



Teachers' Conceptions of Giftedness and Special Needs of Gifted Students

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Abstract

Teachers have an indispensable role in the education of gifted and talented students. Teachers should have a well-developed conception of giftedness and a full understanding of the characteristics and the special needs of gifted and talented students so that they can facilitate effective identification and education. In this qualitative study, ten teachers working in the USA public schools were interviewed to explore their conceptions of giftedness. A grounded theory methodology was used. The analysis yielded five categories: giftedness, problems, strategies, context, and responsibility. According to the relationships among these five categories, the core category giftedness emerged. Results related to each of these five categories are presented and supported by direct quotations from the participants.

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Introduction

National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC; 2009) reported that many teachers who do not have any training in gifted education led the classrooms in which gifted students spend most of their school days. Indeed, teachers have an indispensable role in the education of gifted and talented students (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Siegle, 2001; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). This role emerges in the identification process of gifted students, understanding of their special needs, accommodating them with appropriate learning materials and environment, and being competent facilitators for them in learning interactions. As teachers are central in every aspect of gifted and talented education, it is essential to understand teachers' conceptions of giftedness. Therefore, an exploration of teachers' conceptions of giftedness can provide us with a better understanding of the services provided to gifted and talented students as well as appropriate teacher education programs.

For over a century, scholars have sought to understand and explain giftedness. Many empirical investigations have been conducted and several theories of giftedness have been suggested. These theories vary from psychometrically rooted conceptions to cross-cultural understandings of giftedness (Freeman, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Sak, 2011). The diversity of the theories and approaches for giftedness is summarized well in the comprehensive review of Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011). Although it has not been reached a consensus on the definition of giftedness, a prominent definition offered by Marland Report (1972) is as follows:

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Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified people who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: (1) general intellectual ability; (2) specific academic aptitude; (3) creative or productive thinking; (4) leadership ability; (5) visual and performing arts; and/or (6) psychomotor ability. (p. 2)

The Marland Report's definition of giftedness suggests that giftedness has several dimensions and can occur in different domains; therefore, an individual can be gifted in a single, a few or many areas. Another well-recognized definition of giftedness suggested by the Columbus Group (1991) is as follows:

An 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.

Columbus Group has brought up "asynchronous development" in conceptualization of giftedness. Two definitions above is also an example of how two definitions may have both similar and different point of views. According to scholars in the field, giftedness has usually been conceptualized in terms of high intelligence, the demonstration of certain behaviors or achievement, or various other ways (Clark, 2001; Ford, 2003; Reis & Small, 2005; Renzulli, 2003; Sternberg, 2003, 2005; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2005). Besides, the definition of giftedness, to some extent, influence school and classroom composition. In other words, the way educators define or conceptualize giftedness has ramifications for their gifted identification procedures, program offerings, and the ultimate success of gifted education programs (Schroth & Helfer, 2009).

Each school, regardless of the model that they favored, attempts to identify gifted and talented students so that students can be placed into advanced academic programs and get opportunity to meet their special needs. Effective schools in identifying and placing students into advanced academic programs have consistent identification processes, curriculum, and evaluation models (Callahan, 2001; Ford, 2003; Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth, & Jarvis, 2006). Teacher nominations are one of the common components of gifted identification processes (Siegle, 2001). Teachers play some form of "gatekeeper" role in almost all identification practices (Hunsaker, 1994; Hunsaker, Finley, & Frank, 1994).

It can be argued that teachers among all other people in a school system, such as administrators and counselors, are the most firmly embedded in the day-to-day practice of education (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Therefore, many school districts often ask classroom teachers to nominate their students for offered advance programs (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010). Besides, teachers' judgment of their students in referring them to gifted and talented programs is crucial for the students' attainment of full potential because gifted and talented students fail to be challenged in regular classrooms (Archambault et al., 1993; Reis et al., 1993), and need differentiated learning experiences beyond those provided in the regular school program.

However, many schools have struggled with the problem of underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted education programs such as those who are limited English proficient (LEP) and from low-SES backgrounds (Aguirre, 2003; Barken & Bernal, 1991; Ford, 2003). For example, research evidence indicated that LEP and low-SES students may perform in the classroom at average or below average due to their lower verbal scores even though they have above average nonverbal intelligence scores (Juntune, Kaya, & Ramos, 2011). Therefore, these students may not be identified and placed without effective identification procedures and effective classroom teachers with high awareness of gifted minority students.

