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Social and emotional needs of gifted elementary students: understanding the development of self-concept identification

Suzanne Lindt[1], Emily Rutherford [2], Heather Wagner[3]

Midwestern State University, West College of Education, US

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Abstract

The current research sought to understand the social and emotional development of identified gifted and talented (G/T) elementary students through a mixed-methods concurrent design study. Researchers collected data from G/T students, parents, and teachers in five school districts in the southern USA to better understand G/T students' self-concept in different grade levels during elementary school. Students were interviewed one on one using both open and closed interview questions by trained researchers. In addition, parents and teachers responded to surveys and open-ended questions regarding their G/T students. A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used to best create an overall interpretation of G/T students' self-concept development. Interview transcripts were analyzed and cross-validated among researchers. Themes were developed from codes from student interviews, and themes were also created from parent and teacher surveys to closed-questions. Follow up analyses were conducted to determine correlations between students' self-concept scores and age. An ANOVA was also conducted to determine differences between self-concept scores and grade level. Results suggest that G/T students' self-concept declined as grade level increased and was strongly related to the type of gifted program and method of notification for entrance into the gifted program. In addition, parent and teacher perceptions of G/T students related to student self-concept. The results and findings of this study suggest that a lack of understanding regarding the definition and implications of being identified as gifted exists not only for gifted children but also for their parents. Schools may work to better inform parents and students of what it means to be gifted and what challenges may exist in self-concept development.

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Introduction

Many G/T students struggle with developing effective social skills with their peers, due to their asynchronous development (Rinn & Majority, 2018). When gifted students fail to find a peer group within the classroom, the perception of isolation can have long-lasting consequences (Hollingsworth, 1931). In some cases, the lack of peer acceptance affects the gifted student's academic performance and leads to an increase in depression and the development of low self-esteem. Identified gifted and talented (G/T) students possess different social and emotional development from that of their same age non-identified G/T peers, resulting in a lower self-concept in middle school and high school when compared to non-G/T students. During the period of development from early childhood through adolescence, children gain an understanding of themselves, and this may be especially important for gifted children who think deeply about everything. Shalvelson et al. (1976) suggest that one's experiences, and the understanding and interpretation of those experiences, influences the development of self-concept. However, much

[1] Corresponding author: Suzanne F. Lindt, Associate Professor, Midwestern State University, West College of Education; phone: 940-397-6334, fax: 940-3974694 address: 3410 Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls, TX 76308 E-mail: suzanne.lindt@msutexas.edu 0000-0003-0536-6469
[2] Assistant Professor, Midwestern State University, West College of Education; address: 3410 Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls, TX 76308 E-mail: emily.rutherford@msutexas.edu 0000-0002-9063-1388
[3] Researcher, Address: 543 Sagebrush Ct.; Aledo, TX 76008 E-mail: sflindt.utex01@gmail.com

of the previous research in self-concept of G/T students has focused on the secondary levels. Because the development of self-concept happens over time, a need exists to gain insight into how G/T students' understanding and perceptions regarding their status as gifted children affect their social and emotional growth as they transition into adolescence. Younger children depend on approval from parents, but as children transition through middle childhood and into adolescence, they begin to depend on peers for acceptance.

Historically, students labeled as G/T have been perceived as being psychologically weak and vulnerable (Neihart 1999; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). Initial studies conducted by Terman and his peers (Terman 1927; Terman & Oden, 1947, 1959) found that students labeled as G/T are superior to their peers in cognitive abilities and social adjustment and numerous studies have confirmed this (i.e. Chan, 2011; Lee, et al., 2012). In contrast, Pfeiffer (2009) found the risk of peer stigmatization and a lower self-concept can be linked to labeling students as G/T. By understanding the different influences on a gifted child's perception of self, educators and parents can help gifted children strengthen their self-concepts and focus their unique trains in positive ways. Therefore, the proposed approach to this research is to focus on understanding of gifted children during early and middle childhood or the elementary years may reveal an important understanding of the development of their self-concept and help both educators and parents to support their child during this critical transition to adolescence.

