
Author(s): Svenja Matheis (presenting), Franzis Preckel, Manfred Schmitt
Network: Emerging Researchers’ Group (for presentation at Emerging Researchers’ Conference)
Format: Poster

Session Information

ERG SES E 01, PechaKucha Poster Session
Poster Session
Time: 2016-08-22
15:30-17:00
Room: OB-E1.17 (ALE 1)
Chair: Janinka Greenwood

Contribution


Teachers’ conceptions of giftedness influence which students they identify as gifted and how they behave towards these students. Research findings are mixed, showing an overall positive, negative, or ambivalent view that considers gifted students as intellectually strong, but socio-emotionally inferior. Such misconceptions might lead teachers to focus on their students’ perceived socio-emotional weaknesses instead of supporting their strengths. This study wants to identify how the label gifted influences teacher ratings of student characteristics. Furthermore, it aims to account for implicit teacher assumptions by using a social justice framework. We assume that the belief in a just world might moderate these assumptions as an inter-individual aspect of personality disposition.

There is evidence that gifted and average-ability students do not differ systematically in socio-emotional abilities and non-cognitive characteristics (Rost, 1993, 2009). Nevertheless, teachers sometimes hold incorrect attitudes towards gifted students, such as beliefs about systematic differences in personality traits and social abilities according to intellectual aptitude. Preckel and Vock (2012) consider giftedness a strong trigger that evokes contradictory stereotypes about the gifted. According to the harmony hypothesis, giftedness leads teachers to assume high competences in students’ intellectual and other fields of abilities. As intelligence is a crucial characteristic of giftedness and additionally a socially desirable attribute, subjects conclude that giftedness may be associated with other positive attributes (Mõttus, Allik, Konstabel,
The disharmony hypothesis, in contrast, states an ambivalent classification of character traits such as positive ratings of intellectual ability and negative ratings of social-emotional abilities (Becker, 1978; Gallagher, 1990; Neihart, 1999). Most recently, Baudson and Preckel (2013) found evidence consistent with the disharmony hypothesis, showing that German teachers and student teachers hold ambivalent attitudes and beliefs towards gifted students. In addition, Preckel, Matheis and Kronborg (2015) showed that ambivalence in conceptions towards gifted students is a cross-cultural phenomenon, as student teachers from Germany as well as Australia show ambivalent attitudes towards gifted students. In this manner, besides a high achievement and intellectual abilities, they also incorrectly associate behavioral problems with giftedness.

The psychological processes underlying these different directions of stereotyping, however, are still unknown. In this project, we want to test one possible rationale to explaining ambivalence in ratings by applying theories of justice research. People exhibit a tendency to belief in a just world in which everyone 'gets what they deserve and deserves what they get'. Research has examined individual variability in beliefs in a just world, which is therefore considered a disposition of personality with potential influence on behavior and cognitions (Lerner, 1980). Consequently, people are motivated to defend their belief in a just world when it is threatened by experienced or observed injustice. If recognized injustice seem unlikely to be resolved – as represented by the presence of students with high cognitive abilities – people might restore justice cognitively by re-evaluating the situation in line with their belief in a just world. Thus, we aim to assess and explain teacher attitudes towards and beliefs about gifted students, suggesting an influence of inter-individual differences in justice-related concepts. The main hypothesis, therefore, assumes that ambivalent attitudes are due to beliefs in a just world.

### Method

**Design:**
The study uses an experimental vignette approach to investigate student teacher attitudes towards giftedness as well as their ratings in belief in a just world. Using short student descriptions (so-called 'vignettes'), student teachers will rate fictitious students varying in ability level (gifted/average) and gender (girl/boy) in a between-subject design. Participants will be assigned randomly to one of four vignettes conditions (female/gifted, female/average, male/gifted, male/average). After reading the vignettes, subjects complete a questionnaire about their attitudes towards the gifted and their beliefs in a just world, which should take approximately 15 minutes. The order of instruments will be balanced equally.

**Participants:**
About N=200 student teachers are planned to participate in the study, which assigns n=50 student teachers to each condition. The questionnaire is paper-based, distributed either by email or circulated in university classes, in which participation is voluntary.

**Vignettes:**
The vignettes are brief descriptions of fictitious students including a brief description of an everyday school situation, which allows circumventing social desirability, which always may be an issue when asking people directly about their attitudes towards people. Gender and ability levels are varied. The ability level of the student described in the vignette is assumed to influence teacher ratings of student personality, whereas student gender is included as control variable.

**Questionnaire about the attitudes toward the gifted and student`s characteristics:**
The description of a student as either gifted or of average ability is likely to influence teacher attitudes toward the student. To measure teacher attitudes towards the gifted, we will use the Attitudes Toward Gifted-Questionnaire (Preckel, Baudson & Glock 2014) that assesses the dimensions of intellectual ability, social ability, maladjustment, teacher enthusiasm, and assumed teacher self-efficacy for teaching students (Cronbach’s α: .77-.87). Thus, participants will be asked to complete the questionnaire by using a 6-ary Likert-scale consisting of 29 items.

**Belief in a just world:**
As the construct of a 'belief in a just world' is well known, we will use the well-established questionnaire GWAL (Dalbert, Montada & Schmitt, 1987). The six-item scale assesses general belief in a just world (e.g. ‘I think people try to be fair when making important decisions’), which is independent of social desirability (Loo, 2002) and has been used in numerous studies (e.g., Allen, Ng, & Leiser, 2005).

### Expected Outcomes

After establishing scalar measurement invariance over vignettes, repeated-measures ANOVA with latent factor values (repeated measurement across 5 scales) will be followed by a post-hoc test. If the disharmony hypothesis holds true, results should be consistent with findings in prior studies with identical vignettes (e.g. Preckel, Matheis & Kronborg, 2015). Therefore, student teachers will consider gifted students superior regarding their intellectual ability, but more maladjusted compared to average-ability students. Also, student teachers will report significantly lower self-efficacy for teaching gifted as compared to average-ability students. If the harmony hypothesis holds true, students described as gifted should be rated...
higher on positive socio-emotional characteristics. The perceived self-efficacy and enthusiasm to teach a gifted child are rated as high if the harmony hypothesis holds true. In both hypotheses – harmony and disharmony – the intellectual abilities of students should be rated as high. The results are ideally explained by data for subject beliefs in a just world. It is expected that high ratings in belief in a just world are associated with high ratings in behavioral problems and ratings for a lack on social-emotional skills, i.e. high scoring on the belief in a just world should provide evidence in favor of the disharmony hypothesis.

References


This proposal is part of a master or doctoral thesis.

Author Information

Svenja Matheis (presenting)
University of Koblenz-Landau
DFG-Graduate School Teaching and Learning Processes
Landau

Franzis Preckel
University of Trier, Germany

Manfred Schmitt
University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany