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Academic and Affective Profiles of Low-Income, Minority, and Twice-Exceptional Gifted Learners:

The Role of Gifted Program Membership in Enhancing Self

Joyce VanTassel-Baska
The College of William and Mary

Annie Xuemei Feng
SAIC Frederick, Inc.

Julie Dingle Swanson
The College of Charleston

Chwee Quek
Ministry of Education, Singapore

Kimberley Chandler
The College of William and Mary

Gifted educators have long been concerned about the underrepresentation of low-income and minority students in enrichment programs. This underrepresentation has bred numerous attempts to enhance membership through alternative nonverbal tests (Naglieri & Ford, 2003), alternative performance-based assessment measures and procedures (Borland, Schnur, & Wright, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002), and identification system changes to focus on profile data that look for

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This study examined the academic and affective profiles of gifted students who were classified under the five prototypes of low-income White students, low-income African American students, low-income other minority students, high nonverbal and low verbal students, and twice-exceptional students. A total of 37 vignettes were developed and analyzed based on interviews with selected students, their teachers, and parents. Within and cross-prototype themes were derived. Both cognitive and affective impacts were found, suggesting the power of gifted program membership on enhancing self-confidence and building higher level skills of communication and thinking. All groups interviewed appeared to think that the gifted program had been good for the students in the study, providing challenge at the cognitive level and self-confidence at the affective level. Differences that emerged through the analysis of stakeholder perspectives suggested that students were the least aware of learning problems, but more aware than their parents or teachers of the affective and social issues affecting them. Parents seemed most attuned to their child's heightened self-esteem as a result of identification and program participation. Teachers seemed very aware of learning problems displayed by the child, typically related to perceived motivation, organization, and social skills.

summary

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strengths and peaks of performance across diverse assessment measures (Passow & Frasier, 1996).

Beyond identification issues, however, are other areas of concern and interest to educators. What are the unique characteristics and needs of gifted learners who are identified through alternative assessments? How do these students fare in gifted programs once placed? In a longitudinal study of the identification and performance profiles of performance task-identified students over a span of 6 years, VanTassel-Baska, Feng, and de Brux (2007) found that alternative performance-based assessment identified higher percentages of gifted students who were of lower economic status and minority membership than traditional achievement and aptitude identification protocols. However, performance task-identified students performed at lower levels than traditionally identified students on state standardized tests in both math and English across 4 years, although the effect size was small. Study results also suggested that performance task-identified students who qualified for gifted program placement through a combination of performance task and achievement components performed at levels similar to students identified through traditional aptitude and achievement means on both English and math state assessments. Although academic performance may be seen as a measure of program impact on identified gifted students, are there other program benefits that impact alternatively identified students' cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of life? These are major questions that the authors examined through this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is nested in models of resilience (Luthar, Ciechetti, & Becker, 2000; Werner, 1989) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) that posit that promising students from low-income backgrounds, minority students, and others with special learning needs can benefit from opportunities that build on their personal characteristics and beliefs, as

well as their perseverance and motivation and, thus, extend their sense of self-efficacy. Gagné (2004) also suggested that internal characteristics interact with the external factors of educational opportunities to enhance learning.

Literature Review

Paradigms of identification for gifted programs often preclude such students from entry due to the use of narrow criteria and high threshold cutoff scores. Instead of relying solely on intelligence and achievement test scores for identification, multiple criteria have been recommended for use, including more nontraditional measures, such as observing students interacting with a variety of learning opportunities (Passow & Frasier, 1996), dynamic assessment (Feuerstein, 1986; Kirschenbaum, 1998), and nonverbal tests (Bracken & McCallum, 1998; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Naglieri & Kaufman, 2001). A problem related to using these approaches, however, has been the lack of program match for such students once they were identified (Mills & Tissot, 1995).

Based on our current understanding of the problem of underrepresentation of low-income and minority students in gifted programs and previous studies, the use of performance-based assessment as a nontraditional tool for enhancing the possibility of greater representation of such students in these programs appears to be a promising development as seen through large-scale and longitudinal applications in one state (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2002) and through multiple site efforts across states (Maker, 2005; Sarouphim, 1999, 2001).

Hanson and Ginsburg (1986) found that achievement values contributed positively to high achievement patterns in low-SES students. High parental expectations, peers who value education, personally high educational expectations, and fate control were all associated with increases in achievement over time. Tucker, Harris, Brady, and Herman (1996) also showed that high parental expectations correlated both with higher grade point averages

in elementary school and higher Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) scores in the eighth grade.

Studies also have suggested that social support through the home is a critical variable in the development of low-income students (Olszewski-Kubilius & Scott, 1992; VanTassel-Baska, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Kulieke, 1994). Robinson, Weinberg, Redden, Ramey, and Ramey (1998) explored the family factors that contribute to high-achieving, low-income children. They found that the families of high-achieving children had slightly higher incomes (although still mostly under $1,500/month), slightly better educated parents, and fewer children in the household. However, half of the families of high-achieving children still had incomes of less than $1,000/month and no more than a high school education. What made the most difference were the attitudes of the parents: The parents of high achievers reported being less restrictive and more responsive to their children's input and emphasized to their children how important it was to do well in school.

Clearly, special programs can help minority and low-SES students. Landau, Weissler, and Golod (2001) showed that a 2-year enrichment program for low-SES, gifted Israeli children helped to raise their IQ scores, having the biggest effect on girls (who, before the program, had lower IQs than boys) and on the group of students with the lowest scores. Early identification and services for low-SES students have been shown to have a lasting effect. Campbell and Ramey (1994), in a longitudinal study of students from the North Carolina Abecedarian project, showed that the effects of early intervention could still be seen 7 years later. These effects included higher IQ scores and higher verbal achievement test scores. Curriculum studies also have found that low-income, promising students benefit from an emphasis on higher level thinking and problem solving embedded in subject areas (Bracken, VanTassel-Baska, Brown, & Feng, 2006; Stambaugh, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, Zuo, Avery, & Little, 2002). In a recent review of the literature on low-income promising learners, VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2007) found the need to identify and provide services for these students as early as

possible, the need for transition services at key stages of learning, and the need to provide personalized and social opportunities across the years of schooling. Thus, the literature on low-income students suggests that the interaction of internal capacities and external opportunities with social support can positively impact perceptions of self-efficacy and achievement.