Self-Concept in Gifted Students

Success in school is a major factor in a positive self-concept for students. Self-confidence, or the understanding of oneself based on personal experiences and beliefs about oneself, in skills are developed in many ways throughout their educational careers. Students who are confident in their skills are more likely to choose to participate in highly challenging activities. Student perception of personal skills often affects the type of activities they choose and the level of challenge in each activity. In addition, student perception can also influence the level of persistence they show in mastery and/or completion of activities once they are selected to participate in G/T programs (Ames, 1990; Bandura, 1977, 1986; McCoach & Siegle, 2003; Schunk, 1981, 1984). G/T students perceive their academic competence to be higher when compared to non-gifted peers. In addition, G/T students have higher behavioral competencies and overall self-concept when compared to non-gifted peers. However, students labeled as G/T report themselves as lower than non-gifted peers on measures of appearance and athletic competence (Kosir et al., 2016).

Evidence suggests that female G/T students often have lower self-concept in certain areas than G/T males. Ablard (1997) reported that G/T females score significantly lower in socially related subscales on rating scales. Reis (2002) suggests that females labeled as gifted typically experience lower self-confidence as they enter adolescence. This may be due to parental, teacher, and peer influences.

Influence of Parents, Teachers, and Peers

G/T students are typically independent in their thinking and actions; however, they are also easily influenced by those closest to them. Parents, peers, and teachers can influence the way G/T students think, feel, and respond to stressors which will often lead to a quick decline in self-concept. The influence of parents, peers, and teachers often include, but are not limited to, pressures to perform well, extremely high expectations in all aspects of life, and expectations for high ability class work.

Parents of G/T children often focus on two types of academic goals for their children: mastery goals and performance goals (Kim, 2019). Parents who focus on mastery goals have a desire for their children to develop competence. Parents who focus on performance goals have a desire for their children to demonstrate their competence by outperforming others. Both of these focuses can lead to comparing their child to their peers and comparing past performance to current performance. These comparisons put undue pressure on gifted children to consistently perform at a higher level and rate than their peers.

G/T students may also feel pressure from teachers, though teachers are focused on meeting the needs of all students placed in their classrooms. Most teachers are well trained as pre-service teachers in developing lessons for the average student and also receive some training on teaching students with disabilities, but most teachers receive little to no training on teaching G/T students (Colucci, 2015). The lack of training leads to teachers relying on previous experiences with G/T students and the pressures for identification as their guide for teaching these students. Relying on this leads to the assumption that G/T children are simply "really smart kids" (Colucci, 2015). The practice of viewing G/T students as simply being smart students leads to additional pressures to perform and a lack of focus on the unique needs of this population of students. Lack of focus, by teachers, on the G/T child's needs put the focus on performance. The pressure to perform by teachers causes G/T students to have feelings of being in competition

with other students (Morris, 2013; Vogl & Preckel, 2014). Constant pressure to compete with and outperform their peers often leads to a decline in G/T students' self-concept.

In addition to parent and teacher pressures, G/T students are forced to navigate peer pressure to perform at a higher rate but also to be a typical child. Many G/T children are forced to decide between spending time with peers or continuing their schoolwork in order to meet the pressure of being high performing. The pressure of constantly being expected to perform at a higher level than their peers can lead G/T students to modulate their abilities (Cross et al., 2016). This may be viewed as the only path for G/T students to avoid recognition for their abilities. The inability or unwillingness to take on an outward personality as a high achiever can result in a loss of potential and a rapid decline in self-concept (Cross et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop a greater understanding of G/T student self-concept development in elementary school. Research questions were as follows:

- How and to what extent does the self-concept of gifted elementary school students change throughout the elementary grades?
- How does students' understanding and perception of their gifted status affect social and emotional growth as they transition from childhood into adolescence?
- How do the influences of parents, teachers, and peers of gifted students affect and relate to gifted students' self-concept?

Method

Research Design and Participants

To answer the research questions and gain a more complete understanding of self-concept development in gifted elementary students, a convergent parallel design was selected. Researchers wanted to place equal importance on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the research study to use in mixing the results and creating an overall interpretation of G/T students' self-concept development (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Qualitative data was gathered from students through interviews, during which time the researcher also assisted the student in completing a survey. Parents and teachers completed separate online surveys. Teachers received the surveys via emails sent by their district's G/T coordinator, while parents received the survey via email from the researcher following their child's interview.

