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A Description Of A Gifted Program In A Rural Mississippi County School District Through The Perceptions Of Its Student Participants

Theresa Young Dumas

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A DESCRIPTION OF A GIFTED PROGRAM IN A RURAL MISSISSIPPI COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT THROUGH THE PERCEPTIONS OF ITS STUDENT
PARTICIPANTS

By

Theresa Young Dumas

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
In Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
In Elementary Education
In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Mississippi State, Mississippi

December 2007

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2007

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SCHOOL DISTRICT THROUGH THE PERCEPTIONS OF ITS STUDENT
PARTICIPANTS

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The purpose of this study was to describe a gifted program in a rural Mississippi county school district through the perceptions of its student participants. This study consisted of a total of 19 participants. Thirteen participants in this study were students in grades 7-8 who were currently enrolled in the gifted program and six participants were students in grades 11-12 who had previously been enrolled in the gifted program. The researcher interviewed each focus group on two separate occasions using a tape recorder to record the participants' responses. Each focus group interview lasted about one hour.

This study used qualitative research. Fraenkel & Wallen (2003) stated that "Qualitative researchers have a much greater flexibility in both strategies and techniques they use and the overall research process itself. Their designs tend to emerge during the course of the research" (p.16).

Data in this study were collected using an Interview Protocol created by the researcher. The Interview Protocol was comprised of background information, topics

regarding the gifted program, and topics regarding students' perspectives. After transcribing the data, the researcher developed a matrix to determine the themes/patterns found in the study.

Results suggested that most students entered the gifted program in the second grade by teacher recommendation and taking an IQ test. Results suggested that the perspectives of students who were presently participating in the gifted program, or who had previously participated in the gifted program, were positive in respect to the gifted program. Furthermore, results suggested that the rigorous content of the gifted program prepared 7 - 8 grade participants for the course content taught in their regular education classes and for entrance into high school. This study also suggested that students in the 11- 12 grades were better prepared for the course content taught in their regular education classes and the Advanced Placement classes offered in their school.

Results from interviews indicated that some participants' self-esteem rose due to being in the gifted program. Results also indicated that the participants felt a need to overachieve as a gifted student. It is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted with a follow-up of gifted program graduates.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to God who has sustained me on my journey to achieve my goal. The completion of this dissertation would not be possible without His presence and guidance. Above and beyond, I owe all things to God.

To my husband, Jeffrey Dumas, who has been an ever present help in all my endeavors. He worked multiple jobs when I could not work to help me continue my education. He was always there to provide anything that I needed whether it was food, a smile, a suggestion, or just a nod of approval. He also helped me with my walk of faith in God. He continued to remind me to give Him all my worries and cares. I love you with all my heart.

To my two sons, Lamarcus Boclear and Dekwon Boclear, who were patient with me when I didn't have time to spend with them. They kept their grades up and graduated with honors from high school. They went on to college and entered the workforce to pursue their careers. Both of them seemed to have found their niche in life. I am so proud of them. May God continue to bless and keep them.

To my sisters and brothers, I thank you for your support. It means a lot to have a family who will love you not because of, but in spite of. I love you.

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My deepest appreciation is extended to Dr. Nancy Verhoek-Miller for being the major chair of my committee. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Dwight Hare, Dr. Joe Ray Underwood, Dr. Debra Prince, and Dr. Burnette Hamil. Thank you for your support and time spent on this dissertation. I will be forever grateful for your guidance and support. Without your support this could not have been possible. Words cannot express what you have meant to me on my road to success. May God continue to smile on you and keep each one of you in His care.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Review of Related Literature

Three prevalent beliefs concerning education in the United States consist of (a) a belief that education should include everyone, (b) the notion that every child has the potential to learn, (c) and the idea that gifted qualities are plentiful in every child (Agne, 2001). Gifted students are in practically all segments of public schools in the United States (Cross & Dixon, 1998). The percentage of all identified gifted students in school falls between 3% and 5% (Shapiro, 2001). Moreover, gifted students exhibit proficient and highly developed skills (Greene, 2006). Delisle, Galbraith, and Robinson (as cited in Greene, 2006) stated the following:

Gifted and talented are those who require differentiated educational programs or services beyond the regular school offerings because they possess outstanding abilities and are capable of or demonstrate high levels of performance in any of several domains, including general and specific intellectual ability, leadership, visual and performing arts, creative thinking, and physical dexterity. (p.34)

Some other qualities of giftedness include a tremendous ability to recall information, outstanding language skills, and the ability to demonstrate lengthy concentration (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolen, 1982).

Moreover, gifted students are often limited to the boundaries of regular education instruction (Agne, 2001). A number of students who are recognized as gifted may have to

delay completing their classroom assignments while waiting for other non-gifted students to complete their assignments (Montgomery, 2004).

Teachers find themselves in an awkward position when gifted students get ahead of their peers who are being directed by regular education instruction. When gifted students are held back from advancing at their own pace, they learn that there is no need to excel. In turn, this may lead to dissatisfaction causing the gifted student to get out of the gifted program or give up trying to do extremely well (Agne, 2001).

A general assumption is that gifted students can perform extremely well without support (Goodkin, 2005). According to Carpenter (2001b), some people are under the preconceived notion that highly intelligent students will fare well with no assistance. Unfortunately, these students may suffer because they must remain in the regular education setting where they have gone beyond the regular education students' capabilities. Although gifted students demonstrate high potential, there is a need for emotional guidance and educational instruction (Webb, et al. 1982).

Gifted programs are usually beneficial for gifted students. Students have the option of participating or not participating in such programs (Smith, 2005). Webb, et al. (1982) stated, "Where gifted programs for the gifted exist, too often the emphasis is only on accelerated repetition of facts. Some progressive programs emphasize principles, concepts, and evaluative thinking" (p.11). Still, if identified as gifted; most students choose to participate in the gifted program. Some gifted programs provide an opportunity for gifted students to leave the regular classroom and go to another location to participate in a pull out program for gifted students (Smith). Moreover, according to Smith, this may

be an enjoyable experience for the gifted student, but one drawback may be that the extra assignments they receive may become very stressful for them. Therefore, they may reject their gifted talent or they may drop out of the gifted program.

Many gifted students live in rural locations and attend rural schools (“Responding to the Needs,” 2001). Also, many rural school districts disparage students who are gifted (Carpenter, 2001a). In addition, rural gifted students are frequently undetected in gifted and talented programs (Johnston, 1997). Furthermore, the issue of school size and the designation of rural schools may hinder many students from being recognized as gifted and talented (Sack, 1999). The gifted program is not incorporated as a routine connection to the school environment. Moreover, the distribution of funds for the gifted program is inadequate. Unlike other programs such as special education and disability services that receive funding from local and state policies, the gifted program does not receive such funding (Ludlow, 2004). Gifted students who live in rural locations may be disappointed with their giftedness and the gifted program in their school. The school they attend may offer a limited number of advanced classes. In addition, few classroom resources may be available to them. What's more, gifted students often reside in an isolated community where the drive to cultural events is both lengthy and costly (Cross & Dixon, 1998). Pringle, Webb, Warner, and Peterson (1972) stated,

Many urban school districts throughout the nation have developed special education programs for intellectually gifted pupils. Little attempt has been made, however, to provide similar programs in rural areas. In small districts that have, perhaps, only one or two gifted pupils at each grade level, special programs have

not been possible. (p. 79)

Moreover, the education of gifted students is frequently neglected due to lack of funds and inaccessibility to cultural opportunities (Sack, 1999). According to the National Association for Gifted Children (n.d.), the federal government does not make available financial support to districts explicitly for gifted education. Some states do not finance gifted education, and those that do have to contend with an unequal amount of funding. Numerous rural districts experience a limited supply of capital and are faced with prejudices associated with the gifted program (Carpenter, 2001a). Furthermore, financial support for gifted education is determined by the number of students enrolled in school. Therefore, districts with a higher number of physical and learning disabled pupils may not obtain the necessary funds to support gifted education (Carpenter, 2001a).

A great deal of information has been disclosed by professionals on students' ability to learn, but little literature exists concerning learning from the students' perspective (Muir, 2001). In addition, much has been said and done to recognize the value of gifted teachers, but the viewpoints of gifted students themselves have been left unheard (Vialle & Quigley, 2002). A vast amount of research examining gifted and talented programs has been conducted in elementary and middle grades, but very little research investigating gifted and talented programs has been done at the high school level (Systema, 2000). In fact, one of the first programs to be cut from the budget is the gifted program (Kearney, 1992). What's more, the scarcity of gifted programs in schools may cause the voices of gifted students not to be heard (Trelfa, 1999). However, recent

legislation has stipulated that programs must be implemented in schools to accommodate gifted students (Gosfield, 2002).

The History of the Gifted

Recognition of giftedness started in China around 2200 B.C. The education of students who were gifted started during a period known as the Renaissance which began in the fourteenth century and lasted beyond the sixteenth century (Berger, 1980).

St. Louis, Missouri became known as the site for one of the first programs in the United States strictly for the gifted. This program began in the early 1800s. It emphasized what is known as “flexible promotion” (Berger, 1980, p. 25). Instead of attending elementary school for six years, advanced level students were permitted to accomplish six years of education in four years. In addition, Dr. William T. Harris was an early promoter of gifted education whose ideas included the notion of permitting students to advance from one grade to the next in shorter periods of time and to have a curriculum that was suited to their intellect (Berger).

Educators in the field of gifted education were Hollingworth, and Terman. They attributed portions of their work to other leading gifted education advocates such as Galton, Cattell, Binet, Renzulli, and Gardner. Hollingworth, a psychologist, an educator, and a leading promoter of measurement in the detection of the gifted (Codd, n.d.), became partial to Galton’s studies after being assigned to the reading of Galton’s *Heredity Genius* by an advisor as a graduate student (as cited in Jolly, 2005). Terman (as cited in Jolly, 2005) credited Galton’s impact in his dissertation even before studying gifted. According to O’Donnell (as cited in Jolly, 2005), Galton used his past experiences

and his readings of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, as encouragement for researching genetics from which the teaching of the gifted evolved. Cattell's work combined the study of psychology and science in recognizing individual intellect using numerical techniques. He, too, studied with Galton.

Binet began his work on gifted education by developing a means of evaluation to recognize students who were mentally challenged. According to Hollingworth (as cited in Jolly, 2005), Binet was the leader in creating tests specifically for categorizing children on the basis of intellect. Later, Renzulli created the Schoolwide Enrichment Model as a spin off of the Enrichment Triad Model. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model is based on the idea that a place designed for educational development promotes aptitude growth. Gardner developed the Theory of Multiple Intelligences in which he described intellect as complex and intricate that included areas such as symphony, space, individual relations, numerical skills and language skills (Codd, n.d.).

In 1972, The Office of the Gifted and Talented was created within the Office of Education by the United States Congress (Berger, 1980). Two years later, Section 404 of Public Law 93-380 (also identified as the Special Projects Act) granted over \$2 million on a yearly basis to local and state organizations for a range of special education tasks. Soon after, President Jimmy Carter made it possible through Public Law 95-561 to obtain funding through the Education Amendment of 1978 which is to be distributed to elementary and secondary programs (Berger, 1980). The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education Act was introduced in 1988. This Act was part of the Elementary and Secondary Act. The Elementary and Secondary Act addressed the well

being of students in grades k-12. Although The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education Act does not finance local gifted programs, it is the only federal program that is committed exclusively to students who are talented and gifted. It also encourages schools in the United States to seek out talented students (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).

The purpose of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Act was to orchestrate a cohesive plan involving methodical assignments, inventive tactics, and activities that would improve elementary and secondary schools in accommodating gifted students. This act has continued to be the leading plan geared toward gifted education (Glass, 2004). Twenty years ago, there were a limited number of gifted programs in existence. By 1990, the number of states participating in gifted programs had increased. Over 2 million gifted students in grades K-12 grades were being served. However, there are still gifted students who are not recognized because of variations in state laws and policies (Trelfa, 1999).

Definition of Gifted

Cramond (2004) stated, “a single definition would defy the principles of the cultural and temporal relativity of the concept of giftedness” (p. 15). According to Codd (n.d.), the meaning of the term gifted provides an understanding of gifted children. Codd (n.d.) further stated gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. The gifted child requires a differential educational program and/or services

beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize his/her contribution to self and the society. But, according to Gubbins (2002), no collective definition of giftedness universally exists. The decision of determining the components of giftedness in the United States is made by each state which has independent control over instituting a gifted program as well as selecting a definition for gifted. Also, according to Gubbins, no definite description of gifted education has been established. Furthermore, there is no directive for accommodating gifted students from the national level (Bathon, 2004). No consensus has been reached as to the meaning of gifted although much research has been done regarding the definition (Glass, 2004). According to Coleman (2004), the realm of gifted and talented education consists of boundaries involving the meaning of gifted and other terms related to gifted. The overall aspect of gifted education includes evaluation, instruction, and executive planning that focuses on the uniqueness of every gifted child (Cramond, 2004). The characterization of giftedness is the foundation of the gifted program because gifted students exhibit excellent academic skills by utilizing their artistic, organizational, and imaginative capabilities (Gubbins).

Gagne (as cited in Howley, 2002), proposed that students who are gifted instinctively excel with the assistance of societal stimulation combined with their abilities. With this in mind, gifted children are capable of digesting information even before becoming school age. They are also capable of retaining information and learning fundamental skills more readily than their peers who are in the same grade and of the same age (Webb, et al. 1982). Previously, the term gifted targeted students who were fast-paced learners and those learners who scored high on the IQ test. More recently, that

meaning has changed to encompass the many qualities identified in giftedness, from the customary academic procedures to the capability of relating to other people. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, (n.d). The Marland Report (as cited in Hewton, 1993), defined gifted and talented children as those children who are capable of demonstrating advanced learning abilities. These children require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program.

Identification of Gifted

According to Coleman (2003), more complexities arise in the identification of gifted children than in any other area of education. Recognizing gifted students may be a complicated process. In addition, according to Resnick and Goodman (1997), schools must first locate gifted students before they can be accommodated. Resnick and Goodman further stated that the identification of gifted children more than likely will include Caucasian students, students who exemplify above average aptitudes, students who are financially well-off, and students who are polite. Unfortunately, some students may not be recognized as gifted due to race, being underprivileged or physically challenged, having a language barrier, being a slow learner, or exemplifying behavior problems. In addition, according to Coleman (2003), dilemmas in the recognition of gifted students include contradiction in identification and disagreement over the services rendered to the gifted student. The overall composition for recognition and accommodation of gifted students adheres to the structure set by experts, governmental regulations, individual opinion, and curricular instruction (Gubbins, 2002).

Gifted students can be identified through several other methods. These methods include referral from instructors, parents, IQ tests, academic accomplishments, and demonstration of artistic talents. When identifying the gifted student, no test score, skill, talent or referral is dependent on the other; each one is an independent entity (Webb, et al. 1982).

Although gifted students are identified through several means, teachers are often one of the first to identify gifted students. Teachers may be the guiding force in the development of gifted children (McIntosh & Greenlaw, 1990). According to Abel and Karnes (1994), teachers are important contributors to a beneficial educational atmosphere. Teachers may be the major motivator for many gifted students. Teachers may also provide the bridge that gifted students need to exceed beyond high school to the college or university level (McIntosh & Greenlaw). Teacher referral may include observing the student in the classroom or through group testing. However, one drawback to teacher referral is the fact that some students are not recognized (Webb, et al, 1982).

