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A Study of the Programs and Services for Intellectually Gifted Students in Northeast Tennessee Public School Systems.

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A Study of the Programs and Services for Intellectually

Gifted Students in Northeast Tennessee Public School

Systems

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by

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ABSTRACT

A Study of the Programs and Services for Intellectually

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather data

from a variety of sources including teachers, special

education directors, and the state director of gifted

education to determine what gifted programs and or

strategies are currently being offered in the selected

schools and to explore emerging strategies in the education

of intellectually gifted students in the Bristol Tennessee

School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City

School System, Sullivan County School System, and

Washington County School System.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The findings were presented relative to the research

questions. While the education provided to intellectually

gifted students in Upper East Tennessee is varied, the

options for educational programming and instructional

strategies are modeled after the suggested programming options and instructional strategies mentioned in the research literature by prominent experts in the field of gifted education. The use of these options and strategies varied from system to system and sometimes from school to school.

Although the education for the intellectually gifted student in Tennessee is mandated under the umbrella of special education, programs are often based on financial support from the various systems. Recommendations include continuing an emphasis on differentiating the curriculum to provide academic challenges beyond the regular classroom, providing opportunities for increased instructional time, and garnering the support of educational administrators.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my dad, George F. Price. He was always proud and liked to brag on his children and grandchildren. I wish I could have finished before he died, but I know he will be bragging to all the angels in Heaven, "She's finally finished!"

I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Dr. Russell West. He was the first person I met on this journey. He always encouraged me, directed my paths, and most of all pushed me to go above and beyond what I thought I could do.

I would like to thank the educators, administrators, and Tennessee Director of Special Education for their assistance and their input. To ALL teachers who work tirelessly to bring quality instruction to students, this is dedicated to you.

Jeremiah 29:11

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the 2001-2002 school year, 26,844 of the 910,364
elementary through secondary students enrolled In
Tennessee's public school system were identified as
intellectually gifted (Davidson Institute for Talent
Development, 2004). The U.S. Department of Education
defines giftedness as:

> Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or
> show the potential for performance at remarkably high
> levels of accomplishment when compared with others of
> their age, experience, or environment. These children
> and youth exhibit high performance capability in
> intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess
> an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific
> academic fields. They require services or activities
> not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding
> talents are present in children and youth from all
> cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in
> all areas of human endeavor. (Ross, 1993, p. 11)

The Tennessee State Board of Education Rule
0520-1-9-.01 defines intellectually gifted as, "A child
whose intellectual abilities and potential for achievement
are so outstanding that special provisions are required to
meet the child's educational needs" (State Department of
Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

In 1981 the Tennessee Department of Education was
directed by the state legislature and governor to establish
a program for gifted children to encourage them to develop
their intellectual abilities to their greatest potential.
This study was designed to gather data from a variety of
sources including teachers, special education directors,
and the state director of gifted education to determine
what gifted programs and or strategies were being offered
in the selected schools and to explore emerging strategies
in the education of intellectually gifted students in the
Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City School
System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County
School System, and Washington County School System.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study include recommended best
practices that may enable administrators, special education
personnel, and special education teachers to examine,
analyze, and revise policies, plans, and procedures to
better meet the needs of intellectually gifted students.

Research Questions

1. What educational programs are provided for identified intellectually gifted students in the Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County School System, and Washington County School System?

2. What instructional strategies do teachers of the gifted in the Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County School System, and Washington County School System identify as currently being used to meet the needs of students identified as intellectually gifted?

3. What do teachers of the intellectually gifted identify as the strengths of the strategies currently being provided to gifted students?

4. What do teachers of intellectually gifted students identify as the weaknesses of the strategies currently being provided to gifted students?

Limitations of the Study

1. This is a qualitative study of a limited number of participants in the Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County School System, and Washington County School

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System; no generalizations may be made to anyone other than the study participants.

2. The study is limited to the reliability of the identification process of the intellectually gifted students.

3. The number of educators working with intellectually gifted students limits the study for selection of respondents and interviews.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined on the basis of their use in the context of this study:

Acceleration - Acceleration takes advantage of a student's ability to learn at a faster rate. Materials and activities are presented in a way to advance the student beyond the grade level (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Advanced placement – College-level courses taken as part of a high school program, often referred to as AP courses. Advanced placement courses offer advanced students the opportunity to take courses with more challenging college-level content. Students who complete AP courses are eligible to take the advanced placement exams. Students who

score at the appropriate level may qualify for college

credit at most colleges and universities.

Compacting – Eliminates repetition and minimizes drill

of material presented to students. Students who

demonstrate mastery in the subject area spend less time

with the regular curriculum and more time with enrichment

activities. Compacting allows the student to accelerate at

a faster pace through the curriculum materials typically

presented to grade-level peers (State Department of

Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Consultation – Service provided to a regular classroom

teacher to assist with designing lesson plans or finding

advanced materials for particular students (Swanson, 2004).

Direct Instruction – Teacher-directed instruction is

provided by the teacher to a child with a special education

disability. Instruction is designed to meet the specific

educational needs of the eligible child (State Department

of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Enrichment – Increasing the breadth and the depth of

students' education. The student may explore topics in

greater depth and at higher cognitive levels. The

activities may modify, supplement, and extend achievement

beyond the expectations set forth in the general education

curriculum. Enrichment should focus on the development of

the particular intellectual skills of the individual

student (State Department of Education, Division of Special

Education, 2003).

Free appropriate public education (FAPE) - In

compliance with federally mandated Public Law 101-476, the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) first

enacted in 1990, all disabled children are to be provided

by the public school, at no cost to parents, a free

appropriate education, which allows students to make

satisfactory progress.

Grouping – An arrangement where students identified as

intellectually gifted are placed in groups, which bring

them in contact with others of similar abilities and

interest (State Department of Education, Division of

Special Education, 2003).

Inclusion - Grouping of students in regular classrooms

without regard to ability. It is based on social, not

academic concerns (Norby, 2004).

Independent study – The practice of allowing a student

to independently engage in exploratory study or pursue in-

depth projects of specific interest (State Department of

Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Intellectually gifted - A child whose identified

intellectual abilities and potential for achievement are so

outstanding that special provisions are required to meet the child's educational needs (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Individual education plan (IEP) –A written document, that states the student's unique characteristics and needs. Educational goals and objectives to meet those needs and instructional materials and services to be provided are detailed in the written document (Norby, 2004).

Individualized instruction – Instruction in which the content and pacing are geared toward the individual's unique learning style, abilities, needs, and goals (Norby, 2004).

Least restrictive environment (LRE) - School placement where the student's needs can best be met. Placement should most closely approximate the regular classroom (Norby, 2004).

Pull-out - A part-time special educational program that takes identified special education students out of the regular classroom for a limited time (Nordby, 1997)

Self-contained - A classroom in which students spend the entire day or the majority of the day with the same teacher. Self-contained programs may also be geared toward grouping by ability or disability (Nordby, 1997)

Special Education - Education of students with identified disabilities. Students receive individualized instruction. Appropriate education is based on the unique characteristics of each student. Federal law does not mandate special education for the gifted, but some states, including Tennessee, have their own mandates (Nordby, 1997).

Telescoping – A student is allowed to complete several years of the school's curriculum in less time. Material is not omitted: but the pace of instruction is increased, allowing students to move more rapidly through the content (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007).

Twice-Exceptional – A student who is gifted and has a second handicapping condition, such as a learning disability (Nordby, 2004).

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 introduces the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to educational programs and strategies being used with gifted students. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research methodology that was employed in completing this qualitative study. Chapter 4 provides the data analysis, including narrative description

and dialogue where appropriate to illustrate the categories

of thought that emerged. Chapter 5 reports pertinent

findings, recommendations for future practice, conclusions,

and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Introduction

Masse, a professor of special education at the
Universite du Quebec a Trois-Rivieres, noted, "In the last
two decades, educational movements stressing equity have
resulted in the elimination or reduction of programs for
gifted students in many North American states and school
districts" (2001, p. 170). Gallagher (2004) also discussed
equity in his article about the effects of the No Child
Left Behind legislation. Furthermore, I found the files
related to intellectually gifted education programs to be
varied and the subject of equity prominent in the
literature. As a result, I concentrated my review on and
divided this chapter into the following sections:
giftedness defined, history of gifted education, gifted
education in Tennessee, identification and eligibility of
students for gifted education, characteristics and
challenges, strategies, methods, and models, best
practices, trends for the future, and the importance of
gifted education.

I used the following databases in conducting my search
for pertinent literature: the ERIC database, *Dissertation*

Abstracts, and the InfoTrac/Galenet database. I used the
following descriptors independently, as well as combined
with each other: "gifted education," "programs," and
"strategies."

Giftedness Defined

In 1993 the U.S. Department of Education defined
giftedness as:

> Children and youth with outstanding talent that
> perform or show the potential for performance at
> remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared
> with others of their age, experience, or environment.
> These children and youth exhibit high performance
> capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic
> areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or
> excel in specific academic fields. They require
> services or activities not ordinarily provided by the
> schools. Outstanding talents are present in children
> and youth from all cultural groups, across all
> economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor
> (Ross, 1993, p. 11).

Federal legislation does not mandate that states
provide special services for their gifted and talented
students. Therefore, states are open to establish their own
gifted and talented programs and their own definitions of
gifted and talented students. These definitions have
important implications for the state departments of
education in formulating programs, for identification of
gifted students in local districts, and for judicial
concerns relating to gifted education. The Tennessee

Department of Education defined an intellectually gifted child as, "A child whose intellectual abilities and potential for achievement are so outstanding that special provisions are required to meet the child's educational needs," (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003, p. 2). Coleman (2004) argued that a consensus definition is the best anyone can do and that other definitions are secondary to the practice of gifted education, but he found his position moving in a different direction: "A field cannot have any coherence without common understanding about the limits of the phenomenon" (p. 10). Marland's (1972) definition could be considered as the consensus definition. Since its publication in 1972, small changes have been made. The U.S. Commissioner of Education on behalf of the U.S. Congress produced the following definition:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs, and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:
>
>   1.   general intellectual ability
>
>   2.   specific academic aptitude

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3. creative or productive thinking

4. leadership ability

5. visual and performing arts

6. psychomotor ability

It can be assumed that utilization of these criteria for identification of the gifted and talented will encompass a minimum of 3 to 5 percent of the school population (Marland, 1972, p. 2).

Because understanding giftedness and improving practices are the ultimate goal of gifted education, Coleman (2004) questioned whether specialized definitions would assist in attaining this goal. He suggested that narrowing the definition to a more domain-specific definition would be an improvement over process and aptitude-based definitions.

History of Gifted Education

As Kitano and Kirby noted, "The first 240 years of American educational history demonstrate little attention to gifted individuals" (1986, p. 14). "The history underlying today's interest in the education of the gifted and talented is not a long one. In fact, five events--four people and one Russian satellite--will bring us up to date," acknowledged Davis and Rimm (1985, p. 3). Stanley (1978) described the four people as a family: Sir Francis

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Galton as the grandfather of the gifted-child movement,
Alfred Binet as the midwife, Lewis Terman as the father,
and Columbia University's Leta Hollingworth as the
nurturing mother.

Sir Francis Galton is credited with the earliest
significant research and writing devoted to intelligence
(Davis & Rimm, 1985). Galton was a younger cousin of
Charles Darwin. Based on the tasks Galton could complete at
various ages, Terman estimated Galton's IQ to be 200.
Galton began studying medicine at 16 but later switched to
the study of mathematics. Galton traveled extensively and
earned the Royal Geographical Society's gold medal. After
writing two books, one related to travel and the other
related to weather prediction, he turned to the study of
intelligence. Galton believed intelligence was related to
the senses. His intelligence tests measured visual and
auditory acuity, tactile sensitivity, and reaction time. He
concluded that a person's sensory ability or intelligence
was due to natural selection and heredity. The hereditary
basis of intelligence was reported in his most famous book
Hereditary Genius. Galton is also noted for conducting the
first research related to twins. Galton's twin studies were
intended to unravel the genetic versus environmental
aspects of intelligence (Davis & Rimm).

Modern intelligence tests are linked to Alfred Binet, who coined the term "mental age." Gowan, Khatena, and Torrance (1979) noted, "Though intelligence had been recognized since the time of the Romans as the first aspect of personality, no one up to the 20th century had been able to solve the puzzle of measuring it" (p.7). Binet, aided by T. Simon, was hired by government officials in Paris to create a test that would identify the children in regular classes who could benefit from special classes. These children would be eligible to be placed in special classes to receive special training. A test of intelligence was needed because teachers' judgments of students' abilities were biased. Binet tried a variety of tests, all of which failed, until he began to measure attention span, memory, judgment, reasoning, and comprehension. Binet contended that children's intelligence grew as they matured (Davis & Rimm, 1985).

Lewis Terman made two significant contributions to gifted education. First, he modified the Binet-Simon tests, producing the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale in 1916. Davis and Rimm (1985) credited Terman with Americanizing the Binet test. The Stanford-Binet Test has been revised numerous times with only minor changes and is still used today. Terman's second contribution was his study of gifted

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children. "This study more than any other put an end to the stereotype of the gifted child as puny, sickly, and socially immature," wrote Kirk and Gallagher (1986, p. 77). Seagoe (1975) discussed Terman's interest in individual differences and wrote that Terman viewed gifted students as, "…a major national resource"(p. 80). She quoted Terman as saying, "True democracy demands that every child, whether superior, average, or inferior in ability, be given the fullest opportunity to develop to the limits of his mental capacity" (p. 80).

Leta Hollingworth was noted for her support of gifted education and gifted students in the New York City area. In November, 1916, she became intrigued when a child scored above 180 on the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. She began a study that spanned 23 years. Hollingworth was the first woman to scientifically research and challenge the belief that women were inferior to men. She was noted for proving that environmental conditions greatly affected the degree to which women were allowed to become intellectually distinguished. According to Silverman (1990), Hollingworth became concerned with the "…unique adjustment problems that gifted children experience" (p. 171). Hollingworth was noted for coining the term "gifted" in reference to the intellectually superior. Furthermore, Silverman wrote that

Hollingworth was "…fascinated with the minds of gifted

children and sought to understand each child's personal

experience" (1990, p.171). She was interested in how those

children endured in a world where they were constantly

searching for minds similar to their own. Hollingworth

wanted to establish a fund for gifted children that would

allow them to take money for their educational development

and then donate money after they were established. The fund

was established in Hollingworth's honor after her death and

is called the National Gifted Children's Fund.

