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SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF GIFTED MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF GIFTED MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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Dedication

To love what you do and feel that it matters, how could anything be more fun?
Katharine Graham

To my daughters, who said so many years ago, “Mom, you need to be a GT teacher.”

Fortunately, I was smart enough to listen to them.

I also wish to dedicate this to my husband, Bob, my parents, Helen and Howard, and

to my son, Rob, whose influences continue to resonate in my life.

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George Eliot once said, “It is never too late to become what you might have been.” For me, this journey would not have been possible without the love, encouragement, mentoring and support of my family, colleagues, university professors and dear friends who supported me as I completed my dream.

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And lastly, I wish to thank Traci Argo and the middle school students who vividly shared their lifeworld with me. I still find myself thinking about my ten middle school gifted subjects, their school experiences, and what the future holds for them. I realize that I can not change their future paths, but through their assistance, I can try to influence future gifted students. Hopefully through my careful listening to their voices, I was able to tell the stories and lifeworld of these gifted students, so that changes will be made in the policies and practices that impact the academic growth and development of gifted preadolescents.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the lifeworld of ten gifted middle school students in an attempt to determine the role school environment plays in the academic achievement. The inquiry focuses on the experiences of gifted students in a Title 1 middle school and how these experiences influence their academic achievement. This qualitative study builds on previous research in the area of gifted student perceptions of their learning environments (Adams-Byers, et al., 2004; Berlin, 2009; Peterson, et al., 2009) and the impact of the lifeworld of school on academic achievement.

The phenomenological framework of the study employs semi-structured interviews and student constructed drawings to gather students' perspectives of the academic and social environment of a Title I middle school. Three themes emerge from the shared school experiences. The first theme, Peers, illustrates the importance preadolescents place on friends and underlines the influences of peers during this formative age. The second theme, identity, focuses on the choices students make while searching to find a balance between giftedness and acceptance in the lifeworld of middle school. The last theme, Outlook, reflects the importance placed on education by these students and their desire for relevant, authentic and challenging curriculum.

While the findings from this study can not be generalized, they indicate that the role peers play in the school experiences of gifted middle school students is influential in affecting student's academic achievement and behavior. The study also reveals that gifted students who qualify for above grade level math classes are generally more academically successful and have a more defined gifted identity and persona than study participants who did not qualify for the advanced math program.

The findings of this study contribute to the knowledge of gifted middle school students by listening to their voices, exploring their recommendations and highlighting the process and complexities of gifted student development in a Title I school.

Key words: Middle school, gifted, achievement

Chapter One: Introduction

> The child with underachieving behaviors, who has little control over or understanding of his or her depressed performance, is reminiscent of Narcissus, the Greek mythological character, who upon seeing his reflection in a pond, pined away for the lovely creature he saw. In his case, Narcissus was longing for something he already had, so his was not a problem of attainment but of realization. And just as Narcissus was eventually transformed into a beautiful flower, so might the child with underachieving behaviors come into full bloom, given the proper mix of support and nurturance. (Delisle, Galbraith, & Espeland, 2002, pp. 180-181)

Gifted students may be recognized as exceptional learners (Siegle & McCoach, 2005) however, gifted students not achieving their academic potential are the source of much confusion and frustration for their teachers and parents (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Matthews (2009) estimated that the current high school drop out rate might include up to five percent of gifted students. With 514,238 public school students[1] (Stillwell & Sable, 2013) dropping out of grades nine through twelve, that means that more than 25,500 of students are Gifted and Talented (GT). Renzulli and Park (2002) reported that little concern is given to the number of gifted students dropping out of school. In fact, "the dropout rate of gifted and talented students has been studied less often at local and national levels" (Renzulli & Park, 2002, p. vii). Students with high potential are often the ones at the greatest risk of underachieving (Davidson, Davidson, & Vanderkam, 2004). More importantly, it is believed that as many as 50 percent of gifted students are not working at their academic potential and, as a result, are underachieving academically (Morisano &

[1] National Center for Educational Statistics reports a decrease in the overall drop rate to 3.4%

Shore, 2010). Figures of gifted drop out rates vary. Some researchers report up to 20 percent of high school dropouts are in the gifted range (Emerick, 1992; Hoover-Schultz, 2005; Robinson, 2002).

In recent years, the U.S. high school completion rate has improved, with more students likely to graduate than in the preceding decades (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). Nationally, it is estimated that only 68 to 71% of all high school students graduate (Bridgeland, J. M., DiIulio, Jr., J. J., & Morison, K. B., 2006). The present high school completion rate is based upon "the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds possessing a high school credential. … now (schools) graduate nearly 88% of students" (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010, p. 244). However, a variety of data sources, definitions, and methods were used to calculate this seemingly high rate. Variations in these reported figures may be caused by use of sources from National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), and the inclusion the of GED graduates. The resulting range for the U.S. graduation rate is actually between 66 and 88 percent The estimated minority student rate of graduation is 50 to percent (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented reported 5 percent of both the 12,625 total student sample and the 3,520 gifted student sample dropped out of school ("NAGC teacher training: Advanced students in today's classrooms: What do we know?", n.d.). Matthews (2006), however, reported a very low dropout rate among seventh grade Duke talent search participants: 37 out of 7,916 or 0.47 % with the largest estimate equal to 0.72%. Matthews (n.d.) determined that the number of gifted students who drop out of high school each year ranges from 1 in 50 to 1 in 200, depending upon the specific criteria used to identify giftedness. In a recent study,

Landis and Reschly (2013) found an estimate of the yearly student dropout rate was 3.5 percent of the total high school student population. It is important to note, however, that "…about one-half of high school dropouts eventually receive some sort of alternative certificate of high school completion[2]" (Pharris-Ciurej, Hirschman, Willhoft, 2011, p. 710).

A National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented report entitled *Giftedness and High School Dropouts: Personal, Family, and School-related Factors* found gifted students drop out for the same reasons other kids do (Renzulli & Park, 2002). Some of the common reasons cited were: disliking school, failing or low grades, pregnancy, a job, and having parents who didn't finish school, or a home life was not supportive of learning. This study reported that minority and low socioeconomic status gifted students, considered to be at risk, had a higher risk of dropping out than white high socioeconomic gifted students.

Reis and McCoach (2000) stated that underachievement is a major concern of educators, yet remains an unsolved issue in the field. Rimm (1997), however, called the presence of widespread underachievement to be of "epidemic proportions" and stated "true underachievement problems are a matter of degree" (p.18). Underachievement and "dropping out" behavior involved more than students not graduating from high school, as these behaviors were also visible in elementary and middle school classrooms. Gifted students drop out intellectually, becoming disengaged from learning while still physically sitting in class and attending school.

[2] However, a ''authentic'' high school diploma is worth considerable more in the labor market (Cameron and Heckman, 1993; Heckman and LaFontaine, 2006)

These intellectually capable and talented students exhibit a notable decrease in personal academic achievement and the academic outcomes expected by their parents and teachers based on their capabilities. Such behavior typically begins at the end of elementary school or the beginning middle school. More than half of all gifted students can be classified as underachievers (Rimm, 1987). Several reasons why students do not achieve to their level of potential exist. One reason commonly given by gifted students is boredom. A survey of 25,000 eighth graders conducted by Gentry, Gable, and Springer (2000) found that almost 50% of the students described being bored at least half of their time in school. The academic needs of gifted students differ from those of average-ability students. As a result, school programs for the gifted affect their academic achievement (Rogers, 2007; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007).

Whitmore (1985) stressed the importance of the classroom setting and school academic environment. Fine (1967) described these drop out classroom behaviors as characterized by daydreaming, sulking, "dawdling", procrastination, and being stubborn. Student "rebelliousness expresses itself in inaction; he habitually fails to complete assignments or to follow through on chores" (Fine, 1967, p. 11). Boredom, frustration and misbehavior often accompany unchallenged gifted students whose academic needs are not met in one size fits all classrooms (Davidson, et al., 2004; Hoogeveen, van Hell, & Verhoeven, 2009; Renzulli & Park, 2002). Seeley (1993) estimated there is a risk of 15 to 40 percent of identified gifted students achieving below their academic potential. Morisano & Shore (2010) reported that approximately half of gifted youth characteristically "achieve significantly below their potential" (p.

249). Educators widely accept large numbers of gifted students not attaining the level of academic success they are capable of (McCoach & Siegle, 2008). Hoover-Schultz (2005) referred to this group as being underserved or neglected by educational systems and gifted programs in particular.

The focus of recent educational reform has been more on s achieving minimal competencies than on developing and fostering talents and gifts (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Geake & Gross, 2008; Stanley & Baines, 2002) or preventing the loss of student ability and talents (McCoach &Siegle, 2008; Morisano & Shore, 2010). One wonders what gifted students think about present day school environments and classroom cultures and their place as gifted students within them (Adams-Byers, Whitsell, & Moon, 2004: Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009*)*.

Problem Statement

This phenomenological study investigated gifted students and the role school environment and classroom culture play in cultivating academic abilities and talents. The study is focused on the school "reality" or lifeworld[3] experienced by gifted middle school students. School environment in important in achieving academic success (Emerick, 1992; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007; Whitmore, 1980).

Purpose

The influence of a student's school on academic performance and achievement has been recognized as an important element in the issue of student achievement (Reis & McCoach, 2000). This study focused on the effect of in-school experiences on the

[3] Lifeworld or Lebenswelt was the term used to refer to every day life which included all the immediate experiences, activities, and contacts that make up the world of an individual

academic performance of gifted students during middle school. School environment, as a component in the education process, can be readily adjusted, modified, and evaluated. The purposes of this study were to: (A) describe the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of gifted students toward their education and (B) to investigate how school experiences affected their academic achievement. This study had two major areas of emphasis. First, the study identified the significant school experiences of gifted students. Second, the study examined the influence of these experiences on the academic and social attitudes and behaviors of gifted students in middle school. Two research questions were developed.

Research Questions

1. What kind of experiences do gifted students have in middle school?

Middle school years were selected for this study because early adolescence is considered one of the last chances for parents and teachers to influence the academic and social behaviors (Russell, 1996). Middle school years typically involve a concern with individual self worth and a student's "unique contributions to the world" (Schultz & Delisle, 2003, p. 483). School experiences impact how students view the self (Pajares, & Schunk, 2001; Zimmerman, 1989).

2. How do middle school experiences affect the academic achievement of gifted students?

The presence of gifted students who do not achieve their academic potential is generally acknowledged (McCoach & Siegle, 2008; Rimm, 2003), but there is less agreement concerning why gifted students underachieve (Morisano & Shore, 2010). Schultz (2002b) advocated for the use of qualitative research in the field of gifted

education as an avenue to uncover the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of the achieving and underachieving gifted. Gifted students, especially, have valuable first-hand information to share with educators about what works and what does not when it comes to instruction and learning.

Significance of the Study

Referred to as "our national resource" (Winner, 2000), gifted students have the potential to contribute positively to the well being of society through ideas and innovations (Subotnik, 2006). Whitmore (1980) in her seminal book *Giftedness, Conflict and Underachievement* noted the significant impact school environment has on underachievement. Whitmore stated that it would be "much more useful for educators to examine how the environment might contribute to the child's difficulty and thereby be modified to help eliminate the problem of underachievement" (Whitemore, 1980, p. 190). Rogers (2002) reported that gifted students as early as third and fourth grade learn it is possible to put forth a minimum amount of effort and work, do well, and even receive praise for their work that they know is not their best. The results from standardized achievement tests, reported by The NASSP Bulletin 96 (2012), show that academic achievement of gifted and high ability students has not increased since 1971 (Ali & Heck, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Negative school-related attitudes were cited as a "potential source of school under-achievement among children and adolescents" by Sullivan, Riccio, & Reynolds (2008, p. 297). According to Wolf and Fraser (2008), perceptions of middle school students can dramatically affect academic outcomes. The use of student voice in school reform and decision-making about school environment is a natural byproduct

of a democratic education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Ferguson, Hanreddy, & Draxton, 2011; Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2006).

This qualitative study builds on previous research in the area of gifted student perceptions of their learning environments (Adams-Byers, et al., 2004; Berlin, 2009; Peterson, et al., 2009). While the results from qualitative studies cannot be generalized, the findings may contribute to an understanding of school interactions that affect gifted achievement.

Thesis Outline

This study is comprised of five chapters. This first chapter serves as an introduction to the issue of gifted underachievement and the importance of school and classroom environment in student development and success. Chapter two provides a review of related literature of gifted education, developmental needs of gifted students, the nature of underachievement and the role of school environment and school culture in student achievement. Chapter three focuses on the methodology and procedures involved in data collection. Chapter four introduces participants as categorized by the school's teachers and staff members, the significant school experiences, and descriptions of academics and social culture. Chapter four also contains an analysis of common themes revealed in student interviews. Chapter five discusses findings and the gifted students' behaviors.

Definitions of Essential Terms

The following are definitions of terms deemed essential to this study.

Academic Underachievement

Academic underachievement is typically defined as occurring when a student

exhibits “a severe discrepancy between the expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessment) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations)" (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 157). In addition, “the discrepancy … must not be the direct result of a diagnosed learning disability and must persist over an extended period of time” (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 157).

Attribution Theory

Attributions are the reasons used by students to explain their success or failures in academic events that occurred to and around them (Banks & Woolfson, 2008). Attribution theory implies that it is one’s ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck that causes one’s academic achievement or lack of it (Weiner, 1986). Reis and Hébert (2008) note that: “. . . higher-achieving students tend to attribute their successes to a combination of ability and effort, and their failures to lack of effort. Students who underachieve, however, often attribute their successes to external factors such as luck, and their failures to lack of ability (p. 272).

Boredom

Boredom is generally associated with a lack of academic challenge and stimulation (Kanevsky & Keighly, 2003; Preckel, Gotz, & Frenzel, 2010); it is described as “a negative emotional state with a somewhat unpleasant feeling, characterized with little incentive or interest, in which time appears to stands still” (Preckel, et al., 2010, p. 454).

Gifted and Talented:

"Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society" (Marland, 1971, p. 5). In this study, the term gifted and talented encompasses many components as evidence of high potential or performance capabilities in the fields of intelligence, talent, leadership and high ability and/or expertise in a specific area.

Gifted Selective Consumer

For the purpose of this study, Gifted Selective Consumers are defined as those students referred to as gifted who meet the state and school district's criteria for gifted identification and who are "intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations" (Hébert & Schreiber, 2010, p.572). The academic criteria used to determine Selective Consumer is similar to that of the Gifted Underachiever but apparent in only selected classes.

Gifted Underachiever:

For the purpose of this study, students referred to as gifted underachieving students are those who meet the state and school district's criteria for gifted identification as well as the following criteria for lower than expected achievement:

1. Listed on the school's academically ineligible list for two consecutive weeks or more.
2. Grades in the bottom half of his or her class and/or math/language arts **or** has C average or below.
3. A classroom teacher, gifted specialist, or counselor must label the student a bright underachiever (Moore, 2006, p. 6).

Identity

Identity is the perception of one's self by an individual; it is a personal sense of self that evolves from social interactions. Identity involves the acceptance of one's individuality and seeing one's self as part of a culture that is recognized by others (Erickson, 1968; Sternberg, 1985).

Learning Environment

Learning environment is "the complete physical, social and pedagogical context in which learning is intended to occur" (A place to learn: Lessons from research on learning environments, 2012, p. 12).

Lifeworld (Lebenswelt)

Edmund Husserl coined the term Lifeworld or Lebenswelt in 1917 for use in his phenomenological manuscripts. He used it to label "the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception" and "the original ground of all theoretical and practical life" (Zelic, 2009, p .413). Lifeworld is "a description of things (phenomena) as one experiences them" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 225). This term is used to refer to everyday life in the world around us. The term encompasses all the immediate experiences, activities, and contacts that

make up the world of an individual. In this study, lifeworld refers to the everyday experiences of gifted students attending Haviland Middle School.

Middle School

Middle schools are the result of "the need to develop schools around the needs and characteristics of young adolescents" (Merten, Anfara & Caskey, 2007, p. xiii). Catering to 10-14-year-old students, middle schools are designed to provide a school climate that fosters physical, social, and emotional growth through innovation and exploratory curriculum, instruction, programs, and classes. In this study, the term middle school refers to grades six through eight.

Phenomenon

Phenomenon is defined as "the essence of structure of an experience (Merriam, 1998, p. 15). It is **"**something (such as an interesting fact or event) that can be observed and studied and that typically is unusual or difficult to understand or explain fully" (phenomenon, 2012). In this study, the essence investigated was the lifeworld of school and how it affected gifted middle school academic achievement.

School Climate:

"School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Center: School Climate, n.d.). The term school

climate is also being used to refer to the school environment and includes both the school's physical environment as well as the social and emotional wellbeing of its students and personnel ("Shaping a healthier future for kids," 2015).

School Disengagement:

School disengagement is described as being when a student does not feel a sense of belonging in school or connection to school and, as a result, rejects school values. Examples of student behavior related to disengagement include unexcused absences from school, low grades, not working to potential, and a lack of participation in learning or school activities.

School Engagement:

Student engagement is described as a student's desire and interest to participate in and be successful in school. Some examples of student behavior related to school engagement are good grades, attendance at school, doing school assignments, following teacher directions, and participating in school activities (Appleton, Christenson, Furlong, 2008; Marks, 2000). Recent studies now define engagement as being composed of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components (Wang & Holcomb, 2010).

Significant School Experience or Incident:

Significant school experience or incident is a happening, event, or occurrence that was personally remembered by the student and is deemed as important. It has an impact upon the behavior, attitude, and perception of the student. The experience was one that the student remembers specific details related to the

incident and was able to relate how change in behavior, attitude or perception occurred as a result of the experience.

Stakeholder:

The term stakeholder typically refers to "anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of the school and its students." These individuals or groups "have a stake in the school and its students, meaning that they have personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern" (Hidden curriculum, 2014).

Student Voice:

Student voice is defined as a student's participation in decision-making and dialogue that reflects the student's perspective on teaching, learning, and school environment for the purpose of educational research and reform. It is based upon the premises of rights, respect, and listening (Cook-Sather, 2006). It is considered by Cook-Sather (2007) to be an essential component of a democratic education and vital to working for a change in teaching practice. According to Ferguson, Hanreddy and Draxton (2012) student voice results when "students participate in meaningful decision making and dialogue regarding their learning environment and classroom climate for the purposes of building upon foundations of community and trust" (p. 55).

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

> Make no mistake about it; underachievement is not a crisis of certain groups; it is not limited to the poor; it is not a problem afflicting other people's children. Many middle- and upper-income children are also falling behind intellectually. By the fourth grade, the performance of most children in the US is below what it should be for the nation and is certainly below the achievement levels of children in competing countries. (Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades, 1996, p. 2)

Teaching gifted students is rewarding, challenging, and sometimes frustrating. The innate intelligence, talent, and ability of gifted students affords unlimited opportunities for the teacher to provide the means, support, and environment for these students to uncover, develop, and achieve their potential. Unfortunately, for some gifted students, school is not a time of discovery and exploration but rather an experience to endure (Emerick, 1992; Renzulli & Park, 2000). The purpose of this study was to understand the effects of the middle school environment on the academic achievement of gifted students.

The review of literature is used to highlight central concepts and to determine the theoretical hypothesis essential to a study's research questions (Charmaz, 2006). The related literature and research for this study focused on gifted middle school students, their school experiences and the impact these experiences had on their academic achievement. The review of research is divided into four sections: (1) the context of gifted education in the public school and the evolution of gifted student identification; (2) traits, needs and characteristics of gifted students; (3) the gifted adolescent and underachievement; (4) the role school environment plays in middle school gifted students' academic achievement. The topics of school engagement, boredom, and relationships among students, teachers, and peers, as related to academic

achievement are addressed.

Gifted Education in the Public Schools

The Evolution of Present Day Gifted Education

To understand gifted underachievement one must be familiar with the nature of giftedness and its identification processes and procedures. Controversy continues to surround the nature and definition of giftedness. The Marland Report[4], with its vague and ill-defined categories, highlighted a need to expand the definition and scope of gifted identification when identifying the attributes associated with the concept of giftedness. As a result, the perspective of giftedness has been modified as a multi-faceted construct (Gagne, 1985; Gardner, 1995; Renzulli, 2011; Sternberg, 1986). This move away from the pure psychological number-based[5] definition of giftedness opened the doorway for the adoption of multiple criteria for student identification and added the context of achievement. The end result was a wider, more inclusive and multi-dimensional gifted education student identification system. Borland (2008) reported, "The identification of gifted students was almost always the most controversial aspect of gifted programs in the public schools" (p. 261). Feldhusen & Dai (1997) summarized the atmosphere of present day gifted education as "in transition from a conception of giftedness as a general intellectual entity, present in some and absent in others, to a talent orientation that recognizes the presence in youth of specific talents at varying levels of ability" (1997, p. 1). Gifted individuals are now characterized as possessing a variety of talents and abilities, to be developed with the

[4] See Appendix 2.1 for the Marland Report's definition of giftedness.

[5] Determined by an administered intellectual or school ability test score of at least 130 or 97 percentile and above.

capability of high level of potential and achievement. Reis and Renzulli (2009) described this emerging context of giftedness as "there is no single homogeneous group of gifted children and adults, and giftedness is developmental, not fixed at birth" (p. 233).

Giftedness Redefined

As a result of the changes in the definition of giftedness, identification practices moved from an objective reliance on an ability index score to the subjective consideration of a variety of multi-criteria qualifications and/or multi-talents. This expanded conception of giftedness and its effect on gifted education was supported by research in the field from 1975 to 2005 (Reis & Renzulli, 2006). In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education's definition of gifted and talented was modified to include: "potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment" ("NSGT Giftedness Defined," 2013). The most recent federal guideline for gifted and talented was found in the *No Child Left Behind Act*[6] which defines gifted and talented students as those:

> . . . who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school to fully develop such capabilities. (*No Child Left Behind, Title IX* - General Provisions: Part A, definition no. 22, 2002)

The lack of consensus for an acceptable definition for giftedness continues to impact the assessment of giftedness, student identification, and the programs offered in school as well as the identification of gifted underachieving students (Matthews & McBee,

[6] P.L. 107-110 (Title IX, Part A, definition 22), 2002

2007). Mayer offered, "an evidence based approach" to evaluate the context of giftedness (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005, p. 437). He concluded that giftedness resulted from a combination of innate ability and those personal experiences, which allow an individual's abilities and talents to develop and grow into "extraordinary performance(s) on authentic tasks" (Mayer, 2005, p. 444). The concepts of potential, capability, and the inclusion of expanded domains and talents in gifted identification broadened the field of students now considered for gifted identification. Gifted education, however, still remains hindered by the lack of an agreed upon, accepted, and universally applied definition and criterion[7] for use in the identification of all gifted students, as well as accepted definitions and criterion for those gifted students who do not work up to their potential (Definitions of Giftedness | National Association for Gifted Children, 2010; State and Federal Government Definitions of Giftedness | Duke TIP. n.d.).

Recognition of Culturally Diverse Gifted Students

Giftedness is expressed in a variety of manners and is present in all cultures (Baldwin, 2005) with the definition of giftedness being culturally dependent on the values and views of the student's culture (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Renzulli, 1978). It is essential to consider cultural perceptions of giftedness in schools and communities. Diverse students deserve the opportunity to develop to their potential and share their unique perspectives.

Over time, educators have recognized the existence of an achievement

[7] Some of the commonly employed identification criteria include the use of I.Q. (school ability tests), achievement tests, teacher, parent and student recommendations, standardized checklists, winning a state or national title, and/or a portfolio of student work.

disparity between ethnic and socio-economic groups in this country (Bernal, 2002; Ford & Harmon, 2001). Although concerned with the education of high ability students, the minimal presence[8] of identified minority and low socio-economic students in gifted education programs has been a recognized concern (Chaffey & Bailey, 2008; Ford, 1998; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010).

Gifted identification relies on the student's ability, performance, achievement in relation to peers (Baldwin, 2005) and teacher recommendations. The impact of a student's culture and economic status may influence a teacher's perception and understanding of student behavior (Ford, 2010: McBee, 2010). Ryser (2011) reported teachers frequently have lower academic expectations for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and diverse cultures. The small number[9] of identified gifted culturally diverse students may inhibit academic excellence if, in a democratic society, the goal is for all students to become successful learners (Taylor & Parson, 2011), then "services should be provided for both advanced cognitive development and . . . intelligences outside the normal curve" (Renzulli, 2012, p. 151).

Gifted students comprise a microcosm of our society, a group from all walks of life, with representation from all levels of socio-economic status and cultures (Robinson, Reis, Neihart, & Moon, 2002). Frasier and Passow (1994) proposed ten research-based "absolute" behaviors, which characterize high performance across

[8] 68% white, 135 Hispanic; 9% African-American; 9% Asian/Pacific Islander; 1% Native American (Ash, 2011)

[9] Gabelko & Sosniak (2002) reported that culturally diverse students are being underrepresented in gifted identification by between 30-70 % in relation to their population numbers with Hispanic students being identified as gifted at a rate of 60% of their population (NCES 2011). Other researchers have found that more than 75% of African-American gifted students are underachievers (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008).

cultures, and were recognized as attributes of giftedness (1994, p. v). These qualities were: motivation, advanced interests, communication skills, problem solving ability, well developed memory, imagination/creativity, inquiry, insight, reasoning, and humor (1994, pp. 59-61).

The philosophy of gifted education is in the process of evolving from one of being solely dependent on innate intellectual ability to one in which talent and exceptional ability and/or its potential are recognized. This philosophy, supported by Renzulli's Three Ring Concept of Giftedness[10], serves as the foundation for gifted programing implemented by the school in this study (Renzulli and Reis, 2000, 1991). The goal of Renzulli's theory of giftedness is to provide students with extensive opportunities to develop personal ability and potential and therefore increase creative producers and problem solvers. Renzulli's methodology emphasizes gifted behaviors, not merely the acquisition of book knowledge. It is not enough for a student to possess high ability, capability, or talent; it is the productive use, application, and construction of new products and ideas that result from those attributes that are the focus of his theory. Student "gifts" must be employed in a manner that benefited society (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011).

Gifted Middle School Students

Adolescence can be challenging (Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2007), a time of transition from childhood to adulthood and maturity characterized by rapid and uneven growth and development. Early adolescence, ages 10 to 14, occurs during the middle

[10] Giftedness, according to Renzulli, is believed to be present during the interaction of the three rings: task commitment, above average ability and creativity.

school years. The gifted adolescent faces challenges of physical, social, and emotional development, as well as issues related to self identity, peer relationships and "fitting in" with school culture. Changing classes, new teachers for each subject area, and an increase in competition characterize the transition from elementary to secondary school.

The following sections highlight specific developmental needs of preadolescent in relation to (1) cognitive development, (2) self identity, (3) affinity and (4) academic achievement.

1. Cognitive Development

A student's Intelligence Quotient (IQ) or school ability index is one of the best predictors of GPA, accounting for only 10–20% inconsistency (Ransdell, 2001). As the teenage body grows and develops, so does the teenage brain. During these years, the brain under goes complex structural changes from back (the location of basic functions) to front prefrontal cortex (the location of advanced thinking networks) (Willis, 2009). Changes in verbal IQ scores reported during teen years have been linked to changes in gray matter in the left motor cortex, while performance IQ seemed to correlate with denser gray matter in the anterior cerebellum (*NIMH » The teen brain: Still under construction*, 2011; Ramsden, Richardson, Josse, Thomas, Ellis, Shakeshaft, Seghier & Price, 2011). The impact of new experiences and learning causes growth in the cortex, as new dendrites form and myelin[11] density is increased. This in turn "increases the efficiency of the flow of electric impulses that conduct

[11] Myelin also referred to as "white matter," was made up of "connecting and supporting nerve fibers that transmit information from neuron to neuron--axons and dendrites" (Willis, 2009, p.57).

information" (Willis, 2009, p. 44). The formation of dendrites, combined with the brain's malleable nature, causes changes and the reshaping of dendrite-axon-neuron connections as determined by pathway usage (Jensen, 1998). Studies have shown usage makes these pathways stronger and more efficient: pathways that are not used die or are "pruned away." The brains of gifted students experience a delay in the process of frontal lobe maturation, myelin thickening and "pruning" in the cortex, which is cited as a possible cause for the disconnect between intellectual ability and judgment apparent in adolescent gifted students. This is evident until "frontal lobe maturation is complete and hormonal balance is achieved" (Willis, 2009, p. 50). Advances in brain research indicate a connection between new learning and the physical structure of the brain (Clark, 2002; Jensen, 1998; Sousa, 2001).

Advances in neuroimaging report that intelligence relates to the size of specific areas of the brain, with the volume of white matter indicating more dendrites and an increased ability to process information. Cognitive studies of the teenage brain found that gifted brains may experience more metabolic activity than "average" brains with grey matter in specific areas related to higher IQ (Ramsden, et. al., 2011). Theories related to right and left brain dominance have been replaced with findings that support the two hemispheres of the brain working together improve neural activity in cognitive areas such as math (Willis, 2009).

Parts of the teenage brain involved in growth and pruning and their impact on the gifted teenage brain are as follows:

Corpus Callosum: These nerve fibers enable the right and left hemispheres of the brain to communicate and have been linked to the "faster and greater exchange of

information … in mathematically gifted adolescents" (Willis, 2009, p. 51).

Frontal cortex: One of the last parts of the brain to mature, the frontal cortex is central in developing mental processes. Research suggests that it was "particularly susceptible to emotional and hormonal stimuli" during middle school years (Willis, 2009, p. 51). Peper and Dahl (2013) report that hormones associated with puberty affect brain behavior interactions between social-affective processing systems and cognitive-control systems with the resulting interactions being either positive or negative. The researchers note that influences, which may start as small, may become a larger influence over time (Peper & Dahl, 2013).

Basal ganglia: "Prioritize incoming data in terms of importance and urgency and then they route information to the frontal lobe centers that influence response to the data" (Willis, 2009, p. 51). Basal ganglia are larger in females during early adolescence and are thought to explain why girls may have higher prioritizing ability than boys at this level.

Amygdala: Related to intense emotional responses, the amygdala influences emotional processing and impulsivity in teens (Willis, 2009).

Cerebellum: Responsible for coordination, the cerebellum is believed to stimulate connections between the prefrontal lobe and cerebellum which may influence neural activity in areas of problem solving, music and math calculation (Willis, 2009).

The differences between the male and female brain are attributed by Clark (2002) to biochemistry and anatomy citing research that new experiences and environment improve intellectual capacity by stimulating of new dendrite growth and

establishing of new neural pathways (Clark, 2002; Jensen, 199; Willis, 2009). An increase in brain stimulation causes faster and more complex thought processing for the gifted (Clark, 2002; Jensen, 1998; Willis, 2009).

Research indicates that female and male brains differ in four areas: "processing, chemistry, structure, and activity" (Jantz, 2014). Male brains use seven times more gray matter for activity, causing males to be information and action focused when doing a task or game. Female brains, on the other hand, use ten times more white matter, a connector of gray matter to processing centers, allowing females to multitask and transition quickly when changing activities (Jantz, 2014). The female brain has verbal centers on both sides of the brain, while the male has only a verbal center in left hemisphere of the brain. The female brain has more developed verbal and listening skills, an advantage in processing and organizing data. The right side of the male brain focuses on visual tasks, providing an advantage in mathematics and understanding spatial relationships (Clark, 2002; Jantz, 2014a; Jantz, 2014b; Jensen, 1998). Female students preferred a cooperative learning environment while male students preferred a learning environment that was competitive and stressed individualized learning (Owens & Straton, 1980).

The lack of appropriate and challenging learning activities for gifted students may cause a loss of interest and motivation in school and may lead to underachievement (Jensen, 1998; Sousa, 2001). However, the existence of special curriculum and programing may cause feelings of resentment and alienation by non-gifted classmates. Underachievement among the gifted and talented is pronounced during middle school years as students juggle the diverse expectations of parents,

society, peers, and one's self (Clark, 2008).

As gifted students ages eleven through fourteen move from concrete thinkers to abstract processers, they generally exhibit an increased degree of sensitivity, compassion, and justice with unique sense of humor and unusual interests (Clark, 2008). The presence of higher problem solving and processing levels frequently causes adults to view the gifted student as more mature than their peers and, as a result, they may place more responsibility and higher expectations on the gifted student (Seeley, 2004). Gifted students are often aware of negative labels associated with high ability and may not call attention to themselves and thus, may not work to their potential (Baker, Bridger, & Evans, 1998; Geake & Gross, 2008; Rimm, 2002;).

2. Self-identity

Perceived as "different" from other middle school students (Frank and McBee, 2003), gifted students may be stereotyped as "brains, nerds, or geeks" associated with wearing glasses and pocket protectors, computers and straight A's. The identity development process for the gifted student may appear earlier than it does for non-gifted students (Frank and McBee, 2003; Silverman, 1997), as gifted individuals become formal operational thinkers at an early age (Zuo and Tao, 2001). In addition, gifted students tend to have "heightened emotional and moral sensitivity" which may cause vulnerability (Frank and McBee, 2003, p. 35). The presence of an anti-intellectual atmosphere in our schools and society, where athletics and other talents are valued over academics and giftedness, may cause gifted students to choose peers and friends over fulfilling their intellectual needs (Frank and McBee, 2003). As Dumbledore says to Harry, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far

more than our abilities" (Rowling, 2000, p. 333).

Identity formation is a priority in education. Kaplan and Flum (2012) describe classrooms as "communities of learners" where learning is "developing identification with certain groups and adopting their practices" (p. 171). The effect of school image and student attitude impact school engagement and student goals. Choices made in school by adolescents are important as they impact cognitive capacity, which, in turn influences self-reflection and identity (Flum and Kaplan, 2012). Students make choices daily, before and after school, in the classroom, in the halls, and at lunch in how they network and interact with peers and the school staff.

Erikson viewed personality as a lifelong developmental process involving eight[12] developmental periods to understand one's relationship to the world (1968). Adolescence, according to Erikson, focuses on developing one's identity through the process of interactions with others in society (Erikson, 1968). He reports, "Adolescents are preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the prototype of the day" (Erickson, 1968, p. 128). Identity, at this stage of development, may be based on how the individual perceives society's reaction to him or her. Thus, adolescent identity results in part from the opinion of others, how they react, and the social group in which the student belongs. Erikson and Erickson (1997) state:

The greatest problem we encounter is who we think we are versus who others

[12] A ninth stage of development, the Elderly, was included in Erikson, E. H. (1998). (The life cycle completed). Extended version with new chapters on the ninth stage by Joan M. Erikson. New York: Norton.

> may think we are or are trying to be. 'Who does he or she think I am?' is a troublesome question to ask oneself, and it is difficult to find the appropriate answer. (p. 110)

During adolescence, the perceptions of others influence social and academic success and gifted students are often times faced with choosing between popularity and academics. In the blog *A Face of Gifted Identity Formation* written by Sharon Duncan (2013), the author and theologian Frederick Buechner describes the importance and difficulty of identity formation at an early age for the gifted.

> What we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are—even if we tell it only to ourselves—because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing. (Duncan, 2013)

Kaplan and Flum (2012) note the relationship between learning and identity as students begin to identify with certain groups in the classroom. Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1997) investigated the importance of extracurricular activities on adolescent identity and motivation and reported extracurricular activities consistently served as a basis for student interest, flow and school engagement.

Gifted students may struggle with "what it means to be gifted and how to develop that potential" (Mahoney, 2008, p. 222), resulting in difficulty developing a personal sense of identity. The Gifted Identity Formation Model, proposed by Mahoney (2008; 1998) acknowledges that identity is "multifaceted, complex and forever evolving" (p. 2). This model can be used as a counseling tool to help the gifted student "understand the effect their giftedness has on their life development, and the importance giftedness has on their identity formation, thus better understanding themselves as gifted people" (p. 223). The Gifted Identity Formation Model

(Mahoney, 2008, 1998) is composed of four constructs and twelve systems that help identify and influence the formation of identity among gifted students (Mahoney, 2008). The four constructs are:

Validation: The acknowledgment that one's giftedness exists and is corroborated by others or the individual.

Affirmation: Interactive acknowledgment of one's gifted identity from other individuals or processes. It reinforces for the self "I am gifted."

Affiliation: Belonging to a group and feeling that "who I am" has a place and meaning with others of similar desires and abilities; individuals being valued for who they are.

Affinity: A sense of purpose or calling, which connects the individual to their place in the world.

The twelve environmental systems which impact gifted identity formation are Self, Family, Family of Origin, Culture, Vocational, Environmental, Educational, Social, Psychological, Political, Organic-Physiological, and Developmental (Mahoney, 2008). These 12 systems interact with the four constructs and influence gifted identity development.

Self-identity and social identity are formed through interactions with peers, teachers and family members, and the responses one receives in a variety of social interactions (Berlin, 2009; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Grobman, 2006; Kinney, 1993). Students are shaped through their interactions with individuals important to them, as social group membership is directly related to social identity (Berlin, 2009; Feldhusen

& Dai, 1997; Grobman, 2006; Kinney, 1993; Warrington &Younger, 2011). Social expectations resulting from advanced cognitive development make the formation of identity more difficult for gifted adolescents as their social and emotional needs often vary from their peer groups. Coleman & Cross (2005) cited the difference in academic ability as an example of gifted students receiving different treatment and expectations, which may influence identity and social acceptance.

Two terms frequently associated with gifted underachievers are self-efficacy and self-concept. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as a person's opinion of his/her ability and skill to plan, organize and carry out a plan of action needed to finish a goal, achievement or performance. Self-concept, on the other hand, is related to one's overall ability (McCoach & Siegle, 2001a). According to Byrne (1996)

> Students typically make such judgments by comparing their own performances with that of their classmates (an external comparison), as well as with their own performance in other subjects (an internal comparison); these dual comparatives processes represent frame-of- reference effects.
> (Byrne, 1996, as cited in Yeung, 2014, p. 805)

Whitmore (1980) reported that gifted underachievers typically have either a poor self-concept or poor self-efficacy.

3. **Affinity**

Goodenow defined affiliation or belongingness as a "student's sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (peers and teachers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class" (1993, p. 25). According to Rimm (2000), gifted elementary students are usually well liked and popular experiencing little negative bias, with negative stigma and labeling of gifted usually beginning during middle school and

adolescence. "Gifted students often value being intelligent, yet always realize that giftedness exacts a social price" (Rimm, 2002, p. 13). When 3500 secondary students responded to questionnaire asking if they would rather be good looking, athletic or intelligent, 53.8% of the students reported a preference for being intelligent, followed by being athletic and then good looking. However, in the written narrative accompanying the questionnaire, respondents noted an anti-intellectual bias and commented that there was no immediate social benefit to being intelligent (Rimm, 2002).

Early adolescents have a compelling developmental need to belong to a group of peers, which helps develop socialization skills and aid in the construction of identity (Warrington &Younger, 2011). It is during this period that friendships begin to take on an important role; the adolescent starts to break away from family and assumes more independence. Students struggle to maintain old friendships and to form new ones while assessing a new social environment (Bellmore, 2011). Middle school years may be a difficult period for gifted adolescents, whose advanced cognitive development and increased social awareness allows them to distinguish subtle signs of status and group membership (Cross & Fletcher, 2009). Membership in a peer group or "crowd" has been shown to have significant influence on the physical health and well-being of the gifted teen (Cross & Fletcher, 2009).

Student group membership based on common behaviors such as academic achievement, participation in sports, music preference or style of dress is not

necessarily friendship-based[13] . A review of 44 studies on adolescent peer group identification and characteristics found that peer group status in the school culture was attributed to such factors as visibility, success, grades and social activities. The common student school groups identified were the Elites, Athletes, Deviants, Academics, and Others (Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Brown, 2007).

Torn between establishing one's identity and the desire for acceptance, gifted students are conflicted by their personal needs, group norms, and peer group culture (Jin & Moon, 2006; Assouline & Colangelo, 2000). These factors, combined with an anti-intellectual school environment and negative attitudes of teachers, may cause gifted students to feel diminished or excluded (Geake & Gross, 2008). Mixed messages from the environment, emotional distress, and insecurity about one's social status are reasons gifted students do what is needed to fit in with the group and to keep parents and teachers "happy" (Geake & Gross, 2008; Rimm, 2002).

The relationship between peer status[14] and academic achievement becomes evident as early as elementary school (Bellmore, 2011). Peer group rejection[15] has been found to impact absenteeism, academic performance and attitude towards school. Bellmore (2011) reported that peer rejection and unpopularity in 5th grade foreshadowed the GPA's earned in middle school with students who experienced peer

[13] La Greca, Prinstein, & Fetter, (2001) reported "when asked to identify their three best friends and give their friends' crowd affiliation, 82% of participants reported at least one best friend in their same crowd, many reported their friends were in a different crowd" (as cited in Cross & Fletcher, 2009. p. 757).

[14] "Peer status was a measure of an individual's social functioning that was determined by his or her peer group as a whole" (Cillessen, 2009 as cited in Bellmore, 2011, p. 282).

[15] "Peer rejection, one aspect of peer status, indicated the extent to which one was actively disliked by one's peers" (as cited in Bellmore, 2011, p.282. McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001).

rejection having lower GPA's than students viewed by peers as unpopular who had higher GPA's.

Juvonen reported that by fourth grade students realized that low ability and lack of effort fostered negative opinions of teachers and peers. By eighth grade, however, students who did not work hard were more popular than those who did work hard. Juvonen found that early adolescent students were willing to admit to low ability as an explanation for academic failure rather than admit that the cause of failure was a lack of effort. She reported that "portraying oneself as low in ability is clearly perceived to facilitate social approval… a failing student can obtain multiple social benefits by publicly attributing … poor performance to low aptitude" (2000, p. 28). Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, and Brown (2007) reported that academic achievement and success was usually found in student groups viewed as having high status. Some strategies which allowed gifted students to avoid a nerdy or brainy stereotype were athletic ability, being considered cool, being tough, getting into trouble, or being the class clown (Adler, Kless, and Adler, 1992; Juvonen & Cadigan, 2002).

Being well known and liked is never more important to students than during the middle school years, when the goal of peer acceptance is at its highest (Bellmore, 2011; Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Kinney, 1993). Gifted students are faced with the decision to continue to receive good grades or to adopt strategies to conceal effort and grades from classmates (Zook & Russotti, 2012). Friendships, peer culture, and group conformity caused gifted students to "dumb down" their academic skills and achievements in return for peer acceptance and approval (Perry, 2008; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Zook & Russotti (2012) write:

> … getting good grades does not necessarily jeopardize popularity as long as adolescents also possess desirable characteristics and are not perceived as overly studious and unsociable. In fact, if students can demonstrate the ability to earn high grades without studying (what we call being an "effortless achiever") they may be perceived as naturally intelligent (Dweck, 2002) and admired by peers. (p. 767)

Male popularity is affected by academic effort and achievement more than female popularity, as the middle school male culture may not embrace academics (Zook & Russotti, 2012).

