

"Are you pondering what I'm pondering?"

Self-identity and Gifted Adolescents

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2014 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2014

ABSTRACT

Working with participants in schools for highly gifted students, this study asked adolescents to create a digital story to address the prompt, "How has your life changed since coming to this school?" Participant interviews were conducted in an attempt to determine how gifted students view their educational experiences and how those experiences influence the current development of self-identity. Digital story creation and photo elicitation methods were chosen in an effort to remove researcher bias and allow participant voices to be heard more accurately. Parent and educator interviews were also conducted. Data analysis was completed using narrative construction methods. Findings include several themes among participant self-identity influences including how labels affect participant's view of themselves, perfectionism and competitive drive function in each gifted child, necessity of intellectual challenge, appropriate learning environment helps to create self-confidence and self-identity, and grades are more important than learning for knowledge.

DEDICATION

A professor told us at the beginning of the program that if you didn't have a significant other when you started, you wouldn't get one. If you had one when you started, you wouldn't have them at the end. He's been here since the beginning and he's somehow still here at the end. I couldn't have done it without him – his love and support have made this possible (even at the risk of his own sanity).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is impossible to state the extent of my gratitude to the following people. Without them, I would still be scratching my head in confusion and frustration. Their support of my ideas to marry methods and practices not usually used in educational research will be forever appreciated.

Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh provided guidance and a calming force when I needed them. He pushed me intellectually to grow as a student and a scholar. His serene support during periods of stress is something I can only hope to someday achieve.

Dr. Eric Margolis, wielding the proverbial red pen, improved my writing exponentially. His openness to new ways of using visual methods in research combined with his wealth of experience in the field gave me the confidence that this study could work.

Dr. Jennifer Sandlin who supported my desire for a narrative dissertation in a changing academic political climate.

Dr. Thomas Barone who exposed me to qualitative methods, gave me a whole new insight into research, and whose Narrative Research course was a turning point for me as a scholar.

Dr. Sanford Cohn, who has forgotten more about gifted education than I will ever know and shared his expertise with a rookie scholar.

Susan Heydorn & Robin Boyle, without whom few doctoral students would have graduated.

Finally, crazy TA has put more of her time into listening to me think through ideas and problems than she has into her own dissertation work and I hope I can return the favor as she works toward the light at the end of the tunnel.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Second grade changed my life. That's a strong statement given that I was seven at the time and really don't remember most of the school year. That was the year I was referred for gifted testing. That simple act by my second grade teacher changed how teachers viewed me, how my family viewed and interacted with me, and, most importantly, how I viewed myself.

Teachers had higher expectations of gifted students. I was expected to get high grades, be a role model for other "less intelligent" classmates, to be the model student. While I was moved up a grade in certain subjects to challenge me, I was still a child with normal child interests. Over the years, teacher expectations began to weigh on me and by high school the fear of failing those expectations caused me to take average classes to achieve high grades.

As one of four children at home, being identified as gifted shifted the family dynamic. The default parental response to inappropriate behavior by my siblings became "Why can't you be more like Courtney?" This, in turn, created antagonistic relationships with my siblings through no fault of my own. The more unacceptable their behavior, the less I was noticed as a person and the more I was held up as an unattainable standard. Parental expectations of my behavior and grades, combined with teacher expectations, changed my self-image.

By middle school, I had begun to develop a self-identity based on perfectionism, model behavior, and avoiding notice. If I could get everything perfect, no one would notice me. This relieved some of the tension between my siblings. As I moved into high

school and my siblings became individuals in their own right, their poor choices combined with my model behavior took much of the spotlight away from me, but it was years before I felt comfortable exploring other aspects of my self-identity that were in complete opposition to those of model student and child.

Personal connection to study

A career change from business to education, specifically a shift to K-8 teaching, sparked my interest in gifted education today. The implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) in public classrooms with the mandates on standardized testing and pass rates relegates gifted students to frequently fend for his/herself. As teachers work to meet the passing percentage requirements by focusing on the middle and lower achieving students, gifted students are left to teach themselves, assist classmates with understanding content, or are completely ignored under the assumption that they will pass the test without additional help (Duffett, Farkas, & Loveless, 2008; Gentry, 2006; Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007; Mazie, 2009; Mendoza, 2006). I saw students in the traditional classroom appearing bored, doing homework for other classes, and being intentionally disruptive. I began to wonder how these gifted students internalize the expectations of their teachers and family to create their self-view. Does policy have a trickle-down effect where because the money and time are transferred from gifted to average and below that the gifted student now views his/herself as less important? Does the school/teacher focus on the middle and low achievers translate to parents so that parents of gifted students now view their child as not needing any academic assistance? If I could begin to determine how gifted students under NCLB view themselves in relation to school and family, as an

educator I might be able to create learning environments that help those students become exceptional adults.

Originally, this study asked adolescents attending a school for gifted students to create a visual representation (digital story) in response to the prompt, “What was your life like before being identified as gifted?” There were no parameters given to participants regarding content, length, or creative choices such as music or photos. When presenting and explaining the study and prompt to participants, it was discovered that this particular group of participants had been identified early in their academic careers, most no later than third grade, and only knew life as being gifted – in and out of school. Participants, therefore, “hijacked” the prompt to become “How has your life changed since coming to this school?” As such, this study asked gifted adolescents to create a digital story in response to the question, “How has your life changed since coming to this school?” in an attempt to discover how they created self-identity.

It is important to note that all topics discussed in this dissertation are based in a Western theoretical perspective. Almost any topic based in a Western theoretical perspective, regardless of field, has been critiqued for being exclusionary, white-centric, male-centric, power-centric, etcetera. These critiques span a broad range of topics ranging from what constitutes an educated person (Dewey, 1916), to what is literate (Grushka, 2011) to privilege in gifted education (Latz & Adams, 2011; Mazie, 2009) to if gifted education is even necessary (Grant, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of field

There are several aspects of gifted education that require clarification in order for an informed discussion to occur. These aspects can, and have, created a host of problems in American education. Giftedness as a social construction, nature versus nurture, the nature of intelligence, belief that there is a need for different academic environment(s), and policies regulating and affecting gifted programming are the most debated topics between proponents and detractors of gifted education. Below I provide a general overview of these topics. Once these topics are described, the process of identifying students for gifted programs and the gifted programming options available to schools is discussed. As the vast majority of the literature spanning almost a century discusses these topics, this overview is designed to inform the reader of the major considerations affecting gifted education. This section of the literature review offers a background overview.

Socially constructed. Gifted education has been researched for close to a century. Leta Stetter Hollingworth's seminal work with gifted students in the early 1900s (Hollingworth, 1942) and Lewis Terman's longitudinal study with genius students (Terman, 1925) - both attempting to disprove commonly held stereotypes about highly gifted adults being socially awkward, unhealthy, having poor hygiene, and having higher incidences of mental illness yet finding opposite results - are foundational in this important field. These studies created an opportunity for subsequent researchers to attempt validation of their understandings and beliefs about gifted students through continued research.

A primary point that has emerged from this continued research is that the construct of giftedness is socially defined (Borland, 1997; Gallagher, 1991; Pfeiffer, 2012). It is socially defined by country, culture, and even within different populations of a country. For example, in Japan giftedness is considered both an individual personality trait as separate from the person but also as the person who excels (Matsumura, 2007) with a strong cultural separation between creative/artistic gifts and academic gifts. In aboriginal Australia, the term gifted is not used to describe children who have talents above the others, as their way of life is as an interdependent, group culture where it is unacceptable to stand out from the others (Gibson & Vialle, 2007). Americans generally tend to promote the individual as part of the national identity and a child is considered gifted if he/she is significantly more advanced at something than age peers. Even within the general “American” view of giftedness there are variations. Sternberg (2007) notes that in his previous research (1993) he found that Asian Americans culturally emphasize cognitive competence while Latino Americans culturally emphasize socioemotional competence. These examples of variations on giftedness as a concept showcase the social construction of the term. In addition, Sternberg (2014) notes several studies in a variety of countries where intelligence is culturally defined by practical, tacit knowledge as opposed to the American view of higher academic intelligence being equated with a higher IQ. Given the general American view of giftedness equating to higher IQ (Pfeiffer, 2012), many schools use IQ as an entrance requirement into gifted programming.

Nature versus nurture. Another aspect that affects gifted identification and education is the debate over nature versus nurture. Nature proponents hold to the idea

that intelligence and giftedness are a result of genetics and is an innate ability (Sternberg, 1986; Sternberg, 2014). Nurture proponents hold that the same intelligence and giftedness are a result of environment. Most educators today believe it is a combination of the two (Borland, 1989; Sternberg, 2014), and that students who come from environments with more resources have a better chance of using their innate intelligence to its full potential as opposed to students who come from disadvantaged environments such as those high in poverty, crime, and lacking in experiential experiences (Borland, 1989; Sternberg, 2014). Research on test bias, teacher beliefs, and identification has been conducted and findings suggest that minority students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are identified less often but are not less intelligent (Borland, 1989; Sternberg, 2014).

Teacher beliefs and knowledge of gifted behaviors directly impact this controversial aspect of gifted education. Teacher preparation programs rarely instruct preservice teachers on gifted behaviors in general or how those behaviors might evidence themselves in culturally diverse students (Cooper, 2008; Duffett, Farkas, & Loveless, 2008; Lee, 2008). As discussed more in depth later, the majority of students identified for gifted testing are referred by classroom teachers. Teachers with little or no background on gifted students and culturally or socioeconomically diverse gifted students will make fewer referrals thereby unintentionally reinforcing the nurture aspect of the debate.

Nature of intelligence. Intelligence has been classified into two categories: fluid and fixed, or crystallized. Fluid intelligence "...comprises the set of abilities involved in coping with novel environments and especially in abstract reasoning" (Sternberg, 2008)

while crystallized intelligence “...is the product of the application of these processes” (Sternberg, 2008). Fluid intelligence is typically assessed using standardized tests while fixed intelligence is often assessed by vocabulary and general information (Sternberg, 2005; Sternberg, 2008). There is an ongoing belief by educators that high IQ scores are directly correlated with giftedness (Cohn, 1988; Pfeiffer, 2012; Sternberg, Ferrari, Clinkenbeard, & Grigorenko, 1996) but research continues to point out that this may not be the case with students who are creative and/or talented in areas such as music, art, or writing. In addition, as noted by Sternberg (2007, 2014), gifted educators have been in disagreement regarding the ability to increase a person’s IQ for some time. As previously noted, continued belief by Americans that high IQ equates to giftedness directly affects program designs and who is referred for gifted programs.

Policy issues. A key point affecting gifted education as a whole in the United States is the lack of any federal mandates regarding it. The federal government is currently working on legislation (the TALENT Act) that will identify needs of gifted students, how educators of gifted students should be prepared to teach these students, and how federal funding should be allocated for gifted programs and grants (NAGC, 2011). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (NCLB) includes the following definition of gifted students:

The term ‘gifted and talented’, when used with respect to students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (SEC. 9101, subsection 22)

This definition leaves the entire concept of gifted education at the discretion of the individual states (NAGC, <http://www.nagc.org/GiftedByState.aspx>). In addition, the requirements of NCLB regarding student achievement have forced the vast majority of states and districts to shift funds from “extras” such as art, music, physical education, and gifted education to content areas on the state assessment such as English, reading, and mathematics. A combination of no uniform guidelines and decreasing funds has left gifted education across the country a patchwork of expectations and limitations. The following sections on definitions, identification, and programming will describe this in more detail.

Definitions. It can be difficult to compare studies of gifted children in the United States even when the topic under study seems to be the same simply because there is no consensus on the definition of the construct “gifted.” Some determine giftedness by a standardized test such as an IQ test, some use only academic abilities while excluding creative talents, and still others use a portfolio method (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993).

Norman, Ramsay, Martray, and Roberts (1999) noted,

Potential contributors to the seemingly contradictory findings regarding adjustment in gifted children are the definitions and criteria used to identify gifted students. These vary widely from study to study. Some studies fail to state the criteria for giftedness altogether. (p. 5)

However, as a universal definition has not been agreed upon by educators, politicians, or psychiatric personnel such as psychologists and psychiatrists, it is difficult to determine what exactly qualifies a child as gifted in the United States with any certainty.

What can be agreed upon by most in the field are the categories where students can be identified as gifted. Due to policy issues previously discussed, some states recognize and work to identify in all areas while others work to identify only quantitative and verbal giftedness (NAGC, [http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Gifted_by_State/state_of_states_2012-13/Table%20B%20\(identification\).pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Gifted_by_State/state_of_states_2012-13/Table%20B%20(identification).pdf)). Most standardized tests used for identification purposes (see below) test within acceptable ranges for quantitative and verbal ability but have weaknesses for the other areas. Generally accepted categories of giftedness are quantitative, verbal, spatial, leadership, and creative/talented (Borland, 1997; ERIC, 1990; Renzulli, 2004).

