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Gifted Voices: A Study of High School Students' Proficiency in Persuasive Writing and Their Perceptions of Personal Agency

Abstract

Development of the talents and abilities of gifted children is not ordinarily provided by regular public school programs. Their need for accelerated, complex, and challenging curriculum and processes is often overlooked by educators focused on helping underperforming students to reach grade-level standards. Gifted high school students who are proficient in persuasive writing are able to clearly state a claim, support that claim with evidence and backing, recognize and rebut counterclaims, and draw a conclusion leading to action. If gifted students are proficient at writing persuasively, perhaps they are also able to advocate for learning experiences that are challenging, complex, and accelerated so that they are developing their gifted potential. Belief that one can produce desired outcomes by one's actions is the power of human agency. This study examined the following research question. What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency? The results shed light on the potential that proficiency in persuasive writing may have on gifted students' powers of agency to have their academic needs met.

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GIFTED VOICES: A STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN
PERSUASIVE WRITING AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL AGENCY

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

Susan Carol Anderson

August 2010

Advisor: Linda Lucille Brookhart

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Development of the talents and abilities of gifted children is not ordinarily provided by regular public school programs. Their need for accelerated, complex, and challenging curriculum and processes is often overlooked by educators focused on helping underperforming students to reach grade-level standards. Gifted high school students who are proficient in persuasive writing are able to clearly state a claim, support that claim with evidence and backing, recognize and rebut counterclaims, and draw a conclusion leading to action. If gifted students are proficient at writing persuasively, perhaps they are also able to advocate for learning experiences that are challenging, complex, and accelerated so that they are developing their gifted potential. Belief that one can produce desired outcomes by one's actions is the power of human agency. This study examined the following research question. What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency? The results shed light on the potential that proficiency in persuasive writing may have on gifted students' powers of agency to have their academic needs met.

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...and to the six gifted voices—thank you for allowing me to listen.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Gifted students' educational needs are frequently unmet in public schools for a variety of reasons. The regular educational experience in public schools is designed to meet the needs of average students, not students with exceptional needs. Empowering gifted students to have a voice in designing complex and engaging learning experiences will develop their power of agency to get their learning needs met. The genre of persuasive writing involves developing an effective argument with supporting evidence and recognition of alternative points of view. Proficiency in persuasive writing may be related to gifted students' ability to voice their need for meaningful learning experiences. This study investigated the following research question. What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency? This was a phenomenological study designed to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. This research sought to hear the voices of gifted students, what they experience, and how they experience it (Creswell, 2007).

Gifted children are those with "outstanding talent or potential to perform at high levels when compared with age peers" (Assouline, 2003). Because of their high general mental ability, abstract thinking ability, reasoning, and problem-solving ability

(Gottfredson, 2003; Tannenbaum, 2003), these students require “services or activities not ordinarily provided” by regular school programs to develop their abilities (Assouline, 2003, p. 128). As an educator working with gifted children, I recognize that the unique needs of gifted children are not routinely met in the public schools. Even determining which students qualify for gifted services depends on the criteria of the school district and personnel available to provide services. Abundant assessments are available to collect data on students’ abilities, yet experts in the field of gifted education continue to deliberate whether commonly used assessments adequately measure students’ abilities or are valid in determining whether a student should be formally identified as gifted. Factors such as socio-economics, culture, language, strength areas, and teacher training all play a part in whether a student is appropriately identified as gifted and what, if any, services the child will receive in the public school setting.

Although educators debate what measures are appropriate to identify giftedness in children, they do agree that giftedness can and should be developed (Borland, 2004; Dettmer, 1993; Feldhusen, 2001; Gagné, 2003; Hébert, 2002). A national study found that America’s most talented children are “underchallenged and therefore underachieve” (p. 12) and recommended that schools provide opportunities for America’s top students to learn “challenging material at their own pace” (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 29). While federal and state funds are committed toward improving the educational services for students performing below grade level (Johnson, 2007), relatively few federal or state funds are designated to support educating gifted students (Baker & McIntire, 2003). This leaves the determination of adequate services up to the districts and schools, and research has shown that those services are not adequately meeting the needs

of America's most talented (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Within the state of Colorado, gifted students' services depend on the size and priorities of the school district. Rural and poorer school districts often have few resources to commit to the needs of gifted children, but even in urban and suburban school districts, gifted children's educational needs may not be met because of inadequate identification of economically disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, or English-Language learners (Richert, 2003). Colorado is one of five states in the nation that mandates that school districts identify and provide services to gifted children, and state funds are provided to support those services (NAGC, 2006a).

While gifted programming is provided in some public schools, most gifted students are taught by classroom teachers with little or no training in gifted education, thus the quality of programming depends on the individual teacher's skill in differentiating the curriculum. Teachers may not be aware of gifted students' needs or how to address those needs. Few initial teacher preparatory programs include training in the needs or identification of gifted students (Croft, 2003; Landrum, 1993). Interventions that are designed specifically for individual gifted learners include: building strong classrooms that prize gifted learners, understanding the sensitivity of gifted learners, and embracing a true learning community to combat the dilemma of gifted students dropping out (Matthews, 2006). High stakes testing and accountability demands on teachers' time may lead to inadequate rigor and lack of challenge for gifted learners (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; Gallagher, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999). Classroom teachers are under pressure to ensure that students performing below grade-level improve; therefore much of their time is dedicated to helping struggling students (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007).

When so much effort is spent on improving test scores, gifted students who grasp content quickly and may already be performing at grade level are unlikely to receive additional support or extra challenge.

Underachievement occurs when gifted students perform below their potential, disengaging from the educational process because they are unchallenged in school (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Several researchers found that underachieving gifted students sought complex, open-ended learning opportunities that deepened their understanding and provided authentic learning at an accelerated pace (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Hansen & Johnston Toso, 2007). Researchers also found that a caring teacher who understood gifted students' needs was crucial for turning around underachievement (Emerick, 1992; Hansen & Johnston Toso, 2007; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Providing gifted students with an opportunity to express their learning needs and passions can improve their engagement in learning. Giving students a voice in designing personal learning experiences and options were found to be important in reversing underachievement (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). At the extreme, underachievement results in gifted students dropping out of school. Research indicates that empowering gifted students to increase the complexity, depth, and pace of their education will lead to more intellectual challenge and talent development (Delisle, 1992; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Emerick, 1992; Matthews, 2006; Rimm, 2003). Providing gifted students with an education that includes opportunities for such challenge will develop their potential and decrease gifted students' disengagement from learning. Empowering students to voice their needs can be an important part of an overall gifted education program.

This study compared high school gifted students' agency to have their learning needs met and those students' proficiency in persuasive writing. Agency includes "self-monitoring of one's activities and the cognitive and social conditions under which one engages in them" (Caprara, Fida, Vecchione, Del Bove, Vecchio, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2008, p. 525). Empowering gifted high school students to voice their ideas in a coherent, persuasive manner through writing may transfer to advocating for their personal learning needs in the classroom. The conceptual framework of this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory, "rooted in a view of human agency in which individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development [who] can make things happen by their actions" (Pajares et al., 2007, p. 105). In a classroom setting where gifted students are not always engaged as active participants, developing agency can improve student engagement and empower gifted students to seek meaningful learning experiences. Bandura's theory relates closely to the issue of gifted students actively engaging in determining their own educational opportunities and developing their gifted potential. If gifted students are empowered proactively to engage in their own gifted development, working with their teachers to extend their understanding of a content area, they can be determinants of their learning outcomes.

Teachers necessarily play a central role in empowering students to change the academic setting and maintain engagement in academic learning (Emerick, 1992). The theoretical framework of individuals as agents of their own development relates to gifted students as agents developing their potential for deep and meaningful learning. While teachers are helpful in establishing a classroom climate where authentic learning can take place, empowering individual students to proactively seek increasingly complex learning

opportunities seems especially important for gifted learners who may understand concepts and make complex connections between subject “silos” at a level other students in the class may not be able to understand. Without this agency, students’ gifted potential may not develop fully.

Pajares et al., (2007) found that few researchers have investigated the relationship of self-efficacy and writing proficiency, despite the association of writing with academic success. Self-efficacy and agency are rooted in Bandura’s social cognitive theory and research has shown a relationship between students’ self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance (Bandura, 1991, 2002; Pajares et al., 2007). Persuasive writing is a genre that employs supporting a claim with evidence and examining opposing views in order to rebut them logically and effectively (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). Persuasive writing is a challenging genre of writing and can lead to empowerment (Nippold, Ward-Lonergan, & Fanning, 2005), an essential element in developing agency in gifted learners. Skill in persuasive writing may relate to students’ ability to dialogue effectively with educators and advocate for their needs of differentiated instruction and academic choices. It may also relate to gifted students’ persistence and effort academically, counteracting issues of underachievement and gifted students dropping out of school when they do not believe their learning needs are being met (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Pajares et al., 2007).

Empowering gifted students to dialogue with educators in determining their academic choices requires that teachers assist in providing appropriate choices and help students select them (Douglas, 2004). If gifted students are to receive an education “tailored to their abilities and interests”, they need help understanding their rights and responsibilities as gifted individuals (Douglas, 2004, p. 224). Bandura noted, “People

seek to exert control over important aspects of their lives” (2001, cited in Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 9). Arguing that their academic gifted needs be met in school is an important aspect of gifted students’ lives and relates directly to confidence in their agency (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997). Developing argumentative skills through effective persuasive writing may also develop skills required to advocate for their gifted needs.

A review of the literature showed that a gap exists in the literature linking persuasive writing to gifted students’ perceived power of agency. Recognizing that gifted students often have unmet educational needs and that they may be their own best advocates in getting those needs met, examining power of agency in gifted high school students in relation to academic performance in persuasive writing will inform practices for educating the gifted learner. Persuasive writing involves the process of clearly stating a claim, developing an effective argument with data, elaboration, and backing, rebutting counterclaims, and drawing a conclusion from all of the evidence. This study will investigate the research question: What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students’ proficiency in persuasive writing and those students’ beliefs about their own powers of agency?

Definition of Terms

The terms below are used throughout this study. Instruments that measure and operationalize these terms will be described in Chapter Three.

Agency. Agency is the power to engage in one’s own development and capacity to make things happen by one’s actions (Pajares et al, 2007). It involves “self-monitoring one’s activities and the cognitive and social conditions under which one engages in them” (Caprara et al., 2008, p. 525).

Average student. The average student is one who is not identified as having significant needs that cannot be met within the general education classroom context and materials (Kingore, 2003).

Backing. Backing is additional reasoning and logic that supports the warrant (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Claim. In persuasive writing, the claim is the overall thesis the author is arguing for. The claim should be clearly stated within the first paragraph of a persuasive essay (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Conclusions. Conclusions are the final statements in a persuasive writing piece and restate the claim in the original opinion (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). In the conclusion, the writer evaluates the argument and makes implications for following a course of action (van Eemeren, de Glopper, Grootendorst, & Oostdam, 1995).

Counterclaim. A counterclaim disagrees with the claim in a persuasive argument. The author should include counterclaims and rebuttals within a persuasive piece to effectively refute the counterclaims and find common ground with the reader (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Data. The term data is used in this study as a persuasive writing term in which the author provides evidence backing the original claim or thesis (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). This data “consists of facts or conditions that are objectively observable, beliefs or statements generally accepted as true by the recipient” (Inch & Warnick, 1998, p. 9).

Elaboration. Elaboration is used to connect evidence to opinion. Elaboration makes explicit the nature of the relationship between facts, ideas, and hypotheses (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Gifted. In this study, gifted children are defined as those who show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment, and who have been identified by professionally qualified persons. Gifted learners require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the general education classroom context and materials (Assouline, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). The gifted students participating in this study were identified by the school district using criteria approved by the Colorado Department of Education, including a body of evidence that incorporated cognitive ability and academic achievement. These students also scored Advanced on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) writing test during their 9th grade year.

Hermeneutic circle. A qualitative research methodology involving a back-and-forth process of questioning and re-examining the text resulting in an ever-expanding circle of ideas about the essence of the experience (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009). The steps of the hermeneutic circle are naïve readings, structural analysis, and comprehensive understanding or interpreted whole (Flood, 2010).

Opinion. An opinion is a statement in which the author clarifies the issue and clearly states the intended outcome the author wishes to achieve (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Persuasive writing. Persuasive writing is defined as a genre of writing wherein the author makes a claim, develops the argument through the warrant, evidence, rebuttal to alternative opinions, and draws a conclusion (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Rebuttal. Rebuttal is evidence that refutes the counterclaim (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Underachievement. Underachievement occurs when students with exceptional intellectual potential perform academically below their potential (Emerick, 1992; Matthews, 2006; Rimm, 2003).

Warrant. In persuasive writing, the warrant is the explanation of how the data support the claim. The warrant can also be referred to as the bridge connecting the data to the claim (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Gifted Learners

Gifted learners are “children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment” (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 3). General intellectual ability as measured by a number of intelligence tests has traditionally been used as part of the gifted identification process. The intelligence continuum shows a distribution of general intelligence in a bell-shaped curve, with most people clustered around the average IQ of 100 (Gottfredson, 2003). Those scoring two standard deviations above the mean (IQ of 130) are considered gifted by most experts’ criteria (Gottfredson, 2003). When individuals score three or more standard deviations above the mean (IQ of 145 or more), they are considered highly gifted and those scoring an IQ 180 or above are considered profoundly gifted (Gottfredson, 2003; Silverman, 1989). Children who are highly or profoundly gifted will find the typical public school experience difficult as they perceive abstract concepts and ethical issues far earlier than their age peers (Morelock & Feldman, 2003) and may be vulnerable to emotional problems. Asynchronous development, where the mind is advanced but physical, social, and emotional development is age-appropriate, is common in highly gifted children (Morelock & Feldman, 2003). These children may recognize inequity or ethical issues long before their age peers and despair when they see callous

disregard for less fortunate individuals or creatures. Asynchronous development may also appear in a gifted child with advanced abilities compared to age peers in academic areas such as reading or mathematics, but underdeveloped social abilities in interactions with other children (Morelock & Feldman, 2003). A student's lack of social abilities does not lessen the gifted child's need for specific academic programming to continue development in the gifted strength area.

Gifted students are not simply highly motivated, high achieving students. They are fundamentally different from their peers in their ability to generate complex abstract ideas, their ability to consider multiple perspectives, and their mastery of content with few or no repetitions (Kingore, 2003). Unlike gifted children, high achieving students may be compliant in school and perform well on school assignments but do not have the ability to make complex intellectual connections or learn something new with few repetitions (Kingore, 2003). While some educators recommend high achieving students for gifted programming, the reality is that the regular classroom curriculum and structure suits their learning needs very well. While the regular classroom usually meets the learning needs of average and high achieving students, the regular classroom will not meet the unique needs of gifted children, especially highly or profoundly gifted children.

Needs of gifted children.

Among significant issues in the area of gifted education, Gallagher (2003) includes two areas of concern. The first area of concern is the understanding of intelligence and how that view affects educational programs for gifted students. The second area of concern is how to adapt educational programs and goals for gifted

students. Examining the question of the relationship between identified gifted learners' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency incorporates educational programming and goals for gifted students.

Theorists debate different models of giftedness, but it is usually understood to include high general mental ability, which involves the ability to learn, think abstractly, reason, and solve problems (Gottfredson, 2003; Tannenbaum, 2003). Like other human traits, intelligence is distributed along a bell-shaped curve with giftedness associated with individuals scoring two standard deviations above the mean or 130 IQ, generally considered as the threshold for identification (Gottfredson, 2003). A variety of tools have been used to assess intelligence since the early studies of Lewis Terman who developed the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale in 1916 and revised it through longitudinal studies (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Shurkin, 1992; Terman, 1954). Gagné (2003) defines giftedness as “the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10 percent of age peers” (p. 60). For the purposes of this study, the federal definition of gifted and talented will be used to conceptualize giftedness:

Part A: 1972 Marland Definition (Public Law 91-230, section 806)

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Part B: 1993 National Excellence Report Definition (Based on the Federal Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act)

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (Assouline, 2003, p. 128)

Standardized norm-referenced testing is one method of assessing intellectual ability (Assouline, 2003). Quantifying intellectual ability is commonly performed with assessment tools such as the individually administered Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children or Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, now in its fifth edition, or the group administered Cognitive Abilities Test (Assouline, 2003; Lohman, Korb, & Lakin, 2008). School districts in Colorado may set their own criteria for determining eligibility for gifted identification, but the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) guidelines require school districts to use a body of evidence to determine identification of gifted children using multiple sources of data with specific criteria for determining exceptionality (CDE, 2008).

Although educators debate what tools are appropriate to measure intelligence, few debate the idea that giftedness can and should be developed (Borland, 2004; Dettmer, 1993; Feldhusen, 2001; Gagné, 2003; Hébert, 2002). A national study found that America's most talented children are "underchallenged and therefore underachieve" and recommended that schools provide opportunities for America's top students to learn advanced material with flexibility and variety (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 12). Gottfredson (2003) suggests that presuming gifted students' needs will be met in the regular classroom with the regular grade-level curriculum can be considered

“mistreatment” and she proposes that “educating a profoundly gifted child (IQ 180-200) in a regular classroom may be as intellectually stultifying as the unthinkable proposition of educating a normal child among the ‘profoundly’ retarded (IQ below 20)” (p. 30). In the US Department of Education publication *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* (1993), it was reported that gifted and talented elementary students had mastered 35-50% of the curriculum before the school year began and that few teachers were making adequate provisions to challenge gifted children in their classrooms. Among the recommendations of the study included the improvement of challenging curriculum for gifted children with high-level learning opportunities and the improvement of teacher training to meet the needs of gifted children (US Dept. of Education, 1993).

Teachers may not recognize needs.

One of the difficulties in providing gifted children with appropriately challenging curriculum at an appropriate pace is that teachers may not be aware of gifted students’ needs or how to meet them. Most teacher preparation programs include little, if any, coursework in differentiating instruction for gifted learners (Croft, 2003; Landrum, 1993). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future found that only twenty percent of all teachers felt “very well prepared” to meet the needs of gifted children (Croft, 2003, p.559). Tannenbaum (1983, as cited in Croft, 2003) has stated that “what is necessary and sufficient for the nongifted is necessary but *insufficient* for the gifted, who need more and different learning experiences” (p. 559).

When teachers lack training regarding gifted needs, they may not recognize that gifted children require differentiated curriculum and teaching methods. If a teacher does

not recognize that gifted children need more challenging curriculum and at a faster pace, they are unlikely to provide the appropriate modification to challenge gifted children at a level where the students are learning something new and meaningful every day. With the current federal emphasis on students who are not making adequate yearly progress, schools may not focus on the importance of all students performing to their full potential (Gallagher, 2004). Competing demands on teachers' time and attention often equate to inadequate rigor and lack of challenge for gifted learners (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; Tomlinson, 1999). Since gifted children already know much of the grade-level content, teachers may think gifted children will make it on their own without differentiated instruction; however, without appropriate challenge, many children with high potential are not likely to make it on their own (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Landrum, 1993; Matthews, 2006; Rimm, 2003; Seeley, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Effective education of gifted students includes improvement in teacher preparation and professional development to train teachers in methods of identification and differentiation strategies (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Unfortunately, some teachers may also have biases against gifted education. Some believe gifted education programs are elitist and there is no need for advanced curriculum (McCoach & Seigle, 2007; Rimm, 2003). Gifted children who lack sufficient challenge may be viewed as behavior problems when they speak up and challenge the authority of the teacher (Croft, 2003; Geake & Gross, 2008). Bias may result in under-identification of high-ability minority students or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds because some teachers do not expect these students to be gifted (Croft, 2003; Hébert,

2002; Kitano, 2003). Teachers' biases against gifted students and gifted programming may influence whether appropriate challenges and learning opportunities are provided to gifted learners.

The National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) has developed ten standards for teachers of gifted children that include: an understanding of the foundations of gifted education, the characteristics of gifted learners, learning differences for children from diverse backgrounds, and instructional strategies to differentiate for the needs of gifted learners (VanTassel-Baska, 1998; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The standards also expect teachers of gifted children to have an understanding of appropriate learning environments for gifted learners, how to develop language and communication skills in gifted learners, an understanding of appropriate instructional planning, an understanding of assessment for identification and progress monitoring, ethical practices in gifted education, and how to serve as collaborative advocates for gifted children (NAGC, 2006b; VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Teacher preparation programs and districts providing professional development for teachers of gifted students are expected to use these standards to expand teachers' understanding of gifted students, their educational needs, and how to meet those needs.

Even if teachers have some training and recognize that gifted children need rigorous curriculum delivered at a faster pace, they may not have adequate time to develop appropriately challenging curriculum (Croft, 2003). Effective differentiation requires changes in teaching strategies, objectives, assessment, and resources (Croft, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999; VanTassel-Baska, 1998). Differentiating for gifted students

requires teachers to recognize the characteristics of the gifted child and determine the curricular needs to develop appropriate challenges to meet those needs (Croft, 2003; Feldhusen, 2001). Differentiation does not mean giving the gifted child more of the same curriculum as the typical child (Tomlinson, 1999). Hanninen, as cited in Croft (2003), stated that “expert teachers of gifted [children] focus on student-initiated learning [and] responsive differentiation strategies” in a cohesive program (p. 567). Instruction that is responsive to gifted learners’ needs and provides appropriate challenge improves student engagement and can influence underachievement (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007), a concern when high ability students disengage from academics.

Underachievement of gifted students.

Underachievement of high ability children is an issue recognized by experts in the field of gifted education (Emerick, 1992; Marland, 1972; Matthews, 2006; Renzulli, Baum, Hébert, & McCluskey, 1999). Some researchers distinguish between selective consumers and underachievers, the selective consumers maintaining self-confidence and independence, with the underachievers losing self-esteem and perceived power to change the situation effectively (Delisle, 1992; Delisle & Schultz, 1997). Whether the student chooses to disengage or gives up because of lack of self-esteem, a discrepancy exists between the student’s ability and achievement (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Researchers who examined the reasons for underachievement in gifted students found several underlying factors along with recommendations for addressing the issue.

Gifted students who are performing academically below their potential may disengage from the educational process because school does not meet their learning needs (Reis & McCoach, 2000). These high-ability learners seek challenge outside of school when the classroom environment does not challenge them (Emerick, 1992; Hansen & Johnston Toso, 2007; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; McNabb, 2003). Kanevsky & Keighley (2003) and Hansen & Johnston Toso (2007) found underachieving gifted students sought complex, open-ended learning opportunities that deepened their understanding and provided authentic learning at an accelerated pace. When the school environment did not provide adequately challenging curricula at the appropriate pace, students explored outside interests that provided an “escape” and method to maintain a love of learning (Emerick, 1992). While research may not be able to pinpoint a cause for underachievement, numerous studies show a relationship between underachievement and the lack of challenge and complexity (Emerick, 1992; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Hanson & Johnston Toso, 2007; Reis & McCoach, 2002). Reis & McCoach (2000) suggest that gifted students who are consistently under challenged are at increased risk of underachievement. This finding should lead educators to seek ways to increase challenges for gifted students.