Newland (1976) suggested that World War II led to

recognition of the need for gifted scientists and

technicians to enable America to compete with other

countries in the new technological era. Kitano and Kirby

(1986) acknowledged:

> Although educators at all levels called attention to
> the neglect of the gifted and to manpower shortages in
> the sciences during the early 1950's, it was not until
> the shock of Sputnik in 1957 that gifted education
> became a national concern"(p. 14). Heck (1940) wrote,
> "The history of the development of an educational
> program for gifted children is less definite than that
> of the growth of practices to be used with other
> special groups (p. 391).

Kitano and Kirby found that as the space program got

underway, interest in gifted education declined. During the

60s and early 70s, the emphasis shifted to education for

economically and socially disadvantaged children. Americans

were more concerned with equal opportunities for underprivileged minorities. However, in the latter half of the 1970s, federal legislation motivated a resurgence of interest in gifted education. Section 806, entitled "Provisions Related to Gifted and Talented Children" was added to Public Law 91-230, the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments of 1969. Section 806 allowed identified gifted and talented children to be added to those who could receive funds allocated for Titles III and V of the Elementary and Secondary Act and teacher education provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The amendment also required a study to discover the extent to which special education provisions were necessary for gifted children; to identify whether federal programs were meeting those needs and, if they were not, how federal programs could more effectively meet the needs; and to recommend any new programs. In 1971 Sidney Marland provided the study results to Congress. He recommended that a staff for gifted education be established within the U.S. Office of Education. Four years later $2.5 million was made available for the first time for gifted education. In addition, local and state programs for the gifted and talented received funding through Title IV-C, Educational Innovation and Support, of the Elementary and Secondary

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Act. The Gifted and Talented Children's Education Act of

1978 (P.L. 95-561) was signed into law on November 1, 1978.

The act increased the amount that could be authorized for

gifted education from $25 million for fiscal year 1979 to

$50 million for fiscal year 1983. The act was repealed at

the end of 1981 under the Reagan administration, shifting

responsibility to the states through block grant provisions

(Kitano & Kirby, 1986). According to Piirto (1999),

"Recently an "ebb" has occurred, with several states

enfolding gifted education into general education, saying

that the pedagogy for the gifted is good for all children"

(p. 50).

Heck (1940) listed early methods used with gifted

students in public schools as (1) vacation schools, (2) the

helping teacher, (3) double promotions, (4) credit by

examination, (5) individual instruction (6) project-based

instruction, and (7) special classes. McDonald (1915)

stated that the first special school for gifted children in

the United States was probably organized at Worchester,

Massachusetts, in 1901. Students were selected from all

over the city and placed with superior teachers. Based on

the data Heck collected in 1930 from 736 U.S. cities, only

30 cities had schools or classes for the gifted.

According to Heck (1940), Los Angeles's first class for gifted children began as an experiment in 1915-16. The Los Angeles classes were called opportunity A rooms. Student selection for participation was determined by an intelligence or reading test given to all pupils of those grades from which children were to be chosen. Any student who rated 2 years ahead of his or her chronological age was placed on an eligibility list. Those who made the list were given a group intelligence test. Everyone who scored an I.Q. of 125 was given the Stanford revision of the Binet. The remaining students were placed on the basis of the Terman Group Test. Additions to the eligible list were made based on recommendations by the principal, parents, social agencies, and psychological clinics. Children with an I.Q. under 125 were occasionally admitted if they had demonstrated success in academic achievement (Heck, 1940).

Heck (1940) described the program as essentially an enriched course of study. This enrichment was based on "…(1) adding subjects, (2) selecting more difficult material, (3) introducing many more supplementary books, (4) offering opportunities for increased contacts with interest-arousing institutions, events and people" (p. 395).

Piirto (1999) summarized the history of education for gifted and talented:

> The definitions have varied, yet children who will be called gifted and talented have been and continue to be born and to enter school, and the schools have been and will continue to be challenged to provide suitable educations for these children. No matter how much the school reformers wish that all children could be taught in large classes by one teacher who teaches to the middle, the fact is that those teachers have always and will continue to encounter children whose abilities call for different treatment. (p. 49)

Gifted Education in Tennessee

The Tennessee General assembly passed the Weldon Act in 1972, which defined intellectual giftedness as a handicapping condition. All handicapped children were to receive a free education appropriate to their needs. According to Swanson (2004),

> The U.S. Congress used Tennessee's Weldon Act as a model for the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975. EHA created due process rights, mandated education plans, and defined a "least restrictive environment" for special needs children. While the original draft of EHA included gifted children, they were excluded in the final version of the bill. In 1992, EHA was retitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).(Guide for Perplexed Parents of Bright Students, History of Tennessee Policy, page 5)

In 1998 the Office of Civil Rights forced Tennessee educators to change their existing gifted identification policy. This change required that students could no longer

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be excluded based on test results that had been shown to be culturally biased. Furthermore, school districts were prevented from offering gifted programs only to students in wealthy schools. Swanson (2004) listed the basic principles as follows:

1. Gifted identification must not discriminate.

2. All qualified students in a school district must have access to gifted programming if the district offers it. Tennessee can no longer exclude students using tests that have been shown to be culturally biased and school districts can't offer gifted programs only to students in wealthy schools (Swanson, section, gifted policy).

Tennessee and 22 other states included gifted education as part of special education: Tennessee, along with seven other states, classified giftedness as a disability, according to Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform and Tennessee Association for the Gifted (2003).

Riley (2004) quoted Harolyn Hatley, coordinator of gifted services for the State Department of Education in Tennessee, "We do have disparity across the state." Hatley was referring to the differences in services provided by school districts across the state. Some districts serve hundreds of gifted students every year, while others serve none.

<u>Identification and Eligibility</u>

According to the *Tennessee Department of Education Special Education Manual* (Tennessee Department of Education, 2003), the evaluation of intellectually gifted is a multi-modal identification process. This process ensures a total profile of the student to include the diverse characteristics of intellectual giftedness. No singular mechanism, criterion, or cut-off score (i.e., intelligence or percentile score in academic achievement) is used to determine eligibility. This evaluation process encompasses gifted students who may demonstrate diverse characteristics of intellectual giftedness in divergent or unusual ways. Evaluation procedures for the intellectually gifted in the state of Tennessee are as follows:

1. Evaluation Procedures

   a. Evaluation shall include the following:

      (1) systematic child find and individual screening in the areas of:
          (a) academic performance,
          (b) creative thinking, and
          (c) academic achievement (if needed);

      (2) a team review of individual screening results;

      (3) referral for individual comprehensive assessment based on results from individual screening information. Individual evaluation procedures shall include appropriate use of instruments that are sensitive to cultural, linguistic, and economic differences or

sensory impairments. The comprehensive
assessment shall include:
(a) individual evaluation of cognition or
    intellectual ability; and
(b) individual evaluation of academic
    performance, creative thinking, and
    academic achievement. The need for
    expanded assessment and evaluation in
    each of these areas is determined based
    on the results of the individual
    screening;

(4) evaluation procedures in all of the four
    component areas of evaluation shall be
    completed for program and services planning
    regardless of the criteria used to make the
    final eligibility determination; and

(5) assessment and documentation of how the
    child's intellectual giftedness adversely
    affects educational performance in the
    general education curriculum or learning
    environment. (State Department of Education,
    Division of Special Education, p. 2-3)

The Tennessee State Eligibility Standards are defined

as:

2. Eligibility Standards

   a. Evaluation of intellectually gifted shall
      include:
      (1) assessment through a multi-modal
          identification process, wherein no singular
          mechanism, criterion or cut-off score is
          used for determination of eligibility; and

      (2) evaluation and assessment of the following
          components:
          (a) academic achievement,
          (b) academic performance,
          (c) creative thinking, and
          (d) cognition or intelligence.

   b. Eligibility for an individual child is based on
      analysis of this information. The screening and

comprehensive assessment results must meet specific eligibility standards based on multiple criteria and multiple assessment measures.

c. The standards for intellectually gifted are present and cause an adverse affect on educational performance in the general education curriculum or learning environment. (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003, p. 2)

According to Cross (2003), we still have little knowledge about impoverished children with gifts and talents. Cross said, "We focused early and hard on finding the easy ones—White people of the middle and wealthy classes from enriched environments" (Cross, p. 102). Cross said she believed this group became the main focus until it became the model group. Any child who did not fit this early model became the nonmodal gifted. Cross acknowledged strides toward identifying gifted students from minority backgrounds and twice-exceptional gifted students were being made but still reported that those students from impoverished backgrounds often were not screened for gifted identification.

Masse (2001) pointed out that self-identification might be a viable option, particularly for students beyond grade four. The students would be informed about the curriculum, objectives, and requirements. They could then

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choose to participate or to pass. Masse said this process

had many advantages:

> It taps into the intrinsic motivation and intense
> interest of children. It eliminates the negative
> impact often associated with gifted labels, both for
> the gifted individual and for the student not
> identified as gifted. This method is equitable: Every
> highly interested student has a chance to get in a
> program. It is not expensive in terms of time or
> money. And, finally, it allows students not
> necessarily gifted but highly motivated to develop
> fully their potential. (2001, p. 171)

Characteristics and Challenges

Understanding the needs of gifted students should help

teachers establish a learning environment receptive to

their intellectual and moral development needs. Gifted

students often have a multifaceted approach to learning,

which can be frustrating, causing the teacher to think of

them as "troublesome, unusual, difficult to reach, behaving

in odd ways that may not appeal to the teacher or their

peers" (Hoffman, 1995). As Berger (1991) noted, gifted

students are found in various educational settings, such as

full-time self-contained classrooms, magnet schools,

pullout programs, resource rooms, regular classrooms, and

every combination of these settings. No matter where they

obtain their education, they need an appropriately

differentiated curriculum designed to address their

individual characteristics, needs, abilities, and
interests.

Masse (2001) noted several challenges in providing
appropriate differentiated education for all gifted
students. A major challenge to overcome was the widespread
negative attitude toward gifted education. According to
Masse, "North American society puts athletes, artists, and
musicians on a pedestal, but intellectually gifted
individuals do not engender the same admiration" (p. 172).
The second concern dealt with the establishment of minimum
standards that would integrate current and future knowledge
related to brain functioning and the development process.
The third concern cited by Masse was the need for
appropriate staff development of teachers for the gifted.

Strategies, Methods, and Models

The minimum service offered to gifted students by a
school district is usually teacher consultation.
Consultation is provided to the regular classroom teacher
of a gifted student to assist with lesson design or
provision of materials.

Berger (1991) stated that an effective curriculum for
gifted students should be, "A basic curriculum that has
been modified to meet their needs. The unique

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characteristics of the students must serve as the basis for decisions on how the curriculum should be modified" (p. 2). She described four basic strategies. The first strategy was to modify content. According to Berger, content, as well as learning experiences, could be modified through acceleration, compacting, variety, reorganization, flexible pacing, and the use of more advanced or complex concepts, abstractions, and materials. She suggested students should move through content at their own pace. When the student mastered a concept, he or she should be provided more advanced learning opportunities. Berger described their learning characteristics as best served by, "…thematic, broad-based, and integrative content, rather than just single-subject areas" (p. 2).

Modifying the process was the second strategy Berger (1991) defined. According to Berger, activities should be restructured to be more intellectually demanding. This strategy would hopefully encourage students to think about subjects in a more abstract and complex way.

To modify the environment was the third strategy. Berger (1991) wrote that gifted students learn best in a "receptive, nonjudgmental, student-centered environment that encourages inquiry and independence, includes a wide variety of materials, provides some physical movement, is

generally complex, and connects the school experience with the greater world" (p. 3).

Modifying product expectation and student response was the fourth strategy mentioned by Berger (1991). She thought students should be encouraged to demonstrate what they have learned in a variety of ways. She stated that products (student materials or lessons) should be consistent with the student's learning style. She asserted that the product should, "…address real problems, concerns, and audiences; synthesize rather than summarize information; and include a self-evaluation process" (p. 4).

In the Roeper article, "Serving Gifted Students Through Inclusion," a professor of education, a teacher, and a parent presented their perspectives on serving gifted students through inclusion. Cramond et al. (2002) compared the training of Olympic athletes to the inclusion type of training for intellectually gifted students. Each of those writers provided a thoughtful perspective on inclusion, but none was supportive of this strategy for the education of intellectually gifted students. Cramond et al. stated:

> With what we know about the variability of individual development, it is anachronistic to continue to group children for instruction according to chronological age! Certainly, we wouldn't insist that all children of the same age wear the same shoe size (p. 126).

Cramond et al. (2002) cited the 1995 research of Brewer, Rees, and Argy that suggested there were losses in achievement test scores of gifted students who were regrouped heterogeneously. She pointed out that the impact of such research necessitated a candid analysis of the academic costs and benefits to the brightest students within such a program. Martin, a middle school parent, said that basically what happened was that the children spent the majority of their day "waiting." "They waited for other students to finish work. They waited to move on to more challenging work while they helped other students. They waited while their teacher tried to get around to all the students" (Cramond et al., p. 127). The same scenario was mentioned in Piirto's book, *Talented Children and Adults: Their Development and Education*. A fourth-grade child came home from school. When her father asked her what she did in school today she said, "I waited. The teacher says 'Wait,' every time I ask her a question. Lots of the kids are slower than I. I finished the book the first week, reading ahead. Now I just wait" (Piirto, 1999, p. 67-68).

<div align="center">

Best Practices

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Tomlinson et al. (2002) described gifted education in the past as taking, "…a more constructivist approach to

curriculum and instruction for gifted learners than has

general education, which predicated curriculum largely on a

behaviorist view" (p. 3). Tomlinson et al. further noted

that while gifted education advocated curriculum, "…rooted

in discovery, manipulation of ideas, integration of

subjects via exploration of common themes, a product

orientation, and so on" (p. 4), general education presented

material for practice and replication by students.

Tomlinson et al. (2002) acknowledged, "The field of gifted

education has often been a catalyst, and sometimes a

gadfly, for curriculum and instruction that is both sound

and dynamic" (p. 5).

　　Smutney (2003) acknowledged, "Gifted programs have the

potential to change lives...We have watched bored and

apathetic students reenergized by learning a new subject,

exploring a fresh theory or angle, or testing a hypothesis

they discovered in a gifted program"(p. 1). A gifted

program can provide lasting satisfaction and improved self-

esteem. According to Smutney, "Gifted programs allow gifted

children to share their insights and talents—to be gifted—

in ways their usual classrooms rarely can" (p. 1).

Furthermore, gifted programs give students an opportunity

to network with children who are similarly talented but

from a different environment.

