

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

HOW ABLE SIXTH FORM STUDENTS FELT
ABOUT THEMSELVES,
ABOUT LEARNING,
AND
ABOUT OTHERS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements
for the degree of

Master
of
Education

at Massey University

Cheryl Constable

1994

ABSTRACT

In order to investigate how able sixth form students felt about themselves, about learning, and about other people a pilot study was carried out. From an analysis of the findings of the pilot study, a questionnaire was designed which covered relevant affective (social and emotional) domain aspects such as competitiveness, perfectionism, fear, sensitivity, enjoyment, confidence, happiness, defensiveness, security, worry, and choices in what and how the students learned.

In order to gain more indepth information about how these students felt about themselves, about learning, and about others, a second source of data was collected. Small groups of students from the questionnaire cohort were interviewed. The interview questions were based on the results from the questionnaire; that is the frequency counts of how many students agreed and disagreed with each of the fifty statements. These interviews gave the students the opportunity to respond to the results of the questionnaire, add a contextual base to their responses in the questionnaire, establish any causal relationships between the topics in the questionnaire, and reduce any researcher bias in the interpretation of the results.

The questionnaire sample consisted of 283 students from 20 schools who were nominated by their teachers as able, according to criteria supported in the literature. The interview sample consisted of 46 students from 7 schools.

The research aimed to explore how the students felt about themselves and how they described themselves, how they felt about their own learning, how they felt when they were learning with others, and to point to any problems they had in these areas of the affective domain.

The results showed that the students perceived they had a lack of confidence; had fears and anxieties; were perfectionists at some things; were competitive in order to remain accepted by their group; wanted to change some things about what and how they learned, especially increasing the amount of discussion; were inexperienced in making choices, especially career goals; felt stressed; wanted more life skills; wanted to combine practical skills with theoretical knowledge to make sense of their experiences; but enjoyed being with others despite worrying about what others thought of them in certain circumstances.

The students indicated that these areas adversely affected the quality of their learning.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Don McAlpine and Janet Gregory, for their patience and guidance on theory, design, sampling and data analysis, to the New Zealand Council for Educational Research for their support especially Barb Bishop for teaching me how to use SAS statistical software and Rachel Essen for providing database searches, to Linus Constable for his computer support, to Shirley Taylor from the Brentwood Enrichment Centre and Nikki Fraser of the New Zealand Associations for Gifted Children for their professional support, to The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand for their assistance and support, to Ann Ballantyne, Julie Clifton and Moira McKendry for their editorial advice and support, to all of the teachers who assisted with the selection and organisation of students in the schools, and to the students themselves for participating in this survey.

Table of contents

Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of contents	v
List of tables	vii
 Chapter 1 - Introduction	 1
Purpose of this study	1
The term 'able'	2
The cognitive domain	3
The affective domain	4
Able students	6
The research design	7
Aim of the present study	9
 Chapter 2 - Characteristics of able students: literature review	 11
Identification of gifted students	12
Characteristics of defined groups of gifted students	15
Gifted females	16
Cultural perspectives	18
 Chapter 3 - The affective domain: literature review	 20
The importance of the affective domain	20
How students feel about themselves	34
How students feel about learning	38
How students feel about others	43
Integrated affective and cognitive learning	48
 Chapter 4 - Methodology	 50
The research questions	50
Research methodology	51
The development of questionnaires	53
The pilot study	55
The main study	60
Selecting the sample	66
Collection of questionnaire data	69
The questionnaire sample	71
The interviews	73
Validity of test instruments	76

Chapter 5 - Results of the Questionnaire	78
The Statements	79
Analysis of data	81
Theme 1: How students felt about themselves	82
Theme 2: How students felt about learning	86
Theme 3: How students felt about others	91
Best subject	97
Questionnaire item 51	103
Discussion	104
Chapter 6 - Results of the Interviews	114
Theme 1: How students felt about themselves	117
List of interview questions	117
Interview question 1	119
Interview question 2	125
Interview question 3	127
Interview question 4	133
Interview question 5	137
Interview question 6	141
Theme 2: How students felt about learning	148
List of interview questions	148
Interview question 7	150
Interview question 8	156
Interview question 9	165
Interview question 10	171
Interview question 11	174
Theme 3 How students felt about others	179
List of interview questions	179
Interview question 12	181
Interview question 13	186
Interview question 14	190
Interview question 15	194
Additional information	200
Discussion	201
Chapter 7 - Conclusion	215
Recommendations	224
Appendix	236
References	237

List of tables

Table 1: Pilot study questionnaire	55
Table 2: Main study questionnaire	64
Table 3: Theme 1: How students feel about themselves	83
Table 4: Theme 2: How students feel about learning	87
Table 5: Theme 31: How students feel about others	92
Table 6: Subjects the students say they are best at	98
Table 7: Female and male best subject rankings	100