

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – LA CROSSE

Graduate Studies

PARENT, TEACHER, AND SELF PERCEPTIONS OF
GIFTED STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS

A Chapter Style Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Education Specialist

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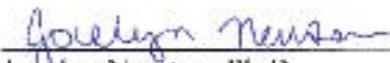
May, 2012

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By Angela Goethel

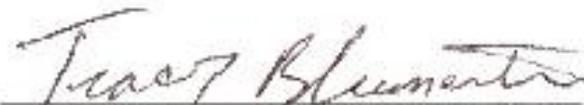
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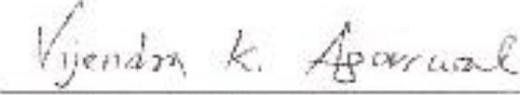
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ABSTRACT

Goethel, A.S. Parent, teacher, and self perceptions of gifted student social skills.
Ed.S. in School Psychology, May 2012, 71pp. (J. Newton)

Social skills competency appears to be critical to the development of positive interpersonal relationships and may serve to increase social connectedness and psychological well-being (Merrell, 1999; Ross, Shochet, & Bellair, 2010; Segrin & Rynes, 2009; Segrin & Taylor, 2007). Research findings have been mixed regarding the social-emotional and psychological well-being of gifted and talented students (Galloway & Porath, 1997). By examining teacher, parent, and self perceptions of gifted student social skills, this study sought to assess those skills which may support the development of positive relationships with adults and peers at school. Differences were found between teacher, parent, and self-perceptions of gifted student social skills at the overall Social Skills composite score and across specific scale scores. Additionally, differences emerged between in the importance these raters placed on skills within the Cooperation scale. Information from qualitative questions was summarized to provide insight which might otherwise be missed with the use of rating scales alone. Implications for practice were considered to assist educators in maximizing the well-being and potential of gifted students in their schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is an honor to thank all those that played key roles in the completion of this research project. I am deeply thankful for the support of Jocelyn Newton, Ph.D. who enthusiastically agreed to chair my thesis committee; met with me regularly, at odd hours of the day, on campus and in coffee shops; and provided invaluable guidance, feedback, and snacks when needed! I would also like to thank my thesis committee, Tracie Blumentritt, Ph.D and Casey Tobin, Ph.D., who supported this project with their time, professional perspectives, and thoughtful feedback. Thank you to Robert Dixon, Ph.D. for encouraging and applauding student participation in educational research, to Galadriel Chilton for being the most excellent e-resources librarian, to my cohort for cheering me on, and to Teresa Znidarsich for absolutely everything she does.

I want to recognize and thank the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and its staff for the commitment to graduate-student research and for providing the resources needed to pursue and complete this project. This research was funded in large part by the Graduate Student Research, Service and Education Leadership Grant Program.

I share my gratitude for all friends and family members who have offered support and encouragement to me and my family at just the right moments. And, above all, I have been profoundly blessed to have the love, support, and teamwork of my husband, Pat, and my three amazing children, Lexi, Maddy, and Zach. You inspire me daily. Thank you for your patience, your understanding, your willingness to help, your participation in the celebration, and hugs on demand! I dedicate this thesis to you.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The continued progress of society, and the robustness of that progress, is dependent on the appropriate recognition, development, and use of available resources. Critical resources which often go overlooked and undernourished are the intellectual gifts and creative talents of our brightest and most talented children and youth. Yet, it may be these same gifts and talents the world is dependent upon to come up with new and innovative solutions for the most urgent and puzzling problems. In the article, *The Mental Wealth of Nations*, the authors emphasize the importance of making the most of such resources, but also point out the world's mental resources are both cognitive and emotional in nature (Beddington et al., 2008). Thus, education and intervention must address both domains if both student potential and resources are to be maximized (Beddington et al., 2008).

In education, professionals are often asked to remain mindful of the needs present within society while responding daily to the immediate and urgent needs of individual students. With this seemingly endless array of needs to meet, increasing demands for academic performance, and tightening budgets, this can be quite a balancing act. On the spectrum of "haves" and "have-nots," it would be easy to view the gifted and talented student population as having plenty, or at least enough to get by on their own. Yet, the most widely accepted definitions of giftedness in state and federal laws, based on the Marland Report of 1972, have describe gifted and talented students as having needs

which extend beyond those which can be met by the typical school curriculum (State of Wisconsin, 2009; Stone & Wisconsin Association of Talented & Gifted, 2005; United States, 2002; United States et al., 2008; United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 1972). These exceptional educational needs encompass not only the need for intellectual growth and talent development, but also unique social and emotional needs which may occur simply due to the nature of gifted individuals and the way in which they perceive the world (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Some researchers have even argued these unique social-emotional characteristics and needs, alone, could be used to identify gifted and talented individuals (Jackson, 2009).

Well-being and mental health appear to be intimately tied to the ability to engage intellectually and emotionally with others and the world (Beddington et al., 2008). Appropriate levels of intellectual and social development appear to enhance an individual's sense of well-being; and, a positive sense of well-being appears to support intellectual and emotional engagement, resulting in continued learning and growth (Beddington et al., 2008; Dowson & Martin, 2009). These research findings suggest it is important not only to examine whether appropriate levels of instruction and learning are taking place in our schools, but also whether students have the skills, and are successfully using them, to establish the type of relationships and engagement needed to support their well-being.

Specifically related to the social-emotional and psychological well-being of gifted and talented students in our schools, research findings have been mixed (Galloway & Porath, 1997). For example, one study indicated gifted students were functioning comparably to, or even above, their peers in specific areas of this domain (Gresham &

Elliott, 2008). Another study revealed potential areas of concern. This study found teachers described gifted students as being emotionally and behaviorally stable, while gifted students reported experiencing greater levels of sadness and isolation than peers (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Another study which identified areas of concern found gifted students expressed feeling a lack of belonging and connection to others at school (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002).

Research suggests social skills competency supports positive interpersonal connections (Gresham & Elliot, 2008). Galloway and Porath (1997) conducted a study which compared teacher and parent ratings of student social skills. While no differences were found between perceptions at the overall composite score level, significant differences were seen at the scale level (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Additionally, researchers anecdotally observed perceptions of social competence to vary based on social skills which were most highly valued by the rater (i.e. teachers and parents) (Galloway & Porath, 1997). The current study sought to take this one step further by including student self ratings of social skills.

What follows is a review of literature. Key areas were explored relating to giftedness, including common characteristics of gifted individuals, the social experiences of gifted and talented children and youth, and the emotional and psychological well-being of gifted students. In addition, research on the importance of social skills competency and social connectedness has been outlined as it related to the emotional and psychological well-being of students.

Characteristics of Gifted Individuals

Over time, definitions of giftedness have shifted in focus from a more narrow

perspective of giftedness as high intelligence to broader, more inclusive definitions such as those presented by Sternberg, Gardner, and Renzulli (Beddington et al., 2008). Not only are these definitions more multifaceted, they consider an individual's potential for development. They also recognize identification of giftedness may vary depending on what is valued by a culture. Sternberg believed successful intelligence was dependent upon an individual's ability to examine his or her strengths and weaknesses and find ways to maximize their potential in relation to others and the world around them (Sternberg, 1997).

In the United States, the federal definition of giftedness, which is based on the Marland Report to Congress, also considers the potential for students to have exceptional abilities in multiple areas:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (United States Congress et al., 1972).

This definition has been adopted by the National Association for Gifted Children and is used by many states, school districts, and other advocacy groups (State of Wisconsin, 2009; Stone & Wisconsin Association of Talented & Gifted, 2005).

To follow recommendations set forth by the Marland Report, educators must first understand the unique characteristics of gifted and talented children which contribute to their exceptional educational needs. The following sections outline research which summarizes the cognitive and social-emotional characteristics of this population.

Cognitive Characteristics of Gifted Students

In a collection of articles about gifted education, Author Pau-San Hoh (2008) used the term *cognitive characteristics* in reference to an individual's tendency to use their *mental resources* in ways which result in the successful execution of tasks which are culturally valued or required by their environment. Gifted children are often described in the literature as precocious, especially in their use of language and ability to communicate (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Plucker & Callahan, 2008; Webb et al., 1982). Giftedness tends to result in exceptional levels of curiosity, persistence, concentration, memory, perception, coordination, intuitive learning, and reasoning (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Plucker & Callahan, 2008; Webb et al., 1982). These individuals tend to enjoy learning and reflecting, are keenly observant, able to make generalizations, and grasp abstract and philosophical ideas (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Plucker & Callahan, 2008; Webb et al., 1982). These cognitive characteristics are often observed in highly gifted individuals regardless of their area of giftedness (e.g. intellectual, artistic) (Hoh, 2008).

Emotional Characteristics of Gifted Students

Above all, gifted children are children. In that respect, they have the same needs for emotional connection, support, and security as other children. There is no evidence that gifted children are less emotionally stable than other children (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002). The idea gifted students don't have unique emotional needs, however, is viewed as a myth by experts on giftedness, many of which emphatically state gifted children and youth display unique emotional traits and experience the world differently as a result of their giftedness (Cross, 2005). Researchers and advocacy groups such as the Columbus Group, The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), and

Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG), all support this idea giftedness results in a unique internal experience, and these children and youth may not only require unique instruction, but also mentoring to achieve optimal growth, development, and well-being (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Jackson, 2009; Morelock, 1992; Peterson, 2009; Webb et al., 1982).