Methodology

The primary research goal of this study was to examine the impact of 4 years of gifted program membership on a targeted group of special needs gifted learners identified through alternative performance-based assessment protocols at grade 3. The guiding research question was: How well are these at-risk students doing in cognitive and affective development now that they have been identified as gifted and placed in special programs? Typologies of students for subanalysis were defined as: low-income White students, low-income African American students, low-income other minority students, twice-exceptional learners, and students with high nonverbal and low verbal profiles. Because the researchers were interested in looking more deeply at the effects of nontraditional identification on cognitive and affective functioning 4 years later, qualitative means were explored (Berg, 1999; Patton, 2002) to follow-up on earlier quantitative analyses (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). Qualitative interviews were the major mode of inquiry of this study, using purposefully selected students, parents, and teachers as the study participants.

Participants

The participants of this study were 37 seventh or eighth graders who were identified as gifted learners in 2000 through standardized ability, achievement, and value-added performance task measures. These students were selected from four school districts whose educational personnel agreed to participate in

the study and who had a critical mass of qualifying students identified through performance task measures in addition to traditional ones. We further sampled students (who met the criteria of being low income as determined by free or reduced lunch, who were members of a minority group, who were identified as twice-exceptional, or who had a significant discrepancy between verbal and nonverbal scores on performance measures) in order to assess similarities and differences among the performance task-identified group. We interviewed the sampled students, as well as the parent(s)/guardian(s), the gifted class teacher, and the middle school science teacher.

A comparison group of traditionally identified students (*N* = 20) was also used to assess any differences between groups. A student vignette was developed if three data sources (interviews from student, parent, and teachers) were available for analysis. Participants included 9 low-income African American students, 13 low-income Caucasian students, 2 "other minorities" (Asian American and Hispanic American), 5 twice-exceptional students, and 9 high nonverbal, low verbal students. Two high nonverbal, low verbal students shared double prototypes with twice-exceptional and low-income White students.

Instrumentation

Interview protocols for students, parents, and teachers were developed. Questions probed key aspects of the student's experience in the gifted program, how the program impacted the student in cognitive and social domains, the parental perceptions of their child's abilities, how the home was involved in the student's development, and teacher observations about the student's learning dispositions and abilities. These probes emerged from a previous study's questionnaires and results (VanTassel-Baska, Feng, Quek, & Struck, 2004).

Parallel questions for teachers and parents probed their perceptions of the sample students' cognitive, academic, and social-emotional development. This strategy helped to triangulate the

perspectives. The interview with parents also included questions related to developmental milestones.

Data Collection

Interviews were held in four participating school districts, selected because of the frequency of performance task-identified students across the past 4 years of assessment implementation.

Each researcher was assigned to conduct all interviews relevant to a particular student case, according to a preassigned schedule of cases. Each research team member interviewed all of the relevant people at each site when possible. However, an additional interviewer was used to complete the work at two sites. In some cases, follow-up telephone interviews were held in order to obtain perspectives from all three of the stakeholders—teacher, student, and parent. Where two researchers collected interview data on the same student (n = 10), the resulting vignettes were reviewed and agreed upon by both.

The interviews consisted of 30- to 90-minute sessions with each student, parent, and teacher interviewee separately. Questions were reworded as needed to ensure that participants could respond to the queries appropriately. For example, student questions were tailored to inquire about "learning activities" rather than curriculum and "how you knew you were doing well" rather than assessment. Researchers recorded interviewee remarks on a sheet of blank paper. The majority of the interviews were also tape-recorded, and the tapes were used for accuracy checks and verbatim quotes. To have a uniform template for data analysis, a form for transferring the interview data was constructed and utilized. The template contained demographic data for each student, including GPA, test scores, ethnic background, SES status, gender, evidence of learning problems, and whether the student was identified through traditional or nontraditional means. In addition to demographic data, the templates also contained data from each stakeholder by question with a supporting quote to substantiate the commentary. See Appendix A for the template used.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was based on the work of Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) and Harry, Sturges, and Klinger (2005) who used the steps of Strauss and Corbin (1998) to derive themes inductively from qualitative interview data. Open and axial coding were employed within each protocol, and selective coding was used across protocols by stakeholder group to derive themes. Discussions on each level of coding and resultant themes were held by the research team to ensure consensus within and across vignettes. One researcher outside the study conducted axial coding for each interview protocol and, in some cases, delineated categories for the other researchers to review and discuss. The match between the code categories and emergent themes were verified for each vignette. Analyses on all data were conducted for: (a) teacher, student, and parent perspectives across cases; (b) within each case across student, teacher, and parent perspectives; and (c) across cases across all three perspectives. Further analyses were also conducted to examine the role of gender and identification methods, inherent dichotomous variables in the sample. Table 1 delineates the steps in the process, who was involved, and the resulting categories and themes.

Because member checking was not used, the research team met and discussed each vignette for consistency and adherence to the interview data available. A consensual approach to agreement on themes was also employed among the six researchers. Transcripts of interviews were reviewed by team members to extract meaningful quotes and to verify the generalizations drawn. Limited commentary was provided by students for most of the questions asked. Their parents also were less verbal in responses than was anticipated. There could be several reasons for this situation: (a) students selected on nonverbal measures could be less verbally communicative than their verbally gifted peers, (b) the number of questions asked without deep probes could have caused less response to any one question, (c) the length of the interviews had upper limits based on the school schedule for students, and (d) the lack of familiarity with the interviewer could also have

Table 1

Steps Used for Data Coding

Steps	Process	Outcomes
1. Review of interview data of parents, student, and teacher	Open coding by researcher team member who conducted the interview	List of topics
2. Review of open coding of parents, teachers, and students categories	Axial coding by researcher external to the team	List of concepts
3. Review of axial codes of parents/teachers/ students	Selective coding across interview stakeholder groups by research team	List of themes

Note. The methodological approach for qualitative data analysis was based on Anfara et al. (2002), Harry et al. (2005), and Strauss and Corbin (1998).

suppressed more elaborative responses. Consequently, there is a lack of richness in the resulting commentary. In order to demonstrate the coherence of the data collection and the synthesis of responses from multiple data sources, two complete vignettes are included (see Appendices B and C).