Worchester's 1956 book, *The Education of Children of Above-Average Mentality,* outlined two possible methods for caring for the needs of above-average children: acceleration and enrichment. Maker (1982) stated, "It is highly unlikely that any model or way of teaching the gifted that is currently being used in gifted programs can provide the comprehensive curriculum needed by the students" (p. ix). She acknowledged that the curriculum chosen may be based on one model, it may use one model as a framework with others as supplements, or it may integrate several of the models into a framework for curriculum (Maker, 1982).

Furthermore, Maker (1986) noted that there should be accountability for practices in the field of education of gifted learners. Even though she saw the need to "guard against attack," Maker (1986) said, "...guarding should not include defending practices just because we have developed them (and always believed they would work)!" Maker concluded, "I would propose that the most significant criterion to use in developing defensible curricula and programs for the gifted is appropriateness. Next in importance would be differentness, and last would be unique appropriateness"(p. 120).

Kaplan (1986) maintained that curricula for the gifted could be assessed based on two questions: "Is the curriculum *differentiated* for the gifted? and Is the curriculum appropriate for the gifted?" (p. 129). According to Kaplan:

> Differentiation of the curriculum implies a general altering of the curriculum with regard to the collective descriptors of giftedness. Appropriateness of the curriculum implies an adaptive altering of the curriculum to the individualistic needs, interests, and abilities of each gifted member of the group (1986, p. 129).

Kaplan's (1979) model for curriculum development in education of the gifted student was as follows:

1. Present content that is related to broad-based issues, themes, or problems.

2. Integrate multiple disciplines into the area of study.

3. Present comprehensive, related, and mutually reinforcing experiences within an area of study.

4. Allow for the in-depth learning of a self-selected topic within the area of study.

5. Develop independent or self-directed study skills.

6. Develop productive, complex, abstract, and/or higher-level thinking skills.

7. Focus on open-ended tasks.

8. Develop research skills and methods.

9. Integrated basic skills and higher-level thinking skills into the curriculum.

10. Encourage the development of products that challenge existing ideas and produce "new" ideas.

11. Encourage the development of products that use new techniques, materials, and forms.

12. Encourage the development of self-understanding, i.e., recognizing and using one's abilities, becoming self-directed, appreciating likenesses and differences between oneself and others.

13. Evaluate student outcomes by using appropriate and specific criteria through self-appraisal, criterion referenced and/or standardized instruments.(p. 5)

Van Tassel-Baska (1984) developed the following

principles to guide curriculum development for the gifted:

1. The content of curricula for the G/T should focus on and be organized to include more elaborate, complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, problems, and themes that integrate knowledge within and across systems of thought.

2. Curricula for the G/T should allow for the development and application of productive thinking skills to enable students to reconceptualize existing knowledge and/or generate new knowledge.

3. Curricula for the G/T should enable them to explore constantly changing knowledge and information and develop the attitude that knowledge is worth pursuing in an open world.

4. Curricula for the G/T should encourage exposure to selection and use of specialized and appropriate resources.

5. Curricula for the G/T should promote self-initiated and self-directed learning and growth.

6. Curricula for the G/T should provide for the development of self-understanding and the understanding of one's relationship to persons, societal institutions, nature, and culture.

7. Evaluations of curricula for the G/T should be
   conducted in accordance with prior stated
   principles, stressing higher-level thinking skills,
   creativity, and excellence in performance and
   products(p. 58).

Feldhusen (1986) wrote that curricula for the

gifted and talented should be planned on a K-12 basis. He

acknowledged:

   There is, however, no way to specify a curriculum by
   grade level for all gifted youth because of
   differences in their levels and types of precocity…
   K-12 curriculum planning means chiefly that
   opportunities are available for accelerated,
   integrative, and intellectually complex learning
   experiences when the student is ready (pp. 247-248).

Marks and Nystrand (1981) stated, "If those

responsible for the education of the young are concerned

with providing opportunities for young people to develop

their gifts, then certain kinds of actions bear

consideration"(p. 67). They described two curriculum

priorities: "(1) any learning opportunity must be seen as

significant and meaningful by those undergoing it if it is

to have impact.(2) schools can reach out to communities to

provide rich experiences for the young (p. 67).

Marks and Nystrand noted:

   The school program for the gifted/talented should be a
   smorgasbord of experiences prepared by students and
   staff for the gifted/talented. The keys to good
   curriculum are flexibility and creativeness, held
   together with the desire to create in an atmosphere
   charged with the idea that our task is not always to

prove, but to improve. The curriculum cannot and must not be the same for all individuals (p. 193.)

Feldhusen (1986) maintained that a variety of program options, including enrichment and acceleration, should be provided to gifted students. He had seen little effort in modification of the regular curriculum, teaching methods, or learning environment in the regular classroom where the gifted students spent the majority of their time. "Ideal programs for the gifted and talented provide multiple services to meet the diverse needs of gifted and talented youth," stated Feldhusen (1986, p. 243). He approved of a more eclectic program, which borrowed the best from various gifted models. Feldhusen (1986) maintained, "The preeminent need of gifted and talented youth is for instruction and experiences at an appropriate cognitive level, pace, depth, and complexity to maintain a challenge and provide for continuous growth" (p. 244). Feldhusen (1986) expressed the view that it is essential that gifted students be challenged to strive for high-level goals, new understanding, and creative excellence in all their studies.

Torrance (1960) acknowledged that acceleration had been practiced in varying amounts over many years. Even though there was essentially nothing new in its form or

procedures, acceleration still had merit. Acceleration and enrichment can seem ambiguous at times. According to Davis and Rimm (1985), there was a rule-of-thumb definition that helped make a clear distinction between acceleration plans and enrichment plans. "Any strategy that results in advanced placement or credit may be titled acceleration, strategies which supplement or go beyond standard grade-level work, but do not result in advanced placement or credit (that is, anything else) may be called enrichment" (p. 96). Davis and Rimm (1985) recommended that both enrichment and acceleration were necessary for a well-rounded gifted program. They conceded that gifted students should be permitted to work at their own rapid pace or acceleration, and they should also have opportunities for greater variety in content or enrichment. Types of acceleration strategies included early admission into kindergarten or first grade, grade-skipping, subject-skipping, early admission to junior or senior high school, credit by examination, college courses in high school, correspondence courses, telescoping programs, and early admission to college.

Enrichment offered high content complexity that required high-level thinking. Enrichment strategies included independent study, learning centers, field trips,

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Saturday programs, summer programs, mentors and

mentorships, Future Problem-Solving competition, and

Olympics of the Mind programs (Davis & Rimm, 1985).

Grouping was another programming strategy for gifted

students. Grouping students of like ability allowed them to

work together at their own pace. Grouping strategies

included magnet schools, private schools, special classes,

multi-age classrooms, cluster groups, mainstreaming,

pullout programs, and resource programs (Van Tassel-Baska,

1984).

Curriculum models offered a theoretical approach to

gifted programs. There are numerous models with various

approaches. Some of the better known models are Renzulli's

Enrichment Triad Model, Renzulli's Revolving Door Model,

Feldhusen's Three-Stage Enrichment Model, Guilford/Meeker

Structure of Intellect Model, Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking,

Treffinger's model for increasing self-directedness, and

Williams' model of developing thinking and feeling (Piirto,

1999). Feldhusen (1986) commented, "Above all, in designing

curriculum for the gifted, it is essential that they be

challenged to strive for high-level goals, for new

understanding and creative excellence in all their studies"

(p. 248).

While research at the time reflected a variety of programming strategies for gifted students, Davis and Rimm (1985) concluded, "There is no 'best' G/T program. Each must be designed to meet the needs of particular gifted students" (p. 180). Tomlinson et al. (2002) agreed, "Teachers in the highest quality classroom also recognize, however, that there is not a single best pace of instruction, that excellence is defined by extending each individual's reach rather than by adhering to a group norm" (p. 264). Smutney (2003) also noted difficulty in gifted programs:

> Given the relatively low priority placed on gifted education and the inadequate services most of these children receive in the United States and abroad, gifted programs help fill a void for the nation's gifted students… By themselves, programs offer only a part-time solution, but giftedness is a full-time condition. Together, however, they could create a more comprehensive and systematic approach to gifted education and could reach far more children (p. 4).

Trends for the Future

According to Stanley and Baines (2002), "…overall pass rate is increasingly being tied to teacher and administrator salaries, the emphasis in many schools has shifted from addressing the potential of the individual student to getting a majority of students up to a minimal

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level of competency"(p. 11). Their argument is that gifted

students are being shortchanged:

> As a nation, we spend $30 billion on special
> education; sometimes at the rate of $100,000 or more
> per child per annum. In contrast, funding for gifted
> and talented programs is minimal, at best. Of the over
> $2 billion spent on instruction in the Chicago Public
> Schools in 2000, one-tenth of one percent was spent on
> the gifted ($3 million). In comparison, spending on
> special education totaled approximately $531 million
> or 177 times the rate of gifted; vocational education
> was funded at $69 million, 35 times the rate of gifted
> education, and bilingual education was funded at $45
> million, 15 times the rate of gifted education.
> Funding for gifted education gets 1% or less of the
> amount for special and compensatory education in most
> districts, including those in Houston, New Orleans,
> Los Angeles, Dallas, Philadelphia, and New York
> (p. 11).

Stanley and Baines (2002) reported that America's

brightest students were the victims of legal requirements

and fixed budgets. They also noted that one of the most

threatening forces is the re-emergence of the concept of

egalitarianism:

> In a study of the effects of progressive reforms (most
> notably detracking) on academic achievement among
> students in Japan, it was found that parents of the
> brightest students were the first to abandon public
> schools in favor of private academies. As a result,
> the reputations of public schools, once the finest
> educational institutions in Japan, began to wither
> (p. 12).

They suggested the same could happen in American

public schools:

> Clearly, the time has come for an expansion of the
> concept of democratic education. Schooling in a

democracy should not mandate identical programs of
study for every student, irrespective of their special
needs, intellect, or talent. Instead, schools should
provide a curriculum that allows all learners to reach
their full potential. (Barr, 1990)

Adams's (2003) article compared the views of John

Mulhern in his 1978 article on the gifted child in the

regular classroom and the views of today. Adams questioned

whether we were moving forward:

Mulhern closes with a description of a classroom
environment that is still desired today. Attributes of
this classroom include requiring critical thinking,
promoting self-directed learning, and permitting
individual pacing. When all classrooms mirror these
qualities, not only will we leave no child behind, but
we will also not keep any child from moving ahead.
(p. 117)

Gallagher (2004) discussed the current No Child Left

Behind law (P.L. 107-110; Elementary and Secondary

Education Amendments of 2001) and its impact on gifted

students. The purpose of the law is to ensure quality

education for all students, particularly those at risk for

academic problems or failure. The law requires extensive

testing in major subject areas for elementary through

secondary students. The results of the tests are used to

determine whether students, teachers, and schools are

performing at acceptable standards. Gallagher (2004)

compared the No Child Left Behind law to other landmark

legislation, including the Education for All Handicapped

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Children Act of 1975. He described the law as aspiring to

reinforce equity. He stated:

> The goal of equity is to see to it that every child
> has an equal opportunity to profit from education and
> if that means some children receive additional
> resources to compensate for poor environments or
> disability, so be it. Who can oppose such noble
> purposes? (p. 121).

However, he was doubtful whether the law would achieve

those purposes. The assumptions behind the No Child Left

Behind legislation was that public schools have been doing

a poor job in educating many students and stipulations

would be needed to encourage improvement, stipulations such

as requiring teachers to be "highly qualified." He

described the sanctions that would be placed on teachers

and schools:

> In some ways this would be akin to beating one's
> scrawny and tired horse to force him to go faster
> instead of feeding the horse better and being assured
> he has an appropriate amount of rest before putting
> him out on the road again. (121)

The issue for gifted students, parents, and teachers

questions what the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act does in

relation to gifted students. The controversy lies with

whether NCLB enhances or impedes excellence. Tomlinson

(2002) agreed, "That we as a nation have elected to 'raise

educational standards' through a remediation-focused

initiative is a familiar irony" (p. 36). According to

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Gallagher (2004), many teachers are turning from the

curriculum in favor of preparing the students for these

"high-stakes" tests. Most of these tests are at a fairly

basic level, which is not a challenge for gifted students-

so again, their needs are not being met. As with many

authorities on gifted education, Gallagher (2004) proposed

that education goals should include thinking skills. The

majority of current tests measured content mastery. High

scores may give the impression of an intelligent student.

Also Gallagher (2004) stated, "Another misguided assumption

of NCLB is that test performance equates with learning"

(p. 123). He suggested the ability to ask good questions

and then find the strategies for answering them is what

should be assessed. According to Gallagher,

> The ability to proactively search the Internet, to use
> divergent thinking in searching for alternative
> solutions, to analyze arguments, and reach defensible
> conclusions are key skills that are rarely assessed.
> These are the skills that mark the productive student
> and adult, not merely a well operating memory bank. We
> should be designing protocols to assess those
> important skills. (p. 123)

Gallagher suggested the NCLB law could be a means to

make a case for advanced, differentiated curricula for

gifted students, training for teachers of the gifted, and

advanced evaluation protocols to measure their advanced

skills and learning. He concluded, "By focusing on these

issues in the education of gifted students, we can remind our friends that excellence as well as equity is a legitimate goal of American education" (p. 123).

Masse (2001) stated that educators should take advantage of the World Wide Web technologies to offer special services to schools with limited instructional resources or those in geographical isolated regions. Barr (1990) noted, "*Tele-learning*" and "*tele-mentoring*" will probably increase access to enrichment possibilities of gifted students. Riley (2004) discussed the ways in which Tennessee is working to improve and expand services to gifted students in Tennessee. One option for students was to take more challenging courses online if the classes were not offered at the students' school. Other suggestions being considered in Tennessee include:

- Creating a gifted license for classroom teachers to add to their teacher certification.

- Train school counselors on how to best identify, test and evaluate gifted students.

- Train educators on how to best teach gifted students.

- Allow gifted high school students to enroll in college courses—for which they earn both high school and college credit—during school hours. In many cases, this would be an expansion of the dual-credit courses that are already available in high school.(*Tennessean*, State Strengthening Services for Gifted Students, May 20, 2004).

Swanson (2004) discussed the recent popularity of academic competitions for gifted students. The competitions focused on inventiveness, creativity, ingenuity, and problem solving.

Berger (1991) viewed curriculum development as, "a dynamic, ongoing process" (p. 4). She saw a need for periodic evaluations of curriculum effectiveness. Berger noted

> Developing curriculum that is sufficiently rigorous, challenging, and coherent for students who are gifted is a challenging task. The result, however, is well worth the effort. Appropriately differentiated curriculum produces well-educated, knowledgeable students who have had to work very hard, have mastered a substantial body of knowledge, and can think clearly and critically about that knowledge (p. 5).

