A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY AND THE PERCEIVED ACHIEVEMENT OF GIFTED CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION STANDARDS IN THEIR SCHOOLS

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Abstract
Gifted middle school students are losing interest in educational pursuits (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003) and without specific curricular adjustments for them at this crucial time in their lives (Cunningham, 2003), society may potentially forfeit the gifts and abilities that might have been fostered and cultivated in these individuals (Renzulli, 2005). This issue is compounded in the wake of dwindling financial support for gifted programming that, in turn, requires creative methods by instructional leaders to meet the needs of this special subpopulation of students (Kaplan, 2004). The literature has consistently promoted leadership self-efficacy as a significant factor in the success of organizations (Bandura, 1997), including schools (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Emanating from the literature on self-efficacy, principals as instructional leaders, and gifted students and programming, this exploratory study sought to answer one overarching question: Does the level of perceived self-efficacy of the middle school principal have a
relationship to the perceived achievement of gifted curriculum and instruction standards in the principal’s school? Utilizing Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’ Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale, with a reliability of .93, and the researcher’s Gifted Curriculum and Instruction Questionnaire, with a reliability of .78, the present study focused upon middle school principals in six districts of between 14,000 and 35,000 students, including suburban and rural districts surrounding metropolitan Atlanta. At the conclusion of a 21-day data collection period, 30 principals responded, yielding a 97% response rate, categorizing this as a near census. The results revealed that these principals had a small negative relationship between the two constructs. Additionally, several items within the instruments had medium and large correlations along the topics of differentiation of instruction for gifted students and various factors of principal self-efficacy, such as promoting school spirit, creating a positive learning environment, motivating teachers, and promoting appropriate behavior with students. The implications of this study revealed the struggle that principals undergo in an attempt to address the equity versus excellence issue in middle schools and to meet even minimum standards for gifted education.