Results

Summary of Findings by Research Prototype

The results that follow focus on each prototype of student interviewed, regardless of whether or not he or she was identified through alternative assessment. When all vignettes were analyzed, we did a secondary content analysis of themes according to the identification route and did not find qualitative differences between the two groups of learners on the dimensions reported in the study.

Low-Income White Students. Of the 13 students in this prototype, the majority were female and were identified through performance tasks. In general, the students perceived the gifted program positively and were cognizant of its impact on them academically, as well as affectively. As one student, Kassandra, noted, "It [the gifted program] challenges you a lot more, and pushes you to the limit until you can't do it. The work makes you think harder" (student interview, August 30, 2004). Their low-SES status did not appear to have an effect on their performance at school. It appeared that the majority of the students were stronger in the verbal domains (reading, writing), as borne out by their initial profile data. Both parents and teachers also observed that most of them were creative and had talents in other areas. One of Blair's teachers noted her creative writing skills:

> Blair surprises me . . . you wouldn't expect that kind of writing from her. [She is a] big girl with kind of a gruff attitude. She knows more about life than the average

> 13-year-old. She comes out with the most beautiful writing. (teacher interview, October 13, 2004)

Almost half of the group were perceived to have learning-related problems, either by their parents or teachers. The problems centered on lack of motivation, as well as time management and organizational skills. Apart from a few with family problems, the majority of parents, as exemplified by the vignette of Blair in Appendix B, appeared to be interested and involved in their children's education.

Low-Income African American Students. The analysis of 9 low-income African American students' identification, performance, and developmental profiles suggested both common and unique characteristics of this group of gifted students. They enjoyed the gifted program experience, became more eager to learn, and willingly worked hard. They particularly appreciated the gifted class environment for learning. Participation in the program itself played an important role in enhancing their self-esteem and increasing their confidence about themselves. One boy, Keith, noted, "The program is a lot of fun. I enjoy the building, the researching, and the computer programs . . . I learned to cooperate and have trust in other people, even to understand myself" (student interview, August 30, 2004). Another student, Jessica, shared that the program helped her to improve her learning and organization skills:

> I have learned better organization and time management. I feel that I am more organized and more in control of my work, teaching myself and my mom that I am the learner, the person responsible for my learning. . . . Before [the gifted program], [I was] not much of a note taker. Now I try to do very detailed notes. [I have] learned not to procrastinate, especially in the gifted program. (student interview, October 4, 2004)

In addition to their continuing academic excellence, many of these students had other creative outlets in music, dance, arts, or sports.

What was unique to African American gifted students was their continued desire for peer relationships outside of their gifted class and the tendency to be perceived as loners by their gifted class teachers. They seemed to be facing a pressure from a peer culture against "acting White," on the one hand, and an increasing hunger for social life as middle schoolers, on the other (Ford, 1996). Several of them (n = 5) presented a high level of maturity in handling peer relationships. One student, Keith, demonstrated his sensitivity in his handling of peers and friendship in and outside of his regular classroom and community: "I don't want to brag about it, 'cause other students might get mad. They are my friends in the regular classroom, and I don't want to break up my friendship" (student interview, August 30, 2004). Another female student, Kassidy, shared her modesty: "I always think of myself as a normal person, I'm just a level ahead of other students, because everybody learns at their own pace" (student interview, May 21, 2004).

One of Barrett's teachers observed his maturity in making friends with those who were not at the same level as he quested for deeper level thinking about justice. She described the student as a "deep thinker who knows intuitively what was needed to solve a problem" (teacher interview, September 1, 2004).

Significant moral support from these families emerged as another important theme unique to this group. These students seemed to be especially appreciative of opportunities the gifted program provided. Keith's mother articulated that she would try her best to provide what she could to send her child to college: "I wish my child could attend college and have what I could not have" (parent interview, August 30, 2004). Regardless of adverse family circumstances due to poverty, sickness, or divorce, the parents who were interviewed presented unanimous support and admiration for their gifted child. See Appendix C for Keith's vignette.

Low-Income Other Minority Students. The sample of students in the study comprising this prototype (n = 3) was small. One student (Asian American) was identified through performance tasks. Two students (one Asian American Indian, one Hispanic) were traditionally identified. Differences in profiles could not be attributed to specific SES levels or minority status. However, the 2 Asian students in the sample demonstrated some language difficulties and were reported to be less verbal.

High-Nonverbal, Low-Verbal Students. Most of the 9 high-nonverbal, low-verbal gifted students in the sample were identified through performance tasks. The majority were female, and all were White. Only 2 were low income, and 1 of those 2 also fit the prototype of twice-exceptional. Overall, the students had good school performance. In addition, most of the students had areas of talent and/or were engaged in creative endeavors, both in and outside of school. These students and their parents saw participation in the gifted program as beneficial. One student, Butter, noted,

> The gifted program is for gifted people and it lets people do things their own way. At home I skateboard. There is this newspaper article where a guy said it's better than a team sport because you can express your talents without a coach telling you what to do. I think that's the same way the gifted program is because you can do stuff like that without being told to do it in certain terms. (student interview, August 30, 2004)

However, the students were aware of the increased demands and expectations resulting from placement in gifted classes.

Although the recognition of giftedness was affirming for many of the students, some of them struggled intermittently with feelings of low confidence and self-esteem. Perfectionism was also common in this group. Interestingly, most were not perceived as gifted by their parents. In some cases, this was because they had an older sibling who had a higher IQ, a situation that

influenced parental perceptions of the second child's ability. In other instances, it was because the student was seen only as a hard worker. One mother remarked: "She didn't do anything to make me think she was gifted. She was an overachiever" (mother interview, August 29, 2004). In still other cases, parents saw their children as uneven in abilities and therefore viewed them as not gifted. The students in the study responded to these parental attitudes by exercising a strong work ethic and striving to get good grades, often outperforming their brighter sibling in school.