One common finding is gifted children and youth often report a sense of being different than their peers (Cross, 2005; Neihart et al., 2002). This sense of being different, and questioning of their “normalcy” places gifted students at an increased risk for social and emotional challenges if they do not experience sufficient interpersonal connectedness and receive appropriate types of support (Cross, 2005; Neihart et al., 2002). Additionally, students experiencing psychological difficulties and may not reach their full developmental potential due to lower levels of motivation or self-efficacy (Dowson & Martin, 2009; Neihart et al., 2002).

Researchers have proposed the following two terms to explain the unique psychological characteristics of gifted and talented individuals: 1) *overexcitabilities* and 2) *asynchronous development*. The following sections define these terms and summarize how these characteristics may affect how gifted students perceive themselves, others, and the world around them.

Overexcitabilities

One unique perspective into the characteristics of gifted individuals is a theory of personality development developed by Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902-1980), a Polish psychiatrist (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). According to Dabrowski, those with high developmental potential are less likely to move through life based on the expectations of

others and norms of society, but have the potential to develop their own inner structure of how the world should be and act accordingly (Jackson, 2009). Dabrowski viewed this as a developmental process in which individuals with high developmental potential begin to separate themselves from the norms of society and, through self-reflection and inner crisis, or *negative adjustment*, move toward harmony between their inner belief system and actions, or *positive adjustment* (Jackson, 2009). Those achieving higher levels of positive adjustment may move beyond changing themselves and work towards changing the world around them (Jackson, 2009).

One major component of this theory is the idea individuals with higher developmental potential will experience extra-sensitivities, or what he called over-excitabilities in response to others and the world around them. These over-excitabilities can vary greatly and fall into five main categories. These are psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual and emotional hypersensitivities (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Over-excitabilities may act to trigger the type of developmental crises described above (Rinn, 2010). These crises may theoretically serve the ultimate purpose of spurring an individual toward a life in which actions and pursuits are congruent with their internal belief system, reflecting the individual's authentic self (Rinn, 2010).

Asynchrony

Asynchrony refers to the idea that, while gifted students go through the same developmental phases as their average peers, they may progress through different areas of development at different rates (Peterson, 2009). The Columbus group (1991) sought to create a definition for giftedness which went beyond intelligence, performance, and behaviors of gifted children to reflect this unique inner experience of gifted children and

youth. They put forth the following statement:

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 (p. 11).

This may manifest itself in multiple ways and is particularly relevant to this study for the following reasons. Gifted students' social skills may not be as advanced as other areas of development, yet teachers, parents, and peers may hold higher expectations or assume students' social-emotional maturity and competence is equivalent to their mental age or ability level (Peterson, 2009; Webb et al., 1982). Higher levels of sensitivity and intensity (as discussed in Dabrowski's theory) may interact with this asynchrony to place students at greater risk for anxiety and stress in social settings, or any area of performance, which threatens these positive assumptions others hold (Peterson, 2009; Webb et al., 1982).

Summary of Characteristics

Overall, the reviewed literature implied gifted and talented students are cognitively and emotionally unique in many ways. Further, these children may be particularly at risk for social and emotional difficulties when they do not receive appropriate support, not only in academic areas, but also social and emotional domains. It is imperative educational professionals understand these needs to most effectively support the development and maximize potential in all students.

Social Experiences of Gifted Students

In her article, *The Eight Great Grievances of Gifted Students: Responding to Special Needs*, Judy Galbraith (1985) summarized interview responses of more than 400 gifted

and talented students, ages 7 to 18 years old. Responses were categorized into eight descriptive statements about the challenges faced by gifted students (Galbraith, 1985). Over half of the themes which emerged involved stress caused by interpersonal relationships and a perceived difficulty in connecting with others at school. These included perceived expectations of perfection from others, ridicule from peers about their intelligence, lack of peers to identify with, and a deep sense of disparteness and desire for acceptance (Galbraith, 1985). Other themes identified involved students' confusion about their giftedness, lack of engagement due to lack of challenge, bewilderment over the list of possible pursuits available to them, and distress over troubles in the world and inability to help (Galbraith, 1985). Despite the many years having passed since these results were published, professionals and research continue to find these same concerns are still very much on the minds of many gifted students (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Mendaglio & Peterson, 2006; Peterson, 2008).

Other emerging themes relative to gifted and talented student social skills are the perceptions significant adults hold regarding gifted student social competence and well-being. Cross (2005) proposed significant adults in the lives of gifted students may not fully know what gifted students are experiencing. Empirical studies have examined this concept. For example, in a study which compared parent and teacher perceptions of social skills in gifted students, Galloway and Porath (1997) found participating teachers and parents did not perceive these competencies similarly to each other. While responses resulted in similar overall ratings, researchers noted teacher and parent ratings differed significantly on the subscales (i.e. Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control) of the Social Skill Rating Scales (SSRS) (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Additionally, parent and teacher

participants were asked to rate how important individual social skills were to student success (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Analysis of these responses revealed the two groups differed significantly in which social skills they valued the most (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Teachers reported valuing those skills which they felt were most important for success in school, with cooperative behaviors (e.g. paying attention and following directions) and self-control (i.e. wise use of free time) being most highly valued (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Parents, however, reported valuing those skills which they felt were most important for success in life, with assertive behaviors and self-control (i.e. pursuing a variety of interests and handling social conflicts appropriately) topping the list (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Researchers concluded by hypothesizing ratings were likely a reflection of how well students had been able to learn and apply the different skills valued in each respective setting (i.e. home and school).

A more recent eight-year study followed a group of 950 students through the secondary grades; 65 of these students were identified as gifted and talented (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). This study compared teacher and self-ratings of student skills in domains which have been demonstrated to have a relationship to psychological health and academic achievement, including social development, social support, conscientiousness, problem solving strategies, and attitude toward school (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Two years of data were used to compare the gifted population to their same-age peers; responses revealed, in relation to average peers, teachers rated gifted and talented students as being more emotionally and behaviorally stable (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Gifted students, however, reported feeling less supported at school and experiencing higher levels of sadness and social

isolation than their same-age peers (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007).

Researchers noted, while most gifted and talented students within the study demonstrated high academic achievement, some were experiencing greater levels of social-emotional difficulties than their peers (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Authors went on to conclude educators must take steps to inform themselves about the social-emotional needs of gifted students and closely monitor the well-being of those students within their schools (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Because a number of students identified lack of connectedness and bullying as top concerns, recommendations were made to group gifted students together for portions of their time at school to provide a peer group and increase connectedness (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Additionally, researchers suggested these results supported a need to offer instruction in social skills and stress management to support positive school experiences in this population (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007).

Summary

Based on empirical research, it appears gifted and talented students may potentially have social experiences which are qualitatively different than their peers. Additionally, these unique social experiences may have the potential to place students at risk; however, they may not be readily observable by significant adults in their lives. Studies demonstrated gifted students have valuable insights to share about their own needs. Researchers have suggested social skills instruction as one potential intervention which may support school connectedness within this population. As outlined in the following section, these concepts are particularly important to understand as they have

been empirically supported as potential protective factors from mental health problems.

Social Skills Competency and Connectedness

For the purposes of this study, the term *social connectedness* referred to the perceived degree and quality of emotional connection engagement gifted students experience with other people in their lives (Merrell, 1999). *Social skills competence* was used to refer to the degree to which students understand and appropriately use specific social skills, or behaviors, which are considered acceptable and tend to support positive social interactions and interpersonal relationships (Merrell, 1999). There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between social connectedness and social skills competence (Merrell, 1999). Appropriate use of social skills tends to result in high quality relationships with others, and these types of relationships appear to support further social skill development (Merrell, 1999).

In one study, researchers found social skills competency to be the second highest predictor of pre-adolescent depressive symptoms, following interpersonal connectedness (Ross et al., 2010). Based on these results, researchers concluded interpersonal connectedness and social skills competency may actually protect people from the development of depression (Segrin & Rynes, 2009). Social skills competency may provide students with the skills necessary for positive and successful interactions with others (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). These successful social interactions are the foundation of interpersonal relationships, or connectedness (Gresham & Elliott, 2008a).

Research has shown social skills competency and interpersonal connectedness to be positively correlated with each other (Ross et al., 2010) and with psychological well-being (Segrin & Rynes, 2009; Segrin & Taylor, 2007). Conversely, social skills deficits

have been correlated with difficulty in establishing relationships and were found to be a risk factor for future depression (Gresham & Elliott, 2008b; Segrin & Rynes, 2009).

Instruction in social skills can provide a foundation for positive interactions and relationships with others at school (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). In addition to a sense of well-being, this sense of connectedness at school may also be positively correlated to academic motivation, engagement, and achievement (Dowson & Martin, 2009).

