AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Self-Concepts and Anxiety Levels of Achieving and Underachieving Upper Elementary Gifted Students of the ANW Special Education Cooperative

Abstract approved: Karen C. Nelson

A non-random, intact group sample of 45 fourth, fifth, and sixth identified gifted students from the Allen, Anderson, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson Counties' (ANW) Special Education Cooperative was exposed once to a personality inventory, THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE, to assess self-concept and anxiety level.

The null hypothesis tested in this study was fourth, fifth, and sixth grade identified gifted achieving and underachieving students from the ANW Cooperative have high (positive) self-concepts and each of the two student groups demonstrates a lack of anxiety. The comparisons of the two groups were made using the mean and the standard deviation for each of the six clusters of the self-concept scale (behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction).

The results showed very little discrepancy between the underachievers' self-concepts and the achievers' self-concepts in terms of mean scores. The data supported the null hypothesis. Neither student group (achievers/underachievers) described itself as needing curriculum adjustment to the self-concept. Similarly, neither group described itself as anxiety-ridden.

SELF-CONCEPTS AND ANXIETY LEVELS OF ACHIEVING AND UNDERACHIEVING UPPER ELEMENTARY GIFTED STUDENTS OF THE ANW SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE

A Thesis

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Masters in Education

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by

Patricia L. McDaniel

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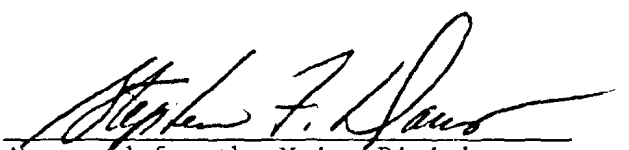

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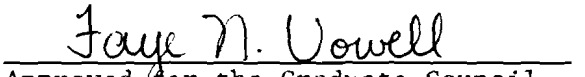

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The following scenario could be observed in any elementary school in any town of any state across our country. In the example given below, Rebecca was an identified gifted student, and was an underachiever with a low self-concept. Those characteristics will be explained later in the study.

> Rebecca, a fifth grader, is another child frustrating to teachers and parents. She once got good grades consistently but now vacillates between A's and F's. If there's a teacher she likes she works hard; if not, it is the teacher's fault that her work isn't correct or finished. And each year it seems she likes fewer and fewer teachers. When her teachers lose patience, she pouts and mutters under her breath.
>
> At home and at school Rebecca loves to chatter, send notes, and talk on the phone, but such activity masks her socialization problems. Frequently her telephone conversations concentrate on negative descriptions of the very girls she considered friends yesterday. Yet her peer group determines how she spends her time.
>
> At home Rebecca plays one parent against the other. When her mother and father set limits together, she slams her bedroom door, asserting her power. Although she defines herself in terms of what she's against, she frequently labels adults as narrow and hypocritical (Rimm, 1985, p. 73).

Statement of the Problem

In the state of Kansas "gifted" children refer to those

elementary and/or secondary age students who have a minimum Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of 128 as shown on a test of intelligence and have attained academic success at the 95th percentile or above as evidenced by an instrument measuring achievement. By checking group achievement scores, noting teachers' concerns regarding student grades, and reading materials in the field, this author found a breakdown of the gifted population into two groups: those who "achieved" or had success in the academic subjects at the 95th percentile or above, and those who "underachieved" exhibiting a "discrepancy between the child's school performance and some index of his/her actual ability" (Rimm, 1984, p. 27). Clark (1983) suggested "low performance could be evidenced by grades assigned by the regular classroom teacher and/or test scores of achievement" (p. 324). Underachievement may be caused by a variety of internal reasons such as a child's need for perfection, an individual's supersensitivity, and deficiency of social skills. Clark (1983) said there may be external factors at fault also such as societal pressures to isolate one who is different, societal expectations, and "the lack of educational provisions, which include inappropriate curriculum, a counterproductive instructional style and philosophy of the teacher, and the punitive societal climate created by classroom peers" (p. 326).

The Anderson, Allen, Neosho, Woodson, and Wilson Counties' (ANW) Special Education Cooperative had both groups of elementary gifted students (achievers and underachievers). Gifted students are different from their classmates, and the fact that these children have

been identified gifted will possibly cause internal pressure (anxiety) to varying degrees. What exactly did the self-concept scales look like for both the achievers and the underachievers? How did they compare regarding anxiety level? These questions were explored as the study progressed.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to compare the self-concept and the anxiety level of the achieving student with the self-concept and the anxiety level of the underachieving student. This study, besides enlarging the existing body of literature, looked specifically at the ANW Cooperative of identified gifted elementary students to pinpoint those children with low self-concepts (achievers and underachievers) and those exhibiting above average levels of anxiety. Should test results for any of these fourth through sixth graders indicate a negative self-concept and/or significant amounts of anxiety, steps should be taken by the facilitator to modify the existing individual education program to include ways of improving the self-concept and/or techniques of coping with the daily pressures to alleviate anxiety.

Definition of Terms

Terms relevant to this study and the field of special education are defined below.

GIFTED STUDENT: Kansas Department of Education Guidelines for Education of the Gifted Program defined intellectually gifted as outstanding performance or potential for outstanding performance by virtue of superior intellectual abilities (K.A.R. 91-12-22(r)). Both

those with demonstrated achievement and those with minimal or low performance who give evidence of high potential in general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitudes and/or creative thinking abilities are included in this definition.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS: An academically achieving gifted child was one identified in the special education program who performed at the 95th percentile or above on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the California Achievement Test of group achievement.

ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVERS: For this study the term academic underachiever was defined as the identified and staffed gifted student who achieved (a period of time from the date of placement) at the composite 94th percentile or below on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and/or the California Achievement Test. The student was simply not performing to his/her capabilities according to the IQ placement and original individual achievement test scores.

SELF-CONCEPT: According to Piers (1984) self-concept was defined as a relatively stable set of self-attitudes reflecting both a description and an evaluation of one's own behaviors and attributes (p. 1).

DEVELOPMENTAL POTENTIAL: (DP) was "the original endowment which determined what level of development a person may reach under optimal conditions" (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, p. 28).

OVEREXCITABILITY: A special excitability or reaction to, enhanced and distinguished by characteristics above and beyond what can be considered common/average; a contribution to a higher level of development (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, p. 28).

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM: In the ANW Cooperative's Comprehensive

Plan for Special Education, an individual education program was "a written statement of the special education and ancillary services needed by a child based on his/her current level of functioning. It assigned responsibility for the delivery of these services, set forth the anticipated changes in the child's behavior, described how these changes would be measured, and was developed prior to the initiation of any special education programming" (Shoemake, p. 40). Hereafter, the individual education program was referred to as the IEP.

GIFTED, TALENTED, AND CREATIVE FACILITATORS: The GTC Facilitator or GTC Teacher had degree certification in regular education and graduate certification in gifted special education and was employed as a gifted, talented, and creative facilitator.

Significance of the Study

The study results may contribute to the literature already found in the field. While researching the topic, few resources were found that had studied the gifted upper elementary student's ideas of self. This writer found no research on the combination of self-esteem and the levels of anxiety of this particular population. Therefore, depending on the results, the study may detail information not previously recorded.

Another contribution of this study would be to locate all achieving and underachieving fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students within this cooperative. The results may show which of the groups (achievers or underachievers) has a healthy self-concept and whether the achievers or the underachievers show themselves as having more anxiety. Should self-concept be negative for any student and/or

anxiety level be high for any student, with parental consent curriculum could be adjusted to include enhancement of self-concept and instruction on coping mechanisms to lessen his/her anxiety level. One who has a healthy self-concept and self-esteem with manageable levels of anxiety can more easily lead a successful academic career. Obviously, the earlier poor self-concept and high anxiety levels are detected, the easier it would be to appropriate intervention methods in order to move one back into the stream of academic and social success.

Since the top three percent of a given population (gifted students) contains achievers and underachievers with positive self-concepts and negative self-concepts, plus varying degrees of anxiety, the remainder of a given population may also manifest these same characteristics and personality traits. A broader perspective would be to school the regular education personnel to the immediate importance of positive self-concept and tolerable anxiety levels for each student in regular education. The individual that has a positive self-concept and healthy self-esteem "has achieved invulnerability to certain societal pressures because of fidelity to an inner ideal" (Thompson, 1984, p. 6).

Literature Review

An online computer search was conducted using Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Exceptional Children Educational Resources (ECER). Prior to the online search, Research in Education (RIE) and Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE) were used to obtain pertinent topic information. The ERIC time parameters were

from 1966 to October, 1990; the ECER search began in 1966 and ran to July, 1990. The terms searched were: achievers, underachievers (underachieving), grades four, five, and six, anxiety, stress, self-concept, and self-esteem. An outline of the literature reviewed and discussions were compartmentalized as follows: ACHIEVEMENT, UNDERACHIEVEMENT, SELF-CONCEPT, and ANXIETY.

ACHIEVEMENT OF GTC CHILDREN

A couple of years ago Betts (1988) predicted that possibly as many as 90 percent of identified gifted children exhibit patterns of high achievement, having learned what "sells" at home and at school. These students scored well on achievement and intelligence tests. Achiever background was similar, with moderate amounts of adult praise and positive reinforcement yet omitting "superlatives such as perfect, gorgeous, brilliant and genius in reference to a child's accomplishments" (Rimm, 1990, p. 35). Rimm (1987) stated that the achievers have internalized pressure to be bright, creative, good, and approved of by others. These pressures were realistic possibilities. These students demonstrated effort and persistence, enjoyed challenges and achieved as long as they saw the relationship between their effort and process, and the outcome. "Students who achieve at appropriate levels receive love from parents because of who they are, not because of their special talent/gift" (Rimm, 1990, p. 36). Supplee (1990), who generally agreed with the prior statements, said "To achieve one must believe in himself, be task committed, and be self-sacrificial. He must also be persistent, motivated, independent . . ." (p. 11).

To briefly summarize, the achieving gifted student generally had

a positive sense of individual worth, and exhibited the ability to cope with his/her own emotional disturbances. Whitmore (1980) stated that the achiever has less anxiety, more control, and self-value. Achievers feel well accepted, self-confident, and assertive" (p. 175-176). "The achievers represent those who have learned to compete, to others" (Rimm, 1988, p. 52).

UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GTC CHILDREN

Underachievement and the self-concept of an individual were closely linked. This paper separated the two to develop a working understanding of both concepts.

Several researchers were in agreement with the underachievement definition as seen within the DEFINITION OF TERMS section of this study (Hoffman, Wasson, & Christianson, 1985; Rimm, 1985; Whitmore, 1986; Emerick, 1989; Supplee, 1990). Underachievement is a learned behavior. These students have been "rewarded for this behavior even before entering school" (Rimm, 1985, p. 73). This problem will not solve itself, said Supplee (1990), and research showed that if the behavior patterns were not reversed by early high school, established self-defeating behaviors continued with little hope of change.

Several studies of underachievers revealed that the students exhibited any number of characteristics including: disorganization, poor (or no) study skills, perfectionistic behavior, aggression/withdrawing, manipulation, and tendency not to obtain closure on ideas and activities (Emerick, 1989; McLamb & Lant, 1988; Rimm, 1986; Turbak, 1989). Whitmore (1980) stated that low achieving students tended to show symptoms of withdrawing, a lack of self-reliance and

personal worth, emotional instability, and an inadequacy of feelings. "They have low self-esteem because they have not been able to achieve in order to build the self-confidence that comes only from real accomplishment" (Rimm, 1984, p. 27).

According to Whitmore (1989), the most negative characteristics of underachievers were a lack of classroom effort, persistent misbehavior, highly aggressive or severely withdrawn behavior, low self-concept, a negative attitude towards school, and low self-expectations. The view of one's self determined the level of achievement and enhanced or limited the development of one's potential (Clark, 1983). Whitmore (1980) similarly stated that "the self-concept affects behaviors as it lowers or elevates expectations of success" (p. 177).

Clark (1983), Rimm (1987), and Meckstroth (1989) conducted similar studies exploring the rationale of students for their underachieving behaviors. Most reasons related to pressure---pressure to be brilliant, creative, and to have good peer relationships. The classroom was seen as rigid, competitive, with an unrewarding curriculum incorporating projects with material they already knew.

Clark (1983) shared an example of a young woman who had experienced pressures and underachieving behaviors during her academic career:

> A young woman around twenty years of age, who was in one of my first classes at the university, came up to me after we had been discussing the common characteristics and problems associated with being gifted. Hesitantly and with much

confusion, she began to relate how she personally identified with the concepts we had been discussing. She stated that she knew she could not have been because she remembered always having questions when everyone else had been satisfied with the information given. She was often told that she spent too much time investigating a subject when the class needed to move on. Other students often groaned audibly at her remarks or shared insights, a happening that she interpreted as proof of her stupidity. She had, since junior high school, changed most of these "bad" habits and had withdrawn into her own world of interests, accepting some B's, mostly C's, and occasional D's as appropriate representation of her ability as a student. She was, however, intrigued by a number of ideas we discussed that seemed personally applicable. After sharing her bewilderment later that evening, she decided to call her parents in Pennsylvania. At our next class session she shared the news that her parents had been told when she was in the third grade that she was highly gifted, around 165 IQ, but did not mention it to her on the advice of the school personnel. What started as the natural curiosity and expectations of a very bright mind, because of inadequate information about the reasons for her differences, turned into self-doubt and self-criticism to the point that her actual performance was inhibited and her growth arrested. She later used this information to reexamine the attitudes she had developed about herself and her abilities. She began to take more risks, to become more aggressive in pursuing academic and

personal knowledge. She will never compensate for the lost years, but she made remarkable progress (p. 110).

Gifted underachievers are faced with many problems. "A person who often is rejected by peers because he/she is gifted and by teachers and parents because he/she is an underachiever" (Saurenman & Michael, 1980, p. 81) could easily espouse a negative self-concept.

SELF-CONCEPT OF GTC CHILDREN - Background

Developmental potential was one of the central concepts in Dabrowski's 1938 theory of human development, called the theory of Positive Disintegration. Origins and final formulation of his theory owed much to the study of gifted, creative, and eminent individuals. Developmental potential (DP) has been defined as the original endowment which determined what level of development a person reached under optimal conditions. There were five defining characteristics to DP called overexcitabilities: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational, and emotional. These were types introduced to denote varieties of nervousness displayed in children under tension-provoking conditions in school (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, p. 28). Dabrowski's theory of 1938 should extend one's understanding of giftedness. For the purpose of this study, this writer examined only the emotional overexcitability of Dabrowski's theory because "among the five forms of psychic overexcitability, the manifestations of emotional overexcitability are the most numerous" (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, p. 38).

Within the emotional overexcitability were "general characteristics of somatic expressions (tense stomach, sinking heart,

flushing), extremes of feeling, inhibition, anxieties, fears, and feelings of guilt" (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, p. 38). This was not an exhaustive list. It showed the richness and intenseness of feeling generally exhibited by a gifted and talented population. A "low degree or absence of emotional overexcitability is the most serious curtailment of a person's developmental potential" (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, p. 45).

Anxieties and fears of the unknown/unpredictable played a distinct role in the psychological make-up of the emotional self. A few examples of intensity of feeling were: "I have a big fear of being disliked by people whom I want to like me...when I want someone to like me, I fear being rejected". Another student said:

> I think I'm most afraid of being alone, of losing all my friends, my family, not being able to turn to someone and ask for help. I hate the thought of living the rest of my life by myself. I'm a person who has to be needed and feel needed . . . Another young person commented: "I feel a sinking sensation and condemn myself---perhaps, that's what a low is, self-condemnation, for me anyway" (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979, pp. 41, 45). They also stated that individuals with an emotional overexcitability will be upset if they hurt or disappoint people with whom they have an emotional attachment. Timidity and shyness were forms of inhibition which often accompanied emotional overexcitability.

In 1990, Freed commented " ... I have noted that children with IQ's above 140 seem to have heightened sensory awareness. They are also incredibly sensitive and intuitive. These observations fit with

Dabrowski's overexcitabilities. Their heightened sensitivity makes them react intensely to everything" (p. 11). Schmitz and Galbraith (1985) concurred with Freed believing that unusual sensitivity to the feelings/expectations of others caused one to be unusually vulnerable to criticism of others.

General Comments

Emotional overexcitabilities, intense reaction, and unusual sensitivity of the gifted population, generally speaking, contributed to the self-concept of a child. Piers (1984) stated that the "self-concept is viewed by an individual as his/her total self-evaluation, or can be specifically---(e.g., the physical self, moral self, academic self)" (p. 43). Coleman and Fults (1987), Betts and Neihart (1988), and Rimm, Cornale, Manos, and Behrend (1989) agreed, believing the self-concept was a societal construct. A child's self-perception was influenced by the social environment in which he resided and by life experiences. Another important point was stressed by Piers (1984):

> Self-concept serves an important organizing function and plays a key role in motivation. By maintaining a consistent image of who we are and how we react in different situations, the existence of a relatively stable self-concept helps to reduce ambiguity in new situations and structure behaviors towards pre-existing goals (p. 44).

Conflicting Studies Results

Chapman and McAlpine (1988) plus Karnes and Whorton (1988) found that gifted students have been reported as having higher self-concepts

and confidence in their academic abilities than other students. Yet, other research (Clark, 1983) reported gifted students as having lower self-concepts due in part to their own expectations. Further research has shown some studies exhibiting no significant differences. "Results may differ according to whether self-concept is seen as either a global or a multidimensional characteristic" (Chapman & McAlpine, 1988, p. 222). The global concept of self assesses the overall aspect; the multidimensional concept "taps the various specific domains such as the academic self, the social self, the physical self and so on" (Li, 1988, p. 175). Loeb and Jay (1987) reported that the literature "fails to provide clearly differentiated measures of self-concept, has not adequately studied certain key subject variables (especially gender), and has generally relied solely on self-report measures" (p. 10).

Underachievers and Self-Concept

It has been well established that underachieving students have lower self-concepts and poorer overall adjustment patterns (Whitmore, 1980; Clark, 1983; Maddux, Scheiber, & Bass, 1982), and this negative self-concept distinguished underachievers from those who achieve according to their ability. The negative self-opinion stemmed from many possibilities: rejection by peers, emotional overexcitabilities, feelings of being different, affirmation due to achievement rather than personal worth, pressure to succeed, and unrealistic goals were but a few.

Special Education Program and Self-Concept

The self-concept may be enhanced or may regress due to the type

of special education implementation applied to each student (how much "mainstreaming" occurs). Some research has found negative effects when placing gifted children in segregated programs. Within the regular classroom environment the gifted student saw himself/herself as exceptional. In the special education program this student no longer saw himself/herself as cognitively exceptional because of being surrounded by his/her intellectual peers (Coleman & Fults, 1982; Maddux et al., 1982; Schneider, Clegg, Byrne, Ledingham, & Crombie, 1987; Chan, 1988). "The amount of time spent in a program, the intensity of the experience, or the program activities, may be expected to influence self-concept of the participants" (Kolloff & Moore, 1989, p. 269).

ANXIETY

Upper elementary gifted students were subject to the same stresses and anxieties as their peers as well as to some sources of stress related to their giftedness (Ford, 1989; Hoffman et al., 1985). Yet, it was a possibility that students were unaware of their own state of tenseness and did not know how to relax or make themselves become less tense (Karnes, Oehler & Jones, 1985).

The tension (anxiety) experienced by both underachieving and achieving gifted students will affect their perceptions of failure and rejection thus tending to produce those behaviors that increase the failure and rejection. Feeling anxious, irritable, unhappy, and rejected, they may withdraw to escape the internal pain (Whitmore, 1980).

Ford (1988) found several stressful, anxiety-producing situations

for students in the classroom including: repetitious school tasks causing boredom, too much review time, and peer and adult expectations due to their academic abilities. Teachers too often used the students as peer tutors, causing stressful situations for the academically talented students. At that point, a gifted student would possibly revert to school and home manipulation to mask the feelings of low self-concept (Rimm, 1984).

Because society is demanding of its students, children often do not have the necessary coping mechanisms to handle effectively quotidian situations. Inadequate ways of coping easily lead to anxieties and fears of failure which in turn lead to low self-concept (Roberson, 1988). Children could easily withdraw into avoidance behaviors or become aggressively rebellious at school and at home. "Both alternatives result in a downward achievement cycle, which results in lack of confidence, skills, and accomplishment" (Rimm, 1988, p. 53).