Researchers contacted several school districts in the southern US to invite them to participate in the research study. A total of five public school districts participated in the research study, and researchers solicited participants by sending letters to parents of identified G/T students through the G/T coordinators from the districts. A total of 35 elementary students (60% female, n = 21) who ranged in age from 6 – 11 years participated in the research study. In addition, fifteen educators from the five school districts and 25 parents of G/T study participants responded to an invitation to participate and completed the survey. See Table 1 for detailed information about participants in the study.

Table 1.

Demographics for Participants

Gender	***N***	**%**	**Grade Level**	***N***	**%**
Female (F)	21	58.3	1	3	8.3
Male (M)	14	38.9	2	9	25
Total	36	100	3	8	22.2
			4	7	19.4
			5	7	19.4
			6	1	2.8
			Total	35	97.2
Program Type					
Pullout	27	77.1	**Notification of G/T**		
Integrated/Experience	4	11.4	Letter	6	17.1
Total	31	88.6	Parents	10	28.6
			School	6	17.1
Frequency of Gifted Services			Other	6	17.1
Weekly	27	77.1	Total	28	80
Occasionally	4	11.4			
Total	31	88.6	**Age Mean**	8.62	

Procedures

Upon parental consent, researchers set up student interview times convenient for the parents and students. Interviews were conducted at the child's school by one of two researchers and were one on one unless a parent chose to be present. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were comprised of two parts: an initial semi-structured interview, and a second part, during which the researchers proctored the completion of the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 2012) given to the students. Both parent and teacher surveys were completed online through Survey Monkey to which parents and teachers received the link via email from researchers or their school principal.

Data Collection Tools

Student Interviews

The first part of the student interview was open-ended and followed the Carspeckian interview protocol (Carspecken, 1996; Schraw et al., 2007). Interviewers asked students questions regarding their current G/T program, how they were notified about acceptance in the G/T program, their attitude about participation in the G/T program, and their perspective of non-G/T peers' attitudes regarding their participation in the program. The researchers developed questions to understand demographics of students and their current situation and to provide a segway into the interview questions about self-concept.

The second part of the interview was closed-ended and utilized an existing survey in which students self-reported their self-concept using the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 2012). Students were first given a statement by the interviewer and asked whether they felt the statement reflected their beliefs. The survey consisted of six parts assessing the following domains: academic competence (ex. *Some kids feel that they are very good at their schoolwork, but other kids worry that they can do the schoolwork assigned to them. Which one is more like you?)*, athletic competence (ex. "*Some kids do very well at all kinds of sports, but some kids don't feel they are very good when it comes to sports. Which one is more like you?"*), social competence (ex. *"Some kids know how to make their classmates like them, but other kids don't know how to make their classmates like them. Which one is more like you?"*), physical appearance (ex. *"Some kids are happy with the way they look, but other kids are not happy with the way they look. Which one is more like you?"*), behavioral conduct (ex. *"Some kids often don't like the way they behave, but other kids do like the way they behave. Which one is more like you?"*), and global self-worth (ex. *"Some kids don't like the way they are leading their life, but other kids do like the way they're leading their life. Which one is more like you?"*). Then, students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement (*ex. Is it a little like you or a lot like you?*). Students' scores were then converted to numbers, similar to items on a Likert scale from 1-4, in which 1 was strongly disagree and 4 was strongly agree for the items on each domain.

Teacher and Parent Surveys

Teachers and parents completed a survey that contained two parts. The first part was comprised of open-ended questions to provide background information on the G/T program and children as well as observed interactions between gifted children and their peers in the classroom. The second part of the survey contained Likert scaled items regarding myths about G/T children.

Teachers responded to questions developed by one of the researchers to determine a general age in which peers of gifted students begin to take notice of abilities of their gifted peers. These questions were developed from the literature and asked questions such as, "Have you had to address negative social interactions between gifted students and their peers in the classroom?" and "How have social struggles manifested in the classroom between gifted students and their peers?"

The questions for parents were developed by the researchers and included questions to provide background information about the G/T child such as, "At what age was your child formally identified as gifted?" and to provide researchers with information about the child's social and emotional development such as, "Has your child been the victim of social bullying in the classroom or at school?"

