

FOSTERING GIFTED STUDENTS' AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT IN AN INCLUSIVE SETTING: A LOOK AT THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT

Kamilu Ibrahim

*Department of Special Education
Bayero University, Kano*

Abstract

Gifted and talented people are credited for advances in medicine, in technology, in theater and cinema, and in the arts. The road these individuals took to achieve their high levels of contribution to society varies, depending on their families' socioeconomic status, their own determination, and the educational opportunities available to them. The purpose of this paper is to provide educators and counselors with a framework for understanding the concept of giftedness, definition of inclusive education and the academic self-concepts of gifted students. As academic self-concept is theoretically, linked with other constructs, including academic achievement and aspirations, it is vital that educators and counselors are aware of the experiences gifted students may face. Implications for educators and counselors are discussed.

Introduction

Self-concept is the construct that negotiates these two selves. In other words, it connotes first the identification of the ideal self as separate from others, and second, it encompasses all the behaviors vetted in the actual self that you engage in to reach the ideal self. Behavioral scientists often assert that the self-concept is the sole perspective from which one can understand an individual's behavior because it includes all the dimensions of the self including how one looks (self-image) and what one knows (self-knowledge) and the ways in which these exist for others (fulfilling the ego).

Definition of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can learn and develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the best interests of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belonging, active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community. These values and beliefs will be shared by schools and communities. Inclusive education is put into practice within school communities that value diversity and nurture the well-being and quality of learning of each of their members. Inclusive education is carried out through a range of public and community programs and services available to all students.

The Concept of Giftedness

Giftedness is an abstract concept, which, at present, has no universally accepted definition. Nevertheless, definitions and explanations put forward by experts in the field of education, psychology and other related areas of knowledge make the concept better understood. In this line, some professionals define “gifted” as an intelligence test score above 130 that is, two or more standard deviations above the norm or the top 2.5% of the population. Some others also define it based on scholastic achievement where the child is described as working two or more grade levels above his or her age. According to the Columbus Group, (1991), a group of respected professionals in the field of gifted, cited by Morelock (1992), suggest a definition based on the gifted child’s differences from the norm:

“Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (Morelock, 1992)”.

Furthermore, Dowland (2000), on the other hand, explains giftedness in a statistical sense as a child who scores in the top 5 percent of the population on an I.Q test. Moreover, Clark (1983) also defines giftedness as:

“A biological root concept, a label for a high level of intelligence that results from the advanced and accelerated integration of functions within the brain, including physical sensing, emotions, cognition and intuition. Such advanced and accelerated may be expressed through abilities such as those involved in cognition, creativity, academic, aptitude, leadership or the visual and performing arts (Clark, 1983)”.

Additionally, Marsh & Shavelson (1985) states that:

“Children and youth with outstanding talent reform or (who) show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools.

Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic, and in all areas of human endeavour (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985)”.