Researchers also found that a caring teacher was crucial for turning around underachievement (Emerick, 1992; Hansen & Johnston Toso, 2007; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Teachers who create an environment of acceptance for all learners through mutual respect and enthusiasm for their content area were important for these students (Hansen & Johnston Toso, 2007; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Teaching

through discovery and hands-on methods allowed students to build upon their strengths; differentiating for individual needs was also considered necessary for addressing underachievement of gifted learners (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Rote learning, memorization, watered down curriculum, and repetition were factors associated with boredom and student underachievement (Gallagher, Harradine, & Coleman, 1997; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Caring teachers who understood gifted students' needs and were willing to adjust the curriculum to meet those needs were identified as important to address underachievement for gifted learners (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003).

A third area of concern associated with underachievement in gifted students was student control and choice in determining academic options (Emerick, 1992; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; McNabb, 2003). Giving students a voice in determining their learning experiences and opportunities to pursue areas of interest were found to be important in reversing underachievement (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). A sense of injustice was reported by underachieving students when they were not provided the option of moving ahead or digging deeper into areas of interest (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Providing choices in content, process, and the learning environment were found to be important to gifted learners (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999). Empowering gifted students to take responsibility for their learning is something not frequently found in traditional classrooms (Noddings, 2005; Kohn, 1993). When students were empowered to self-select challenging curriculum and the independence to determine the product method, students remained engaged in learning at school (Renzulli et al., 1999). Emerick

(1992) found that underachievement could be reversed when students were given opportunities to pursue passion areas of interest.

At the extreme, underachievement may lead to students dropping out of school. Gathering precise data on dropout rates is difficult because different agencies define dropping out in a variety of ways (Matthews, 2006). While research is imprecise in measuring the dropout rate of gifted students with estimates ranging from over 17% (Marland, 1972) to under 1% (Matthews, 2006), the social implications of high ability students dropping out of school are disconcerting. Some underachieving gifted students drop out of high school to attend community college and pursue areas of interest (Matthews, 2006). Others become involved in drugs or alcohol and give up on further education (Matthews, 2006; Renzulli & Park, 2000; Seeley, 2003). When students with exceptional ability opt to discontinue their education, society loses the potential contributions of these individuals in areas of science, leadership, and other important fields where academic learning is essential. Lack of appropriate curricular challenge, powerlessness to change the school environment, and lack of a teacher advocate contributed to gifted students choosing to drop out (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Matthews, 2006; Renzulli & Park, 2000). Matthews (2006) found that building strong classrooms that value gifted learners, understanding the sensitivity of gifted learners, and developing a community of learners were important factors in reversing dropout rates of gifted students. Helping students develop power to affect change in the academic setting was also seen as important in lowering dropout rates (Emerick, 1992). Societal costs of dropouts are estimated to include costs related to crime, violence, and substance abuse

(Seeley, 2003). One study found that gifted minority students who were not included in gifted education programming were much more likely to drop out of high school than gifted minority students included in gifted programming (Smith, LeRose, & Clasen, 1991).

In the 1993 report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (US Department of Education), the authors recognized that a quiet crisis existed in America's schools because gifted and talented students were not being educated appropriately and that these students were "under challenged and therefore underachieved" (p. 12). The report recommended that improving America's schools would ensure

All students have an equal opportunity to develop their talents and to display exceptional talent in educational settings that require sophisticated thinking and a high level of performance. All teachers search for the strengths and talents of their pupils and interests, and nurture those talents. Exceptional students pursue intensively their special talent, allowing the nation to grow intellectually, culturally, and economically stronger (US Department of Education, 1993, p. 36).

The research findings suggest that developing ways to increase gifted students' power to affect change in their education may lead to more intellectual challenge and talent development (Delisle, 1992; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Emerick, 1992; Rimm, 2003).

Under-identification and inadequate programming for gifted learners.

Gifted students are not always identified for gifted programming. In some school districts, the students identified as gifted come from the dominant culture with few minority students or low-income students included. When students lack language or cultural background, some identification assessment tools have shown cultural or linguistic bias. Another problem in identifying minority or low-income students occurs

when districts rely on teacher recommendations for screening of potential giftedness. Since few teachers are trained to recognize gifted potential in non-dominant cultures, they may miss gifted characteristics among minority and low-income students. Several currently used assessments for cognitive abilities rely heavily on background knowledge in vocabulary that may not be familiar to English language learners. In Colorado, the Department of Education requires districts to report the percentages of minority and low-income students identified through the district's criteria and address inequities when the percentages do not closely match the entire student population. Examining the breakdown of identified gifted students by gender is also reported to the Colorado Department of Education. This encourages districts to examine and improve identification processes of minority, low-income, and both genders of students for gifted programming.

A secondary issue related to under-identification is inadequate programming to meet the needs of gifted students. Gifted students require substantially different educational programs beyond what is provided in the regular classroom (US Department of Education, 1993). This requires materials and personnel to provide differentiated content and processes. Schools with high levels of poverty are typically underfunded for gifted programming. Schools with a large percentage of minority students also frequently lack adequate funding for gifted services. This discrepancy among districts influences whether students with high potential are identified as gifted or receive appropriate programming. Students with high potential from the dominant culture who attend schools in middle class or upper class districts are more likely to be identified gifted and receive

appropriate programming options than high potential students who attend schools in low-income districts.

Since gifted children's needs are not met within the regular school curriculum, providing high ability students with skills to voice their need for challenging learning experiences may help bridge the gap when students are not formally identified as gifted or do not have access to gifted programming options. One method of developing their voice is through writing. When students develop the skills to communicate their opinions in writing effectively, expand their ability to recognize multiple perspectives, and support their claim with data and backing, those same skills may be useful in expressing a need to develop their gifted potential. Persuasive writing may be related to gifted students' ability to expand their learning opportunities by effectively communicating their needs for meaningful content and challenging learning options.

Persuasive Writing

Given the foundational status of writing in academic curriculum (Pajares et al., 2007), it is a frequent research topic. The College Board National Commission on Writing (2009) considers writing as central to education, economic competitiveness, civic engagement, and personal expression. Writing skill is essential for academic success (Pajares et al., 2007), but is not an easy skill to learn. McCutchen (1988) found that writing is a complex, demanding task, requiring many interacting subprocesses that requires complex cognitive processing. Developing writing skill is a long-term process, involving much practice and personal discipline (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999) as well as learning from others (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999).

Writing tends to promote self-reflection and aids in examining broad perspectives (Pennebaker et al., cited in Wade, 1995). Wade (1995) indicates that writing is an essential component of critical-thinking instruction, especially important for gifted learners. Critical thinking has been associated with flexible thinking, increasing complexity, and integrating solutions with ill-formed problems (Gallagher, 1998). Developing such critical thinking skills is an important aspect of gifted programming. Understanding multiple perspectives and developing logical arguments are also critical thinking skills (Gallagher, 1998), and necessary for effective persuasive writing.

Developing proficiency in writing skills is expected by state standards including Colorado (Colorado Department of Education, 1995). In Colorado literacy standards, students are expected to exhibit some competence in persuasive writing beginning in 3rd grade, progressively increasing in proficiency through the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) grades 3-10 and ACT test in 11th grade (Colorado Department of Education, 1995; Colorado Department of Education, 2009). Unfortunately, many teachers have “traded authentic writing experiences for quicker, more scripted approaches to literacy instruction” (Pajares et al., 2007, p. 116). Sternberg (2008) warns that in this age of No Child Left Behind legislation, some schools are focusing on test scores and not on excellence. High school writing teachers, in particular, face pressures that limit flexibility and individualized student attention (Pajares et al., 2007).

Encouraging high school students to research a current event or social issue and organize their thinking in a persuasive essay can be motivating and personal. Persuasive writing is an authentic task because it requires students to convince their audience to take action.

Students who perceive their writing as important for accomplishing some action are also more likely to perceive their writing performance as successful (Pajares et al., 2007; Pajares & Valiante, 1997). High school education should equip students with the ability to handle “argumentative discourse” to assess arguments of others and develop their own position (van Eemeren et al., 1995). Argumentative discourse requires the writer to understand the importance of supporting claims with elaboration and backing (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006; Wade, 1995). Students are expected to “identify not only other people’s assumptions but also their own” (Wade, 1995, p. 26) as they develop their argument. Developing the ability to understand and create written arguments is an essential skill for academic learning and beyond (Wolfe, Britt, & Butler, 2009). For gifted students, these skills will be utilized as they progress through academic settings, but more importantly, these are critical skills for identifying issues, discussing them coherently, considering others’ points of view, and resolving controversies throughout a lifetime (Nippold et al., 2005). Gifted students need these skills to advocate for academic challenges and development of their gifted strength areas. Training gifted students in skills of persuasive argument can empower them to identify essential issues important to their mental and emotional development, and examine the issues from multiple perspectives. If gifted students have developed these persuasive skills, they can advocate for their needs academically and personally in a coherent and logical manner.

In 1958, Stephen E. Toulmin wrote *The Uses of Argument*, which has become the standard for structuring applied logic to arguments in many domains (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). Toulmin’s model has been adopted by many fields including medicine,

law, mathematics, science, artificial intelligence, ill-structured problems, philosophy, and speech (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). The Toulmin model was embraced by the field of speech communication and is included in most speech textbooks in the United States as the method for developing arguments (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). Toulmin's model includes the development of an argument with a warrant, backing, rebuttal, and a claim (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). According to one dictionary, "to warrant" is "to provide adequate grounds for; justify; to grant authorization or sanction to (someone); authorize or empower" (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006, p. 7). Thus, developing proficiency in the skill of argumentation using the Toulmin model can empower students.

Despite the importance of developing skills in persuasive writing, the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Writing Report Card reported only thirteen percent of 12th grade students were skilled in written arguments, with only three percent rated excellent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Crammond (1998, cited in Anderson, 2008) considers the mastery of persuasive writing as "important because it empowers students—it enables them to produce, evaluate, and act on the professional, ethical, and political discourse that is central to our democratic society" (p. 308). Dray, Selman, & Hickey Schultz (2009) found a positive relationship between children's social awareness and quality of writing in persuasive letters. Midgette, Haria, and MacArthur (2007) suggest that persuasive writing is particularly difficult because writers must anticipate the "attitudes, beliefs, and arguments of the audience without feedback" (p. 131). Persuasive writing is a challenging genre of writing

and can lead to empowerment (Nippold et al., 2005), an essential element in developing agency in gifted learners.

Wade (1995) associates argumentative writing with critical thinking. She recommends specific teaching in: defining the problem, examining the evidence, analyzing assumptions and biases, avoiding emotional reasoning, avoiding oversimplification, considering alternative interpretations, and tolerating uncertainty. Wolfe et al., (2009) found that students were successful in improving the quality of their persuasive writing when instructed in developing claims, rebuttals, and evidence. Nippold et al., (2005) found that teaching persuasive writing skills to students with language-related disabilities improved their ability to understand multiple perspectives and create persuasive writing assignments, coherently including multiple perspectives. To improve students' proficiency in persuasive writing, researchers recommend fostering intentional learning (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) and reflecting on writing progress rather than writing deficiencies (Pajares et al., 2007). As students learn to examine their own writing skills, they learn to set goals and strategies to improve their writing (Hansen, 1998, cited in Pajares et al., 2007). Helping students pursue individualized learning goals will increase the likelihood that students will become "productive and committed rather than disillusioned and bitter" (Calkins, 1994, cited in Pajares et al., 2007). Students who are uninvolved in their own learning have little reason to modify their beliefs about their abilities (Pajares et al., 2007). Self-awareness about their writing skills helps students interpret their achievements in ways that will increase self-efficacy and empowerment (Pajares et al., 2007).

Developing Agency

What students believe about their writing capabilities powerfully influences their writing performance and academic choices (Hackett, 1995, cited in Pajares et al., 2007). Numerous studies showed relationships between writing self-efficacy and writing performance (Lodewyk & Winne, 2005; Pajares et al., 2007). Modern society requires individuals to possess “high-level cognitive skills and self-regulatory capabilities to meet the demands of modern occupations” (Bandura, 2002, p. 3). Gifted individuals possess high-level cognitive abilities, but may not have writing self-efficacy.

Social cognitive theory as developed by Bandura (1991) examines the link between self-efficacy and human agency. Self-efficacy is described as “personal judgments about one’s ability to perform a given task or course of action” (Lent et al., 1997). Bandura asserted that a student’s self-efficacy influences how he or she responds and predicts choices he or she makes about engaging with tasks (Bandura, 1993, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). Self-efficacy helps determine a student’s choice of “behavioral settings, activities, effort expenditure, performance quality, and persistence” predicting academic and career behavior (Lent et al., 1997, p. 307). Bandura (2002) asserts, “self-efficacy belief is the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties” (p. 3). If gifted students believe they have agency to produce desired outcomes in their personal and academic situations, they may be more motivated to persevere even when academically challenged.

Research indicates that students' self-efficacy relates to academic performance (Pajares et al., 2007). Students with high levels of self-efficacy seem more willing to engage in challenging tasks (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005), expend more effort (Schunk, 1983, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005), and set higher goals (Zimmerman, 1995, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). Students with self-efficacy were also found to process information more effectively at cognitive and metacognitive levels (Berry, 1987, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). Engaging in challenging tasks, expending more effort, setting higher goals, and cognitively processing information more effectively are important goals of educating gifted students. Pajares et al., (2007) assert that "students' self-efficacy beliefs are strong predictors of academic performance, thus important to inform writing performance" (p. 105), making students' self-efficacy beliefs important for study in relationship to writing proficiency.

Bandura (1991) cautions researchers to avoid confusing self-efficacy with locus of control. He deems the two as separate constructs distinguishable "empirically and conceptually" (p. 159). Individuals with internal locus of control believe that their actions can change outcomes (Galbraith & Alexander, 2005). Individuals with external locus of control believe that outcomes are dependent on external factors of chance, fate, or luck (Bandura, 1991). Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is concerned with people's beliefs about their capabilities to organize and execute certain courses of action (Bandura, 1991, 2002). Bandura (1991) states, "beliefs about whether one can produce certain performances cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered the same as beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes" (p. 159). Numerous studies conducted by

Bandura and colleagues indicate that there is a clear distinction between self-efficacy and locus of control; therefore, this study will also make the distinction between these two constructs, focusing on gifted students' self-efficacy, i.e., beliefs about their capabilities to organize and execute actions leading to outcomes that improve their educational experience. Self-efficacy predicts academic performance, effort expenditure, persistence, and career decision making, but locus of control does not (Bandura, 1991; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007); "Compared with students who doubt their learning capabilities, those with high self-efficacy for acquiring a skill or performing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at higher levels (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 9). Perceived value of a learning task is important because learners show little interest in activities they do not value (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002, cited in Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). On the other hand, when students value an activity because they think it will increase their skill in that area, they may "attempt the activity even if they lack self-efficacy to perform" it well (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). The importance of self-efficacy for gifted learners in persistence and tackling difficult and ill-structured tasks is apparent. When gifted students are given challenging learning activities that increase their skill in writing, such as sending letters to the local newspaper editor or governor on an important social issue, they are motivated to tackle the task and perform at a high level. It provides an authentic learning opportunity where students can expand their skills and know that their voice will be heard.

Bandura (2002) asserts our educational system needs to educate students to become "flexible, self-directed learners" (p. 3). Bandura's social cognitive theory is

“rooted in a view of human agency in which individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development and can make things happen by their actions” (Pajares et al., 2007, p. 105). Agency includes “self-monitoring of one’s activities and the cognitive and social conditions under which one engages in them” (Caprara et al., 2008, p. 525). Kush & Cochran (1993) propose that a person with a strong sense of agency is “one who experiences the meaningfulness and actuality of his or her capacity to bring about desirable change” (p. 434). Students’ sense of agency over their academics increases achievement and aspirations (Caprara et al., 2008). Expanding agency for gifted learners requires classroom dialogue and negotiation between students and teachers (Ewald & Wallace, 1994). The teaching role must change from “didactic” to “interactive” to allow student agency in determining learning goals and enhancing self-efficacy (Galbraith & Alexander, 2005, p. 33). Caprara et al. (2008) suggest that in the past, students’ academic development depended on the quality of the school, but now students can implement “greater personal control over their own learning” (p. 525).

Empowering gifted students to dialogue with educators in determining their academic choices requires that teachers provide appropriate choices and help students select them (Douglas, 2004). If gifted students are to receive an education “tailored to their abilities and interests,” they need help understanding their rights and responsibilities as gifted individuals (Douglas, 2004, p. 224). Bandura noted, “People seek to exert control over important aspects of their lives” (2001, cited in Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 9). Arguing that their academic gifted needs are met in school is an important aspect of gifted students’ lives and directly related to confidence in their agency (Lent et

al., 1997). Ernest Boyer, cited in *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (U.S. Department of Education 1993), stated "What gifted students want is flexibility: to be allowed to go at their own pace, to satisfy course requirements as quickly as possible, and to move on to new areas of learning" (p. 21). Empowering gifted students to use their agency power to affect their academic learning and develop their gifted potential is worthy of investigation.

Rationale for Study and Research Question

Persuasive writing skills include examining an issue, developing an argument with sufficient evidence, recognizing and countering opposing ideas, and making a claim leading to action (Wade, 1995; Wolfe et al., 2009). These same skills can also be used in advocating for gifted students' needs in schools. When gifted students believe in their ability to write, their writing performance improves (Bandura, 1991, 2002; Pajares et al., 2007). Students' self-efficacy and agency are related to their persistence and effort academically, counteracting issues of underachievement and potential for dropping out of school when they do not believe their learning needs are being met. Few researchers have investigated the relationship of self-efficacy and writing proficiency, despite the association of writing with academic success (Pajares et al., 2007). A review of the literature revealed no studies comparing gifted students' perceived persuasive writing proficiency and agency to affect their learning experiences at school. Therefore, this study will examine the following research question: What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency?

Chapter Three: Method

Research Question

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. A review of the literature revealed no studies examining the relationship of gifted students' persuasive writing proficiency and agency to affect their learning experiences at school. To investigate this topic, the following question was posed: What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency?

Background

While numerous studies found that students' self-efficacy in writing is related to their performance on writing tasks (Ewald & Wallace, 1994; Lodewyk & Winne, 2005; Pajares et al., 2007; Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999), no study was found that linked gifted students' self-efficacy in writing with persuasive writing. Proficiency in persuasive writing may be related to gifted students' ability to voice their need for meaningful learning experiences. The focus of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational

needs met in school. If a relationship exists, it may inform educators in ways that would improve educational options to meet the needs of gifted students.

Gifted children are those with high general mental ability, abstract thinking ability, reasoning, and problem-solving ability (Gottfredson, 2003; Tannenbaum, 2003) requiring advanced curriculum not frequently offered in regular classrooms (Assouline, 2003, p. 128). Developing America's talent through gifted educational programs has received national attention for years (Marland, 1972; US Department of Education, 1993), yet many gifted students' needs remain unaddressed within the educational system (Emerick, 1992; Matthews, 2006).

Reasons for this include a lack of teacher preparation courses in gifted education (Croft, 2003; Landrum, 1993), demands on teachers' time that focus on students performing below grade level (Gallagher, 2004), and teacher biases viewing gifted education as elitist (McCoach & Seigle, 2007; Rimm, 2003). This results in fewer students being identified as gifted, particularly those from culturally diverse and low socio-economic backgrounds (Croft, 2003; Hébert, 2002; Kitano, 2003).

When gifted students' needs are not met in the classroom, they are at risk for underachievement and may even select to drop out of school (Emerick, 1992; Matthews, 2006). Engaging gifted students in designing challenging opportunities to deepen their understanding in authentic learning experiences can reverse underachievement (Emerick, 1992; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Kanevsky & Keighley (2003) found that giving students a voice in determining their learning experiences and opportunities to pursue areas of interest could engage underachieving students and help them remain in school.

Writing is central to the education of America's students (College Board National Commission on Writing, 2009) and is essential for student success (Pajares et al., 2007). Developing students' skills in the genre of persuasive writing is expected by many state education standards (Wade, 1995). Persuasive writing involves developing an argument with sufficient evidence, recognizing and countering opposing positions, and making a claim leading to action (Wade, 1995; Wolfe et al., 2009). These skills can also be used in advocating for gifted students' needs in the schools. Despite the importance of developing persuasive writing skills, a national report showed that less than fifteen percent of 12th grade students were skillful in persuasive writing (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

The conceptual framework for understanding students' power of agency is based on the work of Albert Bandura (1989; 1991; 2002), who developed the Social Cognitive Theory that incorporates human agency. In this model, "reciprocal causation, action, cognitive, affective, other personal factors, and environmental events" act together as "interactive determinants" (1989, p. 1175). Studies have shown a relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance (Pajares et al., 2007). Bandura (2002) asserts, "self-efficacy belief is the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties" (p. 3). Agency in gifted students provides them with the power to affect change for their own learning. Coupled with the skills of effective argumentation learned through persuasive writing, gifted students with agency would be

expected to advocate for their gifted needs at school and convincingly communicate their desire for authentic and complex learning opportunities.

Research Design

This was a phenomenological study designed to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. This research sought to hear the voices of gifted students, what they experience and how they experience it (Creswell, 2007).

The philosophical background of the phenomenological research tradition traces to Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician, who developed the philosophy of transcendental phenomenology as an alternative to the positivist paradigm to understand an experience (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). One of Husserl's students, Martin Heidegger, developed his own philosophy, hermeneutic phenomenology that sought to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Neither philosopher developed methodologies for scientific research in phenomenology, but numerous authors have done so (Connelly, 2010; Giorgi, 2010; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology developed from the empirical science concepts accepted for years, and was based on the separation of mind and body (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). He sought objectivity in his philosophy to describe the experience, to view the pure phenomenon without any presuppositions, beliefs, or biases (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010) and to gain scientific rigor and acceptance (McConnell-Henry,

2009). He proposed the term *epoché*, the Greek word for bracketing, whereby the researcher sets aside all prior knowledge to ensure that her assumptions do not predetermine the data results (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Giorgi (2010) has suggested that researchers utilizing Husserl's phenomenological philosophy in scientific research should utilize clearly defined methods to ensure validity of their results and stresses the importance of following a methodology for rigor and validity of results.

Heidegger went beyond Husserl's transcendental phenomenology that focused on describing a phenomenon. Seeking to develop meaning and interpret the phenomenon, Heidegger advanced a hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy (Flood, 2010; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). *Hermeneusin* is a Greek verb meaning to understand or interpret (McConnell-Henry, et al, 2009). Heidegger wanted to go beyond pure description, as Husserl proposed, to interpretation while allowing the lived experience to speak for itself (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). In this philosophical framework, the researcher is part of the research, both in her prior knowledge and understanding of the topic, and in her ability to accurately interpret the data. In hermeneutic phenomenology it is important for the researcher to be open about her background knowledge and presuppositions (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009): "Understanding is never without presuppositions. We do not, and cannot understand anything from a purely objective position. We always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world" (Johnson, 2000, cited in McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

According to Heidegger, context matters, both to the participants and to the researcher (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

As an educator who works with gifted students, it is important that I recognize my personal experiences and attitudes about gifted students. Taking a fresh perspective and perceiving freshly can be quite difficult and seldom is achieved perfectly by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Recognizing that an attitude of “disciplined naïveté” (MacLeod, as cited in Giorgi, 2010) is difficult to achieve, I sought to achieve an “intersubjective attitude” (Giorgi, 2010, p. 8) whereby any other researcher facing the same data might discover the same results that I discovered. Rather than following Giorgi’s four steps using the Husserl philosophy of transcendental phenomenology (Flood, 2010), I have chosen to utilize the hermeneutic circle methodology of hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy, whereby my ability to interpret the data will rely on my previous knowledge and understanding (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle consists of the following:

- Step one in the hermeneutic circle as described by Flood (2010) is to begin with a naïve reading, reading the material repeatedly to grasp the meaning with openness to whatever the data presents.
- Step two is a structural analysis, finding themes of essential meaning of the lived experience. This includes dominant themes and sub themes. At this point the researcher should reflect on the themes in relation to her initial understanding of the data.
- The final step in the hermeneutic circle is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the whole. All themes are summarized and reflected on in relation to the research question. All texts are re-examined including the naïve associations, literature review, and developing themes. The purpose is to widen and deepen understanding. According to Flood (2010), the results should be presented in language as close to the lived experience as possible.