Quantitative giftedness can be evidenced by behaviors such as: proceeds quickly from a specific set of instances to a generalization, combines intermediate steps in the thinking process, perceives mathematical patterns and relationships, is able to think and work abstractly and to use deductive and inductive reasoning, and demonstrates a variety of ways of solving problems in addition to excelling on quantitative sections on standardized tests (Clark, 2002; Duke TIP website, 2011; Lester & Schroeder, 1983; Tuttle, 1988). Verbally gifted students excel on reading and interpretative sections of standardized tests as well as have in-depth information on many things, and often want to know why or how something is so. They often have a better reason for not completing tasks than the reason for the task, and enjoy abstract ideas and debating issues (Clark, 2002; NAGC, 2008; Silverman, 1998; Tuttle, 1988).

Students who are spatially gifted can mentally “see” objects in 3D and determine various ways they can work together, they learn in pictures as opposed to words, and

move from problem to answer with little processing in between (Clark, 2002; Silverman, 1982; Tuttle, 1988). Some tests used for identifying gifted students have sections for spatial abilities, such as the CoGAT where students are given shapes and asked to mentally rotate, transpose, dissect, or otherwise adjust them to determine the correct answer. Leadership includes the following which can be a combination of innate traits and learned skills (Clark, 2002; Duke TIP website, 2011; Sternberg, 2005): problem analysis, selling a solution, recognition of how knowledge can both help and hinder creative thinking, willingness to take sensible risks, willingness to surmount obstacles, belief in one's ability to accomplish the task at hand, willingness to tolerate ambiguity, willingness to find extrinsic rewards for the things one is intrinsically motivated to do, and continuation of intellectual growth rather than stagnation.

Creativity/talent is often viewed as a part of giftedness as a general trait (Renzulli, 1999; Sternberg, 2005; Sternberg et al, 1996) as well as the ability to think inductively and deductively about problems to develop non-traditional solutions (Duke TIP website, 2011; Torrance, 1995). Exceptional skill in areas of music, art, or athletics is usually classified under this section as well (Clark, 2008) although few schools have the structures in place to help students advance their abilities in the field.

It is also generally accepted that a higher than average IQ for a child's age is an indicator of giftedness in at least one of the listed areas (Cohn, 1988) but is not always evidenced in testing. Creative students in particular may evidence average or slightly higher than average IQs while outstripping others in their area of talent (Sternberg, 1986; Torrance, 1995).

Identification. Identification requires following a prescribed way of assessing or testing students to determine which ones meet the standard(s) set by the state or district. Identification most often includes a combination of teacher recommendation and standardized tests. Teachers who recognize gifted behaviors or above age/grade level academic achievement in the traditional, inclusive classroom frequently refer students for testing (NAGC, <http://www.nagc.org/GiftedEducationStandards.aspx>; Van Tassel-Baska, 2000). Some behaviors exhibited by gifted students include superior reasoning powers, outstanding problem-solving ability, asking searching questions, having a wide range of interests, being markedly superior in quality and quantity of written and/or spoken vocabulary, reading avidly and absorbing books well beyond his or her years, showing insight into arithmetical problems that require careful reasoning, showing creative ability or imaginative expression, setting realistically high standards for self, and being self-critical in evaluating and correcting his or her own efforts (Clark, 2002; ERIC, 1990, Silverman, n.d).

The largest number of testing referrals comes from classroom teachers (NAGC, <http://www.nagc.org/GiftedEducationStandards.aspx>; Tuttle, 1988). Parents can refer their child in most districts and some districts allow for self-referral for students. Once a child has been referred for testing, they then take a state-approved standardized test. While most of the tests do not specifically test for a person's IQ, they do give a general indication where the test taker would fall on the IQ spectrum with a score of 120-129 being superior and above 130 being highly superior (WISC IV, 2003). Gifted educators generally agree that IQ tests are not 100 percent accurate and that identification of a student should never be based strictly on an IQ score (Borland, 1986; Cohn, 1988;

Renzulli, 1999; Sternberg et al, 1996; Sternberg, 2014; Van Tassel-Baska, 2000), especially for younger children. This has created an expectation in the field that portfolios, parent observations, and student achievements in relation to age peers should all be taken into consideration in addition to a student's IQ score (Borland, 1989; Van Tassel-Baska, 2000).

The list of approved tests varies between states but most use tests that are produced by national testing companies, have been validated, and are norm-referenced. Some of these are the Cognitive Abilities Test (CoGAT), Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT), Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC IV), and the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT). In addition, when there is concern that a ceiling effect (Cohn, 1988) may occur on a given test, the SAT or PSAT can be administered for out of level testing. Students who "hit the ceiling" on the test for their age group essentially have no errors or they are so few that when norm-referenced against age peers it appears they have no errors. By giving younger students a test designed for older students there is a wider range of knowledge the test taker may not have thus allowing room for errors. The student's score can then be norm-referenced to determine their intellectual age. For example, an elementary student that reads and does math well beyond his grade level is given one of the approved cognitive tests. His score indicates that he answered every question correctly. In order to determine how much more advanced he is, an out of level test is given, the PSAT. His score on the PSAT, once norm-referenced, indicates that he has scored the same as the average middle school student. This information gives educators a better frame of reference for the academic and intellectual abilities of a student. School districts that choose to test for creativity frequently use the Torrance

Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT). This test can be given as a figural where students draw responses or as a verbal where they write responses as appropriate (Torrance, 1980). Districts may also choose to administer the Raven Matrices Test in place of the TTCT. Once a student has tested and met the stated requirements for the state and school district, they are then labeled as gifted and placed into the school's gifted programming.

Programming models. Programming is the curriculum delivery model chosen by the state or district. Programming is at the discretion of the state as there is no federal mandate and then falls to the local districts if the state does not mandate a programming model. Local districts choose their model to best fit their needs from administrative, funding, student population, and staffing perspectives (Borland, 1989, Van Tassel-Baska & Brown, 2001). Funding is often the key component for the chosen programming model. Many experts agree that there is no one best model for gifted programming (Borland, 1989; Van Tassel-Baska & Brown, 2001). There are a multitude of options from cluster grouping (least costly and least disruptive to students and school) to self-contained programs (most expensive and potentially most disruptive to students and school). Some of the most frequently used district-wide programming models are (NAGC, 2008; Van Tassel-Baska & Brown, 2001; Renzulli, 1999):

Cluster grouping. Cluster grouping involves having identified students work as a group in the traditional classroom on curriculum appropriate to their learning level, usually while the rest of the class works on the same subject but at a lower level. Since cluster grouping does not involve additional staff or students missing core instruction this model is often the most cost-effective and easiest to implement.

Pull-out. The pull-out model consists of identified students leaving the traditional classroom to work on curriculum appropriate to their learning level in a separate classroom with other identified students. Pull-out programs can be administered by gifted area (verbal, quantitative, or spatial) or as a whole. The amount of time a student is in their gifted classroom is determined by the district. Instruction can be by trained gifted educators or teachers chosen by the school/district.

Self-contained. Self-contained models involve identified students receiving all or almost all instruction in a separate classroom consisting of only gifted students and are frequently taught by an educator with training in gifted learners. This program model is prohibitive to many districts from staffing, space availability, and community opposition standpoints. In general, American ideas of equality are inherently anti-special programs for students frequently viewed as already having “a leg up” on others through higher intellect and a broader range of skill sets (Mazie, 2009; Ward, 2005). This is felt more now with NCLB designed to give all students an equal chance of academic success yet funding is heavily diverted to supporting average and below average learners (Ward, 2005). Without educating the community on the benefits of self-contained programming, the equality mindset can overwhelm a district’s good planning and intentions. This program model works best when implemented for elementary and middle school students. Most secondary education implements an AP model for gifted students.

School-wide Enrichment Model (SEM). A three part plan where students choose from a menu of curriculum choices in individualized learning plans created using a questionnaire that assesses interests and learning styles. SEM was developed by Joseph Renzulli working with Sally Reis (Renzulli, 1999). SEM is often less politically charged

within the local community as it can be used for all students regardless of giftedness or gifted area but is a significant expenditure by the school district as the model is technology based. This requires the school to have enough student computers with internet access.

In addition to district-wide models, there are a multitude of options for students in cases where the chosen model is not sufficient or there is no model in place. As listed in *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (2004), some of these options include:

- Early admission to kindergarten, first grade, middle school, or high school
- Grade skipping
- Self-paced instruction
- Subject matter acceleration
- Curriculum compacting
- Early graduation
- Dual/concurrent enrollment (middle/high school or high school/college)

This is not an inclusive list as a “mix-and-match” implementation is the most often used plan. This variety of options for gifted student education allows for the best fit for the student as well as the school.

To summarize, gifted education in America is socially constructed, involves an ongoing debate regarding the influence and nature of intelligence, has wide ranging policy concerns, has few agreed upon definitions or identification procedures, and includes a list of ways that students can be educated once they have been identified

satisfactorily. Determining exactly who those students are psychologically to best serve them is the next step.

Self-Identity Formation

Before discussing self-identity of gifted adolescents, it is helpful to have a brief discussion of identity creation. The field of psychology has been studied in some form since ancient times and many models of identity creation have been put forth through the ages. For the purposes of this study, I will be using Erik Erikson's (1997) model as it is a strong fit with many gifted students. It is important to note that concepts within identity creation and Erikson's theory such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as separate stages are social constructs that are not recognized in all cultures.

As mentioned previously, Leta Stetter Hollingworth worked with gifted students in her studies. Not as well known in the field of gifted education is her work in adolescent psychology (Hollingworth, 1928). In her studies with adolescents in general, Hollingworth (1928) found that, "Typically the self must be 'found' during adolescence, if at all" (p. 172). This is in line with Erikson who conducted his research after Hollingworth from 1936 until the late 1960s. Erikson developed a theory containing eight stages of identity development, the most important for this study being Fidelity – identity versus ego as this is the stage primarily correlated to the age of the study's participants. When an individual enters adolescence, they must affirm or repudiate childhood identifications while recognizing- and being recognized by- the society in which they live (Erikson, 1997). During adolescence, according to Erikson's theory, individuals encounter:

- identity confusion (the inability to accept any particular identity elements completely to themselves),
- role repudiation (active and selective separation of roles and values that seem workable in identity versus what is considered unworkable),
- and negative identity (socially unacceptable identity that the individual affirms against societal and family recommendations) (Erikson, 1997).

According to Erikson's theory, negotiating these different aspects of identity confirmation is the cornerstone of adolescent personal/emotional growth.

James Marcia (2002a) expanded Erikson's stages theory after noting that adolescence is important in Erikson's theory for two reasons: it is the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, and it is the time during which a fourth personality structure, an identity, is added to the previous structures of ego, self, and superego. As with Erikson's theory, the stages Marcia added are socially constructed and are not recognized globally. The additional stages Marcia added are *moratorium identity* during which the individual takes time to decide what parts they want to add/confirm to themselves and is usually a transitional identity/period leading to *identity achievement*. *Foreclosed identity* is obtained by individuals who have not undergone an exploratory period (p. 12, italics added). Adolescents who have *identity diffusion* may find that they are either a stereotypical or isolated person when they enter young adulthood, not having found or settled on a set identity for themselves (Marcia, 2002b, italics added).

Understanding the general idea that adolescents have to "try on" different aspects of identity to find one that fits their idea of Self raises the question, "What is the self?" This topic has received enough attention to warrant its own area of study in psychology.

However, in the scope of the review of relevant literature several ideas were found. Hollingworth (1928) found that the “innermost self” is a combination of “the physical self, the sartorial self, the social and the moral self, the occupational self, and so forth.” (p. 169). It has been questioned if the self is a physical item with a corresponding sense (Mathews, Bok & Rabins, 2009), acknowledged that we as humans do not know what the self is or how it comes to be but we have many theories about it (Maxwell, 1998; Roeper & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2007), and we have defined the self in a variety of ways. Hogg and Cooper (2003) defined it as “the totality of interrelated yet distinct psychological phenomena that either underlie, causally interact with, or depend upon reflexive consciousness” (p. 110). In addition, Kashima, Foddy, and Platow (2002) found that “when there is a strong commonality among what the individual does and thinks across different contexts, what is retrieved likely has a clear central tendency, resulting in a sense of the unitary self” (p. 46). Interestingly, Wortham (2008) noted that, “Sometimes individuals are identified, of course, and sometimes one event is pivotal for the lasting social identification of an individual” (p. 301). If this is the case for gifted students, it could be the social expectations, the cultural understanding of giftedness, the label of gifted, or any combination of these things that directly affect self-identity development. In asking participants to create a visual representation of their life since coming to the gifted school, I attempted to discover evidence of their process of creating self-identity; what, if anything, was central to that process; and the lasting effects on their self-identity.

