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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL FACTORS AND ACHIEVEMENT PATTERNS
AMONGST HIGH ABILITY LEARNERS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jacquelynn Anne Truckey

August 2009

Advisor: Dr. Elinor Katz

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Abstract

Research indicates that social and emotional factors play a very important role in the achievement levels of all learners and especially so for gifted populations. This qualitative multi-case study was designed to explore, with a sample of secondary level gifted students, their lived experiences and the influences that contribute to their learning success. The rationale for this study stems from the researcher's desire to discover ways to better support secondary gifted students and to help them find more engagement and passion in school.

The purposefully selected sample was composed of five students at the middle and high school levels who had been previously identified as gifted. Additionally, another 17 participants (parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, and one school board member) were included in the study to lend further insight into the experiences of the student participants. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews. Supportive methods included multiple classroom observations and document analysis. The data were coded and organized according to the researcher's questions. Analysis and interpretation of findings were organized according to this abbreviated conceptual framework: (a) Intrinsic and extrinsic influences; (b) Programming; (c) Achievement; (d) Relationships; (e) Affective struggles; (f) Understanding.

This research revealed that affective factors influenced these students greatly (in positive and negative ways) and these social and emotional student needs are rarely addressed at school. Further, it was discovered that the students lacked meaningful relationships with teachers at school and that there was a general lack of understanding about giftedness across all sections of this learning community.

Recommendations are made for the school district, specific school sites, teachers, parents, and students as well as for future research possibilities.

Acknowledgements

It has been a privilege these past five years to be a doctoral student at the University of Denver. As a student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies I have been challenged to think deeply and strive for excellence. Through collaboration with both skilled and knowledgeable instructors and cohort members I have grown as an educator, and as a student, in countless ways. I have been transformed in many other areas of my life as well. I would especially like to thank two very important individuals that have given so much to me, in the way of wisdom, expertise, encouragement, and time: Dr. Ellie Katz and Dr. Debra Deverell.

Of course this opportunity to immerse myself in my studies as a doctoral student would not have been possible without the continued love and support of my husband, Mark, and our daughters Genevieve and Marguerite. Mark provided me a solid example of quiet fortitude and has shown me time and again that important things take time and continued attention to accomplish. Being a mom has caused me to consider the importance of never giving up on *your* dreams too. I was further sustained by the consistent encouragement of friends and other family members as well, especially Mom and Dad, who although neither one were ever able to attend college themselves, always communicated their value for education and sacrificed much so their children could pursue the educational opportunities they could not. They have been my strongest supporters and knowing how much they wanted this honor for me was integral in my drive to see this process to completion.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions.....	10
Research Method	10
Organization of the Study.....	12
Personalizing the Work.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	15
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	19
A Historical Look at Giftedness	20
Identification.....	26
Programming.....	29
Some Subgroups of The Gifted.....	33
Some Social/Emotional Issues.....	45
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	48
Introduction.....	48
Purpose of the Study	49
Research Questions.....	50
Population and Sample	51
Data Collection	52
Data Analysis.....	56
Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis	58
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	60
The Researcher.....	60
Limitations	60
Summary.....	61
Chapter Four: Description of the Setting and Players	63
Introduction.....	63
School District Description.....	63
Study Site: Ptarmigan Middle School.....	66
School Site: Ten Mile High School	68
Profiles of Student Participants.....	70
Summary.....	77
Chapter Five: Results.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Research Questions and Results/Themes.....	79
Objective Analysis of Themes	81
Chapter Summary	94

Chapter Six: Analysis and Interpretation of Results	95
Introduction.....	95
Interpretation.....	100
Passion or Interest Areas.....	100
Self-awareness	101
Self-efficacy	102
Relatedness	103
Motivation.....	104
Effectiveness.....	107
Summary.....	110
Chapter Seven: Summary	111
Introduction.....	111
Summary of the Study	112
Data Analysis.....	118
Results.....	120
Implications.....	127
Limitations	130
Recommendations.....	130
Recommendations for School District.....	132
Recommendations for Schools	133
Recommendations for Teachers.....	136
Recommendations for Parents	137
Recommendations for Students	139
Recommendations for Future Studies.....	141
Reflection	141
Bibliography	144
Appendix A.....	154
Appendix B.....	156
Appendix C.....	157
Appendix D.....	158
Appendix E	159
Appendix F.....	160
Appendix G.....	162
Appendix H.....	164

Chapter One: Introduction

“More important than being gifted is feeling good about oneself, feeling that what one does is important. And that one fits with the world.”

James Webb

Gifted education and gifted programs routinely ignite controversy in the literature, in the news and in general conversation amongst educators and non-educators alike. As Colangelo states:

The base of the controversy is society’s subtle (and not so subtle) love-hate relationship with giftedness and talent...as a nation we have a strong commitment to egalitarianism, as reflected in that mighty phrase, “All men are created equal” (Colangelo, 2003, p. 3).

Critics accuse gifted programs of inequity and the failure to abide by democratic principles and refer to gifted programs as “...meritocratic, inequitable educational programming within schools...” (Sapon-Shevin, 1993, p. 66). Effectively meeting the needs of gifted learners, at the elementary and secondary levels, has been difficult in both the academic and social/emotional realms. Educators differ not only on their perspectives on how to optimize instruction but even on the basic tenets of the subject: What is giftedness? Is giftedness an absolute (a person is gifted or not gifted) or a relative (varying degrees of giftedness develop in certain people at certain times under certain conditions) concept? Is giftedness static (you have it or you don’t) or is it dynamic (it varies within each individual and situation)? These questions have led to fundamental change in the ways in which we view the gifted. Contemporary viewpoints see

giftedness as an evolving, dynamic potential rather than a fixed trait. This basic philosophy impacts how school districts provide for the identification as well as the ongoing programming for these children and we must turn to current research findings as we strive to shape our own perspectives. But putting all of our efforts into proper identification and programming is only part of the picture. The bottom line and our main focus, however, should be the student. Taking the time to develop a holistic understanding of each one of our students will undoubtedly enable us to pave educational pathways for each that are not only appropriate but highly engaging as well.

When developing a holistic understanding of each child as an individual, one must begin with a foundational understanding of the typical characteristics of gifted children in general, knowing that each child is different and this understanding is only a starting point. In the following thesis our lens is narrowed even more toward the gifted adolescent, with a particular focus on the social and emotional behaviors and traits of these learners, especially as this relates to their ability to be successful and achieve at appropriate levels in school.

Student achievement in schools has always been of interest to persons both in and out of education. Parents are concerned about their own student's ability to achieve as they know this directly impacts their son or daughter's ability be happy, successful, and fulfilled in their adult life. Businesses are concerned about how students in their local schools achieve because they know this can put the local offerings in a positive light. Politicians are concerned because taxpayer's money is used to fund our public schools. Student achievement has been a topic of interest dating back to the beginning of the

United States of America, but, despite this fact, educators still struggle with the dilemma of those that, for whatever reason, underachieve. This situation is especially baffling when the student has been found to have high potential but just doesn't perform at the levels one would expect. What could possibly account for this? This study is intended to contribute to the knowledge base in this area of quandary and could shed some light on this topic of student academic performance.

Now in the twenty-first century we, as educators, find ourselves consumed with how to ensure that each and every child learns and is challenged to his or her potential. Twenty years ago, headlines in our nation's newspapers issued a wake-up call to the American public: student learning across the United States of America was at a most depressing low. "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," a report authored by the National Commission on Excellence (1983), specifically cited the following:

1. International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests, American students were never first or second, and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
2. 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
3. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent (Fraser, 2001, p.323).

A Nation at Risk not only grabbed the attention of the nation but it inspired action as well. As Al Shanker, late president of the American Federation of Teachers noted:

A Nation at Risk was an exposition of what we would now call systemic reform: figuring out what we want students to know and be able to do and making sure that all parts of the educational system—standards, curriculum, textbooks, assessments, teacher training—move simultaneously toward the achievement of agreed-upon goals (Gordon, 2003, p. 2).

Among other important goals, a focusing on results ensued.

In 1989 the nation's governors were summoned to a meeting on education by President George Bush. The result of that collaboration was the following, Goals 2000:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn;
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%;
3. American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy;
4. U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement;
5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the right and responsibilities of citizenship; and

6. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning (United States Department of Education, 1994).

The following two goals were added by Congress and included in Goals 2000 when signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994:

7. Teachers will have access to professional development opportunities that will assist them in effectively supporting students for the twenty-first century.
8. By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (United States Department of Education, 1994).

Student achievement has remained a national focus of concern and in 2002 The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush. This act required that schools show evidence that “every child is learning...regardless of race, family background, or income” (United States Government online, 2002).

In addition, specific to our public schools’ gifted population, the Exceptional Child Education Act (ECEA) mandates that achievement is monitored for these students as well. The rules state that each school district is deemed an administrative unit and in order to be eligible for funding it must submit a detailed program plan:

The administrative unit program plan shall describe:

12.02 (1) (e) (i) Methods by which student achievement is monitored and measured for continual learning progress and how such methods align with the state accreditation process (e.g., intervention progress monitoring data sources, advanced learning plan goals, and performance, district, and state assessment data);

12.02 (1) (e) (ii) Methods by which student affective growth is monitored and measured for continual development (e.g., rubrics for personal journals and anecdotal data, student surveys, demonstration of self-advocacy, and student career and/or college plans);

12.02 (1) (e) (iii) Methods for ensuring that gifted student achievement and reporting are consistent with accreditation requirements (i.e., disaggregation of state assessment data for gifted students, identification of discrepancies in the data, goal setting and demonstration of growth);

12.02 (1) (e) (iv) Methods for self-evaluation of the gifted program including a schedule for periodic feedback and review (e.g., review of gifted policy, goals, identification process, programming components, personnel, budget and reporting practices, and the impact of gifted programming on student achievement and progress);

(ECEA Rules, Colorado Department of Education online, 2008).

Students in gifted programs are expected to achieve commensurate growth annually. ECEA defines this as:

12.01 (6) “Commensurate Growth” means the academic and affective progress that can be measured and should be expected of a gifted student given the student’s level of achievement, learning needs, and abilities matched with the appropriate instructional level.”

According to Dr. Karen Rogers (Rogers, 2002) for average kids, commensurate growth is to advance one year of knowledge in one academic year. She indicates we should expect more than a year’s growth for gifted kids and best practices in gifted education will allow for this development. There is no doubt that everyone involved in a child’s education must work together to ensure that the student’s learning experience is highly successful.

Rick DuFour believes that schools must do “whatever it takes” to ensure high achievement and school success. He says that “a fixation on results” will:

...ultimately, inevitably, lead educators to immerse themselves in the question of “How will we respond when, despite our best efforts, our students experience difficulty in learning key concepts?” (DuFour, 2004, p. 141).

It is now believed that a systematic, school-wide process must be in place that routinely examines each child's progress in school and immediately takes action and implements a response if something is found off track. This is a paradigm shift for educators, however, and every school and district is at a different place in this process. This Response to Instruction/Intervention (RTI) process will ultimately cause all connected with an educated child to become even more sensitive to results and assessments, including formative and summative, formal and anecdotal.

Statement of the Problem

This study is significant because there are many high-ability students in our schools who underachieve. The prestigious Marland Report (1972) noted that:

...disturbingly, research has confirmed that many talented children perform far below their intellectual potential. We are increasingly being stripped of the comfortable notion that a bright mind will make its own way (p. 3).

In 1975, one report (Lemov, 1979) estimated that as many as 15-30% of high school dropouts were gifted and talented and the majority of those students were from low socio-economic status (SES) families and culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Renzulli & Park, 2002). Studies indicate that these students may suffer from depression, may be pessimistic or distrustful, may feel alienated or withdrawn, may be aggressive, hostile, resentful, or touchy. In some cases these factors may lead to dropping out of school entirely. These are serious issues that must be adequately addressed within any gifted program that strives to effectively educate the whole child. This begs the question: Why do some students with high potential just not live up to it? According to Webb:

Although gifted students possess exceptional capabilities, most cannot excel without assistance. They need assistance academically, but they also need

assistance emotionally through understanding, acceptance, support, and encouragement (Webb, 1994, p.10).

Understandably, providing advanced academic challenges for the gifted learner is not enough. Programming options in most of our secondary schools address academic needs of students through honors classes, advanced placement, and/or community college offerings at the high school level. In addition, students can immerse themselves in arts-related activities, Speech & Debate, or athletics, etc. The conundrum that presents itself is why, if given such a variety of options to enhance school performance and enjoyment, do students continue to underachieve? What needs still must be addressed?

Numerous professionals in the field of gifted education, in particular, point to the need for a more intensive focus on the affective needs of high ability learners. Howard Gardner has said:

The less a person understands his own feelings, the more he will fall prey to them. The less a person understands the feelings, the responses, and behavior of others, the more likely he will interact inappropriately with them and therefore fail to secure his proper place within the larger community (Delisle, 2002, p. 62).

According to Jim Delisle (2002) there are vastly different ways of being gifted and gifted kids have very different emotional needs. Delisle infers that there are predictors that seem useful, however, in beginning to generalize about the affective needs of gifted individuals and include both quantitative and qualitative factors. One way to do this is to think of the learner as being in need of either acceleration or enrichment. Colangelo and Zaffrann (1979) point to the terms “accelerated” and “enrichment” and state that they actually describe qualitatively different needs and learning styles of gifted youngsters and not simply methods of how to provide for those needs. These experts say that educators

must take deliberate steps to (1) deeply understand their gifted students and (2) understand the frameworks for “accelerated” and “enriched” learners and be able to begin to think of and plan for these learners based upon these contexts because certain known traits and behaviors exist for each category. The social and emotional needs of gifted learners is complex but adequately defining and systematically addressing those needs can have a great impact on the student’s ability to achieve according to their unique potential in school, and, ultimately, beyond their school experience.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this case study was to observe and describe the current programming practice for gifted learners in a school district in Colorado’s Rocky Mountain region, specifically the practices addressing the affective or social/emotional aspects of the gifted child as this relates to the child’s academic programming and his or her level of achievement.

The secondary purpose was to use the data to examine whether there are disparities between student needs and services provided in this area and, if so, to make recommendations for ways to implement more strategies, policies, and programming to more adequately address these needs.

Thirdly, there is undoubtedly a problem with underachievement in schools across our nation and within this specific school district studied. The additional data and observations gleaned from this study will add to the research base in this field.

Research Questions

In order to observe and describe practices that address the social and emotional needs of gifted learners, specific questions were examined to determine if further need existed within this school district's gifted programming to more adequately address both the academic and affective needs of the students. The research questions that drove this study included the following:

1. What factors did gifted students identify as influencing their academic achievement at the secondary level?

How did past and current programming options promote long-term academic success for the identified gifted students within the school district?

Were the students who were identified at the elementary level (and who were achieving at high levels) continuing to achieve at high levels at the middle and high school?
2. What relationships and systems shaped the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of gifted students at the secondary levels?
3. What were the social and emotional issues that identified gifted students were dealing with? Were these needs being addressed by the current gifted programming? How might these needs be met more effectively?

Research Method

Research questions for this multiple-case study were investigated using a qualitative approach. This is considered an instrumental case study as the cases

examined were used instrumentally to illustrate the issue of whether past and current programming options offered to gifted learners are effective (Creswell, 1998). Extensive, multiple sources of information in data collection were used to provide the detailed and in-depth picture of the impactfulness of this rural school district's approach to the education of its gifted students. This case is bounded by time (approximately 3 months data collection) and place (rural Colorado). An in-depth description of the setting of each case is included, as the context to which this situation takes place is a necessary component for understanding and interpreting this picture fully.

The multiple sources used in data collection for this study included observations, interviews, documents, and reports. Through this data collection, a detailed description of the case emerges, as does an analysis of themes or issues and an interpretation or assertions about the case by the researcher (Stake, 1995).

To accomplish the goals of this study, the researcher began with a deliberate analysis of a variety of data points available within the district, for identified gifted students in grades 5-12, involving six elementary, one middle, and one high school, to initially determine a cohort group. This included CSAP, NWEA, student grades, attendance records, and extra-curricular activity involvement, for the past three years. The next step involved determining five students that had shown a significant drop or stagnation in achievement as compared with their own earlier academic performance. These students and their families then formed the cohort group, of which multiple in-class observations took place to gauge engagement and garner evidence of in-class higher-order thinking. Additionally, personal interviews were conducted of students and

their parents to begin to ascertain the reasons why school became more difficult for them (or why it was successful) and to give ideas of what could be put in place to better support the learners, socially and emotionally, throughout their secondary-level school years. Interviews were also conducted with administrators, teachers, counselors, and a gifted coach to ascertain the level of knowledge and support for the affective needs of gifted learners. Finally, a document analysis was done to look at school improvement plans and other such artifacts to determine whether social and emotional factors are acknowledged and planned for in the overall planning stages of the educational process at these schools.

Organization of the Study

This study is composed of seven chapters and describes and interprets the social and emotional factors that relate to student achievement for the five students intently studied. Chapter One summarizes the importance of and our focus on student achievement as well as the significance of how affective factors impact a child's ability to achieve at high levels. Chapter Two focuses on defining giftedness; examines giftedness and other related topics throughout history; presents an integrated timeline and major contributing theorists; presents research-based identification and programming options; and takes a closer look at some subcategories of gifted students, particularly those that underachieve. Chapter Three summarizes the case study methodology and begins to delineate the specific steps involved in this particular investigation. Chapter Four presents a detailed description of the students that were included in the cohort group as well as a description of each school site. Chapter Five objectively presents the initial

results from all data analyses, interviews, observations, including the patterns and themes gleaned from the observations, interviews, and other data analyses. Chapter Six further analyzes the identified themes and narrows the scope by identifying three analytic categories, that are directly tied to the three main research questions. As a result of further analysis of these analytic categories, ten components representing the participants' predominant influences on their achievement were analyzed and interpreted. These components were then related and compared to the literature in the field. These results were summarized and discussed in Chapter Seven with recommendations made upon the analysis of all results, along with implications for further study.

Personalizing the Work

As a classroom teacher, gifted coach, former academic tutor, and mother of two daughters, I know, first hand, that recognizing and paying close attention to the affective needs of all learners matters, but matters most intensely to the gifted learner. I have spent the past fifteen years mothering an especially bright but equally emotionally intense child and the impact that this has had on all of our family cannot be understated. As an educator and mother I have noticed areas in which academic needs were being met but where the social and emotional needs of my child could have been addressed more adequately at school. I noticed opportunities where the school and parents could have been more of a team. Adolescence is a tricky and sometimes problematic time in any child's life, but this child's intensities and personality patterns, it turns out, were fairly predictable and could have been better supported at school. Unfortunately this didn't happen and these issues lead to missed opportunities, intense sadness and loss of self-

esteem, poor grades, and almost full-blown academic failure for this child. This was an at-risk student to be sure and only fervent and continuous focus on the social and emotional aspects of this child's life led to recovery. This eventually translated to high achievement and school success once again, but it is still a day-by-day undertaking and support is now in place (both at home and at school) to enable continued progress.

All of this round-the-clock learning that I have experienced has created a passion in me to better meet the social and emotional needs of not only my own daughter but for all of our gifted learners as well. I have seen areas where their unique needs, aside from the academic ones, could be addressed more fully. I have known students that, although they achieved and seemed happy in elementary school, gradually stopped achieving at high levels as they progressed in school. While I have worked with many successful and highly engaged learners I have also known students that have experienced a multitude of failures that left their mark...and I think these failures could have been prevented, in part, by having social and emotional supports in place at school.

I have come to believe that educating our youth must involve two, intense and explicit, focuses: one on academics, involving a systematic monitoring of the results of best, first instruction and then the deliberate, research-based response to whatever the results tell us. The other focus must involve a deep analysis of the student's social and emotional behaviors and traits and a quick but deliberate, research-based response to what we see there too. Every year gifted students appear in classrooms, their eyes sparkling with eagerness for challenge but with, oftentimes, their worries locked within. Highly capable but underachieving students continue to drop out of school, if not

physically then mentally and emotionally. These “disenchanted” students must be looked at beyond achievement because the affective components can be a huge aid in effectively teaching the academic components (Betts, 2008). We are allowing children to fail and we, as educators, can do better. I believe this can happen through targeted, systematic, and intentional efforts, but the bottom line is we must have put deliberate steps in place, within the social and emotional realms, that will enable us to deeply know and understand our students so that we may truly help to move them forward in all areas of their development. This cannot be left to chance.

Definition of Terms

Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) – Also called a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) or Developmental Learning Plan (DLP). This is a plan developed usually at the school level for a gifted student that includes a variety of information such as: academic strengths and areas of concern, affective needs, assessment information, programming needs and experiences, as well as individual learning goals, objectives, and measures. The ALP is usually written with input from all stakeholders within the student’s support system.

Advanced Placement Classes – College level classes taught in many high schools by qualified teachers. Students take rigorous AP exams usually in May or June. If they successfully complete the class and score well on the exams they are able to earn college credits or take higher level courses when attending college.

Affective Needs – A term used to describe the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted students.

Ascending Intellectual Demand – A term used to define the match between escalating the learner and the curriculum in more advanced knowledge, understanding, and skill in a content area. As students become more advanced, task “demand” will need to escalate to ensure ongoing challenge for that learner.

Compacting – A differentiation strategy which permits students who exhibit prior knowledge or demonstrate mastery of the objective via pre-assessment to move at an accelerated pace through specific material.

Cognition – The mental faculty or process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition or perception.

Creative Thinking – A novel way of seeing or doing things characterized by four components –FLUENCY (generating many ideas), FLEXIBILITY (shifting perspective easily), ORIGINALITY (conceiving of something new), and ELABORATION (building on other ideas).

Creativity – A mental process by which an individual imagines or creates new ideas or products, or recombines existing ideas and products in a new way.

Critical Thinking – A process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, or value of something; characterized by the ability to seek reasons and alternatives, perceive the total situation, and change one’s view based on evidence. Also called “logical” thinking and “analytical” thinking.

Cubing – A teaching strategy designed to help students think about a topic or idea from many different angles.

Facilitated Independent Study – A method for encouraging and supporting students in studying topics of interest or in developing talent areas that may or may not be directly related to what their classmates are learning. The teacher and student (or small group of students) work together to design an area of study, narrow it down to a specific topic of interest, and identify the learner outcomes, resources, a timeline, and a final product to demonstrate learning.

Giftedness- The innate and extraordinary capacity in some domain of ability, whether it is intellectual, perceptual, physical, creative, or social that reflects a comparatively greater degree of this ability or potential as compared with that of the general population (usually the top 2.5 to 3% of the population.) The ability to reason at high levels and think abstractly, the ability to think divergently, the ability to function at extraordinary levels, and an intensity of focus and sensitivity may be traits that are evident, to varying degrees, in gifted learners.

Independent Study – A range of strategies in which students assume major roles in: selecting topics or questions to be investigated; designing plans, procedures, and products for the investigation; establishing and employing criteria for assessing the effectiveness of both the investigation and its end product; conducting the investigation; and sharing its findings. Independent studies allow students to pursue topics of interest in a direction or depth which is not suitable for or likely to be pursued by the class as a whole.

International Baccalaureate Program (IB) – This program is designed to bring a common curriculum to multinational students living in countries throughout the world. The underlying philosophy is to develop the whole student with challenging and in-depth learning experiences through general and comprehensive curriculum at the pre-collegiate level that is pitched at the first-year university level.

Iowa Acceleration Scale – An instrument that provides a systematic and thorough method of decision making for educators and parents who are considering whole-grade acceleration for students in kindergarten through 8th grade.