A student’s self-concept in mathematics, for example, is derived from his or her perceived math competence relative to how he or she performs in other subject areas and how strong he or she thinks his or her peers are in math. Of course, moving into a new, more talented, peer group might result in a BFLPE phenomenon. The I/E model suggests that achievement in one area has a direct positive effect on self-concept in the related area (due to the external comparisons) and a negative effect on the self-concept in the other area (due to the internal comparisons). For example, a student’s verbal achievement would have a strong positive impact on his or her verbal self-concept and a moderate negative impact on his or her math self-concept. The competing effects of the external and internal comparisons largely cancel each other out, and a student’s math self-concept development may appear to be unrelated to his or her verbal self-concept, although he or she may have very similar mathematics and verbal achievement. The I/E model has been applied to gifted students’ math and verbal self-concept development with some success. Williams and Montgomery (1995) found evidence of both internal and external comparisons in the self-concept development of a group of high school honors students. Plucker and Stocking (2001) found that the I/E model successfully explained the math and verbal self-concept development of academically gifted students enrolled in an intensive summer residential program. In addition, they found evidence that the internal/external frame of reference model explains math and verbal self-concept development for students with both mathematical and verbal strengths, and students with strengths in either, but not both, areas. Recently, although they were not using a gifted sample, Marsh and Hau (2004) found support for the I/E model in a study that included students from 26 countries, illustrating the generalizability of the I/E model. Mui, Yeung, Low, and Jin (2000) found support for the I/E model with a sample of gifted, Chinese adolescents. Further, despite often found differences in math and verbal self-concepts among males and females, such that males typically have higher math self-concepts (Williams & Montgomery, 1995) and females typically have higher verbal self-concepts (Marsh & Yeung, 1998), the I/E model appears to work the same for both males and females. Using a sample of 181 gifted adolescents, Rinn, McQueen, Clark, and Rumsey (2008) did not find gender differences within the I/E model, thus providing support for Marsh’s (1986) original notion that the I/E model is equally generalizable to males and females. Other researchers have also failed to find evidence for gender differences with regard to the I/E model (e.g., Marsh & Yeung). Implications for Teachers and Counselors Based on the BFLPE and the I/E model, Marsh and his colleagues (1995) suggested a number of strategies to decrease the negative effects of social comparison on student’s academic self-concepts. We have elaborated upon and added to these suggestions in light of our research and experiences working with gifted and talented adolescents in a variety of instructional and social settings.

-
1. Recognize the breadth of self-concepts that may be held by each talented student. The foundation of the I/E model is that a student may have very different self-concepts in different content areas, even if the student is equally successful in all areas. Assuming that a student sees him- or herself as very talented in English just because he or she tests well in all academic areas overlooks the potential impact of internal and external comparisons in that student's life. A teacher is better off examining the ways in which the gifted adolescent sees him- or herself as having academic strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. Gifted adolescents see themselves as complex, multifaceted people, even within the area of academic performance, and educators and parents should try to see them in the same light.
 2. Self-concept should not be viewed as a means to its own end. There is little credible evidence that boosting self-concept with praise and a lowered level of challenge provides lasting change in a student's intellectual achievement. Indeed, challenge may have a short-term, negative effect on self-concept but a positive long-term effect as a student's confidence slowly increases. In this way, even failure during a challenging task can lead to an enhanced and healthy self-concept within a specific academic area. Emphasizing a student's unique, realistic contribution, rather than praising a hollow intellectual success can boost self-confidence in a challenging program. Although an unrealistically high academic self-concept is not healthy for gifted students' development, teachers should be aware of opportunities to provide reasonable feedback that will encourage students' positive academic self-concepts and perhaps lead to increased achievement.

"Information about learning styles, motivation, and self-concept can be very helpful when designing learning experiences for talented adolescents."
 3. Consider information beyond grades and test scores when planning educational experiences for gifted and talented students. Information about learning styles, motivation, and self-concept can be very helpful when designing learning experiences for talented adolescents. Learning more about our students will help us develop academic experiences to meet their affective needs without compromising intellectual rigor. For example, teachers can develop assessments in which students pursue projects of personal interest. Gifted students, like other students, benefit from the opportunity to express themselves through their work, and providing students with choices within a curriculum provides a unique basis for self-assessment and will likely result in increased motivation and positive self-concept. Depending on their age, gifted students can benefit particularly from independent research projects that can be designed to answer questions of interest to the students. Several gifted education models (e.g., the School wide Enrichment Model, Renzulli, 2005; the Parallel Curriculum Model, Tomlinson et al., 2002) have been shown to be especially effective in this regard.
 4. Balance student exposure to competitive, cooperative, and individualistic activities in the classroom. Some gifted students may thrive in a highly competitive

atmosphere, but that type of environment can foster social comparisons that may lower self-concept, as per the BFLPE. Students are better served if a variety of approaches are used in the classroom. For example, we visited an advanced math class at a summer program in time to see a rousing game of “Around the World,” where students were pitted one against the other in a test of speed and trigonometry facts. A number of students clearly enjoyed the game and appreciated the opportunity to compare their skills to others, but others were nervous and self-conscious. At another intensive summer program, students working on team-based technology projects often faltered due to their lack of familiarity with cooperative activities in which one group was not “the winner” (Plucker & Gorman, 1995). Students need to experience a mixture of cooperative (working with others), individualistic (competing against oneself), and competitive (competing against others) environments to become comfortable with learning under a variety of such contexts.