Parents may also be able to detect that their children are gifted at an early age. They often recognize that their children demonstrate highly developed skills in comparison with other children of the same age (Webb, et al. 1982). Berger (1980) stated that at times it is assumed that all parents consider their children gifted and talented. Therefore, according to Berger, parents should be the last ones to be asked if their children are gifted.

State Identification

In accordance to the Mississippi Gifted Education Act of 1989, the state of Mississippi provides accommodations for students who attend a public school and are recognized as gifted. For example, students enrolled in grades 2-12 are accommodated through services for the intellectually gifted, creatively gifted, and artistically gifted (Regulations for the Gifted Education Program in Mississippi, 2006).

The state of Mississippi's gifted program is guided by program standards for the gifted and talented. There are seven criteria structured by these standards.

Gifted Education Programming Criterion I includes Curriculum and Instruction, Gifted Education Programming Criterion II includes Program Administration and Management, Gifted Education Programming Criterion III includes Program Design, Gifted Education Programming Criterion IV includes Program Evaluation, Gifted Education Programming Criterion V includes Socio-Emotional Guidance and Counseling, Gifted Education Programming Criterion VI includes Professional Development, and Programming Criterion VII includes Student Identification and Assessment. (The Mississippi Education Programs Program Standards Evaluating & Monitoring Approved by the State Board of Education <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us> November, 2004). pp. 4-26

Each criterion is based on a guiding principle and each guiding principle is based on a level of standard. There are four standard level measurements. Standard level one does not meet average standard, standard level two meets minimum standard, standard

level three is above standard and standard level four is considered as exemplary (Mississippi Gifted Education Programs, 2004, <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us>).

Local Identification

Karing High School provides services for students who are recognized as intellectually gifted. For example, the referral process begins in the first and second grade. The county school identification process consists of five steps, beginning with referral, parental permission, assessment; an individual norm-referenced intelligence test by a SDE certified psychometrist or psychologist, and placement. The parents are informed in the event that a student is deemed ineligible. If ineligible, the students can be retested after a six-month period from the previous testing date. The “Local Survey Committee” meets on an annual basis to determine if the student continues to be eligible for the gifted program. Finally, parents have the ability to remove the child from the gifted program. With this in mind, the student cannot reenter the gifted program until the next semester or the next school year. The county school’s instructional management plan for grades 2-12 includes thinking skills, research skills, group dynamics, creativity, and communication. Instruction is based on the guidelines to introduce, develop, extend, and are progressively more difficult (Special Programs for Gifted Students, 2004, <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us>).

Funding for Gifted

Gifted programs are often not recognized as a major component in some educational systems. As a result, finances for these programs are barely noticed at the national level (Shapiro, 2001). Gifted students receive two cents out of every \$100 spent in education. In 2005, over 11 million dollars were allocated for The National Research Center for the Gifted and Talented. This money included a major portion of the Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Students finances. The remaining funds were distributed to various other projects (Sausner, 2005). A lack of funding for gifted programs in American schools has caused children who have exhibited characteristics of giftedness to be overlooked (Shapiro). Due to the belief that gifted students show little evidence of experiencing any academic problems in comparison to other issues concerning the school agenda, gifted education is not a top priority. In addition, complexities occurring within society have caused funds to be distributed elsewhere (Carlson & Buttram, 2004).

In 2002, The National Association for Gifted Children (n.d.) found that more than 20 states did not provide expenditures for gifted programs. In addition, only five states contributed over \$200,000 (Schemo, 2004). Financing for gifted programs in some schools is authorized through special education according to the number of students enrolled in the school district. Funding for gifted students may be limited to schools with a large number of special education students (Carpenter, 2001a).

Rural Schools

Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, and Dean (2005) stated,

Like all schools, rural schools face many pressures. Increasingly diverse student backgrounds, learning styles, and needs; new federal and state accountability requirements; and debates about allocation and availability of education funding are challenges in every U.S. community. But rural schools face a unique set of challenges, largely due to their geographic location. (p. 1)

Location is an obstacle faced by gifted students living in rural locales. According to Carlson and Buttram (2004), “small, isolated rural schools have long posed a challenge to state and federal policy makers. In addition, small schools have frequently been judged too costly and ill equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students” (p.5-6).

Furthermore, gifted students living in rural areas may be disregarded because the schools they attend do not serve their academic needs (Carpenter, 2001a). Truscott and Truscott (2005) stated the following:

Special programs for students with disabilities, Advanced Placement courses, education for the gifted and talented, assistance for English language learners, vocational training, and other special programs are more expensive per child and difficult to provide when the population is so spread out. (p. 127)

Colangelo, Assouline, and New (as cited in Montgomery, 2004) stated the following:

A recent report on gifted learners in rural areas found that half of all public schools in the United States today are in small towns and rural areas and 39% of all public school students (17.5 million) live in rural communities. (p. 3)

Some issues occurring in rural school curricula consist of a lack of accelerated courses, student-to-student rapport, and few opportunities for intellectual prospects

(Carpenter, 2001a). Several other issues include the lack of trained personnel, resources, and a program specifically for gifted students (Ludlow, 2004). A lack of financial support and the fact of low enrollment have made it hard to initiate and continue a gifted program in rural schools (Howley, 2002). In addition, some parents living in rural areas may be concerned about the effect of being in gifted classes will have on their children. Rural instructors may also be worried about fulfilling more than one job obligation (Luhman & Fundis, 1989).

Perceptions of Gifted

Very little data about perceptions of the gifted are available (Greene & Margison, 2004). Opinions about giftedness vary from individual to individual. Even opinions among educational experts vary (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.).

According to Dunn, Dunn and Treffinger (as cited in Tolan, 1994), the perception of giftedness in education begins with the formation of an identity at a young age. During this period, children develop a sense of self as well as an awareness of mental capabilities.

Student Perceptions

Siegle (2006) stated the following:

Unfortunately, many gifted students do not view their school experience as meaningful. For instance, they may not find school intellectually stimulating, because they have already mastered the content or can master it quickly.

Repetition bores many of these students, and once they have learned to expect boredom in class, they will fail to embrace new learning experiences when they

arise. Other gifted students find school topics uninteresting regardless of the level of challenge, because they have developed a well-defined area of interest that is not matched by what happens in school. This leaves them “turned off” to what is taught. Still others do not appear to be interested in anything, either because their early school experiences failed to nourish their natural curiosity or because they doubt their ability to do well. Generally, a student views tasks as meaningful if they gratify a personal interest, are tied to the child’s identity, have an immediate use, or will clearly be useful in the future. (p.1)

The significance of being a gifted student and his/her participation in the gifted program offered at the school he/she attends is relatively extensive and mirrors a wide-range of issues (Cross, 2001). Gifted students may enjoy being in the gifted program, but an additional amount of class work may cause discouragement. Therefore, at some point, the identification of gifted may cease to appeal to the gifted student. As a result, some gifted students may opt out of the program (Smith, 2005). Siegle (2006) also stated gifted students are at a risk for believing that their abilities are simply given, particularly if others in their lives have not discussed their giftedness with them.

Purpose Statement

The problem addressed in this study concerns the lack of information regarding the perceptions of a gifted program in a rural Mississippi county school district by its student participants. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature of

perceptions of students who are participating or have participated in the gifted program in a rural Mississippi county. Data from this study represented the students' perspectives.

Schools that make available accelerated classes create a connection with school-wide, as well as supporters of gifted education, and their students. Opportunities such as this can lead to a gifted program that is more successful and widespread (Luhman & Fundis, 1989). According to Colangelo, Assouline, Baldus, and New (as cited in Montgomery, 2004), the way that people define their reality is dependent upon their own experience and culture. Taking a perspective that builds on current values and strengths of a rural place can enhance the way that schools and communities view their relationships and their assets. This information may also be used to understand the aspects of the rural gifted program by means of first hand experiences through the eyes of students who are participating or who have participated in a gifted program in a rural setting.

Justification for the study

Research involving gifted students' perceptions of their gifted program in a rural county is lacking in the literature. According to Muir (2001), a great deal of information has been disclosed by professionals on students' abilities to learn, but little literature exists concerning learning from the students' perspective. Research from this study provided data that will contribute to filling this gap. According to Kridel (as cited in Boutte, 2002), "In this postmodern age, educators recognize the importance of personal narratives, the power of stories, and the importance not only of whose perspective, but also of whose voice is being expressed and whose is being heard" (p.1).

Appreciating a person's situation and values provides depth to everyone experiences (Boutte, 2002). According to Gallard (as cited in Boutte), "the voice of students is important because language is one of the principal ways that people define themselves and establish alliances with others" (p.6). According to Boutte, much information has been provided concerning the school experiences of students from various backgrounds, but hearing the perspectives of other students are often not recognized.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was there was only one rural school district involved in the study. The study participants therefore were from one school district.

Definition of Terms

Academically Gifted Students exhibit outstanding scholarly capability in accordance to identification methods (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2005).

Artistically Gifted Students display special imaginative talent and amazing skills in drawing and painting in accordance to identification methods (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2005).

Creatively Gifted Students demonstrate unique aptitude by means of imagination and outstanding proficiency in drama in accordance with identification methods (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2005).

Funding or financial support of gifted programs in the United States are contingent on state regulations and local guidelines (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).

Gifted according to The Marland Report are gifted and talented children who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These children require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their potential contribution to self and society (Hewton, 1993).

Giftedness is a valuable attribute that permits individuals to intermingle with his/her surroundings with incredible heights of ingenuity and accomplishments (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).

Gifted Students exemplify an extraordinary level of intelligence and/or scholarly, imaginative or visual talent (Mississippi Code of 1972, SEC 37-23-175 Definitions).

Gifted and Talented according to the Javits Act of 1988 (as cited in Gubbins, 2002), means someone exhibiting extreme potential in areas such as supervision, academics, imagination, or art, and who needs accommodation from the school system to meet their needs.

Gifted Education Programs include an educational curriculum designed for cognitive proficient students in grades 2-12, scholastically talented students in grades 9-12, aesthetic adept in grades 2-12, and/or ingeniously students in grades 2-12 in public educational systems in the state of Mississippi. Gifted education programs should be designed to meet the needs of highly intelligent students but different from the

curriculum designed for regular education students (Mississippi Code of 1972. SEC 37-23-175 Definitions).

Identification of gifted students can be done with IQ scores, success in school, artistic activities, instructors and parents (Webb, et al. 1982).

Intellectually Gifted Students express an astonishing amount of talent in accordance to identification methods (Regulations for the Gifted Education Programs in Mississippi, 2005).

Interview Protocol is a gathering of inquiries reflecting a reliable examination. These inquiries remind the researcher what facts need to be gathered and why these facts are necessary (Yin, 1988). For this study the Interview Protocol consisted of topics regarding the gifted program in a rural school district.

Matrix is a simple structured comprehensive format to determine the similarities and differences of information (Fetterman, 1989).

Rural means a non-urban area with respect to residents, surroundings, or way of life (Responding to the Needs of Gifted Learners in Rural Settings, PK-12 (March 2001) <http://www.megt.org /links/MEGTPositionPaper-RuralGift.pdf>.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study is considered qualitative. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research “is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Fraenkel and Wallen stated, “Qualitative researchers are more concerned with understanding the situations and events from the viewpoint of the participants. Their designs tend to emerge during the course of the research” (p.16). One type of qualitative study is a case study. According to Stake and Creswell (as cited in Ke, 2004) the implementation of a case study evolves from a wide range of sources combined to give a pictorial depiction of a topic.

The focus of this study was to describe gifted students’ perspectives of the gifted program in a rural county in Mississippi. The research method is a descriptive single case study involving gifted students in grades 7-8 and gifted students in grades 11-12 who have been enrolled or who are currently enrolled in the gifted program in a rural school. Merriam (1998) stated, “Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study. ‘Thick’ description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity investigated” (pp. 29-30). A descriptive single case study was appropriate for this study

because it presented a list of items for students to discuss. Yin (1988) stated, “In general case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over the events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 13). This study provided an opportunity for gifted students who are currently in grades 7-8 and gifted students in grades 11-12 who have been participants in the gifted program to use their voices to express their points of view of the gifted program.

Participants

Participants in this study are students who were enrolled in grades 7-8 in the Gifted Program at Karing High School. Additionally, participants were students in grades 11-12 who previously participated in the gifted program at Karing High School. Each participant received a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Karing High School is a pseudonym given to protect the identity of the official school in this research study. Karing High School is located in a rural area in the central portion of Mississippi. It is comprised of grades 7-12 with an enrollment of over 450 students. Thirty-six students in grades 7-8 were currently participating in the gifted program. Thirteen students in grades 7-8 participated in this study. Fourteen parents gave permission for their children to participate in the study, but one child chose not to participate in the study. Twenty-nine students in grades 11-12 were former students in the gifted program at Karing High School. Six parents of 11-12 grade students gave permission for their children to participate in the study. Six 11-12-grade students participated in the study.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix A) approval was requested. The researcher met with the superintendent of the county schools to request permission to conduct the study in a school. The researcher met with the principal of the school to discuss the purpose of the research project. The researcher also met with the gifted teachers and the students in the gifted classes to explain the research project and their role in it.

Upon discussing the project with both the principal and the teacher of the gifted program, the researcher provided each parent with a Consent Form to be signed indicating willingness for his/her child to participate in the study. An Assent Form was then given to each student who volunteered to participate in the study. The Assent Form explained that participation was strictly voluntary.

The researcher mailed Consent Forms to parents of gifted student in grades 7-8 and former gifted students in grades 11-12. Consent Forms that were returned determined the criteria for students who participated in the purposive sample. They also determined the number of students who participated in the study. Merriam (1998) stated, "Purposive (purposeful) sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61).

Patton, as cited in Glesne (1999), found the following:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (p.169)

The researcher interviewed the participants on two separate occasions. Interviews were recorded for consistency. The Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) was used to solicit students' perspectives about their gifted program. The Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) is a collection of topics created by the researcher. These topics remind the researcher of the data needed for the interview and the necessity of gathering this data (Yin, 1988). There were two separate focus group interviews for students in grades 7-8 and for students in grades 11-12. There were no individual interviews. Glesne (1999) stated, "Interviewing more than one person at a time sometimes proves very useful: children often need company to be embolden to talk and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people (often referred to as a focus group" (p. 67). According to Schensul (as cited in Bernard, 1998), focus groups have been engaged to study the understanding, frame of mind, and conviction in numerous circumstances associated with society. Bernard stated, "Group interviews allow the researcher to record and analyze group members' reactions to ideas and each other" (p.715).

Each focus group interview lasted almost one hour. The first focus group interview was an introductory overview to become acquainted with the participants, establish rapport, set ground rules, and explain the objective of the research project. The

second focus group interview conducted was guided by the Interview Protocol. Each student participating in the study was identified by a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The researcher directed the conversation and cautioned the students to speak one at a time to ensure that all perspectives would be heard. The conversation in each session was tape-recorded. The tapes were transcribed after each session. By using a matrix, the researcher looked for prevalent patterns and themes that were found in the interviews.

Data Analysis

The Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) guided the data analysis in this study. Data were transcribed immediately following each interview. Analysis began with the first interview and continued as an ongoing process throughout the study. Data were transcribed precisely and coded for prevalent patterns and themes. These patterns and themes were reported in a narrative form. Connelly and Clandinini (as cited in Merriam, 1998), stated that “At the heart of narrative analysis is the way humans experience the world” (p. 157). Yin (1988) stated that one of the most popular tactics in case study analysis is pattern-matching. “Case study logic compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one (or with several alternative predictions). If the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study strengthen its internal validity” (p. 109).