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore possible differences between teacher, parent, and self-perceptions of gifted students' social skills competencies and level of connectedness, or engagement, at school. Previous research has suggested teachers and parents may not only perceive gifted student social skills competencies differently, but also value different social skills as being most important for success (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Additionally, social-emotional challenges faced by gifted and talented students may easily go unnoticed by educators (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Research revealed many teachers perceived gifted and talented students as being emotionally and behaviorally well-adjusted in relation to same-age peers (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). Gifted students, themselves, reported feeling less supported at school and experiencing greater levels of sadness and social isolation than was reported by their non-gifted peers (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007).

The current study included student self-report, matched with parent and teacher reports, in order to determine if there was a difference between gifted student self-perceptions of their own social competencies and perceptions held by significant adults in their lives. The significance of this study for school psychologists, teachers, and parents

is multidimensional. This study provided additional descriptive information to assist in better understanding the social strengths and needs of this unique population. Specifically, this information offered insight into gifted student social skills competencies, values, and connectedness at school by seeking to understand what gifted students, themselves, had to tell us about their own experiences. Implications for social-emotional interventions and support were considered. Recognizing and valuing the insights teachers, parents, and students have to offer may help to strengthen home-school connections.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

This study explored social skills competency in gifted students, grades 5 through 12. Parent and teacher perceptions of gifted student's social skills, as reported on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Parent and Teacher Rating Scales, were included. Additional insight was provided through the introduction of gifted students' self-perceptions of their own social skill competency, as reported on the SSiS Student Rating Scales. To explore the role values and context play in the development of social skills competency, parent, teacher, and gifted student importance ratings of individual social skills were summarized. Questionnaires were also used to allow participants to provide additional information which may potentially have been missed through the use of rating scales alone.

Participants

The participants in this study were gifted and talented students, grades 5 through 12, as identified through the criteria set by their school district. Additionally, one parent and one teacher participant was paired with each respective student. Teacher respondents for each student had daily contact with the student since the beginning of this current school year (for two months or more). Participation was open to individuals of any gender, race, and socio-economic status. Complete demographic information can be found in chapter three.

Participants were identified through the use of a snowball sample. Specifically, the primary researcher shared information about this study with parents of gifted children and professionals in the field of gifted education using word of mouth and gifted and talented listservs. Interested parents contacted the primary researcher via e-mail to provide their mailing information to receive participation packets. Parents were also asked to pass information about the study along to other parents of gifted children who may have been interested in participating.

Data Collection and Evaluation

Measures

The Social Skills Improvement System, by Gresham and Elliott (2008) is an updated version of the Social Skills Rating System, which was originally published in 1990. The SSiS is used to assess and categorize social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence in children and youth ages 3 through 18 (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Standardized, norm-referenced rating scales have been published for obtaining feedback from multiple raters, including parents, teachers, and students ages 8 through 18 (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). These rating scales can assist with the identification of specific social skill strengths and instructional needs for the purpose of planning interventions and monitoring progress during social skills instruction (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

Because this study focused on positive behaviors associated with the development of successful relationships, only the 46 items in the Social Skills Scale will be used. For each item, a four-point Likert-type scale is used for parents and teachers to indicate how frequently a social skill is observed, *Never, Seldom, Often, or Almost Always* (Gresham &

Elliott, 2008). Students endorse ratings based on how accurate each statement is, *Not True, A Little True, A Lot True, or Very True* (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The Social Skills Scale items result in an overall Social Skills Scale score as well as the following seven Social Skills Subscales scores: 1) Communication, 2) Cooperation, 3) Assertion, 4) Responsibility, 5) Empathy, 6) Engagement, and 7) Self-Control (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Additionally, respondents rate each item on how important they believe each individual skill will be for student growth and success; the choices are *Not Important, Important, and Critical*.

Sex-specific or combined norms are provided for the age ranges 3 to 5, 5 to 12, and 13 to 18, providing comparisons for same-age peers (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

Validity Indexes include an F Index, a Response Pattern Index, and a Response Consistency Index (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The F Index is used to identify when responses are more extreme than would be expected and might indicate an overly negative representation of student behaviors (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The Pattern Index is used to identify when respondents may have used one rating more than would typically be expected or responded in a predictable pattern (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The Response Consistency Index is used to identify when respondents assign different ratings to items which would typically be expected to receive similar ratings (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

Data collection for standardization of the SSiS was based on the Current Population Survey, March 2006, for each of the three age groups mentioned above (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Each age group contained an equal number of boys and girls and was representative of the population for geographic region, race and ethnicity, and

socioeconomic status (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Internal consistency reliability for the Social Skills Scales resulted in high coefficient alpha scores (*Mdn* = .94-.97) (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Test-retest reliability for Social Skills Scales resulted in median correlation coefficients of .80, .84, and .86 for student, teacher, and parent forms, respectively (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). To examine convergent validity, the SSiS rating scales were compared to the Behavior Assessment System for Children, second edition (BASC-II) Parent Rating Scale (PRS), Teacher Rating Scale (TRS) and correlations ranged from moderate to high (.57 to .80) (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

In addition to the SSiS rating scales, qualitative questions were used for each respondent. Answers provided will be analyzed for recurring themes and summarized qualitatively. Questions provided on each questionnaire are summarized as follows:

Student Questionnaire

1. Describe your relationships with other kids at school.
2. Describe your relationships with adults at school.
3. Describe the activities that you are involved in at school.
4. Describe the community activities you are involved in.
5. What would make school a better place for gifted students?

Parent Questionnaire

1. Describe your child's relationships with other kids at school.
2. Describe your child's relationships with adults at school.
3. Describe **your** participation at your child's school.
4. What would make school a better place for gifted students?

Teacher Questionnaire

1. Describe this student's relationships with other students at school.
2. Describe this student's relationships with adults at school.
3. Describe ways that you see this student participating at school?
4. Describe opportunities for parents to be involved at school.
5. What would make it easier for schools to meet the unique needs of the gifted and talented students?

Procedures

This study was approved by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Listservs and snowball sampling were used to share information about this research study and how parents could contact the primary researcher to participate. Packets were mailed to participating parents of gifted students. Each packet contained SSiS rating scales and qualitative questionnaires for each participant (i.e. student, parent, and teacher). Packets also contained informed consent/assent sheets for participants, directions for participation, envelopes in which the student and teacher could seal their respective responses, and a preaddressed-postage-paid envelope in which the parent returned all completed materials to the primary researcher.

Participants were asked general demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, type of school (private, public, home, etc.), and size of school. No identifying information was asked (i.e. no participant names, names of schools, or names of cities/towns). Participant e-mail addresses were kept as a general list-serve for purposes of sending out one reminder, and one thank you message. Participants were also given

the option of receiving a summary of study results via e-mail. These e-mail addresses will not be matched with participant names or numbers.

Directions asked participants to fill out their respective surveys at their convenience and not during school hours. It was estimated to take each participant 10-15 minutes to complete the 46 item survey and an additional 10-15 minutes to complete the corresponding questionnaire. Participants were encouraged to answer all items, but informed they could choose not to answer any items which they did not wish to answer. Instructions included with the surveys specified participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

R1 Is there a difference between teacher, parent, and self perceptions of social-skills competencies in gifted students?

H1 (Null) There will be no difference between teacher, parent, and self ratings of gifted student social skills competencies.

H2 There will be differences between teacher and parent ratings of gifted student social skills.

H3 There will be differences between teacher and student self ratings of gifted student social skills.

R2 Is there a difference between teacher, parent and student ratings of importance for individual social skills?

H1 (Null) There will be no difference between teacher, parent, and student ratings of social skill importance.

H2 There will be a difference between which social skills teachers and parents rate as most important for student success.

H3 There will be a difference between which social skills teachers and students rate as most important for student success.

Data Analysis

Specific measurement methods included repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine potential differences between scores endorsed by each group of raters (parents, teachers, and students). The dependent variables were the eight scores produced from the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Social Skills scales. These scales include the overall Social Skills score and the following seven Social Skills scale scores: 1) Communication, 2) Cooperation, 3) Assertion, 4) Responsibility, 5) Empathy, 6) Engagement, and 7) Self-Control. Additionally, mean importance ratings within each of the seven scales were also examined as dependent variables. The independent variables were rater type (i.e. parent, teacher, or student). Last, qualitative information was analyzed. Feedback from qualitative questions was coded and summarized to examine student connectedness and engagement at school.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

This study was designed to examine potential differences amongst teachers, parents, and self ratings of gifted student social skills in grades 5 through 12. Additionally, this study explored potential differences between the value placed on these social skills by the three participant groups (i.e. parents, students, and teachers). Students, parents, and teachers completed the 46 items within the Social Skills scales portion of the Social Skills Improvement system. Researchers used responses on these questionnaires to compare overall perceptions of gifted student social skills and then break these perceptions down into the following seven areas: 1) Communication, 2) Cooperation, 3) Assertion, 4) Responsibility, 5) Empathy, 6) Engagement, and 7) Self-Control (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). At the scale level, researchers compared not only perceptions of social skills competency in each area, but also the overall value placed on skills within each area. Additionally, each participant responded to brief questionnaires which explored the gifted student relationships, with educators and peers, and involvement, both at school and in the community. These questionnaires allowed researchers to gather qualitative information not addressed by the SSiS rating scales. This chapter outlines demographic characteristics of participants, describe initial reliability of the resulting data, and summarize the primary data analyses and qualitative information.