Teachers are expected to have a full understanding of giftedness and characteristics of gifted and talented students in order to refer their students to gifted and talented programs (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). Furthermore, teachers should be able to nominate their students to gifted and talented education programs independent from students' diverse backgrounds, such as ethnicities, SES levels, languages, gender, and achievement (Siegle et al., 2010; Speirs Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007). According to the studies of Campbell and Verna (1998), Speirs Neumeister et al. (2007), and Cashion and Sullenger, (1996), teachers generally have their own conceptions of giftedness. Accordingly, they can nominate their students to gifted and talented programs according to their own conception of giftedness. Teachers might stress markers such as high achievement and high grades rather than creativity, leadership, divergent thinking, or other gifted characteristics when they are asked to nominate gifted potentials to gifted and talented programs (Guskin, Peng, & Simon, 1992; Hunsaker, Finley, & Frank, 1997). Teachers' conceptions of giftedness and perceptions of their students' special needs may lack understanding about how cultural and environmental factors affect the expression of giftedness among gifted diverse students (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). Consequently, this lack of understanding may produce deficiencies in the identification process as well. As a result, some students who need differentiated and/or enriched education may be deprived educational opportunities appropriate for their special needs.

Cross (2005) and Sternberg (1996) stated that not only lay people but also some experts including teachers may have some misconceptions about giftedness and gifted students. The lack of appropriate teacher training might cause teachers to have misconceptions or to keep their existing misconceptions or dogmas about giftedness (Sak, 2011). Accordingly, they may not perform well in nominating gifted students to gifted education programs.

Lee (1999) interviewed with a group of 16 teachers; novice and expert, female and male, and working with young students. As a result of the phenomenographic analysis, seven conceptions of gifted students emerged: excellence, potential, rarity, noticeability, innate ability, motivation, and asynchrony. Rohrer (1995) conducted interviews with four experienced teachers and found that teachers consider not only students' intellectual performance but also look for students' qualitative characteristics such as intensity, visibility, and uniqueness to differentiate gifted students from other students. Both Lee (1999) and Rohrer (1995) indicated that teachers determine the students performing noticeably better by comparing students' classroom performance with other students.

McCoach and Siegle (2007) provided a comprehensive literature on teachers' attitudes towards gifted students. They concluded that teachers have both positive and negative connotations about gifted students; therefore, each teacher's attitudes or perception should be considered individually. Another study (Bain, Bliss, Choate, & Brown, 2007) reported that teacher candidates hold a very egalitarian conception of gifted students, which cause considering gifted education programs as homogeneous grouping and acceleration for gifted students is unnecessary.

Several researchers indicated that teachers are usually good at identifying gifted students by considering their exceptional academic performance. However, teachers also take other factors into account such as students' motivation and classroom behavior (Moon & Brighton, 2008; Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007) and students' family environments (Rohrer, 1995). This may impair teachers' ability to identify gifted minority students. According to Cribbs, (2009), teachers believe that there are gifted students in all facets of society; however, teachers have difficulties in describing the characteristics of gifted minority students.

Schroth and Helfer (2009) examined the teachers' conceptions of giftedness in a quantitative study. They addressed various prominent conception of giftedness to 900 participants including classroom teachers, gifted education specialist, and administrators and asked them to state whether agree or disagree with each statement. The results showed that most of the participants agreed with all of the conceptions although there were some contradictory conceptions. Schroth and Helfer (2009) viewed this result as an opportunity rather than a disappointing result because participants' agreement with various, even contradicting, conceptions provides rationale for offering different kinds of services for gifted students who are represented by different conceptions.

Plata, Masten, and Trusty (1999) summarized several studies that found teachers' expectations and perceptions of students' abilities and performances to be based on students' race, social class background, and ethnicity. Based on these studies, teachers appear to have a lack of understanding of how giftedness manifests itself in diverse populations. Given their central role in identifying gifted students, teachers are expected to have a well-developed understanding of and the characteristics of gifted children in diverse populations.