Learner Profile – An instrument created for individual students by collecting data regarding student achievement, interests, abilities, and learning styles. Often used as part of the Body of Evidence to determine gifted programming needs (see Advanced Learning Plan).

Learning Centers – Classroom areas that contain a collection of activities or materials designed to teach, reinforce, or extend a particular skill or concept. Learning centers can be used to differentiate content, process, and/or products in relation to a particular skill or concept.

Learning Contract – An agreement between a teacher and student(s). The teacher allows a certain amount of autonomy and choice in exchange for a student’s agreement to design and complete work as the contract specifies. Learning contracts can be used to eliminate repetitious work and to provide challenging and enriching work based on the readiness of the student or group of students.

Learning Modalities – All learners have a dominant learning modality, such as auditory, visual, or kinesthetic. Students learn best when material is provided for them that addresses their strongest learning modality.

Looping – The practice of having a teacher move up and then back down a grade level. A teacher of a 2nd grade class may move up to a 3rd grade class with the same students the next year.

Metacognition – The process of planning, assessing, and monitoring one’s own thinking, which is considered the pinnacle of mental functioning.

Multicultural Education – Culturally responsive education respects diversity while teaching all children to become effective and participating members of a democracy. It respects individuality while promoting respect for others. It emphasizes the contributions of the various groups (e.g., ethnic, gender, religious, sexual orientation, etc.) that make up the population of the world.

Parallel Curriculum – A specific model for developing curriculum. There are four parallels from which curriculum design is approached in this model – “Core Curriculum,” “Curriculum of Connections,” “Curriculum of Practice,” and “Curriculum of Identity.” Teachers use any one or combination of these parallels as a framework for thinking about and planning curriculum.

Preventive Counseling – A developmental approach to guidance and counseling that is concerned with the ongoing growth of the child.

Self-concept – Internal beliefs and attitudes one holds in terms of personal attributes and the roles which are played or fulfilled by the individual.

Self-esteem – Feelings about oneself in regard to personal satisfaction with roles and/or the quality of performance.

Service Learning – A method of teaching, learning, and reflecting that combines academic classroom curriculum with meaningful community service.

Simulation – A teaching model used to provide students with real life situations or problems using a variety of assigned roles, situations, and possible outcomes.

Telescoping Curricula – The student spends less time than usual in a course of study (e.g., completes a 1-year course in a semester or completes high school in 3 years instead of 4).

Thinking Skills – Basic and advanced skills and sub-skills that govern a person's mental processes. These skills consist of knowledge, dispositions, and cognitive and metacognitive operations.

Tiered Assignments – Tiered assignments are used to differentiate instruction for the wide range of student readiness in a heterogeneous classroom.

Twice-Exceptional – The gifted learning-disabled student who exhibits remarkable talents or strengths in some areas and disabling weaknesses in others. These include: identified gifted students who have subtle learning disabilities, un-identified students, and identified learning disabled students who are also gifted.

(Partially retrieved from Colorado Department of Education online, 2008)

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

“Giftedness means many things. It means different things to different people, to society, and to gifted kids themselves.”

Jim Delisle

As this deep, historical and contemporary exploration indicates, many positive changes have impacted how we view and educate our gifted students and this overview is relevant to this particular study for several reasons. First, a thorough historical overview indicates that some ideas relative to educating the gifted have changed over time but many perspectives and theories have remained consistent and are now further supported by current research. In addition, the learning that has happened over centuries still impacts the educational decisions made today and, in this time of budget deficits, it is important to use the vast knowledge that exists on giftedness as a guide for important decision making. Secondly, the contemporary research now offers new insight into and strategies for dealing with students who live in this very complicated new millennium. Educators have to consider the whole child in their quest for the most effective programming options and are called to think creatively in their approach, confidently using research-based strategies as a time-saving mechanism for appropriately educating their students. In planning for the most appropriate education for our gifted youth it is important to not only consider their academic needs but their unique affective requirements as well.

To gain a deeper understanding into the social and emotional needs of gifted children we need to delve deeper into the roots of giftedness, but let us first begin with my own general definition of giftedness, as gleaned from several different sources:

The innate and extraordinary capacity in some domain of ability, whether it is intellectual, perceptual, physical, creative, or social that reflects a comparatively greater degree of this ability or potential as compared with that of the general population (usually the top 2.5 to 3% of the population.) The ability to reason at high levels and think abstractly, the ability to think divergently, the ability to function at extraordinary levels, and an intensity of focus and sensitivity may be traits that are evident, to varying degrees, in gifted learners.

To further increase our knowledge about the gifted, identification and programming must be examined and whole grade acceleration will be explored as it relates to being a viable means to sustaining school achievement and engagement amongst our gifted learners, especially within rural school districts that lack a multitude of programming options. Finally, it is also important to turn our lens to achievement levels amongst the gifted as well as some subgroups and the learning issues that they may deal with.

A Historical Look at Giftedness

Giftedness is a phenomenon that educators have been grappling with throughout the ages. Throughout history societies have selected their most talented individuals for an advanced level of education. For example, during the Tang Dynasty (618-905), which was known for its encouragement of the arts and literature, China sent its gifted children to the Imperial Court where they could receive an education appropriate to their abilities. Plato considered and wrote about the question of human intellectual growth and theorized that the human mind grows from a state of intellectual darkness into various stages of intellectual illumination or knowledge, of which all minds must pass sequentially. He

further speculated that individuals progress to different distances through, and attain different heights within, these stages (Alexander, 1982). European governments during the Renaissance supported gifted individuals in art, architecture, and literature with wealth and honor (Smutny, 2003). In the Western world, however, the term “gifted” indicated a particular talent—Mozart a “gifted musician,” Shakespeare a “gifted writer,” Monet a “gifted artist.” History contains many indications that individuals or groups have been aware that giftedness or genius is not confined to members of an aristocracy or royalty. Efforts to identify gifted children among the common or poor people were made in early history by rulers, as well as politicians and philosophers, who were concerned with the identification of potential leaders to strengthen their governments. Around 800 A.D. Emperor Charlemagne urged the education, at state expense, of promising children to be found among the common people. In the fifteenth century, a Turkish sultan founded a palace school in Constantinople and sent emissaries throughout the empire to select the fairest, strongest, and most intelligent boys without regard to social class. Early in the eighteenth century Thomas Jefferson proposed a legislative bill entitled, “The Diffusion of Education,” to provide at public expense for the university education of promising American youths. The explicit purpose of the bill was to prepare gifted young children for leadership roles in the New World.

Not until the 20th century did the term gifted come to be used in a more general sense and, finally, began to be applied to children who demonstrated unusual and advanced abilities. Debates about the nature of giftedness have focused on a fundamental question: Does a person’s intelligence result primarily from hereditary (nature) or

environmental factors (nurture)? The view that dominated the field for many years was that heredity determined an individual's intelligence more than any other factor. Nearly one hundred years later the French psychologist, Alfred Binet, challenged this viewpoint and set out to prove that intelligence was "educable." IQ testing, as a means for identification of giftedness, grew out of this research and prior to the advent of intelligence testing and the IQ score, giftedness was equated with productivity, superior performance and dedication. Binet, however, thought of intelligence as the use of mental functions, such as attention, memory, discrimination, and practical judgment (Fancher, 1985). Over time the focus on the human mind progressed from philosophical analysis to scientific inquiry into individual differences in intelligence. The scientific investigation centered around the theory that intelligence was a fixed quantity that remained unchanged by outside forces. In time, however, many researchers came to view intellectual growth as greatly dependent on environmental stimulation and the attempts one made to adapt to that environment. Those currently involved in gifted education no longer feel it is sufficient to talk of the stimulation of the human mind and the important role of life experiences. Consequently, gifted education has now evolved to the point at which it is necessary to systematically plan and organize programs within our educational institutions that will adequately provide those appropriate and stimulating experiences (Alexander, 1982).

Public interest in gifted children has been tied to a society's need to develop a greater pool of political and/or scientific leaders and so a concerted effort to identify and educate gifted children has occurred most frequently within emerging nations or nations

seeking to acquire or maintain a role of world leadership or domination. Once the national goals have been met interest usually has waned and general support for special educational programs for the gifted has lessened or disappeared. This decline can be attributed to the efforts of people to stabilize a society through conformity and unity after a war, for example, or a rise to power. Gifted persons often are seen as advocates of change who tend to unsettle established institutions and societies by asserting powerful challenges. (Whitmore, 1980).

The rise of scientific interest in the late nineteenth century led to efforts to study systematic human nature, including the potential for achievement. In America, during the early period of the country's development, gifted individuals were highly valued since leadership was imperative for survival. After that early period the "melting pot" objective began to dominate American values and negative sentiment against "elitism" became stronger. A factory-type structure became characteristic of organizations and institutions, including schools, creating a social climate in which the most creative and intellectually gifted individuals tended to feel devalued and antagonized. Rewards went to high-producing conformists; non-conformists, divergent thinkers, or reflective persons were often made to feel unappreciated, if not socially rejected, because they threatened the "status-quo." In 1940, Herbert Carroll, a noted educational psychiatrist, described the American society as having developed, "side by side with an enthusiasm for success stories, a cult of mediocrity." However, the public attitude was altered by the need for leadership during the two world wars, especially World War II. The peak of American interest in gifted children was sparked in 1957 by Sputnik, which effectively launched

America into the Space Age. The post World War II years and the early part of the fifties had brought about what has been termed “the knowledge explosion” and with this came rapid advances in technology. Sputnik sent America into a frantic search for gifted children with the potential for mastering the knowledge and technology necessary to enable them to become leading scientists in innovative efforts. To many the launching of the Russian satellite Sputnik represented an obvious and shocking technological defeat: The Soviet Union’s scientific minds had outperformed ours. The aftermath has been described as a “total talent mobilization” where gifted children became a prized national resource. Academic coursework was telescoped or condensed for bright students; college courses were offered in high school; and foreign languages were taught in elementary schools. Acceleration and ability grouping were used and efforts were made to identify gifted and talented minority children. Unfortunately this keen interest and progress only lasted about five years because just as before in history, once it was believed that America’s leadership was assured, support for identification and special programming for the gifted diminished. Public support lessened and then shifted to concern for civil rights.

This apathy continued for more than ten years but shifted once again, in the mid-seventies, and was based in recognition of the need for leadership with the concerns directed toward the solution of serious world and national problems: overpopulation; diminishing national resources; hunger; irreversible inflation; corruption and crime; possible nuclear war; disease; space travel, etc. Great minds are still pondering over these same issues today in the Twenty-first Century and our brightest students are again looked to for possible solutions.

As before in our history the nature vs. nurture debate continues, with more current research taking a “developmental view” of giftedness where “coincidence” is considered a major factor in whether a child with potential reaches giftedness or not. According to Smutny (2003), two prominent psychologists (Feldman and Bloom’s) research supports the viewpoint that “unusual ability must coincide with a nurturing environment and excellent teaching.” High intelligence is not the only attribute with which to define giftedness and further research indicates that personality characteristics also play a role, although, historically, the identification of the gifted has been linked to intelligence tests. In the early part of the 20th century Lewis Terman, a professor at Stanford University, translated and refined the work of Binet. He identified 1500 students with an IQ score of at least 135 on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test and then conducted a comprehensive, longitudinal study on the personality characteristics and later creative accomplishments of these young geniuses. Terman’s longitudinal studies indicate four traits that contribute to high achievement among the gifted: persistence in the accomplishment of ends, integration toward goals, self-confidence, and freedom from inferiority feelings (Terman and Oden, 1947). Later, Hildreth argued:

Today, the simple formula of ‘giving a Binet’ and deciding where to ‘draw the line’ no longer suffices. If giftedness is viewed as developed capacities and unusual performances in a wide range of skills and achievements, the identification of the gifted and talented requires a many-sided study of the individual’s intellectual abilities (Hildreth, 1966, p. 37).

Related to this finding is Renzulli’s work (1978) that points to three essential components of giftedness: ability, creativity, and task commitment. For some researchers, creativity is the highest level of cognitive functioning (Guilford 1967;

Torrance 1969). According to Guildford and Torrance the four most widely known abilities relative to creativity are: fluency (generating many ideas); flexibility (creating different thought patterns); originality (producing unique, unexpected ideas); and elaboration (extending ideas, embellishing, implementing ideas.) Gifted researchers and practitioners continue to explore the many facets of giftedness and knowledge of the complex nature of intelligence can aid in creating more equitable methods for the identification and the programming for gifted children. As this is considered it is important to acknowledge and delve deeper into the potential outcome of *not* providing proper identification, programming, and services: gifted students who struggle and do not meet their learning potential:

Every gift contains a danger. Whatever gift we have we are compelled to express. And if the expression of that gift is blocked, distorted, or merely allowed to languish, then the gift turns against us, and we suffer (Johnson, 1993, p. 85).

Identification

According to Ruf (2005) in 1991 a group of high intelligence specialists, later known as “The Columbus Group,” met in Columbus, Ohio, to wrestle with the concept of giftedness...they determined the essence of the gifted individual:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modification in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (Morelock 1991, p.1).

Since that time the definition has been expanded to include:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by

the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), (2002), Title IX, Part A, Sec. 9101[22]).

Not surprisingly, identifying a gifted learner is not an easy task and there has traditionally been much confusion over criteria, terms, and definitions. Giftedness is most often defined as a function of high intelligence and, as a result, intelligence or achievement tests are used extensively to identify it. However, culturally and linguistically diverse groups continue to be underrepresented. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) for 2002 and 2004 point to this fact, with the exception of Asian students, identified as gifted nation-wide:

Hispanic students represent approximately 17.8 percent of the total school population, yet they represents only 3.7 percent of students identified as gifted in 2002 and 4.3 percent of students identified in 2004.

African-American students represent approximately 17.1 percent of the total school population, yet they represented only 3.1 percent of students identified as gifted in 2002 and 3.5 percent of students identified as gifted in 2004. (2007, Table 51).

Many methods of screening for giftedness have been used, such as standardized group tests, creativity tests, individual IQ tests, behavior rating scales, teacher nomination, transcripts, biographical inventories, and parent recommendations/referrals and peer referrals. Contemporary viewpoints suggest a combination of criteria, or a body of evidence, to more accurately identify a learner as gifted, recognizing that multiple identification components must be integrated if an accurate view of the whole child is to emerge (Kingore, 2001). This body of evidence could include: assessment scores, checklist traits and behaviors, parent and teacher inventories. Schools almost always use scores from standardized ability and achievement tests as part of this process. The gifted

range of scores typically starts at the 98th percentile which equates to about a 130 IQ score. According to Ruf (2005), this means that two out of every 100 children could be gifted by this definition. She goes on to state that it is important to note, however, that there are huge differences in capabilities within the highest 1% or 2% of people...the difference in ability between someone at the 99th percentile and someone at the 99.4th percentile may be as large as the difference in ability between someone at the 50th and someone at the 75th percentile. This indicates that percentile scores may not be the best way to communicate student differences and ability levels, nor should it be the only determinant for a child's identification as a gifted learner.

Systematic classroom observation plays an important role in identifying gifted students, especially those that most likely will not be identified using traditional achievement and intelligence measures, such as second language learners or those students with learning or emotional difficulties. The Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI) is one such tool that allows for this intensive and systematic observation. With this system:

Each teacher organizes the observation and screening process as a series of opportunities for all students to demonstrate advanced behaviors. The intent is to be inclusive instead of exclusive by observing every student in the class and noting each student's response to a stimulating learning environment (Kingore, 2001, pg. 1).

There are some who would argue that observation is too subjective and therefore not an effective measure in the identification process. Renzulli reminds us that being subjective does not necessarily mean not appropriate:

If some degree of subjectivity cannot be tolerated, then our definition of giftedness and the resulting programs will logically be limited to abilities that can only be measured by objective tests (Renzulli, 1978, p. 181).

Educators can gain insights into students' potentials from observation of their behavior and, using the KOI, the identification process is then focused on assessment that is ongoing and integrated with the students' needs. In addition, recognizing gifted potential is not a reward for students but, rather, an awareness of needs. With this basic philosophy instruction can be differentiated to match readiness. As Bertie Kingore states:

In the spirit of being inclusive instead of exclusive, it is helpful to think of the identification process as an ongoing series of opportunities given to all students in order to reveal potentials. This attitude is much more developmentally appropriate and sensitive to the background experiences of students than interpreting the screening process as a series of hurdles that students must successfully overcome (Kingore, 2001, pg. 10).

It is important to note, however, that schools need to provide appropriate, high level learning opportunities for all children so that they may then begin to assess and identify high abilities in their students. Through ongoing, thoughtful, and deliberate observation we can begin to balance subjective and objective information in order to identify multiple kinds of talents in all populations (Kingore, 2001).

Programming

The ultimate goal for proper identification of gifted learners should be to enable students to perform at their potential. Programs should then be individualized to the students being served. The program should be stimulating, consistent with the student's stage of development, and compatible with the interests and abilities of the learner (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Greenlaw & McIntosh, 1988; Ross, 1993). Many program models have developed over time to aid in the appropriate education of cognitively gifted students.

These include: Enrichment in the Regular Classroom; Curriculum Differentiation; Curriculum Compacting; Independent Study; Resource Room; Consultant Teacher; Gifted (Instructional) Coaches; Special Schools; Mentors; Acceleration; Advanced Placement Courses. In addition to addressing the academic needs of gifted learners it is very important to make provisions for the affective as well so a comprehensive approach to programming is needed.

An underlying premise in all gifted programming should be that services are tailored to meet the child's individual needs based upon his or her strength areas. One effective way to address strengths for all gifted learners is through a talent development approach to programming. Renzulli's Type III Enrichment opportunities illustrate such an approach and constitute an individual or group investigation of real world problems. Students selected for this type of study would become involved in an investigation of a problem in an area of interest using authentic means of inquiry and would ultimately report their results to a real audience. Renzulli's Enrichment Triad has three levels of enrichment: Type 1, which involves general exploratory experiences; Type 2, involving cognitive and affective development; and Type 3, consisting of individual and small group investigations. This type of project is not an independent study, but an inquiry conducted with the assistance of an adult facilitator or mentor (Baum 2004). Another programming option that has been proven to effectively address student strengths is the Autonomous Learner Model for Optimizing Ability, developed by George Betts and Jolene Kercher. This option has five dimensions to develop students' potential: orientation; individual development; enrichment; seminars; and in-depth study. Emphasis

is placed on the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of the individual (Betts, 2003). As part of the orientation dimension, for example, students receive a variety of instructional opportunities regarding the understanding of giftedness, talent, intelligence and creativity. Dimension Two focuses on inter/intra personal development and the teaching of individualized learning skills. Components of such projects/opportunities that promote success for the students are: (1) A positive relationship with a caring adult; (2) An emphasis on pursuing students' talents and interests in an authentic manner; and (3) An integration of self-regulation strategies learned within the context of the project or study. When considering effective classroom practices the total educational environment must be addressed: the physical; intellectual; and emotional.

In addressing the students intellectual needs a program must be designed to allow students to engage in a challenging curriculum that is unique to how they learn as well as to allow for appropriate accommodation. Differentiated instructional strategies (in content, process, and product) must be used to ensure that students must be able to find opportunities to feel respected and valued in the school community. Examples of differentiation that can be utilized are: flexible grouping; compacting; orbital study; independent projects; group investigations; problem-based learning; and interest centers (Tomlinson, 1999). These methods entail a collaborative effort between student, parent, teachers, administration, and specialists but we must strive to deliver opportunities to these bright students that honors their intelligence while at the same time provides avenues to the learning by which they can be successful. A curriculum that respects

intelligence and offers sophisticated challenge and personal relevance will afford these children opportunities to achieve high quality success.

Whole grade acceleration is another programming option that must be considered viable and appropriate for gifted students. Pressey (1949) defined acceleration as “to progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional.” This methodology has been controversial, however, but this controversy has been relatively recent. Prior to the mid 19th century the idea that children should remain with chronological peers in their schooling was not common. Rather, students frequently only remained at a certain level only long enough to achieve some locally determined outcome. Pressey states that four factors emerged in the 20th century to modify this belief: (1) mandatory attendance for all children; (2) increased educational expectations; (3) the rise of developmental theories in child psychology, and (4) huge increases in the number of students being educated. Callard-Szulgit contends that,

Just as districts in the 70s, 80s, and 90’s went overboard with enrichment as the answer to educating gifted children, school districts are now going overboard with differentiation as the sole answer...Another key part of the process is servicing gifted children at their aptitude levels, which could entail acceleration or grade skipping (Callard-Szulgit, 2003, pg. 15).

Also known as grade advancement, this is a method of meeting the needs of some gifted learners that is simply matching their needs to the appropriate curriculum.

Feldhusen and Klausmeier (1959) demonstrated that when a new learning task is selected at just the right level of student readiness, the skill or concept is learned well and will be more effectively remembered and generalized. Most recently a national report was released after the Summit on Acceleration was held at the University of Iowa in May of

2003. This meeting included scholars and educators from around the country and *A Nation Deceived* was released in 2004 as a result of the work done there. This report has radically changed the way whole grade acceleration is now viewed and served to dispel many unfounded myths, misconceptions, and personal bias. According to Colangelo (2004), “Acceleration is about appropriate educational planning...Acceleration is about respecting individual differences and the fact that some of these differences merit educational flexibility.” *A Nation Deceived* is a meta-analysis of many studies that only serve to validate this practice, especially for highly gifted learners. One of the premises in the document is that a student should never be held back academically for social reasons. This flies in the face of the old excuse often cited by school personnel regarding students suffering socially (and emotionally) as a result of grade advancement. In fact, there has been much research done in this area and, in most cases, children adjust socially as soon as their academic needs are being met.

Some Subgroups of The Gifted

Underachievers. The term “underachiever” is used to refer to any student who has shown exceptional performance on a measure of intelligence and who, nevertheless, does not perform as well as expected for students of the same age on school related tasks. (This term applies to all populations and not only gifted learners.) High ability does not always result in high achievement, which is a critical point for both parents and educators to grasp in order to understand this phenomenon. Underachievement becomes especially evident when one observes a student over time and finds a noticeable pattern—when one sees the special moments or the “tuned-in” times. Research has estimated that about half

of all identified gifted children underachieve in U.S. schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1984; Richert, 1991). This is a significant issue amongst gifted students and more than a half a century after the first book on underachievement was published, little progress has been made in effectively addressing this condition, although research-proven methodologies and strategies exist. This problem is especially prevalent amongst middle and high school students, and many smart teenagers, in particular, simply opt out of performing highly in school. Usually these students are seen as smart but not “working up to their potential.” Unfortunately negative self-concepts and low self-esteem often results in undesirable coping behavior, academic underachievement, and an aversion to school.

The most common characteristics and patterns of underachievement includes: a very high IQ, poor work habits, a seeming inability to concentrate, lack of effort in tasks, an intense interest in one particular area, frequently unfinished work, a low self esteem, demonstrations of emotional frustration, negative attitudes toward self and peers, a skill deficit in at least one subject area, inattentiveness to task at hand, and failure to respond to motivation by usual teacher techniques—all significant social and emotional issues! In addition, these students often feel rejected by their family and they feel their families are dissatisfied with them; they may feel victimized; they are negative in evaluations of themselves, demonstrated by distrust, disinterest, lack of concern, and even hostility toward others (Clark 1979). As a result of constant failure in some areas, these students tend to exhibit either of two basic behavioral patterns: aggressive or withdrawn. The features of the aggressive pattern are: stubborn refusal to comply with requests, attention

seeking, disruption of others, continual rejection of set work, absence of self-direction in decision making, and continual alienation of peers. The features of the withdrawal behavior pattern include lack of communication, fantasy world, working alone, little in class work undertaken, and little attempt to justify behavior.