SUMMARY

With the literature reviewed, information was found indicating low self-concept can be reversed. Studies have shown that the self-concept was relatively stable. It may change over a period of time, but changes come gradually. Efforts to enhance student self-concept often resulted in positive changes and were accompanied generally by increased achievement (Bossing & Sasseen, 1980; Piers, 1984). "Researchers found that when students feel that their teachers have high empathy for them, there are some significant effects. Academic achievement, positive self-concept, and attendance go up . . ."

(Meckstroth, 1990, p. 4).

It was possible, indicate Bossing and Sasseen (1980), to change the self-concept, and it was possible for the teacher to be the change agent (positively or negatively). It will take time. Peripheral experiences are helpful, and relating successes/strengths to one another is important. "It is self-esteem that motivates the individual to strive to overcome difficulties" (Freed, 1990, p. 13).

Distinctive achieving and underachieving characteristics of the students have been shown in the literature. The characteristics provided were by no means a thorough listing due to the expanse and complexity of the problem. No one underachieving individual displayed exactly the same characteristics as another underachiever nor to the same intensity.

Achievement within and without special education programs, emotional overexcitabilities, anxieties, intense reactions, and the unusual sensitivities of these gifted children all played a vital role in each self-concept. Rebecca, the underachieving fifth grader described earlier, should receive guidance regarding these underachieving patterns and toward reversing her low self-concept, and counsel to help her identify and learn to cope with some internal and external pressures. Reversing negative self-concept and learning how to minimize stresses should provide an individual with the courage to continue through his/her academic career.

Chapter 2 is devoted to research methodology including population, identification of a research method and its design, all procedures, writer's assumptions, and the statistical design. Chapter

3 houses the results; Chapter 4 reveals the project summary and conclusions, interpretations, limitations of the study, and recommendations.

Chapter 2

RESEARCH DATABASE AND DESIGN

This chapter outlines the database/design, and the steps and procedures of the study. Assumptions and statistical design are defined next, followed by a chapter summary.

Target Population

The population sampled consisted of the elementary identified gifted students (male and female) of grades four, five, and six. These children were from the Allen, Anderson, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson Counties' (ANW) Special Education Cooperative of southeast Kansas.

Sample Population

Because the target population was extremely small in number (N=55), the sample analyzed was those children whose parents signed, dated, and returned by mail the Parental Consent Letter (see Appendix A). The sample was not a random sample. The sample was the intact groups available to this writer. Each respondent's parent(s) had an equal opportunity to return the parental letter which requested permission for the child to participate in the study. Forty-five parental permission slips were returned. Consequently, the sample should be representative of the target population with the results generalizing to other groups of elementary gifted students.

Research Method and Design

An action research method was used for the study due to a relaxed sampling, non-random technique. This included the intact groups of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders identified as gifted, talented, and

creative within the five-county ANW Cooperative. The design was a One-Time Study where the intact groups were exposed once to a personality inventory measuring certain traits of individuals in order to assess their feelings about themselves.

External Validity

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1990), external validity refers to the extent to which results of a particular study can generalize to a specific population. The findings of a study may be limited in terms of usefulness if the size of the sample is excessively small or narrowly defined.

The group of 55 identified gifted fourth, fifth, and sixth graders of the ANW Cooperative was the population under consideration. The sample became the 45 who had parental permission to participate in the rating scale. Because a random sample was not used, sample description is necessary for replication purposes. These middle class rural students were between nine and twelve years old, 24 (53%) were female, and 21 (47%) were male. No minority students participated in the study. This sample may be limited in number, yet it should generalize to other students of similar socio-economic means outside the ANW Cooperative in southeast Kansas.

Research Questions

Were the levels of self-concept for gifted achievers and gifted underachievers positively ranked? Did achievers view themselves more positively than did underachievers? Did the underachieving students express more anxiety/stress as viewed on the instrument or did the achievers exhibit more anxieties?

Hypotheses

Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade identified gifted achieving students and underachieving gifted students from the ANW Cooperative have high (positive) self-concepts and each of the two student groups demonstrates a lack of anxiety. H_o : $\not{t}_{achievers} = \not{t}_{underachievers}$

Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade identified gifted achieving students and underachieving gifted students from the ANW Cooperative have varying degrees (positive and negative) of self-concept, and each of the two student groups demonstrates disparate anxiety levels.

H_A : $\not{t}_{achievers} \neq \not{t}_{underachievers}$

STEPS AND PROCEDURES

Initially, this writer asked four ANW GTC Facilitators for a total number of their fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students which was $\underline{N} = 55$. At that point a letter of research intent plus an attached parental permission form to administer the self-concept scale were developed. (See Appendix A.) Appropriate addresses could not be secured due to the Right to Privacy Act. Therefore, the correct number of research intent letters per gifted program and a corresponding number of self-addressed stamped letter-size envelopes were placed in a legal-size envelope and were distributed to each GTC Facilitator. The GTC Facilitator personally handed an envelope to the appropriate grade-level child to take home to the parent(s). Each letter was coded at the bottom of the form with the first initial of the GTC Teacher to determine the percentage of returned responses per each facilitator.

A second letter was developed and supplied to those children whose parents failed to return the permission form. After an appropriate length of time, THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE, one per each student having parental consent, was distributed to each GTC Facilitator to be administered individually or in a small group. This author discussed with each individual teacher four rules: there are no right or wrong answers, the scale should be administered in a non-threatening manner, confidentiality shall be maintained, and you are to read aloud to the students all scale items plus the instructional paragraph taken from the student response form. Regarding rule one, the Hawthorne Effect should have been diminished by stressing to the students that there were no right/wrong answers. Rule two and three: administering the scale in a non-threatening manner, and emphasizing the aspect of data confidentiality to the children should have provided them with some comfort and relaxation to openly share feelings regarding specific self-concept categories. Rule four: all items were "orally presented in order to avoid bias due to reading ability" (Bossing & Sasseen, 1980, p. 13). After reading aloud the instructional paragraph, the GTC Facilitator systematically read aloud each item allowing appropriate student response time and collected all forms upon final item completion. This author personally collected these forms to begin the data analysis.

Instrumentation Identification

THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE (subtitled: The Way I Feel About Myself) was the instrument administered. It is a

paper and pencil, untimed, self-reporting tool assessing self-concept in children and adolescents ages 8 through 18, grades three through twelve.

According to Piers (1969), the PIERS-HARRIS had 80 statements to which the student indicated whether the item described the way he/she felt about him/herself. Approximately half the items were worded positively, and half were worded negatively to reduce the possibility of response bias. Scores could range from 0 to 80 on the self-concept index with high scores reflecting more positive self-concepts.

The scale was clustered six ways: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. For score interpretation, all items were scored in the positive direction on the scoring key. Therefore, for all cluster scores, the higher the score, the more positive the attribute. For example, a high score on behavior indicated a positive self-concept with respect to behavior. Yet, a high score on anxiety indicated that the student described him/herself as low in anxiety.

The cluster anxiety was defined as a variety of specific emotions including fear, worry, shyness, nervousness, sadness, and detachment from others. This anxiety cluster for the gifted achievers and the gifted underachievers received special attention as analysis progressed.

The writer examined each student's self-concept score by looking at the composite data. Next, analysis of each of the two gifted groups (achievers/underachievers) occurred, and comparisons were made.

Finally, this writer studied the anxiety levels of each of the two groups. Also, individual scores were studied to determine any implications of high risk for low self-worth and/or high levels of anxiety regarding achievers and underachievers. Any student who had a negative/low total score, or any student having a negative cluster score was considered to be "at risk."

Instrument Validity

Initially, content validity was defined on the scale as qualities a child liked or disliked about him/herself. After analysis of each item, it was determined that the self-concept emphasis should be within two groups "Just me, Myself" and "Personality, Character, Inner Resources, Emotional Tendencies", presumably a better reflection of a child's general self-concept (Piers, 1969, p. 5).

The PIERS-HARRIS scores were compared to Lipsitt's Children's Self-Concept Scale scores and a .68 correlation was obtained. Then PIERS-HARRIS scores were compared to the SRA Junior Inventory scores. A correlation of -.64 was obtained (Piers, 1969, p. 6).

Children's self-reports have only slightly corresponded to the way teachers and peers rate the children. Piers obtained correlations with fourth and sixth graders from non-significant to .49 (Piers, 1969, p. 6).

Piers (1969) also stated that prediction of significantly different self-concept scores for certain groups (institutionalized retarded females) have been confirmed. These lower scores more likely arose due to the fact of institutionalization than to the retardation. In the Piers resource (1969), "Gorlow, Butler and Guthrie (1963) have

also reported that institutionalized retardates manifest significantly more negative self-attitudes than noninstitutionalized retardates" (p. 6).

Instrument Reliability

Most of the reliability data came from the original standardization study which used a 95-item scale. The Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 which assumed equal difficulty of items was used. Correlations from .78 to .93 were obtained. To check this, the Spearman-Brown Odd-Even Formula was applied resulting in coefficients of .90 and .87 respectively for half of grade 6 and half of the grade 10 sample (Piers, 1969, p. 4).

Half of the standardization sample was retested four months later resulting in correlations of .72, .71, and .72 (grade 3, 6, and 10). This was deemed adequate for an experimental-stage personality instrument. "The revised 80-item scale, though shorter, was shown to have better reliability since Wing (1966) found for both a two-month and four-month test-retest coefficients of .77 for 244 fifth graders" according to Piers (1969, p. 4). THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE was judged to have good internal consistency and adequate stability.

STATISTICAL DESIGN

After cluster scores were obtained from THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE, the population was divided into two categories: achievers and underachievers based upon composite group achievement scores. The group scores came from either the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the California Achievement Test because not all

school districts within the ANW Cooperative use the same group achievement instrument. The latest year's composite scores were recorded from either spring, 1990 or fall, 1990.

If an individual's group achievement score was at the 95th percentile or above, that individual was said to be an achiever. If the records showed a score at the 94th percentile or below, that student was considered an underachiever as he/she was presently not performing up to the abilities initially required for program placement (intelligence quotient at least 128; individual achievement at least at the 95th percentile).

