



Interview Article

An interview with Sule Demirel Dingec: about helping parents raise gifted children

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Abstract

In this current day and age it is difficult to parent children. It is even more difficult to parent and raise children who may be intellectually gifted or musically talented or creative. In this interview Dr. Sule Demirel Dingec discusses the role of the teacher, parent and counselor in terms of helping the gifted. She provides some insights into assisting students with the social and emotional concerns as well as addressing the need for mentors and supportive others. It is hope that this interview will provide some assistance to parents and alert others to her pending book which will provide even greater assistance.

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Michael F. Shaughnessy: First of all, can you please tell us about your education and experience?

Şule Demirel Dingec: My name is Şule Demirel Dingec. I have been working in the field of education for gifted individuals at Anadolu University in Turkey since 2007. In the applied dimension, I have conducted studies on character and values education with gifted children at our university's Education and Research Center for Gifted Children. In recent years, I have been actively involved in providing educational counseling for families of gifted students. In the academic context, my areas of focus include the sociocultural dimensions of giftedness, the identification of giftedness, intelligence scales, social-emotional needs of gifted individuals, and family and teacher training.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: Now, why did you write this book and what is the title of it?

Şule Demirel Dinceç: Firstly, the title of the book is: "Gifted Individuals and Their Families: Roles, Needs, Recommendations." In fact, the title of the book is directly related to the reason for writing it.

The questions and difficulties faced by the families I frequently met at the center where I work, as well as the challenges they encountered, led to a project. Within the scope of this project, my team and I developed and implemented a family education program. Families who found this education beneficial expressed their desire to revisit this information from time to time but lacked a resource. They requested a source from us. Along with my other co-authors, I decided to write this book. The content of the family education program in the project had already been prepared by the families themselves when we decided to write the book.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: What challenges do parents face when raising their gifted children?

Şule Demirel Dinceç: I believe the first challenge encountered is when parents, who are generally happy after the identification, are left wondering what to do next. After the identification, parents start worrying about how to support their children. Schools that can support their children or schools with differentiated classes are limited. After-school programs are also limited, and some schools claiming to provide education for the gifted may not have quality content. Sometimes, parents want to support their children with a mentor, but they struggle with how to find one. In summary, one of the most significant challenges parents face is connecting their children with opportunities that can support their talent development.

Other significant challenges involve the social and emotional situations that the child and, consequently, the family encounter. Gifted children may have difficulty finding friends, either due to their natural characteristics or the label effect. The child's loneliness, social communication problems, the parents' efforts to find friends for the child, and their attempts to be friends with the child can sometimes add extra roles. These situations can sometimes progress in an unhealthy way. For example, even well-intentioned parents may not provide opportunities for the natural development of their children's abilities due to excessive expectations or excessive attention. Therefore, families of children in this group may face difficulties due to excessive expectations and attention.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: Are the challenges different for intellectually gifted as opposed to talented or creative students? How does this affect families?

Şule Demirel Dinceç: In the definition of giftedness accepted in Turkey, both intellectual and performance areas are included. However, when we look at the implementation, there are limitations in all of them, but intellectual orientations are generally emphasized. Therefore, a child gifted in academic areas can, with some difficulty, find support, but a child gifted in other areas may be disadvantaged even in the identification stage. Afterward, the child can develop their talent with after-school supports through the individual efforts of the family.

I think in Turkey, mathematics and science are more valued in society currently. On the other hand, there are qualified conservatories in the field of art, but the same cannot be said for sports academies. Especially in high school entrance exams, academically talented children get into elite schools, and those with lower scores go to sports schools. This situation puts parents in a dilemma between supporting their children in the talent area where they will be happy and preparing them for elite academic schools or directing them towards socially accepted career choices. Usually, they prioritize academic content and support other areas as hobbies.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: How can parents find mentors and counselors for gifted children in your country? And how important do you think they are?

Şule Demirel Dinceç: As I mentioned earlier, the individual efforts of parents are crucial in this regard. Parents can seek support in finding a suitable mentor by contacting experts at universities. Unfortunately, there is currently no platform that is both reliable and easily accessible for this purpose. However, in Turkey, many gifted students can experience transformative effects in talent development with mentor support. Sometimes, the child consulting with us may not have similar peers in their school, or their level may exceed that of other gifted children. In such cases, mentorship can be very appropriate. There may be individuals capable of being excellent mentors, but we are weak in

bringing them together. For example, I introduce some families to a few mentors from my personal repertoire, and there can be both successful and unsuccessful matches.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: Are there support networks in your country to support parents?

Şule Demirel Dingeç: Unfortunately, they are very limited. Sometimes, parents come together on their own, but these are short-term gatherings. Sometimes, a few associations are established but cannot continue their active existence. However, at this point, it is not fair to blame the legal framework and its deficiencies in the country. Because first, parents need to demand this to meet their needs. They need to request their rights not just momentarily but continuously and stay together. Experts can develop good family education programs, create meeting platforms, but no expert can replace the role of the family.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: Are there differences in raising gifted girls as opposed to gifted boys?