Demographics

Each participant group was comprised of one gifted student from grades 5 through 12, identified by their school district, one parent or guardian, and one teacher who had known the student for at least two months. Demographic information was collected through participant self-report on questionnaires. Participants contacted the researcher for participation materials in response to information posted on gifted and talented listservs, and completed packets were received from a wide variety of locations across the country. These results represent responses of 50 participants, which included 17 students, 17 parents, and 16 teachers.

Of the 17 students who responded, 14 students (82%) were in middle school (i.e. grades 5 through 8), and three (18%) were in high school (i.e. grades 9 through 12). Nearly twice as many girls participated as boys, with 11 female and six male students responding (65% and 35%, respectively). Sixteen out of the seventeen student participants reported attending public schools (94%). Fifteen students (88%) self-identified as either Caucasian or “white;” one student self-identified as “black and white;” and one student chose not to respond to this item.

All 17 parents who responded were mothers. Of the 16 teachers who responded, 15 were female and one was male. Fourteen teachers taught within regular education classrooms, and two taught gifted and talented classes. Teacher experience ranged from seven to 39 years of teaching experience. The average years of experience reported was 19.4 years. Teachers reported school enrollment ranging from 110 to 2000 students, and class sizes ranging from 13 to 32.

Preliminary Reliability Analysis

Perceptions of social skills competencies in gifted students, grades 5 through 12 were determined through the use of the Social Skills Improvement Scales (SSiS), which is a norm-referenced, nationally standardized measure. Information on reliability of the overall Social Skills score and the seven Social Skills scale scores was reported in chapter two and can be accessed in the SSiS manual (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

Importance ratings are not typically aggregated by scale for scoring purposes, therefore reliability of these ratings is not provided in the SSiS manual (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). To determine the reliability when grouping value ratings in this manner, Cronbach's Alpha was computed within the seven corresponding scales, listed and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Social Skills Scales: Cronbach's Alpha for Value Ratings by Scale and Rater

<u>Social Skills Scales</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Parent</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
Communication	.78	.64	.81
Cooperation	.71	.84	.72
Assertion	.68	.73	.67
Responsibility	.72	.82	.70
Empathy	.86	.86	.80
Engagement	.74	.51	.86
Self-Control	.79	.92	.82

For the SSiS Student importance ratings, mean alpha coefficients across scales ranged from .68 to .86. For the SSiS Parent importance ratings, reliability was found to range from .51-.92. Teacher importance ratings demonstrated mean alpha values from

.67-.86. All scales were determined to be sufficient for the purposes of this current study ($\alpha \geq .60$) with the exception of the Engagement scale on the SSiS Parent form ($\alpha = .51$). Researchers decided against deleting items from this scale due to the small number of contributing items and potential impact on correlations between forms (i.e. teacher, parent, and student). Reliability coefficients of each scale by form are summarized in Table 1.

Main Analyses

The main purpose of this study was to examine differences between teacher, parents, and self-perceptions of gifted students' social skill competencies and differences between how these social skills were valued between these three participant groups. Two questions were proposed to guide these analyses. The results of the analyses conducted to answer these two questions are described in the following sections:

Is there a difference between teacher, parent, and self perceptions of social-skills competencies in gifted students?

A repeated-measures Multivariate Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA) with follow-up paired-sample t-tests was conducted to determine if significant differences exist between parent, teacher, and student scores on the scales of the SSiS. For this analysis, the independent variable was rater type (parent, teacher, and student), and the dependent variables were the seven subscale scores of the SSiS (Communication, Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, Engagement, and Self Control), as well as the overall composite SSiS score. At the multivariate level, there was an overall significant difference between the ratings of gifted student social skills by different raters (i.e. teachers, parents, and gifted students themselves) as measured by the SSiS Teacher,

Parent, and Student forms, Wilk's $\Lambda = .108$, $F(16, 46) = 5.88$, $p < .001$, multivariate $\eta_p^2 = .672$ (see Figure 1).

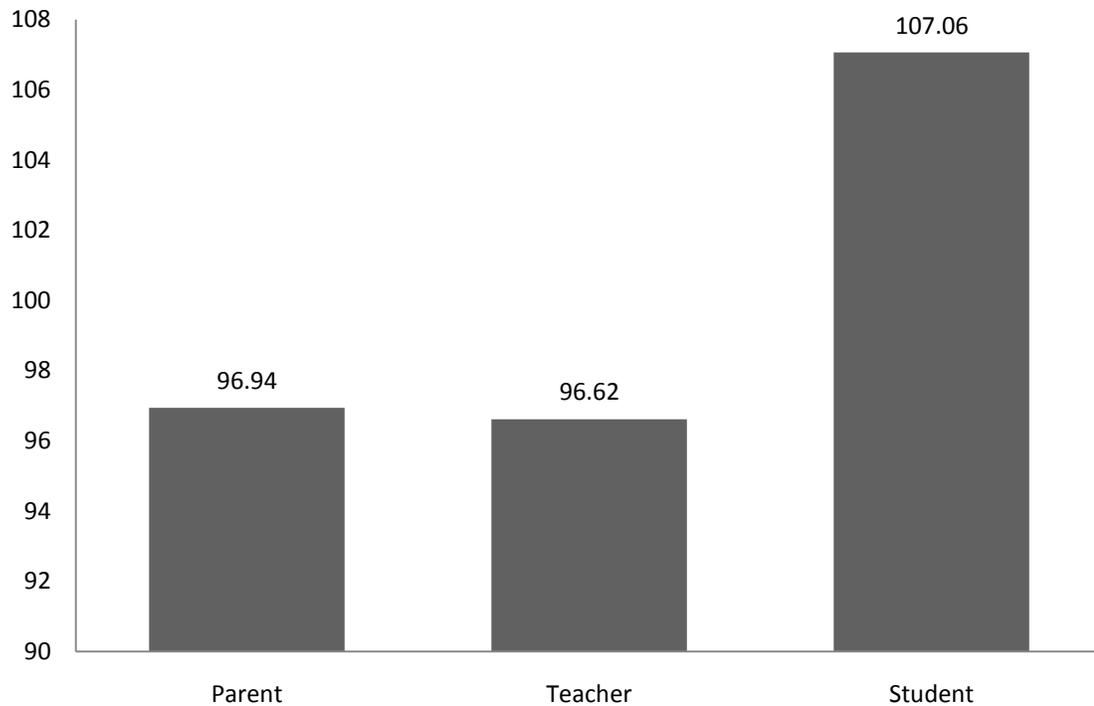


Figure 1. Mean Overall Social Skills Standard Scores by Rater Type

Examination of the follow-up univariate analyses revealed the three rater types significantly differed on several of the dependent variables (see Table 2). Specifically, rater type (i.e. teacher, parent, and student) demonstrated a significant effect on the overall standard Social Skills composite score $F(2, 30) = 5.259$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .260$. Follow-up paired samples t-tests were used to compare raters (i.e. student/parent, parent/teacher, and student/teacher). The Sidák-Bonferroni correction was used to take into account the multiple comparisons being made in this analysis (i.e. $\alpha_{S-B} = 1 - (1 - .05)^{1/15}$). Based on the resulting standard, $p \leq .0034$, no significant differences were found between average overall Social Skills composite scores when making these

comparisons between pairs of raters (i.e. student/parent, student/teacher, and parent/teacher).

Table 2. Gifted Students Social Skills Scales: Mean and Standard Deviations

	Rater		
	Teacher	Parent	Student
Overall Social Skills Standard Scores**			
Mean	96.62	96.94	107.06
SD	14.68	9.38	11.23
Communication Scaled Scores			
Mean	15.25	15.88	14.25
SD	4.24	3.01	2.46
Cooperation Scaled Scores***			
Mean	14.00	13.81	17.88
SD	3.69	2.69	2.63
Assertion Scaled Scores*			
Mean	12.00	14.69	14.63
SD	2.97	3.18	3.63
Responsibility Scaled Scores**			
Mean	14.50	13.50	18.06
SD	3.88	2.58	3.04
Empathy Scaled Scores**			
Mean	9.31	12.81	15.25
SD	5.53	2.90	3.04
Engagement Scaled Scores			
Mean	11.81	12.69	13.19
SD	4.25	3.20	3.33
Self Control Scaled Scores			
Mean	13.81	11.75	14.06
SD	4.90	2.93	3.79

*Differences between scores were significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

**Differences between scores were significant at the $p \leq .01$ level.

***Differences between scores were significant at the $p \leq .001$ level.

Within the Cooperation scale, rater type significantly contributed to variation in scores $F(2, 30) = 14.047, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .484$. Paired samples t-tests with the Sidák-Bonferroni correction revealed a significant difference between scores of student ($M = 17.94, SD = 2.56$) and parent ($M = 14.29, SD = 2.49$) raters; $t(16) = 5.014, p < .001$.

These results suggest, on average, students rated themselves much higher than parents on skills within the Cooperation scale. The comparison between student ($M = 17.75$, $SD = 2.52$) and teacher ($M = 14.50$, $SD = 3.63$) scores revealed a difference approaching significance; $t(15) = 3.402$, $p = .004$), suggesting students also rated themselves higher than teachers in this area. There was no significant difference between scores of parent and teacher raters.

