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Empathy and Understanding: The Impact of Gifted Adults in the Field of Gifted Education

Laura N. Boroughf

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EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING: THE IMPACT OF GIFTED ADULTS IN THE FIELD OF GIFTED EDUCATION

A Dissertation in Practice

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

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Doctor of Education

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of gifted adults, who are educators, in order to understand the empathy and advocacy that comes with a shared childhood experience. This is a qualitative study that used narratives to voice the experience of the gifted child through the memory of eight gifted adult educators. These memories, and reflections on identification, were told through interviews. Themes emerged related to empathy, advocacy, and cognitive dissonance, as well as imposter syndrome, career readiness, gifted minorities and the positives of gifted programming. Ultimately, it was found that gifted programming is overwhelmingly a positive experience and mirrors the statement that “research consistently demonstrates that gifted students who receive any level of services achieve at higher levels than their gifted peers who receive none” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, p. 226), and at the same time, gifted programming or lack thereof influenced each gifted educator’s teaching practice as well as empathy towards the gifted student.

Keywords: gifted, gifted programming, empathy, advocacy, gifted adult
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Personal History

The basis of my research is framed in my personal history. I start this way knowing that “researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). The historical experience I am looking back upon was the pull-out gifted program of which I was a part of. Upon reviewing the years spent in primary and middle school, my most enjoyable memories are from this program. I remember being engaged with hands-on projects, outside-of-the-box thinking, and interesting subject matter. While at times the focus seemed to be primarily on logic puzzles or memorizing interesting facts about the presidents, the teaching style was still unique. Even if it did not necessarily align with current research on gifted education, I consider this once a week opportunity that I was removed from the regular class and able to do something different than my grade-level peers to be the highlight of my elementary and middle school years.

Unfortunately, my memories of my days in school are limited, but given that this gifted class is one of the few educational moments that I can see clearly gives credit to the impact it had on my schooling. At the same time, the one friend I keep in touch with
from my elementary school years is a friend that I met in the gifted pull-out class. What do we talk about when we connect? Memories we have of our beloved gifted program. In recalling these positive moments, it should be acknowledged that in epistemological research “researcher’s biases and perspectives must be recognized to analyze the results” (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2017, p. 228). Therefore, I have a difficult time being impartial to gifted programming when I have witnessed the positives firsthand. This has been the type of class I have wished to re-create in my own teaching career, and the image I have in my mind of what school should be like. Frankly, the positive experience I had in the gifted programming of my youth is probably one of the reasons I wanted to become a teacher!

As a teacher, I have always had an interest in gifted education, and I feel that my personal experiences with gifted students and gifted programming have further influenced my teaching career and focus on gifted education. At times, my interest in gifted education has simply taken on the form of influencing my pedagogical practice in the classroom, while at other times, gifted education has presented the opportunity to play a bigger role in my career. In one district where I worked, gifted education was a priority, so I participated in trainings to better understand how to implement appropriate instructional strategies and curricular modifications into my classroom. This resulted in being named “gifted coordinator” despite, in my opinion, having ridiculously little training.

In a different school, gifted education did not exist, so my focus turned to other areas, and I did what I could to advocate for gifted youth. This included advocating for a seventh-grade student who had a terrible middle school experience because his teachers
did not understand him. His mother reached out to me, venting her frustrations about his teachers, and wishing others could recognize his giftedness in the way that I did. She was a parent experiencing the joys and frustrations of having a gifted child. An experience I, too, would soon understand.

In first grade, my son started having difficulties in school. To be honest, kindergarten and pre-school weren’t much better, but this was the year everything came to a head. His teachers thought his reading was behind, and he just couldn’t seem to focus. But, in my mind, being a poor student or academically behind did not seem to fit the cause. Did his teachers know about the Lego maze with hidden rooms and trap doors that he had created at home? Did it matter that he designed his own origami animals? From reports sent home, it seemed that these were sources of distraction, not amusing anecdotes. Ultimately, testing would reveal that he was gifted and just taking his time when it came to learning to read; but in gaining that answer, there was also the revelation that his teachers might not understand him, and he was not getting the school experience that I had hoped. My son is now in a gifted program that has well-trained teachers who know the social-emotional aspects of giftedness, the asynchrony and overexcitabilities that come with being a gifted child, as well as the best practices in regards to academics, and he is thriving. I can’t help but wish that for all of my students.

As a result of these personal experiences, I try to model my classes on the teaching style that I remember from those that influenced me, as well as the gifted program I was a part, and the gifted training I have received. I would also like my students to remember my class in the same way I do of the gifted program I was once in
as a student. I try to create meaningful lessons and include critical thinking, in much the same way that I remember my gifted class doing. This is also the experience I want my own children to have. As a teacher, I have tried to discover what made being in a gifted class feel so different, and why this class experience continues to resonate with me. At the same time, when I look at my students, I know that there are those who do not feel challenged, others who are eager to learn more, as well as a handful who are not meeting their potential or are simply misunderstood.

My desire to provide an appropriate learning environment for each has fueled my own desire to be in a program where I can know how to best approach my class of students and how to be a resource to my staff as well as an advocate for gifted families. This desire to implement teacher programming and do what is best for the gifted child has influenced my curiosity about whether other teachers who were identified as gifted have been influenced in such a way.

**Persistent Problem of Practice**

According to Buss and Zambo (2010), writers of the CPED (The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate) guide for research, “A problem of practice is caused by a condition that makes you unhappy because it is unjust, causing individuals to feel disenfranchised, or wasting time and resources” (p. 6). A persistent problem of practice in gifted education is that gifted children, in order to feel happy and able, need advocates who are educators who can empathize with individual students in order to make appropriate changes in the classroom and the school culture. “Gifted children often see things from unusual points of view that others cannot share, so others often
misunderstand them” (Halsted, 2009, p. 31). Gifted children also “know they are different, but they may not know, unless a trusted adult tells them, why they are different” (Halsted, 2009, p. 31), thus shedding light on a need for empathetic advocates.

The gifted student is one who can “process information more quickly, reason more accurately, and produce higher-quality products than peers” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, p. 136). Yet, “gifted and talented students grow up in a world of mixed messages where their gifted behavior is both expected, yet often, unaccepted” (Susko, 2009, p. 760). Gifted children are not only misunderstood by other children, but adults, as well, and these adults even include their teachers. General education teachers who do not empathize with the notion of giftedness may have a difficult time meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of their gifted learners. Gifted teachers, who are similar to their gifted students (Lovecky, 1986; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Tolan, 1994), as well as have similarities to the unique traits that accompany giftedness, can be a guide for general education teachers who simply do not have the knowledge or understanding of giftedness to take on this perspective. Gifted adults also have a greater sense of justice, which may allow them to have greater empathy for a gifted student (Nauta & Corten, 2002).

Teachers, as a whole, are underqualified to teach gifted students (Kay, 1998). “In a national survey of teachers of grades 3 and 4, the majority [of teachers] reported that they had no training in gifted education” (Kay, 1998 p. 37). Yet, these students, like those at the opposite end of the spectrum, can be significantly different from their peers whom teachers base their training on. “Students with high abilities are as different from the average learner in terms of both cognitive and affective needs as are students qualifying
for special education” (Neumeister & Burney, 2012, p. 64). “Many students identified as gifted spend significant portions of their school time in heterogeneous classrooms and only will be served appropriately if the curriculum and instruction are differentiated for them in these settings” (Plucker and Callahan, 2008, p. 168). Since a regular classroom teacher may not be well equipped to best outfit the gifted student with the tools needed to navigate the school and life setting, a gifted adult who is an educator can help guide both the gifted child and the teacher through academic, social and emotional concerns. Otherwise, students might be left with teachers who think they are doing the right thing when it has been found that “teachers do not have the training to meet the needs of gifted students in the general education classroom and focus more on struggling learners” (Eckert & Robins, 2017, p. 40).

For gifted students, “the brain that drives them seems to intensify everything that they do” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 34). As a result, the characteristics that can be related to giftedness often result in misdiagnosis and greater misunderstanding amongst classroom teachers (Webb, 2000). Studies of classroom teachers and their ability to identify gifted students show that educators are often unable to label the gifted learners in their room (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1994). This inability often goes hand in hand with misdiagnosis of gifted students for other abnormalities (Webb, 2000). “These common misdiagnoses stem from an ignorance among professionals about specific social and emotional characteristics of gifted children which are then mistakenly assumed by these professionals to be signs of pathology” (Webb, 2000, p. 3). Yet, understandably, “empathy, understanding, and emotional nurturing are essential supports for the
development of young children” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 82), and it is therefore critical for gifted students to be understood.

In the 1960’s, the Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski “developed a theory he believed could explain the intensity, sensitivity, and unusual behavior of gifted individuals” (Probst, 2007). His theory explained that the intense responses to stimuli often found in the gifted and identified as overexcitabilities can be psychomotor, sensual, emotional, imaginational, and intellectual (Probst, 2007). It is believed that gifted students often display overexcitabilities that are a part of their uniquely gifted personality at a higher rate than their average classmates (Lind, 2011). With these overexcitabilities, students “perceive things more intensely and think about them more deeply than their age peers” (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015, p. 21). These characteristics are often seen as problematic (Lind, 2011), and “when the environment is too restrictive and inhibits the natural energy of such students, they find themselves being pushed toward a more extreme end of the continuum” (Baum, Olenchak & Owen, 1998, p. 104), which could result in a student acting out or behaving in a seemingly negative way. Dabrowski did not “see these traits as abnormal but as part and parcel of their talented, creative selves” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 6), but this may lead to misunderstanding on the part of the general education teacher of the unique ways and needs of gifted students or to assume that the child has a disorder. For example:

A high level of psychomotor overexcitability may manifest itself in a variety of behaviors that may resemble attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Intellectual overexcitability may result in incessant questioning to satisfy curiosity. Emotional overexcitability may create intense emotionality due to keen awareness of and concern with global events that do not end when classes do. (Mendaglio, 2011, para. 22)
There are times in which a student, not getting the accommodations that are needed or spending the year with a teacher who does not empathize with their giftedness, could feel “that they would not ‘fit in’ in these settings – a perception that can increase stress and dissatisfaction” (Walton & Cohen, 2007, p. 83). If a teacher can have a better understanding of these characteristics within the social context of schools within which giftedness is seen, he or she might find that “these aren’t disorders at all but misinterpretations of traits that only seem problematic because of context or a value system” (Probst, 2007, para. 26). At the same time, if a teacher can tap into a student’s strengths or see his or her areas of interest, these behavioral problems sometimes have a way of disappearing (Baum, Olenchak & Owen, 1998). Therefore, instead of seeing these traits as “problems” (Probst, 2007), gifted adult educators who can reflect on their schooling as a gifted child, can help provide an insight into these experiences. If these gifted teachers are encouraged to be advocates, there is benefit to students in this relationship, as well. “People who have a trusting relationship with a teacher or mentor are better able to take advantage of critical feedback and other opportunities to learn” (Walton & Cohen, 2007, P. 82).

A Unique Population

Adults who are educators and gifted are a unique population to study. There is little research on teachers of the gifted (Robinson, 2008) and gifted adults, in themselves, are an under-studied population (Perrone-McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012; Perrone-McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler & Perrone, 2011). This is “one population rarely studied and often misunderstood” because it is assumed that “they will
be fine because they are ‘so smart’” (Prober, 2011). Gifted adults at work is also an area that “hardly any scientific research on this topic has been performed” (Nauta & Corten, 2002, para. 1). A gifted student’s “intelligence, creativity, sensitivity, and asynchronous development” follow them into adulthood which, like in gifted youth, can lead to positive and negative situations (Webb, et. al, 2016, p. 53), such as success in a task, or stress in peer relationships. Gifted adults also have social, emotional and spiritual qualities that are much like gifted youth (Prober, 2011). This parallel with their students makes teachers who are gifted a unique population to study.

Some argue that teachers of the gifted should be gifted themselves, or at least have characteristics that mirror that of intellectual giftedness (Ramsey, 1990; Dorhout, 1983; David, 2011; Robinson, 2008). According to research done by Hanna David (2011) the ideal gifted teacher should be able to admit when he or she does not know something, and have a desire to enrich his or herself academically. In research of the ideal gifted teacher, David (2011) found that “most teachers would rather not teach gifted children; they show a negative attitude towards giftedness in general and towards gifted, studious students in particular” and “one of the main reasons teachers do not like to teach the gifted is the high energy level needed in order to do that successfully” (p. 76). Therefore, the ideal gifted teacher needs to be able to match this energy as well as be able to go against the common belief that “being gifted is an advantage the pupil has received” (David, 2011, p. 76).

At the same time, two positive traits for teachers of gifted students are intelligence and empathy (Freehill, 1974), two characteristics that should be supported. Upon
examination of teachers who felt that they had these qualities, “teachers’ perceptions of themselves as gifted were positively related to their attitudes about GT learners” (Berman, Schultz & Weber, 2012, p. 24). In other words, finding a characteristic within oneself that is seen in another opens the door to understanding and possibly even empathy, which can be used to guide others towards a more communal understanding.

Additionally, studies of empathy have found that “I feel your pain,’ is much more than a figure of speech” (Riess, 2017, p. 76).

Research on the abilities of general education classroom teachers to amend their curriculum for gifted students found that, “contemporary educators do not seem to have appropriate strategies, knowledge or confidence in providing an appropriate education for gifted students with learning and attention difficulties” (Baum, Olenchak & Owen, 1998, p. 98).

In such cases, the teacher ignores his or her responsibility to teach the gifted student. The gifted child, sometimes even at a very young age, not only understands he or she has no rights in the classroom, should not ask for attention and certainly should have no expectations to be taught anything new, or at a suitable level, but is permanently ‘in debt’ to others because of the good luck he or she has been blessed with. (David, 2011, p. 76)

This inability to provide for gifted learners without specific gifted education training leads to the purpose of this research, as well as a desire to know whether being gifted and having experienced gifted programming may give some teachers an edge.

*Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of educators, who are gifted adults, regarding the education of gifted children.
**Overarching Question**

How do the experiences of gifted adults who are educators influence their teaching and empathy of gifted learners in order to create empathy in others?

**Sub Questions**

1. In what way does empathy towards giftedness influence gifted adults’ teaching practices?
2. In what ways do gifted adults experience cognitive dissonance when their thoughts about gifted education are inconsistent with the practices at their school or when dealing with other teachers who are not gifted?
3. How do gifted adults in education advocate for gifted practices or gifted students at their school?

In looking at these sub questions, it is important to understand the relationship between empathy, cognitive dissonance and advocacy. The researcher assumes that gifted educators empathize with gifted students and that these educators feel empathy towards their gifted learners when they have cognitive dissonance towards their teaching institution or towards non-gifted teachers. The result of this empathy and cognitive dissonance is advocacy for gifted students.

**Impact**

The impact of this research is in creating teachers as advocates for their gifted students. Buss and Zambo (2010) state that researching a problem of practice should aim at, “improving the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities” (p. 6). While parents can be successful advocates, their plans for advocacy can be blocked when
it comes to interacting with particular teachers, especially teachers who do not empathize
with the parent’s concerns. Parents report that they have difficulty with teachers
implementing educational plans, and some teachers go so far as to argue with the parent
that the plan wasn’t going to change things (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton, & Robertson-
Grewal, 2011). Research also shows “that school personnel usually assume that school
problems are the fault of kids or their parents” (Warshaw & Wayland, 2013). A 2001
study found that of 5,000 reports, “inappropriate curriculum” and “ineffective teaching
practices” were not listed at all as the reason for “primary causes for the child’s failure,”
while “parent/home factors” came up 20% of the time, and “child-based problems” came
up 100% of the time (Lavoie, 2008, n.p.) Ultimately, “teachers teach the way they
learned. Instructors believe that the way they learn is the ‘easy’ or ‘right’ way, and that
they, therefore, direct their students, offsprings, and spouses toward mastering knowledge
in much the same manner” (Dunn & Dunn, 1979, p. 241). This influences the likelihood
that a gifted adult would promote gifted programming and an educator who is not gifted
might report parent or home factors and child-based problems as the reason for concern.

This leads to the possibility that teachers identified as gifted are more likely to
have an innate understanding of gifted student characteristics that often mystifies others
(Morrison & Rizza, 2007), providing a clear rational for the exploration of the narrative
history of gifted adults in the field of gifted education. For example, either due to a lack
of understanding or a lack of empathy towards gifted students who are twice-exceptional,
some schools and teachers focus on remediation over acceleration, which can lead to
underachieving behaviors and mental-health concerns (King, 2005). Twice-exceptional

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youth need teacher advocates to promote both challenging programming in areas where they can show their strengths and accommodations for their individual needs (Martin, 2006; Winebrenner, 1998). Twice-exceptional adults know that without this focus on strengths and accommodations, there is concern for the individual’s social and emotional health (King, 2005).

Gifted adults can empathize with difficulties gifted students might experiences, as these adults report having challenges that include “painful schooling experiences, high levels of sensitivity and intensity, existential depression and difficulties with relationships” (Prober, 2011, para. 5). To further understand giftedness:

Gifted children often speak or act with unusual intensity, and this intensity is difficult for other children to understand or accept; they may see it as ‘weird.’ In addition, people who are gifted frequently have heightened sensitivity to the comments and actions of others, so being misunderstood or rejected is more painful for them than for most other people.” (Halsted, 2009, p. 13)

At the same time, research has shown that gifted adults continue to achieve while they are in adulthood, yet they often feel disappointed on their over-reliance on academia in their youth, as well as their competition for awards to form an identity (Kaufman, 1992). This is a message that gifted adults could potentially share with colleagues when reflecting on the best way to program for a gifted student. Gifted adults could also be considered ideal teachers, as many continue on to earn awards and occupational achievement in college and adulthood (Kaufman, 1992).

Studies of gifted adults show that these individuals often ponder their identification and wonder what it means to be a part of this chosen group (Kaufman, 1992). Therefore, this narrative study gave gifted adult educators the opportunity to
explore their past and reflect on the course of their life as it relates to giftedness. It was also the hope that with this research the learnings and teachings of ideal teachers could be used to suggest ways to improve the teaching and thinking of less ideal teachers.

**Summary**

The researcher’s personal history influenced the persistent problem of practice that is inherent to this study: that gifted students need advocates who are educators who can empathize with individual students in order to make appropriate changes in the classroom and the school culture. The lack of research on adults who are gifted as well as gifted educators directly applied to the statement of purpose. The researcher aimed to look at the impact of identification of giftedness on gifted adults and the experiences that followed this identification as they relate to their teaching practice. The following chapter will examine the literature related to the identification of gifted individuals, gifted characteristics that lead to misunderstanding, gifted teachers, empathy, and a need for advocacy.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature follows a progression of ideas related to gifted research for the study entitled *Empathy and Understanding: The Impact of Gifted Adults in the Field of Gifted Education*. While first presenting the reader with an understanding of giftedness, beginning with identification, what follows is an examination of specific topics related to gifted education as well as terms that gifted adult educators may have been identified by in their youth, or have encountered in their teaching career. After topics related to gifted education, the lens is widened to programming for gifted learners and the literature that considers all of the unique needs of the gifted in providing a perfect program, as well as the characteristics of the ideal teacher to implement this programming. Then, the literature is used to explain situations related to being a gifted adult, as well as the adult view reflecting back on one’s experience of being a gifted child. The final literature necessary to define the direction of this narrative research is advocacy and empathy.

The literature mirrors the themes of the questions that were asked of the respondents, with the goal being an understanding of teaching and empathy to promote advocacy. While this literature review is not meant to be exhaustive of all the related information available, it does provide the necessary information needed to understand the theoretical framework and the study at hand. The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the experiences of gifted adults and how their experiences influence their
perceptions, and teaching, of gifted students. This is done through the theoretical framework of Gordon and Heal’s simulation theory of empathy and Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration, as the former has an impact on how gifted educators perceive gifted students, and the latter deals with the lens through which gifted students view the world and how others perceive them.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is what supports a study and can be thought of as the “blueprint for a house” (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 14). For this study, it was understood that the “theoretical framework consists of the selected theory (or theories) that undergrids your thinking with regards to how you understand and plan to research your topic, as well as the concepts and definitions from that theory that are relevant to your topic” (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 13). This study was supported by the frameworks of the simulation theory of empathy and Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration.

This study was a narrative study. Creswell (2007) notes that, “Narrative studies may have a specific contextual focus, such as teachers or children in classrooms” (p. 55). The context of this study was gifted adults who are teachers. While general education teachers of the gifted might be sympathetic to a gifted student’s concerns, the purpose of this study was to look at the role empathy plays in understanding the plight of a gifted student and whether one must have lived the experience of the other to truly empathize. The focus was whether gifted adults inherently prefer a teaching style that is reflective of the proper programming found in the literature, and if such teachers are more empathetic to concerns related to giftedness, possibly even taking on an advocacy role for gifted
students. This provided a lens for understanding why the simulation theory of empathy was one of the theoretical frameworks chosen for this study. Dickson, Hussein, and Agyem (2018) define a theoretical framework as:

The theoretical framework guides and should resonate with every aspect of the research process from the definition of the problem, literature survey, methodology, presentation and discussion of the findings as well as the conclusions that are found. (p. 438)

Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009) was the second theory used as a theoretical framework for this study as this theory creates a lens to understand why gifted students are often misunderstood and in need of empathy. Simply put, the simulation theory was used in regards to the gifted educators, while the theory of positive disintegration, which includes overexcitabilities, was used to understand gifted students.

**Simulation Theory of Empathy**

Through the simulation theory of empathy, individuals are able to understand one another by “simulating” that emotion within themselves (Lopez, 2010). In other words, “an experience in one person is mirrored, or reexperienced, in an observer” (Shanton & Goldman, 2010, p. 3). By putting oneself in another’s shoes, a person goes beyond sympathy and understands their lived experience (Lopez, 2010). Simulation is explained as:

I, in a process of simulation, put myself in the other’s situation and ask what would I do if I were in that situation. I reduce the other person to something close to who I am and what my experiences mean: I start with a version of what I would do if I were in the other’s situation. (Gallagher, 2012, p. 372)
This is important because a “teacher must be able to imagine himself into the thinking and feeling of the child in order to respond accurately” (Freehill, 1974, p. 247). While general education teachers might lack the training or understanding to take on the perspective of a gifted student, gifted adult educators have lived the experience of being a student who is gifted and can possibly accurately assume necessary steps for social, emotional and academic success. The simulation theory of empathy was used to help understand how a gifted adult who is an educator might teach and connect with gifted students.

**Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration**

At the same time, Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration is “a personality theory that suggests that going through difficult and unsettling periods in our lives (disintegration) can be positive, preparing us for further growth and development as we re-integrate” (Halsted, 2009, p. 17). “Positive disintegration is an emotional rather than an intellectual experience” (Halsted, 2009, p. 17). With this, the theory theorizes five overexcitabilities: psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, intellectual and emotional (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). “Overexcitabilities are expressed in increased sensitivity, awareness, and intensity, and represent a real difference in the fabric of life and quality of experience” (Lind, 2011, n.p.). While this increase in stimuli can lead to positive benefits and joys in life, there are also frustrations that can come with overexcitabilities (Lind, 2011).

Overexcitabilities (OE’s) affect not only the individual displaying them, but those around them, as well (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Individuals who do not understand
these overexcitabilities might feel equally frustrated with the person displaying them, as “children exhibiting OEs are highly reactive or focused within the domain of their OE” (Neihart, Pfeiffer & Cross, 2016, p. 9). Dabrowski’s theory was a framework for understanding gifted students, and was considered in reflecting upon the difficulty teachers have in empathizing with and understanding their gifted students.

Definitions

For ease of understanding, the following list will help to identify terms that are repeatedly used in this study.

- **Advocacy** is “taking one’s own or another’s perspective to obtain a result not otherwise available” (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p. 294). Advocacy, as it relates to this research, refers to specific programming done in the classroom or ways in which individuals strive to meet the needs of a particular student.

- **Asynchronous Development** is “seen when children are highly advanced in one or more areas and average in other areas” (Winebrenner, 2012, p. 12).

- **Cognitive Dissonance** is “a theory in social psychology. It refers to the mental conflict that occurs when a person’s behaviors and beliefs do not align” (Medical News Today).

- **Differentiation** for gifted students implies that “the content focuses on advanced concepts and complex ideas, and learners use strategies and thinking skills with greater degrees of sophistication” (Heacox & Cash, 2014, p. 14).
• **Empathy**, as defined by those in the medical profession, is “an exquisite interplay of neural networks that enables us to perceive the emotions of others, resonate with them emotionally and cognitively, to take in the perspective of others, and to distinguish between our own and others’ emotions” (Riess, 2017, p. 74).

• **Identification** is the process of determining if an individual is “gifted;” a variety of definitions and methods for identification exist, as well as differing cultural beliefs (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015).

• **Imposter Syndrome** is “the fear of being exposed as a fraud, of feeling unworthy of your success, of not being as capable as others. Both genders experience the Imposter Syndrome, but women are more susceptible to it and more intensely affected by it” (Goman, 2018).

• **Multipotentiality** is “when students who perform well in several or all school subjects have great difficulty” choosing a topic or activity; this can lead to difficulty in making career decisions (Halsted, 2009, p. 43).

• **Overexcitabilities** refer to “heightened responsiveness to specific kinds of stimuli” that “characterize gifted children and influence their behavior;” the five overexcitabilities are: psychomotor, sensual, emotional, imaginational and intellectual (Probst, 2007, para. 5).

• **Perfectionist** is described as a student who feels that “you can never fail, you always need approval to feel good about yourself; Gifted people of all ages seem especially prone to perfectionism; They know the difference
between the mediocre and superior” and strive for being unattainably perfect (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015, p. 64).

- **Twice-Exceptional** individuals demonstrate “exceptional levels of capacity, competence, commitment, or creativity in one or more domains coupled with one or more learning difficulties” (Kaufman, 2018, p. 7).
- **Underachievement** is “a discrepancy (or difference) between capability (or potential) and achievement (or performance)” (Winebrenner, 2012, p. 29).

**Review of Research on Giftedness**

This study looks at gifted adults who are also educators of gifted students. These individuals might have a greater understanding and appreciation for twice-exceptionalities, overexcitabilities, perfectionism, underachievement, and proper and improper programming for gifted students. What follows is a literature review of those topics.

**Identification**

Defining giftedness is not easy and identifying a gifted student can be equally difficult.

The Columbus Group provides the following definition for giftedness:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modification in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally. (Silverman, 2013, p. 21)
In regard to the difficulty that comes with identification, gifted students can have overexcitabilities, be twice-exceptional, show asynchronous development, be a perfectionist or an underachiever, as well as display a lot of energy in a variety of ways. This energy can be the result of boredom or simply excitement over a new idea (Baum, Olenchak & Owen, 1998). Due to this list of possible characteristics, “students with high developmental potential will pose challenges to educators” (Mendaglio, 2011, para. 21). As a result, “teachers need to be able to recognize when students aren’t reaching their potential even though they may be passing their classes…smart kids with behavior problems may not just be willful or lazy, but may in fact need support” (Blustain, 2019, para. 25).

VanTassel-Baska (2000) notes that identification is one of the most difficult topics in gifted education and one of the most widely cited areas in the literature. The uneven development, or asynchrony, that is often a part of the gifted definition leads to difficulty in identification (Kaufman, 2018). There is also difficulty in identification because of the worry that results from having a cut-off based on ability, which can lead to disqualification, as well as concern of whether or not a school is adequately assessing underrepresented populations (VanTassel-Baska, 2000; Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009). Identification can also be difficult due to the variety of ways in which giftedness is defined (Heacox & Cash, 2014). As a result, gifted identification should be an ongoing process and take into consideration that giftedness might be presented in different ways and at different times in an individual’s life (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009).
This difficulty in identification is further exacerbated by the fact that gifted individuals have strengths that can span a variety of domains (Heacox & Cash, 2014). Their strengths might not be shown in school, they could flourish during different stages of development, and their gifts or talents might not present until after they are introduced to a particular topic or activity (VanTassel-Baska, 2000). Therefore, since giftedness is difficult to define, a gifted child is sometimes difficult to identify. To add to this difficulty, giftedness has a range, and gifted students can vary within three standard deviations of each other, and there are many areas one can be identified in, which creates a wide variety of gifted learners (VanTassel-Baska, 2000). “Giftedness is by definition an extreme individual difference” (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009, p. 76). Gifted identification is further troubling because a gifted student is more than a test score.

Delisle (2014), in recalling the reflections of a gifted boy, reported that:

He said that giftedness to him is how he understands the world, how deeply he views things, and that isn’t measurable by taking a test, getting straight-A’s, or winning prizes. He said that has always been his problem: teachers want him to get straight-A’s rather than engage in a dialog about how he interprets literature or an event in history. (p. 80-81)

Passow (1992) studied identification and emphasized that a child is not only gifted during the time of day that a pull-out program meets, or only while at school. A gifted child is gifted all day at both home and at school (Passow, 1992). Therefore, identification and nurturing of gifts and talents need to occur at both locations and throughout the day. Passow (1992) stated that, “Unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturance, education and training, the individuals will not attain extreme levels of capability” in their particular fields (p.7). This emphasizes the
idea that environment plays a role in nurturing gifts and talents. To help with this identification and nurturing, parents need to be seen as allies and a form of resource to the school (Passow, 1992). Parenting a gifted child is not easy, and while it might be difficult and time-consuming, parents need to be allowed to advocate for their gifted children (Passow, 1992). Parents may also need to advocate for their child to be identified at points in the year that are not traditionally used for identification (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009). The ways in which parent-advocates are limited will be further discussed, as well as why it is important for teachers to be advocates, as well.

**Twice-Exceptional in Gifted Youth**

Twice-exceptionality includes gifted students with a learning disability (Kaufman, 2018). There are three types of gifted students with a learning disability (King, 2005). The first group is students who are identified as gifted, but they have a learning disability that gets overlooked (King, 2005). The second group consists of students who are unidentified due to the giftedness and the learning disability masking each other, making the gifted student appear average (King, 2005). The third group is of students who are identified as both gifted and learning disabled, but the giftedness is often given little attention, and there is concern that the child will drop out or have negative feelings towards school (King, 2005). If a student is found to have a high ability in one area, but meets the criteria for a disability or a learning difference in another, then programming for both their ability and their exceptionalities needs to occur (King, 2005). Oftentimes, if services are provided by the school, it is usually for the learning or behavioral difficulties, and the giftedness goes unnoticed (Yssel, Prater & Smith, 2010).
Twice-exceptionality is an area fraught with misunderstanding. Gifted adult educators who might also be twice-exceptional will know that “Twice exceptional individuals demonstrate exceptional levels of capacity, competence, commitment or creativity in one or more domains coupled with one or more learning difficulties” (Kaufman, 2018, p. 7). For example, twice-exceptional children have “difficulty performing multi-step instructions and performing tasks sequentially” (Neumann, 2012, table 1), yet, a teacher who is unaware of these characteristics might not know how to properly accommodate for a twice-exceptional student. The difficulty is in that the exceptionality, or learning difficulty, may be masked by giftedness, since the giftedness carries the student forward, or vice versa (King, 2005; Martin, 2006; Morrison & Rizza, 2007). Unfortunately, due to this masking and due to a lack of awareness, it is often the case that more support is given to the disability, and the giftedness goes unchecked (Martin, 2006; Yssel, Prater & Smith, 2010). To show this misdiagnosis, Yssel, Prater and Smith (2010) examined a summer camp for twice exceptional gifted learners. The researchers looked at surveys and interviews of parents and their children. Parent responses mirrored the literature in that twice-exceptional students are usually not recognized for being on both ends of the spectrum, and therefore they rarely receive services for both (Yssel, Prater & Smith, 2010).

To add to this difficulty in identifying twice-exceptional children, there is a myth that gifted students should be gifted in all areas of their life (King, 2005). Unfortunately, because of this belief, a child with a difficulty is sometimes ignored for gifted identification (King, 2005). Health care professionals are not always trained in the areas
of giftedness or characteristics of gifted students, as well, and what often comes to mind for a health care professional is an alternative diagnosis (Webb, et al, 2016); in the healthcare world, abnormal is something to treat (Webb, et. al, 2016). This can lead to a misdiagnosis of a twice-exceptionality when in actuality the student is showing characteristics of giftedness (Webb, et. al, 2016). Take, for example, the difficulty in identifying AD/HD.

To help determine whether a gifted child has AD/HD, one must consider the situation and setting that the behaviors occur in (Webb & Latimer, 1993). Gifted children present characteristics similar to AD/HD in specific situations or settings, which could be the result of boredom with a certain class, while students with AD/HD present characteristics of AD/HD in all settings (Webb & Latimer, 1993). Gifted children in settings of boredom, such as a class in which they already know much of the material, will find “off-task” behavior to amuse themselves; this could appear to an outside observer, such as a teacher or someone not educated in characteristics of the gifted, as AD/HD (Webb & Latimer, 1993, p. 6). The difficulty in determining the difference between a gifted child and a gifted child with AD/HD can be seen in the example that AD/HD individuals are often known for high activity levels, yet gifted students are highly active, as well (Webb & Latimer, 1993). Gifted individuals displaying overexcitabilities may also give off the appearance of AD/HD (Webb, et al, 2016).

A defining difference between gifted children and children with AD/HD is that children with AD/HD are hyperactive and cannot sustain their attention on an activity, while gifted students “can concentrate comfortably for long periods on tasks that interest
them” (Webb & Latimer, 1993, p. 6). AD/HD individuals also are inconsistent with tasks and performance while gifted students will perform well for teachers that they enjoy and can maintain consistent high grades (Webb & Latimer, 1993). Conversely, the possibility of AD/HD is sometimes ignored for gifted individuals when the person seems to be getting into a state of “flow,” a mental state that is often attributed to giftedness (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000), but people with AD/HD can also experience this state of “hyperfocus,” thus making a diagnosis even more difficult (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000). Gifted children with AD/HD are especially prone to this mental state of flow and hyperfocus (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000). It could be unclear as to whether it is the AD/HD or the giftedness that is creating this mental focus, though diagnosing the condition is not always as necessary as finding a behavioral strategy (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000).

Research supports the argument that there is often misdiagnosis in giftedness when a twice-exceptionality is present (Martin, 2006; Winebrenner, 1998; Baum, Olenchak & Owen, 1998). Educating teachers on characteristics of giftedness and identification of twice-exceptionality helps to combat misdiagnosis (King, 2005; Morrison & Rizza, 2007). “The main hindrance to identification for the twice-exceptional continues to be lack of understanding of student characteristics” (Morrison & Rizza, 2007).

At the same time, while twice-exceptionality can be a concern for the emotional health of a child, when support is given, the effects are positive (King, 2005). Weinfield, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, and Shevitz (2005) gathered 289 surveys and then
hypothesized the positive reaction to modifications and accommodations for twice-exceptional students of each group surveyed. Participants were teachers, parents and students who answered on a five-point scale. Overall, modifications and accommodations in combination with strength-based programming was found to be positive and useful (Weinfield, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler & Shevitz, 2005; King, 2005).

Simply being twice-exceptional can impact a student’s mental well-being. “Gifted students with ADHD reported significantly lower self-esteem, behavioral self-concept, and overall happiness than the gifted students without a diagnosis” (Neihart, Pfeiffer & Cross, 2016, p. 107). Medication, for better or worse, is sometimes the remedy for ADHD students. The concern with this, though, is that the research is not available to know whether these drugs suppress gifted and creative mentality (Baum, Olenchak & Owen, 1998). Therefore, medication cannot be the sole answer. Support for a twice-exceptional child must focus on strengths as well as accommodations and the whole child must be considered (King, 2005). An additional difficulty in identification of AD/HD in the gifted learner is that these symptoms are very similar to overexcitabilities (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000). To know the difference, the child needs to have a thorough evaluation by a professional who is trained in gifted characteristics (Kaufmann, Kalbfleisch & Castellanos, 2000).