Şule Demirel Dingeç: Let me give you an example of this. Girls who apply to the center I work for, which is for gifted and talented students. The program at the center is mainly focused on mathematics and science, and the application rates are dominated by boys. However, among the winners of the program, there can be girls who take the first place. But at the application stage, girls are not very confident in mathematics and science. Although this number has increased in recent years, it is still higher in favor of boys.

This situation may not be specific to gifted students in Turkey but could be a general perception for all. For instance, one of my female graduate students at the university initially won admission to engineering but chose education faculty and graduated as a mathematics teacher. Therefore, rather than differences in upbringing, I can say that there are cultural and social stereotypes specific to gender.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: Many gifted children around the world have some mental health issues. How are things in your country?

Şule Demirel Dingeç: In studies in our country, the number of individuals with mental health problems in special or gifted individuals does not seem much higher than the world average. However, this may be due to the limitations of studies in our country. To give an example from personal observations, families coming for identification to the center where I work used to often say, "If our child has a behavioral problem or hyperactivity, is it related to high intelligence or not?" They were quite numerous. We share with them that these conditions may not always be observed together. I think they want to balance a difficult situation with the positive effect of a label they find favorable, but in the past year, I have noticed an increase in specific learning difficulties in children diagnosed as gifted compared to previous years.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: How well prepared are teachers to work with gifted students? What do you think about the collaboration between parents, teachers, and experts in this context?

Şule Demirel Dingeç: Sometimes, I think about my teachers, especially my primary school teacher. I remember the positive impressions she left on me many times in my life with a smile on my face. I believe that the teacher can be a turning point for gifted students, either positively or negatively. In Turkey, some of the teachers working with these students are genuinely enthusiastic and open to development, while others are not very competent. Therefore, to have more qualified teachers working with gifted students, it is the responsibility of not only them but also many stakeholders. For example, at education faculties, any teacher candidate in any field should receive education on how to recognize and support these children, whom to apply to for support, when they start their profession. Teachers working with gifted students should be open to development and constantly follow innovations in their field, but they should not be left alone to do something with their own efforts. For this, it is important that academics work with teachers, teachers do not become disconnected from families, and all stakeholders do not see each other as competitors but work together for the same goal, the well-being of the child.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: What is the role of intelligence testing in identifying gifted students?

Şule Demirel Dingeç: I believe that intelligence tests predict academic skills well and provide important information in this regard. However, it is not easy to measure, let alone define, what intelligence really is. Therefore, when

information about general intelligence or intellectual abilities is needed, these tools can be used to determine the level of the child according to their age and, more importantly, to identify their strong and weak points. However, neither intelligence tests nor any other tool should be idolized. Process-based diagnostics are not very easy or economical but increase the accuracy of correct identification. Therefore, when discussing the results of a intelligence test with families, I always remind them of this. We conducted a 1-hour evaluation here, and the child may have qualified for a program with the report obtained. But maybe after 2 years, the child can make another skill leap that we did not see here, or situations that need support may arise. Even as the child grows older, it would be better to make field-specific evaluations. It is not easy to define or measure intelligence and ability, but it is possible to accept that it is dynamic.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: How well has your book been received?

Şule Demirel Dengeç: We sent the first edition of the book as a gift to the families we provided education to, which triggered us to write the book, and each of them responded very positively. Additionally, the limited availability of Turkish resources on the subject was seen as a significant contribution by our colleagues. I thank them all. While writing a book, the goal is to contribute to the field, but personally, there is something else that I consider very important. That is creating change. In other words, I would be happiest if this book touches the real lives of even a few of the families who read it. Although the book is very new, for now, I can say that I received feedback from one mother. She wrote to me that her communication with her gifted child completely changed, and things at home started to improve. These are very valuable.

Michael F. Shaughnessy: What advice do you have for parents with gifted children?

Şule Demirel Dengeç: I have two fundamental pieces of advice for parents to help their children. Firstly, they should remember that they have not only a "gifted" child but firstly a "child." Excessive expectations can do more harm than good. After that, I would recommend them to remain calm and positive to support their children. Sometimes, opportunities, experts, schools, programs may be limited, or the energy of the parents may decrease. Sometimes the dream school you envision may not be in your area, but there is always something you can do.

Autobiography of Şule Demirel Dengeç



Şule Demirel Dengeç works at Anadolu University, Faculty of Education, Department of Gifted Education. She is also the coordinator of social programs and family education at EPGT Application and Research Center. He completed his master's degree and doctorate in the field of gifted education. She is one of the authors of Türkiye's first domestic intelligence scale, ASİS. He has studies on character development in gifted students, values education and sociocultural dimensions of giftedness. E-mail: suledemirel@anadolu.edu.tr

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