An effective education for gifted and talented students requires teachers to have a well-developed conception of giftedness and a full understanding of the characteristics and the special needs of gifted and talented students. Therefore, studying teachers contributes to our understanding of teachers' conceptions of giftedness and how effective they are in the identification process. Thus, the purpose in the current qualitative study was to explore a group of teachers' conceptions of giftedness.

Method

In the current qualitative study, a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used. When a field of study is new or has little constructed ideas and theories, grounded theory is appropriate to study in that field (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004) because Glaser, Glaser and Strauss, and Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006) state that grounded theory methodology seeks to construct theories. Besides, qualitative studies usually generate hypotheses with their exploratory function (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although there might be some preconceived theories about teachers' conceptions of giftedness, the aim of this study was to explore the participants' conceptions of giftedness regardless of preconceived ideas and theories. Grounded theory is appropriate for this research because the aim was to explore teachers' conceptions rather than prove or disprove preconceived theories. In the current study, teachers' conceptions of giftedness and related important issues emerged from what they told in the interviews (Mills et al., 2006). Grounded theory provided an inductive categorization of data so that the researcher developed a relationship among emerged themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

According to grounded theory methodology, there are multiple individual realities, which are influenced by the context (Mills et al., 2006). As generalization is not appropriate for qualitative studies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), there is no intention to generalize the results of this study. In other words, the results obtained from the current study do not serve as generalizations for other teachers or situations. Rather, the emerging results are directly related to the participants' reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Participants

In the current study, 10 teachers were interviewed. These ten participants were selected conveniently among graduate school students of a large southwestern university in the USA. The researcher did not know the participants and had never met them prior to the study. The study included participants who may have gifted students in their classes or not, and may have taken professional education related to gifted and talented education or not. They also might vary in terms of teaching experience. In short, there was no prescribed criterion for participant selection because the intent of the study was to explore teachers' conceptions of giftedness regardless of their backgrounds, contexts, and current knowledge. Having a conception of giftedness does not require teachers to have gifted students in their classrooms, to have professional education, or to have teaching experience with gifted children. In contrast, teachers may have conceptions of giftedness regardless of their contexts and backgrounds. It also can be expected that the context in which these teachers live and their backgrounds have important influence on their conceptions. However, the aim was to explore their conceptions rather than how their conceptions were built.

As shown in Table 1, four male and six female teachers were included in the current study. Four teachers were Hispanic, three were African American, and the other three were Caucasian. All of ten teachers were working in public schools of the same school district, attending to the same graduate school, and have had gifted students in their classrooms; however, their subject areas, teaching experiences, and ages are varied.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Subject Areas	Teaching Experience
Julia	Female	Latino/Hispanic	Classroom	9
Melissa	Female	Caucasian	Art	7
Katy	Female	Latino/Hispanic	Bilingual	3
John	Male	Latino/Hispanic	Bilingual	16
Hector	Male	Latino/Hispanic	Bilingual	5
Beth	Female	African American	Classroom	7
Jill	Female	African American	Classroom	8
Bruce	Male	Caucasian	Math	4
Jay	Male	African American	Classroom	4
Angela	Female	Caucasian	Science	6

Researcher's Positionality

In qualitative studies, objectivity is a myth (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is inevitable for a researcher to bring their experiences, knowledge, and beliefs into the research process. Therefore, having full understanding and insight of what participants tell is crucial for a qualitative researcher. Glaser and Strauss called this as the sensitivity of the researcher (1967). As a professional in Educational Sciences department and having doctorate in the department of Educational Psychology with the specialization of gifted and talented education, I am knowledgeable about the field of gifted and talented education. I have also been studying with gifted and talented children and their teachers for several years. It has provided me with the field experience so that I can integrate that with my theoretical knowledge. In addition, I have taken several graduate courses in qualitative study methodologies. Thanks to these courses, I was able to conduct interviews and manage the processes of data collection and data analysis effectively. Although it was possible to explore different results from this study, my current beliefs and expectations, which based on my background and experiences in the field, were teachers' lack of understanding or misunderstanding of giftedness. I also believe in that interview as a data collection technique and grounded theory methodology as data analysis and theory construction methodology were the most appropriate ways to explore teachers' conception of giftedness in the present study.