4. Academic Achievement

Two of the strongest qualities related to achievement are cognitive ability and personality[16] (Laidra, Pullmann, & Alik, 2007). However, this "correlation between intelligence and academic achievement appears to decline with age, being highest in primary school and lower in middle school" (Jensen, 1980, p. 319). McCoach and Siegle reported a positive linear relationship between academic achievement and academic self-perception. They noted that "academic self-perceptions "… account for approximately 21% of the variance in students' self-reported GPA" (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a, p. 150). McCoach & Siegle (2003b) noted that both the high achiever and the underachieving gifted student possess high academic self-perceptions because "both groups know that they possess the cognitive skills and abilities to be successful in school" (2003b, p. 62).

Psychological well-being contributes to gifted student's learning. Neihart (1999) wrote "that the psychological well-being of a gifted child is related to the type

[16] "Personality is a psychological system, composed of a group of parts that interact, and develop, and that impact a person's behavioral expression" (Mayer, 2007, p.2).

of giftedness, the educational fit, and the child's personal characteristics such as self-perceptions, temperament and life circumstances" (p. 15). Optimism has a positive influence on peer and adult relationships. In a study of early adolescents, ages 9 to 14, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Thomson (2009) found that peer acceptance by girls is predicted by the presence of a high level of optimism and empathy, while low anxiety and empathy predicted non-acceptance by peers. Positive engagement with peers influences school motivation and academic achievement (Wentzel, 2009). Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker (2006) note that peer acceptance impacts emotional well-being, positive self thoughts, and positive social behavior as well as academic achievement. Peterson, Duncan, & Canady (2009) interviewed recent gifted high school graduates about life events, high school experiences, and stress. The gifted students reported that challenges originating in school were more difficult than those resulting from life events. Students specifically mentioned school stress as a result of social and academic pressures, transitions which occur during school years, and being over committed (Peterson, et al., 2009).

Disequilibrium occurs when there is a "difference between the level and pace of their development and the environment in which they live" (Robinson, 2008, p. 37) and the one in which they attend school. Juvonen & Murdock (1993) report high ability students in upper grade levels adopt and use attributions and self-presentation strategies to establish a social image. Juvonen & Murdock (1993), in a study of eighth grade students on attributional self-presentation strategies, found that "adolescent students are sophisticated at both understanding and responding to their social environments" (p. 373). The researchers reported that eighth graders recognized the

need to adapt attribution strategies to meet the needs of their audience. Students commonly use a lack of effort as an attribution with parent and teachers to explain poor academic performance, but give a lack of ability as an attribution to peers for the same poor academic results. Juvonen and Murdock (1993) concluded "…social motives, like achievement motives (e.g., task and ego orientations), can guide students' behavior" (p. 375) and it is "important to recognize that students' classroom behavior is determined by multiple goals" (p. 375).

Emotions impact learning as teachers and students alike have unique emotional experiences and expressions that influence one's behavior and feelings (Mohammadyari, 2013). Emotional intelligence (EI), is defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). EI is "a learned ability to identify, understand, experience and express human emotions in healthy and productive ways" (Ogundokun & Adeyemo, 2010, p. 129). EI involves four primary abilities focusing intrapersonal knowledge, interpersonal skills, adaptability and getting along with others, and stress management (Hogan, Parker, Wiener, Watters, Wood, & Oke, 2010; Ogundokun & Adeyemo, 2010).

A correlation between academic achievement and emotional intelligence was made by Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, and Majeski (2001), who reported no significant difference between entering high school GPA's and first year university GPA's for dean's list students and university students placed upon academic probation. As a predictor of future grades, EI was 82% correct for high GPA students

and correctly identified 91% of low GPA students (Parker, et al., 2001). The researchers concluded that the EI qualities responsible for predicting academic success were intrapersonal, adaptability, and stress management abilities (Parker, et al., 2001). Mohammadyari (2013) studied the relationship between academic achievement and the EI of gifted students and reported a significant correlation, finding the EI component of self-awareness significant in the prediction of gifted achievement.

Peers may be either a strong source of social support or a roadblock hindering academic success for gifted early adolescents (Ryan, 2000). Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that school engagement and student motivation increased when students and their peers liked school. Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen (2000) noted that students with low levels of support from their friends, family, and teachers were at high risk for poor academic success. Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat & Silsby (2002) reported that adolescent students tend to be attracted to students having academic values similar to their values. 66% of high ability students cited peer pressure as the main motivational force to not get good grades (Clasen & Clasen, 1995). Two additional reasons mentioned for poor grades among gifted students included a negative attitude toward school and the grades peers and friends received (Clasen & Clasen, 1995). In recognizing the parallel between the grades of gifted underachievers and their peers, one wonders, is the lack of academic achievement a cause or an effect of student peer relations. McCoach and Siegle (2008) question whether it is the choice made by gifted underachievers to socialize with students who are also underachievers that causes poor academic achievement or is it the student's underachievement that causes them to associate with other underachieving students.

The relationship among gender, giftedness, and adolescence is seldom researched (Reis & Hébert, 2008). Generally speaking, underachievers are considered to be males rather than females (Matthews & McBee, 2007), with male underachievers outnumbering female underachievers three to one (McCoach and Siegle, 2003a). Underachievement in elementary school is similar for both sexes with a rise in male underachievement occurring as students enter and continue in secondary school (Lupart & Pyryt, 1996). The small number of female underachievers is believed to be related to the ability of female students to hide or disguise one's ability and therefore, avoid teacher attention (Colangelo et al., 1993).

By middle school years, students recognize that academic effort is more valued by teachers and parents than one's peers and adjust their behavior accordingly. Zook and Russotti (2012) investigated self-presentation[17] strategies and popularity in high-achieving middle school students and concluded that popularity was not related to the use of self-presentation strategies. This result, however, was dependent upon gender, grade, and popularity. Popular seventh graders felt that high achieving students should be honest about grades and effort, but by eighth grade, popular students reported doing less studying. Popular girls felt that using vague answers was the best way to respond to questions about grades and effort; boys, however, were not in agreement (Zook & Russotti, 202). A major difference in student self-presentation strategies was that males tended to overestimate their grades, while females provided either an accurate

[17] Also referred to as impression management, it is the process of controlling or manipulating one's behavior in a particular way to influence the impression others form of the individual (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

representation of their grades or, depending upon circumstances, may even underestimate their grades (Heatherington, Townsend, & Burroughs, 2001).

Siegle and Reis (1998) found in a study of gifted students in grades four to eight that teachers "consistently rated females higher than males on effort and quality of work" (p. 39). They reported that students were rated equally in all subjects with the exception of language arts, in which females were ranked higher. Interestingly, female students rated themselves higher in English/language arts than male students; the male students rated themselves higher in the areas of science, math and social studies than female students (Lupart, Cannon & Telfer, 2004; Siegle & Reis, 1998).

Many studies related to academic achievement and gender focus mathematics. Preckel, Goetz, Pekrun, & Kleine, (2008) reported the existence of

> …gender-related differences in math performance (that) are task specific: Boys show better mathematical problem-solving abilities than do girls, whereas girls show a slight advantage in mental arithmetic. Females seem to get better grades at school, but males out perform females on tasks that require mathematical literacy. Furthermore, in the general as well as the gifted populations, males show higher mathematics-related competence beliefs, a stronger interest in math, and a stronger performance goal orientation in mathematics than do females. (p. 149)

Preckel, et.al., (2008) concluded that the socialization practices related to gender were more influential in the areas of math self concept, interest and mastery goal orientation than cognitive ability (2008, p. 155). Tirri and Nokelainen (2011) reported gifted girls underestimated their math ability and viewed their language arts ability as higher even though their performance in those domains was equal. The females in the study felt success originated from effort not ability, whereas males attributed their success to ability (Tirri & Nokelainen, 2011).

Characteristics of Giftedness

As the processes and procedures of gifted identification evolved, so has the scope of characteristics and behaviors generally associated with gifted individuals. Gifted students cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group, but rather should be considered as unique individuals with varied abilities and interests (Reis & Small, 2001). A number of gifted characteristics may be present in varying degrees and intensities, depending upon the gender, culture, and socio-economic level of the student. Characteristics commonly related to the gifted are divided into the following categories: general intellectual ability; specific academic ability; creative ability; leadership ability; psychomotor; and visual and performing arts.

Betts and Neihart (1988) proposed six general profiles of gifted students to help educators recognize reoccurring and prominent behaviors and characteristics frequently identified with gifted students. The gifted profiles proposed were: The Successful, The Challenging, The Underground, The Dropouts, The Double-Labeled, and The Autonomous Learner (Betts & Neihart, 1988, pp.250-251).

Giftedness in the School Setting

School helps shape academic identity and personal perception (Hatt, 2012), serving as a central influence in the student's socialization process by teaching "what it means to be smart" (Hatt, 2012). Interactions that occurred in school and within the realm of education molded students; the implicit views and judgments of others influence the social representation of self and how one personally interprets one's identity. Smartness or giftedness, which is commonly associated with excellence and potential, is based upon the cultural values in place at school (Sternberg, 2007;

Borland, 2004). Hatt (2012), in her yearlong ethnographical study of a kindergarten classroom, proposed that the nature of school and what occurred in the classroom "help to shape who we think we are, who others think we are, and who we think we can become" (Hatt, p. 439). Influenced by the concept of "figured worlds.[18]". Hatt described disciplinary and pedagogical practices that enabled students to construct identities based upon "school smartness." School smartness, as defined in her study, was tied to student identity and self-perception; it was associated with following the rules and behaviors of the hidden curriculum of academia (Hatt, 2012). Hatt proposed that student experiences within the school setting impacted the student's views of smartness and behavior "as a mechanism of control and social positioning along racial and class lines" (Hatt, 2012, p. 438). Thus, "school smartness" became a tool of social positioning, social control, and power in the classroom which affected the class's academic potential, performance, achievement and social culture (Hatt, 2012). School socialization continued from grade to grade with former classmates and teachers affecting one's school history and impacting future school experience.

School and society sends mixed messages about giftedness due in part to the issues of equality and or elitism connected to the use of various educational strategies and curriculum (McCoach & Siegle, 2007). Academic giftedness is accepted in schools almost as an individual difference, similar to a disability, that must be provided for and accommodated (Geake & Gross, 2008). To educators, gifted students are an "at risk" population for potential school problems[19], one of which is

[18] Figured worlds represented the rules, guidelines, or social forces that influenced but did not completely dictate the ways people speak, behave, and conduct their practice within social spaces.

[19]Truancy, dropping out of school, delinquency, boredom, misbehavior in class.

underachievement (Seeley, 2004). Gifted students experience being labeled and stereotyped by classmates as "nerds," "geeks" or "brainiacs" and are frequently socially isolated from peers on the playground, cafeteria, or after school hours (Striley, 2014). Gifted students face many challenges in school as they mature and become productive citizens in our society.

Gifted definition and identification criteria

The school, in this study, philosophically agrees with Mayer[20] (2005) and has adopted an educational philosophy and implemented supporting practices. In this study, the criterion employed by the Bedford School District, in accordance with state gifted education guidelines, serves as the basis for gifted identification and gifted programing. The identification criteria for placement in the district's gifted and talented program includes achievement of 97 percentile or higher on a school ability index results in automatically placement in the gifted education program. In addition, multi-criteria placement occurs through the use of a district matrix, in which students receive points for performance on school ability and achievement tests, recommendations, and outstanding accomplishment in the areas of art, music, writing, acting and leadership. 12 points are required for GT placement in the school district (See Table 2.1 in the appendix to view the district matrix). Once a student is identified as gifted, the student remains in the program until graduation or the student leaves the district.

[20] Mayer stated giftedness resulted from a combination of innate ability and those personal experiences that allow an individual's abilities and talents to develop and grow into "extraordinary performance(s) on authentic tasks" (Mayer, 2005, p. 444).

Underachievement

Academic underachievement[21] and the risks of early high school drop out are not foreign to gifted students. They, like other adolescents, face the challenges of growing up in our present society. The social and emotional development for the gifted adolescent is, however, made more difficult due to their giftedness, the issues they encounter in accommodating their high ability and talents, and the desire to "fit in" with mainstream adolescent culture and society (Jin & Moon, 2006; Moon & Dixon, 2006; Schuler, 2012).

Research in the area of gifted underachievement, while an enigma in education (Hoover-Schultz, 2005), is hindered by the small number of students identified as both gifted and underachieving and the acceptance and use of effective measurement tools (Matthews & McBee, 2007). Underachievement is characterized as both content-specific and situational, with students frequently being successful in some academic areas and not in others, or successful in sports or hobbies while not successful in academic subjects (Delisle & Berger, 1990). Often a struggling academically gifted student who deviates from the norm is viewed as having "problems" and needs to "just apply himself more and stop distracting the rest of the class" (Smutny, 2001, p. 44). Underachievement may be considered a choice that is directly related to the expectations of parents and teachers and dependent upon how they view the ability and aptitude of the gifted student (Delisle & Berger, 1990).

[21] Underachievement was defined in this study as a discrepancy between the student's potential and academic performance as determined by school records and teacher assessment.

Gifted underachievement is recognized as being both complex and challenging and often perceived as a problem of attitude or behavior. Rimm (1997) viewed student achievement or the lack of it, as a behavior and, as such, proposed that underachievement could be modified or changed. Classroom behaviors frequently associated with underachievement include: not turning in work on time or not handing work in; daydreaming; a lack of class participation and attention, the loss of assignments; poor study skills; a history of class disruptions and misbehaviors; and tardiness or frequent absences (Rimm, 1995; Whitmore, 1980). When viewed through the lens of student behavior, these behaviors associated with underachievement can be altered and changed over time (Delisle & Berger, 1990).

The concerns of parents and teachers related to gifted underachievement are noted in the gifted education research literature (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a). These concerns result from the conventional wisdom that gifted students are outstanding learners, typically identified based upon their high academic ability and aptitude (Siegle & McCoach, 2003b). The underachieving gifted student is not generally viewed as a "student at risk" (Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen, & Maxey, 1993) or as a drop out risk because of their high academic skill and exceptional learning ability (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). However, Renzulli and Park (2002) state that some gifted students maybe at risk for dropping out during secondary schooling more than other gifted students. Matthews (2009) reports a high school dropout rate of 5%, which when combined with the statistic cited by Stillwell (2013) that 613,379 students dropped out of high school, indicates that more than 30,000 students who may have tested as gifted dropped out of high school in 2010.

The impact of underachievement persists. Peterson and Colangelo (1996) noted that most gifted underachieving students continue to be unsuccessful in secondary school exhibiting underachievement behaviors in all class subjects. In a follow up study to the previously mentioned findings, Peterson (2000) reported that only 52 percent of the original 153 underachieving students in the 1996 study who attended college actually graduated, while 83 percent of the achieving gifted students in the same study attending college graduated.

Defining Underachievement

Gifted parents and educators agree that underachieving behaviors are present in our students and schools. While the terms gifted and underachievement represent "opposite ends of the educational spectrum" (Hoover-Schultz, 2005, p. 1), gifted underachievement is essentially concerned with human potential that is not realized and developed. While there is no agreed upon definition of gifted underachievement, Whitmore (1980) was instrumental in operationally defining underachievement, distinguishing between the student's performance and potential. She defined underachievement as "performance judged by either grades or achievement test scores or both, that are significantly below the student's measured or demonstrated potential for academic achievement" (p. 168). Dr. Sylvia Rimm viewed underachievement as a "matter of degree," citing the influence of culturally-based testing issues as impacting gifted identification. She defines underachievement as "a discrepancy between a child's school performance and some index of the child's ability. If children are not working to their ability in school, they are underachieving" (Rimm, 1997, p. 18).

Agreement on the definitions of giftedness and underachievement is important for educators in research and in the field (Reis and McCoach, 2000). The most common characteristic attributed to underachievement is a discrepancy between the student's ability (potential) and achievement (performance) (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Whitmore, 1980). Reis and McCoach (2000) proposed a workable definition, for use by gifted researchers and educators, for defining and identifying gifted underachievement (Matthews & McBee, 2007; McCoach & Siegle, 2003a; Siegle, Reis, & McCoach, 2006;).

> Underachievers are students who exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured class grades and teacher evaluations). To be classified as an underachiever, the discrepancy between expected and actual achievement must not be the direct result of a diagnosed learning disability. (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 157)

Lacking an accepted definition for gifted underachievement, the behaviors commonly associated with underachievement are readily recognized and identified by teachers and parents. In the classroom, teachers evaluate students in relation to their potential and actual academic performance or achievement. Identification of gifted underachievement in the classroom focuses on the quality of the student's academics and class behavior, e.g. classroom attention, class participation, the lack of preparedness in assignments and discussions, the refusal to do work, and readiness to blame others for low grades and tests. For parents, gifted underachievement is characterized by poor grades, warning notices, missing work, incomplete, sloppy, lost, forgotten or not turned in assignments, and frequent negative communication by the classroom teacher.

Factors affecting underachievement

At present, the actual causes of gifted underachievement are unknown, with many factors believed to contribute and influence its development. Researchers agree that gifted underachievement indicates problem areas in the student's life (Reis & McCoach, 2000). The presence of student underachievement is thought to result from the interaction of several contributing factors categorized as: (1) school related (Baker, Bridger, & Evans, 1998; Emerick, 1992; Matthews & McBee, 2007; McCoach & Siegle, 2003a; McNabb, 2003; Rimm, 1997; Robinson, 2002; Seely, 1993; Whitmore, 1980) (2) family related (Baker, et al., 1998; McNabb, 2003; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Rimm, 1997; Robinson, 2002) (3) caused by a physical, emotional or cognitive problem (McNabb, 2003; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Robinson, 2002)
(4) resulting from peer influence (McNabb, 2003; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Robinson, 2002) and lastly, (5) due to student personality characteristics (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Reis & McCoach, 2000).

Two main interacting themes related to the cause of underachievement have emerged in the current research: individual (personal, social, family) factors and environmental (school) factors (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Hoover-Schultz, 2005; McNabb, 2003; Neumeister, & Hébert, 2003; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Following family influence on academic achievement, the student's school environment and student/peer culture are the most instrumental forces in determining a student's academic achievement (Hoover-Schultz, 2005; Reis & McCoach, 2000: Rimm, 1995).

Siegle and & McCoach (2001) cite the disconnect between the gifted student, the school's curriculum, and its environment as a source of underachievement.

Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison (2006) researched student perspective as to why students dropped out of school. They reported that 47 percent of students who left school cited the major reason why was uninteresting/boring classes; 66 percent said that they would have worked harder if more had been demanded of them, while 38 percent felt there were not enough rules and students had "too much freedom" (p. 3). Bridgeland, et al. (2006) report that 69 percent of the students felt uninspired to work hard, that homework requirements were one hour or less a day, and that they frequently missed class the year before dropping out of school. Additional environmental or school related factors thought to influence the academic achievement of gifted student include: a lack of challenging classes and curriculum, boredom, a non-intellectual climate in the institution, participation in negative peer groups, and a lack of school curriculum which met the academic and social needs of gifted students (Schultz, 2002a).

While American high schools are referred to as "hiding places for…untapped academic talent" (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 29), research indicates that gifted underachievement begins in the final years of elementary school (Rogers, 2007) and continues into middle school and high school (Friesen, & Milton, 2009; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Willms, Wang & Holcomb, 2010) as students who achieve during elementary years begin to stop working and exhibit a lack of effort and interest in academic achievement. Shaw and McCuen (1960), who studied grades one to eleven in their research on the origins of underachievement, found underachievement to begin as early as first grade for males and to increase during the following years, with third grade being a significant time in the development of male underachievement. Female

underachievers, on the other hand, received grades above those of achieving females up until fifth grade, when their grades began to fall below those reported for achieving girls. Lupart & Pyryt (1996) noted the development of negative attitudes toward academics and school in gifted girls, as well as a decrease in the academic achievement by both males and females during seventh grade.

Middle school years are crucial in the detection and prevention of underachievement. Perry (2008) reported 15 to 40 percent of gifted students may be considered underachievers and Peterson & Colangelo, (1996) noted that 45 percent of students who underachieved in seventh grade continued a pattern of underachievement into and during high school. Academic achievement, according to Mathews (2006), indicates future academic success or the possibility of becoming a high school dropout. Underachievement, if continued into high school, results in either the student dropping out of school or the student experiencing a renewed interest and commitment to school achievement and school success (Busteed, 2013).

Socioeconomic Status

Poverty has a major impact on student academic achievement (Burney and Beilke, 2008). The term socioeconomic status (SES) refers to an individual's "income, level of education, employment, health, and access to resources" ("Socioeconomic status - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia," 2014). Low SES children, regardless of race and ethnicity, score below average on standardized tests (Lacour and Tissington, 2011) and experience a downward trend in GPA when transitioning to middle school (Niehaus, Rudasill, and Rakes, 2012). Some degree of poverty is present in all public schools, where as the presence of diversity in race, culture,

gender, language and school location varies from school to school. As mentioned previously, gifted students living in poverty are few in number and hard to identify, as a disproportionate number of identified gifted students are members of middle or high SES levels [22]. Poverty is present when individuals have "incomes less than that deemed sufficient to purchase basic needs- food, shelter, clothing and other essentials" (Jensen, 2009, p.5-6). A complex issue, poverty influences factors such as home ownership, family assets, length of time in poverty, and income level. Children living in poverty have fewer resources[23] than other children (Payne, 1998). The number of students in a school participating in the Federal Free and Reduced lunch program indicates the existence of poverty in families of school age children (Burney and Beilke, 2008).

Haviland Middle School, as a Title 1 school, has 57% of its student body qualifying for the Free and Reduced Lunch program, therefore, one can reasonably assume identified GT students participate in this program. Four of the GT students participating in this study participate in the school's free and reduced lunch program.

Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York (1966) found that student success is directly related to SES and family background. Bailey (2011) reported that gifted students from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds were resilient and able to adapt social coping skills to a new

[22] The lowest income group of students identified as gifted was composed of 9%, while 47% made up the highest income group in a study reported by Hodgkinson (2006) as cited in (Burney & Beilke, 2008).

[23] Academic success and achievement were directly influenced by the lack of resources available to the student in poverty. Such resources may "include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources as well as support systems, relationships, role models, and knowledge of hidden rules" (Lacour & Tissington, 2011, p.522).

environment. Reis, Colbert, & Hébert (2004) noted that student resiliency was increased when an encouraging adult was combined with either peer support or student participation in extracurricular activities. Low socioeconomic gifted students are usually academically successful in the familiar elementary school setting. However, the transition to a new academic environment may be unsettling for these gifted students, as one's academic identity as "the top in the class" is challenged, curriculum becomes more rigorous, and familiar adult mentors are not in the same school. Resulting academic difficulty and problems cause the student's motivation to shift from performance to avoidance as the student looks for an alternative way to fulfill one's needs (Kumar and Jagacinski, 2011).

This study acknowledges the importance of family and parental influence on low SES students, as the investigation focuses on the role of school environment and culture on gifted students in a Title 1 middle school. Poverty does not inhibit a student's ability to learn (Payne, 2009); it does, however, "influence the learning process and it influences state-mandated standardized test results" (Tienken, 2012, p. 105). Children living in poverty consistently achieve at a lower academic level than students from middle and upper class families (Lacour and Tissington, 2011). Borman and Dowling (2006) report a gain of at least one year of learning per school year for students in poverty, but noted that students from poverty were not at the same academic level as children from middle and high SES when they began public school or at the start of each individual school year.

Four risk factors commonly affect families living in poverty; emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety

issues (Jensen, 2009; Unity, Osagiobare, & Edith, 2013). Children raised in poverty frequently experience "emotional and social instability" (Jensen, 2009, p. 15) and are at a risk to have their needs for "unconditional love, guidance and support, safe, predictable, stable environment . . . harmonious, reciprocal interactions" met (Unity, et al., 2013, p. 154). This deficit in social and emotional support affects the student's social relationships, school behavior, and in turn, academic performance (Jensen, 2009). Students from low SES experience more stress than students from higher SES (Unity, et al., 2013), causing a lack of or slow development of coping skills necessary for school and academic success (Jensen, 2009). Students from low SES are more likely to develop a feeling of helplessness from their experiences with disruptive and traumatic events and a lack of connection to family and community, which causes them to become resigned about their future (Jensen, 2009).

Students from low SES frequently start school behind their more affluent peers (Unity, et al., 2013). A lack of intellectual stimulation and limited vocabulary during a student's early years impacts IQ, vocabulary, and social skills, which lead to low cognitive expectations and low student self-esteem (Jensen, 2009; Unity, et al., 2013). Some possible health and safety issues related to the substandard housing generally available to low SES families included "malnutrition, environmental hazards, and insufficient health care" (Jensen, 2009; Unity, et al., 2013). Frequently low SES students are absent or tardy for school causing them to miss essential academic skills and important curriculum content.

The values and views toward education expressed by the family and community of low SES students affects academic achievement and may cause

disequilibrium between the student and the school (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). For children in poverty, "The social world of school operates by different rules or norms than the social world these children live in" (Pellino, 2009, p. 2). Low SES students are aware of the social and economic differences that exist in school between those with resources and money and those without financial resources. Low SES students generally have fewer opportunities to participate in after school and sport activities, lessons, and camps (Burney & Beilke, 2008), and may not own such things as a cell phone or computer, or have access to the Internet or cable TV, all of which are part of today's mainstream student culture. Social groups in school influence academic behavior, as low SES students struggle to maintain one's cultural identity, earn good grades, and balance the need to work after school, hang out with friends, help out at home or adjust to a new environment because of frequent moves (Burney & Beilke, 2008).

The level of academic challenge a student assumes may overcome the impact of low SES when it comes to completing post-secondary education (Burney & Beilke, 2008). The correlation between a rigorous academic curriculum and post-secondary success, reported by Adelman (2006), reveals that courses in advanced math and Advanced Placement courses "more than doubled the odds that a student with advanced levels of mathematical preparation entering college would eventually graduate" (Burney & Beilke, 2008, p. 178). Recognizing that "few children from high-poverty schools get the education needed in their early years that would prepare them for the advanced curriculum they will need for college preparation" (Burney and Beilke, 2008, p. 179) necessitates that low SES students receive the academic skills

and opportunities to participate in challenging and rigorous academic experiences.

Renzulli (1994) stated that "every learner has strengths or potential strengths that can be used as a foundation for effective learning and creative productivity" (p. 99). This ideology is reflected through his School-wide Enrichment Triad Model, which emphasizes the role student enrichment plays in the development of student ability and talent. For low socioeconomic students, in particular, such academic and cultural enrichment experiences are opportunities for the student to showcase ability and talent in non-traditional ways. Schools need to make provisions to enable low SES students to participate in enriched learning experiences when families are unable to afford such activities, supplies and equipment including field trips, camps, lessons, and musical instruments (Hébert, 2002). Providing low socioeconomic students with enrichment opportunities has resulted in social and academic benefits and student talent development (Miller & Gentry, 2010; Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, & Ngoi, 2004). Student learning and development increases and the school is provided with an alternate means to identify gifted low socioeconomic students (Pereira & Gentry, 2013).

Gifted Underachiever

The profile of a gifted underachiever has been described as "complex and often contrary and inconclusive" (Emerick, 1992, p. 140), with numerous attempts to group underachievers by their characteristics and behaviors (Colangelo, 2002). Gifted students are usually identified as underachieving based upon their classroom behaviors rather than the influences and circumstances that cause such behaviors. Reis and McCoach (2000) recognized the diversity of gifted underachievers and acknowledged

it is almost impossible to identify an underachiever through a characteristic checklist. Some characteristics and behaviors frequently mentioned as being representative of underachieving gifted behavior are low self-esteem, negative attitude towards school and learning, reluctance to take risks or apply one's self, discomfort with competition, lack of perseverance, lack of goal-directed behavior, social isolation, and weaknesses in skill areas and organization (Rimm, 1986; Smutney, 2004; Whitmore, 1986). Other characteristic behaviors commonly noted in underachieving gifted students include a lack of effort; a weakness in study and organization skills; opposition to participation in classroom and learning activities, the lack of participation in extracurricular school activities; the need to please others instead of achieving at school and being easily bored and disruptive behavior in class (Rimm, 2004). Siegle and McCoach (2005) suggested that underachievers think they will not perform well academically for several reason they lacked the skill level necessary to succeed and so were reluctant to try and fail; they did not feel the course work assigned was relevant and/or meaningful to them; or fatalistically, any effort they made to succeed would result in failure.

McCoach and Siegle (2003a) compared gifted achievers and underachievers to determine what differences, if any, existed in their characteristics. Surprisingly, they found that both groups of students had high academic self-perceptions. The differences found between these student groups were in attitude towards school and teachers, personal motivation/self-regulation, goal valuation, and a lack of motivation to be successful in school. Motivation/self-regulation and goal valuation were found to differentiate the two groups with 81% accuracy (McCoach & Siegle, 2003a). In an

investigation of academic achievement in African American students Ford, Grantham and Whiting (2008), determined three factors they felt impacted gifted underachievement regardless of ethnicity the lack of effort, peer pressure, and the presence of stereotypes. Two additional indicators of academic underachievement were the student's quality of schooling exhibited and completion of academic coursework (Anderson & Keith, 1997; Baker et al., 1998).

Achievers and Underachievers

Gifted students are frequently categorized in school and by parents as being either an achiever or an underachiever. Achievers are those students whose academic performance is a reflection of their high ability and achievement test scores. They are excellent students with positive self-efficacy who are usually motivated to perform above grade level and class expectations. Achievers are goal oriented and planned to further their education (Rubin & Reis, 2006). Underachievers, on the other hand, are those students whose low academic performances are inconsistent with their ability and achievement test scores (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). These students appear disinterested in school and are not willing to put forth the effort or time necessary to be successful and achieve. Frequently they display just enough effort to receive average grades, thus choosing to get by rather than use their ability to excel. Often, these students lack motivation and do not plan to further their education.

Underachievers may be classified into a variety of categories (Colangelo, 2002; Frey, 2002). Whitmore (1980), one of the first gifted educators to advance classifications for underachievers, proposed the following three categories for underachievers: the aggressive underachiever, who exhibits disruptive and rebellious

behaviors; the withdrawn underachiever, who is uninvolved and bored; and the rebellious underachiever who exhibits both withdrawn and aggressive behaviors. Clark (2008) and Reis (1998) distinguished underachievers based on context and length of occurrence they noted situational underachievers, students who underachieved in specific situations and chronic underachievers, students with a history of long term underachievement.

The use of localized disengaged behaviors by gifted students was recognized by Delisle (1992) as being a deliberate action to address academic issues and problems in a particular curricular area or with a specific teacher. Delisle identified these underachieving gifted students as "non producers" or "selective consumers" (1992) and distinguished such underachieving gifted behaviors from the chronic long-term underachieving gifted student. Long-term chronic underachievers, as described by Delisle, had a low self-esteem, were dependent learners who were at risk academically in most academic areas, with poor class attendance, and history of not completing course assignments. Selective consumers, on the other hand, were individuals whose achievement and performance equaled their ability in only those areas of interest to them or that they felt were relevant and an asset to their goals. Some characteristics shared by underachievers and selective consumers were impaired socialization skills, a preference for a "Family" classroom environment, and the need for counseling to change attitude and behavior to achieve school success (Delisle, Galbraith, & Espeland,, 2002). Delisle et al., (2002) reported that underachievers and selective consumers varied in personal qualities and motivational intentions, and as a result, should be handled differently. See Appendix Table 2.2 for characteristics that

distinguish underachievers and selective consumers.

The Twice-Exceptional Gifted

Educators have been slow to recognize students who are both identified as gifted and have one or more disabilities. These students are referred to as twice exceptional because they are gifted and have either a learning disability, an emotional or behavioral disorder, a physical disability, or a combination of these disabilities. Twice-exceptional students have the potential to achieve, but become frustrated from the discrepancy between their giftedness and their disability. Frequently their attempts at school work result in failing grades and incomplete work (King, 2005). The most common emotional and behavioral disorder found in twice exceptional students is AD/HD. Student behaviors commonly associated with ADHD include:

> . . . high activity levels, have difficulty paying attention, act without much forethought, experience problems persisting on certain tasks, and have difficulty following rules. Both groups also often experience significant social difficulties and academic underachievement. (Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004, p. 73)

The behaviors of healthy highly gifted students and students with Asperger's Syndrome appear similar (Neihart, 2000). Asperger's Syndrome is a developmental spectrum disorder with characteristics that are found on a continuum, which includes Autism. Asperger's Syndrome is primarily associated with impaired social interaction development which includes a lack of social skills and conventions. Asperger students do not know how to interact with others e.g. how to start a conversation, be polite, or even establish a friendship. Asperger students

> . . . lack a general common sense and awareness of social standards (e.g., establishing eye contact, proximity to others, discerning what maybe considered rude behavior, knowing how and when to take turns"; they also

> misinterpret verbal and nonverbal social cues, which causes conflicts in social settings. As a result of these and other behaviors, students with Asperger's Syndrome generally have difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships. (Bianco, M., Carothers, D. E., & Smiley, L. R., 2009, p.207)

Gifted Asperger students have areas of extreme passion and interest; they are verbal, appear clumsy, have a low tolerance for change, and are aware of their "differentness." In addition, they usually have full time aides working with them during the school day and perform best in an environment that is structured, normal, focused, and free from distractions.

School Environment and Culture

Educational institutions, current pedagogy, and the school's cultural environment each impact student achievement in attaining the goal that all students receive quality earning experiences (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). School environment and culture influence school curriculum, teacher perceptions, student motivation, academic achievement and outcomes, and student behavior all of which can be modified and controlled by the school's educators (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Watkins & Aber, 2009). In this study, school environment and school climate are used interchangeably to encompass the scope and quality of lifeworld the gifted student experiences in school. This student lifeworld includes the social and emotional well-being, physical environment, curriculum and pedagogy employed, and interpersonal relationships and interactions which occur within the school (*National School Climate Center: School Climate*, n.d.).

Middle School

Middle school represents the bridge between elementary and secondary school

to ease the transition between these two distinct educational environments (Coleman, 2001). A period of academic change for grades sixth through eighth, middle school is recognized as a crucial and pivotal time in the education of our youth (Nauert, 2011). Middle school students undergo intense change as they adjust to their new learning environment (Kim, Schwartz, Cappella, & Seidman, 2014; Rockoff, & Lockwood, 2010), negative attitudes about school and specific core subjects develop, academic motivation declines, behavioral problems increase, and gifted underachievement is initiated (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kearn, 2006). Environmental changes associated with middle school include different teachers for each subject area, various class locations with a new group of students each hour, and usually a larger school with new students from other elementary schools (Knowles & Brown, 2000). During this formative period, academic performance begins to drop and school disengagement starts to emerge (Wang & Holcomb, 2010; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). For these reasons, middle school is viewed as one of the last chances to influence the future education and career path of a student (National Middle School Association, 2010).

The relationship between middle school philosophy and gifted education is tenuous at best. However, upon the review of these two educational entities, common ideas and practices are evident and strikingly compatible. The characteristics of middle school and gifted education are primarily concerned with the development of students (Tomlinson, 1995). Both middle school philosophy and gifted education are focused on helping student develop interests and strengths through exploratory classes

and gifted enrichment activities. Gifted education and middle school philosophy both advocate the use of flexible grouping practices and scheduling, with curriculum content characterized as problem-centered and authentic, rich in creative and critical thinking skills, and problem-solving (Chance, 1998). Ideologically the practices employed in middle school pedagogy and gifted education are complementary. The adoption of problem based learning, critical thinking skills, and higher order thinking skills appropriate to the academic ability of the learner benefits all students (Tomlinson, 1995). The very nature of the middle school schedule provides for the grouping and regrouping of students so that gifted and high ability students are able to receive appropriate academic challenge with peers without the distinction of being different and experiencing "peer rejection" (Colangelo, Kelly, 1983).

Middle school students, as mentioned previously, are concerned with establishing personal identity as they "find themselves." They are developing physically, emotionally and socially as they begin to explore diverse career and personal options for their future. The inclusion of a wide variety of exploratory classes, a characteristic of middle school, provides students with academic experiences not usually found in elementary school and expands student horizons (Tomlinson, 1995). It is evident that the unique and individual needs of gifted students may be addressed within the framework and support of gifted education and middle school philosophy.

Role of Academic Setting

Academic achievement is affected by a variety of personal, social and educational factors (Baker, et al., 1998; Clark, 2008; McCoach & Siegle, 2003b;

Seeley, 2004). Today's gifted students, like their classmates, come to school with a variety of problems and issues that influence academic achievement and cannot reasonably be addressed or alleviated within a school environment. Whitmore (1989), however, stressed the role schools played in underachievement when she referred to underachieving students as the product of "underachieving schools" and "underserved groups." She emphasized the importance of providing appropriate learning environments and learning styles for those students "capable of doing much better," the "underserved groups" or special populations of students[24] that existed in our schools. These students were often overlooked for gifted identification and may account for a number of gifted students who were not served and thus underachieve in relation to their innate potential.

Jin & Moon (2006) found that educational setting influences the school satisfaction of gifted students. Jin and Moon reported that high ability Korean students attending a specialized science high school were more satisfied with school life than students attending a general high school. The placement of gifted students in educational settings with inappropriate peers and unchallenging academic environment may result in causing social and emotional problems for them (Robinson, Reis, Neihart, and Moon, 2002). Unsuitable curriculum and/or an inadequate school environment can place gifted students at risk.

School may have a negative influence on the achievement of students who are viewed by educators as "less desirable" (Seeley, 2004). Seeley reported the existence

[24] Some of these populations include the culturally diverse and minority, learning disabled, females, low socio-economic level, and those students that chronically misbehave.

of a relationship between GPA and student behavior in middle school. Lower student GPA's were related to the acting out in class and an increase in the misbehavior of students. The study reports:

> … a reciprocal relationship…between behavior and grade point average. That is by lowering students' grades (who are capable of doing better,) the schools inadvertently prompted students to act out and become behavior problems. Students with behavior problems automatically got lower grades regardless of their ability. (Seeley, 2004, p. 2)

This cycle of bad grades and poor behavior in underachieving gifted students establishes these students at risk for dropping out. Additional school-related risk factors for underachievement not mentioned previously included a too large school, impersonal atmosphere, and school supported cliques (Seeley, 2004).

Middle School Culture and Learning Environment

The American education system seeks to provide students with opportunities and experiences to support growth and development. Research indicates, however, that not all students have similar perceptions and reactions to school environment and climate (Watkins & Aber, 2009). Oftentimes gifted students are ignored special services and experiences as teachers feel these students can be successful on their own (Moon, 2009).

Middle school classrooms represent places of academic learning and socialization for the early adolescent. Developmentally, these students begin to think abstractly and become reflective; socially, students become self-aware, recognizing their strengths and weakness as the opinions of their peers becomes increasingly more important to them (Eccles, 1999). The social norms, behaviors, and personal

interactions that occur within the classroom environment are influenced and molded by teachers and peers (Juvonen & Murdock, 1995; Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Just as learning is an active process built on previous experiences and influenced by curriculum and school culture, socialization and teacher/peer interactions have its foundation in school culture and curriculum. Schools and their classroom culture have the ability to support or discourage student learning and social development (den Brok, Fisher, Rickards, & Bull, 2006; Robinson, et al., 2002; Wang & Dishion, 2012). Research suggests that once peer groups are formed, these groups become similar in levels of achievement and school engagement (Lynch, Lerner, & Leventhal, 2013; Ryan, 2000) and eventually influence the school-wide behaviors and attitudes of students not in the peer group (Lynch, et al., 2013).

Gifted education has a tenuous role in today's society (Colangelo & Davis, 2003); admired and supported when programs and students succeed, but criticized, ignored, and referred to as elitist in light of equity for all students (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 2004; Geake & Gross, 2008; Lassig, 2009: Stanley & Baines, 2002). The anti-intellectual attitude present in America (Colangelo, 2002; Sternberg, 1996) is evidenced by the federal program entitled *No Child Left Behind* 2002 (NCLB, PL 107-110), in which the academic focus of instruction is on raising lower performing students to grade level in lieu of developing the skills and abilities of high performing students. The school district's attitude concerning gifted students and their education is reflected in the practices, behaviors and perceptions implemented in its gifted education program (Bohner & Wänke, 2002). Specifically, teacher attitudes and beliefs related to gifted education affect the academic and social-emotional growth and

development of gifted students and the curriculum and learning experiences offered them (Davis & Rimm, 2004). For the gifted student, the mere act of "Being labeled as 'gifted' in a society that did not value the life of the mind could be as much of a stigma as any other characteristic that set a person apart from others" (Robinson, 2008 p. 41). Goodenow (1993b) emphasized the importance of student interactions with their school environment and culture writing, "Students' classroom engagement, academic effort, and subsequent school success or failure are influenced not only by individual differences in skills, abilities, and predispositions, but also by many situational and contextual factors" (p. 80). In this study, the middle school environment is examined as a social context for student and teacher interactions and student engagement cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally.

Student Engagement

School systems advocate the philosophy of providing for all students; it is, however, the framework of student engagement that ensures students interact cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally with the learning environment (Landis & Reschly, 2013). Hansen and Toso (2007) noted the importance of student engagement and high school completion in their study of 14 gifted high school dropouts. Reasons cited for leaving school included a lack "of belonging at school, positive relationships with teachers, challenge, and respect for values held in high esteem at school (e.g., popularity, conformity and sports)" (2007, p. 34). The 14 gifted dropouts participating in this study "admitted they emotionally gave up at school long before they dropped out" (2007, p. 38) and recognized that their pattern of poor performance and

underachievement began in elementary school and continued on into secondary school (Hansen & Toso, 2007; Renzulli & Park, 2000, 2002).

School engagement, a key to student success in school, is recognized as a predictor of academic achievement (Landis & Reschly, 2013; Marks, 2000).

