

Abstract

Adolescents' ($N = 272$) psychological changes were examined at a residential academy for gifted junior and senior high school students in the Midwest. The School-Based Conception of Giftedness (Coleman & Cross, 2005) was drawn on to understand how school environment influences student development. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to inform the study. Outcome measurement data from the Youth Outcome Questionnaire Self-Report 2.0 (YOQ-SR) tracked students' level of psychological distress over the course of an academic year. Using Latent Growth Curve Model (LGM) analysis, the initial level of distress did not impact how students' stress levels changed over time. The results indicated a strong negative correlation ($r = -.884$) between the slope and quadratic change; meaning, the more a students' level of stress increased the more rapidly they were able to reduce it over time. Overall, the change in stress formed an inverted-U shape, as students adapted to the challenges of the school. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with 9 senior students with a wide range of YOQ-SR scores at the beginning of their junior year. Four categories emerged from the interviews about student experiences at the academy: *Psychological Changes*, *Academic Adjustment*, *Social Adjustment* and *Social Comparison*. In essence, when participating in the academy, students experienced advanced personal development, improved management skills and developed a sense of readiness for college.