Data in this study were analyzed through the use of a matrix. According to Fetterman (1989), matrices offer an easy, organized, detailed way to make a distinction in the data. The investigator can match up and cross-reference categories of data to institute a portrait of an assortment of behaviors or thought categories. Matrices also help the

investigator recognize up-and-coming themes in the data. Recurring themes indicated by the matrix in this study included loyalty, competitiveness, respect, friendship, family, and problem-solving.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents a description of a gifted program in a rural Mississippi county school district through the perceptions of its student participants. This study was guided using an Interview Protocol that was created by the researcher. This chapter presents the background information of the participants and the topics and themes developed from the study. The themes are discussed with the existing literature. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Background Information

This qualitative study was designed to describe the gifted program in a rural county school through the perception of its student participants. The researcher acquired IRB approval for the study. The researcher acquired approval from the rural school district and the principal of Karing High School. Consent forms were sent to the parents of the gifted students and Assent forms were given to the student participants. Each student was purposefully selected in the study.

Karing High School is located in the central portion of Mississippi. Karing High School has 36 students enrolled in the gifted program in the 7-8 grades. Twenty-nine students had been in gifted when they were in elementary school. A total of 19 participants agreed to be in this study. Of the 19 participants in this study, 13 were currently in grades 7-8, and six were currently in grades 11-12. Table 1 and Table 2 in

this study present demographic characteristics of the participants. Each participant was provided a pseudonym to guarantee privacy.

Qualitative analysis was collected from focus group interviews. The participants were interviewed on two separate occasions. Each focus group interview lasted almost an hour. The two focus group interviews with participants in grade 7-8 and the two focus group interviews with participants in grades 11-12 were guided by an Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) that was created by the researcher. The Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) was a guideline that was developed by the researcher based upon a review of the literature.

The researcher recorded each focus group interview. The recordings were transcribed following each focus group interview. While transcribing the students' responses, a matrix was developed to identify emergent themes that occurred from the responses of the participants during the focus group interviews. Data from the focus group interviews suggested that all 19 participants indicated that the gifted program had been a positive influence in their education.

Topics Regarding the Gifted Program

The researcher interviewed the participants on two separate occasions. The data were transcribed and then analyzed after each interview. A matrix was designed to address the themes and patterns found in the analysis. Three topics including grades, assignments, and the gifted teacher were included in this section of the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C). The data were collected from the responses that were given by each participant on the three topics. Each topic is addressed in the next section.

Grades

The purpose of this study was to present a description of a rural gifted program from the point of view of its student participants. In order to obtain such information, the researcher began the interview by introducing the first topic developed from the analysis. This part of the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) observed topics regarding the gifted program.

The first topic emphasized the importance of getting good grades while being in the gifted program. Each student was given the opportunity to voice his/her opinion concerning grades during this portion of the interview. After analyzing the data, it was determined that all 19 participants felt a need to obtain high grades in school. Responses indicated that the gifted program was beneficial in acquiring problem solving skills which led to making higher grades. The researcher surmised from the point of view of the student participants that getting good grades was an essential factor in obtaining a quality education. The participants also indicated that being in the gifted program had influenced their ability to acquire and maintain good grades. Data suggested the participants were competitive concerning the acquisition of high grades with other gifted students as well as with students who were not enrolled in gifted classes. Participants indicated that gifted students had to work hard to remain as competitive as their gifted peers. The participants also indicated that their grades should be higher than those of students who were enrolled in regular education classes because gifted students had taken the IQ test and had been admitted to the gifted program. The participants reported that IQ scores were a significant

factor in being in the gifted program. Thus, these scores were an indication that they should keep and maintain good grades. Overall, this study suggested that being in the gifted program taught the students how to make good grades.

Assignments

The next topic outlined in the Interview Protocol was assignments. The researcher asked the participants how they felt about completing extra assignments in the gifted program. After analyzing the results, the data suggested that the participants had a vast array of opinions concerning assignments. Some participants reported that completing extra assignments was a problem for them at one time. However, data revealed that completing extra assignments did not pose a problem for other students. In addition, the participants' responses suggested that completing assignments in the gifted program proved to be an asset for completing assignments in the regular classroom. Responses disclosed that assignments in gifted classes were more strenuous and took more time to complete than assignments in regular education classes. The participants reported that the assignments in gifted helped with their ability to think on a higher level. Their responses showed their belief that being in gifted class was challenging; yet rewarding. The participants expressed that they did not become bored when completing assignments in the gifted class. Participants also expressed that when assistance with assignments was needed, there was always another gifted student who was willing to help.

It was determined that working with other gifted students proved to be beneficial. Responses suggested that working with other gifted students created a family bond. The participants revealed that the gifted students had formed a close relationship with each

other. Participants reported that this relationship was strong because they had known each other for a long time. Therefore, when the opportunity to complete assignments together became available, they encouraged and aided each other in their endeavors. Furthermore, participants reported that other gifted students motivated them to work harder in completing their assignments.

Data indicated that completing assignments in gifted classes created opportunities for gifted students that were not provided for regular education students. Responses suggested that completing research projects in gifted classes provided more of an in-depth study of research. Participants also reported that completing research projects in gifted classes provided a way to build critical thinking skills.

Data also indicated there were mixed opinions on working in groups to complete assignments with regular education students. Responses suggested that some regular education students wanted to partner with gifted students only to obtain good grades. Participants reported that this fact posed a problem. Furthermore, several participants revealed that they would rather complete the assignment alone than work with some regular education students. Data indicated that some regular education students wanted to be in the same group as a gifted student in order to get an assignment sufficiently completed. Participants expressed that they wanted to maintain their good grades. As a result, they would complete the assignments themselves.

Data indicated that some gifted participants were at times pressured to overachieve. Participants revealed that they felt the need to meet higher standards than other people. Some participants expressed that some gifted students turned the pressure

from a negative experience into a positive experience by working that much harder. Participants reported that they wanted to demonstrate to other people that they were above average students. Participants also revealed that they felt pressured just because they were in gifted classes. Participants also expressed that they did not like to answer questions in regular education classes for fear of others criticizing them if they gave the wrong answer. Data indicated that being pressured made the participants work harder to complete their assignments.

Gifted Teacher

The next topic concerned the influence of the gifted teachers while being in the gifted program. When the researcher asked the participants how the gifted teachers had influenced their lives, the participants indicated that they had positive experiences with the gifted teachers. In the interviews, the participants expressed that they valued the gifted teachers' instructions. Data also suggested that the gifted teachers gave positive reinforcement to the gifted students. The participants reported that the gifted teachers were very encouraging. It was also revealed that the gifted teachers knew when the participants were not working to their full potential. According to the responses by the participants, the gifted teachers also reinforced problem-solving skills helpful to the success of the participants in other classes. The participants also indicated the gifted teachers were available to assist them when needed. Furthermore, the participants' responses suggested that the gifted teachers encouraged them to be successful. Data indicated that the gifted teachers presented question strategies that helped the participants improve their critical thinking skills. It was also noted that the participants felt that the

gifted teachers prepared the participants for higher education by giving authentic instructional experiences. Overall, data suggested that the participants viewed the gifted teacher as important to their educational success.

Summary

Findings from the qualitative analysis indicated that the gifted program had a positive influence on gifted students. The gifted program provided an avenue for success for each participant. A close family bond was created among the gifted students. There were mixed opinions of working with gifted and non-gifted students. There were students who enjoyed working with other students. However, there were students who did not enjoy working with other students. Some gifted students felt a need to overachieve in their classes.

At least three themes surfaced from the topics of maintaining and getting good grades, completing assignments in the gifted classes, and the influence of the gifted teacher. These themes were identified as respect for the gifted program, respect for the gifted teacher, the creation of a family bond, and loyalty to both the gifted program and the gifted teacher.

Topics Regarding Student Perspectives

The researcher addressed topics regarding student perspectives taken from the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C). The researcher included six topics such as being a

gifted student, labeling, parental involvement, future plans, peers, and self esteem. Each topic is addressed in the next section.

Being a Gifted Student

Participants indicated that being a gifted student was an honor. The participants reported that they sometime pressured themselves to overachieve. The participants also revealed that they sometimes experienced pressure from their peers. The participants pointed out that they were competitive with their peers in gifted classes as well as with students who were not in gifted classes. The participants also indicated that being a gifted student gave them the opportunity to form a close bond with other gifted students. The participants reported that being a gifted student provided privileges such as taking educational trips that otherwise they would not have had the opportunity to take in regular education classes. The participants indicated that being a gifted student enhanced their problem-solving and comprehension skills. Overall, the participants indicated that they enjoyed being gifted students. Respect emerged as a theme from being a gifted student. The participants appeared to respect one another's opinions that drew from a willingness to assist each other in class. Respect was also exemplified in the closeness that formed among the participants.

Labeling

Participants revealed that gifted students are labeled for their academic ability. Some responses suggested that labeling not only takes place in the school, but in the community as well. Some participants expressed that they liked being labeled.

Participants indicated that being labeled set them apart from other students. Participants reported that it was an honor to be labeled as gifted. Some participants revealed that although they were being labeled as gifted, they were not going to hide their abilities.

Parental Involvement

Several participants indicated that they wanted to prove to their parents that they were smart by being in the gifted program. Some participants reported that their parents wanted them to make a perfect score on course assignments at all times. Various participants indicated that the reason that they have high expectations is because their parents encouraged them to have high expectations. Some participants reported that their parents informed them that having high expectations would help them later in life. Overall, the participants indicated that they wanted to impress their parents with their academic abilities. Competitiveness was high among the gifted participants. They all wanted to please their parents, maintain good grades, and be the first person to complete classroom assignments.

Future Plans

The participants in the 7- 8 grades indicated that the course content taught in the gifted classes was preparing them for the course content in high school. Participants in the 11-12 grades indicated that the course content taught in the 7-8 gifted classes had prepared them for taking Advanced Placement classes and Subject Area Tests in high school. All participants indicated that the structure of the gifted program had prepared them for a higher education. The participants revealed that the coursework taught by the gifted teachers assisted them in decision-making regarding their future educational goals.

Participants also indicated that the structure of the gifted teachers' classes was similar to that of a college class. The participants also revealed that being in the gifted classes afforded them an opportunity to take educational trips, whereas, they would not have had the same opportunity in the regular classroom. The participants reported that they had to complete coursework that prepared them for taking the trip and that such trips would prepare them for life after high school.

Socially/Peers

Some participants indicated that working with their peers helped enhance their skills of working and dealing with other people. Participants revealed that their peers made them strive to do better. Some participants reported that their peers, at times, teased them, and would tell others not to talk to them. Several participants indicated that some of their peers assumed that just because they were in gifted classes and considered smart, they could not be successful in extracurricular activities such as sports. Other participants also indicated that some of their peers became angry because they assumed that they had the same academic abilities as the gifted student. Participants expressed that they were at times faced with peer pressure.

Self-esteem

Some participants indicated that being in the gifted program had raised their self-esteem. The participants implied that the gifted program made them feel better about themselves. Participants indicated that their self-esteem rose because of their analytical and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, some participants reported that various

teachers and other students treated them differently when they did not know the answer to a question. As a result, being in the gifted program had not raised their self-esteem.

Summary

Results from the analysis indicated that some students are labeled as a result of being in the gifted program. The consensus of the participants indicated that being in the gifted program helped them impress their parents and all participants indicated the rigorous course content taught in the gifted classes would prepare them for a higher education. Participants indicated that their peers influenced them both positively and negatively. Some participants indicated a rise in self-esteem while others indicated that their self-esteem was not affected. Overall, the students' perspectives of the gifted program appeared to be positive.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study was designed to describe the gifted program in a rural county school through the perceptions of its student participants. This study was guided using an Interview Protocol that was created by the researcher. This chapter presents the background information of the participants, topics developed from the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) and themes that emerged from the matrix. The students indicated that participating in the gifted program was a positive experience for them. The participants had forged a strong bond among themselves and also indicated that they felt a desire to overachieve. Participants reported that being in the gifted program had caused them to be labeled as gifted. They noted that being in the gifted program would prepare them for a

successful experience in higher education. Participants revealed that they received both positive and negative comments from their peers. Some participants reported that their self-esteem had risen. Others had not. On the whole, participants indicated that being in the gifted program had been a meaningful and productive experience.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined students' perspectives about a gifted program in a rural Mississippi school district. This study was based on qualitative research describing students' perspectives of a gifted program in a rural Mississippi school district. Participants in this study were gifted students in grades 7-8 and gifted students in grades 11-12. This study was guided by an Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) developed by the researcher. The researcher included three topics in the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C): background information, elements of the gifted program, and concepts regarding students' perspectives. The study was made up of two focused groups. Each focus group was interviewed on two separate occasions. A matrix was developed to identify themes and patterns that emerged during the interviews. Results of the study indicated that the gifted students perceived that the gifted program was a positive experience for them. They also indicated that the gifted teachers encouraged their success in regular education classes, as well as, in gifted classes. The following section summarizes the study findings. The conclusions and recommendations are presented in the next section.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe a gifted program in a rural Mississippi county school district through the perceptions of its student participants. One group of students who is evident nationwide is that of the gifted student. These students come from various races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and locations. Gifted students possess a

unique ability to discern information on an instruction level beyond some of their regular education peers. According to Shapiro (2001), the percentage of gifted students falls between 3% and 5%. Shapiro pointed out that this group includes intellectually gifted, artistically gifted, creatively gifted and musically gifted students. Webb, et al. (1982) stated, “Gifted persons are a diverse group” (p. 6). Meador (as cited in Glass, 2004) stated, “Gifted children are people with the ability to learn rapidly, having advanced ability in a specific domain such as math or reading, to be creative, and to be verbally proficient” (p.25). Moreover, gifted students are enrolled in regular education classes where their academic abilities exceed the instructional restraints of the regular education classes.

Although gifted students are found everywhere, their perspectives of being a gifted student and of being in the gifted program are rarely heard. There has been a strong need for research concerning the voice of a gifted student, yet their voices remain unheard. According to Muir (2001), much has been printed about how professionals assume students learn, but information concerning students’ perspectives is rare. Information gathered during the interviews substantiated the literature in the study.

A universal definition for gifted has not been established. Bines (as cited in Glass, 2004) stated, “After more than 70 years of research, there is not even consensus on an operational definition of giftedness or the most reliable method for identifying gifted students” (p. 25). Bathon (2004) stated,

Gifted and talented education in this country is entirely a state affair. There is no federal legislation mandating states to provide special services to their gifted and

talented students. Therefore, states are free to establish their own gifted and talented programs and their own definitions of gifted and talented students. (n.p.)

Furthermore, many gifted students live in rural communities where identification is difficult. In addition, rural schools may offer limited resources for gifted students.

Cross (1998) stated,

In addition to the size and grade configuration, another important factor in the school-based experiences of gifted students is the rural school's proximity to other resources. Whether an individual school is close to a large town or city, a college or university, or other substantial resources can substantially affect the culture of the school. Distances between communities can also affect the atmosphere in the schools. (p.119)

Rural schools may be considered too expensive and unprepared to meet the needs of some students. Rural schools are faced with inadequate supplies and a small number of classes geared for gifted students (Carlson, & Buttram, 2004). However, some rural schools may offer Advanced Placement classes or online classes. During the study interviews the researcher found that there were three students enrolled in Advanced Placement Biology class. According to Collins (2005), many rural school districts are implementing distance learning classes in their school to include Advance Placement classes in their rural school district. .

Just as location may pose a problem for rural gifted students, they are also faced with inadequate financial support. Funding for gifted programs is often scarce which may cause some gifted student to be disregarded. Financial support for gifted students may be

limited to schools with a large population of special education students. According to Carpenter (2001a), funds for gifted education come out of a special education formula that is based on the number of students enrolled in a school.