Underachievement cannot be said to have any one cause. Rimm (1987) has stated that some gifted students will continue to achieve if they see a relationship between the learning process and its outcomes and has identified four potential relationships between efforts and outcomes, delineating these into “quadrants.” Quadrant 1 children are gifted learners that are demonstrating appropriate effort and are learning and achieving, despite any internalized pressures because their goals are not set at perfectionistic extremes. These children have learned to work hard and have all the appropriate skills and strategies to succeed academically. Quadrants 2 and 3 represent relationships between effort and outcomes that are transitional stages to underachievement and if a mismatch between effort and outcomes continues these children are likely to lose their sense of personal control over outcomes. This is likely to result in serious underachievement, known as Quadrant 4. Rimm has shown that there is a connection to achievement/underachievement at each of these levels to the child’s home, school, and/or peer environments. Rimm’s work has shown that if schools do not value high-achievement outcomes but, rather, set high priorities for athletics and social status, promote an anti-gifted atmosphere that considers gifted programming elitist, provide a rigid classroom environment that requires all students to study identical materials at similar speeds or in similar styles, or teachers who rigidly do not see the quality of

children's work either because of different values, personal power struggles, or cultural or racial prejudice. They may cause children to feel unable to accomplish high-quality outcomes despite their efforts (Davis & Rimm, 1994; Rimm, 1984).

Jim Delisle has a new approach to not only defining underachievement but in modifying it. He asks educators to consider these statements:

(1) Underachievement is first and foremost a behavior and, as such, can change over time. (2) Underachievement is content and situation specific. (3) Underachievement is in the eye of the beholder. (4) Underachievement is tied intimately to self-image development. (5) Underachievement implies that adults disapprove of a child's behavior. (6) Underachievement is a learned set of behaviors. (7) Underachievement is taught (Delisle, 2002, pg. 169).

Further, he states that too often children are labeled underachievers when they are really "selective consumers." Selective consumers take the best from what schools and teachers have to offer and leave the rest behind. For example:

...Underachievers are dependent and reactive but selective consumers are independent and proactive. Underachievers tend to withdraw and selective consumers tend to rebel. Underachievers exhibit uniformly weak performance but selective consumers exhibit performance that varies relative to the teacher and/or content... (pg. 178).

Once you have a pretty good idea as to whether the child is a true underachiever or a selective consumer, Delisle suggests appropriate supportive, intrinsic, and remedial strategies. For example:

Supportive strategies: Selective Consumers: Eliminating (or at least significantly reducing) work already mastered; Underachievers: Holding daily class meetings to discuss student concerns and progress. Intrinsic strategies: Selective Consumers: Students set daily/weekly/monthly goals with approval of teacher. Underachievers: Verbal praise for any self-initiating behaviors. Remedial Strategies: Selective Consumers: Use of humor and personal example to approach areas of academic weakness. Underachievers: Small-group instruction in common areas of weakness (e.g., spelling, sequencing, phonics) (pg. 187).

According to Delisle the most important thing is that we, as caring educators, come to appreciate and understand the central role we play in the academic and emotional lives of gifted children and that we alter our approaches in working with these children.

Gifted Girls. According to a study by Reis and Small (2001), gifted girls, in general, tend to achieve at lower levels as they age due to a drop in self confidence and self-perceived abilities and their study indicated that the aging process has a negative impact on both the achievement and self-confidence of gifted girls. Several studies indicate that the decline in girls' achievement begins in middle school and both parents' and teachers' expectations for girls play an important role in this decline (Rimm, 2008). However, they also state that too many intervening variables affect the complex reasons that one girl grows up self-confident and able to achieve and another does not. Factors such as gender expectations are important to consider: Messages to daughters need to be clear about expectations for their thinking and their intelligence. They can learn math and science and they can play sports and learn to take criticism (Rim, 2008). A report by the National Council for Research on Women tells us that:

Although the gender gap in math and science is narrowing, many girls who are highly competent in these areas are less likely to choose careers in science and technology both parents' and teachers' expectations for girls play an important role in this decline (Rim, 2008, pg. 257).

Gifted Boys. Several studies have shown that family support is very important to the academic achievement of gifted boys but the research also indicates that there is a fine line between support and going too far and providing an excessive emphasis on achievement and competition, which can be damaging as well. According to Olenchak (2002), "Those (boys) who attain success both in and out of school view their families as

more closely knit and supportive than those who show superior ability only in math and science.” Olenchak goes on to say that families should provide social, emotional, and scholastic encouragement and support as well as skills in socialization for their boys. Gifted boys can be especially self-critical and pessimistic, tend to internalize their own concerns and not share them, and learn to avoid asking for help. Positive role modeling is critical to the development of gifted boys because they tend to gauge their behavior through external comparisons. A mentoring relationship with an adult expert in an area of interest offers a gifted boy a strong opportunity for self-development and such relationships have been shown to be beneficial in reversing underachievement and discouragement.

Issues Regarding Both Genders. Several social and emotional issues that tend to be problematic for gifted kids and their families, relative to both genders, surfaced in the literature and are worth noting here: Parental over-protection: According to Troxclair (2008), parents of gifted children tend to have a propensity for overprotection, in general. This, in part, may be a result of the intense nature of these children and the parent’s impulse to step in and rescue the child from repercussions of this trait. As she further explains:

...these children “come equipped with supersensitive nervous systems which enable them to assimilate extraordinary amounts of sensory stimuli.” Creatively gifted children perceive more details in situations, others, and themselves. These traits predispose them to interact with passion and compassion which may lead to forming deep attachments and intense commitments to people or ideas; these feelings bring with them a level of persistence that can result in gifted children being hurt repeatedly (D. Troxclair, 2008).

Another issue that surfaced has to do with boredom. Adolescents, both boys and girls, will often complain that they are bored and hate school because of it. Deal (2004) clarifies and outlines the concept of boredom this way:

The Nine Factors of Boredom

A review of psychological research indicates that nine factors contribute to boredom.

Several of them relate directly to the characteristics of gifted individuals.

1. Age. Feelings of boredom peak in adolescence, when individuals are waiting to engage in meaningful, productive work.
2. Gender. Although members of both genders may experience boredom similarly, researchers believe that girls are more likely to identify this feeling as depression, while boys are more likely to say that they are bored.
3. Perceptions of time. For those experiencing boredom, the time seems to drag. This may lead to the feeling that the entire day was boring, when in “real time” the episode of boredom may have lasted only minutes. Gifted children usually complete work in less time than others, leaving them with extra time to fill. Or they may become so involved in a project that they get frustrated when asked to move on and work on another task. Either situation can lead to boredom. Also, gifted children often have so many interests that their time is overscheduled. They are unaccustomed to downtime and may be at a loss for ways to use it. Parents may need to help them generate ideas for coping with free time. Suggesting unwelcome chores will not ease their boredom. Alternatives should address a child’s interests, mental involvement, or physical outlets for energy.

4. Basic needs. Adequate sleep, proper nutrition, and a sense of security must be provided. Even family disagreements interfere with feelings of security.
5. Physical movement. In school, physical activity is frequently limited. This inner need cannot be ignored and will be expressed somehow, whether in permissible or in unacceptable ways. Gifted individuals often seem to have boundless energy and may have difficulty containing their need for action.
6. Barriers to freedom. In the classroom, some freedoms have to be limited. How a child views these limits, however, can be key to his or her feelings of dissatisfaction expressed as boredom. Gifted individuals, who tend to be self-sufficient and independent, often resent outside controls.
7. Lack of choice and control over activities. Gifted students may be required to do the same activity for the same amount of time as every other student. Because of their high degree of motivation, they often lose interest when they cannot choose their activities themselves.
8. Mental stimulation. Many gifted students require high levels of stimulation and race to take on new challenges. Their rapid rates of acquisition and retention cause them to be impatient with repetition and intolerant of routine tasks.
9. Coping skills. Some students have not developed the ability to cope with feelings of boredom adequately and appropriately. The good news is that coping skills can be learned, planned, modeled, and taught.

In addition, Deal (2004) delineates between depression and boredom, two emotional situations that are often confused. These are presented in the list and information below:

Psychological research mentions the forced effort model as a response to boredom, whereby students who wish to do well or to please others force themselves to continue an activity that bores them. This drains their mental energy reserves, and these children may exhibit characteristics similar to those of depression. The differences between depression and boredom are summarized in the table below. The quality, intensity, frequency, and duration of the feelings are important. This list is not to be used as a diagnostic tool and is only a summary of research findings. If you suspect that your child is reaching the point of being “bored to tears,” consult a doctor or counselor (Deal, 2004).

<i>Boredom</i>	<i>Depression</i>
1. Blames other people or things	Blames self
2. Has an empty feeling	Has a heavy feeling or hopelessness
3. Experiences a lack of interest	Experiences sadness or sense of personal loss
4. Has a limited attention span	Has intense feelings
5. Contributing events are infrequent	Contributing events are persistent
6. Rate of incidence higher in males	Rate of incidence higher in females
7. Seeks stimulation	Avoids stimulation

The Twice Exceptional. Applying more comprehensive screening for the identification of gifted students certainly applies to the many students who fall under the radar and are underachieving. There is a broad continuum of the gifted, from the highly gifted to what’s known as the twice exceptional: students who are gifted, but who struggle with a learning disability or attention deficit, have special intellectual gifts but

are unsuccessful with certain basic learning tasks and, consequently, struggle in school. These students certainly do not stand out as gifted learners...at least not until one digs deeper. Throughout time, anecdotal (and sometimes mythical) stories have described people with uneven patterns of strengths and weaknesses. Only recently have we learned more about people who have this curious mix of learning disabilities and gifts (Baum, 2004). Due to the learning disability or attention deficit these children are often overlooked in their area(s) of strength because of the major focus on what they cannot do and what they do not know. These students are now identified as Twice Exceptional and it is imperative that schools pay attention to the gifts as well as to the learning deficits.

For most people, the terms learning disabled and gifted are on opposite ends of the learning spectrum. However, the State of Colorado defines Twice Exceptional students as students who are identified as gifted and talented in one or more areas of exceptionality, such as in specific academics, general intellectual ability, creativity, leadership, visual, musical, or performing arts but who also are identified with a disability as defined by Federal/State eligibility criteria: perceptual communicative disability (PD); significant identifiable emotional disability (SIED); physical disabilities; sensory disabilities; autism; or ADD/ADHD. Research indicates that 2-5% of the gifted population will have disabilities and 2-5% of students with disabilities will be gifted (Whitmore, 1980; Whitmore and Maker, 1985).

According to Baum (2004) there seem to be three subgroups of these students who are in our schools at this time: (1) Students identified as gifted yet exhibit difficulties in school: Often these students are considered “underachievers” with their learning

disability remaining unrecognized until they are older. These students often will manage to compensate for their disability; (2) Students identified with a disability but whose exceptional abilities are unrecognized and unmet: Inadequate assessments and/or depressed scores (achievement and IQ) often lead to underestimation of these students' intellectual abilities. These children are currently not identified as gifted and do not meet eligibility requirements for gifted programs; (3) Students whose abilities and disabilities mask each other—the student is not identified for either exceptionality: These students are known as “hidden” Twice Exceptional students and function at grade level but well below potential. These students' high intelligence allows them to compensate for their disability. Red flags for a learning disability may be raised for these students later in their school careers. It is thought that this may be the largest group of underserved students in our public school population.

Twice Exceptional students present confusing, paradoxical behaviors. While these students are knowledgeable about many things they can't remember simple facts. Although they are oftentimes task committed they will generate many excuses for not following through to completion of tasks. These students have in-depth interests but have a short attention span and will appear bored and aloof. Consequently, many of these students exhibit low self-esteem. Indicators of low self-esteem include: anger, self-criticism, crying, depression, disruptive behaviors, clowning behaviors, denial of problems, withdrawal, daydreaming and fantasy, and apathetic behavior. In trying to identify these students there are three critical items to look for: (1) Evidence of outstanding talent, ability, or creativity; (2) Evidence of aptitude—achievement

discrepancy based on screening data; and (3) Response to scientifically based instruction. To adequately identify these Twice Exceptional students it is recommended that a multidimensional approach is used: Screening processes should include all students and be universally done at various levels; Multiple sources, tools, and criteria should be used to create a body of evidence; A particular focus should be applied to find underachieving students; and a variety of data should be collected about learners who have documented learning needs.

Identifying these types of learners is only the first step in the process, however. After identification the big question is how to adequately meet their learning needs. First and foremost, focused attention in programming for a twice exceptional learner should be on strengths and interests not on deficits and remediation. It is increasingly clear that when the educational focus is on talent and providing learning environments that align with the student's natural ways of learning, dramatic changes occur in motivation, self-esteem, and behavior (Baum 2004). In order to provide appropriate classroom intervention strategies, teachers must first realize that gifted students with disabilities have learning needs like those that are gifted and like those that have learning problems. This means that teachers must dually differentiate both the curriculum and the instruction for them. "Neglected or suppressed strengths are like infections under the skin; eventually they cause serious damage (Levine, 2002, p. 19). "Attending to the gift" is of particular importance for gifted students with disabilities and too often their strengths are ignored or put on hold in order to address their weaknesses.

Some Social/Emotional Issues

Webb states that:

Gifted children are emotionally intense with extra emotional antennae. This may be evident not only in their interactions with others and their attitudes toward themselves but also in their reactions to everyday events (Webb, 1994, p. 10).

In addition to their sensitivity, these children usually have active imaginations and may read excess into ordinary situations and even jump to conclusions. It is important to help them develop ways of checking their thoughts and fears and to interpret meaning as it was intended by others. Dr. Daniel Amen (1997), asserts that thoughts are very powerful and students must be taught how their brain works and how their body reacts to every thought that they have. He suggests ways to actively teach students to have control over negative thinking and empowers them with the ability to change the ways that they think, which translates directly to their ability to tackle challenging tasks at school.

In addition to hyper-sensitivity, overactive imagination, and negative thinking, acquiring and maintaining social skills has been shown to be another difficult area for gifted students. According to Lavoie (2005), some children are blessed in innately having these skills that are necessary to be successful in life, but others lack a widely coveted asset called “childhood versatility,” a packet of well-rounded abilities plus a keen sense of how and when to deploy them to please the outside world. Many of these students will experience rejection and isolation by their peers as a result of this deficit, which can also lead to apathy, lack of ambition, and underachievement in school.

These are just a few examples of social and emotional issues that can literally cripple the gifted learner and are case in point of why strong affective components must

be in place within gifted programs for students to realize success. Coping strategies must be taught in order for the student to experience success and achieve. Many students must be formally taught how to understand themselves and others. If these strategies are not in place achievement begins to diminish. Perfectionism is an additional affective factor, with wide variances, that also has been linked to underachievement amongst gifted students. The following description begins to delineate some of the behaviors and relative consequences of this often detrimental trait common to gifted learners.

Perfectionism

Another social and emotional-related difficulty that can lead to a lack of achievement and school success for gifted students has to do with the concept of perfectionism. Perfectionists are people who are very bright and most likely have experienced success due to their high intelligence. They often can find multiple solutions to one problem but often they are not comfortable with a finishing point to a project, always feeling like more could be done. The need to do things perfectly is widely known as “perfectionism” and is an impossible goal. This trait can be one of the most crippling problems that can affect some gifted kids. It is important to know that this trait can manifest itself in many ways. Some students will exhibit “the worrywart” tendency and others will just not turn assignments in and appear lazy. Other students will appear agitated and self-critical yet there are some that appear to just blow things off and simply not care. Some perfectionists are serious procrastinators yet others are seriously critical of others and their abilities, which transfers into their ability to form relationships, to positively work in groups, etc. (Greenspon, 2002). Many times perfectionists will avoid

new experiences due to a fear of failure and they are afraid others will view them as inadequate (Callard-Szulgit, 2003). If a child acts as though failure (or even the prospect of it) is devastating and views him or herself as inadequate if their performance falls short of perfect, that is a real danger. The avoidance of failure is a related concept to perfectionism and often results in underachievement amongst gifted children. According to Webb (1994), gifted children easily fall into the trap of being perfectionists even when they are not being pressured by others, although families can easily drift into a pattern of rewarding performance and achievement too much, so much that students measure their success by producing results. As Webb (1994) has put it:

For all too many gifted children, self-concept rests heavily, if not entirely, upon being “gifted” and on accomplishments. It is precarious for any person to hang his or her self concept on only one hook, particularly if that hook happens to be the impossible one of achieving perfection (p.24).

This all happens rather naturally because when a child exhibits unusual abilities, others tend to magnify them. The expectations of the child become exaggerated and they begin to expect perfection. The gifted child’s performance will not match the level of expectation and as time passes the disparity between expectation and performance can be a great source of stress.

Chapter Three: Methodology

“Through reason man observes himself; but he knows himself only through consciousness.”

-Tolstoy

Introduction

The design used in this research was that for a multiple case study. I utilized this qualitative approach due to the desire to explore and describe this special program and its impacts in great depth. Qualitative research takes place within the natural setting, uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, and is emergent rather than tightly prefigured (Creswell, 2003). Stake contends that the qualitative researcher:

Emphasizes episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual (Stake, 1995, pg. xii).

He also states that he views case study research as:

...the commitment to interpretation, an organization around issues, the use of stories, the risks of violation of privacy, the need for validation, and the aim toward naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1995, pg. xiii).

Further, Merriam (1998) indicates that qualitative case study is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting educational phenomena. As she describes it,

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 1998, p.19).

Shank (2002) infers that it is important that a researcher find a good match between his/her interest and skills and the particular research methodology that is chosen. He advises not to underestimate the importance of having a unique vision when conducting our own research activities and the methodology certainly influences this. Certain components that are mainstays of the case study provide a natural fit for me personally and that is why I have chosen this technique. Case study research requires the researcher to be a keen observer and an intent listener and these are both traits that I possess and continually work to refine. The approach is more narrative than structured information gathering, favoring the use of stories but describing happenings within context. Context is of high importance to me in my day-to-day life and as a researcher too. I continuously use contextual clues in decision-making and for gaining a deeper understanding of the world and situations around me. To me, most things must be considered within context to adequately begin to understand them. So, this case study approach is one that definitely appeals to my natural instincts as a writer and as a person. Shank (2002) states that case study, by its nature, turns us away from the typical to the unique...as unique as the individual conducting the research. This ability to individualize within the case study is another aspect of the method that I value.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this case study was to observe and describe the current programming practice for gifted learners in a small school district in Colorado's Rocky Mountain region, specifically the practices addressing the affective or social/emotional

aspects of the child as this relates to the child's academic programming and his or her performance in school.

The secondary purpose was to use these data to examine whether there were disparities between student needs and services provided in this area and, if so, to make recommendations to implement more strategies, policies, and programming to more adequately address these needs.

Thirdly, there is clearly a problem with underachievement in schools across our nation and within this specific school district studied. The additional data and observations gleaned from this study will add to the research base in this field.

Finally, the researcher believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow practitioners and decision-makers in the school district to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of design and facilitation of gifted programming options.

Research Questions

In order to observe and describe practices that addressed the social and emotional needs of gifted learners, specific questions were examined to determine if further need existed within this school district's gifted programming to more adequately address the academic and affective needs of the students. The research questions that drove this study included the following:

1. What factors did gifted students identify as influencing their academic achievement at the secondary level?

How did past and current programming options promote long-term

academic success for the identified gifted students within the school district?

Were the students who were identified at the elementary level (and who were achieving at high levels) continuing to achieve at high levels at the middle and high school?

2. What relationships and systems shaped the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of gifted students at the secondary levels?
3. What were the social and emotional issues that identified gifted students were dealing with? Were these needs being addressed by the current gifted programming? How might these needs be met more effectively?

Population and Sample

This study was conducted in Buffalo Mountain School District (a pseudonym), a small public school district in the central Colorado Rocky Mountains. This study took place during the 2008-2009 school year. The school system included six elementary schools, one middle and one high school. There were 330 identified gifted students, K-12, in this rural school district, identified using multiple measures and, more recently using a body of evidence. The total population in the district was approximately 3,044 students. School district statistical data for 2006-07 show a 3.5% drop-out rate, while the National Center for Education Statistics reports an overall 8.7% dropout rate nationally for the same year (NCES 2009.) Demographic data from the United States Census Bureau (2000) indicates that the county had a total population of 26,843 and was predominately white with slightly less than 10% of the population reported as Hispanic or

Latino. This convenience sample was comprised of both males and females who were fluent in English. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study for the schools, district, county and participants to honor anonymity.

Data Collection

In order to begin to formulate an initial cohort group, specific criteria was established that was compared against data for all identified gifted students at the secondary level. I began with a total identified student count of gifted students of 230, which was narrowed and reduced to 52 and then, finally, ten, given very specific criteria. (The specific criteria used for each area of data collection is noted below.) Next, I contacted the final ten established cohort members for potential involvement in the study and five students responded favorably to participating. I proceeded with the study and included these five students, their families, and twelve of their teachers and/or administrators as participants.

Overall, seven primary methods were used to collect data and four of these were used at the outset to establish this initial cohort group. These four areas of initial data collection were:

1. *Assessments*

Three consecutive years of CSAP data for each identified gifted student, grades 5-10, were analyzed, looking for achievement patterns. NWEA assessment scores for three consecutive years were also analyzed in the same way. Significant achievement drops or stagnations were noted and these students were then placed

into an initial cohort group for those students whose data reflects these achievement patterns.

2. *Grades*

Student academic records were analyzed, for three consecutive years, again with a focus on achievement patterns. Students with significant drops, as well as those showing no significant movement one way or another were noted and their names placed in the initial cohort group for this category.

3. *Attendance Records*

Regular attendance is an indicator of student engagement and motivation in school, so attendance records for each identified gifted student were also analyzed, for three consecutive years. Students showing an increase in their absences over time were placed into the initial cohort group for this category for further comparisons.

4. *Extracurricular Activities/Awards/Leadership Roles*

Research indicates that the level to which a student is involved in extracurricular activities, takes on leadership roles at school (i.e., student engagement) is tied to that student's level of achievement. These records were analyzed for the last three years as well. Students showing little to no participation in these types of activities were also placed in an initial cohort group for this category for further analysis.

Once the initial cohort groups for each category were formulated, a comparison of all four groups was done looking for students that appeared multiple times within

groups. This list was further narrowed, given extremes of decline in achievement (both grades and on standardized tests), absences, and lack of involvement.

Ultimately five students were determined to make up the final cohort group. This group was then utilized for further data collection incorporating multiple classroom observations and personal interviews into this process. A description of these data collection methods are detailed below:

5. *Observation*

This researcher visited grades 6-12 classrooms of which achieving and underachieving (previously identified) gifted learners were present. This was done three times for each of the five student participants and in subjects that were both strength and non-strength areas for them. The driving questions that served to guide each observation were: Does the student seem highly engaged within this classroom setting? What student behaviors and traits are evident and support this assertion? What factors can be observed within the classroom environment that would support this assertion?

The observation protocol (Appendix A) was used to guide each observation. The observation protocol focused on: the structure of the class, description of the setting, areas of curricular extension, activities, and student engagement. A student-engagement rating scale was also utilized in the observation process, using a scale of one to four. One indicated no student engagement, two indicated a small level of engagement, three indicated the student was engaged most of the time and four indicated that the student showed high engagement the whole time.