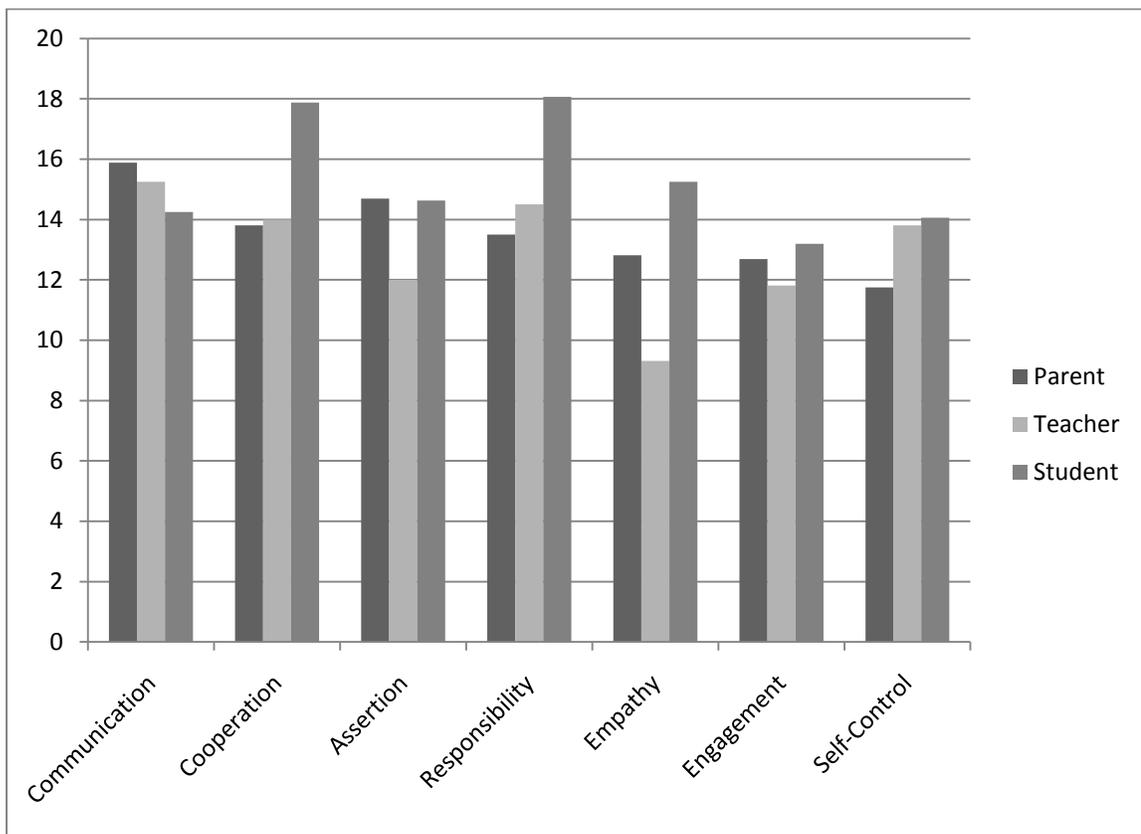


Figure 2. Mean Scale Scores by Rater Type

Within the Responsibility scale, rater type significantly contributed to variation in scores $F(2, 32) = 11.378$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .431$. Paired samples t-tests with the Sidák-Bonferroni correction revealed a significant difference between scores of student ($M = 17.53$, $SD = 3.09$) and parent ($M = 13.94$, $SD = 2.75$) raters; $t(16) = 4.270$, $p = .001$.

These results suggest students rated themselves much higher than parents on skills within

the Responsibility scale. There was no significant difference between average scores of student and teacher raters. Likewise, no differences were noted between parent and teacher raters.

Rater type appeared to contribute significantly to differences between scores within the Empathy scale $F(2, 30) = 8.816, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .370$ and Assertion scale $F(2, 30) = 4.266, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .221$. Paired samples t-tests with Sidák-Bonferroni correction, however, revealed no significant difference between average scale scores in these two areas when student and parent raters, student and teacher raters or parent and teacher raters were compared.

Is there a difference between teacher, parent and student ratings of importance for individual social skills?

A Repeated measures Multivariate Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA) with follow-up paired-sample t-tests was conducted to assess for significant differences between average importance ratings within scales resulting from the responses of teachers, parents, and students on the SSiS Teacher, Parent, and Student forms, respectively. For this analysis, the independent variable was rater type (parent, teacher and student). The independent variables were mean scores on the seven importance scales of the SSiS (Communication Importance, Cooperation Importance, Assertion Importance, Responsibility Importance, Empathy Importance, Engagement Importance, and Self-Control Importance), listed in Table 3.

At the multivariate level, there was an overall significant difference between the importance groups of raters (i.e. teachers, parents, and gifted students themselves) assigned to skills within the seven Social Skills scales on the SSiS Teacher, Parent, and

Student forms, Wilk's $\Lambda = .106$, $F(14, 24) = 3.55$, $p = .003$, multivariate $\eta_p^2 = .674$.

Specifically, rater type (i.e. teacher, parent, and student) significantly contributed to variation in mean importance ratings within the Cooperation scale $F(2, 18) = 8.81$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .495$.

Table 3. Social Skills Scales: Mean Importance Ratings by Rater

	Rater		
	Teacher	Parent	Student
		Communication Scale	
Mean	2.17	2.19	2.28
SD	.31	.26	.43
		Cooperation Scale*	
Mean	2.40	2.15	2.59
SD	.34	.27	.33
		Assertion Scale	
Mean	2.03	2.21	2.36
SD	.28	.26	.36
		Responsibility Scale	
Mean	2.53	2.37	2.63
SD	.25	.32	.33
		Empathy Scale	
Mean	2.10	2.30	2.42
SD	.37	.39	.58
		Engagement Scale	
Mean	2.06	2.01	2.09
SD	.40	.21	.32
		Self Control Scale	
Mean	2.24	2.26	2.53
SD	.34	.36	.37

*Differences between mean importance ratings were significant at the $p \leq .01$ level.

Follow-up paired samples t-tests were used to compare raters (i.e. student/parent, parent/teacher, and student/teacher). Sidak-Bonferroni's correction was used to take into account the multiple comparisons being made in this analysis (i.e. $\alpha_{S-B} = 1 - (1 - .05)^{1/3}$). Based on the resulting standard, $p \leq .017$, a significant difference between student (M =

2.54, SD = 0.32) and parent (M = 2.24, SD = 0.32) raters in the average importance ratings assigned to skills within the Cooperation scale; $t(15) = 3.511, p = .003$. These results suggest students assigned a higher value to skills within the Cooperation scale than parents. There was no statistically significant difference between average importance ratings between parent and teacher raters or between student and teacher raters.

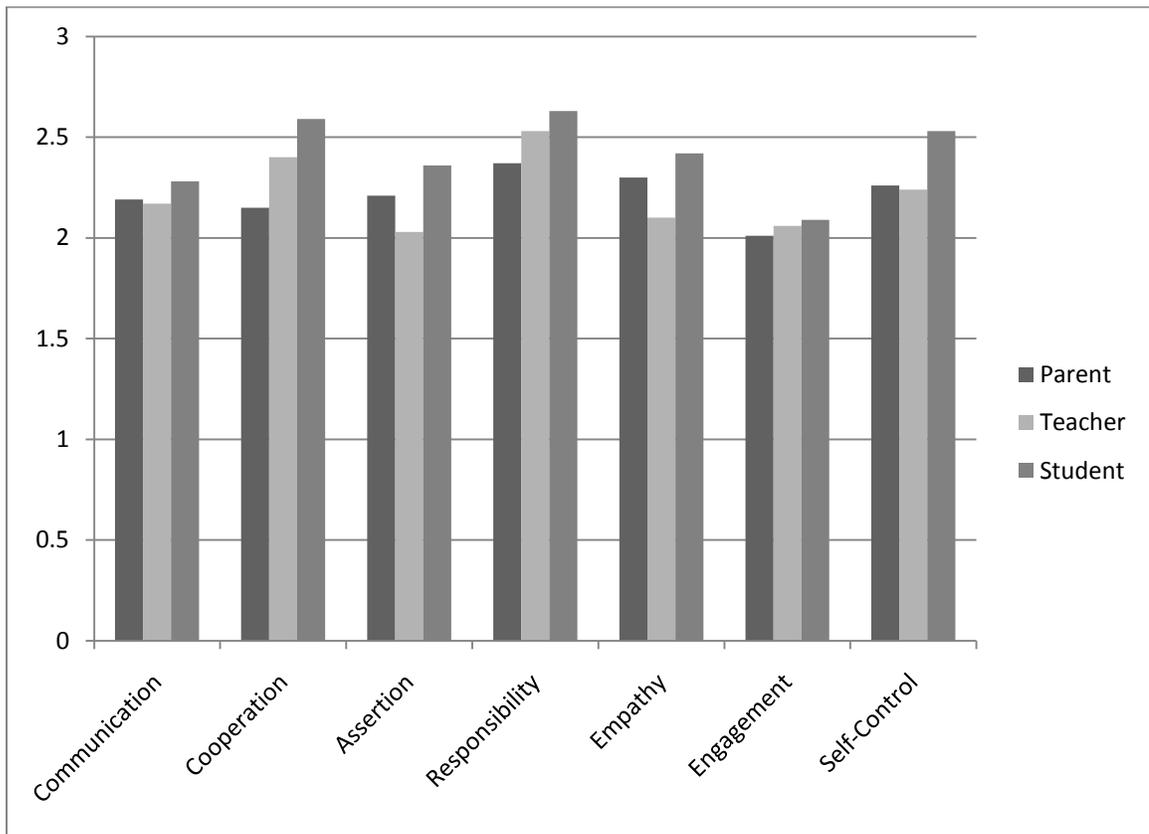


Figure 3. Mean Importance Ratings by Scale and Rater Type

Qualitative Questions

In addition to completing the first 46 items on the SSiS rating scales, participants were given the opportunity to respond to brief qualitative questions in order to gain perspectives which might otherwise be overlooked through the use of rating scales alone. Student and teacher questionnaires each had five questions, and the parent questionnaire