There were reports of cluster frequencies from the rating scale to show high risk and low risk. These categories were: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. The author constructed frequency polygons of each group's scores first, as suggested by Fraenkel and Wallen (1990). Scrutiny of the polygons determined which measure of central tendency to use: "If any polygon shows extreme scores at one end," medians for both groups will be used and possibly means (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990, p. 196). These averages were useful summaries of each group's performance.

SUMMARY

An action research method was utilized to study a population comprised of the intact groups of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade gifted students of the ANW Cooperative. These students were exposed to THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE to assess their feelings about themselves and their anxiety levels. Data were

analyzed categorically from the rating scale by placement on frequency distributions and detailed according to the mean scores from the group of achieving gifted students and from the group of underachieving gifted students. Comparisons were made to determine high- and low-risk self-concept groups. Also, it was decided that neither group had high anxiety levels, as attested by Number IV category of the rating scale. Recommendations for adjustment to curriculum in special education should be warranted to include measures to heighten student self-concept, and to embrace techniques of coping to lessen individual anxiety for the three children who scored negatively in the study.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

This chapter houses two sections: a Self-Concept Analysis and a Statistical Analysis. The Self-Concept Analysis presents information of underachieving students and of achieving students within the 6 clusters of THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. This section also presents summary information on the 6 clusters according to grade delineation. The Statistical Analysis shows the mean responses and the standard deviations of the underachievers and the achievers.

SELF-CONCEPT ANALYSIS

There were 55 fourth, fifth, and sixth identified gifted students within the cooperative. Forty-six parental consent forms to participate in the study were received or 84%. As noted earlier in this report, the GTC Teachers were to give the rating scale. At a final count, 45 students (82%) participated in the study. The one student not participating, who had permission, had extensive illness in the family, and her Facilitator made the decision not to allow her to participate because "it probably wouldn't be accurate anyway, and would cause results to be off."

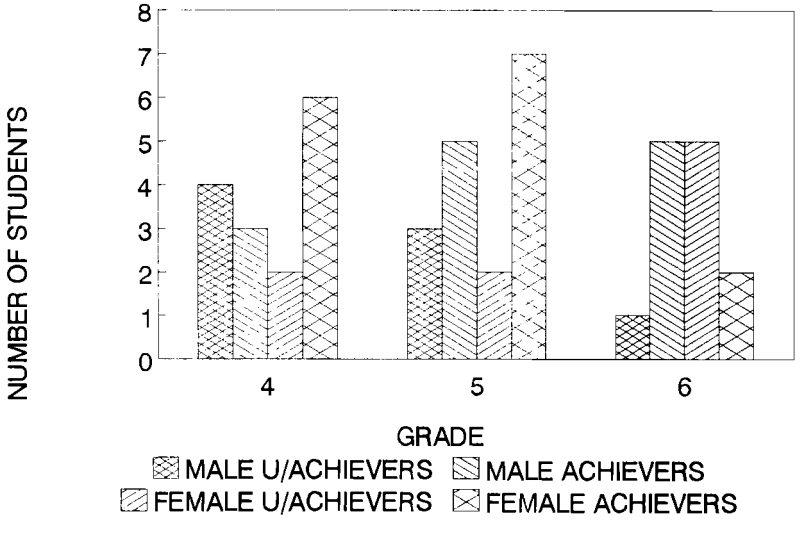
Of these 45 students, 17, or 38%, were underachievers, and 28, or 62%, were achievers. Ten students were not given parental permission to take THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE. Of these 10 students, 6 would be categorized as underachievers. Having looked more closely at the group of 17 underachievers' achievement scores, the range of scores was 11 with a median score of 91 and a mean score

of 90.647. The group of 28 achievers showed a range of 5, a median score of 98 and a mean of 97.392. A look at those 10 students not having permission to participate showed a range of 46 for the 6 underachievers, a median of 89, and a mean of 81.333. The four achievers had a range of 2, a median of 99 with a mean scores of 98.75. TABLES 1-6 summarize the information from the 6 clusters of the rating scale: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. TABLE 7 summarizes information from the total score.

FIGURE 1 shows the sample delineation by grade, male/female, and underachievers and achievers. There were 15 students in the fourth grade, 17 students in the fifth grade, and 13 students in the sixth grade with 21 (47%) male and 24 (53%) female constituting the sample.

FIGURE 1

SAMPLE DELINEATION BY GRADE, BY SEX, BY ACHIEVEMENT



Behavior Cluster

TABLE 1 summarizes the positive responses (99% - 71%), the average responses (70% - 31%), and negative responses (30% - 1%) within the Behavior Cluster of the rating scale. A small percentage (11%) of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade underachievers and achievers described themselves as having behavior concerns. Slightly over half of the achievers scored themselves positively regarding behavior.

TABLE 1

BEHAVIOR RATING OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

BEHAVIOR: UNDERACHIEVERS

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	7	41
Average:	70% - 31%	7	41
Negative:	30% - 1%	3	18
	TOTAL	17	100

BEHAVIOR: ACHIEVERS

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	16	57
Average:	70% - 31%	10	36
Negative:	30% - 1%	2	7
	TOTAL	28	100

Intellectual and School Status

TABLE 2 summarizes the positive, the average, and the negative responses within the Intellectual and School Status Cluster of the rating scale. No underachieving student ranked himself/herself negative regarding intellectual abilities and school status. Only one achieving student noted an intellectual and school status concern. A nearly equal percentage of underachievers/achievers described themselves as intellectually average.

TABLE 2

INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS RATING

OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS: UNDERACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	11	65
Average:	70% - 31%	6	35
Negative:	30% - 1%	--	--
	TOTAL	17	100

INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS: ACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	17	61
Average:	70% - 31%	10	36
Negative:	30% - 1%	1	3
	TOTAL	28	100

Physical Appearance and Attributes

TABLE 3 summarizes students' thoughts of their physical appearance according to positive, average, and negative responses. The 2 groups similarly described themselves regarding this cluster with the underachievers generally holding a more positive focus.

TABLE 3

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND ATTRIBUTES RATING

OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND ATTRIBUTES: UNDERACHIEVERS

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	11	65
Average:	70% - 31%	4	23
Negative:	30% - 1%	2	12
	TOTAL	17	100

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND ATTRIBUTES: ACHIEVERS

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	16	57
Average:	70% - 31%	7	25
Negative:	30% - 1%	5	18
	TOTAL	28	100

Anxiety Cluster

TABLE 4 summarizes the students' responses (positive, average, and negative) regarding statements showing anxiety. Over three-fourths of the underachieving students rated themselves in the positive range indicating that they were low in anxiety. None of these 17 students rated themselves in the negative area of the anxiety cluster. Both groups showed nearly an equal percentage of "average" indications of anxiety.

TABLE 4

ANXIETY RATING OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

ANXIETY: UNDERACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	13	76
Average:	70% - 31%	4	24
Negative:	30% - 1%	--	--
	TOTAL	17	100

ANXIETY: ACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	18	64
Average:	70% - 31%	7	25
Negative:	30% - 1%	3	11
	TOTAL	28	100

Popularity Cluster

TABLE 5 summarizes students' thoughts of their popularity according to positive, average, and negative responses. With regards to popularity, the underachieving students had a more positive rating than did the achieving students. Eighty-two percent of the underachievers rated themselves as either positive or average in popularity. Seventy-one percent of the achievers viewed themselves as positive or average in popularity. Surprisingly, a larger number of achieving students rated themselves within the negative or low areas as tallied on the Profile Form. Twenty-nine percent of the achieving students indicated that they were unpopular; 18% of the underachieving children said they were unpopular.

TABLE 5

POPULARITY RATING OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

POPULARITY: UNDERACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	7	41
Average:	70% - 31%	7	41
Negative:	30% - 1%	3	18
	TOTAL	17	100

POPULARITY: ACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	7	25
Average:	70% - 31%	13	46
Negative:	30% - 1%	8	29
	TOTAL	28	100

Happiness and Satisfaction Cluster

TABLE 6 summarizes positive, average, and negative responses of the underachievers and the achievers on the Happiness and Satisfaction Cluster. A larger percentage of underachieving children (76%) reported a positive rating of happiness and satisfaction than did the achieving children (61%). Over twice as many achievers rated themselves within the negative/low areas compared to the underachievers.

TABLE 6

HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION RATING

OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION: UNDERACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	13	76
Average:	70% - 31%	3	18
Negative:	30% - 1%	1	6
	TOTAL	17	100

HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION: ACHIEVERS

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	17	61
Average:	70% - 31%	7	25
Negative:	30% - 1%	4	14
	TOTAL	28	100

Total Self-Concept Percentages

TABLE 7 summarizes a total percentage representation of the underachieving and the achieving students' responses on THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE. The ratings remain the same: positive, average, and negative.

TABLE 7

TOTAL SELF-CONCEPT RATING OF UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

TOTAL SELF-CONCEPT RATING: UNDERACHIEVERS

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	13	76
Average:	70% - 31%	4	24
Negative:	30% - 1%	--	--
	TOTAL	17	100

TOTAL SELF-CONCEPT RATING: ACHIEVERS

Rating		Frequency	Percent
Positive:	99% - 71%	21	75
Average:	70% - 31%	4	14
Negative:	30% - 1%	3	11
	TOTAL	28	100

Concerning the underachieving group, no student rated himself/herself within the negative area on a total score representation. All of these students rated themselves as average to positive on total self-concept. Eleven percent of the achieving students scored

within the negative area on the Profile Form. A nearly equal representation of underachievers and achievers was found to be within the positive area. Seventy-six percent of underachievers rated themselves as positive in total self-concept, and 75% of achievers rated themselves positive in total self-concept.

AREAS OF MINOR CLUSTER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS

There were 3 clusters from THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE showing minor differences between underachievers' ratings and achievers' ratings regarding average and positive composite responses: Behavior, Anxiety, and Popularity.

1. Behavior Cluster

Eighty-two percent of the underachievers ranked within the average and positive areas of the Profile Form compared to 93% of the achievers. Eleven percent more of the underachievers fell within the negative areas compared to the achievers.

2. Anxiety Cluster

One-hundred percent of the underachievers ranked themselves within the average and positive areas regarding anxiety. Only 89% of the achievers ranked themselves in those respective areas. The underachievers tended to be less anxious than the achievers according to this sample. Eleven percent of the achievers saw themselves as anxious in some form and recorded those feelings.