Additionally, the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI) was used to ascertain student behaviors/traits that would indicate a high level of thinking and engagement and focused on an organization of characteristics of giftedness into these seven categories: advanced language; analytical thinking; meaning motivation; perspective; sense of humor; sensitivity; and accelerated learning. By observing the students within the school environment this researcher could then more adequately provide the context with which generalizations were drawn and assertions were made.

6. *Interviewing*

Five gifted students, five parents of gifted students, and twelve teacher/counselor/administrators were personally interviewed. An interview protocol was used for each interview (see Appendices B, C & D). Each of the protocols was developed based upon the research questions that drove the study and the conceptual framework that emerged. This researcher designed each question in order to elicit specific information and contextual clues that were tied to the questions of the study and provided an answer to each of the research questions. A series of open-ended questions were developed that provided flexibility to allow new directions to emerge in the interview. Each interview took approximately an hour and interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed, verbatim, for a more intensive data analysis later on. Finally, an analysis of the school improvement plans, for both the district and individual buildings, was performed, with a focus upon garnering evidence of support for social/emotional

programming within this school system. A detailed description of this analysis follows.

7. School Improvement Plan

The school improvement plans for the past three years for each secondary building in the district (one high school and one middle school) were analyzed looking for social/emotional overarching goals and priorities, with the thought being that if intentional goal setting and providing for the social/emotional needs of students were a district and building priority there would be evident positive growth for students in this area over time. Alternatively, if the intentional priority was evident in the documents yet students were found to be struggling in this area, a more intensive look at programming would need to take place. Findings from this analysis were noted and then incorporated into the overall recommendations as a result of this study.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2003), data analysis is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking questions, writing memos throughout the study. This involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of all of the information gathered. He provides six generic steps for this process that I followed for analyzing data from interviews and classroom observations:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis
 - a. sorting/arranging into different types
 - b. typing up field notes/interviews

2. Read through all data
 - a. obtain a general sense of info and reflect on overall meaning
 - b. What are the general ideas that participants are saying?
What is the tone of the ideas?
What is the general depth and credibility of the information?
3. Begin coding process (to make sense of data)
 - a. label with an “in vivo” term
 - b. get a sense of the whole
 - c. pick one document to focus on underlying meaning
 - d. repeat process for all, making a list of topics that emerge
 - e. “cluster” similar topics; form into columns for major, unique, etc.
 - f. take this list back to data and continue coding/categorizing
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative
 - a. narrative passage?
6. Make an interpretation or meaning of the data (Creswell, 2003, pg. 193).

Following this procedure, the themes and subcategories of all of interviews were analyzed for trends, including changing or constant themes over time. These data were further analyzed by ultimately identifying themes that appeared in the interviews as well as the classroom observations. In order to increase the validity of the findings, I chose to triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from all of the sources and using all of it to build a coherent justification of themes.

The purpose of the interviews was to better understand and describe the affective factors present amongst the high ability learners studied and whether or not these factors could have had an impact on their achievement in school. In addition, with regard to the teacher and administrator interviews, the purpose for these interviews was to better

understand and describe the attitudes and perspectives of these individuals and ascertain whether support was present for further providing for the affective needs of the gifted learners in their buildings. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of a case. The interview is the main avenue to multiple realities (Stake, 1995).

Classroom observations were analyzed in the same detailed way as outlined above. Additional meaning was gleaned by tallying the tic marks for each category of gifted behaviors and traits and then looking for trends. In addition, the student engagement scale was analyzed and compared with other data points as yet another component utilized for further understanding into the overall school experience of the students studied.

Grades, attendance records, and evidence of extracurricular activities were analyzed by looking for patterns within the data that indicated high achievement and participation, low achievement and participation, and any other variations of these categories with an attention to any trends present.

The school improvement plan data was examined at each school, specifically looking for indicators of social and emotional goal setting and/or a valuing of these factors in plans/actions for achievement within the particular building.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

In the final analysis making sense of large amounts of data, reducing the volume of information through synthesis, and identifying significant themes or patterns presented a challenge and a systematic process was used to accomplish these tasks. I began this

process by taking the time to fully immerse myself in the data and reading and re-reading it to make sense of what was there. Reflection was an integral part of this process and ultimately I was looking for the big ideas that emerged. Next, I proceeded with coding or classifying all of the raw data by breaking it up and transferring the transcribed interviews, in relative segments, to note cards. These note cards were then re-read and labeled by assigning an alphanumeric code, according to overall theme. Additionally, I then color coded each card according to the research question addressed (conceptual framework), in order to be sorted and identified easier later on. In the end, six major themes were identified. Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2009) provide graphic organizers (data summary charts; interpretation outline tool; consistency chart;) as a means for organizing and analyzing these data and I utilized these, as appropriate, to summarize, categorize, analyze, and synthesize the data in an easy to read and more understandable format. In this manner order, structure, and meaning were brought to the vast amount of data collected. Much care was taken on the part of this researcher to summarize the information in a dependable and accurate manner. I used Bloomberg and Volpe's (2009) work as a guide to this process, and they state:

The analytic procedure falls essentially into the following sequential phases: organizing the data, generating categories, identifying patterns and themes, and coding the data (Bloomberg and Volpe (2009), p. 96).

After these data were reduced and groups and subgroups of information were created, these findings were then presented in a narrative manner. Extensive samples of quotations from participants were used to provide detail and context to the story being

told. In addition, the participant's own words serve to communicate the reality of the participants and accurately represent the situation studied by the researcher.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Various efforts were employed by this researcher to address the issues of validity and reliability in trying to establish the trustworthiness of this study. Triangulation of data sources was used, as well as a variety of data collection methods, in order to increase the validity of the study. Inter-rater reliability was utilized in an attempt to increase the reliability of the information presented. This was established by asking several colleagues to help code several of the interviews. Peer debriefing was also utilized in an effort to increase reliability. This was done by informally discussing overall assertions gleaned from the study with specific participants to check for accuracy and interpretation.

The Researcher

I, Jacquelynn A. Truckey, was a Doctoral student at the University of Denver (DU) in Denver, Colorado. I was also an Elementary Gifted Coach in the district where this study took place. I have taught in public schools for twelve years, all being within this rural school district, and three of which serving as a gifted teacher. I am presently a gifted specialist with a focus on coaching classroom teachers. I taught fourth grade for eight years prior to becoming a specialist in the gifted realm.

Limitations

There were several limitations for this multiple-case study. I have been a gifted teacher (and now coach) for three years and this could be considered a limitation as some may interpret historical bias regarding my background. Additionally, this study took

place in one school district in rural Colorado. This represents a very small sample of all Colorado schools having a gifted program. The sampling in the study is selected rather than random and does not reflect the perceptions of all school administrators, gifted coaches, teachers, counselors, parents, and students but is limited to the individuals in this study. Finally, the results of the study are subject to the limitations associated with the brief duration of the study (less than one year), and the use of interview data collection.

With regard to generalizability, Stake shares this viewpoint:

Case study seems a poor basis for generalization. Only a single case or just a few cases will be studied, but these will be studied at length. Certain activities or problems or responses will come up again and again. Thus, for the study, certain generalizations will be drawn...the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well...there is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others the case is different from...(Stake, 1995, pg.8).

Summary

This study represents a detailed examination of current achievement patterns amongst gifted learners and relates these findings to the degree to which social and emotional factors can be tied to a student's level of achievement. I used triangulation (more than three data sources) in the data collection to provide a thick description of this multiple case and to further validate the results obtained. I incorporated interviews, classroom observations, student grades, attendance records, records of participation in extracurricular activities, historical standardized test data, and document analysis to more accurately form an in-depth understanding of this multiple case within its natural context. This allowed me to be able to make some assertions based upon the interpretation of the

overall results gathered, and, ultimately, to make some recommendations for intentional programming improvements, relative to this affective side of a student's school experience, that would ultimately positively impact the student's overall school achievement and performance.

Chapter Four: Description of the Setting and Players

The observer, when he seems to himself to be observing a stone, is really, if physics is to be believed, observing the effects of the stone upon himself.

Bertrand Russell

Introduction

In order to situate this study within a context for the reader, a detailed description of the environment and setting where the research takes place is provided, for both the district overall and for the two school sites. Five short vignettes or profiles of individual student participants follow, to lend a deeper perspective into the lived experiences of the gifted students at these two schools. All description that follows is provided in order to allow the reader to begin to get a feel for place and time.

School District Description

This qualitative study took place in a rural Colorado district located in a mountain community. This community is composed of a diverse population because it is a resort community and made up of a combination of second home owners and permanent residents. The school district had 3,062 students enrolled during the 2007-2008 school year and it had 462 employees for that academic year. This district has eight schools: six elementary, one middle and one high school. Each of the six elementary schools are considered “neighborhood schools” and reflect the subtleties of each sub-community with enrollment under three hundred students at each school. These elementary schools feed into the one middle school, which feeds into the one high school. Enrollment at the

middle school for 2007-2008 was 602 students in grades 6-8 and at the high school was 867 students in grades 9-12.

The student demographics for this district were extremely close to the state's averages with 78% white (64% state), 20% Hispanic (26% state), 1% Asian/Pacific Islander (3% state), <1% Black (6% state), and <1% American Indian or Alaskan Native (1% state). 49% of the students in this district are female while 51% are male. In this district 22% of the students received free or reduced lunch (32% state). The district's ELL population had increased 2000% since 1995, with a total of 20% of the students enrolled district-wide. The drop-out rate for this district was 5.5% for the 2007-2008 school year. The demographics of this district illustrated a growing, diverse population with a wide range of incomes. The district's teachers' education levels were also very close to the state average with 44% with a Master's degree or higher (49% state) and 56% with a Bachelor's degree (51% state). The district was above the state's average in many areas on the state assessment or CSAP.

This school district values small class sizes and lower than average student to teacher ratio. The district has allocated additional funding to high-impact schools that is above the general formula to support services for English Language Learners and Special Education. The district's published vision, mission statement and goal also serve to further clarify its philosophy behind decision making and actions taken:

Vision: Buffalo Mountain School District students, staff and community members work together in an atmosphere of care and respect to offer each student an array of educational programs designed to foster his/her unique academic, vocational, and

personal strengths. Our aim is to develop internationally minded people who help to create a better world.

Mission Statement: In a safe environment, we will do whatever it takes for academic and character success of every student to develop as a lifelong learner and responsible citizen. In order to accomplish this, we will engage every student every day in intellectually challenging and meaningful learning to give all students the resources necessary to prepare them to achieve their greatest potential and to meet the expectations of the future.

Goal: Developing Caring Learners. Every Buffalo Mountain School District student will develop as a caring learner by demonstrating at least one year's growth in academic achievement and by showing an increase in behaviors associated with positive character development. This growth will be measured by a body of evidence in an end-of-year review.

All schools in the district are unified and share and abide by the same vision, mission, and goal. In addition, the district has identified four specific strategies to focus on in order to align with what they profess. These strategies are:

Strategy #1: Professional Learning

Buffalo Mountain School District will develop as a collaborative professional learning community (PLC) focused on doing whatever it takes for the academic and character success of each student. To this end, instructional programs will be effectively implemented PreK-12, and the pilot Professional Learning Time (PLC) will be used to achieve these measures of success in addressing the four questions of the PLC.

Strategy #2: Parent and Community Involvement

Buffalo Mountain Schools will encourage, promote, and support parent and community involvement at all schools. Buffalo Mountain School District believes parent and community involvement inspires community commitment and responsibility to our students. Indicators of success will include participation in Parent-Teacher Conferences and other school events, volunteerism in the schools, and the number of participants attending school-sponsored meetings and outreach activities.

Strategy #3: Financial Resources

Buffalo Mountain School District will further develop revenues and maintain the highest standards of fiscal responsibility. Indicators of success will include the annual audit, public awareness and understanding of the district's finances, and role of the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee.

Strategy #4: Support Services

All departments (Business Services, Facilities/Maintenance, Food Service, Transportation, Human Resources) will deliver quality services that support the District's goal and strategies.

Study Site: Ptarmigan Middle School

Ptarmigan Middle School is located in charming Benton, Colorado in the heart of Columbine County and receives students from six elementary schools located throughout the Columbine County area. The touchstone they operate by is, *Get Real! Practice respect, cooperation and integrity*. The middle school has a current enrollment of 602 students in grades 6-8. The program at Ptarmigan Middle School is designed to meet the

unique needs of middle-level students and features a full implementation of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. The program features interdisciplinary instruction, a broad range of academic programs, and extensive elective opportunities. All programs focus on internationalism and inquiry-based learning. In addition, Ptarmigan Middle School offers an extensive after school activities program. The Building Accountability Committee meets regularly to support and assist efforts in the areas of academic achievement, student success and character development. The Middle School PTSA is also actively involved.

During the 2008/2009 school year, Ptarmigan Middle School continued to make progress on statewide assessments and standardized test scores. The scores in all areas were either above or slightly below the state average. Students have continued to make progress with many students receiving proficient or advanced status.

Literacy assessment testing has identified students in need of Individual Literacy Plans (ILPs). This testing occurs in the fall and spring and involves a process for progress monitoring throughout the school year. Identified students receive literacy instruction and set goals for individual improvement in literacy.

Ptarmigan Middle School recognizes the need to maintain a safe, drug-free, civil learning environment. They strive to develop caring learners through careful planning of the Caring Community staff and the daily interactions between students and students, staff and students, and staff members and staff members.

The school has identified two, over-arching goals to focus on for this school year:

Goal 1: Ptarmigan Middle School will deliver a challenging academic program that maximizes learning through best instructional practice and educational research.

Goal 2: Ptarmigan Middle School will develop an environment that fosters character growth to enhance the emotional and social well being of all students and maintain a safe, drug-free and civil learning environment.

Ptarmigan recognizes the importance of educating the whole child. To this end, it places a strong emphasis on nurturing and understanding the affective needs of adolescents. Ptarmigan Middle School has developed a number of programs to insure that all students have an opportunity to further develop their character and learn essential social skills to be successful (School Improvement Plan, 2008-2009).

School Site: Ten Mile High School

Ten Mile High School has identified the following touchstone in an effort to bring focus to their important educational work at their school: *Expect, Include, Respect and Celebrate*. Ten Mile High School takes pride in its 9-12 programming and its progress toward building a school in which students, teachers, parents, and the community work together in partnership to educate all students to their highest potential. TMHS administration and staff believe that students deserve an education that emphasizes academic excellence as well as essential 21st century skills of critical thinking and creativity.

Currently, Ten Mile High School has 867 students enrolled (approximately 78% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, and 3% other). As the only public high school in Columbine County, TMHS serves all the Columbine townships (Blue River, Breckenridge, Dillon

Valley, Frisco, and Silverthorne) as well as 34 students from surrounding communities outside of the county limits, allowing students from varying backgrounds to experience a plethora of educational opportunities throughout their day: Ten Mile offers over 165 courses in 11 departments.

Ten Mile High School offers a wide variety of curricula to prepare students for the 21st century: the ELA (English Language Acquisition), CTE (Career Technical Education), Special Education programs, the Colorado Mountain College SuperGrad Program, Advanced Placement, and the IB MYP and Diploma Programs. While the International Baccalaureate Organization has authorized Ten Mile High School to provide access for all students to participate in both the Middle Years (9th and 10th graders) and Diploma Programs (11th and 12th graders), at TMHS the emphasis is placed on all teachers employing best teaching practices for all students in every class.

The State of Colorado School Accountability Report for the 2007-2008 school year shows that TMHS received a rating of “high” with regard to overall academic performance on state assessments and a “typical” rating in the academic growth of students category. Standardized test data for 2008 indicates these scores: Reading, Grade 9, overall proficiency (72%); Grade 10 (65%). Writing, Grade 9, overall proficiency (56%); Grade 10 (48%). Math, Grade 9, overall proficiency (46%); Grade 10 (33%). Statistical analysis indicates that the ESL and Special Education populations significantly impact the standardized scores and if disaggregated the scores are much higher for the non-ESL and non-SPED population. TMHS has set specific goals, with regard to closing the achievement gap between ESL and non-ESL students for both reading and math for

the next school year. Additionally, a goal has been set regarding building cultural inclusion and improving school connectedness for all students, staff and families by Spring of 2011. (TMHS School Improvement Plan, 2008-2009; State of Colorado School Accountability Report, 2007-2008).

Profiles of Student Participants

On the following pages a detailed description of each of the five student participants in this study is provided in an effort to allow the reader to vicariously experience the lives of these gifted students. Hopefully this description will allow the reader to develop a deeper understanding of who these “players” are in this unfolding story and what life is like for them in this small snapshot of activity and perspective. Information for these narratives was gleaned from classroom observations and personal interviews. All names used are pseudonyms.

Gwen. I watch Gwen as she sits quietly in the very back row of Mr. Brown’s Advanced Literature class. This spunky and likeable 11th grade student finds herself in a classroom full of seniors, as she has begged for special permission to be here. Mr. Brown has made a connection with Gwen and she has vowed to take any class that he teaches. She loves the way he interacts with students and really cares about and respects each and every one of them. She also loves the way he offers up his own thoughtful opinion while respecting everyone else’s viewpoint. This girl is thrilled to be here but also has a “passion” for languages and for people and their cultures. She has traveled on several mission trips as a translator and speaks fluent French and Spanish. She plans to study abroad next year, in Italy, to be immersed in yet another culture. Academically, her

grades are inconsistent and reflective of her level of respect for the instructor as well as her ability to make meaningful connections and establish a relationship with the teacher. She tells me she is addicted to people and music is like a religion for her. Gwen does not try to be “good-looking,” as she herself has said and reminds me of a Cyndi Lauper wanna-be as she intently listens to another student’s alternate ending on the current book the class has been reading, *The Kite Runner*. This is the final assignment for the group for this last quarter of the school year. I listen, too, as students come to the front of the class to read what they have written, which is required to be at least two-pages and thoughtfully composed. Some renditions are rather outlandish and unrealistic and other versions simply mediocre. Finally Gwen reluctantly steps to the front of the room. I am instantly moved by her writing and the level of depth that she has gone to in order to finalize this story her way. She reads with passion and her words are reflective of the emotion that drives her thinking. I notice others in the room are equally riveted. Her ending rivals that of the novel’s author and Gwen’s poetic flair transports us all and leaves us speechless. When she finishes reading the room is silent, until Gwen apologizes for writing so much and taking so long to present. I hear one boy in the front row turn back to comment positively to another student and joke about how she made all of their versions seem so pathetic. Gwen smiles, slightly, and rushes back to her seat, obviously proud of what she has accomplished but unwilling to diminish anyone else’s efforts by lingering too long in the limelight.

Zach. “He always seems like he’s in la-la land,” his mother tells me, and she’s right, he often does. This behavior could be mistaken for being aloof, rude, or

disrespectful. Some might say this blue-eyed, blond-haired young man has checked out, when in fact he is listening, on some level. Academically, Zach's achievement pallet reflects his engagement level in the learning: a smattering of ups and downs. Computer games are a passion for Zach and his Mom worries about the interaction with people that he's missing playing games so much, so she's now limiting the computer time for him. Zach doesn't understand why. In words and deeds this boy could be described as a minimalist, as he gets the gist of whatever concept is being taught very quickly and then moves on (in his mind) to more interesting ponderings. He says if he had it his way the school's motto would be, "learn it/use it" and he sees no reason to belabor and drag out a point! Read it, apply it once or twice, and far less homework...that would be a perfect world! Zach told me that he is happy to help me out with my study because he would really like to see some changes in how things are done around here. Zach complains that he seems to be usually graded on responsibility vs. mastery of a concept and he resents that...hates the "busy work" thing. (School would prove to be a much more fascinating and engaging place if Zach could just have some more choice in activities and assignments... "la-la land" is a pretty good place to be when you are bored beyond belief.) I watch Zach in math class, along with the 21 other students. The classroom is set up very traditionally, with the students in long rows facing the white board. The teacher is very traditional too and is going over the study guide for the test the class took the previous week...of which everyone bombed (the teacher tells me.) Zach sits quietly and doesn't say a word or ask a question. The teacher keeps talking. So, they are going over

the study guide yet another time so everyone can retake the test again, with hopes of an improved grade! Zach is not listening...yep, looks as if he's gone back to "la-la land..."

Jenny. I sit and chat with Jenny on a Tuesday, in the library after school. She seems a little nervous at first, we have never met previously. As we begin to converse, however, she settles into a comfortable place with me and begins to open up. She is very tall for her age and pretty, with dark eyes and hair. She's quite articulate for a middle schooler and if I didn't know any better I would say she were at least a sophomore in high school. In terms of grades, Jenny's transcript reflects the highs and lows that are typical of a student who is inconsistently engaged and motivated at school. "I don't need to read about things but just need to do it," Jenny relates to me. "I am a kinesthetic learner and I am really good at Art because it is a great way to express myself. I make all of my own cards and I draw a lot, (I learn really well from pictures), and I like beading...I also like to do creative writing. I don't like research papers because I don't like how normal they are!" Jenny confides to me that if she could change anything about herself she would change her shyness...."I find that annoying in other people so I find it annoying in myself too...I have a problem asking for something that I need, with teachers...sometimes this takes a lot of courage." One thing Jenny says she would like to have more courage for is to request "less note-taking" in the classroom. "I like Mr. Carter as a person, but he only teaches one way...every lesson is the same. We start out by going over homework and then we take notes! I hate writing notes!" (I make a "note" to myself to get Jenny the book I have that teaches mind-mapping with pictures...a much better way to endure the note-taking which we're both sure won't go away anytime

soon!) When I observe Jenny in the classroom I see a quiet, well-behaved student, but not one that's particularly engaged or excited about the subject that's currently being taught. Jenny tells me she's pretty good at "sucking it up" and her mom underscores this notion when she says they don't make waves because, "...we have to live with the rules now...otherwise you spend your whole life fighting things." She tells Jenny that as you go further and further into education you can be more creative. I wonder if this will come true for Jenny? I wonder if she will be able to continue to cope, day after day, until education becomes a more creative endeavor for her?

Ben. It's 7:45 in the morning and Mr. Perkins' Biology class has just started. This is a 90 minute block session and I'm anxious to see what this teacher has in store for the kids. I'm here to observe Ben, specifically, a sophomore of medium-build with longish blond hair and brown eyes, who is sitting close by. Academically this boy's grades reflect his boredom and disengagement with school as I notice a few high Bs and even an A or two but then lots of Cs and even a D. This tells me he works hard only if he really has to and mostly is just sliding by and passing time.