> Student engagement refers to the student's active participation in academic and co-curricular or school-related activities, and commitment to educational goals and learning. Engaged students find learning meaningful, and are invested in their learning and future. It is a multidimensional construct that consists of behavioral (including academic), cognitive, and affective subtypes. Student engagement drives learning; requires energy and effort; is affected by multiple contextual influences; and can be achieved for all learners. (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012, pp. 816-817)

Research on student engagement[25] traditionally focuses on academic achievement and a sense of identification with the school. Historically, researchers reported on the GPA's of students, student's time on task in class, and the attention students paid to the teacher as support for the goal of increasing the number of students who stayed in school (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). The Participation Identification (PI) model, proposed by Finn in 1998, illustrated the long time effects of school engagement. This model suggested that active participation in school led to success, which in turn promoted a sense of belonging (identification) and the valuing of school (Finn, 1998). Landis and Reschly stated the PI model supported the current research on dropouts and could be used to predict possible instances of disengagement as early as elementary school (2013). The current increase in student disengagement was evidenced in a 2012 Gallop Student Poll involving approximately 500,000

[25] Some examples of student behavior characterized by student engagement include good grades, attendance at school, doing school assignments, following teacher directions, and participating in school activities.

students in grades 5 to 12 in which Busteed (2013) reported a decrease in student engagement as students advanced in schools. Busteed (2013) found that 80 percent of elementary students reported being engaged in school as compared to only 60 percent of middle school students and 40 percent of high school students.

The value and feeling a student has toward school is central to how they perceive themselves and their achievement (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). The present emphasis of student engagement is shifting to promoting students as life-long learners in a "knowledge based society" (Gilbert, 2007, p. 1). It is important to recognize that adolescent engagement in school affects not only their future, but also the quality of their present lives and experiences. Student engagement is observable and explicit in such behaviors as the amount of time and effort spent on assignments and following school rules (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly. 2006). Student disengagement is a gradual process (Finn, 1989) and increases as students advance through our present educational system (Marks, 2000). Student disengagement[26] has been found to be increased in students with disabilities, minority students or students from low socioeconomic conditions, placing these groups at a distinct disadvantage when they become adults (Audas & Willms, 2001). Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) reported the use of disengagement behaviors[27] by ten underachieving gifted high school students as a way to deal with unchallenging curriculum and course work.

[26] Disengagement was described as when a student does not feel as if they belong in school or connected to school and rejects school values. Examples of student disengagement include unexcused absences from school, low grades or not working to potential, a lack of participation in learning or school activities.

[27] Exemplified by such behaviors as not participating in class discussions and assignments, not completing assigned course work, and inattention during class.

Student engagement has evolved into three recognized and related components[28] in recent years. These components included:

Cognitive /academic engagement: Present when a student is actively involved in the learning process. Some examples include completing or turning in assignments, time and effort spent on schoolwork, and paying attention to or participating in class activities.

Emotional/affective engagement: Present when a student values and connects with the school and the learning process. Some examples are teacher student relationships, peer support, peer relationships, family and community support (Appleton et al., 2006).

Behavioral engagement: Present when a student actively participates in the instructional and extracurricular experiences of the school. Some examples are school and class attendance, class behavior, discipline referrals and suspensions, voluntary classroom participation, study and organizational skills, and participation in extracurricular activities (Appleton, et al., 2006; McCormick & Plucker, 2013).

Academic Curriculum

The current emphasis in public education on ensuring that average and low ability students meet national standards while the needs of high ability students are ignored created an academic atmosphere where gifted students are unchallenged and likely to underachieve (Kanevsky & Keighly, 2003). For gifted students to achieve potential, the school curriculum and instructional strategies must address their

[28] A fourth component was added when the behavioral component was divided to include academic engagement (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

academic needs. Current studies indicated that the cognitive needs of gifted students are frequently not met in our classrooms (Reis, 2008), as only 39 percent of classroom teachers received training and staff development in the academic needs, curriculum requirements and teaching pedagogy for high ability students (Robinson, Shore, & Enerson, 2007).

For many gifted students, middle school is the first time they are academically challenged and discover the need to study and apply effort in order to achieve the high grades that were previously received in elementary school without work or effort (Reis & McCoach, 2000). However, gifted students required to work at a pace similar to that of non-identified students experience a decrease in academic achievement (Birdsall & Correa, 2007). Balduf[29] (2009) noted that gifted college students were not taught the organizational and study skills necessary to successfully address and master a rigorous curriculum and, as a result, began to experience underachievement. Gifted students, report being uncomfortable needing and asking for help and continue to "protecting an image of excellence while struggling academically" (Peterson, 2006, p. 47).

A recent survey of high school students by Peter D. Hart Research Associates reported that approximately 90% of the students surveyed felt that rigor in school needed to be increased and they would have worked harder if more had been expected of them (Hart & Winston, 2005). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004) found student motivation and engagement increased in an academic environment that was characterized as caring with student autonomy present and the use of learning

[29] This was reported in Balduf 's (2009) study of upper level and university students who were underachieving but it is believed to be applicable to middle level education also.

strategies and practices were designed to meet the needs of students. Less than 33 percent of the students in the survey stated that their high school had high academic standards (Hart & Winston, 2005).

The absence of adequate instruction for gifted students is widespread in the American classroom (Robinson, Shore, & Enerson, 2007). Many reasons are cited for providing challenging instruction for gifted students that are difficult if not impossible to address. The lack of adequate instruction may be the result of the lack of tracking, an increase in inclusion practices, societies' changing demographics, and the diverse strengths and weakness inherent in the public school student population. Observations of third and fourth grade classes in all content areas found that gifted students in homogenous groups received instruction 21 percent of the time, while targeted gifted students experienced no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84 percent of the instructional activities in which they participated (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008). A national teacher survey conducted by the Fordham Institute noted that 32 percent of teachers surveyed reported that advanced and high ability students were a low priority in their school. In addition, "73% of teachers agreed that too often, the brightest students were bored and under-challenged in school: we're not giving them a sufficient chance to thrive" (NAGC (a), 2009).

The recognition that gifted students have unique educational needs requiring equal if not more attention from educators is crucial when one considered the potential impact these individuals will have on the quality of our future society. Zeidner & Schleyer (1999) found that positive social contact and interactions were associated with a positive attitude toward school. They reported that gifted students who were not

placed in mainstreamed classes had higher academic self-concept, lower test anxiety and a more positive perception of their giftedness (Zeidner & Schleyer, 1999). In a study on how passion was revealed in the gifted, Fredricks, Alfeld, & Eccles (2010) reported that passion was associated more with non-academic activities (i.e. sports or the arts) than academic areas. Students participating in the study reported "that school settings, and especially regular classrooms as compared with gifted and advanced classes, appeared to undermine rather that support passion" (2010, p. 18). In attempt to provide appropriate challenge for gifted students, ability grouping was used to provide homogeneous classes in core areas. Frequently referred to as big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE), this strategy had mixed results; on the positive side, ability grouping promoted academic achievement and relieved boredom, gifted students were in class with other gifted students and student attitude improved in the academic subject (Preckel, Götz, & Frenzel, 2010). Hertzog (2003) noted gifted students placed in classes with other high ability students experienced the positive feelings towards learning. On the negative side, however, BFLPE has been viewed as elitist (Stanley & Baines, 2002) and some gifted students experienced a temporary decrease in academic self concept only to be replaced later with a return of self confidence and pride in succeeding in a challenging environment (Preckel et al., 2010).

Academic Boredom

Irrelevant, unchallenging curriculum and student boredom are common criticisms of gifted education (Siegle & McCoach, 2005; Whitmore, 1980). Middle school students reported being bored in most core classes approximately 30 to 40 percent of the time (Larson and Richards, 1991; Tze, Klassen & Daniels, 2014).

Students assume the role of "bored student" for many reasons, including peer pressure, the need to belong, and a desire to avoid academic challenges by taking the easy way of doing nothing. Gifted students, including the underachieving, frequently mentioned boredom when discussing academics and school experiences (Plucker, Robinson, Greenspon, Feldhusen, McCoach, & Subotnik, 2004). For the gifted student, the presence of boredom combined with a lack of appropriate academic curriculum and challenge serve as strong indicators of underachievement (Hoekman, McCormick, & Barnett, 2005).

Boredom is generally associated with a lack of academic challenge and stimulation (Preckel, et al., 2010; Kanevsky & Keighly, 2003). It impacts student motivation, cognitive processing, and "self regulated learning and achievement" (Preckel, et al., p. 454). Bored students experience difficulty paying attention, concentrating, and maintaining a sense of focus on academic activities. Hansen and Toso (2007) found that gifted students reported mental wandering when forced to learn material already mastered, with some students noting they actually "tuned out" for the entire class period. Goetz, Preckel, Pekrun, & Hall (2006) reported a difference between general ability students and high ability students in the causes of boredom. They found that gifted students were bored when not challenged, but that average or low ability students were bored when the academic work was too difficult. The research of Kanevsky & Kieghley (2003), which focused on the relationship between learning and boredom, found that gifted students distinguished between learning and other school experiences. For the gifted, learning was not viewed as boring, but if learning did not occur, students became bored (Kanevsky & Kieghley, 2003).

Boredom may be caused by a variety of instructional procedures including inappropriate curriculum and activities, use of unsuitable learning style, lack of subject relatedness, absence of teacher enthusiasm, in addition to, students being under challenged and already knowing the material, or students being over challenged not understanding the material being taught (Kanevsky & Kieghley, 2003; Preckel, et al., 2010). Kanevsky & Kieghley (2003) interviewed ten underachieving gifted high school students, who had either been suspended or dropped out of school at least once, and who chose not to do the "quality" and "quantity" of school work that was "expected of them." These students reported that the differences between learning experiences and boring experiences were the degree of "control, choice, challenge, complexity, and caring teachers" present in the instruction (Kanevsky & Kieghley, 2003). These students cited the lack of these qualities in both middle level and high school instruction as the reason for their "moral indignation" and increase in boredom. For these underachieving gifted students, "the honorable action in response to an inappropriate curriculum was to disengage from it and quit producing" (Kanevsky & Kieghley, 2003, p. 1).

Relationships

A hallmark of middle level education is the establishment of a nurturing and caring environment, supportive of academic achievement in accordance with one's ability. This culture is accomplished through the implementation of such strategies as teaming, school with in a school, and advisory, all of which helped to create the small learning communities characterized by this educational level. Interpersonal relationships are developed between teachers and peers as students spend significant

amounts of time with their classmates in and out of class. The attitudes of middle school teachers directly impact the school and classroom environments (Wormeli, 2001). The importance of strong relationships and connections to school and friends was found by Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin, Glover, Bowes, & Patton, (2007) to be associated with positive student outcomes both academically and socially. Classrooms characterized with a sense of community promoted academics and confidence in school and other social settings

Students were more engaged in school and had more academic success when they felt that teachers cared about them (Klem & Connell, 2004; Wang & Dishion, 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Goodenow (1993b) defined this feeling of teacher concern and school belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). However, Davis reported that motivating middle school students "may require more than developing a supportive relationship with them. It may require rethinking the nature of the classroom climate" (Davis, 2006, p. 208). Davis (2006) reported the connection between student motivation and student teacher relationships, student's understanding of class expectations, and learning activities presented in the class structure and climate.

Teacher/Student Relationships. The transition from elementary school into middle school can be difficult. Students leave the security of a smaller neighborhood school to enter the larger regional middle school, which may cause changes in student motivation and academic performance (Eccles et al., 1993; Kim, et al., 2014; Rockoff, & Lockwood, 2010). Goodenow (1993b) noted a change in the quality of student

teacher relationships during early adolescence, as personal contact with middle school teachers was reduced. The larger academic and social environment of middle school requires adjustment. Transitional students reported "feeling greater anonymity with their middle school teachers and the other students in their classes" (Davis, 2006, p.194). Teacher/student relationships help to relieve the stress of adjusting to middle school life (Gable, Hester, Hester, Hendrickson, & Size, 2005). Davis (2006) noted "supportive relationships with teachers may play an important developmental role during the transition to and through middle school" (Davis, 2006, p. 194).

Relationships have gained in educational importance as researchers recognize teachers are not only curriculum specialists and transmitters of knowledge, but they are instrumental in establishing and guiding the academic and interpersonal climate of their classroom to foster academic achievement and success (Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Teachers "set the context of the classroom social environment and communicate critical information about the types of relationships that students were expected to establish with each other" (Farmer, et al., 2011, p. 248). They guide students in the construction of class rules and norms that reflected academic and behavioral expectations. These structured and caring learning environments impact student socialization, learning experiences, and student motivation (Davis, 2006; Davis, 2003). Classroom environments characterized by high expectations are well defined, fair and likely to report high student attendance, test scores and student engagement (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Middle school students reported feeling "more connected to their teachers and to content when norms for engagement were explicit" (Davis, 2006, p. 217). Positive

teacher student relationships increase motivation, achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004; McCombs, 2003) and increase school engagement for students considered "at risk" (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

Peer Relationships. Important developmental tasks in adolescence include the creation of a peer group and the need to be recognized and included in group activities which support and mirror the individual's interests and characteristics (Meijs, Cillessen, Scholte, Segers, & Spijkerman, 2010). The influence and desire to conform to one's peers is highest in the early adolescent years of middle school; peers have either a positive or negative influence on school engagement, motivation, and achievement (Goodenow, 1993a). Adolescent social and academic development affect peer group membership (Leka, 2015). Peer relationships reflect student social status in adolescence, with high social status indicating the student's well-being and popularity (Meijs et.al., 2010; Ostberg, 2003), while students with low social status are at risk for conduct concerns (Dodge and Pettit, 2003; Meijs et.al., 2010). In a study by LaFontana and Cillessen (2002), popular students were described as attractive, having high interpersonal and communication skills and frequent positive interactions with their peers, while not disliked, peers considered to be unpopular were described as unattractive, different, viewed as not knowing how to behave and to be socially isolated.

DeBruyn & Cillessen (2006) described the two types of popularity present in early adolescence as (1) the perceived or populistic individual, who was popular and influential, but not particularly well-liked by peers, and (2) the sociometric or prosocial popular student who was popular, accepted and well-liked by peers.

"Academic achievement and sociometric popularity are usually positively related: on average, well-liked students perform better than students low in acceptance" (Meijs et.al., 2010, p. 6). While a positive relationship between social intelligence and popularity exists for both types of popularity, a difference in popularity types was determined in academic achievement and popularity (Meijs et.al., 2010). Mixed results were reported for students classified as perceived/populistic with LaFontana and Cillessen (2002) and Gorman, Kim, Schimmelbusch (2002) noting a negative relationship between popularity and academic achievement for male perceived/populistic students but not female ones. The male perceived/populistic students were described as academically low achieving. The male and female students classified as sociometric/prosocial popular were reported as being positively related to achievement (Meijs et.al., 2010).

Peer influence combined with the desire to be popular causes preadolescents to ignore family rules, disregard homework and class assignments, and discount personal academic ability and skills. Behavior problems and lower academic achievement may result (Leka, 2015, p.128). The impact of the social pressure to be popular on academic underachievement has been reported as early as the primary grades. Rimm (2005) stated that 15% of third grade students were concerned about popularity and reported that this number increases each year. Academic self-reporting by high ability middle school students was found by Boehnke (2008) to be affected by peer pressure, as these students chose to under report math achievement, in an attempt to avoid social rejection and segregation. Boehnke (2008) reported the existence of a negative relationship between high math ability and math performance, which was not apparent

in students of average to low math ability. He also reported the influence of peer pressure on middle school girls in the area of math, causes them to report underachievement more than their male counterparts as "the relationship between (high) grades and fears of social exclusion is nominally stronger for girls than for boys" (Boehnke, 2008). Black (2012), in her study on fourth and fifth grade students whose reading and math classwork was checked by peers, found no evidence of intentional underachievement from high ability elementary students when their classwork was peer-reviewed.

Balduf (2009) illustrated the important role peers play in the realm of social interactions and academic achievement by reporting a 90 percent preference for "popular" or "normal" student groups over those characterized as brainy (Balduf, 2009) and that "nonathletic, academically successful high school boys ranked lower on the social ladder than nonathletic, academically unsuccessful boys" (Balduf, 2009, p. 277). Research on gifted males illustrated the role student culture played in underachievement. Pollack (2000) noted that gifted males hid their academic ability in order to be viewed as "cool" by a teen male culture which values being "macho" over being bright. The role of peer pressure in academic settings was further demonstrated in a study on the self-preservation techniques used by intermediate level students. Juvonen and Murdock (1993) reported eighth grade students predicted that the combination of high student ability and effort would increase teacher approval but would also result in a decrease in peer popularity.

Murray-Harvey and Slee (2007) studied the impact of early adolescents' peer relationships on the student's academic, social, and emotional well-being. Although

the study included students with a variety of academic ability levels, Murray-Harvey and Slee (2007) suggest a connection between a student's academic achievement and a positive social adjustment from successful experiences in school. These findings indicate the importance of positive school experiences on achievement (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007). "Experiencing a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to school can thus be considered a critical factor in overall positive youth development, contributing to social and emotional well-being, and academic growth in early adolescence" (Oberle, et al., 2011, p. 890).

Chapter Summary

The development of academic problems and underachievement in intelligent, capable gifted students is unexplained. Researchers recognize the stress of academic privilege for gifted students. In a study of gifted students, Striley found "almost 60 percent of participants reported feeling adversely affected by their privileged status achievement" and "more than 50 percent offered stories of social alienation and explicitly attributed the cause to giftedness" (Striley, 2014, p. 143). Such obstacles are recognized to affect the quality of student satisfaction and engagement in the academic and social aspects of school, both of which are key factors in determining whether or not a student achieves potential.

The middle school environment encourages gifted students to develop their abilities and skills, discover new interests and to begin exploring potential career paths. It is an environment that encourages teachers to establish a rapport with students and address their unique academic and personal needs. Middle school is the

last best chance to convince gifted underachieving students that school can be a positive place for them.

Chapter Three: Methodological Overview

You may have heard the world is made up of atoms and molecules, but it's really made up of stories. When you sit with an individual that's been here, you can give quantitative data a qualitative overlay.

William Turner

Introduction

This qualitative research investigated gifted students and the role school environment and classroom culture played in cultivating academic abilities and talents. The goal of the study is to investigate the lifeworld of gifted middle school students. Qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), focuses on understanding the phenomenon being investigated from the perspective of the participants. Field work plays an important role, as the researcher is instrumental in collecting and analyzing data. Qualitative research provides the process to investigate the lifeworld of middle school its role in academic achievement and the framework to develop theory from the attitudes and views of the interviewed gifted students.

Chapter three presents the research design, data collection, and analysis procedures employed in this study. The researcher's rationale for the use of qualitative methodology and its appropriateness to investigate school experiences and interactions of gifted students are addressed. The basic premises of qualitative research are reviewed and the researcher's theoretical assumptions disclosed. The framework and methodology used to study the actions and resulting decisions made by the ten participating gifted students related to their academic achievement are introduced. Next, the chapter describes the qualitative research process and techniques used in the study, including purposeful sampling, interviewing procedures, and data collection

techniques. Lastly, the issues of trustworthiness and ethics, as related to this study, are introduced.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to investigate gifted students within the context of school experiences. Qualitative research involves "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Its descriptive nature and use of contextual details provide additional insight into the phenomenon of being investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research entails trying to make sense of subjects in their natural setting and interpreting action in relation to the meanings as perceived by participants. A goal for qualitative research is to identify and understand what happens, i.e. to be able to perceive a world/reality (lifeworld) as viewed by its subjects (Patton & Patton, 1990; Willig, 2008;). In addition, qualitative research is "interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5) and in "understanding of the *process* by which an event occurs, rather than simply a comparison of situations involving the presence and absence of the presumed cause" (Maxwell, 2004, p. 9). Thus, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to study reality in depth and detail without predetermined constraints of quantitative research (Patton & Patton, 1990, p. 13).

Qualitative methodology is an approach for studying the impact of school experiences on academic achievement of gifted students as "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Qualitative research allows the researcher to obtain detailed,

contextual information from a small, diverse sample. Thus, the researcher can gain insight of the context even though findings cannot be generalized (Patton, 1990, p. 14).

The Nature of the Research Topic

Generic qualitative research is considered a process as well as a methodology. It is used in education to "discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p.11). It examines a phenomenon in its natural setting and attempts to understand it through the meanings of individuals (Creswell, 2007). As a research method, generic qualitative research draws from a variety of models and theories and its resulting analysis identifies reoccurring themes and categories (Merriam, 1998). Generic qualitative research investigates the lifeworld or familiar everyday experiences that are a part of all human experience. This study attempts to understand school environment from the perspective of the gifted middle school student. The study is concerned with the interactions between gifted students and the middle school environment and focuses on viewing academic achievement from the perspective of the gifted middle school student who experienced this environment.

This qualitative study describes the lifeworld of middle school and the role it plays on the academic achievement of gifted students. It is concerned with the lived experiences of gifted students and their attitudes and feelings revealed through words and drawings. Bogden and Biklen (2007) acknowledge that the influence of the researcher's background combines with the experiences of the subjects in the study and suggests that the retelling of these experiences be in the subjects' own style and language. Bruner (2004) noted that life stories should be revealed in a community in

which tellers and listeners share a common culture.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the role of one particular middle school on the academic achievement of ten gifted students. Two research questions were developed to investigate these issues.

1. What kind of experiences do gifted students have in middle school?

2. How do middle school experiences affect the academic achievement of gifted students?

In the study, three of the eighth grade participants were former students of the researcher; two of the sixth grade students interviewed were siblings of the researcher's former gifted and talented students and one student's family delivered newspapers to the researcher's home. Eight of the ten students interviewed were identified as gifted and talented early in their school tenure; the remaining two students were tested and identified as middle school students while attending Haviland Middle School.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers view the everyday world of human experience as a way to interpret the world. In this methodology, the role of the researcher is to portray "the essence or basic structure of the experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). The researcher gathers data through open-ended questions, conversations with the participants, and from their student produced drawings (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). The researcher recognized and set aside personal experiences, ideas and opinions in order to listen and understand the experiences, views, and opinions of the subjects in

the process called bracketing. These assumptions were set aside or bracketed before study data was reviewed (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative methodology investigated the role school environment and climate played in the gifted students' lifeworld. A discussion of the student's academic achievement was opened through the descriptions of significant school experiences, peer interactions, school relationships, and the group norms present in elementary and middle school. Qualitative methodology provided insight into how gifted students made sense of their lifeworld in middle school.

Within the framework of qualitative research, the researcher attempted to understand the essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of those students who experienced it (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). It was essential that both the process in which the experiences were evolved and the nature these situations had for the individual were understood, so that the resulting interactions were presented in a meaningful manner (Jacobs, 1987). As such, the relationship between the researcher and the gifted student was one where both parties participated and engaged as members of the educational community of the middle school. This inter-relationship allowed the researcher to investigate the individuals, events, and social climate of the school.

Background of Researcher. The researcher is a former teacher and middle school Gifted Resource Coordinator (GRC) with more than 30 years experience in the Bedford Public School District[30]. Her teaching experience includes instruction in science, affective skills education and gifted education at the middle school level. The researcher was employed for 17 years at Haviland Middle School, the Title I, Blue

[30] Pseudonyms are used for the school district and middle school participating in this study.

Ribbon middle school where the participants in this study were members of the school's gifted education program. As the school GRC, the researcher was responsible for initiating, implementing, and supporting academic and enrichment experiences and opportunities for self-discovery and academic enrichment for gifted students.

The researcher experienced frustration when gifted students declined to participate in challenging academic and enrichment opportunities, electing instead to remain in on grade level classes and continuing to go through middle school expending minimal effort and exhibiting a lack of passion for learning. The primary goal of such gifted students appeared to be to keep parents and teachers "happy" and "off their backs" with the least amount of effort, never attempting academic challenges or achieving academic potential. Thus, the researcher became interested in the reasons for underachievement and the influence of school experiences, specifically those experiences related to school climate and environment, on the gifted student.

Reflexity/Theoretical Assumptions

Based upon the researcher's background experience and theoretical underpinnings, the following assumptions were made:

1. Every student deserves the opportunity and support necessary to achieve his or her potential.
2. Giftedness is not limited to any particular racial/ethnic or socioeconomic group, academic ability or talent.
3. The lifeworld of school, socially constructed through the experiences of its students and staff, affects academic achievement.

4. Educators continually seek to improve school environment/climate, i.e. interactions of students, faculty, and staff in such areas as curriculum, pedagogy, activities, school procedures, and peers within an educational setting as a means to support student achievement.

5. Significant and influential school experiences impact the student's emerging identity, academic achievement, and school engagement.

6. School culture and one's peers are an influential force in the socialization and academic achievement of middle school.

Study Setting and Participants

District and school setting. The Bedford Public School District is located in a mid-size, mid-western university community with a population of approximately 118,000. The city's diverse population includes Caucasians, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Middle Easterners, and Asians. The Bedford Public School District is the eighth largest school district in the state and serves approximately 15,806 students[31]. The district is composed of 17 elementary schools, four middle schools, two high schools, an alternative school, and an online school. The district contains the second highest number of U.S. Blue Ribbon Schools and state rewarded schools in the state; in 2015, the district's two high schools were ranked in the top 1% of high schools in the country[32].

School site. Haviland Middle School, where the researcher previously served as a GRC, was chosen for this study as a recognized Title I and Blue Ribbon School. It

5 http://www.norman.k12.ok.us/index.php?news-press-releases&action=view&post_id=153

32 http://www.norman.k12.ok.us/index.php?news-press-releases&action=view&post_id=144

is a sixth through eighth grade middle school with an enrollment of 621 students, 42 fulltime teachers and a student/teacher ratio of 15 to 1. Within the student body, 46% of its students met the criteria for free lunch and 11% qualified for reduced lunch[33] for a total of 57% of the current student population qualifying for free and reduced meals at school. Four of the ten gifted students in this study qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. The demographic make up of the school included 76% Caucasian; 10% American Indian; 8% Hispanic, and 6% African American. During the 2014-15 school year, approximately 21.0 percent of students received special education services.

Haviland is not a typical low income, disadvantaged city school. The school instigated many interventions and supports for its students to assist with academics and positive identity formation. These included serving breakfast and providing food backpacks for the weekends, providing for payment and expenses for school activities and experiences, free after school tutoring, teacher help during lunch, academic intervention time, opportunities for community service, and Extension time to provide the students with a variety of enrichment activities and experiences outside of the regular classroom. Many students were from single parent families. Haviland was in the top 10 % of the state's middle schools and yearly earns grades of B or B+ from the state Assessment Performance. This state adopted A-F School Grading System is based on the school's ability to help students meet grade-level performance standards as well as academic growth. A school's grade also includes factors such as graduation

33 Data for school year 2009-10 obtained from http://publicschoolsk12.com/middle-schools/ok/cleveland-county/402172001078.html

and dropout rates and attendance rates for elementary schools (http://www.greatschools.org).

Haviland Middle School followed the middle school concept of a school within a school, having two core teams per grade. Students' class schedules included four academic classes per day as well as two exploratory classes, an Intervention/Extension class and lunch/overtime period. Class periods were 49 minutes in length[34]. Heterogeneous student placement was used in core and exploratory classes with the exception of math, in which students were placed according to their testing math scores. Each grade level Core team of teachers instructed the same students. Core teams included math, language arts, science, and social studies teachers. Common planning and personal planning time were provided for each grade level team.

The Exploratory team was composed of teachers in the areas of Band, Orchestra, Vocal Music, Spanish, Speech and Drama, Physical Education, Family and Consumer Science, Technology Education and Computer Education. Representatives from the Exploratory team also served as members of grade level teams. Haviland had one Gifted Resource Coordinator (GRC), who was trained in gifted education and was responsible for gifted student identification, assisting faculty members in the provision of gifted services to identified students, and serving as a contact for parents of gifted students. Each grade level team had its own administrator and guidance counselor who remained with the grade level throughout their years at Haviland.

Purposeful Sampling. Purposeful sampling, a characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990) allowing for predetermined criteria relevant to

[34] https://sites.google.com/a/norman.k12.ok.us/502/home/bell-schedules

the research questions, was used to select participants. Merriam stated, "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" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Patton noted, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth" (Patton & Patton, 2002, p. 230). He defined these cases as "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (Patton & Patton, 2002, p. 230). Participants were selected based on the school district's identification criteria and procedures for gifted and talented placement, the review of academic records, and teacher recommendations.

Study Participants. The participants were middle school students identified as gifted and talented based upon district-adopted criteria for identification. Criteria for placement in the district gifted and talented program are as follows: achievement of 97 percentile or higher on a school ability index results in automatic placement inn the gifted education program. In addition, a district matrix (see Appendix 3.1) is employed for multi-criteria placement, as students receive points for performance on school ability and achievement tests, recommendations, and outstanding accomplishment in the areas of art, music, writing, acting and leadership. Twelve points are required for GT placement in the school district. Three participants in the study were gifted students who attended Haviland Middle School while the researcher was employed as its GRC. Ten parents/guardians gave permission for their students to participate in the study. Five of the study participants were male and five were female. Four students were in sixth grade, two in seventh grade and four in eighth grade. The ethnicity of

participants was as follows: one student was Native American, two were Hispanic and seven were Caucasian.

Based on gifted identification, student records and classroom behaviors, school personnel designated four students as underachieving gifted, two students as selective achievers and four as achieving gifted. Underachieving gifted students met the criteria for lower than expected achievement: Name on the school academically ineligible list for two consecutive weeks or grades in the bottom half of his or her class and/or math/language art's or have a C average or below and be labeled a bright underachiever by a classroom teacher, gifted specialist, or counselor. Selective consumers are those students referred to as gifted who meet the state and school district's criteria for gifted identification and are "intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations" (Hebert & Schreiber, 2010, p. 572). Four students participated in the school's free and reduced lunch program. Relevant information on the composition of the gifted students participating in this study is located in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Middle School Study Participants

Grade	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Test	Score	Student Classification	Yrs. in GT	Grade / Yr. ID
8	Amelia	female	Caucasian	Slosson	99%	Achieving	7 years	1st /2008
7	Brenden	male	Hispanic	KBIT	99%	Achieving	2 years	6th/2013
6	Nick	Male	Hispanic	NNAT	97%	Achieving	6 years	1st /2009
6	Tori	Female	Caucasian	Slosson	99%	Achieving	6 years	1st/2009
6	Evan	Male	Caucasian	NNAT	97%	Selective Consumer	6 years	1st/2009
8	Victoria	female	Native American	CogAt	97%	Selective Consumer	6 years	2nd /2009
8	Faith	female	Caucasian	NNAT	99%	Underachieving	5 years	3rd/2010
7	James	Male	Caucasian	NNAT	97%	Underachieving	7 years	1st/2008
6	Kathryn	female	Caucasian	Slosson	99%	Underachieving	4 years	3rd/2011
8	Scout	Male	Caucasian	KBIT	98%	Underachieving	1 year	8th /2014

Data Collection Tools

The flexible nature of qualitative research allowed for the adaptation of open-ended questions to supplement what was previously reported (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). Semi-structured questioning created an informal interview atmosphere where the student was able to respond in his/her own words and the researcher was able to react to the participant by modifying the following questions to reflect what had been previously said (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990).

Student Voice as a Methodological Tool. Students' school experiences shape views, attitudes and behaviors; students know what works for them and what does not. "It would be hard to find any student, in any school, of any age, ability or background, who does not hold strong opinions about what makes them want to engage with a lesson and what makes them switch off" (Wood, 2011 p. 3). To improve educational

opportunities for gifted students, finding out from these students what works would seem crucial. The involvement of gifted adolescents as stakeholders[35] in the academic and social culture of their school aids in the development of future active and informed citizens.

The use of student voice has been instrumental in promoting change in schools (Mitra, 2004); however, student voice rarely has been used as a basis for restructuring school curriculum and pedagogy (Kennedy & Datnow, 2011). Toshalis and Nakkula cited student voice as a powerful tool to increase student engagement and learning, "…empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences so they feel they have a stake in the outcomes" (PR Newswire, April 2012). The examination of behaviors exhibited by underachieving gifted in classrooms and schools, along with their views on their educational experiences, may provide insight into the culture of the gifted in middle school.

Student Voice through Interviews. Qualitative research is supposed to be "flexible, evolving and emergent" (Merriam, 2009, p. 18). It allows for a "reciprocal dialogue and conversation" between the participant and the researcher (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006, p. 166). The use of semi-structured questioning creates an informal interview atmosphere where the student is able to respond in his/her own words and the researcher is able to react to the participant by modifying questions as needed (Merriam, 2009; Patton & Patton, 1990). Thus, the researcher is able to respond directly to the answers and comments of participants and, as such, is able to pursue

[35] The term stakeholder typically refers to anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of the school and its students.

areas of conversation unique to each participant.

The decision to use individual, audio tape, semi-structured interviews with gifted middle school students was based upon the preference gifted students have toward verbal communication (VanTassel-Baska, 2006).

Student Voice Through Student Constructed Drawings. Student drawing is a strategy typically used in elementary and middle school to support conceptual knowledge and understanding. Student drawings serve "as a visible expression of personal voice" (Chula, 1998, p. 7) while providing insight into "instructional practices, learning environments" and teacher/student/peer relationships (Chula, 1998, p. 2). Student produced drawings provide a unique perspective through the process of descriptive, interpretative inquiry. When viewed through the lens of qualitative research, the use of student-constructed drawings enables the analyzing of behaviors and interactions that occurred during social interactions (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Weber & Mitchell (1995) noted, "If we wish to know more intimately what children think and feel, we might begin by taking their drawings more seriously" (p. 242). The use of drawing as an information-seeking tool reduces the pressure for the student to verbalize significant school experiences.

A rationale to integrate student created drawings with semi-structured interviews was offered by Kearney and Hyle (2004).

> Perspectives on the drawing methodology… provide the foundation for our findings that drawings: 1) create a path toward feelings and emotions, 2) lead to a more succinct presentation of participant experiences, 3) require additional verbal interpretation by the participant for accuracy, 4) are unpredictable as a tool for encouraging participation in the research, 5) combat researcher biases when left unstructured, are affected by the amount of researcher-imposed structure in the scope of how they could be interpreted, 6) are affected by the

> amount of research-imposed structure in the scope of how they could be interpreted, and 7) help to create triangulation of study data. (p. 361)

Individual interviews gave the student the opportunity to explain his/her drawing and the thinking behind what had been illustrated. As objects tell stories that are neither right nor wrong, the drawings stimulated reflection about the process (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004) validating and honoring the student's unique perceptions. Bishop and Pflaum (2005) submit that incorporating student drawings in research offers additional perspective and information.

Student-produced art tended to increase the amount of information a child reports about past experiences while helping the student gain control over the event (Looman, 2006). Gross and Hayne (1998) found that when students were given the opportunity to both verbally tell and draw, they provided twice as much information in comparison to only talking. The combination of student produced illustrations with oral and written narratives provides a source for triangulation while serving as a means of extending and elaborating interview discussions (Briell, Elen, Depaepe, & Clarebout, 2010). The increased information about experiences achieved through student drawings was thought to be the result of several factors, including a reduction in pressure, and may help the student in remembering (Gross & Hayne, 1998).

Student drawings in this study focused the discussion on the student's interpretive inquiry through symbols that were both descriptive and explanatory. The examination of more than one student drawing allowed the researcher assemble a more in-depth picture of the student's attitude and perceptions. When combined with student interviews, the result produced clarity as well as additional information.

Data Collection Process

University and School District Consent. Following receipt of an IRB from the University of Oklahoma (Appendix 3.2), permission from the school district (Appendix 3.3), and permission from Haviland's administrator, the school's gifted resource coordinator and the researcher sent email requests to all parents and guardians of Haviland Middle School's identified gifted students, explaining the nature of the study and asking permission to interview students (Appendix 3.4). A follow-up email reminder and second request was sent to parents and guardians (See appendix 3.5). In addition, the school's Gifted Resource Coordinator (GRC), staff members, and school administrators provided a list of identified underachieving gifted students. A total of ten gifted permissions were received from parents/guardians. From those responses, school personnel designated four students as underachieving gifted, two as selective consumers and four as achieving gifted.

The criteria used to determine those students viewed as underachieving or selective consumer in this study is as follows: (1) students who met the criteria for lower than expected achievement, (2) students whose names appeared on the school academically ineligible list for two consecutive weeks or who had grades in the bottom half of his or her class math/language arts classes or who have a C average or below in their math/language arts classes, and (3) labeled a bright underachiever by a classroom teacher, gifted specialist, or counselor (Moore, 2006). The number of academic classes in which low grades were recorded was used to determine whether the student was designated as an Underachiever or Selective Consumer.

Interview Process. Grade level student interviews introduced the researcher who explained the nature of the study. Study confidentiality was discussed, questions were answered, and students were told that they had the opportunity to participate or not participate and could drop out at any time. In the follow up individual interviews, participating students were asked to sign a consent form. Participant confidentiality was established and secured through the use of a pseudonym. Interviews were conducted in a private, quiet, and enclosed location. Pseudonyms were used for the participating school district and middle school.

To introduce the use of illustrations in the data collection process and to establish a level of comfort, students were first asked to draw a picture of himself or herself as a gifted middle school student, title the picture and add any words they felt were necessary to complete the picture. After the drawing was completed, the student was asked to verbally explain the drawing to the researcher. As a warm up and climate building activity, this experience helped to ease student discomfort while providing a precedent for later drawings. Students would frequently add additional components to their drawings as they described them. Drawing materials were provided for each student to use as needed. They included white 8 ½ by 12-inch paper with a place for the picture, its title, and a narrative description of the picture, as well as colored pencils and multi-colored markers for use as drawing tools.

Interviews were held during the school day and were generally one class period in length, with follow-up meetings scheduled if additional time was needed. Interviews were conducted in a private, enclosed space. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used in each student interview. All interviews were audio recorded

with permission of the student and parent/guardian and were transcribed at a later date. Following the interview, the researcher recorded brief field notes including impressions, questions, feelings, reflections on body language or random thoughts related to the interview. Facial reactions, changes in voice patterns and inflection, and environmental factors were also noted. The descriptions and details recorded in the field notes provided additional information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

After introducing the student using a first name pseudonym and recording the gender, grade, and date of the interview, semi-structured open ended questions were asked. These questions addressed the student's views and opinions on giftedness as well as his/her specific insights into school-related experiences and their impact on learning. These questions were developed through a review of literature in the areas of school environment/climate, underachievement and gifted education, with an emphasis on the attitudes and perceptions of gifted students. The guiding questions approved by the IRB at the University of Oklahoma were as follows:

1. Describe what school was like for you during your elementary and middle school years.
2. Describe your typical day at school.
3. Describe significant academic learning activities/experiences you enjoy and those you do not enjoy.
4. Describe significant extra curricular school activities/experiences you enjoy and those you do not enjoy.
5. What is it like to be identified as gifted in elementary school and Middle school?

6. What are the advantages of being identified gifted? (See Appendix 3.6 for interview protocol)

Throughout the interview students were asked to draw and/or use words to describe significant school experiences or incidents, which could have influenced them. Students were asked to explain their illustrations to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Max Weber stated "that to understand human action, we must learn what people intend and how they define their situations and then begin to analyze from their beliefs and definitions" (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011, p. 292). It was through data analysis that the process of making meaning from "what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" was accomplished (Merriam, 2009, p.176). This analysis involved making sense of "text and image data" and "moving deeper and deeper into the understanding of data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 183).

Following the student interviews, interview transcripts and student-produced illustrations were appropriately labeled to correspond to the interviewed student. Student interview tapes were transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed multiple times along with related drawings and field notes. Observations, notes, and student comments were examined in relation to one another to identify common themes with the goal to "identify and discover" common characteristics, properties and concepts (Jacob, 1987, p. 30). Once transcriptions of the students' audio interviews were completed, the students were contacted to perform "member checks" by rereading the interviews and making any corrections and additions they deemed necessary. Eight of the students

elected to reread their interviews and participate in member checking.

Coding and Triangulation of Data. Analysis began with the identification of segments that related to the research questions. Results were compared and regrouped into categories/themes, which, in turn, were regrouped and reworded. The process and schemes used in this comparison resulted in the categories and themes used in the data analysis (Merriam, 2009). Once the coding system for the interviews and the student-produced drawings was devised, reoccurring bits of information were categorized and themes modified to meet the emerging patterns. The resulting data was then analyzed and triangulated with student-produced drawings to establish validity and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness was defined by Schwandt (2007) as "that quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences" (p. 299). Trustworthiness involves both validity and reliability to confirm the accuracy of study data (Creswell, 2009). Trust is established in a qualitative study through continuity and congruence (Jones, et al., 2006). Strategies used to promote continuity and congruence in this study were the use of members checks to make additions and to clarify thoughts (Wertz, et al., 2011, p. 399).

Ethical Considerations

Student confidentiality was a priority. School district and University IRB approval were obtained and the outlined procedures agreed upon were followed. All identified gifted students attending the middle school were contacted and informed of the study. However, student participation was dependent on the approval of the student's parent or guardian and the student. Parents and guardians, as well as

students, were advised of the nature of the study and that the researcher had been a Gifted Resource Coordinator at the site.

The identity of participating students was protected through the use of pseudonyms. All student interviews were held in an enclosed room and audio taped. On the tape, students were identified only through the use of a pseudonym. Throughout the interview, students were only asked questions pertaining to school experiences and attitudes toward gifted identification. In addition, students were asked not to identify teachers by name. Information provided by the students was stored in a locked file at a secure location. All files will be destroyed one year after the study is completed.

Chapter Summary

Through active dialogue with gifted students, elements of their learning and social processes can be discovered (Ferguson, et al., 2011). Through dialogue with gifted students, this study investigated the role school experiences played in the academic achievement of ten gifted middle school students. Genic qualitative research was employed to investigate the actions, decisions and interpretations of students. Research techniques included purposeful sampling, student interviews and student drawings. Coding and data triangulation of interviews and drawings were used to analyze the data. Ten gifted middle school students participated in the study. Students were individually interviewed during school and interactions were discussed and illustrated.

Chapter 4: Findings

"First of all, he said, 'if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view-- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

- Atticus Finch, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Harper Lee (1960, Chapter 3, pp. 85-87)

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how the lifeworld of one middle school affects the academic achievement of ten gifted middle school students. It is within the middle school culture that gifted students negotiate a personal identity, which influences academic success and attitude toward learning (National Middle School Association, 2003; Roeser, et al., 2000). By focusing on the role the middle school environment plays in the experiences of gifted students, the study attempts to answer the questions:

1. What kind of experiences do gifted students have in middle school?
2. How do middle school experiences affect the academic achievement of gifted students?

The participants in this study are identified as gifted and talented based upon their scores on a standardized, nationally-normed school ability index test. Each student scored in the top three percentile at one time or another, qualifying for automatic placement in the school district's gifted education program.