Data Collection (Interview)

Each of ten participants (a total of ten interviews) were interviewed in a convenient place according to each interviewee's preference. Eight interviews were conducted on-campus, and the other two were performed in off-campus places. The length of interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour. All interviews were recorded in their entirety. The interviews were semi-structured and followed a general guideline. The same questions listed below were asked to each interviewee in order to provide parallelism across interviews. Although there was an ordered list of questions, some probing questions were added according to the flow of interviews. These extra questions caused interviewees to think on their answers more and extended their answers so that more information about the topic was able to be obtained. Each interview began with general questions like the educational and professional background of the participants and participants' experiences related to the topic. Then, as the dialog continues between the researcher and the interviewees, main questions to unearth participants' conception of giftedness were asked. All interviews were transcribed by using Windows Media Player and Microsoft Office Word programs.

Interview Questions: The researcher developed 12 interview questions. The first two are warm up questions. The questions 3 through 9 are main questions, which aimed to explore the participants' conceptions of giftedness. Then, two questions were added which related to the roles of teachers in serving gifted and talented students. These two questions were also expected to provide answers related to the topic. The last one is the closing question, which gave the participants the opportunity to share anything else before the closing. The order of the questions is from general to specific and from positive to negative.

Questions:

1. Could you talk a little about your educational (professional) background?
2. If you have had any gifted student/s, could you share your thoughts and impressions about them? *(If you haven't had any, could you share your colleagues' experiences or your experiences through the media or other ways)*
3. What do you think about students who are gifted?
4. Would you prefer your own students to be gifted? Why?
5. How do you define a gifted student?
6. How do you describe a gifted student? Which adjectives can describe best a gifted student?
7. What do you think about the characteristics of gifted and talented students?
8. In what ways do gifted students differ from others?
9. What do you think your educational (professional) background's influence is on your thoughts and beliefs about gifted students?
10. How could students' exceptional needs be best met in school settings?
11. What are the roles of teachers in meeting these needs?
12. Do you have anything else to share on the topic?

The researcher had piloted these questions to a teacher before conducting the study. Thanks to the pilot interview, the researcher had an opportunity to see how much time all questions and answers take. Besides, the pilot interview had provided the researcher with what a participant's answers might be, and what probing questions might be asked after each prescribed question. After the pilot study, some questions were replaced with more appropriate ones in order to get deeper and insightful answers from the participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed ten written interview transcripts using the constant comparison method proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In the constant comparative method, data coding process begins with open coding and ends up with core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mills et al., 2004). During the open coding process, the researcher analyzed transcribed texts line by line, and coded prominent concepts and themes using the techniques of underlining and taking notes mentioned by Cranton and Carusetta, (2004). Afterwards, similarities and differences among all codes were examined to categorize them. Accordingly, an appropriate name for each category was given as listed in Table 2. Open coding ended up with 16 categories, which are *giftedness, degree of giftedness, assessment of giftedness, intelligence, strategies, confusion, difficulties, testing, obstacles, school responsibility, teacher responsibility, significant others, genetic, context, functioning, and development*.

Table 2. Categories and Super-categories Emerged From Coding

Categories	super-categories
giftedness	
degree of giftedness	giftedness
assessment of giftedness	
intelligence	
strategies	strategies
confusion	
difficulties	problems
testing	
obstacles	
school responsibility	responsibility
teacher responsibility	
significant others	
genetic	
context	context
functioning	
development	

Axial coding was also attempted to explore the relationships between the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Beginning from axial coding level, instead of coding the data participant by participant as was done in open coding, the data was analyzed category by category. Several categories were collapsed according to their similarities, and ultimately five super-categories, which are *giftedness*, *problems*, *strategies*, *responsibility*, and *context*, were explored.

