

A phenomenological study of advanced learners placed in educational settings suited to their academic needs.

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Literature Review

- The cognitive outcomes for the specialized educational setting has been well documented in the research. The non cognitive outcomes and the types of social contexts these environments create are not as well known (Coleman,1995; Kulik & Kulik, 1982,1984,1987,1990; Neihart, 2008; Rogers, 1991,1992, 1993, 2004; Zeidner & Scheler,1999).
- The social contexts that some specialized environments are able to create and their non cognitive outcomes may proof to be a more **powerful argument** for gifted programming than their well known cognitive results (Coleman, 1995; Zeidner & Scheler,1999).
- Coleman (1995) defines social context as, “... *the existence of a qualitative change in setting which elevates the participants’ experiences beyond that of a conventional educational milieu. When this state or condition is reached in any setting, a student's learning is magnified.* “
- Several researchers perceive that gifted students benefit not only academically, but socially and emotionally from the specialized educational environment. Researchers have identified various coping strategies used by gifted students in order to manage their identity in the regular school setting (Buescher & Higham, 1990; Galbraith & Delisle, 1996; Gross, 1996; Preuss & Dubow, 2004; Robinson, 1996; Silverman, 1993, 2000; Sowa, McIntire, May, Bland, 1994; Swiatek, 1995, 2002).

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study then, was to use a qualitative framework to describe:

- Social contexts
- Non-cognitive outcomes
- Understanding of what advanced programs provide
- Link between non cognitive outcomes and gifted child involvement in the learning process

Method

- Transcendental Phenomenology
- Lifeworld
- Epoche
- Meaning units/Horizontalization
- Analysis of Individual and composite descriptions
- Essences of the experiences

Research Questions

- How do primary aged gifted students perceive and experience the social contexts of schools that actively cater to their advanced intellectual needs?
- Do gifted girls and boys experience the social context of schools that provide them with extension classes differently?
- What are the non cognitive outcomes of this type of school environment and how do they relate to the gifted child's experience of being gifted in a school that actively caters to his/her academic needs?

Method: Participants and Setting

3 different types of primary school systems

28 participants randomly selected from school extension programs.

Westerford School

- Co-educational private school.
- 5 girls and 4 boys
- Homogenous classes, in class grouping, pull out groups, subject based acceleration.

St Mary`s

- Single sex private girls school
- 9 girls
- Cross grade groupings-subject based acceleration, grade based acceleration, cross year groupings, pull out groups.

Bishops College

- Single sex private boys
- 10 boys
- Pull out groups, in class groupings, Stanford University online courses, subject based acceleration.

Procedure: Transcendental Phenomenology

- Participants interviewed individually, twice, in school environment, following the phenomenological tradition.
- Second interview to clarify and elaborate on transcriptions from first interviews.
- Participants observed in playground and classroom setting.
- School personnel who emerged as important figures interviewed.
- Questions open ended to allow participants own thoughts and opinions to emerge.
- All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim later.
- Transcribed interviews analysed by adhering to specific steps.

Data Analysis: Key Themes

The thematic units that have emerged for each school, in order of salience to the participants, are:

St Mary`s School

Friendship
Challenging Instruction
School Emotional and
Social Support
Peer Relations,
Stress

Bishops College

Peer Relations
Power
Challenging Instruction
Competition
Non Academic Interests
Schedule

Westerford School

Friendship
Stress
Peer & Teacher Relations
Challenging instruction
Religion
Non Academic Interests
Discipline
School Emotional and
Social support.

Peer relations: Labeling Bishops College

Try to avoid being too smart and play lots of games with the other guys from the beginning ... he was the smartest kid in the school, because he came in when the testing was on and he would get really high marks and that's when they would tag him as a nerd. Because he didn't really get much time to make friends with them before the testings were on. So no one really liked him, they thought he was a nerd and that stuff. They always kept being mean to him and they would never let him play games
(Shugilu, Year 5).

Peer Relations: Labeling St Mary's School

...we change groups, like we do a pre-test for each subject so that we can change what group we are in for each different subject. Like say we are going to change to fractions, we do a fraction test and we change groups each time... you go up or down....there are quite a lot of people who go up for different subjects. So no one really minds
(Alison, Year 5).