3. Popularity Cluster

Eighty-two percent of the underachieving students hold an average to positive self regard on popularity. Only 71% of the achieving

students viewed themselves that way. Possibly, this could have been attributed to learned helplessness on their part. There were 11% more achieving students within the negative area than underachieving students.

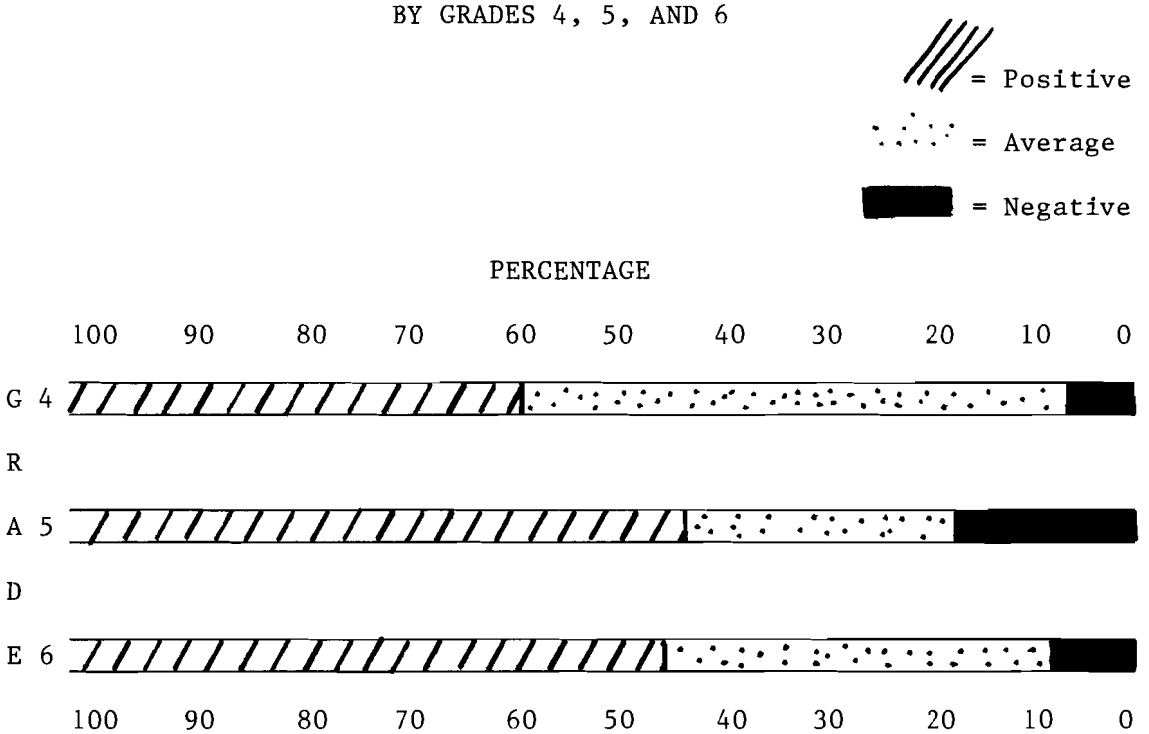
SUMMARY INFORMATION BY GRADE PLACEMENT OF THE SIX CLUSTERS OF THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE

Of the 45 students, 15, or 33%, were fourth graders, 17, or 38%, were fifth graders, and 13, or 29%, were sixth graders. FIGURES 2-7 show the sample delineation by grade according to the 6 clusters of the scale, rather than by the 2 student groups: achievers and underachievers. The three grade levels, all 45 students, were incorporated into each graph for a quicker visual comparison of each cluster's percentages.

FIGURE 2

SAMPLE DELINEATION OF BEHAVIOR CLUSTER

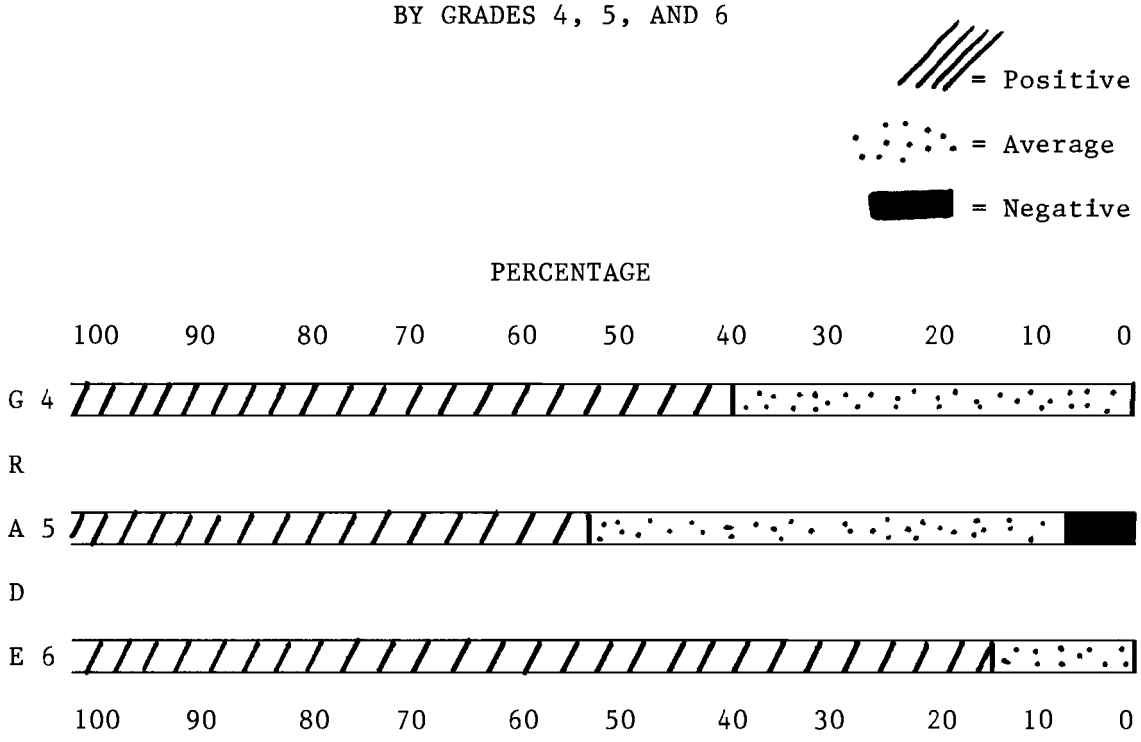
BY GRADES 4, 5, AND 6



The fourth grade and the sixth grade had comparable percentages regarding behavior. Ninety-three percent of the fourth graders and 92% of the sixth graders ranked themselves average to positive in behavior. The fifth grade reflected 18% as indicating behavior concerns.

FIGURE 3

SAMPLE DELINEATION OF INTELLECTUAL AND SCHOOL STATUS CLUSTER BY GRADES 4, 5, AND 6

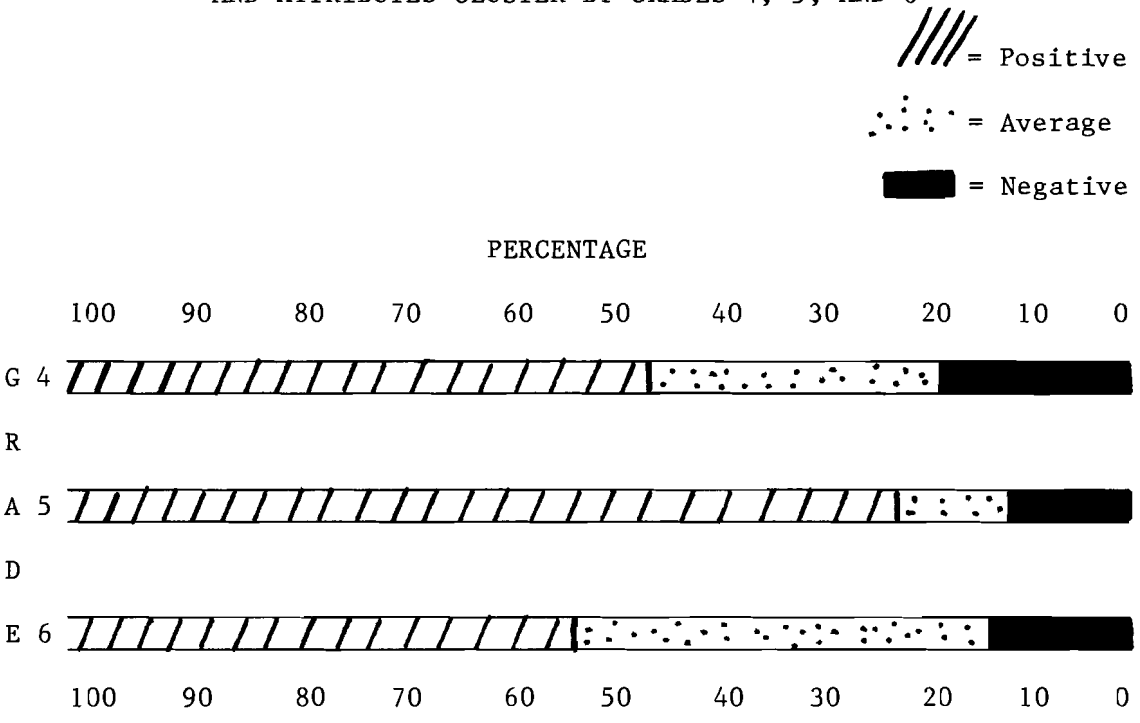


One-hundred percent of the fourth graders and 100% of the sixth graders indicated an average to positive ranking regarding intellectual and school status. Fifth graders indicated a 6% negative ranking in this area.