had four questions. Responses were analyzed for themes which were identified by at least 30 percent of participants (i.e. students, parents, or teachers, respectively). Due to the small number of questionnaires returned, researchers determined listing all responses in the appendix may jeopardize the anonymity of participants. Therefore, for each research question, themes will be identified and then remaining responses will be briefly summarized.

Students

Sixteen out of seventeen student participants (94%) filled out this questionnaire. Responses are summarized in the following sections.

Describe your relationship with other kids at school.

Overall, when describing relationships with others at school, eleven out of 16 students (69%) reported having generally positive relationships with peers at school. Six out of sixteen respondents (38 %) reported having small numbers (i.e. between two to five peers) of close friends. And, five students (31%) commented that, while they were able to get along with many of their peers, they did not get along with all students at school.

While other responses did not emerge as strong themes, they are important to note. Over half of male participants (i.e. four out of six – 25% of overall population and 67% of male respondents) described themselves as “loners,” not needing or relating to peers, or experiencing negative relationships with other students at school. Three students (19%) shared, while they were able to get along with other students at school, they really did not feel close to these peers. Two students (13%) mentioned experiencing very difficult interactions with students, including being bullied by others. And, one

student (6%) reported a lack of connection and understanding between students participating in gifted programming and students who were not receiving such services.

Describe your relationships with adults at school.

When describing relationships with adults at school, 14 out of 16 (88%) reported their relationships with teachers and other adults at school were generally positive. Five out of 16 students (31%) reported feeling very comfortable talking to teachers and seeking help from the adults at their respective schools.

There were a very small number of students who expressed having less than positive experiences with adults at school. One student (6%) felt it was somewhat awkward to interact with adults at school who did not have experience working with gifted students. And, one student (6%) pointed out adults held a lot of power; and, to preserve desired future outcomes, students had very little choice but to be pleasant and meet adult expectations.

Describe the activities that you are involved in at school.

In addition to reporting generally positive relationships at school, students also reported being quite active at school. All students (100%) reported being in at least one school-based activity. On average, students reported being involved in approximately four school activities. A summary of school-based activities cited by students follows:

Eleven students (69%) reported being in bands, choirs, orchestras, or participating in music. Eight (50%) were active in student-leadership organizations (e.g. National Honors Society, student council). Seven (44%) participated in academic teams or clubs (e.g. Science, Math, Foreign Language). Five participants (31%) pursued athletic activities such as team-based sports (e.g. basketball), individual sports (e.g. cross-

country), or athletic clubs (e.g. cross-country ski team). Four students (25%) participated in theater-type activities (e.g. plays, forensics, talent shows). Two (13%) cited art as a school-based activity. Other activities mentioned included, chess club, library media, school dances, school newspaper, advocacy groups, and book clubs.

Describe the community activities you are involved in.

Not only did students report being involved in many school activities, 11 out of 16 students (69%) reported being involved in at least one activity in the community. These students reported participating in an average of two community-based activities in addition to activities at school. The following section provides a summary of these activities:

Seven students reported participating in music lessons or other musical performance groups outside of school (e.g. piano lessons, violin lessons, choirs). Six students (38%) reported attending and being active in church-based groups. Four (25%) participants identified ways they have volunteered within their respective communities. Three (19%) were members of organizations which focused on youth-leadership development. Other community-based activities included athletic lessons, sports, and clubs which focused on specific interests.

What would make school a better place for gifted students?

Responses were mixed regarding the question of what would make school a better place for gifted and talented students. One broad theme which emerged was a desire for more homogeneous grouping, which was mentioned by nine out of 16 students (56%). This took two main forms, with six students expressing a desire for additional time with gifted peers in accelerated classrooms (38%) and three students stating a desire to be in

classes away from those who aren't motivated to achieve or create disruptions in the classroom which interrupt learning.

Other ideas mentioned by students included more class choices, weighted grading, differentiated instruction, individualized attention from TAG teachers, and freedom to identify themselves as participants in gifted programming without being reprimanded.

Parents

Fifteen out of seventeen parent participants (88%) filled out this questionnaire. Responses are summarized in the following sections:

Describe your child's relationships with other kids at school.

Overall, parents described their children's relationships at school as positive. When commenting on relationships with peers at school, all parents (100%) reported their child was generally able to get along with most peers at school. Eight parents (57%) reported their child did not seek out students outside of school, had few to no close relationships at school, or took a long time to develop relationships with peers.

Three parents stated their child preferred to have a small number of very close friends (20%). Three parents (20%) described their child as being introverted and somewhat shy. And, one parent (7%) reported her child had experienced bullying at school. Other information provided by parents about their respective child's interactions was quite varied. Words used included the following: positive, encouraging, loyal, domineering, impatient, and easily provoked.

Describe your child's relationships with adults at school.

When describing their children's relationships with adults at school, 11 parents (79%) described his or her child as respecting teachers and other adults at school. While

no other strong themes emerged from these responses, four parents (27%) stated their children viewed teachers and other adults at school as authority figures to be obeyed. Four parents (27%) reported their children had experienced some level of conflict with at least one teacher and had occasionally challenge teachers and other adults. Three parents (20%) observed their child as being very comfortable talking with adults. Two parents (13%) described their child as being very empathic toward adults, and experiencing frustration when other students did not cooperate. And, one parent commented her child held teachers to high expectations and did not approve when they did not appear to be doing a good job.

Describe your participation at your child's school.

When asked to describe their own participation at their children's schools, parents all reported being active on some level. Ten parents (71%) reported being involved at school by maintaining open communication with teachers and school staff and attending conferences (e.g. phone calls, e-mails, parent-teacher conferences, checking school or teacher websites). Eight parents (57%) identified specific activities in which they volunteer (e.g. helping in the classroom, library, or lunchroom, fundraising, coaching, chaperoning). Five parents (33%) reported attending special events (e.g. open houses, field trips, music concerts, sporting events). Parents mentioned lack of volunteer opportunities at the middle school level, difficulty with work schedules, and having young children at home as barriers to additional participation.

What would make school a better place for gifted students?

Given the opportunity to express opinions about what might improve school for gifted and talented students, seven parents (47%) expressed the need for opportunities for

students to be challenged academically and move along at an accelerated pace as appropriate. Other responses were quite varied. Four parents (27%) identified a need for additional training for staff regarding the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted and talented and twice exceptional students. And, two parents (13%) suggested a need for project-based learning for students. Other ideas included differentiated instruction, ability clustering to assist students in developing a peer group, smaller class sizes, additional opportunities to pursue interests, instructional activities to allow for greater depth of learning, and fewer disruptions in the classroom,

Teachers

Twelve out of sixteen teacher participants (75%) filled out this questionnaire, and responses are summarized as follows:

Describe this student's relationships with other students at school.

When describing student relationships at school, teachers described gifted student relationships with peers quite differently than their relationships with adults. Six teachers (50%) described gifted student interactions with peers as quite positive. These descriptions included comments such as “works well with almost everyone, “well-loved and respected by peers.” The remaining six teachers (50%) described students as being somewhat socially isolated. Teachers noted that students had a “hard time relating to others” and were “quiet and withdrawn.” Teachers elaborated by stating this may be due to very advanced intellectual abilities, a lack of understanding between gifted students and their peers, inability to compromise or consider perspectives other than their own, and introverted personality traits.

Describe this student’s relationships with adults at school.

While descriptions of peer relationships were quite polarized, descriptions of gifted student relationships with adults were overwhelmingly positive. Eleven out of 12 teachers (92%) reported gifted students related quite successfully with adults at school, including comments such as “enjoys talking to adults” and “seeks them out regularly for conversation.”

Four teachers (25%) described the gifted student in their respective classrooms as polite and respectful. Two teachers (17%) expressed students were well-respected by adults. Two (17%) stated students enjoyed answering questions or sharing their knowledge with adults at school. And, one teacher shared the student seemed to be most comfortable talking with adults as opposed to same age peers.

Describe ways that you see this student participating at school.