**Overexcitabilities**

Overexcitabilities are “heightened responsiveness to specific kinds of stimuli” (Probst, 2007, para. 5). Within the field of gifted education, there is the theory that gifted individuals may possess overexcitabilities at a higher rate than average peers (Lind, 2000,
Neihart, Pfeiffer, and Cross, 2016). Overexcitabilities can often be misdiagnosed as a disability (ex. ADHD), giving the child a twice-exceptional label (Webb, et al, 2016). In actuality, the child may just be displaying characteristics that go hand-in-hand with giftedness (Webb, et al, 2016). This is of importance because while having a twice-exceptional child in a classroom may be particularly difficult for a teacher, overexcitabilities will appear the same, but overexcitabilities do not necessarily come with a diagnosis or a learning plan. This is where a teacher who is familiar with giftedness could be critical. It is important for educators to realize that “the emotional extremes that these children experience are not a sign of neurosis, but an indication of potential for growth” (Halsted, 2009, p. 19).

The overexcitabilities that Dabrowski theorized are psychomotor, sensual, emotional, imaginative, and intellectual (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) looked at the ways overexcitabilities are presented in gifted populations. The researchers explained the following: psychomotor refers to having an increased energy, a higher alertness, and a desire to organize (Tucker & Hafenstein). Individuals who exhibit psychomotor overexcitabilities might have tics, nail biting, impulsive behavior, and present as being bossy (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Sensual individuals have an interest in texture, a discriminating taste, and an appreciation for art (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Yet, sensual individuals also might possibly be prone to overeating, frustration with tags on clothing, and feel overwhelmed by crowds (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Intellectual overexcitability is an intensified and accelerated activity of the mind, a large vocabulary and humor (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Intellectual
individuals also tend to neglect duties, and they often are nonconforming, yet dislike unclear areas (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Imaginational people enjoy invention, fantasy, animistic thinking and expressive imagining (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Unfortunately, these individuals are often labeled as daydreamers, as well as distracted, and disruptive (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Finally, emotional people have greater sensitivity, greater empathy, and an understanding of truth and fair play (Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Though, these thoughts can also make them anxious, suicidal, sensitive, and have a desire for perfectionism (Finlay, 2002).

Lind (2000) found that examples of overexcitable traits that may lead a teacher to be negative towards the child are distractibility, sensitivity, “overreacting,” and intensity. Individuals who exhibit overexcitabilities are not always as valued and could potentially have social problems due to the fact that others can not relate to the overexcitabilities being expressed (Lovecky, 1986). Gifted adult educators could support the understanding that an overexcitability will “inevitably lead to dissonance, conflict and tension, but at the same time it enriches, expands and intensifies the individual’s mental development” (Lind, 2000, p.2). At the same time, negative classroom behavior decreases when educators have an empathetic understanding of their students (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2015). Understanding this potential misdiagnosis as well as a lack of awareness is why this study is partially framed by Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration that encompasses overexcitabilities. When teachers are thinking empathetically, they are “less likely to label the student a troublemaker” (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2015, p. 2).
Perfectionism

Siegle and Schuler (2000) define perfectionism as setting unrealistic standards for oneself, often to an unhealthy level. Both gifted children and gifted adults report behaviors of perfectionism (Prober, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). “While balanced perfectionism manifests itself as a healthy pursuit of excellence, when added to the intensity that also characterizes gifted students, perfectionism can become unbalanced and have a negative effect on children’s lives” (Halsted, 2009, p. 40). Students who are perfectionists might be overly critical of their work and ability and have an obsessive approach to preciseness (Siegle & Schuler, 2000). When asked how being identified as gifted affected their identity, 21% of the 83 adults identified as gifted in high school and involved in an ongoing longitudinal study said that identification increased their perfectionism (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright & Jackson, 2010). At the same time, Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright and Jackson (2010) found that there was an increased need for achievement within this adult group that was studied.

Siegle and Schuler (2000) focused on 391 male and female gifted students with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, as well as living in a mixture of geographical areas. The research mirrored that of the literature, in that it was found that gifted females are more concerned with mistakes and being organized than their male gifted peers (Siegle & Schuler, 2000). Interestingly, while not presenting as many perfectionistic traits, gifted males were found to have higher parental expectations which impacts career choices and other gender differences (Siegle & Schuler, 2000).
Research has found that programming can also impact perfectionism. Programming that lacks challenge actually has the effect of increasing perfectionism (Neihart, Pfeiffer & Cross, 2016). “Providing gifted students with rigorous curriculum beginning in kindergarten will foster the development of healthy attitudes toward challenge, mistakes, and working hard to achieve success” (Neihart, Pfeiffer & Cross, 2016, p. 35-36). Teachers need to be mindful of not praising students for their abilities, for this increases the likelihood that students will want to continue to do what is needed to maintain that praise, rather than working hard and taking risks that might not be reflective of their inborn ability (Winebrenner, 2012). Therefore, proper programming is important for both perfectionists and underachievers.

**Underachievers**

Sylvia Rimm (2004) gives a general definition of underachievers as students who “aren’t learning or producing to their abilities in school” (p. 7). Underachievement is linked to inappropriate gifted programming, and “research suggests that students with a positive attitude toward their teachers and courses have higher achievement levels” (Heacox & Cash, 2014, p. 115). This gives just cause for matching the student with the most appropriate teacher. Underachievers are often twice exceptional (Silverman, 2019). Twice-exceptionality contributes to underachievement if the student is not getting proper support for the exceptionality and the giftedness (Silverman, 2019). Underachievement can also be the result of school or home situations (Rimm, 2004). There are multiple symptoms of underachievement, with avoidance of work being one of the most common (Rimm, 2004). “Challenging work may appear threatening” to gifted underachievers and
they may “worry it could reveal that they’re not as gifted as expected” (Rimm, 2004, p. 7).

Like all students, there are some gifted students who depend on more help than is necessary and others who avoid help (Rimm, 2004). Being able to get a good grade, even if that grade is a B, might be an area of pride in which the gifted underachiever can brag about the grade and the lack of time or studying it took (Rimm, 2004). Underachievement is a way to hide giftedness (Rimm, 2004). Gifted boys and gifted girls are seen to mask their giftedness in particular ways (Luftig & Nichols, 1991). Luftig and Nichols (1991) found that gifted boys would mask their giftedness by being funny, and often play the role of the class clown as a way to gain status with their classmates. Gifted girls are much more serious in nature, and in an effort to not appear melancholy, gifted girls also underachieve to mask their giftedness (Luftig & Nichols, 1991). “Underachievement in young girls may best be described as failing to do as well as might be expected in school. Sex differences in underachievement have been found to first emerge in sixth grade or in junior or senior high school” (Reis, 1987, p. 83). “Gifted girls are likely to lower their aspirations during the junior high years in ways that will profoundly affect their futures” (Halsted, 2009, p. 29).

The most common problem for gifted students is when “Kids begin by feeling positive about school, but they’re not sufficiently challenged. They learn that achievement is easy, and learning and studying are effortless” (Rimm, 2004, p. 9). Not being challenged is one difficulty that can lead to underachievement, but finding work to be too difficult leads others down the path of underachievement, as well, especially in
regards to asynchronous development (Silverman, 2019). Underachievers can be asynchronous, with their strengths and weaknesses being far apart (Silverman, 2019). This can lead to purposefully trying to avoid school and anything school related (Martin, 2006). As a result, “underachievers do hold more negative attitudes toward school than average or high achievers” (Heacox & Cash, 2014, p. 115).

There is a second group of underachievers referred to as the hidden underachiever (Coil, 2004). These are students who look like they are doing well enough in school, but are really doing very little (Coil, 2004). There are several mindsets that go along with students in this category. Coil (2004) found that this group of underachievers expect that they should be getting A’s, though they don’t want to do much to get them. They believe that they should be entertained at school, by teachers, and they want instant gratification rather than hard work to get them what they need (Coil, 2004). “Thus our hidden underachievers look for the easy problems and few answers and generally make very few mistakes” (Coil, 2004, p. 28). There are also others who have decided, possibly through their peer group or seeing what a popular student looks like, that giftedness is not cool (Coil, 2004). They, therefore, take the route of underachievement.

Silverman (2019) found that IQ and peer relations go hand in hand, with the greater the IQ the more difficult it is for a gifted student to find a peer group. Therefore, rejecting their giftedness in the name of social status can lead to possible underachievement (Silverman, 2019). Fortunately, proper programming can help reduce the situation of underachievement (Coil, 2004; Delisle, 2014). “When special educational opportunities are afforded to gifted children, and the pace of instruction is increased, the
social and emotional difficulties that gifted children face in school disappear” (Delisle, 2014, p. 9).

**Programming and Differentiation**

**Programming**

Gifted students need educator advocates who can empathize with individual students in order to make appropriate changes in the classroom and the school culture as it relates to programming. Gifted adults report frustration and disappointment over the academic system that they were a part of when they were in school (Prober, 2011), thus possibly giving them motivation to provide a better structure for gifted students currently in the education system. “Gifted students will need a nurturing school environment that respects differences among its students and strives to develop the ‘whole’ student with every learning opportunity” (Susko, 2009, p. 760). Gifted students generally report positive outcomes with gifted programming (Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannatter, 2010). Kaufman (1992) studied 296 gifted adults and found that of those that participated in gifted programming (grade skipping, accelerated classes, school or summer experiences, etc.):

- 79% regarded them as intrinsically worthwhile. Regarding their most significant educational experiences, 40% felt that a particular in-depth academic course or training program had the most impact. Approximately 22% cited exposure to diverse topics and opportunities for independent study as the most significant. (p. 3)

Gifted students need to learn in a manner that organizes the information into big ideas, as well as in a way that makes the information relevant (Tomlinson, 1997). Tomlinson (1997) researched programming and found that there are several ways that
gifted students should and should not be taught. Gifted students should not be expected to learn what they already know or do what they already know how to do (Tomlinson, 1997). Gifted students should not be on their own for an independent assignment for a long period of time (Tomlinson, 1997). Gifted students should not feel like they are just doing busy work or being put into a tutoring position (Tomlinson, 1997). Learning for gifted students should involve actual learning, not just time-filling experiences such as word-searches (Tomlinson, 1997).

James Gallagher (2000) approached the topic of programming by questioning whether giftedness exists and what the value of a gifted education is. He acknowledged that gifted children can be seen differently depending on the culture (Gallagher, 2000). Gallagher (2000) looked at studies on twins and the relationship between nature and nurture in regard to giftedness. He concluded that while genetics and nature play a role in the lives of gifted children, it is important to recognize that nurture and environment are equally important (Gallagher, 2000). This is key when looking at the best approaches to gifted education. Gallagher (2000) found that programming should benefit all children, not just the gifted. For the highly gifted, special teachers need to be employed, and the curriculum needs to be compacted (Gallagher, 2000).

While there are many programs that are good for all students, such as enrichment and problem-solving activities, there are specific practices that are unique for gifted education. These include acceleration, ability grouping, career education for girls, a higher level of the curriculum, and differentiation (Tomlinson, 1997; Gallagher, 2006; Winebrenner, 2000). Acceleration is the most researched effective intervention, yet it is
the one that is used the least (Delisle, 2014). Gallagher (2000) questioned some of the methods currently being used in schools, such as pull-out programming for limited time during a week. He noted how a pull out program is a means to tell parents that something is being done, when in reality, nothing can be accomplished in small increments of time (Gallagher, 2000).

Victoria Neumark (2008) asserted that an enriched curriculum that allows for higher-order thinking and personalized learning is more helpful than specialized classes for gifted students. Gifted students are not a homogenized group and cannot be expected to all learn the same way (Neumark, 2008). Therefore, the curriculum needs to be differentiated for particular needs and abilities, enriched, and personal interests of the students should help guide the curriculum and learning opportunities (Tomlinson, 1997; Gallagher, 2006; Winebrenner, 2000). Neumark (2008) felt that students should be seeing the connections of the curriculum to outside of the classroom, and they should be supported in taking risks and learning from individual failures.

Karen Rogers (2007) in her study entitled “Lessons Learned on Educating the Gifted and Talented: A Synthesis of the Research on Educational Practice” looked at a combination of research on educating the gifted. She identified a district that was going through changes in their gifted programming. To properly determine the direction they should go, the district formed a book group to look at the literature and then created a synthesis of the information. It was determined that gifted learners need challenge daily with either regrouping for instruction or independent learning (Rogers, 2007). “As a part of allowing for individualized learning for gifted learners, it is clear that when students
can show mastery of what is about to be offered, substantial gains in achievement can take place” (Rogers, 2007, p. 386).

Like others (Tomlinson; 1997; Gallagher, 2006; Winebrenner, 2000), Rogers (2007) found that gifted learners need curriculum that is differentiated and done at their advanced pace. Rogers (2007) shed light on several other strong teaching tools that have been repeated throughout the literature including subject-based and grade-based acceleration and providing opportunities for gifted learners to be with peers of similar ability. Ultimately, Rogers (2007) felt that all of these methods could be achieved in just one school or district to best meet the needs of their gifted learners. Rogers (2007) determined that students should be exposed to more advanced information than is presented in the average curriculum. “The more time this occurs for gifted children, the more positive the effects on them, socially and emotionally” (Rogers, 2007, p. 389).

Differentiation

Differentiation is key to proper programming (Tomlinson, 1997; Gallagher, 2006; Neumark, 2008; Rogers, 2007; Winnebrenner, 2000). “General education teachers often need support in differentiating for the diversity in their classroom” (Mofield, 2020, p. 20). Gifted students who do not experience differentiation and are instead stuck in a homogenous curriculum will not have the same opportunity for growth as their peers (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018). “Schools need to recognize that gifted and talented students think differently than do most students their own age and require modifications to curriculum, organizational structure, teaching methods, and social constructs to maximize their learning potential” (Susko, 2009, p. 760). Ultimately, “research
consistently demonstrates that gifted students who receive any level of services achieve at higher levels than their gifted peers who receive none” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, p. 226). Altintas and Ozdemir (2015) explored the area of differentiation with a pre and post-test given to 117 gifted and non-gifted students in both a public and private school. They found that differentiation significantly increased the scores of the control group who received differentiated mathematics lessons (Altintas & Ozdemir, 2015). The researchers argued that differentiation works because of the creative thinking involved, and the positive approach presented for gifted students who have negative feelings towards traditional academics (Altintas & Ozdemir, 2015).

Differentiation helps to meet the needs of all students; yet, it is especially important for gifted students to have a curriculum that meets their unique characteristics and challenges (Tomlinson, 1997; Gallagher, 2006; Winebrenner, 2000). “Planned differentiation should be intentionally implemented for challenging students in academic content, not necessarily for different types of activities” (Mofield, 2020, p. 30). Altintas and Ozdemir (2015) used a mathematics achievement test and a multiple-intelligence inventory and found through these that differentiation increased achievement. They concluded the study by stating that it is not necessary for teachers to use differentiation all the time, but instead that teachers should attempt to do so periodically (Altintas & Ozdemir, 2015). Unfortunately, there is the assumption that “students identified as gifted should be able to make it on their own and general education teachers thought they were already providing differentiation (when they were not)” (Mofield, 2020, p. 22).
Powers (2008) found that independent study is one of the best differentiation techniques for gifted students. Powers (2008) looked at a group of seventh grade social studies students and asked them a series of questions based on the independent study that was implemented in their classroom. The study was based on designing an invention, producing a portfolio, creating a poster and powerpoint and giving an oral presentation. All 16 students reported that they would do another project of this nature in the future, and they had high motivation and responded positively to the questions provided regarding their interest in the material (Powers, 2008). Of the 16 students, 98% liked everything about the project, with the remaining 2% reporting that it was difficult to do, but ultimately, they enjoyed it (Powers, 2008, p. 60). Powers concluded the study by noting how this method supports the twice-exceptional learner and learner with overexcitabilities as they have a strong desire for challenge and interest, yet they are not able to present their abilities or get what they need in an average classroom (Powers, 2008).

In addition to independent study, gifted students need to have a “voice” in their learning; they should have a “chance to tell us what they want pertaining to their own learning and to take responsibility for it” (Powers, 2008, p. 58). “The Use of Independent Study as a Viable Differentiation Technique for Gifted Learners in the Regular Classroom” (2008) stated that gifted students seek challenge and choice. Planning a curriculum in this way can also benefit the biases that are formed towards gifted individuals. When a gifted student is active and engaged in his or her own learning, behavior problems decrease (Powers, 2008). Independent study encourages critical
thinking skills, yet “classroom teachers, however, shy away from its use due to inexperience with the method and questions as to how to monitor and assess learning” (Powers, 2008, p. 58). When teachers do attempt independent study, the results are positive for them, as well as the gifted child (Powers, 2008). When the curriculum is compacted to allow for independent study, “36% to 54% of either the reading or mathematics curricula” is able to be eliminated through pre-assessments, and gifted students perform “as well as equally gifted students who curriculum was not compacted” (Rogers, 2007, p. 386). Thus, giving further evidence that such programming can benefit the gifted child.

**Teacher Characteristics**

All teachers who have a gifted child in their class are teachers of the gifted, yet, not all teachers understand the social, emotional and academic needs of gifted students.

Effective teachers of the gifted share common personality characteristics including empathy, openness, patience, curiosity, a sense of humor, and a positive sense of self. Teachers who excel in working with gifted children understand the inner workings of the child, both the cognitive and emotional aspects. They empathize with the child and are able to imagine how the child thinks and feels about situations and topics. These teachers have an openness that results in their being sensitive to and accepting of all children. Curious about many topics themselves, teachers of the gifted are enthusiastic about students with diverse interests even when the areas of passion for the students are not aligned with the curriculum. (Mann & Mann, 2009)

Imogene Ramsey (1990) suggested that specific teachers of the gifted should be gifted and talented themselves, as well as divergent thinkers. Ramsey (1990) stated that such teachers are also more concerned with the process than the product. Ramsey (1990) described teachers of the gifted as having teaching styles that include critical thinking,
open-ended questions, a flexible approach to education, and a concern for moral
development. Dorhout (1983) found that “academically gifted students may learn more
when being taught by a teacher who displays behavior preferred by the students” (p.
124). Knowledge of subject matter, a sense of humor, and listening to students are key
characteristics of teachers that gifted students’ also value (Robinson, 2008). Exemplary
teachers are more likely to prefer “intuition…and thinking…than the normative
sample…they resembled their gifted, adolescent students” (Robinson, 2008, p. 673).

Since the learning environment that is needed for gifted learners is not necessary
for all students, it is crucial that teachers are aware of the specific needs of gifted
students (Plunkett & Kronberg, 2011). “Appropriate expectations and learning
experiences in school depend on accurate recognition of a child’s performance level or
potential” (Susko, 2009, p. 760). Students are aware when their teachers are giving
gifted students preferential treatment, though. “Children in elementary schools – from
first grade to fifth grade – can distinguish between teacher treatment of low achievers
and teacher treatment of high achievers” (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009,
p.135), insomuch that the students recognized that higher achievers are given more
choice, more positive feedback, and more favorable interaction with their teachers. At
the same time, “a closed mindset to gifted learners is a huge challenge, and the students
can usually tell which teachers understand their needs and which do not” (Mofield,
2020, p. 25).

Multiple studies (Ramsey, 1990; Dorhout, 1983; David, 2011; Robinson, 2008)
have found that students prefer teachers who show high intelligence. Preference for
intelligence, an attribute of giftedness, is within the top three characteristics that gifted students’ value, and it is often cited to be the number one teacher attribute that gifted students prefer (Ramsey, 1990; Dorhout, 1983; David, 2011; Robinson, 2008). Along with this preference, “Extensive observations and research verify significant improvement in both student achievement and motivation when learning and teaching styles are matched” (Dunn & Dunn, 1979, p. 242).

Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu, and Choi (2011) found that gifted students prefer teachers who are personally interested in their students, have high expectations, have meaningful content, and are passionate in teaching. These teachers not only hold high expectations of their students, but they also set high standards for themselves, much like gifted adults, and the teachers are known for being welcoming and using humor to connect with their students (Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu & Choi, 2011). Shoshana Rosemarin (2014) questioned whether the teachers of the gifted should be gifted. In a synthesis of the literature she found that gifted teachers often mirror the characteristics and personalities of their students, and “In order to be a successful mediator for gifted students one would undoubtedly have to be intelligent enough, so he could understand their way of thinking, knowledgeable enough to be able to challenge them and, last but not least, emotionally intelligent” (Rosemarin, 2014, p. 268). At the same time, in regards to the overexcitabilities that often confuse teachers, “the stronger these overexcitabilities are, the less peers and teachers welcome them, unless they, too, are gifted” (Halsted, 2009, p. 18).
Conversely, when general education teachers are asked to rate their gifted students, the results are interesting. In a study of 5,385 students, teachers were asked to rate their gifted students (Siegle & Reis, 1998). Siegle, and Reis (1998) found that females are rated higher on effort, and are seen as better at working hard, and having higher quality of work. In regard to ability, teachers rated males and females the same in all subjects except language arts, where females were rated higher (Siegle & Reis, 1998). Interestingly, males viewed language arts as not as important as other subjects, which might be why teachers perceive their effort as not as strong (Siegle & Reis, 1998).

**Gifted Life Stages**

**Gifted Youth**

Gifted adult educators who can remember what it was like to be a gifted youth will most likely have a greater ability to empathize with their gifted students. Gifted adults report that in thinking of their schooling, they remember feeling anxiety and loneliness, and they had difficulty making friends— all experiences that can be similar to gifted youth (Prober, 2011). For example, Tracy Cross (2013) noted that gifted youth often have difficulty when it comes to making friends. Luftig and Nichols (1991) looked at gifted pupils and how their peers perceive them. The 496 students (64 gifted and 432 non-gifted) were categorized into four groups: gifted girls, non-gifted girls, gifted boys, and non-gifted boys. Of the four groups, gifted girls were the most unpopular and gifted boys were the most popular. Due to their unpopular standing, gifted females were considered to be an at-risk group (Luftig & Nichols, 1991). The researchers (Luftig & Nichols, 1991) determined that their unpopularity could be due to the fact that gifted
females took their academics seriously and are therefore seen as moody or somber.

Research has also found that “girls are treated differently in classrooms in college as well as elementary and secondary school” (Reis, 1987, p. 85).

**Late Bloomers and Career Decisions**

**Late Bloomers.**

Marjoram (1995) found that sometimes there is a late development of giftedness. Part of the problem is the school system. In “Growing Up Gifted: To Everything There is a Season” (Marjoram, 1995) the researcher argued that most schools have a single approach to the curriculum, but they do not have opportunities for late bloomers of talent. Marjoram (1995) found that as IQ increases, the speed at which one is capable of learning increases, yet most school systems do not take this into account, and everyone is given the same basic program. There are numerous famous individuals who excelled later in life, or not in the field they were trained in, and Marjoram (1995) claims that many were problem children. Women throughout history have often been discouraged from learning or encouraged to go into homemaking (Marjoram, 1995). Marjoram (1995) felt the question then becomes how many other gifted students are present that go unacknowledged, or have their (in)abilities solidified at an early age, even when their giftedness shows up later. Marjoram (1995) argued the need for extending and enriching the curriculum, as well as acknowledging and discussing the roles of home, friends, and the street play on the education of a child. The goal of the study was to extend the belief that “Not all flowers bloom in spring. We need far more opportunities for late developing of talent” (Marjoram, 1995, p. 58).
Career Decisions.

Research on career decision-making has found that gifted students are not given as much guidance when it comes to choosing a career as their non-gifted peers. “Even if guidance counselors find the time to career counsel, most of them have little understanding of the unique needs of gifted and talented students” (Greene, 2003, p. 70). Part of the problem is the belief that gifted students do not need as much help in making a career choice, and because of their gifts, “such young people can make it on their own” (Fredrickson, 1986, p. 557). Because of academic success, “the primary value of the individual appears to lie in brainpower” and “the college route is the only acceptable one for a gifted student,” this results in putting “pressure on academically gifted students to pursue math, sciences and technology” (Greene, 2003, p. 68). As a result of lack of guidance, gifted students often have difficulty in choosing a career, or choose one at an early stage in life, such as being a doctor, and they stick to this choice due to external pressures rather than personal desires (Fredrickson, 1986).

Multipotentiality, “the state of having many exceptional talents” (Fisher, 2010), and perfectionism are a part of this career decision problem (Greene, 2003). Therefore, some believe gifted students need even more guidance than others (Fredrickson, 1986; Greene, 2003). Gifted students need “career counseling with someone who is not overawed by them but is aware of the special efforts needed to deal with their potentiality” (Fredrickson, 1986, p. 557). Gifted adults in education will potentially have had similar experiences as their gifted students which would allow them to have a greater
understanding of the pressures in choosing a career or the difficulty in making this choice.

While gifted girls and gifted boys have similar career aspirations, gifted boys are more likely to name a specific career that they are aiming for versus their female peers (Reis, Callahan & Goldsmith, 1994). On the other hand, gifted girls are more likely to have the goal of attending graduate school (Reis, Callahan & Goldsmith, 1994).

“Attitudes of Adolescent Gifted Girls and Boys Toward Education, Achievement, and the Future” found that the major differences in gender were when it came to questions of work and having a family (Reis, Callahan & Goldsmith, 1994). The majority of the girls concluded that they would work while married, and they believed they would continue to work even after having children (Reis, Callahan & Goldsmith, 1994). At the same time, 20% of the boys felt that their future female wives should not work after marriage, and 65% of the boys felt that once their wife had a child, she should no longer work (Reis, Callahan & Goldsmith, 1994, p. 145).

Giftedness and career choice can be affected by family pressure for both gifted youth and gifted adults. In relation to these career situations, the majority of gifted girls feel that their parents would support whatever career they chose, while a majority of boys feel differently (Reis, Callahan & Goldsmith, 1994). When it came to their own confidence in what they themselves could do, Reis, Callahan and Goldsmith (1994) found that almost all of the males and females in their study felt that they had the ability to do whatever they wanted, though the girls attributed this slightly more to hard work rather than innate ability. Siegle and Reis (1998) also focused on student perception of their own
abilities. They found that gifted females are not as confident as their male peers in math and rate their own abilities as lower in this subject area (Siegle & Reis, 1998). Overall, both males and females focus more on ability rather than effort in their quality of work (Siegle & Reis, 1998).

**Young Adulthood**

Gifted children grow into young adults and that giftedness is not lost with age (Lovecky, 1986). With this comes unique challenges:

The challenging and potentially volatile transition from childhood to adolescence becomes further complicated for those who are categorized as academically exceptional or as somehow different than others, including those who are advanced relative to their age peers. (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009, p.90)

Young adulthood is defined as a time between the ages of 18-35 that most individuals are looking for life partners (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). The finding of this ideal individual can be influenced by one’s characteristics of giftedness; for example, gifted individuals often experience overexcitabilities at a higher rate than non-gifted individuals, and gifted individuals look for a spouse who can understand or appreciate this intensity (Perrone-McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012). This desire for having their intensities understood during such an important time of life sheds light on the need for people who understand overexcitabilities to be in a gifted child’s life. “The multifaceted aspects of intensity (psychomotor, intellectual, sensual, imaginative, and emotional), as described by Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration, manifest themselves throughout an individual’s lifespan” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Perrone-McGovern, Boo and Vannatter (2012) feel that these factors combined could influence life
satisfaction for gifted adults, and gifted adults need to be around like-minded people to feel life satisfaction.

Gifted adults have greater job satisfaction, and also have greater marital satisfaction if married to a gifted adult (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). “Gifted adults whose social environments do not include other gifted adults may feel alone or dissatisfied” (Perrone-McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012, p. 46). This could also be why gifted students feel a greater connection to teachers who are gifted. At the same time, many gifted youth have early development of empathy, and empathetic feelings that are more pervasive than their peers (Prober, 2011).

Perrone-McGovern, Boo and Vannatter (2012) desired to know whether gifted adults who are married to other gifted adults felt greater life satisfaction. With marital satisfaction was the belief that one’s spouse is often where an individual receives social support (Perrone-McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012). “Marital and Life Satisfaction Among Gifted Adults” was a longitudinal study with a five-year span separating the research. The researchers found that in the first round of research, those with gifted spouses had a higher level of marital satisfaction than those who did not have a gifted spouse, and they concluded that gifted individuals possibly look for other gifted adults to marry (Perrone-McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012). Five years later, there was no increase in marital satisfaction when comparing gifted adults married to non-gifted adults (Perrone-McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012). It was hypothesized that earlier on in life and in marriage one relies more on their spouse for social interactions and emotional support compared to later, and thus the need for the similarity (Perrone-McGovern, Boo
& Vannatter, 2012). At the same time, giftedness can explain why gifted adults sometimes have difficulty finding a life partner with similar interests and sensitivity, as well as depth and complexity (Prober, 2011).

With only 5% of the population being defined as gifted, finding a life partner that has similar interests, as well as an understanding and empathy for the other’s potential overexcitabilities or twice-exceptionalities, can prove difficult for gifted individuals (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). As a result, many gifted young adults who remain single choose to isolate themselves (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

**Gifted Adults**

“Gifted children do not disappear when they graduate from high school or finish college or graduate degrees. They become gifted adults” (Tolan, 1994). Gifted adults are an under-studied population (Perrone- McGovern, Boo & Vannatter, 2012; Perrone-McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler, & Perrone, 2011). “Definitions in giftedness in adults include exceptional overall knowledge or intelligence, exceptional ability in a specific domain, and the ability to learn and assimilate new information quickly” (Perrone-McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler & Perrone, 2011).

Rinn and Bishop (2015) looked at available research, noting that there are limitations to the data, and aimed to answer several questions through a review of the research that has been already done. The researchers (Rinn & Bishop, 2015), believing that people are most productive as adults, looked at gifted adults rather than gifted children. Since childhood is only a quarter of a lifespan, they desired to ensure that gifted
and talented programming is purposeful, and felt that adulthood should be studied (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). In determining if gifted children become gifted adults, the researchers confirmed this belief (Rims & Bishop, 2015). At the same time, it was found that life satisfaction is related to the ability to use one’s intellect (Perrone-McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler & Perrone, 2011). Therefore, having the ability to use one’s intellect, as well as being married to or in contact with gifted adults, impacts life satisfaction for gifted adults.

Gifted adults were asked to define giftedness. They reported that this definition includes being multitalented and being able to learn quickly (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright & Jackson, 2010). Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright and Jackson (2010) found gender differences in regard to whether or not individuals feel that they are still gifted as adults. More men than women felt that they are currently gifted. The researchers (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright & Jackson, 2010) believe the reason women feel this way is due to the imposter syndrome, or phenomenon, in which one doubts their own abilities. Women may also feel this way because of how males and females are socialized in the West (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright & Jackson, 2010). “Research shows that men and women have distinct attributional differences in how they respond to success and failure” (Goman, 2018, para. 6). “Bright, young males seem to attribute their achievements to their own efforts, while girls attribute their accomplishments to external forces and not to themselves” (Reis, 1987, p. 86). Gifted adult homemakers were found to be less ambitious, and women without children were ranked the lowest for satisfaction in life (Rinn & Bishop, 2015).
The voices of gifted adults must be heard when it comes to understanding the field of gifted education. Gifted adults were asked how identification affected them in their youth (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright & Jackson, 2010). While 13% of the respondents felt that identification led to increased pressure and expectations from others, 18% felt that there was an increase in self-confidence if others knew about their identification (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright & Jackson, 2010).

While studies have reached the conclusion that gifted children become gifted adults, one such study found eminent adults and researched their childhood, rather than the reverse (Goertzel, Goertzel, Goertzel & Hansen, 2004). Of the 400 individuals researched, the researchers found that none of those surveyed had an easy childhood, their parents were ambitious, as well as opinionated, the parents went against societal norms with their opinions, and their mothers were often strong women who got their way. When looking at this information in the opposite direction, other researchers found that most gifted youth do not actually become eminent adults (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). Though high IQ at an early age is a good determinant of education, occupation, and life satisfaction, early educational experiences, such as a summer program for the gifted where one would have like-minded peers or educators who have gifted training or can empathize with the gifted experience, influence adult eminence (Rinn & Bishop, 2015).

Rinn and Bishop (2015) went on to look at factors such as perceptions of giftedness, career choices, marital satisfaction, and overall well-being. The majority of gifted adults felt different being gifted, yet not enough to change their behavior (Rinn & Bishop,
They also felt that being perceived as gifted was a positive in their life (Rinn & Bishop, 2015).

**Gifted Adults as Parents**

To better understand the need for gifted programming or for educators who are gifted, it is helpful to look at gifted adults as parents. Research has found that often gifted parents have gifted children, and/or gifted children have parents who have advanced degrees or higher educational attainment compared to their peer group (Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannatter, 2010). “Looking Back on Lessons Learned: Gifted Adults Reflect on Their Experience in Advanced Classes” looked at 88 adults from ages 35-37 (Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannatter, 2010). Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane and Vannatter (2010) aimed to understand these adults and their experiences with advanced level classes to determine whether they felt their children (real or hypothetical) should also pursue advanced classes. Out of the programming options, acceleration was the most positive experience for these adults and their families (Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannatter, 2010). The results reflected current literature that supports the fact that adults who had been in advanced classes generally had positive experiences, and the majority of participants felt that their children should take advanced classes as well (Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannatter, 2010). Many of the individuals felt that the classes helped them prepare for college, though sometimes they felt isolated from their peers as a result of this choice (Peronne, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane & Vannatter, 2010).
Careers in Teaching

Career aspiration is an area that gifted youth can follow in the footsteps of their gifted teachers. Gifted students often have “a strong sense of social justice that may lead a student to seek a socially important job. A heightened need for emotional connection may lead some gifted and talented individuals to service-oriented careers” (Greene, 2003, p. 69).

Kher-Durlabhji, Lacina-Gifford, Carter and Lalande (1997) found that the highest ranked professions for gifted students are scientist or doctor. At the same time, gifted students are discouraged from going into teaching (Kher-Durlabhji, Lacina-Gifford, Carter & Lalande, 1997). There is a societal belief that these bright students should be able to do better, and they are often not given career guidance (Kher-Durlabhji, Lacina-Gifford, Carter & Lalande, 1997). The concern for this is the quality of teachers who will come out of teaching programs if the top tier of students are not entering the field (Kher-Durlabhji, Lacina-Gifford, Carter & Lalande, 1997). While “A Career in Teaching: Comparing Views of Gifted and Talented Adolescents” began and ended with the concern for the teaching profession, the study also looked at how gifted students are being guided to find a career (Kher-Durlabhji, Lacina-Gifford, Carter & Lalande, 1997). It was found that gifted students are given limited career guidance, yet are simultaneously guided into career choices that “regular” students do not have access to; there is the belief that they will excel at any career (Kher-Durlabhji, Lacina-Gifford, Carter & Lalande, 1997).
Parent and Teacher Advocates

**Parent Advocates**

Within the day-to-day functioning of a school, teacher advocates play an important role for gifted students. Yet, “to hold gifted programs accountable for promoting excellence and equity in terms of program policies and services…the role of parents as advocates is critical,” and they often need the support of a teacher who empathizes with gifted learners to gain the social, emotional or academic accommodations that they are fighting for (Grantham, Frasier, Roberts & Bridges, 2005, p. 138). Parents are often the first to identify their child as gifted, and they are often better at this identification than formal testing (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009). If they recognize that an educational need is not being met, advocacy is necessary. Advocacy, for the sake of this study, is in reference to the promotion of effective teaching practices, with teachers demonstrating specific teaching practices that are favorable for gifted students that promote differentiation and higher-level thinking and parents possibly influencing such programming. Duquette, Orders, Fullarton and Robertson-Grewal (2011) looked at effective advocacy and what parents can do to be advocates for their gifted children. Parents can be involved at the home, school, and the district level. They often become involved because they feel they have a right to do so and want to make a difference for their child (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton & Robertson-Grewal, 2011).

The participants of “Fighting for Their Rights: Advocacy Experiences of Parents of Children Identified with Intellectual Giftedness” (2011) wanted successful school experiences for their gifted children and to have teachers who supported them and their
children, as well as provided a challenging curriculum, but getting there was not easy (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton & Robertson-Grewal, 2011). “Many parents reported that they had difficulties convincing the school personnel that their child was gifted” and even “carefully reviewed the test scores with the committee to make their case” (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton & Robertson-Grewal, 2011, p. 500). The individuals in the study had teachers who became defensive and did not place their child’s needs as a high priority (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton & Robertson-Grewal, 2011).