Peer Relations: Labeling

Westerford School

... you're kind of branded, you know the OC class, you don't mix...most of my friends are from outside the OC class and one of the main problems I have is because of that ... most people in the OC class are like family and they just wanna be with them. But I don't like being so separate. Like the learning is much better so that is a really good part of it. But the school experience is kind of social skills, as well as learning how to do things much better
(Alana, Year 6).

Peer Relations: Labeling Westerford School

...it was sort of hard to make friends because lots of groups were like really, really, picky and they only wanted to have people that were cool or good at sport, and they had like really hard criteria to get into a group...It was really closed up... I mean a lot of people judged you at my last school, but at this school you don't get judged as much, you feel more welcome ...when I walked in everybody was smiling and I was like everybody is smiling this is amazing
(Alexandria, Year 5).

Peer Relations: Labeling Westerford School

...this guy in the year called me a nerd and he's really bad at sport...He's in year 5 at this school and he called me a nerd for being in the OC and I'm like how come I'm better than you at sport, he's just hopeless at sport he sits down on the field with his arms crossed and everything

(Craig, Year 5).

Peer Relations: Competition

Bishops College

Sometimes they get really competitive and also on some occasions violent, because they always want to win and they change the rules and things like that... I just walk away (Trevor, Year 5).

Peer Relations: Competition St Mary`s School

...I am happy with grade level and up. It's a different sort of race you know to get grades, because its like against yourself and you can't compare to anyone. But in swimming you can change your style and get people faster than you, so you like speed up to them and stick with them

(Anna, Year 6).

Peer Relations: Competition

Westerford School

....you get very upset and you don't want to come to class anymore, because you feel humiliated that you have got this mark...when you have got all your peers looking at what you have got...you think like if we didn't have them up then we wouldn't be so fussed about whether you got a really good mark or not

(Alana, Year 6).

Peer Relations: Competition

Westerford School

...it's a lot harder to top the class cause you get some really, really smart people in it...knowing that I'm in the top 13 of the year, cause the OC is thirteen people, makes me feel really good

(Matt, Year 6).

Peer Relations: Conflict Bishops College

...sometimes they hurt us, they always tease us they always follow you; tease you, things like that...we go away and then when they follow us we try and stop them... It's really easy for them because it's only one teacher... They just wait until she is not looking and then they do it

(Alan, Year 4).

Peer Relations: Conflict St Mary's School

... we bring up issues from the classroom and the playground
... the class meetings work a lot, because if you have done something wrong and you don't know what to do people can give you some really good solutions... what we do is we are not allowed to mention any names and a girl could say this girl did this to me and then the girls will give solutions. Like give an I message, like I don't like that will you please stop and things like that. And in the playground they can go out and say sorry

(Sylvia, Year 4).

Emerging Results

Labelling/Stereotypical Perceptions /School Social and Emotional Support/
Grade Orientation/ Coping strategies/Social Relations –closed/open groups

(Coleman & Sanders,1993; Coleman & Cross, 2005 ; Cross, Coleman & Stewart, 1993; Swiatek, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2005).

Social Context in the Classroom: grouping / interests / stress , affective
needs ignored –Westerford School (Zeidner et al,1999; Peterson,2003)

Finding differs from previous research:

- **Gender Difference in Results** - Westerford School (Swiatek,2002; Zeidner et al,1999)
- **Gifted status** - Bishops College (Coleman & Cross, 2001;Foust & Booker,2007)
- **Reference Group Theory** (Marsh, Chessor, Craven & Roche, 1995; Marsh & Hau, 2003,1998 Zeidner & Schleye,1999)
- **Gender Bias** (Kerr & Nicpon,2003 Sadker& Sadker, 1985 Siegle& Reis, 1998)

Emerging Results

- **Gender Role Messages:** macho culture: boy code, gender free zone, gender bias in classroom instruction - Westerford School (Coleman & Cross, 2005; Kerr, 1995, 1997; Kerr & Cohn; Kerr & Nicpon, 2003; Reis & Callahan, 1996 Sadker & Sadker, 1985 Siegle & Reis, 1998)
- **Teacher and Student Relations:** gender status/ gifted role resonate with the research (Coleman & Cross, 2005; Westberg, Archambault & Brown, 1997)
- **Factors that Promote Optimal Social Context/ Non Cognitive Outcomes.**