My goal has been to depict the voices of the gifted students in their pure form in the poetic portrayal (Mears, 2009). My disciplinary perspective as a teacher of gifted students does not preclude my understanding of the phenomenon of being a gifted student, but rather, should provide some insight into the meaning of those experiences in a broad sense, and as they relate to education. Giorgio (2010) states that “there is no reason to automatically assume that a layperson’s insight into a disciplinary meaning is equal to, or better than, that of a researcher who works within the discipline” (p. 13). As a teacher of writing, my understanding of the writing process should guide my understanding of writing development and interpretation of the participants’ writing development. Rather than removing my presuppositions through bracketing as proposed in the Husserl philosophy, I recognize that my background is part of who I am as a researcher (Connelly, 2010) and will help in my understanding of the lived experience of the study participants. By presenting the participants’ perspective “as transparently as possible” (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009, p. 13), and clearly explaining decisions made through the analysis stage, I seek to establish a level of trustworthiness in my research methodology.

Study design.

This phenomenological study was designed to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. To examine this phenomenon, data were gathered from one-on-one interviews, surveys, and persuasive writing responses. Finally the data were analyzed and interpreted.

Data were gathered from one-on-one interviews with six selected students using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) to gather information on their beliefs of their power of agency to have their gifted needs met in school and their proficiency in persuasive writing. The interview data were analyzed for patterns and universal themes utilizing the hermeneutic circle methodology (Flood, 2010).

Additional data were gathered in the form of a self-reporting survey (Appendix B) on the students' beliefs of their power of agency to have their gifted needs met in school. The survey was based on questions from the work of Bandura (1989), Choi, Fuqua, & Griffin (2001, Appendix C) and Usher & Pajares (2009, Appendix D). Arrangements were made for the students to complete a paper copy of the survey (Appendix B) in their school setting during advisory time.

Student proficiency in persuasive writing was examined by means of a response to a persuasive writing prompt. Students were given a writing prompt (Appendix E) that was completed in the presence of this researcher. No direct teaching was provided by this researcher or any teacher on persuasive writing, but students were provided with a copy of the rubric used to score the writing samples (Appendix F). Since the district has a curriculum mapping process in place for the Language Arts curriculum, it was assumed that all 10th grade students across the district had similar writing instruction regardless of the school.

Lastly, the data from all these sources were analyzed and interpreted for significant statements of the students and descriptions of the essence of being gifted, being a persuasive writer, and advocating for their learning needs. Step two of the

hermeneutic circle involves a structural analysis of all the data looking for themes or patterns of essential meaning of the lived experience. Analysis involved viewing individual and composite responses to the questions by domain and by individual question. Trends, discrepancies, and surprises were noted in the data analysis organizer (Mears, 2009, Appendix G). Key phrases were listed from each participant and common terms were color coded on the organizer. As words or phrases began to coalesce into common ideas, the phrases and words would be regrouped and the organizer reprinted for another naïve reading, a fresh look for commonalities, and color coding. To allow the reader to “hear” the voices of the students, a mosaic poetic display (Mears, 2009) or “montage” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 6) combining narratives from all those interviewed was created as part of the final analysis.

Sample

Site selection.

A suburban public school district in Colorado was selected for this study because this district has an established gifted program and serves a diverse population. In the past two years, the district CSAP scores for grades 8-10 have shown sixty-five to eighty percent proficient or advanced on the writing test. The district has implemented district-wide common assessments, so instruction in writing at grade 10 can be assumed to be consistent throughout the district. In addition, the district selection was because of convenience and proximity to the researcher. Permission was obtained from the district’s central office and from high school principals at the district’s two high schools. The principals provided the initial contact with parents regarding the research study through a

cover letter (Appendix H) that accompanied the parent consent form (Appendix I) and student assent form (Appendix J) mailed to parents. Principals also connected me to office staff who arranged times when students could meet with me.

Sample selection.

A purposive sample of six identified gifted 10th grade students was selected from two high schools in the above-mentioned district, using the district's criteria for gifted identification. A purposive sample was selected based on the students' 9th grade writing Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) performance level, with the criterion set at the Advanced level. This indicates the students are generally proficient writers, although they may not be proficient in persuasive writing. CSAP writing tests do not always include a persuasive writing piece and the 9th grade CSAP writing assessment may have included personal narrative, essay, or other genres of writing. Each year the CSAP assessment is modified slightly, so it does not consistently include a persuasive writing assessment. In each of the selected high schools, I gathered the list of students meeting the criteria. The sample was limited to 10th grade students formally identified as gifted, using the identification criteria of the school district. Thirty-five students met the criteria and those students' parents were mailed an information packet including a cover letter from the principal (Appendix H), an explanation of the research study with the parent consent form (Appendix I), and the student assent form (Appendix J). A stamped return-addressed envelope was included for return of the consent and assent forms. After three weeks, a follow-up email was sent to any parents who did not respond to the

mailing. Six students' parents returned the consent form and those students agreed to participate in the study; this included five females and one male.

Statement of bias for research purposes.

This researcher is a District Facilitator of Gifted Education, but has no supervisory role over teachers or students at the selected high schools. The district used in the study was selected because of its gifted programming and convenience.

Since this researcher was the sole appraiser of the writing samples, inter-rater reliability was not an issue. My experience in the area of writing includes teaching writing for the past 15 years and serving as a district-level trainer for teachers in strategies of effective writing instruction. I have developed and utilized rubrics similar to the NAEP writing rubric for the past 13 years, and have participated in inter-rater reliability scoring of students' writing for over 10 years. Students were assigned random identifying numbers so that names would not be associated with the students' writing samples.

Instrumentation

Survey of student's beliefs of agency.

This phenomenological study included a survey of students to gather data on their perceptions of agency. The survey utilized questions from Bandura's Multidimensional Scales of Perceived Self-Efficacy (MSPSE) (Choi et al., 2001, Appendix C) and Usher & Pajares' Sources of Middle School Math Self-efficacy Scale (2009, Appendix D). Choi et al. (2001) examined the internal structure of scores from Bandura's MSPSE from a population of college freshmen ($N = 651$) to provide empirical evaluation and extend the

generalizability of the use of MSPSE. The researchers performed a series of principal axis factor and principal component analyses of the 57 items on the Bandura's survey. Descriptive statistics and correlations among ten components were provided indicating that Bandura's MSPSE provides valid and reliable scores relating self-efficacy to various psychological and educational outcomes (e.g., meeting others' expectations, academic achievement). "The internal structure and empirical dimensions found correspond with previous factor and component analyses of MSPSE scores from middle school students (Bandura et al., 1996, 1999) and high school students (Miller et al., 1999)" (Choi et al., p. 488). Analyses revealed that "nearly all items aligned almost exclusively with theoretically and empirically derived dimensions" (Choi et al., p. 475) of the nine domains of self-efficacy labeled in the MSPSE.

Usher & Pajares (2009) developed and validated items to assess Bandura's "theorized sources of self-efficacy" in middle school math students (p. 80). The researchers developed the items in three phases. The first phase ($N = 1111$) developed and assessed self-efficacy using 84 survey items; based on analyses, the survey items were revised to 39 and assessed in Phase 2 ($N = 824$). After further descriptive analyses with more stringent psychometric cutoff, items were revised and in Phase 3 ($N = 803$), a 24-item Sources of Middle School Mathematics Self-Efficacy Scale was administered. The results were invariant across gender, ethnicity, and mathematics ability level. Items correlated with four self-efficacy measures were statistically significant providing "evidence for strong construct validity, internal consistency, and criterion validity" (Usher & Pajares, 2009, p. 99). "Subscales correlated with self-efficacy, self-concept,

mastery goals, and optimism. Results suggest that the sources scale is psychometrically sound and could be adapted for use in other domains (Usher & Pajares, 2009, p. 89).

The survey constructed for used in this study (Appendix B) utilized questions from Bandura's MSPSE in the areas of: enlisting social resources, meeting others' expectations, self-assertive efficacy, and enlisting parental and community support. Questions from the Sources of Middle School Mathematics Self-Efficacy Scale were used with the academic domain changed from mathematics to writing (Pajares, Hartley, & Valiante, 2001; Usher & Pajares, 2008, 2009). Permission was requested from the principal authors to use questions from each of the surveys with appropriate citation and modification where appropriate for the academic domain. Dr. Bandura and Dr. Usher granted permission through email correspondence.

Since Bandura's theory views agency as domain and task specific, the questions taken from the above-mentioned surveys were written specifically to address students' perceptions of their self-efficacy in persuasive writing (Pajares et al., 2007). My survey requested gender information but with only one male participant, the gender data was not attended to in the analysis to maintain confidentiality. After obtaining written parental consent and student assent, students were asked to complete a survey measuring their perceptions of agency. The survey was given before the persuasive writing prompt so that the writing task did not influence students' answers on the survey. Students were assigned random numbers so this researcher could appropriately attribute students' survey results, writing samples, and interview responses.

Persuasive writing prompt.

After completing the survey, the students included in this study were asked to demonstrate their proficiency in persuasive writing by responding to a persuasive writing prompt (Appendix E), a released item from the NAEP 1998 Writing Report Card. No additional instruction was provided to the students by this researcher or other teachers prior to the writing task. The prompt was a current events topic related to voter registration for 18-year old high school students. Students read a background paragraph about a friend who was working to register young voters and the responses of two friends. Friend 2 was supportive of the voter registration efforts and stated that people should vote when they turn 18. Friend 3 was unsure whether one vote mattered in an election. The students were asked to choose whether they agreed with friend 2 or 3 and to explain whether they would register to vote, why, and to support their position with examples. The task was to convince the friend with whom they disagreed that their position was the correct one.

Scoring of the writing samples was conducted by this researcher using a rubric included in the 1998 NAEP Writing Report Card and guideline for scorers (Appendix F). The rubric shown in Table 1 below is specific to persuasive writing but not specific to any particular topic. Students were provided with a copy of the rubric at the same time they are given the prompt, so they would know how the persuasive writing sample was to be scored.

Table 1

Writing Rubric

Level of Response	Criteria (may be characterized by one or more of the following)
1. Unsatisfactory Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to take a position (addresses topic), but position is very unclear OR takes a position, but provides minimal or no support; may only paraphrase the prompt. • Exhibits little or no apparent organization. • Minimal or no control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; word choice may be inaccurate in much or all of the response. • Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation severely impede understanding across the response.
2. Insufficient Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a position but response is very undeveloped. • Is disorganized or unfocused in much of the response OR clear but very brief. • Minimal control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; word choice may often be inaccurate. • Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation interfere with understanding in much of the response.
3. Uneven Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a position and provides uneven support; may lack development in parts or be repetitive OR response is no more than a well-written beginning. • Is organized in parts of the response; other parts are disjointed and/or lack transitions. • Exhibits uneven control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; may exhibit some inaccurate word choices. • Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation sometimes interfere with understanding.
4. Sufficient Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a clear position and supports it with some pertinent reasons and/or examples; there is some development. • Is generally organized, but has few or no transitions among parts. • Sentence structure may be simple and unvaried; word choice is mostly accurate. • Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not interfere

	with understanding.
5. Skillful Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a clear position and supports it with pertinent reasons and/or examples through much of the response. • Is well organized, but may lack some transitions. • Exhibits some variety in sentence structure and uses good word choice; occasionally, words may be used inaccurately. • Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not interfere with understanding.
6. Excellent Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a clear position and supports it consistently with well-chosen reasons and/or examples; may use persuasive strategy to convey an argument. • Is focused and well organized, with effective use of transitions. • Consistently exhibits variety in sentence structure and precision in word choice. • Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation are few and do not interfere with understanding.

One-on-one interviews.

In addition to the survey and writing sample, data were gathered from the students through interview questions (Appendix A). Students were interviewed one-on-one after completing the written survey and responding to the written prompt. The following standardized questions were asked of all interview participants. Tell me about your experiences:

1. As a person who is identified as gifted.
2. In school after you were identified as gifted.
3. As a writer.
4. Writing persuasively.
5. In advocating for yourself.
6. In advocating for yourself s a gifted learner.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being gifted, being a writer, or self-advocating for your needs?

Interviews were included in the study to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of gifted students' beliefs about agency and their perceived proficiency in persuasive writing. The interviews revealed subtleties that were not always apparent in the survey results. The one-on-one interviews involved six identified gifted students in 10th grade who met the criteria of gifted identification and scored advanced on the 9th grade writing CSAP. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol with questions related to questions from the survey and focused on students' experiences as gifted students, perceptions of their writing ability, particularly their ability to write persuasively. Additional questions probed students' experiences in advocating for themselves as gifted learners. The interviews were recorded for transcription and analyzed to identify themes within the students' responses. The interview protocol followed procedures outlined by Creswell (2007) for phenomenology research focusing on understanding the essence of an experience and Mears (2009) for honoring the voice of participants. Students were asked to tell about their experiences as a gifted person, school experiences after they were identified as gifted, experiences as a writer, experiences writing persuasively, and experiences advocating for themselves as gifted learners. Transcriptions of the interviews were supplied to the students for clarification, verification, and any additions they chose to make. Students were assigned random numbers so their interview responses, written responses, and surveys could be connected for each participant's responses.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interviews.

One-on-one interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emerging themes based on similar concepts. Importance of patterns and frequency of similar patterns across the interviews were analyzed, as well as any striking variations or surprising results. Words or phrases that occurred at least four times were noted. Patterns were distinguished when words and phrases were found among at least three participants, but not necessarily all. Global themes were determined through their repeated prevalence and commonality among all participants, revealing a deeper understanding of the lived experience. Passages were selected as representative of the emergent patterns for use in the final interpretation and discussion of findings. The interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings as I listened repeatedly to the students' responses. The transcripts were then sent to the students for their verification, clarification, and additions, if they chose to make any. None of the participants made any changes from the transcripts. After repeated readings of the interview transcripts, I began writing each participant's interview in a poetic display (Mears, 2009) using the student's words without modification. This constituted the "naïve reading", step one of the hermeneutic circle described for phenomenological research by Flood (2010). From those repeated readings, several meaningful patterns arose that harmonized with the survey results. The individual responses to the semi-structured interview questions by student, represented in poetic display under an assigned pseudonym, are presented in Appendix K.

Writing responses.

The next step of the findings was to score the students' written responses to the writing prompt using the 6-point rubric (Appendix F). The rubric is specific about use of persuasive strategy at the top level (6-Excellent Response), but not specific about what aspects of persuasive strategy is expected. When scoring the written responses, I looked for the persuasive strategies of identifying others' assumptions, identifying one's own assumptions, providing backing and evidence, rebuttal to counterclaims, making a clear claim, providing adequate grounds or justification for the claim, and making a conclusion with a clear call to action. The rubric is clear on the expectation for "well-chosen reasons and/or examples", but I looked for the above-mentioned items as evidence of well-developed persuasive writing skills. As the sole scorer, I was consistent in the application of the rubric in determining the expectations, and looked for the same characteristics in every written response.

Survey.

The survey results were analyzed as additional data to develop the essence of what these young people experience as gifted students, writers, and self-advocates. Bandura's Multidimensional Scales of Perceived Self-Efficacy (Choi et al., 2001, Appendix C) contained nine domains. For the purposes of this study, the focus was narrowed to five domains including: enlisting social resources, meeting others' expectations, enlisting parental and community support, and writing self-efficacy (Appendix B). The scale ranged from definitely false (1) to definitely true (6). Appendix L shows the survey results by student grouped by domain. Analysis involved viewing

individual and composite responses to the questions by domain and by individual question. Trends, discrepancies, and surprises were noted in the data analysis organizer (Mears, 2009, Appendix G). Key phrases were listed from each participant and common terms were color coded on the organizer. As words or phrases began to coalesce into common ideas, the phrases and words would be regrouped and the organizer reprinted for another naïve reading, a fresh look for commonalities, and color coding. Through repeated use of the data analysis organizer in this manner, global themes were revealed that portrayed a deeper understanding of the lived experience.

Integrating the data.

Data from the interviews, surveys, and writing prompts were analyzed and interpreted through repeated “naïve readings” (Flood, 2010). Attending to the “elusive while not overlooking the obvious” (Mears, 2009, p.22), I looked for patterns in the data. Step two of the hermeneutic circle involves a structural analysis seeking patterns of essential meaning of the lived experience. Analysis involved viewing individual and composite responses to the survey questions, responses to the writing prompt and interview responses. Trends, discrepancies, and surprises were noted in the data analysis organizer (Mears, 2009, Appendix G). Key phrases were listed from each participant and common terms were color coded on the organizer. As words or phrases began to coalesce into common ideas, the phrases and words would be regrouped and the organizer reprinted for another naïve reading, a fresh look for commonalities, and color coding. Significant statements are shared from individual poetic displays that “provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p.

61). Summary tables are presented in Chapter Four, as well as a discussion of the findings and emergent patterns. Further analysis utilizing the hermeneutic circle (Flood, 2009) and data analysis organizer (Mears, 2009, Appendix G) in context of the conceptual framework of human agency yielded more global themes which will be discussed in Chapter Five. In addition, a mosaic poetry display combining the voices of all participants was created representing the lived experience of the students.

Timeframe for the Study

The study began in the spring of 2010. Coordination with gifted coordinators, principals, and high school English teachers in the district under study began in February 2010 with completion of the surveys, writing samples, and interviews by June of 2010.

Data analysis of the interviews began after the recordings were transcribed. Follow-up involved sharing the transcripts with the students to clarify or expand on their interviews and to verify that this researcher accurately portrayed their experience. Patterns emerged relating to students' perceived agency and persuasive writing proficiency. Writing sample scoring and survey data analysis were done and interpreted in light of the interview findings. Further analysis yielded global themes in relation to the research question, literature review, and conceptual framework. Final data analysis was completed in June 2010.

Confidentiality and Other Ethical Concerns

For purposes of this study, the names of the selected district and schools have been changed to maintain confidentiality and all student identifiers remain confidential. The location of the district is described only in general terms and specific demographic

data is not provided. Principals and teachers in the school were provided with a project information sheet. Students and parents were provided with a project information sheet explaining the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Their parents completed a consent form and students signed an assent form prior to student participation in the survey, writing sample, and interviews. Students' grades were not affected by participation or lack of participation in the study. Because gender data were collected but not used for analysis, references to gender have been removed to maintain confidentiality.

Limitations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. Not all gifted students are formally identified by their school's criteria. The district in this study has criteria that are different from other districts within Colorado and in other states. The experiences of six students may not be representative of a broader population of gifted students, nor the experiences of gifted who students who may not be performing at a proficient level in their writing. The experiences of these students may not be representative of other students who met the criteria but opted not to participate in this research study. The study is limited to one public school district in Colorado and six students, and the results cannot be generalized to other districts, schools, or students in other public schools, private schools, or those who are home schooled.

Summary

This phenomenological study was designed to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. A qualitative design was used including interviews of students to explore the essence of students' persuasive writing proficiency and their perceived power of agency, a survey of students' beliefs about their power of agency and proficiency in writing, and a persuasive writing sample scored using a nationally developed rubric. Data from the interviews, surveys, and writing samples were analyzed using qualitative analyses. A discussion of the results in Chapter Four details the essence of the experience of gifted high school students as persuasive writers and their beliefs about their power of agency as revealed in the data.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This phenomenological study was designed to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. A qualitative approach was selected to understand the essence of the phenomenon and to hear the voices of the participating gifted students. To investigate this topic, the following research question was posed: What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency?

Six students in 10th grade who were identified in their school district as gifted and who scored at the Advanced level on the 9th grade writing CSAP participated in this study. The findings describe the essence of the students' experiences being gifted, being writers, advocating for their needs as gifted learners, and their proficiency in writing persuasively. This researcher sought to hear the voices of gifted students, document their experiences and how they experience it (Creswell, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenological research methods were used to analyze the data. Data were collected from surveys, written responses to a persuasive writing prompt, and interviews. Realizing that my background as a teacher of gifted students and an instructor of writing placed me in the world of gifted writers, I sought to "represent the participants' perspective as

transparently as possible” (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Interviews were written as poetic displays in each participant’s own words. Using the hermeneutic circle as a guide, I began with a “naïve reading” of all the data. Data from the interviews, surveys, and writing prompts were analyzed and interpreted through repeated “naïve readings” yielding twelve patterns of essential meaning of the participants’ lived experience. Summary tables are presented below as well as a discussion of the findings from each form of the data, combined data findings, and emergent patterns. This chapter will briefly introduce the participants. Findings from the interviews, writing samples, and surveys will be examined followed by an integration of the data and the meaningful patterns that emerged from a structural analysis. Excerpts from individual poetic displays will be used to give voice to the lived experience of the participants. For reporting purposes, pseudonyms have been assigned to the participants to maintain confidentiality.

Participant Profiles

Avery was very willing to participate in this research study and share experiences. Avery is identified gifted in the verbal area, but math is the area of highest interest. Avery was identified as gifted in elementary school and spoke of a lack of motivation prior to identification because schoolwork was uninteresting. Recognition as a good writer by a fifth grade teacher gave Avery a boost in self-esteem and prompted a strong interest to improve in writing. Avery spoke of contentment with school experiences and options.

Burgess was eager to complete the writing prompt and interview after the survey was completed. Burgess was identified as gifted in the verbal area in third grade and spoke of not always being good at writing or receiving good grades in writing. Burgess

mentioned developing leadership skills in various volunteer organizations, having volunteered considerable time in the past two years. Burgess had strong opinions and suggested that opportunities provided to gifted students should be available to other high achieving students as well.

Chauncey was very willing to meet to complete the survey, writing prompt, and interview. Chauncey was identified as gifted at the beginning of sixth grade in both verbal and mathematics areas. Chauncey talked repeatedly about doing one's best, pushing one's self, and trying hard in school. Chauncey expressed a goal of becoming a professional writer and belief that working to improve writing would help in the future.

Desi was also very willing to meet despite a busy schedule of sports and volunteer work. Desi was identified as gifted in sixth grade in the areas of verbal, mathematics, and visual-spatial. Desi expressed satisfaction with school options and expressed a humility regarding gifted needs.