Osborne (2001) found that parents often find it necessary to act when the school does not meet the needs of their gifted child. Parents in this study approached the school in a cooperative way, but some found that if they openly labeled their child as gifted the school was less likely to be helpful with their concerns (Osborne, 2001). Parents were successful if the administrator at the school was flexible and willing to be creative with solutions (Osborne, 2001). Osborne (2001) also found that other parents were successful if they volunteered for programming that would help all of the students, as well as showed respect for the school and did not come across as entitled. Parents were not successful if they were not open to the school about their child’s needs or tried to deny weaknesses on their child’s part (Osborne, 2001). Parents were also not successful in advocating for gifted children if the school already had policies that were inflexible, or if the school overly valued sports or did not have other students with similar abilities (Osborne, 2001). Research on giftedness shows that there is a need for teachers to be better educated, a need to have workshops for parents on the role of advocacy, and a need for teachers who support this advocacy to get other teachers on board.
**Teacher Advocacy**

While parents present one route for advocacy, gifted teachers as advocates are another way in which gifted students can get the services that they need. “Many times when the school does not recognize the needs of gifted students, the teacher becomes the recipient of the parents’ frustrations” (Susko, 2009, p. 761) and the advocate on behalf of the family. Problems in gifted education right now include teacher training and proper programming (Berman, Schultz & Weber, 2012). “Unfortunately, professional educators seldom have training in the learning differences of gifted children or methods for providing the rigorous and stimulating curriculum they need” (Rogers, 2002, p. 3). In a study of pre-service teachers with a pre- and post-test with training on gifted education, it was found that those who are not trained in gifted education or who have not had experience with giftedness themselves are found to have preconceived notions that are difficult to change (Berman, Schultz & Weber, 2012). A similar study found that “students enter teacher education programs with preexisting beliefs based on their experiences as students in schools, and those beliefs are robust and resist change” (Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu & Choi, 2011, p. 112).

Gifted adults who are educators can advocate from the inside by talking to their colleagues about giftedness in ways that parents cannot. In looking at teacher preferences by gifted students, “among the most important personal and social characteristics are that the teacher of the gifted has insights into the cognitive, social and emotional needs of the gifted” (Vialle & Tischler, 2005, p. 173). Such insight can be crucial with teacher collaboration. In a study looking at teacher collaboration, one researcher found themes of
“advocacy and influence when collaboration worked well” (Mofield, 2020, p. 22). With the difficulties parents have when confronting teachers about their gifted child (Osborne, 2001), simply listening to this information from a parent might not be enough to change the thinking of a teacher inexperienced with giftedness. Similarly, in a study of individuals with disabilities, Sonya Miller (2013) found that informing others of the needs of a disabled population through a lens of empathy changed people’s attitudes about disabilities and created opportunities for advocacy. She found that “a curriculum focused on informed empathy improves attitudes toward persons with disabilities” (Miller, 2013, p. 114).

Adult educators who are gifted could pave the way for colleagues to improve attitudes towards gifted children when focusing on their own empathy for the gifted. The goal would be to “change teachers’ mindsets to improve a social system” which has been found effective in studies of empathy (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2015, p. 5). Similarly, when a teacher of the gifted collaborates with a general education teacher over differentiation, it has been found that there is:

- growth in teachers’ competencies in differentiation and growth in student learning. General education teachers learned more about the needs of students identified as gifted and differentiation strategies related to high-level questioning, critical thinking, and creative thinking through this collaborative model. (Mofield, 2020, p. 24)

At the same time, there are many myths related to giftedness and the instruction of the gifted that gifted adult educators can help combat. A myth related to programming is the belief that since gifted students do well on assessments, they are therefore learning; a second myth is that gifted students should be treated as a role model for the rest of their
classmates (Winebrenner, 2000). Winebrenner (2000) combats these myths by discussing the need for all learners to get an education, as well as the desire for equity. Gifted adults who are educators have a first-hand understanding of how gifted students learn differently. They know that gifted students can remember what they learn in less time and at a more complexing level; that they can appear to not be concentrating when they are actually operating on multiple levels of concentration; and that they have often mastered much of the work presented at their grade level (Winebrenner, 2000). The problem related to lack of appropriate programming generally comes down to teacher training. Teachers need to differentiate instruction through the use of pre-assessments, compact the curriculum, provide alternative learning experiences and products as well as provide alternative environments (Winebrenner, 2000). These are all concerns that are potentially easier to tackle from the inside, as a teacher advocate, rather than from the perspective of a parent.

The difficulty in advocacy for the gifted learner is that they already appear to be succeeding in school (Delisle, 2014). The advocate needs to be someone who has intimate knowledge of the positives and negatives of being identified as gifted. It is a natural assumption that by understanding the experiences of gifted youth, as well as mirroring their social and emotional needs (Prober, 2011), gifted adults who are educators would make strong advocates for their gifted students. This is beneficial to the student, as well. Research on students “indicated that they believed they learned more from teachers who understood their needs” (Vialle & Tischler, 2005, p. 180).
Many gifted adults express three forms of overexcitabilities that can be useful in this form of advocacy: divergency, excitability and sensitivity, with sensitivity being seen in a similar way as empathy (Lovecky, 1986). Like gifted youth, gifted adults may feel a lifetime of intensity (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Sensitive gifted adults can identify with others through their heightened feelings; while perceptive gifted adults can see multiple sides of a situation, rather than just their own (Lovecky, 1986). Many gifted adults have lived a life feeling misunderstood by others (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). But in acknowledging this feeling, gifted adults “may be able to help others to understand themselves” as well as “use their special talents to help others find their own creativity and their own source of inner power” (Lovecky, 1986, p. 573-574). In this way, gifted adult educators can help advocate for their gifted students.

**Empathy and Empathy in Education**

*Empathy*

While gifted adults share many of the same characteristics of gifted students, the question becomes whether or not this is enough to promote empathy. “Most people find it easier to be empathetic toward people like themselves, in part because personal experiences shape and define one’s empathic understanding” (Miller, 2013, p. 115). Empathy is defined as, “The ability to understand what another human being is thinking or feeling” (Lopez, 2010, para.1). The field of empathy blends social psychology and cognitive neuroscience (Lopez, 2010). “Empathy is founded on our capacity to recognize that others are similar to us” (Gallagher, 2012, p. 356). “Empathy plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, needs, and desires
between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes prosocial behavior” (Riess, 2017, para. 1).

There are three forms of empathy that deal with understanding the mental state of another (Shanton & Goldman, 2010). The first is called theory theory. The thinking behind this theory is that “given information about another person’s observed behavior or facial expressions, attributors make theoretical inferences to his mental state” (Shanton & Goldman, 2010, p. 1). The second theory of empathy is rationality theory. In rationality theory “people use principles of rationality to attribute mental states to others” (Shanton & Goldman, 2010, p. 1). The third theory, first proposed by Gordon and Heal, is the simulation theory (Shanton & Goldman, 2010). The basis of this theory is that individuals take on the perspective of another to determine their mental state (Shanton & Goldman, 2010). With this theory, “an event can be unconsciously reexperienced if there is a neural or functional resemblance between the original experience and another experience” (Shanton & Goldman, 2010, p. 2). Brain studies have revealed that cells, called “mirror neurons,” are activated when this simulation theory occurs (Gallagher, 2012).

This capacity requires an exquisite interplay of neural networks and enables us to perceive the emotions of others, resonate with them emotionally and cognitively, to take in the perspective of others, and to distinguish between our own and other’s emotions. (Riess, 2017, para. 1)

It is through the simulation theory of empathy that this research was proposed.

**Empathy in Education**

Empathy in education is an area with little research (Barr, 2011; Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019). “Empathy is an important disposition for educators to possess in order to facilitate positive interaction among students” (Barr, 2011, p. 365). Empathy has
been found to benefit academics and a student’s motivation for education increases when they have empathetic teachers (Barr, 2011). “When the teacher has the ability to understand the student’s reaction from the inside, has the sensitive awareness of the process of how education and learning seems to the student…the likelihood of learning is significantly increased” (Rogers, 1967, p. 304). Teacher empathy is defined as “the ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student” (Barr, 2011, p. 365). Of course, teachers will empathize with some students more than others (Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019). Teacher empathy makes a difference in student-teacher relationships and learning (Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019). Teachers who are similar to their students are more likely to have a greater empathetic understanding (Miller, 2013). Not only does empathy play a role in academics and student-teacher relationships, but the need for interventions and discipline is lessened when empathy is encouraged (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2016). Likewise, “The quality of students’ relationships with teachers is one of the strongest predictors of classroom behavior” (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2016, p.1).

Jason Barr (2011) hypothesized that school culture and positive interactions are directly related to a teacher’s ability to empathize with his or her students. Barr (2011) found that “teachers with better perspective-taking would be able to take a third-person perspective, which would aid them in understanding students’ relationships and reacting more appropriately to student behavior” (p. 365). This perspective-taking is important but might not be accurate from teachers who are not themselves gifted, as “many regular education teachers believe they have a full understanding of gifted students, and the
student should just do or understand what the teacher’s expectation is.” (Mofield, 2020, p. 25).

Some teachers are naturally more empathetic than others (Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019). “Instructors high in teacher empathy take the time to get to know their students and help students reach their true potential” (Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019, p. 161). Teacher empathy is related to learning and is among “the strongest predictors of positive student outcomes” (Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019, p. 162). Empathetic teachers do not simply maintain the status quo or lower their standards. Conversely, they “identify and remove obstacles to learning” (Meyers, Rowell, Welss & Smith, 2019, p. 162).

Gifted students may be misunderstood due to asynchronous development, overexcitabilities or other social-emotional factors that are exhibited in giftedness, such as being alone and enjoying this (Halsted, 2009). These social-emotional factors are part of the need for empathetic adults. “Gifted children learn early that many people are annoyed by and resentful of precocious and verbal children with abilities well above the norm” (Halsted, 2009, p. 15). At the same time, “gifted children realize fairly early not only that they are different, but also that there is something vaguely unacceptable about this difference” (Hasted, 2009, p. 15).

**Similar Studies of Gifted Adults**

Karen Feinberg’s (1970) article entitled “Growing Up Gifted” is a similar study that discusses the life experiences she had that made her the gifted adult she has become. She stated that in her youth she confused teachers by asking too many questions, was a
constant reader and was unpopular (Feinberg, 1970). She was also often in mild trouble (Feinberg, 1970). Her parents were good at encouraging her intellect, though (Feinberg, 1970). She had a few teachers who she appreciated for accepting her for who she was (Feinberg, 1970). She decided to go into teaching because she wanted to support other gifted youth (Feinberg, 1970). As an adult, she learned that some men did not want to date her if they knew she wanted to get a Ph.D. (Feinberg, 1970). She used this as a litmus test to find her husband (Feinberg, 1970). She gives advice for other gifted youth and adults; with this advice is the suggestion to be patient, be true to themselves and not try to hide their abilities, and to know that if they are satisfied with life they will be more confident in dealing with the world (Feinberg, 1970). This similar study exemplifies the understanding gifted adults have towards gifted students and the role they play in the lives of gifted youth as well as the role the simulation theory of empathy plays with adults who have similar characteristics as their students.

Gifted adults should be valued for the wisdom they can give to others, as well as the unique role they could have in the education of gifted youth. Like Feinberg (1970), in a longitudinal study of gifted adults, Perrone-McGovern, Ksiarzak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler, and Perrone (2011) provided advice that gifted adults gave to younger gifted adults. These gifted adults suggest to youth that they should remember to be open to different careers and interests, thus reflecting the concerns of others when it came to career choices and the counseling of gifted youth (Fredrickson, 1986; Greene, 2003). The gifted adults also suggested to be who you want to be, not who others expect, and to
always continue to learn (Perrone-McGovern, Ksiazak, Wright, Vannatter, Hyatt, Shepler & Perrone, 2011)

Gaps in the Literature

The literature reveals a lack of research on gifted adults as well as a lack of research on gifted teacher characteristics. There is a need for research on gifted adults who are educators since this is the population that spends a significant amount of time with gifted students. Whether or not this group matches the gifted teacher characteristics that have been identified needs to be determined. Gifted adults who are educators can also provide a lens that is unique and necessary for understanding gifted education. Gifted adult educators as advocates is an area without research.

Summary

In conclusion, this literature review attempts to tease out the ways in which giftedness could play a role in a student’s success. The research presented identifies the difficulty in identification of gifted individuals, as well as proper programming for their school success. Characteristics that influence identification, as well as teacher perceptions of gifted students, are related to underachievement, perfectionism, twice-exceptionality, and overexcitabilities. Gifted adults found positive results with being identified in their youth, and they have experiences and life situations to share with others. At the same time, characteristics of the ideal gifted teacher often mirror those of their students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the relevant research on giftedness in areas in which adult educators unfamiliar with gifted identification or gifted education may or may not have the knowledge or empathy that is needed to accommodate gifted students. Chapter Two looked at research literature on gifted adults and gifted adult teachers. Chapter Two introduced the theoretical frameworks of the simulation theory of empathy and Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration to frame the direction of the literature as well as the research that is being sought. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methods that were used in this study.

Research Design

This research was a qualitative study using a narrative design. Narrative is a form of qualitative research that relies on storytelling (Sandelowski, 1991). In a narrative, the researcher and the subject collaborate on the life story of the individual being studied (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2017). Humans are natural storytellers and telling the story of a lived experience creates value and meaning for the listener.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used to explore a problem as well as establish details that can only be found by talking with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative researchers
believe that people have the ability to examine their experiences and use these as a means to understanding a situation (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2017). “We also use qualitative research because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46). Whereas quantitative data looks at numbers and trends to create meaning, “the goal of qualitative research is to provide in-depth understanding and therefore, targets a specific group, type of individual, event or process” (CIRT, n.d.). The specific group that is targeted then has their story captured and analyzed for themes within a narrative framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “Scholars now see the story in the study, the tale in the theory, the parable in the principle, and the drama in the life” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 161). Qualitative research also has the “ability to transform the world” by beginning with “assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 8).

**Interpretive Framework**

Just like the theory of simulation (Shanton & Goldman, 2010) that allows for an individual to understand another or create empathy towards a situation, narratives can explain a situation in an individual’s life, as well as create meaning within a current context that can allow for a deeper understanding of another (Sandelowski, 1991). John Dewey believed that “people are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). This applies to both the research method of narrative and the theoretical framework of simulation, in such that, this narrative looks to understand individuals and their teaching relationship with others. Dewey believed that with
narrative research, “experiences grow out of other experiences and experiences lead to further experiences,” which is a summation of what this research aimed to do (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). While the theory of simulation was one framework being used for this study, Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009) that acknowledges a level of sensitivity and intensity for gifted children was the other that helped guide the questions being asked and the direction that the individual narratives took.

**Narrative Theory**

Narrative theory is used as the “general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to in a study or a lens through which to view” the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 248).

Narrative theory starts from the assumption that narrative is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with fundamental elements of our experience, such as time, process, and change, and it proceeds from this assumption to study the distinctive nature of narrative and its various structures, elements, uses, and effects. (“What is Narrative Theory,” 2014, para.1)

“Life – as we come to it and as it comes to others – is filled with narrative fragments enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). What better reason to turn to a narrative study then to know that life is full of narratives.

The word narrative comes from Latin for “related,” “told,” or “to tell,” as well as the Sanskrit word for “to know” (Kim, 2016, p. 6). “Thus, a narrative is a form of knowledge that catches the two sides of narrative, telling as well as knowing” (Kim, 2016, p. 6). In order to understand each other and our interactions in the world, as well as
the experiences that are had or to be had, the human experience, especially as it is experienced in schools, is best viewed through a narrative lens (Clandin & Connelly, 2000).

This study was best suited for a narrative approach since narratives study individual people and their life stories (Best, Khan & Jha, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants for this research were gifted adults who were educators. The life story to be told was based on their individual identification and effects of this, and how their identification and thoughts on giftedness are reflected in their teaching, as well as their empathizing and advocating for gifted students. “Narrative inquiry utilizes interdisciplinary interpretive lenses with theoretically, philosophically diverse approaches and methods, all revolving around the narratives and stories of research participants” (Kim, 2016, p.6). This narrative was built upon the theoretical frameworks of the simulation theory of empathy and Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration.

**Narrative Method**

Narrative studies are conducted through interviews, observations, documents, questionnaires, surveys and other data collecting methods (Best, Khan & Jha, 2017). The research proposed in this study was gathered through interviews. “Interviews provide unique insights into the complex lives of individuals in a society,” and they are the “foremost method in narrative inquiry” (Kim, 2016, p. 157).

The setting of a narrative is important. The setting has a narrative history, and the people being interviewed have stories that span beyond the time of observation or interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative setting for this research was the
location and time period of gifted identification and how this identification led to programming. The “principal interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). Unlike quantitative studies, there will not be a hypothesis in a narrative. Knowing this, it is important to both explain oneself in the field and allow the work with participants to shape the direction of the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that one “consider how the collection of the data and their recordings can take different shapes” (p. 71). “The conditions under which the interview takes place also shape the interview; for example, the place, the time of day, and the degree of formality established” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110). There are common elements to narrative analysis:

- collecting stories of personal experience in the form of field texts such as conducting interviews, retelling the stories based on narrative elements, rewriting the stories into a chronological sequence, and incorporating the setting or place of the participants’ experiences. (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 198)

All of this is important in a narrative, as well as the umbrella category of qualitative research, because “qualitative researchers approach their data” knowing that “each case is unique and must be treated accordingly” (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2017, p. 233).

Like other forms of qualitative study, it is important in narrative work, and it was important in this study, to create data files, organize the information, create notes and interview protocols, read through the interviews, make margin notes, and code for themes or narrative structure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Research Questions

This study aimed to examine adults who have been identified as gifted and are in the field of education. Research has shown that gifted individuals prefer teachers who have characteristics similar to themselves (Ramsey, 1990; Dorhout, 1983; David, 2011; Robinson, 2008). The researcher aimed to understand whether identification and a similarity in characteristics allows gifted educators to have a greater empathy for their gifted students. Therefore, the central question being asked was “How do the experiences of gifted adults who are educators influence their teaching and empathy towards gifted learners?”

Overarching Question:

How do the experiences of gifted adults who are educators influence their teaching and empathy of gifted learners in order to create empathy in other teachers?

Sub-questions:

1. In what way does empathy towards giftedness influence gifted adults’ teaching practices?
2. In what ways do gifted adults’ experience cognitive dissonance when their thoughts about gifted education are inconsistent with the practices at their school or when dealing with other teachers who are not gifted?
3. How do gifted adults who are educators advocate for gifted practices or gifted students at their school?
With this overarching question, the goal was to examine how the experience of being identified as gifted shaped the school experiences of the individuals being interviewed, and in turn, how that experience has shaped the way in which a gifted adult approaches his or her classroom and the teaching of gifted learners. Gifted educators can provide unique insight into both the identification of gifted youth and the best practices in programming “with the idea that the teacher’s narrative of experience would shape the curriculum” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). In looking at how to design a study that would engage readers, Creswell and Poth (2018) note that it is important to “study a unique sample” (p. 59). This research aimed to look at a unique sample, as there is little research available on adult educators who are gifted.

Buss and Zambo (2010) acknowledge that, “If you choose to investigate practice through a moral and ethical lens, your work will focus on uncovering hidden assumptions and behaviors that influence individuals” (p. 6). Questions within this study had the possibility of doing this, as they were aimed at getting to an understanding of empathy and how being similarly identified as gifted allows gifted adults to be more or less empathetic towards gifted learners. These questions also looked at the cognitive dissonance that occurs in a setting where gifted students or gifted programming is misunderstood. Riess (2017) believes that “If we are to move in the direction of a more empathic society and a more compassionate world, it is clear that working to enhance our native capacities to empathize is critical” (p. 74). While empathy is difficult to qualify, getting to an understanding of empathy plays an important role in both the school setting and society.
Data Collection Procedures

Validity and Reliability

Questions were tested for validity and reliability prior to interviewing respondents. In this way, it was assured that the questions being asked were done in an informative and purposeful way. The interview questions were shared with three experts in the field with the request that they examine whether the interview questions were appropriately worded, and how closely each question matched the overall research questions. Deirdre Lovecky was the only individual to respond to this request. Her response was appreciated as she has researched gifted adults and their overexcitabilities (1986). She voiced concerns regarding questions related to cognitive dissonance. She felt that:

 Teachers who are gifted themselves, especially if they are highly gifted, experience some dissonance when dealing with other teachers who are more average in IQ. Gifted students often have a lot of trouble with teachers who are not gifted because the teachers cannot imagine what it is like to have a higher IQ and see and feel and think the things the child does. It is more likely that average teachers think that expanding the curriculum means giving the student more work. They don't see why the gifted student should skip work they already know and they don't have a feel for how the mind in need of stimulation experiences the average pace and content of class work. When the gifted teacher, who does get this, as he or she experienced and still experiences it, tries to explain it to the more
average teacher, there can be all sorts of negatives based on the difference between experiences. I would suggest some way of getting to this in your questions, as while good questions, I think they miss this point. (D. Lovecky, personal communication, August 3, 2019)

From this advice, additional questions were added to get a better understanding of the cognitive dissonance that is felt by educators who are gifted. The subsequent interviews were transcribed exactly as spoken. Reliability was gained by bringing the transcribed interviews and information back to the subjects after analysis, also known as member checking. This way it could be determined if the information gathered was accurate and the analysis made was based on truth rather than assumption. Through this method of assessing the questions ahead of time, interviewing research subjects, and returning to the interviewees to verify the data, the validity of the study was enhanced.

**Protection of Participants**

In order to protect the participants in this study, pseudonyms are used. Participants signed a consent form showing the nature of the research, as well as the approval of IRB. Participants were not subjected to anything harmful by being involved in this study, though there could have been some discomfort with the topic of empathy. This was disclosed prior to engaging in interviews. Interviews took place at times that were best for the interviewees, as well as in locations that each felt most comfortable. The researcher’s community partner helped in finding adult educators who are gifted.
Community Partner

The researcher chose a community partner who was familiar with gifted education, as well as familiar with being an educator. The community partner for the researcher was interested in the research and felt that this persistent problem is important. This individual was identified as gifted in second grade, and she is currently the lower school head at a K-8 institution. The community partner agreed to this role (Appendix A) and the research questions were developed. The community partner helped the researcher determine appropriate interview questions that matched the research questions. Through the community partner’s association with the National Association of Independent Schools, connections to heads of schools who could help facilitate finding teachers who might be appropriate research subjects were made.

Interview Procedures and Interview Questions

Cresswell and Poth’s (2018) “Procedures for Preparing and Conducting Interviews” was used as a guide (p. 166):

1. Determine the open-ended research questions to be answered.
2. Identify interviewees based on purposeful sampling procedures.
3. Distinguish type of interview based on mode and interactions.
5. Design and use an interview protocol to guide interactions.
6. Refine interview procedure through pilot testing.
7. Locate a distraction-free place for interviews.
8. Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate.
9. As an interviewer, follow good interview procedures.

10. Decide transcription logistics.

**Interview Procedures**

Interview participants were found through a recruitment letter (Appendix B) distributed by the researcher’s community partner. The recruitment letter provided a description of the research and initial selection criteria of the participants. This selection criteria stated that individuals must have been identified as gifted in their youth. The recruitment letter provided information on how to contact the researcher and the voluntary nature of participation. The researcher then further narrowed the field by ensuring that those who had reached out to participate remembered classroom or school modifications as a result of being identified as gifted and had been an educator for more than a year. In this way, the researcher could be confident that the participant would be able to remember the time in their youth related to the research, as well as respond to questions related to reflecting on their own teaching methods and their students. It was important to find teachers who were beyond their first year because teachers who have survived their first year of teaching have the opportunity to hone their craft, as the first year is often a difficult year. “A first-year teacher may feel stress, lack appropriate support, and may feel unprepared to handle behavioral and academic issues among their students” (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017, p. 265).

An example of an individual responding, but not necessarily qualifying, was a teacher who had been in a gifted program in second grade, but she had not participated in any other gifted programming and was unsure how she ended up in the second grade.
program. Her memory of this experience was not strong, either. Therefore, while this educator may have been interesting to interview, the reflection that was needed for her giftedness and participation in a gifted program was not enough, and therefore she did not qualify.

Once participants voluntarily contacted the researcher, a place and time that was most convenient for each to be interviewed was determined. Interviewees signed an informed consent (Appendix C) that stated the purpose of the study, as well as confidentiality of information. Participants were reassured that pseudonyms would be used, that there were no risks, they were told that there were no benefits or compensation involved, and the informed consent provided a spot for them to agree or disagree to audio recording. Participants filled out a demographic face sheet (Appendix D) for general questions about schooling and geographic location growing up as well as current teaching role. From there, the interview was conducted. The interview, itself, then followed a narrative inquiry protocol. Open-ended questions (Appendix E) were used to determine how identification of giftedness in their youth played a role in their teaching and their approach towards the gifted learner.

At the same time, while the researcher was initially concerned that people would not reply to the recruitment email, the responses were received relatively quickly after each recruitment email was sent. The community partner sent out the recruitment email to various schools that either she or the researcher had contact with, as well as placed the recruitment email on an NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) listserv. Recruitment was done in this way so that those who replied were not personally
requested to reply, and the interviewees needed to contact the researcher or the community partner to show their interest. The researcher then followed up with a second recruitment email to those who had already replied and reminded them of the snowball nature of the study. As a result, the recruitment email was forwarded by these individuals to several other educational organizations and schools.

Thirteen individuals responded to the recruitment letters. Of the thirteen, eight were selected to be interviewed. The remaining five were not selected for the following reasons: one person was not currently teaching, another had no memory of being identified as gifted or the gifted program that she was in for one year, a third person could not commit to a date or time to meet to be interviewed and ultimately no longer seemed interested, a fourth person was identified as gifted as an adult and had not been in a gifted program during schooling, and the final individual teaches gifted students but is not, himself, identified as gifted. He simply had confusion over recruitment wording.

**Interview Questions**

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend open-ended questioning in narrative research to get to the answer to the research problem, as well as five to seven questions. Similarly to Creswell and Poth (2007), Kim (2016) recommends six to ten questions that are prepared in advanced and are open-ended in nature so as to let the interviewee fill the space with his or her individual story. Questions in this study had the goal of “gathering data through the collection of [his or her] stories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Through these narrative stories, the “individual experiences” that were had by this adult while in his or
her youth were determined, with the hope that they would “shed light on the identities of this individual and how [he or she] see themselves” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71).

In discussing the use of interviews, Elliot Eisner (1998) notes: “Conducting a good interview is, in some ways, like participating in a good conversation: Listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than abstract speculations, which are less likely to provide genuinely meaningful information” (p. 183). The interview questions were semi-structured in format. In this way, “you prepare general questions that you want to ask, but use them only to guide the interview, helping you maintain its focus rather than dictate its direction” (Kim, 2016, p. 163).

“During the interview, the researcher prompts the participant to expand in various section of the stories and asks the interviewee to theorize about his or her life” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 200). The focus of this was on the impact being identified as gifted has had on their teaching practices and advocacy for gifted students or gifted programming.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions:</th>
<th>Connection to the Literature</th>
<th>Connection to Sub-Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe your teaching style and your approach to education.</td>
<td>Ramsey, 1990; Dorhout, 1983; Robinson, 2008; Plunkett &amp; Kronberg, 2011</td>
<td>Introductory question that is useful for all three sub-questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Did identification have an effect on you? Explain.</td>
<td>Lopez, 2010; Shanton &amp; Goldman, 2010; Gallagher, 2012; Freehill, 1974; Riess, 2017</td>
<td>In what ways does empathy towards giftedness influence gifted adults teaching practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What perceptions have you observed in your peers with respect to students who have been identified as gifted?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflect on a time in which you witnessed a gifted student who was similar to you or had similar experiences as you did in your youth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did peer teachers respond to this student?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tell me about your schooling as a gifted student?</td>
<td>VanTassel-Baska, 2000; Heacox &amp; Cash, 2014; Delisle, 2014;</td>
<td>In what ways do gifted adults experience cognitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Tell me about a time that you had a gifted student in your class. How did you know he/she was gifted?
7. Tell me about the identification process for you. How does this compare to the identification process employed at your school?
8. Tell me about any changes or modifications to your schooling that resulted from gifted identification and your feelings on this. Does gifted identification result in any educational modification in your current school? Do you feel that these modifications are appropriate?
9. Tell me about being in education as a gifted adult.
10. Tell me about discussions about giftedness or about a gifted student at your school with your colleagues or administrators. How do these conversations usually go? Are gifted students understood at your school?
11. Tell me about how you were perceived in school. Did you ever experience teachers misunderstanding you as a result of giftedness?
12. How do you think this may have affected your approach to the gifted student?

Table 3.1: Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Tell me about a time that you had a gifted student in your class.</td>
<td>Tomlinson, 1997; Gallagher, 2000; Neumark, 2008; Galbraith &amp; Delisle, 2015</td>
<td>dissonance when their thoughts about gifted education are inconsistent with the practices at their school or when dealing with other teachers who are not gifted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tell me about the identification process for you. How does this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compare to the identification process employed at your school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tell me about any changes or modifications to your schooling that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resulted from gifted identification and your feelings on this. Does</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gifted identification result in any educational modification in your</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current school? Do you feel that these modifications are appropriate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tell me about discussions about giftedness or about a gifted student</td>
<td></td>
<td>How do gifted adults in education advocate for gifted practices or gifted students at their school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at your school with your colleagues or administrators. How do these</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversations usually go? Are gifted students understood at your school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Tell me about how you were perceived in school. Did you ever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience teachers misunderstanding you as a result of giftedness?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How do you think this may have affected your approach to the gifted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Data was collected in the form of interviews. Denise Shekerjian (1990) notes that within the interview process, there are multiple situations that could arise as a result of the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, as well as the thought process that goes along with being interviewed and interviewing another. She explains this as:

There is the question you asked that is not, curiously, the question he is trying to answer. There’s the spoken answer and the unspoken answer. There’s the split-second decision as to whether to pursue a follow-up question or shift the line of inquiry altogether. There’s the question that
worked well for the last guy but you couldn’t possibly ask it of this guy, or maybe he thinks he’s answered it already. There’s the problem of trying to get him to elucidate what he thinks, indeed knows, is incredibly self-evident. There’s the problem of the themes to develop and the assumptions you’ve grown to really like, and therefore, hate like the dickens to hear when they’re not true. (Shekerjian, 1990, p. xx)

The researcher aimed to look for these moments in which the participant was providing an unspoken answer or did not answer the question being asked to find the subtle meanings within the interview. It was understood that, “Throughout the slow process of collecting data and analyzing them, the narrative is being shaped” (Creswell, 2018, p. 53). Narrative, as a method, “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2018, p. 67). The stories involved in these interviews included “descriptions of the physical, emotional and social situations” of the participants (Creswell, 2018, p. 69). In this way, the researcher was able to truly understand the stories being told by the gifted adults, as well as the impact identification had on them, and how that has influenced their approach to teaching gifted learners. It should be noted that “narrative stories often contain turning points” (Creswell, 2018, p. 69). The researcher looked for these as a way to enhance the narrative and make further meaning of the situation. “Such incidents can serve as organizing structures for recounting the story including the lead-up and consequences” (Creswell, 2018, p. 69).

**Participants and Sampling**

**Participants**

This was a narrative study of eight gifted individuals who are teachers. Since the method of gathering interviewees was snowball sampling, which is a form of convenience sampling, all attempts at gender and ethnic diversity were made, but were
not always possible. It was desired for subjects to be a mixture of male and female at public and private schools of various diverse backgrounds. With the community partner’s role in independent schools, half of the participants were found through this connection and are currently teaching in private schools. The other four members of the study came from the snowball nature of recruitment. Interviewees were teachers who were identified as gifted and were a part of some sort of gifted programing during their school years. This sample was asked their age, geographic area while growing up, current geographic area of teaching, and education level, in addition to questions directly related to giftedness and teaching.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that the sample size in narrative research is smaller than with other qualitative methods in order to get an understanding of the subjects’ personal story, often with only one or two individuals. Since there needs to be a saturation of information, one or two subjects is not enough, and eight was the proposed amount. In “Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research,” Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommend sampling until the information that is gained begins to become repetitive. In this way, saturation is met. Moser and Korstjens (2018) believe that in qualitative research:

First, participants are always sampled deliberately. Second, sample size differs for each study and is small. Third, the sample will emerge during the study: based on further questions raised in the process of data collection and analysis, inclusion and exclusion criteria might be altered, or the sampling sites might be changed. Finally, the sample is determined by conceptual requirements and not primarily by representation. (p. 10)
The narrative research on gifted adults and overexcitabilities entitled “Can you Hear the Flowers Singing? Issues for Gifted Adults” (Lovecky, 1986) that studied fifteen individuals before reaching saturation was used as a guide.

**Sampling**

The method of sampling was purposeful sampling (CIRT, n.d.). “In this type of sampling, participants are selected or sought after based on pre-selected criteria based on the research question” (CIRT, n.d.). Purposeful sampling is also recommended when the “cases for study are selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative” and the sampling has the purpose of creating a generalization about a phenomenon (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2006, p. 232). The criteria to participate was educators who were identified as gifted. After an initial recruitment letter was sent forth by the community partner to heads of schools, snowball sampling was the method used to purposefully find this sample of teachers. As a teacher, the researcher chose teachers as the basis for the study. CPED defines action research as “problems in their own contexts, or spheres of influences, that is a setting in which they have responsibility, authority, and intimate contextual knowledge” (Buss & Zambo, 2010, n.p.). Teaching is an area in which the researcher had intimate knowledge, and therefore understanding and contextualizing the narratives of other educators was a natural parallel.

Twelve females and two males expressed interest in the study. Five of the females qualified in one or more way, but not all three ways, and therefore they were not interviewed. One male teacher who replied to the recruitment email is a teacher of the gifted, but not gifted himself. The following table shows subject data for the eight
interviewees. This table includes the subject name and respective interview number, gender and teaching role. All names are pseudonyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Lisa*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>3rd/4th grade teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Tina*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>5th/6th algebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Karen*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>4th grade assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Andrea*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>K-5th special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Lacey*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>High school Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – Sandy*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>K-5 GT teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – Sue Ellen*</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>High school special ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – Jared*</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>4-8 drama teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Participant Teaching Role

Table 3.3 provides logistical information about the interviews. This table includes the date of interview, location of interview, the activity for each (interview), and the approximate times spent for each interview. Several people beyond these eight individuals contacted the researcher, but the others did not meet all of the qualifications of the study. The qualifications of this study were that the participants needed to be current educators, identified as gifted in their youth, and individuals who have taught for more than one year. Research on first year teachers revealed that “15 percent leave the profession and another 14 percent change schools after their first year, often as the result of feeling overwhelmed, ineffective, and unsupported” (Goodwin, 2012, p. 84). Participants in the study needed to be able to reflect on their years of teaching, not be in survival mode.
### Table 3.3: Interview Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Lisa*</td>
<td>Sept. 8/ 2:00 pm</td>
<td>Outdoor Table</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>28 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Tina*</td>
<td>Sept. 10/ 3:45 pm</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>27 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Karen*</td>
<td>Sept. 15/ 1:00 pm</td>
<td>Coffee Shop</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>53 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Andrea*</td>
<td>Sept. 26/ 1:30 pm</td>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>44 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Lacey*</td>
<td>Sept. 26/ 3:00 pm</td>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>40 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – Sandy*</td>
<td>Sept. 28/ 2:00 pm</td>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>40 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – Sue Ellen*</td>
<td>Sept. 30/ 2:00 pm</td>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>26 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – Jared*</td>
<td>Oct. 11/ 2:00 pm</td>
<td>School stage</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Pseudonyms have been used in place of actual names.