As students continue to trickle in, some with breakfast in hand, I make note of the structure of the class within this lab-like setting. Tables are arranged in the room in a large rectangle, with students scattered throughout, sitting anywhere they please. I notice the Latino students that are in the class sit together, as do groups of Anglo girls and Anglo boys. Mr. Perkins is in the middle of the rectangle, sitting casually on a stool and lecturing. I remember that Ben told me earlier that he strives to "blend in" and this is evident to me now as Ben hardly moves and just sits there, not unlike the rest of the

students. (I have to wonder if Mr. Perkins is aware of the capacity of this child? Has Ben allowed this teacher to get a glimpse of what he's capable of in this class this semester? Has Mr. Perkins perked Ben's interest enough for him to show the teacher this?) Even though the teacher is writing on the overhead now, and talking, I notice no students actively engaged and taking notes or asking questions. Mr. Perkins asks clarifying questions and calls on students randomly, although never Ben. Mr. Perkins uses video clips to illustrate points and concepts several times, but again, I notice very little response from Ben as he sits quietly. Finally I see him make a move for his backpack, perhaps for a writing tool or previously written notes? He leans forward and pulls out a can of Red Bull energy drink. (I find myself wishing I had one too, as 90 minutes is a very long time to sit in the very same place, with little or no activity!) Ben's mother has described him as an introvert but Ben has told me that if he were a teacher he would, "change up the curriculum and broaden the way kids are taught." He says he would ask kids for their input and make sure lots of hands-on activities, especially in hard classes, were being used to teach and explore a concept. He tells me it's been since middle school that any teacher has asked for his input on anything. I know Ben is passionate about ski racing, but due to an injury he has not trained or raced much this year. He looks depressed to me...has anyone else noticed this? As I watch Ben sit so very still in class and seem so disengaged, I have to wonder what's going on inside this teenage boy right now. Ben's mom says he is complacent, unmotivated and doesn't put a lot of effort into anything these days. She says, "It really comes down to that occasional teacher who has the extra insight to know that kids learn differently...those types of people who don't categorize

people but just look at individual kids and try to see how they can motivate them...” Ben needs that type of teacher, one who will work to make a personal connection and to find a way to engage him...and I do hope that happens very, very soon.

Leslie. The adjectives outgoing, pretty, friendly, and caring aptly describe Leslie. She’s an 8th grader who could have been categorized as an underachiever previously, but is engaged in school and making good gains now. Her grades are reflective of that trend as she has all As and Bs currently but the pattern shows quite a mix previously. Both Leslie and her mom point to the peer counseling group for gifted kids, REACH, that Leslie participated in last year at the middle school, as helping to bring about this change in her achievement levels at school. Leslie tells me homework was an issue for her and she has a problem handling stress and gets overwhelmed easily. She says she didn’t know this about herself and came to this realization in the REACH class last year. “I also found out I have a bit of an organizational problem and I found out that worrying was also a problem for me,” confides Leslie. “I am really intense about my classes. I really care about what the teacher thinks of me. I hate being late. I want to do well.” She has become more self-aware and has learned some coping strategies to help with the stress and worry she experiences. She has also learned some new organizational skills that have really helped her in keeping it all together. The other thing she notes about the REACH group was that all the kids in the class were like her, “...smart, but not doing well in some classes.” She failed math in 7th grade but is in all honors classes now and getting As and Bs in them. Leslie’s passion areas include drama and band. She participates regularly in both community theater productions and plays at school. Leslie says she learns best by

doing and she likes it when the teacher gives guiding questions because then she knows what she is looking for and she can stay on topic. “When we have hands-on activities it sticks in my brain,” Leslie relates. I watch Leslie in her math class as she works with a partner on a series of problems related to Pascal’s Triangle. She is diligent and deeply engaged in the activity and offers input into solving the problem readily. Her analytical abilities are evident. Leslie appears to be socially and academically on track right now and that’s a good thing as she will be moving into the high school setting next school year. I know she’ll need these things in place to be successful.

Summary

This chapter included a detailed description of the district and each school site, complete with their physical attributes as well as philosophy, goals, assessment record, demographics and anything else that seemed pertinent to include. This was done for the purpose of drawing the reader into each “case” and to allow for a deeper understanding into the specificities at each site. In addition, a detailed profile was included for each student participant in the study, based upon information gleaned from the classroom observations and the personal interview. This was provided to aid the reader in formulation of a deeper insight into the make-up and experiences of each of these young individuals.

The following chapter includes an overview of the major themes that were found as part of this study, supported by direct quotes from the participant interviews relative to each category or theme. This information is presented without researcher interpretation at this time. Those elements are part of the discussion in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five: Results

“Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it.” ~Vincent Van Gogh, 1889

Introduction

The purpose of this multi-case study was to explore the lived, educational experiences of gifted students within this rural school district, while deeply examining the school settings and the other relationships and systems that affect the children's experiences and success in school. Success in school has an academic and an affective component and both must be addressed for a student to reach his/her full potential, and this is especially true for a gifted learner:

The traditional Western view is of emotions and intellect as separate and contradictory entities; there is however, an inextricable link between emotions and intellect and, combined, they have a profound effect on gifted people. It is emotional intensity that fuels joy in life, passion for learning, the drive for expression of a talent area, the motivation for achievement (Sword, L., 2008).

This chapter begins by presenting the key findings obtained from 22 in-depth interviews, 15 classroom observations, and an analysis of related documents.

Five major themes emerged from this study as a result of the identified research questions and one subsequent theme emerged (that is not tied to a specific research question) that are considered important and significant to note:

Research Questions and Results/Themes

Research Question 1:

(A) What factors did gifted students identify as influencing their academic achievement at the secondary level?

Result: Secondary level gifted students identified these factors as influencing their academic achievement: peer groups; self-awareness; parents; passion areas.

(B) How did past and current programming options promote long-term academic success for the identified gifted students within the school district?

Result: The students identified the following past and current programming options that have promoted long-term academic success for them: REACH (support groups for gifted learners) at the middle school; classes with understanding, supportive, and flexible teachers.

(C) Were the students who were identified at the elementary level (and who were achieving at high levels) continuing to achieve at high levels at the middle and high school?

Result: The majority (81%) of students who were previously identified as gifted, and who were achieving at high levels, are still achieving at high levels (3.0 or higher.) 19% of the previously identified gifted students are now achieving under a 3.0. Of these students who are underachieving currently, five students were selected for a closer look.

Research Question 2: What relationships and systems shaped the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of gifted students at the secondary levels?

Result: According to the students and parents interviewed, these are the top four relationships and systems that shape student behaviors, attitudes and aspirations: flexible teachers; teachers who seek to understand; peer groups and parents.

Research Question 3: (A) What were the social and emotional issues that identified gifted students were dealing with? (B) Were these needs being addressed by the current gifted programming? (C) How might these needs be met more effectively?

Result: The social and emotional issues that students identified they are dealing with currently are: disorganization; frustration; motivation. (B) The majority of respondents indicated their social and emotional needs were not being addressed currently at school. (C) A variety of recommendations were made (see table 2 for a full listing.) The top three responses were: increase teacher training; increase the use of differentiation strategies; and increase focus on social/emotional issues.

Additionally, as a result of one of the interview questions asked, important data were gleaned regarding the participant's overall understanding of giftedness. The majority of the school community indicated a need to increase the extent of their understanding of what giftedness is: (50%) showed a low level of understanding; (36%) showed a medium level of understanding; (14%) showed a high level of understanding. (See Figure 1, next page, for a graph depicting these percentages.)

Understanding of Giftedness by School Community

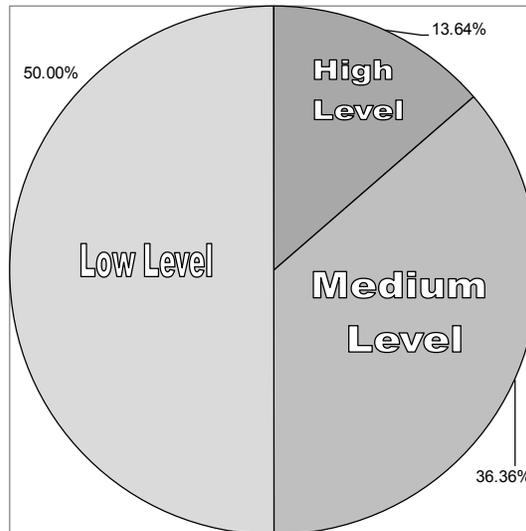


Figure 1.

Following is a more thorough discussion surrounding each of the themes with details that support and explain each one. Included are the voices from participants in the study, illustrated through their direct quotations, which serves to capture some of the richness and complexity of the subject matter. Multiple participant perspectives are portrayed and, by way of “thick description,” the researcher will document a broad range of experiences to provide opportunities for the reader to better understand the reality of the research participants.

Objective Analysis of Themes

Theme 1: (Influences) Secondary level gifted students identified these factors as influencing their academic achievement: self-awareness; peer groups; parents; passion areas.

Based upon participant feedback, self-awareness (and self-perceptions) have both positively and negatively impacted achievement levels. As Leslie indicates, a positive self-perception can go a long way: “I would love for people to hear my message...I *will* accomplish my dreams.” Other students indicated similar sentiments:

Achievement means reaching the goals that I have set for myself...it is not something that someone can give me...it’s something that I have to set and get to it but it makes me feel really good when I do reach a goal...(Jenny)

This last year has been the best...perhaps it’s because I am finally realizing that I am a very privileged, intelligent, lucky person and most people don’t get these chances. It’s about how I feel and how I have been thinking about it...(Gwen)

The negative messages we sometimes send ourselves is very impactful as well and has had a negative effect on Jenny, as her mom Diana reflects: “Her self-labeling has been a problem and she has had to learn to embrace her differences and learn how she can use these things...”

Having a passion area of intense focus has proven to be a benefit for students and often transfers into other areas of study as well. All of the student participants in this study indicated they had an area of passion that they pursued. Often the students were able to pursue these interests within the school setting through elective classes:

My passion is sports medicine...I am looking to have a career in that. I am interested in exercise and how it affects the body. I got interested because of my diabetes...the athletic trainer teaches a class on how to treat injuries and I plan to take this class. Perhaps I can become a sports trainer...(Ben)

My passion areas include basketball and guitar...also, I really love to read, across all genres. I have opportunities at school to study reading in Language Arts but it is made less interesting by being required to write book reports when I am done reading. I would rather give one, big comment about what I have read, with the general idea and the gist...(Zach)

Another influence on the student's achievement had to do with peer groups. The middle school years seemed to be a more tumultuous time for kids, with regard to peer issues, as Luci, a school administrator states: "I think, especially with middle school, if kids are struggling with peers and they don't know what to do with it, it impacts everything in their life...we must set up supports for this..." Peer groups have had a positive impact at this middle school as illustrated in Jasmine, Leslie's mom's comment regarding the peer support group for gifted students, REACH: "...Kids got together and talked about the problems they were facing...these weren't remedial kids but smart, highly capable kids that were struggling...this was very powerful" The high school students in the study indicated that peer interactions were important and a positive influence for them at this point in their school careers:

I am kind of a needy person...I am addicted to connections...I wish I were a bit more independent from others in general. I like having people around me and I depend on other people...I wish I could depend more on myself. I have a lot of close friends, which is lucky for me. I think I have a lot of friends because I like people and I like making people feel better...I like talking with them. I work at making close bonds...(Gwen)

...My happiest time period that I have had in school is right now because I like my schedule and I have made new friends. I am confident socially because I affiliate with people that are like me. For two years in elementary school my classes were separated from the other classes so it changed who I hung out with...I hung out with kids who were also gifted...but I no longer hang out with them...I blend in a little better now. (Ben)

Parents were another major influence on student achievement as indicated by the participants in this study. Several student participants related that they depended upon their parents for support and had close relationships with their parents. As Leslie states:

“My favorite adult is my mom. She is a good influence. She got me into acting and singing.” Another student reflects this way:

My parents know me for who I really am...not teachers...I act a certain way around teachers. My parents support me by taking the time to help me. They try very hard to do that...they take my side on anything. (Jenny)

Jenny is a Twice Exceptional learner and had a rough go of things in elementary school. According to her mom, it took a lot of time, patience, investigation, and work with specialists and outside counselors to get Jenny to where she is today, that being a happy, well-adjusted and thriving teenager but as the following quote illustrates, that hasn't always been the case:

...hands fluttering, pulling hair out, etc. led to the emotional disability designation...we finally made the decision to put her on medication and what a difference! It has reduced her anxiety level and the heightened state was taken down with the drugs.” (Diana, Jenny's mom)

These parents have shown that they will do what it takes to see their daughter reach her full potential. Other parent participants in the study responded in similar ways regarding their influence over their child, as Elizabeth, Zach's mom states: “...we prod him along and try to support him with humor...sometimes this is very difficult.” Many gifted children exhibit a fierce independence and it can be hard for parents, at times, to offer guidance. Stacy, Gwen's mom put it succinctly: “She will have to find her own path and we will be there to support her in whatever way.”

Theme 2: (Programming) The students identified the following past and current programming options that have *promoted* long-term academic success for them: REACH (support groups for gifted learners) at the middle school; classes with understanding, supportive, and flexible teachers. Additionally, participants identified these past and

current programming options that *do not promote* long-term academic success for them: too much homework/busy work; “note taking” during the majority of class time.

The middle school’s REACH support group was overwhelmingly the most effective programming option that either secondary school had to offer students, either academically or socially/emotionally.

Last year Ms. Hall led the kids to become more introspective and Leslie heard from other smart kids that they were having the same problems too...they problem-solved together. She learned in REACH how to cope and it was better hearing it from someone other than your parent...the peer interaction was perfect. (Jasmine, Leslie’s mother)

High school teachers and administrators have indicated that they will be incorporating this programming option into their offerings for the 2009-2010 school year as well, as Bethany, the high school’s gifted specialist stated: “We are planning on having a social/emotional support group during advisory time once a month...also, we will work with staff to dispel myths and gauge the level of knowledge teachers have...”

In addition to the support groups, the other programming option that participants indicated they found effective were classes with supportive, understanding, and flexible teachers. Several teachers and their specific classes were referred to like this one:

Last year I didn’t like the Language Arts class so much because my teacher wasn’t so engaging. My teacher now makes it interesting, funny, and he relates to teenagers...he knows how to keep us interested...he tries to make it more than the standard curriculum and he listens to students...he goes out of his way to establish and maintain relationships with kids. (Ben)

In terms of programming options that *did not promote* success for students academically or socially/emotionally, classes with too much homework and/or busy work were the

overwhelming response by participants. These types of classes included honors and IB coursework:

This year has been really good...I got out of the IB Program and that has a lot to do with it. Nothing against the IB Program but the teachers who teach in that program have a very strict curriculum that they have to follow...those that don't can be more flexible. The work load isn't as bad, I am enjoying my classes and I am learning a lot. (Gwen)

Throughout 6th grade I was in all honors classes and I did non-honors classes the next year. There was a lot of extra homework added on in the honors classes...seemed like twice as much. (Ben)

In honors classes I don't think it's about gifted, it's about more homework...not much focus on higher level concepts...it's just about more homework in honors classes. (Jenny)

Elizabeth, Zach's mom sums it up this way: "All of the extra work has impacted him...he doesn't take pride in his work and he just wants to get it done fast, so he rushes through it..."

Theme 3: (Achievement) The majority (81%) of students who were previously identified as gifted, and who were achieving at high levels, are still achieving at high levels (3.0 or higher.) 19% of the previously identified gifted students are now achieving under a 3.0. Of these students who are potentially underachieving currently (in one class or more), 5 students were selected for a closer look.

It is important to note at the outset that an integral sub-question grew out of this original research question as I delved deeper within the existing data for gifted students in this district. This question had to do with the potential over-identification of gifted students in the district and how I could increase my comfort level with whether the students I focused on in this case study were truly gifted after all. There are a total of

1,451 students at the secondary level in this school district, of which 230 have been previously identified as gifted (16% of total secondary population.) Statistically speaking, this percentage identified is very high, as it would be reasonable to expect that about 5% of any population could be classified as gifted. Continuing with this rationale, it also would be reasonable to predict then that at least 10% of the 16% identified at these schools are most likely high achieving students and not necessarily truly gifted. Because of this potential over-identification, great care was taken by this researcher in selecting the five students that were studied in depth. Many gifted identification tools were utilized and examined and, in addition to this researcher's expertise in the field, each of the five students studied were found to have a propensity for giftedness. Additionally, this propensity was underscored through one-on-one interviews with both students and parents as well as multiple classroom observations involving each student. Teachers and administrators were also polled and their responses have also contributed to my satisfaction level in choosing the five students included in this study.

Of the students that were shown to be potentially underachieving at this time (in at least one class), the reasons they indicated varied. One parent offered this reason: "...If he isn't really good at something right off the bat he simply stops trying!" Other parents responded this way:

Reading is a strength for him...if he is interested he will perform. Writing for busy work is something that he hates to do. Math has also been a strength but the responsibility factor comes into play there since he often doesn't turn in his homework. (Elizabeth)

The NWEA test scores (and other standardized scores) do not reflect her ability (as she has gotten older.) I think there is some purposefulness in it...she doesn't like the rote nature of the testing as it limits her creativity, etc. (Diana)

One particular student responded this way:

I have had difficulties with learning math and science. If I don't have a teacher that I connect to I automatically shut out every lesson. This isn't a good thing, I know, but I will stop listening! The feeling I get from a teacher is key...last year I had a teacher who wasn't very good...and she didn't communicate enthusiasm for the subject...I didn't learn anything and I had tutors to teach me stuff so I could pass my tests. (Gwen)

Theme 4: (Relationships) According to the students and parents interviewed, these are the top four relationships and systems that shape student behaviors, attitudes and aspirations: flexible teachers; teachers who seek to understand; peer groups and parents.

Unfortunately, there were not too many instances of relationships and systems that were cited that were viewed positively. In responding to this realm of questioning, students and parents tended to cite teachers, who were both inflexible and lacked understanding, as negatively shaping their behaviors and attitudes, as in this example:

She dropped out of all IB classes at the end of last year...the teachers were so bad and we told the counselors we were picking the classes by the teachers that were teaching them...last year was a bad year! (Stacy)

There were a few examples of positive relationships to include, however:

Most teachers thought she was misbehaving and immature...Ms. Hintman looked deeper...she just didn't write her off...(Jasmine)

Mr. Morrison connects to kids very well too...His patience is so good...instead of blowing up he knows that things do go wrong and there is nothing you can do about it. He'll tease kids but gives them all a chance to prove themselves and he gives kids a lot of responsibility...he is very good about not giving too much and they always rise to the challenge, come to class. They do the things he asks...(Gwen)

Some students indicated that they did not consider any adult relationship to be especially important and influential in their lives right now and no mentor-relationships existed at school either. When Ben was asked about important adults in his life he responded: “No adults...my friends do know me well...I’m pretty open with them.” Another student responded this way:

I don’t have an adult (teacher, friend, coach, parent) that I am close to. I have friends my age, with similar interests, that I enjoy...they have good qualities like they are cool and funny. (Zach)

Theme 5: (Social/Emotional Struggles) The predominant social and emotional issues that students identified they were dealing with currently were: disorganization; frustration; motivation. Other issues were expressed as well and the table on the following page reflects these responses. (See Table 1, next page, for more on these various issues.)

Table 1.
Social/Emotional Factors Indicated by Students to be Influences on Achievement

		Anxiety	Frustration	Dis-organization	Perfectionism	Peer Relationships	Stress	Understanding Self/Others	Motivation	Striving to Excel	Lack of Self-Esteem
Parents											
1	Stacy		X	X					X		X
2	Diana	X	X	X			X	X		X	
3	Becky				X	X		X	X	X	
4	Jasmine	X		X			X	X			
5	Elizabeth		X	X				X	X	X	
Students											
6	Leslie	X		X			X	X			
7	Ben		X	X	X			X	X	X	
8	Jenny	X	X	X			X	X			X
9	Zach		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
10	Gwen		X	X	X		X				X
Teachers/ Admin											
11	Luci	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
12	Peggy	X	X			X		X	X		X
13	Bethany	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
14	Mark	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
15	Greg		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
16	Lois	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
17	Luke		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
18	Ann	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19	Mary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
20	Sue	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
21	Janet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
22	Paul	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TOTAL	22	14 (64%)	19 (86%)	20 (91%)	15 (68%)	13 (59%)	15 (68%)	15 (68%)	17 (77%)	14 (64%)	11 (50%)

Here are some examples of what participants confided to me when I interviewed them:

...She has communicated that there is a level of anxiety there when everything is turned in and she is caught up—she’s looking over her shoulder and anticipating the next stressor...that is more overwhelming than anything and she can “control” this by always maintaining a certain level of stress...she is so used to having something out of whack that she needs something to control, so she purposefully doesn’t turn in some work...(Diana)

It wasn’t that she wasn’t getting the concept...she just lacked follow through. Going from class to class and period to period was the issue...by Tuesday she was behind. She was not a remedial kid. She just needed help with organization. (Jasmine)

One student had this to say:

My weaknesses are that I can freak out over tests and sometimes don’t do well because of this. I do have issues with test taking. Sometimes I feel under pressure and I don’t do as well as I think I could have. I have all the answers in my head and I have prepared well but I don’t show it due to stress...(Leslie)

The teachers I interviewed had experience, to one degree or another, with gifted students and their social/emotional intensities, too. Ann, a high school teacher, stated: “Social/Emotional needs can be very asynchronous with the cognitive piece and they can be masked. These issues can hugely impact achievement in school...” Other teachers shared these comments:

They seem to have an abundance of emotion...they sometimes isolate themselves socially...I have seen students with perfectionistic tendencies or a fear of failure. Also, some students struggle when they are faced with challenging material all of a sudden and question their skill levels, etc. They will struggle with the whole idea of having to work hard. (Lois)

A challenge in dealing with them in math is the issue of showing their work...they say, “I can do it in my head, why do I have to show the work?” They really become frustrated with this sometimes and I struggle with that...Many cannot take even the smallest amount of criticism. (Greg)

Building administrators had varying levels of experience with gifted students and these individuals had these insights to share:

I taught a gifted pullout class for three years in Albuquerque. I was one of four GT teachers in our high school. My Master's is in SPED with an emphasis in gifted...I noticed that these students could be a handful and could be C and D students...they never really developed those organizational and motivational skills that they needed. I noticed some hypersensitivity and some depression. I also noticed some kids being overachievers and some obsessive-compulsive behaviors. The discussions they would get into and the individualism expressed within classes where all identified gifted kids were present was phenomenal...In New Mexico they actually had an IEP just as if they were a SPED student and we were held to the goals, etc. (Paul)

They do struggle with peer issues...it's about fitting in, being different. They tune out too...the whole boredom thing and the whole peer thing. It is so much about having those kids in leadership roles where they can feel empowered...they have to become advocates for themselves...these are true life skills. (Peggy)

The second part of this research question and finding had to do with meeting the needs of gifted learners at school and this was the pattern gleaned from this study:

The majority of respondents indicated their social and emotional needs were not being addressed currently at school.

Stacy, Gwen's mom gave me this feedback: "These issues have not been addressed at school...she has not had really close relationships with teachers." Other parents and teachers had these words to share:

Our biggest problem was the lack of understanding among educators with regard to giftedness and twice exceptionality. It was really hard for teachers (even the really good ones) to get it...they seem to get used to working with the main population and they have a hard time moving beyond what normally works, etc. The curriculum kind of beats them down...a normal teacher has a hard time going beyond that...(Diana, Jenny's mom)

This has always been an area that our district has struggled with...in terms of identification and meeting the needs. These kids are often ignored because,

“...these kids are smart and can teach themselves, basically, and I’ve got to deal with these other kids.” It’s been really sad to see that attitude towards these children...their sensitivity to the world around them is so increased that they have greater struggles with growing up, identifying who they are and what their needs are...the social piece (fitting in, etc.) can shake up their world. I have a lot of empathy for this group, and their parents as well...I think that’s another thing...that parents of gifted students have been very strong advocates and the school district feels that push back and becomes very defensive and then you have that dynamic and it’s hard to move forward...(Sue, high school counselor)

Subsequent Theme 6: (Understanding) The majority of the school community indicated a need to increase the extent of their understanding of what giftedness is: (50%) low level of understanding; (36%) medium level of understanding; (14%) high level of understanding.