Gifted Self-Identity

Studies with gifted students have been conducted since the early 1920s when Leta Hollingworth conducted her famous study on highly gifted individuals (Hollingworth,

1942) and Lewis Terman conducted his longitudinal study on highly gifted individuals (Terman, 1925). Highly gifted refers to those with IQs beyond 140. Using these studies as a launching point, research has progressed into studying other aspects of gifted students such as characteristics of gifted learners (see sections on Definitions and Identification), importance of IQ (see sections on IQ and Nature vs. Nurture), appropriate curriculum and educational environment (see section on Programming), and their social-emotional needs. In addition, a large body of research has studied the disproportionate number white males versus females and minority students identified for gifted programs. Like much of gifted education, there are two perspectives in the research: a failure of teacher education programs to provide preservice teachers with information on gifted behaviors resulting in teachers not knowing what to look for versus socially ingrained racial and gender bias in teachers.

Social interaction and gifted identity. Many of the theories of self have a social interaction component. Erikson (1997) stated,

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

The aforementioned quote summarizes what several researchers have found in their work with gifted students and self-identity: that ideas of self are created based on how others react to you (Cross & Coleman, 1993; Davis, Seider & Gardner, 2008; Frank & McBee, 2003; Grobman, 2006; Hertzog, 2003; Kinney, 1993; Klein, 2007; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; Mischel, 1977; Neihart, 1998), and that social identity of

gifted students is directly related to the social group(s) they interact with (Davis et al, 2008; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Gross, 1998; Kinney, 1993; McAdams et al, 2006; Mischel, 1977; Neihart, 1998; Norman, Ramsay, Roberts, & Martray, 2000). A gifted student's social identity is also perceived as their social standing (Berlin, 2009; Cross & Coleman, 1993; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Glaeser, 2003; Grobman, 2006; Gross, 1998; Hertzog, 2003; Kinney, 1993; Manaster et al, 1994; Moulton et al, 1998; Neihart, 1998; Rinn, 2006). This idea is important to note as adolescents are forming their identities of who they will become as adults during the same time that their ideas of what is considered socially acceptable is being reflected by those they interact with such as peers, parents, and educators. Middle grades are where adolescents form their self-identity as gifted individuals but also form their social identities based on their interactions with the same groups of peers, educators, and parents (Berlin, 2009; Cross & Coleman, 1993; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Frank & McBee, 2003; Glaeser, 2003; Grobman, 2006; Gross, 1998; Hertzog, 2003; Kinney, 1993; Klein, 2007; Manaster, Chan, Watt, & Wiehe, 1994; Moulton, Moulton, Housewright & Bailey, 1998; Neihart, 1998; Rinn, 2006). This body of research has demonstrated the important role social/peer response can play when considering gifted student self-identity.

Self perception and gifted identity. An integral part of creating identity in gifted students is the perception of themselves created by interactions with those around them. Many find themselves put in the position of adapting or adjusting their behavior based on their social location at the time. Ungar (2000) quoted one of his research participants, Tanya, as saying:

I change when I'm in a particular environment. How I'm talking here is not how I talk anywhere else. I'm a totally different person here than I am with my mom or my dad. I'm never the totally same person in every spot. I don't want people to know me totally, just a little bit about me. Feels better that way. (p. 175)

Another participant, Laura, stated:

I just stay with my friends who like me and believe in the way I do things and don't believe in what everyone else says. (p. 172)

Gross (1998) shared the following comment from a research participant:

It's getting to the stage that I'm beginning to dislike myself...I don't really approve of telling lies and I'm having to tell them all the time. I'm even telling lies about myself to myself. I'm going to end up not knowing who I really am. (p. 173)

Other researchers (Cross & Coleman, 1993; Davis, Seider, & Gardner, 2008; Glaeser, 2003; Samuels, 2008) have found similar findings in their respective studies.

Another aspect of gifted student self-perception is stereotyping. Research has found that stereotyping, or expectations of stereotyping, affects gifted children's perception of themselves or how they believe others perceive them (Berlin, 2009; Coleman & Cross, 1993; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Hertzog, 2003; Manaster et al, 1994; Moulton et al, 1998). If beliefs and fears related to stereotyping are prevalent in gifted student social interactions, this can distinctly influence both behavior and self-perception. The literature regarding gifted student social self-perceptions contains findings that both support and refute earlier work. In addition, more recent studies have found that parent and teacher expectations of gifted students also affect their self-perception (Berlin, 2007;

Hertzog, 2003; Manaster et al, 1994; Merkstroth, 1992; Moulton et al, 1998; Neihart, 2006; Norman et al, 1999; Nowinski, 2007; Porath & Lupart, 2009; Samuels, 2008).

An additional aspect of self-identity of gifted students in relation to social relationships is the forced choice dilemma (Gross, 1998). Gifted students feel compelled to choose between pursuing their gifts or playing dumb in order to fit in with age peers (Frank & McBee, 2003; Glaeser, 2003; Gross, 1998; Klein, 2007; Neihart, 1998). While many schools and educators make efforts to create communities of diverse learners and encourage tolerance, students themselves either create or perceive different environments in which they interact daily. One of these perceptions is caused by the actual label of 'gifted'. Studies have shown that students labeled as gifted have had both positive experiences such as feeling validated as "smart" in the eyes of adults and being placed in more challenging curriculum (Berlin, 2009; Cross & Coleman, 1993; Gates, 2010; Hoge & Renzulli, 1993; Manaster et al, 1994; Moulton et al, 1998) and negative experiences with the gifted label such as feeling that adults viewed them negatively, peers disliked them, and feeling increased internal pressure to be the best/perfect. (Cross & Coleman, 1993; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Hertzog, 2003; Hertzog & Bennett, 2003; Manaster et al, 1994; Moulton et al, 1998)

Parent and Educator Perceptions

It is important to note that there is very little literature on parent or teacher perceptions of gifted students. While it is occasionally written that educators are the professionals and parents are expected to let them do their jobs (Hertzog & Bennett, 2003; Roeper, 2007; Tolan, 1992), this is anecdotally mentioned without research support. However, the lack of research in this area seems to support that educators know

what is best for students and parent input is unnecessary, and the belief that the student and educator interactions are more important.

Parent perceptions. One of the key points noted in much of the literature is that parents of gifted children are aware of, and adjust for, the traits that their child has that other children do not. These traits include a strong sense of justice, self-direction, autonomy, inner drive, nonconformity, and a need for challenging curriculum.

A repeated finding in many studies of gifted children is that of inner drive and autonomy. Grobman (2006) found that the inner drive of his participants (patients) “felt like an obligatory force of nature” (p. 200). He also found that their need for autonomy developed early and was a strong part of each of their personalities. Klein (2007) found, “Gifted children insist on marching to their own drummer, which includes the ability to learn quickly on their own and the ability to make up rules as they go along” (p. 15). While these traits can lead to problems in the classroom, parents often find them to be a positive aspect of their gifted child.

Parental expectations of gifted students can be influenced by the school’s approach to gifted education. Some research found that parents reported unhelpful administrations that resisted appropriate educational modifications for gifted students such as subject or grade acceleration or controversy regarding gifted education in general wherein school administrators did not believe gifted programming was necessary (Grant, 2002; Hertzog & Bennett, 2003; Martin, 2002; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012; Tolan, 1992). When the school is unsupportive of gifted education, parents find it hard to stabilize their expectations of their gifted child. Other research found that many parents of gifted students had little to no framework for how to educate their child

(Solow, 1995). Without a framework of what giftedness is within their community and the academic situation, parents find it hard to know what needs to be provided to create the most appropriate learning environment for their child.

In conjunction with the finding regarding a lack of framework for giftedness, several studies have found conflicting data on parental expectations of their children in regards to socialization problems. Some parents felt it was the child's fault, sometimes but not always attributed to their giftedness (Norman et al, 1999; Roeper, 2007; Solow, 1995), while others felt there were few or no socialization issues at all (Galloway, Briar, Porath, & Marion, 1997; Solow, 1995). These conflicting findings can be attributed to a variety of research variables such as differences in data collection methods, differences in data analysis, and different participant groups; but one of the variables could be the lack of a framework for identifying (or even understanding) gifted behaviors.

Educator perceptions. Like parents, educators often find that they have a lack of framework for working with gifted students. The overriding pressure of NCLB has put educators in the position of having to teach to the middle and lower learners at the expense of the higher learners. As Benson (2002) noted:

In theory, the teacher with a heterogeneous group of students will receive support and assistance from his/her colleagues more familiar with how to best serve the needs of students who represent either end of the ability spectrum, namely those from the gifted and special education programs. In reality, at least in my experience, this support structure is nonexistent in any form but lip service and the individual teacher is left to his/her own devices for how to best handle the situation. (p. 126)

This is underwritten by the fact that many educators support all culturally accepted definitions of giftedness in academic settings (Schroth & Helfer, 2009) and that the personal feelings of the educator can affect a student's ability to be recognized for gifted services regardless of actual need (Cross & Coleman, 1993; Galloway et al, 1997; Gates, 2010; Grant, 2002); Hertzog, 2003; Norman et al, 2000; Tolan, 1992). Teachers who are familiar with classroom behaviors evidenced by gifted students have higher referral rates for gifted testing while teachers who are not familiar with these behaviors in relation to giftedness have higher referral rates for special education testing, most often ADHD. At young ages, classroom behaviors of gifted students – loud outbursts, impatience, constant movement, inability to sit still, higher than normal levels of frustration at not getting something correct, short attention span – can be, and is often mistaken for ADHD. An overwhelming number of early career teachers feel comfortable identifying behaviors associated with ADHD but are unaware that those same behaviors could be a result of giftedness (Bangel, Enersen, Capobinaco, & Moon, 2006; Baum & Olenchak, 2002; Kos, Richdale, & Hay, 2006; Krochak & Ryan, 2007; Newman, Gregg, & Dantzler, 2009; Rinn & Nelson, 2009; Webb, Goerss, Amend, Webb, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2006).

The rare teacher education program has a course or two in gifted education to prepare pre-service teachers for identifying gifted students within the traditional, inclusive classroom setting and/or developing curriculum appropriate to the learning level of gifted students in their classrooms (Cooper, 2008; Lee, 2008). These pre-service teachers learn to evaluate student behaviors within a variety of frameworks and find ways to help students be successful in the school setting.

Need for New Research

Concerns with current research. There are several concerns with the currently available research on self-identity of the gifted student. One is that there is a dearth of research in these areas compared to other aspects of gifted education and what is available is dated. Almost every study references the same three studies (Coleman & Cross, 1988; Kerr, Colangelo, & Gaeth, 1988; and Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). Some newer studies take into consideration social changes and cultural expectations; but many still use these dated studies to frame their own. Another commonality within the reviewed literature is that of self-reporting. While many of the studies conducted quantitative analysis of the collected data, small sample sizes and self-reporting of the analyzed data can make comparisons between studies difficult. Additionally, one author noted that, "...because our knowledge of issues pertinent to children is largely "proxy information" gathered by researchers but unconfirmed by children themselves, the researcher's way of "seeing children" is critical in eliciting valid and useful information." (Porath & Lupart, 2009, p. 91). These issues are critical to consider when collecting information via self-reporting and surveys.

New research. New research should consider ways of accessing student feelings, ideas, and concerns that move away from self-reporting and surveys and move more toward children's self-representations and explanations of these concepts. Methodologies such as photo elicitation, autoethnography, and life story allow children to tell their own story instead of researchers gathering proxy information. Younger children can orally relate their own stories and experiences when writing or typing are beyond their current skill set.

It is also necessary to update much of the research to current social and cultural contexts where gifted students are creating identities online, in schools, and in social groups outside of the academic environment. The advances in technology and its infiltration into all aspects of life have had a major impact on how gifted students create self-identity yet little of the research being undertaken has focused on this fact. Current social and cultural contexts for adolescent self-identity are directly tied to technology and its impact on life in general. Harrison (1999) combined photo elicitation with participant created drawings while studying stage development in young gifted students. As the literature shows, studies on gifted student self-identity, studies using visual media to explore stage theory, and studies using digital media to explore self-identity have been conducted; however this study is the first of its kind to meld digital media creation with visual methods specifically in the field of gifted self-identity.

Summary

Erikson's (1997) theory of self-identity formation, expanded by Marcia (2002a, 2002b), lays the groundwork for understanding how adolescents become who they are as adults. There are several stages where adolescents can become "stuck" while forging their adult selves. In order to progress through the growth process, adolescents must "try on" various identities and get social feedback to find what feels best to them. The social feedback each receives creates a different sense of self in turn.

Gifted students have perceptions of themselves that are based on labels, social feedback such as the "forced choice" dilemma, teacher and parent expectations, and stereotypes. Acknowledging and evaluating these various aspects and the effect they

have on gifted student self-concept can help adults in a gifted child's life to assist with the growth process.

An improved understanding of how gifted children develop self-identity and self-perception can be used to inform parents and educators of ways to create better, more effective curriculum, and social/emotional supports as well as informing these same groups of the most effective way to interact with gifted students. By allowing students to tell their own story in the time they live in, researchers can help all parties involved to relate to each other in more effective ways. As research has shown, educators often have preconceived ideas of gifted students and parents often do not have a framework for raising their gifted child. Allowing gifted students to tell their own story in any number of ways can positively contribute toward alleviating these issues.