Importance of Gifted Education

As cited in the issue brief developed by Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform and the Tennessee Association for the Gifted (2003), a study by Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, and Slavin (1993) noted, "…84 percent of regular classroom teachers do not modify the curriculum for gifted students and, as a result, gifted students waste much of their time in the regular classroom" (p. 1). According to the research by Tennessee Initiative for Gifted Education Reform and Tennessee Association for the Gifted (2003):

The pace and content of the standard curriculum are
not designed with gifted students in mind, and efforts
to "raise the bar for everyone" do not address their
educational needs. To ensure that gifted students are
taught at their current achievement levels and make
continuous academic progress, they need curriculum
differentiation or compacting, subject or grade
acceleration, special classes, and access to programs
not normally offered to their age peers. (p. 1)

Tomlinson et al. (2002) described the young people of

today as, "…more demanding and powerful consumers—in their

regard to their education—than they have been

traditionally" (p. 2). Tomlinson et al. maintained that

effective curriculum should be responsive to the learner

and his or her world. Tomlinson et al. stated:

An appreciation of contemporary learners, their world,
and the need to maximize the capacity of each learner
leads us to make the following conclusions about
curriculum design that have guided our work:

- Curriculum should guide students in mastering key
  information, ideas, and the fundamental skills of
  the disciplines

- Curriculum should help students grapple with
  complex and ambiguous issues and problems

- Curriculum should move students from novice
  toward expert levels of performance in the
  disciplines

- Curriculum should provide students opportunities
  for original work in the disciplines
- Curriculum should help students encounter,
  accept, and ultimately embrace challenge in
  learning

- Curriculum should prepare students for a world in which knowledge expands and changes at a dizzying pace

- Curriculum should help students determine constants in the past and in themselves while helping them prepare for a changing world

- Curriculum should help students develop a sense of themselves as well as of their possibilities in the world in which they live

- Curriculum should be compelling and satisfying enough to encourage students to persist in developing their capacities. (p. 2)

Tomlinson et al. (2002) concluded, "Therefore, education at all levels ought to be about providing environments and opportunities designed to maximize individual capacity" (p. 3).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather data from numerous sources such as teachers, special education directors, and the Tennessee state director of gifted education to investigate what gifted programs and or strategies are currently being offered in selected schools and explore the emerging strategies in the field of gifted education within the selected schools.

The study is qualitative in its design. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the participants, describe the data-gathering process that was used, outline the process by which semi-structured interviews were conducted, and delineate the procedures that were used for data collection and analysis.

Design of the Study

The design of the study was based on a type of qualitative research that involves making careful descriptions of educational phenomena. The interview process explored attitudes and beliefs of the teachers, the directors of special education, and the state director of gifted education. The primary method of data collection was

semi-structured interviews of a purposeful sample of

educators and administrators involved in the education of

gifted individuals. Qualitative research techniques served

as the predominant mode of analysis.

<u>Participants in the Study</u>

In keeping with the qualitative research design,

purposeful sampling techniques were used. Twenty-six

participants were interviewed including the current

Tennessee Director of Gifted Education. I interviewed the

five area special education directors from the Bristol

Tennessee School System, Johnson City School System,

Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County School

System, and Washington County School System and 15

elementary through secondary special education teachers,

representing 20 of the 50 schools in the selected school

systems, and 5 regular classroom teachers, providing 26

participants. The participants were involved in the

education or administration of identified intellectually

gifted students during the 2005-2006 school year.

The Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State

University authorized me to conduct the study. After

potential participants were identified, initial contact

with each individual was made in person or by telephone. A

letter of explanation of the study was given to each person

who agreed to participate. Each interview took place at the

designated date and time requested by the interviewee. Each

research participant was asked to sign a consent form and

did so.

Instrumentation

I developed and pilot-tested an interview guide. The

instrument was based on the literature review as well as my

experience with gifted programs and strategies.

The purpose of the interviews was to elicit responses

of those individuals in the educational environment who

were involved in the education and administration of gifted

students. Permission to transcribe each interview was

requested and obtained from each participant: anonymity and

confidentiality were guaranteed.

Data Collection

As the principal investigator, I was the primary data

collector during all interviews in this qualitative study.

Detailed descriptions of events, persons, interactions,

direct quotations, and the school were recorded. A research

journal was used to record notes of any occurrence that

might appear to relate to the research topic. Data were

collected using semi-structured interviewing techniques. An interview guide allowed me to collect accurate data. I conducted 26 interviews, which I tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to discover the respondents' perceptions related to the education of gifted students within their specific school settings. The primary means of data collection in this study was the semi-structured interviews.

A general interview guide provided a list of topics to be investigated. The interview guide allowed me to collect data related to a set of topics common to each of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the interviewees opportunities to reflect upon and verbalize their perceptions of the gifted program within their educational systems. As the interviews progressed, the questions became more open ended. This technique allowed each respondent the opportunity to express his or her opinions freely. The topics to be discussed were based on the unique needs and characteristics of the intellectually gifted student as revealed by the review of literature.

Data Analysis

After each participant was interviewed, the recorded interview was transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcripts were audited. I began analyzing the data by coding each incident in the data into as many categories of analysis as is appropriate. A set of tentative categories was developed through exploration and discovery reflected from the research questions established in Chapter 1.

I reread the transcripts individually to code for specific instances of the categories and to look for the relationships between categories. The interview transcripts were used to identify comments related to themes collected from the teachers, special education directors, and the state director of special education interviews.

Trustworthiness

I used triangulation, referential adequacy, peer debriefing, and member checking in this study to establish credibility. According to Patton (2002), "It is in data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by

strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn"
(p. 556).

To represent a purposeful sample, I interviewed 26
educators including the current Tennessee Director of
Gifted Education: the 5 area special education directors
from the Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City
School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan
County School System, and Washington County School System;
15 elementary through secondary special education teachers;
and 5 regular classroom teachers. Creswell (2003) noted
that a large number of participants were not needed. He
stated, "The idea behind qualitative research is to
purposefully select participants or sites that will best
help the researcher understand the problem and the research
questions" (p. 185).

Referential adequacy was established by audio taping
and transcribing verbatim all interviews. Dr. Pashia Hogan
served as peer debriefer to ensure my honesty and accuracy
throughout the study. Creswell (2003) described a peer
debriefer as, "...a person who reviews and asks questions
about the qualitative study so that the account will
resonate with people other than the researcher" (p. 196).

After all of the interviews are transcribed and the
preliminary data analysis was completed, I invited each

participant to review the statements in the preliminary

report that pertained specifically to him or her to check

for accuracy and completeness. This is called "member-

checking". According to Patton (2002), "Researchers and

evaluators can learn a great deal about the accuracy,

completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their

data analysis by having the people described in that

analysis react to what is described and concluded" (p.

560).

Summary

This chapter describes the qualitative research design

that was used to investigate the perceptions of educators

and administrators of intellectually gifted individuals.

The purposes of this chapter are to identify the

participants, describe the data gathering processes that I

used, outline the process by which I conducted semi-

structured interviews, and delineate the procedures that I

employed for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather

data from a variety of sources including teachers, special

education directors, and the state director of gifted

education to determine what gifted programs and or

strategies are currently being offered in the selected

schools and to explore emerging strategies in the education

of intellectually gifted students in the Bristol Tennessee

School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City

School System, Sullivan County School System, and

Washington County School System. This chapter presents the

data-gathering process of the study.

<u>Interviewees</u>

As initially planned, I collected data by interviewing

26 participants. The interviewees included the current

Tennessee Director of Gifted Education: the 5 area special

education directors from the Bristol Tennessee School

System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City School

System, Sullivan County School System, and Washington

County School System; and 15 elementary through secondary

special education teachers, representing 20 of the 50

schools in the selected school systems, and 5 regular

classroom teachers, providing 26 participants. The

participants were involved in the education or

administration of identified intellectually gifted students

during the 2006-2007 school year.

Subjects were interviewed privately at the location of

their choice. These locations consisted primarily of the

classrooms or offices of the interviewees with the

exception of two who invited me into their homes. Each

session was recorded on audio tape. Each subject had prior

knowledge as to the nature of the interview. All

participants were comfortable with the interview process

and did not hesitate to answer the interview questions.

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method to

inductively identify themes of thought was used to analyze

the participants' responses as provided by the verbatim

transcripts. Because confidentiality was assured, none of

the participants are referred to by their real names;

pseudonyms are used.

<u>Development of Categories</u>

I avoided using predetermined categories. As the taped

interview sessions were transcribed, categories and

subcategories were created. The categories generally

reflected the questions asked in the interview guides.

Constant comparisons between potential categories and the

actual transcripts were made. Analysis of the transcripts

revealed seven major types of educational programming for

intellectually gifted students: direct, consultation,

inclusion, acceleration, afterschool activities, advanced

placement, and ability grouping. Instructional strategies

were much more complex. Using the key concepts derived from

the review of literature, instructional strategies were

grouped into three major strategies: acceleration,

enrichment, and grouping. Consequently, Chapter 4 exhibits

in narrative form the key categories of thought that

emerged through the data analysis. The seven educational

programs for intellectually gifted students are presented

first, along with participants' perceptions concerning

strengths and weaknesses in each program. The three

instructional strategies for intellectually gifted students

follow, along with descriptions of participants'

perceptions concerning strengths and weaknesses.

Educational Programs

Analysis of the transcripts revealed seven major types

of educational programming for gifted students: direct,

consultation, inclusion, acceleration, afterschool activities, advanced placement, and ability grouping. Each program is presented along with participants' perceptions concerning strengths and weaknesses.

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is defined as instruction provided by the teacher, in this case by a teacher to a special education child. Instruction is designed to meet the specific educational needs of the eligible child (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003). Direct instruction, or service, is sometimes referred to by participants as "pull-out."

Interviewee 4 began her career using direct service with gifted students 22 years ago. A curriculum was developed based on the student's interests taking into consideration the student's strengths and weaknesses. Interviewee 4 stated:

> If the child is very adept in science, we looked at the scientific process. We used the theme for everyone, but within the theme we catered, well catered is not really the word, we emphasized trying to develop a student's talent.

Like Interviewee 4, Interviewee 11 said she worked with gifted students in direct service. She referred to direct

service as a pull-out program. She explained the criteria

for participation:

> The pull-out would be a child going to the resource
> room for specific academic enrichment activities to
> enhance their regular ed curriculum. We determine
> pull-out services through testing; they have to meet
> their three criteria stages. That's how we determine
> whether they qualify for gifted services.

Strengths

Interviewee 1, a regular classroom teacher, described

the benefits to direct service:

> Well, I am very pleased that our system offers the
> educational service for the gifted students because
> that way they are able to come into an environment
> that is particularly for them, and they can use their
> talents to explore different ways of learning in
> another setting, not just in our classroom setting. It
> is wonderful that they have that opportunity to have a
> teacher just for them at so many times a week. I know
> this from experience because my daughter is in that
> educational service for the gifted, and she absolutely
> loves it. She is thrilled when she gets to come in and
> learn new things about people and places that she
> otherwise would not probably have learned in her
> classroom, and she loves that. She likes to come to
> her Outreach class.

Interviewee 2 said she also felt strongly about direct

service. She viewed the strength of direct service as an

opportunity to identify the needs of students and look at

the students' strengths and weaknesses:

> In the setting that I'm in the strength of direct
> services is that we are in a small group. We can more
> clearly identify the needs, the strengths, and
> relative weaknesses of students. Also, when we have

them in a group of intellectual peers, I see a greater
freedom for them to use their whole vocabulary to
express off-the-wall ideas. I think you just cannot
beat direct service for being able to look at
strengths and relative weaknesses in students. You can
also provide more individualized instruction for them.

Interviewee 16, a very young, energetic teacher, could

not recommend direct service enough:

I think this program is great because it enriches
them, and they also enrich me. I can only say I love
my job, because these kids like what they are doing
and because we do the hands-on activities, and they
are so motivated. Pull-out you see them: I can see how
they are doing, see what bothers them, and what not to
do, and I can see how to inspire them, and how
creative they are. I can see that, but with
consultation I can't.

The opportunity of each gifted child to be with his or

her intellectual peers was noted as a strength by

Interviewee 17. She also commented that being with

intellectual peers creates more spontaneity in learning.

Weaknesses

Interviewee 2 pointed out that gifted students in

direct service sometimes assumed they already knew the

subject matter, and they would tune out the teacher like

they often tune out regular classroom teachers. Her advice

was:

You have to develop a relationship with your students
so they know that when you are doing direct
instruction they need to listen. A lot of gifted

students do tune out direct instruction, especially if they already think they know what's going on.

Interviewee 11 called attention to the fact that a weakness to direct service she noticed was as the children got older; they did not like being singled out:

> They don't like being pulled from their classroom because these are kids who are usually academically very strong and to pull them out you've got to pull them from some subject, and they feel like they are getting behind in that subject. They feel like they are being singled out and they don't want to be removed from their peers.

Interviewee 17, a high school special education teacher, indicated that a weakness for direct service in the high school was inconsistency. "The weakness is they have to wait: you know, it's not a consistent program throughout the year for the student." Student participation is mandated by schedule instead of abilities or interests.

Interviewee 21, a regular classroom teacher, mentioned a prominent concern often noted with gifted education in general, labeling. She stated, "The weakness is the label probably: I don't think we need labels on children at any level. I just don't think children should be labeled; we are all good at something."

The perception by Interviewee 2, a special education teacher, was a stark contrast to Interviewee 21, the regular education teacher. Interviewee 2 noted:

The only weakness with it lies with the regular
classroom teacher. If they have a regular classroom
teacher who understands that gifted is special
education just as much as resource is and that they
can pretest, that they can compact, truly compact
assignments and that they can differentiate
assignments for the students; if you can do that, it
doesn't have a weakness, but if you have a teacher who
insists the student do all the work, who does no pre-
testing, who has no idea that the kids already know
most of the material; then you've got a problem.
That's a weakness, and it comes out to be a burden on
the child instead of being something that will help
them.

Interviewee 17 also had concerns with the regular

classroom teachers, noting that regular classroom teachers

would sometimes be opposed to students being pulled out of

their academic class for fear of missing something that

might be on the T-CAP test. "Oh no, what if they teach them

how to think instead of how to place commas or quotations,

you know," was her satirical comment.

Interviewee 14, a special education teacher, also

voiced the concern of when and in what class should the

gifted student leave to participate in direct service, or

pull-out:

The weakness of pull-out is what area we are going to
pull these kids out from. Are we going to pull them
out of their academic classes which they have to have
or are we going to pull them out of their related arts
classes which they consider fun and want to be in. We
don't want to punish them by having this pull-out
class and saying you're gifted you have to have this.