Throughout all of the interviews completed with teachers, administrators, parents, and students, it became very evident that there was a need to increase the level of understanding within this community, with regard to what giftedness entails and how it manifests through behaviors and traits. An overwhelming response from participants had to do with kids thinking differently or having an intensity about them. Additionally, some more of the thoughts expressed are reflected in these examples:

I have learned a lot in the last few years...I was not against giftedness but I had a very narrow view (as I think is true for most classroom teachers I know.) I have become more passionate and my mind has been opened. I know kids now that really need more and different...I have gotten much more passionate and urgent feeling. It has taken my deliberate and focused work to raise this awareness.
(Ann, middle school gifted specialist)

Always knowing how I can help them is a challenge...I think the underachieving gifted kid is such a conundrum to me...I don’t know how to tap into their motivation and then just keep that going. I also wish we had the time and place to work on social and emotional issues...this is hard at the high school level.
(Bethany, high school teacher)

Chapter Summary

Based upon the conceptual framework of this study and through a systematic coding and analysis procedure, the researcher was able to categorize data retrieved from personal interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Individual passages from the interview transcripts were grouped in thematically connected categories and then used to directly answer each research question that was originally identified in the study. These themes were reported in an objective manner, free from researcher bias or interpretation.

To summarize, first, the data indicated that there were few current programming options that the participants tied to their academic success. Instead, there were a number of programming options identified that did not influence student achievement positively. Second, according to data analysis, the majority of identified gifted students who were achieving at high levels earlier in their school careers are continuing to achieve at high levels in middle and high school. Of those that aren't, five students were chosen to study more in-depth. Third, flexible and understanding teachers were pointed to as affecting student achievement and attitudes positively, although just a few teachers stood out for the students this way at school. Fourth, students were found to be dealing with a number of social and emotional issues, such as frustration, lack of motivation, and disorganization. Finally, participants indicated that these social and emotional needs were rarely being addressed at school.

The following chapter further analyzes, interprets, and synthesizes the above results of this study in light of previous studies and research in this area.

Chapter Six: Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Nine tenths of education is encouragement
Anatole France

Introduction

The purpose of this multi-case study was to explore and understand the lived, educational experiences of gifted students within this rural school district, while deeply examining the school settings and the other relationships and systems that affect the children's experiences and success in school. It was hoped that a better understanding of the perceptions of gifted students and their parents and teachers (as well as administrators) in this school system would provide insight about how to adjust programming options to better meet the students' needs, especially within the social and emotional realm of their experiences.

The researcher employed multiple measures of inquiry to validate and cross-check findings. Formally these were: in-depth interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. In addition, informal conversations with a multitude of individuals took place and contributed to this researcher's depth of knowledge and perspective in this area. Participants in the study included 22 persons: a mixture of gifted students, their parents, middle and high school classroom teachers and administrators, district-level administrators, and one school board member. The data were coded, analyzed, and

organized by research question and then by categories and subcategories guided by the conceptual framework. The study was based on the following research questions:

1. What factors did gifted students identify as influencing their academic achievement at the secondary level?

How did past and current programming options promote long-term academic success for the identified gifted students within the school district?

Were the students who were identified at the elementary level (and who were achieving at high levels) continuing to achieve at high levels at the middle and high school?
2. What relationships and systems shaped the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of gifted students at the secondary levels?
3. What were the social and emotional issues that identified gifted students were dealing with? Were these needs being addressed by the current gifted programming? How might these needs be met more effectively?

The results in chapter 5 specifically answer the questions and sub-questions above. The over-arching theme was that there were a variety of social and emotional issues that gifted students were struggling with that did influence their academic achievement and engagement level in school and these issues presented needs that were not currently being addressed, in any formal or consistent way, at school. As a consequence, achievement levels for these students studied were also inconsistent and the students' continue to rely on parental and peer support as well as the support and

guidance from the occasional understanding and flexible teacher as they attempt to negotiate these sometimes very problematic areas.

This chapter subjectively analyzes, interprets, and synthesizes the results. The main themes of this study were: Influences; Programming; Achievement; Relationships; Soc/Emotional Struggles; and Understanding. These are further synthesized for this chapter and the chapter is organized by the following analytic categories:

1. Influences on Student Academic Achievement. (Research Question 1)
2. Relationships and Systems that Shape Student Behaviors and Attitudes. (Research Question 2)
3. Problematic Social and Emotional Issues (Research Question 3)

As a result of even deeper analysis, the following components were identified that, in combination with each other, represent what this study has found to be the predominant influences that affect the educational experiences for the students involved in this study: social struggles; emotional struggles; boredom; passion areas; self-awareness; self-efficacy; parents; peers; and teachers. The following diagram (Figure 2, next page) represents the potential relationship and inter-connectedness between these components and illustrates how a given student presents may be the product of a combination of several or more of these components (at varying degrees). It is important to note that not all components are applicable to every student nor do the components have equal weight but vary with every situation. For example, if a gifted student exhibits a good degree of self-efficacy chances are that the individual also is fairly self-aware and most likely has passion areas that they pursue in and/or out of school and, subsequently, indicates little or

no boredom in school because of these factors. This could also translate into a fairly low incidence of social/emotional struggles. As another example, if the student experiences positive parental influence whereby the parent seeks out and helps to provide opportunities in the student's passion area, this could translate into a higher rate of self-efficacy and a lower incidence of social/emotional struggles for that student. Of course many, many other factors play into how this all transpires and impacts the learning of each student.

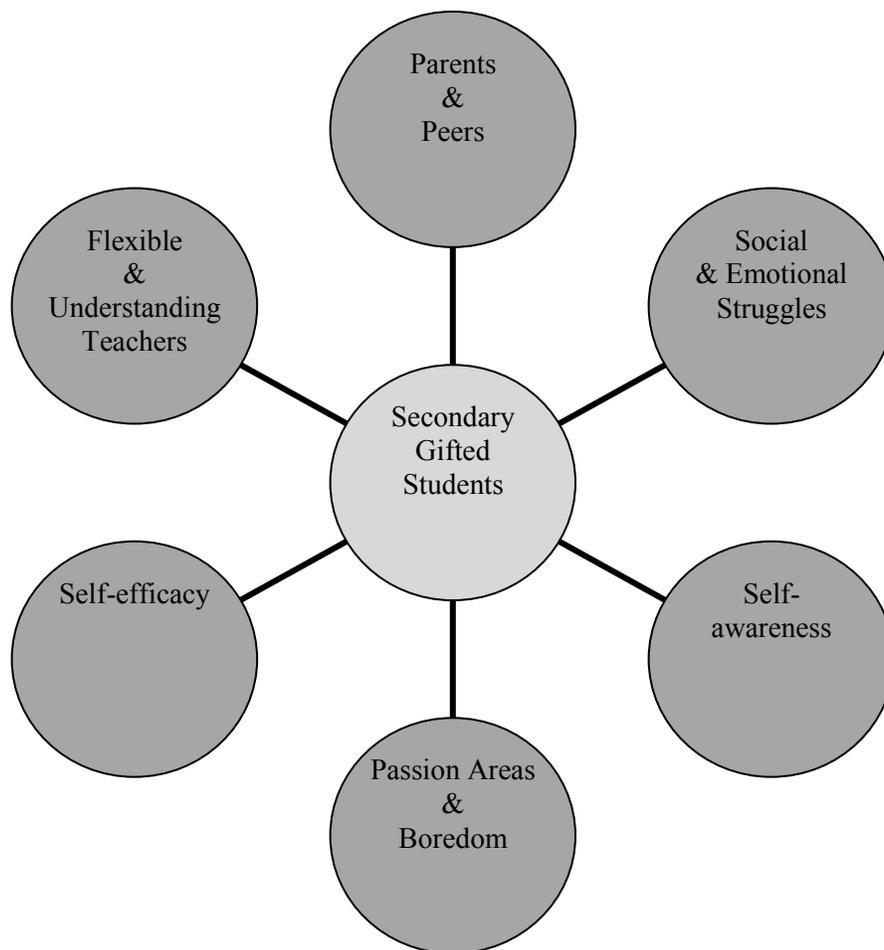


Figure 2. Potential Influences on Students' Achievement

Using Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as a guide in this process, these analytic categories are directly tied with this study's research questions, as noted previously, and were used to code the data and present the results in chapter 5. In the analysis the researcher has strived to connect patterns or themes within the analytic categories, as well as to connect the pattern and themes that emerged as the process unfolded. Additionally, relevant theory and research was tied in and these themes are compared and contrasted to issues raised by the literature.

To sum up, the results were presented in narrative form in the previous chapter after the researcher organized data retrieved from various sources into categories. The purpose of this chapter was to present interpretations of these results. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), "The aim in qualitative research is on understanding and the goal is to tell a richly detailed story, that includes the context and connects participants, events, activities, processes and experiences to larger issues." The purpose of the results chapter was to split apart the pieces of data and the purpose of this chapter is to attempt to reconstruct a more holistic understanding. The relevant literature on social and emotional issues related to gifted education will be considered while this analysis and interpretation process takes place. In light of the fact that these defined analytic categories do overlap and are sometimes interdependent upon one another, I will discuss this analysis as a combination of the three categories together rather than separating out each one.

Interpretation

The first research question focused on the students' influences during their school years, especially since entering middle school, and sought to find out whom, how, and what they thought impacted their learning over time. The second research question specifically honed in on the relationships and systems that were influences and the third question got specific about the kinds of social and emotional issues the students dealt with as part of their learning process. The participants (directly and indirectly) pointed to predominately intrinsic factors that they identified as affecting them, both positively and negatively. Extrinsic factors were addressed as well.

Passion or Interest Areas

Passion or interest areas were one intrinsic factor that the students' showed enthusiasm about and pointed to as influencing their achievement. As Jasmine, Leslie's mom shared, "Acting, theater, and music are her passions and she actively pursues these at school and outside of school too." The impactfulness of passion or interest areas is supported in the literature. George Betts' "Autonomous Learner Model" (1985) is one such example. When following this model students are encouraged to pursue their individual passion area(s) and develop these at a high level. They can learn core curriculum through their passion or interest areas and utilize higher levels of questioning as part of this learning process.

In addition to Betts' contributions on this topic, McWhirter's work also supports and validates the influence of passion areas upon student learning. According to McWhirter (1993), the use of passion areas can enhance a student's feeling of security

that, ultimately, deepens his or her creativity and learning overall. The use of passion areas counteracts the notion that “school is not relevant” or “school is boring.” If passion areas are pursued in authentic ways this could increase student self-esteem and self-concept and serve to engage the student in school. Frye-Mason (2004) supports this theory in her dissertation work with smart students struggling in school as well, as her study found incorporating interest areas into learning situations showed a positive effect on student achievement. The importance of this finding is that the use of interest areas must be incorporated into instruction if students are to be engaged effectively.

Connections are important and as Sword (2008) stated earlier, emotions are tied to the drive to learn. If a student is not excited about the learning there will be no drive or motivation that will sustain them through the process.

Self-awareness

Students’ and parents also indicated that self-awareness was key in being able to successfully negotiate the schooling realm. This included things like understanding one’s learning style, strengths, and weaknesses; understanding what it means to be gifted and the common traits and issues associated with that; setting realistic goals and plans for follow through; knowing how to negotiate socially with peers and with adults, such as teachers and picking up on non-verbal queues. One student illustrates her level of self-awareness this way:

I like learning new things and believing in new things...I have an open mind. I am stubborn and I don’t like to hear that I am wrong...sometimes I am not as open to accepting that I am wrong as I should be. Sometimes I am too eager to learn...sometimes I would rather spend more time on English or history rather than on math. I don’t do a good job of pacing myself. Also, my organizational

skills are nonexistent! I have learned to keep everything in the same pile and go through it every time I need something! (Gwen)

Stress is a significant issue amongst today's adolescents and, according to Genshaft and Broyles (1991), gifted teens have unique personality traits that make them even more susceptible than their peers. Kuczen (1987) states that since stress is an individualized matter, its intervention must also be individualized, with the first step assisting students in becoming more self-aware. Encouraging gifted adolescents to become aware of their own bodies and how stress affects them can be most beneficial, Kuczen says. Being introspective and knowing your strengths and weaknesses, as well as what you are capable of, can assist a student greatly in their quest to find academic success and the research supports this as being an important influence on adolescents.

Self-efficacy

Another intrinsic factor that is closely related to self-awareness is self-concept. Students with a positive self-concept have been shown to do better, academically and socially, in school. This is tied to the whole idea of self-efficacy. Efficacy beliefs deal not only with the skills that the individual possesses but with his or her beliefs about what can be accomplished with those skills under a variety of circumstances. Repeated mastery experiences help to develop a positive efficacy and one becomes resilient when one is successful in overcoming difficult obstacles through perseverant efforts (Bandura, 1997). The greater efficacy one has the more positive the self-concept. Social cognitive theory postulates that human achievement depends upon the interaction between one's behaviors, personal factors, such as thoughts and beliefs, and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is hypothesized to have effects on task choice, effort,

persistence, and achievement. Students most reliably obtain information to appraise their self-efficacy from their actual performances and most often this is a sub-conscious effort. Parents and peers have also been shown to influence a student's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). For example, parents who provide an environment and opportunities that stimulate a child's curiosity and allows for mastery experiences help to build a child's self-efficacy. Peers influence a child's self-efficacy through modeling. Observing others succeed can motivate the child to attempt the task as well if they believe they will be successful. The opposite is true as well. Several parents and teachers in this researcher's study commented about some students' unwillingness to try hard, stay with a difficult task to completion. Greg commented: "Also, some students struggle when they are faced with challenging material all of a sudden and question their skill level. They struggle with the whole idea of having to work hard." I think it is probable that this response on the part of the student, at least in part, relates to student belief in his or herself or their self-efficacy.

Relatedness

In addition to self-efficacy, another factor that is important to school success (and was indirectly highlighted by students in this study) is how well students experience a sense of relatedness to the school environment and how well they are engaged. Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall (1996) suggested that a students' involvement and participation in school is in part dependent upon how much the school environment contributes to their perceptions of autonomy and relatedness, which, in turn, influence self-efficacy and academic achievement. Zach, a middle school boy who has obviously

“checked-out” had this to say: “If I could design my own learning program everyone would get to choose...there would be lots of independence and lots of hands-on activities.” This student seems to crave the autonomy and relatedness that is mentioned above.

It is known that peers influence a student greatly during adolescence and the peer group context enhances or diminishes a student’s feelings of relatedness or belonging also. In addition, teacher-student relationships are also a very important factor in increasing one’s sense of belonging. Steps taken to increase students’ perceptions that their teacher cares about them and their learning has been shown to strengthen teacher-student relationships (Arhar, 1997; Mac Iver et al., 2000). This research underscores the importance of establishing connections with teachers, as was also indicated as important to the students who participated in this study.

Motivation

Student lack of motivation is a factor that is often cited as a reason for underachievement and teachers are often heard lamenting about how difficult it is to consistently keep some students motivated. There has been much research done in the area of motivation and student learning and the following reflects one point of view:

The importance of enhancing a child’s motivation (their self-confidence, enthusiasm, and desire to understand and develop skills) is explicitly recognized in the subject literature. This increased motivation, in turn, leads to the kind of active engagement with academic tasks that maximize learning (Stipek, 2002, pg. 310).

The NCTM standards (2000) refer to students’ confidence in their ability to tackle difficult problems and take control of their own learning. Implicit within this document is

that motivation is an integral component of learning. Stipek (2002) offers these four main recommendations, because as she puts it, “Good instruction is motivating”:

1. Focus on challenging, conceptual thinking
2. Focus on learning and understanding (as opposed to getting correct answers)
3. Increase student autonomy in their learning
4. Increase the authenticity and meaningfulness in instruction

Based upon my observations and student comments, there is a lack of focus on conceptual learning in the school environments in which this study took place. Jenny puts it this way: “In honors classes I don’t think it’s about gifted, it’s about homework...not much focus on higher-level concepts.”

Keeping students motivated is important in every subject area and both the National Research Council (1996) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science Benchmarks for Science Literacy (Project 2061, 1993) have made recommendations regarding science being taught as an active process. Giving the students opportunity to conduct experiments is just one part of the process. For example, students must have “minds-on” as well as “hands-on” experiences (National Research Council, 1996, pg. 2). It is further stated that textbook reading is no substitute for reading, discussing, and writing about scientific articles. Book-length investigations of important scientific topics should also be done on a very regular basis. Based upon my observation in several science classes I can attest to the lack of engagement of students and to the lack of “minds-on” or “hands-on” experiences, at least on a regular basis.

Children's conceptions of ability have been shown to play a significant role in their achievement also but this, too, can be tied to motivation. As students age, critical changes take place in these conceptions and their influence on achievement motivation. It is during this time that children begin to fully understand the idea of ability and, as these concepts develop, children become more concerned about their ability and more sensitive to evaluation, especially negative evaluation. According to Dweck (2002), once they have developed a clear and coherent understanding of ability, the particular conception of ability they adopt will determine their motivational patterns. This conception will influence such things as whether they seek out challenges and how resilient they are when faced with a setback. This directly relates to what Becky, Ben's mom had to say about him when she said: "If he isn't really good at something right off the bat he stops trying." According to Dweck's study, students who retain confidence in their ability in the face of failure are not necessarily those who have the most ability. Her work indicates that there are basically two "effort beliefs" that students' subscribe to and it has to do with how they view intelligence (one viewpoint being that intelligence is "fixed" and you have it or you don't and you cannot develop intelligence through effort (entity). The other viewpoint is that effort can increase intelligence...the harder you work the smarter you'll get.) This is known as the "entity vs. incremental theory." The other important idea to consider is intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation. It is clear from the research that possessing intrinsic motivation (having an internal push or drive to succeed) benefits all learners to a higher degree than does a dependence upon external factors (extrinsic motivation). According to Dweck, beliefs do affect intrinsic motivation and

performance and those holding an “entity theory” were more likely than those with an incremental theory to believe that high effort in school indeed implies low ability—for entity students effort is more dangerous because it can show that you’re dumb and, in the end, it can be less effective than just not trying in the first place. Students who believe in fixed intelligence (entity) will sacrifice learning in favor of a chance to look smart and avoid looking dumb. Additionally, students may be influenced in this regard by teachers’ parents’ and other evaluators’ conceptions of ability as well. The recent work of Butler (2000) suggests that adults who hold different theories of intelligence judge and treat children differently. For example, teachers with an entity theory appear to render judgments of students more quickly, often on the basis of initial performance and sometimes rigid and not open to revision. The same holds true for a parent who emphasizes ability and who attributes success to talent versus a parent who holds the incremental theory and emphasizes effort and attributing effort to success. With regard to Ben, as referred to above, I predict he subscribes to an entity theory and that may explain his avoidance of putting in extra effort and his lack of motivation. As his mom stated when asked if the gifted identification helped or harmed her child:

For Ben, it made him think he did not have to work as hard because, well, he’s so smart he’ll manage somehow...in some ways he has worked less hard than if he hadn’t been labeled as gifted. (Becky)

Effectiveness

As a final question for teachers and administrators I asked them to give their effectiveness rating for the gifted programming in our district, on a scale from 0-10. The results are shown in the graph below:

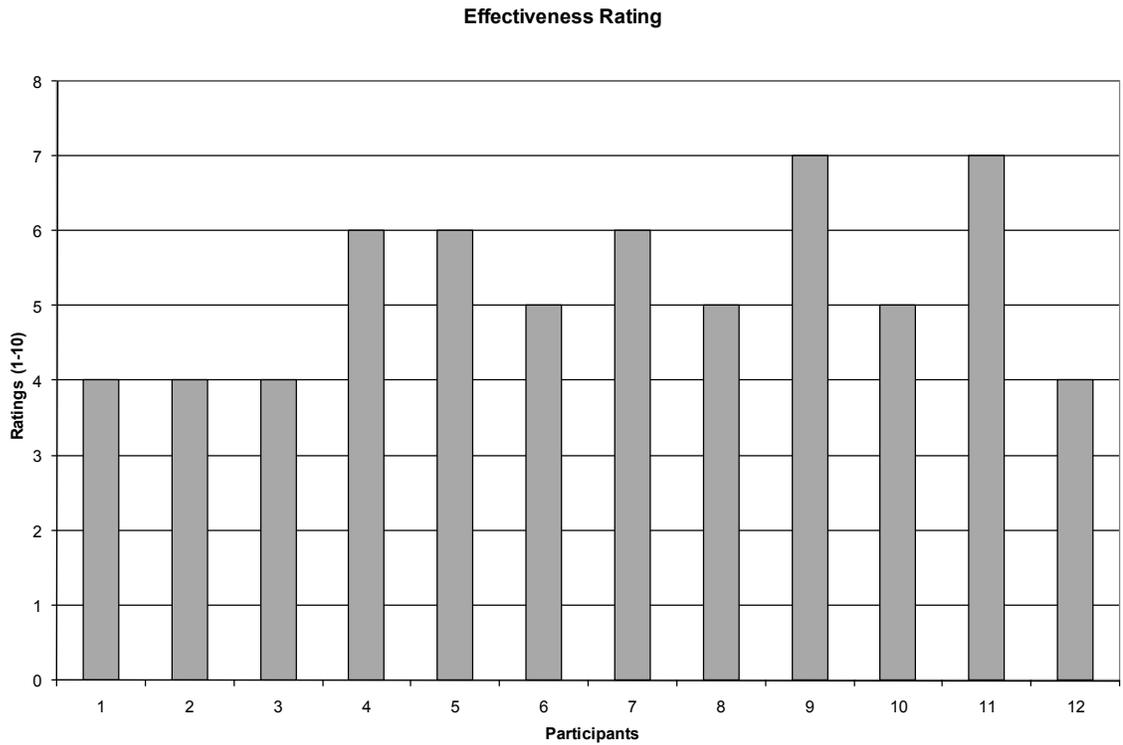


Figure 3.

All responses indicated that there was still room for improvement, with many participants (over half of them) indicating much more work was needed to reach greater effectiveness.

In addition, I asked all participants for recommendations on how the effectiveness of gifted programming in our district could be increased. Their responses are reflected in the following table (Table 2) and will be taken into account as I formulate my own recommendations, to be presented in the following chapter.

		Increase Teacher Training	Increase Student Mentoring Opportunities	Teach Students Self Advocacy	Implement Peer Support Groups	Increase Use of Differentiation Strategies	Increase Level of Understanding for All	Teach Students Self Awareness	Seek Alternative Solutions for Homework	Increase Focus on Social Emotional Factors	Increase Gifted Focus within RTI Process	Eliminate Busy Work	Social Emotional Class Offering
1	Stacy	X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	
2	Diana	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	
3	Becky	X				X	X		X	X		X	
4	Jasmine	X			X	X		X	X	X			
5	Elizabeth	X		X		X			X	X		X	
6	Leslie				X	X			X			X	
7	Ben					X	X		X			X	
8	Jenny			X		X			X			X	
9	Zach					X			X			X	
10	Gwen	X		X	X	X	X		X			X	
11	Luci	X		X	X	X	X			X	X		
12	Peggy	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
13	Bethany	X		X	X	X	X			X	X		X
14	Mark	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		
15	Greg	X		X		X	X			X			
16	Lois	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
17	Luke	X	X	X		X	X			X			
18	Ann	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
19	Mary	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			
20	Sue	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			X
21	Janet	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
22	Paul	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
TOTAL	22	18 (82%)	6 (27%)	17 (77%)	15 (68%)	22 (100%)	16 (73%)	7 (32%)	14 (64%)	17 (77%)	5 (23%)	11 (50%)	5 (23%)

Table 2. Participants' Recommendations for Improvement

Summary

Participants in this study indicated that there were both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affected their achievement levels in school. Many different factors were mentioned by participants and, after a synthesis of data, six main influencers emerged. A deeper analysis of these six components, as well as an interpretation of what this means was then done for each. Relevant research was tied in to support and validate these assertions. The influences (flexible & understanding teachers; parents & peers; social and emotional struggles; self-awareness; passion areas & boredom; self-efficacy;) as indicated by the participants in this study, most likely contribute to the frustration, lack of motivation and disorganization that participants indicated were present for them (in varying degrees) in these schools. In addition, other negative results could manifest because of the stress and perfectionism that are present.