Both teachers and parents completed a second part of the survey with Likert scaled items that addressed commonly held myths surrounding giftedness to better understand parents' and teachers' knowledge of giftedness. The nineteen myths used in the research came from the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), who compiled a list of the most prevalent myths in gifted education that was originally published in a special included in *Gifted Child Quarterly* in the fall of 2009. Teachers and parents indicated the extent that they felt the myths were always or never true for gifted kids on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Statements included myths such as, "Gifted students don't need help; they'll do fine on their own." and "Gifted students are happy, popular, and well-adjusted in school.".

Data Analysis

The convergent design specifies a separate analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data before merging the two strands (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Researchers first analyzed the interview transcripts from open-ended questions from students and cross-validated these with a third researcher. Emerged themes were then quantified for each participant and student responses to the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 2012) were placed in a table for further analysis.

Students

The first part of the student interview asked students questions regarding their current G/T program and how they were notified about acceptance in the G/T program. Responses from students explained the varied G/T programming offered in their school (pull out, integrated, experience only), how they were notified about their acceptance into the G/T program (letter sent to home, parents contacted, informed at school, other), and the frequency of their participation in the G/T program (daily, weekly, monthly, other). The second part of the open-ended questions asked students about their attitude regarding participation in the G/T program, what it means to be G/T, and why they believe they are G/T.

Data from the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 2012) was entered into SPSS and analyzed to determine correlations between variables affecting students' self-concepts and identification as gifted students. Researchers first utilized correlational analysis to find related variables and then conducted a one-way ANOVA to analyze any grade-level differences in the data.

Parents and Teachers

Percentages of responses from parent and teacher surveys were calculated and coded for each question and categorized regarding parents' and teachers' beliefs about G/T students. Three themes were identified and can be seen in Table 4. For the second part of parent and teacher surveys, responses to myths about G/T students were calculated for the responses to the Likert scales. Myths with responses at 40% or higher were analyzed further to understand the myths that parents and teachers strongly agreed with.

Results

Both quantitative and qualitative data was then triangulated to answer the research questions. The results are presented as answers to our research questions to explain results from qualitative and quantitative research. We present results grouped as elementary students' understanding of being G/T, the social and emotional changes that the G/T students explained and how their self-concept differed from one grade level to another, and then we explain the results from parents, teachers, and students' perception of peers as they are related to G/T students.

Elementary Students' Understanding of Being G/T

First, researchers wanted to know more about what G/T students understand about being G/T. The first interview questions for students aimed to better understand G/T students' self-awareness of being gifted. Most students (70%) believed that they were placed into the G/T program because they performed well on a standardized test (ex. "When I took the test, I got the highest score."), while a smaller number (22%) thought it was because they made good grades in their classes (ex. "The teachers they see that you're making a bit higher grades, and they can tell that you're creative."). Students were also asked what it means to be G/T, and students responses included beliefs about being "above" other students (50%, ex. "We're a little better than the others."), the fact that they process information differently than other students (17%; ex. "I think we processed things a little more and we understood things a little better."), or they had no ideas to explain why they were identified as G/T (33%). See Table 2 for themes and student quotes. Full demographic information for student participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 2.
Themes from G/T Student Open-Ended Questions

Question Type	Theme	%	Quote
G/T Identification	Performance on standardized test	*70*	*"Uh, mainly made me think that I was gifted and talented was whenever I got commended on the STAR test in 3rd grade. I felt like I was smart enough to be in the GT program." (Male, 10yrs old)* *"When I took the test, I got the highest score." (Female, 9yrs old)*
	Grades in class	*22*	*"The teachers they see that you're making a bit higher grades, and they can tell that you're creative." (Female, 10yrs old)*
	Other reasons	*8*	*"Um, because I was really smart." (Female, 6yrs old)* *"I don't know; I just started going." (Female, 7yrs old)*
Definition of G/T	Being "above" other students	*50*	*"We're a little better than the others (non-gifted peers)." (Male, 9yrs old)* *"I guess I'm above the other students." (Female,11yrs old)*
	Process information differently	*17*	*"I'm different from the other kids because the way I think and the way I see things is sort a different from the way they see things. Because I think more, not like advanced than them. But I think rather differently from them." (Female, 9yrs old)* *"You can probably think quicker, or maybe you can, um, already, like, if you look at a paper, you already know the answer." (Female, 10yrs old)* *"I think we processed things a little more and we understood things a little better." (Female, 10yrs old)*
	Unknown	*33*	*"I don't know." (Male, 7yrs old)*
Peers	Curious	*60*	*"They think it is neat that we do cool stuff." (Female, 11yrs old)*
	Uninterested	*40*	*"They don't ask us anything when we come back after our morning G/T." (Female, 10yrs old)*
Peers mean	Peers Mean (Bullying behavior)	*24*	*"They sort of do treat me different because if we do group work you know, I'm the one answering the questions." (Male, 8yrs old)*