An attempt was made to find a diverse sample of genders, ethnicities, school settings - in regards to public or private, and geographic locations of both identification and current teaching locations. Due to the snowball nature of the sampling, the researcher relied on those that replied or were recommended after seeing the recruitment email. All of those who replied and were interviewed were Caucasian, and seven of the eight were female.

**Content and Process Reflection**

Interviewees were interviewed at a variety of locations. This included a coffee shop, a library, several classrooms, an outside eating space, and over the phone. All individuals agreed to be audio recorded. The researcher took notes during the interview as well as listened to each audio recording to appropriately transcribe the interviews. Interviews ranged from around 25 minutes to an hour, with follow-up interviews if information was unclear or further clarification was needed. After transcription took place, the interviews were shared with the participants to verify that their words and ideas...
were accurately captured to ensure the validity of the interviews. Interviewees were also given the opportunity to include anything additional that they felt needed to be included or was missing from the transcript. Pseudonyms are used for all of the following accounts of the interviews.

Lisa was the first to respond to the recruitment email. She is a middle-aged woman and has been teaching for twenty years. In addition to being gifted, she has two children that are gifted, as well. She has taught at several schools and is currently teaching third grade. She was eager to participate, and she was available rather quickly after the email was sent out. The researcher met with her on a Sunday at 2:00 pm in early September. She had been out doing errands during the morning and needed to stop by her classroom. The researcher met her at her school, and the interview was conducted at an outdoor table. After going over the consent form and demographic face sheet, a recording app on a phone was used to record the interview. It was a beautiful day, and the conversation about giftedness and Lisa’s experience as a gifted child and now an educator who is gifted flowed easily. Her interview lasted twenty-eight minutes. Lisa enjoyed being a part of this interview. When asked if she was good on time or needed to leave, her response was, “No, this is fine, it’s actually kind of fun.”

Tina replied to the recruitment email rather quickly, as well. Finding a time to meet was difficult, as she was leaving for an overnight trip with her sixth graders within a few days. It was decided that the best time to meet was after-school in her classroom in early September. Upon arriving at the school, the researcher was directed to Tina’s room. There had been limited conversation over email, so the researcher was unsure of what to
expect. Tina directed the researcher to the “comfy” chairs in the corner of her class. While these were slightly awkward at first, the set-up of the seating allowed for a relaxed, conversational tone to the interview. Tina spoke from the heart and became very emotional about her experiences as a gifted child and as the mother of two gifted children. Tina’s interview only lasted twenty-seven minutes, but a few days later she contacted the researcher to tell her how much she enjoyed the process. She expressed her gratitude for being in the study, as she was able to reflect in a way she had not before, and she appreciated that someone was wanting to listen to what it was like to grow up gifted and have gifted children.

Karen was extremely eager to discuss giftedness. She is considering getting her masters in gifted education, and she was pleased that she was chosen to be interviewed as she had questions about being in a gifted program that she wanted to ask. She and the researcher planned to meet at a coffee shop on a Sunday in mid-September. The researcher reassured her that there would be ample time for the interview and for her questions. Karen is the youngest of those who were interviewed, and she has taught for the fewest number of years, but her perspective was greatly appreciated. It was evident to the researcher that Karen would perseverate over her own questions if she did not ask them right away. After going over the consent form and the nature of the study, the researcher decided to pause the interview and let Karen get her questions off her mind. Then, she and the researcher drank coffee and discussed her life. She was a philosophy major in college and this background, as well as her gifted mind, were easily observed in the interview as her answers had a stream of consciousness form to them. One idea
flowed to the next, and any pause was quickly filled. Not including the initial questions that Karen asked, the interview lasted fifty-three minutes. A few weeks after, Karen contacted the researcher to say how much she appreciated being interviewed and having the chance to reflect on her life.

Andrea was the first person to be interviewed over the phone. She lives in California and contacted the researcher after a childhood friend of hers had seen the recruitment email and passed it her way. Andrea and the researcher exchanged several emails and text messages before finally having a phone conversation. This back and forth introduction made for an easy interview. The researcher wishes that this interview could have been done in person due to the ease of conversation. Andrea has taught for almost ten years and was previously in marketing. She is currently on maternity leave, and other than being mindful of nap times, her schedule was relatively open to talk. She mentioned twice that she wasn’t sure about her giftedness. She knew that she had qualified for programming, but she now, as an adult, felt unsure if the gifted title fit. The interview lasted forty-four minutes.

Lacey lives on the east coast and has taught for twenty-five years. The interview took place over the phone at the end of September. Most of Lacey’s career was spent teaching in elementary school, but she was recently transferred to a high school position. Lacey is a Spanish teacher. She mentioned both in her email, as well as twice in the interview, that she is in Mensa. This is something she clearly felt proud of. The conversation went well, though there seemed to be some confusion on her part regarding
some of the questions. While the researcher attempted to bring clarity to these, the forty-minute interview had a choppy nature to it that had not been felt with other participants.

Sandy is a middle-aged female. She has only taught for five years. She spent time before her teaching career as a stay-at-home mom. Her gifted children are part of what brought her to education. She was an art teacher for five years before recently changing careers and taking a position as a gifted coordinator. She grew up on the east-coast and now lives in Denver. Sandy was easy to talk to. She and the researcher connected over the similar ages of their children as well as the life of being a working mother and a teacher. They spoke on the phone for forty-minutes during the last week of September.

Sue Ellen is forty-eight and has taught for twenty-seven years. She grew up in the Midwest and currently resides in the west. Sue Ellen was a bit reserved when it came to talking about giftedness. She was unsure of how her gifted background had impacted her life, and she was not entirely sure about her impact on gifted students or gifted education. Despite this, her responses were similar to others in the study when it came down to her experiences as a gifted child and as an educator with an understanding of gifted youth. Her interview was the shortest, lasting only twenty-six minutes.

Jared is a middle school drama teacher who has also taught middle school English. Previously, he was employed in a special education classroom. Initially, the plan for the interview was for the researcher to interview Jared while he worked on the backdrop for his upcoming play. The play was looming and having time to be interviewed was limited. While working while talking was not ideal, it was the best solution that could be found, especially knowing the importance of having a male
represented in the study. Despite this, after the first question, Jared put down the PVC pipe he had been assembling and sat across from the researcher on the stage to think deeply about his answers. This interview was the most interesting and the most intense. Jared would pause for lengthy amounts of time, seemingly mentally debating and mulling over each answer before answering. The researcher anxiously, and nervously, awaited his responses, while also reassuring him that he did not have to answer if he did not feel comfortable.

Twice he shared a story or a thought that he felt was important for the researcher to know, but he did not want it included in the study. Each time, the researcher paused note taking, gave him her full attention, and became fully aware of his intense personality. Prior to the interview, Jared shared that he was going through a difficult life experience. This, in addition to the impending play, was partially why narrowing down a time to be interviewed was so difficult. The researcher couldn’t help but wonder if it was his personality or his life situation that resulted in emotional responses and dramatic pauses. By the end of the interview, Jared was teary-eyed, and he questioned why this process was bringing up so many emotions for him. All in all, the interview lasted forty-five minutes. Interestingly, like Tina, at the end of the interview Jared was thankful for the opportunity to reflect on his giftedness and on his life as a gifted child and gifted adult. He seemed sincerely appreciative for being provided a listening ear and a reflective space.
Demographic Information

The following two tables (Table 3.4 and Table 3.5) show information obtained from the demographic face sheet given to each interviewee. The information was gathered at the beginning of the interview session and prior to the interview officially starting. This information allowed the researcher to skip over some basic questions, as well as provided some information for the researcher to go off of in regards to interview questions and what to expect with the interview protocol.

Table 3.4: Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Geographic area while growing up</th>
<th>Current geographic area of teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Lisa</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>S. CA</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Tina</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>S. CA</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Karen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BA; pursuing masters</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Andrea</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>SW Iowa</td>
<td>S. California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Lacey</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Sandy</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Sue Ellen</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Jared</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demographic face sheet was also helpful in determining if the subject met the interview qualifications. While attempts were made to clarify these qualifications prior to
the interviews, there was still some confusion as to whether or not the interviewee needed to be gifted or teach gifted students. These questions allowed for the researcher to quickly see whether or not an individual qualified. Interviewees also needed to have taught for multiple years and be currently teaching in order to take part in the study. The demographic face sheet covered these areas, as well. A diverse sample of males and females, as well as ethnic diversity, geographic diversity, and a diverse sampling of childhood schooling and teaching backgrounds was also desired, in regards to both geographic location in childhood and currently, as well as school type (public, private, charter) in childhood and as current teachers. Therefore, questions covering these two areas of interest were also asked.

While this sample was not diverse in regards to ethnicity or gender, Table 3.4 displays the results of the demographic face sheet showing the diversity of the subjects in other ways. First, the interviewees ranged in ages. The youngest person to be interviewed was twenty-four and the oldest was fifty-three. These individuals also ranged in their years of teaching experience. The fewest number of years of being in the teaching field was two years and the most teaching experience was twenty-seven years. Six of the eight research subjects currently reside and teach in or around Denver, Colorado, and the other two research subjects live and teach in Massachusetts and Southern California. At the same time, their personal schooling and locations of identification span the United States. These childhood locations include Southern California, Colorado, Iowa, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana and New Jersey. Table 3.5 displays the gifted programming that each
participant participated as well as whether each was in public or private school, as well as their current teaching information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age identified as gifted</th>
<th>Type of gifted program(s)</th>
<th>Attended public or private school</th>
<th>Teaches at public or private school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Lisa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small group enrichment; magnet school; magnet program</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Tina</td>
<td>7 or 8</td>
<td>Mixed level classes</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Karen</td>
<td>8 or 9</td>
<td>Pull-out program; AP classes</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Andrea</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pull-out program; gifted classroom; AP classes</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Lacey</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pull-out; independent study</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Sandy</td>
<td>Elementary aged</td>
<td>Pull-out; AP classes</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Sue Ellen</td>
<td>5 or 6</td>
<td>Pull-out; weekends at local university; supplemental programming</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Jared</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>Classes that were only open to gifted students</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All eight participants attended public schools in their youth as well as during and after identification. There were a variety of types of gifted programs represented within the sample. These programs included small group enrichment, magnet programs, pull-out programs, mixed level classes, independent study, Saturday programming, and specific classes or schooling for gifted students. Four of the eight interviewees currently work at a private school, while the other four currently work at a public school. The age of identification for these individuals was anywhere from five years old to ten years old, with a few participants being uncertain as to the exact year they were identified.
*Narrative Space*

Clandin and Connelly (2000) use three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a means of understanding the researchers place within a narrative. Clandin and Connelly (2000) explain that in this three-dimensional space “we meet ourselves in the past, the present, and the future” (p. 60). This is noted because “in writing narrative research texts, we must be mindful of balancing the tensions of writing within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, of writing in ways that capture the field experiences, and of balancing these with audience” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 154).

*Role of the Researcher*

Narrative space impacts the role of the researcher. It is understood by the researcher that, “The way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the way participants respond and give accounts of their experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110). Clandin and Connelly (2000) believe that field experience might impact the memory of the researcher and, at the same time, the incidents of those being interviewed are both seen in the past and put alongside present-day stories or situations. In this way, the narrative takes up a third-dimensional space (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). This can involve, for example, “a remembered past in one place to a present moment in another, all the while imaginatively constructing an identity for the future” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 55). In this way, the researcher was sometimes brought face to face with his or her own stories alongside that of the person being interviewed (Clandin & Connelly, 2000).
To best understand this role, it is necessary to understand the experiences of the researcher. From 2nd-3rd grade the researcher was in a gifted pull-out program at the local elementary school. From 4th-7th grade, the researcher tested into a gifted pull-out program at a private school. From 8th-12th grade the researcher was in advanced, honors and AP classes. In this way, the researcher had a similar life experience as the research subjects. The researcher also stayed mindful that “there’s the problem that just by asking the question, you’ve interjected bias and influenced the answer- a variant of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle” (Shekerjian, 1990, p. xxi).

**Narrative Tensions**

Clandin and Connelly (2000) note that tensions exist within narrative work. These are:

1. Temporality
2. People
3. Action
4. Certainty
5. Context

Each will be looked at in detail to gain an understanding of how narrative tensions affect the research being done.

**Temporality**

Temporality deals with time, and how events are lacking a sense of time. “Events and things are characterized in and of themselves. They are seen ‘to be,’ to have a timeless sense about them” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). Events are seen more than in the moment that they take place. With narrative research, events are an “expression of
something happening over time” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). The tension this creates is “between seeing things in time versus seeing things as they are,” especially in regards to the “narrative of experience” and understanding how that experience creates a relationship to be understood (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30).

While it was important to have an understanding of when identification occurred, the thinking about time became muddled in the descriptions of these experiences. Some interviewees were able to pinpoint the exact years in which certain events occurred, but for the most part, the time after identification blended together into one experience.

**People**

With narrative research, people create some natural boundaries. “We take for granted that people, at any point in time, are in a process of personal change and that from an educational point of view, it is important to be able to narrate the person in terms of the process” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). The unknown when it comes to dealing with people can create a natural tension. This tension varied from person to person during the interview process. In each interview there was a hesitancy to answer, from time to time, and some interviewees were concerned about being candid about their school situation. For one, this hesitation came simply in response to never having been asked questions about her giftedness. Therefore, her process of understanding her giftedness was somewhat ongoing as the interview progressed.

**Action**

Narrative researchers look for actions as cues of “narrative signs” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). These actions alone cannot be interpreted. The narrative history needs
to be known (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). Without understanding a person’s particular history, the significance of the sign is unknown (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). “There is an interpretive pathway between action and meaning mapped out in terms of narrative histories” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31).

Determining the actions of these interviewees was the goal of this research, but getting there meant understanding their personal histories. Simply jumping to the action, identification, would not have provided as much meaning as learning their particular history leading up to identification and thereafter.

**Certainty**

Claiming certainty of a situation can lead to claiming causality that may or may not actually occur. “In narrative thinking, interpretations of events can always be otherwise,” or in other words, there is a “kind of uncertainty about an event’s meaning” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31). While one would like to believe that A equals B, and there is certainty in that relationship, “the attitude in a narrative perspective is one of doing ‘one’s best’ under the circumstances, knowing all the while that other possibilities, other interpretations, other ways of explaining things are possible” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31).

While causality is claimed in the results of these interviews, it is understood that the proposed causes are not the only reason for behavior. While the researcher would like to assume that the identification of giftedness of an individual has a direct correlation with current teaching practice, it is understood that this certainty can not be claimed.
**Context**

Context is always present in the creation of narrative research (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). The boundaries around context can create tension. “Context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32). Context allows the researcher to create connections between variables.

As with causality, the researcher attempted to keep context in mind. The demographic face sheet and interview protocol helped to create boundaries within the context, but again, it is understood that the context can change and can create tension.

**Analysis of the Data**

The interview data was initially analyzed through the “spiral” approach suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). Data was collected and organized by participant and findings were reported. Then, the researcher read and re-read the data to determine emerging ideas. Emerging ideas were created and coded within the research. While it seems like there is a set format for analyzing the data, steps often occurred concurrently. “The process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process- they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185).
The Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 186)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing and organizing the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and memoing emergent ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing and classifying codes into themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and assessing interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing and visualizing the data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Account of findings                                  |

Table 3.6: Data Analysis

Then, within this spiral approach, the data was analyzed in a way that is more specific to narrative study. Narrative researchers often frame their questions in the form of open-ended questions (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). This open-ended approach allowed for reflection and storytelling on the part of each individual interviewee. The focus of each narrative story was the gifted educator’s school experiences as they relate to giftedness, as well as their teaching and perception of gifted students. Once these interviews occurred, they were organized, as well as described, and the results of the interviews were interpreted (Best, Khan & Jha, 2017). These stories were restoried - “reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework” (Creswell, 2013, p. 74)- to put the stories into a chronological order and find a connection among them. They were then analyzed for themes and turning points, as well as the setting (Creswell, 2013).

The participants were included in this process of the research, as they could add value to determining the meaning of their story (Creswell, 2013), and their participation was helpful in ensuring that the interpretation of the material was valid and reliable. Finally, the written account was told in the form of a series of chronological stories.
retelling the effects that the identification of giftedness had on this gifted individual, and how it impacts their teaching and feelings of empathy (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher kept in mind that Best, Kahn and Jha (2017) recommend that interpretation cannot occur until after the data has been organized and described. Within the description, it is necessary to expand upon the setting, the interviewees, relevant viewpoints, and any other activities or descriptions deemed necessary (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2017). Best, Kahn and Jha (2017) reference Patton (1990) when describing the necessary step of interpretation:

Interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering ‘why’ questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytical framework. It is tempting to rush into the creative work of interpreting the data before doing the detailed, hard work of putting together coherent answers to major descriptive questions. But description comes first. (Best, Kahn & Jha, 2017, p. 249-250)

Narrative studies aim to look at the stories being told and turning points that occur within specific events (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data was analyzed in this way, as well as with a focus on the three-dimensional space (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). This three-dimensional space approach “includes analyzing the data for three elements: interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places or the storyteller’s places)” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 198). These stories were then compared to others in order for the researcher to look for themes related to the research questions. The stories were re-written and the setting of experience was included for a greater understanding of the narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher then looked at the stories to “interpret the larger meaning” of them and determine what information was gained (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 199). Participants
were involved in the analysis of the material (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). The resulting analytical writing includes “(a) processes in the individual’s life, (b) the different theories that relate to these life experiences, and (c) the unique and general features of the life” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 200).

Coding

Data was gathered before it was coded. Coding involves assigning a word or phrase that captures the essence or meaning behind a statement (Saldana, 2016). As this research included a small sample size, the researcher manually coded the information as a single coder. “Coding in most qualitative studies is a solitary act – the ‘lone ethnographer’ intimately at work with her data – but larger fieldwork projects may involve a team” (Saldana, 2016, p. 36). As recommended by Cresswell and Poth (2018), memos were used to capture themes within the interviews, noteworthy quotes were identified as well as descriptions as to why they were important, and patterns were noted. Once codes were formed, the data and codes were analyzed for categories (Saldana, 2016). Categories were then interpreted for themes which led to an assertion of theories (Saldana, 2016). In addition to the codes and themes that naturally came up, the coding for this research looked for themes dealing with empathy, programming, advocacy and cognitive dissonance.

Bias and Limitations

By the nature of the community partner being a part of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), several participants that responded to the recruitment email were all currently employed at private schools, though several had previously
worked in both public and private settings. Not surprisingly, all eight had attended public school and that is where their gifted identification occurred.

A further limitation of the study was that some individuals thought that the study was directed at educators who teach gifted individuals, not educators who are themselves gifted, despite careful wording of the recruitment email to mitigate this misunderstanding. It was later determined that others might have had this confusion, as well. A few individuals reached out to the researcher believing that they did qualify for the study but simultaneously had some hesitations about their qualifications because they are gifted adults but they do not teach gifted students. Thus, it is difficult to clarify the wording on this topic.

It should be noted that the researcher was concerned that her own biases towards the advantages of gifted education could potentially influence the interviews or interpretation of the results. Fortunately, interviewees responded positively towards their own gifted experience with very little prompting, and this was no longer a primary concern for the researcher. At the same time, while an attempt was made to include individuals with a mixture of race, class, and genders by not turning away anyone who replied to the recruitment email, white females were the majority of those who replied. This could partially be due to the geographic area of the research, as well as the field of teaching in which 77% of the field is female and 80% is white (Walker, 2018). It should also be noted that the intent of this study is not to generalize but rather to inform.

An additional limitation of this study is the “mirror of retrospection” described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as the experience in which “…in looking back at childhood, it
is inevitable that what we see is colored by what happened in the years in between, by present circumstances, and by future goals” (1996, p. 172). The interviewees were asked to reflect on their experiences of being identified as gifted or in a gifted program during their school years, and the corresponding reflection of this time period could be remembered more positively or negatively due to this retrospective nature.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the specific methodology of this study, which was narrative research. This chapter discussed how the interpretive framework relates to these particular methods. The research questions as well as the data collection, in regards to narrative space and narrative tensions, were identified. Eight research subjects were found and interviewed. Each has a unique story and a background that was purposefully chosen for the sake of the research. This chapter concluded with ways in which qualitative data is coded and analyzed.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

We did not hear the word gifted as a child. We thought we were odd. Even as we age, it is difficult to say aloud, ‘I am a gifted adult.’ We realize the differences in our reasoning, but mostly in our feelings. When loved ones hurt, we feel physical pain. A breathtaking sunset brings tears to our eyes. We lie awake at night, wishing we could set things right in the world. We labor to internalize the wisdom of Candide to tend our own garden; and, when we do, it is with an intensity that could ignite the universe. Joy Navan (2014, para. 1)

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of educators, who are gifted adults, regarding the education of gifted children. The previous chapter identified the methodology for this study as well as the participants for the research. This research is a qualitative study that uses a narrative lens. “Education and educational studies are a form of experience. Narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

Interviews were used to gather information. Eight individuals were interviewed. Cresswell and Poth’s (2018) “Procedure for Preparing and Conducting Interviews” was used as a guide for interviewing (p. 166). These sampled individuals represented a variety of geographic locations, as well as a mixture of private and public-school settings, and a range of teaching years and teaching positions. Interviews ranged from twenty-six minutes to fifty-three minutes. One male and seven females were interviewed. To qualify for the study, each participant was selected according to the following criteria:
individuals had to be formally identified as gifted at some point in their youth, individuals had to have been in a gifted program during schooling, individuals need to currently be an active teacher, and individuals need to have taught for more than one year. The interview questions focused on identification of giftedness for the individual being interviewed and to what extent this identification, and the resulting gifted programming, impacts their teaching and empathy towards gifted students.

Qualitative research was selected as it is a method that allows the researcher to explore a problem and establish details (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Likewise, narrative was implemented within this qualitative method as narrative is a way to best understand each other and our interactions in the world, as well as the experiences that are had or to be had (Clandin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher chose interviews for “Interviews provide unique insights into the complex lives of individuals in a society” (Kim, 2016, p. 157). The interview questions were semi-structured in format with open-ended questions. These open-ended questions were used to guide the interview and maintain focus “rather than dictate its direction” (Kim, 2016, p. 163). The interviews were then restoried - “reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework”- and put into a chronological order in this current chapter (Creswell, 2013, p. 74).

This chapter will examine the experiences of the eight individuals who were interviewed: Lisa, Tina, Karen, Andrea, Lacey, Sandy, Sue Ellen and Jared (pseudonyms are used and other identifiers have been removed from the following retellings). To better understand these narratives, the following list of terms is provided:

105
Pull-Out Program: a small group strategy; often, the “typical pull-out program does not have a single focus or outcome and is not coordinated with the regular curriculum” frequently becoming a “potpourri” of activities (Rogers, 2002, p. 221).

Magnet Program: “public schools that enroll students from multiple school boundaries and often provide a thematic focus for curriculum, activities, and/or school services” (Eckert & Robins, 2017, p. 110).

Governor’s School: “advanced learning opportunities for secondary gifted students in a residential environment” (Eckert & Robins, 2017, p. 109).

The first to be interviewed was Lisa.

Lisa

Lisa is forty-five-years old, Caucasian, and she has taught for twenty years. She teaches at a private gifted school in Denver, Colorado that emphasizes an IB curriculum. She grew up in Southern California and attended public school for all of her K-12 education. She was identified as gifted prior to kindergarten and attended a pull-out program, where particular students were removed from the class on a weekly basis, in kindergarten through the third grade with small group enrichment. From fourth through sixth grade she was at a magnet school for the gifted, and from seventh through ninth grade she attended a half day gifted magnet school program. Lisa is married to a gifted adult, and she has two gifted children.
Identification and Gifted Schooling

Identification.

Lisa was informally identified as gifted in preschool. At this time, her grandmother was a janitor at the local community college. Lisa attended the preschool program that was a part of the college for free. Teachers recognized that she was advanced, and she and two or three other students were grouped together in kindergarten and were provided a separate reading time. While this identification did not formally label her as gifted, she reflects that there was some method to it beyond a teacher’s assumption that determined that she was advanced, though she cannot remember what that method was. She remembers her kindergarten teacher having a school store and she and the other advanced children were allowed to help the teacher set it up and get everything ready in the store for the other classmates. She says that this did not feel like a formal gifted program, but it was definitely an “add on small group kind of thing” that was not open to all of the students. Her teacher also allowed for this identified group of students to complete passion projects.

Throughout her school, Lisa remembers that she was the student who always asked “why?” She wanted to know why they were doing something or why they were learning a particular piece of information. She was not satisfied unless she knew what was the point. She was often motivated by having a bigger idea to explore.

Gifted Schooling.

Lisa became aware of being formally tested for giftedness in the fourth grade. She attributes already getting gifted programming prior to the fourth grade because “it was
approached differently back then.” In the fourth grade, she was taken to the library for testing. Since she showed signs of giftedness at an early age, it is no surprise that she was placed in a pull-out program, where certain students were removed from the class for lessons that were unique for those students in the years prior to this identification and then into a formal gifted program at this time. Lisa reports that things came easily to her, and she was always more creative than her peers. She was the neighborhood child who was “in charge of coming up with games and stuff to play.” The other neighborhood children relied on her creativity, and this felt different from the pressures of competing with other ideas from her gifted peers at school.

She appreciated the thematic units that filled her academic days from fourth through sixth grade. A unit on ancient Greece is one that she remembers well, and she has replicated this unit in her own classroom. As a result, she stated that her gifted programming was “the happiest time for me when I was a kid. It was when I was the most engaged.”

Lisa remembered having a lot of competing ideas with her gifted and non-gifted peers. This competition of thought gave Lisa the label of “bossy” by at least one peer, yet she was also known to be quirky and energetic, as well as creative. To this day, being thought of as creative is somewhat surprising to her, and she thinks that being creative as a sign of giftedness is an interesting idea. She stated that, “You kind of just assume other people’s brains are doing the same thing and seeing the same connections, so of course, that is what you would do,” when figuring out a problem and the answer seems creative to others and logical to her. She also attributes her giftedness to her ability to make
connections. She stated about herself, “People say you’re so creative, but it is not because I’m a big artist, but I’m good at pulling ideas together in a creative way.”

As an adult, she believes these connections can be seen in the speed of her conversations, which she says naturally have a fast pace when she is talking with other gifted individuals. She acknowledges that her conversations with her gifted husband and gifted children often take on numerous tangents. Lisa reports that she also recognizes her faults. She is not a connected learner or someone who has a lot of facts to rely on, instead, she will tell you that “I suck at trivial pursuit, but I am good at other games. I’m really good at connecting.”

**Effects of Identification.**

One of the biggest disappointments Lisa feels over her identification is that there was a sense that because she was gifted, she was going to be just fine. She reports that she got the sense that teachers and administrators used her intellect as a measure of her ability to get through life. Neither of her parents had gone to college. She came from a working-class family without a lot of money. Yet, because of her gifted identification, no one talked with her about doing the SATs or applying for scholarships. She believes that there seemed to be an assumption that because she was gifted, she had all of these parts of her life figured out. Yet, based on who her parents were, she notes that she was missing many of these pieces, and her high school experience was difficult. In retrospect, she realizes that “things aren’t a problem until they are.” As a teacher, Lisa reflects on her own experience of being a gifted student and is reminded that having A’s or B’s is not the
whole picture: gifted students can be struggling even if their grade-point does not reflect this struggle.

*Teaching, Teaching Practices and Gifted Students*

**Teaching.**

Lisa began her teaching career as a preschool teacher while she was in undergraduate school. Then, while she was in a master’s program in Boston, she ended up working at an admissions office program for urban schools. Through this job, she taught a summer geometry class to a group of high schoolers who had had a terrible geometry experience the prior year. In addition to the summer geometry class, she had been a tutor at their school during the year, and through this tutoring she was aware that these students had had a bad situation with their math teacher. So, she put together a geometry and architecture course with the hopes that they would leave after the summer feeling successful with geometry and more enthusiastic about this area of math.

This was a turning point for Lisa. Creating a complex unit that encouraged critical thinking and real-world situations appealed to her. She realized that she wanted to work more with gifted students. She tends to like big projects and big thinking, and “giving kids the tools and strategies that they need” appealed to her. She was also influenced by her own life experience of others expecting that her giftedness was enough to get her through life. She felt that “just cause you’re smart doesn’t mean everything is going to be a piece of cake and a yellow brick road,” and she wanted to carry this idea forward while instructing others. Ultimately, she went into teaching because of her love of the gifted program of which she was a part, but also because of the ways in which she felt like the
education system had failed her. She wanted to “counter that and give other kids a better experience.”

**Teaching Practices.**

Lisa describes her style of teaching as “focusing on concepts and the power of inquiry.” She prefers her units to be interdisciplinary and concept based. When asked to describe her teaching style, she responds that she approaches her class not as the expert with all of the knowledge, but as a fellow learner who wants to explore the concepts side by side with her students. She attributes this both to her giftedness and to the gifted education that she received. She also recognizes that she was the student who wanted to know what was the point, and she strives to provide that explanation to her students. In doing so, she hopes to motivate her students to learn.

Lisa reports that “I am a big believer in growth mindset.” She attributes this to her own struggles with math in middle school. While the rest of her schooling came easily, she hit a hurdle in middle school math, and she began to think that she could not do math. She believed that, “I’m smart at everything else, but I’m dumb at math.” She stated that she had a fixed mindset about the subject, and it wasn’t until much later that she recognized that she was good at math. In fact, she reports that she now loves math, and it is one of her favorite things to teach. In thinking of her own schooling, she recognizes that her appreciation for math as a teacher is in “wanting to show kids how to see things in a different way.” She feels that had she been taught in a way that met her needs, she could have thrived in math at an earlier age. But instead, her teachers did not teach the way that she learns. Showing students that there are different ways to approach a problem
and meeting their individual needs has been a motivation within Lisa’s own teaching style.

**Gifted Students.**

As a teacher, Lisa has found that her friends often assume that “gifted students will be okay.” This is a topic that has come up with both her own children and the students that she teaches. She refers back to the myth that smart students will be just fine, and that others do not recognize the behaviors and problems that come with giftedness. To others, she feels that these behaviors can seem like “rebelliousness, or an annoyance, especially when a gifted student asks a lot of questions or has a particular form of humor.” Because of this, she reports seeing herself in different students and identifying with individual quirks.

While teaching in Massachusetts, Lisa taught a unit based on a book that presented information and pictures every ten years of the same town in America. She would show the class pictures of how things changed over time, and there would be activities based on what the houses were like or different scenes from the town. She remembers one student figured out what she was trying to do pretty early on. Where other students only studied what was given each day, this student put the pieces together and quickly saw the big idea. To Lisa, this girl clearly presented as gifted. Like the ability to connect big ideas that Lisa sees within herself, Lisa saw this ability within this student and was able to determine that the child was most likely gifted.

Lisa recognizes that understanding giftedness has allowed her to empathize with her students. She reports that when she sees a student struggling with something, she
pauses and tries to think of how she can explain the information in a different way. She recalls her struggles with math and mirrors their feelings. She reports that she wants to help make connections and build motivation for her students. She states, “I really want them to see themselves as capable and resilient not because things are easy but because they can develop skills and strategies in addition to their natural gifts.” She feels it is important to recognize that a student’s giftedness does not just go away as they get older or are away from school. From her own experience, she knows that you do not stop being gifted when you become an adult. She believes that:

Gifted children are still children. They want to play and they have their own challenges. Also, though they understand some things way beyond their years, other things may be more difficult for them than their age peers. Managing emotions like frustration and stress are areas where gifted children may need extra support. Gifted kids often get a lot of fixed mindset messages from adults that tell them they are smart and kids often translate this into ‘everything should be easy for me.’ When it isn’t, this struggle can be self-deflating.

Lisa approaches teaching by seeing the whole child. She speaks more of learning with her students and creating life-long learners than she does of specific curriculum.

Tina

Tina has been teaching for seventeen years. She is Caucasian, fifty-three-years-old, and grew up in the Bay Area of California. She now resides in Denver, CO and teaches in a private school. She was identified gifted in elementary school and was placed
in mixed classes combining three grade levels – a class of second, third and fourth
graders, as well as a class of fourth, fifth and sixth graders in her local public school. Tina
is married and has three gifted children.

*Identification and Gifted Schooling*

**Identification.**

Tina remembers that identification involved lots of tests. She recalled that,
“Everybody took tests and then I kept taking tests.” She doesn’t remember what tests she
took, but the results meant that she kept getting put into multi-level classes of mixed age
groups. She believes that while the school recognized her giftedness, they clearly didn’t
know what to do with it. She reflects that public education in the Bay Area at that time
was poor, and her school was on the verge of collapsing. Class sizes were getting smaller
and smaller. So, the response, according to Tina, was not “let’s give these people extra
attention,” it was “these people are going to be fine, so let’s put them with higher levels.”

**Gifted schooling.**

Schooling for Tina was in the early 1970’s. She claims that “they did all kinds of
things in the early 70’s,” including “putting thirty kids in a class with three grade levels.”
Since this was not a pull-out program or a formal gifted school, she did not know she was
in a gifted program until much later in her life. She did recognize, though, that she was
doing harder work than her peers who were not in a combined 4, 5, and 6 class. While her
identification did not have any impact on her time in middle school or in high school, she
did take honors classes in college and graduated with a double major. She attributes this
less to her gifted identification, though, and more because “that’s how I roll.”
**Effects of Identification.**

As a result of her giftedness, Tina reports she was perceived differently in school. When she was in the 4, 5, and 6 grouping, there were only two other fourth graders in the class. She recalls that the older children didn’t want to hang out with these younger peers, “as the difference between a fourth and a sixth grade is pretty vast.” As a teacher, she recognizes how difficult this must have been for both the students and the teachers at this school. Despite not having a lot of friends who were older than her and in her same class, Tina did get a lot of attention, though. Unfortunately, this attention was not attributed by others to her giftedness, but because she was a self-proclaimed “rotten kid.” Ultimately, she believes, “her giftedness was the cause of her rottenness.” She reflects that the school was not meeting her gifted needs. She was frustrated with her schooling and feeling unsatisfied, and, so, she turned this frustration outward. She reflects, “So, this poor teacher with all of these kids in their class has to deal with a 4\textsuperscript{th} grader, but also had to deal with a 4\textsuperscript{th} grader who acted out all of the time.” She figures she was the student who teachers talked about and groaned about when they got their class list at the beginning of the year.

**Teaching, Teaching Practices and Gifted Students**

**Teaching.**

Before becoming a classroom teacher, Tina had a career in marketing. She claims that she had a whole life before she was a teacher. When her own children came along, she decided to stay home with them. Having three gifted children, one of whom was profoundly gifted, was the catalyst that led her into teaching. She began by volunteering
in her son’s school which led to being asked to be at the school for longer periods of time in order to lead a math group or fill in for a teacher. Eventually, she was at the school all of the time, and she reports that she found that she was “kind of good at teaching.” She decided to go back to school and get her master’s in education. She attributes her gifted children to why she is now in the classroom rather than in marketing. Reflecting on her teaching ability, Tina stated:

I think my own giftedness has allowed me to be a better teacher. I think most teachers see charts, or a line graph, or a bar chart, and I see a matrix. I can see that if I take this student and I apply this thing, then the student is going to get this better. I can only attribute that to the fact that my brain works differently, and also I can feel differently.

Teaching Practices.

Tina directly relates her ability to be a good teacher to her own schooling. She knows the frustration of being in a classroom as a gifted student and not being satisfied. She states, “I can see it in them. I can recognize it and sometimes help them negotiate around it.” She believes it is very rare to have educators who have gifted training, especially when to get a teaching degree, schools of higher education often spend “very little time on gifted education.” She sees with her peers that “there is a lot of misconception and a lot of frustration. Even when you know what is going on intellectually, it’s rough.”

As a teacher, Tina describes herself as the “mean one.” She believes she is nice, but strict. She reports that she sets strong boundaries but can also grant leeway. Amongst
her students, she feels that she is also known for being funny. She believes in a growth mindset, and she reports that she says to her students that she believes in them enough for the both of them, and she will continue to do so until they believe in themselves, too. She wonders if she is trying to complete the circle on what she needed as a child.