Another problem gifted students must contend with is identification. Recognizing gifted students may keep some schools from accommodating them. Various problems occur in the identification process of gifted students including inconsistent representation, using only one criterion to measure intelligence, improper application of data, and improper services rendered to gifted students (Coleman, 2003).

In this study, the researcher found that most of the participants were identified as gifted by taking an IQ test and by teacher referral. Most of the participants were identified in the first or second grade. One participant indicated that he had to take the IQ test twice before he passed. When he passed the test, he was enrolled in the gifted program. There are different methods in identifying gifted students including teacher referral, parents, and IQ tests. Parents are often the first to identify their child's giftedness. Teachers may also identify gifted students but some teachers may overlook some gifted students (Webb et al, 1982).

This study utilized qualitative research and included 19 participants. Participants in this study included gifted students in grades 7-8 and gifted students in grades 11-12. Thirteen of the participants were in grades 7-8. Six of the participants were in grades 11-12. The researcher interviewed the focus groups on two separate occasions. Each participant was given a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. An Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) was developed by the researcher. The researcher used the Interview

Protocol to develop a matrix to locate emerging themes from the study. Fetterman (1989) stated, the researcher can compare and cross-reference categories of information to establish a picture of a range of behaviors or thought categories” (p. 96). Themes that emerged from the study matrix included loyalty, competitiveness, respect, courage, and a family bond.

After careful analysis using a matrix, various themes emerged from this study including problem-solving skills, loyalty, respect, friendship, and a close family bond. The participants indicated that they learned better techniques for problem-solving in their gifted classes. They indicated that their gifted teachers initiated strategic instructional options that helped them become successful in their other classes. One participant stated, “There are some things we did in gifted that involved a lot of thinking. I think it prepares you to make tough choices. It helps you through life more than any other class would.” Another theme that emerged from the interviews was loyalty. The participants indicated a loyalty to the gifted program. Another participant said, “I would say if I had the choice of being in the regular classroom or stay in the gifted class, I would say that I would rather be in gifted.”

The researcher found that the rural gifted program provided the participants with many educational opportunities. The literature says that gifted students prefer to stay in the gifted program, but some opt to get out of the program because of the added coursework (Smith, 2005). As gifted students, they were afforded many liberties that influenced their success in other classes. One participant indicated, “If you complete your assignments, almost every Friday, you get the opportunity to play games and things. You

can't just go around playing trivial games.” Other participants indicated that they were rewarded for being a gifted student. “You have to work toward going on trips. It's kind of a reward for trying your hardest. In the regular classroom, you do it because you have to and there is nothing to look forward to. There is no reward.”

The researcher found that the participants were loyal to themselves, their parents, their teachers, and the gifted program. The participants indicated that as gifted students, their parents and their gifted teachers expected them to excel and they felt a need to do what was expected of them. They indicated that this was part of being a gifted student. They also indicated that their gifted teachers were a driving force behind their success in school. One participant stated, “My gifted teacher gives me confidence by telling me if I work hard I can be anything I want to be.” Another participant said, “Our gifted teacher really supports us.” Meanwhile, another participant said, “I have very high expectations. My parents make me.” Still, another participant said, “I think being in the gifted program has helped me to where I want to make 100 averages on everything. My parents want me to do that too, but I'm not just doing it for them. I'm doing it for myself.”

The researcher found that the participants in the study were very competitive. They indicated that competitiveness ran strong with other students. Making good grades was an important factor for being a gifted student so competition was inevitable. The participants indicated that competing with other students made them want to excel in their assignments. A participant said, “Other gifted students drive you to do better.” Another participant indicated, “I'm pretty competitive. They know how I am in my academics and they know that when we get report cards, I want all A's or one B or I want

high A's or low A's." Still, another participant indicated that he and another student are constantly in competition. The participant said,

He and I always compete. If he gets an A or high A's, I get like a 95. He gets bragging rights if he beats me. If I get a high A because you know everybody in that classroom was so smart and you wanted to feel like the smartest one. It is very competitive. You always wanted to finish first and if you didn't, you had to finish first on the next activity.

Although the gifted students were faced with peer pressure, results indicated that the gifted program was a productive part of the participants' education. The participants still held the gifted program in high regard. In addition, a number of participants indicated that being in the gifted program contributed to a rise in their self-esteem. Therefore, each student wanted to remain in the gifted program because he or she enjoyed mastering the course content taught in gifted classes. Responses included, "It has helped my self-esteem. It taught me there are people who are smart and have made it," "Some people might not admit it, but we've all been pressured to do better," and "Being pressured helped my grade out even though I didn't feel like doing the work."

The researcher found that being in the gifted program enhanced the participants' problem-solving skills. The participants indicated that they had learned more than one way to solve problems in the gifted classes. They indicated that a problem could be solved using various tactics. Responses included, "Being in gifted taught you not to give up and try a little harder," "Gifted kind of adjusted our thinking levels on the level that college professors teach so we'll better understand how they want us to complete our

work and make good grades,” and “Being in gifted makes you think more. It improves your thinking ability. You can think deeper by doing different activities that can really challenge you.”

Lasting friendships and a close family bond were two other themes that emerged from this study. Most of the students had known each other since first or second grade. Moreover, most of them had entered the gifted program during the same period of time. Therefore, they had created a close-knit gifted student family. They depended upon one another for encouragement and help with assignments. This was shown by the following participant responses, “Our gifted class was like a family. We are so close to each other,” “There weren’t any other people who could relate to us like we did with each other,” “When we were in gifted, there was always encouragement,” and “Everybody in there wants to make good grades and if you mess up on some stuff, there’s someone there to show you how to do it.”

This study examined a gifted program in a rural Mississippi county school district through the perceptions of its student participants. The researcher based this study on the limited amount of research covering the students’ perspectives of the gifted program in a rural school district. This study addressed background information, elements of the gifted program, and concepts regarding students’ perspectives. The researcher found that the gifted students considered themselves as one big family. As a result, the gifted program enabled them to form a strong bond with each other. According to Cross (2001), gifted students who reside in small rural areas pointed out that being a part of the gifted program felt like being in a family. This research study validated that

fact. According to Smith (2005), gifted programs promote achievement in the life of a young person.

In this study, the participants indicated that the gifted classes were challenging and that the student participants respected the challenges and took necessary steps to excel. Overall, the study participants felt that being a gifted student would prove advantageous to their educational success.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe a gifted program in a rural Mississippi school district through the perceptions of its student participants. This study was conducted using an Interview Protocol (See Appendix C) devised by the researcher. A matrix was developed to isolate the emerging themes and patterns that occurred during the interviews. The researcher interviewed the participants on two separate occasions.

Qualitative results from the study indicated that the gifted program was a valuable asset to this rural Mississippi school district. Additionally, qualitative findings indicated that participants gained valuable experiences in improving their academic skills as a result of participating in the gifted program.

According to the related research, only a limited number of studies have investigated the perspectives of the gifted student toward their gifted program (Muir, 2001). This study will add to the literature concerning the perspectives of gifted students in rural Mississippi school districts. Due to the lack of funding, rural school districts may face a shortage in resources for the gifted program (Sack, 1999). In some rural schools,

there may be a limited number of Advanced Placement classes offered due to budget constraints. A limited number of teachers available to teach the classes, and the location and size of the school may be limiting factors (Luhman & Fundis, 1989). An option suggested by related research, which is also supported by the findings of the current study is to make available more Advanced Placement classes, dual enrollment classes, and online classes.

Finally, the researcher concluded that the participants valued their participation in the gifted program. The researcher concluded that the gifted teachers encouraged each gifted student to be successful and that the gifted student benefited from the rigorous course content taught in the gifted program.

Recommendations

Due to the limited amount of research on gifted students' perspectives, (Muir, 2001), the researcher examined students' perceptions about a gifted program in a rural Mississippi school district. The study revealed that the students' perspectives were positive in reference to the gifted program. From the students' points-of-view, the gifted program may be an asset to the rural school district. Listening to- and encoding- the perspectives of the gifted students may comprise essential factors in evaluating the success of the rural gifted program. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made by the researcher:

1. It is recommended that further research be conducted on students' perspectives concerning the gifted program in rural schools.

2. It is recommended that further research be conducted with more than one rural school district to examine students' perspective of their gifted program.
3. It is recommended that a rural school district consortium be implemented to share instructional resources among districts. Resources may include teachers of the gifted, regular education teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders to alleviate the problems with inadequate resources. .
4. It is recommended that more funding be supplied to rural schools from the local, state, and federal levels to supplement the gifted program in their school districts.
5. Based upon the participants' responses, it is recommended that rural school districts periodically offer a facilitated forum wherein gifted students can voice their perspectives about the gifted program.
6. It is recommended that rural school systems make opportunities available for students to take advantage of online classes, dual enrollment consisting of attending high school and college classes simultaneously, and Advanced Placement course participation.
7. It is recommended that parental involvement should continue to be encouraged through accessible media outlets.

8. It is recommended that rural school districts conduct in-service workshops for both regular education teachers and gifted teachers so that all teachers are cognizant of the learning styles of gifted students.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTION REVIEW BOARD PERMISSION LETTER



February 6, 2007

Theresa Dumas
Rt. 3 Box 196-E
Eupora, MS 39744

RE: IRB Study #07-030: A Description of a Gifted Program in a Rural County in Mississippi Through the Perceptions of its Student Participants

Dear Mrs. Dumas:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 2/5/2007 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please refer to your IRB number (#07-030) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at cwilliams@research.msstate.edu or 325-5220.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Williams".

Christine Williams
IRB Administrator

cc: Nancy Verhoek-Miller

Office for Regulatory Compliance

P. O. Box 6223 • 8A Morgan Street • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776

APPENDIX B

RESUME

Theresa Young Dumas
Rt 3 Box 196-E
Eupora, MS 39744
(662) 258-2707
horsedoctor@telepak.net

OBJECTIVE

To utilize the instructional and counseling skills acquired in classes taken in the field of education as well as skills acquired during employment in the educational system.

EDUCATION

- **Graduate Institution:**

2007 ABD: Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS

2007 (Candidate) Doctor of Philosophy, Elementary Education: Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS

May 1999: Master of Science, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS

May 1996: Bachelor of Science, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS

- **Undergraduate Institution:**

May 1994: Associate of Arts Degree, Holmes Community College, Goodman, MS

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- **1984-1994**

Wells Lamont Glove Factory: Machine Operator

Duties: Sewing cuffs on gloves

- **1992-1994**

Walmart

Duties: Cashier

- **1996**

Clinical/Field-Based Instruction & Certification: Parental Involvement/ Reading

- **1997-1999**

Graduate assistant for Dr. Dwight Hare

Duties: Implement data by tracking previous graduate students

- **1996- 2004**

Webster County School System

5th Grade Social Studies Teacher, 6th Grade Science & Reading Teacher, 8th Grade

Social Studies Teacher

Duties: Educate students according to the curriculum and implement the competencies and objectives of the course content mandated by the state of Mississippi. To also meet the needs of individual students through a productive school program guided by the school district.

- **2003**

Middle Grades Institute Training

Trained to enhance the skills of 7th and 8th grade teachers to become highly qualified due to federal requirements of No Child Left Behind

- **2004- Present**

East Webster High School Counselor

Duties: Work with students to provide individually and group counseling services. Collaborate with parents, teachers, and administrators to provide a healthy environment for students to become successful in the classroom. Implement

coping strategies that will help students deal with individual, societal, and behavioral problems. Promote academic growth, career awareness, assist in the referral process, and prepare students for post secondary planning. Schedule classes for students in grades 7-12. Provide transcripts for students in grades 7-12, as well as previous graduates of East Webster High School. Maintain and update student records according to school policy. School Test Coordinator: administer, train, and distribute testing materials for all state tests. Coordinate tutoring program school-wide.

- **2005-2007**

Disciplinary Committee Member

Duties: Interact with other committee members to recommend discipline that will be beneficial for both student and school.

- **2006-2007**

Supervisor for Mississippi State University Counselor Intern

Duties:

- **2007**

Staff Development Committee Member/Drop Out Convention Committee Member

PUBLICATIONS

1998: Mississippi Professional Educators

Feature Article: Webster County in Spotlight, “The Ties That Bind”

HONORS & AWARDS

- **1994-1996**

Golden Key National Honor Society

Gamma Beta Phi Society

Kappa Delta Phi Honor Society, Historian

Mississippi State Reading Council

Holmes Cultural Diversity Center Award

Mississippi State President Scholars

Black Awareness Program

United States Achievement Academy

Reading Certification

Program Chairman of the chapter of Mississippi Professional Educators at

Mississippi State University

President's Scholar

- **2002-2003**

Rotary Teacher

AFFILIATIONS

- **1996-Present**

Mississippi Professional Educators

REFERENCES

Available upon request

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Institution: Karing High School
- Interviewee: Students currently enrolled in the Gifted Program at Karing High School and former students who participated in the Gifted Program.
- Interviewer: Theresa Y. Dumas
- Protocol Sections:
- A: Background Information
 - B. Topics Regarding the Gifted Program
 - C. Topics Regarding Students' Perspectives
- Post Interview Comments:

Introductory Protocol:

I want to talk to you about the Gifted Program at Karing High School. My interest is to gain an awareness of your view of being a student in the Gifted Program. There is no right or wrong answers. I will be taking notes as well as using a tape recorder to record our conversation for consistency. You can cease the conversation if at any time you become uncomfortable with the topic. You are under no obligation to continue the interview. This interview will last approximately one hour, but I will want to talk to you again for approximately an hour sometime in the future. Your information will be kept in the strictest confidence. I will tell no one you participated in the interview. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Introduction:

Current and former students participating in the Gifted Program at Karing High School have been asked to participate in an Interview Protocol. This study focuses on the students' perspectives of being in the Gifted Program at their school. This study will contribute to filling the space where gifted students voices have been absent and to gain an understanding of the Gifted Program from the gifted students' point of view.

Background Information:

Your present grade

Your age

Your ethnicity

Your gender

The grade you entered the Gifted Program

Tell me a little bit about how you became involved in the Gifted Program.

Tell me about your schedule. Where is gifted in it?

A. Topics regarding the Gifted Program:

Grades:

Getting good grades is an important part of being a gifted student.

Share with me your thoughts on:

Being Influenced. If so, how? If not, why not?

Benefits of being a student in the gifted program

Assignments

Please share with me concerning the assignments that you have been assigned in the gifted program.

Please tell me about:

Completing extra assignments

Research projects

Group assignments

Working with other gifted students

Pressure to underachieve

Pressure to overachieve

Gifted Teacher:

Teachers have a big influence on students' success. Please share your thought on:

Teacher motivation

Teacher expectations

Challenging/interesting material

Future preparation

Content of coursework

C. Topics Regarding Students' Perspective

Gifted students are placed in an advanced classroom setting. Please share your thoughts on:

Being a gifted student

Labeling

Parental involvement

Future plans

Socially/Peers

Self esteem

Changes in thought processes/ if any

Environment

Post Interview Comments:

I know I have a college degree, but I have never been in a gifted program. I am interested in what it is like being in a gifted program. So, tell me what I need to know that I didn't ask.

Of all the things we discussed, what should I have asked you that I did not?

What do I need to know that you didn't tell me? Have we missed anything?

APPENDIX D
7-8 GRADES TRANSCRIPTION

Good morning and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to conduct this interview with me. I am working to obtain a Ph.D. at Belling State University in Townsville, USA.

