

**Social and Academic Abilities of Gifted Children
as Perceived by Parents and Teachers**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study was an investigation of the social and academic abilities of gifted children as perceived by parents and teachers. From the literature reviewed, it was thought that social skills perceived by parents and teachers would be different, and that these adults' would value specific social skills differently. As an extension of Wentzel's research (1991), it was also suggested that teacher ratings of social and academic abilities may be interdependent.

The sample consisted of 27 preadolescent children ages 6 through 12. Subjects were included who scored at least 125 on the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III) or on the Stanford Binet-Fourth Edition (SB-IV). The subjects' parents and teachers were asked to rate the social abilities of the children and the teachers were also asked to evaluate the academic abilities of the children.

A series of t-tests were used to evaluate differences between the parent and teacher ratings. Ranking the most valued social skills enabled comparisons between teacher and parent highly valued social behaviors. Pearson correlations served to identify relationships between teacher ratings of social and academic abilities.

The results revealed that both parents and teachers perceived the gifted children as demonstrating social skills similar to those in the norm sample. Teachers' highly valued social skills reflected cooperative behaviors, while parents placed more importance on those behaviors reflecting assertion. Ratings of academic ability were related to ratings of social ability, but only when the academic assessment incorporated some classroom behaviors.

Future research needs to include larger samples of gifted children. Investigation of the appropriateness of the assessment tools with the gifted population needs to be undertaken. As well, further examination of the relationship between social and academic abilities would be valuable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vii
 CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF STUDY	 1
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	1
CONTEXT OF PROBLEM	3
SUMMARY OF PROBLEM	4
JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY	5
ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY	6
DEFINITION OF VARIABLES	6
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE	9
 CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	 11
OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER TWO	11
NATURE OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED CHILDREN	11
RATIONALE OF INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS	15
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY	16
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ABILITY	18
INFLUENCE OF BEHAVIOR PERCEPTIONS ON TEACHERS' JUDGMENTS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	20
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ABILITY AND ACADEMIC ABILITY	22
RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS	24
RATIONALE FOR INVESTIGATING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS	25
PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY	26
RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS	29
RATIONALE FOR INVESTIGATING CONGRUENCE OF TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS	30
COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS	30
SETTING INFLUENCE ON INTERRATER AGREEMENT	33
RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS	36
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWO	36
FORMAL STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS	37
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	 38
POPULATION	39
SAMPLE	39
MEASUREMENT OF IQ	40
MEASUREMENT OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	42
MEASUREMENT OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SKILLS	43
TESTING PROCEDURES	49
DESIGN OF STUDY	50
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE	50

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	51
PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY	51
EVALUATIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY	57
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL ABILITY AND ACADEMIC ABILITY	62
 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	66
PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY	67
EVALUATIONS OF SOCIAL SKILLS	71
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL ABILITY AND ACADEMIC ABILITY	72
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	75
SUMMARY OF CHAPTER FIVE	76
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	77
 APPENDIX A	81
APPENDIX B	82

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for IQ Measurements.	41
Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Academic Achievement.	43
Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of Frequency Ratings by Parents and Teachers	52
Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Importance Ratings by Parents and Teachers	57
Table 5: Highly Valued Social Skills as Rated by Parents	60
Table 6: Highly Valued Social Skills as Rated by Teachers	61
Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Ratings of Social and Academic Abilities.	62
Table 8: Pearson Correlations for Teacher Perceptions of Academic and Social Abilities	63

LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
Figure 1: Frequency Ratings by Parents and Teachers	54
Figure 2: Importance Ratings by Parents and Teachers	58
Figure 3: Distribution of Academic Competence Ratings	64
Figure 4: Distribution of Scholastic Competence Ratings	65

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF STUDY

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is important to understand how teachers and parents perceive gifted children, as these perceptions impact on the educational and familial experiences of gifted children. How these influential adults interpret the social and academic competencies of gifted children may also drive parent-child and teacher-child interpersonal interactions.

The perception of intellectually gifted children's social relations has been infused by two dichotomous beliefs (Schneider, 1987). The first belief is the assumption that bright children are destined to be social outcasts. By virtue of their social precocity and inappropriate social skills, these intellectually gifted children are plagued with unsatisfactory social relations throughout their child and adult lives. Documented life stories of socially distraught, yet highly intelligent, individuals have consistently emerged in literature, primarily in descriptions of 'suffering' artists, novelists, and musicians (Schneider, 1987). In contrast, however, the empirical research describes gifted children as well-adjusted, emotionally stable, socially skilled individuals (Janos & Robinson, 1985).

The empirical work that has focused on the social competence of gifted children has most often relied on teacher and parent ratings of behavior. This research rarely differentiates the adult perceptions, and collapses these perceptions into one adult perspective. Exactly how gifted children are perceived socially by their parents and teachers remains unclear.

Studies of the social development of gifted children are fairly common and reveal a general trend of well-developed social skills in the gifted population. However, there are few studies differentiating between 'actual' social skills and

'perceived' social skills. This subtle distinction forces one to look closely at the assumptions of previous research in this field. Identifying the 'actual' social skills may be inconsequential, as it is the *perception* of these social skills which motivates further social interaction.

Most of the empirical work has implicitly assumed that the observers' assessments of social skills have been the objective truth. Therefore, little attention has been given to the importance and influence of *who* was making the observations. Recognizing the lenses through which parents and teachers 'see' gifted children is critical.

A similar argument can be applied to the perception of academic competencies. That is, how teachers perceive the academic abilities of gifted children may have significant educational consequences for the children. Recent research has suggested that the way teachers perceive children's academic achievement is more closely related to the children's social behaviors than to their intellectual ability (Wentzel, 1991). The relationship between perceived academic ability and perceived social ability has yet to be explored thoroughly in the gifted population.

This study addresses the previously discussed issues by exploring the perceptions of social and academic abilities of gifted children, rather than measuring the 'actual' social and academic abilities. Teacher perceptions of both social and academic competencies and parent perceptions of social skills are explored and discussed within the context of the gifted child population. Congruence of these adult perceptions are evaluated to provide a clearer picture of the complexities of the gifted child.

CONTEXT OF PROBLEM

The following analysis of the problem context involves a general discussion of the nature of social skills in gifted children, teacher and parent perceptions of gifted children, and the congruence of teacher and parent perceptions.

The earliest studies which explored the social development of intellectually gifted children were conducted by Terman (1925) and Hollingworth (1942). Both concluded that gifted children demonstrate superior social competencies in comparison with their same age peers. These findings have been consistently replicated in more recent years (Kalliopuska, 1992; Stokes & Leary, 1984). Nevertheless, the myth of the gifted child as social outcast pervades society.

In the current study, a review of recent literature is provided to develop a better understanding of the nature of social skills in gifted children. This analysis will also provide the necessary framework in which to interpret the subsequent information on teacher and parent perceptions.

How a teacher perceives the social abilities of a gifted child may have both social and academic consequences for the child. Interaction between teacher and child will be affected by the teacher's perceptions of the child's social behaviors. As well, "children who are well liked by teachers (i.e. perceived to be socially responsible) tend to get better grades than those who are not as well liked" (Wentzel, 1991, p.9). It has been suggested that the way teachers perceive behavior in the classroom may influence their ratings of academic abilities. That is, teacher evaluations of social and academic competencies may be *interdependent*.

The way parents perceive the social skills of their gifted children may be one of the catalysts of parent-child interactions. Understanding how parents perceive the social skills of their gifted children may be extremely useful in further understanding the social behaviors of gifted children. Investigation of parent perspectives

provides a reference point from which to compare and evaluate teacher perceptions of gifted children.

Children interact with others in often radically different situations, and are expected to demonstrate situation-specific social skills. Patterns of interaction between child and teacher and child and parent may differ dramatically. Only a few studies have assessed both teacher and parent perceptions of gifted children, but the researchers have traditionally collapsed the teacher and parent perceptions. By combining the results, only one adult perspective was provided. No studies could be located which directly *compared* these adult perceptions. A social skill demonstrated in the classroom and highly valued by the teacher may be interpreted quite differently in the home environment, while an important social skill in the home may not be similarly appreciated in an educational setting.

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM:

This study explored the way teachers and parents perceive intellectually gifted children and the similarities and differences of these perceptions. Teacher perceptions of social and academic abilities were examined to better understand the gifted child. This study drew from a population of middle- to upper-elementary aged school children. This investigation addressed the problem:

How do teachers perceive important social abilities and academic abilities of gifted children ? How do the perceptions and evaluations of social skills by teachers and parents differ?

JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

The way in which gifted childrens' social and academic skills are interpreted by their teachers has tremendous impact on the educational experiences of children (Wentzel, 1991). It is critical to identify the underlying valued social skills and their relationship to perceived academic skills. If a significant relationship exists then ratings of children's academics may be influenced by *both* social and academic competencies. Understanding what social skills are important for success in classrooms will shed light on how gifted children are perceived socially by their teachers.

Understanding how parents perceive the important social skills of gifted children is valuable for two reasons. Primarily, this knowledge would provide some insight into the social expectations parents have of their children. The parent perceptions are also crucial reference points from which to compare the social perceptions by teachers. Differences between teacher and parent perceptions may indicate situation-specific behavioral expectations of the children. Interpreting perception and evaluation differences by these adults will provide an understanding of the situational demands on gifted children.

The research which has been conducted in this area continues to produce contradictory information and is infused with definition and measurement inconsistencies. A precise measurement of teacher and parent perceptions is needed to provide some understanding of these influential adults' perceptions. Understanding the way in which teachers and parents perceive gifted children and exploring the congruence of these perceptions will provide some insight into the social complexities of the gifted child. In addition, examining the relationship between perceptions of social and academic abilities is especially valuable within the population of gifted children, as it is these gifted children who may suffer

academically due to factors related to their social, rather than intellectual, behaviors.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY:

Chapter One provides an overview of the rationale for the study and general description of the research problem. In Chapter Two, the literature relevant to the study is critically reviewed. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, specifically the subjects, measures, procedures and design. In Chapter Four, the results of the data analyses are outlined. Chapter Five discusses the results of the study, and draws conclusions and implications for future research.

DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

Giftedness:

In recent years, a theory of multiple intelligences has been proposed. According to the theory, intelligence encompasses multiple talents, such as artistic, social, academic and musical (Gardner, 1983). One of the areas in which children can demonstrate exceptional achievement is in general intellectual ability (Ministry reference). For the purposes of this study, the concept of giftedness was restricted to the cognitive domain. As the current research includes an investigation of the relationships between *academic* ability and social ability and between academic ability and intellectual ability, limiting the conception of giftedness was appropriate. Assessments of general intellectual ability are achieved by traditional measures of IQ.

Children were identified as intellectually gifted if they received a full scale score of 125 or higher on the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III) or on the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale: Fourth Edition (SBIV). Producing a score of 125 or higher, or scoring in the top 5% of the population, has been commonly accepted as an indication of intellectual giftedness (Davis & Rimm, 1989). Using this criterion for intellectual giftedness, a pure sample of gifted children would emerge that would be useful for research purposes.

Social Ability

Social ability , in terms of the current study, is comprised of the notions of social skills and behavioral conduct. Social skills and behavioral conduct, as operationalized in the present research, are conceptually similar.

A. Social Skills

The concept of 'social skills' has been defined in various ways depending on the research context. In this study, the construct definition of social skills was adopted from Gresham and Elliott's (1990) definition. These authors identify social skills as "socially acceptable learned behaviors which enable a person to interact effectively with others and avoid socially unacceptable responses" (Gresham & Elliott, 1990, p.2). In reference to this study, the term 'social skills' will be used exclusively, although in the review of literature other terms such as social competence, or social behavior, are used. The meaning of the terms as defined by particular authors will be described when necessary. The perception of social skills by parents and teachers is important to the present work.

B. Behavioral Conduct

The construct, 'behavioral conduct', is operationalized as meaning "...do the right thing, act the way they are supposed to, avoid getting into trouble, and do the things they are supposed to do" (Harter, 1985, p.2). This definition encompasses a wide range of behaviors, mainly thought of as 'socially responsible' behaviors (Wentzel, 1991). The construct, behavioral conduct, is conceptually similar to the social skills construct in that both tap into the social behaviors of children. However, within the context of this study, behavioral conduct refers to more global social behaviors, while social skills refers to specific prosocial behaviors. Teacher and parent perceptions of behavioral conduct are relevant to this research.