Gifted students appear to develop self-identity in much the same way as non-gifted students, but they are more sensitive to expectations, social cues, and labeling. Some of this is due to differences in personality traits found in many gifted students such as a strong sense of justice, self-direction, autonomy, inner drive, nonconformity, and a need for a challenging curriculum. Other times, it is due to the social and cultural context of where they live and attend school. New research that takes this into consideration in its methodologies and reporting design can make a valuable impact in gifted education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Structural Constraints

The process of designing a research study, producing a dissertation from the collected data, and successfully completing the doctoral program for entry and acceptance into the chosen field can feel similar to a choose-your-own-adventure book – while you as the student and researcher have an idea and a plan, there are a multitude of choices that have to be made throughout the doctoral program by other parties that can change the course of the plan. Every doctoral student, regardless of field, has experienced a change of plan, a redirection of research agenda, or a significant setback of some kind. Acknowledging and recognizing the obstacles and restraints within a program can serve two purposes: it allows fellow doctoral students to understand they are not alone in their struggles and it allows the reader to understand the context within which the research was conducted and analyzed, the outside influences that shape the final product.

My original research study was designed as a narrative construction written as a novel in the humanities tradition like English and creative writing, incorporating the traditional literature review, methodologies, and data analysis within the content of the novel itself. This plan was approved by my committee in place at the time with Institutional Review Board approvals for data collection. A series of events including changes in committee chair and members and their areas of expertise, study site delays, addition of a second study site, delays within departments providing required approvals, and loss of faculty and their knowledge through retirement, restructuring, and/or

transition to new universities, forced my original plan to evolve into the current work being presented.

The field of gifted education is small at the research level and most academics in the field know each other and where they work as well as where most gifted schools are located. Collecting data at gifted study sites with a limited participant pool creates challenges for protecting both participant identity and institutional reputations. The students all know who participated in the study as do the gifted educators. Ensuring student immunity from any form of backlash as a result of this study was a paramount concern that directly affected my choice of data analysis methods. Additionally, as the study prompt was very open-ended, it was impossible to anticipate how participants would create their videos. Assuming that students would include images of family, friends, and classmates raised concerns about protecting identities and acquiring the consent of people included that were not participants. In order to protect identities of all people that could possibly be involved, the decision was made to not ask IRB approval for direct video use in publications. The approved research protocol stated that identifiable data would be confidential or given pseudonyms to protect all parties.

One direct effect of this decision is the limitations it imposes on data analysis. Most of the participants created videos of themselves speaking to the camera. Without approved consent forms for use of minors' images and no way of concealing their identity, data analysis methods that would have exposed them such as image analysis (analyzing participant images) were not available as options. As a result of these limitations, the original study was designed to be a novel wherein the data generated from the participants' videos and the related photo elicitation interviews would be used to

develop narrative. The final product has turned out to be a modified narrative dissertation using portraiture for data analysis. Photo elicitation, digital storytelling, and narrative research (each discussed in detail below) were the original methodologies planned. Data from participant videos and interviews was predominantly related to how identification as gifted and the change in educational environment impacted their development of self-identity. In order to protect student identity yet showcase the data provided by participants, the creation of character composites to create portraits of the participants was a necessary change within the structural constraints of completing my doctoral program.

As a methodology, photo elicitation involves interviewing participants about photographs to hear their perspective in their own words. Using digital storytelling to create multimedia “photographs” to use in photo elicitation interviews with gifted adolescents allows participants to be more fully immersed with the prompt at a personal level between their comfort with technology and the freedom to interpret the prompt in the way that best fits their personality as opposed to only taking traditional pictures. The nature of photo elicitation interviews is narrative as the participant tells the interviewer a story and as such narrative research methods fall nicely into place for constructing the data analysis.

Photo Elicitation Interviews

Traditionally, visual images in research have been in the domain of anthropologists and sociologists (Banks, 1998). Only recently has visual media begun to be more acceptable within the realm of educational research. With the release of Collier’s *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* in 1967 and the

revised version in 1986, visual media (especially photography) have had a much larger acceptance in some fields with education still lagging behind (Fischman, 2001; Moore, Croxford, Adams, Refaee, Cox and Sharples, 2008). One of the possible reasons for the slow to warm response in educational research may be what has been observed in the literature as the researcher giving up control (Banks, 1998; Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, and Phoenix, 2008; Harper, 2002; Kettle, 2011; Moore et al, 2008; Thomson and Gunter, 2007). Harper (2003) notes, “Like all research, visual research depends upon and redistributes social power.” (p. 192). Most Western educational systems have been built on a power structure of some kind – generally a top-down design – where relinquishing control to those lower on the power hierarchy may make some researchers uncomfortable. It is also possible that as traditional research has been numbers and text oriented (Fischman, 2001) with a strong “scientific” design having a research project without those components may make educational researchers uncomfortable as well.

Photo elicitation as a methodology involves using photographs either provided by the researcher(s) or taken by the participant and using them to stimulate conversation. Often, the conversations are informal, unstructured open-ended questions about the pictures so the researcher can get the participant’s views, feelings, concerns, etc., regarding the photograph and its context ideally limiting any preconceived expectations or theoretical interpretation on the part of the researcher. By allowing the participants to take their own photographs, they not only give researchers access to aspects of their lives that otherwise would be out of reach (Moore et al, 2008), but participants take direct control of the interview (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Harper, 2002; Moore et al, 2008). Heisley (2001) (as quoted in Kettle, 2010) argued that photo elicitation can be used as

an independent research method as opposed to supplementing another methodology. Photo elicitation as a methodology causes the photo “lose its claim to objectivity” and to “unlock the subjectivity of those who see the image differently from the researcher” (Harper, 2003). The use of photo elicitation interview techniques in my study encouraged a dialogue where the participants would frequently start a descriptive process and end by questioning larger relationships in their life. For example, a participant began by describing the room choice for where the digital story had been recorded. By the end of her description, she had evolved into how her room was a statement and visual representation of who she was as a person. Her awareness of this had never occurred before as evidenced by her response of, “Wow! I never caught that before. I just decorated with stuff I liked.” Photo elicitation allows the participant’s story to be shared with much more of their own voice and less of the researcher’s.

One of the growing areas of research has been in underserved populations, those traditionally recognized as minority or of low socio-economic status. The term “underserved populations” has changed in definition over time but the wonderful thing about photo elicitation as a methodology is that it is an ideal way for students from all walks of life to describe in their own voice how they view their experiences. Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, and Phoenix (2008) noted that images introduce a topic without the need for words and offer the chance to introduce aspects of their lives that could have been left out or inadvertently missed by the researcher. They also noted that the methodology may be well suited for uncovering sensitive issues that do not fit well with cultural stereotypes – i.e., with the dominant discourse in school systems. Thomson and Gunter (2007) found that photo elicitation gives of those with “subjugated knowledges” a chance to be heard.

As these researchers have observed, by allowing the participants to engage with the photographs and share their own views of what they are seeing from their own perspective the voices of all parties are heard. Participants at one study site in the current study were chosen specifically for their non-traditional status within gifted programs, i.e. that they were minority, minority and female, and/or of low socio-economic status. Photo elicitation is very well suited to these participants as their story becomes the data.

One of the ever-present concerns for educational researchers is that of power relations between the researcher and the researched. Who is qualified to speak for whom and why? Did the participant share as much as they could or did they only share what was specifically asked for? Were they uncomfortable in the research setting, with the questions, with the particular researcher physically present in the setting? All of these factors play into the power structures between the researcher and the researched. By using photo elicitation methods where the participants choose what photographs to take and then having an informal, conversation style interview with the participants about the photos they shot, power barriers are more likely to weaken (Croghan et al, 2008; Gourlay, 2010; Harper, 2002; Magnini, 2006; Moore et al, 2008). Having a less power divided relationship with participants can allow for a more relaxed research setting where participants are more comfortable sharing their honest feelings, emotions, and beliefs thereby creating more reliable data.

Banks (1998) pointed out that photography is not objective as people create their identities on film – knowingly or not. Even if participants take the photos for the research study, they still may be creating a particular identity unknowingly that may come out in the conversation about the photos (Croghan et al, 2008). Pinney (as quoted

in Ketelle, 2010) argued that the photograph's artistic qualities and reinterpretation can open up new ways of understanding and interpreting a single image and allows people from all cultures and experiences to share their view(s). This procedure is fueled by the radical but simple idea that two people standing side by side, looking at identical objects, see different things (Harper, 2002). In saying this, Harper sums up what Banks pointed out: photographs can show one thing, but two people looking at it can see two different things. A research participant might think they are showing a specific part of their life but without their commentary to fill in the blanks the researcher may see what they want to see, what they believe is there (Morris, 2007).

The battle cry of teenagers has forever been, "You just don't understand!" Photo elicitation interviews weaken this potential barrier to accessing student perspectives by not only allowing adolescents to take the photographs but also giving adolescents the opportunity to explain the story behind the photographs in their own words. While I as the researcher choose some aspects such as which data to include and how it is presented, the data itself is the voice of the participants as they experience it. As participants, these gifted middle school students have the majority share of the power in determining what a given photo means *to them*. Giving gifted students the opportunity to share their perspectives about their gifted identity through digital storytelling allows participants to thoughtfully tell their stories to an interested listener. As the researcher, my knowledge, biases, and expectations should be placed behind the participant voices as much as possible for photo elicitation to be effective.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling allows people to tell their story in their own way by selecting a topic, conducting research, creating the text, and creating a video that addresses the topic in an interesting way (Robin, 2008). Several authors have found that there are specific items that should be included in a digital story to make it worthwhile. Some of these items/steps are: should be personal where the student determines what is “worth telling”, begins with a story/script, are concise (no more than five minutes in length), use readily available source materials (while most people would expect this to include or be only video most digital stories use still photographs and other items scanned in such as ribbons, medals and awards students have won, etc.), include universal story elements, involve collaboration, and should require interpretation by the viewer/learner (Coventry, 2008; Kajder, 2004; Rossiter and Garcia, 2010; Salpeter, 2005; Skouge and Rao, 2009).

Some authors found that they encountered problems with the steps of creating a digital story as they began working with their students. Some found there was a disconnect between what their students felt was appropriate for content of their digital story, what was “worth telling” that others would be able to learn from (Coventry, 2008; Kajder, 2004; Kieler, 2010; Rossiter and Garcia, 2010; Salpeter, 2005). Students today have become used to being told what is necessary or appropriate to learn in school due to high stakes testing that for them to decide what is worth sharing with or learned by another is often difficult for them to imagine. Other authors found that their schools’ requirements for what to teach in relation to standards or high stakes testing mandates created problems for justifying what they were doing in their classrooms with digital storytelling (Kajder, 2004; Robin, 2008; Skouge and Rao, 2009).

Students sometimes gain the ability to create agency for themselves using digital stories, create the ability to show their identity as they wish it to be seen as opposed to how it is currently viewed (Hull and Katz, 2006). By using digital stories in this way, students gain and exercise the skills needed to decontextualize artifacts from one arena and place them in another under different context, creating a new use for them. While most students do this to some extent with some number of things, students who gain these skills and exercise them via digital storytelling are creating agency and identity (Hull and Katz, 2006). Gibbons (2010), as part of a larger nationwide study researching media literacy in youth organizations where marginalized students created videos, found that, "... how identity is expressed in youth videos differs among organisations depending on whether fostering an individual or a collective identity is the goal" (p.8).

As students become more and more immersed in technology, using it to express themselves has become almost second nature everywhere from Facebook to email to digital stories. Many are more comfortable online than in the classroom using their online personalities in games such as World of Warcraft and Minecraft to interact with others in (online) social settings they would otherwise never consider in the classroom. Transferring this technical skill and comfort to digital storytelling for this research study to access gifted students' views about their educational experiences should help them to give more honest responses, to "reflexively interrogate visual data in dialogue with...spoken word" (Andrews et al, 2008, p. 83) as they do not have to navigate new skill sets or the affective filters that go into effect when struggling to learn a new skill/language.

Narrative Research Methods

Goodson, Biesta, Tedder and Adair wrote the following as the opening to *Narrative Learning* (2010):

The focus...is on stories: on the stories people tell about their lives and the stories they tell about themselves. Such stories are not entirely optional. It is not that we can simply choose to have or not to have them. In a very fundamental sense we exist and live our lives ‘in’ and ‘through’ stories. When we are born, we enter into a world full of stories: the stories of our parents, our generation, our culture, our nation, our civilization, and so on. Over time we begin to add our own stories and through this may alter the stories that have been told about who and what we are...Stories can give our lives structure, coherence and meaning, or they can provide the backdrop against which we experiences our lives as complex, fragmented or without meaning (p.1).