5. Consider each student's participation in multiple instructional contexts. Gifted students spend their academic lives in a variety of instructional settings (Stocking, 1998). In addition to the regular classroom, they often attend after-school, weekend, and summer programs, all of which allow the talented adolescent to interact with a different peer group than is found in regular classroom settings. The impact of a particular instructional context on academic self-concept may be influenced by the perceived competence of peers, the method for selecting students for a program, the ability of the teacher to work with academically talented students, the level of competition, type of curriculum and level of curriculum differentiation, and assessment strategies (Plucker & Stocking, 2002). With talented adolescents often participating in several such contexts over the course of a year, teachers should consider how all of these experiences influence adolescents' views of themselves.
6. Provide students with feedback about individual growth instead of comparisons with other students in the class. This principle is an elaboration of the previous recommendation about balancing competition, collaboration, and individualism in the classroom. If students are exposed to all of these experiences, it is important for teachers to provide students with feedback about their progress within each area. With respect to individualistic experiences, students should receive feedback about performance relative to their own base-lines and expected growth. In some cases, assessing gifted students according to the standards for their age is irrelevant to the instructor and the students, who realize that age or grade-based standards for underestimate the students' potential performance. Regarding cooperative activities, students should receive information about their interpersonal skills, and students should receive a wide range of data about their performance relative to peers during and after competitive learning experiences. In general, this detailed feedback aids students in assessing their own abilities and forming a realistic self-concept.

.....

“Students should receive information about their interpersonal skills, and students should receive a wide range of data about their performance relative to peers.”

7. Provide teachers with opportunities to learn more about the special needs of academically gifted adolescents. Any teacher can benefit from specialized training in new instructional strategies, and those methods that are effective for instructing gifted students can be beneficial to many students. However, when gifted students’ instructional needs are not met in the classroom, whether in pullout programs or summer residential programs, students can suffer a variety of negative affective consequences, including negative impacts on academic self-concepts. A highly trained teacher (with regard to differentiation) is more likely to provide the optimal level of challenge and support that will encourage gifted students’ affective and intellectual development.

Conclusion

Self-concept is a construct that negotiates exchanges between your ideal and actual selves. In doing this, it attempts to solve problems, achieve stability, ensure protection, seek change and improve constantly. The discussion of gifted students’ self-concept development should not focus solely on academic self-concept. Self-concept researchers are widening their focus to include self-concept in areas as diverse as interpersonal relations and athletic ability (e.g., Bain & Bell, 2004; Chanal, Marsh, Sarrazin, & Bois, 2005; Rinn & Wininger, 2007). Future research should extend the application of the I/E model and the BFLPE to address the influence of academic self-concept on the development of nonacademic dimensions, such as self-concept in peer relations, physical attractiveness, and inter- and intra-personal relations, as well as examine changes in the I/ E model and BFLPE across time. In the meantime, these preceding recommendations provide a good starting point for practitioners interested in fostering their gifted students’ academic self-concepts. The self-concept is a construct that negotiates exchanges between your ideal and actual selves. In doing this, it attempts to solve problems, achieve stability, ensure protection, seek change and improve constantly.

References

- Bain, S. K., & Bell, S. M. (2004). Social Self-concept, Social Attributions, and Peer relationships in Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Graders who are gifted compared to high achievers. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 48, pp. 167-178.
- Chanal, J. P., Marsh, H. W., Sarrazin, P. G., & Bois, J. E. (2005). Big-fish-little-pond Effects on Gymnastics Self-concept: Social Comparison Processes in a Physical Setting. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 27, 53-70.