Academic Ability

Within the context of the present study, academic ability is composed of both academic competence and scholastic competence. Academic competence and scholastic competence are similar conceptually, but there are some differences between the two concepts. Academic competence refers to ability based on cognitive and social factors demonstrated within the classroom while Scholastic competence refers to ability based purely on school-related cognitive factors.

A. Academic Competence

Academic Competence refers to the academic abilities of a child within the context of the classroom and also incorporates some school-related social behaviors, such as motivation and overall classroom behavior (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). In the current study, *teachers' perceptions* of the children's academic competence are relevant. Perceptions of children's academic competence, which include academic and some social ratings, are important for the current study.

B. Scholastic Competence

Scholastic competence refers to the child's "competence or ability within the realm of scholastic performance" (Harter, 1985, p.2). This concept reflects the child's competence within school-related activities with reference to purely cognitive skills, rather than behavioral skills. In the current work, *teachers' perceptions* of children's scholastic competence are relevant.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE:

Examining the importance and congruence of teacher perceptions and parent perceptions of gifted children is justified on the basis of the following recognized needs:

- to describe how teachers and parents perceive important social skills of gifted children.

- to investigate how teachers perceive the academic abilities, both academic competence and scholastic competence, of gifted children.
- to explore the relationship between teacher perceptions of academic abilities and social abilities in gifted children
- to explore the congruence of teacher and parent perceptions of important social skills demonstrated by gifted children.

Literature relevant to the investigation of these needs is reviewed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter relevant literature is critically reviewed to provide a framework in which to discuss the identified research needs. The literature is addressed under the following general headings:

- Nature of social skills in intellectually gifted children
- Teachers' perceptions of gifted children's social and academic abilities
- Parents' perceptions of gifted children's social abilities
- Comparison of teacher and parent perceptions
- Chapter summary
- Formal statement of research questions

NATURE OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED CHILDREN

Throughout the following discussion, the relationship between social skills and intellectual giftedness will be analyzed. Examination and interpretation of the research may produce a clearer picture of the nature of social skills among the intellectually gifted. An understanding of the kinds of social skills demonstrated by gifted children will provide the context in which to evaluate teacher and parent perceptions of the social skills of gifted children.

In an early study, Gallagher (1958) investigated the relationship between Social Status and Intelligence, Propinquity, and Social Perception. By using a series of sociometric instruments, Gallagher investigated several different hypotheses. Of

relevance to the current work is Gallagher's suggestion that social perception, or social skills, is positively related to intelligence. His results indicated that bright children were more socially popular than average pupils; that is, social popularity was positively related to intellectual status (Gallagher, 1958). Gallagher attributed the ability to sense friendship choices of others to superior social perception. He concluded that bright children were more socially perceptive than the average children as they were better able to predict the friendship choices.

A more recent study compared the effects of specific decentering prompts on decision consequences by intellectually gifted and average children. Stokes and Leary (1984) wanted to specifically investigate the "impact of children's level of general intelligence upon their social judgments and responsiveness to prompts" (Stokes & Leary, 1984, p.565). The researchers hypothesized that there was a positive relationship between responsiveness to prompts and intelligence. The subjects were read one paragraph scenarios which described an incident in which a child makes a reasonable decision. For each scenario, three different endings were possible, varying in the consequence severity of the character's decision. Half of the subjects were 'prompted' to reflect on the character's original intentions, while the other half of the subjects did not receive prompting. The children were then asked to rate the characters in terms of being smart or stupid, friendly or mean, or good or bad. The results suggested that the gifted children, *when prompted*, were more able to disregard the consequences and consider the characters' original intentions. These researchers concluded that there was a positive relationship between intellectual functioning and social-cognitive reasoning.

Kalliopuska (1992) also believes a correlation exists between children's social behaviors and their intellectual ability. She has applied social learning theory and cognitive-developmental theory to explain how cognitive representations may

mediate social competencies. To test this hypothesis, she investigated the factors related to students motivated by affectional empathy, and those motivated by cognitive factors. Motivation, in this context, refers to the generation of a number of ways to help other students. The children's actual helping behavior was assessed by peers' sociometric ratings by all of the students. Good abstract thinking, as measured by the Similarities sub-section on the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children, was found to be a factor which related positively to peer rated helping behaviors. Kalliopuska (1992) concluded that high intellectual ability is related to children's prosocial behaviors. These three studies suggest that differences in social competencies exist between children, and that social giftedness may be correlated with high intellectual ability.

Contradictory evidence comes from the research of Ritchie, Bernard, and Shertzer (1982). They compared gifted and non-gifted children along one dimension of social competence-interpersonal sensitivity. They described interpersonal sensitivity as "the ability to perceive and differentiate the behavioral interactions between others" (Ritchie et. al, 1982, p.105). This research hypothesized that academically talented children and academically average children may differ in terms of interpersonal sensitivity.

A series of vignettes containing subtle interpersonal dynamics were shown to the children. In each vignette, at least two behavioral interactions were recognizable. Examples of specific behavioral interactions included "the ability to perceive the emotions of others,... the ability to perceive nonverbal cues and make inferences from them,...and the ability to perceive defensiveness" (Ritchie et. al, 1982, p.106). Following the vignettes, the children were asked to complete a forced-choice questionnaire to assess their discrimination skill. The correct answers were established by eight counselling psychologists who viewed and rated the vignettes individually.

There was only a slight difference in the measured interpersonal sensitivity between the academically gifted and non-gifted children. The authors speculate that "superior interpersonal sensitivity is a type of giftedness separate from superior level of intelligence" (Ritchie et. al, 1982, p.108). These findings contradict some of the earlier research which found high correlations between social skills and intellectual giftedness. This relationship, or correlation, appears to depend on which social skills are measured and what tool is used for assessment.

In their review of social development of gifted children, Janos and Robinson (1985) suggest that children with high IQs may be able to solve theoretical social conflicts more effectively than their peers. However, these advanced social-cognitive skills may not be reflected in the child's behavior. These findings impact significantly upon the current study. That is, when gifted children have had traditional assessments of their social skills they have fared well perhaps due to their cognitive abilities and knowledge of what is socially appropriate behavior. However, despite being able to articulate the acceptable social responses, these children, for whatever reasons, may not demonstrate socially responsible behavior in real life situations.

Nevertheless, it is not the measurement of the "actual" social skills that is critical, but how these social skills are *perceived* by different people within the childrens' lives. Recognizing the lenses through which adults perceive gifted children may be more informative. For the purposes of the current work, the measurement of the "actual" social skills is irrelevant. However, it is the *perceptions* of social skills by parents and teachers which drive their interpersonal interactions with gifted children.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

RATIONALE FOR INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

It is important to understand how teachers perceive gifted children and to explore the behavioral expectations teachers have of gifted children. It is these perceptions and expectations that have a great impact on the education of gifted children. How teachers perceive the social and academic abilities of their gifted students is of primary interest to the current research.

One key source of vulnerability that places intellectually gifted children at risk is teacher understandings and expectations of giftedness (Whitmore, 1988). Whitmore (1988) suggests that teachers and other adults often hold misconceptions of giftedness, which manifest in inappropriate expectations for gifted students. When teachers believe that gifted children are more mature intellectually, they also expect more mature behavior, although research (Janos & Robinson, 1985) has yet to conclusively support the link between intellectual development and social development. Since the perception of gifted children's social skills by the teachers guides the students' interaction (Wentzel, 1991), it is essential to understand exactly how teachers perceive gifted children socially.

Another critical reason for investigating the way in which teachers perceive gifted children involves the relationship between academic ability and social skills. Wentzel (1991) has recently proposed that socially responsible behaviors are correlated with academic achievement and furthermore academic and social skills may be interdependent factors. It follows that how teachers perceive the social

behaviors of children may have serious implications for the academic achievement of children. This premise has potentially interesting effects upon the population of gifted children for it is these intellectually gifted children who *may* be suffering academically because of the nature of their social skills, rather than their cognitive abilities. Exactly how teachers perceive the academic competencies of intellectually gifted children who do *not* demonstrate socially responsible behaviors remains unclear. A thorough exploration of teachers' perceptions of the social and academic abilities of gifted children is needed to shed light on the relationship between these ability perceptions.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY IN GIFTED CHILDREN

The assessment of teacher perceptions of gifted children's social competence has been achieved by several measures including psychological scales, rating scales, and behavior checklists (Robinson & Noble, 1991). In general, gifted children have been perceived by their teachers as experiencing average or superior psychosocial adjustment (Janos & Robinson, 1985).

The majority of the studies on teachers' perceptions of gifted children are not specific to observable social skills of intellectually gifted children, but rather general conceptions of social giftedness. One such study was conducted by Guskin, Peng, and Majd-Jabbari (1988). These researchers were intrigued by prospective and experienced teachers' conceptions of multiple kinds of giftedness.

Initially, teachers were asked to generate areas of ability in which children may be talented, and create descriptions which may characterize these students. Subsequently, the subjects received a booklet, generated by the initial brainstorming by teachers, which listed several different areas in which a child may be outstanding. Instructions were given to sort the areas into similar groups. The results indicated that these teachers perceived five different clusters of possible giftedness: analytic or cognitive ability, social-personality skills, creative arts, verbal ability, and motor skills. The broad category of social-personality skills which emerged included social skills, motivation, and independence.

The experience of teaching did not seem to affect the teachers' perceptions of different forms of giftedness. These findings suggest that conceptions of giftedness are learned prior to actual teaching experience, and these conceptions are relatively stable over time.

General conceptions of social giftedness, although interesting from a theoretical standpoint, may or may not impact on the way teachers interact with gifted children. Critical for this research is the query of how teachers perceive the social skills of intellectually gifted children.

An early study by Hitchfield (1973) has been one of the few longitudinal reports on gifted children and their development. She studied a group of approximately 250 gifted children over a period of 11 years. Using the Bristol Social Maturity Scales, teachers rated the gifted children as significantly more stable and displaying a lower incidence of social maladjustment.

Consistent with Hitchfield's findings, in a more recent study (Barnett & Fiscella, 1985) teachers rated gifted children as more developmentally advanced than their same-age peers in physical, *social*, and cognitive play styles. The gifted children were perceived to demonstrate more 'prosocial' play. In this study, 'prosocial' play was described in general terms as interactive play with fellow classmates. Specific

social skills used in the 'prosocial' play were not identified. Therefore the exact behaviors which the gifted children demonstrated were not described in the study.

Bourque and Li (1987) conducted a focused investigation on the social adjustment of intellectually gifted children in segregated versus regular-classroom settings. Harter's (1985) Teacher's Rating of Child's Actual Competence was used as the measure of the teacher's perception of the child's social competence. In this study, social competence was reflected in interpersonal competence with peers. The findings suggest that the educational setting does not appear to have any differential impact on the intellectually gifted children's social adjustment as rated by teachers (Bourque & Li, 1987). Although the results indicate a generally positive social emotional adjustment for these gifted children irrespective of setting, the authors suggest that the difficulties of rejected or neglected students may not have been uncovered.

The above studies lend further support to Janos and Robinson's (1985) conclusion which is that gifted children have generally been perceived by their teachers as being socially superior to their average ability peers. The studies reviewed here have focused on a more general notion of social 'adjustment'. References to the specific social skills of gifted children are rare. A more valid and useful exploration would be teachers reflecting on the social skills of gifted children within the contexts of their own classrooms.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ABILITY

Guskin, Peng and Simon (1992) focused closely on teachers' expectancies of hypothetical students based on patterns of giftedness and demographic

characteristics. The authors argued that teachers' beliefs and expectancies influence the identification of and programming for gifted children. The focus of their study was to determine whether the earlier identified categories (Guskin, Peng, & Majd-Jabbari, 1988) inform decisions teachers make about individual pupils.

Prospective and experienced teachers comprised the sample. The teachers were asked to make several judgments in response to written scenarios of students with varying backgrounds. The responses included 25 trait ratings, recommendations for programming and resources, and predictions of future success. Consistent with the earlier research, these findings found that teachers' differential perceptions correlated with the cognitive ability patterns.