Gifted Students' Social and Emotional Changes

Secondly, researchers wanted to better understand when G/T students' self-concept changes in elementary school. Correlational analysis were first conducted to determine how both age and grade level related to self-concept variables. Many of the self-concept variables were highly correlated with one another, but only athletic competence was significantly correlated with age and grade level. Results suggest that as grade level increases, athletic competence (-.37) significantly decreases, which indicates that as students move into higher grade levels, G/T students may be less likely to possess athletic competence. In addition to athletic competence, social competence (-.20) and global self-worth (-.28) have the quickest decrease to age and grade level, though they were not significant. This means that these areas are more drastically affected as G/T kids get older and move into higher grade levels. Overall, every measure of self-concept decreased with age and grade level. Though not all were statistically significant, this supports our hypothesis that as G/T kids get older, their self-concept decreases. See Table 3 for all correlations between variables. To further understand grade-level differences in self-concept, researchers conducted a one-way ANOVA to determine how self-concept components differ between grade levels. None of the results for grade level were significant, though between group differences for behavioral self-concept neared significance [$F_{(2, 34)} = 2.20$, $p = .095$]. Results offer that students' overall self-concept and athletic competence changes beginning in late elementary school. Students in pull-out programs had lower social competence than those in programs who met less often. Overall, students' self-concept decreased from 1st to 5th grade, which is typical for all students across the nation whether identified as G/T or not. Though all variables declined, athletic competence declined the quickest when comparing grade-level differences. Athletic competence is defined as students' belief about their ability to be good at sports and other athletic endeavors, and results indicate that as students move to higher grades, their belief about their athletic ability decreases

Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations among the Descriptives and Self-Concept Variables for Elementary

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Descriptive										
1. Age	8.62	1.39	--							
2. Grade Level	3.26	1.36	.92***	--						
Self-Concept										
3. School Competence	3.31	.56	-.11	-.10	--					
4. Behavioral Competence	3.31	.71	-.20	-.20	.30	--				
5. Social Competence	3.36	.67	-.23	-.20	.32	.94***	--			
6. Athletic Competence	2.91	.69	-.36*	-.37*	.56***	.51**	.56***	--		
7. Physical Appearance	3.47	.59	-.07	-.03	-.05	.51**	.55**	.22	--	
8. Global Self-Worth	3.64	.36	-.21	-.28	.38*	.55**	.59***	.68***	.45**	--
9. Overall Self-Concept	3.33	.45	-.26	-.26	.55**	.87***	.90***	.78***	.60***	.78***

Notes. N = 19-20; $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

Influence of Peers, Parents, and Teachers on Gifted Students

In the third part of the open-ended student interviews, students were asked their perspective of non-G/T peers' attitudes about G/T students. Emerged themes from peers indicated peers are curious (60%, ex. "They think it is neat that we do cool stuff.") or peers are uninterested (40%, ex. "They don't ask us anything new when we come back after our morning G/T."). Of those who mentioned peers' interest, students indicated either peers were mean (24%, ex. "They sort of do treat me different because if we do group work you know, I'm the one answering the questions.") or not mean (76%) to them. See Table 2 for themes and quotes from students. These results suggest that peers at the elementary age may not have much understanding about gifted students or gifted programs. However, for older students interviewed, some students shared that they felt peers had certain expectations of them too.

In addition, researchers were interested in understanding whether the influence of parents and teachers of gifted students affects G/T students' self-concept. Teacher and parent responses were similar, but they did have some differences. Themes for parents included a concern that their children feel pressure to perform well in schoolwork, but some admitted that their child has been bullied for being smart. Another theme found for parents was that their G/T child often feel responsible for helping other kids in the classroom and are expected to know the answers. However, this is different from teacher responses regarding the same concepts. Parents also disagreed with the idea that gifted children are challenged in the classroom, and they supported the idea of pull out programs and other enrichment activities for their G/T child.