Afterwards, the process of selective coding was implemented to integrate and refine the understanding of the emerged five categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A core category to which all other categories were related and interconnected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was identified. According to the relationships among all five categories, the core category *giftedness* was emerged. Although it would be possible to develop a tentative hypothesis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and draw a diagram (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mills et al., 2004) for the sake of better understanding of the relationships between categories, the data obtained from the current sample is not enough do those.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative studies do not fit into the traditional concepts of validity and reliability because qualitative research includes analysis is a form of interpretation (Morse, 1994) and is inherently subjective (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Martaeu, 1997). However, the current study used some verification strategies such as thinking theoretically, ensuring methodological coherence and sampling sufficiency, and developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection, and analysis, recommended by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002), to ensure trustworthiness of the analysis and the results. Congruence between the research questions and the methods employed provided the study with methodological coherence. The participants were effective in providing information on the topic. The data collection and analysis were conducted as parallel process; thus, saturation of categories with optimal quality data was ensured. Besides, the existing theories of intelligence and giftedness were utilized to interpret and analyze the data so that a deeper understanding of the topic was obtained. In summary, above-mentioned strategies contributed to validity and reliability of the study.

Results

A grounded theory analysis of this qualitative study yielded five super-categories: *giftedness*, *problems*, *strategies*, *context*, and *responsibility*. Results related to each of five super-categories are presented and supported by direct quotations from the participants.

Giftedness

Each participants in this study has had gifted students in their classrooms. In addition, all of them have taken at least one time training about gifted and talented students. The common trainings for all participants were state-mandated gifted and talented education certification program and required or selective graduate courses. Although teachers were expected to have conceptions of giftedness regardless of having experiences with gifted students or not and taking education about gifted students or not, emerged conceptions of the participants were almost completely based on their experiences and trainings.

Conception of giftedness varied across participants although there were some commonalities among them. Some participants explained giftedness with regard to different aspects of development, such as social, physical, and psychological, in addition to genetic component, while John associated giftedness to genetic component. He often stated: "Giftedness is blessing." Furthermore, some participants mentioned that a child might be gifted just because God created the child as gifted. This statement should be noted to understand how giftedness is attributed to either creation or environmental factors by the participants.

Participants reported various characteristics of gifted students. "Questioning", "thinking different", "thinking creative", "above level", "having different learning style", "quick" or "faster", "unique", "curious", "sensitive", and "coping with problems" are some of the common characteristics stated by all participants. Some participants also described their gifted students as "smart", "learn easily", "having different and original perspectives", "sometimes alone", "dealing with social issues", and "preoccupied". In general, they mostly preferred positive adjectives in describing their gifted students.

It is important to note that four participants talked about the degree of giftedness, while others considered giftedness as all-or-none situation. For example, Julia stated,

Somebody who is gifted at 170 or 160 IQ, I think, does not have the same issues, or the same capacity obviously with somebody who is gifted at 120 or 130 IQ. You know, they are very different (p. 4).

Besides, Julia and Katy frequently stated phrases such as "lower IQ", "higher IQ", and "very gifted" to emphasize the degree of giftedness. In this sense, another outstanding point was that they have tendency to associate giftedness with intelligence. In other words, having higher IQ scores means being more gifted according to these participants. Besides, when teachers had nominated a particular student based on their classroom observation, they expected from the student to get a high score on any IQ test and be labeled as gifted. That was also another indication of the direct relationship between IQ scores and giftedness, which exist in the participants' conceptions of giftedness.

Problems

The problems associated with giftedness and gifted students mentioned by the participants can be grouped into three different areas. First of all, teachers have difficulties in dealing with gifted students. They feel obligated to do something different and more for gifted students within class, but dealing with each gifted student is not an easy job because of time limit, class size, and several other responsibilities. Besides, participants described gifted students as challenging because of their exceptional needs and endless questions.

Secondly, assessment of giftedness is another problem area according to the participants. As all participants were working for the same school district, they were all familiar with the same gifted identification procedures implemented by the school district. All participants had consensus on the inadequacy of the gifted identification process because they asserted that it may exclude some students, "who are gifted in reality", to be identified as gifted. The most frequently specified issue is students' verbal skills. As most of the students of the participants are Hispanic and bilingual, students may have lack of verbal or language skills despite their at least average nonverbal skills. If assessment of giftedness relies on verbal skills, students may fail to be identified as gifted. Therefore, verbal and nonverbal abilities should be evaluated together in the identification process (Delen, Kaya, & Ritter, 2012).

