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## Enrichment Programming for Secondary School Gifted Students: A Narrative Inquiry

Melissa D. Gollan-Wills, *The University of Western Ontario*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education degree  
in Education

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**ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMING FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS:  
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Melissa D. Gollan-Wills

Faculty of Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## **Abstract**

The current constructivist interpretive narrative inquiry study considered the ways in which recently implemented enrichment programming on a system level was experienced by gifted secondary school learners and designated gifted teachers or contacts at the secondary schools. Through an in-depth exploration of stories of experiences that gifted students told about enrichment programming, this study offered significant insight into the unique learning needs and challenges of gifted adolescents in today's secondary classrooms. Methods included an initial demographic questionnaire followed by a maximal variation sample of 12 participants for the second phase of the study with follow-up focus groups. Focus group interview data were video recorded, transcribed, and returned to participants to be member-checked for accuracy, omissions, deletions, or enhancements, and were subsequently analysed for patterns in experiences that offered insight into students' and teachers' perceptions of enrichment programming needs. Results of the study showcased alternative non-credit enrichment programming to be both appreciated and designed well, but the needs of gifted learners in the regular classroom are still not being met, as the remedial needs of struggling learners continue to take precedent in the regular classroom.

*Keywords:* gifted, enrichment, secondary, narrative

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## Prologue

We often make promises to ourselves to right a wrong or change the experiences of others based on what we have experienced in our own lives. Growing up, my teachers always saw me as a high-ability learner and certainly a pleaser, as they would repeatedly give me more work to “challenge” me, and I would always comply day after day and year after year. This student-teacher relationship seemed to progress throughout my earliest years in elementary school to my secondary experience. When I was in the fourth grade I was administered a pre-screener for Giftedness; poorly timed as my family suffered a serious trauma three months prior to the test. An auto wreck left my family in a compromised position; my mother was hospitalized for nearly six months, my brother suffered from serious brain trauma, I was in a wheelchair with broken limbs and a chipped back, and my poor father was going in-between the residences of home and hospital trying to support his family.

The day of the test was obviously not an opportune time for me to showcase my intellectual abilities, and I actually have no record to this day of actually writing the test. I had only returned to school the month prior with my blood-shot eyes, limbs in casts, wheelchair-bound and missing my family stability. Months later the results came back in letter format to my home indicating that I did not meet criteria, followed by a phone call from the school psychologist suggesting that further testing be completed, as this result was somehow uncharacteristic of my abilities. Still ploughing through each day, some at school and others at the hospital, the request was never followed up, but I was recommended to attend the ELOPE program, which was an enrichment withdrawal format during the school days. As a pleaser, I attended the sessions but found that toward the end

of my elementary school career I did not enjoy going anymore because all the enrichment activities were Math-focused and I loved literature, poetry, and writing.

When I entered secondary school I had no desire to continue in this ELOPE program because I had manifested this association with ELOPE and Math problems, and Math certainly failed to make me happy, even though I did enjoy being around other intellectually-stimulating peers. I continued to get involved in students' council, extra-curricular sports, and took as many electives as I could in my five years of secondary school.

I continued this trend in university by switching majors four times, taking prerequisite courses each summer to fulfill each new program's requirements, and tried to surround myself with unique, academic experiences that ranged from Psychology and Sociology to Philosophy, Women's Studies, Statistics and Finite, Forensics and Geology, and even English Literature and Criminology. I could not get enough learning in throughout those four packed years and wished I had the opportunity to explore these fields of study or even been exposed to professionals in the disciplines in my secondary career, as these subjects offered me the rich discourse and engaging learning experiences I craved sitting in my Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) Math and Science classes.

After I attended a Faculty of Education in New York State, I came back to Canada to teach English and Law at the secondary level. After a few of years as both an educator and a Learning Support Teacher (LST) I took on the headship of the Special Education Department and began to oversee our three unique departments of mainstream Resource, Gifted, and Developmental Education. Teaching both compulsory and elective subjects I found that I was increasingly programming for a wide range of abilities in my classes from at-risk to gifted. I found myself

looking into other avenues of programming and began to weave my own enrichment into the lessons and activities that could work for all the students in the classes. I became more attentive to my colleague, an LST and English teacher, who was running the ELOPE program at the same high school I had gone to a decade earlier and appreciated how far it had come, exploring different disciplines in a variety of formats, not just Math worksheets and numerical computer games.