In the following chapter I will present specific, research-based recommendations to hopefully begin to increase the effectiveness of the instruction and programming for the students involved in this study as well as the other identified gifted students within this school district.

Chapter Seven: Summary

Good advice is always certain to be ignored, but that's no reason not to give it.

Agatha Christie

Introduction

The purpose of this multi-case study was to explore with a sample of identified gifted learners the lived experiences of identified gifted students in this rural school district, with a special lens focused upon the social and emotional aspects of their learning process. This was done in an effort to determine if both academic and affective needs were being adequately met within the programming provided. The conclusions from this study align with the research questions, themes, and patterns discovered and address these six main areas: (a) the major influences students indicated had significant impact upon their ability to achieve in their school setting; (b) programming strategies that impacted their learning; (c) achievement patterns and the implications of those; (d) whether there existed influential relationships for the student and the impact of those connections; (e) the kinds of social and emotional issues students were dealing with as adolescents; and (f) the level of understanding the various members of this learning community possessed regarding giftedness. Following is a summary of this study, a discussion of the major results and conclusions gleaned from this research, the implications of these results, the limitations associated with this research, recommendations based upon this study's results, and this researcher's final reflection.

Summary of the Study

This multi-case study was designed to take a closer look at the experiences of secondary level gifted learners within this specific school district, with a specific focus upon the affective aspects of their learning program. Effectively meeting the needs of gifted learners, at the elementary and secondary levels, has been difficult in both the academic and social/emotional realms. Academic needs can be addressed adequately through a variety of course offerings at these middle and high schools and, with the implementation of the International Baccalaureate Program at both schools, much work is being done to incorporate a multi-disciplinary, inquiry-based approach at both schools. Social and emotional aspects of learning are addressed within the IB philosophy because this is recognized as a very important aspect to consider for any learner. However, even beyond this effort, secondary level gifted students in particular *must* have their social/emotional needs addressed, not only in the planning and theoretical dimensions of the instruction that is provided, but also through the action steps of not only the lessons provided but in the relationships established throughout the school environment and also in the avenues in which these students are to express their learning. As stated by a prominent researcher in the field:

Although gifted students possess exceptional capabilities, most cannot excel without assistance. They need assistance academically, but they also need assistance emotionally through understanding, acceptance, support, and encouragement (Webb, 1994, p.10).

The design used in this research was that for a multiple case study. I utilized this qualitative approach due to the desire to explore and describe this special program and its

impacts in great depth. Qualitative research takes place within the natural setting, uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, and is emergent rather than tightly prefigured (Creswell, 2003). This was not only a design well-suited for the kind of exploration I wanted to execute but case study was also a good fit for me and aligned with my personal attributes of valuing observation, questioning, and working at understanding people, especially within the contexts in which they operate.

The primary purpose of this case study was to observe and describe the current programming practice for gifted learners in a small school district in Colorado's Rocky Mountain region, specifically the practices addressing the affective or social/emotional aspects of the child as this relates to the child's academic programming and their performance in school.

The secondary purpose was to use the data to examine whether there were disparities between student needs and services provided in this area and, if so, to make recommendations for ways to implement more strategies, policies, and programming to more adequately address these needs.

Thirdly, there is clearly a problem with underachievement in schools across our nation and within this specific school district studied. The additional data and observations gleaned from this study will add to the research base in this field. Additionally, the researcher believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow practitioners and decision-makers in the school district to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of design and facilitation of gifted programming options.

The research questions that drove this study included the following:

1. What factors did gifted students identify as influencing their academic achievement at the secondary level?

How did past and current programming options promote long-term academic success for the identified gifted students within the school district?

Were the students who were identified at the elementary level (and who were achieving at high levels) continuing to achieve at high levels at the middle and high school?

2. What relationships and systems shaped the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of gifted students at the secondary levels?
3. What were the social and emotional issues that identified gifted students were dealing with? Were these needs being addressed by the current gifted programming? How might these needs be met more effectively?

This study was conducted in Buffalo Mountain School District (a pseudonym), a small public school district in the central Colorado Rocky Mountains. This study took place during the 2008-2009 school year. The school system included six elementary schools, one middle and one high school. There were 330 identified gifted students, K-12, in this rural school district. The total population in the district was approximately 3,044 students. This convenience sample was comprised of both males and females who were fluent in English. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study for the schools, district, county and participants to honor anonymity.

In order to begin to formulate an initial cohort group, specific criteria were established that was compared against the data for all identified gifted students at the secondary level. The specific criteria used for each area of data collection is noted below. Overall, seven primary methods were used to collect data and four of these were used at the outset to establish this initial cohort group. These four areas of initial data collection were:

Assessments

Three consecutive years of CSAP data for each identified gifted student, grades 5-10, were analyzed, looking for achievement patterns. NWEA assessment scores for three consecutive years were also analyzed in the same way. Significant achievement drops or stagnations were noted and these students were then placed into an initial cohort group for those students whose data reflects these achievement patterns.

Grades

Student academic records were analyzed, for three consecutive years, again with a focus on achievement patterns. Students with significant drops, as well as those showing no significant movement one way or another were noted and their names placed in the initial cohort group for this category.

Attendance Records

Regular attendance is an indicator of student engagement and motivation in school, so attendance records for each identified gifted student were also analyzed for three consecutive years. Students showing more than 10 absences per semester were placed into the initial cohort group for this category for further comparisons.

Extracurricular Activities/Awards/Leadership Roles

Research indicates that the level to which a student is involved in extracurricular activities, takes on leadership roles at school is tied to that student's level of achievement. These records were also analyzed for the last three years. Students showing little to no participation in these types of activities were also placed in an initial cohort group for this category for further analysis. Once the initial cohort groups for each category were formulated, a comparison of all four groups was done looking for students that appeared multiple times within groups. This list was further narrowed, given extremes of decline in achievement (both grades and on standardized tests), absences, and lack of involvement. Ultimately five students were determined to make up the final cohort group. This group was then utilized for further data collection incorporating multiple classroom observations and personal interviews into this process. A description of these data collection methods are detailed below:

Observation

This researcher visited grades 6-12 classrooms of which achieving and underachieving (previously identified) gifted learners were present. This was done three times each. The driving questions that served to guide each observation were: Does the student seem highly engaged within this classroom setting? What student behaviors and traits are evident and support this assertion? What factors can be observed within the classroom environment that would support this assertion?

The observation protocol (Appendix A) was used to guide each observation. The observation protocol focused on: the structure of the class, description of the setting,

areas of curricular extension, activities, and student engagement. A student-engagement rating scale was also utilized in the observation process, using a scale of one to four. One indicated no student engagement, two indicated a small level of engagement, three indicated the student was engaged most of the time and four indicated that the student showed high engagement the whole time. Additionally, the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI) was used to ascertain student behaviors/traits that would indicate a high level of thinking and engagement and focused on an organization of characteristics of giftedness into these seven categories: advanced language; analytical thinking; meaning motivation; perspective; sense of humor; sensitivity; and accelerated learning. By observing the students within the school environment this researcher could adequately provide the context with which generalizations were drawn and assertions were made.

Interviewing

5 gifted students, 5 parents of gifted students, and 12 teacher/counselor/administrators were personally interviewed. An interview protocol was used for each interview (see Appendix C). Finally, an analysis of the school improvement plans, for both the district and individual buildings, was performed, with a focus upon garnering evidence of support for social/emotional programming within this school system. A detailed description of this analysis follows.

School Improvement Plan

The school improvement plans for the past three years for each secondary building in the district (one high school and one middle school) were analyzed looking for

social/emotional overarching goals and priorities, with the thought being that if intentional goal setting and providing for the social/emotional needs of students were a district and building priority there would be evident positive growth for students in this area over time. Alternatively, if the intentional priority was evident in the documents yet students were found to be struggling in this area, a more intensive look at programming would need to take place. Findings from this analysis were noted and then incorporated into the overall recommendations as a result of this study.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2003), data analysis is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking questions, writing memos throughout the study. This involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of all of the information gathered as well as looking for themes and patterns within the data. I followed both Creswell's steps and those suggested by Bloomberg & Volpe (2009) for analyzing data from interviews and classroom observations.

In order to increase the validity of the findings, I chose to triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from all of the sources and using all of it to build a coherent justification of themes.

The purpose of the interviews was to better understand and describe the affective factors present amongst the high ability learners studied and whether or not these factors could have had an impact on their achievement in school. In addition, with regard to the

teacher and administrator interviews, the purpose for these interviews was to better understand and describe the attitudes and perspectives of these individuals and ascertain whether support was present for further providing for the affective needs of the gifted learners in their buildings. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of a case. The interview is the main avenue to multiple realities (Stake, 1995).

Classroom observations were analyzed in the same detailed way as outlined above. Additional meaning was gleaned by tallying the tic marks for each category of gifted behaviors and traits and then looking for trends. In addition, the student engagement scale was analyzed and compared with other data points as yet another component utilized for further understanding into the overall school experience of the students studied.

Grades, attendance records, and evidence of extracurricular activities were analyzed by looking for patterns within the data that indicated high achievement and participation, low achievement and participation, and any other variations of these categories with an attention to any trends present.

The school improvement plan data was examined at each school, specifically looking for indicators of social and emotional goal setting and/or a valuing of these factors in plans/actions for achievement within the particular building.

Results

Research Question 1:

(A) What factors did gifted students identify as influencing their academic achievement at the secondary level?

Result: Secondary level gifted students identified these factors as influencing their academic achievement: peer groups; self-awareness; parents; passion areas.

Discussion: Based upon participant feedback, self-awareness (and self-perceptions) have both positively and negatively impacted achievement levels. For example, if a student had a high level of self-awareness then this tended to have a positive impact on his/her achievement, with the opposite being true as well.

Having a passion area of intense focus has proven to be a benefit for students and often transfers into other areas of study. All of the student participants in this study indicated they had an area of passion that they pursued. Often the students were able to pursue these interests within the school setting through elective classes, although these interest areas were rarely incorporated into classroom lessons and/or assignments/projects for them.

Another influence on the student's achievement had to do with peer groups. The middle school years seemed to be a more tumultuous time for kids, with regard to peer issues, as Luci, a school administrator stated: "I think, especially with middle school, if kids are struggling with peers and they don't know what to do with it, it impacts everything in their life...we must set up supports for this..." Peer groups have had a positive impact at this middle school as illustrated in Jasmine, Leslie's mom's comment

regarding the peer support group for gifted students, REACH: "...Kids got together and talked about the problems they were facing...these weren't remedial kids but smart, highly capable kids that were struggling...this was very powerful."

Parents were another major influence on student achievement as indicated by the participants in this study. Several student participants related that they depended upon their parents for support and had close relationships with their parents. Parents were shown to positively impact student achievement in this study.

(B) How did past and current programming options promote long-term academic success for the identified gifted students within the school district?

Result: The students identified the following past and current programming options that have promoted long-term academic success for them: REACH (support groups for gifted learners) at the middle school; classes with understanding, supportive, and flexible teachers.

Discussion: The middle school's REACH support group was overwhelmingly the most effective programming option that either secondary school had to offer students, either academically or socially/emotionally. High school teachers and administrators have indicated that they will be incorporating this programming option into their offerings for the 2009-2010 school year as well, as Bethany, the high school's gifted specialist stated: "We are planning on having a social/emotional support group during advisory time once a month...also, we will work with staff to dispel myths and gauge the level of knowledge teachers have..."

In addition to the support groups, the other programming option that participants indicated they found effective was classes with supportive, understanding, and flexible teachers. Unfortunately too few of these types of teachers existed within either school setting, according to the students and parents interviewed.

In terms of programming options that *did not promote* success for students academically or socially/emotionally, classes with too much homework and/or busy work were the overwhelming response by participants. These types of classes included honors and IB coursework.

(C) Were the students who were identified at the elementary level (and who were achieving at high levels) continuing to achieve at high levels at the middle and high school?

Result: The majority (81%) of students who were previously identified as gifted, and who were achieving at high levels, are still achieving at high levels (3.0 or higher). 19% of the previously identified gifted students are now achieving under a 3.0. Of these students who are underachieving currently, five students were selected for a closer look.

Research Question 2: What relationships and systems shaped the behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of gifted students at the secondary levels?

Result: According to the students and parents interviewed, these are the top four relationships and systems that shape student behaviors, attitudes and aspirations: flexible teachers; teachers who seek to understand; peer groups and parents.

Discussion: Unfortunately, there were not too many instances of relationships and systems that were cited that were viewed positively. In response to this realm of

questioning, students and parents tended to cite teachers, who were both inflexible and lacked understanding, as negatively shaping their behaviors and attitudes, as in this example:

She dropped out of all IB classes at the end of last year...the teachers were so bad and we told the counselors we were picking the classes by the teachers that were teaching them...last year was a bad year! (Stacy)

There were a few examples of positive relationships to include, however:

Most teachers thought she was misbehaving and immature...Ms. Hintman looked deeper...she just didn't write her off...(Jasmine)

Mr. Morrison connects to kids very well too...His patience is so good...instead of blowing up he knows that things do go wrong and there is nothing you can do about it. He'll tease kids but gives them all a chance to prove themselves and he gives kids a lot of responsibility...he is very good about not giving too much and they always rise to the challenge, come to class. They do the things he asks...(Gwen)

Some students indicated that they did not consider any adult relationship to be especially important and influential in their lives right now. When Ben was asked about important adults in his life he responded: "No adults...my friends do know me well...I'm pretty open with them." Another student responded this way:

I don't have an adult (teacher, friend, coach) that I am close to. I have friends my age, with similar interests, that I enjoy...they have good qualities like they are cool and funny. (Zach)

Research Question 3: (A) What were the social and emotional issues that identified gifted students were dealing with? (B) Were these needs being addressed by the current gifted programming? (C) How might these needs be met more effectively?

Result: (A) The social and emotional issues that students identified they are dealing with currently are: disorganization; frustration; motivation.

Discussion: Here are some examples of what participants confided to me when I interviewed them:

...She has communicated that there is a level of anxiety there when everything is turned in and she is caught up—she’s looking over her shoulder and anticipating the next stressor...that is more overwhelming than anything and she can “control” this by always maintaining a certain level of stress...she is so used to having something out of whack that she needs something to control, so she purposefully doesn’t turn in some work...(Diana)

It wasn’t that she wasn’t getting the concept...she just lacked follow through. Going from class to class and period to period was the issue...by Tuesday she was behind. She was not a remedial kid. She just needed help with organization. (Jasmine)

Result: (B) The majority of respondents indicated their social and emotional needs were not being addressed currently at school.

Discussion: Stacy, Gwen’s mom gave me this feedback: “These issues have not been addressed at school...she has not had really close relationships with teachers.” Other parents and teachers had these words to share:

Our biggest problem was the lack of understanding among educators with regard to giftedness and twice exceptionality. It was really hard for teachers (even the really good ones) to get it...they seem to get used to working with the main population and they have a hard time moving beyond what normally works. The curriculum kind of beats them down...a normal teacher has a hard time going beyond that...(Diana, Jenny’s mom)

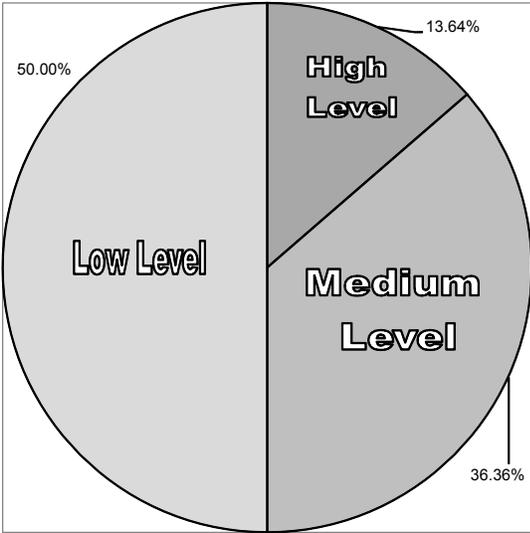
This has always been an area that our district has struggled with...in terms of identification and meeting the needs. These kids are often ignored because, “...these kids are smart and can teach themselves, basically, and I’ve got to deal with these other kids.” It’s been really sad to see that attitude towards these children...their sensitivity to the world around them is so increased that they have

greater struggles with growing up, identifying who they are and what their needs are...the social piece (fitting in, etc.) can shake up their world. I have a lot of empathy for this group, and their parents as well...I think that's another thing...that parents of gifted students have been very strong advocates and the school district feels that push back and becomes very defensive and then you have that dynamic and it's hard to move forward...(Sue, high school counselor)

Result: (C) A variety of recommendations were made (see Table 2 for a full listing.) The top three responses were: increase teacher training; increase the use of differentiation strategies; and increase focus on social/emotional issues.

Additionally, as a result of one of the interview questions asked, important data was gleaned regarding the participant's overall understanding of giftedness. The majority of the school community indicated a need to increase the extent of their understanding of what giftedness is: (50%) showed a low level of understanding; (36%) showed a medium level of understanding; (14%) showed a high level of understanding.

**Understanding of Giftedness
by School Community**



As a consequence of a deeper analysis of the results, I found that many of the main themes, or driving forces, in this study had both positive and negative impacts.

For example, an identified influence could positively or negatively impact the student, depending upon the situation and the student. Table 3, below, was provided in an effort to delineate some of these interpretations:

Driving Forces	Positive	Negative
<i>1. Influences</i>	1. Self-awareness can help with decision making 2. Parents were shown to be a positive influence	1. Self-awareness can lead to self-labeling 2. Parents, if over-protective = negative influence
<i>2. Programming</i>	1. Most teachers have the desire to individualize 2. REACH, peer support groups at the middle school, were positive	1. When it comes down to it, it is too hard to individualize 2. REACH groups meet inconsistently/none at HS
<i>3. Achievement</i>	1. Most gifted were shown to still be achieving at high levels 2. Achievement is high where teacher relationship is meaningful (select classes)	1. District has a problem with over-identification of gifted, therefore skewed numbers 2. Achievement has stagnated or is low where no meaningful teacher/student relationship exists
<i>4. Relationships</i>	1. Several knowledgeable, caring teachers were mentioned (with respect to giftedness) 2. Some teachers naturally value their relationships with students...part of how they teach	1. Few teachers seem to take the time to reach out and get to know their students 2. Many teachers view teaching as purely an academic-related endeavor
<i>5. Soc/Emo Struggles</i>	1. If affective issues are blatant, student receives extra support at school 2. If student affective skills are built up, ++achievement	1. For typical gifted, Soc/Emo needs not being addressed at school 2. If student affective skills are low, --achievement

Table 3. Negative or Positive?

Implications

What do these results suggest? What actions do the results obtained elicit? One of the first implications is that students do not live in a vacuum and there are many, many influencers in their learning environment that must also be considered when designing instructional programs. For example, not all gifted students are plagued by crippling social/emotional issues (some are very well-adjusted and happy students!) but sometimes things develop and change very quickly, so at one point a student will not have any interfering issues but shortly after very well could. Another implication is that differences in the level of giftedness exists for each learner and, subsequently, student needs will vary greatly from student to student. These potential needs must be recognized as strong influences on achievement and safety nets must be in place to support students if the situation arises.

Another implication of this study is that although positive programming options are in place for students at both sites already, much more needs to be done and action steps need to be identified. This was not only my own observation but this was further supported by the responses of all of the participants in the study as well (as shown as Figure 3 on the next page) with over half of the participants rating the district at a “5” or below (on a scale of 0-10, with 0 indicating a negligible effectiveness and 10 indicating extremely effective).

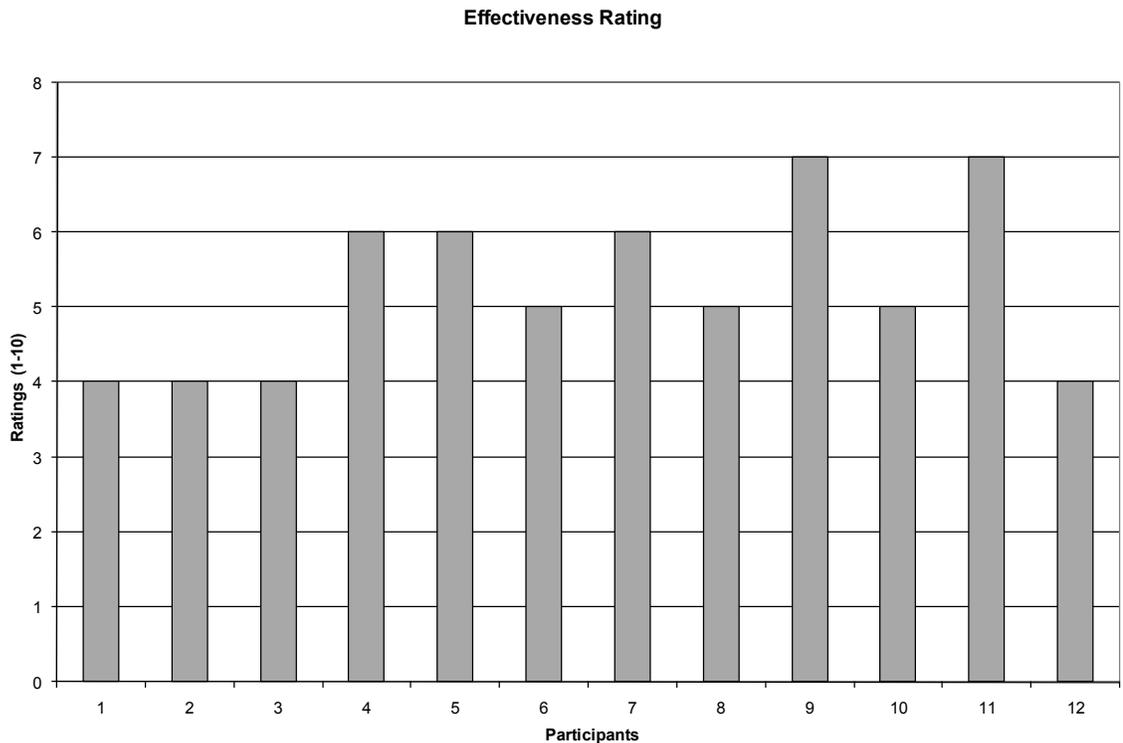


Figure 3.

In terms of achievement for gifted students in the district, the first implication is that, due to the obvious over-achievement levels (as already addressed in Chapter 5), it is clear that multiple identification measures must be in place, K-12, that are consistently used across the district and are research-based. Secondly, with 19% of the identified gifted learners showing a GPA below proficiency implies that a closer look needs to be taken into the situations of these individual students. They should not be allowed to fail!

An implication of the question regarding relationships is that the schools, for the most part, are still very traditionally run, with the focus being on academics with traditional measures used to address academic needs. I think the results of this study

imply that more non-traditional, out-of-the-box solutions need to be put into place to meet both the academic and affective needs of the students at both of these schools.

