of the gifted made me say "wow" with its wonderful observations in a magazine I edited. That's why I suggest you review the codes in this interview.

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