The students in this prototype also tended to be strong in math and/or science and had a preference for hands-on and creative activities. Alex's gifted education teacher noted, "When I teach him, I know I'd better use some manipulatives in class. When something was broken, my students always came to get help from Alex . . ." (teacher interview, August 30, 2004). Reasoning, logic, problem solving, and creativity were common descriptors of these students' strengths. They also were generally portrayed as friendly and well-liked.

As a group, the students appeared balanced in social relationships, academics, and creative activity. Family support and insightfulness into the students was also seen by this mother's comment about her daughter's experiences in school: "Vi loves to learn but needs a different type of teaching to bring out her intelligence" (mother interview, August 29, 2004).

Twice-Exceptional Students. Four of the 5 students in the twice-exceptional sample were males. Three (1 female, 2 males) were identified through performance tasks. Of these students, 2 had been permanently removed from the gifted program; another was removed, but had been reinstated. The students were permanently removed from the program because they were struggling with their grades. The 3 students remaining in the program had an overall strong school performance.

The analysis of the twice-exceptional students' vignettes and resulting themes reveals more negative factors at work than positive ones. Although both students and parents made many positive comments about the impact of the gifted program, more

in-depth probing revealed many negative elements in the students' school experiences as a result of their twice-exceptional characteristics. Low motivation, hypersensitivity, lack of organization skills, negative behaviors, and lack of teacher accommodations for disabilities were some of the negative factors. One student noted: "I was disorganized and ended up being kicked out of the program because of that" (student interview, September 25, 2004). Another said: "Having to leave the program was hard as I had made friends there, and kids in the regular program picked on me when I went back" (student interview, September 25, 2004). To a certain extent, these students' motivation seemed to be teacher-dependent and interest-driven, as one parent noted about her son, Ralph, who was identified through his 99th percentile performance on an aptitude test, "His motivation appears to be tied to his teachers. Ralph would be highly motivated to finish a task if he likes his teacher who can get his interests sustained and engaged" (parent interview, January 20, 2005). In other cases, removal from the program was the perceived rationale for lowered motivation. As one parent noted: "David's attitude and self-concept have been negatively affected by being removed from the gifted program" (parent interview, September 25, 2004).

Summary of Findings by Stakeholder Perspectives

The following section details the major emergent themes by the role of the interviewee: teacher, student, and parent. Themes were derived when 20% or more of respondents cited the same observation or thought. This threshold percentage was chosen because it constituted a critical mass of students, teachers, and parents, given the sample size and uniqueness of the group.

Teacher Emergent Themes. Forty-eight teachers overall were interviewed for the study. Teachers identified creativity and sociability as being two prominent characteristics of gifted students, with 22 teachers citing each characteristic. Seventeen teacher respondents characterized gifted students as having an intrin-

sically motivated work ethic. Possessing confidence, high self-esteem, and positive adjustment were identified as characteristics of gifted students by 11 teacher respondents. Interviewed teachers conveyed characteristics about individual students such as Ricky's teacher, who observed that "he pushes himself and strives for excellence" (teacher interview, October 6, 2004).

The two themes of low self-esteem/lacking confidence and perfectionism were each identified by 10 teacher respondents. Ricky's math and science teacher noted that "if he doesn't get something the first time, he wants to move on to a different question" (teacher interview, October 6, 2004). His language arts teacher shared that Ricky is "highly motivated. He strives to do well. He almost pushes himself too hard" (teacher interview, October 6, 2004).

Other ideas were identified by less than 20% of the teachers. Nine respondents reported that the students they had in class had "strong time management/organizational skills." Leadership; low motivation; hands-on learning style; and subject strengths, weaknesses, or preference were each identified as gifted student characteristics by 8 respondents. A science teacher described one gifted student, Janice, as having strong critical thinking skills and being "very creative, big picture, and doesn't like details" (teacher interview, November 17, 2004). The same teacher also thought that Janice had trouble with reading and "works below potential," identifying disorganization as a weakness. Her language arts teacher expressed that her motivation appeared fine, but that family tensions existed. Several teachers mentioned home problems: "It seems there was a big rift between Janice and her mother which may be the root of her failure" (teacher interview, November 17, 2004). One of her teachers said, "She is never an extremely happy person. She is an eye-roller; she has an attitude about her. Everything is kind of a pain to her" (teacher interview, November 17, 2004).

Seven teacher respondents mentioned resiliency, capable but underachieving, high-level thinking abilities, preference for targeted peer groups, poor time management and organizational skills, family support, and family dysfunction issues as character-

Table 2

Teacher Emergent Themes From Interview Data (*N* = 48)

Number of Respondents	Teacher Thematics
22	Creativity*
22	Sociability
17	Intrinsic motivation/work ethic*
11	Confidence/good self-esteem/adjustment**
10	Low self-esteem/lacking confidence
10	Perfectionism
9	Strong time management/organizational skills
8	Leadership
8	Hands-on learning style*
8	Low motivation/lazy
8	Subject strengths/weaknesses/preference**
7	Family dysfunction/issues/divorce*
7	Family support/involvement
7	Preference for targeted peer groups*
7	Poor time management/organizational skills
7	Resiliency
7	Capable but underachieving
7	High level thinking abilities

Note. ***Cross two perspective thematic. **Cross three perspective thematic.**

istics of these learners. Table 2 reports the number of responses coded for each idea emerging from teacher interviews.

Student Emergent Themes. Overall, 37 students were interviewed for the study. Thirty-one students discussed the challenge of advanced learning as central to their gifted program experiences and desire for future learning. A program effect of confidence-building was reported by 26 student respondents, and 23 students reported having distinct subject-area strengths, weaknesses, and preferences.