FIGURE 4

SAMPLE DELINEATION OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

AND ATTRIBUTES CLUSTER BY GRADES 4, 5, AND 6

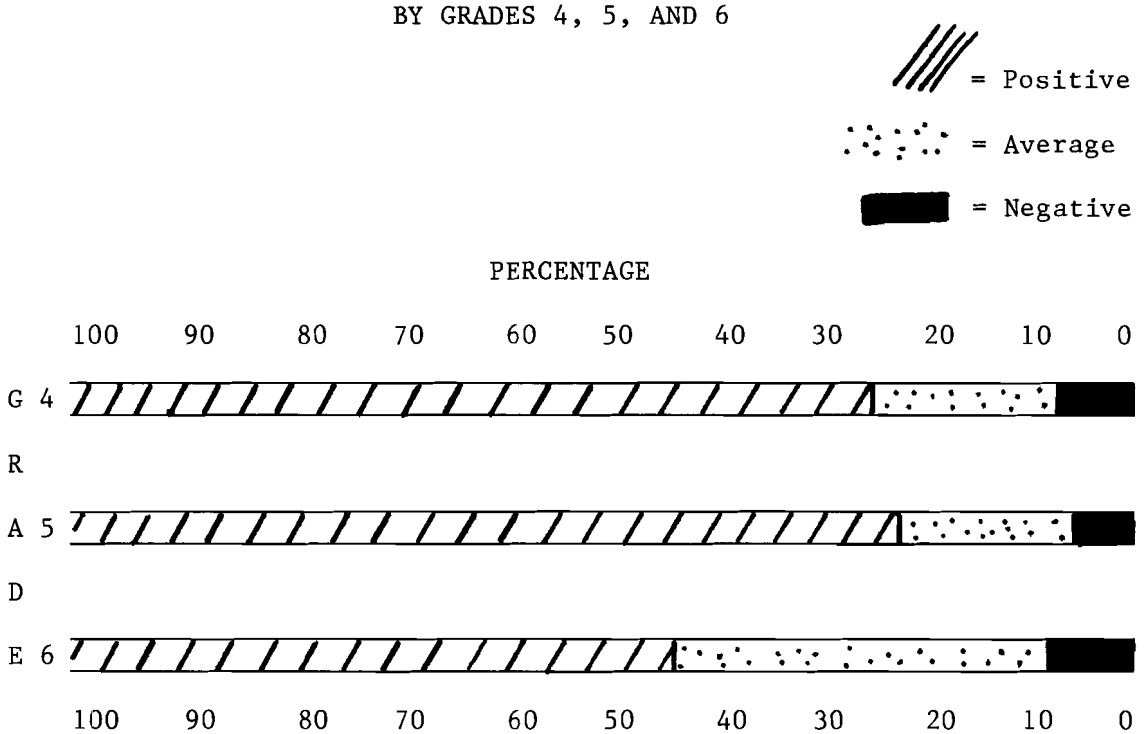


Over three-fourths of the students in the fifth grade showed a positive physical appearance and attributes concept. Yet, having combined an average percentage with a positive percentage in each of the three grades, they were very closely ranked.

FIGURE 5

SAMPLE DELINEATION OF ANXIETY CLUSTER

BY GRADES 4, 5, AND 6

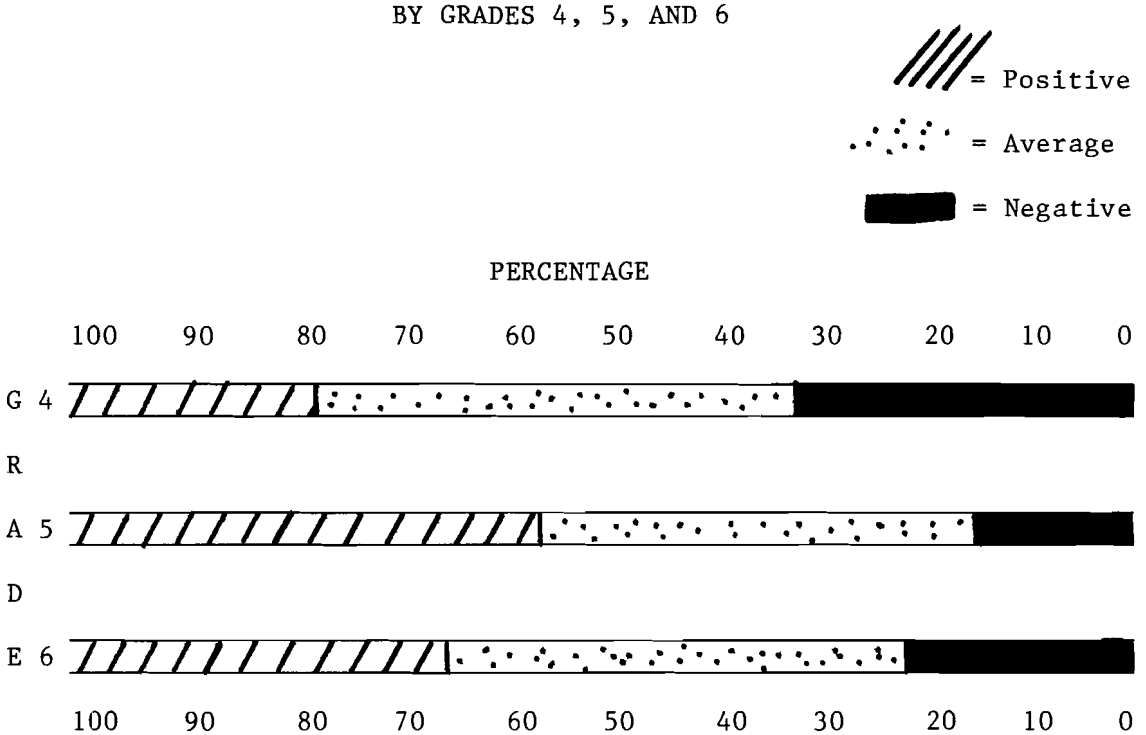


There were no apparent meaningful differences regarding the risk of high levels of anxiety within the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Those percentages of students responding in the negative area (completely shaded on the graph) were minimal in number. Ninety-three percent (42 students) responded within the average to positive area on the Profile Form leaving 7% (3 students) ranking themselves negatively in anxiety. The three students' scores were discussed with the parents provided the parents indicated on their permission forms that they wished to know the scores after the completion of the study.

FIGURE 6

SAMPLE DELINEATION OF POPULARITY CLUSTER

BY GRADES 4, 5, AND 6

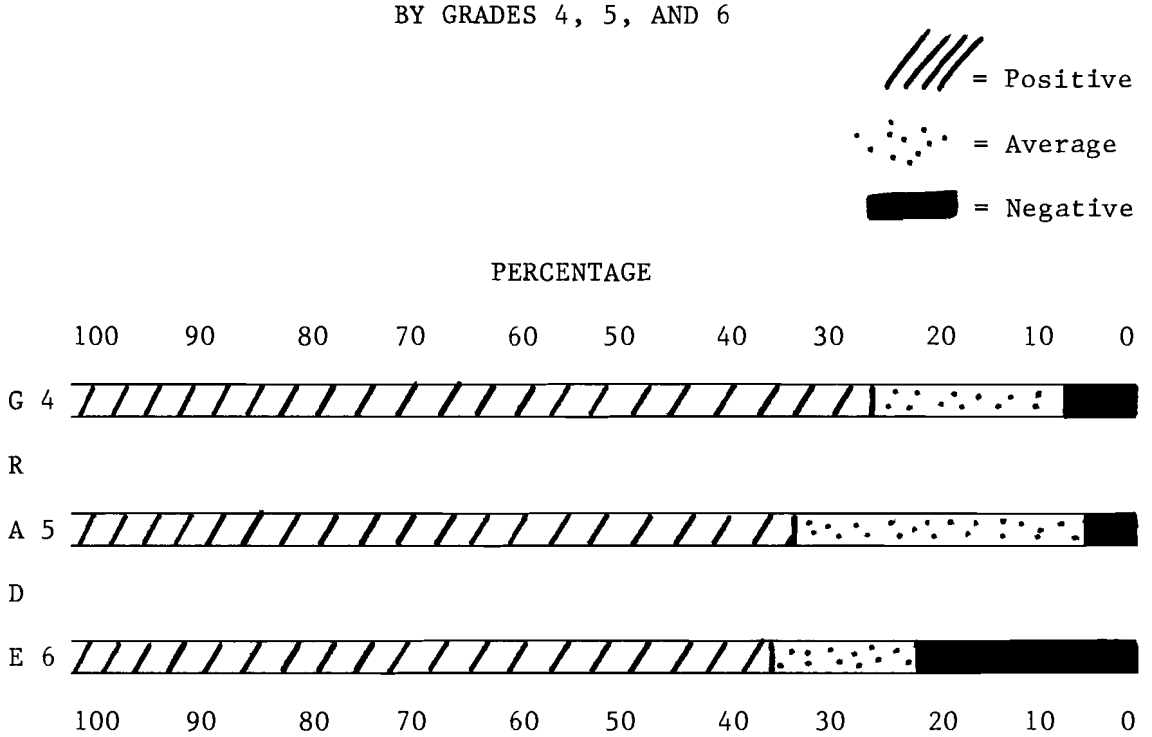


The fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students indicated fewer positive responses on the popularity cluster than any other cluster on the rating scale. The fourth graders generally viewed themselves as less popular than their grade level peers. Most of those participating in the study ranked themselves as average in popularity.

FIGURE 7

SAMPLE DELINEATION OF HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION CLUSTER

BY GRADES 4, 5, AND 6



A larger percentage discrepancy was noted among the groups of sixth graders than the other two grades. The sixth grade students had 23% negative responses, while the fifth graders recorded 6% and the fourth graders recorded 7% negative responses. The fourth and fifth grades' positive, average, and negative responses were closely ranked.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The underachieving students and the achieving students were compared on the 6 clusters of THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE: behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. The comparisons of the 2 groups were made using the mean and the standard deviation for each of the 6 clusters of the scale.

TABLE 8 indicates the self-concept analyses of 6 clusters in the rating scale. The 6 clusters are shown in the first column. Columns 2 and 3 show the means and standard deviations for the underachieving students. Columns 4 and 5 show the means and the standard deviations for the achieving students.