Teachers mentioned that some parents of G/T students have approached them regarding social and emotional development concerns regarding their child. As related to the gifted students, teachers' feedback suggests that gifted students are challenged and given no special treatment when compared to non-gifted peers. However, they suggested that G/T students often put pressure on themselves to perform well, while teachers believe that other G/T students do not reach their full academic potential. Teachers also mentioned that G/T students enjoy independent learning. Findings in the study offer that parents and teachers may have an influence in gifted students' self-concept through their explanation of defining G/T and through their attitudes and messages with G/T students. See Table 4 for parent and teacher themes.

Table 4.

Emerged Themes from Parents and Teachers

Themes	Teachers	Parents
Pressure to perform in school	x	x
Difficulty being challenged in class	x	x
Responsibility for helping others		x

For the myths section of parent and teacher surveys, researchers identified the myths that had a large percentage (over 40%) of those who agreed or strongly agreed with the myth and then wanted to look at the myths in which parents and teachers responded similarly. For parents, the myths in which most parents agreed or strongly agreed suggest that parents feel gifted students enjoy working independently on projects (52.2%), reteaching gifted students what they already know is okay (47.8%), and gifted students are happy and well-adjusted in school (43.4%). This

suggests that parents may not have much of an understanding about gifted students' social and emotional growth. For teachers, the myths that teachers agreed or strongly agreed to are that gifted students enjoy completing projects independently (53.3%) and that gifted education requires an abundance of resources (46.7%). This suggests that teachers may also not fully understand gifted children's social and emotional growth and that they may feel overwhelmed with teaching gifted children.

Discussion

The results and findings of this study suggest that a lack of understanding regarding the definition and implications of being identified as gifted exists not only for the gifted children, but for their parents as well. Wirthweing et al. (2019) supports this finding by stating that there is a broad definition for giftedness that is typically accepted, there is a lack of information on the specific functions of this definition which is often difficult for parents to relate to. Although it appears as if this deficit contributes to negative peer interactions that reinforce the negative stereotyping of gifted students, both adding to their insecurity, and stimulating the development of unrealistic expectations, additional research is needed to determine to what extent, if any, the themes that emerged from this study might serve as facilitative factors in the decline of the self-concept of gifted elementary school students.

Student Experiences

During the one-on-one interview portion of the study, students were asked a series of questions intended to illuminate their understanding of the concept of giftedness and examine students' perceptions regarding their own identification as G/T. The interview questions also allowed researchers to probe students' perceptions regarding whether or not they feel that being identified as G/T impacts interactions between the students and their teachers and peers.

When asked if they like participating in the G/T program at their respective schools, all interviewed students explained that they liked participating in their G/T programs and provided researchers with both positive and negative aspects of participation. Students mentioned field trips, missing class, and learning different things as positive aspects of participating in G/T. Missing recess, missing classroom assignments, leaving friends behind to go on field trips, peer jealousy, and high peer expectations were given as negatives to being identified as G/T.

Students in the early elementary grades have little understanding of what it means to be G/T and why they are labeled as G/T. These students also have higher self-concepts. As children progress through elementary school, they begin to develop a greater understanding of themselves and both students and peers realize their differences. As suggested by Pfeiffer (2009), these labels may have negative consequences and place negative pressures on G/T students.

Teacher and Parent Experiences

Teachers answered a survey about gifted students in their classes and their perceptions of how the students are treated by others. Most of the feedback was positive to indicate that pull out programs are effective and that G/T students have not received any social bullying from peers. However, teachers mentioned that some parents of G/T students have approached them regarding social and emotional development concerns regarding their child. Though G/T students are typically more socially advanced than their peers, they may progress at a different rate and be perceived differently by their parents. As related to the gifted students, teachers' feedback suggests that gifted students are challenged and given no special treatment when compared to non-gifted peers. Teachers also mentioned that G/T students enjoy independent learning. However, they suggested that G/T students often put pressure on themselves to perform well, while teachers believe that other G/T students do not reach their full academic potential. Morris (2013) mentioned that this pressure to perform well may come from peers, parents, or even from G/T students themselves.