The theme of friendship and how friendship patterns vary between gifted classrooms and regular classrooms was men-

Table 3

Student Emergent Themes From Interview Data (*N* = 37)

Number of Respondents	Student Thematics
31	Challenge/advanced learning/greater depth*
26	Confidence building**
23	Subject strengths/weaknesses/preferences**
22	Issue of friendship: patterns vary—G/T & regular classrooms
19	Project/hands-on learning preference*
15	Influence (positive and negative) of teachers
12	Connectivity of learning to other classes/real world
12	Heavy workload
10	High expectation
10	Rapid pacing
9	Intellectual peerage
8	Family issues*
8	Sense of belonging
8	Preference for group work

Note. *Cross two perspective thematic. **Cross three perspective thematic.

tioned by 22 student respondents. Nineteen students reported a preference for projects and hands-on learning activities; 15 students identified the positive and negative influences of teachers. One student, Jerry, stated that "Being in the gifted program affects my learning attitude a lot. It is exciting and fun." His interview conveyed that the challenge, fast pace, and exciting projects of his gifted classes have had a positive impact on him. Having been in both regular and gifted classes, Jerry noticed that "in regular class, it is too slow and too easy. In my gifted program, teachers correct you more." He also noticed differences in student behavior in his gifted classes. He felt that he "belongs more in the program because the student behavior is good. [He] prefers projects and likes that they are challenging and require research" (student interview, October 6, 2004).

Twelve respondents reported on the theme of connectivity of learning between classes and the real world, as well as the

heavy workload. Ten student respondents reported on both high expectations and rapid pacing as characteristics of gifted classes. The influence of intellectual peers was a theme shared by 9 respondents. Having a sense of belonging and having a preference for group work were each identified by 8 respondents. Table 3 reports the frequency of responses for each emergent theme cited by students.

Parent Emergent Themes From Interview Data. Thirty-seven parents were interviewed for the study. Twenty-two parents reported on the themes of increased motivation and desire to succeed, evidence of creative outlets, and the clear subject matter preference of their children. Ralph's mother expressed that he is an excellent reader, outstanding in math, very strong in hands-on activities, and very visual. She reported that science has been his favorite subject over the years, and he is very motivated and good at doing experiments (parent interview, January 20, 2005).

Eighteen parents reported the enhanced learning and challenge that the gifted program provided their child. The theme of strong self-esteem, confidence, and pride emerged from 13 parent responders, and 11 suggested that their child learned easily and quickly with little effort. One of the parents interviewed reported that his daughter Barbara was bright at a very young age, prior to beginning school. She was characterized as a "quick study," strong in language arts, responsible, outgoing, popular, and a leader among her peers (parent interview, November 15, 2004).

Ten parents suggested that they did not see their child as gifted and that they were surprised by the designation when their child was identified. Eight parents cited that the transition to middle school was challenging for their children, especially the adjustment to a new peer group, varying teachers, and higher expectations for learning. Eight parents related key characteristics that they observed in their child, including being "shy and introspective" and "empathic and caring." Seven parents reported themes regarding their child's maturity, strong willfulness, and individual responsibility for their actions. Barbara's father illustrated her sense of right and wrong as a strength and her will-

Table 4

Parent Emergent Themes From Interview Data (*N* = 37)

Number of Respondents	Parent Thematics
22	Increased motivation and desire to succeed*
22	Evidence of creative outlets*
22	Clear subject matter preference**
18	Enhanced learning and challenge*
13	Strong self-esteem/confidence/pride**
11	Learns easily and quickly; little effort
10	Declaration not gifted child
8	Transition to middle school issues
8	Shy/introspective/quiet
8	Empathic/caring
7	Mature
7	Strong-willed**
7	Responsible

Note. *Cross two perspective thematic. **Cross three perspective thematic.

ingness to go above and beyond to help out with tasks. For example, Barbara spent all day helping a friend with a school project because she did not like to see other children get in trouble for things they did not do. She also helped her mother with injections that were necessary for her mother's health (parent interview, November 15, 2004). Table 4 reports the frequency of parental responses by theme in descending order.

Discussion

The data from this research study provided insight into the characteristics of gifted students from low-income and minority backgrounds or who were twice-exceptional. The self-characterizations, as well as characterizations from parents and teachers, tended to be positive, citing traits that are associated with

good learners and healthy personalities in general. This is consistent with the literature on resilience and self-efficacy. In some instances, individual students were seen as troubled. However, all groups interviewed appeared to think that the gifted program had been good for the students in the study, providing challenge at the cognitive level and self-confidence at the affective level. Differences that emerged through the analysis of stakeholder perspectives suggested that students were the least aware of learning problems, but more aware than their parents or teachers of the affective and social issues affecting them. Parents seemed most attuned to their child's heightened self-esteem as a result of identification and program participation. Teachers seemed very aware of learning problems displayed by the child, typically related to perceived motivation, organization, and social skills.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the small sample size within prototypes, this study can only be seen as exploratory in discerning the similarities and differences among these groups of special needs gifted learners. There was also a limitation in the amount of data collected on each student due to the one-hour time limitation of the interviews. The developmental level of the students and the circumstances of being interviewed by adults they did not know and who often were of different ethnic background may have also contributed to a lack of deeper responses from the participants. Although multiple perspectives were gleaned through various interviews, enhancing the credibility of the themes derived, only one interview was held with each person at one point in time, limiting the overall richness of the data. Follow-up interviews may have yielded a more in-depth portrait than what was obtained. Moreover, due to access and time constraints, member checking was not feasible. Thus, an outside researcher validated categories and themes derived from each aspect of the study.

Conclusions

This study attempted to ascertain the perspectives of at-risk gifted students, their parents, and their teachers regarding performance, adjustment, and learning potential exhibited since being identified and participating in elementary gifted programs. Different prototypes revealed different patterns of strengths and weaknesses, preferences and perceptions about learning, and stressors in their lives. African American low-income learners struggled with the loss of their social group by participating in the gifted program, still preferring to be a part of that original network. Low-income Caucasian students gladly took up the mantle of friendships in the gifted program. Twice-exceptional students recorded different struggles related to keeping up in both regular class work and the gifted program. The high-nonverbal, low-verbal group found compensation strategies for being successful in the gifted program through creative outlets and using other skill sets such as leadership.