TABLE 8

ANALYSIS OF MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

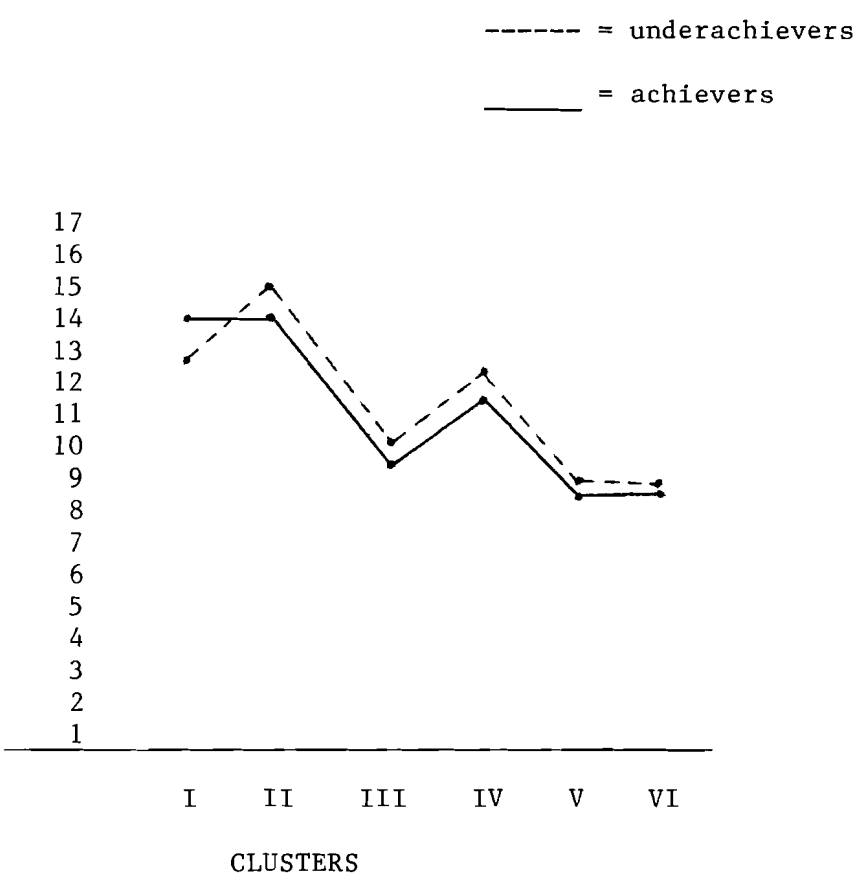
OF UNDERACHIEVERS' AND ACHIEVERS' SELF-CONCEPTS

CLUSTERS	UNDERACHIEVERS		ACHIEVERS	
	X	SD	Y	SD
I Behavior	13.0	2.94	14.07	2.55
II Intellectual and School Status	15.29	1.69	14.46	2.20
III Physical Appearance and Attributes	10.35	2.64	9.25	3.24
IV Anxiety	12.24	1.39	11.46	2.82
V Popularity	9.12	2.55	8.25	3.19
VI Happiness and Satisfaction	9.0	1.37	8.43	1.93
TOTAL	65.53	7.69	62.04	12.18

FIGURE 8 shows the delineation of mean differences of underachievers and achievers for the 6 clusters: I Behavior, II Intellectual and School Status, III Physical Appearance and Attributes, IV Anxiety, V Popularity, VI Happiness and Satisfaction.

FIGURE 8

CLUSTER MEAN SCORES FOR UNDERACHIEVERS AND ACHIEVERS



Analysis of Means

FIGURE 8 shows the cluster mean differences for the underachieving students and for the achieving students. This graph showed very little discrepancy between the underachievers' self-concepts and the achievers' self-concepts in terms of mean scores. Because the mean scores of each cluster group were virtually the same,

the minimal differences noted on the graph were purely descriptive and due to error.

On THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE Profile Form "average scores are usually considered to be those between the 31st and 70th percentiles or between raw scores of 46 to 60" (Piers, 1984, p. 10). Cluster mean scores I Behavior and V Popularity placed both groups, the underachievers and the achievers, within the "average" bracket. II Intellectual and School Status and IV Anxiety were the only 2 clusters within the "positive" area for both groups of students. None of the cluster mean scores for either group fell within the "negative" area on the Profile Form.

Analysis of Hypothesis

Referring to TABLE 8, the data indicated that none of the clusters reported a meaningful difference of mean score and standard deviation values. Therefore, for all 6 clusters the null hypothesis ($H_o : \mu_{achievers} = \mu_{underachievers}$) was accepted.

SUMMARY

The fourth, fifth, and sixth graders having parental permission ($N = 45$) responded to THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE to assess their feelings about themselves and their anxiety levels. Frequency tables and percentages were compiled indicating positive, average, and negative responses for each cluster per group of students. Graphs were drawn indicating cluster percentages by grade placement. Group mean differences tables were completed to determine high- and low-risk self-concept groups. In final analysis, neither

student group, achievers nor underachievers, described itself as needing curriculum adjustment to the self-concept. Similarly, neither group described itself as anxiety-ridden.

Chapter 4

PROJECT SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to assess the self-concepts and levels of anxiety of the achieving/underachieving gifted fourth, fifth, and sixth graders of the Allen, Anderson, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson Counties' (ANW) Special Education Cooperative. A review of the literature (Chapter 1) found underachievers to have lower self-concepts than have the achievers. The literature reviewed also suggested that both gifted groups could be subject to high levels of anxiety.

Project Summary and Conclusions

THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE was used: 1) to determine self-concept risk of the two groups, and 2) to assess students' levels of anxiety. Students' score responses for each cluster fell within the positive, the average, or the negative percentages indicated on the Profile Form. Group mean differences were calculated to determine high- and low-risk self-concept groups. Anxiety, Cluster IV, was closely examined in both student groups to see which students responded within the negative area on the response form. Those students would be considered at-risk regarding levels of anxiety. Then appropriate curricular adjustments and/or coping mechanisms should be implemented with each at-risk student.

The underachieving children scored slightly more positive than the achieving children in these clusters: Intellectual and School

Status, II; Physical Appearance and Attributes, III; Anxiety, IV; Popularity, V; and Happiness and Satisfaction, VI (see FIGURE 8, p. 45). Behavior, I, was the only cluster on which achievers scored more positively than the underachievers. Responses of underachieving students did not indicate a need for any specific curricular adjustments to enhance self-concept. Neither did the achieving students report self-concept concerns. Both student groups reported the self-concept group means scores within the positive (71 to 100 percentile) areas. Likewise, both student groups' group means scores for anxiety, Cluster IV, were positioned within the positive area (71 to 100 percentile). The initial hypothesis that fourth through sixth grade identified gifted achieving students and underachieving gifted students from the ANW Cooperative have positive self-concepts and the 2 student groups demonstrate a lack of anxiety was accepted.

Interpretations

TABLE 9 summarizes the self-concept for the underachievers by grade level. The number of students and corresponding percentages are numerically defined showing positive, average, and/or negative scorings for this group. Similarly, TABLE 10 summarizes the self-concept for the achieving students by grade level, number of students, and percentages.

TABLE 9

TOTAL SELF-CONCEPT OF UNDERACHIEVERS BY GRADE LEVEL

	No. of Students	Percent	No. of Students	Percent	No. of Students	Percent
Positive	4	23.5	4	23.5	5	29.0
Average	2	12.0	1	6.0	1	6.0
Negative	-	----	-	----	-	----
	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	

All of the 17 underachieving students scored within the average and positive areas of the scale. Not one fourth, fifth, or sixth grade student labeled himself/herself as "low" in self-concept or anxiety. This writer was surprised and pleased that all underachievers' self-concepts were so positive.

TABLE 10

TOTAL SELF-CONCEPT OF ACHIEVERS BY GRADE LEVEL

	No. of Students	Percent	No. of Students	Percent	No. of Students	Percent
Positive	6	21.0	10	36.0	5	18.0
Average	2	7.0	1	3.5	1	3.5
Negative	1	3.5	1	3.5	1	3.5
	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	

Of the 28 achievers, 3 were designated low in self-concept: one fourth grader, one fifth grader, and one sixth grader. Twenty-one of the students (75%) have positive self-concepts, and 4 (14%) indicated

an average self-concept.

Seventy-six percent of the underachievers and 75% of the achievers have positive self-concepts. Thirty-four of the 45 children taking THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE scored within the positive area on the scale.

There were 10 students who were not granted parental permission to participate in the study. This writer questions parental reasoning for refusing permission. At least one of the parents thought the instrument to be used was a test; he did not want his daughter to take another test. One or two parents wondered if THE PIERS-HARRIS were an intelligence test. This writer visited several minutes with a mother who needed more detail about the study. She eventually stated that she thought the scale to be "too personal," and she did not want it given to her son. Possibly, the others denying permission realized that their child was not achieving academic potential (underachieving), sensed a low self-concept within the child, and refused permission so visible, concrete evidence (scores) would not be evident.

The writer showed a list of those students having permission to a facilitator. The facilitator labeled those students <u>not</u> appearing on the list "A, B, C," etc. (to protect the right to privacy) noting corresponding group achievement scores. Consequently, 6 of the remaining 10 children are classified as underachievers according to the parameters of this study. These 6 show achievement scores ranging from the 47th percentile to the 92nd percentile. The remaining 4 students not participating in the study, had scored at the 98-99th

percentile on the group achievement test. Possibly, these 10 are the very students needing to participate in the rating scale. It would have been interesting to find whether the 6 non-participating underachievers would also have scored as positively as their participating counterparts. Possibly, these findings are inflated because these 10 students were not sharing in the study.

It was interesting to note resultant tabulations in the anxiety area. All students responded to this scale during the legislative session which wrestled with the gifted mandate issue. These students had been apprised of the situation from the beginning, and had participated in the democratic process for conveying personal opinion prior to responding to statements of anxiety on the scale. Both student groups' scores tabulated within the low-risk area of the Profile Form.

Limitations of the Study

As previously stated, the literature is not entirely decisive regarding achievers' and underachievers' self-concepts. Less information is directed towards the anxiety issue of both student groups. Yet, the majority of reviewed literature reported that underachieving students tend to have lower self-concepts with higher levels of anxiety than have the achieving students. Here are some conditions that put restraints on this study. These conditions could be the reason that no apparent differences resulted in the study.

1. Size

The target population itself is small (N = 55) with the sample population determined to be 45. The small number of participants

could be confining regarding the study's generalizability.

2. Definitions

Possibly, there were no particular group differences due to the definitions used to delineate the underachievers from the achievers. To become more definitive, one could use the student's grade point average (GPA) in conjunction with the group achievement score to aid the defining process.