Tina reports that she likes to give her students as much choice as possible and believes that their ideas are better than hers. She states that she “likes being there as my students learn to make choices,” and she clarifies the nature of choice being both social and academic. She likes to “learn alongside them.” She continues on with, “I like helping them pick up tools that they might be able to use as they work on learning how to make good choices, whether that’s an academic choice or a social choice and how you treat someone else.” Giving students the tools that they will need for life is a skill Tina finds important to teach, and a part of how she describes her teaching style.

She recalls a lesson in which she asked her students to pick a hero. She states, “I had five of them go blank.” They had too many to choose from and responded to her that they couldn’t choose. She told them, “You can choose. Not only that, you have to choose. Let’s talk through how you are going to do this.”

Ultimately, she wonders if maybe she became the teacher she wanted to have in school. While reflecting on this, she stated, “I was a pretty wild child. I could outthink many adults, and those I couldn’t, I didn’t care. I was also bored in school, which gave me space to think about other things.” As an adult, she recognizes how difficult being gifted can be, and how gifted children are given a double-edged sword. She reflects that
“their brains are capable of so much, yet their hearts are not prepared for what they are seeing or imagining.”

**Gifted Students.**

When working in Hawaii, Tina had a student that reminded her of herself. The Hawaii public education system was not great, and 1/3 of the class was in special education. The school did not have the space or ability to identify gifted students. One girl, the one who stands out in Tina’s memory as being similar to herself, walked around angry and “prickly all the time.” With concern in her voice, Tina reports she had a “difficult time working with others and got in her own way in social situations.” Unfortunately, Tina remembers that the teachers wrote her off, but Tina believed that “she really did have it and could have been so much more had the school been able to serve her.”

Tina has also witnessed emotional troubles with gifted students. She says, “I have seen so much existential depression. I am still one of my former [gifted] student’s last call because he has wanted to kill himself for a long time. I am the person he will call if he decided to do it.” Her own children have also led her to ponder the plight of gifted students. She has three gifted children, one of whom is highly gifted and cried every day after he was picked up from school until third grade when he switched to a school that had a gifted program. Tina recalls asking his first-grade teacher what he would learn that year. The teacher reported that he would learn to read. Tina’s son had already read *Harry Potter.* She decided to transfer him to a Catholic school, which she regrets, as the school taught “to the middle 70%” and did not have the resources for other students. “They had
not patience for my son and his questions and his loud voice and his insistence that
everything be just a certain way.” Emotionally, she recalls,

He would sit by himself at recess and just watch everybody, kind of curled
up like in a coma. When I went to pick him up, he would crawl into the car
and went to the very back corner and put his head against the window so
nobody could see him. When we got home, he would go into his room and
cry every day.

Tina feels that the school he switched to “saved his life.” It wasn’t until years later
that she found out that he had been suicidal in third grade and often contemplated killing
himself. “It is amazing what the brain can do,” says Tina, “and how tragically unfair that
is. It’s fine once they grow into themselves, and it’s wonderful once they grow into
themselves, but nobody tells you that it’s going to take until they are twenty-five to do
so.” As a result, Tina feels frustrated with the response many people have towards gifted
students:

I think people still forget that gifted kids are kids. So often, the focus is on
what the child can do, can understand, and not on strategizing how to allow
for the prism of understanding these kiddos are capable of and still find a
way for them to play hopscotch or four-square. Gifted kids are often treated
like very small adults, and this mindset shortchanges them.

*Adult Giftedness*

Tina appreciated the time she was given to reflect on her childhood identification
as well as her teaching practices. She repeatedly expressed this gratitude and how being
given this space to reflect felt really good. Providing this space to reflect led her to a discussion on what if feels like being a gifted adult. She feels that adults have similar problems as gifted children. She stated,

There is so much focus on gifted students, which is fantastic, but not as much on gifted adults. It’s almost as though adults are supposed to grow out of the challenges that come with giftedness. Sure, most of us have strategies in place that we’ve figured out, but that doesn’t mean the intensities are easier to deal with, or the frustration with ‘real world’ pacing eases up. If anything, I think it gets harder, even with strategies Gifted kids who are being served have support from teachers, parents, sometimes peers. Gifted adults are just supposed to deal with it. It gets very hard to wait for the rest of the world to catch up to what you’re thinking all the time. The systems in place end up seeming more like places to brag about IQ scores – I’m looking at you Mensa – than supportive safe places.

Like Lisa, Tina has a whole-child approach. She knows the dangers of not recognizing the socio-emotional side of giftedness, both from her own son and her students. Therefore, she teaches in a manner that allows students to learn about themselves and their own abilities and helps them to gain life skills.

Karen

Karen is a twenty-four-year-old assistant teacher in Denver, Colorado. She is Caucasian. She grew up in Denver and has lived most of her life there with the exception of four years spent at a small liberal arts evangelical college in Chicago where she
pursued a degree in philosophy. Growing up, she went to public school, though she is now employed at a Pre/K-8 private school in Denver. She was identified as gifted at the age of nine or ten. Her memory of the exact age was unclear. Karen was placed in a gifted language arts group in the third grade and fifth grade. She had gifted classes from the sixth through eighth grades, and she took AP classes in high school. Karen is married to a gifted individual. She is currently working toward getting her master’s degree while working full-time.

Identification and Gifted Schooling

Identification.

Karen’s memory of identification was weak, but she had asked her parents about it, and they helped fill in the gaps. She knows that she started taking standardized tests in school in the third grade. She self-reports that she was always a “pretty good student.” She recalls that she was not always the quietest in class, but she was cooperative. In the third grade, her standardized test scores qualified her for the language arts gifted program at her school.

Upon reflection, Karen realized that as a child, she was somewhat puzzled by the testing and her resulting identification. She states, “When you are that young you are trying to figure out who am I and where do I belong, and you tend to accept when somebody tells you to do this, and you do what you are told.” With that thinking in mind, she did as she was told and took the tests and started going to gifted classes. Ultimately, she reports, “it felt like an honor to be in the program.” She remembers that she was able to go to a different room in her school and do things that the other students were not
doing. Unfortunately, she recalls that doing something different often ended up just being more work, and she reflects, “not necessarily something better or more enjoyable.” This frustrated her, and so, she decided to just stop doing the work. By fourth grade, this lack of effort was becoming more of a rebellion.

Karen reports that at this age her understanding of the world and herself had changed. Rather than being the cooperative student that she was known for, she realized that she didn’t have to do what her teachers were telling her to do. Looking back on this, she wonders if she was actually suffering from depression. Her interest in school was minimal, and ultimately, she just did not care anymore. Coincidentally, this was also the year she decided to no longer eat meat. Despite coming from a family of meat-eaters, she had never been comfortable with it, and ethically, she felt that she could not eat meat any longer. While also realizing that she no longer needed to do her work, she also thought, “Well, I don’t have to do this” and became a vegetarian, a decision that she has “stuck with to this day.” She remembers this as the first moral decision of her life. She reflects that this wasn’t something she was doing for someone else or as a result of others, this was something she wanted for herself.

This subtle pushing of boundaries ended up getting her kicked out of the gifted program. She remembers wondering, “What is this program? What are they doing, taking people in and out?” It was a troubling time. She felt like “if you are being cooperative you get to be there, and if you’re not, then you don’t.” Part of this lack of motivation was due to her dislike of her fourth-grade teacher, a woman who was overly stern and not enthusiastic about her job. Not only was she not the most likable individual, but Karen
believed that her methods of determining giftedness were suspect. She tended to look for boys who were bored and acting out. If it weren’t for her standardized tests scores, Karen believes she might have been overlooked for the program. As an adult looking back, Karen feels that this assumption was frustrating. She decided to fit this mold, and she became a sneaky underachiever, with the goal of seeing how much she could get away with. Where her scores got her in, her attitude got her out. In the fourth grade, she was no longer a part of the gifted program.

By the end of fourth grade and into the beginning of fifth, Karen had endured numerous conferences with both her parents and her teachers regarding her motivation. Fortunately, these meetings worked. She realized the aggravation she was causing her parents, and she began to work harder in fifth grade. At the same time, she was showing signs of AD/HD. Her mother talked to a friend of hers, a nurse, who suggested giving Karen a bit of coffee each morning. At the time, Karen reported that she thought she was being given a fun treat, and it seemed like a cool, adult privilege. It also seemed to work. Her newfound focus and increased work ethic paid off. Halfway through the school year, the school let her back into the gifted program.

**Gifted Schooling.**

Karen’s elementary school gifted program was a pull-out program. It was filled with worksheets and reading, and the occasional exciting project, but mostly even those were little activities that did not advance her thinking very far or usefully take up much time. She recalls making a marionette one day and playing with putty on another day because the teacher said there was research on kinesthetic learning and “playing with
your hands helped you think.” But mostly she remembers the giant Einstein poster in the room with the picture of the older genius sticking his tongue out. As a class, she and her friends would collectively try to connect the content to Einstein and get the teacher off track. This was a time of doing as little as possible, turning it in, and letting it be.

In elementary school, Karen describes that being in the gifted program was not the highlight of her day, but this all changed in middle school. To her, the gifted program in middle school was “awesome.” She reports that this was partially due to having a different gifted teacher, someone who was trained in gifted education. For middle school, the program was no longer a pull-out program, but instead an entirely separate class. She was in it for her entire middle school career. Karen, excitedly, recalls the projects and activities she was fortunate to do in this class. She was given access to many different kinds of language arts activities including debates, plays and poetry. As a sixth grader, she performed in Hamlet, in eighth grade she read dystopias and discussed the implications of a society that was presented as a utopia. The class constructed societies and compared themselves to characters in their books. They had big, broad discussions and open-ended questions that led to Socratic seminars. All of this came naturally to her. She “never struggled with finding the meaning in something,” which made the program all the more exciting. In middle school, everything was fun, interesting, and engaging and more importantly, this program pushed her thinking further.

**Effects of Identification.**

The biggest effect identification immediately had on Karen was the expectation that she was supposed to be really smart. While she was identified as gifted in language
arts, she was not identified for math. And while she felt the effects of the myth that gifted
students are expected to know what to do in every subject, she was struggling with a
disorganized mind and perfectionist feelings. Frequently, her work was turned in late or
not at all. She would often do the work, but she would be really frustrated and think it
wasn’t good enough, and, she reports, “so I wouldn’t turn it in.” Or she would do the
work, get halfway through with it but get frustrated with herself and concerned that it
wouldn’t be good enough and just not finish it. During this time, she would compare
herself to others and ultimately do as little as possible.

While Karen’s enjoyment of the gifted program that she was a part of waxed and
waned as she went from lower to middle school, she found that it left an unattended
deficit that she had to deal with in high school. She had been doing theater and debates
and other interesting activities during her middle years in her gifted program, yet she was
not taught how to write a 5-paragraph essay. She struggled with this throughout her
freshman year, and she ultimately figured out how to write a five-paragraph essay, but on
her own and not until the end of her freshman year. She also found it interesting that she
remembers not wanting to worry about grades when she got to high school. She still tried
hard on her work and did well, but she would physically block herself from looking at the
grade she received for an assignment. This is not something she ever saw her peers doing.
As an adult, Karen reflects on her gifted identification and feels that:

There is a development of insecurity as part of this process. There is a very
weird feeling of someone else saying you are this. I remember distinctly
when I went from being in the good math class to the not so good math
class, and it felt terrible. Kids want to be challenged and included in conversations, but on the flip side, you feel like you know nothing and can be very insecure. I wonder if my students feel the same thing?

_Teaching, Teaching Practices and Gifted Students_

**Teaching.**

Karen never had plans of going into education or being a teacher. She was really interested in art, and she focused heavily on her faith, so much so that her faith influenced her choice in undergraduate colleges. Karen felt that her religion was more important than anything else. For a degree, she knew that she wanted to do something with people, and this led her to a major in philosophy.

There were three jobs that guided Karen into the direction of becoming a teacher. First, she was asked to be a teaching assistant in an introduction to philosophy class. This appealed to her, as she loved grading papers and enjoyed seeing other people’s thoughts on the subject matter. She also enjoyed determining whether the students were or were not understanding the material. Later, she was an assistant instructor for a backpacking program that worked with children. This led her to the determination that she enjoyed working with younger students. Finally, she had a summer job working with adults getting their GED. From this experience, she realized how important education was. In thinking of these three opportunities, she remarked, “I figured out that I loved all this, and the one thing that bound it all together was education.”

Her first experience in teaching was as a student-teacher in a public-school classroom that focused heavily on preparing students to take a state test. She reflects that
this was a real eye-opener for her. To her, “education had been discussions and Socratic seminars, and now she was being asked to narrow her questions down and lead the students to more specific answers.” Where she had been taught in a world of open-ended questions, she was now being asked to create closed-ended questions and stick to topics that would be on the district assessments.

Reflecting on this time, Karen realizes that one of the teachers that she gravitated towards while in this setting was the drama/gifted teacher. He gave her the task of working with an advanced math class. She recalled a girl in the class who was clearly gifted. Karen remembered that the child was willing to try out new problems and she was willing to push herself and apply what she had learned in different ways. It seemed, to Karen, that this student was desperate for real-world applications. Karen remarks that, “this was more in my wheelhouse.” Karen began to provide the student with opportunities to find different ways to use what she was learning and to apply it to different products. When thinking back to this time, and to this specific student, Karen remembers the discussions that came out of this experience very fondly.

**Teaching Practices.**

If you ask Karen what her teaching practice looks like, she will tell you that she definitely has an aversion to worksheets. She recognizes that sometimes this is necessary, especially for mundane topics like vocabulary, but she really enjoys doing projects “that are low floor and high ceiling where the kids can take it as far as they want to.” She uses creative writing in her social studies class as a way for students to show what they know about history.
Karen realizes the impact her own education has had on her. She reports, “Without having people connect text and math problems to my experience, I felt and remember feeling that school felt artificial.” She was frustrated with her schooling. As a result, she wants to include more debates in her curriculum. She asks a lot of her students, even if not all of her students are up for the challenge, and she wants to make this type of advanced thinking is available for the students who are ready to be pushed. On the flip side, she remembers not being included in conversations, and she recognizes that students have a need to know where a curriculum is going. She also reflects on being pretty frustrated by her school when she was in elementary school. This is a subject, she admits, that she is still grappling with; though she is not exactly clear why.

**Gifted Students.**

At Karen’s current school, there is not a process for identifying gifted students. On the one hand, she recognizes that if all the teachers are doing work that can benefit gifted students, that other students will get this benefit, as well, and she feels that many of her colleagues are doing this work. On the other hand, she would not have been identified had there not been a screening test at her school, and she worries about what that means for those who are flying under the radar. She believes that, “State tests aren’t great, but they do give an understanding of where a student is compared to their peers.” There is also the dilemma of paying for testing. Without a school psychologist on site, families at her school have to find an outside person to do the testing, which is often costly. “It makes it really challenging because it seems like the kids who get the evaluation are the kids who are really struggling and aren’t the ones who necessarily are doing ok but could
be getting more help.” This results in identification of mostly twice-exceptional students. To which Karen reflects, “If you only know twice-exceptionality kids, then you don’t think of giftedness. If you only know 2E gifted kids, you probably don’t know everything about GT.”

Karen’s goal with all of her students, but especially her gifted students, is that she doesn’t want them to be bored. She worries that this means that she might be overly challenging with her expectations and might stress students out, but she prefers this over giving them too easy of work. She directly ties this to her memories of being a student. She also knows that she was often frustrated as a child when her teachers did not explain why she was learning what she was learning. This has led her to feeling like she needs to justify to her students why they are doing something. She gives them an explanation, or says, “here’s why, or this is my understanding of why we are doing this, not just because it is required, but there are ways it can connect to your life.” She also responds that gifted children have a “desire to want to figure it out.” She recognizes that this isn’t just limited to gifted children, but “curiosity, desire, and that fervor to understand something seems to be an indicator of giftedness.”

Karen ponders her lessons and the effects they have on her gifted and non-gifted students. She recognizes the faults and successes in her own schooling and uses that information in her own thinking about teaching.

**Andrea**

Andrea has taught for nine years. She was originally in the marketing industry before beginning her teaching career at a public school in Southern California, just
outside of Los Angeles. She grew up in Southwest Iowa and attended public school for all twelve years of her schooling. She was in a pull-out gifted program beginning in the third grade; then in the fourth grade she was accepted into the Challenge Program, a separate all-day gifted program. She took AP classes in high school, and she has her Masters, plus some credits beyond her Masters. She is Caucasian and forty-years-old.

Andrea is currently a Special Education teacher for K-5th grade students. She reports that she teaches everything that her kids need, but the program and the district really try to focus on Special Education. Therefore, she focuses primarily on remediation of mostly English Language Arts and Mathematical concepts.

*Identification and Gifted Schooling*

*Identification.*

Andrea doesn’t remember the identification process or much of the gifted pull-out program that she was a part of, other than it focused on logic and thinking puzzles, but she does remember the Challenge Program. This was an all-day program for the gifted and talented within the public elementary school. The program was very small and utilized only one teacher who she remembers as being incredibly intelligent, himself. Unfortunately, her only experience in this program was for a few days as a trial. Her parents decided that being a part of this would be too stressful. As an adult, she still questions whether that would have been the case. She always wanted to be in it. She thought the projects and studies that the students were doing in that program were vastly more interesting than what she was doing in her regular classroom. Instead of being in challenge, she was in the “high” class, based on tracking, and she was still in the pull-out
program that met once a week. To this day, she remembers wishing she could be in the Challenge class with her friends who were doing cool and interesting work.

**Effects of Identification.**

Andrea believes that identification did not have any effects on her social growth. She reports that she always had plenty of friends, and her parents were pretty strict. Andrea reflects that she approaches problems differently than others, and she wonders if that is because of the logic problems that she did in the gifted program, or simply a result of the way that she thinks. She reports:

> We did logic puzzles and specifically I remember questions like – if Tommy has a blue bike and Kelsey has a red bike, who has the orange bike- it was on an X and Y axis – I just really remember doing a lot of those logic puzzles. I would guess that that was it for the research at the time.

She reports that she views problems as solvable and as having more than one possible outcome. She has also been told that she is good at thinking outside the box.

**Gifted Schooling.**

Andrea reflects that she was bored and felt unchallenged during her schooling. Yet, despite being in the gifted pull-out program, she reports that she never really felt like a gifted student. She was always in the high track and in AP classes, but possibly because her parents did not emphasize it, she reflects that she did not really associate herself with giftedness.

Andrea also describes herself as being pretty rule bound throughout her elementary, middle and high school years. She remembers being upset with a teacher
during her sophomore year of high school. She did not express this to the teacher, but she assumes that she must have been pouting or somehow showing her displeasure during class. The teacher asked her to stay after class, and she let Andrea know that she did not like her attitude. Conforming with her rule bound nature, Andrea did not say anything back. The teacher continued to talk. Finally, Andrea responded with, “I didn’t like the lesson today.” The teacher’s response was that Andrea was too smart to say that. Andrea could tell that the teacher immediately regretted saying this. She recalls that it seemed that all of the other teachers were aware of Andrea’s abilities, but this particular teacher did not seem to have the same understanding.

*Teaching Practices and Gifted Students*

**Teaching Practices.**

Andrea describes her teaching style as mirroring that of her elementary school teachers. She states, “I really loved my elementary school teachers. I don’t know if it is the difference of growing up in Iowa versus California or the time frame, but I do kind of emulate them.” She has an individualized reward system in her class. She describes her class as having clear expectations and rules, and students get rewarded for their effort with personalized sticker charts kept on their desks. Andrea reports that she has a philosophy of growth mindset, therefore, students also have individual goals in her class. She has them put a sticker on their charts if they are working towards a goal.

When it comes to individual lessons, she describes how she models the lesson for her class, then the class works together on it before they are sent off on their own to try. She calls this the “I do, we do, you do” method and finds it to be very effective. She
reports that she is also not afraid to backtrack. If a student is not understanding the lesson, she will reteach rather than move on. She states that, “I do what needs to be done. I am pretty reflective, which is important.”

**Gifted Students.**

Andrea recognizes gifted students by the product of their work and the vocabulary they use in their writing. She also defines a gifted student as one who can do math problems in their head correctly or is reading at a higher level than his or her peers. She has found that involving gifted students in their own learning can be effective. She wishes more teachers would do this.

Andrea’s school has a formal process for identifying gifted students, but it is not instituted until fourth grade. She thinks this is much too old and the school waits too long to identify. There is nothing that follows after this identification, either. Her school does not have a formalized gifted program, so identification is simply for the teacher, parents, and student to know, and with the hopes that a teacher might differentiate for the gifted students in his or her class. Andrea’s school focuses mostly on remediation. She reports her frustration with these practices.

Andrea is sometimes on hiring committees, and when she interviews, she reflects that she always makes sure to ask the candidate how they will meet the needs of high students and the students who are struggling. She reports that she wants candidates to think about both categories of students, and it is an expectation for her that they are able to do this. She states, “I want the candidate to think about both ends of the spectrum – can
you meet the high kids needs and the kids who are struggling. I think gifted is easier than remediation. I’m expecting them to be able to do it, no matter what.”

Andrea describes personally reaching out to gifted students at her school to provide challenging work. She sat with two identified gifted children at lunch every Friday because they were excellent writers, and they needed support with being challenged in their writing. She wasn’t paid, and she wasn’t asked to do this. She reports simply recognizing that the school was failing them. Andrea describes one of the children, a little girl, as “tenacious, funny, and kind of dorky.” She describes her lower school self in much the same manner. The little girl liked to do what she was told, but she was also bored. She was friendly and outgoing. Andrea describes herself in much the same way, noting that the little girl “is bored in her coursework- that was me, but she is a way better writer.” Andrea reports that she saw herself in this child, and she helped this child get involved in her own learning by simply asking her what she would like to do when she is bored. This is how she found out that the student likes to write. This allowed the two to have a relationship at lunch that provided the student time to write. Andrea did not push her to write about specific topics. The student chose the direction of the writing, and Andrea reflects that the child’s subsequent work was “well above and beyond the average fourth grader.”

Andrea wishes her staff had a better understanding of the social-emotional side of the gifted child. She has had conversations with teachers who are annoyed with a twice-exceptional student because of his or her emotions. Andrea recognizes that gifted students can be academically gifted but emotionally immature. Her own understanding of
what it feels like to be in a class and to not be getting what she needed has helped her to recognize these feelings in others. Andrea reports that the teachers at her school understand differentiation, but she does not think they have mastered it. She recalls a time in which a peer teacher was asked to do something for a gifted student, and his response was that he was not going to do what was being asked. She feels that the fourth-grade team at her school does well with giftedness, “but that is only two teachers.” Fortunately, Andrea has found that are teachers who seem to understand the academic side of giftedness. They report to her that the gifted student is easier to work with and state, “I know exactly what to do with the high and the low kid, but I don’t know what to do with the middle kid.”

Andrea wishes for more from her colleagues and her school in regards to giftedness, but she is limited by what her district allows. Therefore, she does what she can while on a hiring committee and by approaching individual teachers to make changes for the sake of a gifted student.

Lacey

Lacey is a fifty-three-year-old Caucasian female. She has taught Spanish for twenty-five years; she is also certified to teach Russian. For most of that career, she taught at the lower school level, though her district just transitioned her to a high school class this past year. In the past, she has enjoyed organizing the spelling bee for the school, holding a knitting club, and being the Student Council advisor. She grew up attending a public school in Connecticut and currently teaches at a public school in Massachusetts. She was identified as gifted at age six. She taught herself Spanish at the
age of seven. After identification, she was in a pull-out program, and she did independent study in high school.

**Identification and Gifted Schooling**

**Identification.**

Lacey does not think there was a strict process like there is now for identifying giftedness when she was identified. She was identified in the 1970’s, and she assumes that the time period is why there may not have been a formal gifted program. She recalls differentiated instruction, though. She was often sent into the hallway to do her work. She also had a separate desk from a lot of the class for several years, and she did much of her work independently. She completed two years of math in the first grade without any instruction. In kindergarten, she was able to read and tell time by the minute. Her teachers and parents knew early on that she was gifted, and if it weren’t for the fact that she had an older sister a grade above her, she believes she would have been moved up a grade. She reflects that her parents were not for this, though.

Ultimately, Lacey reports that her advanced abilities led to her perceiving herself as knowing everything. This lack of modesty was noticed in her work by her kindergarten teacher, who subsequently came to talk to her. Lacey made sure to not mention her advanced ability in written assignments again. She also reflects that her desk in the hallway was fine for her, especially with her independent personality, but she recognizes that this is not how a child should be treated.
Effects of Identification.

Despite spending most of her time working independently in math and reading, Lacey actually liked school. She knew at the time that she didn’t fit in with the other children, and she felt sorry for them. She reports being surprised that they had not already learned what was being taught. To her, she reflects, the answer was clear, or the information was not new. Without having a peer that was at the same level as herself, Lacey reports that she just could not relate. Fortunately, the years in school were not spent just working in the hall, she also got to do things that other students were not able to do, which pleased her. She remembers making and binding by hand books that she wrote by herself after her teacher gave her the supplies.

Some of Lacey’s time was spent being a “model” for other students, though. One time in second grade, she believes that a boy was purposefully given the seat next to her. She recalls that he stole her watch and cheated off her papers. The teacher wouldn’t let the class talk, so she wasn’t able to tell on him. Lacey responded by writing all of the answers incorrectly really quickly and letting him copy, then she would erase them and correctly write the answers before turning in the paper. She assumes, “he probably didn’t really like me” after that. At the same time, Lacey describes herself as a loner. She recalls that she was fine with this. She liked to read and study, and she had imaginary friends. She labeled herself as an “anomaly” in her family, as well. She believes they did not understand her. They always felt that when she answered questions she was trying “to show off or look smarter than them.”
Gifted Schooling.

Lacey recalls that in first grade there were two teachers that taught the grade, but they split the curriculum. One teacher would teach the language arts lessons, and the other would teach the math lessons. Lacey met the teacher who taught math only two times: the first day and last day of school. The rest of the time, she recalls, she was doing math on her own. She also remembers that she was never given a reading partner in language arts. She recalls, “The class simply did not have someone on my level.” Lacey also remembers that at six, she saw the groupings that her teacher had put the rest of the class in for reading, and she knew that they had been grouped by ability. She recalls that she had the knowledge of this even without her teacher making anyone aware of the make-up of the groupings.

Lacey reports that she earned 100’s on all of her tests, and her teachers kept trying to challenge her. When she got to high school, the school did not have a gifted teacher. Interestingly, “the school took four people from each grade and had them, with the seniors in charge, design the gifted program.” Upon reflection, she recognized that this was a strange way to go about things. At this time, she reflects, she had already been accepted to Mensa, and she participated in all honors classes.

Teaching Practices and Gifted Students

Teaching Practices.

Lacey likes hard work, and she likes to challenge her students. She sometimes has to step back, though, and remember that just because she can learn something quickly doesn’t mean that her students can. She gets frustrated by teachers, administrators and
parents driving the curriculum, especially when it is viewed through how many grades for the gradebook are needed in a given week or what standards need to be hit.

Lacey reports that she thinks in analogies and sees pictures in her head. She feels that this way of thinking guides her teaching. She once had a colleague tell his class that they could not use analogies to answer questions. Lacey assumes that this was a rule created in response to Lacey’s own teaching style. This was upsetting to her, and she was worried for her colleague’s students. She remarked, “But that’s how I think! So, if that’s what was told to kids, I wonder how many kids aren’t able to express themselves.”

Lacey remembers that on her first teaching evaluation that her teaching style was deemed as “eclectic.” In thinking of her teaching style, she reflects that she tries to be student centered. She reports recognition in the value of students being interested and how this leads to greater investment on their part. She states that, “I tell kids that I trust them, but they have to rise to the occasion, and then I keep raising the bar.” She reports being known for pushing her students but also having them involved in their learning. She prefers not to teach from a textbook, and she wants her students to enjoy coming to her class.

**Gifted Students.**

Frustrated, Lacey reports that the gifted program was eliminated at her current school. She reports that when the program was running, it was only partially funded, and the teacher in charge changed yearly. She believes this was because the workload was just too great for anyone to stay with the position. Then, she recalls, the school started
giving standardized test after standardized test. She feels that the school is missing out on “some really great kids because they didn’t test well.”

Lacey states that she tends to spot the gifted students pretty quickly, and she tries to make sure they are challenged. She reports this as being a personal goal of hers. She does not want the gifted students to just coast and not be challenged because she knows that this is easy to do. She is also stunned by the lack of professionalism amongst teachers when approaching gifted students. She sees teachers getting into a rut and using the curriculum they have used every year and not working to challenge gifted children because that means more work for them. It also bothers her when she hears a peer teacher state that a student is “scary smart” or “they are too smart for their own good.” She doesn’t want students to feel ashamed for their giftedness.

Lacey recalls a time when she was doing a Spanish lesson in a class and the classroom teacher was sitting at the back of the room at her desk. The lesson was very concrete, and Lacey could tell that two students, both boys, were bored. She had already assumed that they were gifted. She began to give a more advanced question related to telling time to these two students when she was interrupted by the classroom teacher who told her to stop. The boys were disappointed, and so was Lacey. To Lacey, it seemed that the teacher did not want the students knowing more than she, the teacher, was ready for them to know, and since Lacey was trying to teach something that was not part of the current curriculum, the classroom teacher made her stop. Lacey also thinks that because there is so much talk about differentiation now that “teachers hide their true thoughts on gifted students. They know it is not appropriate to say what they are thinking.”
Lacey feels that other teachers need to know that gifted students are not trying to get on their nerves by being “smart-asses.” She knows, from her own schooling, and she sees this with other teachers, that gifted students often give an answer that is misinterpreted. She sees adults viewing gifted students as disrespectful. She has had to interpret gifted behavior for teachers, and she feels that gifted children just make sense to her. She responds, “No one seems to think about or care that those things stay with a person as they go through their lives.”

**Sandy**

Sandy has been teaching for five years. She is a forty-one-year-old white female. She was formerly an art teacher, but she just recently became the gifted coordinator at her district. She lives and teaches in Denver, Colorado, and she grew up in Delaware. She went to public schools for her elementary, middle and high school schooling, and she currently works at two public schools. Sandy was identified as gifted when she was in elementary school, and she was placed in a pull-out program. There were no gifted services in her middle school. Sandy did not take AP or honors classes at her high school, but she does have her Master’s degree. Sandy’s own children are also identified as gifted.

**Identification and Gifted Schooling**

**Identification.**

Sandy was identified as gifted at her local suburban school and subsequently bussed into the city of Wilmington, Delaware for elementary school. She does not specifically remember how identification occurred, but she was told by her mother that she had her IQ tested, and that was how she got into the program. She enjoyed being a
part of the pull-out program that she was placed in. She reflects how she would be given challenging words problems and logic puzzles. The class did an egg drop, and she remembers it dropping from a second story window. She recalls:

There was a very diverse demographic to the school. From what I remember about the pull-out program is that it was basically the highlight of my day. They would give us a lot of challenging word problems, I see them still giving those to kids today.

She also remembers learning how to type in the third grade. She loved that, as well.

**Gifted Schooling.**

Sandy recalls that in her gifted pull-out program she experienced a lot of critical thinking activities and special projects with abstract focuses as well as being exposed to interdisciplinary academics. She reports that spending her time working on these types of lessons in the pull-out program was very enjoyable for her. In fact, she reflects that this is what she was picturing when she went into gifted education, and instead, she reports with frustration, she primarily works on math enrichment and math acceleration. An area that she does not feel highly enthused about.

Today, Sandy does not consider herself to be highly gifted. She recognizes that she was not very high achieving while in school, and instead she refers to herself as being “mainstream.” She wishes that she currently had more content knowledge, and she wonders if maybe she had a reading disorder during schooling. Part of this modesty towards her own giftedness might be due to her family’s response to her being gifted while growing up. She responds, “My family did not focus on the gifted label; on the
contrary, I was labeled the ‘artistic’ daughter, whereas my older sister was labeled the ‘smart’ one since she was a high achiever. I don’t even remember if my older sister was identified as gifted!”

Effects of Identification.

Sandy did not feel awkward about her identification in elementary school. She enjoyed it, and she does not remember any negative impacts. While she feels that she was labeled as “weird” in elementary school, she recalls that she owned it, and, to her, this was not a negative label.

In middle school, Sandy did not want to be portrayed as smart. She was the typical shy female, and she would hide behind these characteristics. She overcame this by the time she got into high school, though. She was only in one AP class, but she reports that this was more due to the offerings at her school than her desire to be in advanced classes.

Teaching Practices and Gifted Students

Teaching Practices.

Sandy describes herself as a teacher as “kind, warm and open” and she likes to be “creative and quirky” in her classroom. She responds that her teaching style is child focused, “keeping their interests in mind.” Her lessons are open-ended, and she lets the interests of the students determine the objective, rather than having a set curriculum. She also considers herself to be friendly. Sandy wishes that her time wasn’t spent on math acceleration and enrichment as often as it is. She feels that she went into giftedness to “teach gifted learners, not to teach sixth and seventh grade math.”
Prior to becoming a gifted coordinator, Sandy was an art teacher. This experience influenced her thinking about gifted students and her desire to return to school to earn a gifted degree. She responds:

For 5 years I taught elementary art in a Title One school in Nashville at a public school. My favorite part about that was that I had an after-school art club and I was able to take out the talented artists and work on bigger projects with them. So, that sort of played into me wanting to look into GT. I enjoyed working with the different age ranges. I really enjoyed the kids who totally appreciated art and could be trusted with all the art materials. That’s what I pictured: eager, motivated learners. I can think of a few elementary kids in art who were quiet and then I would saddle up next to them and ask them questions. They were daydreamers and came out with all sorts of higher-level thinking of the art. And they just had it. They could draw or combine colors and they just had it within them. They didn’t need any training. It didn’t bother me at all that some of the kids were better at it than me. They were experts at things that I am never going to be an expert at. Some people are threatened, though. I am not an artist, I just taught art.

At the same time, Sandy’s own children are also gifted, and she believes that this helps with her own understanding of giftedness.

**Gifted Students.**

Sandy is frustrated at the identification process in her district. She works in an affluent district that has a gifted and talented program. The wealth is a problem, though,
as she has heard of parents hiring tutors to help their children get into the gifted and talented classes. She especially sees this in math where students attend Sunday math programs because their parents think high achieving equals giftedness. Sandy has received pushback from parents when she has to inform them of what real giftedness looks like. She reports that, “In one elementary school there were 18 out of 107 2nd graders identified as gifted, and out of those I hear that a lot of the parents worked with them.”

Sandy reports that she has had mixed responses by her peers’ to giftedness. She has been pleasantly surprised that some have asked her if particular students are high achieving or gifted. She appreciates that they are trying to distinguish between the two, and they are noticing the increase of twice-exceptional students in their classes. Sandy wishes that she had more experience with twice-exceptional students, and she recognizes that this is an area that even she, as a gifted coordinator, could use more education. The principals she works with have been open-minded to giftedness, and they do not seem to have firm ideas about what it means to be gifted.

Sandy tries to advocate for her gifted students. She recalls a time when she had a first grader who was early access, early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, and younger than his peers, yet he was way beyond in his reading ability. He was a voracious reader, and the books in his classroom were not at his level. The school library had a policy of only letting students check out two books a week. Sandy spoke to the librarian and made it possible for him to check out seven books at a time.
Recently, Sandy was at an IEP meeting for a student with socio-emotional trauma and behavioral concerns. Sandy felt that he was most likely going to be removed from the school. Testing had just revealed that he was gifted. Sandy felt pride in making sure that the school and his parents were aware of his giftedness, and that his parents signed off on this, so that he would be able to get the services he needed at any school he attended. Sandy shares this as evidence of advocating for gifted students.

**Sue Ellen**

Sue Ellen grew up in Indiana. She has taught for twenty-seven years. Sue Ellen is a forty-eight-year-old Caucasian female, and she teaches special education for students with mild, moderate and severe affective needs, as well as behavioral, hearing, vision, and cognitive impairments at a high school in western Colorado. Currently, she teaches two pull-out courses for students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plan) and team teaches two other courses. She holds a license to teach social studies and is highly qualified to teach English. She was identified as gifted when she was five or six. She was provided supplemental programming within her general education classes, and occasionally this included pull-out programming. She also took gifted courses on the weekends at a local university. AP courses were not provided at her high school. She holds a Master’s degree.