Emory was willing to meet after summer vacation began. Emory was identified as gifted in sixth grade in the visual-spatial area. Emory was very open about feelings related to gifted opportunities in school and the importance of working hard. Emory talked about taking Advanced Placement classes and getting college credit while still in high school. Emory is involved in several sports and volunteer opportunities.

Francis was very willing to participate in the research study and openly shared ideas. Francis was identified as verbally gifted in third grade. Francis is involved in sports and has taken several Advanced Placement courses. Francis indicated that once identified as gifted, coursework became more challenging and interesting.

Survey.

The survey focused on five domains including: enlisting social resources, meeting others' expectations, enlisting parental and community support, and writing self-efficacy (Appendix B). The scale ranged from definitely false (1) to definitely true (6). For items in the domain of enlisting social resources, students' responses ranged from 3 to 6 with the majority at 5 or 6. In the domain of meeting others' expectations, responses ranged from 4 to 6 with the majority at 5 or 6. In the domain of self-assertive efficacy, responses ranged from 3 to 6 with the majority at 5 or 6. For items in the domain of enlisting parental and community support, the scores ranged from 3 to 6 with the majority at 5 to 6. The domain of writing self-efficacy made up the bulk of the questions on the survey. Items 19 and 35 through 40 were coded in reverse as they had negative connotations. Overall, the students showed high self-efficacy in writing, but there were some striking individual differences, with responses ranging from 1 to 6. Table 2 summarizes the survey results by domain. Appendix L details the individual differences showing a comparison by question, grouped by domains.

Table 2

Summary of Survey Results by Domain

Domain	Domain Average	Score Range	Question Numbers
Enlisting Social Resources	5	3-6	1, 2, 3, 4
Meet Others' Expectations	5	4-6	5, 6, 7, 8
Self-assertive Efficacy	5	3-6	9, 10, 11, 12
Enlisting Parental and Community Support	5	3-6	13, 14, 15, 16
Writing Self-efficacy (Items #19 and 35-40 are reverse coded)	5	1-6	17-40

Writing Prompts

The persuasive writing response results are illustrated in Table 3. The written responses showed that the students all had a sufficient response; a sufficient response to the prompt included a claim and supporting evidence or backing. Most were skilled in their argumentation and developed the argument in an organized, thoughtful manner. The area where students missed some aspects of argumentation was most commonly in failing to recognize their own assumptions and in some instances, the assumptions of others. Table 3 shows that this group of students has a good understanding of persuasive writing and most of their writing fell within the “skillful” to “excellent” response level.

Table 3

Summary of Persuasive Writing Scores

Student	Written response score	Comments
Avery	5 Skillful	Claim is clear; recognizes assumptions of others; strong counterclaim rebuttal; makes several assumptions of own without acknowledging them as such; conclusion is brief—does not call others to action
Burgess	6 Excellent	Claim is clear with strong backing and historical evidence; opposition's and own assumptions are identified; provides strong conclusion and call to action
Chauncey	6 Excellent	Claim is clear; backing and evidence are sufficient; clearly identified opposition's assumptions; not clear if recognized own assumptions; call to action is clearly stated in the conclusion
Desi	4 Sufficient	Claim is presented; backing is brief; no recognition of counterclaim or rebuttals; no acknowledgement of opposition's or own assumptions; call to action is brief; lacks a clear conclusion
Emory	5 Skillful	Claim is clear; rebuttal of counterclaim could be stronger; identified opposition's assumptions; not clear if recognized own assumptions; conclusion could be stronger
Francis	5 Skillful	Claim is clear regarding course of action, but not clearly stated in reference to the prompt; backing is broad and includes historical evidence; rebuttal is strong to opposition's counterclaim; not clear if recognized own assumptions; conclusion has a weak call to action, again, failing to reference the prompt
Average	5.17	Skillful response

Combined Data and Meaningful Patterns

Step two of the hermeneutic circle involves a structural analysis of all the data looking for themes or patterns of essential meaning of the lived experience. Analysis involved viewing individual and composite responses to the questions by domain and by individual question. Trends, discrepancies, and surprises were noted in the data analysis organizer (Mears, 2009, Appendix G). Key phrases were listed from each participant and common terms were color coded on the organizer. As words or phrases began to coalesce into common ideas, the phrases and words would be regrouped and the organizer reprinted for another naïve reading, a fresh look for commonalities, and color coding. Twelve patterns developed including: pushing one's self, parental support, gifted equates to more challenges and opportunities, working for the future, gifted is not too different, self-advocacy has not come up, it is good/important to be a writer, perseverance, overall contentment with school, academic effort, interesting topics matter in writing, and a lack of motivation before being identified as gifted. Below are reflections of the patterns with selected excerpts from individual participants that portray my initial understanding of the lived experience of the participants.

Pushing one's self.

The first pattern that was clear through the interviews and survey responses was the idea of pushing one's self. Students expressed this in questions 25, 26, 27, and 28 of the survey. Most of the students responded to questions about pushing themselves, competing with themselves, and working through challenging writing assignments

successfully either “definitely true” or nearly so. Examples from the poetic display also portray the pattern of pushing one’s self.

Avery

I wanted to do actual work
Schoolwork became easier to do
 Harder to think about
 Easier to want to do
 Harder to actually put my mind to
 To do the things that other people struggled with
As soon as I got to be gifted
 They gave me problems
 I had to actually think
 And learn
Things like that
I found it much more enjoyable
 I’m trying to become a good writer
I wrote an essay on the Iditarod
 I was really interested in it at the time
 It ended up a five-page essay
It’s a work
 You have to be working toward it

Chauncey

It has been good to push myself educationally
I could have chosen not to write at all
 But I think it’s good to always be writing
 Because you will always be getting better
 As long as you are still writing
My language arts teacher has been awesome
 She has pushed me to get better
 In writing
She pushed me into AP language
 There is going to be a lot of writing
 I’m nervous
 But I think it’s going to be
 A really good decision for me
I definitely pushed myself a lot more
 Took a lot harder classes
 To make sure I was doing
 All that I could
 To be my personal best
 Get the best experience I can out of school

I just work really hard
And care a lot about school
It's my number one priority
Always

I've always pushed myself
Chosen to take the harder choice
Rather than the easy way out
Need to push myself more, I think, this year

Desi

You give me a prompt
And I'll just write it
Anytime there's a prompt
I just kind of write
I took AP Euro
And I was always able to brain dump
Everything onto the page
I've never gotten any negative feedback
From my writing
In eighth grade
We did a lot of persuasive writing
I really enjoyed taking a stand
One way or the other
Trying to prove my point
I really enjoyed putting my word out there
My team creamed the other team

Emory

I enjoyed being pushed in math
Taking hard classes
But when I got into honors English
It seemed kind of easier
Because of everyone else
You're surrounded by people
Who are good at English
So I had to get used to it
I definitely think honors English
Fit me better
Normal English was really easy
I already knew everything
The teacher was teaching
So it was just like practice
I signed up for honors civics

After I took history in middle school
I felt like history is pretty easy
There could be a lot more gifted students
At our school
But some people are just lazy
Get caught up with high school
I think they are missing out
The classes that I take
That are advanced
Once you get into them
You have to work hard
But it's worth it
Because you are a year ahead
Then you can take AP classes
Which can count as college credits
So there are definitely some advantages

Francis

I tried to disagree
Because I kind of believed it
But I wanted to do something different
It was kind of hard
I like being gifted
I think it's definitely a good thing
Some people may say that it's not
Because you have to set the bar higher
For yourself
That means it's harder
To meet the bar
You have to push yourself harder
Than other students may
I think it's definitely a beneficial thing
I like pushing myself
And trying to be the best I can be

Parental or grandparental support.

A second pattern that emerged from the interviews and survey responses was one of parental or grandparent support. Survey questions 5, 13, 15, and 31 relate to parental expectations and support. Most of the students responded to questions about meeting parents' expectations, getting parents to help with a problem, and getting parents to take

part in school activities either “definitely true” or nearly so. Question 31, adults in their family telling them what a good writer had a wider variation, from 2, nearly false, to 6, definitely true. Examples from the poetic display also portray the pattern of parental support.

Desi

My grandparents do a lot of that
They really are the people
Who converse with the gifted teacher

Emory

After awhile it got resolved
I think my parents had to get involved, too
My teacher mentioned honors English to me
Then I talked to my parents about it
Then I decided we should do that

Francis

My parents have definitely advocated for me
In a lot of these areas
Not necessarily myself
But they’ve helped me a lot

Gifted identification equates to more challenge and opportunity.

A third pattern emerging from the interviews was that being identified as gifted means more challenge and more opportunities. Repeatedly, the participants would make statements that indicated they had more challenge because they were identified as gifted. They also had opportunities that were not available to all students and they enjoyed the challenge of working with others of like mind. Examples from the poetic display clearly express this in their own words.

Avery

It has been a good thing for me
Not to be held back
Not on an average pace

As soon as I got into the gifted program
I felt challenged
It was good
School became easier in some areas
Harder in others
I met a bunch of new people
Kind of like me
A little more intelligent
I got a new friend base
Overall a better experience
After I was identified as gifted
Math really affected me
In average math class
I was breezing by
It was unbelievably easy for me
Much easier to do
To focus on
Really get it down
That was the subject
Where I liked being gifted
Math
Where I felt the most challenge

Burgess

Especially it seems more in like English
I've been pulled out and
We'll do different projects
Than the normal students
I think I've had a little bit more opportunities
Than a normal kid
I remember something
Called Omnibus
In like first or second grade
It was more in middle school
We'd be pulled out
And we read, like, a different book
And did different book reports
And we always had
Different spelling than the others
I took honors English as a freshman

Chauncey

I've gotten to do things like this
I've gotten to go on field trips for gifted and talented students

Which has been a cool experience
The gifted and talented teacher at our school
Offered me to do independent studies
And other things for our school
So that I can get into prestigious schools
I've been given a lot of advantages
A lot of advice that most students haven't received
From her or other teachers
I think I was identified in fourth or fifth grade
I was in a completely different classroom
Than everyone else
There were a small number of us
Who just went to a different classroom
We took higher level classes
It was good
It was a good experience
It was a lot more personal
Because of the smaller numbers
One teacher who taught everything
That was nice
I had a group of peers
A group of people pushing me
There's always competitions and everything
You can't help that
That's always good, too
I think being gifted and talented
It is helping me get there
Helping me get the opportunities

Desi

We'd go with the gifted teacher
For a little time of the day
I could always go to the gifted teacher
Be like, this isn't challenging me enough
But I feel that everything has been challenging enough
We'd always have the vocabulary
That was different
From the vocab that regular students had

Emory

They have some meetings for AP classes
There was one about a trip you could do
Over the summer
To Costa Rica

With a bunch of students
Which would be fun

Francis

In school

I get a lot of opportunities
Being gifted
More challenges that I can have
Like being in advanced classes
Next year I'm doing this EFE thing
You've probably heard of it
Where you can do outside of school studies
So that's a really cool thing
For me to be able to do
Being gifted
So after they identified me as gifted
It was easier for me to be challenged
I was put into more challenging classes
It just made things a lot more challenging for me
Which made it more interesting
And more fun
More satisfactory
I felt like I was actually doing things
That were going to help me

Working for the future.

An additional pattern that emerged from interviews was the idea that the students are working now for their future. The opportunities and challenges they have had will help them achieve long-term goals for the future. Examples from the poetic display portray this pattern in the students' own words.

Chauncey

I've been given a lot of advantages
It will help me toward the future
I want to be a journalist
When I grow up
That's my biggest ambition
That's why I'm taking AP language this year
To get a lot more writing
I'm going to take a lot more writing classes

I want to get better as a writer
That's why I decided to do this prompt
Just to make sure
That I'm keeping my writing fresh
Through practice
I've gotten better at it
It's still something I need to work on
I know writing will take me places
I've always wanted to be a sports journalist
I think being gifted and talented
It is helping me get there
Helping me get the opportunities
That I need to get there

Desi

I think it's going to change
I got my Advanced Learning Plan
I think that will influence next year
And the years to come

Emory

Once you get into them
You have to work hard
But it's worth it
Because you are a year ahead
Then you can take AP classes
Which can count as college credits
So there are definitely some advantages

Francis

I think it's a good thing
It's definitely good
To be able to express yourself in writing
I heard that in college
You have to write a lot
So it's good to get that experience
Like taking the initiative to do the EFE classes
And that's kind of for my future, too
Being gifted I can do that
So that was my idea
Something that would help me in the future
That would go along with being gifted
Because I think you only get that opportunity
If you're gifted

I'm not sure

Gifted is not too different.

One surprising pattern revealed in the interviews was that being identified gifted was not too different than the experiences any other student might have in school. These students did not feel that they were especially deserving or worthy of special treatment.

They expressed an underlying humility that was evident in their own words.

Burgess

And it's not as big in high school
Because there are a lot more
Like, you take honors classes
And a lot of those kids are gifted
But a lot are just ones that try harder

Chauncey

I wouldn't say that I'm gifted or talented
I just work really hard
And care a lot about school

Desi

There was nothing to it
We'd do whatever she had planned for that day
It wasn't anything special
It was just where they were able to monitor you
I've always thought that "being gifted"
Has never really influenced me
Just to where I'm able to say
Yeah, I'm gifted and people recognize that
It's not anything
From day to day
Besides that it hasn't pushed me a different way
One way or the other
But I don't think I've gotten any specific experiences
The only thing that I've done in high school
So far
That could be considered gifted
Is this
And also I took a Mind Works class
That was open to everybody

So not all that many things have happened
Regarding specifics
Not really anything significant
I guess I'm not a very needy person

Emory

I don't really remember
 When I was identified as gifted
 It just showed up in the computer
 I came into the district as a new student in fifth grade
In middle school
 I was in advanced math
 I think that was it
It doesn't seem different
 Much different than other students
 Who aren't gifted
So I don't really have any experiences
 I haven't had too many challenges

Self-advocacy has not come up often.

One pattern that emerged from the interviews was that these participants did not feel a need to advocate for themselves very often. Survey questions 9-12 related to self-assertive efficacy. Students' responses were almost uniformly at 6, definitely true, or nearly so at 5. Of the thirty-six responses to those four questions, only one was marked at 3 and three were scored at 4. Overall, these students believe they can express their opinions when other classmates disagree with them, stand up for themselves when they are unfairly treated, deal with situations where others are annoying them or hurting their feelings, and stand firm to someone who is asking something unreasonable or inconvenient. This indicates that the students are able to self-advocate and have a strong sense of self-assertive efficacy. While this may be true, the interview responses indicated that these students did not often feel a need to self-advocate. Examples from the poetic display portray this tendency.

Avery

I haven't had much to advocate for
I've always been pretty content
It hasn't come up as important for me

Chauncey

I did a lot more when I was younger
Like in middle school
I definitely pushed myself a lot more

Desi

I guess
I've never really gotten to the point
Where I needed to do that
I don't need to do that
I guess I'm not a very needy person
I haven't actually done that
It wasn't ever
Yeah, I'm bored
I honestly haven't done that much of it
I've never personally gotten up
And said I need this
Or anything else

Emory

None that I know of
My teacher mentioned honors English to me
Then I talked to my parents about it
Then I decided we should do that

Francis

I'm not sure
So that wasn't too hard to ask
To do a different thing
I did get the option
To do upper level math
I guess I was advocating for myself
When I chose to do that in seventh grade
So that wasn't really advocating for myself
Because I already was given the option
But I just accepted it

It is good and important to be a writer.

With many of the survey questions on writing self-efficacy and several of the interview questions on writing, the data yielded much information about the students' experiences as writers. Several survey item responses were surprising. Question 18 asked if the students have always been successful in writing. Two of the students responded 2, nearly false, or 3, more false than true. Question 20 asked the students got good grades in writing on the last report card and Burgess scored this at a 3 indicating more false than true. Questions 21 and 22 asked if the students do well on writing assignments and on even the most difficult writing assignments. Several students scored these at 2 or 3 on the rating scale, indicating these statements were more false than true. Particularly surprising responses were to questions 23 and 24 asking whether seeing adults do well in writing pushes them to do better or when they see how their writing teacher demonstrates quality writing they are able to picture themselves writing in the same way. Only two students rated these questions at 5 or 6 on the rating scale, indicating that most students found these statements more false than true.

Questions 29-30 on the survey related to who has told them they are good at writing, have a talent for writing, or have received praised for their writing ability. Ratings for these questions were varied from several rated at 2, nearly false. Recognizing that some students are praised for work that comes very easily to them, students rating these questions as false was a surprising finding. Questions 35-40 had negative connotations related to stress, anxiety, and nervousness. While most students rated these as more false than true, a few scored these questions at 4 and one at 5. This indicates that

some stress or nervousness may be present when these students are asked to write, despite their high abilities. The written responses all indicated that the students had a sufficient response to meet the prompt requirements, and most were skillful or excellent in their response to the prompt. Below are some of the excerpts of the students' voices indicating their perspective on the importance of being a writer.

Avery

I'm trying to become a good writer
 It really made me feel good
 To know that I was good at writing
It felt good to be recognized
 Rather than just writing
 Getting a grade on it
 Putting it back in my backpack
It felt good
 To be recognized
I've written persuasively a lot
 It's a big school thing
 They want us to know how to do it
It's really important
I enjoy writing persuasively
 If it's about the right topics
 If I'm really interested in it
Persuasive writing is good
 I like it

Burgess

So I feel like writing
 Is a hard thing
 To be judged on
Because it's so personal
 I guess
I definitely feel that
 I've had guidance to help me improve
 With most of my essays and things
You can always go to the teacher
 Before or after school
 Or talk about your choices
 And all that
So I think that teachers are very open

To helping you improve
Your writing
So I think that's a big help

Chauncey

That's why I'm taking AP language this year
To get a lot more writing
I'm going to take a lot more writing classes
I want to get better as a writer
But I think it's good to always be writing
Because you will always be getting better
As long as you are still writing
I've definitely gotten better at it
For sure
There are always persuasive essays
No matter what class you are taking
It's the most
It's one of the biggest prompts every year
Persuasive

Through practice
I've gotten better at it
It's still something I need to work on
I've had some specific training in persuasive writing
This year we read help
Helping ideas
Things you can do to make
Persuasive writing better
In formatting
Stuff like that
Which I've had before
I guess it wasn't too in depth
But it helped
For sure

Desi

But I've always enjoyed writing
I've always been good at it
I've never gotten a bad grade
On a writing assignment
I've never gotten any negative feedback
From my writing
I've always been able to incorporate a little bit
If they give you a prompt
You need to prove your point

I've always put it in there

Emory

I was in normal English
 For the first semester of this year
 I transferred to honors
I've finally gotten used to writing
I definitely think honors English
 Fit me better
 Normal English was really easy
 I already knew everything
 The teacher was teaching
 So it was just like practice

The classes that I take
 That are advanced
Once you get into them
 You have to work hard
 But it's worth it

Francis

Writing is pretty...
 Sometimes it's like a chore
 Depending on the prompt
If it's a good prompt
 Then it's easy to take a stand
I like writing
 Definitely
I think it's a good thing
 It's definitely good
 To be able to express yourself in writing
I like persuasive
 It's good to be able to take a stand

Perseverance.

Several of the survey questions related somewhat to perseverance. Meeting expectations questions 5-8 are in some ways related and students scored these as definitely true or nearly so. Question 27 asks about imagining working through writing assignments successfully and students scored that as more true than false consistently,

with many scoring it 5 or 6, definitely true or nearly so. Several students spoke of perseverance in their interviews, shown in the poetic display below.

Avery

Schoolwork became easier to do
 Harder to think about
 Easier to want to do
 Harder to actually put my mind to
As soon as I got to be gifted
 They gave me problems
 I had to actually think
 And learn
It felt good to be recognized
 Rather than just writing
 Getting a grade on it
 Putting it back in my backpack
It felt good
 To be recognized
It's a work
You have to be working toward it

Chauncey

I definitely pushed myself a lot more
 Took a lot harder classes
 To make sure I was doing
 All that I could
 To be my personal best
 Get the best experience I can out of school
I haven't always been the best writer
That's why I'm taking AP language this year
 To get a lot more writing
 I'm going to take a lot more writing classes
 I want to get better as a writer
I've definitely gotten better at it
 For sure
There are always persuasive essays
 No matter what class you are taking
Through practice
 I've gotten better at it
 It's still something I need to work on
The last two years
 I've taken harder classes than most of my friends
 I've always pushed myself

Chosen to take the harder choice
 Rather than the easy way out
There are always opportunities
 That I've missed out on
 Need to push myself more, I think, this year
We could choose to do the normal lesson
 Or independently work on history day
I did that for two years
 That was a cool experience
 To go do the competition
It was something I chose to do

Emory

I'm really good at math
 I enjoyed being pushed in math
 Taking hard classes
It's not too bad
 Just as long as I keep up with my work
 It's fine
I wasn't really into writing
 I didn't really like it as much
But when I got into honors English
 It seemed kind of easier
 Because of everyone else
 You're surrounded by people
 Who are good at English
 So I had to get used to it
I definitely think honors English
 Fit me better
 Normal English was really easy
 I already knew everything
 The teacher was teaching
 So it was just like practice
So I had to speak out about that
 I wasn't just going to let him
 Count it as a zero
Sometimes it is scary
 To advocate with adults
 Because you feel they know more than you
 But you don't want just
 To be pushed over like that
 Because I didn't cheat at all
We had to do a lot of things
 And I didn't do so well in all of them

But when it came to the final
I got an A

Francis

So after they identified me as gifted
 It was easier for me to be challenged
 I was put into more challenging classes
It just made things a lot more challenging for me
 Which made it more interesting
 And more fun
 More satisfactory
I felt like I was actually doing things
 That were going to help me
What I'm doing with that is
 I'm going to the elementary school
 Helping with the music classes
 Because I'd like to do music in college
So that was my idea
 Something that would help me in the future
I like being gifted
 I think it's definitely a good thing
Some people may say that it's not
 Because you have to set the bar higher
 For yourself
That means it's harder
 To meet the bar
 You have to push yourself harder
 Than other students may
Although in other areas it could be easier
 Because things come to you easier

Overall contentment with school.

Students indicated an overall contentment with their school experience and that it is meeting their needs as gifted learners. There were some minor exceptions, related to a pull-out program in middle school where they were getting more advanced vocabulary but perceived it more as a method of monitoring them than a challenge academically. Examples of the students' satisfaction with school are represented in the poetic display.