This study suffers from methodological limitations relating to threats to ecological external validity. Although concrete examples of 'hypothetical' children were provided, threats to external validity still exist. The authors point out that "in the real world of large classes and constraints upon the content and methods of instruction teachers may have little opportunity to observe or otherwise learn about the diverse accomplishments and talents of their students" (Guskin et.al, 1992, p.32). To obtain a more valid measure of how teachers perceive gifted children, teachers need to reflect on gifted children within the contexts of their own classrooms.

The study also suffers from threats to population external validity. That is, the population from which the sample was drawn, the accessible population, differs in some way from the target population, the ideal group to which the researcher would like to apply the findings. This study draws from a sample pool of prospective and experienced teachers. The experienced teachers in both studies were graduate students who were not teaching at the time of the study, but had varying degrees of previous teaching experience. The prospective teachers were students who were

in the process of training to be teachers. This sample pool may differ significantly from teachers who are teaching in classrooms at present. This difference between the accessible population and a more general population of teachers introduces another threat to external validity.

To address these methodological concerns, further research needs to examine teachers' natural perceptions of their own gifted students who show differing social patterns. Specifically, teachers need to reflect upon giftedness within the context of their own classrooms and their own students. By exploring the perceptions of practicing teachers, the threats to population external validity could be minimized. Situating the research within the context of real classrooms would improve ecological external validity.

INFLUENCE OF BEHAVIOR PERCEPTIONS ON TEACHERS' JUDGMENTS OF ACADEMIC ABILITY

Recently, educational researchers have become intrigued by the relationship between teacher perceptions of behavior and teacher perceptions of academic ability. It has been suggested that how teachers interpret the social behaviors of children may affect the ratings of children's academic skills (Wentzel, 1991). If this relationship exists, there are significant implications for children. That is, teachers' ratings of children's academic ability may be influenced by children's intellectual and *social* performances, rather than an academic evaluation based purely on perceptions of cognitive abilities.

Support for the relationship between teacher perceptions of social behaviors and perceptions of academic achievement comes from Czeschlik and Detlef (1989). The effects of three temperament factors on teacher's ratings of intellectual abilities

were explored. The sample included 40 gifted and 40 non-gifted elementary-aged children. The factors related to temperament were task orientation, personal-social flexibility, and reactivity. Teachers were asked to rate the children on the Teacher Temperament Questionnaire, as well as rate the children's intellectual and academic abilities.

Reactivity did not seem to influence the teacher's ratings, but both the factors of personal-social flexibility and task orientation related to the teachers' ratings. Personal-social flexibility seemed to have an effect only on the ratings of academic achievement. The largest effects were observed in relation to the factor task orientation. The non-gifted children who were rated high on task orientation received better ratings for both academic and intellectual abilities than did the gifted children who scored low on task orientation. This result has direct implications for gifted children, particularly those who are not perceived as being able to concentrate for long periods of time on an assigned classroom task. That is, teachers underestimated the academic achievement of gifted children, based on their behavioral perceptions, rather than the children's academic or intellectual abilities.

The Czeschlik and Detlef study (1989) suggests that there are differences between the measures of academic achievement and intellectual or scholastic abilities. Their findings indicate that teachers' perception of behavior relate more closely to their ratings of academic achievement than to ratings of intellectual ability. When teachers rated academic achievement they considered both academic and social abilities, rather than basing their perceptions on purely academic skills. However, when asked to evaluate intellectual abilities, it seems the teachers made their judgments solely based on the cognitive or scholastic competencies of children. Exactly how perceptions of academic achievement and intellectual ability related was not discussed by the authors.

The behavioral perceptions may be considered threats to the validity of scholastic judgments by teachers. If the aim of instruction includes "noncognitive outcomes as well as scholastic achievement, then the reflection of behavior perceptions in academic grades must be considered relevant" (Bennett, Gottesman, Rock, & Cerullo, 1993, p.347). However, when the perceptions of social behaviors, such as compliance and conformity, affect the academic ratings, the validity of teachers' ratings is threatened.

Czeschlik and Detlef (1989) suggest that further research into teacher perceptions of behaviors may provide a better understanding of teacher ratings of academic achievement and intellectual abilities. Continued exploration within the gifted population seems warranted considering the far reaching ramifications of teacher perceptions on this group of children.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ABILITY AND ACADEMIC ABILITY

Wentzel (1991) has explored the relation between social responsibility and academic achievement. In her review of the literature, she defines social responsibility as "adherence to social rules and expectations" (Wentzel, 1991, p.1). These social rules reflect the social and cultural norms, and when applied to the classroom, mean the rules and norms that define the student role. In a classroom, students are expected to conform to those rules which help promote cooperation and respect amongst students and teachers.

The social-behavioral competencies preferred by teachers have been extensively investigated within the population of children with developmental disabilities. The social behaviors which are highly valued by teachers are those

that "reflect (a) compliance with requests, instructions and directions; (b) facilitate task engagement and completion; (c) demonstrate cooperation; and (d) contribute to positive social exchanges with the dominant or controlling adult" (Williams, Walker, Holmes, Todis, & Fabre', 1989, p. 19). The important social skills, or socially responsible behaviors, have yet to be deduced within the gifted population, although these behaviors might be valued across the spectrum of abilities. Identifying social skills critical for success in the classroom will shed light on the perceptions of social and academic abilities by teachers.

Wentzel proposed that behaving in a socially responsible manner directly contributes to learning and academic achievement, and that the goals of social responsibility and academic achievement are not independent, but *interdependent* factors. Socially responsible behavior has been correlated with academic achievement in a variety of studies, but the way in which socially responsible behavior may promote, or have a *causal* effect, on academic achievement remains unclear.

Wentzel suggests that one factor which promotes academic achievement relates to interpersonal interactions with peers and teachers. Socially responsible behaviors in the classroom can facilitate positive interactions among students, and between students and teachers. Wentzel claims that teachers' preference for students is based primarily on students' socially responsible behavior. When students follow classroom rules, teachers can focus more closely on teaching rather than classroom management. Therefore, teachers are "more appreciative and positive toward students who were cooperative and persistent (i.e. socially responsible) than students who were less responsible but displayed high levels of creativity and achievement" (Wentzel, 1991, p.9).

This finding has considerable impact upon the population of gifted children in elementary classrooms. Considering that many gifted children may display high

levels of creativity and achievement, teachers may perceive these gifted children as socially irresponsible. Wentzel's work suggests that students who are perceived as socially irresponsible are treated more negatively and achieve lower grades.

This research suggests there are particular social skills which are highly valued in the classroom and perceptions of these important social skills are related to perceptions of academic skills. Further understanding of gifted children will be accomplished by an examination of the social skills critical for classroom success and an investigation of how teacher perceptions of important social skills and academic abilities are related.

Research Directions and Formulation of Research Questions

As a group, it appears that gifted children, particularly during the preadolescent years, are socially well-adjusted, as indicated by their teachers. However, perceptions of *specific* social skills seem to be scarce, while much more global measures of social 'adjustment' have been used to draw conclusions. The present review of literature on teacher perceptions of gifted children's social skills and academic competencies is limited by the research attempts in this area. Janos and Robinson (1985) concur, and highlight the "glaring absence of reports from teachers, who can presumably make reasonable judgments in a way that parents cannot "(Janos & Robinson, 1985, p.155). The reviewed literature also suggests the importance of understanding the relationship between teacher perceptions of

social skills and academic competencies. Research questions which emerge from this review are:

- How do teachers perceive and evaluate the importance of social skills and academic abilities of gifted children?
- Is there a significant positive relationship between teacher perceptions of social ability and academic ability?
- Are there differences in the way teachers rate academic competence and scholastic competence?

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN GIFTED CHILDREN

RATIONALE FOR INVESTIGATING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Parent perceptions and behavioral expectations of gifted children often guide parent-child interactions. It has been suggested that when there is a mismatch between parental beliefs and their children's abilities (i.e. intellectual or social), the quality of home experiences is negatively affected (Louis & Lewis, 1992).

Discrepancy between the intellectual and social-emotional development of a gifted child can create stress for both parent and child (Colangelo & Dettman, 1983). In order to better understand the parent-child dynamics, investigation of parental

perceptions is a valuable avenue for research. Exploring how parents perceive the social skills of their intellectually gifted children is one focus of the current study.

Examining parent perceptions is also valuable in order to make comparisons with teachers' perceptions. Obtaining a different point of view is critical in developing a complete understanding of the social behaviors of gifted children at home and at school. When both the teacher and parent perspectives have been traditionally assessed, the usual practice has been to collapse their perceptions to form one unified adult perspective. By assuming that teachers and parents value and perceive similar social skills, the social expectancies unique to the contexts are not uncovered. It is essential to investigate parent perceptions *in relation to* teacher perceptions as separate and distinct perspectives.

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED CHILDRENS' SOCIAL SKILLS

Parent perceptions have been assessed most frequently by rating scales, questionnaires, and interviews. Robinson and Noble (1991) concluded that, overall, parents perceived their gifted children as displaying age-appropriate social skills, and the social maturity reported by teachers is not recognized as such by parents. The reason for parents' differing perceptions is unclear.

Lupowski (1989) conducted one of the few observational studies of "social behaviors of gifted and typical preschool children in laboratory school programs" (Lupowski, 1989, p.124). In this study, the social behaviors of gifted and non-gifted preschool children were compared using the Social Development Scale and a social observation instrument. This instrument, as developed by the researcher, divided observed social behaviors into three categories; child is *alone*, child is *with others*, and child is engaged in *cooperative play*.

According to Lupowski, cooperative play was defined as when "the child plays in an organized group making a product, striving to attain a competitive goal, dramatizing a situation, or playing a formal game" (Lupowski, 1989, p.125). This general definition neglects to record and describe instances of specific social skills demonstrated by the gifted preschoolers.

When parent responses to questionnaires and researchers' observations were compared, a distinct pattern emerged. Parents of gifted and non-gifted preschoolers rated their children about the same in terms of social behaviors. However, the analyses of the videotaped observations revealed a difference between the two groups in terms of play observed. That is, the gifted children demonstrated cooperative play more frequently than did their non-gifted peers.

Cautious interpretation and generalization of these findings are necessary. Although the level of social behavior was *perceived* differently by the parents and observers, this does not necessarily translate into the child's *actual* social behaviors being different. The author also points out that the two instruments may be measuring different aspects of the construct of social skills. Nevertheless, the finding that the parents consistently 'underestimated' the positive social behavior of their gifted children relates to how parents perceive social behaviors.

This pattern of parental underestimation of the actual social skills of their gifted children has been replicated by other researchers. Robinson, Dale, and Landesman (1991), as cited in Robinson and Noble (1991), asked parents to rate their linguistically advanced preschoolers on the Revised Vineland Social Maturity Scale. The toddlers were rated significantly higher on the Communication Scale, but not in the domains of socialization or self-help.

Both this research and the Lupowski work have drawn from a sample of young gifted children. Perhaps the well-developed social skills of gifted children do not emerge until the children are elementary-aged. However, with an older sample of

children, ages 8 to 10, similar results were obtained. The parental responses to a questionnaire of the same scale also indicated average socialization and self-help skills for their gifted children (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, unpublished paper), as cited in Janos and Robinson (1985).

This trend is puzzling considering the consistent findings of the superior social ability demonstrated by gifted children (Janos & Robinson, 1985). Several explanations of the discrepancy between teacher and parent perceptions are possible. Whether parents fail to perceive the social maturity of their children or whether the children do not demonstrate superior social skills is not clear. These contradictory findings may also reflect the parental frame of reference. Since the parents are most familiar with their gifted children, the behaviors may be interpreted as 'average'. It may also be that parents value behaviors other than those on the scales used.

Some contradictory information comes from Douhitt (1991). She compared specific behaviors in a naturalistic setting. In this attempt to identify social skills, the author chose the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (V.A.B.S.) to compare the 'adaptive behavior' of gifted and non-gifted children. The construct of 'adaptive behaviors' refers to incidents demonstrating personal independence and social responsibility. The 'adaptive behavior' scale is comprised of four sub-domains; communications, social skills, motor skills and daily living skills. The primary caregiver, usually the child's mother, completed the VABS. The results indicated significant differences between the gifted and non-gifted children along three of the four dimensions, communications, social skills, and daily living skills. These results seem to contradict the earlier cited studies.