During the course of this interview, there will be no right or wrong answers to the questions that I'm going to ask you. This is a voluntary interview. You can cease this conversation at any time. If at any time you feel as if you don't want to participate you will be under no obligation to continue the interview. It will not reflect any aspect of your character nor will it cause you to acquire bad grades. Your gifted teacher will not have access to the conversation that will take place during our interview. The interview will last approximately one hour but we will talk again for a final interview. Your information will be kept in the strictest of confidence. I will tell no one that you participated in the interview. I will use a tape recorder to record your answers because there will be times when we will say things and there is no way I will be able to write everything when you say it. Please feel free to share all of your thoughts both positive and negative. I am just as interested in your negative comments as I am in your positive comments. We will begin by an introduction of everyone.

In preparation for the interview, the students' chairs were placed in a semi-circle. I wanted to create an informal atmosphere to make certain the participants would be comfortable during the interview. Each student was given the opportunity to introduce himself/herself and was asked to answer several background questions. In order to clearly portray each student's response, I created a table to distinguish each participant's response. Table 1 below gives a visual picture indicating each student's answer.

Background Information

Table 1 7th & 8th grade students enrolled in the gifted program

Name	Grade	Gender	Race	Age	# of classes taking	Grade entered Gifted	Period taking Gifted	How did you get in Gifted
Santanna	8	Female	White	14	7	2nd	2nd	IQ Test
Buddy	8	Male	Black	14	7	2nd	2nd	IQ Test
John	8	Male	White	14	7	1st	6th	IQ Test
Marlee	7	Female	White	13	7	3rd	3rd	IQ Test
Brad	7	Male	White	13	7	2nd	6th	IQ Test
Glenda	7	Female	White	13	7	2nd	6th	IQ test
Wilson	7	Male	White	13	7	4th	6th	IQ Test
Barbara	7	Female	White	13	7	2nd	5th	IQ Test
Dale	8	Male	Black	14	7	4th	3rd	IQ test
Tina	8	Female	White	14	7	3rd	6th	IQ Test
Julie	7	Female	White	13	7	2nd	6th	IQ Test
James	8	Female	White	14	7	3rd	3rd	IQ Test
George	8	Male	White	14	7	3rd	3rd	IQ Test

First of all, the interview began by discussing the time frame indicative of when the students entered the gifted program. During the conversation, I found that only one student qualified to be in the gifted program as early as first grade. John stated “My first grade teacher thought I made good grades so she told my parents about the gifted program, and after that I took the test.” Six students qualified to be in the gifted program in the second grade, four students qualified in the third grade, and two students qualified in the fourth grade.

I started the next part of the interview by eliciting information about the procedure of becoming a participant in the gifted program. Most entered upon recommendation and taking an IQ test. Barbara stated, “My cousin was teaching at the

time, and she told me it was a good class to take so I decided that I wanted to take the test, and when I took it I passed it.” Wilson indicated, “I actually took the test in the second grade and I didn’t pass it. I was told that I didn’t have very good test taking skills for standardized tests and it took me a couple of years to pass the test.” Glenda commented, “My teacher submitted my name and I took the test.” George stated, “My teacher told my mother and she thought I was smart enough to be in the class. Brad, Marlee, Buddy, Santanna, and James also indicated that their teacher recommended them.

After hearing about the procedural process, and in order to gain more insight into the students’ perceptions of the gifted program, I asked them to give me a description of the gifted program. Everyone agreed with Glenda when she said “helpful, challenging, and difficult.” James indicated that it was “challenging.” On the other hand, Buddy stated “it keeps you busy. It keeps you working and it also helps your reading skills. After a period of silence, I stressed that I needed to know everyone’s thoughts. I also emphasized that they did not have to agree with everyone else’s opinions and that nothing would be repeated outside this forum. After that, James chipped in and said, “It’s challenging.” Dale’s description was “It was interesting.” Marlee pointed out, “Sometimes it can be difficult. You have to do certain things, and it really makes you use your head.” Brad continued with “It’s challenging and hard sometimes yet, at the same time, it’s worth the work”.

After listening and hearing other’s opinions, everyone appeared to understand the concept of the interview and appeared at ease with the direction of the interview. Our conversation continued with the discussion of acquiring and maintaining good grades. I

was told that the gifted program had been an influential factor in keeping their grades in tact. Barbara began the conversation. She said, "I am taking Algebra. Being in the gifted program has helped me prepare for the class." Glenda continued, "We learned to write paragraphs and stuff earlier in the gifted program than anybody else in the regular classroom. That really helped our reading skills. Some of us started writing paragraphs in the third grade. We started learning how to write them in the second grade." Glenda interrupted, "It also helped in our English class." Wilson interjected, "I would say it has helped me because the programs for gifted students suppose to be for smart students. Since I'm in gifted I should have above average grades." Wilson stated, "In our regular classes, we would start at the same time with everybody else but, we would complete our assignments first." In the end, by nodding their heads in agreement, everyone indicated that the gifted program had helped them to maintain good grades.

While the discussion of getting good grades continued, the conversation changed to the benefits or non-benefits of the gifted program as a part of their education. The majority of students indicated that being a part of the gifted program was beneficial to their education and it was an integral part of how they valued their education. "The gifted program helps you think harder," said George. Brad continued, "It benefited me by helping with my thinking skills. We've been writing a lot of paragraphs and reading a lot of books have helped me a lot." Moreover, Santanna said, "You can do work, but you can still have fun at the same time. Wilson replied, "It gives me sort of a head start and makes me feel like I'm prepared to make better grades. It also gives me a competitive edge. I'm very competitive. You can ask anybody here." Everyone chuckled at Wilson's last

comment about being very competitive. Glenda commented, “It helps me in other classes especially in pre-Algebra. All the Math and English skills we learn in gifted have also helped me in my Reading classes.” Appearing unsure how to answer, Dale looked up and said, “I agree with Glenda, it helps me in my math skills and reading skills.” Finally to get everyone’s opinion, I asked if there were any other comments. Julie, James, Buddy, and John said, “No, we agree with what has already been said.”

Wanting to gain as much information as possible from the students’ perspective, my next topic involved the completion of assignments in the regular education classroom and in the gifted classroom. Most of the students agreed that assignments in the gifted classroom are more strenuous than the classes in the regular classroom. John’s point of view was, “It wasn’t all that hard for me. I may take a little more time to finish my lesson but it’s not that hard for me. Barbara said, “The first nine weeks when I was in gifted I was always behind in my reading but now that I’ve gotten use to it I can usually complete everything in a day.” Glenda continued, “Sometimes you don’t mind doing the work because it’s fun when you do it, so you just go ahead and do it anyway. Even though it’s a lot of work you do it any way.” Dale agreed, “It’s not that bad, but sometimes it gets hectic.” Wilson also agreed, “The assignments are not all that hard, but some do take extra thinking. Our gifted teacher tricks us every now and then and gives us something really hard like mind benders.” George looked around as if pondering what has already been said, “Everybody in there wants to make good grades and if you mess up on some stuff there’s someone there to show you how to do it.” Marlee joined in, “You have lots of opportunities. It’s really a laid back environment. You work as hard as you can but, if

you don't get through she lets you go back and finish it." Buddy continued, "I would say that it's not that hard but some things are hard. The assignments that our gifted teacher gives us help in reading, writing, and math as well as other classes. Most of the stuff we do is fun." John commented, "If you complete all your assignments, almost every Friday you get the opportunity to play games and things. These games are something that really makes you think. You just can't go around playing trivial games." At the end of this part of the conversation Santanna said, "I think our gifted teacher does give us hard work and it does take time to finish it, but I think if you put your mind to it you should get through with it that day. We are never given work that takes a long time." Their silence appeared as an indication that this part of the discussion was over.

When the previous discussion ended, I forged ahead to gain the students' perception of completing research projects. Research projects are a component of the instructional curriculum of the gifted program. The students indicated that everyone enrolled in gifted were required to complete some form of research project. Some of the students could only remember bits and pieces about their previous projects while others could not remember anything. At this point, Dale couldn't think of anything that he had completed. However, Buddy could remember completing a project in the second grade. He said, "When we were in second grade, we had to complete a project about the Presidents. We began by looking up information about them and organizing it. At this time I thought it was hard work, but when I got to third grade I had to complete more advanced and more educational work." John said that he thought some of the research projects were "kind of fun." After that Marlee began to tell me about her experience, "In

the sixth grade we had to do power point presentations on different subjects. It was fun to do those because we got to design and draw and really get in to it and make it kind of fun.” Brad, on the other hand, didn’t feel the same as the other students when he first began being a part of the gifted program. He said, “Back then when we had to do the thing about presidents, I didn’t like doing it because I didn’t like reading and we had to look up all this information in the encyclopedia. But now it seems like I would rather do that instead of seat work.”

Before I broached the next topic, I wanted to make certain that everyone had been given the opportunity to respond. So, I reiterated that this was an open forum and everyone could voice his or her opinions. The students appeared to understand what I said, so we began discussing their perception of working with other students in a group setting. The consensus of the group was that working in groups could be chaotic at times, but overall working together could be a good thing. Some students like working in groups whereas others preferred to work alone. This part of the conversation began with Julie giving her input. She simply stated, “I like working in groups.” James agreed with Julie, “I like working in groups too. I like to hear what everybody else has to say.” George on the other hand said, “I have friends that I like to work with all the time. Sometimes our gifted teacher lets us work with people we like to work with and sometimes she doesn’t.” With only a few students to contend with in the same gifted class Santanna interjected, “I like group work because there are only four people in my class. I’m always with the same girls so it’s a lot easier. In my other classes I might get in groups with people who don’t do the work and I end up doing it all. In the gifted class, it’s a lot different. Gifted

students actually want to do the work and want to do it right.” Buddy’s opinion was the same as James and Santanna. He said, “It’s fun and it helps with thinking skills. It helps in getting along with people. But, in Algebra I, I would rather work by myself than work with other people. Most of the people in my period don’t like to do what they need to do. They sit there and ask me questions and expect me to give the answers. In gifted class it’s different because everybody does what they need to do.”

On the other hand, Buddy remarked, “I don’t like it when other students won’t complete their work, but I usually help them because I know that’s the right thing to do but I sure don’t like it. I’d rather them earn it on their own.” John’s thoughts were similar to Buddy. “If everyone in the group had a certain job that they are supposed to do it wouldn’t be bad. You could still make a fair grade and do an o.k job.”

In addition to working with other students in a group setting, the participants told me that sometimes they were placed with students who needed encouragement to complete the assigned tasks. Although, some students had the incentive to become successful, they did not display the same work incentive as the gifted students. John’s perspective was “Well some of the people I’ve worked with in my regular classes still won’t do their work and I’m not going to ask them to do it. I usually end up doing it myself if that’s what it takes to make a good grade. It really doesn’t bother me. I just sit there and tell myself I am going to make a good grade.” Brad and Robert shared similar points of view with John.

On the other hand, Marlee said, “I think working in a group is a good way to share ideas on subjects you are working on that normally if you weren’t in a group and

were by yourself you wouldn't think of some things." Brad continued, "Group work is a real good thing to do. Like Robert said, It helps your skills and you get done quicker with your work. It's more than likely to be a better project because a lot of people were working together on it." Glenda's opinion was totally different from the other students' opinion. "Personally", said Glenda, "I don't work well in groups. I'll have an idea and someone will disagree with it, and I don't like when people disagree with my ideas." John concluded, "When we are working in groups, there are a lot of people with artistic views that some people just kind of use. I think if you try hard enough you can survive some people ideas."

At this point we ended the previous conversation and began discussing about being in the gifted program and if and how it had prepared them in their dealings with others who disagreed with their point of view. Buddy said, "Being in gifted helps with leadership skills and helps you to compromise and come to a solution to the problem. George, John and Brad concurred, "Gifted helps us a lot in dealing with others who disagree with us." Wilson, Barbara, and Dale's perspective followed along the same line as the others' perspective. Wilson said, "I really like working in groups for some reason. I don't know what it is. Working alone or individually can become frustrating and you don't know what to do. Working in a group helps other students to look to you for an idea. You can work together to devise a solution even when they disagree with you." At the same time, Barbara's perspective was, "I like working in groups. But, I would just rather work with people who are my friends than people I don't get along with because when we disagree we are not able to improvise but with my friends we are able to

improvise and do something with our ideas together.” Everyone agreed with the exception of Glenda, when Dale concluded, “Everyone will disagree at some point but I think it’s easier to work in groups. You can divide the work up in sections and get it done quicker.”

Our conversation continued as we began talking about the group assignments that they had been given to complete this year. I was told that the gifted teacher assigned various group projects and each gifted student is responsible for its completion. Santanna remembered reading a book and having to carry out several activities that coincided with the book. She said, “We had to read a book where the father of the children in the book is a director. He usually directs big Broadway plays but now he’s directing a play in a small town. We had to complete a banner like a theater banner that said, “The sound of music” and it had to show what the play was about, and we had to list information about the play. It was really fun to do. I like doing stuff like that because I am very creative, and it was really fun to do.” Brad could remember having to complete a project, but he really couldn’t remember what the project included because it was done during the first nine weeks of school.

Without intending to do so, the conversation led to the issue of reading silently or orally. The students began mumbling about reading and what part reading played in being gifted. “While completing our projects” John said, “Every other day we have to read. Some classes read aloud and some read silently. To be honest if some read silently they would never read.” “I like reading silently because I read faster than some people and I like to finish my work and get it over with” said Marlee. “I like reading silently because

there are some people who have trouble reading than other people, and I don't like to hear them read because it messes up my train of thought when I'm reading. So I'd just rather read silently," continued Glenda. On the other hand, Barbara liked reading for a different reason. "I like reading aloud, but I'm probably the only person in the gifted class that read slow. I like to read at my own pace and that was the reason I was so behind the first nine weeks." Santanna seemed to think, "Reading orally helps comprehension skills. "We just learn so much from each other when we read because we discuss as we go along." John liked reading silently because, "I can read fast and some students say the wrong word when they are reading." Dale laughed, "John can read faster than I can read." The other students joined in the laughter. As the laughter subsided, Dale and Buddy both agreed that a few of them love to compete. According to John, "We try to hurry up and get done. Other people who follow along in the book get lost because they're trying to keep up with us. But, I talk faster normally than anybody in the class."

Just as reading was a major component of the gifted program, working with other gifted students was also an important factor. Everyone appeared to have a different opinion about working with his or her gifted peers. George said, "Some gifted students are brainiacs. They act smarter than other people while some people are slow readers and some people read too fast." Barbara expressed, "I like working with other gifted people. Its just they have a problem with me. It's hard for us to get our work done if we are working together on something. We just don't get along. It doesn't work out too well." However, Buddy's description of working with other gifted students took another angle. He said, "To me working with other gifted students is like having Sunday School at

church. Everybody is on the same level, and one person might do one thing, and another person will do another thing. So when you're through, you learn more than one thing because if you work by yourself you might just see that one thing. Somebody else might see another." Like Buddy said, "Especially in our class, we pretty much all like working together. All four of us interact pretty well because we have been in that particular class for so long and in each other classes for so long, I think it just helps us all to be on the same level. When you're in other classes and you're faster and they're slower, they don't understand it. It's hard to stay on track because you want to go on. You get bored and they're still trying to get it. And it's just hard to stay on track," exclaimed Santanna. Again, Buddy said, "I feel the same way. It's a lot of people I don't want to call dumb or anything, but some people don't grasp things as quick as others. That's how I felt when I was in band my junior high year. I was doing things pretty much faster than everybody else. It's frustrating to me to work with people who are not on the same level as I am. But, when we work together with the people who are not on the same level, I think it still helps with people skills and how to deal with others." As soon as Buddy finished speaking, James said, "I agree with both of them. They're not stupid, but their comprehension skills aren't as good as working with students who are gifted." Brad continued, "Other gifted students drive you to do better. It helps when you're in a class with four people and they're on the same level as you." Nevertheless, Julie expressed the opposite from everyone else. She said, "It's frustrating to work with other gifted students."