**Identification and Gifted Schooling**

**Identification.**

Sue Ellen does not remember the identification process, but she assumes it must have had to do with the Iowa test, or whatever similar test was taken during her youth. In
addition to qualifying for programming at her school, she qualified for a Saturday program at the local university. She remembers having packets of Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) questions to answer during the school day, and then she and her fellow gifted classmates were required to take the SATs in seventh grade. She recalls constantly getting college mail from that point on until she graduated. She enjoyed the Saturday classes. They were fun, and they challenged her in a way that she wasn’t during the school day. The Saturday classes had enrichment courses such as computer programming, which she considered a unique skill in the early 80’s and not something her friends were doing in public school. For years she did this program, throughout elementary and middle school, until life became too busy in high school. At one point, she had taken an integrated math class at the Saturday college course, and when she got to Calculus in high school her response was, “Well look at that, this is what we did!” As an adult, she now assumes all the classes were run by graduate students.

**Gifted Schooling.**

Sue Ellen remembers learning really useful subject matter like all of the root words, which she considers a handy skill. But, this was only the result of being in the corner of the classroom with two other girls doing packets of root words, not because a teacher was providing her a differentiated lesson. School came very easy to her, and she did not have to learn how to study until she was in college. Even in high school, she did not have to work very hard. She was salutatorian, though she wonders if she could have been valedictorian had she worked harder. But she did not necessarily know how to do this. “How do you teach someone those skills if they don’t need them?” she ponders.
Effects of Identification.

Sue Ellen recalls that there were expectations from her teachers about what was and was not acceptable as it related to her identification. She felt that everyone but the school guidance counselor was aware that she was gifted. By the spring of her junior year, she had already been accepted to a few schools and had even decided where she wanted to go. Yet, her school guidance counselor called her into her office in April of her senior year to see if she had considered college. Sue Ellen recalls this with frustration.

She also remembers some peers saying they were intimidated by her. This seemed to be related to her giftedness. She once had the opportunity to ask a peer why he was so mean to her, and he said it was because he felt intimidated.

Sue Ellen feels that even though her life might have been very similar to how she has lived it because her parents were very proactive, that a lot of opportunities resulted because of her identification. Ultimately, she states, “I don’t know if being identified was the gatekeeper or if having two parents working on advanced degrees was the gatekeeper for things like the Saturday courses.”

As an adult, and as a teacher, Sue Ellen reports that she does not feel very gifted. She remarks, “There just aren’t as many opportunities to discuss giftedness.”

Teaching Practices and Gifted Students

Teaching Practices.

Sue Ellen is currently teaching all of the social studies classes for her special needs’ students. She does not think her school has a very strong RtI (Response to Intervention) program. She feels that the school does not seem to be successfully
identifying students at either end of the spectrum. She has seen students come to the school with a gifted label, and the response from administration is to send these students to AP classes as a freshman. This does not seem like enough to Sue Ellen. Her own students do not have the opportunity to take college classes, as she did. She wishes the school had the ability to send a freshman to a college class. This identification difficulty has also been seen with second language learners. Sue Ellen recalls a new student who spoke both French and Vietnamese. The student was struggling her freshman year, and the school did not have the proper supports to test her in her native language. By her senior year, she was doing calculus for fun. Sue Ellen regrets that the school did not have the tools to identify her sooner.

Sue Ellen explains that she likes to have a structure of class expectations. She allows for “freedom within this structure.” Sue Ellen found that there are things that she is naturally good at, such as multiplication, and since she has always known how to do this, she has had to teach herself the skill of how to teach “something that I’m good at.”

**Gifted Students.**

Sue Ellen gets frustrated when she does not recognize a student who has a gifted label. Her own children have helped her to recognize the unique differences of gifted students. Her son was identified as gifted in elementary school, but she reports that he does not know how to study, and she fears he does not have the skillset to be successful in high school. On the other hand, she believes her daughter should have been given a learning differences label, but she easily excelled in school.
In her school, Sue Ellen sees teachers who expect gifted students to get an A, and when the students do, the teachers do not do anything to challenge them further. She also reports that she has peers who are knowledgeable of giftedness and work hard to help gifted students achieve. She finds that to identify a gifted student, one needs to just notice and pay attention. She explains that she tries to make a gifted student’s skills relevant to what is being done in class. She asks herself, “What is the student’s skill and what can they do with it?”

Despite responding that she does “notice and pay attention” to “find ways” to make the skills of a gifted student useful in a class, she does not believe that she advocates for gifted students. She states, “I don’t do a lot in my current position. It is just not part of my scope.”

**Jared**

Jared is a forty-year-old Caucasian, male teacher from New Jersey. He has taught for twelve years, with some of the time being spent teaching English, and in the most recent years, he has taught drama. He has also worked and volunteered in special education. Jared currently teaches at a private school in Denver, Colorado. He was identified gifted in the fourth grade while attending public school. Jared’s spouse is also gifted and both of his sons are highly gifted.

**Identification and Gifted Schooling**

**Identification.**

From kindergarten through third grade, Jared attended a cooperative school, “a school in which students, teachers, staff and families enter into a collaborative learning
and working relationship with one another” (“What is a Co-Op”). He reflects that his parents were “hippies without the drugs” and this school matched their personalities. At this school, students would call teachers by their first names, and there were no grades. He believes that this experience really shaped his thinking of what education should be.

In the fourth grade, he transferred to a more traditional public school. He was tested and accepted into the school’s gifted and talented program entitled Creative Intelligence. This meant he was able to, as he says, “take a bunch of classes that were only open to other gifted students.”

**Gifted Schooling.**

Jared’s schooling in New Jersey was a unique system, in that throughout elementary, middle and high school the students had core academic classes, and then everyone took electives. For Jared, who was a part of the gifted program, the Creative Intelligence program provided electives up through the fifth grade. He recalls that the program included electives in social studies where the students would talk about complicated issues. Jared enjoyed this, as he notes that he is often known for having advanced discussions in his classes, and a class on complicated issues is right up his alley. Some of these difficult discussions in the gifted elective classes included the causes of war. This may have continued throughout middle school, but he does not entirely remember.

He also recalls that his schooling was unique in that each teacher in the district was required to teach a “passion” class that constituted the electives offered. To Jared, these were exciting offerings. His face lit up when discussing these courses. Jared
enjoyed being with teachers who really knew their stuff and enjoyed teaching the electives. Jared also took AP classes in high school. In high school, Jared was accepted into the Governor’s School for the Arts which he reports “was one of the most important things that happened” to him related to his giftedness. He feels that he was finally in an environment with other “legit” gifted students. He reports that “it was the best month of my teenage life.”

Effects of Identification.

With teachers, Jared was always perceived as a very good student. He claims that this means he could get away with cheating. He felt like he had a reputation of being a good student to maintain, so even though he did not like cheating, this was something he sometimes did. His peers thought he was smart and nerdy, but also somewhat of an oddity. He was athletic and smart, but he did not conform socially. He reflects that he did not know how, nor did he have the desire, and as a result, he was socially awkward.

Jared reports that he was sometimes confused because people seemed mean. He often wonders why he could not have been accepted for who he was. He recalls enjoying a particular history elective because it was not with the same group of students that he was usually in class with. He wonders if he had been with a different group of people if he would have liked his peers more, but unfortunately, the smart individuals in his classes did not like him, and those that did like him were in other classes. Not only did this make him question social dynamics, but he also questioned the relation of race, class and academics. He reflects:
The smartest guy I knew, M.E., was a black guy who never talked in class and was never allowed to take AP classes. From then on, I began to question my own giftedness. I started to wonder how much identification was happening along class lines, and that weirded me out. The only black kids who were in AP classes were the rich kids. But M.E. was a fourth ward kid from a poor neighborhood – and we were paired for a project, and he was the smartest guy I knew in high school.

Jared wishes his programming had been more rigorous or more complete. By this, he explained, he ultimately means that he wished he had been given the tools to understand his own giftedness. He feels that he was identified with the strengths of being gifted, but he did not have a gifted teacher with whom to express his frustrations with social issues or whatever he was bored with. He also wonders if other gifted individuals have the same feelings of wishing they could or should have done more. Ironically, despite this desire to do more, Jared was recently recognized with a big teaching award in the state of Colorado. Ultimately, he feels that there is a level of dissatisfaction with being highly gifted. People know what you are capable of producing, “and so less than that is disappointing.” He continued on, “you look around you and see other people doing great shit, and it doesn’t feel abstract to you.”

**Teaching Practices and Gifted Students**

**Teaching Practices.**

Jared describes his teaching practice as “always positive, never satisfied.” He says he is hyper sensitive to making sure that his students, and especially his gifted students,
are not bored. He reports that he tends to make everything at a gifted level and adjust downward as need be. He’s been told numerous times, by peers and administrators, that the assignments he gives to students are too difficult for their age. Sometimes he has agreed, but mostly he has felt that they were wrong. There were times in which other teachers were excited by the writing that he was getting from his students. He attributes this to knowing how to ask the right questions.

**Gifted Students.**

There is no formal identification process at the school Jared works at. But, he recognizes and assumes that in general, the gifted students that he has taught get excited about the same sort of things that he was excited about in middle school. Likewise, he believes they get bored with the same things that he would have gotten bored with. Jared reports getting extremely frustrated at the lack of funding for gifted programs. He appreciates the strides that have been made in special education, but he finds it deplorable that gifted students are left to manage on their own. He is very passionate about this topic. He remarks:

I’m really glad for the strides our culture has made relative to our kids with special needs. I think it is a big positive for our culture, and I think it is great. So, when I think about that, I’m glad for those strides, but it comes with a big caveat, and here is the but. It is a sin to fail special needs kids, but the reality is as F*d up as everything is now for our species, we really need the gifted kids. I’m not suggesting cutting funding for special ed kids, but I’m saying that if we finally wrapped our heads around getting special
ed kids the shit they need, just the idea that gifted kids are gifted and they will be ok, the idea that we don’t prioritize our gifted kids is bananas. The fact that we put more time, effort, and media attention into our athletic kids is petty selfish, pathetic and embarrassing. I think if we are in an environment of equity, equity, equity, equity doesn’t get us to Mars. We don’t have a culture of cashing in on our smart kids, and it is embarrassing.

Jared feels that his own giftedness helps him to serve all of his students well but especially his gifted students. He identifies gifted students as those who have a complexity of thought that is well beyond other students in their class or of the same grade. He recognizes that his giftedness also sometimes makes him impatient with his peers. Jared appreciated the opportunity to be interviewed. He reflected in an email that it was “cathartic, healing and empowering in a way I did not know I needed.”

**Research Question**

This research aimed to explore the following question: How do the experiences of gifted adults who are educators influence their teaching and empathy of gifted learners in order to create empathy in other teachers? Each of these eight individuals reflected on ways in which the experience of being identified as gifted has influenced both their teaching practice and their empathy of gifted learners. They identified ways in which their teaching practice is directly related to the positive or negative programming that each experienced. They also identified individual students who had similar experiences as they did in their youth. The gifted adults reflected on ways in which they are empathetic towards the educational experience of current gifted youth. It was surprising the extent to
which gifted programming in their youth effects the current teaching practices of these gifted adults. At the same time, empathy seemed related to protecting students from negative experiences that these gifted individuals had, or in an attempt to replicate positive experiences for their students.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks of Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration and the simulation theory of empathy were used to guide the open-ended questions in these interviews. The theory of positive disintegration was a framework for the questions related to how these gifted adults were understood or misunderstood and how their gifted students are understood or misunderstood in regards to behaviors related to overexcitabilities. The simulation theory of empathy was a framework used for questions related to how these gifted adults see themselves in their students, and how they advocate for individual students when they recognize a student with a similar experience as themselves. The researcher was struck by the similarity in experiences those interviewed had with their gifted students.

**Summary**

This qualitative study followed a narrative protocol in the form of semi-structured open-ended interviews. Eight individuals who had been identified as gifted in their youth and participated in gifted programming during their elementary, middle or high school schooling were interviewed. These eight individuals are current teachers in public and private schools. The interviews focused on identification and the effects of identification on the individual, especially in regards to their current teaching practices. The questions
were asked with the intent of understanding the influence of their prior experience in a
gifted program on their current advocacy for gifted students. The themes of empathy
influencing teaching practices, cognitive dissonance and advocacy emerged. These will
be discussed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

“Everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had. The quality of any
experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or
disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences” (Dewey, 1938, p. 27).

Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the responses within the eight interviews. The interviews were broken down into topics related to identification, gifted schooling, teaching, teaching practices, and gifted students. Within each topic, the goal of the interview was to examine the effect identification had on the individual during his or her years of schooling as well as the effect the subsequent gifted programming has on his or her current teaching style. The researcher also desired to understand whether this identification affects an individual’s approach to the gifted student in regards to empathy or advocacy and whether a “teacher’s narrative of experience would shape the curriculum” (Clandin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). Ultimately, it was found that a teacher’s narrative does shape his or her curriculum.

The interview subjects were eight individuals who had been identified as gifted during their schooling. They had distinctly different backgrounds, but each had the similarity of participating in some form of gifted programming. This programming
ranged from sitting in the hall and independently studying to formal magnet schools. Several participants participated in enrichment pull-out programs. All eight individuals are currently teaching.

The following chapter will analyze the content of the research gained from the interviews in comparison to the literature on giftedness. The interviews have been coded for concepts related to the research questions: empathy, cognitive dissonance, and advocacy. The research questions guided the interview protocol, and the research was coded for themes within these concepts, as well as emerging themes. These will be discussed in the following pages as well as their relation to the theoretical frameworks of the simulation theory of empathy and Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration. Emerging themes were found in the interviews, and these, as well as possibilities for future studies, will conclude the chapter.

The eight individuals who were interviewed helped to elucidate on what it was like to be a gifted student. The ways in which their histories connected to the literature were numerous. While attempts were made to analyze all aspects of the data, the analysis primarily focused on the data compared to the three concepts related to the research questions: empathy, cognitive dissonance and advocacy, as well as the literature surrounding identification and programming, and specific characteristics of gifted individuals.
Experiences of Each Individual

Lisa’s Experience

Lisa was fortunate enough to experience gifted programming throughout most of her schooling. She enjoyed the gifted magnet school she attended between fourth through sixth grade. She was in a pull-out gifted program in her early elementary years and in a half day magnet school for the upper elementary years. Yet, the gifted magnet school during her middle grades is where she shared her most memories and feelings of enjoyment. Her interview revealed several analytical themes about her youth that influence her teaching. First, her gifted brain influences her teaching style. She states that, “I was the kid that would always ask the ‘why are we doing this?’ I was the ‘what’s the point?’ kid.” As a result, her units are concept-based, inquiry-based, and she appreciates side by side learning with her students. This mirroring of her own student’s brains allows her to empathize with their thinking style. A second theme revealed in Lisa’s narrative is the understanding that the gifted need guidance. She learned in her own education that some things came “easy until it didn’t.” This has helped her to encourage a growth mindset within her classroom.

Lisa also knows the gifted need guidance in some areas that others might not consider because she had teachers believe that “because I was gifted I just knew how to do things,” when she didn’t. She recognizes that “managing emotions like frustration and stress are areas where gifted children may need extra support.” Finally, Lisa has a deep understanding, that is potentially more so than other non-gifted teachers, of what it is like to be gifted because of her own background. She explained that, “though gifted students
understand some things way beyond their years, other things may be more difficult for them than their age peers.” Her mirroring of emotions and experiences with her gifted students allows her to empathize with and provide appropriate programming for gifted individuals in her class.

**Tina’s Experience**

Tina attended a multi-age classroom in a failing school system. She was frustrated with her experiences, especially noting the large class size and lack of peers of her own age, which led to improper programming for her. Yet, this frustration is what she attributes to being, “a good teacher now or a good teacher of gifted kids, because I know. I know the not being satisfied. I can recognize it in them and sometimes help them negotiate them around it.” This similarity in experiences allows her to empathize with her gifted students as well as helps her teach in a manner that gifted students appreciate. She also attributes her son’s giftedness to being why she is in the classroom rather than a different career. Her children, as well as her gifted students, have allowed her to understand the socio-emotional concerns that come with giftedness.

A theme that was reflected in Tina’s retelling of her life experience is that of being a wild child. She was the student that nobody wanted. She turned her frustration with the school system outward and would act out. This translates into her teaching practice by being empathetic towards students that are similar to herself and by wanting to learn alongside her students and having a desire to provide them tools to live by. She states, “I love being alongside them while they pick up these tools and try them out.” Tina can also see how her gifted brain influences her teaching style. She “sees a matrix”
and knows how to “see this student and apply this thing” in order to be an effective teacher. She also feels that her “brain works differently” and she “feels differently.” Because of this way of thinking, and because of her experience as a gifted youth, she has a greater understanding of what it means to be and feel like to be gifted. Tina’s interview also focused on what it means to be a gifted adult. She described the challenges of being a gifted adult and how gifted children who are being properly served have support from many people, yet gifted adults do not have these same opportunities for “supportive safe places.”

Karen’s Experience

Karen was identified for a gifted program in fourth grade. She was identified as gifted in language arts but not in math. She soon realized that this opportunity did not necessarily provide better work, but just more of the same work. As a result, she began to no longer try and became an underachiever. Because she stopped caring, Karen was removed from the gifted program before the year was over. Midway within her fifth-grade year, Karen’s performance improved and she was placed back into the gifted program. This theme of underachievement is reflected in how she approaches her teaching practice. In thinking of why she became an underachiever, she does not like busy work or worksheets for her students. She wants to challenge her students and make sure her lessons are meaningful. Beyond fifth grade, Karen had an “awesome” time in her middle school gifted program. The programming she experienced really solidified the type of teacher she wants to be. She wishes to teach in much of the same creative ways. Karen’s own background has also helped her to understand giftedness as well as how to
teach the gifted child. She was the student who wanted “to know why.” Therefore, she provides real-world applications to her students and tries to make sure they understanding the meaning and reasoning for an assignment.

**Andrea’s Experience**

Andrea’s experience into gifted education began in third grade when she tested into a once a week pull-out program at her school. She enjoyed and remembers the logic puzzles that came with this opportunity. In high school, Andrea took AP classes. It was in one such course in her sophomore year that, similarly to Karen, she pushed boundaries. She remembers telling the teacher that she did not like the lesson. In discussing her own teaching career, several themes came up. First was a theme of schools not meeting the needs of the gifted. She sat with two gifted students every Friday at lunch to help provide them challenge in writing because she believes “we are failing them.” She saw herself in one student and noted that “She is bored in her coursework- that was me.”

A second theme is with her noting that other teachers do not understand the socio-emotional sides of gifted. She brought up the response of colleagues stating, “She is annoying me today” about a gifted student. Andrea’s giftedness impacts her approach to problems. She stated, “I approach problems differently than other people that I encounter.” She noted that she thinks “outside of the box.” Despite never feeling like a gifted student, Andrea believes her giftedness has brought on a greater awareness of what it feels like to be gifted. She stated, “I feel more aware of what it feels like to be bored in class or not challenged in class.” As a result, she looks for those opportunities to challenge others.
Lacey’s Experience

Lacey was identified gifted at the age of six. Her school did not have a formal gifted program, so she was given independent instruction and a desk in the hallway. Before high school she was admitted to Mensa, and in high school she and the other gifted students were asked to create the gifted program. A primary theme of Lacey’s youth was that of not fitting in. She liked being in the hall, and she felt sorry for the other students. She did not know how they had not learned whatever they were learning all ready. She had already taught herself Spanish at the age of six, and she had no peers of equal mental ability. She also felt like an anomaly at home. Her family did not understand her either. But, she liked to read and study, and she had imaginary friends. From an early age, she perceived herself as knowing more than anyone else. As an adult, she has had microaggressions directed at her, with a peer teacher not allowing his students to speak in the analogies that she is known for. She worries about similar situations occurring to her students. This leads to a theme of: things are not right. She knows that being in a hall by herself is not how children should be treated. As a result, she makes it a personal agenda to spot the gifted students and find ways to challenge them.

An additional theme that came up in Lacey’s interview is that of lack of trying amongst her peer teachers. She believes teachers get in a rut and teach from the same binder every year. They are not looking to challenge anyone “because that takes too much work.” She stated that that was not for her, though. She likes to work hard and meet the needs of her students. She also believes teachers are self-conscious about students
knowing more than they are ready for. When she has tried to challenge students in her Spanish class, she has had the lead teacher shut the lesson down for fear of the individual students being beyond where he or she wants them to be in the curriculum. Teachers also “hide their thinking on differentiation,” knowing that it is not appropriate to say anything against it. Because of her gifted experiences while growing up, she knows that gifted students are misinterpreted. They are seen as “smartasses” when giving an answer that is correct but misinterpreted. She had this happen in her childhood, and she has seen this happen in her adulthood. As a result, she says that giftedness makes sense to her. Her ability to teach and empathize with gifted students is directly related to her lifelong experiences. She ended the interview stating, “No one seems to think about or care that those things stay with a person as they go through your lives.”

**Sandy’s Experience**

Sandy began gifted pull-out programming in elementary school. In middle school she did not want to be known as gifted and her memories of gifted programming from that time were limited. Her high school “wasn’t very good,” and she was only in one AP class. She currently works as a gifted coordinator in an affluent district. She recently began this career and as she spoke it was apparent that her expectations were not meeting reality, which became a theme of the interview. She is doing more math remediation than she expected. She was hoping for eager, motivated learners, but seems to deal more with parents than students. In her youth she had experienced “critical thinking, special projects and interdisciplinary academics,” but she has not had very many chances to teach in this way in this position. Instead, she has a lot of paperwork. She is proud of helping a student
be able to check out more books at the library than his peers, and she was able to see that another student was signed off as twice-exceptional in a parent meeting which enables him to get the services he needs at any school he attends.

*Sue Ellen’s Experience*

Sue Ellen was identified as gifted early on in life at the age of five or six. She received supplemental programming within the general education classes as well as occasional pull-out programming. She attended courses on the weekends open to gifted students at a local university. She did not take any AP classes in high school, as her high school did not offer any. She now works in special education for students with mild, moderate and severe affective needs, as well as those with learning disabilities or emotional or behavioral challenges. She primarily teaches social studies. The theme that came up in Sue Ellen’s interview was that of opportunities and missed opportunities. Through her gifted programming, she learned typing, calculus and root words. She reflected positively on the opportunity for each. Yet, at the same time, she missed opportunities to be with her peers, as she was often doing packets with one other student while the rest of the class was off doing other work, such as a performing a play. As a result, her peers were intimidated by her. She also recognizes that she could have been valedictorian had she worked harder. In her teaching role, she sees similar opportunities and missed opportunities. While some peers will appropriately push a gifted student, others will not if the student is already getting an A. Similarly to not knowing how to teach herself the skill of working harder, Sue Ellen has had difficulty in teaching her students skills that she knows well, such as multiplying. She ended the time reflecting on
her giftedness by stating, “I think as a teacher I don’t feel very gifted as an adult. There aren’t many opportunities to discuss giftedness.”

**Jared’s Experience**

Jared was identified as gifted in the fourth grade when he entered the public school system after attending a cooperative school from kindergarten through third grade. The New Jersey school system that he was a part of had a unique Creative Intelligence program that allowed for advanced elective classes open only to the gifted students. Jared expressed feeling that his identification was incomplete because he did not have a “gifted teacher to go to to express [his] frustration with social issues or whatever he was bored with.” Because of this boredom, his own giftedness affects his approach to the gifted child, as he is hypersensitive to make sure that the gifted students in his classes are not bored. Jared began to question the process of gifted programming when he noticed that gifted identification seemed to happen along class lines. He also felt that there was a lack of acceptance for who he was amongst his gifted peers.

Jared’s interview revealed two themes: contradictions and priorities. Jared felt that he was a bit of a contradiction in his schooling in that he was smart and perceived by teachers as good, yet he cheated. He was also nerdy yet athletic, which made him a bit confusing to his peers, whom he also felt confused by. He feels that he should have had more social standing, yet he often thought his peers were mean. In regards to priorities, he spoke of both special needs students and athletic students given priority, yet gifted students not having similar access and therefore a lack of equity. Jared’s experiences as a
gifted youth help him to understand the gifted students that he teaches. He also wonders if gifted students question the same things about life that he does:

I can only speak for myself in this, but I do wonder if other gifted adults feel this way- and I wonder if gifted kids feel this way too – it is a feeling that they could have or should have done more. Whereas, yea, I think there is a general level of dissatisfaction that comes from being highly gifted for a lot of people in that you know that you are capable of producing when you do your very, very, very best, and so less than that is disappointing. I also think that you look around and see other people doing great shit, and it doesn’t feel abstract to you.

**Connections to the Literature**

The researcher’s goal of the literature was to show all the ways gifted students can be perplexing to educators as well as highlight the need for gifted students to have empathetic advocates. Schools and teachers can be dismissive of parents and therefore another avenue of advocacy is through educators. Gifted educators mirror the experiences of their gifted youth, especially socially and academically, and could be best at encouraging non-gifted educators to see the world of giftedness through a peer’s eyes. Themes from the literature that emerged in the interviews were related to identification (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 2008; Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013), programming (Halsted, 2009; Plucker & Callahan, 2008; Mann & Mann, 2009), socio-emotional behavior (Halsted, 2009), perfectionism (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009), underachievement (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan,
Identification

“There are many strategies for identifying gifted and talented students for programs. Whereas some programs stress only intelligence (aptitude) scores, a multidimensional assessment is recommended” (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011, p. 82). For the eight individuals interviewed, the majority recalled taking an IQ test, or their parents remembered IQ testing, with little memory of other factors being considered, but, given the time period of identification, all eight recalled that testing was the only method used. While Lisa, Tina, and Jared could remember taking tests, Karen, Lacey, Sandy, Sue Ellen and Andrea had a more difficult time remembering the specific identification procedures. Granted, these eight may not have been aware of other measures that were used in their individual identification. For some, this identification led to acceptance into specific classes, while for others, this simply meant modifications of the curriculum.

Karen exemplified the importance of screening for giftedness, as well as how being labeled as gifted can lead to questioning of one’s own identity. Karen felt that her identification would not have happened without a screening test because the gifted
teacher at her school generally seemed to focus on “squirrelly boys.” This is not surprising as “identifying gifted children on the basis of teacher nomination overlooks many gifted children. Several studies have shown that teacher nomination correctly identifies less than half of students later found to be gifted through individual testing” (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 2008, p. 46). Karen was also struck by the complicated aspects of being identified as gifted. Not only did she recognize the tendency for boys to be identified over girls, she questioned what her own identification meant. Later, when she was not living up to her potential in the gifted program, she was removed. She then questioned what being pulled from the gifted program also meant about her as a person. The literature supports this feeling in that “continued search for understanding and meaning in their identification” is a common theme amongst the gifted (Kaufman, 1992, p. 4). As an adult reflecting on her identification, Karen stated,

I think there is a development of insecurity as a part of this process. There is a very weird feeling of someone else saying you are this. I remember distinctly when I went from being in the good math class to the not so good math class, and it was terrible. What is my place in this is an important question in all kids and all learners, but especially with gifted learners, because satisfaction of doing a good job is often not enough.

Identification does not always occur where these eight individuals are employed, though. Karen expressed her frustration at the lack of identification at her teaching institution, and Lacey was concerned that the gifted program at her school was eliminated. Andrea was equally concerned that her current schools identifies for giftedness but does not actually
Programming

It was evident from the data analysis that gifted programming is an incredibly important aspect of a gifted student’s educational experience. Even those who were in a once a week pull-out program, or who had only a few years in a gifted program, reported that this was the highlight of their time in lower or middle school education. Lisa and Sandy specifically said that their gifted pull-out program was the best part of their schooling. Jared felt the same sentiment about his opportunity to attend Governor’s School. Part of the appreciation for any form of programming was the achievement gained. This parallels the literature in that “research consistently demonstrates that gifted students who receive any level of services achieve at higher levels than their gifted peers who receive none” (Callahan and Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 226). Even Lacey, who knows that being placed in the hall was not right, appreciated that she was given the opportunity to do things that her peers were not and at a level that more appropriately matched her needs.

Five out of the eight interviewees were involved in pull-out programs at some point in their schooling. Despite being widespread during the time of identification for many of these individuals, pull-out programs are given a negative connotation within the research. “It is ironic that the most popular programming design is also so severely criticized. A common statement is that pullout programs are a poor solution to the full-time problem of being gifted” (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011, p.152). Though these five
individuals could have probably benefited from more, they still expressed positive reactions to this form of limited programming.

**Programming Impacts the Student.**

Not only does gifted programming lead to cognitive gains (Rogers, 2002), but there is also a positive impact programming has on the individual person. This research found that gifted students are affected by being in a gifted program. Lisa, who attended a public magnet school for the gifted and now teaches at a private gifted school, stated, “I guess for me, that [gifted magnet school] was the happiest time for me when I was a kid. It was when I was the most engaged.” Karen was equally positive in her descriptions of her middle school gifted program. She remembers a list of projects and assignments that she completed during these years because they were so memorable to her. She loved talking about dystopias and practicing debates in her gifted class. Sandy, who attended a pull-out program at a public school and currently teaches at a public school, also loved her gifted pull-out programming. She stated, “It was basically the highlight of my day.”

Compared to Lisa, Karen and Sandy, the programming put in place for Lacey seems less than optimal. Lacey was identified at the age of six and attended a pull-out gifted program as well as participated in independent study in a public school. She was put in the hall or had a desk by herself away from her peers. Research has shown that “in addition to appropriate pacing of complex material, gifted children need to be with others of their own ability level. Grouping gifted children is controversial, but research indicates that it provides the optimum learning situation for them” (Halsted, 2009, p. 57). Others might see Lacey’s situation as controversial, as when she wasn’t placed in the hall, she
was being a “model” to other students, but she reported actually liking this, for she was able to do her own work. She recognized, at an early age, that she did not fit in with other children her age, and, “Where other gifted children are not available, the young gifted child becomes aware that he feels and acts differently from others” (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, p. 14). Therefore, this plan just seemed to make sense, and she reported that she did not really know any differently. While this set-up could seem a bit lonesome to the outside viewer, Lacey appreciated the opportunities it provided to work on big projects, such as creating her own hand-bound books. This appreciation is reflected in the literature in that “gifted children may actually require time alone, and they may need more of it than most other people need or can understand” (Halsted, 2009, p. 13).

Sue Ellen attended public schooling and participated in a pull-out program as well as attended the local university on the weekends. She remembers her lower school teachers differentiating the curriculum for her. She had a similar experience of feeling like Lacey that what she was learning, such as root words, was a “fabulous opportunity to learn handy things,” yet she was often doing work that the rest of her class was not and sometimes wishing to be a part of the activities that they were doing.

Conversely, programming can have the opposite effect if it is not the proper programming for a particular child. “Large-scale studies documenting that few adaptations are made for high-ability learners in the classroom appear to confirm that their academic needs are not met by general education teachers” (Plucker & Callahan, 2008, p. 671). Tina recognized the limitations of her schooling and believes that the lack of programming led to her frustration and becoming a self-described “rotten kid” and
“wild child.” Similarly, Karen did not have a good experience during her elementary years, even though she was in a gifted pull-out program, and therefore began to fit the description of the classic underachiever. As a result, she explained that she does not have many fond memories of the elementary school gifted program compared to her positive memories of the middle school gifted program.

Lacey found the lack of programming in her high school to be rather ridiculous. She remembers being asked, with four other people from each grade, to design the gifted program. She was already in Mensa at this time, and stated that the others were as well. Therefore, the school accommodation of honors classes and pull-out opportunities seemed rather inadequate.

Jared attended a public school that had elective classes that were only open to gifted students. He is now a drama teacher at a private school. Jared remembers talking about big issues in the gifted social studies elective that he was able to join as a result of identification. This was something that he enjoyed. He was also accepted into the Governor’s School, and he reported, “that was probably the most important thing that happened to me relative to giftedness because then I really was in an environment full of legit gifted kids, and it was the best month of my teenage life.”

Boring was an adjective frequently used by the gifted individuals in this study to describe the general education classroom. The research confirms that “the usual school setting becomes boring, particularly when the child is not appropriately placed, or when the system tries to force the child into its preset average mold” (Webb, Meckstroth &
While these individuals may have been bored in the regular classroom, gifted programming had a positive impact on the individuals in this study.  

**Programming Influences the Educator.**

Teachers of the gifted choose strategies and activities based on their individual teaching strengths and styles, as well as their students’ learning profiles, readiness levels, and interests. They rarely teach something the same way twice because their students' academic needs vary widely, and they have an extensive repertoire of strategies from which to draw. (Mann & Mann, 2009)

Those who were interviewed described ways in which their memories of their gifted programming have impacted their ability to be a good educator and mirror that of the literature.

Lisa reported, “I think I went into gifted teaching because some of the best parts of my education were in the gifted program.” She also recognized that a lack of gifted programming at times during her schooling also influences her teaching. “I saw where my own education failed me in a way, and I wanted to counter that and give other kids a better experience.” Lisa stated that she tends to like “big projects and big thinking.” She recalled the gifted program that she was a part of while growing up completed projects of this nature and one on Greece especially stood out to her in her mind. So much so, that she replicates the project with her gifted class. Like Feinberg (1970), Lisa went into teaching to support gifted students.

Tina had a similar sentiment, in that her education was not enough at times. Because of these feelings of boredom, Tina thinks she is a better teacher, especially of gifted kids. She stated, “Because I know. I know the frustration. I know the not being
satisfied.” She went even so far as to say that she “became the teacher I wanted to have when I was in school.”

As a result of the menial worksheets she was given in school, Karen claims she has an aversion to worksheets and uses these as little as possible in her classroom. She wants to do more debates in her class, like she remembers experiencing in her gifted program, and she tries to include creative writing as much as possible, also in response to the memories of her gifted education. She does not want her gifted students to be bored and stated, “I think that comes from my memories of being a student” and having her own moments of boredom. She continued on by saying, “Another thing I remember was being really, really frustrated if instructors did not explain to me why I was learning what I was learning.” As a result, she tries to justify her lessons to her students and make sure they understand the “why” of the experience.

Jared thinks about what he was like as a student in thinking of his own students. He stated, “I would say that in general the GT kids get excited about the same sort of projects that I think middle school me would have gotten excited about, and the GT kids here get bored with the same shit I would have gotten bored with.” Because of his gifted programming and understanding of the gifted, Jared uses this knowledge to make sure his gifted students are not bored. He stated, “I think it helps me serve all my students, particularly my more gifted kids.”

Lacey did not have the opportunity to experience strong whole-class gifted programming, as she was often the only gifted child in her class and set apart from the rest of the group. While she uses this memory as motivation to challenge gifted students,
her own personal teaching style is based on her beliefs about teaching and the way in
which she enjoys running her class. Ultimately, she likes her class to be child-centered.
She wants to “nurture them because they are all just so stressed and tired.”

Sandy remembers working on special projects, interdisciplinary academics, and
focusing on critical thinking in her gifted pull-out program. She recently graduated with
her Masters in gifted education after teaching art education for five years, and she reports
that she went into the field of gifted education because she was expecting to be able to
teach in a similar way to how she was taught. She was hoping to be involved in planning
more abstract projects, but unfortunately, she is often expected to do math enrichment or
remediation. This goes to show that educators are also limited in their ability to program.
Sandy has “ideas about what I want to do” but she feels she cannot implement them
because of the amount of paperwork that comes with the job of being a gifted
coordinator.