Lastly, according to the participants, there are some obstacles for gifted students to fulfill their full potentials. Language and poverty are the most frequently stated issues that hinder giftedness as well as academic achievement. For example, Katy explained as below how limited resources can be effective on students' development and academic achievement,

We have discussed how early experiences that students have affect their performance and development. Exposure to certain things, like let's say whether they read at home or they have books at home, is important. They are not read at home, so they do not develop vocabulary and of course they are not going to be reading because they do not have books (Katy, p. 2).

In short, it can be drawn from what the participants told that poverty and language have important roles on academic achievement, several aspects of students' development and self-expression. Thus, it makes the assessment of the giftedness for those students living in poverty and having diverse background more difficult.

Strategies

Teachers explained several strategies to deal with gifted students. Those strategies might be either planned or unplanned and either intentional or unintentional. Some of the strategies were used by the participants to encourage gifted students, whereas some other strategies were just participants' suggestions to make current situation better for gifted learners. According to the participants, each gifted student is unique and has different needs; therefore, "fitting their styles" as stated by Katy and "being flexible with them" as stated by Jay were some common strategies to address students' needs regarding their individual differences. In order to provide gifted students with rich resources and more alternatives, teachers came up with mainly two different opinions. Two teachers were favor of creating opportunities and variety of learning experiences to "foster students' giftedness" (Beth and Angela). On the other hand, other two teachers emphasized that gifted students have excellent coping skills, so they could cope with every obstacle they encounter and find alternate solutions. Other teachers never mentioned their strategies as teachers in providing opportunities and creating alternates for their gifted students.

“Culturally relevant teaching”, stated only by Melissa, is important to mention here because each participant was teaching the kids who have diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, being aware of cultural and ethnic diversity within classroom and accordingly adapting teaching and learning environment might be one of the best strategies teachers should have and practice.

Context

Participants’ conceptions of giftedness seem partly shaped by some contextual factors. Parents, classmates, and school counselors, as significant others for a student, contextually play important roles on teachers’ conceptions of giftedness. For example, classmates are important because the teachers tended to evaluate giftedness of a certain student relative to the other students in the classrooms.

Developmental level of students is another criterion emerged while teachers were considering if a particular student as gifted or not. According to the participants, if a student has some characteristics that are higher level than their peers, the student is generally considered as above-level or gifted. For example, Melissa shared a story about a socially well-developed African American student who could answer a simple question in a very complex way.

...simple question; if you could change one thing in your life to make it easier, what would you change? Any other second grader would think something very simple. This little boy said; if I need to make my life easier, I wouldn’t be black, I would be white. I mean he explicitly answered it.

Another contextual factor is teachers’ subject areas. What the teachers teach seem shaping their conception of giftedness. For example, Melissa, who is art teacher, explained giftedness with regard a specific domain, which is art. She also called above-level students as “artistically gifted”. On the other hand, some other participants, such as classroom teachers, defined giftedness as being expressed in all areas rather than specific domains.

Responsibility

While the participants were talking about issues in gifted education and strategies to overcome those issues, responsibilities for both teachers and school and district administrations unearthed. Teachers held responsible themselves for providing gifted students with appropriate educational experiences. They reported that there are also some responsibilities should be held by school and district administration. Each teacher stressed the importance of knowing which students in a classroom are gifted because awareness of the existence of giftedness is prerequisite of facilitation for gifted students. In addition to required trainings, teachers should take extra trainings or attend graduate courses to have well-developed knowledge of giftedness. According to the participants, there is a clear difference between trained and untrained teachers in terms of understanding giftedness and meeting the needs of gifted students. For example, Bruce emphasized the importance of training as,

...if teachers don’t know how to work with those students, and then those great talent are just wasted. Even a teacher doesn’t have any gifted student, he or she needs to have a gifted training because you never know....

As for the responsibilities of school and district, participants frequently mentioned gifted and talented programs for students, in-service training for teachers, and appropriate assessment procedures to identify each gifted student. All ten participants agreed on the schools' main expectation from teachers, which is differentiation; however, Katy stated, "...nobody come to your classroom to check". It seems that if teachers internalize responsibilities for gifted students, then there is no need for control mechanism to check if teachers implement expected or required programs for gifted students.