In Douhitt's work, the parents did perceive their gifted children as having superior social skills. It is not clear why these results differed from the previously

discussed work; however, several methodological issues may have affected the results.

In Douhitt's sample, children between the ages of 2 and 16 years, with a mean age of 6, were included. No attempt was made to investigate the relationship of age to the adaptive behaviors, so developmental changes that would have occurred were not discussed. Also, the distinction between subjects who were gifted and non-gifted was very minor. The non-gifted group had IQs of 96 to 131, while the gifted group had IQs of 132 to 164. Restricting the non-gifted sample to IQ's between 96 and 115 and the gifted sample to IQs of 132 or higher would have produced a much purer sample.

The criticisms of Douhitt's sample urge cautious interpretation of these results. Clearly a sample of similarly high IQ, elementary-aged children is needed to draw any concrete conclusions for this population of children.

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTION

The literature on parent perceptions is steeped with contradictions. A general trend of parents perceiving their gifted children as socially 'average' seems to have emerged. However, there is some evidence that parents rate their gifted children as more socially competent than non-gifted children. Developing an understanding of how parents perceive their gifted children may shed light on parent-child interactions and provide a valuable reference point for comparison with teacher perceptions. One question which emerges from this literature is:

- How do parents perceive and evaluate the importance of social skills as demonstrated by gifted children?

CONVERGING PERCEPTIONS BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS

RATIONALE FOR INVESTIGATING CONGRUENCE OF TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS

Children are expected to demonstrate social skills across a broad range of social environments, and within relationships with situation-specific people. Patterns of interactions between child and parent, or child and teacher, frequently differ significantly. The behavioral expectations for gifted children also may vary depending on the situation. The way in which teachers and parents perceive gifted children's behaviors forms the contextual expectancies of each environment.

Several researchers have attempted to tap the teacher and parent perceptions of children, yet few have closely examined the perceptions of gifted children. Of these few, only a handful (Robinson & Noble, 1991; Schneider, 1987) have assessed *both* the parent and teacher ratings. However, no studies could be located which compared these adult perceptions of gifted children.

The following discussion describes research which compares teacher and parent perceptions of intellectually 'average' children. These studies will be analyzed to provide an understanding of the methods used to access this information. As none of the following studies included a substantial sample of gifted children, cautious generalization of the findings is necessary. As well, the influence of different settings on the parent and teacher ratings of social skills will be addressed.

COMPARISON OF TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS

Van Aken and van Lieshout (1991) investigated the agreement and stability of child-descriptions by teachers and mothers. These authors proposed that the degree of agreement between referent persons concerning the child's behavior may be related to expectancies of behavior in different environments. They suggest that higher levels of agreement will correlate with more consistency in the child's behavior across different environments and over time. One of their main hypotheses was that the consistency of child-descriptions would be causally related to peer competence.

A longitudinal model was used in the study to assess the stability (consistency of descriptions over a period of time) and consensus (agreement in child-descriptions between pairs of referent persons) (van Aken & van Lieshout, 1991). For the purpose of applying this knowledge to the current research, only the peer competence descriptors are relevant. Two indices of peer competence were considered; the acceptance and rejection by classmates. The California Child Q-sort was used to tap into the child-descriptions. This measurement consists of 100 statements about a child's behavior; for example, prefers nonverbal communication; is persistent; tends to go to pieces under stress, etc. The teachers and mothers sorted these statements into 9 categories ranging from least to most characteristic for the child. When the children were 7, 10, and 12, their teachers and parents were given the Q-sort descriptions to determine the degree of stability and consensus between perceptions.

The findings provide strong support for stability between consistency of child-descriptions and consensus between referents. The agreement between teachers and parents in different situation contexts remained essentially the same over a span of several years. A significant relationship was found between consensus and peer competence. That is, *the higher the agreement and stability of child-descriptions, the more competent the children were in their peer relations*. The

authors conclude that the development of social competence seems to be influenced by consistency and, furthermore, the "development of competence should incorporate, not only the content of social support as provided by specific sources, but also the consistency of ideas among various sources of support to which the child is exposed" (van Aken & van Lieshout, 1991, p.97).

These results suggest that teachers and parents perceived children's behavior quite similarly. Not only was there consensus between referents, there appears to be stability over time. One can interpret this finding as indicating a consistency in the child's behavior across environments. The social behavior appears to be free of situational influences, or at least, referent influences.

However, the *importance* of these behaviors in the eyes of teachers and parents was not measured. Although the child may be behaving in a similar manner, perhaps the value of these behaviors is interpreted differently by teachers and parents. For example, a child may be rated as 'persistent' by both her teacher and her mother, but in the classroom this behavior may be interpreted as counter-productive and a waste of time, while at home the same behavior may be viewed as important and admirable. Although the Q-sort technique was effective in assessing the *kinds* of behaviors demonstrated by the child, the *value* of these behaviors in the classroom and in the home was not measured.

In addition, the majority of the children in this study were of average intelligence, so generalizing to a gifted population is inappropriate. Perhaps this pattern of results is limited to children not identified as gifted, and the perceptions and behaviors of gifted children are dependent upon context. To extend these findings to a gifted population, a sample of highly intelligent children is required.

In order to address the issue of social validity, a different measurement tool is necessary. How teachers and parents interpret and value social skills was the focus of the following study. Powless and Elliott (1993) looked at samples of white

and native American preschoolers in order to explore the impact of implicit cultural values on the perceptions of children's' behaviors. Assessment of both the frequency and importance of social skills as rated by teachers and parents was completed. These authors hoped to provide a better understanding of cross-cultural expectations for children's behavior.

The Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) for teachers and parents was completed by native and white referent persons. Teachers of native preschoolers and teachers of white preschoolers rated the frequency and importance of specific prosocial behaviors. Parents of native preschoolers and parents of white preschoolers also rated frequency and importance of social skills. The analyses focused on the differences corresponding to race or culture.

The results indicated that native children exhibit significantly fewer social skills as rated by teachers and their parents. Interestingly, parents of native children rated the importance of the particular social skills differently than parents of white children. The authors conclude that parents and teachers of native preschoolers value different social behaviors than those associated with white children and suggest that "cultural similarity of raters may influence the degree of interrater agreement" (Powless & Elliott, 1993, p.304).

SETTING INFLUENCE ON INTERRATER AGREEMENT

Social skills, as conceptualized in the current study, are those "behaviors which, within *given situations* (italics added), maximize the probability of securing and maintaining reinforcement and/or decreasing the likelihood of punishment or extinction contingent upon one's social behavior" (Gresham & Reschly, 1986, p. 4).

It is important to recognize the influence of the *given situations* on the perception of social skills by informants such as teachers and parents. The influence of setting differences on the perception of social skills by different adults has not been investigated within the gifted child population.

Achenbach, McConaughy, and Howell (1987) recognized the importance of determining the degree of consistency between different informants' reports of childrens' behaviors. In an extensive review, these authors completed a meta-analysis of over one hundred studies on the reports of the behavioral and emotional problems of children from ages 2 to 19 years. Teachers, parents, observers, peers and the subjects themselves comprised the group of informants. Although the gifted population was not the focus of the review, the issues raised were relevant to the cross-informant aspect of the current study.

Questions of situational specificity are particularly crucial when investigating the social behaviors of children. Complete assessment of a child's social skills involves both the home and school situations, thereby introducing the need for several informants. Low correlations between cross-informants has typically been interpreted as one or both informants being biased or unreliable. However this "neglects the possibility that different informants validly contribute different information...(and) may indicate that the target variables differ from one situation to another, rather than that the informants' reports are invalid or unreliable" (Achenbach et. al, 1987, p.213). After comparing the correlations of over 100 studies, the results indicated that the parents' and teachers' reports differed significantly with a mean Pearson r of .28.

One study that has explored the effects of multiple informants on perceived social skills has included a sample of children identified as mildly handicapped (Gresham & Reschly, 1986). Although the gifted population is not represented in

their sample, the study exemplifies how one might explore the effects of settings on perceived social skills.

One of the research questions addressed by Gresham and Reschly concerns the relationship between social skills measured by parents and teachers. The two measures of social skills used were the Social Behavior Assessment-Teacher Version (SBA-T) and the Social Behavior Assessment-Parent Version (SBA-P). The SBA-T and SBA-P were designed to assess the social skills of children in school and home environments respectively. The results indicated a moderate correlation ($r=.40$) between the measures of SBA-T and SBA-P (Gresham & Reschly, 1986).

The authors explained the moderate correlation by highlighting the role of setting factors in the measurement of social competence. Given the setting differences and social behavior demands of home and school, low agreement between teacher and parent ratings of social skills should be expected. The authors conclude that "social skills do not represent a general response disposition or trait, but rather...are determined by a variety of factors pertaining to how behaviors are assessed and the conditions under which assessment takes place (i.e. setting factors)" (Gresham & Reschly, 1986, p. 19).

These conclusions inform the current investigation. Both the method of assessment and the particular settings may have some effect upon the agreement or independence of teacher and parent ratings of social skills. Understanding the measurement instruments and particular setting influences is critical in the assessment of perceived social skills.

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Exploring the agreement or independence of parent and teacher perceptions of gifted children's social skills may provide some insight into the social complexities of gifted children. There appears to be a research need as no studies have focused investigation on comparing adult perceptions of gifted children's social behaviors. Understanding the social complexities of gifted children will help develop an appreciation of the influence of settings on referents' judgments. The following research questions emerged:

- Are there differences in the way parents and teachers perceive the social skills of gifted children? If so, how do their perceptions differ?
- Are there differences in the way parents and teachers evaluate the importance of social skills? If so, how do their evaluations differ?

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWO

In Chapter Two, the literature relating to teacher perceptions of the social and academic skills of gifted children was reviewed. A discussion of parent perceptions and evaluations of the social skills demonstrated by gifted children was also included in order to provide a framework for comparing perceptions of gifted children. From this discussion it was deduced that there is a need for further research in this area. Particularly apparent is the need to explore the differences between teacher and parent perceptions of intellectually gifted children. Several research questions emerged from this review of the literature and are summarized below.

FORMAL STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that will be addressed in the current study are:

- ◆ How do teachers perceive the social abilities and academic abilities of gifted children? How do teachers evaluate the importance of specific social skills?
- ◆ Is there a significant positive relationship between teacher perceptions of social ability and academic ability?
- ◆ Are there differences in the way teachers rate academic competence and scholastic competence?
- ◆ How do parents perceive the social skills of gifted children? How do parents evaluate the importance of specific social skills?
- ◆ Are there differences in the way parents and teachers perceive the social skills of gifted children? If so, how do their perceptions differ? How do teacher and parent perceptions of gifted children differ from teacher and parent perceptions of a normative sample of children (i.e. children of 'average' intellectual ability)?
- ◆ Are there differences in the way parents and teachers evaluate the importance of social skills? If so, how do their evaluations differ?

In Chapter 3, a description of the methods used to investigate the research questions is provided.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER THREE

The current study addressed the following research objectives:

- to provide an understanding of how teachers perceive social skills and academic skills and how they evaluate the importance of specific social skills
- to explore the relationship between teacher perceptions of social ability and academic ability
- to explore the relationship between teacher perceptions of academic competence and scholastic competence
- to provide an understanding of how parents perceive the social skills of gifted children and evaluate the importance of specific social skills
- to investigate the differences between parent and teacher perceptions and evaluations of gifted childrens' social skills
- to compare the adult perceptions of social skills between gifted children and a normative sample of children

As the study is exploratory in nature there are no formal hypotheses stated.

The research methodology of the study is described in the following three part discussion. Part one includes details about the population and sample of the subjects. Part two discusses the quantitative measures and the testing procedures. In part three, the design of the study is explained.

PART ONE

Population

The target population was preadolescent gifted students attending schools in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, including Vancouver. The accessible population was children who were voluntarily brought to the Clinic on Ability and Development in the Psychoeducational Research and Training Centre at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia. At the Clinic on Ability and Development, data continues to be collected over a period of several years. Data for this research were drawn from a larger project designed to examine the intellectual and social development of gifted children.