The only weakness noted by Interviewee 16 was the amount of time she actually worked with her gifted students. "Weaknesses are I only see them one time a week." This was mentioned by many participants as a weakness of gifted programs.

<u>Inclusion</u>

Nordby (2004) defined inclusion as, "Grouping of students in regular classrooms without regard to ability. It is based on social, not academic concerns" (Glossary of Gifted Education, section I). The term inclusion comes historically from when children with disabilities first were segregated for instruction in public schools. Parents and professionals desired a more equitable, "normal" treatment of these students and for closer contact with their nondisabled peers. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004, requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" to meet their "unique needs." IDEA considers that the "least restrictive environment" begins with placement in the regular education classroom.

Interviewee 12, a regular education teacher, discussed how she dealt with the inclusion setting:

I have special ed, low special ed, to gifted students
in each class. I plan my class to where it's open-
ended, where they can experience what they need to and
be challenged and still get the eighth grade
curriculum that they need.

Interviewee 13 related that the students were grouped

in an inclusion setting; and all students have the same

text book, but modifications were made by the teacher for

the gifted students. Modifications included various

projects or computer activities for students to choose.

Interviewee 13 also said the gifted students were

encouraged to use their leadership skills in cooperative

learning situations. The students would be grouped with

students of varying degrees and abilities. The gifted

students are encouraged to use their leadership skills to

plan, organize, and delegate activities for the other

students.

Interviewee 21 is a regular education teacher. She

said she preferred to have the gifted children in her class

in the inclusion setting. She has taught 30 years and

worked with both the direct service, or pull-out, programs

and inclusion.

Strengths

Interviewee 11, a director of special education,

viewed the strength of inclusion as:

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Instead of pulling the children out, they are in the classroom so other kids in the classroom benefit from seeing the skills that these kids have. And lots of time the gifted kids are the peer models that they need for academic improvement.

Interviewee 13 acknowledged that she thought it was good for a gifted child to be in an inclusion setting because he or she was exposed to all personalities and all ability levels:

The strength of it is teaching a child tolerance. Just because a child is gifted does not mean that he is going to succeed in this world. It's good for a gifted child after they have been in an inclusion class because they are exposed to all personalities, all ability levels. They have to be able to get along with all types of people.

Interviewee 16 noted, "An inclusive setting probably develops more meaningful peer relationships." She also conveyed how an inclusive setting would allow having two professionals in the classroom giving different types of instruction. She viewed the opportunity as a way to make it more diverse and well rounded.

As far as one professional might be good with written activities and one professional might be good with group activities, having two people that are good with different areas of instruction to show the child to make it a little more, well-rounded diverse situation.

Interviewee 22, a special education teacher, noted a strength in comparison to consultation services. She stated:

A strength would be getting to know a child as a
child, not just as a kid's name on a piece of paper;
putting a face to a name and some traits to a child,
that kind of thing and seeing how they interact with
their peers, because a lot of times with gifted kids
that's an issue.

Weaknesses

Interviewee 16 mentioned some of the regular students
might have been distracted when the gifted students were
working on different areas with the special education
teacher.

Interviewee 13 recognized a different type of
distraction and an interesting weakness in the inclusion
setting:

I have also seen children in the inclusion program who
are very gifted who will downsize in order to become
friends with that C or D student, especially if they
are getting letters from the pretty girl and if she
makes Ds then they may downsize to make a D also.

Acceleration

Acceleration takes advantage of a student's ability to
learn at a faster rate. Materials and activities are
presented in a way to advance the student beyond the grade
level (State Department of Education, Division of Special
Education, 2003).

Interviewee 14 is a middle school teacher, and she
noted that acceleration was offered more than it had been

in the past. Students are allowed to take higher level

classes without as much supervision from the special

education teacher.

> They're able to be challenged there without me having
> to check on them as much. If our students are in the
> seventh grade taking algebra, which is typically an
> eighth grade class, they are able when they finish
> that class to go on to the high school their eighth
> grade year and start taking high school classes for
> credit. And then once they have maxed out there, they
> are able to go to college and take courses for credit.

> Interviewee 18, a regular education teacher, stated

she would love to see more opportunities for the gifted

students to advance in grades.

> They sometimes get pigeon holed when we say we can
> meet their needs in the regular ed classroom. I do see
> students who I feel like should be moved up on ahead,
> who have mastered their work and who are going to lose
> that focus and lose that edge if they just remain
> where they are.

Strengths

> Interviewee 11 discussed the advantages of

acceleration:

> Advantages of acceleration of course is that it allows
> the child to move at their own pace, if they are
> flying through the curriculum and they are allowed to
> go to the next grade because they have mastered all of
> the skills of their grade level, then you are
> providing more opportunities to them and less
> likelihood that they will be bored with school or
> maybe not drop out later or that type of thing.

Interviewee 14 noted that a strength to acceleration was to provide the opportunity to get the student farther earlier in his or her life.

> The strength is they're going to receive high school credit hours and that's going to put them ahead in graduation. We have some students that graduate early are taking the college classes early. So, the strength is we are getting them farther earlier in life.

Interviewee 15 agreed with Interviewee 14. She said:

> I think the strength is obvious. Many of those students really, really, really look forward to their college experience; and they are already kind of living in that world in some ways and to have the opportunity as a high school student to go on to a renowned college campus and take classes, I think it is just very inspiring for them. It just gets them that much more excited and more motivated to do what they can do. It is just a very exciting experience; it gives them a small taste of what they need to be prepared for in college in terms of the organization and the responsibility, things like that.

Weaknesses

Interviewee 11, a special education director, stressed that acceleration is something that has to be looked at very carefully. She discussed the issue of maturity level:

> I like that we look at each child individually, and we don't just automatically say what's going to happen because a lot of children are not mature enough to skip a grade or to go on to college classes while they are still in high school.

The issues she mentioned were:

- What is the maturity level of the students where they

  are to be grouped?

- Are the students physically developed enough to be with older children?

- Are their interests similar?

Her concern was noted, "It's really an important decision in that child's life which could affect the rest of their life. If they don't do well or if the expectations are so high, they may crash later on from all the pressure or whatever."

Consultation

Consultation service is defined as service provided to a regular classroom teacher to assist with designing lesson plans or finding advanced materials for particular students (Swanson, 2004). When Interviewee 2 was asked to explain the differences in the various services provided relating to the area of consultation, she said, "Well, the consultation that's obvious that I work more with the teacher than I do with the student."

Interviewee 11 explained consultative services as:

Consultative services are with the regular ed teacher pertaining to modifying the curriculum for the gifted child in the classroom. In the consultative model, the services would be in the regular classroom directed by the regular ed teacher with assistance from the special ed teacher on activities to do with that child.

Interviewee 14, a special education teacher, also said she used consultation with her gifted students. She described how she checks with the students' regular education teacher twice a month to make sure the gifted students are progressing in the needed areas. She stated:

> I think our school within the six years that I have been here has done a really good job of providing services for gifted students. My first year I would have said no, because our gifted students were all in all the same classes and doing a lot of the same thing, they were just given extra stuff to do. Now we are challenging them by putting them in classes that make them think and makes them do more. So we're doing what we need to be doing eventually we'll probably be taking our gifted students out of the Special Ed services because we're meeting their needs without Special Ed services. You know, my consultation services aren't really needed at this point because they're getting what they need in the classroom without me having to push for it.

Interviewee 16 also said she used consultation. As the special education teacher, she developed goals to be used within the regular classroom setting. She stated, "Basically, I just touch base with the regular ed teacher to see what they are doing there."

Interviewee 18, a regular classroom teacher, described her experience with gifted students in an inclusion setting in much the same way as did Interviewees 16 and 14. She was asked to complete a consultation form for the special education teacher which she described as, "Every 3 weeks we get a form that asks about class attendance, completing

homework, missing assignments, grades, upcoming tests,

upcoming assignments, major projects, and extra credit

opportunities."

Interviewee 19 stated that she occasionally worked

with some students on an independent project, if needed.

She said she provided extra support to the student and the

classroom teacher. She also said she consult with parents.

According to Interviewee 19, "Parents also have contact

with me, too, when they think their child needs to have

some more alternate or more advanced work in the

classroom." Interviewee 19 explained the process to

determine services:

> You determine if their needs can be met in the regular
> classroom without special education services, so that
> their needs are being met in the most, least
> restrictive environment possible, first, and if the
> need would be so great that they would need special
> services then you go down the road, then continue on
> there, but you want to make sure that they are in the
> least restrictive environment which is a regular
> education classroom.

Interviewee 20 predominantly serves students in a

pull-out setting but does have a few students on a

consultation basis. Because of schedule conflicts or other

concerns, the students were placed on consultation.

According to Interviewee 20, sometimes a child actually

could not handle the extra work in a pull-out setting, did

not wish to participate in a pull-out program, or did not

make the best grades in the classroom setting. In that case, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting would be held and consultation service would be selected. "Let's get them going on the right path in the regular classroom first. Then we will see," suggested Interviewee 20. She referred to her position with the student on consultation as, "Well, consultation is where I just act as the case manager, check in once or twice a month, really twice a month, just to make sure the child's needs are being met."

Interviewee 22 also stated that parents often said that the student's needs were being met within the regular classroom and the student could be placed on consultation.

> In all the schools I've been in, all the teachers have been very willing to give challenging activities to those more creative students and kindly give some liberties to the gifted students to do what they feel like they need to do to have their needs met in the classroom.

To aid in her consultation, she meets with the classroom teacher and asks:

> Is there anything they need, do they need any supplementary materials, is there anything I need to provide to them that they don't have, what are they doing in the classroom? You know, what other educational opportunities are they giving the kids? Just different things like that and that can be through e-mail, that can be through a written note, conference in the hall, or just touching base with them throughout the week. That may be every two weeks or it may be every week, but I do it on a regular basis. It's just to kind of touch base.

One of the reasons Interviewee 20 stated they changed from a pull-out service to a consultation service was because some students felt different being pulled from classes. The students did not feel as though they were part of the regular classes. Some students were even chided for their participation. The school system then chose to go to the consultation services. According to Interviewee 20:

> They went to a consultation basis where their needs were being met in the classroom. Materials were provided to the regular ed teacher and the special ed teacher was more of just a facilitator, somebody who provides what the regular ed teacher needs, also, a kind of a bridge between the parents and the teacher. If the parents have an issue they can call me they can get a hold of me a whole lot easier than they could the classroom teacher. Fortunately we've not had many issues so that's where I think they come to the consultation basis with Bristol. The kids and parents felt like they were being pulled out and being taken out of the regular classroom that they were missing instruction that was going on in the regular classroom at the time. We wanted to provide the least restrictive environment for them and that's just how this system feels like they do that.

Strengths

The majority of participants acknowledged the strength of consultation to be exactly what the name stated, the ability to consult between special education teacher and regular education teacher concerning the needs of the gifted student.

Interviewee 11 stated, "The strength of consultation would be having the special ed teacher working with that regular ed teacher helping them develop the skills to work with the child in the classroom."

Interviewee 23 also noted that the main benefit of consultation was the opportunity to talk with the regular education teacher concerning the needs of the gifted student:

No Child Left Behind really it's not leaving anybody behind, but sometimes the higher level students aren't really thought about in that system sometimes. And I think if you at least focus the regular teachers on the fact that hey these students also need challenged, that link with me is probably what is the main benefit of consultation.

Interviewee 14 agreed:

The strength of consultation is being able to check on the students, making sure that they are getting what they need. We'll check with their teachers, that way we can communicate with the parents. It's just a way to keep up with them and keep a check on them.

Interviewee 18 mentioned similar perceptions and also noted communication with parents:

I think a strength with the consultation forms is that the parents are communicated with. I think another strength is that it really gives the, resource teacher or special ed teacher some knowledge about what we are doing in the classroom; an expectation, it gives them a quick snapshot of what their grades are, and how their behavior is, and so forth.

Interviewee 22 noted that as a special education teacher, she was not with a child every day like the

classroom teacher. As far as consultation was concerned she said she thought that the classroom teacher was the person to best determine the needs of the gifted child:

> One strength I see is that it really does kind of give the teachers, the classroom teachers who are with theses children everyday, day in and day out, to better suit their educational needs, where as me coming in as a, you know, special educator, not being with them all day long, not having that rapport with them, I may not be honing in on what they need for that specific subject. I think it gives the teachers, I don't want to say free reign, but it gives them the opportunity to do what they want to do and not somebody looking over them, saying do this, or do that. I would think they would feel like they are able to do more. I feel like they have a little bit more freedom to do what they really feel like the child needs.

Interviewee 15, a high school special educator, stated the fact that the majority of her gifted students preferred to participate in the general high school curriculum in the honors classes or AP classes, classes specific to their gifted skills and talents. Although this was their choice, because they were receiving consultation services they also knew that there was an option for something different should the need arise. The students would request the consultation service in such an instance.

Weaknesses

Participants reported weaknesses in multiple areas concerning consultation. Some perceived the weakness as a

time factor issue. Others viewed consultation as lacking in the appropriateness of the curriculum for gifted students. A lack of opportunity to work with peers of similar ability was noted as a weakness. Another weakness concerned the fact that the teacher did not spend enough time with the students to get to know them, and still another participant noted that the classroom teacher ignored the special education teacher's suggestions for the gifted student.

Interviewee 11, a director of special education, related a concern that may be shared by many special education teachers. Numerous special education teachers serve multiple spectrums of special education. A special education teacher could possibly serve both gifted and learning-disabled students. She noted a weakness in consultation concerning that case in point. "I think the biggest weakness would be the time factor for the special ed teacher because they have such large case loads of children who are very needy on the other end of the spectrum."

Interviewee 14, a special education teacher, also observed the same dilemma. She discussed her opinion that the lower-level students usually received direct service, and that the gifted students were on consultation. She related that the teacher could "fall behind" with

consulting or checking on the gifted students because the majority of the teacher's time is consumed by the direct service with the lower-level students. "Sometimes the gifted students are pushed to the side because you know that they are doing what they need to be doing."

Interviewee 18 saw consultation as basically communication between the school and the parent concerning the student. She stated, "The weakness is it really doesn't promote any above and beyond gifted type of service or projects. It really doesn't do anything to help them to continue on an accelerated path. It's just pretty much parent communication."

Interviewee 20's comments emphasized that the students did not get to participate with their peers in a setting where the students could learn from each other.

Interviewee 22's main concern was her contention that she did not work closely with the students, and consultation did not provide an opportunity to get to know them personally.