These past two years was when my journey to ‘right a wrong’ truly began. I had been offered a job at a system’s level in 2012 to program for all gifted, bright and talented students across all the high schools in the board. After adjusting to the change in pace and the rather large geographical area, I began visiting all of the 26 schools that I was to support, meeting the gifted teachers/Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) and the students for whom and with whom I would program. This endeavour was certainly not as pleasant as I thought it was going to be, as my experience coming from the secondary school I was at prior to this position was inconsistent with other schools’ deliveries and development. Some schools were rather progressive in non-credit enrichment, some were in the process of developing enriched courses or Advanced Placement, and other schools had never met an Itinerant Gifted Teacher nor did they have any in-school or off-site programming. After meeting with each of the schools and getting a sense of where they were at and what they needed, I decided that a vision to showcase what gifted and enrichment programming could look like was a necessary step forward for equitable and representative programming for all.

The Secondary Gifted Programming Vision was developed in October 2012 and then immediately implemented throughout the school year to include transition support, in-school enrichment both for credit and non-credit, as well as outside opportunities that provided large-

scale enrichment with professionals and community members in a variety of disciplines that engaged learners and fostered like-minded peer interaction. Everything in this vision came out of experiences, both those of meeting with the schools and getting a sense of what the teachers and students believed they needed for accommodations to their learning, and from my own experiences of being that 12 year-old child who decided to give up on enrichment because she just could not do another Math problem.

# Chapter 1

## 1 Introduction

*I want people to understand that as a gifted student I actually have special needs, not just that I have a special ability or talent.*

—Ben<sup>1</sup>, Grade 11

Contemporary classroom teachers are expected to not only provide engaging lessons and activities for a variety of subject areas in the regular classroom but authentically assess student work, offer constructive feedback, provide instruction to a wide range of students, remediate struggling learners, and provide enrichment for above average ability students all in one space (Vaughn, Feldhusen, & Asher, 1991). A common misconception in education is that because gifted, bright and talented students have higher intelligence quotients and often enter classrooms with prior knowledge of advanced content for their age (Mills, Ablard, & Gustin, 1994), they do not require the same remedial accommodations that struggling students with learning difficulties experience, so their areas of need tend to go overlooked as they are not perceived as urgent, and are then underserved (Reis & Renzulli, 2010a). Smith (2011) finds that gifted children suffer in the mainstream classroom because they are thought of as already having an advantage over struggling learners, so their enrichment needs are ignored because of this misunderstanding. The needs of gifted learners are often neglected because of the erroneous assumption that high scores on pre-assessments or tests are synonymous with learning (Winebrenner, 2000). Unfortunately, many educators and educational institutions still hold the prejudiced perspective that the gifted are the “haves” and that specialized programs that offer enrichment in curricular studies are elitist and

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for all participant responses in this study.

undemocratic because the learning challenged students, the “have-nots,” are unable to achieve even the satisfactory level of understanding, so their remedial needs must come first (Davis, 2006). It follows that in order to truly understand that gifted students have special *needs*, not just special *abilities* and *talents*, we must listen to their stories of experience in mainstream education today so we as educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century can best meet those individual learning needs, opposed to assuming they will be *just fine* because they are our brightest.

## **1.1 Statement of Purpose**

This constructivist interpretive narrative inquiry study was designed to gather the voices of secondary gifted students and the teachers that implement programming for them to learn from their experiences in not only enrichment programming experienced throughout their mainstream educational career, but in the recent enrichment programming initiatives introduced in the 2012-2013 school year. The purpose of this study was to inform and improve secondary gifted programming by gathering the ‘stories of experience’ of those we program for, reflecting on those experiences in the programming, and providing opportunities and initiatives in response to their articulated needs and interests. It must be noted that even with the best intentions put forth, the vision developed and implemented into the secondary schools was solely crafted with the voices of adults—specifically educators—so this study was designed to include those rich and contextual narratives from the students themselves who have provided valuable insight into the needs of today’s gifted adolescents. The stories of experiences shared in this study will be used to refine the format, framework, and delivery of enrichment initiatives in the immediate future as a



means of “progressive collaborative refinement” (Goldszmidt, Dornan, & Lingard, 2014) of the system vision for secondary enrichment.