Sample

The total sample size included in this study was 27. The students ranged in age from 6 years 3 months to 12 years 7 months, with a mean age of 9 years 9 months. The sample included 10 girls and 17 boys who all spoke English fluently. With regard to ethnicity, 14 of the participants were Caucasian, 9 of the participants were Asian, and 4 participants were from other minority groups. The students were attending schools in private, public and parochial settings. Each child was receiving some special educational support for being intellectually gifted. The socio-economic level of the sample was middle- to upper-middle class.

Preadolescent children were the focus of the study in order to maintain consistency with the population of children in the literature reviewed. Elementary-aged children are still greatly affected by the primary adults in their lives, primarily their parents and teachers.

Part Two

Four quantitative measures are described in this section. The quantitative measures include the measurement of IQ, measurement of academic achievement, and two measures of perceived social skills.

Quantitative Measures

Measurement of IQ

The subject's intellectual ability was measured by either the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III) or the Stanford-Binet Fourth Edition (SB-IV). Approximately one-half of the subjects were assessed with the WISC-III, while the other half were assessed using the Stanford-Binet-Fourth Edition (SB-IV).

The WISC-III is a recently revised test of general cognitive ability. Children's performance across a variety of tasks is compared with the performance of other children their age. Each child's performance is interpreted in terms of Full Scale, Verbal Scale, and Performance Scale scores. To be included in the current sample, the children had to obtain a full scale score of 125 or more. The descriptive statistics for the WISC-III are detailed in Table 1.

The Stanford-Binet is similar to the WISC-III, in that it also is a test of general cognitive ability. Children perform a variety of tasks and their performance is

compared with other same age children. Each child's performance is interpreted in terms of a composite score, and scores for verbal reasoning, abstract verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and short term memory. Only children who obtained a composite score of 125 or more were included in the sample. The descriptive statistics for the SBIV are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics for IQ Measurements

	Means (SD)
<u>WISC-III</u>	
Full Scale	130.29 (3.97)
Verbal Scale	130.93 (5.58)
Performance Scale	124.57 (7.70)
<u>SBIV (n=13)</u>	
Composite	135.46 (10.92)
Verbal Reasoning	123.92 (11.87)
Abstract Verbal Reasoning	132.85 (10.16)
Quantitative Reasoning	139.46 (13.61)
Short Term Memory	124.38 (9.80)

Measurement of Academic Achievement

The instruments used to measure academic achievement were the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised (WJ-R): Tests of Achievement-Standard Battery and the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement. Twenty-two of the subjects were assessed on the WJ-R, while five of the subjects were assessed on the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement.

The WJ-R is a recently revised (1989) battery of academic achievement tests. These tests measure various aspects of scholastic achievement in the domains of reading, mathematics, written language, broad knowledge and basic academic skills. The descriptive statistics for the WJ-R are shown in Table 2.

The Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement is similar to the WJ-R as it measures children's academic achievement. For the purposes of the current study, only the battery composite, reading composite and math composite scores are relevant. The descriptive statistics for the Kaufman Battery are found in Table 2.

Table 2:
Descriptive Statistics for Academic Achievement

	Means (SD)
<u>WJ-R (n=22)</u>	
Broad Reading	133.86 (18.29)
Broad Mathematics	138.82 (17.16)
Broad Written Language	123.59 (16.82)
Broad Knowledge	123.77 (10.77)
Academic Skills	131.68 (19.71)
<u>Kaufman (n=5)</u>	
Composite	134.80 (7.01)
Reading Composite	119.80 (12.19)
Math Composite	138.60 (8.44)

Measurement of Perceived Social Skills

Description of Rating Scales

A. Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990)

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was developed to provide an assessment of childrens' social behaviors and assist in the development of appropriate interventions for children with social difficulties. This measurement tool differs from other behavior rating scales for several reasons.

Important to the current research are the following features which make the SSRS an appropriate and effective assessment tool: emphasis on positive behaviors, inclusion of academic competence rating, compilation of normative data, multi-rater approach, and inclusion of importance rating scale (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

The items used on the social skills domain assess common core behaviors from the subdomains of Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-control. The Cooperation scale includes behaviors such as complying with rules and directions. The Assertion scale includes behaviors like responding to the actions of others. On the Self-Control scale the behaviors relate to those that emerge in conflict situations. Sample items from both parent and teacher forms are included in Appendix A.

The authors developed the items on the SSRS based on empirical research on children's social competence. The initial pool of 100 items from the Teacher Ratings of Social Skills (TROSS) were used for a tryout of the SSRS and subsequently reduced to 30 items for teachers and 38 items for parents.

The SSRS was standardized on a sample of 4,170 children, which produced 1,027 parent ratings and 259 teacher ratings. Of this group, a 'yoked' sample of teachers, parents and students all rated the student's social skills. The norms were developed for groups defined by sex and handicap status. Age did not appear to influence the SSRS scores in a consistent way so norms delineated by age were not developed. Although children of different cognitive abilities, such as learning disabled children and mildly mentally retarded children, were included in the sample, children who were intellectually gifted were not included.

The authors used several methods to estimate the reliability of the SSRS. The internal consistency estimates for elementary children on the teacher form were all between .85 and .96, and on the parent form ranged from .74 to .88. Test-retest reliability produced coefficients on the social skills subscales for teachers ranging from .75 to .88 and from .77 to .84 for parents.

Criterion validity of the teacher form was established by comparing the SSRS to the Social Behavior Assessment (SBA), Child-Behavior Checklist-Teacher Report Form (CBCL-TRF), and the Harter Teacher Rating Scale (TRS). The SSRS and SBA produced moderate to high correlations suggesting that these scales are measuring similar constructs. The SSRS problem behaviors were highly correlated to the CBCL-TRF. Moderate to high correlations were found between the SSRS teacher form and the Harter total score. The authors concluded that students rated as well-adjusted on the Harter TRS tend to have well-developed social skills, higher academic competence, and relatively fewer problem behaviors, as measured by the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

To assess the criterion validity on the Parent form of the SSRS, the CBCL was compared to the SSRS-P. The social competence scale on the CBCL contains items pertaining to the child's involvement in various activities as well as items about the child's ability to get along with others. The SSRS-P social skills scale correlates .58 with the social competence scale on the CBCL.

Of primary interest to this research are the teacher and parent frequency ratings of social skills, parent and teacher ratings of the importance of these social skills and the teachers' ratings of academic competence. The following sections provide more detailed information about both the teacher and parent rating scales.

SSRS-Teacher's Version

The SSRS-T (teacher's version) consists of 30 items divided into measures of social skills and measures of problem behaviors. To maintain consistency with the literature reviewed, only the social skill items are included in this study. Within the domain of social skills, there are three subscales of prosocial behaviors:

cooperation, assertion, and self-control. The third component of the SSRS-T measures the teacher's perception of the child's academic competence.

Teachers rate the frequency of a behavior as often true (2), sometimes true (1), or never true(0). Teachers also rate how critical this behavior is for success in their classroom. That is, if the behavior is critical for success in the classroom, important for success in the classroom or unimportant for success in the classroom, the rating will be 2, 1, or 0 respectively. The importance ratings are included as an indication of the social validity of the behaviors within the educational setting.

Teachers also rate the academic competence of the children. On the SSRS, the Academic competence subscale consists of an evaluation of academic functioning and school-related behaviors. The items measure reading and math performance, general cognitive functioning, motivation, parental support and overall classroom behaviors. Ratings are on a 5-point scale (1=lowest 10%, 5=highest 10%).

SSRS-Parent's Version

The Parent's version (SSRS-P) is comprised of 30 items which measure the frequency and importance of prosocial behaviors. The social skills domain is subdivided into cooperation, assertion, self-control and responsibility. Parents also rate specific problem behaviors within the subscales of externalizing, internalizing, and hyperactivity. For the purposes of this study, only the parent ratings of cooperation, assertion and self-control and the corresponding importance ratings are included. The frequency of behaviors is rated in a similar manner as those from

the SSRS-T, while the importance of these behaviors is rated by referring to the home environment.

B. Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985)

Harter (1985) developed this scale from her earlier instrument, The Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982). Four samples were used to assess the psychometric properties of the revised measurement. These samples were drawn from lower middle class to upper middle class communities in Colorado. The internal reliabilities were estimated by Cronbach's Alpha for each of the six subscales. Only the subscales Scholastic Competence and Behavioral Conduct are relevant for the current research, so psychometric data on the remaining subscales are not included. The reliability for Scholastic Competence ranged from .80 to .85 and for Behavioral Conduct reliability ranged from .71 to .77.

The SPPC includes a range of possible scores from 1 to 4. From a normative sample, the means for each subscale of the SPPC centre around the value of 3.0. Specifically, the means for Scholastic Competence and Behavioral Conduct ranged from 2.61 to 2.95 and 2.75 to 3.32. Most of the standard deviations were between .50 and .85 suggesting much individual variation.

The Self-Perception Profile for Children is comprised of six subscales which include ratings of perceptions of competence in different domains. For the purposes of this study, only the subscales of scholastic competence and behavioral conduct are applicable. In the adults' rating scale, both of the subscales contain three items. Raters first decide which statement best describes the child, then the raters decide if their chosen statement is 'really like' or 'sort of like' the child. This structured alternative format is used to minimize socially desirable responses;

however this may not be as critical when measuring others' perceptions rather than self-perceptions. A sample of items from both of the subscales is appended (see Appendix B).

The behavioral conduct subscale essentially taps the perceived socially 'responsible' behaviors of the child. The scholastic competence subscale assesses the perceived competence or ability within the realm of scholastic performance.

For the children who were below age eight or third grade, a pictorial version of the scale was administered. The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence (Harter & Pike, 1984) was completed for 6 of the subjects. This scale is a downward extension of Harter's Perceived Competence scale. The scale is easy to administer and the pictorial format is well understood by young children.

For the purposes of the current research only the subscale of Cognitive Competence was included. This scale assesses the child's perceived cognitive abilities, such as word, letter, colour recognition, and the ability to read and write words. The Cognitive Competence subscale correlates with the Scholastic Competence scale of the SPPC version. With a normative sample, the average score is 2.5 with a standard deviation of .5, however in studies with gifted children the Cognitive Competence scores usually average 3.3 (Silverman, Chitwood, & Waters, 1986).

Harter has not yet incorporated a measure of behavioral conduct for the younger children, so no data were collected on this domain. The metric for both the SPPC and the Pictorial Scale is the same, with 1 being the lowest rating and 4 being the highest rating.

When teachers use either the SPPC or the Pictorial Scale, they are rating their perceptions of the *actual* behaviors of the child. Harter states that "other adults may rate the child's competence or adequacy, for example, counsellors, therapists, parents, etc." (Harter, 1985, p.12), and the identical items may be used. For the

current study, both teachers and parents used the same items to rate their perceptions of the child's actual behaviors.

Testing Procedures

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger assessment battery. The description of the testing procedures includes details about the entire battery of tests. Relevant procedures for the current research are the teacher and parent scale completion and assessment of the children's IQ and academic achievement.

Initially parents were sent an information package which included both the parent and teacher forms of the SSRS and the SPPC. Parents were asked to complete the scales and request completion of the forms by the child's teacher.

A trained graduate student tested the children individually, in the absence of the parents. During their first visit to the clinic, the children completed pre- and post-tests of perceptions of academic ability. The children had to estimate how well they learn as compared to other children their age. These pre- and post- tests were administered before and after the assessment of academic achievement. Their academic achievement was measured by the WJ-R or by the Kaufman Tests of Educational Achievement. This test was followed by a semi-structured interview with the child, then a test of working memory and central social structure.

During their second session, the children completed a pre- and post-test of their perception of intelligence. The children had to estimate how intelligent they thought they were as compared to other children their age. Between the pre- and post- tests, an assessment of cognitive ability was administered. Students were given the WISC-III or the SBIV. Following the IQ measure, the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985) or the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence

(1982) was completed. The final tests were the Scale of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Orientation in the Classroom and the SSRS (for children).

Each of the testing sessions extended for 2.5 to 3 hours. Due to the longitudinal nature of the larger study, the subjects were assessed during either the summers of 1992, 1993 or 1994. However, for this research, all relevant data for each child were collected at the same time. That is, if a child was assessed during the summer of 1993 only data from the 1993 session is included in this collection, rather than some combination of data from 1993 and 1994.

Once the assessment was completed, a working draft of the written report was shared with the parents by the supervising professors. At that time, any questions or concerns about the report were addressed. The final draft, with the appropriate revisions, was then sent to the parents.