Many perspectives are shared among teachers, parents, and the students themselves, all suggesting the beneficial nature of gifted identification and programming for these students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Many common yet diverse characteristics were cited for these students, ranging from being strong learners in several ways to being limited in motivation, organization, and the ability to work with peers. Less clear also was the pathway for continued growth and development of these learners as they traverse the latter part of middle school and matriculate to high school, especially with respect to teacher support for individual learning needs and problems.

It is fair to conclude, however, that after 3 to 4 years in the gifted program, these gifted students, regardless of prototype, had gained important new skills, enhanced their academic performance, and felt renewed confidence in their own abilities.

Implications for Practice

Although the vignettes individually do not carry direct implications for interventions, taken as group, they suggest that practitioners might find them helpful for several important uses in gifted programs.

The vignettes developed in this study could be used to help teachers and other educators understand the need for differentiating instruction for students with diverse abilities and uneven profiles. Several of these students, for example, had only one area of academic strength and exhibited problems with motivation and performance in school. There is a clear need for adapting and accommodating curriculum and instruction to students who do not fit the "typical" profile of gifted behavior that includes students who are strong in all subjects in school, well-motivated, and capable of strong classroom performance. The vignettes provide a synthesized model of student, parent, and teacher perceptions on the characteristics and needs of traditionally underserved gifted students and the implications for gifted program membership across the elementary years. As such, they provide the basis for discussion of (a) cognitive and affective interventions, tailored to individual needs; (b) special counseling issues for these learners; (c) the psychological boost provided them by gifted program membership, perhaps due to a more appropriate peer group for learning; and (d) the need for transitional counseling into high school.

Educators need to be proactive regarding emergent behaviors and needs that cut across cognitive and affective areas when planning instruction for learners from low-income, minority, and twice-exceptional backgrounds (Johnsen, VanTassel-Baska, & Robinson, 2008). Thus, the vignettes could be used as a basis for professional development. Teachers and program coordinators could benefit from understanding the differences among gifted learners in respect to working successfully with them in schools and classrooms. The use of vignettes for professional development would deepen understanding of the nature and needs of

these special learners and provide data for making inferences about ways to accommodate their learning needs.

The findings of this study provide some evidential support for offering counseling services to gifted students who come from low-income and minority family backgrounds in order to address affective needs, including academic planning (Olszewski-Kubilius & Scott, 1992), instruction on time management, organizational and study skills, and coaching on positive peer relationships.

Many of the students spoke of friends they had made in their elementary school gifted programs who no longer were in their classes and their sense of loneliness in the heterogeneous middle school environment. More content-based advanced options for these learners at the middle school level would have allowed them to have similar-ability peers. This might be one option to consider in responding to their sense of social isolation (Rogers, 2002).

Finally, as these students matriculate to high school, the nature of their risk factors and their strengths need to be considered in providing appropriate transition counseling. The literature suggests the vulnerability of these students at this stage of development for accrual of appropriately high level opportunities to learn (Johnsen, Feuerbacher, & Witte, 2006).

There are some research implications of the study as well. It will further our understanding of the developmental path of these special needs learners if we can follow them longitudinally. Moreover, it will be a worthwhile endeavor to continue to conduct case studies of gifted students representing different minority groups to ascertain similarities and differences to the prototypes found in this study. Further research is also warranted to validate the prototypes and to assess the prevalence of comparable themes with a larger sample of students from these membership categories.

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Appendix A
Project STAR Research: Student Interview Template

Name of the Student: Grade level: District:	Identification Information: STAR _____ Trad. _____	Identification Scores: Test/Name/Score A: B: C:	Research Prototype:	Grades in G/T Class: Math _____ LA _____ In Science _____ Overall GPA _____

Questions	Interview Notes	Quotes	Other
1. How does the participation in gifted programs affect your learning? (Probes: Learning in gifted class, in regular class, learning in language arts, math, science, and social studies?)			
2. What are your perceptions of the curriculum and instruction of the gifted program you are in? (Probes: Challenging? Easy? Exciting? Dull? In which subject areas? At which grade level?)			
3. How did you feel about yourself after being placed in gifted programs? (Probes: Do you like being in the gifted classes? Does it affect your liking of study in other academic domains? How does it affect your learning and life attitude?)			

Questions	Interview Notes	Quotes	Other
4. Do you feel more of a sense of belonging in your gifted classes or in your regular classes? Please elaborate. (Probes: Was it easy to make new friends in gifted classes? What special problems did you encounter? How comfortable are you in your regular class?).			
5. Which aspects of your gifted program do you like the best? Which aspects of your gifted program do you dislike? Please explain.			
6. What component(s) of your gifted program do you feel need to be improved? (Probes: How would you change your gifted program? What changes can be made to your gifted program so that you could have had happier and more satisfactory experiences?)			
7. Are there any additional things you care about and you want to share?			

Appendix B
Blair Clancy

Blair Clancy, a Caucasian seventh-grade female in a suburban middle school in South Carolina, was identified as gifted in fourth grade. She was selected based on Dimension B, Achievement, with a score of 94th percentile in Reading on the Metropolitan Achievement Test-7, and Dimension C, Star Performance Tasks, with a score of 17 out of 20 (85%) on the verbal portion of the test, qualifying her for participation in the gifted program. She fit the profile of a low-income, Caucasian student identified through performance tasks. Blair's current placement was in the language arts portion of the middle school gifted program (Gate). Her grades at the end of the last year were: 74 in math, 81 in English/Language Arts, 93 in science, and an overall grade point average of 2.75.

In physical appearance, Blair was overweight and carelessly dressed. She was reserved, and her responses were short and abrupt. Blair did not offer much elaboration even with prob-

ing. Asked how she felt about being identified as gifted, Blair stated, "When I got in, I was excited. I would be doing things that required more thinking. When doing projects for another class, I think 'I am in Gate. I can do this. I'm smart enough to do this.'" Identification affected her self-confidence and made her feel special. She felt more a sense of belonging in her Gate class, saying, "Most of my friends were already in Gate classes." She said in fifth-grade Gate; they worked on word stems and book reports. To Blair, the more interesting learning activities were word games (e.g., jeopardy with word stems; mystery word, with a sentence on the board and a missing word). She talked about a project where students picked an invention that affected their lives and researched it. She indicated a preference for different types of work by commenting that she would like to have the same amount of group work as independent work in Gate. Interestingly, Blair said she did not like writing, which was opposite of what her current teacher noted as her strength. She stated that Gate "does not really help other subjects, because [Gate and other subjects] don't really connect."