This is a powerful statement of how deeply stories affect humans as a whole regardless of country, culture, race, etc. If people learn and develop themselves via story and interacting with the stories of others (Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou, 2008; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson et al, 2010; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Webster and Mertova, 2007), does that make the story “true” or only their personal version of truth? Determining the answer to that question is one of the goals of narrative research. As noted by Polkinghorne (2005), “...because configurative analysis is the researcher’s construction, it is inappropriate to ask if it is the “real” or “true” story” (p. 93). While determining final truth is not the goal of narrative research, guiding readers to find their personal version of truth in the stories is. Another definition of narrative research

supports this goal of guiding readers to their own version of truth as noted by Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2008), “Narrative research is a multilevel, interdisciplinary field and any attempt to simplify its complexity would not do justice to the richness of approaches, theoretical understanding and unexpected findings that it has offered.” (p. 12)

Ivor Goodson (1994) detailed the importance of understanding the “tyranny of the local” and the “specificity of the personal” when writing narrative. The “tyranny of the local” is the need to create a story that people outside of the immediate area can relate to, identify with, and recount as relevant, authentic, and plausible. Escaping the “specificity of the personal” removes the writer’s personal identity, the writer’s personal ownership of an occurrence so that it becomes more general in nature. These two actions allow a writer to create a story that readers in many areas and many cultures can relate to and see themselves within the specific aspects of the narrative. “Life stories are ‘lives interpreted and made textual’ and should therefore be seen as ‘a partial, selective commentary on lived experience’ (Goodson and Sikes, 2001 as stated in Goodson et al, 2010). Life stories, narratives, should be “understood as accounts ‘of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons’” (Bruner, 1990 as stated in Goodson et al, 2010). In their daily interactions people do not worry about escaping the tyranny of the local or the specificity of the personal. The people they interact with, share their stories with, intertwine their lives with are people they know on a personal level. They are friends, relatives, their child’s teacher, the cashier at the supermarket, or the librarian at the public library. While these examples may not all be close personal relationships, sharing stories with them does not require the teller to make the leap from the local to the

general. The listener or the reader, the co-creator of the story, will understand the story even if it takes place outside of the local area because they are familiar with the characters in the story. But what do educational researchers do when they want to tell their story? How do they escape the tyranny of the local and the specificity of the personal with actual data, information collected at a research site and shared with people who have no point of reference? How do educational researchers share the stories of these research participants in ways that people all over the world can relate to? One of the best answers to these questions is narrative research.

Narrative research allows researchers to collect data and infuse that data into scenes using literary elements such as plot, setting, and characters that allow readers to relate to the events and the characters in ways they understand (Coulter & Smith, 2009). A “reconstruction of stories across times and places” (Andrews et al, 2008) allows the writer to create the level/depth of “truth” to their choosing. This also allows researchers to choose between what Bakhtin (1981) called an “epic” or a “novel”. An epic spends its time working toward one correct answer, that which the author has pre-determined to be so, and a novel that spends its time working with several perspectives, never fully committing to one option as the correct one and allowing the reader to determine for themselves which they believe to be the correct answer. Multiple voices in a narrative, polyphony (Bakhtin, 1981), often raise questions of the status quo and the currently held assumptions of the majority. Gibbons (2010) uses Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of chronotope, time and space in a novel, in a layered way to access polyphony in youth created videos to study self-identity narratives. As a narrative research study, this

dissertation's analysis is designed to be novel in the Bakhtin sense of allowing the reader to determine what the "truth" is for his/herself.

It is important to distinguish between analysis of narrative and narrative analysis. While the former analyzes narrative data and culminates in categories, the latter analyzes narrative data and culminates in a story (Polkinghorne, 2005). "Story" should not be regarded in the popular connotation of untrue or fictional. It is used to indicate the use of literary elements, specifically use of plot and characters, to create an experience for the reader affecting the narrative through processes (Bruner, 1985; Polkinghorne, 2005). Plot in narrative research serves to:

- (a) delimiting a temporal range which marks the beginning and end of a story, (b) providing criteria for the selection of events to be included in the story, (c) temporally ordering events into an unfolding movement culminating in a conclusion, and (d) clarifying or making explicit the meaning events have as contributors to the story as a unified whole. (Polkinghorne, 2005. p. 73)

Narrative cognition (Bruner, 1985) allows memories to "retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meaning connected with it." (Polkinghorne, 2005. p. 78-79) Using stories with plot enables narrative cognition to function allowing for learning to take place as knowledge is affected on a personal experience basis as opposed to a general idea basis (Polkinghorne, 2005). In addition, narrative analysis must include relevant contextual and cultural information, fit the collected data, and make the 'research report' understandable and plausible by use of a plot whereas analysis of narrative creates categories of information using narrative data of various kinds (Dollard, 1935 in

Polkinghorne, 2005). Narrative analysis is also a dialogic process (Bakhtin, 1981) between the researcher and the participants where the outcome is a story created by the exchange of information, feelings, and experiences.

Readers have an expectation of how information should flow. Polkinghorne (1988) identified some narrative as prosaic text that is in the form of natural discourse or speech, others as narrative in form of story (while specifying that they are temporal occurrences held together with a plot and not to be inferred that they are not truthful), and that “one technique they can employ is based on readers’ expectations that when a discourse contains story-like elements, such as setting and protagonists, a plot will be included that serves to display the elements as meaningful and consequential parts of a single enterprise” (pg. 8). However, when there are multiple characters in a narrative, the chronological linearity becomes negotiable (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). When data collected in research settings are written using narrative format readers will often remember the data longer in addition to being more inclined to share that information with others as they are familiar and expecting the pattern of a story.

The basis for narrative research is that of lived experience as told to someone is co-constructed between the teller, the writer, and the reader (Andrews et al, 2008; Bakhtin, 1981; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Webster and Mertova, 2007). While qualitative research can have aspects of the idea of the “lived experience,” narrative research by definition must be lived and then somehow told to another. “To begin with, the term *narration* suggests (1) a *communication* process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee and (2) the *verbal* nature of the medium used to transmit the message.” (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983. p. 2,

emphasis in original). One aspect of narrative research that all narrative researchers must learn and determine for themselves is where they fit within the narrative. As a researcher, just being present at the research site changes the dynamic of the study and creates co-constructed narratives (Andrews et al, 2008; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2005). How the narrative researcher chooses to account for that in the written account is at the discretion of the researcher and their comfort with both narrative research and literary elements (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Coylar & Holley, 2010; Lincoln, 1997 in Coylar & Holley, 2010). Do they prefer the first person, the third person, or that of the omniscient narrator? How reliable is the narrator? Can you change person/scenes/narrators effectively? Should you as the researcher be the narrator or a character in the account? What level of your professional knowledge should be included and how should it be included? Did your perspective change from the start of the study to the end and if so, how? Should this be included in the written account for the reader and again, if so, how – introduction, afterword, footnotes throughout? All of these are considerations for well written narrative research.

One concern of narrative research is often the concern of social research in general – who is qualified to speak for whom? As a researcher, am I qualified to speak for the student participants in my study? As a white female am I qualified to speak for a male, a black, a black male, a Latina, a Latino student? By using the combination of digital storytelling and photo elicitation in conjunction with narrative research I am creating a greater opportunity for the participant to tell their own story in their own words. By asking probing, self-reflective questions of the participants relating to their experiences with their giftedness, education, social experiences, and how these areas

interact in their digital stories, I can work to keep their voices and perspectives strong while actively working to limit my own assumptions and biases. Where the individual participant stories come together to tell the same story and where they diverge, their voices will still be their own with my acknowledged assumptions, biases, and limitations as a narrative researcher and the reader will be able to determine what the “right” or “best” answer is for them.

Portraiture

Qualitative researchers have a number of options to choose from when planning a study. While there are often several methodologies that could work, the researcher has to make the decision regarding which one will be the most effective for not only obtaining the data being sought but for analyzing that data and presenting it to their audience.

Study location and duration, funding, audience, researcher intent (the reason for the study in the first place), and institution limitations all play into what methodology is ultimately chosen. My original chosen methodology was narrative research with a narrative construction (Barone, 2007) novel for data analysis but structural constraints necessitated a shift more than a change in methodology. In order to escape the structural constraints and still maintain the narrative, qualitative methodology and data analysis, I shifted to portraiture as my methodology.

Portraiture as an identified, formal methodology is relatively new in the field of educational research. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot named it while doing it in 1983 as she researched “good schools” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Other fields such as anthropology (Geertz, 1974) have been creating portraits of peoples being studied for much longer. Even now, decades later, portraiture as a methodology seems to have far

fewer practitioners than other methodologies such as ethnography, autoethnography, and vignettes. A search for supporting literature returns few articles and almost exclusively they reference each other, Lawrence-Lightfoot's original work (1983), and her follow up work with Jessica Davis on the process of conducting portraiture research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This is not to say that researchers are not creating portraits of study participants; it is to say that if they are, their work is being classified/labeled in other areas such as qualitative, narrative, composite characters, overviews of cultures and/or peoples, or is in fields where portraiture is a traditional data analysis practice and does not need to be identified as such. These limitations of newness, classification/labeling, wide range of fields, and traditionally accepted methods make finding supporting and descriptive literature challenging.

As a methodology, portraiture is designed to marry narrative and analysis. Gaztambide-Fernández, Cairns, Kawashima, Menna, & VanderDussen (2011) stated, "Recognizing that descriptions are always interpretive, the portraitist uses creative writing to carefully craft a narrative that integrates her analysis of the data while also leaving the text open for interpretation," (p. 5). This view is similar to that of Barone (1992, 1997, 2007), Eisner (1988), Matthias & Petchauer (2012), and Witz (2006). Portraiture has been acknowledged, like most qualitative methods, to involve the researcher on a much more personal level than in mixed methods and quantitative studies. The biases and expectations of the researcher are more able to be displayed through their choice of what data to include and what to exclude, the story created to share the data, the voice used, the language chosen, the final image or experience the reader gains from the final product (Barone, 1992, 1997, 2007; Geertz, 1974; Witz, 2006). In addition, the way

in which a researcher listens to a story directly impacts their view of the data and what is worthy of inclusion (Matthias & Petchauer, 2012; Witz, 2006). It is important to note that this is a known and accepted part of narrative research; however, in pairing portraiture with photo elicitation (which is designed to allow the participant voice to come to the fore with as little researcher influence as possible) the created portrait has a stronger likelihood of being more participant voice and less researcher bias. The aim was to allow the photo elicitation interviews to create an avenue for participant data to coalesce into themes with minimal researcher assistance. That aim was achieved in that the themes displayed in the portraits that follow and discussed at the end of this dissertation were evident in almost all the participant interviews and I did not have to search for them. In asking for their story in this way, listening *for* their story, I was able to hear and share more of their stories and themes with less of my biases in the way.

Like all qualitative inquiry, portraiture stresses the balance between the empirical and interpretive and not defining a final truth (Barone, 1992, 1997, 2007; Eisner, 1988; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, 1986, 2005; Witz, 2006). In narrative research methods, the question of fiction becomes central to readers. What is created and what is factual? How does the reader know what is “true” and what is not? Barone (1992, 1997, 2007), Coulter & Smith (2009), Geertz (1974), and Holley & Colyar (2012) address this issue by incorporating literary elements such as plot, setting, characters, voice, “thick description”, and critical storytelling. By acknowledging to the reader that this is a narrative construction, a story designed to include the reader in the meaning-making process, the fact versus fiction argument is not lost but is set aside as acknowledged by

both parties as non-central to the goal of the work – sharing the portrait of another as a way for the reader to experience the culture, environment, location, self of another.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) discusses the paradox of portraiture and of being a narrative researcher. In her article, *Reflections on Portraiture: A Dialogue Between Art and Science* (2005), she perfectly explains that portraiture is inherently paradoxical:

The process of creating narrative portraits requires a difficult (sometimes paradoxical) vigilance to empirical description *and* aesthetic expression and a careful scrutiny and modulation of voice. It is a discerning, deliberative process and a highly creative one. The data must be scrutinized carefully, searching for the story line that emerges from the material. However, there is never a single story; many could be told. So the portraitist is active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative. What gets left out is often as important as what gets included—the blank spaces, the silences, also shape the form of the story. For the portraitist, then, there is a crucial dynamic between documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving *and* shaping, reflecting *and* imposing, mirroring *and* improvising . . . a string of paradoxes. The effort to reach coherence must both flow organically from the data *and* from the interpretive witness of the portraitist (p. 10).

With this description, Lawrence-Lightfoot silences narrative inquiry critics and “truth” critics by acknowledging for all researchers that portraiture is complex, interpretive, empirical, and personal all at once. By understanding and accepting that portraiture is

paradoxical, researchers using this methodology can work toward including less personal biases and toward more participant voices.