## **1.2 Description of Problem**

When considering the range of abilities present in today’s classrooms, both extremes of abilities on a learning curve are equally as far removed from the norm (Winebrenner, 2000), indicating that all students regardless of which end deserve accommodations. From an equity perspective, it is not an either/or decision (Winebrenner, 2000); educational institutions must provide both programs where struggling learners receive support for various intellectual difficulties, language-based and numerical disabilities, among others, and are supported through various accommodations including assistive technology that aids in comprehension and output, extra time for processing, and even chunking of material for instructional support. Likewise, gifted students require accommodations in the form of cognitive stimulation to help them reach their fullest potential (Delisle & Lewis, 2003; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Smith, 2011), including curriculum compacting, interdisciplinary studies, subject acceleration, enrichment withdrawal opportunities, and in some cases, social-emotional development. Noting the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001, Ruf (2005) explains how the focus in schools is largely on raising the achievement of students with learning difficulties, which have “ironically left the accelerated children behind” (in Smith, 2011, p. 140). With gifted adolescents between the ages of 11 and 15 identified as the most at-risk for their designation adjustment period (Sousa, 2003), it is necessary to provide sufficient enrichment programming that targets not only cognitive but affective skills, including peer dynamics, social

relations, and individual talent in order to combat potential underachievement from a lack of motivation and interest in the regular classroom (Mills et al., 1994; Reis & Renzulli, 2004). The Educational Amendment Act (1980), more commonly known as Bill 82, even mandates that the Ontario Minister of Education ensure that all school boards provide special education programs and services for all exceptional students, which includes the formal exceptionality of Giftedness (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. A20). The needs of advanced students are not being met, and unless adjustments are made to the pace and level of their instruction, they are likely to continue to be underserved (Mills et al., 1994).

Enrichment withdrawal opportunities are a way to provide students of above average abilities a forum to capitalize on their strengths and interests, and carry out worthwhile projects and activities that lead to significant academic and social gains (Reis & Renzulli, 2010a). These opportunities outside the regular classroom have been a well-adopted format in the elementary panel but with very little carry-over into secondary programming, as it is generally believed that the streaming in secondary courses meets students' needs. Furthermore, some public secondary schools have designated enriched classes that explore material in-depth and meet the need of cognitive stimulation, but many schools are not able to offer designated classes beyond the academic stream. With students' pathways to post-secondary paved with prescribed, strongly recommended electives, students tend to follow a specified route for credit attainment opposed to exploring their individual talents and passions if they fall outside the route.

In order for education to be developmentally appropriate for gifted students, enrichment opportunities must be provided either within the regular class through differentiation, extension

activities, or Type III enrichment activities that are situated in real-world issues (Renzulli & Reis, 2008), or outside the regular classroom with enrichment withdrawal programs and outreach opportunities. Given today's classroom dynamics with various learners in one space and the responsibility to provide sufficient programming for all abilities (Loveless, Farkas, & Duffett, 2008), enrichment opportunities and programs for the majority of above average ability students have typically been offered outside of the regular class. What is more, teachers believe that gifted learners require a wide range of experiences that are beyond the depth and breadth of the regular curriculum, deserve a focus on individual talent development, and ought to receive authentic learning opportunities that are often self-directed (Reis & Renzulli, 2008), but are struggling to differentiate for all learners in their classes, especially for those requiring remedial assistance (Loveless et al., 2008).

As the Secondary School Itinerant for Gifted for a relatively large, local public school board, it is my responsibility to develop and integrate effective programming for our gifted and bright/talented students into the 26 schools with the assistance of secondary school teachers identified as gifted teachers, contacts, or Learning Support Teachers (LSTs). In order to develop equitable and representative programming for all schools, a vision was developed in October 2012, which included transition support, in-school programming, and outside opportunities and included a mix of credit and non-credit options. Since the 2012-2013 school year, secondary students ranging from Grades 9 through 12, in addition to incoming formally identified Grade 8s for transition, have been exposed to all initiatives in varying capacities. Some schools have incorporated pieces of the vision in the past and are rather progressive in its implementation,

whereas other schools were only introduced to enrichment programming when the vision was released and opportunities were made available.

### *Components of the Secondary Gifted Programming Vision*

Transition support comes in the form of an event called “Discover Gifted—Secondary,” which exposes incoming formally identified gifted eighth grade students to the enrichment withdrawal, non-credit program called ELOPE (an acronym for “Extended Learning Opportunities through Progressive Enrichment”) that offers enrichment outside the regular classroom. As for the secondary in-school programming options, four programs were implemented including: (1) the ELOPE program, which encompasses the traditional ‘pull-out’ format but offers enrichment during shorter blocks of time versus the traditional full-day to three-day pull-out at the elementary level called ‘cluster sessions’; (2) curriculum compacting, which is an accommodation in the form of acceleration and involves crafting a course that combines curricular expectations in more rich and meaningful tasks and assignments, and allows students to save space in their timetables for other electives or enrichment opportunities; (3) Advanced Placement (AP) exam mentoring, which brings the post-secondary experience to the high school classroom by providing opportunities to earn university credits and/or advanced placement in university based on critical and creative thinking and problem-solving; and (4) Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC) courses that allow students the freedom to explore a subject in great depth through a self-study framework that meets the expectation strands of theory and foundation, process and methods of research, and implementation, evaluation, impacts, and consequences. Finally, outside opportunities provide large-scale enriched learning experiences well beyond the depth and breadth of that typically