When describing gifted student participation at school, eight teachers (67%) reported that one way they saw students participating at school was through the student’s extracurricular involvement (e.g. chess club, sports, and music groups). Seven teachers (58%) noted students participated through their motivation to achieve (e.g. top of class), willingness to be a role model for the class (e.g. leader in groups), and willingness to actively engage in the classroom (e.g. volunteering answers, reading aloud, and group participation). One teacher observed her student to actively seek out opportunities to use her creative talents.

Describe opportunities for parents to be involved at school.

Collectively, teachers noted a wide variety of ways parents are able to participate at their respective child’s school(s). Seven out of twelve teachers (58%) identified

volunteering in classes or other areas during the school day as opportunities for parent involvement. Five (42%) included parent organizations (e.g. PTO, PTA). Five teachers (42%) also mentioned volunteer opportunities at special events (e.g. field trips and travel, programs and performances, fairs, sports events).

Three teachers (25%) cited extracurricular activities such as advising clubs, coaching sports, or providing academic assistance as opportunities for parent involvement. And, one teacher (8%) pointed out parents were able to participate at school simply by attending events and being present in their child's school experience. Similar to parents, teachers noted there are sometimes fewer opportunities at the middle school level than the elementary level.

What would make it easier for schools to meet the unique needs of the gifted and talented students?

When sharing ideas about what would make it easier for schools to meet the unique needs of gifted and talented students, six teachers (50%) expressed the need for differentiated instruction and individualized placement to ensure all students are appropriately challenged. A larger number of responses would likely be required to identify additional themes within this respondent group; the remaining ideas shared, however, will be summarized.

Having more time to plan for and carry out differentiated instructional plans was cited by three teachers as being important (25%). Three teachers (25%) identified a need for additional training in the area of talented and gifted (TAG) education. Three cited the importance of providing homogeneous grouping to allow students to develop a peer group. Two teachers (17%) identified a need for qualified teachers and administrators

who understand the needs of this population and how to meet those needs. Two (17%) suggested more opportunities for students to use their gifts and talents to pursue areas of interest and passion. Other factors cited as important to the quality of gifted and talented programming were the need to provide social skills instruction to a percentage of students and opportunities for practicing those skills. Additionally one mentioned funding as being helpful in providing additional programming for students based on their unique abilities.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Research suggests social skills competencies are the building blocks of positive interpersonal relationships (Merrell, 1999; Ross et al., 2010; Segrin & Rynes, 2009; Segrin & Taylor, 2007). Additionally, these skills have been empirically correlated with a person's level of connectedness and psychological well-being (Ross et al., 2010; Segrin & Rynes, 2009; Segrin & Taylor, 2007). Research findings regarding the well-being of gifted students have not been consistent (Galloway & Porath, 1997). Some studies have indicated gifted students are doing quite well (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). In other research gifted students reported experiencing higher levels of sadness and feelings of isolation than their peers (Vialle & Australian Research Council, 2007). These findings suggest a need for research to examine gifted student social skills because these competencies may provide a foundation from which students can connect with others.

The purposes of this study were to examine differences between teacher, parent, and self-perceptions of gifted students' social skills and the level of importance each of these groups places on these social skills. Additionally, this study sought to qualitatively explore students' relationships with adults and peers, their level of involvement at school and in the community, and participants' ideal "wishes" for gifted and talented education. Each participant group included one teacher, one parent, and one student from grades 5 through 12 who had been identified as meeting criteria for gifted and talented programming, as specified by his or her school district. Respondents completed the

Social Skills scales (i.e. items 1-46) on their respective SSiS rating scale (i.e. teacher, parent, or student form). Additionally, participants were asked to respond to a brief questionnaire, which examined qualitative information as mentioned above. A total of 50 participants returned completed rating scales (i.e. 16 teachers, 17 parents, and 17 students).

This current study was designed to answer the following main research questions:

Is there a difference between teacher, parent, and self perceptions of social-skills competencies in gifted students?

Quantitatively, parents, teachers, and student perceptions initially appeared to differ significantly in their reported perceptions of gifted student social skills at the multivariate and univariate analysis. Paired t-tests with the Sidák-Bonferroni correction, however, suggested no statistically significant difference existed at the composite score level. Thus, these results appeared to support the null hypothesis and supported previous research findings which reported no differences between teacher and parent perceptions at the overall score level on a similar measure of social skills (Galloway & Porath, 1997).

At the scale level, quantitative analyses demonstrated significant difference between scores resulting from the responses of teachers, parents, and students in the areas of Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, and Empathy. Follow-up paired sample t-tests with Sidák-Bonferroni correction were conducted to examine specific differences between parents and teachers, parents and students, and teachers and students. Following this correction, significance emerged in only two scales, Cooperation and Responsibility.

Within the Cooperation scale, researchers noted differences between both parent and student perceptions and teacher and student perceptions, with students rating

themselves significantly higher in this area than either parents or teachers. These results disproved the null hypothesis and supported the third hypotheses, which posited differences between teacher and student perceptions of social skills. Researchers did not predict any significant differences between parent and student perceptions, thus no related hypothesis had been included in this study. Within the Responsibility scale, students rated themselves much higher than parents. These results appear to disprove the null hypothesis in the area of Responsibility, specifically when examining differences between student and parent perceptions.

Qualitatively, when asked to describe student's relationships with peers at school, teachers were divided in their perceptions. While half of teachers observed students to relate very successfully with other students, the other half described the gifted student in their respective classrooms to be somewhat socially isolated. Teacher comments suggested, while students were highly intelligent, they did not appear to know how to relate to their peers. While these statements do not allow for generalization to the entire population of gifted students, they do suggest teachers are seeing something different at school than parents, or even gifted students, themselves. Teachers reported positive peer relationships less frequently than either parents or students. This does not support the null hypothesis, and provides support for hypotheses two and three, which predicted differences between teacher and student perceptions as well as between teacher and parent perceptions.

Qualitatively, parent, teacher, and student responses on questionnaires reported many students within this population frequently sought out interactions with teachers and other adults at school and experienced a high degree of comfort in these interactions. In

contrast, qualitative responses provided further evidence for the idea that despite high levels of intelligence, gifted students may not always understand how to relate to peers. This concept was echoed by students, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Despite assigning higher value ratings to Communication skills than either parents or teachers, gifted students rated themselves lower than these adults. This phenomenon was unique to this scale. Qualitatively, teacher, parent, and student responses suggested, while students generally understood how to get along with peers at school, and while some gifted students were doing quite well socially, not all students within this population were able to successfully relate to or develop close relationships with their typically developing peers.

Is there a difference between teacher, parent and student ratings of importance for individual social skills?

Based on analyses conducted to address the second research question, significant differences were seen between the mean importance ratings assigned by teachers, parents, and students on specific types of social skills. Specifically, analyses revealed differences between mean importance ratings within the SSiS Cooperation scale. T-tests revealed students assigned significantly higher value to skills within this scale than parents. Despite the high value students placed on skills in this area, parent and teacher responses on the SSiS resulted in significantly lower scores than student responses in this area. This suggests some students within this population may not fully understand expectations or standards held by significant adults, both at home and school. This information does not support the null hypotheses. No prediction was made by researchers regarding differences in perceptions between students and parents.

Implications for Educational Professionals

Responses of participants suggest educational professionals should be cognizant that gifted and talented students who have exceptional academic abilities or other profound talents may have social skills competencies in the average range, or possibly even lower. Educators should remain aware of this phenomenon of asynchrony and guard against placing higher social expectations on gifted students than are placed on other students in the same age group. Additionally, while parents and teachers rated gifted students as performing in the average range on the SSiS, students often rated themselves significantly higher than these adults. Based on this information, schools may consider planning instructional activities designed to assist students in further developing their understanding of skills valued at home and in the school setting. It is important for students to understand how behaviors might be perceived by others and to be given the opportunity to develop those skill domains in which students and adults expressed significantly different perceptions of performance.

Additionally, students collectively rated themselves lower than either parents or teachers in the area of Communication despite placing higher value on skills within this domain. While this is a very small sample to draw conclusions from, significance emerged despite very stringent standards for significance. This information suggests schools may want to offer opportunities for explicit instruction in communication skills. Additionally, qualitative responses of a few children, most strikingly adolescent boys, suggested a need for social skills instruction within a percentage of this population. Schools might consider screening for potential asynchrony in social skills development within the gifted and talented population in order to identify a small number of students

who may benefit from training and practice in this area to help support their ability to connect with peers at school.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

Despite the differences seen between teacher, parent, and student perceptions, mean scores (i.e. overall and scale scores) resulting from the responses of parents, teachers, and students each fell within the average range when compared, respectively, to similar raters of same-age students using normative information provided in the SSiS administration manual (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). These findings suggest additional research is needed to determine if differences observed in this study are also present within the general population.

Additionally, these analyses represent a relatively small total number of participants. Because multiple analyses were needed to identify the exact location of significance (i.e. between which pairs of raters), researchers used the Sidák-Bonferroni correction which resulted in a higher standard for significance. It is possible, given a larger number of participants, additional areas of significance would emerge. Also, a larger sample size would have allowed for more variations in grouping of data (e.g. grouping by gender, grade level, area of identification, scores on cognitive measures, type of gifted programming received).