Narrative Dissertations

The expectation of a dissertation follows a prescribed format: it is usually five to seven chapters; has a literature review, methods, and data collection sections; and ends with a data analysis where the author informs the reader what they have determined from collected data. It frequently contains a section for future research and/or ideas for how to best implement research findings. Narrative dissertations do not follow this prescribed format. Narrative dissertations, as described by Webster and Mertova (2007) in *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method...*, are:

Theses in which the researcher has used personal writing to present personal reactions and experiences to the study... Included in the reporting is the reflective process of analyzing the research process itself; in other words, exploring the dimensions of narrative inquiry. In the overall process of writing, the narrative is also seen as an iterative process, one of change over time (p. 18).

Narrative dissertations include ways of encouraging the reader to form their own opinions of the collected data as presented in a story format. They “allow us to watch what an experience can do to people who are living that experience...offer us a way of experiencing those effects without experimenting with our own lives...” (Webster and Mertova, 2007. p. 20). As already discussed, humans learn best from story as they can relate to it as well as relate it to others in conversation. Fables and parables are fantastic examples of this. In academia, it can be difficult to shift from the standard dissertation format to a narrative format. It may seem to some, depending on discipline, that sections

are missing or that the researcher did not complete the final process of analyzing the data to inform readers of what was found. It may feel awkward, informal, or worse – “made up” or fictional (Andrews et al, 2008). Yet, a well-crafted narrative dissertation will encourage the reader to create their own opinions of the topic being researched. A well-crafted narrative dissertation will create more questions than it answers; it strives to be a novel and not an epic (Bahktin, 1981). This dissertation is presented as a modified narrative dissertation containing traditional chapters with narrative constructed data analysis.

Narrative dissertations are not new. In Creative Writing, English, and Interdisciplinary doctorates it is commonplace to write a novel as the dissertation or final component of the course of study (Babiak, 1998; Barbosa-Jerez, 1999; Bennett, 2011; Blair, 2001; Borchelt, 1999; Brown, 2010; D’Antoni, 2001; Daugherty, 2000; Fragoulis, 1999; Glass, 1997; Hamilton, 1999; Harr, 2010; Heckman, 2000; Hoffman, 2009; Hutchinson, 1997; Kapcala, 2010; Lannon, 2002; Luehr, 2007; Lyons, 2008; Mandelbaum, 2008; Mauldin, 2013; Melnyk, 2001; Mukundbhai, 2005; Orr, 2012; Pineda, 2002; Reedy, 1999; Sanderson, 1996; Schwartz, 2000; Sloan, 2006; Stuart, 2006; Sundberg, 2007; Taylor, 2011; Turner, 2004; Wentworth, 2011; Wyly, 1997). In addition, terminal degrees in the arts frequently produce narrative theses (ex: Enslow, 1997; Leal, 2003). The concept of narrative dissertation crosses disciplines and continues to grow. There are examples in Education (Burdick, 2012; Cote, 2010; Damelin, 2002; De La Garza, 2011; Hobday-Kusch, 2009; Huntly, 2010; Johnson, 2011; LaJevic, 2009; Lander, 2005; Lipszyc, 2006; Mauldin, 2011; Perry, 2010, Sands, 2003; Schultz, 2006; Sellitto, 1991; Skillen, 2009; Val Feilen, 2009; Wright, 2004), Communications (Kahl,

2008; Stewart, 2010; Williams, 2010), Anthropology (Bechter, 2009; Henderson, 2012; Dobson, 2012; Frankel, 2013; Krupa, 1999), Humanities (Khraish, 2009; Mass, 2002; Raskin, 2004) and Psychology (Barfield, 2010; Luminais, 2012). While this is but a minute sampling of narrative dissertations, the most well known in the field is *Boundary Bay* by Risha Dunlop published in 1999. Dunlop's dissertation focuses on the educational experiences of secondary teachers as well as doctoral students. *Boundary Bay*, as well as innumerable dissertations prior to 1999, has continued to have a strong following of qualitative researchers using it as a guide and presents a strong case for the method as a dissertation format.

Data Collection

This study was conducted at two sites specifically designed for educating highly gifted students. The total number of study participants was 11 with 4 at Location 1 and 7 at Location 2. Students had been identified in accordance with state statutes on gifted education and local school district policies stemming from the state statutes. The state statute (state not listed for anonymity) reads,

In this article, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. "Gifted education" means appropriate academic course offerings and services that are required to provide an educational program that is an integral part of the regular school day and that is commensurate with the academic abilities and potential of a gifted pupil.

2. "Gifted pupil" means a child who is of lawful school age, who due to superior intellect or advanced learning ability, or both, is not afforded an opportunity for otherwise attainable progress and development in regular

classroom instruction and who needs appropriate gifted education services, to achieve at levels commensurate with the child's intellect and ability.

In addition, state statutes regarding local school district responsibilities for gifted education read as:

A. The governing board of each school district shall develop a scope and sequence for the identification process of and curriculum modifications for gifted pupils to ensure that gifted pupils receive gifted education commensurate with their academic abilities and potentials. Programs and services for gifted pupils shall be provided as an integrated, differentiated learning experience during the regular school day. The scope and the sequence shall:

1. Provide for routine screening for gifted pupils using one or more tests adopted by the state board as prescribed... School districts may identify any number of pupils as gifted but shall identify as gifted at least those pupils who score at or above the ninety-seventh percentile, based on national norms, on a test adopted by the state board of education.

Local school districts can lower their standard for identifying students from the mandated ninety-seventh percentile to a minimum that meets their individual district needs while still maintaining the rigor of their gifted program. One study site held to the state mandate while the other lowered their minimum percentile threshold slightly to allow for differences in student languages, lack of experience with standardized tests, and a wide range of ages from second to eighth grade. The tests approved by the state board for identifying gifted students include the Cognitive Ability Test (CoGAT), Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT), Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC IV),

and the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT), among others. These are standardized tests that are scored using national norms and can be given to students who either do not speak or read English or where English is their second language. As previously discussed, there are five recognized areas of giftedness and both study sites test for verbal, quantitative, and spatial ability using the listed tests. All study participants had been identified in at least one of these areas and most were identified in two or three.

By nature of the chosen population, the locations separated gifted students from mainstream students and consisted entirely of students who learn differently and generally at higher levels than age peers at other schools. There were notable differences between the locations as well as the student participants.

Location 1: Location 1 is a private school operating as part of a non-profit educational group. As a private school, the school can set acceptance criteria and tuition rates. Tuition assistance was available to families demonstrating need. At the time of the study, there were twenty-six (26) students enrolled at the school ranging in age from 9-14. All students were gifted by state definition and had passed an extensive interview process including an IQ test with a minimum score of 130. Students interested in attending the school must apply as they would for college including an essay, parent essay responses, interview with their parents, scoring in the 'Exceeds' category on state standardized tests, recommendation letters from a math and an English teacher, and have SAT/ACT test scores that meet the acceptance criteria. While this could seem normal for entrance into a private school, it is important to remember that the applicants to the school are between 12-15 years of age on average. To have a competitive SAT/ACT score at that age places the student in the top percentiles in the country.

Participants in the study were chosen using convenience sampling with the assistance of the school director. Due to the limited sample size of the participant pool as a whole (class being 26) and that limited research is available about specific student populations such as some race/ethnicities convenience sampling was the best choice. All students in the school were issued Apple laptops and iPads with internet access; therefore all participants had access to appropriate and necessary technology to create a digital story. Each iPad had a built-in digital camera and video camera capabilities. Each iPad and laptop also had iMovie software installed. Participants were already comfortable working with the technology and had access to it on a regular basis creating a situation where no additional cost or training was required to create the digital story.

The study was conducted with four participants. Although there were originally six participants technical problems prevented one from submitting a digital story and academic difficulties prevented the other. Participants were selected with the help of the school. A general call for participants was issued to the 26 students in the gifted program, of whom 6 students and their parents expressed willingness to participate in the study. Site visits were conducted once a week from October to December 2011 and data collection was conducted during weekly visits from February 2012 through April 2012. Participants created their digital stories outside of school and photo elicitation interviews were conducted during school hours at the end of April 2012. Interviews were audio taped after verbally receiving participant permission, in line with IRB approval. Parent participation interviews were conducted via phone for use as comparison data for student provided data.

Location 2: Location 2 is a subset of a local public school district, a “school within a school”. As such, it is subject to federal and state laws regarding discrimination, standardized testing, funding, and district-wide curriculum content per grade level. Being public, the school is tuition-free but does have an application process including gifted testing scores, student and parent essays, and state standardized test scores in the ‘Exceeds’ category. At the time of the study, there were approximately ninety students enrolled at the school across grades 6-8. All students were gifted by state definition and had passed the application process.

Participants in the study were chosen via voluntary sign up. An open invitation was issued to all students with a brief explanation of what the study would entail. Interested students were given parental permission consent forms and student assent forms. Those that returned the forms participated. All students in the school were issued Apple laptops with internet access; therefore all participants had access to appropriate and necessary technology to create a digital story. Each laptop had a built-in video camera and had iMovie software installed. Participants were already comfortable working with the technology and had access to it on a regular basis creating a situation where no additional cost or training was required to create the digital story.

The study was conducted with seven participants. As a teacher at the school, I had built relationships with all students in grades 6 and 7 as well as some in grade 8. Students were invited to participate in January 2013 and worked on the project until March 2013. The language arts teacher allowed participants to work on their digital story when they had completed other work as well as during lunch and after school. Data was collected in March 2013 with photo elicitation interviews conducted during school hours.

Interviews were audio taped after verbally receiving participant permission, in line with IRB approval.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Using multiple methodologies for data collection and analysis is like following a complex map to a new destination. As a reader/traveler, you have a general idea where/what the end destination is but getting there requires multiple roads and turns. Digital storytelling asks participants to create their own visual answer to an open ended prompt, essentially creating multimedia photographs. This is the first leg of the journey on the map. These multimedia photographs are investigated using photo elicitation where the researcher gathers the participants' stories through open ended interview questions. This is the second leg of the journey and overlaps with the first for some distance. Narrative research takes the collected data from the photo elicitation interviews and creates a story that allows the reader to find their own answers and understandings without specifically directing them to any "correct" answer. This is the final leg of the journey with the destination being data analysis using narrative construction to create a story that engages the reader, elicits a reaction of some kind, and hopefully stimulates conversation on the topic after the reading is complete. Participant created videos displayed their stories, photo elicitation interviews collected those stories (study data), that I reviewed for recurring themes and striking outlying instances. These themes and instances were embedded into narratively constructed stories as data analysis.

Narrative Construction/Creative Nonfiction for Data Analysis

Creative nonfiction is the writing-based version of narrative construction, the researched-based writing style that employs literary elements such as plot, tone, setting,

and character development/creation (Barone, 2007). Both styles adhere to the cardinal rule of the reader trusting that the story is true. As Lee Gutkind, editor of *Creative Nonfiction* and recognized godfather of creative nonfiction, states on his journal's site,

"Creative" doesn't mean inventing what didn't happen, reporting and describing what wasn't there. It doesn't mean that the writer has a license to lie. The cardinal rule is clear—and cannot be violated. This is the pledge the writer makes to the reader—the maxim we live by, the anchor of creative nonfiction: "You can't make this stuff up!" (<http://www.creativenonfiction.org/what-is-creative-nonfiction#sthash.zigV3o2c.dpuf>)

Narrative research and creative nonfiction have given credence to what narrative researchers strive to do: tell a good story. Some people are natural storytellers, knowing intrinsically how to weave truth (data) and plausible reality together seamlessly. Often, these people are or can be mistaken for making things up. Yet what they are doing is instructing, sharing, and learning in ways people can relate to. Polkinghorne (1995), drawing from Bruner, details narrative configuration as using data and storytelling together to communicate to readers. Caulley (2008) and Coulter and Smith (2009) help to describe how to use literary elements such as point of view, narrator reliability, authorial distance, and metaphor, figurative language, and theme in constructing creative nonfiction and narrative research.

There are varying opinions in creative nonfiction regarding what can be changed, obscured, or compressed without losing the truth the reader expects (Bloom, 2003).

Narrative construction, being researched based, allows for creation of composite characters, pseudonyms, and changed locations are necessary to protect the participants

of research studies (Wright, 2004). This is especially true in smaller fields of study or when working with children. As the study is both a smaller field within education and educational research and had children as participants, I have created composite characters to tell the stories of the participants.

The reader has an expectation of the creative nonfiction/narrative construction author to verify they were “there” to witness the story as it unfolded. This is usually done via the author including themselves as a character in the story (Sparkes, 2002). With the stories that follow, my evidence of “being there” follows each character composite as a Researcher Aside.

Researcher’s Place in Qualitative Research

All qualitative researchers are affected by their research. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) discuss the quandary of “loving” research subjects and “being in love” with them. Where is that line? How does one realize when they have crossed the line? What other ways can the research environment and the research itself affect the researcher? These seem to be considerations that a qualitative researcher must consider. However, as a narrative researcher, I feel I am more open to being affected by the research because I am the one creating the story. Multiple perspectives, multiple voices allow for discussion of alternative answers to “understood” problems and solutions. As noted by Cooper and White (2012) “...prime concerns of qualitative research is not the generalizability of findings but the understanding of the phenomenon...” (p.7). By including my “field notes” through Researcher Asides I am adding my voice, my perspective to the data that create the foundation for the story.