Effective teachers of the gifted use a variety of teaching styles and techniques
including student and strength-centered approaches, high expectations, open-ended
activities, independent study, problem-based learning, inquiry-based instruction, and
enthusiasm for learning (Mann & Mann, 2009). Like Lacey, Sandy describes her teaching
style as child-focused as well as friendly, quirky, creative and open-ended. Sue Ellen has
a skill-based approach to teaching. She feels like the way to help a gifted student is to
find a skill they are good at and making the lesson relevant to them.
Social-Emotional Behavior

Understanding their own socio-emotional behavior helps gifted adult educators understand the socio-emotional experiences of their gifted students. “Too often, we fail to recognize that gifted children can have trouble with emotional and social development, and we assume that even if they do have problems, they have the intelligence to deal with them” (Halsted, 2009, p.11). Both as students and as educators, the individuals in this study reflected on the socio-emotional aspects of giftedness and know the need for educators to have a strong understanding of socio-emotional behaviors, as well.

Lisa recognizes the difficulties that can come hand-in-hand with giftedness. She stated, “Managing emotions like frustration and stress are areas where gifted children may need extra support.”

Lacey was a self-identified loner during her school years. She feels that she did not fit in with the other students, nor did she fit in with her own family. But, she liked to read and study, and she had imaginary friends. In her mind, she was just fine.

In his youth, Jared feels he confused his peers. They saw him as nerdy, and he was unsure of how to interact with them. His athleticism combined with his intellectual ability made him a curiosity. Where he believes he should have had more social standing due to his athleticism, he did not have the social understanding to do so. He reflected that, “sometimes people just sort of seemed mean, so that was sort of confusing.” He feels that he fit the gifted profile, and he had the social awkwardness that can come with giftedness, yet, the smart students did not like him. He was identified with the strengths of being gifted, and accepted into the advanced classes, but he does not feel that he was helped
with the socio-emotional aspect of giftedness. He reflected that he did not have a gifted
teacher to express these concerns to. Therefore, his school was able to provide a
curriculum for the cognitive side of giftedness, but, in Jared’s memory, did not have the
staff to address the socio-emotional side.

Tina’s giftedness led her to have socio-emotional difficulties, as well. She was in
a failing school system, bored, and with ample time to think about things, she turned her
frustration outward. She became the child that teachers did not want to have in their class.
She relates this to her own teaching and how there are times when a teacher looks at their
class list and gets discouraged by seeing a particular name. She became that child. She
also knows the socio-emotional concerns that come with giftedness from her own
children and from children she has taught.

Others expressed socio-emotional concerns. As an adult, Karen recognizes that
she probably had undiagnosed depression when she was younger. Sue Ellen felt that her
peers were intimidated by her. Andrea recognizes that many gifted students are
academically gifted but emotionally immature, especially if a student is twice-
exceptional.

**Perfectionism**

“The gifted often set unrealistic standards for themselves…giftedness and
perfectionism are soul mates” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 147). Lacey notes the
increase in anxiety amongst all students, though she wonders if it is a function of
giftedness for her gifted students since “many of them get hard on themselves if they
don’t have an A.” Jared was known in school as a good student, but because of this, he
felt that he had a reputation to maintain. While this does not necessarily qualify as perfectionism, he would cheat to maintain this reputation. This is not something he is particularly proud of as an adult. Yet, part of this perfectionism has had lasting effects on him. He reported wishing he could have done more and wonders if other gifted individuals feel that they should have done more.

**Underachievement**

Underachievement is a “discrepancy between the child’s school performance and some index of his or her actual ability” (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011, p. 288). Since Karen had the perception that her school was not giving her better work, just more work, she began to underachieve when she was in the 4th grade. She had an advanced understanding of the gifted testing procedures, which in itself could be related to her giftedness, and she felt sort of puzzled by being in the gifted program. She felt the approach to identification was strange, especially since the gifted teacher seemed to focus on identifying mathematically advanced boys, and she questioned the subsequent program in that it “felt like a punishment and reward sort of thing. If you are being cooperative, you get to be there and if you’re not, then you don’t.” All of these thoughts, as well as what she refers to as undiagnosed ADHD, led her to somewhat purposefully underachieve with a “subtle pushing of boundaries.” She no longer wanted to play the rules of the system. She would “do as little as possible. Turn it in, and let it be.” While underachievement may seem like laziness, the gifted underachiever often has school to blame. “It can be difficult for the upper three percent of children called gifted to stay motivated in an educational system that is oriented primarily toward the other 97%”
Sometimes Karen would work on an assignment, get frustrated with herself halfway through, and then not turn it in. Frequently, these responses were due to feeling like her work was not good enough. So, she would do “as little possible and leave it.” Low self-esteem is a common characteristic of underachievement, as well as thinking about the pressures of being gifted as a reason to underachieve (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011).

Sandy no longer wanted to appear smart when she got to middle school. She explains that she was a shy female and did not want to be known as gifted. Research shows that this form of underachievement is a common occurrence amongst gifted females (Luftig & Nichols, 1991; Halsted, 2009). By middle school, gender plays a role in school success with gifted females losing confidence, losing interest in STEM academics, and defining themselves by relationships rather than academics (Post, 2015).

**Myths of Giftedness**

The idea that giftedness helps a person coast through life is an unfortunate, yet identifiable, belief that permeates the literature (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 2018). As a result of this myth, “One population rarely studied and often misunderstood are the people we assume will be fine because they are ‘so smart’” (Prober, 2011, para. 33). The National Association for Gifted Children states that this “and other myths prevents our country from appropriately educating millions of advanced students” (“Myths About Gifted Students,” n.d.). Within the context of this research, this belief came out in the interviews as “you’re smart…you will be ok.” Lisa discovered that in high school people assumed that because she was gifted she automatically knew how to do things. She was
not given the support that was needed to help her figure out where and how to apply to college because of this assumption. She directly stated that others felt that because she was gifted she would be just fine. Tina also reported that instead of getting extra attention in her youth, the gifted students were put into classes that were not effective, with too many students and not enough supports, under the belief that “these people are going to be fine.”

While Jared did not experience a myth of the gifted in his youth, he spoke of the gifted myth that “gifted individuals will be just fine” in his concern for gifted practices. When thinking of gifted individuals, Jared recognizes that this society believes that the gifted will be ok, but he believes with the state of our current world, this is a problem. He stated that, “as everything is now for our species, we really need the gifted kids,” but, “just the idea that gifted kids are gifted and they will be ok is bananas.”

**Gifted Achievements**

Gifted adults could also be considered ideal teachers, as many continue on to earn awards and occupational achievement in college and adulthood (Kaufman, 1992). Given that these are gifted individuals, it came as no surprise that five of those who were interviewed obtained their masters, and of the remaining three, one is in the process of obtaining a graduate degree. Tina was in honors classes in high school and was a double major in college. Karen joined a philosophy cohort that was very "intrinsically motivated. Everyone was there because they wanted to learn more and push each other.” Karen, Sandy and Andrea each took AP classes in high school.
At the same time, research has shown that gifted adults continue to achieve while they are in adulthood, yet they often feel disappointed on their over-reliance on academia in their youth, as well as their competition for awards to form an identity (Kaufman, 1992). Jared did not specifically mention concern over focusing too much on academics or awards in his youth, but he did specifically state dissatisfaction with where his life is now:

I can only speak for myself in his, but I do wonder if other gifted adults feel this way – and I wonder if gifted kids work this way to – is a feeling that they could have or should have done more. Whereas, yea, I think there is sort of a general level of dissatisfaction that comes with being GT for a lot of people in that you know what you are capable of producing when you do your very very, very best, and so less than that is disappointing.

Ironically, Jared recently won a major teaching award, so even though he is aware of his own giftedness, and he has been successful in his life, there is always the hope for more or the feeling that good is not good enough. This type of thinking is typical of middle adulthood, as “middle-aged adults are likely to take a long-range perspective – to consider societal goals, as well as their own goals in life, and how they might improve the world in whatever ways they think might be possible” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 173).

**Gifted Adults**

“Adults can be recognized as gifted by two different means: Either they are identified as gifted during their educational years, and/or they attain recognition in
adulthood for superior performance in a particular talent area” (Housand & Housand, 2009). The individuals in this study experience many of the same life situations and frustrations as the gifted adults found in the literature. As Lisa said, in regards to giftedness, “I don’t think it goes away. It’s not like you stop.” Lisa married someone who is also gifted, and she has two gifted children. Lisa believes that as a family, the conversations that are had are much faster paced and go in more tangents than the conversations that are had with her non-gifted peers. As a gifted adult, she sometimes forgets that others might not be thinking in the same way. She stated, “You kind of just assume other people’s brains are doing the same thing and seeing the same connections.”

It is no surprise that Lisa married a gifted person, as gifted individuals often marry other gifted individuals (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). Karen is also married to a gifted adult, as is Jared, who has two highly gifted children.

Tina also reflected on the difficulties of being a gifted adult. Where gifted students get a lot of focus, she feels that there is little mention of or support for gifted adults.

As a gifted adult, Karen reflected that she was pretty frustrated by school. This is an area that she is “still grappling with.” Therefore, while one’s giftedness does not go away with age, neither do the feelings associated with schooling for a gifted individual.

Sue Ellen has had some difficulty in teaching as a gifted adult. When it comes to teaching something that she has always known how to do, such as multiplication, she has struggled with how to teach it differently. She said, “I had to teach myself the skill of how to teach something that I’m good at.” Similarly, Lacey stated, “My biggest problem
as a teacher is stepping back and knowing that I can learn something really quickly but they (the students) can’t.”

“Most gifted adults have repeatedly felt misunderstood by others” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 169). Lacey recognizes that her peers do not always understand her. When asked about being a gifted adult, Jared replied, “It sometimes makes me impatient with my peers, which isn’t necessarily a good thing.” Jared spoke of his deep concerns for the world. Within the context of this portion of the interview, he stated, “Maybe this is a GT thing, but how is it nobody else realizes how high the stakes are.” While this type of concern is not limited to just the gifted or highly gifted, this response shows how Jared acknowledges his own giftedness and how being gifted brings about a different type of thinking.

**Gifted Teachers**

In regard to personality, teachers of the gifted should have a positive attitude towards the gifted and enjoy teaching this group of students, as well (David, 2011). “Such teachers show enthusiasm and insatiable curiosity” (Dvorka & Dvorak, 2009). This research on teachers who are gifted mirrored that of the literature in that it was found that teachers of the gifted had goals of their teaching that were “inherently and intrinsically motivating, stimulating” and included “inspiring activities and projects because teachers recognized if they were bored with assignments or curriculum, students must be as well” (Dvorka & Dvorak, 2009). Each of the individuals interviewed in this study provided positive reports of interacting with and teaching gifted students. Tina feels
that she is both strict and funny; she knows when her students are bored and wants to make them feel challenged.

Similarly, Jared, in regards to his teaching style, believes that he is “always positive, never satisfied,” and Lisa enjoys learning alongside her students. Lisa also recalled how her own teachers did not teach her in the way that she learns, especially in regards to math, and therefore she strives to make sure her students do not feel the same way. Andrea recognizes that she is good at thinking outside of the box, a benefit to her teaching style. The individuals in this study found ways to ensure that their students are seeing connections of the curriculum to outside of the classroom and are supported in taking risks and learning from individual failures (Neumark, 2008).

**Underrepresented Populations**

Jared learned the harsh reality that gifted programs sometimes focus on class which leads to underrepresentation of those from poverty of minority or of a racial minority (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). Jared spoke of a student who was the “smartest guy” he knew, yet was African American, poor and not in the gifted program. This led Jared to wonder if identification happened along class lines. This “weirded” him out. As an educator, his reflection and confusion of this is promising, as educators need to “support the performance of gifted and talented students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds,” which includes impoverished students and racial minorities (VanTassel-Baska, 2010, p. 13).
**Imposter Syndrome**

Imposter syndrome is “the fear of being exposed as a fraud, of feeling unworthy of your success, of not being as capable as others. Both genders experience the Imposter Syndrome, but women are more susceptible to it and more intensely affected by it” (Goman, 2018). The researchers Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright and Jackson (2010) believe the reason women feel this way is due to doubts in their own abilities.

Several of the women in the study felt they were imposters to their giftedness. As an adult, Sandy does not think she is very gifted. She stated, “I’m really pretty mainstream.” Similarly, Andrea stated that she never felt like a gifted student. Sue Ellen also does not feel very gifted as an adult. She feels, “There just aren’t as many opportunities to discuss giftedness.”

Despite clearly having a very philosophical way of thinking about the world, Karen reported feeling inadequate compared to the individuals in her philosophy cohort. She believes that those in the group were most likely gifted, themselves, and as a result she “always felt inferior to those people.” She felt that, “part of that was being a woman in a predominantly male cohort.”

**Analysis of the Overarching Question**

This research aimed to examine the following overarching question:

How do the experiences of gifted adults who are educators influence their teaching and empathy of gifted learners in order to create empathy in other teachers?

This research found that educators who are identified as gifted and who were a part of a gifted program in their youth often attempt to replicate aspects of that program
in their own teaching. Karen attempts to infuse critical thinking and differentiation into each of her lessons. She wants to hold debates, like she remembers participating in with her gifted program, and she looks for ways to challenge her students. Sandy is a bit disappointed that she is not able to replicate her gifted programming more frequently. In reflecting on her career changes, she stated, “So, that sort of played into me wanting to look into GT. When I went into this area of education, that is what I was picturing. I was picturing abstract projects.”

This research also found that the formative years surrounding the time of identification has a lasting impact on an individuals’ subsequent schooling and even current teaching role. Karen reflected on this when discussing her students. She stated, I guess I just really, really don’t want them to be bored. I think I tend to stress kids out rather than giving them too easy of work. I think that comes from my memories of being a student. Another thing I remember was being really, really frustrated if instructors did not explain to me why I was learning what I was learning. Oftentimes I feel I need to justify to a student why we are doing something.

At the same time, those who were interviewed sometimes attempted to make up for the lack of programming or problems in their own education by becoming the teacher they wish they had had. “Schools often hold beliefs and attitudes that result in actions that can be damaging to the optimal growth of gifted children” (Susko, 2009, p. 760). Tina explained this beautifully when she said, “But I think that is why I’m a good teacher now, or a good teacher of gifted kids. Because I know. I know the frustration. I know the not
being satisfied.” Similarly, Andrea stated, “I feel more aware of what it feels like to be bored in class or not challenged in class. I think it gave me an awareness.”

This research found that gifted individuals often feel that the program that they were a part of was the best aspect of their schooling which subsequently influences their current teaching style. Lisa exemplified this when she said, “I guess for me that [the time when she was in magnet school] was the happiest time for me when I was a kid. It was when I was the most engaged.” Today, her classroom is filled with projects and thematic units that are reflective of those gifted programming years. Sandy had similar sentiments, and she has a similar teaching style. She has a desire to create big projects. She reflected, “From what I remember about the pull-out program is that it was basically the highlight of my day.”

Upon reflecting on their youth, these gifted educators often recalled the difficulty that comes with giftedness which further supports the notion of being empathetic to gifted youth. Jared felt that he was a bit of a “curiosity” to his school-aged peers and knows that he sometimes frustrates his teaching colleagues. Sandy was labeled as weird in her youth, and she has also experienced her colleagues misunderstanding her and her teaching style. This misunderstanding of their gifted-peers by non-gifted individuals and the labeling of “weird” is reflected in the literature (Halsted, 2009). Lisa explained how her mind works faster than her peers and how her speed of conversation is faster than others. Tina is deeply concerned for the difficulties of being gifted. She stated, “Even when you know what is going on intellectually it’s rough. The gifted identification can be the biggest - it is a double-edged sword that a parent can be handed. It comes with all of
this possibility but it’s like with great power comes great responsibility, and the brain’s ability to intake so much is balanced by the fact that they are not capable of understanding in their heart what they are seeing or imagining.”

Furthermore, this research found that educators who are gifted are empathetic towards their gifted students and often frustrated with inadequate accommodations for gifted individuals at their current teaching institutions. Jared explained this best by saying how he knows what gifted students are excited by because he is equally excited with similar content or ideas. Karen is concerned that her teaching institution does not identify for giftedness. Andrea believes students should be identified sooner than fourth grade, the grade in which students are tested for giftedness at her school. Sue Ellen does not believe her school does a very good job of identifying students at either end of the spectrum.

Gifted adults feel discouraged by other adults making assumptions about giftedness, and they, themselves, get frustrated when they do not realize that a student is gifted. For example, Sue Ellen stated, “I think sometimes I get frustrated when I don’t recognize a kid who has a gifted label.” In response to gifted students with other teachers, Lacey replied, “They (gifted students) are not trying to be smart-asses. I think that me being me, I know when I was a kid, and I will see this in other teachers, they are just giving a factual answer and they are compelled to tell the truth, and it gets misinterpreted.”

Empathy was most frequently shown by these gifted educators by making curriculum decisions in order for the gifted students in their classes to be challenged and
not bored. The empathy these individuals felt was often towards students that they saw as being similar to themselves and mirroring their own feelings related to giftedness.

Occasionally, these individuals found ways to advocate for specific gifted students, but advocacy mostly came in the form of a teaching style and curriculum. There did not seem to be a relationship between the level of empathy or cognitive dissonance in order to create advocacy. Recalling specific moments of advocacy seemed to be more dependent on the interviewee’s memory of such moments rather than a direct result of empathy or cognitive dissonance. While none of the interviewees made statements regarding directly attempting to create empathy in other teachers, the possibility of doing so seems plausible given the results of the research. For example, Lacey reported explaining giftedness to her fellow teachers when she witnessed individuals not understanding a gifted student. Therefore, it can be assumed that educators who are gifted remember and understand what it is like to be a gifted youth, and therefore the implication of this research could potentially be for teachers who are gifted to help non-gifted teachers see the world through the eyes of a gifted individual to increase their capacity to feel empathy for gifted students.

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Table 5.7: Concepts Identified in the Interviews.

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**Analysis of the Research Questions**

The goal of this research was to examine how the experience of being identified as gifted shaped the school experiences of the individuals being interviewed, and in turn, how that experience has shaped the way in which a gifted adult approaches his or her classroom and the teaching of gifted learners. The research questions were as follows:

1. In what way does empathy towards giftedness influence gifted adults’ teaching practices?

2. In what ways do gifted adults’ experience cognitive dissonance when their thoughts about gifted education are inconsistent with the practices at their school or when dealing with other teachers who are not gifted?

3. How do gifted adults who are educators advocate for gifted practices or gifted students at their school?

**Question One**

The first research sub-question aimed to understand empathy: In what way does empathy towards giftedness influence gifted adults’ teaching practices? Gifted adults go into education for a myriad of reasons, but their teaching practice is often based on their educational experience – either as a result of or in response to the ways that they had been taught. This leads to an empathetic approach to educating the gifted child. While
caring can happen with any teacher, empathy is when there is a similarity of experience, often with an emotional component. Empathy is when one is able to “perceive the emotions of another” (Riess, 2017, p. 27). In the simulation theory of empathy, “an experience in one person is mirror, or reexperienced, in an observer” (Shanton & Goldman, 2010, p. 3). For these gifted educators, there is a feeling of not wanting their students to feel how they did as well as approaching education in a way that they would have wanted for themselves.

Gifted children must come to know that there are people who understand and care, and who realize that being gifted sometimes hurts. They must come to know that others share their ways of viewing the world, and they must develop a sense of value for many ordinary things and ordinary people. (Webb, Meckstroth & Toland, p. 32)

The empathy of these gifted adults extends to including ways that the individuals interviewed enjoyed being taught into their own teaching practice. In a study by Bakar, Ishak & Abidin (2013), it was found that empathy “allows a person to comprehend or share a frame of reference with another person” (p. 765) and gifted individuals “scored high in all domains of empathy, in particular, the ability to leverage with diverse groups of individuals, to provide services for others, to care for others and to understand and help others” (p. 767). The empathy of this group generally fell in the categories of providing services for others and understanding and helping others. While each of these individuals are no doubt empathetic to the needs of their students, Lisa, Tina, Karen, Andrea, Lacey and Jared reflected on specific moments or feelings of empathy in their interview.
Lisa reported feeling like her schooling was easy, until a point when it wasn’t. She felt this way particularly with math. She believed, “I must be dumb at math. I’m smart at everything else, but I’m dumb at math.” She acknowledged that she had a fixed mindset around this. It is also possible that she believed in the stereotype threat that females are not good at math (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018). Lisa sees the trouble this mindset can create with her gifted students and empathizes with the struggles they have. Her life experiences of having adults think she didn’t need help translates into her understanding of her gifted students. “Gifted kids often get a lot of fixed mindset messages from adults that tell them they are smart and kids often translate this into ‘everything should be easy for me.’ When it isn’t, this struggle can be self-deflating.” This belief mirrors the literature, in that “teacher’s beliefs about the malleability of intelligence – that is, whether teachers view ability as fixed or malleable – interact with their behaviors to create classrooms that communicate messages to children about their potential to achieve” (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009, p.135). Furthermore, Lisa’s empathy for the gifted is the reason she teaches at a gifted school. She stated, Part of what keeps me at a school for gifted is I can empathize with where kids are coming from. It makes me, if someone is struggling with something, go huh, how can I think about this in a different way or how can I explain this in a different way that will connect with them? Instead of stopping her from teaching or appreciating math, Lisa’s personal struggle with math did the opposite. She persevered beyond these difficulties and
eventually taught a class to reluctant math students. Math is now one of her favorite
classes to teach. Reflecting on this experience provided space for her to share her
empathy of students who might be in a similar, difficult position, as well as her
motivation for teaching gifted students. Her memories of her childhood mirror that of her
students. She stated, “I really want them to see themselves as capable and resilient. Not
because things are easy, but because they can develop skills and strategies in addition to
their natural gifts.”

Tina.

Tina also empathizes with her gifted students as a result of her own education.
The faults in her school system led her to feeling frustrated and unsatisfied. She sees
when her gifted students are feeling the same way. “I can see it in them. I can recognize it
and sometimes help them negotiate around it.” Tina empathizes in other ways, as well.
Her own gifted child was suicidal during the school years that he was in a school that did
not have gifted programming. She believes that the school with a gifted program that he
transferred to “saved his life.” She continued on, “I’m absolutely certain of that.” Tina is
also the last call for a gifted student who has threatened suicide in the past. She attributes
this to the “existential depression” that comes with giftedness. She reflected on the tragic
unfairness of the gifted brain:

It comes with all of this possibility, but it’s like with great power comes
great responsibility, and the brain’s ability to intake so much is balanced by
the fact that they are not capable of understanding in their heart what they
are seeing.
Tina does not shy away from the socio-emotional side of giftedness. Instead, when it comes to negotiating the difficulties of friendships or other life experiences, she loves to be there and give her students the tools to figure out what to do. Tina said, “I love being alongside them while they pick up these tools and try them out.” This is part of the empathy she feels towards her gifted students. She approaches her class with a growth mindset and lets her gifted students know that she believes in them. This reflects the literature in that the goal of a gifted teacher should be “to create classrooms that communicate messages to children about their potential to achieve” (Horowitz, Subotnik & Matthews, 2009, p.135). Having a growth mindset and encouraging this growth mindset within students helps to combat underachievement (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018). This empathy goes so far as for Tina to wonder, “Am I trying to complete the circle on what I wanted/needed as a kid?”

Karen.

Karen describes gifted students as ones who have a curiosity and a desire or fervor to understand something as well as wanting a real-world application to a unit or assignment. She doesn’t just see the gifted student as one who has a high-test score. She recognizes that there is more to it. Karen empathizes with her students by reflecting on her own feelings of her giftedness. She recognizes the insecurity she felt while in her bachelor of arts philosophy program and states, “I think that is something that sometimes happens with kids, too. They want to be challenged and included in conversations, but on the flip side you feel like you know nothing and can be very insecure.” Karen reflected
on mirroring feelings of her students by pondering, “I wonder if my students feel the same thing?”

**Andrea.**

Andrea reported being bored in school. She can empathize with students who are also not being challenged. As a teacher, her memory of boredom prompted her to sit with two students who she believed were also bored at lunch on Fridays in order to give them a chance to be challenged in their writing. She did not get paid but instead chose to spend her time in this way because she believed the school was failing them. She said she does this because she believes in “involving gifted students in their own learning.” She also believes that her giftedness has made her more aware of what it feels like to not be challenged in class. While she admits that her giftedness has not impacted her greatly, in regards to teaching, she does believe that it has given her greater awareness.

**Jared.**

Similarly, Jared is “hyper sensitive of making sure that my gifted kids are not bored.” He thinks about his lessons in this way, and because he empathizes with the gifted child, he then makes everything appropriate for the gifted and adjusts downward as need be.

**Lacey.**

Lacey’s feelings of empathy come from her memories as a child as well as how she has been treated as an adult. She likes to think in analogies, but this was negatively noticed by one of the teachers at her school. The teacher responded by telling his class that they could not use analogies to explain their thinking. She knows this was directly
related to her, and she felt somewhat hurt by this rule that was written with her in mind. She worried about what this meant for the children in that class. She stated her concern with students not being given the opportunity to answer in a way that works for them. Lacey also gets frustrated when she hears teachers say, “oh, that kid is scary smart” or “they are too smart for their own good.” She worries that students are being made to feel ashamed for their giftedness. She reported having to interpret gifted behaviors to other teachers. Because of her background, and having been misinterpreted as a child, she stated that gifted students make sense to her.

Lacey feels that she spots the gifted children pretty quickly. She tries to make sure that they are challenged. To her, it is a personal agenda. She directly ties this to her own experience of sitting in the hallway and doing her own work that was different from her peers. She states, “I know that my personality and me being in the hallway was fine, but that’s not how a kid should be treated.” A time Lacey made a curricular change was in teaching a set of boys an advanced concept related to telling time. Lacey does not have her own classroom and is a roving Spanish teacher. She remembers the classroom teacher shutting the lesson down because it was more advanced than the current curriculum. Lacey shared that she has gifted students who are happy to see her because she “gets them.” Since it is not socially acceptable for a boy to be smart at her school, if she has a male student who she knows won’t continue to try because of the repercussions of a good grade, she will put a D on his paper, but then let him know that he actually earned an A, as a way of helping him to both save face and be motivated to try. This desire to not look advanced in front of peers is a known situation in gifted research because “even though

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high academic performance generally assures approval of adults, it is often threatening to peers” (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 2008, p. 152).

**Empathy: The Road to Understanding**

Within the concept of empathy, the theme of empathy being the road to understanding came up repeatedly. In examining the responses of these eight individuals, it is apparent that they understand what their gifted students are going through cognitively and socially-emotionally. Because of this understanding, they have a desire to create a curriculum that will meet the needs of their gifted learners, or modify the existing program or school experience for an individual student. Empathy comes, in this case, from being misunderstood by a peer teacher and remembering what it feels like to be a misunderstood gifted student.

**Question Two**

The second research sub-question aimed to understand cognitive dissonance: In what ways do gifted adults’ experience cognitive dissonance when their thoughts about gifted education are inconsistent with the practices at their school or when dealing with other teachers who are not gifted? The goal of gifted programming is to “discover all children with gifted potential for opportunities to develop that potential” and “to provide appropriate programming for all students who already have obviously developed gifted skills” (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011, p. 82). The individuals in this study were often concerned with one or both of these identification goals. Six of the eight individuals were concerned by the limited or lack of gifted programming at their school. Six of the eight
individuals were able to recall moments of dealing with other teachers who are not gifted and feeling uncomfortable with the responses of these other individuals.

**Tina.**

The lack of education on giftedness for individuals in a pre-service program is unfortunate. It is here that Tina reported the most cognitive dissonance. “It is very rare,” she stated, “to have educators with gifted education backgrounds. We have good-hearted people in the industry, but there is a lot of misconception. You know, I think it’s [gifted training] what, two weeks?” Tina also reflected on being involved as a board member of the Hawaii Gifted Association. She tried to advocate for gifted students while in this setting, but there was not enough money or interested people to support gifted programming. She stated that, “Principals actually laughed at us” with the attempts the board was trying to make on the part of gifted students.

**Karen.**

Karen’s cognitive dissonance comes from the fact that her current teaching institution does not test for giftedness. She recognizes that she might not have been identified if there had not been a screening test at her school. Because her school does not identify gifted students, students who have been identified are done so with an outside, and often costly, evaluator. This results in the school primarily knowing only of their twice-exceptional gifted students and not identifying others. Karen spoke of her concern for this cost, as well as the discrepancy with this process. “It makes it really challenging because it seems like the kids who get the evaluations are the kids who are really struggling…We are identifying a very specific kind of gifted student.”
Andrea.

Andrea feels cognitive dissonance towards the age at which her school identifies gifted students. She is also discouraged by what is done with this information. Her school tests and identifies students in the fourth grade, which she stated is much too old to identify. Andrea is also frustrated at the lack of programming that results from the identification. She stated, “I think we are failing these kids.” Andrea also believes that her colleagues do not understand the social-emotional side of the gifted child. She recognizes that many of the gifted children in her school are immature, and she sees other teachers misunderstanding this asynchrony in development. Her frustrations parallel the literature that, “Asynchrony is a factor that should be considered by the adults who make decisions concerning gifted children” (Halsted, 2009, p. 23). Differentiation is an additional concern for Andrea. She has had a colleague refuse to differentiate for a gifted student, and there are others that she works with who she feels are not very good at determining how to differentiate.

Lacey.

The gifted program in Lacey’s school district was removed last year, and prior to its removal gifted identification was based solely on testing. Lacey is annoyed by this practice and feels cognitive dissonance towards her school. She stated that, “We always commiserated that they were missing some really great kids because they didn’t test well. There are a lot of cool things they could have done with kids, but they couldn’t because the administration wants hard, cold numbers to point to.” Lacey is also stunned by the “lack of professionalism” she has seen with many of her colleagues. She is frustrated
when they get in a rut and do the same lesson year after year. She believes that “they aren’t looking to challenge anyone, because that is more work for them.” She also thinks that with differentiation being the current buzzword, teachers hide their thinking because they know it’s not appropriate to say something negative about a gifted student. Yet, they might still be thinking it.

**Sandy.**

Sandy was hoping to be involved with more gifted enrichment and projects that modeled optimal gifted programming when she became a gifted teacher. Unfortunately, she is often expected to do math remediation and math enrichment. The difference between the expectation and the reality is challenging for her which brings on feelings of cognitive dissonance. She is also limited in time, as she feels that she is often bogged down in paperwork. Fortunately, she has had several principals ask a lot of questions about giftedness. They have been receptive and open-minded to what it means to be gifted, and, she reports, they want to learn more.

**Sue Ellen.**

Sue Ellen was fortunate to take college classes throughout elementary and middle school. Yet, now she works at a high school that does not advance the gifted youth. She believes:

I don’t think we have a very good RtI program. I don’t think we are identifying kids at either end of the spectrum. Kids come to us with labels sometimes, and it appears that our solution is to send them to AP classes as
a freshman, and they aren’t always prepared for that, or we don’t have the support to send a freshman to a college class.

Sue Ellen also gets frustrated with herself when she doesn’t recognize a student with a gifted label. Fortunately, she has seen teachers in her school work hard to meet the needs of gifted students, though she has seen others who do not push the gifted students further if they are already getting an A. This is important to her because she recognizes that if she had pushed herself more she may have been valedictorian instead of salutatorian.

**Jared.**

Jared feels cognitive dissonance on a more global scale. He is upset at the way of the world and the lack of focus on gifted students. He uses those with special needs, and his experience in working in a special needs’ classroom, as an area to contrast with giftedness. He appreciates the focus those with special needs have been granted, but feels that for the world to succeed and solve the problems that have been created, gifted students need to be recognized. He feels that “the idea that we don’t prioritize our gifted kids is bananas.” Jared is not the only one to think this way, as this lack of prioritization for gifted individuals is a concern in the literature, as well:

Whether or not we can accept the fact that gifted individuals have real needs, the narrow classification niche for gifted children offered by traditional education is just as off the mark as it is for children who are developmentally delayed. How then, could it be reasonable to offer identical programs and learning methods for everyone? (Jacobsen, 1999, p. 67)

In addition to not prioritizing gifted students, Jared believes the world has put other focuses in the wrong area. “The fact that we put more time, effort and media attention into our athletic kids is petty, selfish, pathetic and embarrassing.” Again, he is
supported by the literature: “Our society does not greatly prize intellectual stimulation” (Webb, Mekstroth & Tolan, 2008, p. 11). In regards to his own teaching, Jared has experienced other teachers not understanding his methods. He said, “I would run out of fingers and toes for being told an assignment I’m giving to kids is too difficult for their age by peers or administrators. Sometimes they were right, but mostly they were not.” This coupled with his recent teaching award shows Jared has an appropriate understanding of students and giftedness.

**Cognitive Dissonance: Specific to the Individual Experience**

Each individual in this study reflected on frustrations that are related to the concept of cognitive dissonance. In an analysis of this concept, the research revealed a theme of cognitive dissonance being specific to the individual experience. While “the culture and climate of the school needs to create a learning environment where the philosophy is that all students should be expected to develop their strengths and weaknesses to the fullest” (Susko, 2009, p. 760), these individuals found that school climates do not always reflect this belief. Cognitive dissonance is specific to the individual experience because it can result from the unique teaching experience of each participant. Cognitive dissonance is also specific to the individual experience because of the individual programming experiences in one’s youth coming in contrast with the expectations of one’s current teaching role or school.

**Question Three**

The third research sub-question aimed to understand advocacy: How do gifted adults who are educators advocate for gifted practices or gifted students at their school?
Advocacy is “taking one’s own or another’s perspective to obtain a result not otherwise available” (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p. 294). Through mirroring the feelings of their gifted students, gifted educators are able to both empathize with and advocate for gifted students. Parents advocate for their gifted children by hoping for curricular changes and wishing for their child’s giftedness to be understood. They want their children to experience appropriate educational activities, and they have the most success when they, themselves, understand giftedness as well as the school system (Osborne, 2001). They want their child’s academic, social and emotional needs to be met. Yet, parents sometimes discover that it is difficult to get teachers on board with programming changes, and they even have a difficult time getting the school to acknowledge their child’s giftedness, especially if the child is twice-exceptional (Duquette et al., 2011). Gifted teachers have the advantage of already understanding both giftedness and the school system.

Under this definition of advocacy, Andrea advocated for her gifted students by sitting with them at lunch every Friday to provide challenge in writing. She was obtaining a result that would not have occurred in their regular classroom. Sandy advocated for a student by providing the opportunity for him to check out more than the book limit from the school library. This, again, was a situation in which it was important to take on a perspective of another in order to obtain a result not normally found.

Analysis of the concept of advocacy resulted in a few surprising themes. First, advocacy, for an educator, is more about meeting the needs of individual students by finding ways to challenge or modify the curriculum rather than approaching a school
board or advocating at the state or national level. While there are those who might be able to advocate at the district, state or national level, others do what they can to advocate for students within the school that they work. Tina was the only individual, amongst those interviewed, who had attempted to advocate at a higher level. She was on a board for gifted education while being an educator in Hawaii. Her experience with this was not positive, though, as she found limited support and a lack of funding for the needs of the gifted. Despite being a high school special education teacher, Sue Ellen feels that she is not able to do a lot of advocating in her current position for gifted students. She stated, “It is just not part of my scope.”

Advocacy: A Difficult and Lonely Journey

Advocacy is not always easy. Norma Hafenstein (2020) believes educators should, “Take that risk on behalf of the needs of gifted learners.” Gifted educators want to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of their students, and sometimes this is at a risk with their colleagues. Jared pushes his students and has had colleagues disagree with this decision. Lacey attempted to modify the curriculum for two boys, and as a result the lead teacher shut these modifications down. She has also tried to explain giftedness to other teachers, a situation that could feel uncomfortable or awkward.

Educators advocate by specifically looking out for gifted students. For example, Lacey makes it a personal mission to look for and recognize gifted students. Sue Ellen gets frustrated if she does not initially recognize a student’s giftedness.