- Clark, B. (1983). *Growing up gifted*. (2nd ed) Ohio: Charles Emerill Publishing Company.
- Dai, D. Y., & Rinn, A. N. (2008). The Big-fish Little-pond Effect: What do we Know and Where do we Go from Here? *Educational Psychology Review*, 20, 283-317.
- Downland, H. (2000). *Highly Gifted Children*. Retrieved January 20, 2006 from <http://www.noagresgifted.org/underserved.htm>.
- Earsh, H. W., & Parker, J. W. (1984). Determinants of Student Self-concept: Is it Better to be a relatively large fish in a small pond even if you don't learn to swim as well? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47, 213-231.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* New York: W. W. Norton.
- Garg, R. (1992). Academic and Non-academic Self-concepts: Influence of Recent Life-change Experiences and Demographic, Social, and Health Variables. *NACADA Journal*, 13, 43-52.
- Harter, S. (1986). Processes Underlying the Construction, Maintenance, and Enhancement of the Self-concept in Children. In J. Suls & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), *Psychological Perspectives on the self* (Vol. 3, pp. 137-181).
- House, J. D. (2000). The Effect of Student Involvement on the Development of Academic Self-concept. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 140, 261-266
- Marsh, H. W. (1987). The Big- Fish Little Pond Effect on Academic Self-concept. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79, 280.
- Marsh, H. W., & Hau, K. (2004). Explaining Paradoxical Relations between Academic Self-concepts and Achievements: Cross-cultural Generalizability of the Internal/external Frame of Reference Predictions across 26 countries. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96, 56- 67.
- Marsh, H. W., & Shavelson, R. (1985). Self-concept: Its multifaceted, Hierarchical structure. *Educational Psychologist*, 20, 107-123.
- Marsh, H. W., Chessor, D., Craven, R., & Roche, L. (1995). The effects of gifted and talented programs on academic self-concept: The big fish strikes again. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 285-319.
- Mui, F. L. L., Yeung, A. S., Low, R., & Jin, P. (2000). Academic self-concept of Talented students: Factor Structure and Applicability of the Internal/external frame of Reference model. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 23, 343-367.
- Plucker, J. A., & Gorman, M. E. (1995). Group Interaction during a Summer Course on Invention and Design for high ability

-
- secondary Students. *The Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 6, 258-27
- Plucker, J. A., & Stocking, V. B. (2002, April). An Extension of the I/E model of Self-concept to Multiple Contexts and its Implications for gifted students. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Plucker, J. A., Robinson, N. M., Greenspon, T. S., Feldhusen, J. F., McCoach, D. B., & Subotnik, R. F. (2004). It's not how the pond makes you feel, but rather how high you can jump. *American Psychologist*, 59, 268
- Rinn, A. N. (2007). Effects of Programmatic Selectivity on the Academic Achievement, Academic Self- concepts, and Aspirations of Gifted College Students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 51, 232-245.
- Rinn, A. N., McQueen, K. S., Clark, G., & Rumsey, J. L. (2008). Gender Differences in Gifted Adolescents' Math/verbal Self-concepts and Math/verbal Achievement: Implications for the STEM fields. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 32, 34-.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Rankin, R. J. (1990). Math, Verbal, and General Academic Self-concept: The internal/ external frame of Reference Model and Gender Differences in Self-concept Structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 546-554.
- Stocking, V. B. (1998). "What I did on my vacation": Summer options for gifted students. *NASSP Bulletin*, 82, 93-100.
- Tomlinson, C. A., Kaplan, S. N., Renzulli J. S., Purcell, J., Leppien, J., & Burns, D. (2002, November). The Parallel Curriculum: A design to Develop high potential and Challenge high-ability Learners. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association for Gifted Children, St. Paul, MN.
- Valentine, J. C., DuBois, D. L., Cooper, H. (2004). The Relation between Self- Beliefs and Academic Achievement: A Meta-analytic Review. *Educational Psychologist*, 39, 111-133.
- Williams, J. E., & Montgomery, D. (1995). Using frame of Reference Theory to Understand the Self-concept of Academically able Students. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 18, 400-409.