To summarize the findings, Figure 1 offers a comprehensive overview of the participant teachers' conceptions of the giftedness and gifted students. It illustrates emerged five super-categories (the super-category giftedness is the core category) along with associated key terms and concepts mentioned by the participants.

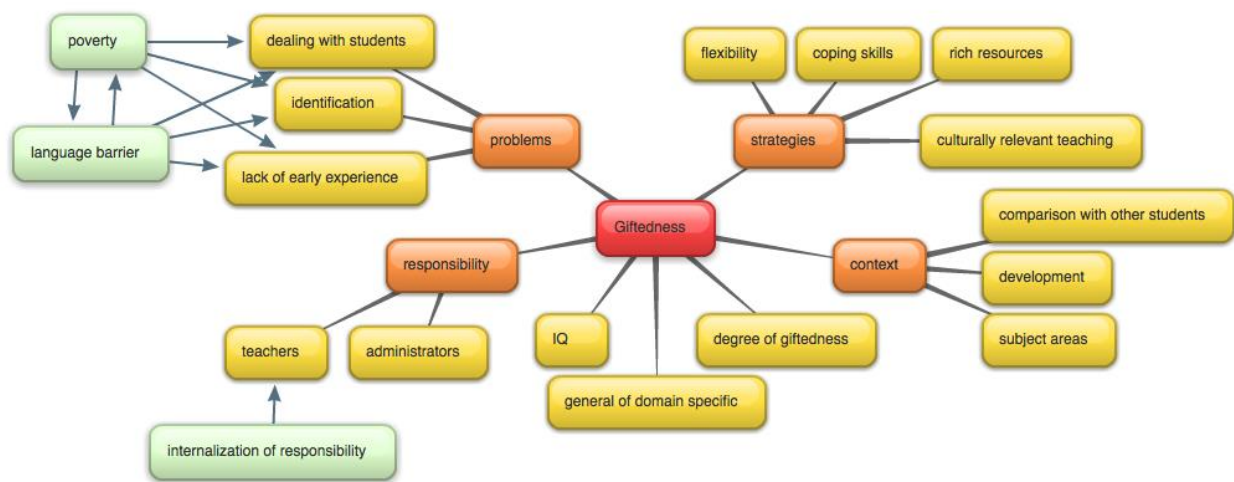


Figure 1. The core category, super-categories, and associated terms and concepts on teachers' conceptions of giftedness and gifted students

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that conception of giftedness may vary teacher to teacher. As reported by Campbell and Verna (1998), Speirs Neumeister et al. (2007), and Cashion and Sullenger, (1996), teachers generally have their own conceptions of giftedness. Participants' conceptions of and attitudes towards gifted students need to be evaluated individual basis as stated by McCoach and Siegle (2007). This study also shows that teachers' conceptions of giftedness are shaped more or less by teachers' professional educations, trainings, and early experiences. Accordingly, teachers' beliefs and thought about their students and classroom practices that they implement are determined by their conceptions. Therefore, teachers should know who gifted students are and what characteristics they have in order to have a well-developed gifted conception. According to what the participants of this study told, their understanding of giftedness and definitions of giftedness have important influences on their nomination decisions and classroom practices. It can also be concluded that whether a student was nominated to a gifted education program would affect, directly or indirectly, gifted students' fulfillment of their potentials.

Another important conclusion is the existence of some issues about gifted students and gifted education. Each participant of this study reported about the same issues. The most outstanding issue is the identification of gifted diverse students. Identification of gifted minority and low-SES students is challenging mainly because of their lower verbal skills (Juntune, Kaya, & Ramos, 2011). Although the participants believe that there are gifted students in all demographic groups such as ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender groups, they do not have much knowledge about the emergence of giftedness in those different groups, which supports Cribbs's (2009) findings. As for the solutions to these issues, it seems an ambiguity in the division of responsibility among teachers, parents, and school administrations. They also have no clear solutions to issues. Even if they have a solution to an issue, they may encounter several obstacles within the context that they are in.

According to the results obtained from these ten participants, teachers' education and experiences play a central role on their conception of giftedness. Therefore, providing teachers with quality education and positive experiences with gifted and talented students may create more competent teachers.

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