Our former discussion turned from working with other gifted students to the application of performing at his/her best potential. Some of the students said that they didn't work to achieve their full potential because they wanted to remain a part of the crowd. However, Santanna didn't quite agree with some of the other students. She said, "I feel that I am completely opposite from that. I feel like God made me smart for a reason. He made me where I can comprehend faster. I want to use what God gave me and I want to make people see that I can comprehend stuff and that's how I am and that's part of my personality." "I agree with that too," said Buddy. "I feel that I have to achieve more than what is expected, because I believe we should try to achieve more than average. We should try and be above average as a gifted student. If God gave it to you, you should use it because it's for a reason and most people know me. I'm pretty competitive. They know how I am in my academics and they know that when we get report cards I want all A's or one B or I want high A's or low A's." I also agree," said John. "I mean, I know I don't do as well as I could, but if I actually apply myself a little more I would do much better. I think I do fair. I've got to pull up some of my grades, but I'm not going to underachieve. I'm going to do as well as I can." "I agree with all of them," said Wilson. "I have very high expectations. My parents make me. They tell me I need to do this because it's going to help later on. I have so many gifts and being in the gifted program is only one of them. I just want to use my gift." Suddenly, Barbara said, "I think being in gifted has helped me to where I want to make 100 averages on every thing. I want to make 100 all the time. My parents want me to do that too, but I'm not just doing it for them. I'm doing it for myself." Brad stated, "You should always do your best

academically no matter if you're smart, or if you're slower than other people because if you do your best academically, you could get college scholarships." "I have to agree with Buddy," said George. He and I always compete. If he gets an "A" or a high "A" I get like a 95. He gets bragging rights if he beats me. If I get a high "A" I get bragging rights." Santanna looked up and said, "In our grade there are some people who are really really competitive. Buddy, John and I all want to beat each other and we all want to have highest or second highest average. We want to be the top three."

With Santanna's last comment embedded in my mind, as well as the opinions of the other students, I felt the need to find out what was so special about being a gifted student. Since, I never had the pleasure or displeasure of participating in a gifted program, I asked the students to share their thoughts on the significance of being in the gifted program. Glenda told me that the gifted program has been a positive experience for her. She said, "I think the gifted program should extend through the 12th grade because it has helped us this far, and it will also help us when we have to complete our Subject Area Tests." "Brad's experience was also similar to Glenda's. "Gifted is a good class to take if you're academically prepared for it. It also helps in other classes. I'm in Pre-Algebra, and it has really helped me comprehend Algebra better than I thought I would be able." "Being in this interview has helped me especially to express my thoughts and hear other people thoughts, and I find that I feel the same way that they feel about being gifted. I never really thought about how I felt until now," said Marlee. John didn't think along the same lines as Glenda. He said, "I don't really think gifted should extend to the 12th grade. I think there should be more of an opportunity to express our creative side." Santanna

agreed with John, “I think it has created an outlet for us, but since we are in such a small town and a small school, we don’t have as much opportunities to be creative. We don’t have a lot of money, and we don’t have the supplies and the money to pay for opportunities like that to be creative.” John rejoined the conversation, “I feel the same way that Santanna does about the money, and how we are a small school that does not support creativity. This school doesn’t have sufficient financial backing.” As George began to speak, Buddy interrupted, “I think gifted has a lot of benefits. It helps on basic classroom activities, it gives individual leadership skills and compromising skills and it’s very helpful. Finally, George said, “As other students said, “People are going to ask you questions because you are in the gifted class and sometimes you might not have the answer to help them out.” I think gifted is supposed to be the class for smart students. Everybody else counts on you to be smart because they think you are smart” concluded James.

Eventually, the conversation about the significance of being a gifted student ended, and a discussion about the influence from the gifted teacher began to emerge. Barbara told me that one way the gifted teacher has affected her classroom performance is by teaching her to write essays. Barbara said, “We write a lot in gifted and that will help me on my Subject Area Test when I am in high school. Our gifted teacher is teaching us to write essays that include five paragraphs.” According to Buddy, “Our gifted teacher also encourages us to be successful.” “Yes,” agreed John. “We are given rewards that include extra credit.” “My gifted teacher gives me confidence by telling me if I work hard I can be anything I want to be” said Dale. “I agree,” said Wilson, “Our

gifted teacher really supports us.” Assignments in the gifted classroom can become challenging and tedious. To meet these challenges Marlee meets her teachers’ expectations by working harder and trying to complete the work. She said, “When we are given hard assignments, our teacher gives us time to complete it.” “I try to do a little bit more,” said John. “The first thing I do is, I begin thinking of all my resources,” exclaimed Tina. “Exactly,” said John. “I would use the most reliable resource that I had to complete the assignment.”

In addition, George said, “One way our teacher prepares us for life beyond high school is by taking trips.” The trips we take help us see and learn more. It’s hands-on so we can get more out of it.” “We have traveled to see the Pyramid exhibit when it was in Memphis, Tennessee. Items in the exhibit were delivered from different museums from all over the country and internationally. It was really nice to see all that and see,” said Wilson. Our gifted teacher uses different topics and taking us on trips helps us learn more about that topic. The trips have helped more than being in the classroom,” said Barbara. “Not only are we given the opportunity to take trips but we are given work in class that helps us in math, writing, and reading. It also helps us to stimulate our brains and learn test-taking skills. Our teacher assigns books to read that helps us learn to be better readers,” concluded Buddy. Everybody laughed as they all agree taking trips was one of the best parts of being in the gifted program. They also emphasized that the coursework that they get beforehand prepared them for taking the trip.

After the lengthy discussion about taking trips subsided, I wanted to find out about the students’ perceptions about being identified as a gifted student. Most of the

students didn't mind having the title of being a gifted student. Some even thought of it as an honor. Glenda responded, "I think it actually helps because you might be in a regular classroom setting where you don't learn as much." Marlee continued, "I think it's special because some people really wish they could be smart." George stated, "I like being label as gifted and smart but, I just want everybody to know that I'm a regular person like they are." Buddy's responded, "It is an honor for others to recognize your ability and to know that you think faster. Other students will realize that I'm smart and they will give me respect. It helps to identify who are gifted." On the other hand, Wilson said, "If you're gifted, everybody expects more from you." "I like being in gifted class" expressed Tina. "It makes me feel good when everybody is like oh! She is smart. She's in gifted but, sometimes people will say she's smart don't talk to her." However, Brad said, "Sometimes, people will come to me because they know I'm smart. You get tired of people coming to you asking you to do stuff that they can do for themselves." Santanna appeared torn. She couldn't decide if she preferred to be labeled or not. "I like it, and then I don't like it because some people will say, Oh! She's nerdy. Let's not hang out with her. But, I like it because it makes me feel good. It makes me strive in my other classes." At the end of this conversation, I was told that the students felt as if they were being used by other students when helping with their work. John stated, "We just go on and do the work. I do it out of boredom." But Santanna, Tina and Glenda stated, "We do the work because we just don't want to cause conflict." Barbara and Tina share similar views. Barbara said "I just stay the same. I'm not going to hide that I'm smart. If they have a problem with it, I can't help it." Tina finished, "You shouldn't try to dumb yourself

down. Other students may feel inferior. I think that God made you smarter for a reason and that you shouldn't hide it or dumb yourself down. When I asked Julie if she wanted to comment, she just shook her head as if she was indicating that she didn't have a comment.

From the previous conversation, I learned that sometimes students are pressured to perform in a certain manner. The students indicated that being identified or defined as a gifted student could become a positive or negative factor dealing with their level of self-confidence. As a result of wanting to obtain a better grasp of the situation, I asked the students for their opinions. John's responded, "I don't know why, but it gives you a feeling of superiority because you are smarter than other students." "In some ways it does make you feel like you're superior but when you make a bad grade you don't think you are good enough," stated Wilson. George's responded, "I don't like it when people think just because we're in gifted that we think we are better than them." But John intervened, "We are not bragging, but we are smart." Tina agreed with John, "It makes you feel good because you know you're good and smart but not that you're better than others." "It makes me feel good and lets me know that I want to be a successful person one day," concluded Marlee. No one else commented on the issue of self-esteem.

Finally, our interviews came to an end. I wanted to know if there was anything else they wanted to tell me." In order to accomplish my goal of finding out their perspective, I said, "I know that I'm a college student and there are some things that I know about the gifted program, but there are some things that I don't know about the gifted program. I've never been in a gifted program. I've never sat in a gifted class nor

have I been under gifted instruction; therefore I am interested in what it is like being in the gifted program. Is there anything that you would like to tell me that I have not already asked you about the gifted class, the gifted program, your class work, or anything that you can think of that I have left out of our conversation? Tina replied, "Being in gifted is different than your other classes because the discussions get deeper. I'm not trying to say we are better than any one, but, it's more of a higher intelligence conversation." John continued, "It is a more controlled environment." "Yes," said Wilson. "You look forward to your class." George quickly stated, "Gifted puts you in a better position for college." Buddy responded, "I think gifted gives you a mature route with people on your own level. I'm not trying to say we are higher or better, but when you are in the gifted program, it kind of makes you feel superior and secure. When you are around other gifted students it is better because you learn more and because we dig deeper into our subjects. In other classes some students are not concerned with getting to the bottom of things. But when you are in gifted it really helps you solve problems. I think most of us are competitive." Santanna agreed with Buddy. She said, "In gifted, behavior is not really a problem, and you can learn more, because in regular classes there are a lot people and they don't want to be in school. They don't want to learn and they don't really care about school. They don't think they're going anywhere but this school. But, in gifted behavior is not really an issue, because there are people in gifted who really want to learn. They don't care about looking cool." George continued, "When you're in gifted, you get smarter and smarter, but some people get angry that they are not in gifted because they think that they are as smart as you are. When we play sports, the only thing that other

students say is ‘He is smart, he’s not going to do well’. But, we can play football as well as anyone else and be smart at the same time.” “When you are in gifted, and you get ready to go to college, they will look back on your record and see that you have been in gifted and they will know that you are academically higher than other people. You have a better chance for scholarships too,” said James. “In gifted we’re just around each other and we’re all on the same level so we don’t have to be ashamed or smarter or that we learn better or anything like that. We’re all the same in there” stated Barbara. Moreover, Glenda stated, “There are some things we did in gifted that involved a lot of thinking. I think it prepares you to make tough choices. It helps you through life more than any other class would.” Wilson included, “It allows more liberties than many other classes. John and Tina made the last two comments. John concluded, “Gifted teachers aren’t usually as strict as other teachers. They’re a little bit more lenient. They have a more relaxed environment. It makes it easier.” Tina’s commented, “Like John said, you’re not boxed in. You don’t have as many rules. Because of the behavior issue you don’t goof off in gifted. So there are not as many rules and you have more creative freedom. It helps you learn how to be creative and you learn more.”

At the end of the second interview with the 7th and 8th grade participants, I thanked everyone for his or her input, honesty, and patience. The interviews ended. I bid everyone farewell and I returned the room to its original state and collected the taped recordings.

APPENDIX E
11-12 GRADES TRANSCRIPTION

The following information is the results of the data collected from the interview transcriptions with students in grades 11-12.

Good morning and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to conduct this interview with me. I am working to obtain a Ph.D. at Bellingin State University in Townsville, USA.

During the course of this interview there will be no right or wrong answers to the questions that I'm going to ask you. This is a voluntary interview. You can cease this conversation at any time. If at any time you feel as if you don't want to participate you will be under no obligation to continue the interview. It will not reflect upon any aspect of your character nor will it cause you to acquire bad grades. Your gifted teacher will not have access to the conversation that will take place during our interview. The interview will last approximately one hour but we will talk again for a final interview. Your information will be kept in the strictest of confidence. I will tell no one that you participated in the interview. I will use a tape recorder to record your answers because there will be times when we will say things and there is no way I will be able to write everything when you say it. Please feel free to share all your thoughts both positive and negative. I am just as interested in your negative comments as I am in your positive comments. We will begin by an introduction of everyone.

First and foremost, in preparation for the interview, I placed the students' chairs in a semi-circle. I wanted to create an informal atmosphere to make certain the participants would feel at ease during the interview. The interview began with each student introducing himself/herself. After the initial interview, I asked the participants to

respond to several demographic questions. In order to clearly portray and pinpoint the importance of each student's response, I created a table to distinguish each participant's response. Table 2 below gives a visual picture indicating each student's answer.

Table 2. 11th & 12th grade students previously enrolled in the gifted program

Name	Grade	Gender	Race	Age	# of classes taking	Grade entered Gifted	Period taking Gifted	How did you get in Gifted
Jane	11	Female	White	16	6	2nd	No Gifted Class	IQ test
Derrick	12	Male	Black	17	7	7th	No Gifted Class	IQ test
Susan	12	Female	White	17	6	2nd	No Gifted Class	IQ test
Joann	12	Female	White	17	6	2nd	No Gifted Class	IQ test
Jill	12	Female	White	17	6	2nd	No Gifted Class	IQ test
Cierra	11	Female	White	16	7	2nd	No Gifted Class	I Q test

After gaining the demographic responses that I needed from each student, I wanted to know the procedure of how he/she entered the gifted program. So, each student explained how he/she first became a participant in the gifted program. I found that everyone entered the gifted program in the second grade after taking the IQ test in the first grade with the exception of one student. Jane, Susan, Joann, Jill, and Cierra first

participated in the gifted program when they entered the second grade. Derrick moved from another state and did not participate in the gifted program until he entered seventh grade. There were no students presently enrolled in the gifted program because the program ends after students complete the eighth grade. I was told the only other option for these gifted students were to take Advance Placement classes. Advance Placement classes offer students in grades nine through twelve an opportunity to take college level courses while being enrolled in high school. The AP class that was being taught when I conducted this study was AP Biology. Three students were enrolled in AP Biology, while the other three students were enrolled in regular education classes. Jill, Joann, and Cierra were enrolled in AP Biology. Derrick, Jane, and Susan were enrolled in regular education classes.

In addition to obtaining knowledge about the entrance process, I also wanted to find out how the participants would describe the gifted program. At this point, I asked the students for one word that would describe the gifted program. Four students responded to this inquiry. The other two students nodded in agreement with what had been said. Derrick and Susan said, "Challenging." Jane's replied, "Frustrating. You really have to apply yourself." Joann continued, "In other classes you just study and take a test but in gifted, you had to do stuff that really challenged you." Derrick wrapped it up, "It taught you to find new ways to think and solve problems." At this point, I asked if there were any more comments, but everyone agreed that there was not anything else that they wanted to say.

After waiting several minutes for more comments, I continued with my Interview Protocol. As the students appeared to become more comfortable with the discussion, I took this opportunity to approach the topic of the grades. I wanted to find out if grades were an important aspect of being a participant in the gifted program. The students gave a unanimous agreement that getting good grades was an essential part of being in the gifted program. In fact, each student who responded gave his/her interpretation of why getting good grades was an important issue. Jane was the first student to respond to the topic. She said, "It was kind of encouraging. You know being in the gifted class made you strive harder to do better in your other classes." Joann continued, "When you are in the gifted class and other students are not, you should be the person who makes good grades, or want to make better grades than other people who are not in gifted because you know you took the test to be in there. When you have a high IQ, you should use what you have to make better grades." In addition, Cierra said, "Everybody expects you to make good grades." Jill appeared to laugh. She said, "I was going to say the same thing that Cierra said." The conversation ended with Jane appearing to shrug indicating that she had no comment on this subject.