Participant Stories

Brianna. I got my test back today. I mean, it's not like it was hard or anything but it's awesome to see the A at the top of the page. I missed a couple but it gives me something to improve on, right? Getting them all correct is boring. What would I have to learn then? Every time I make that comment to my mom, she makes some mom comment about challenging myself and doing as well as my brother. *He* didn't go to school with nothing but gifted kids like him. *He* went to normal school. *He* got to play sports and get straight A's at the same time because his classmates and teachers didn't challenge him. At least not as much as I get challenged here. Not everyone can be perfect, you know? I have a 4.0 just like he did but I have to work harder for it than he did.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. I love my school, that it's challenging and all that. It's a perfect fit for me. The top students have a friendly competition to see who can be number one in the class for the longest. I've been number one or number two for most of the year. The competition pushes me to work harder, do more than everyone else. Some of them call me an overachiever but that's not fair. Just because I do more and better than they do... they're just jealous. They can be top of the class, too. They just don't want it as much as I do. It's interesting. Before, at my old school, I only had one or two people in class to compare to and we were in constant competition with each other. Now, I have the entire class. Some of them are more competitive than others – some of them don't care about being the best or their grades. How is that even possible?! – but at least I have a bigger group to push me.

When I first came to this school, my parents were afraid that I would cave to the pressure. Honestly, I think they were worried I wouldn't be as good as my brother. Good grades are what get you into college, you know. They were afraid I wouldn't be able to handle the pressure of a class full of kids like me and my grades would go down. Proved them wrong, huh? The pressure is pretty intense but its motivating most of the time. My parents put pressure on me to do well because I have this great opportunity to go to the school but also because I have an obligation to be great for the country and my generation. The smart kids are the ones that are going to find the cure for cancer, start new companies, colonize space. I don't know what I want to do after college or what I want to major in while I'm there. Everyone has an opinion, just ask my parents. They'll tell you exactly what I need to do with my life. There's pressure from my classmates but it's different now. Before, it was pressure to never be wrong, to always know the answers. It was like being on a pedestal and having to constantly worry about falling off. I had a reputation to uphold for being the smartest in class. Even when I did have a question, I couldn't ask – that would ruin my reputation. I would just go home and research it, teach myself before class the next day. Now, everyone in class is smart and the pressure of maintaining the top spot I put on myself. I can ask questions when or if I need to without feeling like I fell off the pedestal, like everyone lost respect for me or thinks I'm dumb. It's still a lot of pressure but it's different, I guess.

At least they get it here, the students and teachers, I mean. We're not like other kids. Kids like me need a school of just kids that are alike. We're different; we think and learn differently, we find answers in unusual ways. We learn faster and learn more information than normal kids. At my old school I had to learn a topic or concept like six

or seven times before the rest of the class got it. I had it after the first or second time. All that wasted time going over the same thing, over and over. And the next year having to review AGAIN what we learned the year before. It was awful! Here, the teachers teach something twice at the most and if someone has a question, they ask while we're working independently. That way the whole class doesn't have to sit through something they already know. I don't have to ask too many questions during independent work time, though. I get it the first time. That's probably why I'm either first or second in the class all the time.

I've noticed that when I'm with my normal friends I don't talk to them about school anymore. We talk about normal stuff like who likes who, TV shows, music, you know – teenager stuff. We don't talk about classes or college or what we want to do in life. We still hang out but I pretty much have two groups of friends: my smart friends and my normal friends. They could never hang out together. Are you kidding? My normal friends would make fun of my smart friends for being smart and my smart friends would feel bad but not do anything about it. I'm lucky to have both groups as friends – a lot of my classmates don't – but it's hard to switch between sometimes. Sometimes it feels like I'm two different people but I can handle it. I'm creative, outgoing, intuitive, and determined. I've taken several tests that show this is true. Besides, I know myself and those are good descriptions of me but it's nice to have the tests to back it up. Being an outgoing creator that intuitive makes it easy for me to handle both groups of friends without too many problems. Lucky them!

Anyway, I know I have different strengths than my brother and different opportunities but an A is an A, right? As long as I get into a good college I can still be as

good as he is, as good as the rest of my classmates, right? I can still be top of the class because they still give A's in college.

Researcher Aside: During the course of conducting interviews with my adolescent participants, the question of learning for the sake of knowledge versus learning for a grade came up with each participant. It was not a question I had pre-determined; it was an organic outgrowth of the dialectical exchange between us while having a conversation. Educators and parents often tell adolescents that “grades don't matter, it's about what you learn” yet the vast majority of what students do in school is graded. Students learn this at a very young age, and gifted children especially learn that grades are a reflection of their “intelligence” and “smarts” to everyone else. Grades create bragging rights, hierarchies in some classrooms, and frequently open doors to new opportunities such as universities, internships, and awards. The level of unease with their finished products because of no grade and no detailed list of product expectations was apparent. Each participant commented on it at some point at least once. Explaining to them that their response, choice of content, and opinions were all valid as well as having an in-depth discussion on learning for learning sake (adult view/stated goal) versus getting the best grade (student understanding of what adults say) with each participant helped to alleviate their unease but many still felt that their work was not up to par.

As much as I would like to break tradition and say I did my research for the knowledge the truth is I did it for the “grade”. I did it for a variety of reasons but also for the grade, to meet the requirements of my dissertation for my PhD.

Tyler. Why is it such a big deal to be better than everyone else? I learn because I want to not to win some imaginary competition. There's no award that I know of for

being better or smarter than everyone else. Well, maybe for being better but I bet it's for being nice or something. There really isn't a test for that. You have to have a test to prove you learned stuff, right? Otherwise, how would you be able to prove it to other people? Besides, what would teachers do if they couldn't test us and prove we learned stuff?

There's too much emphasis on comparing to others and then we're expected to work together. It's turning everyone into pressure cookers. How are we supposed to handle, "You're working to be the best," and "Work in groups,"? I can't work to my potential with people that can't keep up mentally with me. So instead of trying to make that work in my head, I decided to not participate in the process or give in to the pressure. I decide what my goal is and I take steps to make it happen. My parents think there's something wrong with me, I know they do. They can't figure out why I don't go out for team sports, don't go to the mall on weekends with friends, don't audition for the school play. Because none of that interests me and if I didn't choose the goal, there's no reason to work for it. Sometimes, I'll do something social just to appease them, to keep them from freaking out too much, but my interest and attention aren't in it.

I'm not antisocial in the clinical sense. I just prefer to work and be by myself. I'm introverted. That's a good quality in engineers, researchers, architects. Here, at this school, that's respected as part of who I am and mostly no one tries to change it. Before, at my old school, I was bullied for being different. I like who I am – my smarts, my interest in unusual things, that I'm not the best looking or my clothes aren't straight from a magazine ad – and really don't care what anyone else thinks. It's nice to not have someone constantly on my case about "Go play with the other kids," or "Why do you

have to be reading all the time,” or “Are you always this weird?” Look at Bill Gates. He was different and weird and how did he turn out? Awesome. The answer to that question is Awesome. And rich. Very rich. So, obviously it’s alright to be introverted and different.

I like to watch people interacting with each other. Over time, I’ve learned when to watch and when to participate when there’s something in it for me. Participating for the grade isn’t something I consider. Can I learn something new? Can I help teach something new to the group? If that’s the case, then I’ll participate. Otherwise, count me out. What’s the point of doing work that I’ve already mastered? If I wanted to do that, I’d plan to stay in regular school, not go to college, and have a boring do-nothing job. How horrible would that be to have to do the same thing day after day, year after year with no options for anything new? If I’m being mentally challenged, I’m in.

We, my classmates and I, keep being told we’re all kinds of things: smart, brilliant, creative, imaginative, determined, ambitious, driven. And a bunch of other things that I forget. We’ve taken tests to confirm what we keep being told. Do those tests show we learned something or that we were already those things? Yeah, I’m smart and determined but so were lots of people through history. Einstein, Stalin, and George Washington were smart and determined. They’re just adjectives; parts of speech we learned in English class.

Although, I can see how driven applies to me. I’m driven to beat my last best regardless of what it was, who else did it, or who did it better. Golf is a team sport but it’s also an individual sport. If I do well, the team does well. If the team sucks, I am still driven to do better than my last best score. My score should continually improve until

I've mastered the game, perfected it. Once I've mastered, perfected something I can move on to the next thing to conquer. Other than golf, right now I'm working on perfecting, conquering school. Every A moves me one step closer to perfecting school. Then I can move on to perfecting college.

Being here at this school gives me the chance to work to finding perfection, keep people guessing about my thought processes, be challenged mentally, and make my parents both excited and concerned at the same time. What else could I ask for?

Researcher Aside: it became clearer that each participant had a distinct feeling regarding how they were labeled. Where the label originated seemed to have some importance to some participants (parents, siblings, coaches, teachers, administrators) while others only clung to the label and their understanding of what it meant to/for them. Gifted, smart, intelligent, fun, athletic, visionary, successful, passionate. How each participant embraced or refused a label spoke volumes about the student and connections could be drawn between other identity characteristics. One participant chose to take labels given to them from a standardized test and create new labels for themselves in the same genre but refused the one from the test. Why? Did the participant have a problem with standardized tests, with the person assigning the labels, with the particular word used, with the fact that other kids that took it could have the same label and they want to be as individualistic as possible? Other participants claimed the label from the same standardized test as part of their identity. They acknowledged, "I am a ____." Each participant then proceeded to explain what that meant to them and the relationship to their identity. Do these participants have less need to be unique than the first? Do they have a different view of the particular word given to them? Since the participants that chose

different labels for themselves were in different categories, is category the driving difference?

I have heard a comedian talk about a Disney attraction where visitors place their hand on a cave wall handprint and a computer randomly assigns the person an animal and details the characteristics that apply to people. There were multiple animals but one was far less desirable than the others no matter how much Disney tried to make it be equal (Oswalt, 2011). As a researcher and educator of gifted students, seeing this in action even though I had been warned throughout my education about labeling students was an eye opening experience. Many adults forget that their behavior is noticed by adolescents trying different ways of becoming an adult and the behavior they notice may not be the one hoped for. While one participant noted that he had never heard the term “nerdy” used in a positive way as a compliment until this school year, it should be noted that the participant did notice it being used. Had the person making the comment used it in a negative context, how would the participant incorporate that knowledge into his identity? Seeing this during interviews affected me as a person and as an educator. It is extremely important to be aware of what one says or does around adolescents, especially gifted adolescents because their asynchronous development can make outcomes more extreme.

Max. I’m just a normal kid. We’re all just normal kids. People seem to think that because we’re gifted we should be more than human or shoot lasers from our eyes. We aren’t superheroes, we’re not like Brain – a genius. We aren’t like Pinky either but still... We aren’t all powerful, going to take over the world. We’re just people that have different abilities than others.

School is one of those places where we're expected to be superheroes. Sometimes that can happen, sometimes it can't. I've been to some schools where I wasn't challenged and my parents were afraid I would "go to the dark side". It wouldn't take much for me to use my gifts for trouble if I wanted to. Bored kids cause trouble. This school challenges me so at least my parents aren't so worried I'm going to set something on fire. Not that I would! My last school either ignored me completely since they knew I'd already learned the material or gave me stupid repetitive worksheets to do. I quit doing them at the beginning of every year. And every year my parents would have to explain to the school that they were OK with my not doing them and didn't care about the grades. I didn't get instruction directed at my learning level so I ended up here. I get instruction directed at my level and that challenges me to learn more. Not what to learn specifically but general concepts and ideas that prompt me to learn more or to look at things from a different perspective. Even math and science that are pretty specific in their concepts are directed at my level and challenge me to learn more.

Challenge is important to me and school is the way to successfully achieve the life I want. However, finding people that think like me, learn at my speed, process information and solve problems like I do – that's much more important in my opinion. I'll get good grades if I want to at any school. Finding a place that I belong, that feels like it was made for me to be here... that's hard to find. People are fake. They just are. They pretend to be your friend, to understand what you're saying, that they want to hang out with you. They smile at you but then judge you to other people. Here, they're real. They're open to new ideas, new thoughts, new experiences. It's OK to listen to different music, wear different clothes, not have the newest phone. Since we're all a little

different, we're all the same. And we've basically become like a family. We know when each other are struggling with a class and help each other out. No one gets made fun of for being smart or dumb or different.

It was scary coming here, I won't lie. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. I've been the new kid before, more than once actually. This was different. What if I couldn't do the work? What if I wasn't up to the challenge? What if they made fun of me? Usually, I stay out of the way and don't have to try too hard to do well academically. I've been bullied before and I've been punked by kids who claimed to be my friends. I really didn't want to go through that again, even if there was a chance to be challenged and learn new, interesting things. I know my parents would be fine with lower grades than what I'm used to getting as long as I was learning but I didn't want to disappoint them either. And I really didn't want to spend another school year with no real friends. So, yeah. I basically was made to come here whether I wanted to or not. I'm glad I did – it's been the best year ever – but the first week was tough. Trying to make friends when you know no one and the stress of that combined with real mental work and learning makes for a seriously tough time. The teachers were great about making everyone comfortable and equal and I'm sure they would've been fine with us coming to talk to them if we were freaking out but I just wanted to handle it on my own.