Avery

As soon as I got into the gifted program
I felt challenged
I wanted to do actual work
Overall a better experience
After I was identified as gifted
I found it much more enjoyable
I've always been pretty content
With the options they've given me
To do things
So I've never felt it necessary to
Go out and say
I need a whole new topic
As one individual in hundreds
I've always felt
I've had enough options

Burgess

The teachers are pretty good
At identifying
If they feel you are gifted
And feel that you can handle it
I mean
I've been told
I wanted to take a certain science course
But the teacher wouldn't let me
She's just like
You're too smart for this class
So she made me go to the normal class
She wanted me to take one
That would be more challenging
I haven't asked
For any kind of differentiation
I guess if I really
Felt that I could do something more
I guess I would ask
But I haven't felt that yet

Chauncey

That was nice
I had a group of peers
We could choose to do the normal lesson
Or independently work on history day
That was something a lot different
Than what everyone else was doing

So that was cool
I think being gifted and talented
It is helping me get there
Helping me get the opportunities
That I need to get there

Desi

The gifted teacher
Has always said
If I had any classes that weren't really challenging
To come to her
But I feel that everything has been challenging enough

Emory

I was put in
Advanced math and science
Then I took honors English
In middle school
I was in advanced math
I think that was it
I'm really good at math
I enjoyed being pushed in math
Taking hard classes
I was in normal English
For the first semester of this year
I transferred to honors
I definitely think honors English
Fit me better
I signed up for honors civics
After I took history in middle school
I felt like history is pretty easy
But civics is way different than that
But we're learning
I kind of enjoyed that
We had to do a lot of things
And I didn't do so well in all of them
But when it came to the final
I got an A
The classes that I take
That are advanced
Once you get into them
You have to work hard
But it's worth it
Because you are a year ahead

Then you can take AP classes
Which can count as college credits

Francis

In school

I get a lot of opportunities
Being gifted

More challenges that I can have

Like being in advanced classes
Where you can do outside of school studies

As for me

It kind of made me feel special
When I heard that I was gifted

I did get the option

To do upper level math

When I went to algebra instead of

Whatever regular it was

What I'm doing with that is

I'm going to the elementary school

Helping with the music classes

Because I'd like to do music in college

So that was my idea

Academic effort.

Another pattern that appeared in the interviews was a sense of the importance of academic effort. Most of the participants expressed that working to improve and doing well in school was valued by them. Their words show this in the poetic display.

Avery

It has been a good thing for me

Not to be held back

Not on an average pace

It helped a lot

In my motivation

School became easier in some areas

Harder in others

Harder to think about

Easier to want to do

Harder to actually put my mind to

Overall a better experience

As soon as I got to be gifted

They gave me problems
I had to actually think
And learn
I found it much more enjoyable
Much easier to do
To focus on
After I got some interesting topics
To write about
To think about
I found it a lot more enjoyable
I started to work on it a little more
Actually think about it
I wrote an essay on the Iditarod
I was really interested in at the time
It ended up a five-page essay

Chauncey

I have always been in higher classes
It has been good to push myself educationally
Education is important to me
I definitely pushed myself a lot more
Took a lot harder classes
To make sure I was doing
All that I could
To be my personal best
Get the best experience I can out of school
We took higher level classes
It was good
It was a good experience
Why I'm taking AP language this year
To get a lot more writing
I'm going to take a lot more writing classes
I want to get better as a writer
I could have chosen not to write at all
But I think it's good to always be writing
Because you will always be getting better
As long as you are still writing
My language arts teacher has been awesome
She has pushed me to get better
In writing
She pushed me into AP language
There is going to be a lot of writing
I'm nervous
But I think it's going to be

A really good decision for me
Through practice
I've gotten better at it
It's still something I need to work on
We could choose to do the normal lesson
Or independently work on history day
I did that for two years
That was a cool experience
To go do the competition
We actually ended up doing really good
In our group
That was something a lot different
Than what everyone else was doing
So that was cool
It was something I chose to do
There are a lot of other aspects of my life
Like sports
And friends
But school is always number one for me

Desi

But I've always enjoyed writing
I've always been good at it
I've never gotten a bad grade
On a writing assignment
Anytime there's a prompt
I just kind of write
I took AP Euro
I've never gotten any negative feedback
From my writing
We had to write out what we were going to say
My team creamed the other team
It was great
I've always enjoyed it

Emory

I was put in
Advanced math and science
Then I took honors English
But when I got into honors English
It seemed kind of easier
Because of everyone else
You're surrounded by people
Who are good at English

So I had to get used to it
Definitely think honors English
Fit me better
Normal English was really easy
I already knew everything
The teacher was teaching
So it was just like practice
My teacher mentioned honors English to me
Then I talked to my parents about it
Then I decided we should do that
I signed up for honors civics
After I took history in middle school
I felt like history is pretty easy
But civics is way different than that
But we're learning
I kind of enjoyed that
We had to do a lot of things
And I didn't do so well in all of them
But when it came to the final
I got an A
The classes that I take
That are advanced
Once you get into them
You have to work hard
But it's worth it
Because you are a year ahead
Then you can take AP classes
Which can count as college credits
So there are definitely some advantages

Francis

More challenges that I can have
Like being in advanced classes
Next year I'm doing this EFE thing
You've probably heard of it
Where you can do outside of school studies
What I'm doing with that is
I'm going to the elementary school
Helping with the music classes
Because I'd like to do music in college
When I was younger
I was always pretty good at
Everything in school
I felt confident in everything that I did

Probably more so than other students
So after they identified me as gifted
It was easier for me to be challenged
I was put into more challenging classes
It just made things a lot more challenging for me
Which made it more interesting
And more fun
More satisfactory
I felt like I was actually doing things
Things that were going to help me
I like being gifted
I think it's definitely a good thing
Some people may say that it's not
Because you have to set the bar higher
For yourself
That means it's harder
To meet the bar
You have to push yourself harder
Than other students may
Although in other areas it could be easier
Because things come to you easier
I think it's definitely a beneficial thing
I like pushing myself
And trying to be the best I can be

Interesting topics matter in writing.

Regarding writing, one pattern came through loud and clear. These students believe that interesting topics matter in writing. It affects their motivation and effort to write more and better quality. In their own words, below are excerpts from the poetic display.

Avery
After I got some interesting topics
To write about
To think about
I found it a lot more enjoyable
I started to work on it a little more
Actually think about it
I grew to like it
My first interesting topic was in fifth grade

Before I wasn't really interested in writing
But this was one of the things that
Gave me a little hope
For writing
After that, if I got a topic I was interested in
I could write for days about it
I enjoy writing persuasively
If it's about the right topics
If I'm really interested in it
It's a big thing for me
If I'm not interested
I don't really want to write about it
It's hard to
I don't feel I've gotten many good topics in school
The few I have
Are very good
Persuasive writing is good
I like it
One paper was all about conflicts
Things that were public
That everyone was talking about
You got to pick a side and write about it
I found that one very enjoyable
Because I got to choose my topic
I got to investigate all the sides
That was my favorite

Burgess

I've had a couple interesting prompts
I thought the one
That we did for the writing assessment
Was different
I think just because
I felt there was a lot you could do with it
And then some of the CSAP ones
Are just funny I think
Like there was this one
About how you had to...
There was a wildlife preserve
And they wanted to do drilling
But how would you preserve the way
And you had to convince the company
How to preserve some of the wildlife
So I don't know

I just think
They pick kind of weird topics sometimes

Chauncey

We did history day
In middle school
We could choose to do the normal lesson
Or independently work on history day
I did that for two years
That was a cool experience
To go do the competition
We actually ended up doing really good
In our group
That was something a lot different
Than what everyone else was doing
So that was cool
It was something I chose to do

Desi

We had this thing
In eighth grade
That was like a debate
We had to write out what we were going to say
My team creamed the other team
It was great
I've always enjoyed it

Emory

But when I got into honors English
It seemed kind of easier
Because of everyone else
You're surrounded by people
Who are good at English
I definitely think honors English
Fit me better
Normal English was really easy
I already knew everything
The teacher was teaching
So it was just like practice
I don't really
Write persuasively too much
I have had to write
A few essays about that
Like abortion and stuff

Eating disorders
I did it more in middle school
But in high school
It's more like informational and stuff
More like a report than a persuasive essay

Francis

Writing is pretty...
Sometimes it's like a chore
Depending on the prompt
If it's a good prompt
Then it's easy to take a stand
Write about something
Especially when it's something that you're passionate about
Something you find interesting
But when it's not
Then it can be a chore

Motivation was lacking before identification as gifted.

A final pattern several of the students indicated was that prior to being identified as gifted and receiving services for advanced curriculum they lacked motivation to do their best in school. Examples from the poetic display are presented below.

Avery

When I was in that group
Then I felt almost bored
Then I didn't really want to get into any assignments
Then it was hard to focus
I ended up just goofing off
Not paying attention
Apathetic
Watching other kids struggle with things I found easy
Before that there wasn't a program
It helped a lot
In my motivation
Overall a better experience
After I was identified as gifted
Math really affected me
In average math class
I was breezing by
It was unbelievably easy for me
To do the things that other people struggled with

As soon as I got to be gifted
They gave me problems
I had to actually think
And learn
I found it much more enjoyable
Much easier to do
To focus on
Really get it down
That was the subject
Where I liked being gifted
Math
Where I felt the most challenge

Chauncey

I haven't always been the best writer
I was when I was younger
My language arts teacher has been awesome
She has pushed me to get better
In writing
The last two years
I've taken harder classes than most of my friends

Francis

When I was younger
I was always pretty good at
Everything in school
I felt confident in everything that I did
Probably more so than other students
So after they identified me as gifted
It was easier for me to be challenged
I was put into more challenging classes
It just made things a lot more challenging for me
Which made it more interesting
And more fun
More satisfactory
I felt like I was actually doing things
That were going to help me
I think I was identified in elementary school

Summary

This study examined the phenomenon of the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency

to have their educational needs met in school. The emergent patterns were: pushing one's self, parental support, gifted equates to more challenges and opportunities, working for the future, gifted is not too different, self-advocacy has not come up, it is good/important to be a writer, perseverance, overall contentment with school, academic effort, interesting topics matter in writing, and a lack of motivation before being identified as gifted. Each of these patterns was discussed in relation to interview responses shown in poetic display and survey responses and writing proficiency as shown on the prompt, where applicable. In Chapter Five I will discuss and interpret the data and provide a mosaic poetic display combining the words of all participants into a montage of gifted voices. Recommendations for further studies will be provided.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

Children who are identified as gifted may not consistently have their learning needs met in the school setting. This phenomenological study was designed to understand the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. To examine this topic, the following research question was posed: What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency?

Through surveys, responses to a persuasive writing prompt, and interviews, six identified gifted students in 10th grade gave voice to their experiences. The transcribed interviews were written as poetic displays in each student's own words. The survey results were explored through the five domains of: enlisting social resources, meeting others expectations, self-assertive efficacy, enlisting parental and community support, and writing self-efficacy. Individual and combined responses to survey questions were examined. Written responses to the prompt were scored using a national rubric to determine proficiency in persuasive writing (Appendix F). Chapter Four described the hermeneutic phenomenological research methods used to analyze the data through repeated readings. This analysis yielded twelve meaningful patterns from the integrated data: pushing one's self, parental support, gifted equates to more challenges and

opportunities, working for the future, gifted is not too different, self-advocacy has not come up, it is good/important to be a writer, perseverance, overall contentment with school, academic effort, interesting topics matter in writing, and a lack of motivation before being identified as gifted. In this chapter, I will describe further analysis and interpretation of the data using the hermeneutic circle, discuss the global themes that were derived from the patterns, and present the students' voices in a mosaic poetic display combining the words of all participants. Finally, recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Global Themes

The third step of the hermeneutic circle of phenomenological research methods as described by Flood (2010) is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the whole experience. The twelve patterns examined in Chapter Four were reflected on in relation to the research question, relevant literature, the conceptual framework of human agency, and my professional experience as a teacher of gifted students and writing. I sought to revise, widen, and deepen my understanding of the students' experience. From this circular approach, four global themes were derived that provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experience of the participants. The four global themes are: empowerment, engagement in learning, caring support, and complexity of writing. The four themes are described in Table 4 below and then discussed in relation to the data, research question, literature, and the conceptual framework.

Table 4

Global Themes

Theme	Descriptors
Empowerment	Challenges and opportunities; course selection; acceleration options; discussion, guidance, and support; engagement in own development; persistence; choices; pursuing interests; confidence in ability; power over aspects of their lives; leadership; effort and pushing one’s self; quality of performance; setting high goals; expending effort; cognitive and metacognitive processing
Engagement in learning	Accepting challenges and opportunities; engagement in own development; prior to identification few choices, slower pace, less challenge, less motivation, boredom, even behavior problems; instruction that was responsive to student needs improved engagement; worked harder and at higher levels when instruction was responsive to interests and the need for challenge
Caring support	Caring teachers, parents, and grandparents; teachers who recognize they need challenge; provide support; discuss and encourage, even demand higher level of work; community of learners, like-minded peers
Complexity of writing	Writing process is complex; learning to write is a long-term process; learn from others; develop critical thinking in persuasive writing process; proficiency in persuasive writing; confidence in writing ability; importance of relevant and interesting topics, authentic audience; subjectivity of writing grades/scores; awareness of writing skills; academic choices to take difficult courses

Empowerment.

Empowerment for these six participants appeared in a variety of forms. For most of them, it appeared in the form of challenges, opportunities, and course selection. It could also mean accelerated curriculum in the form of above-grade-level math, honors

courses, and Advanced Placement courses. Empowerment might appear through discussion with a parent or teacher or it might take the form of guidance on what coursework would be appropriately challenging. Empowerment might look like support to stretch to a higher level of performance academically or in a leadership role. For the participants, empowerment was evident through engagement in their own academic development. Persistence was another feature of empowerment as students opted to take more rigorous courses and were willing to practice until they improved their writing. Choices in coursework or in assignments were a form of empowerment. Choices that allowed the students to pursue their interests were seen as empowering. When students expressed confidence in their ability, they were articulating empowerment. The participants had power over aspects of their lives that were important. It was empowering when students' beliefs influenced their choices in the level of effort they expended, in their course choices, in their performance quality, and in their persistence.

The research question examined the students' beliefs about their powers of agency in relation to their proficiency in persuasive writing. A review of the literature in relation to the data found that self-efficacy related strongly with empowerment. The conceptual framework of human agency also relates to empowerment. Power of agency involves self-monitoring of one's activities (Caprara et al, 2008) and is built on Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991). Self-efficacy is the foundation of human agency whereby people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions (Bandura, 1991). Bandura (cited in Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 9) noted that "people seek to exert control over important aspects of their lives." By selecting to accept

more challenging courses, expending considerable effort, displaying high quality performance, and persisting in gifted programs, the students exhibited agency. All participants indicated that school was important to them and they were making choices that would determine their future.

Nippold et al. (2005) indicated that persuasive writing could lead to empowerment and these students displayed a high level of competence in persuasive writing. Pajares et al. (2007) recognized that self-awareness about their writing skills helps students interpret achievements in ways that increase self-efficacy and empowerment. The participants showed a firm self-awareness of their writing skills: “I’ve never been the creative, sit down and write type, but I’ve always enjoyed writing,” stated Desi. Even if they were not always good at writing or always enjoyed writing, they recognized that they were competent and able to write at a proficient level most of the time: “I haven’t always been the best writer,” Chauncey acknowledged, but “through practice I’ve gotten better at it.” Knowing they had developed their writing skills was empowering. Avery recognized this: “I’m trying to become a good writer.”

Bandura recognized that by persevering through difficulties, people learn to face adversity and develop a stronger sense of efficacy (1989). Despite not always doing well or getting good grades in writing, they persevered. Survey results indicated that neither were all participants told they were good writers nor did they do well on difficult writing assignments at all times. Yet they were willing to engage in more challenging tasks, expend effort, and set higher goals. Francis, who acknowledged setting “the bar higher”, felt special “after they identified me as gifted. It was easier for me to be challenged. I was

put into more challenging classes.” Avery enjoyed additional challenge stating, “schoolwork became easier to do, harder to think about, easier to want to do, harder to actually put my mind to.” Bandura and Schunk (cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005) linked high self-efficacy with a willingness to engage in more challenging tasks. Students with self-efficacy were found by Berry (cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005) to process at higher cognitive and metacognitive levels. The participants showed high levels of cognitive processing in their written responses and in their introspective replies to interview questions. Metacognition was evident in their thoughtful responses to interview questions and examination of their experiences as gifted learners. Caprara et al. (2008) found that students’ sense of agency over their academics increased achievement and aspirations. Chauncey recognized that “being gifted and talented is helping me get there, helping me get the opportunities I need to get there.” The participating students are academically achieving at high levels by taking advanced courses including honors, advanced mathematics, and Advanced Placement courses. Many of the students are also maintaining 4.0 grade point averages. They have high aspirations for their future with several working to be accepted into selective colleges and hoping for careers in medicine, law, engineering, music, or as writers.

Based on the multiple ways self-efficacy was displayed in the students’ responses, I believe they have agency to get their needs met in school. They seek challenges and opportunities. They persevere despite setbacks and have confidence in their ability to succeed. The participants in this study are actively engaged in their own development and have power over meaningful aspects of their lives.

A surprising finding was the subtle form of agency portrayed in these students' lives. I was expecting more overt forms of agency in students asking for specific challenges and opportunities. There was humility within the voices of the participants that I did not expect: "I guess I'm not a very needy person," stated Desi. Some voiced a concern for other students' opportunities and that they were not too different from their peers regarding the need for challenge and opportunities. Burgess pondered, "I feel like we should offer more to the kids who try hard but aren't identified as gifted. I think that if they're given some of the opportunities that the gifted children are given that it might help them too." I expected to hear more personal responsibility to demand challenge and opportunity, but the students expressed a sense that challenges and opportunities within the schools were open to anyone willing to work hard. That seemed reasonable to these students as they did not seek recognition as extraordinarily different from their age peers. "It doesn't seem different, much different than others who aren't gifted," commented Emory.

I wonder if there is a culture of conformity in this suburban school district and perhaps peer influence is strong among the students to the degree that they do not wish to stand out from their peers in a marked manner. The patterns of "overall contentment with school," "gifted is not too different," and "self-advocacy has not come up" are juxtaposed with "gifted identification equates to more challenge and opportunity" and "motivation was lacking before identification as gifted." These seemingly disconnected patterns made me wonder if the students realized how many options they had that are not common in other schools. Perhaps taking honors courses, Advanced Placement courses, or a

leadership role in a club or other organization are ways of meeting their needs without being too pushy, but demanding a college-level course as a sophomore would not be considered reasonable. I wonder how much the students understand giftedness, their individual strength areas or potential for outstanding performance in a particular academic area. If teachers are ill-informed in gifted identification, perhaps that is reflected in little communication with students, resulting in a lack of understanding of the rights and responsibilities of gifted students to expect anything more from the school. I wonder how informed parents and grandparents are regarding their rights and responsibilities to communicate with the schools regarding the needs of their gifted children. I wonder if students who are gifted but not performing at such a high level would express contentment with their school experience. I wonder if students who are identified as verbally gifted but not performing at the proficient level on the CSAP writing test, would have different experiences or have a different level of self-efficacy compared with those who are performing at a proficient level.

I also wonder if part of the reason for the subtle expression of agency was that these schools have more offerings for gifted and high achieving students than many public schools. If that is so, perhaps structures that anticipate the needs of these advanced learners are in place so the students do not have to make overt requests for their learning needs. In schools with a high percentage of minority students or those from a low-socioeconomic background, the results might be quite different. In other districts or schools without so many opportunities for acceleration, where students do not experience the support from parents and teachers or the opportunity to interact regularly with

intellectual peers, there may be more underachievement and less self-efficacy of gifted or potentially gifted students. Even Burgess recognized that not all students at the school who might benefit are given opportunities to be challenged to the same level. Schools where minority or poorer students are under-represented in gifted programs might need to focus on developing the capacity of all students and provide opportunities for student-directed learning to develop students' passion areas to see if that increases academic performance and gifted representation. Professional development of teachers to identify and differentiate for gifted learners may be required along with administrative expectations for the climate to improve so that gifted students' needs are addressed appropriately.

Engagement in learning.

The six participating students demonstrated that they are engaged in learning in multiple ways. They have accepted challenges and opportunities provided to them as gifted learners. They are engaged in their own development. Before they were identified as gifted, some of the participants indicated that they were not actively engaged in learning. They lacked choice, the curriculum was moving at a slower pace and they felt less challenge and motivation. Indications of boredom, repetition, or rote learning were evident before identification and gifted services were provided. Students even may have become behavior problems or chosen to goof off before they were given appropriate challenge as gifted learners. When instruction was responsive to the student's needs, engagement improved along with motivation.

Examining engagement in relation to the research question led me to ask if the students were engaged because they possessed agency to get their learning needs met. A review of the literature indicated that providing students with accelerated learning options increases engagement (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Douglas (2004) found that tailoring education to gifted students' abilities and interest and helping students select them was important. These students indicated in the survey responses and interviews that learning was a high priority for them. They are engaged in their own development through course selection. They experienced an improvement in motivation when school work was modified from slow-paced, repetitive instruction to hands-on, challenging, or competitive options with other like-minded peers. Avery declared, "When I was in that group ... I felt almost bored. I didn't really want to get into any assignments. It was hard to focus. I ended up just goofing off, not paying attention, apathetic, watching other kids struggle with things I found easy." Providing choice was a common thread in the voices of the students, choice for coursework and for product options. Gifted programming that provided challenge appeared to be important to establish and maintain motivation to engage in learning at a high level. Emory explained, "I'm really good at math. I enjoy being pushed in math, taking hard classes."

Examining the conceptual framework of human agency also indicated a connection between agency and engagement. Students with high levels of self-efficacy are more willing to engage in challenging tasks (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). Belief that their actions can produce desired outcomes is at the heart of the concept of human agency (Bandura, 1991). These students expressed a

belief that their engagement in academic learning was important both now and for their future. Chauncey recognized how important this was explaining, “I definitely pushed myself a lot more, took a lot harder classes to make sure I was doing all that I could to be my personal best, get the best experience I can out of school.”

High self-efficacy beliefs are indicative of high academic performance (Pajares et al., 2007) which these students all exhibited. The participants expressed a willingness to work hard, persist even when tasks are difficult, and achieve at high levels, behaviors associated with high self-efficacy (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Emory offered an example of this commenting, “I definitely think honors English fit me better. Normal English was really easy. I already knew everything the teacher was teaching, so it was just like practice.” Engagement in learning opportunities was an expression of the students’ agency.

A surprise revealed in the data was that only one participant recalled the frustration experienced prior to receiving gifted services in elementary school. Perhaps the experience would have been more common if others had a definite shift in services once they were identified as gifted. While one student did express the impact of being in a self-contained gifted classroom in elementary and how enjoyable that was, the student did not voice frustration with what came prior to that positive experience. I wonder if more behavior problems would be evident in students who did not receive adequate challenge in school or were not given options to explore areas of interest. If the students were given a scale to rate certain classes and/or teachers for responsiveness to their needs, I wonder how many would score the class as highly responsive or only slightly so.

With their humble orientation, these students seemed satisfied with what they were offered in school, for the most part. Slight disengagement was voiced by one participant regarding middle school language arts options as simply a means of monitoring rather than challenging the students academically. Perhaps their humility of not being too needy was comingled with compliance to fit into the school culture and not be too different from the norm. Humility appears as a positive trait, while compliance may be self-limiting, restricting some possibilities that would be available for the students if they were more demanding.

I wonder about other gifted students who are not engaged in learning, underachieving in their gifted area. As a society I wonder if we value developing the capacity of gifted students or prefer to focus on standardization and conformity. If gifted students do not develop their abilities, society loses the contributions and leadership they might provide. Perhaps underachieving gifted students perceive school as unchallenging and not worth their effort. With authentic learning opportunities and more student-directed learning, underachievement might be reversed. Underachievement certainly is not limited to gifted students. All students might benefit from a more student-directed learning approach with choices to pursue areas of interest.