Findings

All middle school students experience stressors related to their physical, social, and emotional development during adolescences (Baker, 1996). The ten gifted participants represent a diverse student sample characterized by individual differences

in age, talents, interests, socio-economic background, culture, and personality, while sharing a common middle school environment and culture.

Student interviews began with questions related to the student's earliest memories of being identified as gifted and his or her placement and participation in the school district's gifted program. These general questions served to validate[36] the student's sense of giftedness and helped establish a relaxed atmosphere before the student was asked to recall significant academic and school-related incidents. Achievers Nick, Tori, and Amelia; selective consumer Evan; and underachiever James were identified in the first grade for placement in the district's gifted and talented program. Selective consumer Victoria was identified in the second grade, and underachievers Faith and Kathryn were identified in third grade. Achiever Brendan and underachiever Scout were identified for gifted placement during middle school. None of the participants were re-evaluated for Gifted and Talented (GT) once placed in the district's gifted program, as the Bedford School District policy states that once a student is identified as gifted, the student remains identified as gifted throughout their remaining years in the district.

School staff, in collaboration with the researcher, grouped the study participants into three academic categories based upon academic achievement: Achiever, Selective Consumer, and Underachiever. The criteria used to determine the categories are described below, including brief descriptions of the gifted students who

[36] The Gifted Identity Model proposed by Mahoney (1998) consists of four constructs; validation, affirmation, affiliation and affinity. These serve as building blocks in the development of self-identity and the 12 systems that impact the formation of gifted identity. The systems are self, family, family origin, cultural, vocational, environmental, educational, social, psychological, political, organic-physiological and developmental.

fit each grouping. An analysis of qualitative interview data from each academic achievement category of gifted learners follows the profiles of the individual group members.

Achievers

Academically achieving gifted students are distinguished by their academic performance, which reflects both test performance and high ability. These students are motivated, goal-oriented, and have positive self-efficacy (Rubin & Reis, 2006). By definition, achieving gifted students have academic grades consistent with their academic potential, as indicated by the school ability index and nationally-normed testing results. The chart below contains composite information related to the four academically achieving gifted students in the study. These students are eighth grader, Amelia; seventh grader, Brendan; and sixth graders, Nick and Tori. Below are brief descriptions, academic profiles, and self-portraits of each "Achieving" gifted student.

Table 4.1 Composite Academic Profile of Gifted Achievers

Grade	Name	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**	**Test**	**Score**	**Advanced courses**	**Yrs. in GT**	**Grade/ Yr. ID**
8	Amelia	Female	Caucasian	Slosson	99%	Pre-Algebra; HS Algebra I; HS Plane Geometry	7 years	1st/2008
7	Brenden	Male	Hispanic	KBIT	99%	Pre-Algebra; HS Algebra I	2 years	6th/2013
6	Nick	Male	Hispanic	NNAT	97%	Pre-Algebra	6 years	1st/2009
6	Tori	Female	Caucasian	Slosson	99%	Pre-Algebra	6 years	1st /2009

AMELIA

Amelia was an eighth grade gifted Caucasian female who enjoys participating in sports, both in school and after school, and plays first chair violin in the school orchestra. She is from a family with professional backgrounds with Amelia describing her father as a "math genius", and her mother having a PhD. Additionally, both of her parents are former National Merit Scholars. When asked about her childhood, Amelia replies, "I have always been raised and have always hung out with the smart people." Amelia's parents are divorced and both have remarried. Her father and his current family live in Texas. She is the oldest child in each family, living with two half-brothers (ages six and eight months); she also has a half-brother and half-sister who live with her dad. Amelia's mother is a college psychology professor at a four-year institution approximately 90 minutes from Bedford.

Amelia's self-portrait (Figure 4.1) shows a smiling student with thoughts on her two strong academic areas, language arts and math. Amelia is a very active and well-liked student at Haviland. She participates in a variety of extracurricular activities at school and, as a result, has friendship groups based in sports, music, and academics. She has been a member of orchestra since fifth grade and this year is first chair violin in eighth grade. A member of the school orchestra and National Junior Honor Society (NJHS), Amelia attended Middle School Model UN and is on the school's academic team. In addition, Amelia plays slow-pitch softball for Haviland and is on the girls' basketball team. After school, Amelia participates in an area club

soccer program. She plans to continue playing basketball, soccer, and be a member of the high school orchestra.



Figure 4.1 Amelia's Self-Portrait

From an early age, Amelia has enjoyed being in school and learning; she remembers reading chapter books and writing sentences when others in her class were learning to read. Identified as gifted and talented during first grade, Amelia likes completing extra credit work after finishing a class assignment saying, "I learn more than other people, so it is kind of an advantage to me."

Academically, Amelia was an honor roll[37] student during her three years at Haviland (See Appendix 4.1 to view her academic profile). Occasionally her name appears on the school ineligible list, but she is always able to bring her grades up and remain on the school honor roll. During her eighth grade year, Amelia is a four point student receiving all A's in her core and exploratory classes. She earned occasional C's on her weekly eligibility grades, but was able to raise her grade to an A by the end of the quarter. At the end of eighth grade, Amelia earned credit in two high school classes and had a cumulative GPA of 3.923 on her high school transcript.

On state-mandated tests taken in grades three to eight, Amelia scored Proficient in Reading in grades three, four and five and Advanced in grades six, seven and eight and in Math she scored proficient in grade three and Advanced in grades four, five and six. Amelia received an Advance on the Algebra I End of Instruction[38] (EOI) test and the Plane Geometry EOI. Amelia was Proficient on the writing tests taken in fifth and eighth grade while receiving Advanced on the Science and Social Studies tests. During the fall of 2014, Amelia took the eighth grade Explore test provided by the ACT as a college readiness test. She received a composite score of 20 or 92% with subtest scores of 24 or 98% in Math; 19 or 88% in Reading; 21 or 93 % in Science, and 17 or 75 % in Language arts.

[37] School and district academic honor roll requires a quarterly minimum GPA of 3.5 on a 4.0 system.

[38] End of Instruction, a state-mandated test given in certain high school academic classes.

BRENDAN

Brendan was an inquisitive, confident, and engaging young man. A seventh grader, he moved to Bedford at the beginning of his sixth grade school year. He is bilingual and Hispanic. Brendan has lived in many places in the United States and in Europe; he prefers "places where it is sunny, not too hot and not too cold." Brendan has an older brother who attends an area high school; his mother is employed at the local state university. When not in school, Brendan rides horses, plays games on his computer, reads, and takes care of his animals, including his cats and dog.

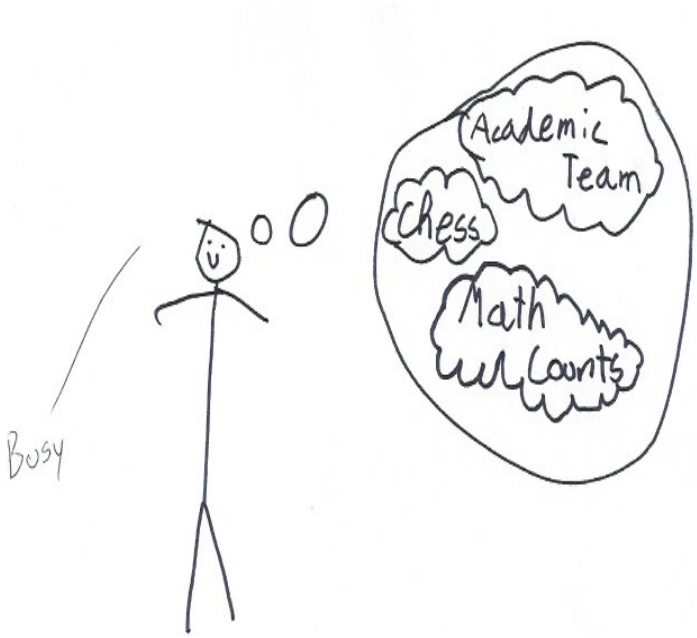


Figure 4.2 Brendan's self-portrait

In his self-portrait, (Figure 4.2) Brendan depicts himself as a happy individual with a big smile on his face. He likes school and is involved in the following school-

sponsored gifted activities: NJHS, MathCounts, Chess Club, and the school Academic Team. Brendan added the "busy" comment on his self-portrait during his second semester interview, when his three gifted activities were each in full operation. In the written description of his self-portrait, Brendan lists the days of the week he participates in these activities, which occur either during lunch or after school. As a gifted student, Brendan feels that there are more opportunities and options have to fun participating in "academic stuff." Brendan reports that he likes his entire school day and feels that the best part of school is "making friends, getting to know people."

Academically designated as an achieving gifted student, Brendan was not identified for a gifted and talented program until his enrollment at Haviland, as this is the first school he has attended with a gifted program. Brendan is an honor roll student at Haviland, earning A's during sixth grade, except for one B in seventh grade Math Extensions/Pre-Algebra (See Appendix 4.2 to view his academic profile). During seventh grade, he continues to demonstrate a high level of academic success as a 4.0 student, earning straight A's in all of his academic and exploratory classes this year. He is consistently on the school's academic honor roll each quarter. This year (seventh grade), Brendan begins to acquire high school credits on his transcript by taking high school level Algebra I. He earned four A's in this course, and eighth grade will continue in the advanced math track by enrolling in high school level Plane Geometry.

Brendan scored Advanced on the state-mandated Reading and Math tests taken at the end of his sixth and seventh grade years and in seventh grade Geography test. He scored Advanced on the Algebra I EOI test at the end of the academic school year.

His team teachers and the school administration designated him as an achieving gifted student.

NICK

Nick is a respectful, sensitive, and hardworking Hispanic sixth grade student. He lives with his parents and a dog, for which he is responsible for its upkeep and care. He is the youngest of three brothers and the only child still living at home. One of Nick's older brothers is presently attending college; another brother no longer lives at home. Nick is thoughtful when answering questions and responds precisely, but hesitantly. He likes to cook and enjoys playing the video game Minecraft.

Nick has been identified for the school district's gifted program since first grade, placing in the top 3 percentile on the NNAT, a nationally-normed school ability test. He enjoys school and is very proud of being in the gifted education program. He said, "I always was looking at the clock waiting for when they would come and pick me up" to go to gifted class in elementary school. School and learning are important to Nick as he expressed frustration with students in his classes who were noisy and misbehaving: "They are told every day that if you want to be someone that's going to get a good job then you are going to need to be good at school."

Nick's self- portrait (Figure 4.3), illustrates that he feels being identified as gifted has resulted in expanding his brain. Gifted identification has set his "brain on

fire" and opened new experiences and opportunities for him.

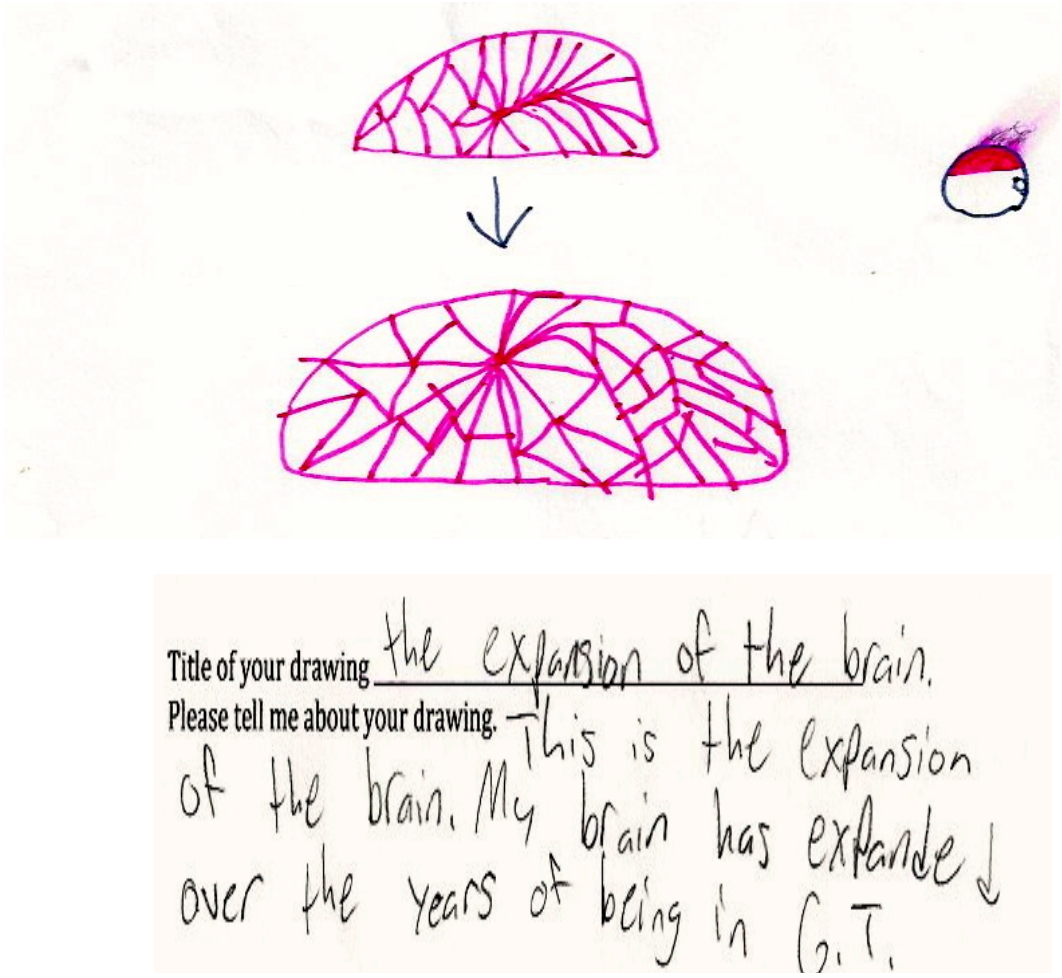


Figure 4.3 Nick's Self-portrait

Academically, Nick received straight A's in the fourth and fifth grades and was excited to qualify for the above grade level seventh grade Math Extensions class (formerly called Pre-algebra, the curriculum taught this class is for seventh grade math classes preparing to enroll in high school Algebra I) at the end of fifth grade. He was then enrolled in the advanced math progression, which includes high school Algebra I and high school Plane Geometry, while still attending middle school. As an honor roll student in middle school, Nick admits he had academic adjustment problems in the

second and third quarters of sixth grade, receiving two C's during second quarter ineligibility checks and one C during the third quarter (See Appendix 4.3 to view his academic profile). These midterm grades were raised to B's by the end of each quarter. Being with friends and maintaining friendships are a priority for Nick in his first year of middle school. He does not participate in any school or GT sponsored clubs and only decided to go on a law- related field trip when he learned best friend was going.

Nick's performance on state-mandated testing was as follows: Advanced in Math for third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades; Reading Advanced in third and fifth grade and Proficient in fourth and sixth grade; Proficient in Science and Writing in fifth grade and Advanced in Social Studies. His sixth grade team teachers and the school administration designated him as an achieving gifted student.

TORI

Tori is the only child in her present family, but she has five brothers and sisters that live in other states. She is an intense, but quiet young lady, with high expectations for herself and others. She appears to be both socially and academically confident and secure; but in actuality, she becomes stressed when uncomfortable and unable to control her surroundings. Tori sat through each of our interviews with one leg bouncing the entire time. She is a sixth grade transfer student to Haviland and, as such, entered middle school with few acquaintances. She is Caucasian and enjoys a variety of academic competitions, performing and theater activities, and participating in after school drama, music, and dance lessons. Tori's self -portrait reflects a confident young lady who is aware of her talents and not overly influenced by the opinion of others. For her self-portrait (Figure 4.4), Tori chose to draw a picture of herself as an

actor in a recent local theater production of *Cats* saying, “I like it, because it is just me. Gifted has changed me. It’s just kind of who I am.” Tori mentions she is wearing her favorite shirt in the self-portrait, but then adds with a smile, “in real life I have arms.”



Figure 4.4 Tori's self-portrait

Tori enjoys participating in a variety of academic competitions and won the Haviland History Bee, placing second regionals, to qualify for Nationals held in Louisville, Kentucky during the upcoming summer. When asked what is important to her as a student, Tori replies:

Good grades and I have a couple of friends, I don't really feel like I need a lot

> of them but good grades, and then, again, that's like, got to keep a fairly clean discipline record and that's pretty much it. I don't really care about how I look or anything I just kind of go with it.

Academically, Tori earned straight A's during her elementary school years and her sixth grade year at Haviland (See Appendix 4.4 to view her academic profile). She is in Pre-Algebra/seventh grade Math Extensions and will enroll in high school Algebra I at the start of seventh grade, thus beginning her high school transcript. Tori scores Advanced in Math on the state-mandated tests during third, fourth, and fifth grade; and Advance in Reading third and fifth grade while her fourth grade reading score was Proficient. Tori did not take the writing test in fifth grade but scored Advance in both Science and Social Studies that year. Tori's sixth grade team teachers and the school administration designated her as an achieving gifted student.

Observations of Achieving Gifted Students

These achieving gifted students disclosed the following school experiences and observations related to their social and academic environment at Haviland Middle School. The students' individual narratives were synthesized to describe both the social and academic contexts as experienced by the achieving students. As stakeholders, their voices and drawings provide insight in to their lifeworld. The perceptions of their present academic and social lives allows the researcher to ascertain what it is like to be an achieving gifted student in a Title 1 public middle school. These composite descriptions reveal topics that influence the relationship between school environment and academic achievement.

Identity and Giftedness. Developing an identity which encompasses giftedness provides the foundation for one's future goals and achievements. Each of

the achieving students realized at a young age that learning was easier for them than it was for their classmates. They accepted good grades and ease-in-learning as part of their lifeworld. Amelia, Nick, and Tori established a gifted identity in elementary school and experienced validation, affirmation, and affinity going to their regularly scheduled GT class meetings, through the friendships they established with other gifted students in their grade and in their regular classrooms. Interestingly, Nick, who said all of his friends were in GT, mentioned the relationship between good grades and giftedness, and questioned the nature of giftedness. While discussing his friends, he said, "There is (sic) some of them, I am kind of questioning, on how they got in. Because one of them claims, he is like as, way smarter than me, but when I see him, I don't really see that this person does that much to do anything."

Amelia, Nick, and Tori do not remember what school was like before being identified as gifted. Brendan, who moved frequently in elementary school, did not realize that programs like gifted education existed. He remembers getting good grades in his other schools, but added that other kids did also. Now identified as GT, he looks forward to participating in additional fun academic "Stuff" like the Academic Team and MathCounts, which are both offered at Haviland Middle School.

Aside from the validation of being placed in the school's gifted program, one of the more visible forms of validation and affirmation is placement in an above grade level advanced class that is based on district criteria. Such classes at Haviland are limited to Mathematics. Additional high school level classes[39] are offered to all

[39] Any students may enroll in Spanish I, Biology I, Oklahoma History and Personal Financial Literacy (PFL)

eighth graders at Haviland and involve student self-enrollment. For the "achieving" participants gifted identity is acknowledged with their placement[40] in the seventh grade Math Extension class (Pre-Algebra) in sixth grade. Nick talks of how excited and proud he is to "just get in," saying he received an 80 on the qualifying test in fifth grade.

The four achieving gifted students appear comfortable with the label of gifted in their classes and with peers. GT students and the school's student body are aware that the seventh grade Math Extension class enables those students to advance in math and take high school level Algebra I in seventh grade and Plane Geometry in eighth grade[41]. The fact that teachers and classmates recognize their membership in such an above grade level math class provides validation and affirmation of giftedness.

Amelia and Brendan did not report experiencing negative reactions or teasing related to their advanced academic ability, however, Tori and Nick were subjected to some comments and teasing. Tori experienced teasing in elementary and middle school. Tori acknowledges that for her, being gifted has a negative side, as "some people make fun of me because I'm really smart." She adds, "Probably because I'm gifted, like no one has really made fun of me or anything because they don't know me. It's just, I think, it's just mainly because . . . I'm usually pretty quick with answers and things." She talks of feeling uncomfortable when a student calls attention to her ability, saying to the class that Tori could probably read a certain above grade level

[40] Advanced math placement was based upon district established criteria, parents, however, may sign a waiver to obtain placement in these classes.

[41] Algebra 1 was normally taken in ninth grade, while Plane Geometry was considered a tenth grade math class.

Spanish passage. Tori adds, "I wish she would not have done that, meaning mentioning me," but then she acknowledges to the researcher, "I probably could have figured out what it said, even though I had no idea."

Nick remembers being called a nerd, "not in mean-spirited way, just like. It's friendly, like what friends say. They are just calling you smart, but when people say in a mean spirit, it's mean-spirited." When that happens, Nick responds, with "There is a saying, 'Nerds now, your bosses later." Both Tori and Nick report choosing to ignore students when such remarks are made.

Affiliation[42] readily occurs at Haviland as a byproduct of class scheduling, for it is not unusual for students placed in advanced math classes to have a majority of students from their advanced math class, also in their science, social studies, and language arts classes[43]. In addition, gifted affiliation is experienced through student participation in the variety of gifted activities and experiences offered by the school's gifted program. These achieving gifted students recognize that they are different than their classmates in intellectual ability and speed of mastery. Nick views (Figure 4.5) being identified gifted as what inspires his success at school.

[42] Affiliation is the association with others having similar interests, abilities and desires without losing one's identity.

[43] This occurrence was often referred to as tracking. While the placement of a large number of similar ability students in classes is not done intentionally, it may result when a core class (math) is ability- driven, making it is more difficult to heterogeneously distribute students in the remaining number of limited class offerings.

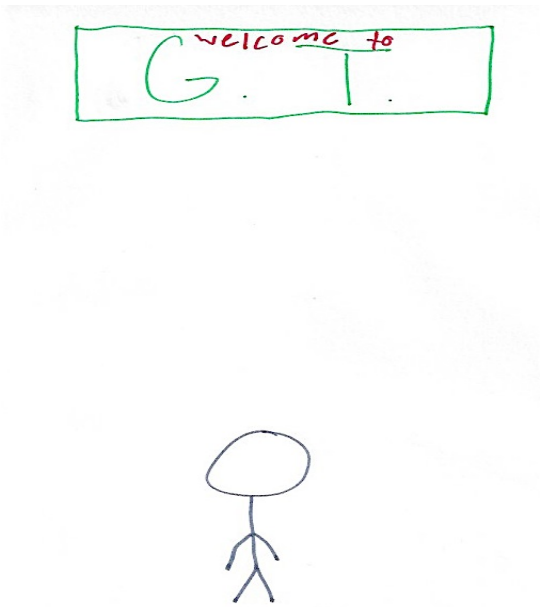


Figure 4.5 Nick feels inspires being in GT

When asked about his drawing, Nick replies, "I feel pretty honored, actually, that I was invited into GT. Really nothing changed after being identified. I still feel like, GT at school was a good opportunity for me." When asked what being gifted means to him, Nick answers, "It just means to have a bigger mindset and be more imaginative than other kids and take school seriously." Nick distinguishes between the gifted students in his classes and himself when he says that not all of the gifted kids he knows take school seriously, and some even get into trouble.

When questioned what it means to be gifted, Amelia responds, "I have been gifted, identified as gifted for so long that I don't know how I would be without it. I don't remember before at all." To Amelia, being gifted means being "more advanced than everyone, I mean, relatively more intelligent. I know the way I am gifted is that I understand things better, I just think of things more scientifically." Amelia mentions belonging to different friendship groups, but not feeling a sense of affinity or comfort

in any of them. Amelia, in her description of herself, she alludes to a feeling of isolation as gifted individual when she says:

> I'm the Doctor Who loving geek, I'm in all the crowds sort of, and it sort of makes me not have a place cause everyone has this little crowd that they're in where their comfortable around everyone, but I am sort of I'm in the sports crowd, I'm in the orchestra, I'm in the geek Doctor Who, I'm in the chess club…

On the other hand, being gifted for Brendan means "that you work, maybe a little harder, maybe you just want more options, and you want more academic things to be successful, and you want to learn more." Tori downplays her ability and talents, and provides a different view of giftedness saying, "Everybody is gifted at something." When asked about herself personally, she answers modestly, "I just think that I 'm just like everybody else and not different or anything."

The achieving gifted students receive support for their giftedness from friendship groups composed primarily of other gifted students, many of whom they went to elementary school with and who are in their advanced level classes.

Self-Perceptions and Self-Efficacy. Early adolescence maturation begins the process of assuming responsibility for one's actions, learning the social skills and behaviors accepted in adult culture, and beginning the process of discovering personal interests (Carmichael, Callingham, Watson, & Hay, 2009). Positive emotional learning experiences in middle school are a prerequisite to student interest development (p. 63). Achieving students acknowledge the value and benefits of receiving a high-quality education. When asked if they feel successful in school, the students express their

self-efficacy[44] in terms of school academics and social culture. Amelia mentions the positive influence of family and friends on her self-efficiency and academic achievement,

> a lot for me comes from my friends, and I have always been raised and I have always hung out with the smart people, I mean, my mom has a PhD and my dad was a National Merit Scholar, I am just sort of used to this sort of crowd and so all my friends being smart sort of boosts my intelligence because they push me to know more things and if you don't learn your stuff, you feel like an idiot around them.

Amelia shares the influence that GLAMS (Figure 4.6), a female engineering event for middle school females with a high interest in science, had on her attitude and her views of future possibilities.

> It was kind of inspiring me to succeed just because of all the woman that had done so much with their lives. They talked about their struggles of being a female and growing up in school and now in their profession in college because there are not many females in their profession and in their engineering classes. They discussed the kind of engineering they are studying and now they've been doing academically. They're inspiring females to go into engineering as a career even though guys kind of dominate it professionally.

[44] Self-efficacy is defined by A. Bandura (1986) as the individual's belief in one's ability to accomplish a specific task, which has an influence over events influencing their lives. Bandura professed that self-efficacy determined how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave.



Figure 4.6 Amelia is inspired to succeed by GLAMS

The act of learning is of primary importance to Brendan: “I feel I’m doing pretty good (sic). I’m learning. That’s the important part if I learn, if I remember it, even though sometimes I do forget it. I think I’m doing pretty well.” When asked about success in school, Nick refers to having friends and then grades as being important: “I have plenty of friends and I am doing very well academically.” Tori mentions that, for her, feeling successful involves having good grades, a couple of friends, and a “fairly clean discipline record and that's pretty much it.” She then adds her view on the pressure current female students experience on how to dress and interact socially at Haviland saying: “I don't really care about how I look or anything, I just kind of go with it.” The achieving gifted students report feeling confident in their

academic ability to achieve good grades and to have positive interactions with friends and peers at school.

Socialization and Peer Culture. The Haviland student body, with its diverse peer groups, establishes the social and academic culture which, in turn, forms the school's academic culture (Lynch, et al., 2013). In an attempt to discover the school's prevailing peer culture, the achieving students are asked to describe the other students at Haviland. Tori comments she thinks the Haviland student body is made of,

> kind of half and half, half the noisy disruptive kids and half the well-behaved mature kids. In the classes I've been in, seemingly there's about half and half, maybe, I mean not quite like that, but I guess they're pretty good and sometimes they can get loud but... It's noisy, like before class it is, but usually not during class. Sometimes it is. . . But, that's really only when our teacher's not here.

Brendan feels most of the students are nice, but adds that occasionally there might be a "person who would go down the hallway screaming many things, but most kids are just normal people." Brendan relates his experiences with peer pressure;

> Sometimes friends pressure each other to act or treat each other or other people some way, or say 'Oh, you should have done better than this' or they say, 'Oh, I did this so you should be able to do this' or 'I got this you should and go ahead and buy that' or things like that.

Amelia mentions some students at Haviland can be "rude", but then she tells of her reactions and treatment of students who are not in GT, which is questionably rude itself, at best:

> I can be kind of mean about people that aren't in GT, because they tend to be obnoxious and they don't know what they're talking about a lot of them. I don't like certain people . . . when they have no idea what they are talking about. It's just teenagers are kind of rude to everyone and I'm just tired of it.

Brendan stresses the importance of a positive school environment on academic success at Haviland. He says, "I think that if you have a good environment you're going to be successful pretty much." His definition of a good school environment is:

> I don't like it when people throw trash around, sometimes talking in groups about the subject is good, but other times it can be really disrupting. The teachers sometimes have to get angry; I would wish they didn't have to do that as much and people would behave a little. People don't have to be rude. It doesn't happen very often.

The importance of maintaining school discipline in the school environment is brought up by Tori, who says, "People sometimes need discipline, and if they didn't have that, then this place would be crazy, but they do and so it makes it kind of easier to learn."

Nick distinguishes the differences in school behavior between students in his advanced class and in his regular classes. He mentions students in a non-advanced class who are "very disruptive" but who, in an advanced class, are really well behaved, and he then tells of one student who is disruptive in both the advanced and non-advanced classes. Nick is concerned that students are not taking school seriously saying, "I always see kids, that I know, that always get in trouble . . . when they're around teachers they're subtler (sic), but they do a lot of bad stuff whenever teachers aren't around." When commenting on the students at Haviland, he says, "I would describe 99% of them, as good, hardworking students, but there is 1%, there is always going to be few kids that don't really listen to the teacher at all and just get on their nerves." He says,

> It bothers me very much because, I'm just shaking my head, saying to myself, please just be quiet so that we can get on with the class, because we have finals here, and there is (sic) finals, if we don't do our stuff in class, the tests are going to be hard for us.

Brendan supports Nick's views of students not completing their assignments and homework saying "I especially get frustrated when they get to school and they're like, oh, 'I forgot to do my homework' and they forget, like every day. It's the same thing. It gets kind of old. I forget (my homework) maybe once a month." The achieving students recognize their school has a few disruptive students in its student body, but they feel that Haviland has a positive learning environment overall. They express frustration with other students in class when they misbehave, do not do assignments, or impede class instruction.

Friends and Fitting In. Making friends is an important developmental task of preadolescence. Their relationships and interactions with peers and the existing social culture influence the students' academic achievement and success. For Brendan, "making friends, getting to know people" is easy and he refers to it as "the best part of school." Brendan's frequent moves are an asset when it comes to meeting people and establishing friendships. A new sixth grader to Haviland, Brendan took the initiative to meet people. He says that, "The first day of school, I just sat somewhere at lunch and I just saw some people and was like, well why don't I go sit with them, I figured out who they were and then pretty much I just found a bunch of people." Later Brendan found out that many of his new lunch friends were also in classes with him. In seventh grade, Brendan reports he made more new friends with the new school year, and new and different students in his classes and school activities.

Nick feels school is important when it comes to making friends. When questioned what was the best thing about school, he answers quickly,

> Getting to be with my friends, because there's not many times that we can – since we all live away from each other. All of my friends, we live maybe five miles apart from each other so we don't really get to hang out that much when we're not in school.

Nick's friendship group is composed of members of the school's gifted program, many of whom are friends from his elementary school. He reports that many of his friends are not in classes with him, so lunch and recess are crucial times, when "I'm able to sit around and talk with my friends." The importance of lunch socialization time is illustrated, as Nick talks of how he saves a table for his friends: "Usually I'm the first one in there so I'll go and grab a table, most of the time I'll have at least one friend with me to go and grab a table. We would put our backpacks on chairs so the other kids don't come and take them." Nick and his friends also take advantage of GT activities to spend time together. Nick talks of his plans to go to the Law Day field trip at an area university: "My friend's going to go to it too. But I think that we're only able to bring thirty-five kids or something, so I'm hoping that we're both able to get into it." When asked if he is interested in becoming a lawyer, Nick answers "No" but adds his friend wants to be a lawyer, and Nick wants to join his friend on the field trip.

Friends and fitting in are secondary goals for Tori, who says, "I have a couple of friends, I don't really feel like I need a lot of them." Tori appears to have few close friends at Haviland or in the community. She did not attend one of the four elementary schools that sends students to Haviland, so Tori entered middle school only knowing four students, two of whom had been in an after school activity with her. Tori said she met her friends either by having core classes with them, an eighth hour with them, or on the academic team. When asked about her after school activities, Tori replies, "I do

acting and I write, and I talk to myself with a bunch of imaginary friends. So I do that and I take voice lessons and piano lessons." After finishing her homework, Tori reports she will "go out and swing and talk to myself, sort of, I have imaginary people." The lack of significant companionship from school acquaintances or friends is evident during her after-school hours, when Tori compensates for this absence by communicating and interacting with her "imaginary friends."

Amelia reports she likes to learn, but feels that probably the best part of school is "getting to see my friends during recess. I just, I like hanging out with my friends, I am that kind of person." When asked how many close friends she has, Amelia answers, "I used to have a whole lot, but like I said, my best friend decided that she hated me. She claimed that I've been a huge bully to her for three years even though it's kind of the exact opposite." Presently, Amelia has two really close friends, one in Band and the other in Orchestra; both are also in GT and have been friends of Amelia's throughout middle school. The importance of having a friend for school activities is highlighted when Amelia tells of attending Middle School Model UN. She remembers the previous year as being better, and having fun than this year "because my best friend was there, but now I am not friends with her anymore because she decided to hate me, so I was just sort of bored, I didn't have someone to hang out with (this year) while I was there."

Amelia talks of the pressures of making friends and trying "to fit in" in middle school and shares the possible consequences she experienced, as the beginning of sixth grade was an especially difficult time for her. She tells of receiving her first and only

C on her report card in the above grade level seventh grade Math Extension/Pre-Algebra class during the sixth grade:

> I was sort of trying to fit in at middle school, and I had a period where I sort of hung out with all the people, like just, people that I don't normally hang out with who were bad influences. And I just didn't do my work, I wasn't doing my homework so I wasn't learning the stuff that I needed to learn, but then it sort of opened my eyes.

Later in the interview, Amelia acknowledges a benefit of having her present friends, as she provides an example of positive peer pressure: "So all my friends being smart sort of boosts my intelligence because they push me to know more things and if you don't learn your stuff, you feel like an idiot around them."

Having and maintaining friendships are important to the majority of achieving gifted students, as they voice that friends are the best part of school. Students shared some of the strategies and heartbreaks of middle school interactions, which occurred during this rapidly changing time in their lives. Students also provide insight into the strong influence that their peers played on their academic achievement and behaviour.

Life Outside of the Classroom. These achieving gifted students participate in a wide variety of extracurricular activities during and after school, in the community, and their homes. In addition to their daily homework, these students have responsibilities at home like caring for younger siblings, helping with household chores, and caring for family pets and animals.

Amelia is the only achieving gifted student to play interscholastic sports, being on a slow-pitch softball team and basketball team at school. In addition, she is a member of a competitive community soccer team, which essentially plays and practices throughout the year. Amelia is first chair violin in the school orchestra and a

member of the National Junior Honor Society, the Chess Club, and the school's Academic Team. Brendan is a member of the school Academic Team, Chess Club, the National Junior Honor Society, and the school's MathCounts Team. Tori is involved with acting, voice, and dance classes, as well as piano lessons after school. Nick does not participate in organized school activities or organized after-school activities.

Activities mentioned by the achieving gifted students as frequently enjoyed during free time are reading, playing video games, drawing, listening to music, watching TV, hanging out with friends, going to the mall and movies, and communicating with friends through texting.

School as a Place of Learning. All four of the achieving gifted students like Haviland Middle School and feel school is important to their future. They value it as an effective way to meet and interact with people and make new friends. These students voiced learning as important to securing well-paying, challenging jobs and careers after completing their education.

Asked to draw what inspires him to succeed in school (Figure 4.7), Brendan illustrates his mother saying to him, "That your best is your best, but if you don't do your best, you're not going to do well in life." Brendan writes, "I don't want to work at a McDonald's when I grow up. I want to do interesting thing." adding, "I want to do something good." Nick also demonstrates the value he places on school when he says: "it's . . . important because you will be, this isn't meant to offend anyone, but if you don't go to school, you will end up working at McDonalds." Nick then adds, "if you go to school and you don't learn, what's the point of going . . . as I said earlier, you'll

end up working at McDonalds if you don't learn because school is all about learning stuff "

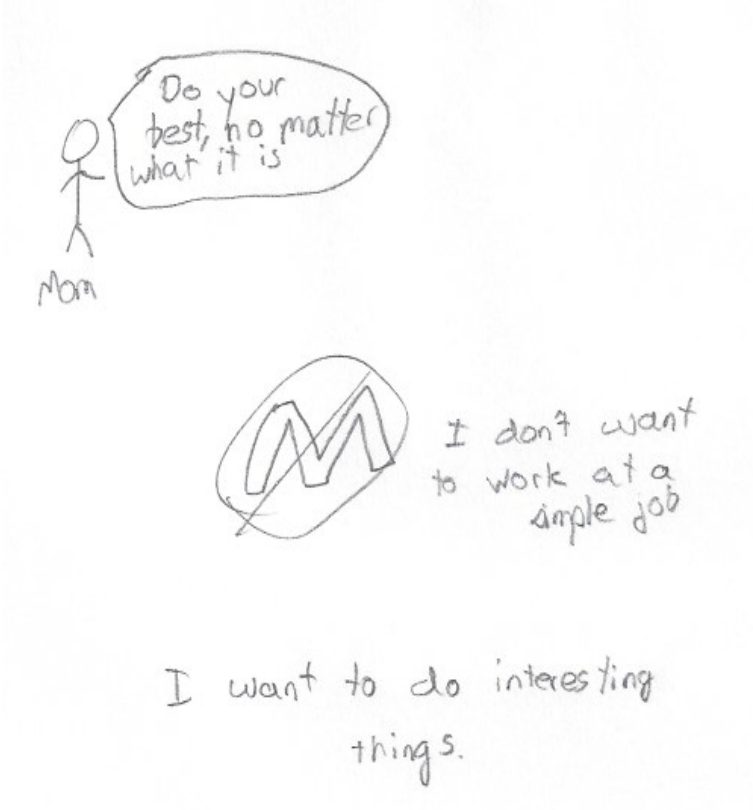


Figure 4.7 Brendan's inspiration for success

Amelia, who is from a highly-educated family, has strong feelings about the value of an education and what a lack of schooling would mean: "You're uneducated, I mean you're not going to know what you're doing in life. You're not going to be able to get a good job in the future. You won't have the skills that you need and it'll just make your life suck and everyone else around you." Brendan agrees with Amelia, but adds, "I think school is not just important for the academics, I think it's important for learning about people and getting social skills." He mentions the value of developing

people and social skills, the importance of being polite, how to make friends, and learning communication skills so an individual knows "what to say when, (and) when to talk, (and) when to not."

Nick recognizes the importance of staying on task during class and mentions the importance of school in his achieving personal goals. He expresses frustration with the small number of students, who he describes as constantly disrupting class. When asked why he thought these students acted out in class, he comments: "They always think that they want to be in the school gym and they think that all that matters in getting into the NBA is being good at the sport, but it's not. It's really about getting your education."

Academic Culture and Student Boredom. As honor roll students in middle school, these achieving students are concerned with both the curriculum being taught and the classroom environment. All of the students are enrolled in above grade level math classes and are able to compare the academic environment of "advanced" classes with that of on grade level core classes. A need for more above grade level classes in outside of Mathematics is expressed. These students prefer classes with challenging and rapidly moving curriculum and those in which pedagogy addresses a variety learning styles, activities and projects.

The Bedford School District has made advances in increasing the academic challenge for its high-ability and gifted students. The addition of zero hour[45], exploratory classes, and extension classes, have made it possible for students to begin

[45] The class time before school officially begins when an accredited high school class that is held. Zero hour provides students with the opportunity to enroll in additional high school class before school begins

adding to earning credit on their high school transcript in middle school by taking such courses as Algebra I, Plane Geometry, Biology I, and Spanish I, and Spanish II. Two additional high school credit courses are Oklahoma History and Personal Financial Literacy (PFL). These classes, required for high school graduation, are offered during the eighth grade exploratory hours. Amelia and Brendan have enrolled in Algebra 1 and Amelia is now enrolled in above grade level Plane Geometry. Tori and Nick, as sixth graders take Pre-Algebra seventh grade Math Extensions as their sixth grade Math class.

Tori reports spending her elementary classroom instruction time with curriculum she had either already mastered or was able to rapidly master, and waiting for the rest of her class to catch up. She said that she likes school, but wants to experience more academic challenge in her classes. She expresses the need for advanced classes and thinks they should be offered as early as elementary school. Tori says, "I kind of wish I can take an advanced science, but they don't have that for sixth grade. So, I can't." Tori relates as a fourth grader, "I learned literally nothing." She remembers during math class: "I would always work ahead, because I already knew how to do whatever they were talking about)." When asked what she did during her math class, Tori answers, "I just kind of sat there and watched them."

Brendan, Tori, and Nick all mention the behavior of other students, who they feel are disruptive, talk out during class, or slack off, saying that such behavior bother them and impact their concentration and learning. Nick comments, "When other people don't do their homework and there are so many other people that haven't done

it, that we can't go ahead because they haven't finished and I'm finished; I get really.... frustrated." Nick then adds:

> There are some kids, in non-advance (classes) that are very disruptive in class. In one of my advance classes, they are really good but the other advance class, that the same kid that is as disruptive as in my non-advance classes. I think to myself, do you think you're doing your best job now, honestly?

Brendan prefers a quiet learning environment to aid his concentration saying, "I don't need a bunch of people talking." He also mentions not liking to highlight the sections he read in books. "Supposedly, it's to help understand . . . It doesn't fit in for me."

Like Brendan, Tori and Nick also prefer a quiet, engaged classroom. Worksheets are not one of Tori's favorite activities. She prefers learning activities in which teachers mix activities up with learning stations, let the students have some choice in assignments and projects and employing multi-intelligence strategies. Nick expresses frustration when the behaviors of classmates interfere with learning, specifically mentioning some of his gifted classmates "that aren't even taking school seriously, they just are getting F's and things" and "they're more subtle (sic) but they do a lot of bad stuff whenever teachers aren't around."

Grades and Achievement. Grades provide students and parents information on academic progress and achievement and, as such, are an accepted evaluation tool. Tori said she did not like getting bad grades on assignments, but that she definitely did not want a C on her report card, as she would lose her yearly membership in the school's honor society. She views her grades realistically, describing them as, "Good, I have all A's but I used to have a B in math which is fine, because it's technically an eighth grade math class, so if I have like a high B in math that's okay, the rest of them

I kind of expect to have A's in them." Tori explains receiving a B on the weekly eligibility report:

> I think it happened when I had like 3 assignments where I had C's and D's on them because, it wasn't that I didn't get it, it's just that, I don't exactly remember what happened but I got kind of lower grades on a few assignments and so it kind of made me go down a little bit but then I had a test or something and I had a good grade on it so it led me back up to an A. So that was good.