After a few moments of silence, I initiated the issue of completing extra assignments in the gifted program. The focus at this moment was on the students' perception of having to complete assignments in regular education classes as well as assignments in gifted classes. There were a variety of different opinions. For example, Joann started by saying, "It didn't really bother me. It was just another class that I had to deal with." On the other hand, Cierra said, "I remember when I was in third grade and I

was at that age where I wanted to play a lot. I was in gifted class on a specific day and I would have a lot of homework that night. It got really frustrating after a couple of weeks of it. But I realized it was helping in the long run so I did it anyway.” Jill continued, “In elementary school, I think it was harder having extra work. I would miss the whole day of school to go to the gifted class and then I’d have to complete all of the other homework that was given for that day. I thought it should be a certain time during the day or something, not a whole day out of school once a week. It is hard to catch up.” Susan joined in, “It was hard in elementary school but in the fifth grade, we just had gifted class during a certain time during the day. You didn’t miss a whole day of regular classes. In junior high, it was a lot easier just having gifted class during one period. It was just like regular class for us.” Jane agreed, “It made it a lot easier.” As I stated earlier, Derrick was the only student who enrolled in the gifted program in the seventh grade. He said, “Since, I started in the seventh grade, I only took a gifted class for one period. It wasn’t nearly as bad or as boring as the Reading class the other students had to go to. So I didn’t mind it at all.” Jill continued, “It really wasn’t boring. I don’t remember having to take anything home. Usually our projects were hands-on in the classroom.” Susan nodded as if in agreement and said, “And the work was fun that we did because our gifted teacher made it fun.” After the last comment was made, some of the students appeared to be thinking about something else that they wanted to say to contribute to the conversation, but no one said a word. This component of the conversation came to a close.

After listening to the students’ perceptions of the description, grades, and assignments in the gifted program, the next item that I wanted to address was the

instructional curriculum as a part of the gifted program. Since research is an instructional objective of the gifted program, I asked the students to enlighten me about some of the research projects that they had been assigned to complete in gifted class. The students appeared to become excited as they recalled details about some of the projects that they had completed. Jill quickly said, "In elementary school we did a project every week. We had a little crate and it had folders in it. During one year we did a project about Presidents and during another year we did a project on other famous people. We had to go through the folder and select a project. The project selection could not be about something or someone who we already knew. It had to be about somebody we had never done before. We had to get the information from the encyclopedia and we had to read about it. After, we had to write a report on what we had read." Then, Susan said, "One time we did a study on Ancient Egyptians. One of the things we did while studying about Egyptians was making Egyptian money as well as other Egyptian artifacts." Jane smiled, "The Egyptian project was cool." "Yeah," said Susan, "We made artifacts out of paper mache." Joann continued, "We learned a lot about Ancient Egyptians. One year we completed a project about NASCAR. Our gifted teacher had gone to the NASCAR races during the summer, and she got an opportunity to ride in the cars and stuff. When she came back to school, she taught us a lot about NASCAR and racing. We did a lot of stuff on that." As the conversation continued, Jane said, "We also learned about Japan one year." Everyone agreed when Derrick said, "The projects that we completed were very interesting." Furthermore, Joann remarked, "It has helped with what we need to have in the classroom with what courses we are taking." Derrick, Jill, and Joann agreed that the

gifted program provided more in-depth study of research compared to the regular classroom. Susan said, "It is more than an assignment. We have done a lot of critical thinking and brain building skills." Cierra interjected, "It seems like we try a lot harder than other students do." Joann concluded, "I think it was easier for us to learn how to do the research. It was only a few of us in gifted class and the gifted teacher could take time to really show us how to do something. It was more one on one than in the regular classroom."

In view of the fact that the students appeared to be excited about the discussion of their research projects, there came a point where the conversation moved in a different direction. I didn't want to lose the rapport that had been established, but after a period of time the topic turned from research projects to the students' perceptions of working with other students as part of a group. During this conversation, I found that there were mixed opinions about working in groups. Cierra said, "Being in groups in the gifted class was a lot better than it was in the regular classroom. Other kids in our group would say, 'I was in the group with the smart kids.' Then you would end up doing everything. In gifted everybody was smart so you had an easier time. You didn't do all the work by yourself." Everybody laughed at Cierra's comments. Jill said, "It always stressed me out being in groups in the regular class because other students always wanted you to be in their group. They would always asked you to be in their group and you had to sort of be a natural born leader because if you were not, your group would bring you down and you didn't want a bad grade. So you took up the slack so you could have a good grade." Anna continued, "Being in the gifted class made you want to do group work. You wanted to be

the one to figure it out instead of the people that were with you. You wanted to be the smarter one. You always wanted to get done first.” Laughing, Susan said, “The joy in gifted is you had somebody to fall back on to help you figure something out.” Joann continued, “You just knew there were people trying as hard as you.” Furthermore, said Derrick, “There was always someone there. Some people specialize in different subjects than others. It was a lot easier to know that there was someone who could help me learn something a lot better than I actually was learning.” Up until this point Jane had not commented, so I asked her to give me her perspective and she laughed and said, “Everybody has already said everything I was going to say.”

With the previous topics and the students’ responses ever present in my mind, a backdrop demonstrating a willingness to divulge their perceptions on other topics concerning the gifted program began to take shape. Taking advantage of the students’ enthusiasm, I steered the conversation to their perceptions of the benefits or non-benefits of the gifted program. The consensus of each participant in the study was that being in the gifted program had been beneficial in his or her education. Jane said, “I really and truly feel like it made me smarter. I read so much better than other people. Math is not hard for me because of what we had to do in gifted. Right now those projects that we had to do in elementary school such as the Presidents and stuff doesn’t bother me because being in gifted has helped me with other skills.” Derrick added, “I say self-esteem. It helped my self-esteem a lot because it showed me that I’m just as good as everyone else. People judge you. It helped because I didn’t have to worry about being the only guy in the class. Someone out there understood me for having the same kind of IQ that they

have.” Susan said, “Being in gifted makes you think more. It improves your thinking ability. You can think deeper by doing different activities that can really challenge you.” Everyone appeared to agree with what had been said. Then, Jill began talking about how being in gifted had been a benefit for her while taking Trigonometry and other classes. She vigorously stated, “The work we did in gifted was a lot more challenging and that made you know you could figure it (the problem) out. You figured it out in gifted and you knew if you just try you could figure it out in the regular classroom.” Susan agreed, “There’s got to be a solution. You just got to take your time and try to figure it out. Everyone nodded in agreement. Joann piped in, “I like to be challenged, but if I don’t think I can do it, I will go to another gifted student to help me figure it out. In gifted you knew there were answers to a problem, you just had to keep working and keep working on it. It really showed me how not to give up and keep trying. The answer was there.” Jill agreed, “It helped me to see like she said. It helps you see the solution before you almost know what the answer is. You just have to figure out how to get there. It also helped me to see the picture as a whole not just a bunch of puzzle pieces. I see it as one big picture. Each individual piece is put together to make one big picture. Others see it as a big project but, I can see it before I get through.” As the conversation continued to flow, I glanced around the room. Cierra exclaimed, “You can figure out stuff like when our Math teacher says something about shapes and analysis, I’ll try to work the problem in different ways. I can find about six different ways to answer a problem. I found out that you don’t have to just do it one way to figure something out in order to get the same answer. You can get the right answer without going through every step like your teacher

told you. A lot of times I'm pretty competitive, and I like to compete pretty bad by having the best project and everything. I think I strive more to impress people. If somebody had a project with flashing lights, I would want to do more to make mine better. You had to be competitive. Everybody else was just as smart as you are so you had to work hard. Working the problem different than the regular procedure was not usually a problem. She continued, "Nobody's really had a problem with that so far. But sometimes they'll ask how you did that. I don't know, I just did it. A lot of the time it doesn't bother a lot of the teachers. Sometimes they will tell me that is not the way I want you to do it. I mean I can always do it the way they want me to do it." The other participants nodded and smiled with affirmation. All in all, it appeared that the benefits outweighed the non-benefits.

Our next topic focused on working with other gifted students. These were students who excelled as well or better than their other gifted classmates. Susan was the first to reply. She said, "Everybody always wanted to race and figure out the mindbender first. They were always looking just to race. You are always looking constantly at the person sitting next to you to see if they've got something you don't have. We were always trying to beat somebody because you know everybody in that classroom was so smart and you wanted to feel like the smartest one. Just for one activity, you just wanted to beat everybody so bad." While everybody laughed at Susan's comment, Derrick said, "You got bragging rights about everything when you're the first to finish an activity." Everybody continued laughing. Susan exclaimed, "Oh yeah, as Susan said," declared Jane, "It is very competitive. You always wanted to finish first and if you didn't you had

to finish first on the next activity.” Laughingly, Susan said, “Or second.” Jane continued, “Or close to third.” Joann, Jill, and Cierra laughed appearing to nod their heads in agreement. Again Susan laughed and said, “Real close to third.” Jane joined in, “You didn’t want to be last.” Susan commented again, “Yeah second or first.” Derrick laughed and said, “Yeah.” “If you were the last person to take your paper to the teacher’s desk, you kinda sat by yourself that day with your head hung low,” said Susan.

Everybody laughed. Jane said, “Sometimes we would take our work home if we didn’t finish it just so we wouldn’t have to work on it the next day.” Since Jill had not commented thus far, I asked for her thoughts. Jill responded, “It’s different from anything else you’ll ever do, cause like somebody said it’s more competitive, but it also helps you see things a different way. It helps you not be so one track-minded. It also helps you to go along with other people and makes you a people person. Say you’re an introvert, someone who sits there and does all his work. Now, he/she can be the smartest person in the class, but if he/she doesn’t have people skills, he/she’s not going to get very far. And, when you’re working with five or six gifted people it helps to straighten that out, because you have to share what you know especially in the gifted class. You have to share because if you don’t, you’re not contributing anything.” Joann spoke up and said, “Like they said, it was competitive. I mean in our class, if you didn’t get it or you’re having trouble somebody’s going to help you and they’re not going to act like you’re stupid. They are going to be nice and they are going to help you get through it and to get finished. I mean you learn to work with each other.” Everybody agreed with Jill. Joann continued, “They are going to help you and you learn to work around that and kind of

step to the side. Sometimes, people would get upset if they couldn't figure out something. So, you got to be patient. Take it easy." Derrick said, "I mean even though we were competitive, we were still friends in the end. We did help out when others needed help because I needed help all the time." Everybody laughed at Derrick's comment. Joann said, "You are really good friends with all the people in your gifted class. When you are in gifted class it is just gifted students, so you got to be friends and we are all pretty good friends now. Derrick and Jane concluded by agreeing with Joann.

Since working with other gifted students appeared to pose little problems, one student compared it to having a family. Family members help each other in times of need. It seemed as if the gifted program provided a helping hand for its student participants. "Our gifted class was like a family," remarked Derrick. "We are so close to each other. There were only ten people in a classroom versus twenty-five or twenty-six in the regular classroom," continued Susan. "There were not many people in our class," said Jane. Jill remarked, "We were just like a real family." At this point Derrick said, "There weren't any other people who could relate to us like we did with each other." "Yeah," said Jill, Susan, and Cierra. "And our gifted teacher wouldn't let us work with the same people in group work. She would make us pick somebody different. If she didn't, it would be the same two or three people wanting to work together. Sometimes she would switch it up or make us work with other people to see their point of view than just the same people all the time," continued Susan. At that point, Cierra stated, "I hated it when other students would ask what you got on your report card. I would tell them my grades and they would say 'I hate you' and I would say 'you shouldn't ask.' " Everybody appeared to agree.

They laughed and nodded their heads. Furthermore, Jill said, “When we were in gifted, there was always encouragement. People were constantly saying ‘that’s o.k. you can get it the next time, don’t give up.’ In the regular classroom when you don’t get something right other students were like ‘Huh’ cause they know you’re suppose to be smarter, and if you can’t figure it out, they think it’s funny.” While Jill was still talking, Derrick and Susan murmured, “The other students would laugh and say that we thought you were smart and you can’t do it.” “In gifted, it wasn’t like that. It was well, you can try and do it better the next time. Do it like this or our gifted teacher would show us how to do it. It was just a lot more encouraging,” remarked Susan.

While, the consensus of being in gifted appeared to be like a family, some gifted students received negative comments from other non-gifted students. So, I wanted to know if comments made by other people made them want to hide their potential and become complacent and not perform to their full capabilities. Susan responded, “People think we’re nerds.” Everybody laughed and made gestures in agreement. Lara looked upward while Cierra looked over at Jill and nodded in agreement. Susan continued, “They say you’re a nerd and it makes you want to procrastinate and wait until the last minute to do stuff so people won’t say things like ‘gosh you did that two weeks in advance. You are so weird.’ People are like that just because they wait until the last minute and they think everybody else should wait.” On the other hand, Joann said, “I don’t think I’ve ever been pressured. Yeah, people make fun of me, but that doesn’t affect me. If they make fun of me, it makes me want to do even more. If they make fun of

me for doing my work, then I'm going to do something extra (laughed) and rub it in their face."

As stated earlier, students in grades 9-12 have an opportunity to enroll in Advance Placement classes while they are still in high school. Taking Advance Placement classes also allows students to get college credits in high school. Jill is one of the students taking AP classes. She commented, "We will be in AP Biology and we'll be talking or something and our teacher will come in the room and start making a joke and Joann will say 'Yeah, can we start work,' and he's like 'Sure, Joann.' The AP classroom fills with laughter because they know Joann is smart." Cierra continued, "I hate answering questions in class. Derrick agreed, "I can't stand it." Cierra continued, "If the AP Biology teacher asks a question, I will know the answer but nobody else will answer and I am not going to raise my hand to answer, because I've been asked not to answer out loud in class." Susan remarked, "Nobody else will answer so you try to wait it out." "If nobody answers the question, I will wait about ten minutes later and I will answer. Cierre said, "One day one of my teachers pulled me outside of class and said 'everybody knows that you know the answer and if you could just not answer out loud that would be great.' " On this comment, Jill said, "That would have made me feel bad." "I wasn't trying to be like that. I just know the answer, but when my teacher told me that it really bothered me, said Cierra. "If the teacher would have pulled me out I would have been upset. I know sometimes there are gifted students who have a small-minded teacher. Everybody knows you know the answer. I've never let it bother me, but if somebody pulled me aside like that, that would have really bothered me. I've always been very goal oriented. Even when

I was three or four and somebody would ask me what were my plans, I could tell them straight out. It might have been a billion things, but I could tell them that I'm going to college, and I'm going to do this and this. I've always been known to excel in my schoolwork. It was going to make college easier and it was also going to make paying for college easier. So, even when I was little, I knew that paying for college and doing good in my life as an adult depended on how well I did in high school," remarked Jill.