Caring support.

The participants in this study recognized the importance of support from others. Many mentioned the support they received from teachers who recognized their need for challenge in the curriculum or a faster pace of instruction. Many had experiences where a teacher recommended that they take a higher-level course with more academic challenge,

either in honors or Advanced Placement. In elementary, middle, and high school, they recognized how important it was to have school support and encouragement for more challenging work. In several instances, the students appreciated that a teacher demanded that they take the more rigorous course. Burgess commented, “I wanted to take a certain science course, but the teacher wouldn’t let me. She’s just like, ‘You’re too smart for this class.’ So she made me go to the normal class. She wanted me to take one that would be more challenging.”

In relation to the research question, caring support seems to relate to the students’ beliefs in their powers of agency. Knowing that they had the caring support of others seemed to empower the students and increase self-efficacy. Review of the literature and conceptual framework of human agency found several links between the concept of self-efficacy and support. Douglas (2004) found that when teachers help students examine academic choices tailored to their abilities and interests, the students were empowered. Kanevsky & Keighley (2003) found that caring teachers were essential for reversing underachievement and increasing motivation for complex learning opportunities that deepened understanding at an accelerated pace. Rote learning, memorization, watered-down curriculum, and repetition were factors associated with low motivation and boredom for gifted learners (Gallagher et al., 1997; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Giving students a voice in determining their learning experiences and pursuing areas of interest were found to be important for gifted learners (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999). Matthews (2006) found that building a classroom climate that developed a community of learners was important for reversing dropout rates of gifted students.

Having a caring teacher who would provide challenge was important, but also having resources within the school to expose them to other options was important. It mattered that they could go to a gifted resource teacher for support or to learn about other opportunities on how to get information on coursework or how to prepare for highly competitive colleges. Chauncey explained, “The gifted and talented teacher at our school offered ... independent studies and other things ... so that I could get into prestigious schools.” Support could be in the form of face-to-face meetings or in alerting the students to upcoming opportunities for leadership or outside-of-school events.

Within the school setting, participants also recognized the importance of a community of learners similar to themselves. This group of intellectual peers was helpful for challenge, competition, and support. Avery “met a bunch of new people kind of like me, a little more intelligent. I got a new friend base.” “You’re surrounded by people who are good at English, so I had to get used to it,” explained Emory. Chauncey acknowledged the importance of like-minded peers stating, “I had a group of peers, a group of people pushing me.” Survey results indicated that seeing other kids do better in writing was more motivating for their improvement than seeing the teacher demonstrate quality writing. Many also recognized that observing how other students improved their writing served as an example for improving their own writing. Students expressed enjoyment at working with like-minded peers in competitions such as debates or history projects. Whether working as part of a team or individually on similar tasks, the students recognized that having a community of learners supported them to reach higher levels.

The six participants also recognized the importance of parent or grandparent support. In the survey, the responses showed that students felt confident they had the support of the adults in their families. They could get parents or grandparents to help them with school-related tasks or talk with teachers. They valued the discussions parents had with them about issues related to school including course selection, potential for whole-grade acceleration, or their future direction for college and career. Understated, but evident, was that the support from parents and grandparents would be available at any time if it was needed. “My parents are a big part of it ... very influential in this,” declared Francis. Desi recognized the role of grandparents “who converse with the gifted teacher.” Parents would be called upon to help resolve issues with teachers over grades or course selection, but that was not often needed. Emory described a dispute with a history teacher when advocating for a change in grade: “After awhile it got resolved. I think my parents had to get involved, too.” Just knowing this support from parents and grandparents was available seemed to provide a strong sense of self-efficacy and empowerment for the students to be bold if they needed to talk to teachers.

A surprising result from the survey was that several students did not have adult family members telling them they were good at writing and one did not have teachers verbally acknowledging good writing. While these may seem unsupportive, perhaps it was interpreted by the students as opportunities for growth rather than criticism. I wonder what role praise plays versus recognition of effort or if a relationship exists between the level of self-efficacy and level of caring support from teachers, family members, or peers.

I wonder how training teachers to identify gifted students and providing strategies to differentiate instruction would affect students' self-efficacy.

Complexity of writing.

The data confirmed that writing is a complex task for the participants. The students valued writing skills and recognized that it required perseverance and continuous learning. Learning to become a good writer of persuasive arguments was also valued by the participants and they recognized it as an important genre taught in their schools. Students expressed a willingness to expend effort to improve their persuasive writing skills and that teachers had helped somewhat in that development. They also indicated the importance of relevant and interesting topics to motivate them in writing.

A review of the literature and examination of the conceptual framework of human agency shed additional light on the theme of the complexity of writing. McCutchen (1988) recognized writing as a complex, demanding task requiring many subprocesses and complex cognitive processing. Developing writing skills requires much practice and personal discipline over a long-term process (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). Pennebaker et al. (cited in Wade, 1995) found that writing tends to promote self-reflection and aids in examining broad perspectives. In relation to self-efficacy and agency, Pajares et al. (2007) found that self-awareness about writing skills helps students interpret their achievements in ways that increase self-efficacy and empowerment.

Relating the complexity of writing to the research question, a clear connection exists between complexity of writing and development of proficiency in persuasive writing. Midgette et al. (2007) suggested that persuasive writing is particularly difficult

because writers must anticipate counter arguments to adequately address and rebut them. Processing the requirements of writing to a prompt is complex, something at which the participants displayed high levels of competence. Learning to be a good writer is a long-term process that involves learning from others, particularly from like-minded peers. Participants indicated in survey responses that peers are a positive factor for improving their writing. Learning to write requires critical thinking and learning to write persuasively is particularly complex. It requires a coherent argument, examining multiple perspectives, and the ability to see a way to resolve conflict. Five out of six of the students in this study performed at a skilled (5) or excellent (6) level on the writing prompt, far above the national average for high school seniors where the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported only thirteen percent of 12th grade students were skilled in written arguments with only three percent rated excellent (NAEP, 1998). Participants expressed confidence in their ability to improve their writing and an awareness of their writing skills.

There was also an expression that writing is subjective. Whether one is considered a good writer depends on the reader and that reader's perspective. Grades are also subjective and the participants have not always believed they were good writers or received good grades in writing: "I feel like writing is a hard thing to be judged on because it's so personal," explained Burgess. "I honestly don't think I'm that good of a writer. It depends on what I'm writing ... on the reader." What students believe influences their academic choices (Bandura, 1989). These students had taken or were planning to take honors English or Advanced Placement English, indicating they believed

they could succeed at a high level of rigor in language arts. Awareness of their writing skill, coupled with their willingness to take risks, indicated that these students believe they are good writers and they want to continue to learn and be challenged in their writing: “I haven’t always been the best writer,” explained Chauncey. “That’s why I’m taking AP language this year, to get more writing. I want to get better as a writer.” Emory was less interested in writing before enrolling in honors English: “I wasn’t really into writing. I didn’t like it as much, but when I got into honors English, it seemed kind of easier because ... it fit me better. Normal English was really easy.”

Having interesting topics to choose from that were personally relevant seemed motivating to the students: “If it’s a good prompt, then it’s easy to take a stand,” declared Francis. “I enjoy writing persuasively if it’s about the right topics,” Avery explained. “If I’m not interested, I don’t really want to write about it. I don’t feel I’ve gotten many good topics in school. One was all about conflicts ... you got to pick a side and write about it. I found that one very enjoyable.”

One surprise found in the data was the lack of intentional teaching in the requirements of a sound persuasive argument. The students recognized it as an important genre, yet they seemed to have little deliberate instruction in how to frame a good persuasive argument. Burgess expressed that “support, explanation, [and] claims” were taught since elementary school and not much had changed over the years. Recognizing that these are essential parts of a persuasive argument is foundational, but I expected that students at the end of 10th grade would have a more developed understanding of persuasive writing. I wonder what level of proficiency would have been displayed in the

students' writing if they had explicit instruction in Wade's specific recommendations for teaching persuasive writing (1995) or whether such instruction would affect self-efficacy. I wonder what impact the state assessments might have on the teaching of persuasive argument. If persuasive writing was seen as vital for student success on the CSAP, then it one might think it would be taught more thoroughly in the schools.

Through the survey and interviews, students reflected on their progress and deficiencies in writing. Given the influence peers and self-competition seemed to have on these participants, I wonder what effect examining their own writing skills and setting goals and strategies to improve their writing as Hansen recommended (cited in Pajares et al., 2007) would have in improving their writing skills. Another surprise was the lack of writing to an authentic audience. As an adult, I often think of persuasive writing to call for action in community issues, politics, and in relation to environmental or global issues. Current events seem a prime candidate for authentic persuasive writing. Few of the students mentioned writing persuasively for public consumption. I wondered how much of their writing was solely for a teacher audience. If students had authentic audiences for their persuasive writing, perhaps it would be more motivating and the skill level might improve. Van Eemeren et al. (1995) expressed the belief that high schools should equip students with the ability to handle argumentative discourse to assess the arguments of others and develop their own position. This level of critical thinking is worthy of gifted students' effort, but I wonder how much instruction is given to students to help them handle argumentative discourse.

Gifted Voices Mosaic

Combining the voices of all participants in light of the global themes was part of the analysis of data. As neutrally and transparently as possible, this mosaic seeks to portray the lived experience of the gifted students.

Empowerment.

It kind of made me feel special
 When I heard that I was gifted
As Soon as I got into the gifted program
 I felt challenged
 I wanted to do actual work
 It was good
It's been a good thing for me
 Not to be held back
 Not on an average pace
It happened in fourth or fifth grade
 Before that there wasn't a program
I think I was identified in fourth or fifth grade
After they identified me as gifted
 It was easier for me to be challenged
I was put into more challenging classes
 It made things a lot more challenging for me
I think I was identified as gifted
 In first or second grade
 It was pretty early
I don't really remember
 When I was identified as gifted
It just showed up in the computer
 I came into the district as a new student in fifth grade
Which made it more interesting
 More fun
 More satisfactory
I think I was identified in elementary school
I was in a completely different classroom
 Than everyone else
There were a small number of us
 Who just went to a different classroom
We took higher level classes
 It was good
 It was a good experience

It was a lot more personal
 Because of the smaller numbers
One teacher who taught everything
 That was nice
I was always pretty good
 At everything in school
I felt confident
 In everything that I did
It hasn't really been extremely different
 So I don't really have any experiences
 I haven't had too many challenges
It started in middle school
 There was nothing to it
It's not anything
 From day to day
I have always been in higher classes
 Probably more than other students
In school
 I get a lot of opportunities
 Being gifted
More challenges
 That I can have
 Like being in advanced classes
I've been told I'm gifted in verbal
 Which I guess is more with languages and things
I don't remember much in elementary school
 It was more in middle school
It seems more in English
 I've been pulled out
I took honors English
 As a freshman
We'll do different projects
 Than the normal students
We'd read a different book
 Different book reports
 Different spelling
They were able to monitor you
We'd have the vocabulary
 That was different
 From the vocab that regular students had
I was put in
 Advanced math and science
In middle school
 I was in advanced math

I've had a little bit more opportunities
 Than a normal kid
Not as big in high school
 Because there are a lot more
There are a lot of gifted students
You take honors classes
 And a lot of those kids are gifted
 But a lot are just ones that try harder
As gifted in high school
 I don't think I've gotten any specific experiences
The only thing that I've done in high school
 So far
That could be considered gifted
 Is this
Sometimes I feel
 We should offer more stuff
To the kids who try hard
 But aren't identified as gifted
 That might help them too
I've gotten to do things
 Go on field trips
 Given a lot of advantages
I took a Mind Works class
 That was open to everybody
Next year I'm doing this EFE thing
 Where you can do outside of school studies
So that's a really cool thing
 For me to be able to do
 Being gifted
I like being gifted
 I think it's definitely a good thing
Some people may say that it's not
 Because you have to set the bar higher
 For yourself
That means it's harder
 To meet the bar
You have to push yourself harder
 Than other students may
Although in other areas
 It could be easier
 Because things come to you easier
It has been good to push myself
 Educationally
I think it's definitely a beneficial thing

I've always been pretty content
 With the options they've given me
 To do things
Not always with the main focus of things
 But always with the options they gave me
 To present the main focus
So I've never felt it necessary to
 Go out and say
 I need a whole new topic
As one individual in hundreds
 That's not a good way
 To go about it
I've never personally gotten up
 And said I need this
 Or anything else
I haven't asked
 For any kind of differentiation
I guess if I really felt
 That I could do something more
 I would ask
But I haven't felt that yet
I haven't had much to advocate for
It wasn't ever
 Yeah, I'm bored
 I honestly haven't done that much of it
Not a whole lot
 I guess advocating for myself
I guess
 I've never really gotten to the point
 Where I needed to do that
I've always felt
 I've had enough options
 To find a good way to present
I think advocating is an important skill
I wasn't very good at it
 For a long time
I would just say I want this
 Not a very good way of approaching it
You have to present more than just I want it
 You have to present why you want it
 Why it's good for you
It's important to know it's a work
 You have to be working toward it
Being gifted

Has never really influenced me
I guess I'm not a very needy person
Yeah, I'm gifted and people recognize that
A lot of people
Don't make a point of
Oh, ___'s really smart
Some people will say that
It can get annoying
It doesn't seem much different
Than other students
Who aren't gifted
So not all that many things have happened
I think it's going to change
I got my Advanced Learning Plan
I think that will influence next year
And the years to come
I think it's definitely a good thing
I think it will definitely help me
In my future
I think being gifted and talented
Is helping me get there
Helping me get the opportunities
That I need to get there

Engagement.

I definitely pushed myself a lot more
Took a lot harder classes
To make sure I was doing
All that I could
To be my personal best
Get the best experience I can out of school
As soon as I got to be gifted
They gave me problems
I had to actually think
And learn
Things like that
I found it much more enjoyable
Much easier to do
To focus on
Really get it down
That was the subject
Where I liked being gifted
Math

Where I felt the most challenge
When I was in that [other] group
Then I felt almost bored
Then I didn't really want to get into any assignments
Then it was hard to focus
I ended up just goofing off
Not paying attention
Apathetic
Watching other kids struggle
With things I found easy
As soon as I got into the gifted program
It helped a lot
In my motivation
School became easier in some areas
Harder in others
Schoolwork became easier to do
Harder to think about
Easier to want to do
Harder to actually put my mind to
Overall a better experience
After I was identified as gifted
Math really affected me
In average math class
I was breezing by
It was unbelievably easy for me
To do the things that other people struggled with
I did get the option
To do upper level math
That was advocating for myself
When I chose to do that in seventh grade
I went to algebra instead of
Whatever regular was
I was given the option
But I accepted it
I'm really good at math
I enjoyed being pushed in math
Taking hard classes
It's not too bad
Just as long as I keep up with my work
It's fine
I like pushing myself
Trying to be the best I can be
Education is important to me
I was in normal English

For the first semester of this year
I transferred to honors
I've finally gotten used to writing
I definitely think honors English
Fit me better
Normal English was really easy
I already knew everything
The teacher was teaching
So it was just like practice
You have to set the bar higher
For yourself
That means it's harder
To meet the bar
You have to push yourself harder
It's definitely a beneficial thing
It has been good to push myself educationally
Taking the initiative to do the EFE classes
That's kind of for my future, too
Being gifted I can do that
I'm going to the elementary school
Helping with the music classes
I'd like to do music in college
That was my idea
Something that would help me
In the future
I think you only get that opportunity
If you're gifted
In middle school
I definitely pushed myself
We did history day
We could choose to do the normal lesson
Or independently work on history day
I did that for two years
That was a cool experience
To go do the competition
We actually ended up doing really good
In our group
That was something a lot different
Than what everyone else was doing
So that was cool
Something I chose to do
The last two years
I've taken harder classes
Than most of my friends

I took AP Euro
I'm taking AP language this year
 To get a lot more writing
I'm going to take a lot more writing classes
 I want to get better as a writer
That's why I decided to do this prompt
 Just to make sure
 I'm keeping my writing fresh
I could have chosen not to write at all
 I think it's good to always be writing
You will always be getting better
 As long as you are still writing
I've always pushed myself
 Chosen to take the harder choice
 Rather than the easy way out
I signed up for honors civics
After I took history in middle school
 I felt like history is pretty easy
Civics is way different than that
 But when it came to the final
 I got an A
There are always opportunities
 That I've missed out on
 Need to push myself more this year
I just work really hard
 And care a lot about school
It's my number one priority
 Always
There could be a lot more gifted students
 At our school
But some people are just lazy
 Get caught up with high school
 I think they are missing out
There are a lot of other aspects of my life
 Like sports
 And friends
But school is always number one for me
The classes that I take
 That are advanced
Once you get into them
 You have to work hard
But it's worth it
 Because you are a year ahead
Then you can take AP classes

Which can count as college credits
I felt like I was actually doing things
That were going to help me
So there are definitely some advantages

Caring support.

The gifted teacher
Has always said
If I had any classes that weren't really challenging
To come to her
I could always go to the gifted teacher
Be like, this isn't challenging me enough
In middle school
The gifted teacher would always
Have something to do
You can always go to the teacher
Before or after school
Just to clarify stuff
Or talk about your choices
I think teachers are very open
To helping you improve
Your writing
I think that's a big help
I've been given a lot of advantages
A lot of advice
That most students haven't received
From her or other teachers
It will help me toward the future
I feel like it's been pretty easy
To talk to all of my teachers
Teachers are pretty good
At identifying
If they feel you are gifted
And feel that you can handle it
It's not hard to speak up
If you do it at the end of class
Some teachers
They just don't get some things
I had a history teacher
Who just wasn't good with the students
The gifted and talented teacher at our school
Offered independent studies
Other things for our school

So that I can get into prestigious schools
My language arts teacher has been awesome
She has pushed me to get better
In writing
She pushed me into AP language
There is going to be a lot of writing
I'm nervous
But I think it's going to be
A really good decision for me
I wanted to take a certain science course
But the teacher wouldn't let me
She's just like
You're too smart for this class
So she made me go to the normal class
She wanted me to take one
That would be more challenging
The teacher was really proud of me
I got to speak in front of students
It really made me feel good
To know that I was good at writing
It felt good to be recognized
Rather than just writing
Getting a grade on it
Putting it back in my backpack
It felt good
To be recognized
I had to speak out about that
I wasn't going to let him
Count it as a zero
Because I didn't cheat at all
After awhile it got resolved
I think my parents had to get involved, too
So I had to
Kind of
Speak out about that
Sometimes it is scary
To advocate with adults
Because you feel they know more than you
But you don't want just
To be pushed over like that
So it can be scary
But not too hard
My teacher mentioned honors English to me
Then I talked to my parents about it

Then I decided we should do that
My parents have definitely advocated for me
 In a lot of these areas
 They've helped me a lot
So my parents are a big part of it
 Very influential in this
My grandmother is a very good writer
 So I always go to her
 If I need any help
My grandparents do a lot of that
 They really are the people
 Who converse with the gifted teacher
They asked me to skip a grade in fourth grade
 But me and my parents talked about it
 And we decided not to
So that was kind of our decision
 And probably a good decision
I'd already read the book
 That wasn't too hard
 To ask to do a different thing
Because we just said
 We've already read that
Because there was a little group of students
 So I was able to do a different assignment
I can definitely speak up for myself
 With other students
 Advocate for my own point of view
 I'm not afraid to do that
There's always competitions and everything
 You can't help that
 That's always good, too
We had to write out what we were going to say
 My team creamed the other team
It was great
 I've always enjoyed it
A trip to Costa Rica
 With a bunch of students
 Would be fun
Because of everyone else
You're surrounded by people
 Who are good at English
I got a new friend base
 I had a group of peers
 A group of people pushing me

I had a bunch of new people
A little more intelligent
Kind of like me

Complexity of Writing.

I haven't always been the best writer
I honestly don't think
I'm that good of a writer
I wasn't really into writing
I didn't really like it as much
I didn't really enjoy writing
In elementary school
Half-way through middle school
It wasn't one of my top subjects
Didn't really focus on it
Didn't want to work on it
I've never been the creative
Sit down and write type
But I've always enjoyed writing
People tell me I'm a good writer
I've never gotten a bad grade
On a writing assignment
I don't write a whole lot
In my free time
I write a little bit
Like in a journal or something
I wouldn't write an essay on my own
Those are things I do in school
I like writing
Definitely
I like writing
Sometimes it's a chore
Depending on the prompt
If it's a good prompt
Then it's easy to take a stand
Write about something
Especially when it's something
That you're passionate about
Something you find interesting
But when it's not
Then it can be a chore
After I got some interesting topics

To write about
 To think about
I found it a lot more enjoyable
I started to work on it a little more
 Actually think about it
 I grew to like it
I think it depends on what I'm writing
 It's a very subjective subject
I think you can
 Give your writing to anybody
And then it depends on the person
 How they feel about writing
Writing is a hard thing
 To be judged on
 Because it's so personal
My first interesting topic was in fifth grade
 Before I wasn't really interested in writing
But this was one of the things
 That gave me a little hope
 For writing
I wrote an essay on the Iditarod
 I was really interested in it at the time
It ended up a five page essay
After I wrote it
 It really made me feel good
 To know that I was good at writing
Even if I didn't find it as great
 As everyone else did
After that, if I got a topic I was interested in
 I could write for days about it
Ever since middle school
 I've always been able to write
I've never had the writer's block
 You give me a prompt
 And I'll just write
I heard that in college
 You have to write a lot
 So it's good to get that experience
I like persuasive
 It's good to be able to take a stand
 Write about something impartially
But I haven't done a lot of persuasive writing
 A good amount
Just whatever they give in school

But not on my own
In eighth grade
 We did a lot of persuasive writing
Middle school
 That was where we really focused on it
 I've definitely gotten better at it
I really enjoyed taking a stand
 One way or the other
 Trying to prove my point
There are always persuasive essays
 No matter what class you are taking
It's one of the biggest prompts every year
 Persuasive
I've written persuasively a lot
 It's a big school thing
They want us to know how to do it
 It's really important
We write a lot more persuasive writing
Through practice
 I've gotten better at it
 It's still something I need to work on
I have had to write
 A few essays about that
 Like abortion and stuff
 Eating disorders
 Essays like that
I did it more in middle school
In high school
 It's more like informational
 More like a report
I've had a little bit of instruction
 To make it better
It's pretty much the same thing
 You know, support, explanation, claims
But it's been the same kind of process
 Since elementary school
I've had some specific training
 In persuasive writing
This year we read
 Helping ideas
Things you can do to make
 Persuasive writing better
 In formatting
 Stuff like that

Which I've had before
 I guess it wasn't too in depth
 But it helped
I definitely feel that I've had guidance
 To help me improve
 With most of my essays
We haven't really done much of it in high school
 I've always been able to incorporate a little bit
If they give you a prompt
 You need to prove your point
I've always put it in there
I enjoy writing persuasively
 If it's about the right topics
 If I'm really interested in it
It's a big thing for me
 If I'm not interested
 I don't really want to write about it
 It's hard to
I don't feel I've gotten many good topics in school
 The few I have
 Are very good
Persuasive writing is good
 I like it
One paper was all about conflicts
 Things that were public
 That everyone was talking about
You got to pick a side and write about it
I found that one very enjoyable
 Because I got to choose my topic
 I got to investigate all the sides
That was my favorite
I've always liked persuasive writing
 I've always been good at it
I've never gotten any negative feedback
 From my writing
I really enjoy putting my word out there
We had this thing
 In eighth grade
 That was like a debate
We had to write out what we were going to say
My team creamed the other team
 It was great
 I've always enjoyed it
It's kind of easier to have an opinion

Rather than be unbiased
Just writing something about facts
I like it more
Usually I'm on the more popular stand
We did this sport essay
A quote about how sports are good
It said, do you agree or disagree
I tried to disagree
Because I kind of believed it
But I wanted to do something different
It was kind of hard
I think it's definitely easier
To go with the opinion that is more popular
I've had a couple interesting prompts
I thought the one that we did
For the writing assessment was different
Some of the CSAP ones
Are just funny
There was this one
You had to convince the company
To preserve some of the wildlife
I just think
They pick kind of weird topics sometimes
When I got into honors English
It seemed kind of easier
I feel like
I'm getting better at doing it
To let people know what I'm good at
I want to be a journalist
When I grow up
I've always wanted to be a sports journalist
Because I love sports
I think it would be a really cool experience
I love reading sports articles
I think it would be so cool
To do something like that
That's my biggest ambition
That's why I'm taking AP language
I want to get better as a writer
I could have chosen
Not to write at all
But I think it's good to always be writing
Because you will always be getting better
As long as you are still writing

I know writing will take me places
It's definitely good
To be able to express yourself in writing

Recommendations for Future Research and Educational Practices

Self-efficacy and powers of human agency are closely tied to students' willingness to persevere, expend effort, and set higher goals (Bandura & Schunk, Schunk, and Zimmerman, all cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). These factors are also related to higher cognitive and metacognitive functioning (Berry, cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005). Future researchers might examine the relationship between students' self-efficacy, setting high goals, and taking rigorous courses. Studying levels of agency relative to persuasive writing proficiency among students from low socio-economic backgrounds, English language learners, or minority students would also be worth exploring. Comparing the level of self-efficacy in students who are proficient and those who are not proficient in persuasive writing would also be interesting. This could be examined for gifted students and non-gifted students.