Amelia is the only interviewed gifted student participating in several school-sponsored athletic teams and a competitive sports team. She recognizes how difficult it is to maintain her grades while participating in after school athletics, but says, "Coaches really do try to get you to keep your grades up. They are like second parents." She then mentions having team "study hours" where the team members bonded and studied together "We all got to hang out and know each other. We all did homework and we all just ate food. It was good and we got stuff done."

Amelia and Brendan both mention the influence of extraneous forces outside of their control as impacting their academic achievement. Amelia tells of missing a lot of school with a high fever (Figure 4.8) and bad cough that lingered until winter break, and then, just when she was getting better, she was out for "a week and a half for her grandfather's funeral." She said, "There was like a three-month period where I was just completely lost in school because I only went for like a week. And so, getting sick and missing school really makes me mad." She reports that with the understanding and help from teachers and friends texting her assignments, she was able to get caught up and bring her grades up.

Since I'm advanced and I always get A's and everything what a lot of my teachers did was like take this test because you missed the entire chapter, take the test. Whatever you get on the test, I'll put in the grade book for the rest of the chapter. And most of the test I got likes 95's so they put it in the book and so... my grades were fine.



Figure 4.8 Illness and excused absences affect Amelia's grades

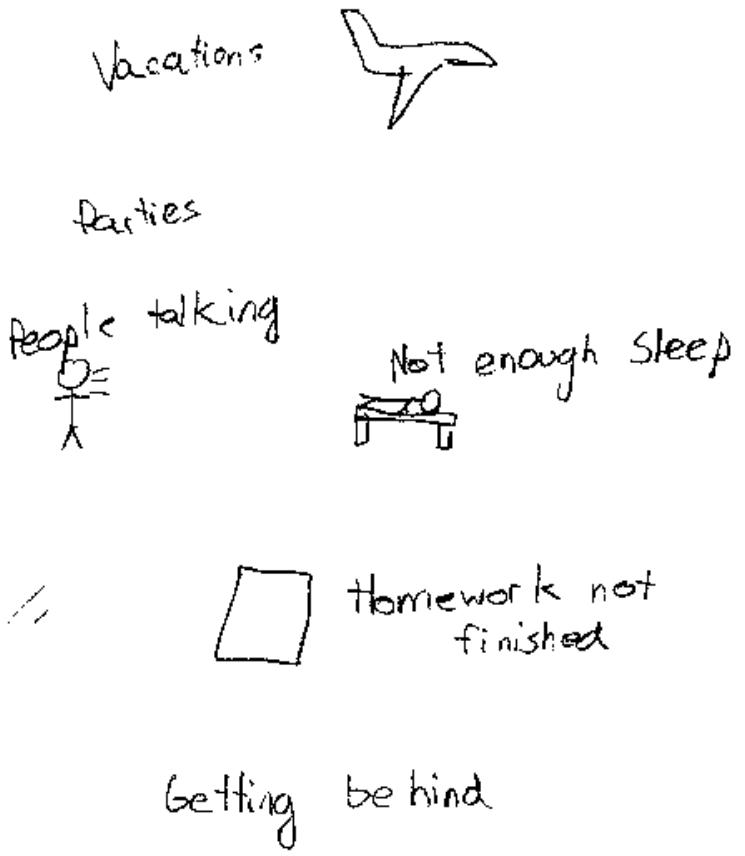


Figure 4.9 Brendan's reasons for lack of academic success at school

Brendan actually listed the causes or reasons (Figure 4.9) that "interfere with (his) being successful," such as going to Spain and parties. He said he may "slack off" or procrastinate doing homework, and sometimes "doesn't always do his best" when referring to the items he listed as causes for his lack of academic success. He adds he doesn't like to be gone from school a lot, as "making up for absences is not fun," which echoes James's feelings about missing class work because of GT activities.

Brendan feels his teachers expect his best effort when it comes to academics, and that he tries "My hardest. Your hardest is your best. Some people for hard work they get a B. Others just get an easy A. I think they just expect you to work your

hardest." Brendan admits sometimes he slacks off saying, "sometimes I procrastinate, maybe I should have worked a little before even if it was just a little," not leaving it all until just before it is due. Brendan describes his grades as stable and when asked what he thought they were, he answers, "They're high."

Nick addresses the difference in academics between elementary and middle school. He remembers,

> In the elementary school, I never really studied, because I always had straight A's and work was easy for me. But in middle school, the work jumped up like five steps and you actually need to study. You need to or else you're going to fail. There's no doubt about it.

The relationship between good grades and studying was further illustrated as Nick shares his thoughts about not being able to qualify for the National Junior Honor Society because he had too many B's. At the beginning middle school, Nick says he thought, "Well, I don't need to study. I've been getting straight A's, then you don't study and your grades drop." He comments, "I wasn't able to make the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) because I had gotten two B's (Figure 4.10) in the beginning of the year. But after I started studying, I brought those two B's up and I now have straight A's." Nick unfortunately, will have to wait until next year to join this honor group. When asked how he feels about not being able to join NJHS, he answers, "I was upset for myself for getting the two B's, my mother was especially upset." At first, Nick did not mind not being a member of NJHS, as he did not think any of his friends were in it. But after he realizes that they are members, he adds, "Now, I'm interested in it." Not being a member of NJHS in sixth grade made Nick "want to work a lot harder" so he would be able to qualify for membership next year.

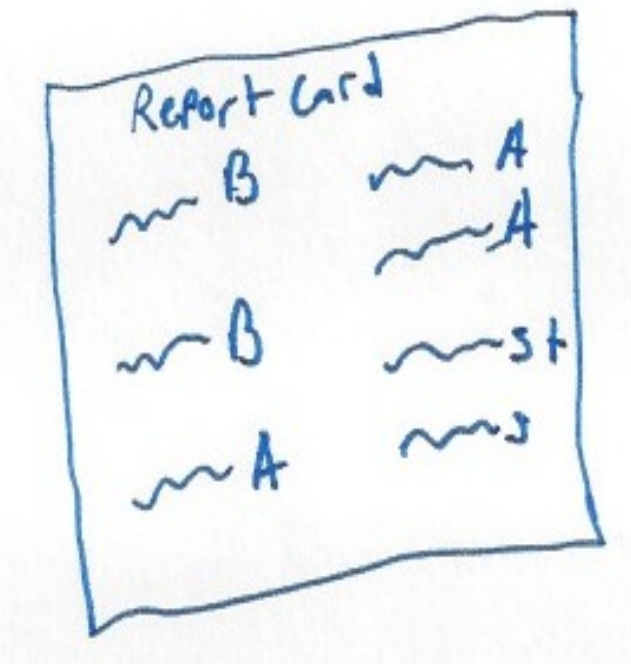


Figure 4.10 Nick's grades affected his membership in NJHS

Amelia addresses a common dilemma faced by many gifted students in our society today, that of balancing the desire for academic achievement with the need to experience life and to develop one's passions and interests. When asked about her grades, Amelia states the importance to her of "having a life" saying, "I would do way better if I quit soccer and I quit violin, but I know I'd rather have a good quality of life than just have a really smart life so I'm trying to even them out. I have A's but they're not all really high A's." Nick also comments about his grades when he says, "I'm not doing my best job, but I'm doing a good job. I'll get a job that will keep me in the good zone" and then he adds that his grades are good enough to keep his parents and teachers happy.

Grades are important to these achieving gifted students. They realize that factors outside academic ability can influence their ability to study, do homework, and perform equal to their academic potential. These gifted students are beginning to develop personal priorities of what is important and what is not as they try to achieve and maintain a balance between academic excellence and "having a life."

Future Goals. Grades are important to these achieving gifted students as each of these achievers plans to attend college. These students are focused on planning for the future. Amelia and Nick have possible future careers in mind. Amelia desires to get a PhD in neuroscience of psychology and become either a professor or researcher, while Nick would like to do something in computer technology, like design or program video games. Brendan and Tori are more interested in building a good academic foundation for college. Tori, at this age, says she is interested in the field of science. Brendan is uncertain about what he wants to study as a future career, but comments, "Right now I just want to do well in school so I can have a basic set up for when I go to college and whatever I want to do." Brendan knows he wants his future to be interesting and fun and that it consists of not "making hamburger patties."

After the discussion of the findings reported from each achieving group on their academic perceptions and attitudes, the findings are recapped and placed in a table of listing the topics covered during student interviews. The views, attitudes and perception are condensed and placed in the appropriate column to ease comparison between the designated achieving student groups. Each achieving category of gifted students is added following the completion of a discussion of its findings. Table 4.2 is a summary of the views and perceptions provided by achieving gifted students.

Table 4.2 Summary of Academic Perceptions of Gifted Students

	Achieving gifted	Gifted Selective Consumers	Underachieving gifted
Gifted Identity	All students scored in the top three percentile on a national normed school ability test and experienced validation, affinity and affiliation through membership in above grade level math classes. Two experienced forms of teasing. Affiliation accomplished through class scheduling and participation in GT experiences. Friendship groups mainly composed of other GT students		
Self-perception and Self-Efficacy	All experienced confidence in their academics and peer relationships		
Socialization and Peer Culture	All felt school had a positive learning environment but expressed frustration with those students who disrupted class instruction		
Friends and Fitting In	Friends were important to the majority of the		

	achieving gifted students. Lunch was the time to socialize. Friends and social group influenced achieving students' grades, actions and behaviors		
Life Outside of School	Students participated in a variety of school and community activities and helped at home.		
School as Place of Learning	Students recognized the importance of school in achieving personal goals.		
Academic Culture and School Boredom	Students mentioned the difference in class climate and classroom behavior between non advanced core class and their above grade level math classes. Academic challenge important.		
Grades and Achievement	Students recognized that studying and good grades were related. Students were aware of the factors influence their academic achievement Strive to achieve		

	academic excellence and "have a life."		
Future Goals	Students were focused on their future and securing interesting and challenging careers		

Selective Consumers

Selective consumers are those underachieving gifted students whose achievement and performance reflect their high ability in academic areas that interest them, that they feel are relevant or will help them achieve their goals, or that have a teacher they like/admire. Selective consumers exhibit inconsistent academic performance and classroom behaviors that are not in line with their high academic ability and achievement test scores in the academic areas they prefer. By definition, selective consumers have academic grades that are lower than expected in a specific academic area, as based on their school ability index and state and nationally-normed testing results. In addition, these students are on the school's academically ineligible list for two or more consecutive weeks; or earned grades in the bottom half of his or her class and/or math/language arts; or had a C average or below and were labeled a bright underachiever by a classroom teacher, gifted specialist, or counselor. Teachers and staff identified two of the gifted students in this study as Selective Consumers. These students are sixth grader, Evan and eighth grader, Victoria. On the next page are descriptions, academic profiles, and self-portraits of each Selective Consumer gifted student. See table 4.3 on the next page.

Table 4.3 Composite Academic Profile of Selective Consumers

Grade	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Test	Score	Advanced courses	Yrs. in GT	Grade/ Yr. ID
6	Evan	Male	Caucasian	NNAT	97%		6 years	1st/2009
8	Victoria	Female	Native American	CogAt	97%	Pre-Algebra; HS Algebra I; HS Plane Geometry; HS Biology I; HS Oklahoma History; HS PFL	6 years	2nd/2009

EVAN

Evan is the fourth member in his family to attend Haviland and be included in the school's gifted program, as his older brother and two older sisters were also identified as gifted. From a close knit professional family, he is an attractive, personable, and popular sixth grade student who participates in a variety of sports and fine arts-related activities and is an avid skateboarder. Evan was identified in first grade on the NNAT a nationally-normed school ability index, after placing in the top three percentile range. He is of Caucasian ethnicity, and in addition to all types of sports, he enjoys writing and drawing; Evan has won cash prizes for his short stories. Presently, Evan is serving as a vice president in the school's National Junior Honor Society. He describes himself as a "creative-truth teller, an aspiring an author and winner of writing contests."



Figure 4.11 Evan's self-portrait

Evan's self-portrait (Figure 4.11) reflects his artistic and writing talents. For his self-portrait, Evan looks as he did on the morning of our first interview. Evan is not intimated by being asked to draw. He spends time and includes color and detail in his drawing. Evan uses color to represent his "traits and personality;" he notes especially that black symbolizes the bad habits, traits, and anger he wants to eliminate. The white area on the top is included for "improvement." When asked about the title he

chose for the self portrait, Evan says he is not just one type of individual, but many different ones- student, writer, artist, actor, athlete, and skateboarder.

Evan earned all A's during his fourth and fifth grade years in elementary school and qualified for the sixth grade Math Extensions class (which is an enriched sixth grade math class based upon sixth grade math curriculum). An honor roll student, Evan experienced academic difficulties in the sixth grade Math Extensions class, as reflected in the weekly eligibility grade checks (See Appendix 4.5 to view his academic profile). During the first half of sixth grade, he earned four C's in the first quarter and one C, two D's, and two F's in the second quarter. Evan had weekly grades of B's or higher during third quarter but had seven C's in the fourth quarter. By the end of each marking period, Evan, however, is able to bring each quarterly sixth grade Math Extension grade up to a B average. Evan received A's each quarter for his other three core classes.

Evan's performance on state-mandated testing is as follows: Proficient in both Math and Reading for third, fourth, and fifth grades; Proficient in Science, Advanced in Social Studies and Limited Knowledge on the fifth grade Writing test.

Evan was identified by the school staff as exhibiting characteristics of a Selective Consumer in the area of math. Evan frequently earned C's on the weekly math eligibility reports for sixth grade Math Extensions class but consistently managed to bring the quarterly grade up to a B by the end of the marking period.

VICTORIA

Victoria, an eighth grader, skipped her fifth grade year in elementary school and entered sixth grade at Haviland in the fall of 2012 at the age of 10. She is a bright, spunky and vocal GT student, who is not afraid to express her opinions. Victoria's parents are divorced and her dad has remarried; however, both birth parents continue to live in Bedford and play active roles in her life. Victoria has one older sister who was in the gifted program at Haviland and now attends a local high school. Victoria and her sister live with her dad and stepmother. Victoria is a Native American and participates in the school's free and reduced lunch program.

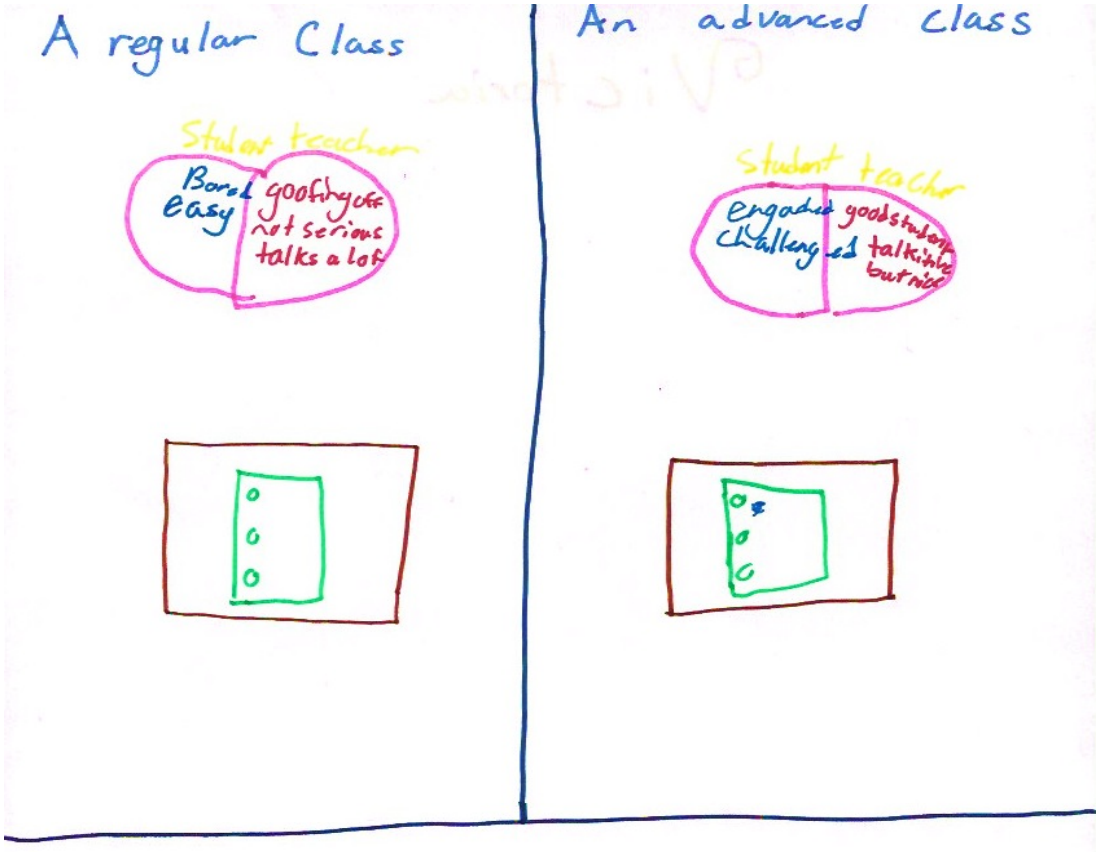


Figure 4.12 Victoria's self-portrait

Victoria was identified as gifted and talented in second grade on the CogAt, a nationally-normed school ability test, in which she scored in the top three percentile range. Victoria views herself as a reflection of her classroom behaviors. She titles her self-portrait (Figure 4.12) *Regular vs. Gifted* and her drawing graphically represents the differences in gifted and non-gifted classroom behaviors as Victoria perceives them. For her self-portrait, Victoria chooses to define herself through her behavior as a gifted student in school. She describes her student-self as:

> . . . in a regular class I'm normally bored and it's easy and I'm just not really engaged. I'm just kind of like sitting there and not really doing anything. And I see from the teacher's perspective, of what I think a teacher would think of me if I'm just in a regular class as I'm goofing off, I'm not serious about it, I'm just talking a lot, and it's because I'm bored, not engaged. And in an advanced class, I'm engaged, I'm challenged. I'm talking but it's ... like a discussion it's what you're supposed to and then from the teacher's perspective I would think, that I was getting the material ... I'm talking, but I'm talking like where I'm supposed to, not just chatting with my friend.

When asked if she likes GT, Victoria answers:

> I like GT, though I wish there was more higher level classes. Frankly like more higher level like social studies, like a separate set of classes than just the regular common core, because that doesn't challenge some people. And I know friends ... I'm friends with a lot of GT people and so they get too, like one of my friends she's really like above like languages, and a lot of other things. So she's bored also.

In sixth grade, Victoria was on the school's academic honor roll each quarter in spite of having times when she received weekly eligibility grades of C, D, or F (See Appendix 4.6 to view her academic profile). During the the first half of sixth grade, Victoria consistently pulls her quarterly grades up to at least a B average. However, the third quarter is especially difficult, as evidenced by the low eligibility grades she

receives in seventh grade Math Extensions and social studies. During this quarter, that Victoria receives her first C on a report card in seventh grade Math Extensions, but is able to bring her social studies grade to an A. Seventh grade Math Extension class continues to be a problem for Victoria as she receives a C in this class in the fourth marking period. Victoria's score on the state-mandated Math test is high enough for her to qualify for Algebra I in seventh grade.

Seventh grade is a good year academically for Victoria, as she is on the school's academic honor roll each quarter in spite of having times when she receives weekly eligibility grades of C, D or F. As in sixth grade, Victoria is able to pull her quarterly grades up to at least a B average by handing in late assignments and redoing work that received low grades before the end of the marking period.

Victoria is enrolled four high school credit classes in eighth grade. She continues to make the school's academic honor roll each quarter even though she also continues to receive Cs, Ds and Fs on her weekly eligibility grade reports. However, by the end of each marking period, Victoria brings her core grades up enough to be placed on the school's honor roll.

On state-mandated tests taken in grades three through eight, Victoria scored Advanced in Reading in grades three, four*, six, seven, and eight and in Math she scored Advanced in grades three, four*, and six. Victoria received an advanced on the End of Instruction tests for Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology 1. Victoria was Proficient on the eighth grade Writing and Science tests and received Advanced in Social Studies. During the fall of 2014, Victoria took the eighth grade Explore test provided by the ACT as a college readiness test. She received a composite score of 21

or 96% with subtest scores of 18 or 84% in Math; 23 or 97 % in Reading; 25 or 100 % in Science, and 17 or 75 % in Language Arts.

Observations and Perception of Selective Consumers

Evan and Victoria, designated as Selective Consumers, share their school experiences and observations related to the social and academic environment at Haviland Middle School. As with the achieving gifted students, these students' individual narratives and drawings were analyzed and synthesized to reveal a picture of the social and academic contexts they experienced as gifted middle school students. Their composite verbal descriptions and drawings reveal the topics cited below that influence their relationships between their school environment and academic achievement.

Identity and Giftedness. Similar to the achieving gifted students, Evan and Victoria recognized at a young age that they were academically advanced compared to their peers. They were both identified as gifted and talented early in their school years; Evan was identified in first grade and Victoria during second grade. Gifted identification played an integral part of their elementary school experiences. Both students reported that schoolwork was easy for them and that they were on their school's academic honor rolls. Evan and Victoria experienced validation, affirmation and affiliation during elementary school when they went to their regularly scheduled GT class meetings, through the friendships they established with other gifted students in their grade, and in their regular classrooms.

Establishing a gifted identity in middle school is more complex than it is in elementary school, as students are evaluated by teachers and peers based upon

academic accomplishments and actions. Similar to the achieving gifted students, Victoria receives validation and affirmation through her placement in the above grade level math classes of seventh grade Math Extensions/Pre-Algebra, Algebra I and Plane Geometry. Evan, however, receives his gifted validation from his recognized talents in writing and drawing and as Vice President of the school's National Junior Honor Society. Both Evan and Victoria participate in school-sponsored gifted activities and experiences, and appear comfortable with the label of gifted in class and with their peers.

Evan and Victoria are at ease being identified as gifted in class and by teachers. Identified in the early years of elementary school, both students experience gifted validation, affinity, and affiliation in middle school through their academic performance and participation in gifted related activities and experiences. They report that the majority of their friends are also in GT; Evan added that a lot of his friends also play sports with him.

Self -Perceptions and Self-Efficacy. Evan and Victoria are honor roll students and recognize the importance and value of receiving a quality education. They express feelings of being successful in school. Evan attributes his success, "Because I pay attention during class. And I take all the notes. And I'll study before tests." He reports getting good grades and that his parents are pleased with his grades. Victoria is more reflective concerning her giftedness and success and she does not consider herself as really successful: "I'm comfortable with my academic performance, but would like to improve my work ethic." She says, "Well, sometimes

when I'm bored or just don't really want to like do anything that day, I don't really do my work and so I just need a better work ethic."

Socialization and Peer Culture. Students are socialized entering middle school, part of which involves hearing "horror stories" about the present seventh and eighth grade students. The selective consumers discussed their easy transition into middle school. Evan, a younger brother of former Haviland students, laughs and acknowledges that the stories were not true and are just told to intimidate and scare incoming middle school students. Victoria, who entered Haviland at the age of ten, reported her transition from elementary to middle school was good, saying she did not feel that her friends "judged her for being gifted after she skipped a grade." She comments, "People were like, 'OMG, you skipped a grade. How did you do that? I wish I could have done that.' They weren't really mean about it. So they were just like, OMG. You're only 10."

Evan and Victoria are asked about the peer culture at Haviland, who they describe as one in which most of the students are nice and wanted to learn. Victoria notes, "The majority of the students here, I believe, . . . are doing their work and they're okay, I mean, there is not really any that, like I don't really like." She adds that the general student body needs more time to process and learn subject matter than gifted students. Victoria also mentions some students as being "ruddish." When asked to explain that term, she replies, "I consider it rude if they are making a lot of jokes against people or they're disrupting the class a lot. And some kids are just there and they don't really do anything in class and some kids are actually like working and are good students." Asked what she thought was the difference between GT students and

the other kids in the school, Victoria makes the distinction that average students: "most of the time they're goofing off in their regular classes, but that's because they don't want to do the work. And they just don't grasp stuff as well, so they need more help."

Friends and Fitting In. Friends remain an important aspect of middle school life. Each of the Selective Consumers has friendship groups established in elementary school and they gradually add new students to these groups. Evan is familiar with Haviland and is from the largest elementary school with students attending Haviland. Evan talks of being at ease and not being worried about entering middle school even though he acknowledges the stories "to scare" the incoming sixth graders. Evan feels he met a lot of sixth grade students from the other elementary schools, and tells of how he makes a new friend of a student in his grade: "I asked him for gum one day after lunch, and so then we started talking and then we became friends." He adds, "I've known most of my good friends from elementary school, and we have a lot in common. So we'll get together on the weekends and do stuff." He describes his friends as "a lot of them are in the gifted and talented program. And they're silly, like I am. And we like to do a lot of the same stuff." As an athlete, Evan also has the opportunity to meet fellow Haviland students at various sport venues in the community.

Victoria describes skipping fifth grade to enter sixth grade: "At first I was a little ... I mean, I knew a few people, so I didn't really have a lot of friends, but then I started making friends. . .. so that was a little challenging.... once I got used to it, it was fine." She describes her friends as "normally doing their work and they're advanced,

so they're kind of bored and they just are just like me. We're just alike, okay." Victoria mentions all the advanced classes that she and her friends have taken, so that next fall when they start high school they will be considered, credit wise, as sophomores. When asked about her social life at Haviland, Victoria talks of moving between groups but views "middle school drama" as something she tries to avoid. She responds:

> I wouldn't say like I have a ton of friends, but I have a lot of friends that I just kind of like see during recess or before school on Fridays, I like to move around a bunch because I'm moving from a group of friends to another group of friends. And I mean, some of my friends have a lot of conflict and changes going on and I just ... I don't really mind it because I'm used to it. I'm just like; you all have drama, good for you.

The role of friends and fitting in with a group continues to be important to these Selective Consumers. These students continue to maintain friendships with students from their respective elementary schools while meeting new friends in their classes and through school and GT activities. Both Evan and Victoria talk about how much their friends resemble them and are in the gifted program with them.

Life Outside of School. Evan participates in a variety of school-sponsored extra curricular activities and community activities. He is on the school's track and cross-country teams and serves as Vice President of the school's National Junior Honor Society. In addition, after school, Evan participates in acting and "improve" classes, scouting, plays basketball in a community league, and enjoys skateboarding during his free time. Victoria participates on the school's Academic Team. After school, she spends time "texting some, mostly just listening to music and reading or looking at Pinterest or something." Both students see and "hang out" with friends when not in school.

School as a Place of Learning. Evan and Victoria liked Haviland Middle School and enjoy going to school there. For them middle school is an important step towards securing a well-paying and challenging career in the future. Both students plan to attend college after high school.

Academic Culture and Boredom. Throughout the interview process, Victoria frequently mentions the fact that she is "not challenged" and not engaged in her core classes. When asked to explain her views, she replies, "In a regular class I'm normally bored and it's easy and I'm just not really engaged. I'm just kind of like sitting there and not really doing anything." Victoria recognizes how she must appear to her teachers saying, "I see from the teacher's perspective of what I think a teacher would think of me, if I'm just in a regular class as I'm goofing off, I'm not serious about it, I'm just talking a lot, and it's because I'm bored, not engaged." This is not isolated academic behavior for Victoria as she skipped fifth grade after multiple classroom situations and misbehavior during instructional time in elementary school. She describes fourth grade and her last year in elementary school as:

> I was really bored and so like any kind of noise would really bother me because I was bored, I wasn't challenged. And so I kind of yelled at people for turning a page or breathing loudly. And so, yeah, that year was... was really bad, "Yeah, man." I was just like, "Bad ...I got in trouble a little bit, and my parents had to talk to my teacher . . . But then my parents understood that I was not being challenged and so that's when they started to think about me skipping a grade.

After completing fourth grade, Victoria takes and passes the district's Proficiency Promotion Test during the summer of 2012; she is then promoted into sixth grade and enters Haviland Middle School. Victoria received all A''s on her quarterly report cards in fourth grade and has been on the Haviland school honor roll

each marking period. Victoria continues to express her need to be challenged academically in her middle school classes. When asked about her current middle school experiences, she answers:

> Academically it's pretty positive, I'm challenged, and I'm not as bored as I was in fourth grade, which was really bad. The school is okay in my opinion. I wish they had more language arts and science. I mean, there's Biology, but I already audited it last year, so I know the material.

After mentioning being frequently bored in classes, Victoria is asked whether teachers realize she is bored and not being challenged. She responds, "I don't know. I know the teachers know that I get the work done and I'm fine with it. I don't even really need to be like, you know, like reviewed or whatnot. So I don't really know if I look bored other than that I'm just talking." When asked if she got into trouble for talking in class, Victoria says: "Normally it's just, 'Hey, stop talking'. It's normally not really anything else." Asked to describe her behaviors and actions when bored in a class, Victoria replies:

> Well, I normally just zone out or just doodle or something. It's not really like ... I mean, sometimes like I just kind of like either finish the work early or just zone out because I'm bored and I just ... I don't really like ... I don't know how to like explain it, other than talking and like doodling and zoning, there's not really anything else I do.

Victoria is very open about her desire for challenging curriculum and her need to be engaged in learning. She admits that she is currently being challenged at Haviland, but is also quite vocal about her desires for increased academic challenge in classes offered at Haviland and throughout the Bedford school district. She feels very strongly that the level of challenge should be increased in the areas of language arts,

social studies and science, and suggests that additional advanced level core classes be added to the middle school curriculum.

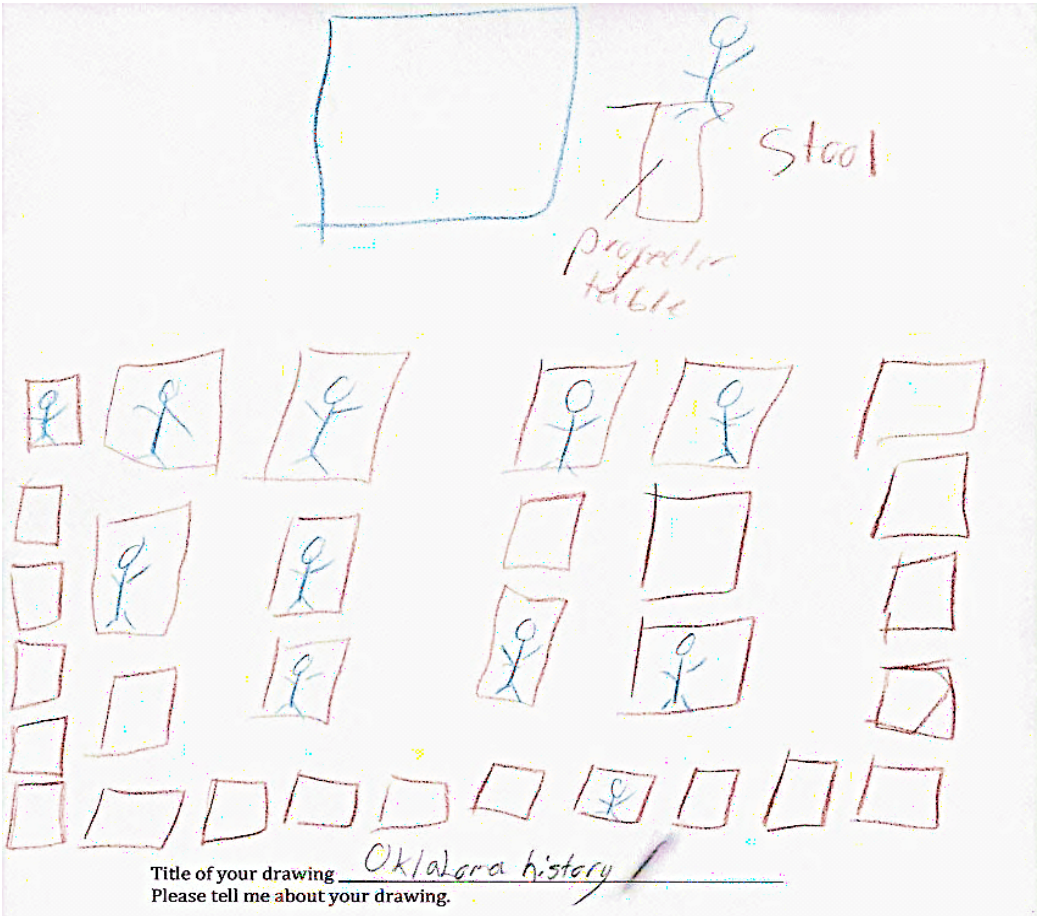


Figure 4.13 Victoria's view of a positive learning environment

Victoria illustrates of her view of an inspiring classroom environment (Figure 4.13); she then describes what make this a positive learning environment for her:

> A good learning environment for me would be where we have a lot of discussions, like in depth debates, and it's engaging, you're not just sitting there copying notes or just doing worksheets. So, I find a classroom that is engaging the teacher is like up and about and the students are either sitting at their desk like totally engaged, or they're up and about. I like it where you feel like you're actually doing something, not just sitting there getting it... I mean I'm fine with lectures; lectures are okay to me. But notes and just doing worksheets are just a waste. I don't find them a way to learn anything.

When asked to describe a challenging classroom, Victoria mentions the amount of class time a teacher spends on reviewing material and suggests that for gifted and high ability students that time would be more productive introducing new concepts:

> If the teacher is engaged and we're not reviewing as much. We might review a little, but we won't really review that much. If everyone has the concepts down in a class as I'm challenged and everyone pretty gets it much so we review only a little, like right before a test or something. And so there's not a lot of review and the materials are presented in more depth.

Victoria voiced strong opinions about the use of worksheets to teach curriculum content. She says, "In my opinion the teacher isn't really teaching . . . so basically we just get worksheets and we just look at the answers because we don't really learn anything there. I mean we learn some, but it's not really like learning."

Grades and Achievement. Of the gifted students in this study, Victoria has the most high school credits on her transcript and will enter high school in Fall, 20015, credit-wise as a sophomore. She has taken the following high school courses while attending middle school: Algebra I, Plane Geometry, Biology I, Oklahoma History, Personal Financial Literacy, and will take CP Freshman English during summer school before entering high school. Victoria's goal, however, is not to graduate from high school early: "My ultimate goal is to take as many classes as I can really. That's pretty much what it is'.

> Because if I graduate early then I'll be either 16, I'll be 16, and so ... I mean, I could go to (the local university), but I'd really like to go to a different school. My dad won't let me go out of state, right, to college. So I'll be taking college classes with 21 year olds and I'll be 16, and my mom's not really comfortable with that. So I'm thinking my senior year I'll just take more AP courses, or courses that I haven't taken.

Evan and Victoria were designated by school personnel and the researcher as students whose academic achievement was not indicative of their academic ability in all classes and who did not always perform academically at the level indicated by their ability. As Selective Consumers, their academic performance is considered inconsistent and does not mirror the achievement indicated by their test results. Selective Consumers underachieve in classes that are of little or no interest to them, are deemed irrelevant to their goals, or in which they have a teacher they do not like and admire. Victoria was viewed as a Selective Consumer because she is frequently included on Haviland's weekly ineligible list. Victoria's ineligible listings are not limited to one particular class or subject area, but include the four core classes. Math, an area of strength for Victoria, is consistently the cause of her poor weekly grades in sixth and seventh grades, in part because she did not keep up with her daily assignments.

When asked about her grades, Victoria replies, "I normally get A's and B's, possibly a C, but then I just go and correct stuff, so I'm normally getting A's", adding, "Yeah. I just have to actually do the work." Victoria is aware she needs to complete and hand in to assignments to bring her grades up to honor roll level. She addresses this shortcoming e.g. completing assigned work when she addresses the need to improve her work ethic. The high academic accomplishments of her friends have a positive influence Victoria to also achieve high grades and the school's honor roll each quarter.

Evan also exhibits a pattern of receiving weekly ineligibility grades of C or below in sixth grade Math Extensions during three of his four sixth grade marking

periods. He is, however, able to bring up his math average to at least an 80 in each of the marking periods by redoing and completing homework assignments; and as a result, he makes the school's honor each academic grading period. Sixth grade Math Extensions is not a favorite subject of Evan's, as evidenced by the fact he stated that he is able to and would like to miss math to talk with the researcher. The actual cause of Evan's difficulties with math is unclear, whether Evan does not like the subject area, or does not like his math teacher, or whether he feels math is not needed for his future plans as an author illustrator was undetermined. Evan, however, is motivated to maintain at least a B in math to remain National Junior Honor Society Vice President and to keep his parents "happy."

Both Evan and Victoria were asked specifically about their grades and both students commented that they were "good" neglecting to mention that they are frequently included on the school's ineligible list. Evan and Victoria are apparently referring to their end of the marking period grades rather daily or weekly grade averages. Victoria admits there are times when she does not hand in or complete class assignments and homework because she "didn't feel like doing it." It is the result of such negligent behavior that causes Victoria to frequently be listed on the school ineligible list. Evan says he has good grades and his parents are pleased with his them. Both Evan and Victoria are felt by the school faculty to be gifted Selective Consumers and show evidence that their math grades in particular do not reflect their ability. Both students are consistently able to bring their grades up in time so they are included on the school's academic honor roll each quarter.

Future Goals. Both Selective Consumers plan on attending college. At present, Evan's goal is to become an author/ illustrator because he enjoys both writing and drawing. When explaining his career choice, he refers to himself as a "creative truth-teller" saying, "I like to make stuff up, and tell that to people. So I thought, why not just do that forever." Victoria is undecided about her future career, but definitely plans to attend college saying, "I don't know what I want to do. I want a high paying job that I'm interested in, but I don't really know what career I want to get into or what I want to do." When discussing her possible options, Victoria says,

> I know I like to do a lot of the social sciences. I know I love social science, like anthropology and stuff. But I also know that they don't pay well if I major in it. So I probably won't. I'll probably go into engineering or something or political office.

Evan and Victoria are exploring possible career options, at this point, Evan desires to be an author/ illustrator while Victoria knows what she enjoys studying in school but ultimately says her goal is to secure "a high paying job" that interests her.

The findings reported by the gifted selective consumer on topics covered during student interviews were recapped and included in Table 4.4. These views, attitudes and perception are placed in the appropriate column to ease comparison between the designated achieving student groups. A category of gifted students is added following the completion of a discussion of its findings. Table 4.4 is a summary of the views and perceptions provided by gifted achieving students and gifted selective consumers.

Table 4.4 Summary of Academic Perceptions of Gifted Selective Consumers

	Achieving Gifted	Gifted Selective Consumers	Underachieving Gifted
Gifted Identity	All students scored in the top three percentile on a national normed school ability test and experienced validation, affinity and affiliation through membership in above grade level math classes. Two experienced forms of teasing. Affiliation accomplished through class scheduling and participation in GT experiences. Friendship groups mainly composed of other GT students	Both students scored in the top three percentile on a national normed school ability test and experienced validation, affinity and affiliation; Victoria through membership in above grade level math classes and Evan through writing and art. Affiliation accomplished through class scheduling and participation in GT experiences. Friendship groups mainly composed of other GT students and athletes (Evan).	
Self-perception and Self-Efficacy	All experienced confidence in their academics and peer relationships	Both considered themselves successful with grades and friends	
Socialization and Peer Culture	All felt school has a positive learning environment but expressed frustration with those students who disrupted class instruction	Viewed majority of students' as positive who wanted to learn.	
Friends and Fitting In	Friends were important to the majority of the	Friends important, friendship groups composed of	

	achieving gifted students. Lunch was the time to socialize. Friends and social group influenced achieving students' grades, actions and behaviors	students from same elementary school other GT students and students met through sports Friends and social group influenced students' grades, actions and behaviors	
Life Outside of School	Students participated in a variety of school and community activities and helped at home.	Students participated in a variety of school and community activities and helped at home.	.
School as Place of Learning	Students recognized the importance of school in achieving personal goals.	Students recognized the importance of school in achieving personal goals.	
Academic Culture and School Boredom	Students mentioned the difference in class climate and classroom behavior between non advanced core class and their above grade level math classes. Academic challenge important.	The importance of academic challenge stressed and academic boredom described as well as how students behave when bored by one student	.
Grades and Achievement	Students recognized that studying and good grades were related. Students were aware of the factors influence their academic	Students felt grades were "good" as they made honor roll, however, weekly grades indicated problems with assignments and tests. Parents,	

	achievement Strive to achieve academic excellence and "have a life."	peers and social status influential	
Future Goals	Students were focused on their future and securing interesting and challenging careers	Students were focused on their future and securing interesting and challenging careers	

UNDERACHIEVERS

Academically underachieving gifted students are those gifted students who consistently exhibit low academic performance in core classes over a long period of time, which is not consistent with their high academic ability and achievement test scores. Underachievers are characterized as not doing or completing class assignments, failing to hand in class assignments to be graded, having a lack of motivation, and displaying a minimal amount of effort to successfully complete school assignments or participate in class activities. In addition, these students are consistently on the school's academically ineligible list for two or more consecutive weeks, or earned grades in the bottom half of his or her class and/or math/language arts, or have a C average or below and were labeled a bright Underachiever by a classroom teacher, gifted specialist, or counselor. Teachers and staff identified four gifted students as underachieving. These gifted students are sixth grader, Kathryn, seventh grader, James, and eighth graders, Faith and Scout. Following are brief descriptions of these "underachieving" students along with their academic profiles and self-portraits.

Table 4.5 Composite Academic Profile of Underachieving Gifted Students

Grade	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Test	Score	Advanced courses	Yrs. in GT	Grade/ Yr. ID
8	Faith	female	Caucasian	NNAT	99%	Pre-Algebra HS Algebra I Spanish I	5 years	3rd 2010
7	James	Male	Caucasian	NNAT	97%	Pre-Algebra	7 years	1st/2008
6	Kathryn	Female	Caucasian	Slosson	99%		4 years	3rd/2011
8	Scout	Male	Caucasian	KBIT	98%		1 year	8th/2014

FAITH

Faith is a happy, 14-year-old, eighth grade student who lives with her single mother and younger sister in central Bedford. She is Caucasian and was born in Chicago, moving to Bedford at the age of three. Faith's parents divorced when she was "really, really young" but she said that she would often go to visit her dad in Illinois during the summer months. Faith's father died when she was five. She mentions the pictures she has with her father and tells the researcher how she painted her desk and then encased the pictures in plastic on her desk at home. Faith mentions she still goes to visit her dad's family in Wisconsin during the summer months.

Faith is a quiet-spoken, reserved, and pretty girl who enjoys drawing and math. She is from a low socio-economic environment with a single working mom and a nearby grandmother who helps the family by picking up Faith at school as needed. Faith participates in the school's free and reduced lunch program. She reports that they "just got a TV" but do not have cable, a computer, or the Internet at home. She

does, however, have a cell phone, and saying, “The only technology thing I do is I text my friends or listen to my music.”