Interviewee 2 perceived the consultation setting to work better in the high school than the elementary school:

> I don't like consultation service. I did work in a
> consultation setting in high school several years ago
> and I was working with a team of teachers who were
> primarily teaching advanced placement classes. They
> were very specific with the materials they requested

and we really, I think, had a good working
relationship. Where I could supply materials, where I
could educate them about the needs of the students,
where they could go, what they needed; we worked as at
team and that was really good. But with younger
students I'm not happy with consultation, because
teachers ignore you. By in large the teachers will
ignore your suggestions. That's my problem with it. If
you've got a teacher who wants to work with you then
that can be a good thing but that's not been my
experience.

After-School Activities

Interviewee 11 and Interviewee 13 both mentioned

after-school activities for the intellectually gifted

students. The activities mentioned were: Odyssey of the

Mind, chess club, mock trials, Scholars Bowl, and Science

Olympiad. These programs are optional, and participation is

often based upon the availability of transportation.

Strengths

Interviewee 21 remarked, "It gives children who aren't

involved in athletics another avenue to have an active

environment outside of the school in a way that motivates

them." She also related that sometimes children that are

gifted have difficulty with their social skills. She noted

that the after-school programs provided an opportunity to

socialize. She said that gifted students often could find

the perfect niche with programs like Odyssey of the Mind.

She said that the gifted students' needed to participate in activities that worked their minds when they might be lacking in athletic skills.

Weaknesses

Interviewee 11 noted the lack of parent involvement as a weakness. "The weakness would be the parents who don't have the opportunity to leave them there where they have to ride the bus home. Parents can't be involved, can't come and get them."

Interviewee 15 echoed the same thing, "Some of our gifted students may not be able to participate in programs outside of school due to a lack of transportation." She also expressed another concern about after-school programs:

> I have had several of my students who were gifted fall
> into the very common pit of over committing and then
> they are spread so thin. I understand the situation
> because they feel like they want to do this because
> they are good at it and some of my students have been
> good in so many areas that they wanted to lead in so
> many areas and then they get really spread to thin and
> get stressed out.

Advanced Placement

Advanced placement classes are college-level courses taken as part of a high school program, often referred to as AP courses. Advanced placement courses offer advanced students the opportunity to take courses with more

challenging college-level content. Students who complete

advanced placement courses are eligible to take the

advanced placement exams. Students that score at the

appropriate level may qualify for college credit at most

colleges and universities.

Strengths

Interviewee 23, a high school special education

teacher, noted that the gifted students often took the

advanced placement classes in high school. Interviewee 13,

a special education teacher at the elementary level, also

said she used advanced placement with the elementary

students. She explained:

> Some of our children attend our high school and do
> Algebra 1 in eighth grade, but this isn't an IEP
> decision, this goes through the guidance department.
> Students sometimes are put into pre-algebra class in
> seventh grade and they do attend classes with eighth
> graders if their math scores are such that the school
> feels like they can handle the class. They are not
> just put in an advanced class because they are gifted,
> because they may not be gifted in all academic areas,
> and it depends on where the area of giftedness is. In
> the advanced language arts class they are grouped on
> ability level and they're challenged to do more
> writing activities, and activities that are still in
> the standards but at or above the level three.

Weaknesses

Interviewee 14 commented on the difficulty sometimes

in providing transportation to the high school for middle

school students in advanced placement classes. Interviewee 15 stated the same problem, "I don't really know of a specific weakness except that it does take them off of our campus for a little while, and there are always complications with that." She also emphasized the desire to offer more AP classes. She related how advanced placement classes were not offered in all areas. She supported this fact with the reason, "We don't have enough students who are capable of that level of work to offer an even wider variety of those classes."

Interviewee 15 noted the conflict with scheduling, "They are only scheduled at specific times: it's not like you can take AP physics first period, second period, third period, or fourth period." Students may choose to participate only if it fits in their schedule. Students may have to wait until the advanced placement course is offered in another semester. She also voiced the same concern as Interviewee 14 in the lack of advanced placement courses offered: "I am sure that my gifted students could have gone further had there been other AP classes offered."

Interviewee 15 conveyed the fact that the high school gifted students are often decertified at the high school level. Decertification means the student is no longer labeled as gifted. The reasoning behind this

decertification, according to Interviewee 15, is that the

faculty views the high school program strong enough to meet

the student's needs academically as well as in leadership

and social skills. The student's parents must also agree

and give their authorization for decertification at an

Individual Education Plan (IEP meeting). She commented on

the program at the high school level being such a strong

program, not just academically, but in leadership and

social skills that more of the students needs were being

met without certification as gifted. When asked if

Interviewee 15 had anything to add she stated:

> The only thing that really comes to mind is that
> having done this from an elementary position and also
> in a high school position I see a vast difference in
> my thoughts on services for gifted students. In the
> elementary class the curriculum is very structured and
> there aren't as many built in options for gifted
> students in the elementary level. So, at the
> elementary level the gifted students that I had I felt
> needed the IEP in order to provide them something
> beyond what was available at the elementary level. I
> haven't worked in our middle school so I won't even
> speak to that. But at the high school level, I'm not
> saying I won't get a gifted student tomorrow that
> blows the roof off of everything we've got and we have
> to put something together totally different, but I
> feel like for the students that I have had since then
> and many others we have built such a strong program,
> not just academically but in leadership and social
> skills that we feel like we can meet more of their
> needs without having the certification.

Ability Grouping

Ability grouping is defined as an arrangement wherein students identified as intellectually gifted are placed in groups, which bring them in contact with others of similar abilities and interest (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003). Ability grouping was noted as an educational service for intellectually gifted students by Interviewee 21. "The other third grade teacher and I began skill grouping in math only: we did move them at their speed in a group of other students at the same level in math only."

Strengths

Interviewee 11 compared the strengths of grouping to what the regular classroom teacher does when he or she groups for reading. "So they have their advanced readers in one group, and they have their low readers in one group, and their average readers in one group. To me, that's an advantage because you are teaching them all at the same level."

Interviewee 12, a regular education teacher, expressed her perceptions of ability grouping:

> Well, the strength would be what you could cover and how you can cover it, just the depth of it. Just

think, instead of spending so much time on the basics you could probably take it to the next level with that class. Make them discover and just uncover more about each concept.

Interviewee 21's views were similar. She stated, "The strength is it eliminates the problem of them being bored with the over-explained steps that other children need and they don't, feel as frustrated with, why aren't they getting this?"

Weaknesses

Interviewee 11 perceived the weakness with ability grouping as a lack of diversity. She emphasized it was not like the real world. "School wouldn't be like the real world if all gifted kids were put in one class, and all the slow learners were put in another class. So that would be my biggest disadvantage, it just wouldn't be like the real world."

Interviewee 12 had the same viewpoint:

But they've got to learn to work with other people that are on different levels, from different socioeconomic groups, different ethnic groups: and you know, if they're all together all day long, then they are not going to get that. It's not a real world situation. and that is what we are trying to get them ready for.

She also commented that having gifted students grouped did not produce a utopia classroom. She identified another

weakness in the fact that it sometimes became a social

status issue:

> You would like to think that they were all the best of
> the best of the gifted, but not all identified gifted
> are focused students, they don't always produce that
> ability that they have. You'd like to think it was the
> utopia of the classroom, but realistically it's
> probably not. The draw back is that it becomes a
> social status, like I'm in the gifted science class
> and you're not.

Interviewee 15 voiced her underlying concern that

there were not enough gifted students to rationalize the

salary for a teacher to teach the class. "They're just

aren't the number of students that would justify paying a

teacher to teach those specialized classes."

Instructional Strategies

Marks and Nystrand noted:

The school program for the gifted/talented should be a
smorgasbord of experiences prepared by students and
staff for the gifted/talented. The keys to good
curriculum are flexibility and creativeness, held
together with the desire to create in an atmosphere
charged with the idea that our task is not always to
prove, but to improve. The curriculum cannot and must
not be the same for all individuals (p. 193.)

Analysis of the interviews concerning instructional

strategies agreed with Marks and Nystrand. There was a

smorgasbord of instructional strategies viewed by the

interview participants. Feldhusen (1986) also noted:

> There is, however, no way to specify a curriculum by
> grade level for all gifted youth because of
> differences in their levels and types of precocity…
> K-12 curriculum planning means chiefly that
> opportunities are available for accelerated,
> integrative, and intellectually complex learning
> experiences when the student is ready. (pp. 247-248)

In Worchester's 1956 book, *The Education of Children of Above-Average Mentality,* he outlined two possible methods for caring for the needs of above-average children: acceleration and enrichment. Feldhusen (1986) also maintained that a variety of program options, including enrichment and acceleration, should be provided to gifted students. Davis and Rimm (1985) recommended that both enrichment and acceleration were necessary for a well-rounded gifted program.

According to Davis and Rimm (1985), there was a rule-of-thumb definition that helped make a clear distinction between acceleration plans and enrichment plans. "Any strategy that results in advanced placement or credit may be titled acceleration, strategies which supplement or go beyond standard grade-level work, but do not result in advanced placement or credit (that is, anything else) may be called enrichment" (p. 96). Grouping was another programming strategy for gifted students. The plethora of instructional strategies noted by participants was

categorized into the three suggested categories:
acceleration, enrichment, and grouping.

Acceleration

    Acceleration was also listed as an educational program
by participants, as well as an instructional strategy. This
section focuses on acceleration as an instructional
strategy, which can both be used to advance students beyond
grade level by achieving credit or also by acceleration or
rapid movement through subject matter.

    Acceleration, as defined by the State Department,
takes advantage of a student's ability to learn at a faster
rate. Materials and activities are presented in a way to
advance the student beyond the grade level (State
Department of Education, Division of Special Education,
2003). All the area high schools offer advanced placement
courses. Advanced placement courses are college-level
classes taken as part of a high school program. Advanced
placement courses offer advanced students the opportunity
to take courses with more challenging college-level
content. Students who complete advanced placement courses
are eligible to take the advanced placement exams. Students
who score at the appropriate level may qualify for college
credit at most colleges and universities. Intellectually

gifted students are not required to take advanced placement
courses in high school, but it is an option that provides
acceleration.

Interviewee 11, a director of special education,
offers acceleration opportunities within her school system.
She listed various acceleration opportunities, such as a
student going to a higher grade level class for specific
subjects, advanced placement classes, and grade skipping
which occurs occasionally but not very often. She also
mentioned the opportunity for early college admittance or
the opportunity for students to work at their own level and
pace in specific subjects.

Interviewee 15 noted the depth of instructional
strategies within other instructional strategies offered by
many high school teachers:

> Many of our AP and honors teachers use a more
> comprehensive approach to instruction and a more
> varied array of input for information, and then also
> offer a more varied array of output for the students
> to demonstrate their knowledge, which I think is
> especially important for gifted students."

When Piirot(1999) discussed acceleration and
enrichment she stated simply, "The subject matter for
grouping is either accelerated or enriched classes.
Accelerated classes are those that move rapidly through the

subject matter; enriched classes are those that cover more

subjects in greater depth" p.64.

<u>Strengths</u>

Interviewee 2 explained the strengths of acceleration

or self-paced work simply as:

> We try to develop ways and we try to develop interest
> and we try to develop strategies that you can keep
> yourself occupied and you can keep yourself learning.
> Self-paced work is great. But the advantage of it is
> they can't sit around and yell "I'm bored" if they're
> going at their own pace.

Interviewee 11 referred to the instructional strategy

of acceleration as compacting. Compacting, as defined by

the State Department of Education, eliminates repetition

and minimizes drill of material presented to students.

Students who demonstrate mastery in the subject area spend

less time with the regular curriculum and more time with

enrichment activities. Compacting allows the student to

accelerate at a faster pace through the curriculum

materials typically presented to grade-level peers (State

Department of Education, Division of Special Education,

2003). Interviewee 11 stated:

> The strength of compacting would be that it allows the
> gifted child to not get bogged down with the
> mundaneness of the curriculum especially if it is an
> area that they are already very proficient at, and
> learned a long time ago. It will allow them to move
> faster through the curriculum.

Interviewee 14 voiced the main idea of all special education instruction with her viewpoint concerning acceleration, "The strengths of acceleration is that we are meeting kids' needs, putting them in the areas that they are stronger in and pushing them to make them stronger in that area."

Interviewee 18, a regular classroom teacher, explained the concept simply:

> Well, if they make an A on a pretest about information that I'm going to cover for the next two weeks, it just bothers me to think they are going to have to sit through that two weeks and be bored listening to what they already know. So, I think that is the positive thing of acceleration. They move ahead at their own pace because they have already mastered that content, now they need more or they need new information.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses noted by Interviewee 11, a director of special education, were affecting the teacher and the student. The concern for the teacher pertained to time constraints, the concern for the student related to peer observation:

> A weakness of that would be time constraints for the teacher, it would require more from the teacher in order to allow them to do that. Also, it could single them out in a way that they would be uncomfortable with. If they are doing something different, and their peers don't understand why they are not doing what they are doing.

Interviewee 18, a regular classroom teacher, also

noted the same concerns for the teacher:

> It takes a lot of teacher prep because I have to get
> the pretest ready earlier, I have to have alternative
> activities for them ready, which might include
> worksheets or rubrics, different things, so that's the
> weakness to me with the acceleration is that the
> teacher time that it takes to be able to plan and
> implement the acceleration.

Enrichment

The State Department of Education, Division of Special

Education (2003), defines enrichment as extending a pupil's

education to be broader in scope. The student may explore

topics in greater depth and at higher cognitive levels. The

activities may modify, supplement, and extend achievement

beyond the expectations set forth in the general education

curriculum. Enrichment should focus on the development of

the particular intellectual skills of the individual

student. According to Davis and Rimm, strategies that

supplement or go beyond standard grade-level work but do

not result in advanced placement or credit (that is,

anything else) may be called enrichment" (p. 96). This was

certainly true of the participants interviewed. The

enrichment area held the broadest spectrum of instructional

strategies for intellectually gifted students.

Interviewee 12 described her instructional strategies

for gifted students:

> I try to make it to where it's not just, 'Here's the
> information; lecture and repetition.' I make it; try
> to make it more of a discovery process; an inquiry
> process to where here's part of the information and
> you try to figure out the rest. If you make it
> relevant to them then they are going to remember it.

She offers open-ended questions to promote class

discussion. She described the gifted student's desire for

learning as a "thirst."

> I have got one class that I probably have more gifted
> kids in this year than I ever have, and the
> discussions are just tremendous in that class, even
> when they are off task. If they are off topic the
> discussion is still so good about the other science
> topic that you kind of have to answer those and then
> you have to pull them back, because they want to keep
> going. It's like a thirst.