Part Three

Design of Study:

The nature of this study is exploratory. The design has both comparative and correlational aspects. It is a comparative study because the perceptions and evaluations by teachers and parents are compared. The correlational component of the design involves the investigation of relationships, specifically, the relationships between perceived social ability and academic ability and perceived academic achievement and scholastic competence.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE

This chapter described the study's methodology including the sample, measurement instruments, design, and analyses. In Chapter four the results of the statistical analyses are presented.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter has been subdivided into three sections. In order to facilitate connection between the research questions and the results, each question has been reiterated followed by the statistical analyses for that particular question. The first section describes the research questions and analyses concerning the perceptions of social ability held by teachers and parents, differences between their perceptions and perceptions of nongifted children. The second section addresses the research questions concerning the evaluation of social skills by parents and teachers and the differences between their evaluations. The final section describes the results of investigation of the relationships between social ability and academic ability and the differences between the measures of both of these constructs.

An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) scores are already standardized; however the scores from the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) were transformed into standard form. Converting the SPPC scores made comparisons between the SSRS and SPPC feasible.

A: PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ABILITY

How do teachers perceive the social ability of gifted children?

How do parents perceive the social ability of gifted children?

The means and standard deviations for the Frequency ratings on the SSRS-P and SSRS-T are presented in Table 3. Visual representation of the Frequency

ratings by teachers and parents is provided in Figure 1. These data and the behavioral conduct data were used to address the research questions concerning the perception of social ability by parents and teachers.

**Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of
Social Skill Ratings by Parents and Teachers**

	Parents (n=26)	Teachers (n=24)
<u>SSRS</u>		
Cooperation	12.96 (2.82)	16.17 (4.05)
Assertion	15.92 (3.07)	11.54 (4.03)
Self-Control	13.50 (3.66)	12.83 (3.07)
Standard Score	104.38 (10.40)	99.92 (10.63)
<u>SPPC</u>		
Behavioral Conduct	3.46 (.60)	3.21 (.98)

Note. The raw scores for Cooperation, Assertion and Self-Control can be compared across subscales given that each subscale is composed of 10 items.

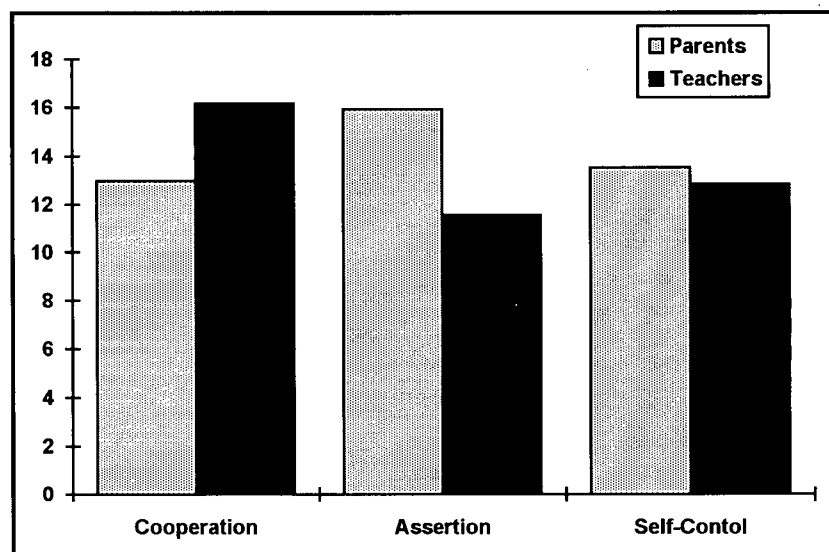
Within the frequency ratings on the SSRS, the social skills are rated with values of 0, 1, or 2. A score of 0 indicates the behavior is "never true" (i.e. never observed); a score of 1 indicates the behavior is "sometimes true" (i.e. sometimes observed); and a score of 2 indicates the behavior is "often true" (i.e. often observed). The mean scores, as listed in Table 3, represent the average for the 10 items within a subscale. To calculate the average rating *per item*, the mean scores need to be divided by 10 (number of items per subscale).

Overall, parents perceived their gifted children as demonstrating cooperation, assertion, and self-control skills in the 'sometimes true' to 'often true' range. That is, the average rating *per item* on the Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control scale was 1.30, 1.59 and 1.35 respectively. Cooperation and Self-Control skills were observed as ranging from 'sometimes true' to 'often true'. Assertion skills were observed in the same range but closer to the 'often true' extreme.

Overall, teachers perceived the children as demonstrating cooperative, assertive, and self-control skills in the 'sometimes true' to 'often true' range. The average rating *per item* for the Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control subscales was 1.62, 1.15 and 1.28. Therefore, cooperative social skills were closest to 'often true', while assertive and self-control skills were closest to 'sometimes true'.

On the behavioral conduct scale, the metric ranges from 1 to 4, with a low score reflecting poor behavioral conduct and a high score reflecting good behavioral conduct. The norm average range for behavioral conduct is 2.75 to 3.32. The mean teacher rating of 3.21 (.98) is an average score as compared to the norm. The mean parent rating of 3.46 (.60) is slightly above 'average' as compared to the norm. However, *both* the teacher and parent ratings fall between 3 and 4 which suggests that these adults are perceiving the children as demonstrating 'good' overall behavioral conduct.

Figure 1: Frequency Ratings by Parents and Teachers



Are there differences in the way parents and teachers perceive the social abilities of gifted children? If so, how do their perceptions differ?

For all comparisons, t-tests were performed. Overall, parents rated the gifted children as demonstrating social skills more often as compared to teacher ratings, $104.38 > 99.92$; however the difference between teacher and parent ratings was not significant, $t(48)=-1.50$, $p=.14$.

Teacher and parent ratings of Self-Control were not significantly different, $t(48)=-.65$, $p=.52$. Differences between teacher and parent ratings did emerge on two of the subscales from the SSRS. Teacher ratings of Cooperation were significantly higher than parent ratings of Cooperation, $t(48)=3.27$, $p=.02$. There

was also a significant difference between teacher and parent ratings of Assertion, $t(48)=-4.34$, $p<.00$ with parents rating assertion higher than teachers. Parents and teachers did not rate the behavioral conduct of the gifted children significantly differently, $t(32)=-.90$, $p=.38$.

How do teacher and parent perceptions of gifted children differ from teacher and parent perceptions of a normative sample of children?

The parent and teacher ratings on the SSRS were compared to the ratings of a normative sample as described in the test manual (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Interindividual, norm-referenced information may be obtained by interpreting the Scale and Subscale information. Raw score comparisons were made within each of the subscales. The percentile ranks for the mean Standard Scores were calculated as well.

To interpret the Subscale scores, the Subscale raw scores can be translated into Behavior Levels using the appropriate tables from the test manual (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The Behavior Levels are based on the performance of the SSRS standardization sample. According to Gresham and Elliott, "raw scores within one standard deviation above or below the standardization sample mean are considered to be in the *average* range...raw scores above one standard deviation are labeled *more*...(and) raw scores below one standard deviation are labeled *fewer*" (Gresham & Elliott, 1990, p.48).

Within the normative sample, the average ranges of teacher ratings of Cooperation, Assertion and Self-Control are 12-19, 9-17 and 11-19 respectively. In the present study, when teachers rated gifted children on the same scales, the mean ratings were 16.17 for Cooperation, 11.54 for Assertion and 12.83 for Self-Control. Each of these ratings falls within the *average* range. Therefore, teachers'

ratings of gifted children were similar to teachers' ratings of nongifted children within the normative sample.

Each standard score translates directly into a percentile rank. The teacher ratings in the current sample produced a Standard Score mean of 99.92. According to the normative data, a standard score of 99.92 translates to a percentile rank of 47. Therefore, overall, teachers rated the social skills of the gifted children *slightly* below average.

According to the normative data, parents of nongifted children rated the social skills of Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control as 10-16, 14-19, and 10-16, respectively. In the current research, parents' ratings of gifted children were 12.96 for Cooperation, 15.92 for Assertion, and 13.50 for Self-Control. Each of these ratings fell within the average range as described in the test manual.

The parents in the current sample rated the overall social skills of gifted children as 104.38. A mean standard score of 104.38 is equivalent to a percentile rank of 61. Therefore, the parents of gifted children rated their children's social skills as being *slightly* above average.

Gresham and Elliott recommend caution when interpreting differences in percentile rank, particularly near the centre of the distribution. As percentile ranks are unequal units, this can lead to errors in the interpretation of the difference between two percentile ranks. That is, seemingly large differences in percentile ranks near the centre of the distribution may correspond to relatively small differences in the actual standard scores. For example, with the present data, the parent and teacher standard score ratings, 99.92 and 104.38 respectively, differ only by approximately 4 units, while in percentile ranks, the difference is considerably larger (parents=47; teachers=61; difference=14 units).

B: EVALUATIONS OF SOCIAL SKILLS

How do teachers evaluate the importance of specific social skills?

How do parents evaluate the importance of specific social skills?

The means and standard deviations for the Importance ratings on the SSRS-P and SSRS-T are presented in Table 4. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the Importance ratings as indicated by parents and teachers.

**Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of
Parent and Teacher Ratings of Importance**

	<i>Parents (n=26)</i>	<i>Teachers (n=24)</i>
Cooperation	10.50 (2.28)	14.96 (2.94)
Assertion	11.69 (2.77)	11.71 (2.61)
Self-Control	12.88 (2.60)	13.63 (3.25)

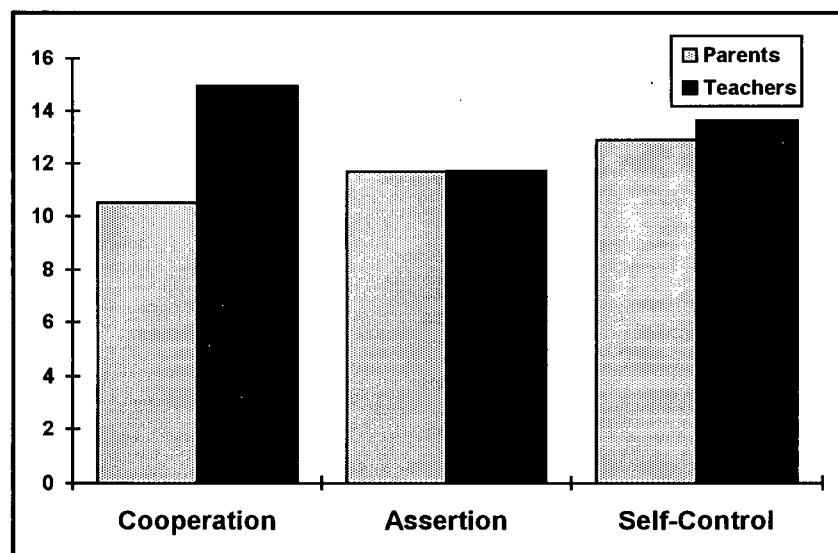
Within the Importance ratings on the SSRS, the social skills are rated as 0, 1 or 2. A score of 0 indicates the social skill is "unimportant for success"; a score of 1 indicates the social skill is "important for success"; and a score of 2 indicates the social skills is "critical for success". Similar to the Frequency ratings, to calculate the average rating *per item*, the mean scores need to be divided by 10.

Overall, parents rated the cooperative, assertive, and self-control skills as important to critical for success. The Cooperation skills average rating was 1.05 indicating that parents perceived these skills as 'important for success'. The

Assertion and Self-Control skills received ratings of 1.17 and 1.29, indicating that both these kinds of skills are important to critical for success.

Teachers rated the cooperative, assertive and self-control skills in the important to critical for success range. The cooperation skills received an average rating of 1.50, suggesting that these behaviors are mid-way between important to critical for success. The assertion and self-control skills were rated as 1.17 and 1.36, indicating that both these kinds of social skills are important to success in the classroom.

Figure 2: Importance Ratings by Parents and Teachers



Are there differences in the way parents and teachers evaluate the importance of social skills? If so, how do their evaluations differ?