Faith was identified as gifted and talented in third grade based upon her results on the NNAT school ability test which placed her in the top three percentile on a nationally-normed school ability test. Based upon her fifth grade math testing results, Faith was placed in the sixth grade Math Extension class upon entering Haviland. This class is an enriched and accelerated sixth grade math class covering the on grade level sixth grade math curriculum. The class began her math acceleration in middle school, which ends with Faith enrolling in high school Algebra I in eighth grade.

Figure 4.14 Faith's self-portrait



For her self-portrait (Figure 4.14) as a gifted student, Faith draws a smiling girl with a backpack. When asked what was in her backpack, Faith replies "Like my school work, binders, books, and books to read." As an explanation as to why she is smiling, Faith replies, "Well, I usually am very happy when I go to school because I get to see all my friends and do the work I like to do like math, social studies and science."

As a fifth grade elementary school student, Faith received all A's in language arts and A's and B's in math, reading, spelling, and social studies. (See Appendix 4.7 to view her academic profile). Faith started sixth grade on the school honor roll, with A's in language arts, science, and social studies and a B in sixth grade Math Extensions, earning a GPA of 3.833. As sixth grade progresses, Faith remains on the school's academic honor roll until the final quarter when she earned her first D in middle school language arts and earned a fourth quarter GPA of 3.167. A review of her weekly eligibility grades reveals a gradual increase in the number of weekly core subject grades that were C or below. Faith, in most instances, works and is able to bring her quarterly core grade averages up to B's by the end of the marking period, as illustrated in the second quarter with social studies, third quarter in language arts, and in sixth grade Math Extensions. It is interesting to note; Faith earns an A in language arts for the first quarter of sixth grade, however, by the end of fourth quarter, her language arts grade has dropped to a D.

Academically, Faith's seventh grade is characterized with an increase in weekly eligibility grades that are C or below and Faith once again attempts to improve her grades at the end of the grading period. The year begins with Faith on the honor

roll for the first half of the school year with A's and B's in her core subjects. However, her weekly language arts grades during second quarter do not reflect her ability and indicate that she was not completing, handing in, or redoing assignments as needed. During the third quarter, problems with seventh grade Math Extensions and science begin. Her weekly eligibility grades in seventh grade Math Extensions class are two C's and eight D's and she receives two D's in science. Faith is able to pull up her science grade to a B for the third quarter, but earns a D in seventh grade Math Extensions (her favorite subject area). By the end of seventh grade, Faith is continually earning weekly ineligibility grades of C's in science and social studies. She is able to end the year with B's in both science and social studies. Faith's seventh grade Math Extensions grade was raised from a D in third quarter to a B in Fourth quarter despite weekly eligibility grades of C's and D's. It is during fourth quarter that language arts begins to emerge as a major concern in Faith's academic profile. Faith has weekly grades of four C's, two D's, and two F's during the last nine-week marking period. She is able to raise this grade and ends the year with a C in language arts. In spite of low weekly grades, Faith is able to maintains at least a B average each quarter in seventh grade.

Academically, eighth grade is both challenging and difficult for Faith, as she is not on the school's academic honor roll. Faith starts eighth grade enrolled in three high school credit classes. Spanish I, Algebra I, and Biology I --in addition to her grade level classes in language arts, science and social studies. She withdraws from Biology I with a B average during the second marking period, while continuing to be enrolled in two high school credit classes: Spanish I and Algebra I. She earns B

averages in each of these high school courses and, more importantly, she does not receive any weekly grades below B in either of these classes during her eighth grade year.

Eighth grade finds Faith's problems with language arts intensifying and issues in social studies also begin to emerge. From the start of school year until its end, Faith continually receives low (C or below) weekly eligibility grades in language arts, resulting in her receiving an F each marking periods and failing the course. In social studies, the first two marking period grades are D and then F. Faith, however, is able to turn her social studies grades around and earn a B for the third marking period despite receiving six D's that quarter in social studies. Faith's science grades are consistently A's and B's until the fourth marking period when she starts to develop grade problems. She receives five C's and one F during the last marking period in science, but is able to pull her science quarterly grade average up to a B by the end of the fourth marking period.

On the state-mandated tests, taken in three through eight, Faith scores Proficient in Reading in grades three, four, five, six, seven, and eight and in Math she scores Advanced in grades four, five, six, and seven. Faith receives a Proficient in the Algebra I End of Instruction test. In fifth grade, Faith is Proficient in Writing and Science but receives a Limited Knowledge score in Social Studies. During the fall of 2014, she takes the eighth grade Explore test provided by the ACT as a college readiness test. Faith receives a composite score of 16 or 64%, with subtest scores of 18 or 84% in Math; 13 or 44% in Reading; 17 or 63 % in Science, and 15 or 61%, in Language arts.

JAMES

James lives with his mother outside of the urban center of Bedford often referred to as "in the country" near an area lake. He reports that there are no friends or students his age living near him. He has a half-sister who lives in Hawaii, but James rarely sees either his father or sister. With dyed black hair, he is a quiet, almost sullen seventh grader, who was identified as gifted and talented in first grade on the NNAT, a nationally-normed school ability test, scoring in the top three percentile. James is of Caucasian ethnicity and participates in the school's free and reduced lunch program. He experienced teasing and bullying in both elementary and middle school, and expresses anger to the researcher about being picked on. He credits his mother for his academic success and reports doing household chores to help her out. He likes to read and enjoys playing video games, in particular Super Smash Brothers and the role-playing game Pokémon.

It is interesting to note that in his self-portrait (Figure 4.15), James does not draw an image of himself as a gifted student but, instead lists the advantages and disadvantages and his major concerns related to his participation in gifted experiences and activities. According to the written description of his drawing, having to make up work missed due to participation in a GT activity is considered worth it if one is able to get out of attending class. When viewing his pros and cons of GT, it is apparent that having to make up the work that is missed while participating in a gifted activity

is an "issue"[46] with James. He, in fact, mentions this work missed due to participation several times throughout the interview.

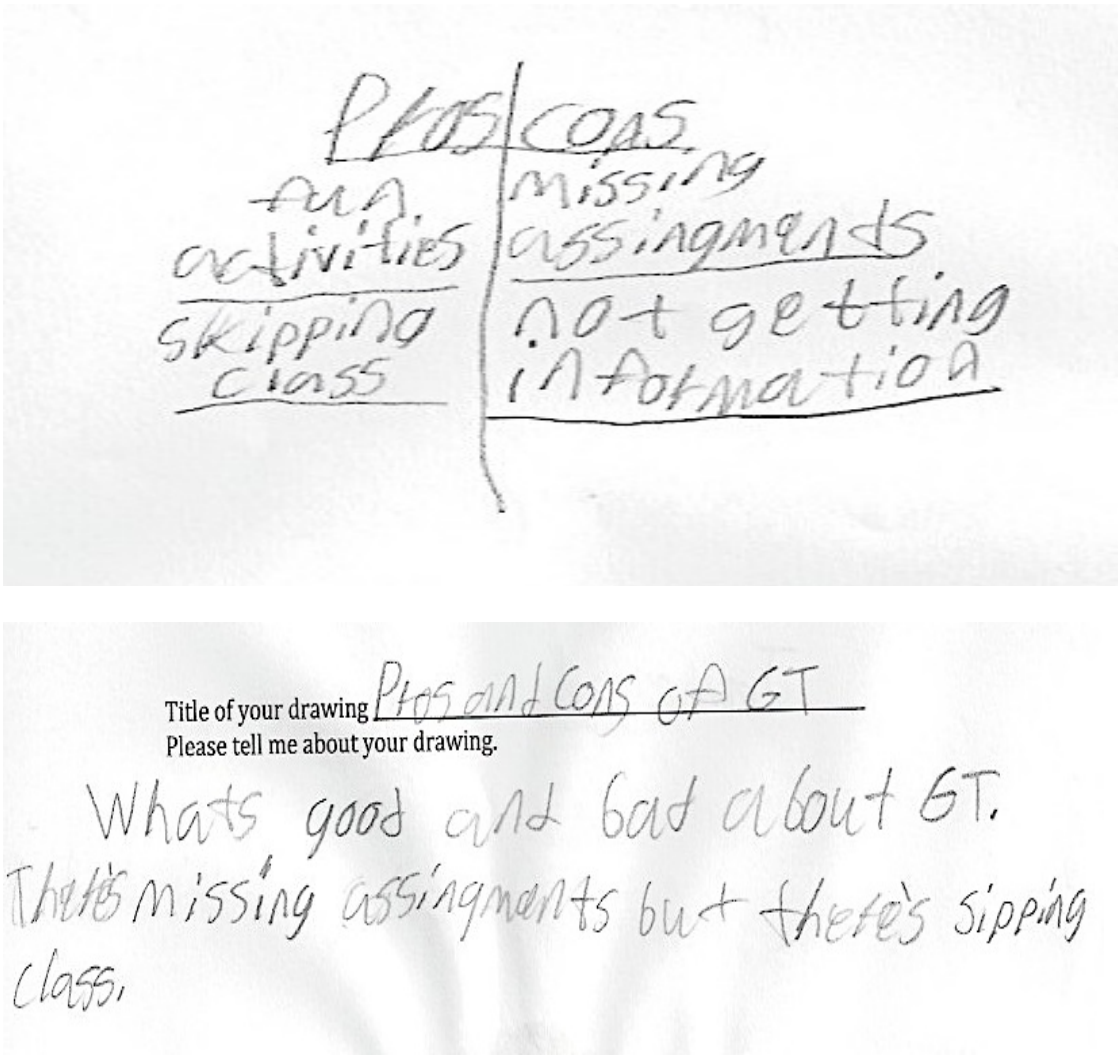


Figure 4.15 James's self-portrait

James's fourth and fifth grade elementary school report cards are composed of A's and B's. However, his middle school grades are not as high as his grades in

[46] Note that at present, Bedford School District policy is that students are not to be penalized for work missed while attending a gifted and talented activity, they however, are responsible for the material that is covered in class during their absence.

elementary school and do not reflect James' academic ability and potential. He is not an honor roll student at Haviland (See Appendix 4.8 to view his grades academic profile). James experiences academic difficulties in both sixth grade language arts class and sixth grade Math Extensions class, in addition to earning occasional C's, D's and F's in science and social studies. The second and third quarters of sixth grade were a particularly difficult time grade-wise for James. In each of these quarters, he received C's and D's in three out of four core classes. His grades, however, begin to show improvement by the end of fourth quarter, but are not an accurate reflection of his academic ability and potential.

James's grades improve somewhat in seventh grade with his quarterly grades being higher than his weekly eligibility ones. He receives two C's in Language arts, one D in seventh grade Math Extensions, two C's in science with the remainder of his other quarterly grades being A's and B's. Seventh grade is an academically better year for James compared to sixth grade, but he still does not make the school honor roll.

On the state-mandated tests taken in grades three, four, five, and six James scores Advanced in Math in third and fourth grade and Proficient in grades five, six, and seven. On the Reading test, he scores Proficient in grades three and four, Limited Knowledge in grade five and Proficient in grades six and seven. He earns a Proficient in the fifth grade Writing and Science tests and the seventh grade Geography test. The seventh grade team and school staff identified James as displaying characteristics of a gifted underachieving student.

KATHRYN

Kathryn is an attractive, tall, poised sixth grade student, who describes herself as a swimmer who is "actually really good. I swim every day of the week, twice a day." She is well spoken and appears both confident and goal-oriented. Kathryn speaks of her desire to attend an Ivy League college on a swimming scholarship like her swimming mentor and her eventual hopes for a place on the USA Olympic swim team. In addition, Kathryn is very active in LoveWorks, a community after school program for upper elementary students and middle school students, which focuses on performing community service, developing leadership, and study skills.

Kathryn was identified as gifted and talented in third grade on the Slosson school ability index, scoring in the top three percentile on this nationally-normed school ability test. On first impression, Kathryn appears to "have her act together" and is an achieving gifted honor roll student. However, in actuality, she is experiencing adjustment problems with peers and academics. Kathryn knows what to say to fulfill her stereotypical version of a "well rounded gifted student" but in reality she is not the person she describes herself to be. Her self-portrait (Figure 4.16) reflects how Kathryn sees herself, but not how she actually is in sixth grade. It is interesting to note that the paper she holds in her self-portrait is marked with a red A+, but when the self-portrait was drawn, she had not attained that level of academic achievement in any of her classes.

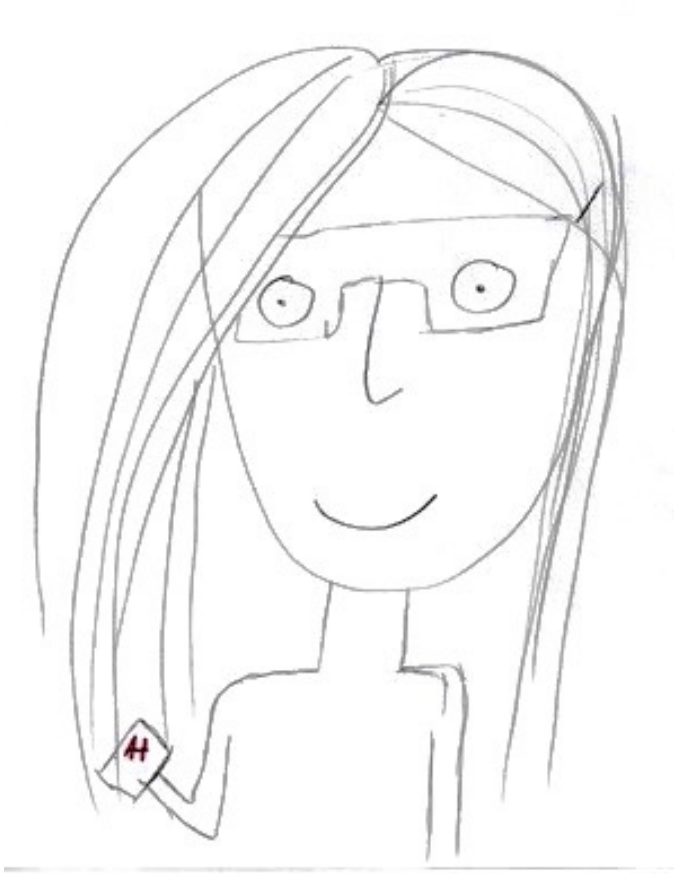


Figure 4.16 Kathryn's self-portrait

Kathryn lives with her parents and five sisters. Kathryn's family moved into the Haviland school district the summer before middle school began and, as such, Kathryn is considered "new" to Haviland. She attended Camp Turning Points with the other incoming sixth grade students to become familiar with the school environment, and meet other sixth graders. The sixth grade team and school staff identified Kathryn as displaying characteristics of a gifted underachieving student based upon the discrepancy between her intellectual ability and her class and grade performances.

Kathryn's fifth grade report card consisted of A's and B's. Kathryn's sixth grade middle school report card does not accurately reflect her academic ability and

potential, as she was never on the school's quarterly academic honor roll. (See Appendix 4.9 to view her academic profile). Sixth grade core classes at Haviland Middle School traditionally begin the school year by reviewing what was covered in fifth grade and, generally speaking, most students are academically successful. Kathryn, however, begins the school year experiencing academic difficulties in her sixth grade Math Extensions class as well as language arts and social studies. By the second academic quarter, Kathryn has weekly eligibility grades of D's and F's in sixth grade Math Extensions and C's and a D in Language arts. During the third and fourth marking periods, Kathryn earns weekly grades of C and below in all core classes. Kathryn, however, is able to raise these weekly grade averages so that she has end of the marking period grades that are mostly B's and C's with one D. She received two C's and one D in sixth grade Math Extensions and one C in Science and one C in social studies. Kathryn's sixth grade GPA fluctuated from a 3.33 for the first quarter to a 2.833 for the fourth quarter. The third quarter marking period was her lowest with a 2.6 GPA.

On the third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade state-mandated testing, Kathryn earned a Proficient in both the Math and Reading tests. She receives Proficient on the fifth grade Writing test, Limited Knowledge in fifth grade Science, and an Advanced in fifth grade social studies.

SCOUT

Scout is a large, heavy-set eighth grade boy who is twice exceptional, identified as being both gifted and as having Asperger's Syndrome and ADHD. He describes himself as "someone that half the time doesn't know what they're doing and

acts like they know what they're doing." Scout and his mom, Susan, a single parent, lived in Bedford where he has attended a variety of elementary and middle schools in the Bedford and surrounding school districts. Scout is Caucasian and participated in the school's free and reduced lunch program.

Scout was a newly identified eighth grade GT student at Haviland when the fall study recruitment letters were sent to the gifted and talented families. Scout, however, has since withdrawn from Haviland and attends an online charter school offered by the state. Scout has a current Instructional Education Plan (IEP) in effect with the school district and state. He has a history from pre K to middle school of classroom performance issues and behavior problems, which interfere and limit his school attendance and his engagement in school. Scout's mother, Susan, was present throughout the interview and occasionally contributed her thoughts and perspective as Scout related his educational journey as a twice-exceptional gifted student to the Researcher.

Scout has a history of not attending school or staying in school for the entire day, as he frequently came to school late and left early. During the interview process, Susan tells of an early incident in Scout's elementary school years when he hid under a desk and fallen chairs. This incident resulted in Scout, at at the age of six, being placed in handcuffs and shackles and taken to a residential facility where he stayed for five months. Susan said that the only good result from that experience was that while at the residential facility, he was diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome and the previously recognized ADHA condition was confirmed, which led to and Scout's diagnosis being finally accepted by the Bedford School District. Scout's remaining

early elementary years are characterized by his attending school for a half day in a series of elementary schools and hospital programs focused mainly on modifying and controlling behavior not learning and providing education.

During his upper elementary years, Scout is placed in a class with a special education teacher who recognizes his ability and works to have Scout mainstreamed into grade level classes. In fifth grade, Scout begins to attend school for the full day. Once mainstreamed, Scout begins to read, acquire math skills, and complete grade level schoolwork (See Appendix 4.10 to view his academic profile). This special education teacher is instrumental in placing Scout in an Autism program upon entering middle school. Unfortunately, according to Scout and Susan, the school experiences at his first middle school are similar to what he experienced in his early elementary school years. Scout transfers to Haviland during the third quarter of his sixth grade year. Seventh grade is a relatively good year for Scout; he has an aide with him throughout the day to ease his transition into middle school and to help him cope with school related issues.

Scout is identified as gifted and talented in the fall of his eighth grade year based upon his results on the KBIT, a nationally-normed school ability test in which he scores in the top three percentile. Scout has high vocabulary and verbal skills but is noticeably lacking in written communication skills, preferring to talk rather than write, a common characteristic associated with Asperger's Syndrome. For his self-portrait, Scout draws a computer monitor with programming on it, entitling it "my work," which he described as "what I do." It is interesting to note that Scout portrays himself

not as a gifted person (Figure 4.17) but rather as what he does or as he says, "his work". Scout discusses at length his online life, gaming activities, and friends.

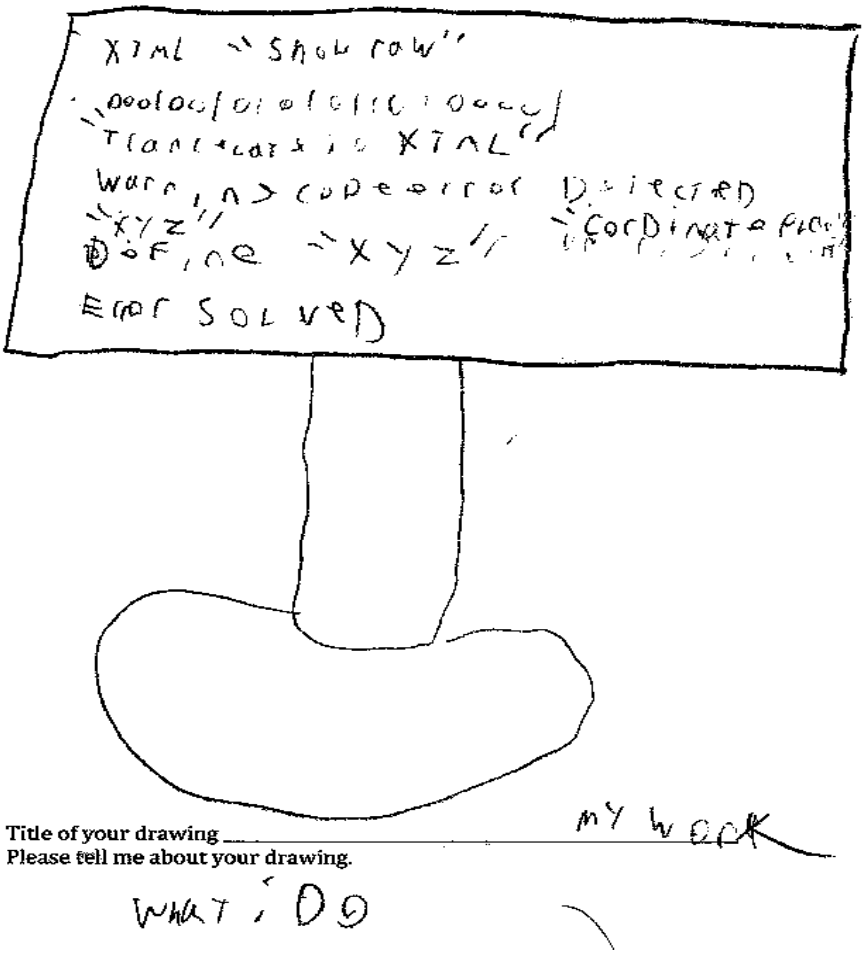


Figure 4. 17: Scout's Self-portrait

It is difficult to evaluate Scout's report cards in the same manner that the other students in this study are evaluated. Scout was initially placed in special needs and special education classes and, as such, the curriculum and grade procedures used were not consistent with those for students in on grade level classes. The transcript of a special needs or special education student does not have any mention of in place

academic accommodations and modification. In light of that information, it is apparent that due to Scout's low grades that he was choosing to not complete or turn in class assignments. Upon Scout's identification as gifted and talented, Scout became what is referred to in gifted education as a twice-exceptional[47] student and was mainstreamed in all core classes.

Scout's seventh grade report card reflects an improvement in grades on his academic transcript. During his seventh and eighth grade years, according to Susan and Scout, Scout, is mainstreamed with an aide into grade level core classes at Haviland Middle School. It is evident that Scout is finishing, handing in, and redoing and correcting classwork mistakes when necessary. First and third quarters, Scout brings his core and exploratory class grades to a GPA to 3.167. Second and fourth quarters find Scout earning A's and B's in his core class, as with Scout making the school's academic honor roll fourth quarter.

Eighth grade finds that Scout's academic experiences are not as positive as those of seventh grade. After viewing his quarterly grades, it is evident that Scout returned to his previous behaviors of failing to complete and turn in his class assignments specifically in Language arts. Scout, however, reports he completes his assignments and mentions, in his opinion, that either the teacher loses his work or other students take his work after he places it in the workbasket. He says missing work is the reason why he began to earn a F in language arts.

[47] Twice-exceptional students are individuals who are both learning disabled and gifted and talented who need remediation activities as well as opportunities to promote their own individual strengths and talents in the domains in which they have superior abilities.

It is interesting to note that after being placed in mainstreamed core classes in fifth grade and then again in seventh and eighth grade, Scout's results on state-mandated tests improves. In third grade, Scout was tested on the OMAAP, a special education version of state-mandated testing. He received Advanced in the areas of Reading and Math. From fourth grade on Scout was evaluated using on grade level state-mandated tests. In Reading, he received Limited Knowledge in grades four, five and six and Proficient in grade seven. In the area of math, Scout was Proficient in grades four and seven and Unsatisfactory in grade six. In fifth grade Scout earned Proficient on the state writing test and Advanced in Social Studies and Science. The Explore test was taken during fall semester of eighth grade at Haviland. He earned a composite score of 13 or 29% on the test. His subtest scores were Reading14 or 44 %; Math-13 or 25%; Science 14 or 24% and Language Arts 14 or 23%.

Observations and Perceptions of Gifted Underachievers

The Underachievers each shared their school experiences and observations related to the social and academic environment at Haviland Middle School. As with the Achievers and Selective Consumer students, these students' individual narratives and drawings were analyzed and synthesized to reveal a picture of the social and academic contexts they experience as gifted middle school students. Their composite verbal descriptions and drawings provide insight into the topics cited below, which shaped the students' relationships between school environment and academic achievement.

Identity and Giftedness. For James, GT is integral part of his school experiences as he was identified as gifted in first grade: Faith and Kathryn, identified

in third grade, and Scout, identified in eighth grade, remember school as being a time before or after their gifted identification. Scout was not identified as GT until the fall of eighth grade. During elementary school, James, Faith, and Kathryn, report enjoying going to GT class and participating in its activities. They found classwork to be easy, and each were on their schools' honor roll. These students established a gifted identity in elementary school and experienced validation, affirmation, and affinity going to their regularly scheduled GT class meetings, through the friendships they establish with other gifted students in their grade, and in their regular classrooms.

Establishing a gifted identity in middle school is more difficult in middle school than elementary school for the Underachiever. Faith, James, Kathryn and Scout are not enrolled in the above grade level advanced math courses at Haviland. For them, gifted validation from teachers and peers is primarily achieved through their being recognized for outstanding academic accomplishments, classroom behaviors, and participation in gifted experiences.

Kathryn describes being gifted as "a very good label," saying "it's a good feeling to kind of know that like, Oh, well. I'm kinda (sic) set apart from like the average student." She goes on to say, "I think being in GT doesn't mean that I, like, get to slack off like any more like an average kid, . . . being in GT means you need to work like harder." She continues explaining her view of what it is like to be a gifted student:

> We are held to like a higher standard, like being given a big assignment for the week when all the GT students will get sent to the library and we'll work on it with another teacher and we would do different things than the regular class would have done.

Faith enjoyed being in the gifted class during elementary school "because we play(ed) games and bunch of my friends were with me in GT and I got to play games and do other activities that you don't do in regular classes like math. It was really fun for me." Faith commented that her best friend was not in the gifted program, when asked if it bothered her or her friend, Faith replies, "It doesn't really put an affect on anybody really. GT doesn't really matter. I mean it matters, but we don't think we're smarter than you because we're in GT. It doesn't really mean you're smarter." Her identification as gifted, however, causes Faith to question how and why she was identified as gifted. She comments that she does not really understand what being gifted is and what giftedness means: "I still don't understand what it means to be gifted and talented. I mean I don't know. I used to think it was good grades, when I had really good grades, but now in my language arts class, I don't ever get good grades." Faith also questions whether she is still in GT, saying she has not participated in any GT-related activities during eighth grade. She comments, "In eighth grade now, I haven't had any of my teachers give me extra work because I'm in GT or they really haven't even told me or talked to me about it." She adds that they probably know that she is in Gt because she participates in GT meetings and gets called out to do GT things, saying "probably because they're my teachers, they probably know I'm in GT."

James likes being in the gifted and talented program, but repeats that he dislikes having to make up work when he participates in gifted activities, stating, "I just don't really like the extra work" which he says influences his participation in gifted activities. When asked if teachers and his peers realize that he is in GT, he reports, "I don't think they know that I'm in GT," saying, "I just don't really talk about

it that much." He then adds, "I'm not too sure who's in the gifted program." For Kathryn, validation as a gifted student from peers and teachers is also somewhat questionable. Kathryn is asked if other students know she is in GT, and she replies, "Well, you know, we go to the meetings and stuff, so maybe, not really, unless, . . . I say anything about it, or you know they see me doing some GT activity."

Scout, on the other hand, recognized his intelligence and high ability and sought gifted validation by asking the school's Gifted Resource Coordinator to test him for the program. He was pleased to be identified and immediately let his teachers know that he was gifted and academically capable. Scout's mom, however, is nervous about his identification. Recognizing Scout's uniqueness, she says, "I know how kids can be and how cruel they can be. Once . . . identified as smart, it puts a target on him." She then comments, "As far as at home, I'm so proud. It's the best thing, you know? I was very rowdy, He got a 98! He got a 98!" Scout made sure that his current IEP was updated to note that he was now identified as gifted.

For these underachieving gifted students, validation, affirmation and affiliation of their gifted identity is not readily available through enrollment in above grade level math classes. Validation is possible through academic accomplishments, and affiliation[48] occurs as a result of random class scheduling and participation in school activities of interest. These underachieving students are able to participate in school-sponsored academic competitions and gifted-related events, which help promote and

[48] Affiliation is the association with others having similar interests, abilities and desires without losing one's identity and uniqueness.

develop friendships based upon a common interests or passions, unfortunately, they have chosen not to participate in them.

The final building block in The Mahoney Gifted Identity Model is affinity, or a goal or passion, which according to Mahoney "provides for a goodness of fit, for appropriate challenge and stimulation to develop the gifted attributes (2008, p. 4)." Faith is the only gifted student in the study who expressed experiencing affinity. An underachieving gifted student and not in the above grade level advanced math classes, Faith says, "I just like to do math. I do math all the time." She relates going on a seventh grade GT field trip to an area university and the impact it had on her. She chose to participate in a four-for Faith, the first time she was able to connect her passion, math, with a possible future career, accounting. Faith was also the only gifted student who shared that she received affirmation from a teacher on her math ability and her gifted identity. She proudly reported, with a big smile, what her high school Algebra I teacher said about her. "He says I'm one of his top students. I was like okay." When asked how she felt about that, she answers, "Good, like really good," and then said that she proudly told her mother, who in turn was pleased.

Self-perception and Self-Efficacy. The underachieving students in this study recognize the importance and benefit of an education. Asked if they are successful in school, the students told of having personal belief in themselves related to their academic and social culture. James reports not knowing his grades, saying he hadn't seen them lately, but that he felt personally successful at school, commenting**, "**I've gotten good grades, made some friends."

Faith also feels good about her successes in school, saying she likes to get good grades, although she acknowledges academic difficulties in language arts and social studies this year. She says, "I have a pretty bad grade in language arts right now. It's pretty harsh for me and I mean I have an okay grade in social studies but I'm getting that up to date." She then adds, "I always ended up getting my language arts grade up, and then I'd have A's and B's." As a student who rides the bus to school, she talks of the difficulty she has staying for help after school and how she asks her grandmother to pick her up because her mom is working. Faith mentions that sometimes she goes in for lunch overtime to complete or get help with class assignments.

Kathryn remembers being challenged academically in sixth grade but comments that she feels academically successful, saying, "I make A's and B's." She then stresses how important it is to "really set high standards for yourself and like do your best all through school and like getting to like go to a good college."

Scout expresses his frustration with the quality of work he is given in public middle school. Asked about his middle school grades, he replies, "I was trying hard, to the best of my abilities, and the best of my abilities is giving it all correct. But when stuff on coloring is in there, I don't color because that's just, it's stupid, honestly." Talking about his present online school and classes, both Scout and his mother indicated they are pleased with his change from public school. Scout comments, "I feel challenged from the actual work. I feel perfectly challenged on that. It is good work. Exactly the school for who I am. The work is just perfect, if I get better at it or

worst at it." In general, these students expressed belief in themselves with respect to school, academics, and friends, regardless of the grades they earned.

Socialization and Peer Culture. Social interactions and the prevailing peer culture influence middle school student behavior. Faith discounts the popular middle school myth about the seventh and eighth grade students, saying, "When I first got here, I thought it would be like in movies, a bunch of bullies, but it's really not. All the kids here are really nice even if you don't even know them." Referring to her fellow eighth graders, she comments, "I will pass students in the hallway and most of them are getting in their lockers, getting their stuff, and hurrying to go to class. But there's some troublemakers who don't mean anything, they just goof around and backtalk the teachers." Faith adds, "the trouble makers" are 'nice to kids," saying "I haven't seen anybody get bullied ever, not that I remember. Bullying isn't a big issue here. If there is any, it's like really little." None of the underachievers mention the behaviors of other students in their classes or the impact of student behavior has upon their school experiences and learning.

Scout and James do not agree with Faith that bullying is a non-issue at Haviland. Scout and James each report instances where they were bullied or teased in the halls or at recess by other students. They, also, do not support the presence of friendly teasing, as mentioned by Nick, nor do they view their bullying experiences as recognition of their ability. Scout mentions the rumors that appeared after he went out for the school's football team and how, as a result, he was teased about trying out for the football team. He says walking down the halls he would encounter:

> . . . a problem group of kids that were at that one football tryout. It wasn't obvious teasing. But I could tell they were making fun of me. It was something that if you were in that football practice, you would know. They called me stuff like slowpoke.

In Scout's opinion, nothing was done about it even though teachers and other kids in the hall heard it.

James also mentions of being bullied in both elementary and middle school. He says students "cuss, they make fun of people, and they tell offensive 'your momma' jokes which don't make any sense." When asked if he reports it, James answers, "Sometimes, if it's that bad, but I usually just ignore it." James reports getting angry when it happens, but says it usually stops if you ignore it, and that the bully just moves on to "someone else and makes fun of them." Asked what teachers do about bullying, James replies, "They usually don't hear them and when somebody tells them about it . . .[silence]". James, like Scout, feels that when a teacher doesn't take immediate action after a report of bullying, that the person doesn't care and that nothing is done.

For Faith, school is an oasis, where she can get her schoolwork done when she is not able to work on it or complete it at home. In this supportive environment, she also has the advantage of being enrolled in a math class with a teacher she likes and who likes her. Faith receives validation and encouragement from this teacher she admires. She says of her Algebra I teacher, he "really makes it fun, he like, gets into it. . . Because I really like the subject and I'm into it."

Friends and Fitting In. The friends and the student's social culture are important influences on academics. The role they play on academics as well as in

identity development is illustrated through social interactions experienced and shared by some of the Underachievers.

The majority of GT students in the study relate that they are still friends with students from their elementary school days and other GT students. Faith mentions she met most of her really good friends during third and fourth grade, but she is not as friendly with some of them now, referring to them as only acquaintances. Faith does mention one long time best friend she still interacts with, who would work with her to help other students in elementary school, and is not in the gifted program. She also mentions a former best friend, from whom she has grown apart and doesn't talk to. The person is now considered a "troublemaker," who Faith describes as someone "that doesn't do anything and just goofs around and back talks the teachers."

The importance of maintaining her personal friendships is evident in Faith's choices as an Underachiever. Faith recognizes she has been given many opportunities to do well in school, but acknowledges seeing her friends and talking to them during class is sometimes more important to her, even if her grades are affected. She says, "But sometimes I don't take it (the opportunity to go into overtime) and then bad grades like that end up happening." Faith says, she goes into overtime[49] when she hasn't completed an assignment, turned one in, or received a low grade on a paper. She continues, "But when my grade is still bad and I need to redo things and turn them in, I don't go in. I want to hang out with my friends, when I can and talk with my friends when I can because in class, you don't really get to talk with your friends."

[49] Academic help available for students which is held during lunch and supervised by grade level teachers. It is a time when students can finish work, make up work or redo low grades.

She then justifies her behavior saying, “That’s why kids talk in class because they don’t really get to see their friends much.”

Lunch continues to be an important time for peer socialization; Faith usually sits at lunch with friends and her boyfriend. She describes her group as “really loud. We have a great time all the time, but sometimes, I’ll have a headache and I just want quietness.” She feels her friends are supportive and help her with her homework, but Faith adds, she also helps her friends with their schoolwork. One friend, Jesse, is mentioned as her best friend, saying he gives her good advice: “I talk to him about most of my problems that I have in school, or family, or friends because we both have a few family problems and we talk about them.” While Faith’s goal is to be the first in her family to go to college, she worries about what the future will be like. She shares her fears of not seeing friends, getting lost, not being able to turn work in late, receiving bad grades in high school.

> If I go to college, like when I get there I’m going not to see my friends, but I will also get lost because college is a huge way because like high schools and middle schools and like I’m going to get lost. Even in a high school, you cannot turn in late work. If it's like you don’t turn it in when it’s due then it’s just a zero. I have had a thing for late work since like sixth grade, and I am scared that, I’m going like, have horrible grades in high school and not be able to go to college.

Kathryn, a new student to Haviland, moved into the area during the summer before sixth grade. She attended Camp Turning Point and easily met new friends as well as becoming reacquainted with fellow swimmers who attend Haviland. She confesses to having a history of getting into difficulties with friends and relates that her fourth grade year was really difficult. She says it was caused by a “series of things” that resulted in her losing all of her friends. She reports that it was not until

the beginning of fifth grade that things began to improve. She said her grades were affected by her difficulties with friends: "I stopped turning in things and like so that when you are not turning things in, it affects a lot. But, my fourth grade teacher, she came and like tutored me on Sunday nights and like helped me do all my homework and stuff and explained it to me." When asked about her grades at the time, Kathryn went on to say, "I don't really think I cared. I guess, you know, I kinda (sic) like honestly lost it."

Kathryn mentions similar friendship problems have occurred this year during sixth grade.

> There is a group of seventh Grade girls that, well, I'm not close to them anymore. All of them like weren't the greatest people and, you know, they just did bad things all the time. So, you know, you're kinda (sic) like, "Oh…" I distanced myself from them quite a bit, like we don't really see each other any more… We haven't talked in … since we were friends, which was over Thanksgiving, you know. Yeah it was hard.

Two other underachieving gifted students reveal, that for them, developing friendships and establishing relationships with classmates is not easy. James talks about currently working on a social studies project and talks about his partner for the project, "I was stuck with somebody because we were the only ones left, and he hasn't done any of the work so far. I've struggled to try and do most of it but, he just – does nothing." James reports he has stayed friendly with the same students from elementary school, but adds, that he met a lot of new people. When asked how this happens, James replies, "Well, probably because most of them, just my friends, became friends with them and we got stuck sitting with each other on the bus."

Scout's Asperger's interferes with and limits his ability to socialize and develop relationships. For Scout, having a friend is not about interacting with other students or people in person but rather, as he prefers, it is interacting with others through technology.

> I met like one or two friends, but honestly I'm not really someone who likes to make friends unless they come to me about it first. Cause early on the computer, I have like ten people I talk to (on the computer) almost every single day and those are friends.

Scout mentions his best friend, Ryan, from Kentucky, who he has been "talking" with for at least three years and tells of two others from Europe. In relation school friends, Scout's experience is limited. He mentions a student named Kevin[50], who was in the special education program, and in his science class. However, Kevin left school after "he threw a really big fit…He literally bit a teacher's arm until it totally bled." Scout reports he was outside the room when it happened, but shared his reaction to the situation. "The kids in there (the classroom), I could hear them, they were making all fun of him and stuff, being typical mean teenagers."

Life outside of school. For the most part, these students have busy lives and many responsibilities at home after school ends. Kathryn is a member of an area swim club after school and she participates competitively on weekends in area swimming meets. When asked about her grades, physical commitment, and large amount of time spent in swimming practices and, she replies:

> I'm there at the pool all of the time. So, like being here and like having homework at night, it's really hard especially with swimming . . . I will usually do a lot of my homework in overtime, which is during like recess or like during eighth hour. And then, a lot of times I'll do my homework in the morning,

[50] A pseudonym for the student's real name.

> before school, because at night, I never really get the time, as I go to practice right after school and then I go home.

The other students typically have homework and are also responsible for chores at home. Their after school activities range from taking care of pets or younger siblings to washing dishes, taking out the trash, vacuuming and keeping their rooms picked up. James likes to play video games, watch TV, and read when his homework is finished. Faith draws, listens to music on her phone, and "hangs out with friends." Kathryn is involved with LoveWorks and performs community service after school with the group, as well as daily swimming team practices. Socially, these students, with the exception of Scout, mention hanging out with friends, going to the mall and movies, and communicating with friends through texting. Scout spends his free time on the computer "working," playing video games, or reading.

School as a Place of Learning. The underachieving gifted students and their families recognized that school is instrumental in securing personal success and goals. The families support their students academically and stress the importance of school. While not all of these students love school, they do acknowledge it is necessary and is important to future successes. Middle school is recognized as critical step in attending college and securing well-paying jobs and careers after completing their education.

Faith, James, and Kathryn like attending Haviland Middle School and view the school as an important and essential way for them to improve the quality of their future life and an effective way to meet people and establish new friendships. Scout, on the other hand, hates school because of incidents that occurred early in his schooling and, as a result, he has a history of being tardy, absent or leaving school

early. These students and their parents view education as a path to securing well paying jobs and careers when they are older.

Responding to being asked to draw an experience or situation that inspires him to succeed at school, James relates, “Probably my mom, she keeps saying over and over that if I don’t go to school, I won’t get a job and if I don’t get a job, I’ll be on the streets (Figure 4.18).” In explaining the picture, James says, “That’s me and that’s my mom. That’s me in school. That’s me at a job and that’s me living on the side of the streets,” with his mom saying to him: “You’ll end up living on the side of the streets if you don’t get a job. So come to school.”

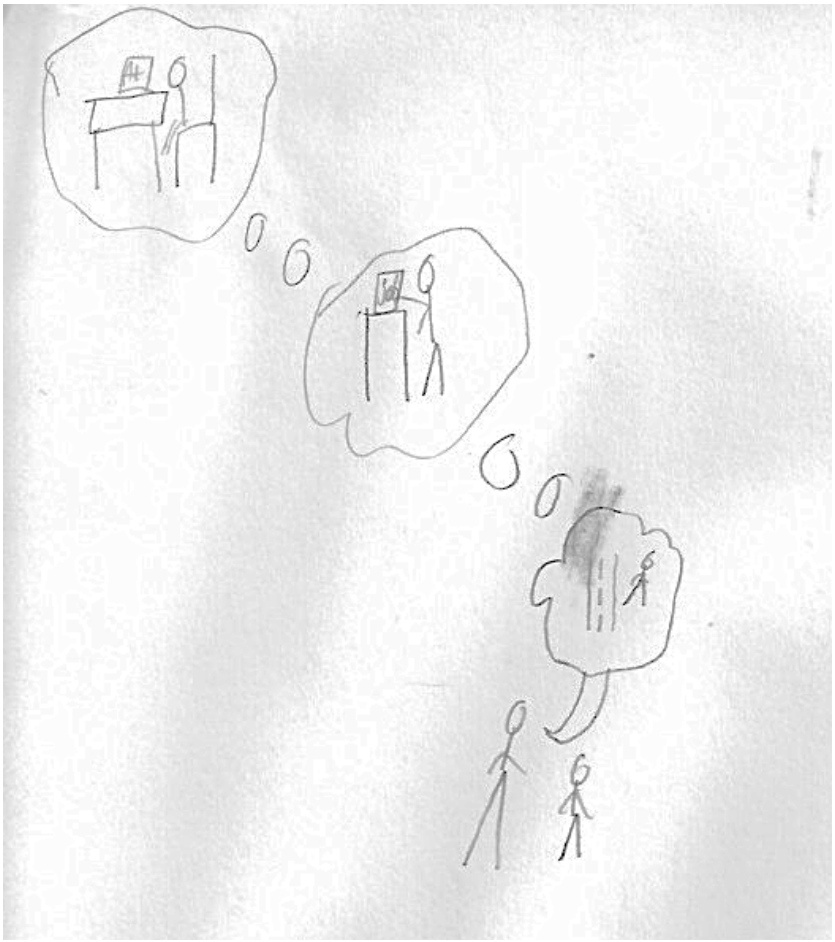


Figure 4.18: James’ mom inspires him to succeed.