Mrs. Clancy, Blair's mother, said her daughter was speaking in complete sentences early, and she could have conversations with her as a 2-year-old. "When Blair was born, I could tell from very young she was brighter than most kids. It only took two days to potty train her." Her mother observed that by age 5, Blair was reading at a second-grade level. She continued a high level of school performance through age 10 with "straight A's on her report card and homework that we [her parents] couldn't understand." Now, Blair's mother says that she relies on her daughter to help her to understand things sometimes. "I'm 36. I ask her things. Last night I had a project. I asked her how to do it." At this time, Blair's school performance is uneven. Mrs. Clancy stated, "Blair has the capability to do well but sometimes doesn't. She is not afraid to ask questions; she's very inquisitive."

Blair had a younger brother who is also "smart" according to Mrs. Clancy. Blair's mom noted that brother and sister are different in that Blair procrastinates, yet she persists in a way her brother does not. Mrs. Clancy said that most of her daugh-

ter's friends are not in Gate. This observation indicated a change from when Blair first began in Gate where most of her friends were at that time. Her mother described Blair and her friends as "tomboys, tough girlfriends. She has lots of friends; she gets along with all types of people." Blair is a "night owl" who enjoys doing computer research. She has extensive knowledge about music, sings in a band, and plays an instrument. Blair likes horses and is an avid reader. Mrs. Clancy saw Blair's strengths as reading and spelling, and believes that math is her weakness. "She likes [math], but it is not her cup of tea." Her mother noted that Blair has increased her reading and has more homework, especially in language arts, as a result of the gifted program. "She reads more at 13 than her parents." Mrs. Clancy stated that Blair has good self-esteem and a good attitude towards learning, but observed that her daughter has become a procrastinator. "She puts [schoolwork] off, does it at last minute, and still pulls off a good grade." The most significant change Mrs. Clancy has noticed is that "[Blair] became more articulate. I talk to her as an adult—my friends enjoy talking with her. She relates well to them and knows what they are talking about." Her mother clearly was proud of her. She said, "[Blair] is very driven. She has BIG goals, dreams. She knows what she wants to do in life. I am very proud of her. She is going in the right direction."

Both Blair's language arts and science teachers were interviewed for the study. Without hesitation, Blair's language arts teacher, Ms. Tyler, said Blair's strength was her writing. Tyler stated, "Being in tune to her topic, her writing, her surroundings, the beautiful words that come from her hand—that is her talent. Her mind is incredible and wonderful." Her creativity and thinking ability is evident in class. "You don't think she is paying attention—but she is on top of it." Blair's science teacher, Ms. Rupert, has noticed her deep understanding; "She operates much like other gifted students. She understands material on a deeper level." Other strengths noted in science class were good vocabulary, strong oral communication, and leadership. "[Blair] is good academically, [displays] good graphing techniques, and is very creative and funny." Ms. Rupert commented on Blair's

distractibility: "She may get halfway through work and go to another task or play with something. She is easily distracted and likes to play sometimes." In language arts, Blair's attention to details or rules that have an academic basis are problematic:

> If [students] have to meet a certain type of requirement, she leaves things out—partly due to her lack of organization and partly to her personality. Guidelines are not always followed. An example was doing an MLA citation—something out of the ordinary. She did not do that; she left it off from the assignment. Her weakness seemed to be attention to detail—but definitely no mind weakness.

A special learning characteristic observed by Blair's language arts teacher was her insightful writing. Ms. Tyler stated,

> [Blair] surprises me. When you look at her—a White (probably) middle class kid—you wouldn't expect the type of writing from her. [She is a] big girl [with] kind of a gruff attitude. She knows more about life than the average 13-year-old. She comes out with the most beautiful writing. [She's] not a pleaser, [but is] just the type of character who does what she wants to do. She is making connections, asking questions like "I wonder why? What would happen if . . ."

Blair's "adult" maturity is not only evidenced in her insightful writing but also in the books she selects to read. Her science teacher saw Blair as a good student, who is a visual learner and who can quickly master words.

As for Blair's social-emotional development, her language arts teacher saw it as normal except that Blair is more direct than the typical middle school student.

> She tells it like it is. It may be a control issue in some group interactions. She does not want to share power.

> She [can be] unbending with others, not to an extreme where it is causing problems. She does not compromise much on group work. [Blair] may have self-esteem issues [that] may be linked to control. [She] has friends—not a problem there.

Her science teacher believed Blair had good self-esteem and commented that although she liked science, Blair may not work on projects in which she is not interested. She "doesn't like to be corrected and may be perfectionist at times." Ms. Rupert has observed some defiant behaviors and noted that Blair at times displays an attitude of superiority. For example, she had refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance and has talked during the daily "moment of silence."

Blair was a young woman with strong self-esteem, independent spirit, and apparent maturity for her age. She also was aware of the skill development that she had experienced in the gifted program in vocabulary study and literary analysis. She has noticed that the program is challenging sometimes, although she denies liking writing, a perceived strength by others. Clearly, her language skills of speaking, writing, and reading were strong as were her creative skills. However, her procrastination, lack of attention to detail, and distractibility contributed to uneven performance in school.

Appendix C
Keith Kasteen

Keith was nominated for the gifted program in a suburban school district in the state of South Carolina when he was a second grader, and he was identified and placed in the gifted program at the third-grade level based on his 90th percentile performance on the nonverbal component of the TCS test and a score of 18 (90%) on the verbal component of the performance tasks. He has been in the gifted program for 5 years. Keith was enrolled in both the language arts and math strands of the gifted

program. He has been a *B* student according to both his grade report and the two teachers interviewed. Based on his identification scores, Keith was classified as a low-income African American student prototype who was identified through performance tasks.

Wearing a white T-shirt and blue jeans, Keith presented as a handsome 12-year-old African American boy with a pair of bright eyes and curly hair. He was a little bit short compared to other students of his age. A polite and quiet student was the first impression of him. However, he became verbal and conversant once he started to talk.