On the other hand, after hearing about gifted students who sometimes would not apply themselves to demonstrate their full potential, I was told that some gifted students would put forth an extra effort to demonstrate added potential. Each student indicated that at one time or other they had felt the need to do something extra to showcase their abilities. Joann said, "Yeah, you have to overachieve because everybody thinks you are smart because you are gifted, and you are supposed to make better grades and know the answers to all the questions and figure it out before everybody else does. Everybody probably has the answers, but they just won't say because they are scared they will be wrong. A lot times if gifted students say something out loud and they are wrong, people are going to make fun of them. But you've got to move on past that because they are being immature and everybody is going to get something wrong sooner or later. So you have got to move past the negative people and look toward your positive friends." "I agree with Joann," said Jane. "If somebody makes higher grades than you, they will say you are in gifted. I kind of feel pressured that I need to do better because I was in gifted. Another kid may have taken the test and not passed it or got high enough on it but they made better than me. I kind of feel like they should not have made better than me. I'm

supposed to be smarter than them.” Derrick continued, “It is like we are stereotyped because we are in the gifted class. We have to meet higher standards or other people will look down on us. So there are times when I do try to overachieve so I won’t be called stupid or something.” Smiling, Susan remarked, “See I don’t have a lot of common sense so I try to make it up with my book sense. I know people call me dumb and that’s just how I am. And my dad always says, ‘My God! Susan you are so stupid. Sometimes, I just worry about you.’ So it makes me want to make good grades to prove to him I can do it. It is just that I have book sense and no common sense.” She laughed at her own comment. The other students nodded their heads in agreement with Susan’s comments.

Continuing the conversation, Susan stated, “But if it’s something concrete, something I can read and answer, I can do a lot better. Jill continued, “I agree with Derrick. I think we are stereotyped because we were the smart people. We are the smart people and at a young age they separate us. That is ok because I learned more about other smart people and everyday ordinary people. When you are in gifted you are with people who are like you. I feel pressured to overachieve in everything because you were those gifted people and you have been those gifted people since second grade. Once you’ve been that way for so long it is kind of ingrained in you. When I have a project, I will start it on the same day it is given to me. I am a list person. I will make out a list and a schedule. I will have a project due and I’m going to have it done in two weeks. If it is a presentation, I need to have it memorized and ready to go. At one point in time, I think we have all been pressured. Some people might not admit it, but we’ve all been pressured to do better. Put the extra ‘oomph’ in it. Put the glitter on the board because it says I spent

ten minutes putting glitter on and just that extra effort and it helps.” “Being pressured helped my grade out even though I didn’t feel like doing the work. I said I’ve got to do it and it just helped me with everyday little things, stated Cierra. Susan continued, “You want to be better than everybody. But, a lot of times, you get the highest grade and there is still pressure. It always frustrates me when I’m taking seven classes, AP Biology, Chemistry and two sciences a year and my main competitor is taking learning strategies, driver education and art. You’re trying to be the best, but you’ve also got to take harder stuff. You got to prepare yourself. It’s a lot harder to be the best if you’re taking harder stuff.” The other participants nodded their heads, and silence filled the room.

The interview was almost over, but there was more information that I wanted to acquire before the next time we would meet. So, I broached the subject of higher education, life after high school and having being a participant in the gifted program compared to the education of their peers. According to Jane, the gifted program had helped her analyze situations better and to become more creative. She said, “In English, I’ll get done reading my three pages before everybody else. I think it made everybody in gifted so much smarter.” “Being in gifted taught you not to give up and to try a little bit harder,” remarked Joann. Derrick chimed in, “Gifted kind of adjusted our thinking levels on the level that college professors teach so we’ll better understand how they want us to complete our work and make good grades.” Joann’s commented, “But, I’ve learned you have to apply yourself. You have to have application skills in college. You have to use it in some form.” Jill said, “And gifted will help even if you have to go round the world to

answer a question. It helps you find other ways to answer it and not just that one particular way.” “Even if the teacher said that’s the way to do it,” ended Joann.

Finally, we our first interview had reached a stopping point. But, before we left, the students and I summarized some of the topics that had been discussed that morning. They began by them telling me how this interview had enlightened their views about being in the gifted program in a different way. Joann said, “I never thought about a lot of things that you asked. I never even considered gifted the way I see it now. I think this interview has really helped me.” Derrick continued, “I enjoyed it because I got a chance to hear how others saw gifted and how it helped them out. It helped me reflect on myself and how it has helped me.” All of the participants appeared to agree with Derrick by nodding their heads.

Probing for more responses, I asked if there was anything else that they wanted to tell me that we had not discussed, or anything else that they wanted to elaborate on. Joann responded, “I have a question. Do you know what percent are there of gifted students? I responded, “It varies because some students are not identified as gifted in order to enter the gifted program, or they choose not to show their ability and underachieve, so we don’t know the exact number.

Joann remarked, “I didn’t know if they have done some kind of poll targeting gifted students.” I responded, “When a lot of students get in higher grades and peer pressure is more confined, sometimes they choose not to achieve so other people will not identify their giftedness. They choose not to take the AP classes because just as Susan said earlier, they don’t want to it to be said that they are acting like a nerd. They think

that their peers are going to say they're acting like a nerd, and they don't want to be called a nerd. They don't want to be called smart either, so they choose not to show their ability. There's no way to identify them unless they are interviewed as I am doing today. Susan wanted to know, "Do you think that people who were in the gifted program scored higher on their ACT than other people? I responded, "Not necessarily. It depends on the individual person. A person can be gifted but, exhibit test anxiety. This may hamper their testing ability. Some gifted students are more prepared but as I said earlier it depends on the individual person. I'm sure there are students who are in gifted, or who have been in gifted who are not good test takers and it is not because they are not familiar with the material on the test. Maybe, it's because they over analyze the question. But, on the other hand, some gifted students are excellent standardize tests takers. Our conversation came to an end. I told them that I would return at our appointed time to complete the second part of our interview.

With the first part of the interview completed, the students seemed eager to begin our final interview. There were several elements that we had not discussed previously, and I was hoping to get the students' perceptions on those issues. As in the previous session, we were seated in an informal setting. Each student sat where they had previously during the first interview. I opened conversation by introducing the topic of being influenced. I wanted to know if they had encountered any positive /negative influence as a result of being in the gifted program. Derrick responded, "I would say the teachers pushed me to do better work than what I turned in, especially when they knew I was capable of doing better. They encouraged me and told me to take the extra time.

They knew when I didn't take the time to achieve a better grade especially if they knew I could have." Susan said, "Sometimes they wrote notes on your paper like 'you can do better than this. You're not really applying yourself as well as you could have been.' "

Jane continued, "Most of them would always say 'that's good. You are doing a good job. Keep going.' They were just encouraging all the time." "When you do not do your best it makes you feel bad and makes you want to do better the next time. Our teachers are expecting the best from us.," said Susan. Jill appeared to agree with everyone else. Cierra's responded "A lot of the time when you are making good grades, our teachers will say, 'good job.' " Everyone agreed when Derrick stated, "I think teachers expect more from us than the average person. I mean the average student because our minds are supposed to be capable of a little bit more than every body else. "Yes," said Jill. "When we are presented with challenging material, it helps us think of other ways to do it. Play with it, turn it around, and manipulate it anyway you can to find that answer. It helps you see regular class work more clearly. When you manipulate the material you know exactly how to get from point A to point B." Finally, silence filled the room as the students waited for me to initiate the next topic.

As I sat and pondered on what had just been said, I decided to link the previous conversation to the students' perception of rigorous coursework in both the regular education classes and the gifted classes. I found that most of the students wanted to become more engaged in the challenging work that was offered in the gifted class. Jill commented, "Well, material in the gifted classroom, it's definitely more challenging. In the second grade you are presented with fifth grade or sixth grade material. You are in the

second grade so it's definitely more challenging." Jane also commented, "In the regular classroom the stuff is harder. But in our gifted class it took everybody a little longer to figure it out. Being in the regular classroom helps other people who are a little slower get through faster. The participants began look at one another and laugh and joke about what had just been said. Cierra said, "A lot of gifted students have to think about the material for a long time, but when you finish it you are glad, and say I'm through with it." Derrick replied, "I like the challenge because when I'm bored, I'll tend to throw it off and put it away, but when I'm challenged I just can't stop. I have to keep on going until I figure it out because I won't feel happy until I do."

As stated earlier, students may be faced with influential factors from other sources. The participants told me that their teachers were a major factor in influencing their education. Their teachers were pivotal in the way each student challenged himself or herself. Susan said, "Even if we don't see a solution to any problem we have, our teacher tells us right off to keep trying because everything has an answer. If you get any problem or anything you experience has a way to end. You just have to figure it out and not get bogged down. You'll eventually find the answer; it just might take a while."

Derrick continued, "Our teachers show us what they expect from the different professions we're going to run into in college and how we should achieve success in their eyes. They provide us with information to help better ourselves in whatever we want to achieve academically. They help us to gather information in what particular profession we are going to be taking." Jill agreed with Derrick, "I think they have influenced me like Derrick said, "Some teachers are harder than other teachers and students can't relate to

those teachers, just because they think that they are hard. They don't understand that the hardest teachers that you will ever have are the ones that make life at college easier. When you get to college, you will be able to say that you are already familiar with the material. The gifted teachers have helped with that because it was harder work. They tried to help, but it was more of a "what do you think"? It was more of a well, let's see if we can help this person get around to answering the question and that's what's really going to help gifted students achieve in college because your professor is going to help you but they're not going to tell you the answer. I believe that's going to help a lot when we get to college. Cierra replied, "A lot of us in gifted learned skills that would prepare us for college."

Besides the issue of being influenced, there is the issue of being distinguished as a gifted student. The gifted students had to deal with other aspects that occurred in the classroom with other students. The participants remarked that because of being in the gifted class, they were labeled as the smart people. There were mixed feelings concerning this matter. Jane said, "It is hard because you are supposed to have more thinking ability than other students. Derrick interjected, "When we are in groups, they pretty much do not want to do anything. They pretty much know they are guaranteed a good grade if they are in the group with us." "Even if you don't know what you're doing you're not going to get help. In Anatomy & Physiology, we will go to lab and other students will say 'Oh, I want to be in her group.' When you get to the lab, all they do is sit there and talk or eat or do something else. I am sitting there trying to do blood types in lab and they are all over there talking not trying to help me out. I did not know what I was doing, but I could not

ask them for help. But, they feel as if they are with the smart person so they were going to get a good grade. It is always like that,” remarked Susan. Jill followed along the same lines as Susan, “Even if you’re not in school, if you are doing a project for the community, gifted students are not only labeled as gifted, they’re labeled as completers. If you are doing something outside of school well, you’re already labeled as leader so they expect you to lead.” Jill’s responded, “And, sometimes, you just don’t want to be the leader. You want somebody else to take up the slack. Just like in group work you’re given the entire load and you just cannot take the entire load.”

On the other hand, stated Cierra, “Sometimes it’s not that bad. But if get an award every year, the other students will want to know why you do get it every year? You should not get stuff just because you are gifted. They think you did not really earn it.” Jill ended this part of the conversation, “I think being in the gifted classroom setting helps because when you are the only gifted student in the regular classroom, everybody’s going to try to get with you. But, if you are in a gifted classroom there’s no pressure. Everybody knows what they are doing or at least is attempting to do it and not trying to just copy. There is no pressure. The less pressure, the easier it is to think.” Everyone confirmed approval of what had been said by nodding and shaking their heads.

After everyone had had the opportunity to speak on the previous matter, I directed the conversation to another instructional matter. I was interested in the students’ perception of taking educational trips that supplemented the lessons that were taught in the classroom. The participants told me that these trips were educational as well as fun. They were given the opportunity witness the relevance of what had been taught in the

classroom with taking the trips. Jane said, “You have to work toward going on trips. It’s kind of a reward for trying your hardest. You can get to go somewhere. It’s like you are getting something out of what you are doing. In the regular classroom, you do it because you have to and there is nothing to look forward to. There is no reward. You don’t get anything for getting an A.” Jill replied, “The trips are always better because there are only thirty students so you get to go places like Space Camp or somewhere like that. In the regular classroom, you get to go to the zoo. You are not getting anything out of going to the zoo. Yeah! The animals are great, but you’re not getting anything out of it that you can use in real life whereas when we go somewhere like Space Camp or Vicksburg, you are learning something that you can use more than once.” Everyone agreed that the trips went along with their coursework. With resounding voices they all agreed that they would rather take trips than be in the classroom.

After talking about trips and classroom activities, we broached the significance of self-worth. The students told me that their level of confidence magnified by being in the gifted program. In order to obtain a clearer view of this matter, I elicited comments from the students about their perception of self-esteem in accordance with being in gifted classes.

Derrick said, “It has helped my self-esteem. It taught me that there are people who are smart and have made it. They have made it really really well in life and if they can get through it then I shouldn’t worry about the little problems I have. I have no reason not to be as successful as they are.” “Being in gifted has me feel better about myself. Sometimes I don’t feel smart but being in gifted has really helped me to see that I am

smart. Deep down I know that I am smart,” responded Jane. At this time Jill said, “It has helped me to realize that I did this stuff. People will call you gifted, but deep down they are slightly jealous because they know you were the gifted student. It is alright for you to be goofy every once in a while or everyday because you were the gifted one. I think it has helped my self-esteem because I can show them how stupid their comments are.” “I agree,” Susan replied, “but sometimes we can ask the dumbest question with the obvious answer. We were in Calculus and the problem was $2x = 4$ and I wanted to know how was the answer 2? You just divide 4 by 2. It was obvious stuff, but I just didn’t think about it at the time. “Yeah,” said Jane. “Sometimes, the easier things are the hardest to complete.” Derrick continued, “Your self esteem rise when you see stuff and can analyze it but sometimes it is so obvious that you bypass it.” Everybody agreed. “Our self-esteem is high because on the hard stuff in Calculus and Trigonometry, we make good but, simple equations blow our minds. We are so used to thinking so deep that we couldn’t think simple,” added Susan. On the other hand, Cierra commented, “I don’t think being in gifted class has helped my self-esteem. I have trouble figuring small number equations. I don’t judge myself by what others think. Sometimes teachers and everybody treat me differently. And, I know a lot of people who were smart that were not in gifted that could do stuff better than me and I couldn’t figure out stuff and they would say ‘you don’t know how to do it’? And I would say “no,” ended Cierra.

Finally, we were near the end of the interview, so I said, “I have never been in a gifted program. I have never sat under gifted instruction. I need to know if there’s anything that I didn’t ask you that I need to know about being in the gifted program. Jill

responded, "I think you need to get copies of every Toggle, every Mind Bender, and every Mind Boggler that we have ever done and work each of them out." Everybody looked at each other and laughed at Jill's comment. "It would be like sitting in that class. Because we could talk to you for hours on end and tell you Oh! gifted did this, but until you have actually done the work you can't grasp it." "Yeah," said Jane, "and not the little easy three square ones. You have to do one of the big ones." Susan replied, "Oh my God." Jill said, "That takes four days." I told them that I was not familiar with Toggle so tell me a little about it. Jill replied, "It is math and you are given numbers and you have a plus and a minus. The object is to get the same number at the end of each row in each direction. You can only use one plus and one minus. If you have a plus in one place you cannot use another plus in another place." Derrick replied, "That game is scary and it makes you think." Susan and Cierra agreed. "It is challenging and rough."

Finally, I stated, "Can you think of anything that we did not cover in our interviews?" Derrick said, "I would say if I had the choice of being in the regular classroom or stay in gifted class, I would say that I would rather be in the gifted classroom." "I would like to say overall I enjoyed gifted more than the regular classroom. I wish we could still have it through the twelfth grade. In normal classrooms you don't get as much out of it as you do in the gifted classroom," added Susan. "Jane replied, "I think we covered everything. I think we pretty much touched everything," Everyone else agreed and the interview came to a close. I returned the room to its original state and collected the tape recorder. Then, I left the room thinking about the information that I had gained from the participants.