> Interviewee 14 described how the instructional

strategies for gifted students are determined:

> The IEP that we give for the students is going to be
> general and it's going to say we want to make sure
> they are challenged, they do research activities and
> things, and it doesn't go by specific classes. They
> have to meet criteria just like any other student
> does. I'm not going to put a student who is not gifted
> in the area of math in a higher level math class,
> that's not where their area of need would be. So we're
> just going to put them where they need to be based on
> their TCAP scores, their grades, and teacher input.

> Interviewee 17 is a high school special education

teacher whose focus with gifted students is in the area of

reading and language arts. She stated:

I tell them everything they do is for a reason, and
the premise of the class is that they communicate
their ideas through written and spoken communication;
this determines their future, educationally,
professionally, and personally. And those are the
skills that we work on. We never memorize, we never
copy down definitions, we do discovery through
thinking, through pre-questioning, and by that decide
what the words mean, we use them and we never let them
go. And that's been wonderful.

Interviewee 18 commented that the gifted students

often came to her seeking enrichment. They chose to go

beyond the requirements of the regular curriculum. "I will

have gifted students who are highly motivated who will seek

out additional opportunities, will take project assignments

that I give to my regular ed students, and they will go

above and beyond."

Interviewee 20, a middle school special education

teacher, discussed enrichment:

It's different from acceleration although I do most of
my goals on about an eighth grade level even though
these are sixth and seventh graders. So it is a little
bit, I think, more enriching for them. It gives them
more opportunities to learn more and to spread their
wings. You know, look and see what else is out there.
They learn different strategies like what we've talked
about; research and thinking skills and things like
that. That can be done in the regular classroom too, I
just don't think regular classroom teachers have as
much time or opportunity.

Interviewee 21 shared her viewpoint concerning gifted

students, affirming the need for challenge:

> Gifted students are very challenging. They are
> interesting, they keep you on top of things very much,
> they ask a lot of questions, and sometimes I find them
> a little frustrating because the questions don't stop.
> Depending on how well they know me, their why's never
> end, but gifted students definitely need to be
> challenged.

Technology was mentioned often as an enrichment type of instructional strategy. Interviewee 14 stated, "We have a class named TechEd that all of the students get to take where they do hands-on learning activities, you know, building rockets and making videos."

Interviewee 23, a high school special education teacher, discussed the changes within recent years related to the Internet. He uses Internet research when students complete their regular classroom work. He encourages the use of Internet research as enrichment to go beyond the requirements of the classroom

Interviewee 13 also noted the fast-paced impact of technology and why it was important for students, "Computer concepts is a remediation class in college now, so they need to know it when they go into high school."

Strengths to Technology

Interviewee 1 was highly impressed with the opportunities for students to use technology.

Well, the strengths are--the world is their own. I mean they can look up anything that they want to look up. They can research any subject that they would like to research more deeply. They can do interactive field trips. It is just wonderful!

Interviewee 12 reiterated what Interviewee 1

described:

They can pull up newspapers and magazines that they may not have on hand, and they can share information that they find from the newspaper in China, and it just goes beyond the boundaries of the classroom. It lets them see the world, good and bad, to some extent.

She noted other strengths:

Kids know more about the computers than I do, we've got five computers here in the classroom and you know their computers at home are probably more advanced than what we have. But just exposing them to it is definitely an advantage and letting them help each other, because when they can help each other understand and move the program or how to find something on the internet then that's going to allow them to understand it better, to retain it.

Interviewee 16 perceived technology's motivating

factor to be the fact that computers are "hands-on." She

added that once a teacher stops instruction, it doesn't

mean the students' minds stop: they keep going, and

technology is the vehicle to continue learning.

Weaknesses to Technology

Interviewee 2 described a weakness with technology

that we have all faced:

> If all your systems are up and running, you're fine,
> but if you plan a whole day around technology and the
> systems down, or you have the computer going on the
> fritz or if for some reason your technology is not
> working that is really frustrating. It's frustrating
> for everybody, but gifted kids don't have a whole lot
> of tolerances for that.

She also discussed the vast knowledge of technology gifted students already possess. "You better realize you might have students who know more about what you're doing than you do."

Interviewee 12 echoed the same weakness concerning the computer, "The disadvantage is you never know if it is going to be working that day or not."

Interviewee 1 discussed problems with the Internet in her regular classroom setting. She explained that she had found time management was important because the students might be instructed to do something on the Internet, and they would become so focused they wouldn't know when to stop.

Critical thinking or higher-level thinking was also mentioned often as a major instructional strategy. Interviewee 17 stated, "I tell them every day the job is to get you to think. That's what I'm here for. And that's what we do."

Research of special projects or themed units were all mentioned by various participants. Interviewee 2 stated:

There are a million ways you can go with a themed unit." She gave examples of students given a unit on Egyptology choosing areas of interest in art, science, and architecture. She explained, "There is virtually something for everybody there that helps the teacher be able to select enough material on a topic for everybody and it's really a planning bonus for a teacher. It also helps to create an atmosphere in your classroom, when we are sitting under a themed atmosphere and every corner of the classroom has a different topic going on so they feel some ownership of the classroom where you often have many, many different levels of children coming in and out, so they've got a place that's theirs.

Interviewee 2 viewed the weakness of themed units as, "The weakness is that you might have a student...you might have 15 students who love it and one who doesn't, but that is your job as a teacher to find some angle that they will enjoy."

Strengths

Interviewee 2 noted the students' excitement with introduction to new enrichment topics, "Once they realize you are approaching new material, they can be very excited about very new material. If they realize you have something new to present to them; then it can be really fun for both the teacher and the student." Smutney's (2003) comment confirmed this statement, "Gifted programs have the potential to change lives...We have watched bored and apathetic students reenergized by learning a new subject,

exploring a fresh theory or angle, or testing a hypothesis

they discovered in a gifted program"(p. 1).

Interviewee 11, a special education director,

confirmed what many people believe, instructional

strategies used with the gifted can and should be used with

all students.

> I think a strength of enrichment and in really all of
> these that they can be provided to any child. Not just
> a child labeled as gifted. If you have a group of
> children in your room that are advanced and working
> above grade level it could be for them also, not just
> the gifted child. So, that's definitely one advantage
> to it, also, would provide more interest in specific
> subjects, children are allowed to do activities beyond
> the regular curriculum, they can pick a specific part
> of that subject they are studying and do something
> very creative with it.

Weaknesses

Interviewee 2 discussed the disadvantages of self-

paced learning within the enrichment arena:

> If you have a student who is less than motivated it is
> very difficult to use self-paced learning. So, if you
> have a student who you know from experience who is not
> very motivated you better make sure you have contract
> with him if your going to use self-paced learning and
> you have to monitor that more closely; are they
> actually doing anything, are they actually making
> progress. Sometimes you have in self-paced learning a
> lot of gifted kids who are great verbally but they
> don't want to put it on paper and those students
> sometimes can have trouble with self-paced learning
> unless you are willing to assess them orally.

<u>Grouping</u>

Grouping students of like ability allows them to work together at their own pace. Grouping strategies include magnet schools, private schools, special classes, multi-age classrooms, cluster groups, mainstreaming, pull-out programs, and resource programs.

Interviewee 11 defined grouping, "Grouping can include things like cluster grouping, which are small groups of students who work together periodically, but not constantly alternative classes or schools, mini-studies, and multiage grouping."

<u>Strengths</u>

Interviewee 12, a regular classroom teacher, discussed the students' enjoyment of working with their peers in a group, but also the choices made by gifted students when their grade is at stake:

> I do a lot of small group usually two to three people in a group, and they like that. They like to interact with their peers. The groups are never the same, and they finally realize that, and when I do let them choose who they work with they choose wisely. That's a development process that they have to figure out. 'Oh, they are my buddy, but they don't do very good group work and this is my grade on the line, so I think I'll work with somebody else.' And that's a mature thing, for them to discover that especially in the eighth grade being so sociable. It does make a difference.

Interviewee 2, a special educator who has worked with gifted students for over 22 years, commented that she uses peer tutoring during enrichment activities. Interviewee 2 serves gifted students in a pull-out setting. Peer-tutoring is often mentioned by experts of gifted education as an inferior strategy for gifted students. She explains her rationale:

> I never do this until I know my students and we talk very much about how everybody's good at different things and a lot of these students will say "that's not my best thing" but I teach them to say that "I'm going to try". Everybody is good at different things and the students will often identify who's good at what. And if you foster that respect for each other, they will often seek each other for peer tutoring. When I have new students come in, I often select a student who's patient or who's methodical, someone who fits the personality of the other child to teach them the little things that they need to know to function in the class. The disadvantage is sometimes these bright children aren't patient with somebody who isn't catching on fast. They might be impatient or they might say something to hurt the other child's feelings. Of course well all work not to let things like that happen. We can make a mistake in assigning someone as a peer helper; you just have to pay attention to what's going on. But in a lot of situations I have heard them say, "You're really good at this, can you help me?

Weaknesses

Interviewee 11, a special education director, noted:

> A disadvantage would be having so many like children like you're not getting exposure to diversity. It's not like the real world and school wouldn't be like the real world if all gifted kids were put in one

class and all the slow learners were put in another class. So that would be my biggest disadvantage, it just wouldn't be like the real world is.

Wishes and Improvements for Educational Programs

At the end of each interview, I gave each participant an opportunity to add anything else pertaining to educational programming or instructional strategies for the gifted. This often opened the arena for recommendations.

Interviewee 2 discussed a desire to see more alternative assessment. She stated:

> I am very disturbed with the trend of going back to objectives and spitting out the right answer. Since we have started focusing again so much on these results, I have seen a rapid decline in my student's abilities to think creatively, in my student's abilities to do inferential thinking, in my student's ability to do any kind of logical thinking. They want to go for the one right answer and they will discard and exclude relevant, interesting information for the sake of one right answer and I can also see it affecting their reading. They cannot think and discuss about abstract concepts. They are becoming so trained to take the test and if you give an essay test or if you ask them to write a reflective or persuasive paragraph, they are hamstrung by the fact that there is no right answer. I have been teaching for over 30 years and it's a distressing trend.

Interviewee 7, a regular classroom teacher mentioned concerns pertaining to educational programming:

> I'm torn from the regular classroom teacher perspective. I've been here on both ends. I've been here when we had pullout advance studies and I've been here when we had the kids within the classroom. I am really torn, I definitely want my gifted kids within

my classroom, but I think we are doing a disservice. I think if we truly want to challenge them. I think they are deserving of at least, even if it's just two times a week of having a pullout service for them to give them those extra opportunities. I sometimes feel like they are being held back.

Interviewee 20 mentioned the desire for more time to be provided to the gifted student:

I hope someday that we will be able to provide more time for those services because there is so much emphasis on the other end of the spectrum, that I think not necessarily that these children are left out but that it needs to be emphasized here too because they also have needs.

Interviewee 23 confirmed the need to have programs for gifted students. He stated:

I have been in Special Ed my whole career and worked with everything from middle school behavior disorders, the gang kids in Phoenix, to multiple handicapped conditions. I kind of get the whole spectrum of Special Ed since I've been teaching and gifted probably is the one group left out the most because I think a lot of people feel like ah they're going to take care of themselves, they have everything anyway and that type of thing. I think some of those kids maybe need the most guidance because they have a whole lot of brain power, they have a lot of things going on in their minds, and sometimes they don't have anyone to bounce it off of, or be able to focus it and get going in the right direction and without any services like that. I think it can really cause problems even emotionally in some respects.

Interviewee 24 reiterated the same feelings. She said, "I just feel like we really need to push for our gifted services and continue serving our gifted students and try to meet their needs."

Interviewee 1 wished she could have more time to work with her gifted students. She is a regular education teacher and she noted:

> Sometimes I feel like they get left, not that they're not learning, but that the opportunity to push them more should be more available because as a teacher you have a diverse learning group in your class so you sometimes tend to gravitate towards the ones who aren't even grasping our regular curriculum instead of pushing the ones that could go above and beyond it because you feel safe with them. I wish I could provide more time for them and strategically set up my classroom to where they are.

Concerning the time issue she added, "Of course, the weakness is when you spend so much time with one set of students, then you know you are taking away time from another set of students."

> Interviewee 12 expressed her desires saying:

> I wish that we could provide exactly what everybody needed, you know make it more individualized instruction where this student needs kinesthetic learning, this student needs more concrete paper work or book work to get the same concept, but that is hard when you have got 30 kids in a classroom and when the ranges are different.

> Interviewee 18 made a profound statement:

> So, whether it's grade advancement or high school credits in eighth grade or after school programs for them, before school programs, clubs I just don't know if there are enough opportunities for gifted students to shine. For example, athletes have teams, they play games, they go to other schools, and well currently we don't have anything, like Jeopardy or Knowledge Bowl or anything to test the minds, compete with the mind. So, I'd like to see something there, the academia part focused on instead of the athletic part. I think

something like that for the gifted students would be good for them.

Interviewee 20 discussed her pleasure in working with gifted students. She said:

I enjoy doing it, I hope I get to continue doing it, and I hope someday that I will be able to provide more time for those services because there is so much emphasis on the other end of the spectrum, that I think not necessarily that these children are left out but that their needs should be emphasized here too because they also have needs.

Summary

As reflected by the data analysis, each of the 26 participants in this study described the factors that helped develop their educational experiences with intellectually gifted students. Strengths and weaknesses were noted.

Within the data analysis as presented in Chapter 4 several themes were described in the perceptions expressed by study participants. These themes included seven major educational programs offered to gifted students. A plethora of instructional strategies were mentioned but were divided into three major areas: enrichment, acceleration, and grouping. Thick descriptions were used to present themes from the perspective of each type of study participant whenever possible. Information from the data analysis

section was then used to answer the research questions

posed in Chapter 1. Findings and recommendations for future

practice developed from the data analysis are presented in

Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS TO

IMPROVE PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The actual gifted programs and or strategies currently being offered in selected schools of the Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County School System, and Washington County School System were investigated in this study. Equipped with interview guides and a tape recorder, I interviewed 26 participants, including the current Tennessee Director of Gifted Education: the 5 area special education directors from the Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan County School System, and Washington County School System; 15 elementary through secondary special education teachers and 5 regular classroom teachers; providing 26 participants. All participants were currently involved in the education or administration of identified intellectually gifted students during the 2006-2007 school year.

Summary of Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings that emerged from the interview process. The findings, based on the data analysis presented in Chapter 4, focus on two areas: educational programming for intellectually gifted students and instructional strategies for intellectually gifted students and are presented in two sections implied by these two areas. Recommendations for future practice, conclusions, and implications for further research are also included.