Therefore, these educators often want the same thing that parent advocates are hoping for: specific gifted programming and an understanding of giftedness to best
support gifted students. Gifted educators are valuable when it comes to advocating for gifted youth. They have opportunities that parents might not, and they can make the programming changes that parents are hoping for. “Parents describe a successful school experience for their children would involve a curriculum that was challenging and taught by teachers who are supportive and have an understanding of learning styles” (Duquette et al., 2011, p. 503-405). Gifted educations can help to facilitative these programming changes as well as provide this support when other educators are not available.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Dabrowksi’s Theory of positive disintegration was used as a way to guide the literature review, the methodology, in regards to the questioning, and the coding of themes. The overexcitabilities discussed within this theory are where gifted students are often misunderstood. The socio-emotional behavior revealed in the interviews can often be thought of in light of Dabrowski’s work. This “provides a theoretical base for: 1) recognizing aspects of personality development in the gifted, 2) reframing characteristics that often are viewed as annoying or troublesome in a more positive light” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 262). At the same time, the descriptions of empathy and advocacy were best understood with Dabrowski’s theory in mind. The overexcitabilities that these gifted individuals express, both as children and adults, are a way in which these adults further feel empathetic towards their gifted students.

There were areas in the research that leaned in the direction of revealing overexcitabilities, such as when Lacey spoke of being misinterpreted as a child. She also had imaginary friends. Gifted children with imaginary friends can also display
imaginational overexcitability (Halsted, 2009). Sandy being labeled as weird, or Jared being misinterpreted as an adult, as well as peer teachers not understanding gifted students when the interview subjects had a clear grasp of behaviors can all be viewed as potential overexcitabilities. At the same time, there is no way of knowing if Karen’s unidentified ADHD could really have been a misdiagnosis of overexcitabilities, but the possibility is there. Jared’s desire to cheat to maintain his high grades is related to Dabrowski, as well. Lack of challenge and stimulation can lead to perfectionism, and Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration explains perfectionism as a desire for self-perfection and a driving force to “live a life imbued with higher-values” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 148).

Tina’s deep feelings mirror that of gifted children with emotional overexcitabilities, who are “capable of strong empathy and deep relationships” (Halsted, 2009, p. 18). She wants her students to know what to do in social situations, and she is concerned for the difficulties gifted children face. Tina recognizes the intensities that come along with giftedness as well as the difficulty of being a gifted individual. She explained, “Sure, most of us have strategies in place that we’ve figured out, but that doesn’t mean the intensities are easier to deal with or the frustration of ‘real world’ pacing eases up. If anything, I think it gets harder.” Lisa recognizes the behaviors that come along with giftedness that can be misinterpreted. She stated, “There are things that can be signs of giftedness that can be seen as other behaviors, like asking a lot of questions, but in an annoying way.”
Jared’s emotional overexcitabilities were displayed in his response to the interview questions. He became very emotional, both angry and visibly upset while answering, and it is clear that he is deeply concerned about the world. In the course of the interview, he would take long pauses and ponder the questions, and he seemed to be on the verge of tears. Answers related to the current state of the world may have affected him, yet it also seemed that the time that was taken to think about his youth and his giftedness, and the space between his answers, provided an additional reason for his emotional response.

At the same time, the simulation theory of empathy played a strong role in the research. Just like the previous theory, the simulation theory of empathy was used to guide the literature review and methodology as well as the questioning of interviewees. Through the simulation theory of empathy, individuals are able to understand one another by “simulating” that emotion within themselves (Lopez, 2010). This is important because a “teacher must be able to imagine himself into the thinking and feeling of the child in order to respond accurately” (Freehill, 1974, p. 247). By putting oneself in another’s shoes, a person goes beyond sympathy and understands the other person’s lived experience (Lopez, 2010). The lines between empathy and advocacy were often blurred in regards to if an answer qualified for one or the other. The researcher determined that if answers fit within the framework of the simulation theory of empathy, then they fell within the boundaries of empathy or advocacy.

Andrea, by taking on the perspective of her students, advocated for two students who would have felt the same boredom she felt by sitting with them at lunch and
encouraging them to write. Lacey believes that she “gets” gifted students, and because she sees herself in them, she does what she can to advocate for their needs. Lisa advocated for math students who were mirroring the struggles that she had had in math. She hoped to show them that math was something they could succeed in, just like she had. Lisa, Tina, Karen and Jared all reported feeling bored in school. Boredom is something they can see in others, and at the same time do not want others to feel. Lisa, Tina, Karen, Andrea, Lacy and Jared all had moments in which they could empathize with a student who was mirroring feelings they had felt.

**Emerging Themes**

The data was coded for themes from the literature as well as themes that emerged. These included one’s own giftedness influencing teaching, the response to being interviewed, and unrecognized giftedness. Each of these related to the research questions.

**The Influence of One’s Own Giftedness**

No one ever took them [gifted adults] aside and explained: ‘Of course you’re different. You’re intense, complex, and driven because you’re gifted.’ No one told them they cannot escape the fact that they will always be quantitatively, qualitatively, motivationally different from other people. Nor do they know that these very same things that are the basis of criticism are fundamental building blocks of excellence and advance development. (Jacobsen, 1999, p. 17)

While how one was or was not taught, and how this programming affected their own classroom teaching, was a dominant theme in the research, another theme that emerged was how being gifted was in itself an influencer on how one approaches education. Understanding how their own brain works helps each of these individuals empathize and understand their gifted students. It also allows them to teach in a manner
that is appreciated by gifted students and aligns with best practice in gifted education. They can mirror their own feelings and learning styles with their students.

Lisa believes that she always makes sure students know why they are learning something because she has a mind that needs to know the why of a lesson, as well. At the same time, since she loves learning, her teaching style is not a traditional format with the teacher being the giver of knowledge, or the expert; instead, she likes “side by side learning with kids.” Teachers of the gifted are often continuous learners. Dvorak and Dvorak (2009) found that:

Teachers displaying reputational expertise exhibited lifelong learner traits and encouraged students to embrace this as well. Viewing themselves as facilitators of learning eliminated the need to be seen as an expert and enabled teachers to learn and become enlightened along with students.

Lisa claimed that she has also always been a creative thinker. Because of her creative mind, her style of teaching parallels that of the research on best practices in gifted education. Lisa reported, “I’m not a disconnected knowledge person who has just a lot of facts at my disposal, but I’m really good at connecting.” Her way of thinking works well with the IB teaching approach at her school. Lisa approaches her units from the lens of “interdisciplinary and inquiry based” as well as concept based. Because she is “good at pulling ideas together in a creative way,” Lisa enjoys having units of study that are along this line of thinking. It is not surprising that she self-identifies her giftedness in the realm of creativity. “There is good evidence that creativity and intelligence are related” (Davis, Rimm & Siegle, 2011, p. 41), and creativity is a characteristic of giftedness.

Tina’s giftedness has affected her ability to teach, as well. She recognizes that her mind works differently than other teachers. She explained that where “most teachers see
charts or a line graph, or a bar chart, I see a matrix.” Her giftedness allows for different socio-emotional responses, as well. She stated, “I can feel differently.” She attributes both of these qualities to making her a better teacher. She reports that because her brain sees things differently, she can see the best way to approach an individual child and what learning style she should use. She attributes her ability to be a strong teacher and know what to do in certain situations to the “fact that my brain works differently.”

Karen also thinks in a way that supports her approach to teaching the gifted child. She has a background in philosophy, and she questions the world. Even her interview showed her philosophical way of thinking through her stream of consciousness style answers. Karen wants to have “broad discussions and open-ended questions” with her students since that is what she enjoys. She stated, “Growing up, that all really came naturally to me. I never struggled with finding the meaning in something.” Karen is one who also needs to know “why,” and therefore, her way of thinking influences her teaching.

Andrea believes that she approaches problems differently than other people she knows. She is unsure if this is due to the logic problems that she practiced in the gifted program while growing up, or if this is simply how she thinks. Regardless, she views problems as “solvable and having more than one possible outcome.” She stated, “I’ve been told that I think outside the box,” which potentially directly impacts her way of teaching.
Lacey has to remind herself that her students might not be able to learn things as fast as she is able to. She uses this as a teaching point, though, and tells kids, “I have this brain, and I’m going to use it as well as I can.”

**Response to Being Interviewed**

Gifted adults want to talk about their giftedness. This was found in the responses to being interviewed. Several of the individuals who were interviewed were thankful for this opportunity or became emotional during the interview. This response occurred as individuals thought about the cognitive dissonance they felt towards their school or the empathy they felt for their students. In describing difficult moments in their own lives or the lives of their students, these individuals were emotional. They were also grateful for this chance for others to empathize with them. Both Tina, Karen and Jared followed up their interviews with unsolicited messages of thanks. They each spoke of their appreciation for having the time to reflect on a part of their life that they often do not give space for.

Tina explained her frustration with the lack of opportunity to reflect on one’s giftedness. She appreciated the time that was given to being interviewed and was emotional in sharing some of her life stories. She ended the conversation with, “Gifted adults are just supposed to deal with it. It gets very hard to wait for the rest of the world to catch up to what you're thinking all the time. The systems in place end up seeming like places to brag about IQ scores than supportive safe places.” She went so far as to say, “Thank you for the opportunity to think through all this. I don’t know if this helps your research any, but it certainly helped me.”
Karen enjoyed the space to reflect and believes that it is important that gifted adults are studied. She felt that, in regards to researching gifted adults, “This is really important work.” Jared stated that the interview was “cathartic, healing and empowering in a way I did not know I needed.”

In a follow-up email, Lacey expressed surprise in the direction of the study as well as pleased that someone was interested in her life. She stated, “No one seems to think about or care that those things stay with a person as they go through your lives. Your perspective is an interesting one; it’s not something I’ve heard of someone researching before.”

**Unrecognized Giftedness**

Unrecognized giftedness occurs for both gifted students and gifted adults. This theme that emerged further allows gifted adults to connect and empathize with their gifted students. Since they have felt moments in which others have not recognized their giftedness, they can mirror this feeling when they see teachers not recognizing gifted students. Several interviewees reported memories of their teachers not recognizing their gifts. As they are teachers, themselves, this is an important theme to consider. Andrea shared a story of a time in which she was disgruntled with a lesson during her sophomore year. The teacher called her to the front of the room and reprimanded her for saying that the lesson was not impactful. Andrea felt that the teacher was unaware of her gifts, whereas all of her other teachers knew of her giftedness. In this instance, not only did the teacher not appreciate being told of the problems with the lesson, she did not appreciate Andrea’s intellect. Sue Ellen also experienced, as a student, adults at her school who did
not recognize her giftedness. She had already applied and been accepted to college when the school guidance counselor called her in and asked her if she was thinking of applying. These incidents were clearly impactful, and not something these individuals wish to repeat with their gifted students.

Sue Ellen and Lacey are both frustrated at themselves when they do not realize a student is gifted. Sue Ellen and Karen both wish their schools did more to identify and recognize gifted students. This goes to show that not all education systems are aware of their gifted populations. The unfortunate matter is, “Our society is ambivalent about difference, as well as intelligence, and children can easily develop the uncomfortable feeling that something is wrong with them” (Halsted, 2009, p. 15). The responses from these interviewees show that feeling like you are different, yet not having others recognize this difference, can have lasting effects on a child. At the same time, this feeling of difference is not limited to children. Even as an adult, Lacey has had her peer teachers not understand her gifts. The same can be said for Jared who has had peer teachers question his teaching style. Lisa spoke of her friends who do not have the same speed of conversation as herself and do not have the same understanding of giftedness.

**Other Considerations**

While there was an attempt to categorize interview answers within the frameworks of this study and the underlying themes of empathy, cognitive dissonance, and advocacy, it should be noted that each of these themes are somewhat subjective. One individual’s definition might be framed differently than another. Moments in which these gifted teachers specifically spoke of empathizing with a student, or used the word
empathy in their answer, were written in response to question number one, regarding empathy. Yet, each individual might have a different definition of empathy. It would be advantageous for a future narrative study to have each individual participant define empathy and what it means to them to determine if each has a different operational definition of empathy. With this in mind, what is seen as “empathy” by one person could considered “caring” by another. Beyond answers that used the word empathy, the researcher looked for times in which situations or emotions were being mirrored by a student with an adult educator’s life experience.

At the same time, advocacy was related to empathy in this study in that advocacy was defined as “taking one’s own or another’s perspective to obtain a result not otherwise available” (Duquette et al., 2011, p. 491). In the same vein as empathy, what fell under the guidelines of advocacy in this study might be seen as normal teaching procedures to others. The examples of advocacy that are mentioned are in response to the researcher’s specific questioning of when the interviewee had felt that she or he had advocated for another. Again, there is room for interpretation within this questioning and definition. It is the assumption of the researcher that the improper programming that one experiences could lead to advocacy on the behalf of another for proper programming, as would proper programming in one’s youth lead to advocacy for proper programming as an educator, especially in situations of cognitive dissonance when proper programming is desired but the school is not providing it.

A few of the interview answers did not align with the areas of research. Karen reported that her school does not test for giftedness, and while she felt that that was a
disadvantage in understanding giftedness, she felt that many of the teachers were already teaching in a manner that is good for gifted learners, which is a benefit to all students. This suggests that a gifted educator is not necessarily necessary to bridge this gap in understanding. A second answer that did not line up with this study was in Andrea’s reporting of some teachers thinking that gifted students are easier to work with. She reported that some say, “I know exactly what to do with the high and the low kids, but I don’t know what to do with the middle kid.” This goes to show that not all educators are perplexed by how to best accommodate for the gifted students in their class. At the same time, all eight interviewees were asked to identify a student similar to themselves, and Sandy was unable to do so. She believes that she was “not super high achieving.” So while Sandy might empathize and advocate for her gifted students, she did not report mirroring emotions of her students or feeling similar to any student, which would make her empathy and advocacy outside of the framework of this study. An additional consideration is those who feel imposters to their giftedness. The researcher wonders, Is it possible to know if they truly connect with gifted students if they do not feel gifted themselves? This is exemplified with Sue Ellen who says, “I think as a teacher I don’t feel very gifted.”

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study was the small sample size. Eight participants are not enough to make assumptions about the larger population. This study only had Caucasian individuals, and seven of the eight were female, despite attempts to include a diverse population. This lack of diversity is a further limitation of this study.
The fact that individuals who were willing and interested in discussing their gifted education was a limitation of this study, as well, as the responses were mostly positive. The individuals were told the nature of the study, as well as the qualifications for being interviewed, prior to each interview. Only those who wished to discuss their gifted identification replied to the interview request. This could possibly reflect the mirror of retrospection, a belief that states that “...in looking back at childhood, it is inevitable that what we see is colored by what happened in the years in between, by present circumstances, and by future goals” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 172). As much as the researcher would like to assume that gifted programming is positive for gifted students, as was seen through the eyes of these gifted adults, more research would need to be done with a larger, more diverse sample in order to make that claim.

At the same time, advocacy, as it relates to the specific interview question, might be interpreted differently for those who were being interviewed than for the interviewer. Those that responded to this question did respond with the same intention as the researcher, but it is possible that those who did not have an answer were thinking of advocacy in a broader way, such as advocacy at a national level. This is a limitation that was discovered during the coding process.

**Implications**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to examine the perceptions of educators, who are gifted adults, regarding the education of gifted children. It was found that one’s gifted identity is influential as is the appropriate or inappropriate schooling based on this identity. This research reaffirms findings from previous studies on the need
for gifted programming and the impact such programming can have on a child. It was found through this study that gifted programming has such an impact on gifted students that it is replicated if they become gifted adult educators. In the same way, poor schooling is also remembered and used as a reason to be a better teacher than how one was taught. “The forms of thinking that students are able to use are profoundly influenced by the kind of experience they are able to have. Thus the school’s curriculum is important” (Eisner, 1998, p.7). This proper or improper programming also leads to empathy on the part of the adult educator. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will be looked upon and give reason to validate the need for gifted programming in a school, as well as to consider gifted adult educators in an advisory role when designing gifted programming. This research also affirms that through mirroring feelings of their students, gifted adult educators advocate for these individuals as well as feel empathy for their shared experiences.

Further implications for this research are in career planning. Gifted individuals already have difficulties choosing a career and they are often pushed into prestigious careers. Yet, this research shows that gifted students should be encouraged to consider teaching careers for the sake of future generations of gifted students, as gifted adults are often the ones whom gifted students appreciate and gravitate towards. This research suggests that since gifted adult educators often think in a manner that is similar to their gifted students and teach in a way that is appreciated by their gifted students, it would seem promising to highlight careers in education for gifted students and encourage students to pursue such careers.
This research should also be used to inform educational practices in schools. It would be advantageous to have gifted individuals as educators in gifted education as there is “significant improvement in both student achievement and motivation when learning and teaching styles are matched” (Dunne & Dunn, 1979, p. 242). This study looked at research on how comfortable educators feel in serving gifted students. The research that has been done by others generally confirms that educators do not feel they have enough training or a strong enough understanding of giftedness to adequately serve gifted youth. The implication of this research study is that adult educators who are gifted do feel comfortable educating gifted youth and have a strong enough understanding of giftedness to adequately educate gifted students. This is partially due to the fact that gifted adult educators “resembled their gifted, adolescent students” in both thinking and learning styles (Robinson, 2008, p. 673).

An additional implication of this research would be in the role of gifted educators as mentors for gifted students and non-gifted educators. Gifted educators, with knowledge of how it feels to be a gifted student, can help students in forming their own identity as “knowledge of their giftedness and acceptance of their differences are very important steps in the search for identity” (Halsted, 2009, p. 31). Additionally, by helping non-gifted educators see the world through the eyes of the gifted, gifted adults can help peer teachers empathize with their gifted students, especially in light of how gifted students are often perceived by non-gifted educators (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1994).

Finally, gifted educators need to be supported in their efforts of advocacy. They recognize students or behaviors that remind them of themselves, and reach out to help
individual students because they know how being gifted feels. These efforts should not go unrecognized but should be validated and encouraged. Ultimately, this research deserves attention due to the lack of research available on gifted adults. At the same time, this research reveals that giftedness is a focus during schooling, but gifted adults need the opportunity to reflect on their giftedness during adulthood.

**Policy Implications**

In reflecting on their youth and in revealing thoughts about their teaching institutions, the eight who were interviewed provided insight on where there needs to be changes in policy. First of all, it should be schoolwide policy that gifted students are identified through a variety of measures and at an early age. All schools, not just schools for the gifted, should have a policy in place for identifying giftedness as well as appropriate programming as a result of such identification. Within schools, there should be a policy that gifted students should not be put in the hall or away from their peers for extended periods of time, and they should not be given busy work or just more of the same work. Gifted students should be given projects and activities that support their interests and abilities, and they should be included in the discussion of why something is being taught.

At the same time, teachers should be held to the same policy standards. Teachers must be flexible and able to change their curriculum to meet the needs of the classroom and should be held accountable when it is apparent that differentiation is not occurring. For some schools, this will mean that policy needs to change at the statewide level. If teachers do not have the ability to meet the needs of their gifted at the classroom level
because of statewide requirements, then there might need to be an overhaul of the school system starting with state policies.

Further policy changes need to occur at the school level in the hiring of educators for the gifted. Like Andrea, individuals who are on hiring committees need to determine the comfort level of those being hired to meet the needs of all learners and especially those at both ends of the spectrum. At the same time, when trying to build momentum for a gifted program or gifted coordinator, it might be worthwhile to identify gifted teachers as they stand to be the greatest advocates for gifted students- either because they had great programming or because they missed out.

**Areas for Future Study**

Future studies would benefit in expanding on the information gathered from this study by having a larger sample size as well as focusing in on what advocacy means in the context of being a teacher. A narrative study with the same parameters could look at twice-exceptional teachers, as well as gifted teachers who are of an underrepresented population, to examine the impact their identification has on their teaching and empathy of gifted learners. It would be beneficial to see if twice-exceptional adults have greater empathy for twice-exceptional students, as well as gifted adults of an underrepresented population for gifted students of an underrepresented population, and if either group approach programming or advocacy differently than the eight individuals in this research study.

Future studies could look at the role of empathy in teaching as well as whether gifted learners who are more empathetic are more likely to go into teaching. A large
quantitative study with individuals in a variety of career settings could use the “Multidimensional Emotional Empathy Scale” (Caruso & Mayer, 1998) to assess whether teachers are more empathetic and if gifted adults are more likely to go into education. At the same time, this research could add to the research available on career planning, and attempt to determine how likely gifted youth are to choose a career in education. With this thinking, one could research whether gifted students who are drawn to a career in education are supported in this decision or encouraged to find a more prestigious employment.

There then would need to be research on the thoughts of parents of the gifted in regards to their child’s teacher also being gifted. This could, of course, lead to both positive or negative changes within the culture of the staff at a school. If teachers who are gifted were hired to teach the gifted, research would need to determine whether or not this leads to any discomfort between these teachers and other teachers at the school. Research, in the form of a longitudinal study, would also need to happen to determine whether students of these teachers reflect positively on their gifted experience and mirror the feelings of the individuals in this study.

A quantitative or qualitative future study could also look at whether gifted adult educators attend more professional development opportunities than their peers that would lead to encouraging their teaching practices to be more similar to the research on best practices for gifted education. “Educators help shape minds, and the curriculum we provide is one of the most important tools we use in this process” (Eisner, 1998, p. 13). If gifted adult educators are attending more professional development opportunities, they
might already be shaping minds in a way that is different from their peers in addition to
the giftedness that influences their teaching practices.

This research could also add to the research available on mentorships and spark
new research looking at mentorships between gifted youth and gifted adults. This
research shows the need for more research around the social-emotional needs of gifted
learners.

This research could inspire significant change in the practice of teaching gifted
learners as well as affect other educational issues such as bullying and inclusion of neuro-
diverse learners through empathy and understanding. A future study could look at
whether empathizing with one group leads to empathy of others. In which case, it could
be assumed that such empathy would lead to a school that is more inclusive of all
students. “The good school…would aim at increasing individual differences” (Eisner,
1998, p.113).

Studies that follow could look at the role gifted adult teacher mentors could play
in encouraging other teachers to empathize with gifted students. “Good teaching and
substantive curricula cannot be mandated; they have to be grown” (Eisner, 1998, p. 138).
Therefore, in order to grow good teachers for the gifted, gifted educators need to mentor
other teachers. A case study would be an appropriate framework for such research. While
there will be some teachers who do not empathize with gifted learners do to a lack of
training, there will be others who do empathize but were not identified as gifted in their
youth. Therefore, a future study should look at the natural empathy that is present for
some adults and test these individuals for whether they are gifted themselves. This
research should also include testing for giftedness of the teacher who is known for thinking outside the box and is nominated by peers or self-nominated because of such ideas.

The research on gifted adults is limited, and the research on the best teachers of the gifted is outdated. There was also minimal research to be found on gifted adults educating gifted students. Therefore, there needs to be more research on gifted adults, educators of the gifted, and gifted adult educators. Future research that needs to be done should look at how training of teachers would be different if gifted individuals are being trained to be educators. There is the potential for this to lead to significant curriculum changes if gifted educators think differently than their peers. Gifted educators could self-report if they approach a teaching unit in a manner that is different from their peers.

**A Note on the Time**

It should be noted, that as these last pages are being written, edited and reviewed, the nation is facing a difficult situation as a pandemic is sweeping throughout the world. This particular disease, a form of coronavirus known as Covid19, is a virus that affects the respiratory system. Upon realizing how quickly it could be spread, countries began encouraging their populations to practice social distancing and quarantining those individuals who have been in contact with others with the disease.

Covid19 is changing the way the world operates. Individuals and families are under strict guidelines to remain isolated in an attempt to slow down the spread of this deadly disease. As a result, businesses have been halted, lives have been put on hold, and the education system has been drastically altered as teachers are learning to teach
remotely and the responsibility for implementing education is put into the hands of family members through online programming.

While this is indeed a frightening time, which demands an incredible learning curve for teachers, as schools attempt to completely adapt their curriculum for an online platform, there is the opportunity for change. Teachers are being asked to evaluate what is truly important within their curriculum, and how they can go about challenging their students, as well as how they can go about keeping their students interested. Teachers who have been teaching the same way for years or who have been reluctant to evaluate their programming before are being forced to do so. Some schools that have traditionally taught with the goal of a standardized test in mind are no longer feeling such pressure. On the flip side, while there is the opportunity to revamp, the reality is that there will be a lot of individuals teaching what they have always taught, just online. The question is, if we did not have the strain of this chaos and disruption, what would online education look like? In times of great stress, you are not at your best and chances of great creativity are slim. Yet, hopefully teachers are developing the skills and resources now that they may someday use in the classroom.

Changes could happen for students, as well. Gifted students might be able to take a more active role in their education and be in the “driver’s seat” for once with what they want to learn and how they want to be taught. Gifted students need to have a “voice” in their learning; they should have a “chance to tell us what they want pertaining to their own learning and to take responsibility for it” (Powers, 2008, p. 58). Those who are generally bored with the everyday curriculum could have the opportunity to finish
assignments at a faster pace. They could no longer need to sit through the multiple repetitions of learning that happens in the more traditional classroom. Students will have the freedom to access material in the way they desire to learn. This time also builds in an opportunity to create resilience. Which makes one wonder, does being in a time of crisis help gifted children think about the world in a different way without the restrictions of the classroom? At the same time, gifted educators could have the opportunity to teach what they enjoyed being taught and in a manner that involves learning alongside their students. Gifted educators might feel that they are making more of an impact as they can tailor the curriculum to the needs of particular students. Unfortunately, the online format might be painful for the twice-exceptional students who already have a difficult time with focus and motivation. For them, what has been traditionally hard could now be brutally difficult. Ultimately, while how this will change the education system is unclear, there is the potential for major changes to happen as it is a time like no other, and one that could lead to the re-evaluation of many systems within society.

**Closing Thoughts**

Gifted students need advocates who are educators who can empathize with individual gifted students in order to make appropriate changes in the classroom and school culture. “Gifted children can make themselves unpopular with teachers, especially with those who do not know about or are not sympathetic to the special characteristics and needs of the gifted” (Halsted, 2009, p. 36). Therefore, gifted students need educators who understand their academic, social and emotional needs. “Educators should be looking for ways that students’ learning needs are and are not being matched by the
The following assumptions can be made as a result of this study. 1. Gifted educators could be inherently better at programming in a manner gifted students enjoy as a result of experiencing such programming, wishing to experience such programming, or having a similar way of thinking as a gifted learner that allows for a natural desire for such programming. 2. Gifted educators could be more empathetic to the needs of the gifted as a result of heightened empathy that is often seen due to emotional overexcitabilities amongst the gifted (Nauta & Corten, 2002). 3. Gifted educators reflecting on their own youth, either positively or negatively, could influence their teaching and empathy.

The researcher is so grateful for this opportunity to work with the eight individuals who were interviewed. This opportunity to reflect on their giftedness was important to these individuals, and it is clear that being gifted is a primary aspect of one’s identity. There is an appreciation for the time they took in doing this, as well as their candid responses to their life experiences. Without this honesty, the results of the interviews would not have been this rich.

**Summary**

All students need good teachers, but gifted students also need teachers who “get them.” It is the hope of the researcher that the reader will take away from this research the importance of understanding and empathizing with the gifted child. Not doing so can have lasting effects and doing so could lead to a schoolwide community that is more inclusive of all neuro-diverse learners. This has implications for policy practices, as well. Many of the problems that are found in gifted education are a result of teachers not
understanding the child or the school not taking a more positive approach towards the gifted. This could be alleviated if gifted educators were given the opportunity to take the lead in programming, training and planning as is related to teaching the gifted. While hiring gifted educators to teach gifted classes might seem optimal, such placement might not be possible for all school systems. Therefore, having internships and student teaching opportunities with educators who are gifted and with gifted classes should be required for all educators. The individuals in this study revealed what it is like to have a teacher who does not understand the needs of the gifted and what it feels like to be a gifted student in a school system that does not have appropriate measures in place. Therefore, simply having a gifted educator teach the gifted is not enough. This empathy needs to be transferred to all educators who will come in contact with a gifted student.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to answer the driving question of how the experiences of gifted adults who are educators influence their teaching and empathy towards gifted learners. The concepts of empathy, cognitive dissonance and advocacy were three areas of focus for this research. These themes came up in the retelling of one’s individual story of identification by the interviewees. Six out of the eight individuals described moments of empathizing with gifted students, all eight interviewees have felt cognitive dissonance in their teaching careers, and four of the eight interviewees have had moments of advocacy in the form of individually working with a child or group and advocating for their needs. Themes from this research mirrored that of the literature. Themes that emerged included how one’s own giftedness influences his or her teaching, how the individuals who were interviewed responded to the interview itself, and how the
individuals had teachers who did not recognize their gifts. Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration and the simulation theory of empathy were used as theoretical frameworks to guide the research. These two theories were used in the considering of literature, methodology, and themes of the research.

Finally, this research reiterates what is already known about gifted programming, that there are positive benefits from adaptations and accommodations within the classroom, yet this research looks at this understanding from the approach of the adult thinking back on his or her life, rather than from the approach of the gifted student or test scores. Looking at the gifted experience through the lifespan, one sees how giftedness affects many aspects of life, from schooling to marriage to career choices and even children, with gifted individuals often having gifted children. Ultimately, identification and giftedness do impact the adult educator who is gifted especially in regards to specific programming and having a desire to challenge the gifted student. The cognitive dissonance one feels as a gifted adult educator leads to empathy. With encouragement, this empathy could lead to advocacy which could be useful in coaching non-gifted educators how to best teach and interact with gifted students.
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APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY PARTNER LETTER

April 19, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to confirm my interest in partnering with Laura Brouchon on her graduate research work.

I am currently the Lower School Head at St. Anne's Episcopal School. I have been at St. Anne's since August 2018. Previously, I was the Associate Division Head at Avenues: The World School for several years. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Education, a Master of Arts in Language & Literacy, and am about to complete a Master of Education in Private School Leadership.

I look forward to working with Laura on her research in gifted education as it has personal and professional appeal and implications. I was identified and benefited from gifted education from 3rd grade and was personally aware of the impacts that had on my education. Currently, I am helping lead an independent school with strong intervention work for students with learning differences. That said, we have a wide spectrum of learners for whom further research on best practices for gifted learners is crucial.

Sincerely,

Katherine Huaiani
APPENDIX B: LETTER TO RECRUIT

Dear Faculty,

My name is Laura Boroughf, and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about educators who are gifted. I am a third-year student, and this study is a part of my doctoral dissertation. I greatly appreciate your consideration for this study.

You are eligible to be in this study if you are an educator, and if you were identified as gifted through formal testing at some point during your schooling. If you meet these qualifications and decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview. Interviews will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you. If you are not eligible, but you know someone who is, I would greatly appreciate you either forwarding this email or contacting my community partner with their information.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in this study or not. If you’d like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me or contact me at laura.boroughf@du.edu or lauraboroughf@gmail.com or 909-538-3198 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, at norma.hafenstein@du.edu, or my community partner, Katherine Huamani, at khuamani@st-annes.org.

Thank you very much.

Laura Boroughf
University of Denver
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Study Title: Empathy and Understanding: The Impact of Gifted Adults in the Field of Gifted Education

IRBNet #: 1452897-1

Principal Investigator: Laura Boroughf; DU Graduate Student

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein

Study Site: Location to be determined by participants

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose

You are being asked to be in this research study because you meet the qualification of being an educator who has been formally identified as being gifted.

This is a narrative research study. The method of research is through interviews. You will be asked questions that will allow you to reflect on your life in order to provide the researcher an understanding of being identified as gifted, as well as being an educator who is gifted.

As a researcher, I will conduct, audiotape, and transcribe interviews. Each interview will take 30-60 minutes. Follow-up interviews may be necessary.

You may choose not to participate in the study and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdraw from participation involves no penalty.
Risks or Discomforts

Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing certain issues about your experience that may be upsetting. You are welcome to decline discussing any issue that may cause you discomfort.

Benefits

The benefits of being involved in this study involve being able to reflect on your life and teaching career. You will also be providing invaluable information in regards to teaching and giftedness. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, I will be happy to provide one for you. We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Confidentiality of Information

As the researcher, I will treat all information gathered as confidential. Pseudonyms will be used when analyzing the data, and descriptive features that would link you to the information provided will be removed. Your individual identity will be kept private when presented or published.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Representatives from the University of Denver may also review the research records for monitoring purposes.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

Incentives to participate

You will not receive any payment for being in this study.
Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves video/audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study.

_____ YES, I agree to be video/audio recorded.

_____ NO, I do not agree to be video/audio recorded.

Questions

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Laura Boroughf at laura.boroughf@du.edu or 909-538-3198 or Dr. Norma Hafenstein faculty advisor at norma.hafenstein@du.edu.

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at (303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

______________________________  __________________________  ______________
Printed Name                  Signature                          Date
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW FACE SHEET

What is your age? ____________________  How many years have you taught? _____

Geographic area while growing up: ______________________________

Current geographic area of teaching: ____________________________

Education level: _____________________________________________

At what age were you identified as gifted? _________________________

What sort of gifted services did you receive as a result of your identification? (pull-out program, gifted class, AP classes, etc.)? List all that occurred.

What type of school did you attend?  public  charter  private

What type of school do you work at?  public  charter  private

What is your role in your current position, and what do you teach?
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND REVISED QUESTIONS (IN ITALICS)

1. Tell me about the identification process for you. How does this compare to the identification process employed at your school?

2. *Tell me about your schooling as a gifted student.*

3. Tell me about any changes or modifications to your schooling that resulted from gifted identification (AP classes, pull out programs, gifted programs, etc), and your feelings on this. Does gifted identification result in any educational modification in your current school? *Do you feel that these modifications are appropriate or inadequate?*

4. Tell me about how you were perceived in school. Did gifted or non-gifted peers or teachers perceive you differently?

5. Did you ever experience teachers misunderstanding you (or a student) as a result of asynchronous development, perfectionism, underachievement, twice-exceptionalities or overexcitabilities related to giftedness (each will be defined and explained as needed)? How have you responded to this?

6. Did identification have an effect on you, either in regards to school, family, friends or your personal well-being? Explain.

7. How do you think this may have affected your approach to the gifted student?

8. What perceptions have you observed in your peers with respect to students who have been identified as gifted? How have these reactions either mirrored or differed from feelings about yourself when you were identified as gifted?

9. Reflect on a time in which you witnessed a gifted student who was similar to you or had similar experiences as you did in your youth. How do you feel about this experience and what was your response? *How did peer teachers respond to this student?*

10. Describe your teaching style and teaching practice.

11. Tell me about a time that you had a gifted student in your class. How did you know he/she was gifted, and how did the student present themselves?

12. *Tell me about being in education as a gifted adult.*
13. *Tell me about discussions about giftedness or about a gifted student at your school with a colleague or administrator. How do these conversations usually go? Do you ever see students being misunderstood at your school due to a lack of understanding of giftedness?*
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TIMELINE

April 7, 2019 – Community partner was contacted and agreed to be the community partner in this study.

July 3, 2019 – Researcher presented research proposal, and the proposal was accepted.

July 3, 2019 – Researcher submitted to IRB.

July 24, 2019 – Researcher gained IRB approval.

August 1, 2019 – Researcher submitted research questions and interview questions to an expert on adult giftedness (Deirdre Lovecky) who replied with suggestions.

August 6, 2019 – Researcher discussed with community partner how to recruit.

August 13, 2019 – Researcher discussed interview questions with community partner.

August 16, 2019 – Researcher resubmitted to IRB with question adjustments.

August 20, 2019 – Researcher gained second IRB approval.

August 26, 2019 – Community partner sent out recruitment email to NAIS list serve.

September 2, 2019 – Community partner checked in to see if anyone had responded; she suggested a few people to contact to send out additional sets of recruitment emails.

September 3, 2019 – Researcher conducted a practice interview with a colleague who also happened to be gifted; this allowed for the researcher to feel more at ease when the official interviews began.

September 22, 2019 – Additional emails sent to those who originally saw the first recruitment letter round to reinforce the snowball nature of the study; they were reminded that if they, themselves, did not qualify, they may know someone who does qualify.
September-October, 2019 – Interviews were conducted throughout the months of September and October with interviews lasting from twenty-six minutes to fifty-three minutes, with the average time being around forty-four minutes.

October 23-30, 2019 – Interviews were transcribed and shared with interviewees for validity and reliability.

November 4 – By this date, each participant participated in member checking of his or her transcription and reported back any changes they desired. Other than minor editing mistakes, no changes or additions were requested.