To determine whether the evaluations were significantly different, t-tests were conducted for each subscale of the SSRS. There were no significant differences between the teacher and parent ratings of Assertion $t(48) = -.02$,

$p=.98$, or Self-Control, $t(48)=-.89$, $p=.38$. On the Cooperation subscale, teachers and parents did rate the importance of these social skills differently, $t(48)=-6.01$, $p=.00$. The teachers perceived the social skills reflecting Cooperation as critical for success in their classrooms. The parents perceived the Cooperation social skills to be important for success within the home environment.

When the highest ranked items by teachers and parents were compared, there were differences in the *kinds* of social skills which were highly valued. The 10 highest ranked social skills as rated by parents and teachers are described in Tables 5 and 6.

Note that three of the subjects completed the SSRS forms which are appropriate for secondary students. These secondary forms are conceptually similar to the elementary forms in that the social skills are sub-divided into the domains of cooperation, assertion, and self-control. The data from these three subjects were included in the overall ratings of importance for each of the subscales.

Since the secondary items are phrased slightly differently, these three subjects were omitted from the individual item analysis. Note that upon careful inspection of the 3 subjects' data, the particular items of highest value for parents and teachers did correspond with the items identified from the elementary form. However, due to the wording difference, not conceptual difference, these secondary items were omitted from Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Highly Valued Social Skills as Rated by Parents

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Subscale</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Item</u>
1	Self-Control	1.57	Avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble.
1	Assertion	1.57	Reports accidents to appropriate persons.
2	Assertion	1.48	Shows interest in a variety of things.
3	Self-Control	1.39	Politely refuses unreasonable requests from others.
4	Self-Control	1.30	Responds appropriately when hit or pushed by other children.
4	Cooperation	1.30	Congratulates family members on accomplishments.
4	Self-Control	1.30	Receives criticism well.
5	Self-Control	1.26	Speaks in an appropriate tone of voice at home
5	Self-Control	1.26	Controls temper when arguing with other children.
5	Self-Control	1.26	Ends disagreements with you calmly.
5	Self-Control	1.26	Controls temper in conflict situations with you
5	Assertion	1.26	Is self-confident in social situations such as parties or group outings.
5	Self-Control	1.26	Cooperates with family members without being asked to do so.

The three highest ranked items emerged from the assertion and self-control subscales. Cooperation social skills did not receive a high ranking by parents, appearing only once in the ten highest rankings.

Table 6: Highly Valued Social Skills as Rated by Teachers

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Subscale</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Item</u>
1	Cooperation	1.73	Follows your directions.
1	Cooperation	1.73	Attends to your instructions.
2	Cooperation	1.59	Uses free time wisely.
3	Cooperation	1.55	Finishes class assignments within time limits.
4	Self-Control	1.50	Cooperates with peers without prompting.
5	Self-Control	1.45	Controls temper in conflict situations with peers.
5	Cooperation	1.45	Produces correct schoolwork.
5	Self-Control	1.45	Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children.
6	Cooperation	1.41	Uses time appropriately while waiting for help.
6	Assertion	1.41	Appropriately tells you when he or she thinks you have treated him or her unfair
6	Cooperation	1.41	Ignores peer distractions when doing class work.
6	Cooperation	1.41	Easily makes transitions from one classroom activity to another.

The highest ranked social skills as rated by teachers emerged from the Cooperation subscale. Cooperation social skills and Self-Control social skills dominate the highest valued social skills as rated by teachers, while items from the Assertion scale appeared only once.

C: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL ABILITY AND ACADEMIC ABILITY

The means and standard deviations for the Social and Academic Ability Ratings are presented in Table 7. Note that the scholastic competence and behavioral conduct raw scores have been transformed to a standardized form. The raw scores were first converted to z-scores. Then, the z-scores were converted to a distribution with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. The SPPC scores were transformed to enable comparisons with the SSRS scores.

Table 7: Teacher Ratings of Social and Academic Abilities

	<u>Means (standard deviations)</u>
Scholastic Competence	120.80 (9.71)
Academic Competence	111.87 (5.12)
Behavioral Conduct	106.26 (26.37)
Social Skills	99.92 (10.63)

Is there a significant positive relationship between teacher perceptions of social ability and academic ability?

To understand the relationships between perceptions of social and academic abilities, Pearson correlations were calculated and are presented in Table 8. Significant positive relationships were found between academic competence and both measures of social ability. That is, academic competence (SSRS) and social

skills (SSRS) were moderately correlated ($r=.56$), and academic competence (SSRS) and behavioral conduct (SPPC) were highly correlated ($r=.79$). Academic ability, as measured by scholastic competence (SPPC), was not significantly correlated with either measure of social ability.

**Table 8: Pearson Correlations for Teacher Perceptions
of Academic and Social Abilities**

	Academic Competence (SSRS)	Scholastic Competence (SPPC)	Overall Social Skills (SSRS)
Scholastic Competence	.53*		
Overall Social Skills	.56*	.03	
Behavioral Conduct	.79**	.28	.75**

Note. * $p<.01$, ** $p<.001$

Are there differences in the way teachers rate academic competence and scholastic competence? Are there differences in the way teachers rate social skills and behavioral conduct?

To judge whether there are significant differences between means of academic competence and scholastic competence and between means of social skills and behavioral conduct, t-tests for paired samples were performed. When ratings of academic competence and scholastic competence were compared, a significant difference between the means was detected, $t(22)=-4.99$, $p=.00$, with scholastic competence ratings being higher. There was no significant difference between the social skills mean and the behavioral conduct mean, $t(17)=1.87$, $p=.08$.

Since teachers were making all of these ratings, a possible rater bias was introduced. To investigate this possibility, the distributions of ratings for both social and academic abilities were investigated. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the skewed distributions of the academic competence and scholastic competence variables. In order to compare means of abnormal distributions a nonparametric test was chosen. Since a test for significant differences between two correlated samples was needed, the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test was appropriate for this analysis.

Figure 3: Distribution of Academic Competence Ratings

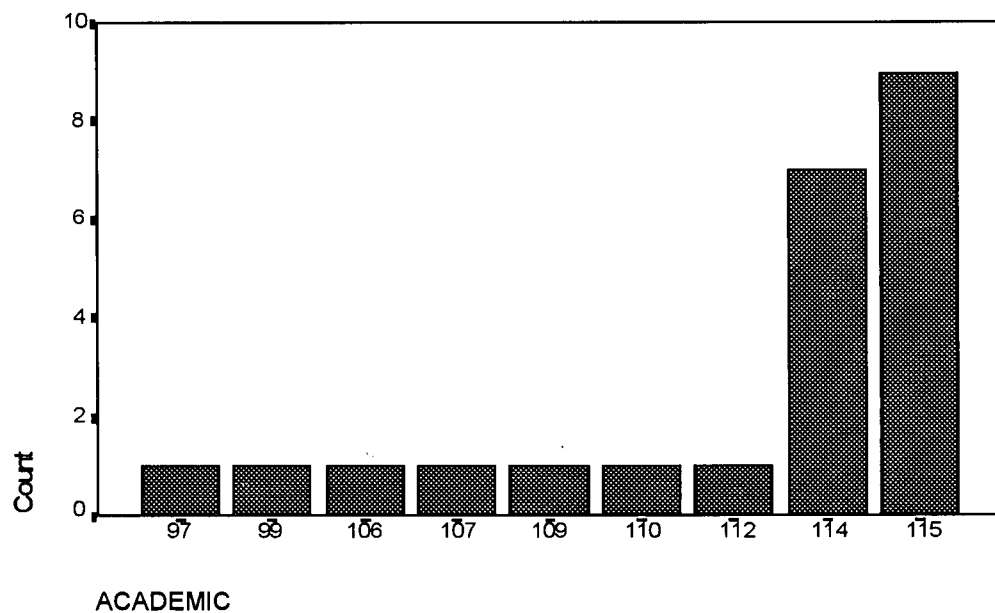
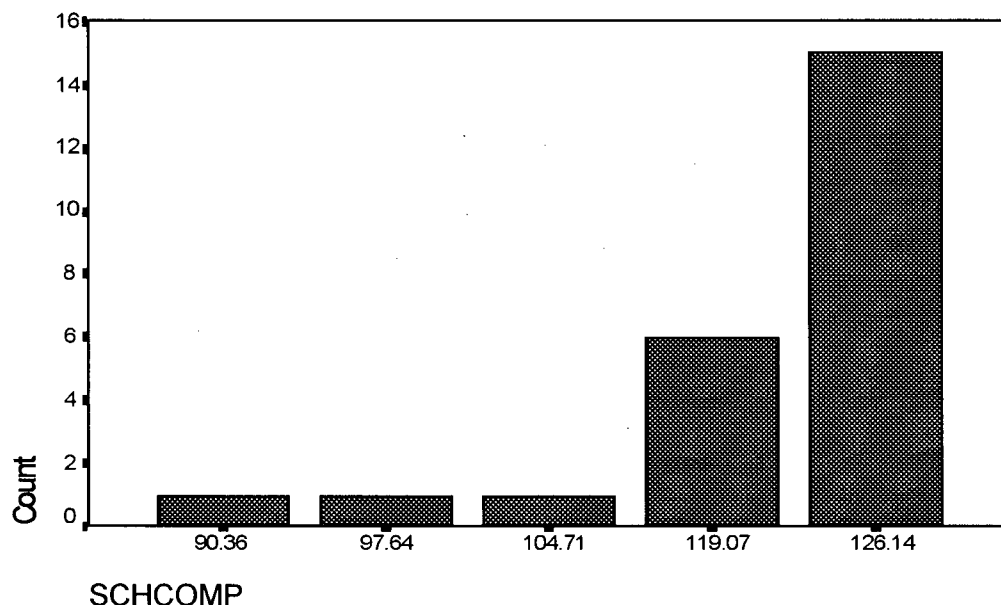


Figure 4: Distribution of Scholastic Competence Ratings



When the means for the scholastic competence and academic competence ratings were compared using the Wilcoxon test, a significant difference was observed, $z = -3.50$, $p = .00$. Comparison of the social skills mean and the behavioral conduct mean using the Wilcoxon did not reveal a significant difference, $z = -1.72$, $p = .09$.

The results of the Wilcoxon tests are similar to the results of the conventional t-test for paired samples. The similarity of the tests suggests that the results may be interpreted as statistically valid. Therefore, teachers rated academic competence and scholastic competence differently, with scholastic competence being rated higher. However, no difference was observed between teacher ratings of social skills and behavioral conduct.

In Chapter Five the results of the study will be discussed and interpreted in light of the research questions. Limitations of the current study and recommendations for further research are also included in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In Chapter 5, the limitations of the study are described; the results are interpreted; and implications of the current research for education and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Limitations of the Study

There are two major limitations facing the current study. One relates to the sample and one relates to the assessment tools.

As the sample of children was self-selected for the study, certain biases are possible. Since the children were voluntarily brought to the Clinic, this introduces a bias due to volunteerism. Another concern is the small size of the sample. Due its volunteer nature and size, the sample of children participating in the current study may not be representative of the population of gifted children. This means that generalizations to the population of gifted children need to be made cautiously. However, analysis of the results derived from this particular sample will provide the basis for hypothesizing certain trends within the gifted population. A description of the hypotheses and suggestions for future research are included throughout the discussion.

Another limitation of this study concerns the measurement tools. The Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985) are both valid and reliable measures appropriate for addressing the questions raised in the literature review. However, neither of these measures has been exhaustively tested within the gifted population. Harter (1985)

has suggested that the SPPC may require certain modifications for special populations, such as intellectually gifted students. Current investigation of this issue is being undertaken by Harter. Gresham and Elliott (1990) account for a range of intellectual capabilities; however, the gifted population is not included in their initial normative data. Potential difficulties of both measures when used with gifted children have not been identified. Specific concerns which arose in the data analysis relating to the assessment tools will be addressed throughout the discussion.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

A: Perceptions of Social Ability

Assessments of teacher perceptions have traditionally described gifted children as experiencing superior psychosocial adjustment in a global sense (Janos & Robinson, 1985); however, measures of perceived social skills are rare. Janos and Robinson (1991) concluded that teachers generally perceive gifted children as being socially superior. In the current study, teachers were asked reflect upon the social skills of gifted children within the contexts of their own classrooms.

On both measures of social ability, the teachers rated the children as demonstrating average social skills. Within the subscales of the SSRS, teachers perceived the gifted children as demonstrating cooperation frequently, while self-control and assertion skills were rated lower, but still within the average range.