Conclusions

While the education provided to intellectually gifted students in Upper East Tennessee is varied, the options for educational programming and instructional strategies are modeled after the suggested programming options and instructional strategies mentioned in the research literature by prominent experts in the field of gifted education. The use of these options and strategies varied from system to system and sometimes from school to school.

Tennessee is one of the few states that continue to include education of the gifted under the umbrella of special education. This being the case, gifted education in

Tennessee also is mandated by the rules and regulations of special education. The mandate requires some type of education be provided for students identified as intellectually gifted. The requirements are broad in spectrum. Education could be on a consultation basis all the way to a direct pull-out type of education, and each system is allowed to choose what type of service it would like to provide. In theory, when best practices are mentioned, the phrase "meet the needs of the individual child" should be broad in spectrum with a continuum of opportunities being sought to provide the best education possible to meet the students' needs. The diversity in education for the intellectually gifted students is due in reality to what each individual school system perceives it can provide financially. The cost of providing service via consultation is much less than the cost of providing service via a direct pull-out.

<center>Educational Programs</center>

Each of the participants was asked to discuss the educational programs provided for identified intellectually gifted students within his or her school system. As revealed by the data analysis presented in Chapter 4, seven major programs were defined: direct, consultation,

<center>118</center>

inclusion, acceleration, after-school activities, advanced
placement, and ability grouping.

Consultation

The primary educational program offered to
intellectually gifted students within the selected school
systems of Bristol Tennessee School System, Johnson City
School System, Kingsport City School System, Sullivan
County School System, and Washington County School System
was consultation. Swanson (2004) defined consultation as
service provided to a regular classroom teacher to assist
with designing lesson plans or finding advanced materials
for particular students. In a consultation program, each
gifted student is placed in a regular classroom setting;
and extra materials or lessons are provided by the special
education teacher when needed. The student is listed as a
special education student, and the individual education
plan (IEP) lists the services as consultation. There is
very little or no contact with the special education
teacher. Many of the special education teachers served both
spectrums of special education with the learning disabled
group of students receiving direct, or pull-out, service
and the gifted student receiving consultation.

Direct Service

Direct service, also referred to as pull-out, was the second most often offered program. Teacher-directed instruction is provided by the special education teacher for a child with a special education disability. Instruction is designed to meet the specific educational needs of the eligible child (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Advanced Placement

Advanced placement was an educational program offered by all high schools. It is not a required program for the intellectually gifted student, but often it is the choice of the intellectually gifted student. Advanced placement courses are college-level courses taken as part of a high school program, often referred to as AP courses. Advanced placement courses offer advanced students the opportunity to take courses with more challenging college-level content. Students who complete advanced placement courses are eligible to take the advanced placement exams. Students who score at the appropriate level may qualify for college credit at most colleges and universities.

<u>Inclusion</u>

Inclusion tied with advanced placement as the third most often selected choice of educational programming offered to the intellectually gifted student. Norby (2004) defined inclusion as grouping of students in regular classrooms without regard to ability. It is based on social, not academic concerns. Gifted students are not pulled from the regular classroom setting but are "included" with students in the regular classroom, and the special education teacher comes into the classroom for a select time to provide advanced material or enrichment. The term "inclusion" historically comes from the time when children with disabilities first were segregated for instruction in public schools, parents and professionals desired a more equitable, "normal" treatment of these students and for closer contact with their nondisabled peers. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004, requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" to meet their "unique needs." IDEA considers that the "least restrictive environment" begins with placement in the regular education classroom.

Ability Grouping and After-School Programs

Ability grouping and After School Programs were ranked low in the choices for educational programming. Ability grouping is defined as an arrangement where students identified as intellectually gifted are placed in groups that bring them in contact with others of similar abilities and interest (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Acceleration

Acceleration was the least mentioned option in educational programming for intellectually gifted students. Acceleration takes advantage of a student's ability to learn at a faster rate. Materials and activities are presented in a way to advance the student beyond the grade level (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003).

Instructional Strategies

There was a plethora of instructional strategies perceived by the interview participants. After review of the research findings the instructional strategies were categorized as follows: acceleration, enrichment, and grouping.

Enrichment

The State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, (2003) defines enrichment as extending a pupil's education to be broader in scope. The student may explore topics in greater depth and at higher cognitive levels. The activities may modify, supplement, and extend achievement beyond the expectations set forth in the general education curriculum. Enrichment should focus on the development of the particular intellectual skills of the individual student.

Enrichment was the strategy mentioned most often by participants. The definition is broad in scope and encompasses a varied spectrum.

Grouping

Grouping is defined as an arrangement wherein students identified as intellectually gifted are placed in groups, bringing them in contact with others of similar abilities and interests (State Department of Education, Division of Special Education, 2003). This strategy was second in popularity noted by participants.

<u>Acceleration</u>

Acceleration was listed as an educational program by participants as well as an instructional strategy. Acceleration can be defined as an instructional strategy that can both be used to advance students beyond grade level by achieving credit or also by acceleration or rapid movement through subject matter.

Acceleration was the least favorite instructional strategy chosen by participants in this study. It was also the least favorite type of educational programming for the gifted student. Time constraints on the teacher were noted by several participants as a disadvantage to acceleration. Negative observations by the students' peers were also noted as a weakness.

<u>Recommendations to Improve Practice</u>

In Chapter 2, the "Best Practices" for the education of the intellectually gifted were presented. At the conclusion of my research, the findings indicate that many of the "Best Practices" mentioned by prominent experts in the field of gifted education were also mentioned by the participants of this study. Tomlinson et al. (2002) noted that gifted education advocated curriculum, "…rooted in discovery, manipulation of ideas, integration of subjects

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via exploration of common themes, a product orientation,

and so on" (p. 4).

A recurring theme in the discussion of gifted

education was what type of educational program works best

with intellectually gifted students and how to provide the

most appropriate instructional strategies to best meet

their needs.

Enrichment was the strategy mentioned most often by

participants. Because the definition is broad in scope and

encompasses a varied spectrum, many learning opportunities

may be considered enrichment. I think enrichment is a

wonderful area for gifted instruction, but I recommend that

educators using enrichment type activities determine

whether the enrichment activities being utilized are of the

same standards as those revealed in the literature.

According to Davis and Rimm (1985), enrichment should offer

high content complexity, requiring high-level thinking.

Grouping can also be accomplished in various ways:

magnet schools, private schools, special classes, multi-age

classrooms, cluster groups, mainstreaming, pull-out

programs, and resource programs. However possible, I think

gifted students should have some time to work together. I

agree with Smutney (2003), "Gifted programs allow gifted

children to share their insights and talents--to be gifted-

-in ways their usual classroom rarely can" (p. 1). Grouping

gives students an opportunity to network with children of

similar abilities.

Acceleration was the least favorite type of

educational programming mentioned by study participants. I

understand Interviewee 11's, a special education director

concerns about acceleration. She stressed that acceleration

is something that has to be looked at very carefully:

> I like that we look at each child individually, and we
> don't just automatically say what's going to happen
> because a lot of children are not mature enough to
> skip a grade or to go on to college classes while they
> are still in high school. It's really an important
> decision in that child's life which could affect the
> rest of their life.

I also agree that acceleration should not be

recommended without careful consideration. In addition, I

think it is a viable opportunity for the gifted student and

should be considered more often. Davis and Rimm (1985)

recommended that both enrichment and acceleration are

necessary for a well-rounded gifted program. They conceded

that gifted students should be permitted to work at their

own rapid pace, or acceleration, and that they should also

have opportunities for greater variety in content or

enrichment. Types of acceleration strategies mentioned in

the "Best Practices" section of Chapter 2 included early

admission into kindergarten or first grade, grade-skipping,

subject-skipping, early admission to junior or senior high school, credit by examination, college courses in high school, correspondence courses, telescoping programs, and early admission to college.

Characterizing the different educational programs provided to gifted students in Upper East Tennessee and distinguishing the various instructional strategies used by participants should enable educational personnel working with gifted students to select programs and instructional strategies they deem appropriate for their school system and their intellectually gifted students.

A key concept in special education is individualized instruction for each student. Kaplan (1986) maintained that curricula for the gifted could be assessed based on two questions: "Is the curriculum *differentiated* for the gifted? and Is the curriculum appropriate for the gifted?" (p. 129). I also see the need for gifted curricula to be individualized and differentiated, incorporating higher-level thinking and offering challenge. Feldhusen (1986) maintained, "The pre-eminent need of gifted and talented youth is for instruction and experiences at an appropriate cognitive level, pace, depth, and complexity to maintain a challenge and provide for continuous growth" (p. 244).

Feldhusen (1986) acknowledged the difficulty in

specifying a curriculum specific to gifted students:

> There is, however, no way to specify a curriculum by
> grade level for all gifted youth because of
> differences in their levels and types of precocity…
> K-12 curriculum planning means chiefly that
> opportunities are available for accelerated,
> integrative, and intellectually complex learning
> experiences when the student is ready. (pp. 247-248)

Although it is a difficult task, I think the realms of

opportunity are broad. The gifted student deserves our

attention, and the research has shown various types of

programs and strategies that can be used. Maker (1986)

noted that there should be accountability for practices in

the field of education of gifted learners. Even though she

saw the need to "guard against attack," Maker (1986) said,

"…guarding should not include defending practices just

because we have developed them (and always believed they

would work)!" Maker concluded, "I would propose that the

most significant criterion to use in developing defensible

curricula and programs for the gifted is appropriateness.

Next in importance would be differentness, and last would

be unique appropriateness" (p. 120). Accountability is very

important and something I did not hear mentioned or

described within my study. If we do not focus on

accountability, then I fear our programs and strategies for educating the gifted could be weakened.

The actual experience of participants working with the intellectually gifted student and the findings as outlined under Significance of the Study in Chapter 1 should enable administrators to revise policies, plans, and procedures to better meet the needs of intellectually gifted students. Therefore, based on the findings that resulted from the data analysis, I recommend that educational facilities support the gifted population by addressing the desires and barriers described by the participants:

- Alternative assessment

- Program options

- Increased service time

- Required programming for gifted

- Individualization

- Academic competition

Recommendations for Further Research

Further qualitative research from the perspectives of intellectually gifted adults to determine what they perceive as areas of need for the education of the intellectually gifted compared to those in the field of

education would be used to expand the knowledge of administrators, special education teachers, and regular education teachers related to the best practices for working effectively with this type of student. In addition, the perspectives of the parent of the intellectually gifted student would be beneficial and could yield additional implications for practice.

A quantitative study comparing the attitudes and opinions of intellectually gifted students or the similarities or differences between the educational programs and instructional strategies would yield even more insight into working with intellectually gifted students.

In Chapter 2, the "Best Practices" for the education of the intellectually gifted was presented. At the conclusion of my research, the findings indicated that many of the "Best Practices" mentioned by prominent experts in the field of gifted education were also mentioned by the participants in this study. Further research would yield the extent to which these practices are being presented within each individual program offered at each of the educational school systems listed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE 1

(QUESTIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER INTERVIEWS)

1. Please tell me about your experience teaching gifted students.
2. What types of educational services do you currently provide to your gifted students? How are those services different?
3. How do you determine which specific service(s) to provide?
4. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each. Let's begin with _____.
   (I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the services named by the interviewee.)
5. What instructional strategies do you currently use with your gifted students?
6. In addition to _____ what other strategies do you use?
7. Based on your experience, let's discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each of these beginning with _____.

(I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the educational strategies named by the interviewee.)

8. What services or strategies do you wish you could provide?

9. What currently keeps you from offering these services or strategies?

10. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each. Let's begin with _____.
(I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the services and or strategies named by the interviewee.)

11. Before we close, I'd like to give you this opportunity to add anything else related to either educational services or instructional strategies.

* There will be additional follow-up questions based on the interview answers. I have listed the possible questions under the related questions.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE 2

(GUIDE FOR STATE DIRECTOR OF GIFTED EDUCATION INTERVIEW)

1. Please tell me about your experience working with
   gifted students.

2. What types of educational services are currently
   provided to gifted students in your state? How are
   those services different?

3. What determines which specific service(s) to use?

4. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in
   relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each.
   Let's begin with _____.
   (I will continue with this question until we have
   discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the
   services named by the interviewee.)

5. What instructional strategies are currently used with
   gifted students in your state?

6. What other strategies are you aware of being used in
   other states? Why are those strategies not utilized in
   Tennessee?

7. Based on your experience, let's discuss the strengths
   and weaknesses of each of these beginning with
   _____.
   (I will continue with this question until we have
   discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the
   educational strategies named by the interviewee.)

8. What services or strategies do you wish could be provide to gifted students in your state?

9. What currently keeps you from offering these services or strategies?

10. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each. Let's begin with _____.
(I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the services and or strategies named by the interviewee.)

11. Before we close, I'd like to give you this opportunity to add anything else related to gifted education.

*There will be additional follow-up questions based on the interview answers. I have listed the possible questions under the related questions.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE 3

(QUESTIONS FOR REGULAR EDUCATION TEACHER INTERVIEWS)

1. Please tell me about your experience teaching gifted students.

2. What types of educational services do you currently provide to your gifted students? How are those services different?

3. How do you determine which specific service(s) to use?

4. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each. Let's begin with _____.

5. (I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the services named by the interviewee.)

6. What instructional strategies do you currently use with your gifted students?

7. In addition to _____ what other strategies do you use?

8. Based on your experience, let's discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each of these beginning with _____.

9. (I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the educational strategies named by the interviewee.)

10. What services or strategies do you wish you could provide?

11. What currently keeps you from offering these services or strategies?

12. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each. Let's begin with _____.

13. (I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the services and or strategies named by the interviewee.)

14. Before we close, I'd like to give you this opportunity to add anything else related to either educational services or instructional strategies.

* There will be additional follow-up questions based on the interview answers. I have listed the possible questions under the related questions.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE 4

(QUESTIONS FOR SYSTEMS' SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS'

INTERVIEWS)

1. Please tell me what types of educational services are currently provided to gifted students in your system? How are those services different?

2. What determines which specific service(s) are used?

3. I'd like to explore each of these in detail in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of each. Let's begin with _____.

   (I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the services named by the interviewee.)

4. What instructional strategies are currently used with gifted students in your system?

5. Based on your experience, let's discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each of these beginning with _____.

   (I will continue with this question until we have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the educational strategies named by the interviewee.)

6. What other strategies are you aware of being used in other systems? Why are those strategies not utilized in your system?

7. What services or strategies do you wish could be
   provided to gifted students in your system?

8. What currently keeps you from offering these services
   or strategies?

9. Before we close, I'd like to give you this opportunity
   to add anything else related to providing services for
   the gifted student.

*There will be additional follow-up questions based on the
interview answers. I have listed the possible questions
under the related questions.

VITA

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