Many opportunities for further research are related to student engagement. Research could focus on agency in elementary students to determine if self-efficacy is present when students are not provided with options to self-select challenging courses as they are in high school. Researchers could examine agency in gifted males in relation to motivation or behavior issues. Kerr and Cohn (2001) found that when gifted boys are appropriately challenged, underachievement often ends. A relationship may also exist between diagnosis of ADHD in boys and gifted abilities (Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005). Future research might examine the relationship between

ADHD, gifted abilities, and agency. Another area to explore might be students' perception of responsiveness of the classroom to their academic needs in relation to level of engagement. This could also be explored in relation to self-efficacy. Comparing the use of authentic learning opportunities and student-directed learning versus more teacher-directed could examine levels of student engagement. Examining engagement in schools with high minority populations or students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds might find that student-directed learning increased engagement and academic performance. Further research could investigate the engagement of gifted students in schools where few options are available for challenging coursework such as rural schools or schools highly impacted by low funding.

Several opportunities for further study relate to caring support. Research could focus on the relationship between praise from adults for writing competency compared to recognition of effort for improvement in writing skills. Another study might examine the relationship between level of self-efficacy and the level of caring support received from teachers, family members, and peers. Further research could examine if student self-efficacy is affected when teachers receive professional development in gifted identification and differentiation strategies. Related to this, a study might examine the level of expectation from administrators for differentiation to meet individual students' needs and how those expectations impact student self-efficacy.

Several questions arose that would investigate the complexity of writing. Would intentional learning and reflection on progress rather than deficiencies in writing be evident in students setting increasingly higher personal goals and revealing high self-

efficacy? Through direct instruction in all aspects of persuasive argument including: defining a problem, examining evidence, analyzing assumptions and biases, avoiding emotional reasoning, avoiding oversimplification, considering alternate interpretations, and tolerating uncertainty (Wade, 1995), would students show increased rates of self-efficacy and empowerment? What level of empowerment would be evident if students in elementary schools were taught skills in self-advocacy? Would such skill training result in students accepting higher-level challenges, expending more effort, and setting higher goals for their future? Would writing to authentic audiences increase motivation or improve proficiency in persuasive writing? If students are taught specific strategies to understand argumentative discourse, would their proficiency in persuasive writing improve? Would other areas of writing improve as well? Further research combining identified gifted students' self-efficacy to get their needs met in school and objective measures of empowerment such as taking rigorous courses, setting higher goals for grades, or planning for a challenging career in area of giftedness is needed to determine if there is a strong relationship with gifted students' proficiency in persuasive writing and their powers of agency to get their gifted needs met in school.

Conclusion

This study examined the research question: What is the relationship between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and those students' beliefs about their own powers of agency? The results showed that the students had a sense of empowerment through their identification as gifted individuals and the resulting challenges and opportunities they received in their education. The power of

agency to affect their educational options was rarely overt in deliberate confrontations with educators or demanding differentiated instruction. It was more subtle in speaking with teachers about options, requesting alternate assignments, selecting more challenging coursework, or seeking out the gifted teacher for guidance.

The students had strong beliefs in their abilities to be good writers and they demonstrated their ability in their responses to the writing prompt. The survey responses supported the students' beliefs about their powers of agency and self-efficacy in writing, corresponding to the level of effort they were willing to expend and the level of challenge they were willing to accept. Setting high goals for their school experiences and for the future also indicated a high level of self-efficacy because what students believe influences their choices for accepting rigorous challenges.

Knowing they had support in the form of caring teachers, parents, grandparents, and like-minded peers mattered to these students. They enjoyed competitions and learning from peers. They appreciated that teachers, parents, and grandparents were there to support when needed, to discuss important choices with them, and to guide them toward higher levels of challenge both now and in the future. Knowing these caring people had their back provided a foundational support so the students could focus on being their best and working up to their potential.

While the data collected in this study suggests a relationship exists between identified gifted high school students' proficiency in persuasive writing and their own powers of agency, the findings express the experiences of only six students. The meanings they ascribe to those experiences and their voices indicate they believe in their

powers to affect their education. The method of expressing that power may be subtle, but it is evident. Willingness to accept challenges, to relish challenges, and to seek them out is an expression of empowerment.

This study was limited by the small number of participants and their educational backgrounds. All students came from a mid-sized suburban school district in Colorado, and five of the six participants were female. The results of the study cannot be generalized to other public schools, private schools, or those who are home schooled. This study examines the persuasive writing proficiency of 10th grade gifted students; the results cannot be generalized to students in other grade levels, or to other genres of writing.

Despite these limitations, the results shed light on the potential that proficiency in persuasive writing may have on gifted students' powers of agency to get their academic needs met. Recommendations for future research and educational practices articulate some of the lessons learned through this study of the phenomenon of the essence of the experience of gifted high school students, their proficiency in persuasive writing, and their perceived agency to have their educational needs met in school. It was a privilege to listen to the voices of these gifted students and to provide a venue where their voices might be heard.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Students were interviewed one-on-one after completing the written survey and responding to written prompt. The following standardized questions were asked of all interview participants.

1. Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.
2. Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.
3. Tell me about your experiences as a writer.
4. Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.
5. Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.
6. Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.
7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being gifted, being a writer, or self-advocating for your needs?

Appendix B: Student Survey

Student Code # _____ Date _____

Score the following items on a scale of 1-definitely false to 6-definitely true.

Enlisting Social Resources

1. I can get teachers to help me when I get stuck on schoolwork.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
2. I can get another student to help me when I get stuck on schoolwork.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
3. I can get adults to help me when I have social problems,
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
4. I can get a friend to help me when I have social problems.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

Meet Others' Expectations

5. I feel/think I can meet my parents' expectations.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
6. I feel/think I can meet my teachers' expectations.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
7. I feel/think I can meet my peers' expectations.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
8. I feel/think I can meet my expectations of myself.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

Self-Assertive Efficacy

9. I can express my opinions when other classmates disagree with me.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
10. I can stand up for myself when I feel I am being treated unfairly.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
11. I can deal with situations where others are annoying me or hurting my feelings.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
12. I can stand firm to someone who is asking me to do something unreasonable or inconvenient.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

Enlisting Parental and Community Support

13. I can get my parent(s) to help me with a problem.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
14. I can get my brother(s) and/or sister(s) to help me with a problem.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
15. I can get my parents to take part in school activities.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
16. I can get people outside the school to take an interest in my school (community groups, churches).
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

Writing Self-efficacy

17. I make excellent grades on writing tests.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
18. I have always been successful with writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

19. Even when I study very hard, I do poorly in writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
20. I got good grades in writing on my last report card.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
21. I do well on writing assignments.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
22. I do well on even the most difficult writing assignments.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
23. Seeing adults do well in writing pushes me to do better.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
24. When I see how my writing teacher demonstrates quality writing, I can picture myself writing in the same way.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
25. Seeing kids do better than me in writing pushes me to do better.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
26. When I see how another student improves his/her writing, I can see myself improving my writing in the same way.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
27. I imagine myself working through challenging writing assignments successfully.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
28. I compete with myself in writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
29. My writing teachers have told that I am good at writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

30. People have told me that I have a talent for writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
31. Adults in my family have told me what a good writing student I am.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
32. I have been praised for my ability in writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
33. Other students have told me that I'm good at writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
34. My classmates like to work with me in writing because they think I'm good at it.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
35. Just being in writing class makes feel stressed and nervous.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
36. Writing assignments take all of my energy.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
37. I start to feel stressed-out as soon as I begin my writing assignments.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
38. My mind goes blank and I am unable to think clearly when doing writing assignments.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
39. I get depressed when I think about learning writing.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True
40. My whole body becomes tense when I have to write.
Definitely False 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6 Definitely True

Gender

41. Please indicate your gender.

1 Male

2 Female

Appendix C: Bandura's Multidimensional Scales of Perceived Self-Efficacy

Choi, Fuqua, & Griffin (2001)

Rate the following questions on a scale on 1-not well at all to 7-very well.

Enlisting Social Resources

1. How well can you get teachers to help you when you get stuck on schoolwork?
2. How well can you get another student to help you when you get stuck on schoolwork?
3. How well can you get adults to help you when you have social problems?
4. How well can you get a friend to help you when you have social problems?

Academic Achievement

5. How well can you learn general mathematics?
6. How well can you learn algebra?
7. How well can you learn science?
8. How well can you learn biology?
9. How well can you learn reading and writing language skills?
10. How well can you learn to use computers?
11. How well can you learn a foreign language?
12. How well can you learn social studies?
13. How well can you learn English grammar?

Self-Regulated Learning

14. How well can you finish homework assignments by deadlines?
15. How well can you study when there are other interesting things to do?
16. How well can you concentrate on school subjects?

17. How well can you take class notes of class instruction?
18. How well can you use the library to get information for class assignments?
19. How well can you plan your school work?
20. How well can you organize your school work?
21. How well can you remember information presented in class and textbooks?
22. How well can you arrange a place to study without distractions?
23. How well can you motivate yourself to do school work?
24. How well can you participate in class discussions?

Leisure-Time Skill and Extracurricular Activities

25. How well can you learn sports skills?
26. How well can you learn dance skills?
27. How well can you learn music skills?
28. How well can you do the kinds of things that are needed to work on the school newspaper?
29. How well can you do the kinds of things needed to be a member of the school government?
30. How well can you do the kinds of things needed to take part in school plays?
31. How well can you do regular physical education activities?
32. How well can you learn the skills needed for team sports (for example, basketball, volleyball, swimming, football, soccer)?

Self-Regulatory Efficacy to Resist Peer Pressure

33. How well can you resist peer pressure to do things in school that can get you into trouble?
34. How well can you stop yourself from skipping school when you feel bored or upset?

35. How well can you resist peer pressure to smoke cigarettes?
36. How well can you resist peer pressure to drink beer, wine, or liquor?
37. How well can you resist peer pressure to smoke marijuana?
38. How well can you resist peer pressure to use pills (uppers, downers)?
39. How well can you resist peer pressure to use crack?
40. How well can you resist pressure to have sexual intercourse?
41. How well can you control your temper?

Meet Others' Expectations

42. How well can you live up to what your parents expect of you?
43. How well can you live up to what your teachers expect of you?
44. How well can you live up to what your peers expect of you?
45. How well can you live up to what you expect of yourself?

Social Self-Efficacy

46. How well can you make and keep friends of the opposite sex?
47. How well can you make and keep friends of the same sex?
48. How well can you carry on conversations with others?
49. How well can you work in a group?

Self-Assertive Efficacy

50. How well can you express your opinions when other classmates disagree with you?
51. How well can you stand up for yourself when you feel you are being treated unfairly?

52. How well can you deal with situations where others are annoying you or hurting your feelings?
53. How well can you stand firm to someone who is asking you to do something unreasonable or inconvenient?

Enlisting Parental and Community Support

54. How much can you get your parent(s) to help you with a problem?
55. How well can you get your brother(s) and sister(s) to help you with a problem?
56. How well can you get your parents to take part in school activities?
57. How well can you get people outside the school to take an interest in your school (community groups, churches)?

Appendix D: Sources of Middle School Mathematics Self-efficacy Scale

Usher & Pajares (2009)

Score the following items on a scale of 1-definitely false to 6-definitely true.

1. I make excellent grades on math tests
2. I have always been successful with math
3. Even when I study very hard, I do poorly in math
4. I got good grades in math on my last report card
5. I do well on math assignments
6. I do well on even the most difficult math assignments
7. Seeing adults do well in math pushes me to do better
8. When I see how my math teacher solves a problem, I can picture myself solving the problem in the same way
9. Seeing kids do better than me in math pushes me to do better
10. When I see how another student solves a math problem, I can see myself solving the problem in the same way
11. I imagine myself working through challenging math problems successfully
12. I compete with myself in math
13. My math teachers have told that I am good at learning math
14. People have told me that I have a talent for math
15. Adults in my family have told me what a good math student I am
16. I have been praised for my ability in math
17. Other students have told me that I'm good at learning math

18. My classmates like to work with me in math because they think I'm good at it
19. Just being in math class makes feel stressed and nervous
20. Doing math work takes all of my energy
21. I start to feel stressed-out as soon as I begin my math work
22. My mind goes blank and I am unable to think clearly when doing math work
23. I get depressed when I think about learning math
24. My whole body becomes tense when I have to do math

**Appendix E: National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) 1998 Writing
Assessment**

Sample Persuasive Writing Prompt—Grade 12

National Center for Education Statistics. (1998, p. 166)

One Vote

Your school is sponsoring a voter registration drive for 18-year-old high school students. You and three of your friends are talking about the project. Your friends say the following.

Friend 1: “I’m working on the young voters’ registration drive. Are you going to come to it and register? You’re all 18, so you can do it. We’re trying to help increase the number of young people who vote and it shouldn’t be too hard — I read that the percentage of 18- to 20-year-olds who vote increased in recent years. We want that percentage to keep going up.”

Friend 2: “I’ll be there. People should vote as soon as they turn 18. It’s one of the responsibilities of living in a democracy.”

Friend 3: “I don’t know if people should even bother to register. One vote in an election isn’t going to change anything.”

Do you agree with friend 2 or 3? Write a response to your friends in which you explain whether you will or will not register to vote. Be sure to explain why and support your position with examples from your reading or experience. Try to convince the friend with whom you disagree that your position is the right one.

Appendix F: National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) 1998 Writing

Assessment

Twelfth-Grade Persuasive Writing Scoring Guide

National Center for Education Statistics. (1998, p. 145)

1. Unsatisfactory Response (may be characterized by one or more of the following)
 - Attempts to take a position (addresses topic), but position is very unclear OR takes a position, but provides minimal or no support; may only paraphrase the prompt.
 - Exhibits little or no apparent organization.
 - Minimal or no control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; word choice may be inaccurate in much or all of the response.
 - Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation severely impede understanding across the response.
2. Insufficient Response (may be characterized by one or more of the following)
 - Takes a position but response is very undeveloped.
 - Is disorganized or unfocused in much of the response OR clear but very brief.
 - Minimal control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; word choice may often be inaccurate.
 - Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation interfere with understanding in much of the response.
3. Uneven Response (may be characterized by one or more of the following)
 - Takes a position and provides uneven support; may lack development in parts or be repetitive OR response is no more than a well-written beginning.
 - Is organized in parts of the response; other parts are disjointed and/or lack transitions.
 - Exhibits uneven control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; may exhibit some inaccurate word choices.

- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation sometimes interfere with understanding.
4. Sufficient Response
- Takes a clear position and supports it with some pertinent reasons and/or examples; there is some development.
 - Is generally organized, but has few or no transitions among parts.
 - Sentence structure may be simple and unvaried; word choice is mostly accurate.
 - Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not interfere with understanding.
5. Skillful Response
- Takes a clear position and supports it with pertinent reasons and/or examples through much of the response.
 - Is well organized, but may lack some transitions.
 - Exhibits some variety in sentence structure and uses good word choice; occasionally, words may be used inaccurately.
 - Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not interfere with understanding.
6. Excellent Response
- Takes a clear position and supports it consistently with well-chosen reasons and/or examples; may use persuasive strategy to convey an argument.
 - Is focused and well organized, with effective use of transitions.
 - Consistently exhibits variety in sentence structure and precision in word choice.
 - Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation are few and do not interfere with understanding.

Appendix G: Data Analysis Organizer

Mears (2009)

Narrators	Narrator A	Narrator B	Narrator C	Narrator D	Narrator E	Narrator F
Themes or patterns						
Theme 1						
Theme 2						
Theme 3						
Theme 4						
Theme 5						

Appendix H: Principal's Cover Letter

Date

Dear Parents:

Your child has been selected to participate in a doctoral research study that will investigate gifted students' perceptions of self-advocacy and their proficiency in persuasive writing. The study is conducted by Facilitator of Gifted Education, Susan Anderson, as the culminating project of her Ph.D. at the University of Denver. The enclosed Parental Consent Form and Student Assent Form give more details on what the study will involve and where you may get additional information if you have questions.

As a District, we are interested in students' self-advocacy and particularly interested in whether gifted students' self-advocacy is expressed within our school. If you are willing to allow your child to participate in the study, I encourage you to review the enclosed documents, sign the consent form, and have your child sign the assent form. Once signed, please return the forms to Susan in the enclosed stamped envelope.

I anticipate that the research for this study can be completed in one advisory class for the survey and writing prompt portions, with perhaps one additional advisory class needed for interviews. Students who participate in this study will not miss any of their content courses and their grades will not be affected whether they agree to participate in the study or not. Of course, the more students who do participate, the more valid the results are likely to be.

If you have questions for me regarding this study, feel free to contact me. You may also contact Susan Anderson at 757-1546 or sanderson@lewispalmer.org.

Sincerely,

Principal

Appendix I: Parental Consent Form

GIFTED VOICES: A STUDY OF GIFTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN PERSUASIVE WRITING AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL AGENCY

Your child has been selected to participate in a study that will investigate gifted students' perceptions of self-advocacy and proficiency in persuasive writing. Perceptions of personal agency can be expressed as the ability to self-advocate, produce desired outcomes in personal and academic situations, and may motivate students to persevere even when academically challenged. Students will be asked to complete a survey reflecting on their self-advocacy and their proficiency in persuasive writing and write a response to a persuasive writing prompt. In addition, some students will be interviewed. An audio recording will be made of the interviews. All data will remain confidential, and students' responses will not be attributed to them by name. Once the research study is completed, the data will be shredded and destroyed. It is expected that this study will conclude before August 2010. The study is conducted by Susan Anderson as part of a doctoral research project. Results will be used to examine if a relationship exists between gifted students' self-advocacy and their proficiency in persuasive writing. Susan can be reached at (719) 757-1546 or sanderson@lewispalmer.org. You may also contact Dr. Linda Brookhart, dissertation committee chair, at (303) 871-2973 or linda.brookhart@du.edu. This consent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on November 10, 2009.

Participation in this study should take no more than 60-90 minutes of your child's class time at school. Participation will involve responding to forty-one questions about self-advocacy and writing, responding to a writing prompt, and for some students, an interview. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, your child experiences discomfort, she or he may discontinue participation at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Students' grades will not be affected by participation or refusal to participate in this study.

Your child's responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify him/her. This is done to protect the confidentiality of responses. Only the researcher will have access to individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, 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 or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that 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.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you or your child were treated during the survey, written response, or interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of

Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820. You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

Parental Consent Form

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called GIFTED VOICES: A STUDY OF GIFTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN PERSUASIVE WRITING AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL AGENCY. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to allow my child 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.

Parent's Printed Name _____

Parent's Signature _____

Date _____

Child's Name _____

_____ I agree to allow my child to be audiotaped.

_____ I do not agree to allow my child to be audiotaped.

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 J: Student Assent Form

GIFTED VOICES: A STUDY OF GIFTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN PERSUASIVE WRITING AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL AGENCY

You have been selected to participate in a study that will investigate gifted students' perceptions of self-advocacy and proficiency in persuasive writing. Perceptions of personal agency can be expressed as the ability to self-advocate, produce desired outcomes in personal and academic situations, and may motivate students to persevere even when academically challenged. You will be asked to complete a survey reflecting on self-advocacy and your proficiency in persuasive writing and write a response to a persuasive writing prompt. In addition, some students will be interviewed. An audio recording will be made of the interviews. All data will remain confidential, and students' responses will not be attributed to them by name. The study is conducted by Susan Anderson as part of a doctoral research project. Results will be used to examine if a relationship exists between students' self-advocacy and their proficiency in persuasive writing. Susan can be reached at (719) 757-1546 or sanderson@lewispalmer.org. You may also contact Dr. Linda Brookhart, dissertation committee chair, at (303) 871-2973 or linda.brookhart@du.edu. This assent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on November 10, 2009.

Participation in this study should take about 60-90 minutes of your time, during class time at school. Participation will involve responding to forty-one questions about self-advocacy and writing. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort, you may discontinue participation at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Students' grades will not be affected by participation or refusal to participate in this study.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, 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 or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that 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.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the survey, writing response, or interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

Student Assent Form

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called GIFTED VOICES: A STUDY OF GIFTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN PERSUASIVE WRITING AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL AGENCY. 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 assent at any time. I have received a copy of this assent form.

Student's Printed Name _____

Student's Signature _____

Date _____

I agree to be audiotaped.

I do not agree to be audiotaped.

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 K: Gifted Voices

Below are the individual poetic displays of the student interviews with the interview questions and assigned pseudonyms.

Avery

Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.

It has been a good thing for me
 Not to be held back
 Not on an average pace
When I was in that group
 Then I felt almost bored
 Then I didn't really want to get into any assignments
 Then it was hard to focus
I ended up just goofing off
 Not paying attention
 Apathetic
 Watching other kids struggle with things I found easy
As soon as I got into the gifted program
 I felt challenged
 I wanted to do actual work
It was good
 It happened in fourth or fifth grade
 Before that there wasn't a program
It helped a lot
 In my motivation

Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.