Speaking of freaking out, there seems to be a consensus that only an A is acceptable. When one of us has a B or even worse, a C, everyone tried to help them to get back on track to an A. I don't understand this. If you learned something in a class, isn't that success? In the big picture of life, what does an A matter? Does it make you a better person? Does it give you super powers? Yes, it gives you opportunities a C might

not like college choice and scholarships but what if you got A's because you weren't challenged? Is that A the same as one you had to work for? What about a C you worked hard for and learned so many new and useful things? Is that C worth less than an easy A? None of that seems to be considered by parents, teachers, most of my classmates. My parents understand but from what I can tell they aren't normal parents. My classmates are constantly worried their parents will freak out because of a grade they got. Internal drive for perfection isn't enough; they have to worry about parental pressure, too. I'm not sure how they deal.

If nothing else, I've made lifetime friends and I've finally found a place I belong. I'll learn no matter where I am in life but I'm just a normal person that wants people to talk to that get me and where I'm coming from.

Researcher Aside: What do I do with a video of a middle schooler sitting in front of the camera telling me about how they were bullied at their previous schools by teachers and classmates? What do I do with a video of a student sitting in a stark white room talking to the camera in the most serious, adult tone I've ever heard from someone their age about how being accepted to the school has allowed them to network with people that could make their lives infinitely better by going to the best colleges? One who reenacts being bored out of their mind at previous schools but includes minor details of things learned at the new school without even realizing that's what they've picked to include in their reenactment of the new (current) school because they enjoyed learning it so much? The same student that indicates visually in his video that all work for every class was done as the class started yet states in the interview that doing that at the current school would be a nightmare as the teachers would never allow it and the expectations of

student work don't allow for that. Two participants chose not being in front of the camera. Of these two, the video voiceover speaks to the depth of his relationship with his father and the direct effect that has had on his education and development of self; how he was one of those people that felt public school wouldn't be up to the same standards as a private school and was ashamed when he discovered he was wrong. What do I do with that video, that information? I had expected the photo elicitation method to allow the participants' voices to come to the fore of the narrative. I was "gifted" with two additional benefits of photo elicitation that I had not expected. One, as a narrative researcher the use of photo elicitation exposes significantly more thematic information than other interview techniques I have been exposed to. Allowing participants to tell what is important to them opens doors and windows to their personalities and thought processes they may not be aware they are opening but tie exceptionally well to other participants. Two, as an educator and an adult who has the academic knowledge of what makes a child gifted but the life experience of over twice that of my participants, photo elicitation allows me to ask introspective questions that may or may not affect the creation of their self-identity but inspires them to think and question the status quo. They may very well have participated in my study and never think of it again, but then again, they may have found a new way to question the world.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Trends Found in Data

Working with gifted adolescents using methods such as photo elicitation that allow participants to tell their own story created a portal into their world – how they respond to different environments, family, self-imposed expectations, and their education. There are several implications to be drawn from the data such as how labels affect participant’s view of themselves, how perfectionism and competitive drive function in each gifted child, how intellectual challenge is a necessity, how the appropriate learning environment helps to create self-confidence and self-identity, and that we are continuing to model that learning for the sake of knowledge isn’t a worthy goal.

Labels, positive or negative, affected participants by creating concern that they might not live up to the label or, alternately, they adopted it into their self-identity (Gates, 2010). Most had no connection, emotional or cognitive, to the traditional stereotypes of gifted students but had more responses to parent and educator expectations that they felt accompanied the label. For example, students who had been told they were “smart”, “a genius”, or “brilliant” felt more anxiety about not performing to the expectations of those labels as they understood them to mean. Students that had been given positive labels tended to regard them more anxiously in fear of “messaging up” and/or losing the label. Those that had been given negative or negative connotation labels seemed to recognize them for what they were and chose to less often accept them. For example, those that had been told they were “pushy”, “rude”, or “mean” chose to not acknowledge the label and

would sometimes even go so far as to find positive connotations to the label such as instead of being pushy, they saw themselves as a leader and a director of activity within the classroom. While the sample size of this study is small and cannot be generalized across the population, it is important to note that gifted students do respond to labels and some affect their academic performance more than others. It is also important to note that labels from educators tend to hold more weight with gifted students than those from parents or peers.

Perfectionism and the competitive drive in gifted children can be symbiotic or catastrophic (Silverman, 1999). A symbiotic relationship between the two allows a gifted child to strive to be their best while paying attention to details and ensuring that the work they do is the best of their ability. A catastrophic relationship cripples a gifted child as they become so afraid of something not being perfect that they fail to start at all. Their competitive drive engages but since they can't start they become extremely frustrated. Many underachieving gifted students are victims of a catastrophic relationship between these two traits. Several potential participants in this study found themselves caught in the catastrophic relationship and as such never began their digital story even though they had every intention of doing so. The perfectionism of almost all the participants was evidenced by questions and comments regarding the quality, length, and/or content of their digital stories. "Did I do it right?" and "Is it good enough?" were common questions. "I'm sure it's horrible" and "It probably sucks" were common comments I heard before even starting the interview. As educators, it is important to understand the relationship between perfectionism and competitive drive and to be able to determine how they interact for each child (Brophy, 1996).

For the participants in this study, intellectual challenge is a necessity not an option or goal. Their experiences after being in a learning environment dedicated to their intellectual stimulation and challenge with peers that are on their same level after having been in traditional inclusive classrooms were positive and had profound effects on their self-confidence and self-identity. Research has shown student motivation and engagement with the curriculum is important and directly affects student success (Little, 2012; Van Tassel-Baska, 2007).

Gifted students learn differently than other students and need the intellectual challenge to keep them interested (Little, 2012; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2012; Van Tassel-Baska, 2007). All participants, regardless of previous education experiences, felt that their previous education was boring, easy, repetitive, waste of their time, and uninteresting. None mentioned having to teach classmates in previous education environments, which happens frequently especially in elementary school, but several mentioned reading under the desk while repetitive instruction was given, completing work while it was being collected, and not doing homework because it was content they had learned years earlier. Comments about school after being placed in a specific gifted environment were more to being challenged, have to do homework at home, research is interesting, and sharing ideas with classmates creates new ideas for themselves. It is critical to the development of gifted students' self-identity that their education challenges them intellectually so they develop traits of hard work, perseverance, and curiosity.

All the participants in this study were comfortable with sharing their feelings on their educational experiences as well as being in front of a camera. The appropriate

learning environment helps to create self-confidence and self-identity where instead of feeling they are shunned as the “know it all” and have a fear of being “less smart” in front of non-gifted classmates, gifted students are comfortable asking questions, sharing knowledge, stating their beliefs with conviction. Several participants noted that being in a traditional classroom as the known gifted kid puts pressure on them to not be seen as being “less smart” than the rest of the class thinks they are. What level of “smart” a student is viewed as varies between grade level, classmate and teacher reaction to the student’s gifts, and student’s self-image from family and close friends. The pressure of being seen as “less smart” stopped participants from asking or answering questions and in general caused them to withdraw from the learning experience as a whole. Gifted students in classes of like-minded peers feel less pressure to be the smartest or right all the time because all the students are the smartest and all make mistakes.

Learning for the sake of learning, what we as educators continually tell students should be their goal, is not what we model for them. All the important work they do has a grade assigned and that which is not important does not. By perpetuating this behavior, we are training students to only expend effort on the items that are graded and only enough effort to achieve an A. When asked if they would continue to learn if nothing were graded, several participants asked what the point of that would be. Several others looked confused and had to think for a moment before responding that they might, might not. Our behaviors as educators are continuing to model and teach that learning for the sake of knowledge is not a worthy goal. For gifted children in particular, this is devastating as they begin their education with nothing but a desire to learn anything and everything and by middle school only want to work for the grade. How will this

mentality affect advances in the sciences and new creations in the arts? If we are creating students who only work as hard as the rubric determines necessary for an A, what will happen when there is no rubric, no A to add to the endless list of those already earned?

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Tirupalavanam Ganesh
EDUC - I.

From: Mark Roosa, Chair 
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 02/17/2012

Committee Action: **Expedited Approval**

Approval Date: 02/17/2012

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 1202007393

Study Title: Dissertation Study

Expiration Date: 02/16/2013

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

Dissertation Study

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Assistant Professor Tirupalavanam Ganesh in the Department/Division/College of Engineering at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn how gifted middle schoolers feel about their educational experiences.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will involve creating a digital story to tell the story of their educational experiences as a gifted child which will take approximately 20 minutes once a week for two months and a final interview at the end that will take approximately one hour. The digital story will be a videotape that they will create and the final interview will be audiotaped. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and will not affect your child's grade. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is the chance for their experiences to make changes for the better to gifted educational practices. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify your child in any way. In order to maintain confidentiality of the records researchers will use pseudonyms for all names, locations, and any personally identifying characteristics. The information collected will be kept electronically on a flash drive in a password protected file and kept on the Arizona State University campus in a locked file cabinet with the hard copy files of collected data. Only the researchers will have access to these files. All collected data – digital and hard copy – will be destroyed by deletion or shredding three (3) years after the end of the study.

Due to the nature of digital storytelling (where the participant creates a video response to a question prompt) some identifying characteristics of your child may be visible on the video they create. However, the video your child creates will only be viewed by your child, myself, and Dr. Ganesh.

Responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at 602-826-6651 or Dr. Ganesh at (480) 727-9375.

Sincerely,

Courtney Hart

ASU IRB
Approved
Sign for Mark Messer
Date 2/17/2012 - 2/16/2013

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ (Child's name) to participate in the above study. I understand that my child will be creating a video response to a question prompt and that only my child and the researchers will be allowed to view this.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Dissertation Study

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate in a study concerning my educational experiences as a gifted student.

I will be asked to create a digital story (video) that I will work on once a week for about 20 minutes for two months and to talk about my video in an interview that will take about an hour.

My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my grade in any way.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

ASU IRB
Approved
Sign R. for Mark Plouza
Date 2/17/2012 - 2/16/2013

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AMENDMENT



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Eric Margolis
ED

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 12/17/2012

Committee Action: Amendment to Approved Protocol

Approval Date: 12/17/2012

Review Type: Expedited F12

IRB Protocol #: 1202007393

Study Title: Dissertation Study

Expiration Date: 02/16/2013

The amendment to the above-referenced protocol has been APPROVED following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

Dissertation Study

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Associate Professor Eric Margolis in the Department/Division/College of Communication at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn how gifted middle schoolers feel about their educational experiences.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will involve creating a digital story to tell the story of their educational experiences as a gifted child which will take approximately 20 minutes once a week for two months and a final interview at the end that will take approximately one hour. The digital story will be a video that they will create and the final interview will be audiotaped. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and will not affect your child's grade. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is the chance for their experiences to make changes for the better to gifted educational practices. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify your child in any way. In order to maintain confidentiality of the records researchers will use pseudonyms for all names, locations, and any personally identifying characteristics. The information collected will be kept electronically on a flash drive in a password protected file and kept on the Arizona State University campus in a locked file cabinet with the hard copy files of collected data. Only the researchers will have access to these files. All collected data – digital and hard copy – will be destroyed by deletion or shredding three (3) years after the end of the study.

Due to the nature of digital storytelling (where the participant creates a video response to a question prompt) some identifying characteristics of your child may be visible on the video they create. However, the video your child creates will only be viewed by your child, myself, and Dr. Margolis.

Responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at 602-826-6651 or Dr. Margolis at (480) 965-0131.

Sincerely,

Courtney Hart

	ASU IRB Approved
Sign <u>SM</u>	
Date <u>12/17/12 - 2/16/13</u>	

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ (Child's name) to participate in the above study. I understand that my child will be creating a video response to a question prompt and that only my child and the researchers will be allowed to view this.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

I am a middle school teacher part-time at Tempe's newly opened ASPIRE Academy at Connolly Middle School. This school is designed and dedicated to the education of middle school students who have been identified gifted in two of the three areas the state recognizes: verbal, quantitative, and spatial. Students with a 94% and above in one area and an 85% and above in a second area are qualified to attend. These students are similar to those at the original study site in that they are adolescents who have been identified as gifted, are in a learning environment designed specifically for their learning needs, have access to technology on a daily basis that will allow them to respond to the study prompt, and who have experience with other education environments for comparison. Like the students at the original study site, I have created a rapport with these students that will make it more comfortable for them to respond to the prompt and participate in the follow up interview much easier.

Addition of this site will allow for additional participants (we were unable to get more than are currently participating at the original site) as well as compare and contrast the similarities and differences between both the participant responses and the sites.