3. Achievement Score Range

Forty-six (83%) of the 55 students had a group achievement composite test score at the 90th percentile and above. Seven (13%) of the 55 students had a test score between the 80th and the 89th percentile. One student (2%) had a score in the upper 70th percentile, and one student (2%) scored at the 47th percentile on a group achievement test. According to this study, scores for the achieving students range from the 99th percentile to and including the 95th percentile. Scores range for the underachieving group from the 94th percentile to the 47th percentile.

According to the definition section of this paper, there is no "gray area" between those performing up to their abilities and those not performing to their abilities. From the 99th percentile to the 95th percentile are the achievers. Those at the 94th percentile and below are considered the underachievers. Perhaps, consideration of a "gray area" would be appropriate. Maybe students should not be considered at-risk for underachievement until group achievement percentiles and/or GPA are below the 80th percentile. Should one entertain this "gray area" concept, then this special education

cooperative has 32 students who achieve, 21 students within the designated "gray area", and 2 students who are underachieving. If this were considered, the ANW Cooperative has virtually no underachieving children. According to final results of this study using achievement test scores solely, there is little difference between the 2 student groups regarding self-concepts and levels of anxiety.

4. Group Achievement Tests

Twelve of 28 achieving students (43%) of this study had group achievement composite test scores at the 99th percentile. Consideration of low ceiling (in terms of percentiles) for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the California Achievement Test should be made. These 12 percentiles of 99 do not adequately reflect student knowledge. This is a perplexing limitation the facilitators and the cooperatives across this state face.

Recommendations

Further study in the area of self-concept and anxiety of the gifted population (both the achievers and the underachievers) is encouraged based on the findings of this study. A quantity of literature reviewed indicated that underachievers tend to have low self-concepts while achieving students hold more positive self-concepts. The writer's findings are contrary to the findings of previous studies. The 17 gifted underachievers were not substantially more positive in their scores, yet they did score above the 28 gifted achieving children. Some suggestions for future study: 1) increase the sample size to help generalization of results, 2) use the grade

point average of each student and the latest group achievement composite score to determine levels of achievement, and 3) pay particularly close attention to the gender results, as information would broaden the literature base in the field. In one study, results indicated "a higher mean value for self-worth for 4th grade females (3.35) than for males (3.28)" (Li, 1988, p. 177). Extensive research in this gender-related area regarding similarities and differences would be enlightening and could aid the GTC Facilitator in program planning and implementation for the students.

Of these 45 students, only 3 scored low (30 to 1 percentile) on the self-concept scale. None of the 45 children of this study scored high levels of anxiety. The 3 scoring in the at-risk area of self-concept should have a modified special education curriculum to stimulate improvement of self-concept/esteem. Regarding this recommendation, curriculum modification should be handled in special education class and could as easily be pursued in the regular education class to benefit all class members. THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE "can be used as a screening device in school classrooms to identify children in need of psychological referral" (Piers, 1969, p. 19). Those children in a regular education classroom showing negative self-concept percentages (as the 3 of this study) should be considered for further screening. Conversely, should this rating scale be used only in a gifted, talented, and creative program by facilitators, it could also be an indicator of those with self-concept deficiencies who possibly would benefit from further screening. Facilitators might then observe particularly low

cluster scores and make creative adjustments within the child's Individual Education Program. Also, noting individual item responses on the scale could prove beneficial for the teacher as a beginning point for self-concept enhancement.

Finally, this writer has the opinion that the observed negative behaviors of underachievers (as reviewed through the literature in Chapter 1 and including students of the study) may be symptoms rather than characteristics. Some symptoms are inattention to detail, inadequate attention span to classroom work the student considers boring due to mastery of that concept, a lack of task closure (so many ongoing interests that no one activity reaches closure), and possibly a developing low self-concept. This student may not be an underachiever. These four areas may be indicative of an individual's unique way of learning rather than characteristics of underachievement. Underachievement may be a negative mis-label. The output required from the student may not match the teacher's method of teaching. Also, the required output may not match the student's method of learning. A lack of flexibility of teaching styles may produce tensions. Due to these ongoing tensions of the mismatch, achievement might drop and a low self-esteem could develop. This writer would encourage study of learning styles of individuals which would then supply a premise of why teachers teach the way they do. Could the "problem" be that teachers need to pinpoint students' learning styles and teach to these styles thus fostering motivation and achievement, rather than to bandage the students' underachieving characteristics that may have evolved? At this point, research is

inconclusive. The goal is two-fold: 1) to identify and serve all gifted students whether or not they achieve/underachieve, and whether or not their mode of receptive learning matches the teacher's method of teaching, and 2) to keep each student's self-concept positive, intact, and healthy in order for each student to pursue his/her own educational career in an autonomous manner.

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APPENDIX A

PARENTAL LETTER OF RESEARCH INTENT

Special Education Cooperative

Danny J. Shoemake • Director (316) 473-2257

507 N. 9th Street • P.O. Box 207 • Humboldt, Kansas 66748

Dear Parent of a Gifted Child:

I am employed by the ANW Cooperative to teach elementary (K-4) gifted students in Chanute. Presently, I am completing work towards a master's degree in psychology with emphasis on teaching the gifted at Emporia State University. Part of my course requirements is a research problem: I will be looking at the gifted achiever/ underachiever and his/her self-concept.

I would like permission to have your child take The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The scale will be kept confidential with the exception: Your child's gifted facilitator may wish to see the report; your signature will permit my divulging its contents to him/her. You too, of course, may wish to know the results and later that could be arranged at your convenience. I also would like approval to obtain your child's group achievement scores from 1990.

Please give my request some thought; with your permission I look forward to getting "semi-acquainted" with your child through the self-report administered.

Please sign, date, and detach the form below. Mail the form to me in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you ahead of time for letting me briefly "borrow" your child. Should you have questions, please call me at 431-3508 in Chanute after four o'clock.

Sincerely,

Pat McDaniel.

Pat McDaniel, GTC Facilitator
Lincoln Elementary
Chanute, KS 66720

Mrs. McDaniel has my permission to: 1) Administer the The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, and 2) Obtain my child's 1990 composite group achievement scores.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS

APPENDIX B

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS

This application should be attached to the project proposal or description and submitted, along with the Informed Consent Document, to the Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects.

1. Name of Prinicpal Investigator(s) or Responsible Individuals: Patricia L. McDaniel

2. Departmental Affiliation: Psychology/Special Education

3. Person to whom notification should be sent: Patricia L. McDaniel

   Address: 1316 West Fifth Street, Chanute, KS 66720.

4. Title of Project: Self-Concepts and Anxiety Levels of Achieving and Underachieving Upper Elementary Gifted Students of the ANW Special Education Cooperative

5. Funding Agency (if applicable): NA

6. Project Purpose(s): The purpose of the study is to determine the self-concept level (high/low) and anxiety level of identified gifted fourth, fifth, and sixth graders of the ANW Special Education Cooperative. These students are at risk. Their IEP should attend to these risks by modifying the curriculum appropriately.

7. Describe the proposed subjects: (age, sex, race, or other special characteristics, such as students in a specific class, etc.)

   The subjects are fourth, fifth, and sixth grade identified gifted students. They are an intact group of the ANW Special Education

Cooperative, male and female, predominantly white, rural, and middle-class children.

8. Describe how the subjects are to be selected: This subject pool is an intact, non-random, population of 55 in a five-county area of southeast Kansas.

9. Describe the proposed procedures in the project. Any proposed experimental activities that are included in evaluation, research, development, demonstration, instruction, study, treatments, debriefing, questionnaires, and similar projects must be described here if they are not clearly outlined in the project proposal or description. (Use additional pages if necessary.) A parental letter of research intent will be sent (via the four gifted, talented, and creative facilitators) to each student requesting parental signature which gives permission for their child to take the self-report THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE. The sample population becomes those students who have been allowed to participate in the self-concept scale through signature of parents. The children will be given the scale by their facilitator only once. Data will be analyzed after collection of all student forms from the GTC Teachers.

10. Will questionnaires, tests, or related research instruments not explained in question #9 be used? _____Yes __X__No (If yes, attach a copy to this application.)

11. Will electrical or mechanical devices be used? _____Yes __X__No (If yes, attach a detailed description of the device(s).)

12. Do the benefits of the research outweigh the risks to human

subjects? __X__ Yes _____ No On what page of the project description is this information outlined? ___ If not provided in the project description, such information should be outlined here.

See pages 5 and 26-27.

13. Are there any possible emergencies which might arise in utilization of human subjects in this project? _____ Yes __X__ No On what page of the project description are these emergencies discussed? _____ Further detail may be provided here.

No "emergencies" have been detected in the planning stages of this study.

14. What provisions will you take for keeping research data private?

Names of participating students will be number coded. This code will be placed on the student form in place of student name. Researcher shall collect the student forms upon item completion.

15. Attach a copy of the informed consent document, as it will be used for your subjects.

STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT: I have acquainted myself with the Federal Regulations and University policy regarding the use of human subjects in research and related activities and will conduct this project in accordance with those requirements. Any changes in procedures will be cleared through the Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects.

Patricia L. McDaniel. 12-5-90.

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

Karen C. Nelson 12-11-90

Signature of responsible individual (faculty advisor) Date

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

The Department/Division of Psychology and Special Education supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research and related activities. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and that if you do withdraw from the study, you will not be subjected to reprimand or any other form of reproach.

1. Procedures to be followed in the study, as well as identification of any procedures which are experimental.

   A self-concept rating scale will be filled out once by gifted upper elementary students. After completing the 80-item form, the child's GTC Teacher will collect all student forms.

2. Description of any attendant discomforts or other forms of risk involved for subjects taking part in the study.

   There should be very little student discomfort. The student's own GTC Facilitator shall be the one in charge of response form dispersement. The students will be told that there are no right/wrong answers and that this scale is NOT a test.

3. Description of benefits to be expected from the study or research.

   It is imperative that those identified gifted students with low self-concept and high levels of anxiety be recognized and helped. Curriculum adjustments to include enhancement of self-concept and

learning how to cope with the stresses/anxieties of daily life should be made in order for the student to have appropriate academic and social successes.

4. Appropriate alternative procedures that would be advantageous for the subject.

   NA

"I have read the above statement and have been fully advised of the procedures to be used in this project. I have been given sufficient opportunity to ask any questions I had concerning the procedures and possible risks involved. I understand the potential risks involved and I assume them voluntarily. I likewise understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without being subjected to reproach."

_____ _____

Subject and/or authorized representative Date