On the surface, it appears that the results contradict earlier studies which suggested that teachers perceived gifted children as above average socially. By

situating the current evaluations within the context of real classrooms and children, different results were obtained. When reflecting upon individual children, teachers perceived their overall social skills as average: however differences emerged in the kinds of social skills perceived.

Previous investigations of parent perceptions regarding gifted children have found that parents usually perceive their gifted children as demonstrating average social skills. In the current study, the parents rated the gifted children approximately four points above the average as indicated from the normative data. Therefore the parents perceived their children as displaying *slightly* above average social skills.

These results differ from earlier studies (Lupowski, 1989; Robinson & Noble, 1991). The differences may be explained by one of the following reasons. In the earlier studies, the samples of children were preschool age, while in the current study the sample was elementary-aged. Perhaps gifted children display 'average' social skills until they reach elementary age then begin to demonstrate more highly developed social skills. The developmental nature of social skills may be reflected in the parents' perceptions.

This developmental hypothesis concurs with research originally conducted by Webb (1974). Within a Piagetian framework, Webb noted that gifted children acquired thought processes associated with concrete and formal operations at approximately the same ages as intellectually average children. However, once these forms of thought were acquired, the gifted children were able to think more flexibly and elaborately. Perhaps preschool gifted children have similar social-cognitive knowledge to their 'average' peers but are able to apply this knowledge in a more flexible and elaborative manner once they reach elementary ages.

A different explanation lies in the nature of the sample. It is possible that the children who participated in this study were different from the population of gifted

children along significant social dimensions. That is, this sample may have been skewed as the children demonstrated consistently above average social skills. However, it is unlikely that this explanation can account for the parents' high ratings since research (Freeman, 1979) has documented some social differences from self-selected samples. Freeman's research indicated a trend of *more* social difficulties in children who have been voluntarily brought to research settings for the purposes of assessment. Therefore, if the sample were different from the gifted population, it is more probable that the sample would experience more social skills difficulties, rather than demonstrate above average social skills.

When parents' and teachers' perceptions have been compared previously, there has been a low to moderate agreement between perceptions (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987). In the Achenbach et. al (1987) review, the agreement between multi-informants was analyzed and highlighted the influence of situation specific behaviors. These authors concluded that the low agreement between teacher and parent ratings of social skills should be expected given the setting differences and social behavior demands of home and school.

Within the current study, parents' and teachers' perceptions of the children's *overall* social skills were similar. This finding is somewhat contradictory considering the results of Achenbach's work. The fact that the perceptions were generally similarly suggests that the children are behaving in similar ways at home and at school and there is a great deal of overlap between the demonstrated social skills within each context.

Differences in the rater perceptions did emerge when *specific* kinds of social skills were evaluated. Teachers perceived the children as behaving more cooperatively as compared to parents. That is, within the school setting, these children were demonstrating more cooperation skills than within the home setting.

Parents, however, perceived the children as demonstrating more assertive behaviors at home, as compared to at school.

These differential perceptions are consistent with earlier research on the agreement between different raters. That is, although teachers' and parents' perceptions differ, each contributes valid information about the child. The difference between ratings may be related to the behavioral demands within the specific situations. When in a school setting, it is critical that children learn to demonstrate cooperative behaviors such as following directions, attending to instructions and using free time wisely (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). These particular behavioral expectations may be perceived as important, but not critical, to the home environment. By contrast, the prevalent social behaviors observed at home were assertive behaviors, such as reporting accidents to appropriate persons. The difference between teacher and parent perceptions of social ability for this population may be attributed to the behavioral expectations of each context.

Teacher and parent perceptions of gifted children were compared to teacher and parent perceptions of a normative sample of children. Perceptions of the gifted children all fell within in the average range of behavior levels as identified by Gresham and Elliott (1990). Teachers and parents perceived the gifted children as demonstrating cooperation, assertion, and self-control skills as frequently as children of the norm sample.

The gifted children were ranked as average on the specific subscales. When their overall social skills were compared slight differences did emerge, with teachers' ratings being just below the norm average and parents' ratings being just above the norm average. However, both parent and teacher ratings did fall within the average range of social skills.

Evaluation of Social Skills

Investigation of the social validation of social skills revealed some interesting trends. When asked to rate the importance of certain kinds of social skills, teachers rated cooperation as being more important than did parents. Parents and teachers attributed similar social value to the skills reflecting assertion and self-control.

To further understand the particular social skills which parents and teachers valued highly, individual items were identified as the most important social skills. When the highest ranked items as rated by parents and teachers were compared, there were significant differences in the *kinds* of social behaviors which each group valued.

Teachers' evaluations indicated that cooperative social skills were critical for success in their classrooms. Of the highest ranked items, cooperative social skills dominated the ratings. The four social behaviors most highly valued were following directions, attending to instructions, using free time wisely and finishing class assignments within time limits. Each of these social skills is intuitively crucial for success within the school environment.

These teacher valued social skills parallel those identified in earlier social validation studies (Torrance, 1970; Williams et. al, 1989). These authors concluded that the social-behavioral competencies preferred by adults are those that "(a)reflect compliance with requests, instructions, and directions; (b) facilitate task engagement and completion; (c) demonstrate cooperativeness; and (d) contribute to positive social exchanges with the dominant or controlling adult" (Williams, et. al, p.19). Earlier research by Torrance (1970) found that teachers from several different countries rank "always asking questions" very low as a

desirable characteristic, and the most universally discouraged was "disturb class procedures or organization". The most important behaviors identified by teachers of gifted children reflect social skills similar to those identified in the earlier studies.

In contrast, parents did not value similar kinds of social behaviors as the teachers. In fact, cooperative social skills appeared only once in the highest ranked items. Parents valued behaviors which demonstrated self-control and assertion. In particular, the self-control skills identified as important, namely "avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble" and "politely refuses unreasonable requests from others," reflect a concern for children's basic safety. The assertive behavior, "reports accidents to appropriate persons," also reflects a safety concern for children. Showing interest in a variety of things was another social behavior that was highly valued by parents.

As the ranking of items suggest, there is high agreement between perceived and valued social skills for both parents and teachers. This implies that the children were adept at matching their behaviors to the environmental expectations. In particular, as teachers highly valued cooperative behaviors, the children demonstrated strong cooperation skills within the classroom.

Relationship between Social Ability and Academic Ability

The relationships between the two measures of social ability and the two measures of academic ability revealed an interesting pattern of results. There were no significant differences between the measures of social skills and behavioral conduct. This finding suggests that these measures are tapping into the same kinds of social behaviors, namely, that social skills reflecting "socially acceptable

learned behaviors which enable a person to interact effectively with others and avoid socially unacceptable responses" (Gresham & Elliott, 1990, p.2) and behavioral conduct reflecting a range of behaviors thought of as socially responsible are similar concepts.

There was a significant difference between the measures of academic ability. The scholastic competence ratings were significantly higher than the ratings of academic competence ratings. The discrepancy between ratings suggests that these measures are tapping different concepts. As outlined in Chapter One, academic competence refers to the academic abilities of a child within the context of the classroom and also incorporates some school-related social behaviors, such as motivation. In contrast, scholastic competence refers to abilities of a purely cognitive nature.

To explain the difference in the ratings of academic ability, one needs to look at the underlying concepts of each measure. As the academic competence ratings were lower, this suggests that the inclusion of school-related behaviors may have depressed the scores of the children. Teachers perceived the children as demonstrating cooperative behaviors which are critical for success in the classroom; however, teachers may have perceived other negative social skills which affected their ratings of academic competence. Since the data in the study includes reference to prosocial behaviors only, it is possible that children may demonstrate specific negative behaviors as well as prosocial behaviors. The two kinds of social behaviors need not be mutually exclusive. As the academic competence rating incorporates 'overall classroom behavior', the teachers' overall perceptions of academic ability may have been influenced by both appropriate and inappropriate social skills.

Several of the social and academic measures were moderately to highly correlated. The moderate correlation between academic competence and

scholastic competence concurs with the explanation described above. That is, academic competence and scholastic competence both tap academic abilities but their underlying conceptual bases are not identical. Social skills and behavioral conduct were highly correlated suggesting that these measures are tapping similar concepts.

Academic competence was significantly correlated with both the social skills and behavioral conduct measures. The strong correlation between this measure of academic ability and social ability provides further support for the arguments put forth by Wentzel (1993). For the children in this study, behaving in socially appropriate and responsible ways was related to their academic ability. However, scholastic competence was not significantly correlated with either social skills or behavioral conduct. Taken together, these results suggest that social and academic abilities are related only when the measures of academic ability have incorporated social-behavioral components. But when academic ability is assessed as a purely cognitive concept, separate and distinct from school-related social behaviors, social and academic abilities are unrelated.

This interpretation sheds light on some of the hypotheses suggested by Wentzel (1991). She claimed that "although behaving in socially appropriate and responsible ways is valued in its own right, these aspects of social competence are also powerful predictors of academic performance" (p.357). The current research clarifies the notion of academic performance. When academic performance is assessed by referring to academic skills and school-related behaviors, the relationship between social and academic ability is present. When academic performance is assessed by referring to only cognitive abilities, there appears to be no relationship between social and academic abilities.

Suggestions for Future Research

The first suggestions for future research are derived from the limitations outlined at the beginning of Chapter Five. In order to confirm the results obtained, additional studies need to include larger samples of gifted children. Replicating the study using a random sample of gifted children would address the volunteer bias. Conducting the study with these modifications to the sample would allow for more valid generalizations to the population of gifted children.

Future research needs also to address the concerns of the appropriateness of the measurement tools. Both the SSRS and the SPPC were developed to assess the characteristics of children who are of average or below average intelligence, not those who are intellectually gifted. The gifted children in the current study were perceived as demonstrating social skills of average ability. Like the work from Webb (1974), which suggests a qualitative difference in gifted childrens' thought, perhaps gifted children have acquired the age-appropriate forms of thought in relation to social behaviors, but can apply this knowledge in a more flexible and elaborate manner. These measures may not have tapped into the flexibility and elaborativeness of gifted childrens' social behaviors. Future research needs to consider the possibility that the traditional assessments of social skills may be ineffectual within the gifted population and may underestimate the social abilities of these children.

The most important finding of the current study relates to the relationship between social ability and academic ability. The results suggest that academic ability, as perceived by teachers, is related to *both* cognitive and social abilities. For the children in this study, their perceived social skills seemed to depress their academic ratings.

Wentzel (1991) has found that students who were less responsible but displayed high levels of creativity were not treated as positively as those students who demonstrated socially responsible behaviors. Investigating the relationship between the social and academic abilities of intellectually gifted children who are not perceived as socially skilled could provide some essential insights into gifted children.

Summary of Chapter 5

Chapter Five described the limitations facing the current study. The results of data analyses were interpreted and suggestions for future research were made.

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Appendix A

Sample items from Teacher form of the SSRS

Cooperation Subscale:

- Follows your instructions.
- Attends to your instructions.
- Uses free time wisely.

Assertion Subscale:

- Appropriately tells you when he or she thinks you have treated him or her unfairly.
- Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair.
- Invites others to join in activities.

Self-Control Subscale:

- Cooperates with peers without prompting.
- Produces correct schoolwork.
- Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children.

Sample items from Parent form of the SSRS

Cooperation Subscale:

- Congratulates family members on accomplishments.
- Keeps room clean and neat without being reminded.
- Volunteers to help family members with tasks.

Assertion Subscale:

- Reports accidents to appropriate persons.
- Show interest in a variety of things.
- Is self-confident in social situations such as parties or group outings.

Self-Control Subscale:

- Avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble.
- Politely refuses unreasonable requests from others.
- Receives criticism well.

Appendix B

Sample items from the Self-Perception Profile for Children

Behavioral Conduct:

Some kids usually do the right thing BUT Other kids often don't do the right thing.

Some kids usually get into trouble because of the things they do BUT Other kids usually don't do things that get them into trouble.

Some kids behave themselves very well BUT Other kids often find it hard to behave themselves.

Scholastic Competence:

Some kids often forget what they learn BUT Other kids remember things easily.

Some kids do very well at their classwork BUT Other kids don't do well at their classwork.

Some kids have trouble figuring out the answers in school BUT Other kids can almost always figure out the answers.