School became easier in some areas
 Harder in others
I met a bunch of new people
 Kind of like me
 A little more intelligent
 I got a new friend base
Schoolwork became easier to do
 Harder to think about
 Easier to want to do
 Harder to actually put my mind to
Overall a better experience
 After I was identified as gifted

Math really affected me
 In average math class
 I was breezing by
 It was unbelievably easy for me
 To do the things that other people struggled with
As soon as I got to be gifted
 They gave me problems
 I had to actually think
 And learn
Things like that
I found it much more enjoyable
 Much easier to do
 To focus on
 Really get it down
That was the subject
 Where I liked being gifted
 Math
 Where I felt the most challenge

Tell me about your experiences as a writer.

I didn't really enjoy writing
 In elementary school
 Half-way through middle school
It wasn't one of my top subjects
 I left it by the wayside
 Didn't really focus on it
 Didn't want to work on it
After I got some interesting topics
 To write about
 To think about
I found it a lot more enjoyable
 I started to work on it a little more
 Actually think about it
I grew to like it
 I'm trying to become a good writer
My first interesting topic was in fifth grade
 Before I wasn't really interested in writing
 But this was one of the things that
 Gave me a little hope
 For writing
I wrote an essay on the Iditarod
 I was really interested in at the time

It ended up a five-page essay
The teacher was really proud of me
I got to speak in front of students
After I wrote it
It really made me feel good
To know that I was good at writing
Even if I didn't find it as great
As everyone else did
After that, if I got a topic I was interested in
I could write for days about it
It felt good to be recognized
Rather than just writing
Getting a grade on it
Putting it back in my backpack
It felt good
To be recognized

Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.

I've written persuasively a lot
It's a big school thing
They want us to know how to do it
It's really important
I enjoy writing persuasively
If it's about the right topics
If I'm really interested in it
It's a big thing for me
If I'm not interested
I don't really want to write about it
It's hard to
I don't feel I've gotten many good topics in school
The few I have
Are very good
Persuasive writing is good
I like it
One paper was all about conflicts
Things that were public
That everyone was talking about
You got to pick a side and write about it
I found that one very enjoyable
Because I got to choose my topic
I got to investigate all the sides
That was my favorite

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.

I think it is an important skill to have
 I wasn't very good at it
 For a long time
 I didn't understand why
 I wasn't good at it
I would just say I want this
 I want that
 Which is not a very good way of approaching it
You have to present more than just I want it
 You have to present why you want it
 Why it's good for you
 Things like that
Before you can just go out there
 Without a plan
 Ask for it
It's important to know
 You can't just say
 I want that game
 Or I want that
It's got to be
 I want it because ___
 Or I think I should get it because ___
It's a work
 You have to be working toward it

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.

I haven't had much to advocate for
 I've always been pretty content
 With the options they've given me
 To do things
Not always with the main focus of things
 But always with the options they gave me
 To present the main focus
So I've never felt it necessary to
 Go out and say
 I need a whole new topic
 As one individual in hundreds
That's not a good way
 To go about it
I've always felt
 I've had enough options

To find a good way to present
It hasn't come up as important for me

Burgess

Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.

I don't know
It seems like...
 I feel like in our district
 There are a lot of gifted students
So I know
 Especially it seems more in like English
 I've been pulled out and
We'll do different projects
 Than the normal students
And it's not as big in high school
 Because there are a lot more
Like, you take honors classes
 And a lot of those kids are gifted
 But a lot are just ones that try harder
I don't know really
 Besides being offered to take more tests
 And things
That's pretty much what I feel
I think I've had a little bit more opportunities
 Than a normal kid
 I don't know
I feel like sometimes
 We should offer more stuff
 To the kids who try hard
 But aren't identified as gifted
Because I know
 There are a couple people I know
 That try hard
But I think that if they're given
 Some of the opportunities
 That the gifted children are given
 That it might help them too
I think I was identified as gifted
 In first or second grade
 It was pretty early
And I've been told
 I'm gifted in verbal

Which I guess
Is more with languages and things

Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.

I remember something
 Called Omnibus
 In like first or second grade
But I don't remember that too much
 And then
 I don't think so much in elementary school
It was more in middle school
 We'd be pulled out
 And we read, like, a different book
 And did different book reports
And we always had
 Different spelling than the others
I took honors English as a freshman

Tell me about your experiences as a writer.

I honestly don't think
 I'm that good of a writer
I think it depends
 On what I'm writing and things
I think it's a very subjective subject
 Because I think you can
 Give your writing to anybody
 And then it depends on the person
 How they feel about writing
Because I just think
 It depends on the reader
Because there are so many books
 That people have written
 And so many people who love them
Then there are other people
 Who have read the same book
 And they hate it
So I feel like writing
 Is a hard thing
 To be judged on
Because it's so personal
 I guess
I definitely feel that

I've had guidance to help me improve
With most of my essays and things
You can always go to the teacher
Before or after school
Or talk about your choices
And all that
So I think that teachers are very open
To helping you improve
Your writing
So I think that's a big help

Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.

I think
We write a lot more persuasive writing
Than like...
I don't know
I think we're working more now on...
It's pretty much been the same thing
The same, you know
Support, explanation, claims
And so it's just different ways
Of kind of doing it
But it's been the same kind of process
Since elementary school
I guess
I've had a little bit of instruction
To make it better
I think that it's more
Of a personal thing
Like you can't really
Tell your whole class
How to do it
I think it depends
On the actual writer
I've had a couple interesting prompts
I thought the one
That we did for the writing assessment
Was different
I think just because
I felt there was a lot you could do with it
And then some of the CSAP ones
Are just funny I think
Like there was this one

About how you had to...
There was a wildlife preserve
And they wanted to do drilling
But how would you preserve the way
And you had to convince the company
How to preserve some of the wildlife
So I don't know
I just think
They pick kind of weird topics sometimes

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.

I feel like
I'm getting better at doing it
Like getting myself
Into clubs
And working my way up
Because I'm in Serteens now
But they want me on the board
And so just working
To let people know
What I'm good at, I guess

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.

I don't know.
Like pushing yourself
To be identified
Or to show that you're gifted, kind of?

Maybe more asking for a particular kind of coursework or project?

No, because it seems
That teachers are pretty good
At identifying
If they feel you are gifted
And feel that you can handle it

I mean
I've been told
I wanted to take a certain science course
But the teacher wouldn't let me
She's just like
You're too smart for this class

So she made me go to the normal class
She wanted me to take one
That would be more challenging
I haven't asked
For any kind of differentiation
I guess if I really
Felt that I could do something more
I guess I would ask
But I haven't felt that yet

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being gifted, being a writer, or self-advocating for your needs?

I just think
It's a lot different
In high school
I think just
Because it seems like there are
A lot more gifted people
So I mean
I think it's kind of hard
Specifically...
I don't know
It's not hard to speak up
If you do it
At the end of class or something
It's easier
I feel like it's been pretty easy
To talk to all of my teachers

Chauncey

Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.

It hasn't really been extremely different
I have always been in higher classes
It has been good to push myself educationally
Education is important to me
I've gotten to do things like this
I've gotten to go on field trips for gifted and talented students
Which has been a cool experience
The gifted and talented teacher at our school
Offered me to do independent studies
And other things for our school

So that I can get into prestigious schools
I've been given a lot of advantages
A lot of advice that most students haven't received
From her or other teachers
It will help me toward the future

Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.

I definitely pushed myself a lot more
Took a lot harder classes
To make sure I was doing
All that I could
To be my personal best
Get the best experience I can out of school
I think I was identified in fourth or fifth grade
I was in a completely different classroom
Than everyone else
There were a small number of us
Who just went to a different classroom
We took higher level classes
It was good
It was a good experience
It was a lot more personal
Because of the smaller numbers
One teacher who taught everything
That was nice
I had a group of peers
A group of people pushing me
There's always competitions and everything
You can't help that
That's always good, too

Tell me about your experiences as a writer.

I haven't always been the best writer
I was when I was younger
I was a lot more dedicated
I want to be a journalist
When I grow up
That's my biggest ambition
That's why I'm taking AP language this year
To get a lot more writing
I'm going to take a lot more writing classes
I want to get better as a writer

That's why I decided to do this prompt
Just to make sure
That I'm keeping my writing fresh
I could have chosen not to write at all
But I think it's good to always be writing
Because you will always be getting better
As long as you are still writing
My language arts teacher has been awesome
She has pushed me to get better
In writing
She pushed me into AP language
There is going to be a lot of writing
I'm nervous
But I think it's going to be
A really good decision for me

Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.

I've definitely gotten better at it
For sure
There are always persuasive essays
No matter what class you are taking
It's the most
It's one of the biggest prompts every year
Persuasive
Through practice
I've gotten better at it
It's still something I need to work on
I've had some specific training in persuasive writing
This year we read help
Helping ideas
Things you can do to make
Persuasive writing better
In formatting
Stuff like that
Which I've had before
I guess it wasn't too in depth
But it helped
For sure

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.

I did a lot more when I was younger

Like in middle school
I definitely pushed myself a lot more
The last two years
I've taken harder classes than most of my friends
I've always pushed myself
Chosen to take the harder choice
Rather than the easy way out
There are always opportunities
That I've missed out on
Need to push myself more, I think, this year

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.

We did history day
In middle school
We could choose to do the normal lesson
Or independently work on history day
I did that for two years
That was a cool experience
To go do the competition
We actually ended up doing really good
In our group
That was something a lot different
Than what everyone else was doing
So that was cool
It was something I chose to do

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being gifted, being a writer, or self-advocating for your needs?

I wouldn't say that I'm gifted or talented
I just work really hard
And care a lot about school
It's my number one priority
Always
There are a lot of other aspects of my life
Like sports
And friends
But school is always number one for me
I know writing will take me places
I've always wanted to be a sports journalist
Because I love sports
I think it would be a really cool experience
I love reading sports articles

Stuff like that
I think it would be so cool
 To do something like that
I think being gifted and talented
 It is helping me get there
 Helping me get the opportunities
 That I need to get there

Desi

Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.

It started in middle school
 There was nothing to it
We'd go with the gifted teacher
 For a little time of the day
 We'd do whatever she had planned for that day
 It wasn't anything special
 It was just where they were able to monitor you
I've always thought that "being gifted"
 Has never really influenced me
 Just to where I'm able to say
 Yeah, I'm gifted and people recognize that

It's not anything
 From day to day
I could always go to the gifted teacher
 Be like, this isn't challenging me enough
 Besides that it hasn't pushed me a different way
 One way or the other

Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.

The gifted teacher would always have something to do
 We'd always have the vocabulary
 That was different
 From the vocab that regular students had
As gifted in high school
 I've always had the tier two thing
 But I don't think I've gotten any specific experiences
The only thing that I've done in high school
 So far
 That could be considered gifted
 Is this

And also I took a Mind Works class
That was open to everybody
So not all that many things have happened
I think it's going to change
I got my Advanced Learning Plan
I think that will influence next year
And the years to come
Regarding specifics
Not really anything significant

Tell me about your experiences as a writer.

I've never been the creative
Sit down and write type
But I've always enjoyed writing
I've always been good at it
I've never gotten a bad grade
On a writing assignment
Where it goes wrong for me
Is the grammar and stuff
Ever since middle school
I've always been able to write
I've never had the writer's block
You give me a prompt
And I'll just write it
I think that comes a lot
Because I live with my grandparents
My grandmother is a very good writer
She's really good with the language arts
So I always go to her
If I need any help
Anytime there's a prompt
I just kind of write
I took AP Euro
And I was always able to brain dump
Everything onto the page
I've never gotten any negative feedback
From my writing

Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.

In eighth grade
We did a lot of persuasive writing
I really enjoyed taking a stand

One way or the other
Trying to prove my point
We haven't really done much of it in high school
I've always been able to incorporate a little bit
If they give you a prompt
You need to prove your point
I've always put it in there
Other than in middle school
That was where we really focused on it
I've always liked persuasive writing
I really enjoyed putting my word out there
We had this thing
In eighth grade
That was like a debate
We had to write out what we were going to say
My team creamed the other team
It was great
I've always enjoyed it

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.

I guess
I've never really gotten to the point
Where I needed to do that
The gifted teacher
Has always said
If I had an classes that weren't really challenging
To come to her
But I feel that everything has been challenging enough
I don't need to do that
I guess I'm not a very needy person
I haven't actually done that
I think I did it in middle school
That was just to clarify stuff
So I'd be able to go on
With a clearer view
What was going on with school work
It wasn't ever
Yeah, I'm bored
I honestly haven't done that much of it

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.

I haven't specifically done that

My grandparents do a lot of that
They really are the people
Who converse with the gifted teacher
I've never personally gotten up
And said I need this
Or anything else

Emory

Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.

I was put in
Advanced math and science
Then I took honors English
There are meetings
Stuff at school
Like different things you can do
Sign up for
They have some meetings for AP classes
There was one about a trip you could do
Over the summer
To Costa Rica
With a bunch of students
Which would be fun
Just meetings like that
I don't really remember
When I was identified as gifted
It just showed up in the computer
I came into the district as a new student in fifth grade
In middle school
I was in advanced math
I think that was it

Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.

I was going to
Take that trip to Costa Rica
Before it got cancelled
It doesn't seem different
Much different than other students
Who aren't gifted
So I don't really have any experiences
I haven't had too many challenges
I'm really good at math

I enjoyed being pushed in math
Taking hard classes
It's not too bad
Just as long as I keep up with my work
It's fine

Tell me about your experiences as a writer.

I wasn't really into writing
I didn't really like it as much
But when I got into honors English
It seemed kind of easier
Because of everyone else
You're surrounded by people
Who are good at English
So I had to get used to it

I was in normal English
For the first semester of this year
I transferred to honors
I've finally gotten used to writing
Now that school's ended
It is kind of harder
I definitely think honors English
Fit me better
Normal English was really easy
I already knew everything
The teacher was teaching
So it was just like practice

Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.

I don't really
Write persuasively too much
I have had to write
A few essays about that
Like abortion and stuff
Eating disorders
Essays like that
I did it more in middle school
But in high school
It's more like informational and stuff
More like a report than a persuasive essay

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.

Some teachers
 They just don't get some things
 I had a history teacher
 Who just wasn't good with the students

So I had to
 Kind of
 Speak out about that

There are also
 Like with the other students
 Where they include religion
 Just stuff like that

That's really controversial
 There are a lot of students that speak out
 About that at our school

I can definitely speak up for myself
 Advocate for my own point of view
 I'm not afraid to do that

Regarding the history teacher
 We had a test
 I didn't have my book
 Because I brought it the day before

There was an essay question on the test
 You had to read this article in the book
 Then respond to these questions
 It was worth half the test grade

So after my friend had turned in her test
 And she was done with her book and everything
 And I saw other people sharing books

So I took her book
 I just read the article and gave it back to her
 Then answered the questions on my own

Then he counted that as cheating
 He only counted that to me
 He didn't mention the other students either
 He didn't say anything to them

So I had to speak out about that
 I wasn't just going to let him
 Count it as a zero
 Because I didn't cheat at all

After awhile it got resolved
 I think my parents had to get involved, too

Sometimes it is scary
 To advocate with adults
 Because you feel they know more than you

But you don't want just
To be pushed over like that
So it can be scary
But not too hard

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.

None that I know of
My teacher mentioned honors English to me
Then I talked to my parents about it
Then I decided we should do that
I signed up for honors civics
After I took history in middle school
I felt like history is pretty easy
But civics is way different than that
But we're learning
I kind of enjoyed that
We had to do a lot of things
And I didn't do so well in all of them
But when it came to the final
I got an A

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being gifted, being a writer, or self-advocating for your needs?

There could be a lot more gifted students
At our school
But some people are just lazy
Get caught up with high school
I think they are missing out
The classes that I take
That are advanced
Once you get into them
You have to work hard
But it's worth it
Because you are a year ahead
Then you can take AP classes
Which can count as college credits
So there are definitely some advantages

Francis

Tell me about your experiences as a person who is identified as gifted.

In school
 I get a lot of opportunities
 Being gifted
More challenges that I can have
 Like being in advanced classes
Next year I'm doing this EFE thing
 You've probably heard of it
Where you can do outside of school studies
 So that's a really cool thing
 For me to be able to do
 Being gifted
With my friends
 It's kind of interesting
A lot of people
 Don't make a point of being
 Like, oh, ___'s really smart
Some people will say that
 It can get annoying
 It's not too different
I think it's definitely a good thing
 I think it will definitely help me
 In my future

Tell me about your experiences in school after you were identified as gifted.

As for me
 It kind of made me feel special
 When I heard that I was gifted
When I was younger
 I was always pretty good at
 Everything in school
I felt confident in everything that I did
 Probably more so than other students
So after they identified me as gifted
 It was easier for me to be challenged
 I was put into more challenging classes
It just made things a lot more challenging for me
 Which made it more interesting
 And more fun
 More satisfactory
I felt like I was actually doing things
 That were going to help me
I think I was identified in elementary school

Tell me about your experiences as a writer.

A lot of people
 Tell me I'm a good writer
I like writing
 I don't write a whole lot in my free time
 I write a little bit
 Like in a journal or something
I wouldn't write like an essay on my own
 Those are the things I do in school
Writing is pretty...
 Sometimes it's like a chore
 Depending on the prompt
If it's a good prompt
 Then it's easy to take a stand
 Write about something
Especially when it's something that you're passionate about
 Something you find interesting
But when it's not
 Then it can be a chore
I like writing
 Definitely
I think it's a good thing
 It's definitely good
 To be able to express yourself in writing
I heard that in college
 You have to write a lot
 So it's good to get that experience
I like persuasive
 It's good to be able to take a stand
 Write about something impartially
It's kind of easier to have an opinion
 Rather than be unbiased
 Just writing something about facts
 Rather than an opinion

Tell me about your experiences writing persuasively.

I like it more
 Usually I'm on the stand
 Usually in prompts
 There are two stands
One of them is more popular than another one
 So usually I'm on the more popular stand

We did this sport essay
 It was a quote about how sports are good
 It said, do you agree or disagree
I tried to disagree
 Because I kind of believed it
 But I wanted to do something different
It was kind of hard
 So I think it's definitely easier
 To go with the opinion that is more popular
But I haven't done a lot of persuasive writing
 A good amount
 Just whatever they give in school
 But not on my own

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself.

I'm not sure
I remember one time
 In the middle school
 We were reading a book
And I read a lot
 So I'd already read the book
 So I was able to do a different assignment
 With different books than what people were doing
So that wasn't too hard to ask
 To do a different thing
Because we just said we've already read that
 Because there was a little group of students
 So things like that
I did get the option
 To do upper level math
I guess I was advocating for myself
 When I chose to do that in seventh grade
When I went to algebra instead of
 Whatever regular it was
So that wasn't really advocating for myself
 Because I already was given the option
 But I just accepted it

Tell me about your experiences in advocating for yourself as a gifted learner.

Not a whole lot
I guess advocating for myself
 Like taking the initiative to do the EFE classes

And that's kind of for my future, too
Being gifted I can do that
What I'm doing with that is
I'm going to the elementary school
Helping with the music classes
Because I'd like to do music in college
So that was my idea
Something that would help me in the future
That would go along with being gifted
Because I think you only get that opportunity
If you're gifted
I'm not sure

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being gifted, being a writer, or self-advocating for your needs?

I like being gifted
I think it's definitely a good thing
Some people may say that it's not
Because you have to set the bar higher
For yourself
That means it's harder
To meet the bar
You have to push yourself harder
Than other students may
Although in other areas it could be easier
Because things come to you easier
I think it's definitely a beneficial thing
I like pushing myself
And trying to be the best I can be
My parents have definitely advocated for me
In a lot of these areas
Not necessarily myself
But they've helped me a lot
This may be worth noting
They asked me to skip a grade in fourth grade
But me and my parents talked about it
And we decided not to
So that was kind of our decision
And probably a good decision
Just based on my age
So my parents are a big part of it
Not my grandparents
But my parents are very influential in this

Appendix L: Survey Results by Student

	Student Identifier					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
<i>Enlisting Social Resources</i>						
1. I can get teachers to help me when I get stuck at school	5	3	5	6	5	5
2. I can get another student to help me when I get stuck on schoolwork	5	4	3	6	6	3
3. I can get adults to help me when I have social problems	4	5	3	6	5	6
4. I can get a friend to help me when I have a social problem	6	5	6	6	6	5
<i>Meet Others' Expectations</i>						
5. I feel/think I can meet my parents' expectations	6	4	5	6	5	6
6. I feel/think I can meet my teachers' expectation	6	5	5	6	4	6
7. I feel/think I can meet my peers' expectations	6	5	5	6	4	5
8. I feel/think I can meet my expectations of myself	6	4	4	6	5	5
<i>Self-assertive Efficacy</i>						
9. I can express my opinions when other classmates disagree with me	6	6	3	6	4	6
10. I can stand up for myself when I feel I am being treated unfairly	4	5	5	6	5	5
11. I can deal with situations where others are annoying me or hurting my feelings	5	6	6	6	5	6
12. I can stand firm to someone who is asking me to do something unreasonable or inconvenient	5	5	6	6	4	6
<i>Enlisting Parental and Community Support</i>						
13. I can get my parent(s) to help me with a problem	6	6	5	6	3	6
14. I can get my brother(s) and/or sister(s) to help me with a problem	3	4	5	NA	4	5
15. I can get my parents to take part in school activities	6	5	4	6	6	6
16. I can get people outside the school to take an interest in my school (community groups, churches)	4	4	3	6	3	6
<i>Writing Self-efficacy</i>						
17. I make excellent grades on writing tests	5	3	4	5	4	6
18. I have always been successful with writing	2	2	3	6	5	6
19. Even when I study very hard, I do poorly in writing	2	2	2	1	1	1
20. I got good grades in writing on my last report card	5	3	5	6	5	6
21. I do well on writing assignments	6	3	4	6	4	6
22. I do well on even the most difficult writing assignments	5	2	2	6	4	6
23. Seeing adults do well in writing pushes me to do better	5	4	1	6	2	5
24. When I see how my writing teacher demonstrates quality writing, I can picture myself writing in the same way	3	3	3	6	3	5
25. Seeing kids do better than me in writing pushes me to do	4	5	5	6	3	6

26. When I see how another student improves his/her writing, I can see myself improving my writing in the same way	5	5	5	5	4	5
27. I imagine myself working through challenging writing assignments successfully	5	4	6	6	4	5
28. I compete with myself in writing	6	5	4	6	2	6
29. My writing teachers have told me that I am good at writing	6	4	3	6	5	6
30. People have told me that I have a talent for writing	5	3	3	4	4	5
31. Adults in my family have told me what a good writing student I am	4	2	2	6	6	6
32. I have been praised for my ability in writing	5	3	2	6	3	6
33. Other students have told me that I'm good at writing	5	5	2	6	5	6
34. My classmates like to work with me in writing because they think I'm good at it	3	3	3	6	3	5
35. Just being in writing class makes me feel stressed and nervous	2	2	2	1	4	1
36. Writing assignments take all of my energy	3	2	5	4	3	1
37. I start to feel stressed-out as soon as I begin my writing assignments	1	3	4	4	3	2
38. My mind goes blank and I am unable to think clearly when doing writing assignments	1	2	3	1	1	2
39. I get depressed when I think about learning writing	1	3	1	1	1	1
40. My whole body becomes tense when I have to write	1	2	2	1	2	1