Regarding the affective implications of the results of this study, the top three social/emotional issues the students indicated they were dealing with (frustration, disorganization, and motivation) all indicate that immediate action must take place on the part of school personnel, in particular, at this time. Many other affective needs were expressed too, and it is clear that adult intervention is warranted and these students should not continue to operate without the support and guidance of individuals that possess insight into their particular situations. The literature and research highlighted in earlier chapters regarding motivation and the components that are tied directly to it (such as self-efficacy and effort) point to a need for adult support and guidance in order to increase motivation. Direct adult guidance and support must also be in place to rectify the dis-organizational habits a student may possess as well as to assist in alleviating the high frustration level of a student who doesn't experience a great deal of autonomy in their learning environment, for example.

Finally, as a result of this study, 86% of the participants were shown to have a medium to low level of understanding of what giftedness is. This implies that giftedness does not hold a very high place of value within this district, in general but especially at the secondary level, and the need to increase that knowledge base has not been present previously.

Limitations

There were several limitations for this multiple-case study. I have been a gifted teacher (and now coach) for three years and this could be considered a limitation as some may interpret historical bias regarding my background. Additionally, this study took place in one school district in rural Colorado. This represents a very small sample of all Colorado schools having a gifted program. The sampling in the study is selected rather than random and does not reflect the perceptions of all school administrators, gifted coaches, teachers, counselors, parents, and students but is limited to the individuals in this study. Finally, the results of the study are subject to the limitations associated with the brief duration of the study (less than one year) and the use of interview data collection.

With regard to generalizability, Stake shares this viewpoint:

Case study seems a poor basis for generalization. Only a single case or just a few cases will be studied, but these will be studied at length. Certain activities or problems or responses will come up again and again. Thus, for the study, certain generalizations will be drawn...the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well...there is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others the case is different from...(Stake, 1995, pg.8).

Recommendations

Introduction

Given the district's established mission statement and the fact that it is recognized that all of these groups must work together to provide engaging and effective educational experiences for our students, very specific recommendations follow for all participant

groups: district; schools; teachers; parents; and students. To reiterate, the district's mission statement is as follows:

Mission Statement: In a safe environment, we will do whatever it takes for academic and character success of every student to develop as a lifelong learner and responsible citizen. In order to accomplish this, we will engage every student every day in intellectually challenging and meaningful learning to give all students the resources necessary to prepare them to achieve their greatest potential and to meet the expectations of the future.

This researcher recognizes and appreciates the tight budget situation that schools are in currently and that special programs and general education compete for funding within each system. All students must be considered as dollars are appropriated to optimize the learning opportunities at each level of education. This district offers a K-12, whole district IB program as a means of offering challenging and meaningful learning to all students. It is important to note, however, that the IB Programme is a philosophy and offers many guidelines and resources for effective, inquiry-based instruction but it is not a gifted program by itself and must not be used as such. This program and philosophy certainly benefits gifted learners (when implemented correctly and completely) but other teacher training, specific to gifted education, must accompany this foundation in order to truly benefit gifted learners. Most often, this so called "gifted training" serves to increase the effectiveness of instruction *for all learners* as well. Teacher training in effectively using differentiation strategies is an example of this and districts concerned with optimizing their valuable funding dollars will see much benefit in this focus in professional development for its teachers.

Another overall recommendation for the district and its personnel has to do with the fidelity, focus, and attention paid to the established mission statement. My recommendation is to stay true to the district's published mission statement of "doing whatever it takes for the academic and character success of every student" and "engaging every student every day in intellectually challenging and meaningful learning". This school district has professed that they will do whatever it takes to optimize learning for each student but I'm not sure how far the district is willing to back that statement. For example, an administrator in the district told me, essentially, that while that is a nice, caring statement to make it is actually pretty hard to do, if not impossible! Given that, I have two points to make here: (1) Is it difficult or impossible because we, as educators, are unwilling to really make changes and create un-comfortableness, at least for the short term? Is this something we can adapt our culture to allow? Can we make steps in the right direction and take one student at a time to honor what we said we would do? (2) If the district is unwilling to, ultimately, to "do whatever it takes" then they must remove this shallow statement from their mission and re-word the mission to reflect what the district is truly capable of and not imply false hope to those that will take them at their word.

Recommendations for School District

1. Increase the focus of student social and emotional needs for all learners
2. Increase the understanding of giftedness for secondary school personnel
3. Implement district-wide training for differentiated instruction, complete with follow-ups
4. Tie the expectation of the use of differentiated strategies to teacher evaluation

5. District-wide gifted personnel should continue to work collaboratively in their efforts to bring consistency and credence to all gifted endeavors across all grade levels

Discussion- I believe that this district must make it a priority to give teachers the basic training and resources needed to even begin to adequately address the needs of gifted learners. My first suggestion would be to make this a two-fold process and address the specific needs of the gifted within a larger context of training on the affective needs of all learners in general. Next, recent research has given new insight into the way the brain learns and researchers have recommended specific strategies for instruction given this brain-based knowledge. According to Kaufeldt (2005), “The emerging research findings on how the human brain learns and remembers are beginning to influence decisions about discipline, social structures, classroom experiences, physical movement and comfort, nutrition, student stress, and lesson content.” These aspects should be incorporated into differentiation training to optimize the strategies we are using with kids in classrooms and to be as effective in the learning process as we can be.

Recommendations for Schools

1. Increase the focus of student and social and emotional needs for all students
2. Increase the understanding of giftedness for secondary school personnel
3. Expect that teachers be trained in the use of differentiated strategies
4. Seek alternative solutions for excess homework
5. Continue and/or implement peer support groups

6. Increase student mentoring opportunities
7. Establish an “understanding yourself” course offering whereby students become more self-aware, learn to appropriately advocate for themselves, gain strategies to become better organized, increase their study skills, etc.
8. Increase the gifted focus within the RTI process
9. Increase the FTE for the gifted specialist within your buildings
10. Institute a secondary gifted support group for parents
11. Track and provide extra support for the 19% of your gifted population (combined from both schools) that are shown to be underachieving currently
12. Examine and re-focus the job of the counselors at the high school on predominately working with students, in order to truly utilize this built in support system for kids
13. Establish a constant “teacher mentor” for each gifted student and encourage meaningful relationship-building over time as well as student advocacy as part of this role
14. Stay true to the district’s published mission statement of “doing whatever it takes for the academic and character success of every student” and “engaging every student every day in intellectually challenging and meaningful learning”

Discussion- Delisle (2002) has said that the most important thing is that we, as caring educators, come to appreciate and understand the central role we play in the academic and emotional lives of gifted children and that we alter our approaches in working with these children. One of the over-riding issues at the secondary level in this

district is that there has been an over-identification of gifted learners in the past and this has served to undermine the credibility of the gifted program in general. Another issue that adds fuel to the fire here is that along with over-identification there is lack of identification documents for the majority of the students identified, so there is no evidence, in many cases, to support the previous identification as gifted. As a result of this teachers have discounted its existence, for the most part. In 2006 the State of Colorado passed House Bill 22-20-103(1.2), which mandates individual record keeping and a written record of gifted programming for each identified student (ALP). Both secondary schools now have the obligation to recognize their gifted populations. In response to this mandate, the high school has extended the opportunity for an ALP to parents of gifted students, with the stipulation that if they didn't respond that would imply they were not interested in such a document. Apparently five or six of the 119 identified gifted learners presently at the high school will have a specific program plan written for them. Please consider this: even though research suggests that, statistically speaking, a good portion of your identified gifted learners could not officially be gifted, it still should be recognized that, at the very least, these students were once very high achieving students, so much so that they were labeled as gifted (according to previously established criteria). Whether truly gifted or not the fact is they were once high achieving students and now they are not. Even if the high school doesn't have the resources to write an ALP for each one of these students at this time, my suggestion would be to track and provide extra support for the 19% of the gifted population that my research indicates is now underachieving. (Incidentally, the counselors at the high school expressed their

concern about writing an ALP for a student they have no documentation about...how to do this when their personal identifying information is unavailable? My suggestion is for both counselors and teacher mentors to establish a relationship with the student and opportunities for goal-writing will surface.)

Recommendations for Teachers

1. Increase your focus on the social and emotional needs of students
2. Increase your knowledge base with regard to giftedness
3. Increase your skill level in the use of differentiated strategies, with a special focus on brain-based instruction and research
4. Seek alternatives to homework excess
5. Eliminate busy work
6. Establish a systematic way for reaching out to students, taking an interest in their lives and getting to know them on a personal level (teacher mentors for each gifted student?)
7. Work collaboratively with parents to better meet the needs of gifted students

Discussion- It is very important to recognize that the average teacher has very little background knowledge and/or expertise in teaching gifted learners—our undergraduate teacher preparation programs simply do not prepare educators for what this realm entails. Knowing this, I am offering very specific suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of teacher instruction with gifted individuals. A programming option that is utilized with success by many districts is The Autonomous Learner Model for Optimizing Ability, developed by George Betts and Jolene Kercher. This option has five

dimensions to develop students' potential: orientation; individual development; enrichment; seminars; and in-depth study. The whole child is addressed, and emphasis is placed on the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of the individual (Betts, 2003). As part of the orientation dimension, for example, students receive a variety of instructional opportunities regarding the understanding of giftedness, talent, intelligence and creativity. Dimension Two focuses on inter/intra personal development and the teaching of individualized learning skills. Components of such projects/opportunities that promote success for the students are: (1) A positive relationship with a caring adult; (2) An emphasis on pursuing students' talents and interests in an authentic manner; and (3) An integration of self-regulation strategies learned within the context of the project or study. When considering effective classroom practices the total educational environment must be addressed: the physical, intellectual and emotional, and paying close attention to brain-based strategies is most helpful here. Finally, a curriculum that respects intelligence and offers sophisticated challenge and personal relevance will afford these children opportunities to achieve high quality success.

Recommendations for Parents

1. Continue to appropriately advocate for needs of your children
2. Attend monthly meetings of gifted parent support group and find other ways to network too
3. Continue to seek out and provide engaging enrichment opportunities for your children

4. Avidly research and become an expert on the needs of your gifted learner
5. Research and seek out ways to increase the autonomy of your gifted student
6. Look for ways to work collaboratively and proactively with your child's teacher(s)

Discussion-Parents play a very important role in the education and personal development of their children and for gifted children the parent/student relationship is especially vital. One way that parents can increase their knowledge base and gain effectiveness with their gifted child is through networking with other parents of gifted children in the district. There is a parent support group, at the elementary level, that meets monthly to discuss topical issues and to provide support, guidance, and information to attendees. Currently there is not such a group at the secondary level. Given the fact that “giftedness” has taken a back seat at both the middle and high schools for a number of years, my suggestion would be to form a “parent academic advocacy group” to include any parents interested in academics at your school, not just parents of the gifted. Within that framework issues could be addressed that apply to students across the board, with specific speakers brought in to address narrower topics, such as the appropriate strategies to be used for working with gifted learners. Aside from this, learn as much as you can parents! There is an abundance of information online and familiarizing yourself with the issues you may or may not be dealing with right now is a very wise thing to do.

One last suggestion is regarding seeking ways to increase the autonomy of your gifted student, as mentioned in the recommendations above. Throughout my research the importance of recognizing a gifted student craving and then taking deliberate measures in

developing autonomy was underscored. This independence is so important to nurture and guide. According to Frost (2009), “Wise parents understand that parenting isn’t about simply keeping kids happy—it’s about giving them opportunities to be truly challenged in order to develop fully as confident and compassionate young adults.” One way to do this is through a foreign exchange program. One program to note is the International Rotary Exchange Program. There are two local Rotary clubs in this community that are ready and willing to sponsor your child for a year, semester, or summer exchange and this makes perfect sense as a means of deeply challenging our gifted learners in absolutely every aspect of their being...I suggest that parents check them out! Another opportunity to explore as a means of increasing student autonomy is within the realm of service learning. Furco (1996) refers to the Corporation for National Service definition for service-learning that is helpful to consider:

A method under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs, that are integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provide structured time for reflection, and that enhance what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community..." (Furco (1996); Corporation for National and Community Service, 1990).

Parents should work closely with school personnel to provide meaningful service learning opportunities to all students as a means of increasing student autonomy and, ultimately, greater student engagement and enjoyment in school.

Recommendations for Students

1. Do whatever you can to become more self-aware
2. Learn how to appropriately advocate for yourself

3. Seek out new opportunities to learn in your passion area(s) or area(s) of interest, both at school and outside of school
4. Reach out and get to know one or two teachers at school on a personal level
5. Continue to ask your parents for support and guidance
6. Seek out mentoring opportunities
7. Learn more about foreign exchange opportunities at the high school level (Rotary International) and/or service learning opportunities in your community

Discussion- I have one suggestion I will note here that will allow students to experience all of the recommendations I have thoughtfully made for them above: explore the possibility of a year-long foreign exchange, a truly life-changing opportunity! Rotary International provides one such exchange program but other programs also exist and the Internet is a good starting point for searching out these opportunities. As part of the Rotary Exchange Program, students generally are placed in one of their three country choices and many students report that although a year-long experience away from home can be challenging at times, they learned so much about themselves and the world. They also report to making many life-long friendships and learned skills needed in becoming a truly internationally-minded student. For more information read, *The New Global Student*, (2009), by Maya Frost. This option makes perfect sense, in so many ways, for gifted students and is highly suggested as a means of increasing student engagement in not only school but life!

Recommendations for Future Studies

1. Continue to engage in more research regarding the affective aspects of a child's learning
2. Perform another multi-case study in the same manner but focus on five high achieving students and compare and contrast the results

Discussion- As a result of this study I have come to realize that the affective needs of an individual absolutely must be addressed for the learning to be optimized. Knowing this, I would highly suggest that more research be done focusing on the social and emotional needs of not only gifted learners but all learners across the continuum. The affective is simply not addressed in schools unless there is a problem that significantly interferes with a child's learning. I believe that a student's affective needs should automatically be part of the planning process and, subsequently, the learning experiences for kids would be far more effective if that were the case.

Reflection

I have learned a great deal over the course of completing this research study from beginning to end. One of the most important ideas that came out of this for me was the fact that in education today we spend a lot of time analyzing and strategizing (and agonizing) about student achievement. Many individuals and organizations spend much time, money, and effort in tracking and measuring student achievement because it's considered an important gauge of the effectiveness of our collective ability to educate children. Learning and teaching are very complex processes, however. This study has allowed me to deeply understand that, with regard to education, the individual possesses

two, equally important, aspects that we must simultaneously address in order to get the full picture: the academic and the affective. We don't give our students standardized tests to measure the affective side, nor would we want to do that. It is so very important to realize, however, that the affective feeds directly into and impacts that which we do measure regularly, the academic. We need to recognize the clues that the academic can give us concerning the affective. For example, if a student is not achieving at the level we would expect, given past performance, this should cause us to take a deeper and closer look to figure out why this is so. This is rarely done and instead further academic factors are examined. We need to become more knowledgeable about the affective factors that impact student learning in such a big way and act on what we ascertain. Every individual is different in the way that they approach learning and a one-size-fits-all approach is simply ineffective. This study has brought home to me this importance and I now comprehend that this affective aspect is what drives, motivates, and inspires many students. As one student told me:

Achievement means success for me...successful isn't having a big house or a good job or a nice car...it's more about being completely happy in what I'm doing. One thing that makes me happy is my Guatemala mission trips. I have done two trips now and I help with the medical part but mostly the translating part...I love the fact that I have something really important to do. (Gwen)

Along the way this student, luckily, was influenced positively to allow her to reach the balanced state that she is at. Perhaps it was due to parental or peer influences but she is at a point of self-awareness and self-realization that many individuals never reach. This study has allowed me to visualize that we, as educators, have an obligation (if we are

truly going to “educate” the whole child) to help them reach their fullest potential, and that involves both an academic as well as a social/emotional focus.

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Appendix A

Observation Protocol

The Kingore Observation Inventory will be used to look for behaviors in these seven categories of giftedness:

Advanced Language

Analytical Thinking, (See KOI, attached)

Meaning Motivation

Perspective

Sense of Humor

Sensitivity

Accelerated Learning

A student-engagement rating scale was also utilized in the observation process, using a scale of one to four:

One=no student engagement

Two=a small level of engagement

Three=the student was engaged most of the time

Four=the student showed high engagement the whole time

Observation Protocol

Page 2

A detailed description in these areas was provided to provide context for the observational notes:

Class Structure:

Setting:

Curricular Extension Areas:

Activities:

Appendix B

Student Interview Protocol

1. You were formally identified as a gifted student. What do you think giftedness is?
2. Describe your feelings about being identified as gifted. Has this changed anything for you?
3. What kinds of ways are you like other students at your school? What do you have in common?
4. Have you noticed any ways in which you are different from other students that you know at school? If so, please give a detailed description.
5. Describe how school is going for you now. What are your favorite subjects? Why?
6. What are your strengths as a learner? What are your weaknesses?
7. Do you have any “passion” areas or areas of intense interest, either at school or outside of school? Please describe.
8. Who are some of your favorite teachers? Coaches? Adults? Why?
9. What are some of the things these people do that are meaningful to you?
10. Describe your past experiences with school. How has your personality changed since elementary school? When was your happiest time period in school? How were your grades then? What activities were you in then?
11. Have you ever encountered difficulties with learning and achieving at school? If so, do you have any ideas why? Was this always so or when was the turning point? If not, why do you think you haven't?
12. What is one thing that you really like about yourself?
13. What is one thing that you would change about yourself?

Appendix C

Parent Interview Protocol

1. Your child was identified previously as a gifted student. What do you think giftedness is?
2. Do you think that this identification has helped or harmed your child? In what ways?
3. Describe your son or daughter's school experience. Please include achievement levels, how they feel about themselves as a learner, how they interact socially, levels of extracurricular participation, etc.
4. What are your child's strengths? Weaknesses?
5. Does your son or daughter have a "passion" or area of intense interest? Please describe.
6. Do you know of any adults (teachers, coaches, etc.) that have been especially influential and effective with your child? How come?
7. What has been the easiest thing about raising a gifted child?
8. What has been the hardest thing about raising a gifted child?
9. Are there any social and/or emotional issues that you think your child has struggled with or continues to struggle with? Please describe the ways you have supported your child to help to try to solve these problems.
10. In schools today we try to meet the needs of the whole child, both academic needs and the social and emotional. How do you feel needs in both of these areas have been met?
11. What are your greatest hopes for this child's future?

Appendix D

Administrator/Teacher/Counselor/Gifted Coach

Interview Protocol

1. What is giftedness?
2. Describe your feelings about giftedness.
3. Have you ever taught or otherwise interacted with a gifted student for a substantial length of time? What did you notice? How was he/she the same as other students? How was he/she different?
4. What has been the most rewarding thing about working with a gifted student?
5. What has been the most challenging aspect of working with a gifted student?
6. What do you know about the social/emotional issues that affect gifted learners?
7. In what ways do you accommodate and plan for these affective needs?
8. How important to you think these factors are in the overall education of gifted learners?
9. Do you have any ideas on how the level of support, in the areas of social and emotional development, can be increased in this district and/or at your school?

Appendix E

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

I, Jacquelynn Anne Truckey, am conducting a study to examine gifted students' achievement patterns in school as this relates to social and emotional factors. I would appreciate your help by participating in an interview that will take approximately one hour of your time. Dr. Elinor Katz, of the University of Denver, is supervising this study. This research has been approved by ***** School District and the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver.

There are no risks, nor particular benefits, to you for your participation in this study. There is no payment for your participation as participation is strictly voluntary. Your opinions, thoughts, and responses will remain confidential as only group responses and general trends will be reported with no names/positions attached. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or negative judgments against you. If you have concerns, questions, or complaints about how you were treated during your participation, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052. You may also write to either of the above at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 South University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate your time and the insights and perspective that you will provide.

Most sincerely,

Jacquelynn Anne Truckey, Doctoral Student
University of Denver

Appendix F

Informed Consent

I, _____, have been invited to participate in the study, "Social and Emotional Factors and Achievement Patterns Amongst High Ability Learners." I am aware that the information I provide Jacquelynn Anne Truckey will be used in her dissertation research. I understand that the purpose of this study is to qualitatively observe and describe the current programming practice for gifted learners in this rural Colorado school district, specifically the practices addressing the affective or social/emotional aspects of the gifted child as this relates to the child's academic programming and his or her level of achievement. I understand that any interview and/or observation data obtained will be submitted to me for my review and that I may offer suggestions for revision if I find the data not to be accurate in my perceptions or experience.

I know that I can reach Jacquelynn Truckey ***** if I have any questions or concerns about this study. I understand that Dr. Elinor Katz, Professor, College of Education at the University of Denver will supervise the study. If I have any questions or concerns I can contact Dr. Katz.

I am aware that my participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw my consent and participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. My name or any indication of my personal identity will not be intentionally revealed in any written documents or oral presentations. All school data, interview responses, and other documents will be secured in Jacquelynn Truckey's home office.

I have been informed that there are two limits to the promise of confidentiality: If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect the law requires that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order of subpoena.

Informed Consent
Page 2

If I have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, or regarding my rights as a research participant, I may contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303)871-3454 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303)871-4052. I may also write to either of the above named persons at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 South University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

I have read and understand the foregoing descriptions of Jacquelynn Anne Truckey's study entitled, "Social and Emotional Factors and Achievement Patterns Amongst High Ability Learners." I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form and know that Jacquelynn Truckey has the original copy.

Signature _____ Date _____

I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or email address:

Appendix G

Parent Permission Letter

Dear Parents,

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jacquelynn Truckey, as a requirement for completion of her Ph.D., at the University of Denver. The purpose of this research is to take a deeper look at social and emotional factors and achievement patterns amongst gifted students. This study will last from November to May, 2009.

There are not any foreseeable risks for students participating in this study. The components that will impact your child are: examination of achievement and other school data; classroom observation; and the student interviews. None of these procedures will interfere with the student's normal school routine. Student interviews will be arranged at a convenient time for both you and your student, most likely after school or on a weekend day. I am hopeful that this research, its findings and implications, will add new data to the field of education and **** School District by demonstrating a need for more attention and programming to more effectively address the social and emotional aspects of our gifted learners. All names and data collected will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used when findings are reported. Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your child's participation in this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me. If you have any questions or concerns about the way in which you or your child were treated during this research, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303)871-3454 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303)871-4052. You may also write to the above named persons at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 South University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Most sincerely,

Jacquelynn Truckey

Parent Permission Letter

Page 2

I have read and understand the preceding descriptions of the research study entitled, "Social and Emotional Factors and Achievement Patterns Amongst High Ability Learners." I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to have my child participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order of subpoena.

Please print:

(Child's Name)

(Parent's Signature)

Appendix H

Student Assent Form

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jacquelynn Truckey, as a requirement for completion of her Ph.D., at the University of Denver. The purpose of this research is to take a deeper look at your experiences as a gifted learner within this school district, with the hope of making more positive changes that could impact both you and other students within the gifted program in our schools. This study will last from January to May, 2009, but your direct participation will only involve approximately one hour during this time frame.

There are not any foreseeable risks for students participating in this study. The components that will impact you are: examination of achievement and other school data; classroom observation; and the student interviews. None of these procedures will interfere with your normal school routine. Student interviews will be arranged at a convenient time for you, most likely after school or on a weekend day. I am hopeful that this research, its findings and implications, will add new data to the field of education and ***** School District by demonstrating a need for more attention and programming to more effectively address the social and emotional aspects of our gifted learners. All names and data collected will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used when findings are reported. Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me. If you have any questions or concerns about the way in which you were treated during this research, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303)871-3454 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303)871-4052. You may also write to the above named persons at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 South University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Most sincerely,

Jacquelynn Truckey