For parents, most parents felt that G/T students had pressure to perform well in school and difficulty being challenged in class. This may be due to the fact that teachers have a belief that G/T students need additional resources in the classroom and that they want to work independently. Parents also added that they felt their G/T children felt a responsibility to help others in their classes, which may put undue pressure on G/T students to perform at a higher level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Though researchers explain that self-concept is established by peer comparison, which leads to an overall decline of self-concept over time, G/T students may be especially prone to a quicker self-concept decline because they are pushed harder and are continuously surrounded by other G/T students who perform above level. Teachers and

parents should be aware of this and help their child or student to focus on individual growth and learning, rather than comparing one's abilities to that of his or her peers. In addition, parents and teachers should help their identified G/T students to understand that being gifted does not mean one has greater knowledge and makes better grades. Identification into the school's G/T program is a result of one's ability to solve problems quickly and reason at a higher level.

Student feedback regarding their G/T programs was overall positive and students seem pleased with the work that they do during their time in G/T. However, we suggest that upon acceptance into G/T programs, students and parents receive more information on what it is to be identified as G/T and what their child is likely to experience in the program and with peers. G/T kids may not develop in the same way as their non-G/T peers, and parents may need to be aware of what it means to be gifted.

In addition, parents should be made aware of the possibility of social bullying that may result from their child being identified as G/T and the pressure that he or she may have. Parents felt that their child was not challenged, so more suggestions may be given to teachers for ways to challenge G/T students in the classroom.

Teachers of the gifted seem to have a good understanding of the potentials of gifted students. They realize that there may be added pressure on gifted students, but they understand that G/T kids enjoy working on additional assignments. Teachers noted no concerns with social bullying at the elementary level, but because of parents' concerns with social development, more information should be given to teachers about G/T kids and their needs of how they feel when compared to others.

Limitations

As with any research study, limitations exist in the current study. The research conducted solicited opinions of teachers, parents, and students for the data, so the results of the study may not apply to other G/T programs across the US. Though the data was gathered from several school districts, the sample size was small, which may also limit applicability of the study results. Future research studies should include additional research with a variety of students across G/T programs within and outside the US to better determine whether findings in this study apply to other G/T students. Despite the limitations, the current research does offer findings that may benefit parents and G/T program coordinators to better inform G/T students and help these students to develop socially and emotionally throughout and beyond elementary school.

Author Biographies

Suzanne F. Lindt, Ph.D. is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Learning in the West College of Education at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, TX. She currently teaches educational psychology and classroom assessment to teacher education majors in all certification areas. She is a former middle school English and gifted and talented teacher. Her current research interests are in the areas of student motivation and student classroom engagement in both K-12 education and higher education. She is also the mother of two gifted children. In her spare time, Suzanne enjoys reading, being outdoors, and spending time with her family. **Affiliation:** Midwestern State University, West College of Education; address: 3410 Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls, TX 76308; Phone: 940-397-6334, Fax: 940-3974694 **E-mail:** suzanne.lindt@msutexas.edu

Emily Rutherford, Ed.D. is currently an assistant professor in the West College of Education at Midwestern State University where she teaches special education and educational assessment courses to graduate and undergraduate students. Dr. Rutherford is a former public school teacher, educational diagnostician and special education supervisor. She has spent almost 20 years working in the public and private school sector with students with disabilities as well as gifts and talents. Her research interests include various areas of special education, teacher assessment and other related topics. She is also the mother of two children. In her spare time, Emily enjoys reading, cooking, and spending time with her family. **Affiliation:** Midwestern State University, West College of Education Address: 3410 Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls, TX 76308 Phone: 940-397-4800 **E-mail:** emily.rutherford@msutexas.edu

Heather Wagner received her BA in English with a 4-8 teaching certification from Midwestern State University in 2014. She has taught 5th, 7th, and 9th grade English and 9th grade composition in North Carolina and Texas. She is the mother of three gifted children and developed this research project as an undergraduate research project (funded by EURECA at MSU Texas) to better understand the social and emotional needs of gifted children. Heather Wagner, Home address: 543 Sagebrush Ct.; Aledo, TX 76008; home: 803-236-0881; email: jayrdubya@yahoo.com

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