Faith shares the role a school field trip played in introducing her to a variety of Math-oriented career options. Faith, who "really enjoys math", views it as an important part of her future. She relates a school GT field trip to the local university in which gifted students were able to pick workshops of interest to attend. Faith selected a math class in which she was the only girl and the only student from Haviland in this area of study, neither of which seemed to bother her. She talks excitedly of this experience saying:

> We got to play math games and learn about math careers. This stuff is pretty fun. And then we did career walk about and I went into the accounting office, and so I want to be an accountant when I grow up. And then she told us about accounting and like what you would do as an accountant and we played a little game about money planning a birthday party. Like with a budget for the money.

Of the students interviewed, Faith is the most cognizant of the relationship between finances, the quality of life, and the benefits associated with being educated. She relates, "My mom didn't go to college. I mean she has two kids, and its kind of hard because she's a single parent." Faith then discusses the importance of school:

> Well, for me, I really want to get a really good job when I'm older, . . . because I don't want to end up working at McDonald's for the rest of my life and not have a good salary. I want to live in, not like a mansion or whatever, but I want to live in a pretty decent two-story house with five bedrooms or something.

Faith is motivated to succeed based upon her goal of wanting to be the first in her family to attend college. She says, "What inspires me is that none of my family members, that I know of that are still alive, like great grandmas and good aunts have gone to college, so I can be the first person in my family to go to college." She indicates herself in the drawing (Figure 4.19) with a check mark saying, "I want to be

the first person in the family to go to college. My family doesn't really talk about school and all and I just want to be the first person. I want to go to college."



Figure 4.19 Faith inspired by goal to be the first in in family to go to college

The opinions expressed by James and Scout toward school differed from those of the other gifted students interviewed in the study, with their views of school ranging from indifference to dislike. James recognizes the importance of school, but is indifferent to the institution of school, saying his goal is "Just getting through school and not having to worry about stuff." When asked how he feels he is doing in relation

to that goal, he answers, “Pretty good. I just try to ignore what all the stupid people say and hang out with my friends sometimes.” James is also very concerned about having to make up classwork missed to attend gifted activities and as a result says he does not take advantage of the opportunities available for him to participate in many gifted activities during school.

When James is asked to draw an incident which causes him to feel unsuccessful, he shares feeling discouraged when “the teachers don’t really like you” and then he draws a picture (Figure 4. 20) of a time “when a friend starts talking to me and I respond to him and the teacher thinks that I was the one talking.” When asked if the teacher is talking to both of the students, James replies that it depends “on who (sic) he noticed talking, if he notices me or him or both of us.” He then adds, “Like it wasn’t supposed to happen. He was the one who should’ve gotten into trouble, not me.” James also expresses his opinion that “teachers don’t care,” saying that bullying occurs everywhere at school, “in the classrooms, at recess.” He reports, “They usually don’t hear them and when somebody tells them about it, they don’t care.” He comments, if “Teachers (were) actually paying attention to what the students say “that would stop kids from teasing, bullying and making fun of others.”



Figure 4.20 Teacher's reaction to James talking in class makes him feel discouraged.

Scout, also does not have good feelings towards the institution of school, saying the reason he hates school is because of things that happened to him during his elementary school years. He says, "The real truth behind that was I was scared of school after what happened to me in first grade." He then mentions the continuous teasing and bullying that occurred to him through his years in school. Scout tells of trying to run away from school, of being placed in time out, in "safety house," and even placed in "handcuffs and shackles when he was six."

> I was in a bad kids' school. The teachers knew I was singled out, but once I started hiding under the desks they got fed up. They literally sent me to mental asylum and when I was in there they diagnosed me with Asperger's Syndrome. I was in there for almost a year or so.

When asked about the work he was assigned in middle school, Scout responds, "I was trying hard, to the best of my abilities. And the best of my abilities is giving it all correct. When stuff on coloring is in there, I don't color because that's just, it's stupid, honestly." During his recent middle school time, Scout has a history of coming to school late and leaving early. Susan, Scout's mother, mentions how difficult it is to get him up to go to school and how frequently she is called by either the school or Scout himself to come and bring him home. Scout's view and perceptions of public school is depicted in Figure 4.21.

Figure 4.21 Scout's view of public school



Academic Culture and Student Boredom. These Underachievers felt the curriculum offered was not relevant to their needs or interests and that teachers did not adjust their teaching styles or methodology to accommodate the diverse student learning styles present in classroom. In contrast to the other students in this study, these students did not address a lack of challenge, student boredom, or the behavior of other students when asked about the academic culture of Haviland. Of this group of students, only Faith is enrolled in two high school credit classes, Algebra I and Spanish I in addition to her regular grade level core classes. The other underachieving students are in on grade level core classes.

James thinks students should have more choices in selecting middle school classes; he would also like to see more variety in the nature and types of science and math classes added to the school's curriculum. He advocates more hands-on learning opportunities and the ability to study "stuff that we'll actually use in our future." James describes himself as not liking worksheets and being "not really talkative. I just do the work that I do and then turn it in." He wants to be a scientist, adding, "In science class, I'm not really doing too well because the type of science I want to learn about, isn't the type of science they're teaching." James wants to learn more about Astronomy.

Faith is readily aware of her preferred learning style, which is to take notes, writing class information down, and then studying; she wonders why all teachers don't put notes on the overhead or computer. She recognizes her lack of written notes in language arts is one of the reasons why she is not succeeding in that class,

> I like to take notes a lot so I can take them home and look over them, and I have to write it down and also see it in words, so I can remember it. That's why I'd like some classes . . . there're no books in language arts or printed lessons about what you've learned so you just have to remember what the teacher said. It's pretty hard for me to do that.

Faith also reports having trouble in classes where class discussion is an important part of instruction.

> I don't like being called on in class because then everybody turns around and looks at me. I may know the answer but I don't like talking and talking . . . most of the time I don't even know the answer because I don't remember it. All the teachers just talk except in science. We only take notes in science. It's pretty easy so that's pretty easy for me, and math is too, but language arts and social studies. We take notes sometimes in social studies, but it's talking and talking and just hard to remember all this.

Grades and Achievement. Each of of these underachievers, with the possible exception of Scout, has the potential to be academically successful in middle school, as they received high grades and were honor roll students during elementary school. Faith reports having good grades, especially in math, but says, "I've always had an issue and trouble in language arts. Like in sixth grade, and I did seventh grade." When asked to explain what she means by issue, Faith replies, "I have had trouble in language arts getting stuff turned in. Sometimes I don't get it because my language arts teacher always just talks and tells us to take notes." Faith feels her personal expectations are similar to those of her teachers, but recognizes that she is influenced by "middle school drama".

> You know, I try but sometimes I'm forgetful, and I don't do it. When something happens in school, drama, I'll talk with my friends, not realizing that I am, like not paying attention in class, and just I sometimes don't, you know finish my work, when it's really pretty easy to do.

Although she was currently failing eighth grade language arts, Faith comments, "I like getting good grades because I don't want to get held back and I'll be left behind here and all my friends will go to high school. That really scares me."

When Faith is asked to draw an experience or situation that discourages her, she represents her grades on the Parent Portal, the school district website where parents are able to view their student's grades in any class (Figure 4.22). Hopefully, the four F's that Faith earned during the year in language arts will serve as a wake up call for her and that she learned that if you don't pay attention in class, do the work, and hand in class assignments, you will not earn passing grades- an important lesson to learn before entering high school.

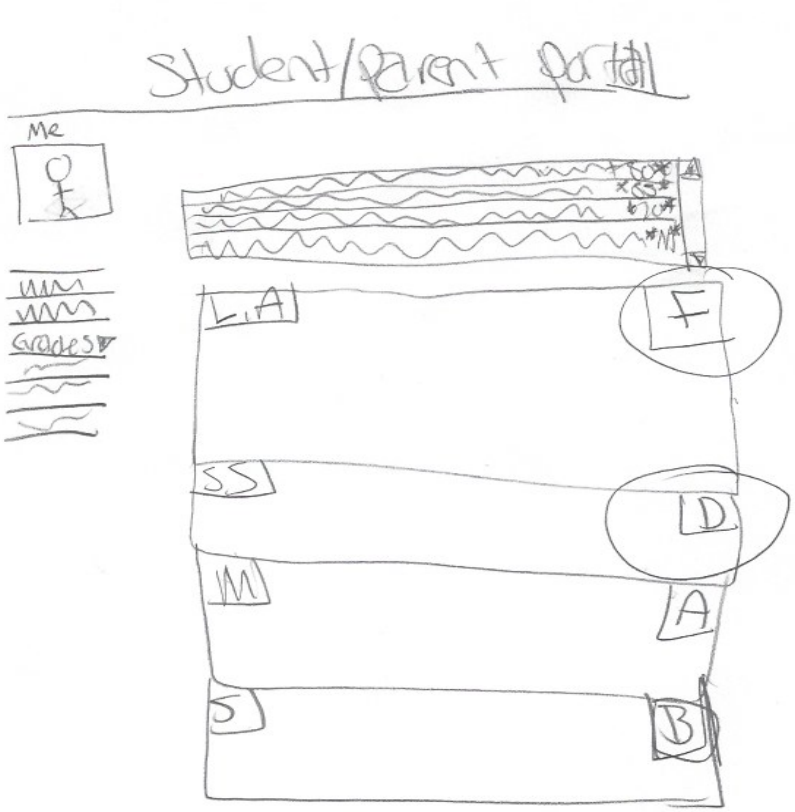


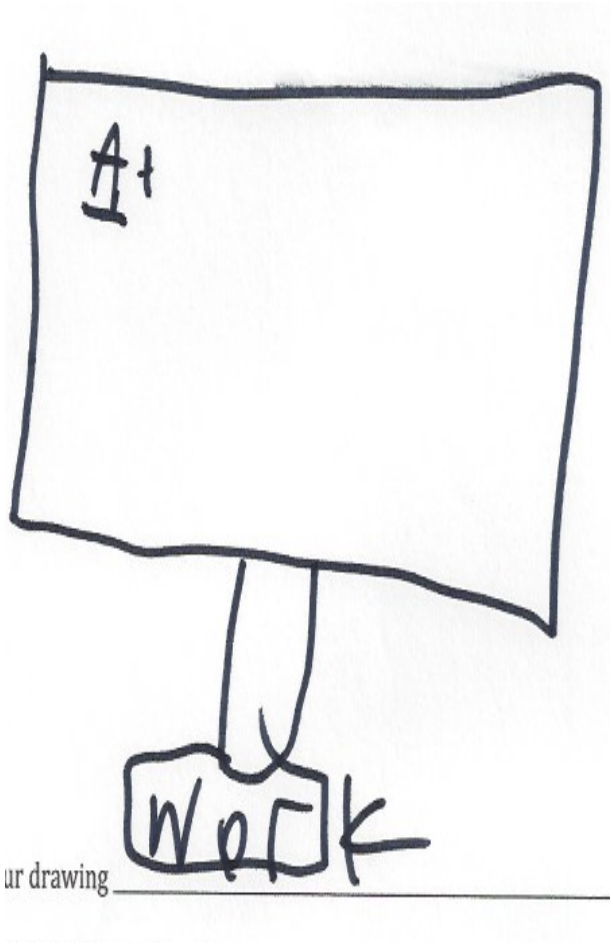
Figure 4.22 Faith's issues with language arts and social studies are reflected on her report card.

Kathryn tells of the pressure she experiences at the end of the quarter concerning her grades. She says that with tests and other assignments to do "it gets really stressed out around then, like especially like with friends and then like I have a social life too." When asked about her grades, Kathryn says"

> I've always had about the same kind of level of grades all my life. I mean, in elementary school, I have always had A's and B's. This year, middle school is a lot harder than elementary school. I think I have a B in a couple of classes. I don't have a B in Math, but you know, I'm happy with it. I have like a C; I have heard C is like kind of the average of where that's at. So, I, you know, if a C is average, then B is obviously above than that.

Scout and his mom appear to be happy with their decision for Scout to participate in on-line schooling. His mom reports that Scout is still on an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and she does not miss the "fight to get him just to go to school everyday." She reports Scout now does his schoolwork without any hassle (Figure 4.23) and when finished, he is free to spend the rest of day on the computer gaming or "at work." Scout says entire units for each course are given to him at the same time, as well as the dates each assignment is due. He then divides the work up and decides what he will do that day. He describes the school assignments as "simple it's not like do these million questions. It's do this assignment, then do a test." Scout prefers to being able to complete one class at a time saying it is a better and easier way for him to learn. He comments, "The work is perfectly challenging. It's not as long and simpler, what I mean by simpler, it's not as many questions, but it's harder work." Scout is planning on graduating from high school and "probably going for college."

Figure 4.23: Scout's view of his new online school and his online grades



Faith completed two high school credit classes, while Scout has not taken any advanced level classes. Scout continues to be enrolled in grade level core classes through his online school. During the 2014-15 school year, Faith took the high school classes-- Spanish I and Algebra I. James plans to enroll in high school Biology I and high school Algebra I in eighth grade. For the coming academic school year 2015-16, Kathryn is not enrolled in any advanced level classes in seventh grade.

Grades appear to not be that important to these underachieving gifted students. They recognized that factors outside their academic ability like curriculum relevancy,

one's learning style, the teacher's style of teaching and one's willingness to be distracted during class influenced grades. Personal priorities are beginning to develop and influence what is important and what is not as they strived to maintain a balance between academics and "having a life."

Future Goals. Although still in middle school, these underachieving gifted students are focused on their plans for high school and beyond, as each of the Underachievers plans to attend college. James, Kathryn, Scout, and Faith have expressed specific career goals: James would like to be a scientist and study Astronomy or maybe design and create video games; he thinks he will probably go to the local University. Faith wants to become an accountant. When Faith is asked why college was so important to her, she answered, "Because I can get a degree. I want to go into a good job, so I could get good money and when I have kids or something, I can have good things and a decent house and stuff."

Scout wants to have a career that has something to do, "with making games, what I originally always dreamed of was working at Valve, one of the leading game developing companies in the U.S. and the entire world," or "maybe start my own game company. Literally do individual start up, making games." Kathryn has a goal of swimming in the Olympics (Figure 4.24) and she reports working out every day before and after school and on weekends to achieve that goal. Kathryn says she averages about five hours a day "in water" and adds, "Swimming is what I wanna (sic) do with my life. So, in order to pursue that, I need good grades to get in to a good college."



Figure 4.24 Kathryn is inspired by 2012 Olympics

The findings reported by the gifted underachievers on the topics covered during student interviews are recapped and included in Table 4.6. These views, attitudes and perception are placed in the appropriate column to ease comparison between the three designated achieving student groups. Table 4.6 is a summary of the views and perceptions provided by gifted achieving students, gifted selective consumers and gifted underachievers.

Table 4.6 Summary of Academic Perceptions of Achieving, Selective Consumers, and Underachieving Students

	Achieving Gifted	Gifted Selective Consumers	Underachieving Gifted
Gifted Identity	All in the top three percentile on a nationally-normed school ability test and experienced validation, affinity and affiliation through membership in above grade level math classes. Two experienced forms of teasing. Affiliation accomplished through class scheduling and participation in GT experiences. Friendship groups mainly composed of other GT students and students from school activities.	Both in the top three percentile on a nationally-normed school ability test and experienced validation, affinity and affiliation; Victoria through membership in above grade level math classes and Evan through writing and art. Affiliation accomplished through class scheduling and participation in GT experiences. Friendship groups mainly composed of other GT students and athletes (Evan).	All in the top three percentile on a nationally-normed school ability test with the majority establishing gifted identities during or after third grade. None were enrolled in above grade level math classes. Three were uncertainness about giftedness. Little affiliation accomplished through class scheduling and participation in GT experiences. One student experienced affinity. Friendship groups largely made of non GT students.
Self-perception and Self-efficacy	All experienced confidence in their academics and peer relationships.	Both considered themselves successful with grades and friends.	All felt successful at school, believing in themselves and their academics and social culture.
Socialization and Peer Culture	All felt school had a positive learning environment but expressed frustration with those students who disrupted class instruction.	Viewed majority of students as positive and wanting to learn.	Two experienced forms of teasing; the others didn't think it was a problem. Class room behavior was not discussed.

Friends and "Fitting In"	Friends are important to the majority of the achieving gifted students. Lunch was the time to socialize. Friends and social group influenced achieving students' grades, actions and behaviors.	Friends are important, friendship groups composed of students from same elementary school other GT students and students met through sports Friends and social group influenced students' grades, actions and behaviors.	Friends are important to these students. Friends and one's social group influenced the grades, actions and behaviors of underachieving students. Time with friends sometimes chosen over school work.
Life Outside of School	Students participated in a variety of school and community activities and helped at home.	Students participated in a variety of school and community activities and helped at home.	One student participated sport and community activities and all helped at home.
School as Place of Learning	Students recognized the importance of school in achieving personal goals.	Students recognized the importance of school in achieving personal goals.	Students and their families recognized the importance of school in achieving personal goals but not all of them necessarily liked the institution of the school.
Academic Culture and School Boredom	Students mentioned the difference in class climate and classroom behavior between non advanced core classes and their above grade level math classes. Academic challenge important.	The importance of academic challenge stressed and academic boredom described as well as how students behave when bored by one student.	Curriculum relevance important. Students were aware of their learning style and expressed the desire that teachers address student academic needs by using a variety of learning styles and pedagogy when teaching.
Grades and Achievement	Students recognized that	Students felt grades were	One underachiever acknowledged

	studying and good grades were related. Students were aware of the factors influencing their academic achievement and strive to achieve academic excellence and "have a life."	"good" as they made honor roll, however, weekly grades indicated problems with assignments and tests. Parents, peers and social status influential.	academic problems and not earning good grades and one mentioned the stress related to earning good grades and having a social life.
Future Goals	Students were focused on their future and securing interesting and challenging careers.	Students were focused on their future and securing interesting and challenging careers.	Students were focused on their future and securing interesting and challenging careers.

Findings

This phenomenological study focuses on middle school life as experienced by gifted students and the role their lifeworld plays on academic achievement. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the role of one particular middle school on the academic achievement of ten gifted students. It attempts to provide insight into why some gifted students become Underachievers or Selective Consumers while other gifted students achieved academically.

Common Themes

Three themes emerged from student interviews and drawings related to the lifeworld of middle school and academic achievement. These themes reveal the essence of what it is like to be a gifted student within the common context of a Title I middle school. It is through the words and drawings of these gifted students that the following themes were identified and developed: Peers, Identity, and Outlook.

Theme I: Peers. The first theme emerged from the importance gifted students placed on meeting and socializing with friends at school. Meeting and socializing with friends during school is of primary importance to the majority of the gifted students interviewed. All of the students in this study want acceptance from their peer group and state that lunch was their favorite class as it was an important time to interact with friends. The majority of the participants said that their friends are also in the gifted program, and that many were friends from their elementary school GT days, describing them as "just like me," sharing the same goal, hobbies and interests. The students report that they meet new acquaintances and make friends through their middle school classes, other friends, school activities and lessons, sports and clubs held in the community.

Important during this stage of development, friends provide security and a sense of belonging as students begin to expand their social world from family life to school and the community. Students find comfort being with others as they explore the many changes of adolescence and middle school and begin to make choices which will impact their future. Gifted students are beginning to make choices based on their need to fit in and the friendship groups available and willing to accept them. Friendship group membership carries both positive and negative consequences. Students are more likely to participate in school activities and field trips if a friend is signed up or planning to attend the event. Positive peer pressure for good grade result when the group values academic achievement and on the honor roll. However, the reverse is also possible if the gifted student is in a group in which academics are not valued and less than stellar grades are the norm. Three students shared the impact of

choosing “friends” instead of correcting assignments or talking instead of paying attention in class.

The desire to fit in also impacts student behavior. These gifted students describe their friends as “just like me,” sharing the same goal, hobbies and interests. Students desiring acceptance will take risks and change former behaviors if they feel it will secure group acceptance. One gifted student sought membership on the school football team even though he was not physically able or fit to participate; two others joined friendship groups that they later discovered did not share their same goals and values. In these instances, negative consequences like a drop in grades, school discipline problems and teasing and bullying occurred for the gifted students. The influence of peers on student behavior may cause students not to take advantage of the help offered during lunch to make up or redo poor grades or cause them to be distracted in class and not pay attention to classroom instruction.

Lunch and recess are given as the primary time students meet and socialize with friends and others who are not in their same classes. Lunch in the cafeteria is “open seating” and, as a result, tables and chairs are at a premium. Generally, students have an established friendship group in a specific area where they normally eat. One sixth grader describes running to the cafeteria each day to save a table and chairs so that his friends can all eat together. Another sixth grader prefers to change tables and rotate eating and talking with different groups of his friends from his classes, sport, performing arts, and school activities.

When one has few friends, class and lunch time can be difficult. One student shared his frustration at being one of the last students chosen to work on a social

studies project and as a result, getting a partner who did nothing; he was not happy about it. He mentioned the presence of student groups that did not like each other but peacefully coexisted, and being the target of teasing and bullying at school.
Lunch for new students, students without many friends, or those excluded, left out, or involved in "drama" within their friendship group presents problems of who to eat with and where to sit. They can go to lunch alone and try to find a place to eat as the lunch tables quickly fill up with established groups of friends. These students frequently seek the Band room, Orchestra room, Media center or a teacher's room to eat and spend quiet time by themselves or with a small group of friends away from the rest of the students. For some, the pressure to fit in causes them to have several friendship groups and move back and forth between them while others will have a few friends or stay by his or herself outside of the lunchroom scene.

The choices students make in relation to their peers affect their achievement, classroom behavior and academic future. However, there are other factors that influence ta middle school students' peers. The impact of having friends in advanced classes and having friends who are not in advanced or high-level classes has been studied in the research. It is uncertain whether a student's grades influence friendships or friendships influence a student's grades. However, in middle school, grades and academic achievement do influence the academic level of a student and some of the classes they are assigned. Friendship and affinity result when students are enrolled in classes together.

Theme II: Identity. The second theme evolved from the nature of giftedness as expressed by the gifted students in the study. These students are faced with making

choices that affect one's self, impact their future, and influence the opinions of others, and these choices are instrumental in molding the gifted student's identity. The challenge for the gifted adolescent, at this stage of development, is to find a balance between one's identity as gifted and peer social acceptance. For the students in this study, the search for identity and the wish to be accepted and "fit in" is ongoing.

Acceptance of one's giftedness is central to establishing a personal identity; yet these students were unsure what giftedness means and entails. Opinions of giftedness ranged from being more advanced than others, or working harder and wanting to learn more, getting good grades, or that all are gifted in some way. It is evident that these students are aware of the differences in intellect that existed, but are not mindful of the fact that the concept of giftedness indicates a potential to be developed.

The nature of giftedness and the concept of "potential" are evaluated in light of how others view the individual and how the student compares one's self to that of one's peers. Mahoney's Gifted Identity Formation Model (1998) lists four constructs present within the gifted individual's academic and social life considered instrumental in shaping giftedness: validation, affirmation, affiliation and affinity. These non linear constructs and the 12 systems they impact serve as a framework to understand giftedness as a part of human behavior (Mahoney, 1998).

The characteristics of the middle school concept and the scheduling of classes in the transition period between elementary and high school may cause students to doubt their giftedness. The validation and affirmation received in elementary school

through participation in Gifted pullout[51] classes is not present in middle school. Gifted students must choose to participate in gifted activities or their academic achievements and performances in the classroom must qualify them for participation in advanced programs. As academic challenge is increased in middle school, the emphasis shifts from having potential to successfully achieving potential.

Middle school teachers are aware of the students identified as Gifted and Talented in their classes; however, gifted students in middle school receive validation based upon their progress, success, and accomplishments, not their potential for achievement or their name on a list. For the students advanced in the area of math, or winning academic competitions, or participating in advanced and differentiated assignments and activities in their core classes, affirmation is acknowledged.

The ongoing struggle of negotiating between academic success, achievement, and a social life is addressed by students in this study. They candidly talk of not applying themselves to their academics during the first months of sixth grade and they each share the dire result[52] of not studying or doing class assignments. These gifted students have discovered that academic success is a combination of ability and effort. Two students question the importance high academic achievement as opposed to having a social life as they struggle to find the balance between identity and peer acceptance.

[51] A class in which all gifted students are regularly sent to the gifted resource coordinator for enrichment.

[52] Amelia received her first C ever, and Nick had two B's and was not eligible to join the school's NJHS.

Theme III: Outlook. The third theme reflects the importance these gifted students placed on education. Important as it is for the students to see and interact with friends and peers, the students in this study value a quality education and recognize learning as an essential tool in securing a better quality of life and a higher standard of living than what they now experience. Students specifically mention the importance of getting a good education so that they will not have to work at a fast food restaurant cooking and serving hamburgers. They value having the skills one needs to be able to do something interesting and worthwhile with their lives.

Inherent in the desire for a quality and challenging education, these gifted students are not content to receive A's for curriculum they already know and have mastered. They want advanced and high-level subject matter in place of grade level curriculum in science, language arts, and social studies. They also ask for easy access to such high school classes as Chemistry and Algebra and curriculum that is relevant to their needs and interests.

These students are critical of some teaching strategies used in their academic classes, as they feel the pedagogy employed by their teachers does not support and enhance students' learning styles or promote high-level discussions and problem-solving skills. Generally speaking, gifted students view worksheets and answering questions at the end of the chapter as busy work.

Summary

Chapter four introduces the study participants and explores their lifeworld of school experiences to determine the role in academic achievement. The study attempts to answer the question why some gifted students become underachievers or selective

consumers while other gifted students achieve academically. Ten gifted students are briefly introduced and their academic profiles presented. These students are given a voice to relate the significant school experiences that influenced their academic achievement. The students describe, in their own words, their views of giftedness and the establishment of a gifted identity, the learning process in a middle school environment, the existing peer culture, the importance of peer relationships, and their future goals and aspirations. Three themes emerge from the analysis of data: Peers, Identity, and Outlook.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

> Most people who will attain success in their lives, however defined, are people who figure out who they are—what they have to offer themselves, others, and the world at large. They find ways of making the most of their diverse talents, and they find ways to live with their weaknesses. (Sternberg, 1997, p. 9)

Introduction

Chapter five focuses on the discussion of findings that emerged from the two research questions under investigation. By focusing on the lifeworld of gifted middle school students, this study sought to explore the middle school experiences of these students and to determine the influence of their school experiences on the academic achievement of gifted middle school students. Each research questions of the study will be addressed individually.

Research Question One

Question One: What kind of experiences do gifted students have in middle school?

The academic and social culture of a school impacts how students view giftedness, achievement, and the roles they assume as learners within the school environment. The lifeworld of Haviland, a Title I middle school, reveals the following influential experiences for its gifted students.

Environment and Climate in a Title I School. Middle school serves as the transition from elementary school to high school. It is the first of many changes students experience as they enter secondary level education. For students, these differences involve classes in multiple buildings, changes in the structure of schooling with new classes and teaming, more students, increase competition in academics,

sports, and popularity, and the loss of close community found in the elementary school. Teachers and staff try to help students adjust to these changes through strategies like teaming, advisory and climate building activities. Change is difficult, and adjustment to middle school is challenging for some students.

Although a Title I school, the majority students identified for the GT program at Haviland are of middle to high socioeconomic status. As the minority gifted population, these low SES students are aware of the social and financial differences that existed between themselves and other gifted students. The low socioeconomic gifted students interviewed, who were academically successful in elementary school, frequently had difficulty adjusting to more rigorous curriculum, larger numbers of gifted students, and lack of school mentors present in the middle school environment. Low SES gifted students have the additional stress of maintaining a cultural identity, fitting in with a group, pressure to obtain good grades, and fulfilling their responsibilities at home.

The interviewed gifted students enjoy coming to Haviland and like the school. They see the school as accepting and promoting student achievement in all areas and as having a supportive student body, faculty, and staff. These students view Haviland as a place of friendship, learning and safety. They feel that the majority of its student body are "good, hardworking students" but did recognize that "there is always going to be few kids that don't really listen to the teacher at all." Problem students were felt to be in the minority at Haviland and were not students in the above grade level Math classes. These students are class members, however, in the school's on grade level core classes of language arts, science, social studies and math and the school's

Exploratory classes. The gifted students express frustration with having to wait for their classmates to finish work or master curriculum before class instruction is able to move forward.

Gifted students have opportunities to participate in a variety of enrichment and extension activities in class and throughout the school day. Some examples offered that specifically target gifted students include a variety of academic competitions like Spelling Bee, MathCounts, and the Geography Bee; high interest clubs like Chess, Model UN, Robotics and Book Club; The school's National Junior Honor Society; and leadership training.

Some antagonism and friction reportedly exists within the student body. During the interview process, three individuals addressed bullying and the few students who tease and taunt vulnerable students. The gifted victims report feeling that bullying is frequently ignored. The existence of different student friendship groups (cliques) were also mentioned but said to coexist without any noticeable conflict and trouble.

Academics. Following middle school philosophy, all students at Haviland are heterogeneously and randomly placed into classes through a computer scheduling program and all classes, with the exception of above grade level Math classes, are composed of diversity in ability, gender and ethnicity. Gifted education research is mixed on the benefits and values of placing gifted students in homogeneous classes. All classes offered meet state academic standards and follow state-mandated curriculum. Seeking a compromise, Haviland, following Bedford School District policy, places students into Math classes based upon the student's Math ability as

determined by district criteria[53]. One unintended result is an increase in the likelihood that students in above grade level math classes will be more likely to be together in their other core classes.

Gifted students not enrolled in above grade level Math, usually have one or two GT students in their core classes, with the majority of students in these classes not identified as gifted. This distinction is relevant as class climate and instruction are affected by low skilled students and misbehaving students. In addition, shared classroom experiences serve as the source for the formation of many peer relationships on the middle school level. Classes composed mainly of high ability students are felt by the gifted students to have fewer behavioral problems, better discipline, students with greater work ethic, and a challenging academic climate.

Friends, Peers and Affiliation. The interviewed gifted students view school first as a way to see and interact with friends and then as an important resource for learning. The importance of establishing and maintaining friends, developing peer relationships, and finding a social group is evident in the analysis of student interviews. The interviewed students frequently join clubs, go on field trips, participate in projects, or sign up for expansion and extension activities to be with their friends and meet other students who share their interests, experiences and values.

Recess and lunch are listed as their favorite classes. Students say this time is one of the few opportunities outside of the classroom where they can interact with peers and visit with friends. This socialization time is an important part of the school

[53] The majority of students placed in the above grade level math classes met district math criteria, however, parents are permitted to enroll their student in an above grade level math class if they signed a district placement wavier. Some parents choose to do this.

day, as many times friends are not on the same core team or in the same academic classes. As a low SES school, many students do not have personal cell phones or Internet access to communicate with friends outside of school. The desire for peer relationships and the need to make friends common at this age level increases the importance of gifted students finding friends who share common interests, experiences and values.

Identity Development. The gifted students' self-concept and self-perception are molded by the social feedback students receive at school from peers and school faculty and staff members. Classroom experiences and interactions are an influence, as are the interactions that take place outside the classroom. At this time in their lives, gifted adolescents are struggling with being gifted, as they try to answer the questions, Who am I? and What do I want to do with my life?

Research Question Two

Question Two: How do middle school experiences affect the academic achievement of gifted students?

The study reveals that a diverse group of gifted and talented students attending the same school have different school experiences that affect academic achievement. The following lifeworld experiences at Haviland are influential in determining whether the gifted student achieves academically or not. These students are making choices, being influenced by their lifeworld, and exploring various ways to fit in the academic and social world of middle school.

The Influence of Environment and Climate in a Title I School. As a Title I school, Haviland Middle School seeks to equalize its academic and social environment

by providing opportunities, resources, and financial support for all of its students. This philosophy insures that low SES students are able to participate all school-related activities and experiences. Resources provide funds for school supplies, equipment, and activities and academic assistance is available in-school and after-school. A discrepancy between economic levels continues to exist in the school social and cultural arenas, and gifted low SES students are aware of it. Teachers provide the materials and equipment needed for assignments and projects, and class time is allotted for all students to use school computers and the Internet. However, low SES students must be aware that these academic supports exist and be willing to seek out and use.

Haviland offers a variety of enrichment and academic opportunities during class time, lunch, and before and after school. Gifted students need to take advantage of the opportunities offered and be willing try the new and unfamiliar even if it means doing it alone.

The Influence of Friends, Peer Groups and Affiliation. Establishing friendships, forming peer groups and being accepted into a group's academic and social activities are important developmental tasks in adolescence. Adolescent friends play a prominent factor in an individual's academic achievement, school motivation, and school engagement, which then influence the student's friendship group. The majority of interviewed students report their friends are like them and are also in the GT program. Students generally have a core group of friends or acquaintances from elementary school that they know and with whom they are familiar. The students continue their friendships with elementary school friends, many of whom are GT,

while adding new friends they meet at Haviland who share their interests and experiences.

Peer relationships are frequently established with students in their classes. Gifted students enrolled in above grade level Math classes have an advantage when it comes to being able to interact with students of similar ability and common interests, as they are more likely to be enrolled in the same core classes as other students from their Math class. Sharing core classes with other GT students increases the opportunity for social interactions and affiliation as the amount of time the students spend together is increased. Gifted students not qualifying for placement in such an above grade level Math class are at a disadvantage, as they lack the opportunity to be in multiple classes with students of similar ability and therefore, are unable to readily establish affirmation and affiliation with other gifted students. Not all GT students are at ease and comfortable making new friends; therefore, the opportunity to join interest groups or sign up for activities of interest gives these students additional chances to meet students with similar interests in a safe and comfortable environment.

The influence of peers and the desire to conform to the behaviors and attitudes of friends to ensure acceptance is strong during middle school years. Scout is more comfortable interacting with others on the computer as his socialization skills are limited due to his Asperger's condition; however, he attempted[54] to "fit in" at Haviland by trying out for the school football team. He reports being teased and bullied in the hall by other students who were at the tryout after he decided that

[54] Scout went out for the school football team and joined the chess club. Also, his one friend at school became violent in class and was eventually suspended from school.

football was not for him. Tori compensates for her lack of friends after school when she talks of playing and talking to her imaginary friends when alone at home.

Several of the gifted students shared experiences with friends and peers that affected their academic achievement. Friends appeared to be more important to Faith than good grades. Faith talks about choosing not going into lunch overtime to make up or redo low grades during lunch, preferring instead to see and talk with friends. She also shares choosing to communicate with friends in class and catch up on teenage drama instead of listening and paying attention to class instruction. Amelia reports wanting to fit in with students she wasn't friendly with normally and to do so stopped doing her homework. As a result, got she got her first C on a report card. Kathryn talks of a "tightrope" middle school students walk between academic achievement and being with friends. She discusses pressure that occurs at the end of an academic quarter when she wants to be with friends but has tests and assignments to do saying, "like I have a social life, too."

Amelia and Victoria both mention the positive influence friends have on their grades saying that they are inspired to keep achieving like their friends. An example of positive peer influence is shared by Nick who reports not really caring if he were in NJHS until he realizes that his friends had joined. Nick also tells of signing up to attend a GT field trip to a law school even though he wasn't interested in a career in law because his best friend was interested and was going on the trip.

Faith's personal goal to be the first in her family to attend college has had a positive impact on her academic performance. Faith, an Underachiever, enrolls in two high school classes in middle school and receives B's in both, never appearing on the

school ineligibility list for these classes. At the same time, she is a less than stellar student in her regular eighth grade core classes. Faith recognizes that these two high school courses are important to her academic future and, as such, she applies her talent and ability, does her classwork and studies. She typifies the gifted underachieving low SES student who is torn between her social culture and academic achievement. She picks and chooses when to spend time with her social group, or when to achieve and apply herself by working toward her goal of college. Faith recognizes that she has "friends who distract me in class" and voices that being in a different class would have "helped me."

The Influence of Academics. Aside from valuing school as a means to meet and maintain friendships, these gifted students recognize the importance of an education and realize that the learning that occurs during school is essential for a successful future. These students do not want to work in fast food restaurants like McDonald's as adults. They plan to attend college and the majority are presently taking high school classes in middle school for credit on their high school transcripts. Haviland and the Bedford School District are also making progress toward meeting the academic needs of its gifted students. The option to skip a grade is available to gifted and high ability students, and more students are now electing to enroll in high school credit classes while still in middle school.

The gifted students in above grade level Math classes commented on the differences in classroom environment and culture between the above grade level class and their other on grade level core classes. Students mentioned being frustrated that it takes their classmates a long time to finish work or when they don't do the assigned

work at home in regular core classes. They report that class instruction "waits" for these students to catch up. Worksheets are viewed as busy work and are not liked by some of the gifted students. Other gifted students prefer quiet, engaging classrooms where the teacher changes activities within the class period and students have some choice in projects and assignments.

The importance of providing academic challenge to students is a frequent topic of conversation among educators: it is also a major need expressed within the gifted student population. Boredom during elementary school and middle school is mentioned in the gifted student interviews. Victoria feels Haviland is more challenging academically than elementary school, and continues to advocate for advanced classes in the areas of language arts and social studies. Tori wishes additional curriculum options were in place so that she could enroll in advanced or more challenging classes while still in sixth grade. James, an underachieving gifted student, advocates for changes in curriculum that would reflect what students are interested in and what they would actually use in the future. Students report that they read, draw, daydream or talk to friends when bored in class, and some GT students even get into trouble when not engaged in learning.

Achieving gifted students generally view themselves as cognitively engaged in school. They are enrolled in above grade level Math classes, approve of the rigorous course work in Math class, and want more challenge in other classes. Academic accommodations, like differentiation strategies, alternate assignments, and curriculum compacting are offered by classroom teachers, but they are too few in number, limited in scope and not readily available. Grade level and low skilled students are the primary

focus of the majority of classroom teachers. Achieving gifted students suggest appropriate and challenging curriculum as the cure for the academic boredom that is reported by achieving and selective consumer gifted students in some core classes. The students questioned why every core discipline does not implement a variety of academic levels similar to those employed in Math classes, and ask for class activities and experiences that are relevant to student needs and interests.

The relationship between ability and effort is mentioned by Kathryn, Nick, Amelia, and Brendan. Kathryn and Nick both mentioned how surprised they were that middle school was not as easy as elementary school had been for them. Nick remembers thinking, "Well, I don't need to study. I've been getting straight A's" and then realizing that if you don't study, your previously good grade will drop. Amelia and Brendan shared instances in which they were not able to rely solely on their innate ability and found that academic success was the result of a combination of ability, effort and hard work (studying).

All of the students interviewed in this study were high achieving students in elementary school, with the exception of Scout. Of the remaining nine students, Kathryn and James have not been on the school honor roll since entering middle school; Faith was on the honor roll sporadically during sixth and seventh grade, but not in eighth grade. Not one of the three students qualified for above grade level Math classes. James wants to be a scientist, but adds he knows he is not performing and applying himself in seventh grade science. He says that the units covered in the class do not relate to his goals or interests in science. James recognizes that he is not getting a good grade and is not concerned, as he waits to be able to enroll in classes he feels

will help meet his career goals.

An additional challenge for middle school teachers and administrators are the high achieving students who are not reaching their potential. For these gifted student, earning good grades is not the same as being challenged to achieve their zone of proximal development[55] (ZPD). Amelia and Nick represent achieving gifted students who earn good grades but admit to not being challenged. Both Nick and Amelia are honor roll students, enrolled in above grade level Math classes, and in the district's gifted program since first grade. When asked about his success at school, Nick acknowledges that he is not doing as well as he could when he replies, "I have plenty of friends and I am doing very well academically. I'm not doing my best job but I'm doing a good job." Amelia also says her grades could be higher if she limited her extracurricular activities. Although both of these students admit they could get higher grades if they choose to, in reality, they have not had the opportunity to explore potential areas of academic interest and passion that are not part of the standard middle school curriculum. As a result, they do what they have to do to keep their teachers and parents happy.

These students, like other adolescents, are making choices about when and whether to achieve at a high level academically. They are determining the value of school curriculum, academic classes and assignments in relation to their perception of

[55] The zone of proximal development, developed by Lev Vygotsky, is the gap between what a learner has already mastered (the actual level of development) and what he or she can achieve when provided with educational support (potential development) (Coffey, 2009, p.1).

personal needs, interests and relevance. Academic ability and personal potential are secondary concerns to them at this developmental level.

Influence of Gifted Identity Development. The students in this study recognize at a young age that they are different than their friends and peers. They learn to adapt using coping mechanisms so they can appear to be like the other kids, and they may "dumb down" their ability[56] or assume a more socially acceptable identity[57] in order to fit in with a social group. Social influences and a desire to be liked by one's peers impacts gifted identity. The challenge for the gifted students in this study is to find a balance between the social and academic realms that allow each individual to discover who he or she really is. The discovery of gifted identity is ongoing, as all of these students are in the process of defining themselves and their futures.

When the gifted students are asked about giftedness during their individual interviews some related being unsure of what being identified as gifted means and involves. Many of the students recognize that they are more advanced academically than other students and mention thinking that getting good grades is the criterion for identification. Several students question whether they are still gifted, as they have not participated in extension and enrichment projects with the GRC.

Mahoney's Gifted Identity Formation Model (1998) proposes that the constructs of validation, affirmation, affiliation and affinity are necessary to mold gifted identity and are present in the academic and social life of gifted individuals. An

[56] As illustrated when Amelia, Brendan and Nick all confess that they are not working at their potential.

[57] As illustrated when Faith chooses to be with friends at lunch instead of attending overtime to improve her language arts grade.

awareness of this model helps to understand why some of the study subjects readily identified with being gifted and others are unsure of their gifted identity. All of the students interviewed initially received validation and affirmation when their family and their Gifted Resource Coordinator told them of their placement in the gifted program. The students enrolled in above grade level Math classes are not concerned whether they are still considered as gifted because they receive daily validation, affirmation and affiliation through their enrollment in an advanced level Math class. They also actively participate in the gifted academic programs and contests offered at Haviland.