While reliability coefficients for the importance ratings appeared to be sufficient for these research purposes, these ratings were not standardized using a large population. Due to the small number of participants and specific group being studies, these results may not have represented a normative sample. These coefficients may have been

affected by a restriction of range. A much larger and more representative sample population would be required to standardize importance ratings by scale.

In addition to small sample size, the methods used to recruit participants may have resulted in a restriction of range. Using gifted and talented listservs, participants were asked to volunteer for participation and were, thus, self-selected. Participants likely had resources which allowed for access to information about this study and were motivated to spend additional time participating. Participation required time spent contacting the primary researcher, completing rating scales and questionnaires, and coordinating the dissemination and collection of these materials to teachers and students prior to returning completed materials. This study may have overlooked portions of the population who did not have the resources which allowed for access to this study due to a variety of reasons (e.g. prohibitive schedules, low socioeconomic status, language differences, lack of interest or motivation).

Data was not collected regarding the methods used by school districts to identify students for gifted and talented services, in what areas students were identified, or whether students were receiving additional services for exceptional needs (e.g. learning disability, autism spectrum disorders). Social skills competency may be developed to differing degrees when comparing students that have been identified for TAG services in the area of leadership and those identified solely for high academic achievement. The same would likely be true for students who are experiencing giftedness in addition to other exceptionalities and are receiving services for twice exceptionality. Future studies should include this information to explore social skills, connectedness, well-being, and potential needs within specific populations of gifted and talented students.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATIONAL LETTER SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

Dear Parents,

My name is Angela Goethel. I am a current graduate student in the School Psychology program at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting an applied research project. I would like to examine social skills and social connectedness of gifted and talented students, grades five through twelve.

I am interested in finding out more about the social-emotional strengths and needs of gifted and talented students. To do this, I am seeking feedback from you, your child, and one teacher who knows your child well. This information will help provide additional insights into how schools can best support the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented students.

All participants in this study will be asked to respond to a 46 item rating scale and have the opportunity to answer questions designed to allow responses that the rating scale, alone, might miss. **If you, your child, and one of your child’s teachers are willing to participate, please e-mail your postal mailing address to goethel.ange@uwlax.edu with the subject heading “Gifted Student Social Skills Study.”**

E-mail and mailing addresses will only be used to mail participation packets and send communications regarding the study. No names or e-mail addresses will be shared or visible to others in e-mails sent from me to participant groups. Though names are needed on consent forms, no identifying information will be linked to the data or used when sharing results of this study.

Results of this study will be shared at the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) annual convention in San Francisco this next February, 2011. This is an exciting opportunity to bring the social-emotional needs of this population before school psychologists and other educational professionals from across the nation. Our goal is to provide information that will help professionals to better support the social well-being of gifted and talented students within their schools.

This research study has been approved by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Institutional Review Board. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to Angela Goethel (715)586-0161. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects can be directed to the UW – La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (608)785-8124 or irb@uwlax.edu.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angela Goethel". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Angela Goethel, M.S.Ed.
School Psychology Graduate Student
University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

APPENDIX B
CONSENT/ASSENT FORMS

Dear Parent,

My name is Angela Goethel. I am a current graduate student in the School Psychology program at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting an applied research project.

I am interested in finding out more about the social-emotional strengths and needs of gifted and talented students. To do this, I am seeking feedback from you, your child, and one teacher who knows your child well. This information will help provide additional insights into how schools can best support the social-emotional needs of gifted and talented students.

Participants will be asked to fill out the first 46 items on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Rating Scale. These rating scales should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. Additional questions have been provided to allow participants to share information that would otherwise be missed by the rating scales, alone. **If you are willing to participate in this study, and would like your child to participate in this study, please sign your consent below for you and your child.**

Though names are needed on consent forms, no identifying information will be linked to the data or used when sharing results of this study. Results will be shared at professional meetings and conferences as grouped data, only. Responses of participants will be completely confidential. Participation numbers will be used so that responses cannot be linked to any identifying information.

There are no known risks involved in participating in this study, although it is possible that questions may draw attention to any social difficulties that have already been experienced by your child. If, at any time, you become aware that your child needs additional support to cope with difficult emotions, you are encouraged to contact a school psychologist or counselor to help in supporting their emotional well-being.

This research study has been approved by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Institutional Review Board. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to Angela Goethel (715) 586-0161. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects can be directed to the UW – La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (608)785-8124 or irb@uwlax.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation! Your input is greatly appreciated!

I have read the above information, and wish to participate in this study. I give my consent for my child to participate in this study.

Child's Name (printed) _____

Parent's Name (printed) _____

Parent's Signature _____

Dear Educator,

My name is Angela Goethel. I am a current graduate student in the School Psychology program at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting an applied research project. I am interested in finding out more about the social-emotional strengths and needs of gifted and talented students. To do this we are seeking your feedback.

To participate, you will be asked to fill out the first 46 items on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Rating Scale. This rating scale should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. Additional questions have been provided to allow you to share information that would otherwise be missed by the rating scales, alone. **If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign your consent below, complete the rating scale and questionnaire, and seal all items in the envelope provided. Your student’s parent will pick up this envelope and return it unopened.**

Though names are needed on consent forms, no identifying information will be linked to the data or used when sharing results of this study. Results will be shared at professional meetings and conferences as grouped data, only. Responses of participants will be completely confidential and coded so that responses cannot be linked to participants.

There are no known risks involved in participating in this study, although it is possible that questions may draw attention to any social difficulties that have already been experienced by your student. If, at any time, you become aware that your student needs additional support to cope with difficult emotions, please encourage them to talk with their parent(s), a school psychologist, or a school counselor.

This research study has been approved by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Institutional Review Board. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to Angela Goethel (715)586-0161. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects can be directed to the UW – La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (608)785-8124 or irb@uwlax.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation! Your input is greatly appreciated!

I have read the above information and wish to participate in this study.

Name of Participant (printed) _____

Signature of Participant _____

****Because this research study is not in cooperation with a specific school district, please complete the rating scale and questionnaire during non-school hours. Thank You!***

Dear Student,

My name is Angela Goethel. I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. As part of my school requirements, I am doing research to find out more about the strengths and needs of gifted and talented students. Your participation will provide additional information about how schools can best support gifted and talented students at school.

Participation is not required. You may choose not to participate at any time. If you do participate, you will be asked to fill out the first 46 items on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Rating Scale. This should take you no more than 10-15. Questions have been provided to allow you to share additional information. You may choose to spend as much or as little time as you wish to answer these questions, and you may choose not to answer any of these questions.

There is no right or wrong answer for any of the items. Your answers will not be shared with anyone at your school, and you will not be graded on your answers. **If you choose to participate in this study, and feel comfortable that your answers will be kept private, please sign below. You may seal your answers in the envelope provided when you are finished. Your parent will return this envelope unopened.**

Thank you!

I would like to participate in this study and understand that I can stop participation at any time. I understand that my answers will not be shared with my school and that my name will not be shared with anyone.

Signature of Student _____

This research study has been approved by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Institutional Review Board. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to Angela Goethel (715)586-0161. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects can be directed to the UW – La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (608)785-8124 or irb@uwlax.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation! Your input is greatly appreciated!

APPENDIX C

DIRECTIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Directions

Contents of Participation Packet:

- ✓ Directions for Participation
- ✓ Parent Informed Consent Form
- ✓ Student Informed Assent Form
- ✓ Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Parent Rating Scale
 - Return Envelope
- ✓ Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Student Rating Scale
 - Return Envelope
- ✓ Teacher Packet (includes the following)
 - Teacher Informed Consent Form
 - Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale
 - Return Envelope

Directions for Participation:

- ✓ Give the teacher packet to a current teacher that has known your child for at least two months, and has agreed to participate.
- ✓ Complete the parent rating scale and questionnaire.
- ✓ Please allow your child to complete their rating scale & questionnaire in private and at a time that will not conflict with school work or activities.
- ✓ Please return all materials (Parent, teacher and student rating scales, questionnaires, and consent/assent forms) together in the large preaddressed, postage-paid manila envelope.

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX D
QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES

Parent Questionnaire

Type of School My Child Attends:

- Public
- Private
- Other _____

Please briefly answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers. If you do not wish to answer a question, leave it blank. Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts as a parent. Your ideas are very important to us.

1. Describe your child's relationships with other kids at school.

2. Describe your child's relationships with adults at school.

3. Describe **your** participation at your child's school.

4. What would make school a better place for gifted students?

Teacher Questionnaire

Approximate Enrollment of School _____ Average Class Size _____
Grade Level(s) Currently Teaching _____ Years of Experience _____
Content Areas Currently Teaching _____

Please briefly answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers. If you do not wish to answer a question, leave it blank. Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts as an educator. Your ideas are very important to us.

1. Describe this student's relationships with other students at school.
2. Describe this student's relationships with adults at school.
3. Describe ways that you see this student participating at school?
4. Describe opportunities for parents to be involved at school.
5. What would make it easier for schools to meet the unique needs of the gifted and talented students?