Keith felt positively about his gifted program experiences, citing the focus on learning, hands-on activities, field trips, and his math teacher as the most direct benefits. His favorite subject has been mathematics, and he loved his math teacher's instruction where clays and blocks were used to help him understand and learn the subject. Keith shared that he was enrolled in a Summer/Saturday program at the University of South Carolina, together with high school students for 5 hours a day, twice a week, which also helped him sustain his interests in mathematics. Keith stated that he enjoyed the experiential way of learning. He described that he loved his English class last year when they had a field trip to the newspaper. They not only learned about producing and writing in the newspaper industry, but the class also produced its own newspaper. He contributed to the paper by writing articles in the sports section, noting "I like it . . . because it made me feel that I am a sports star." He also shared that he loved reading a variety of books, such as biographies, adventures, sports, and scary books. Keith seemed to be a social-emotionally well-balanced child. He interacted well with friends in both gifted and regular classes. He was conscious of the "bottom line" in terms of friends to hangout with. He was clearly aware of his smartness yet he did not want to show off in front of his regular class friends, explaining that "I don't want to brag about it, cause other students might get mad. They are my friends in the regular classroom, and I don't want to break up my friendships."

Keith appeared to be a very conscientious and responsible boy and had a strong and close relationship with his mother. He was willing to look after his sick mother at home, instead of playing outside as his big brother did, noting that he would hang out with his friends after his mother's surgery. Keith aspired to become a pediatrician, noting that he liked to work with kids, plus being a pediatrician would be a good contact in the hospital if family members got sick, particularly his mother.

Keith's mother, Ms. Kasteen, was very proud of her son. Without having an opportunity to go to college herself, she worked hard to provide what she could for her children, noting "I want and wish my kid to get what I did not get." Ms. Kasteen views her son as a "bright little boy" who is curious, inquisitive, adventurous, and strong-willed, noting that "He was always inquisitive and searched for answers." His determined nature was evident as early as 3 years old, and "he had the intent to get things done then." At a young age, Keith had a strong interest in experimenting with mechanical objects such as the clock or the radio the family had; he would tear apart these little things to see what was inside. Before the age of 5, he was able to assemble them without adult supervision. According to his mother, Keith made good grades until the sixth grade when no gifted classes were offered in his middle school, and he was teased for smartness. His mother noted that Keith intended to slack off during that year and played camouflage in order to make his friends feel that he was not showing off. He seemed to come back on track in his schoolwork and was more eager to learn now.

Keith was more advanced intellectually than many other children of his age, according to Ms. Kasteen. She was well aware of her son's giftedness when Keith was in kindergarten when she brought him to a math and science fair, where he was able to figure out the formula of a math problem that was several grades above him. His mother also noted that Keith often came up with ideas that were not typical of his age peers, giving as an example a conversation she had with him about the blue sky while he was little, relating it to the ozone of the atmosphere. In his mother's words, "He thinks at a deeper level." However, his

mother was also worried about her son's nonconforming way of thinking and responding to questions, fearing that both might affect his grades and the impression he left on his teachers.

His mother felt that a strong desire to learn, confidence, strong math and science interest and aptitude, and the spirit of "never scared of challenge" were Keith's strengths, whereas his weaknesses often came from his becoming headstrong, which was not much appreciated in a typical school setting. Compared to his brother who is 3 years older, Keith is more outgoing, more sure about himself, would stand up for what he feels is right, and is smarter. The two brothers are similar in that they both have a strong will for being a leader when with friends, and both want to win in a competitive setting. She reported that Keith's home activities included playing sports, reading comic books, doing mechanics, and looking after cousins.

Both teachers who were interviewed saw Keith as "not a strong student" in respect to grades and performance in class. Both categorized him as a *B* student. The elementary teacher noted that Keith liked to build things using manipulatives. However, he "orally lost his track." Acknowledging that he enjoyed being in the gifted class and contributing to class discussions, the same teacher did not find him a highly motivated learner in her class. She commented that Keith seemed to have trouble with the high-level thinking activities that were central to most of the gifted program routines. In her elementary gifted class, the *Logic Book* was frequently used and a series of thinking skills such as deductive reasoning, inference skills, sequencing, matrix, analogy, and different kinds of critical thinking were taught and used in those years; Keith struggled in these activities. She noted that Keith often came up with different ideas in her class, and she attributed it to right-brain versus left-brain differences, noting that "He was not a strong student, but probably a right-brained student"; and when he did problem solving in class, he "comes up [with] something totally out of place." The teacher's comments echoed his mom's worries that her son's "atypical" way of thinking and behaving might get him into occasional trouble in class.

While acknowledging that Keith enjoyed hands-on activities and therefore might be a visual learner, the other teacher stressed that he had poor time-management and organization skills and needed modeling and reminders. According to both teachers, Keith appeared to be slow, easily distracted, and somewhat lazy in doing his class or home assignments. Sometimes he was doing the assignment just for the sake of doing it. As one teacher put it, "He might get things correct, but time-wise, he appeared to be lagging behind."

Both teachers observed that Keith got along well with other students, and he appeared to have a group of friends with whom he hung out. The elementary teacher commented that Keith appeared to be a little immature compared to other students in her class. He had the habit of throwing friendly punches at his classmates and talked a lot about his mother and brother in a number of settings. She noted that Keith's mother was very concerned with her son's schoolwork and made a number of contacts regarding him.

These interviews presented a picture of a young African American boy who was curious, intelligent, responsible, and social-emotionally healthy. Family illness has brought out his altruistic nature and his career aspirations. His early sign of adventurous behaviors, nonconforming ways of thinking, and professed eagerness in learning showed him to be a student with strong potential. He appeared to be strong in hands-on activities and inclined to experiential ways of learning in different domains. He was socially effective in all groups and extremely close to his mother. Yet his mediocre grades and performance in class, coupled with problems with distractibility and lack of motivation, time-management, and organizational skills, affected teachers' perceptions of his real strengths. His mother's view of him suggested she also is concerned about his nonconformist ways as they may cause him problems in school.

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