Gifted students not in an above grade level math class have a more difficult time receiving validation, affirmation, affiliation and affinity in grade level classrooms from teachers and peers. As a result, these students[58] question their gifted identity. Not able to readily receive validation and affirmation for their intellectual ability because they are not in an above grade level class, they need to "shine" and stand out in their regular core classes[59] where, with the exception of Evan, it appears they have not done anything academically outstanding and are not readily recognized as gifted. Without validation and affirmation from teachers and peers, these students are left to question their ability and become more inclined to explore alternative areas in their search for personal identity and group acceptance.

Faith, who has strong social ties to her SES culture, is fortunate her math

[58] Faith, Evan, James, Kathryn, and Scout.

[59] A regular middle school classroom is made up of a heterogeneous mix of students with all levels of academic ability, teachers are mainly focused on teaching skills and curriculum that will bring students up to grade level and there is peer pressure not to stand out or call attention to one's self.

teacher praises her ability and reinforces her belief in herself. She also experienced affinity by discovering accounting as a possible career on a seventh grade GT field trip. Evan, while not in an advanced math class, receives validation, affirmation, and affiliation from teachers and other students who recognize him as a student leader, athlete, and prize-winning artist and writer. Scout received gifted validation and affirmation when he learns he qualifies for the district Gifted and Talented Program.

Intelligence is not consistently valued in the American culture. Our present society regards talent in sports or music more than academic ability; as a result, it's not considered cool to be intelligent. However, in middle school, it is acceptable to be smart if you also are attractive, popular, play sports, or have musical talent; otherwise it is not really "cool." Being smart is not something the other students aspire to achieve. Gifted students, like other adolescents, are negotiating who they are and who they want to be and consequently, how they will behave as that emerging social being. At this stage in their lives, they want to fit in more than to focus on giftedness and their academic potential.

Study Implications

The question why some gifted students achieve academically while other gifted students do not is central to this investigation. All but one[60] of the participants enjoys coming to school and likes to see their friends. The students recognize that school is an important avenue to well paying jobs and careers. They find the school's peer culture to be supportive of student effort and achievement in all academic and

[60] Scout does not like school in general because of prior negative experiences that occurred to him while attending school.

extracurricular activities. The importance and influence of friends on the study's subjects resonates throughout the student interviews. The majority of students report lunch/recess is their favorite class and describe it as a time when they get to see and visit with friends, as frequently their friends are not part of the same core team or in the same classes. The desire to spend time with friends during school is further illustrated when students share going on a field trip, joining a club or activity, or skipping lunch overtime to be with friends or because their friends are "doing it."

Membership in a peer group can have either a positive or negative influence on the academic achievement, school engagement and motivation of the preadolescent (Cross & Fletcher, 2009; Goodenow, 1993a). Murray-Harvey and Slee (2007) reported the influence of peer relationships on academic, social and emotional well-being of adolescents and suggest that academic achievement is related to positive school experiences. Depending on peer group culture and status, gifted students face a "forced choice dilemma" to conform to group pressure and follow what is acceptable academic behavior within the group or to do just enough to get by academically and keep parents and teachers satisfied (Geake & Gross, 2008; Gross, 1998; Rimm, 2002). For the preadolescent, it is important to be liked. As a result, they have to decide whether to (1) work hard, get good grades and not be very popular; (2) to stop doing class work and get poor grades; or (3) to develop self-presentation strategies to hide their effort and grades from their peers.

Scout demonstrates how strong a desire to "fit in" with a peer group can be when he tries out for the school football team. Not athletically inclined, Scout is a large student, without athletic or football experience, who has Asperger's Syndrome

and is not your typical football player or fan. Scout finds his physical limitations prevent him from being able to physically keep up with the other students and decides not to continue trying out. After leaving football tryouts, he reports frequently being teased and made fun of for attempting to join the team.

Additional occasions where the importance of friends or a lack of friends is an influential force affecting the study's gifted students and their behaviors are cited below. Friends appeared to be more important to Faith than good grades, even though she wants to be the first in her family to go to college. Faith chooses not to complete or redo assignments during lunch because she wants to see and talk with her friends. She tells of choosing to communicate with friends in class and "catch up on their teenage drama" instead of listening to class instruction. James shares working on a project in social studies and not being chosen to be part of group by any of his classmates. He is left to work with another student, who also was not picked for a group. He is both frustrated and angry that he has a "partner" who does not contribute and that he has to do the project all alone. The important need for companionship during preadolescent years is illustrated when Tori talks about friends. Tori says she has a few friends at Haviland, but reports that after school time she plays outside with her "imaginary friends" and talks to her "imaginary friends" when she is alone at home.

All of the students are asked about their giftedness and what it means to them. Some report realizing, they were different at an early age because of a special quality or ability, while others reveal that they have difficulty seeing themselves as gifted and question whether they are still in the gifted program now that they are in middle

school. However, not one of the students reported feeling socially stigmatized by gifted identification. The validation and affirmation that gifted elementary school students received through frequent and regularly scheduled meetings or classes with other gifted students helped to establish the students' identity as gifted individuals. The frequent GT meetings are missing at Haviland Middle School: time limitations and scheduling do not permit small weekly meetings for GT students to connect and interact with other GT students. Instead, middle school teachers are made aware of the gifted students in their classes through a list given to them at the beginning of the semester. It becomes the responsibility of the individual teacher to provide differentiated work for gifted students. Gifted students need to demonstrate their high ability and aptitude so that the teacher recognizes the need to provide alternate assignments and projects to the gifted student. The school Gifted Resource Coordinator (GRC), who mentors the gifted sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, schedules monthly grade level GT meetings. During these monthly meetings, gifted students receive information concerning upcoming GT events and participate in large group activities. Attendance is optional and dependent on whether the student hears an announcement of the meeting and is able to leave class to attend.

In contrast to the acknowledgement and support gifted students received in elementary school, it was understandable that those gifted middle school students who were not in an above grade level Math class might question whether they are still in GT. In light of Mahoney's Gifted Identity Formation Model (1998), gifted students not enrolled in an above grade level Math class do not receive the daily acknowledgement and recognition for their giftedness that students in these classes do. These students

also have fewer opportunities to interact academically with other gifted students as a philosophical foundation of middle school education is heterogeneous classes. Thus, those gifted students not qualifying for advanced math are randomly enrolled in core classes alongside the other members of their grade level.

The creation of one section of advanced Math per core team, however, increases the likelihood that students in an advanced math class are in at least one of the three other core classes together. This increases the affiliation between gifted students enrolled in advanced math, yet essentially penalizes gifted students whose intellectual strength is not spatial, in the area of math, or whose families can not afford math tutors for the qualifying tests. At the time of this investigation, provisions have not been made to offer above grade level academic classes to gifted and high ability students with an academic strength in the areas of science, language arts or social studies.

Haviland and the Bedford School District have made advances to provide for the academic growth and development of high ability and gifted learners. Students are able to enroll in six high school credit courses while still attending middle school. However, academic boredom persists in middle school classrooms particularly when students have already mastered curriculum being taught or when they are able to master curriculum faster than the majority of the class. James, who aspires to become a scientist, feels what is being taught in science class has no connection to him and what he wants to do in the future. Therefore, he does what he has to to get by and waits for future science classes to meet his needs, while recognizing that he is not getting a good grade in seventh grade science. Victoria copes with academic boredom

by using class time to daydream, draw, read or simply talk to other students after she finishes a class assignment or when she decides that she is not going to do the assignment at that time. To alleviate this problem, teachers need additional training and time to develop ways to assess prior student knowledge and to provide those students who have mastered grade level curriculum with respectful and challenging projects and assignments.

The academic patterns and student behaviors initiated in middle school serve to shape gifted students though out high school years and beyond. Recognized as a turning point in adolescent lives, middle level education needs to provide interventions that will ensure gifted students have multiple opportunities to interact with other students of similar ability and interest in academic areas. This is especially important for low SES schools, in which student ties to community culture and neighborhood friends are strong. Gifted students are aware social and economic differences exist in their school. These need authentic and respectful class room opportunities to work with a variety of students who share similar ability and interest. Through class interactions, working together on assignments, students will discover others who are like them intellectually. Gifted students will naturally build relationships with students who are culturally, socially and economically different than they are.

For gifted low SES students increased opportunities for respectful academic interactions will provide validation, affirmation, and affiliation of their giftedness at a time when they are struggling with trying to fit in and establishing an identity.

Study Conclusions

No attempt is made in this study to generalize the findings, as this is a

qualitative investigation of the middle school experiences in a Title I middle school in a Midwestern university community. One can not infer that other gifted students will react like the students in this study. The purpose of the study is to help understand the school experiences of gifted middle school students and the influence school experiences have on academics. Interviews were transcribed and the researcher made no preconceptions related to the findings of the study.

On the basis of this study, it is not possible to determine whether any specific middle school experience influenced or caused a decrease in academic achievement in the gifted participants from elementary school years to middle school. The study did reveal that the role peers play in the school experiences of gifted middle school students is influential in affecting student's academic achievement and behavior. The study also found that the participants who qualified for above grade level math classes were generally more academically successful than participants who did not qualify for the advanced math program. The study also found that participants enrolled in above grade level math classes had a more defined gifted identity and persona than the participants in grade level math classes.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. All gifted middle school student be enrolled in at least one core class in which the student has high interest and/or aptitude per year of middle school. The enrollment in a homogeneous core class of gifted students would provide an opportunity for gifted students to interact with students of similar abilities

and interests while providing all gifted students with validation, affirmation, affiliation, and affinity at a critical time in their development.

2. Special attention and interest should be shown to students and their families from low socioeconomic environments. Alternate paths for gifted identification that would reflect the norms and values of the diverse cultures present in the school's student population should be investigated and developed.

3. Low SES Families should be made aware of the steps, processes, procedures, and sources of possible funding involved in attending college at an early stage. This information should be repeated yearly throughout the student's academic career.

4. Any academic, financial or personal resources needed by a gifted student should be readily accessible and available to any gifted student who expresses the need.

5. Require all undergraduate and new teachers to receive instruction in gifted education before graduation from college and becoming a certified teacher.

6. Require staff development/training in the area of gifted education each year, during which teachers have the opportunity to become familiar with gifted pedagogy, have time to develop lessons and projects that stress differentiation, and to form differentiation cadres to support the implementation and assessment of differentiation within each grade level and school.

Limitations of the study

The application of the findings from this study are limited by the qualitative nature of the study; however, the voices of its participants serve to indicate what gifted middle school students feel towards middle school and the challenges that they faced in developing an identity as a gifted individual. In addition, the study involves a small sample of gifted students from the same Title I school. The existence and impact of poverty at Haviland Middle School is acknowledged.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a beginning investigation into the nature and extent of lifeworld experiences of a Title I middle school on academic achievement of gifted students, the following recommendations for future research are proposed:

1. Increase the number, geographic area, size, socioeconomic status and percentage of ethnicity in schools to be studied.
2. Continue to include individual interviews of gifted students but add interviews with focus groups of gifted students, teachers and parents of gifted students to obtain a complete perspective of the "middle school experience."
3. Develop a long range study of the same group of gifted students in the same school for their entire tenure as a gifted student in middle school.
4. Initiate a mixed method study that compares gifted students enrolled in above grade level core classes with gifted students enrolled in on grade level core classes.

Researcher's Final Reflection

In closing, this study highlights the importance of providing special academic programing for gifted and talented students in a Title I middle school. The academic talents and abilities of gifted students during this formative age are not consistently being addressed at this level. Middle level education must provide an instructional environment that reflects the unique curriculum needs and interests of gifted students. Schools should provide above grade level classes in the core areas such as language arts, science, and social studies, not just in mathematics. Without this type of programing, middle school students, in particular low SES students, are not given the opportunity to explore many areas of ability and interest and, as a result, begin to cognitively disengage from school.

This study illustrates the influence one's peers have during preadolescence. Students seek to fit in with a group that shares their common interests, abilities and values. Peer influence causes students to reevaluate and mold their academic performance and behaviors to complement those of their friendship group. Gifted students, especially low SES gifted students, benefit from interacting academically and socially with students who share a common ability or area of interest. We, as educators, have the responsibility to help gifted students develop social and academic relationships that will build desire and motivation toward achievement and personal fulfillment.

We, as educators, can no longer neglect gifted and high ability students assuming that they will "survive and learn on their own" denying that they that they need personal attention and targeted instruction. To ignore the the education of

America's gifted students is tantamount to the relegating the future of our present society to mediocrity. It is a disservice to gifted and high ability students and to our country as well. Recent brain research indicates that new experiences and opportunities develop dendrites providing more efficient pathways and thus increase mental capacity.

Gifted students need educational resources and opportunities. Giftedness is not a static state of being, it involves promise and potential which can be developed and nurtured in an academic setting. Students with undeveloped abilities and talents need a variety of authentic and challenging experiences to thrive. It is during middle school that adolescents begin to exhibit an interest and desire in specific areas of appeal and concentration. Hard work, practice, self-discipline, persistence, opportunity and time commitment are necessary for success. Gifted students need to experience challenge and frustration to encounter success and to develop the necessary skills to achieve their ultimate potential. Gifted students need to learn at a pace and depth that is appropriate for them. The untapped human resources of American's gifted students are a source for future innovations, discoveries and creative endeavors. The responsibility for the enhancement of gifted students lies, in part, with our educational system.

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APPENDIX 1: Chapter 2.1

The Marland Report's Definition of Giftedness

Intelligence is acknowledged as a contributing factor in the identification of giftedness, however, in 1972, The United States Office of Education (USOE) changed the construct of giftedness with the issue of the Marland Report. This report made gifted education a national priority and encouraged states to assume leadership in its planning and development (Marland, 1972, p. xii). The Marland Report redefined giftedness while expanding the context of what it means to be gifted; it defined gifted as:

> "Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: (1) general intellectual ability, (2) specific academic aptitude, (3) creative or productive thinking, (4) leadership, (5) visual and performing arts, (6) psychomotor ability. It can be assumed that utilization of these criteria for identification of the gifted and talented will encompass a minimum of 3 to 5 percent of the school population (Marland, 1972, p. 5).

APPENDIX 2: Chapter 2.2

Characteristics of Underachievers and Selective Consumers

Characteristics of Underachievers and Selective Consumers

Underachievers	**Selective Consumers**
do not fully understand the causes or possible solutions to low grades	can explain both the problems and cures of their low grades
are dependent and reactive	are independent and proactive
tend to withdraw when faced with challenges	tend to rebel when faced with "busy work"
respect or fear authority figures	see most teachers as adversaries
need both structure and imposed limits	require less structure and more "breathing room"
exhibit uniformly weak school performance across subjects	exhibit performance that varies relative to the teacher and/or curriculum area
often require family intervention	can usually be dealt with by flexible classroom teachers
experience positive change usually over the long term	experience positive change sometimes "overnight"
are often perfectionistic despite no pressure from others to be so	are self-satisfied with whatever level of performance is attainment
have a poor academic self-image	see themselves as academically competent

(Delisle, 2004)

APPENDIX 3: Chapter 3.1

Bedford School District Gifted Identification Matrix

GIFTED PROGRAM Multi-Criteria Evaluation Matrix

Student Name_____Grade_____
School_____ Date_____

97% on a Nationally Standardized Test of Intellectual Ability is automatic placement.

Assessment Areas	2	4	6	8	10
Nationally Standardized Test of Intellectual Ability: (includes Standard Error of Measurement) Test Name_____ Date_____ Score_____	87-88%ile	89-90%ile	91-92%ile	93-94%ile	95-96%ile
		2		4	
Oklahoma CRT/EOI Tests		Satisfactory		Advanced	
Math or Algebra I Advanced date_____ Satisfactory					
Reading or English II Advanced date_____ Satisfactory					
	1	2	3	4	5
Achievement as demonstrated on ONLY ONE of the following tests:	85%ile	88%ile	91%ile	94%ile	97%ile
➔ACHIEVEMENT TEST Name of test _____ Total Math Total Reading					
➔EXPLORE or PLAN or ACT test Date: . Math Reading					
➔PSAT Date: . Math Verbal					
	1	2			
Recommendation: Self, peer, parent, teacher, or an average thereof	2.5	3.5			
Column Totals					

Overall Total _____ An overall total of 12 or greater recommends placement.

Appendix 4: Chapter 3.2

IRB Consent Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: May 16, 2014

IRB#: 4204

Principal Investigator: Alice Mary Pease Woodford

Approval Date: 05/16/2014

Expiration Date: 04/30/2015

Study Title: The Role of School Experiences on the Attitudes, Perceptions and Behaviors of Underachieving Gifted students

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI:

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

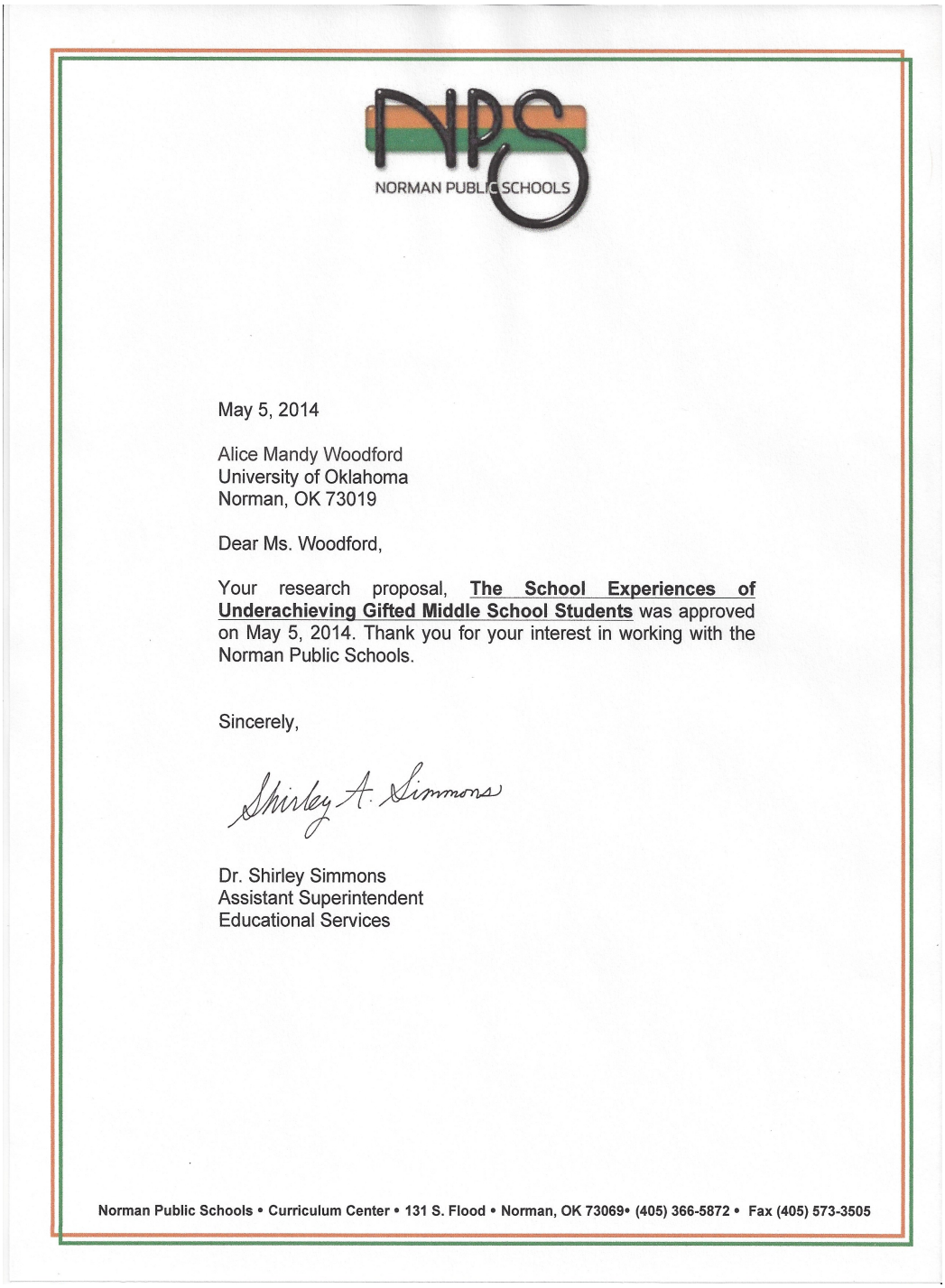
Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX 5: Chapter 3.3

School District Consent Letter



NORMAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 5, 2014

Alice Mandy Woodford
University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK 73019

Dear Ms. Woodford,

Your research proposal, **The School Experiences of Underachieving Gifted Middle School Students** was approved on May 5, 2014. Thank you for your interest in working with the Norman Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Shirley A. Simmons

Dr. Shirley Simmons
Assistant Superintendent
Educational Services

Norman Public Schools • Curriculum Center • 131 S. Flood • Norman, OK 73069• (405) 366-5872 • Fax (405) 573-3505

APPENDIX 6: Chapter 3.4

Parent Consent and Information Letter

Fall, 2014

Parents,

My name is Mandy Woodford and I am a PhD. candidate at the University of Oklahoma in the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum department. I was the gifted resource coordinator at Longfellow Middle School for 16 years. Currently, I am doing a research study to determine impact of school experiences on the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of gifted students. The importance of this study is to describe the role school experiences have on the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of gifted students and how school experiences affect students' achievement and attitude. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this study. I will also ask your child if s/he will agree to participate in this project.

If your child participates in this study, I will interview students individually in the either the school media center or the gifted resource room. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded so that I can transcribe it at a later date. Students will be asked to describe school experiences of a typical day at middle school. They will also be asked the advantages and disadvantage of being identified as gifted. Students will be asked to draw examples of their academic and social involvement in learning and school activities like sports, clubs, school service projects and assemblies. The interview will be approximately one class period in length. Interviews will not take place during class time. While there are no direct benefits to your child for participating in this study, I feel the results of this study will help me and other teachers learn more about the middle school experiences of gifted students and the impact these experiences have on a gifted student's academic achievement and satisfaction. During this research study, I will keep all data from the interviews in a secure location for one year after which time I will destroy all data. In addition, a pseudonym will be used in place of your child's name and no personal identifying information will be used to ensure confidentiality.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Your child (and you) can choose to participate or not to participate. In addition, at any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission, and your child can stop participating without any negative consequences. I recognize that I am both the researcher in this project and may have been your child's gifted resource coordinator in the past. Thus, I want to ensure you that your child's participation or non-participation in my research study will not impact his/her participation in gifted activities or his/her teacher-to-student relationships. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me, Mandy Woodford at home at 405.364.5354 or email me at m.woodford@cox.net.

Please keep this for your records.

The University of Oklahoma is an equal opportunity institution.

****

If you consent for your child to participate in this study, please sign and complete the attached Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study form and return it to the Longfellow Middle School for Mandy Woodford, c/o Ms. Traci Argo, Longfellow Middle School, Boyd Hall room 5 or mail it to Mrs. A. Mandy Woodford, 1215 Benson Drive, Norman, OK 73071. Your student will be contacted after receiving your signed consent form.

APPENDIX 7: Chapter 3.5

Follow up Parent information and Consent Letter

Dear parent/guardian of _____,

My name is Mandy Woodford and I am a PhD. candidate at the University of Oklahoma, College of Education in the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum department. I am also a former gifted resource coordinator at Longfellow Middle School. As a gifted resource teacher and the parent of gifted students, I became interested in the influence of school experiences on the academic achievement of gifted students and how these experiences influenced their feelings toward school and learning, which led me to pursue a doctoral degree in this field. The grade level teachers and Ms. Argo, Longfellow's gifted resource coordinator, suggested your gifted and talented student, _____, as a possible participant in a research study I am conducting. I am asking permission for your child to take part in this study, which will investigate the views of gifted students and their school experiences. If you give permission, I will also ask your child if he/she is willing to participate as well, as it is important that he/she is comfortable taking part too. Please know that all participation in this research study is confidential and voluntary. While there are no direct benefits to your child for participating in this study, I feel the results of this research will help teachers learn more about the middle school experiences of gifted students and the impact these experiences have on our gifted students' academic achievement and school satisfaction.

How the study will work;

- Students in the study will be individually interviewed for approximately one class period at a time convenient for both the student and his/her teachers.
- The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed later.
- Students will be asked to describe a typical middle school day as well as any advantages and disadvantages of being identified as gifted.
- To ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used in place of your child's name and no identifying personal information will be disclosed in my research.
- You or your child will be able to stop participating in the study at any time without any negative consequences.
- All interview and research data will be kept in a secure location for one year, after which time, the data will be destroyed.

If you consent for your child to participate in this study, please sign and complete the attached Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study form and return it to the Longfellow Middle School for Mandy Woodford, c/o Ms. Traci Argo, Longfellow Middle School, Boyd Hall, room 5 or mail it to Mrs. A. Mandy Woodford, 1215 Benson Drive, Norman, OK 73071. Students will be contacted after receiving a signed consent form. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Mandy Woodford, at home at 405.364.5354 or email me at m.woodford@cox.net.

Sincerely yours,

APPENDIX 8: Chapter 3.6

Student Interview Protocol

The following questions served as a guideline to determine the feelings of gifted students toward gifted identification, how they deal with their giftedness and school experiences both in a gifted program and in the regular classroom.

The questions are open-ended, unstructured and designed to get students to talk about themselves, their giftedness, peers and their school environment.

1. Tell me about yourself- family background, relationships, friendships, locations, likes and dislikes, current situation. Tell me about your schooling; programs or extra-curricular involvement, awards. What was school like for you when you started? What's the best part of school? What do you like most about school? Tell me about a day at school that you really enjoyed?

The next questions were asked to find out how the student feels about being gifted and how they deal with their giftedness and their experiences in a gifted program.

Draw a picture of yourself as a middle school gifted student and tell me about it.

2. What do you think it means to be gifted? Describe your experiences as a gifted student and in the gifted program. How do your experiences in the gifted program compare with those in your regular classes? What do you think the differences are/were? Did being identified gifted change you or how you feel about school and life?

Draw a picture of an experience or happening that inspired you to achieve and be successful as a middle school gifted student and tell me about it. What meaning have the incident hold for you personally?

Questions related to middle school classes and course work are asked.

3. Describe experiences in the regular classroom. Describe experiences in the GT or above grade level classes. What are the differences? In your view, what worked for you and what didn't in school? Tell me about your experiences in the classroom, were they positive or negative Why or why not? What do you like least about school? What do you think your teachers expect from you? What do you expect from yourself?

Questions were then asked about the participants' activities and peer relationships.

4. What can you tell me about the students at your school, your classmates, friends? Have you ever experienced peer pressure? Do you ever feel pressure/different because you were gifted? Explain. Tell me about what you do outside school. What hobbies do you have? Do your school and after school activities and friends (social culture) affect your school performance?

Draw an example of events or experiences that have inhibited your desire for success or when you have felt unsuccessful. Tell me about it. What meanings have the incident hold for you personally?

The last questions are about school general questions about school coursework and the classes there are enrolled in. Students are asked for suggestions about how they would design a curriculum that meets their academic needs

5. What kind of classes are you taking this year? Tell me about some of the classes you had in previous years. How challenging was/is your classes/curriculum? Describe your school. Do you consider your school to be a good school? How would you describe your experiences at school Do you believe school is important? In your view, what worked for you and what didn't in school? Do you believe you have been given every opportunity to do well at school? If you could change anything about school, what would it be?

APPENDIX 9: Chapter 4.1

Amelia's Academic Profile

Amelia's 6th Grade Report Card
2012-13

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	1 C, 1 D	A	1 D	A	Above C	A	1 C, 1F	B
7th Math Extensions/ Pre-algebra	1 C, 1 F	B	8 Cs, 1 D, 4 Fs	C	Above C	B	Above C	B
Science	Above C	B	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		3.667		3.667		3.833		3.667

Amelia's 7th Grade Report Card
2013-14

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	3 Cs, 1 D	B	Above C	A	Above C	A
Algebra 1	Above C	B	2 Ds, 4	B	4 Cs	B	Above C	B
Science	Above C	B	Above C	A	Above C	A	1 C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	1 F	B	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		3.833		3.5		3.833		3.833

Amelia's 8th Grade Report Card
2014-15

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
L. Arts	Above C	A	2 Cs,	4	1 C	A	Above C	A
Plane Geometry	Above C	A	Above C	A/A	Above C	A	Above C	A/A
Science	Above C	A	1 D	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
S. Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		4.0		4.0		4.0		4.0
Cumulative GPA		3.75		3.857		3.9		3.923

Amelia's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	Grade	TEST	Reading	Math	Writing	S. Studies	Science	L. Arts	Comp
09-10	3rd	OCCT	Proficient/ 881	Proficient/ 792					
10-11	4th	OCCT	Proficient/ 764	Advanced /821					
11-12	5th	OCCT	Proficient/ 769	Advanced /863	Proficient/ 41	Advanced /820	Advanced /886		
12-13	6th	OCCT	Advanced /899	Advanced /865					
13-14	7th	OCCT	Advanced /895						
13-14	7th	EOI		Algebra 1 proficient/ 760					
14-15	8th	OCCT	Advanced /921		Proficient/ 41	Advanced /851	Advanced /787		
14-15	8th	EOI		Geometry Advanced /999					
14-15	8th	Explore	88%/ 19	98%/24			93%/21	75%/ 17	92%/ 20

APPENDIX 10: Chapter 4.2

Brendan's Academic Profile

Brendan's 6th Grade Report Card
2013-14

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
7th Math Extensions	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	B	Above C	A
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		4.0		4.0		3.833		4.0

Brendan's 7th Grade Report Card
2014-15

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Algebra 1	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		4.0		4.0		4.0		4.0

Brendan's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	Grade	Test	Reading	Math	Writing	S. Studies	Science	L.Arts	Comp
12-13	5th	STAR		Advanced / 511			Advanced /480	Advanced/503	
13-14	6th	OCCT	Advanced / 906	Advanced /913					
14-15	7th	OCCT	Advanced / 842			Geography Advanced/ 964			
14-15	7th	EOI		Algebra 1 Advanced / 999					

APPENDIX 11: Chapter 4.3

Nick's Academic Profile

Nick's 6th grade report card
2014-15

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	2 Cs	B	Above C	A	Above C	A
7th Math Extensions	Above C	B	Above C	B	Above C	A	Above C	A
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	1 C	A	Above C	A
GPA		3.833		3.667		4.0		4.0

Nick's State Mandated Testing Results

YEAR	GRADE	TEST	READING	MATH	WRITING	S.STUDIES	SCIENCE	L. ARTS	COMP
11-12	3rd	OCCT	Advanced /990	Advanced /923					
12-13	4th	OCCT	Proficient/ 832	Advanced /836					
13-14	5th	OCCT	Advanced /851	Advanced /832	Proficient/ 41	Advanced /787	Proficient/ 739		
14-15	6th	OCCT	Proficient/ 815	Advanced /882					

APPENDIX 12: Chapter 4.4

Tori's Academic Profile

Tori's 6th grade report card
2014-15

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
7th Math Extensions	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		4.0		4.0		4.0		4.0

Tori's State Mandated Testing Results

YEAR	GRADE	TEST	READING	MATH	WRITING	S.STUDIES	SCIENCE	L. ARTS	COMP
11-12	3rd	OCCT	Proficient/873	Advanced/990					
12-13	4th	OCCT	Advanced/890	Advanced/815					
13-14	5th	OCCT	Advanced/887	Advanced/949		Advanced/850	Advanced/819		
14-15	6th	OCCT	Advanced/990	Advanced/990					

APPENDIX 13: Chapter 4.5

Evan's Academic Profile

Evan's 6th Grade Report Card
2014-15

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
6th Math Extensions	4 Cs	B	1 Cs, 2 D, 2 Fs	B	Above C	B	7 CS	B
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
GPA		3.833		3.833		3.833		3.833

Evan's State Mandated Testing Results

YEAR	GRADE	TEST	READING	MATH	WRITING	S.STUDIES	SCIENCE	L. ARTS	COMP
11-12	3rd	OCCT	Proficient/ 830	Proficient/ 728					
12-13	4th	OCCT	Proficient/ 771	Proficient/ 784					
13-14	5th	OCCT	Proficient/ 825	Proficient/ 782	Limited Knowledge /35	Advanced /766	Proficient/ 750		
14-15	6th	OCCT	Proficient/ 788	Proficient/ 815					

APPENDIX 14: Chapter 4.6

Victoria's Academic Profile

Victoria's 6th Grade Report Card
2012-13

6th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	1 C	A	1D	A	1F	A	1 C	B
7th math Extensions	1 C	B	4 Cs	B	7 C's, 2D's	C	9 C's	C
Science	Above C	B	Above C	A	1 D	A	Above C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	7 C's, 1 D, 1 F	A	Above C	A
GPA		3.667		3.833		3.667		3.5

Victoria's 7th Grade Report Card
2013-14

7th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	Above C	A	1C	A	1 C	A	Above C	A
Algebra 1	2 C's, 1 D	C	1 C, 2 F's	B/B	2 C's, 1 D, 1 F	B	2 Cs	B/B
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	B
Social Studies	Above C	A	4 C's	A	Above C	A	Above C	A
Biology 1	1 C	A	6 C's		Withdrew from class			
GPA		3.714		3.833		3.833		3.667
GPA								

Victoria's 8th Grade Report Card
2014-15

8th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	4 C's	B	1C, 2F's	B	1 C, 3 D's	B	3C's, 4 F's	C
Plane Geometry	Above C	A	Above C	A/A	2 C's	A	Above C	B/A
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	B
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	1 C	B	1 D, 4 F's	A
Biology 1	3 D's	A	Above C	B/B	1 F	A	1 F	B
Personal Finance	All S	S	All S	S				
OK History					4 C's	A	Above C	A/A
GPA		3.833		3.667		3.75		3.5
Cumulative GPA		3.624		3.642		3.681		3.633
Summer 2015 CP English 1(Pre-AP)				A				A

Victoria's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	Grade	Test	Reading	Math	Writing	S. Studies	Science	L .Arts	Comp
10-11	3rd	OCCT	Advanced/ 894	Advanced /865					
11-12	4th	OCCT	Advanced/ 990	Advanced / 990					
12-13	6th	OCCT	Advanced/ 860	Advanced / 939					
13-14	7th	OCCT	Advanced/ 990						
13-14	7th	EOI		Algebra1 Advanced /764					
14-15	8th	OCCT	Advanced/ 990		Proficient/ 45	Advanced / 884	Proficient/ 739		
14-15		Explore	97%/ 23	84%/ 18			100%/25	75%/ 17	96%/ 21
14-15		EOI					Biology Advanced 817		

APPENDIX 15: Chapter 4.7

Faith's Academic Profile

Faith's 6th Grade Report Card
2012-13

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language. Arts	2 C's	A	1 C	B	1 C, 1 F	B	1 C, 3 D's	D
6th Math Extensions	1 C	B	Above C	B	4 C's	B	2 C's	A
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	A	Above C	B
Social Studies	2 C's	A	5 C's	B	Above C	A	4 C's	B
GPA		3.833		3.5		3.667		3.167

Faith's 7th Grade Report Card
2013-14

7th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	1 C	B	4 C's, 1 D, 1 F	B	Above C	B	4 C's, 2 D's, 2 F's	C
7th Math Extensions	2 C's	B	5 C's	B	2 C's, 8 D's	D	4 C's, 3D's	B
Science	Above C	A	Above C	A	2 D's	B	8 C's	B
Social Studies	Above C	B	Above C	A	Above C	B	7 C's	B
GPA		3.5		3.667		3.0		3.167

Faith's 8th Grade Report Card
2014-15

8th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	1 D, 9 F's	F	8 F's	F	1 C, 1 D, 5 F's	F	1 D, 8 F's, 1 U	F
Algebra 1	Above C	B	Above C	B/B	Above C	A	Above C	B/B
Science	Above C	A	2 Cs	B	Above C	B	5 C's, 1 F	B
Social Studies	2 C, 2 D's	D	7 F's, 1 C	F	6 D's	B	3 C's	B
Biology 1	Above C	A	Above C	Withdrew from class				
Spanish 1	Above C	A	Above C	A/B	Above C	B	Above C	B/B
GPA		2.667		2.167		2.833		2.667
Cumulative GPA								

Faith's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	Grade	Test	Reading	Math	Writing	S. Studies	Science	L.ARTS	COMP
09-10	3rd	OCCT	Proficient/ 716						
10-11	4th	OCCT	Proficient/ 728	Advanced /806					
11-12	5th	OCCT	Proficient/ 713	Advanced /794	Proficient/ 48	Limited Knowledge /677	Proficient/ 786		
12-13	6th	OCCT	Proficient/ 796	Advanced /790					
13-14	7th	OCCT	Proficient/ 775	Advanced /804					
14-15	8th	OCCT	Proficient/ 786		Limited knowledge/ 35	Proficient/ 722	Advanced / 775		
14-15	8th	EOI		Algebra 1 proficient 760					
14-15	8th	Explore	44%/ / 13	84%/18			63%/ 17	61%/ 15	64%/ 16

APPENDIX 16: Chapter 4.8

James' Academic Profile

James's 6th Grade Report Card 2013-14

6th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	2 Ds, 1 F	D	4 Ds, 6 Fs	D	6 Ds, 4 Fs	D	5 Cs	C
6th Math Extensions	2 Cs, 3 Ds, 2 Fs	B	6 Cs	C	1 Cs, 6 Ds, 2 Fs	C	3 Cs	B
Science	1 D	A	1Cs, 3 Ds	C	1 C	A	1 C	A
Social Studies	Above C	A	Above C	A	2 Cs, 1 D, 6 Fs	D	2 Cs	B
GPA		3.333		2.5		2.667		3.167

James 7th Grade Report Card 2014-15

7th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	6 C's	C	1C, 1 D	B	1C	B	4 C's, 1 D, 1 F	C
7th Math Extensions	1 C	B	Above C	B	9 D's	D	2 C's, 3 D's, 2 F's	B
Science	1 F	B	3 C's, 2 F's	C	5 C's, 3 D's, 1 F	C	2 C's	B
Social Studies	1 C	B	5 C's	B	Above C	A	Above C	B
GPA		3.167		3.167		3.0		3.167

James's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	Grade	Test	Reading	Math	Writing	S. Studies	Science	LArts	Comp
10-11	3rd	OCCT	Proficient/ 721	Advanced /816					
11-12	4th	OCCT	Proficient/ 721	Advanced /821					
12-13	5th	OCCT	Limited Knowledge/690	Proficient/ 753	Proficient/ 38		Proficient/ 724		
13-14	6th	OCCT	Proficient/ 749	Proficient/ 743					
14-15	7th	OCCT	Proficient/ 740	Proficient/ 754		Geography/ Proficient 713			

APPENDIX 17: Chapter 4.9

: Kathryn's Academic Profile

Kathryn's 6th Grade Report Card
2014-15

6th grade	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	1C	B	3 C's, 1 D	C	2 C's	B	8 C's	C
6th Math Extensions	1 C, 1 F	B	3 Ds, 4 F's	C	1 C, 3 D's, 5 F's	D	4 C's, 4 D's,	C
Science	Above C	B	Above C	B	8 C's	B	1 C, 4 D's. 1 F	C
Social Studies	1 F	B	Above C	A	5 C's, 4 D's	C	3 C s, 3 F's	B
GPA		3.33		3.167		2.6		2.833

Kathryn's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	**Grade**	**Test**	**Reading**	**Math**	**Writing**	**Studies**	**Science**	**L.Arts**	**Comp**
11-12	3rd	OCCT	Proficient/ 849	Proficient/ 755					
12-13	4th	OCCT	Proficient/ 760	Proficient/ 744					
13-14	5th	OCCT	Proficient/ 806	Proficient/ 729	Proficient/ 45	Advanced /732	Limited Knowledge /694		
14-15	6th	OCCT	Proficient/ 746	Proficient/ 742					

APPENDIX 18: Chapter 4.10

Scout's Academic Profile

Scout's 6th Grade Report Card
2012-13
Entered Haviland 4th quarter 2013

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts							Above C	A
Math							3 C's, 4 D's, 1 F	D
Science							5 C's, 1 F	C
Social Studies							4 C's, 5 D's	D
GPA								2.4

Scout's 7th Grade Report Card
2013-14

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	1 C	B	Above C	A	2 C's, 6 F's	C	Above C	B
7th Math	4 C's	C	Above C	B	2 C's	A	Above C	A
Science	3 C's, 1 F,	B	Above C	B	3 C's	B	Above C	B
Social Studies	2 C's	B	Above C	B	4 C's	C	1 C	B
GPA		3.167		3.33		3.167		3.5

Scout's 8th Grade Report Card
2014-15

	Ist quarter		2nd quarter		3rd quarter		4th quarter	
Core Class	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade	Eligibility	Grade
Language Arts	9 F's	F	3 Cs', 4 D's, 2 F's	F				
8th Math	Above C	A	Above C	A				
Science	3 C's	C	4 C's, 1 F	D				
Social Studies	3C'a	C	2 C's, 6 D's	D				
GPA		2.167		1.833*				

*Scout withdrew from Haviland Middle School at the beginning of second semester 2015 to enroll in an online charter school.

Scout's On Line Grades 8th grade
Second Semester 2015

Course Name	Curriculum	Course Length	Cumulative Grade	Cumulative Grade % Completed	1st Semester	2nd Semester	Final
8th Language Arts	Compass Learning Odyssey (K-12)	Full	90%	70%			
8th Math	Compass Learning Odyssey (K-12)	Full	82%	41%			
8th Science	Compass Learning Odyssey (K-12)	Full	88%	46%			
8th US History	Compass Learning Odyssey (K-12)	Full	89%	53%			
8th Writing	Compass Learning Odyssey (K-12)	Full	93%	68%			

Scout's State Mandated Testing Results

Year	Grade	Test	Reading	Math	Writing	S. Studies	Science	L. Arts	Comp
09-10	3rd	OMAAP	Advanced/279	Advanced /291					
10-11	4th	OCCT	Limited Knowledge/699	Proficient/ 744					
11-12	5th	OCCT	Limited Knowledge/651		Proficient/ 49	Advanced /792	Advanced /886		
12-13	6th	OCCT	Limited Knowledge/ 678	U/651					
13-14	7th	OCCT	Proficient/ 475	Proficient/ 475					
14-15	8th	Explore	44%/ 13	25%/ 13			24%/14	23%/14	29%/ 13