offered in the regular classroom and often include local universities and community partners. Enrichment conferences called “SPARK!” (an acronym for “Specialized Programming Activating Rich Kinds of Experiences and Discoveries”) are designed to bring like-minded peers together—who are typically identified as gifted and/or share similar interests—across a variety of schools and regions for workshops, sessions, lectures, and activities that are completely student interest-driven.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What can we learn from the stories of experience that gifted students tell about enrichment programming?
  - a. Do their stories reflect that their needs are being addressed?
  - b. Do their stories suggest that they have ownership in the design of their enrichment programming?
  - c. Do their stories express barriers to fulfilling their learning outcomes and behaviours, specifically academic achievement, motivation, and critical and creative thinking skills?
  - d. Do their stories express barriers to their affective skill development, specifically with regards to social-emotional development and individual talent development?

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The current study aimed at exploring enrichment programming through the stories of experience from gifted students and enrichment teachers. The present research explored students’ experiences in both elementary and secondary school, as well as teachers’ experiences designing and delivering enrichment programming at the secondary panel through an initial

demographic questionnaire, as well as follow-up focus group interviews with other secondary students and designated gifted teachers. Participants were provided a space at a central location—the Board Office for a local public school board—for a one day follow-up that included three focus group sessions for each participant where they were asked to share stories of experiences in a range of topics pertaining to enrichment programming and gifted learners’ needs. Participants discussed non-credit and for-credit enrichment programming, the recently implemented enrichment programming initiative vision, advocacy and social-emotional support, achievement and underachievement, development of individual talents, the identification process and Individual Education Plans, responses to issues identified in both the initial questionnaires and in recent research, and how the needs of gifted students are being addressed and supported in mainstream education. All student participants held the formal designation of Intellectual—Giftedness, and all teacher participants were considered to be gifted contacts, teachers, and/or Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) for their secondary schools.

## **1.5 Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were used as defined:

**Affective** referred specifically to the feelings and attitudes about learning and was used in this study as a domain of development that addressed a learner’s emotions toward learning experiences (Clark, 2013). The affective domain included social and peer relations, social-emotional development, and individual self-concept with respect to identifying one’s feelings of interest and unique talents.

Also based on Bloom's domains, the term **behaviour** was used as a learning domain as it pertained to skill development in Bloom's psychomotor learning domain (Clark, 2013).

Likewise, **cognitive** was used in this study as a learning domain (Gentile & Lalley, 2005) to classify learning outcomes, specifically how academic achievement and knowledge were developed and/or fostered. The term was partnered with the psychomotor domain for the purposes of asking how stories of experience showcased barriers to both knowledge and skill development, specifically with academic achievement, motivation, and both critical and creative thinking skills. For example, both the cognitive (development of knowledge) and behavioural (fostering of skill development) domains were taken into account for academic achievement, motivation, and critical and creative thinking skills.

**Enrichment** referred to the extended, in-depth, and/or broadened programming offered to above average ability students, and was also referred to as an instructional accommodation in this study. Enrichment is typically beyond the depth and breadth of what is offered in the regular classroom (Clark & Zimmerman, 1994).

**Gifted** in this study referred to the designation given to either elementary or secondary students that met individual board criteria. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Special Education Guide for Educators*, Giftedness is an Intellectual exceptionality where individuals have "an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated" (2001, p. A 20).

For a complete list of defined terms please see Appendix A.

## 1.6 Summary

The needs of gifted learners in today's mainstream classrooms continue to go overlooked, as the assumption is that their intelligence and ability to learn have armed them with the necessary skills for academic success. The reality, however, is that the needs of these above average ability learners are still considered *needs* and require strategies for instruction, assessment, and alternative programming in order to meet these areas of concern. Sustainable change can only come from an in-depth understanding and awareness of student needs. It follows that the best way to achieve this deeper understanding of student needs is to go to the students themselves, as well as those teachers who program for those students, and ask them to share their stories of experience with gifted programming so we can learn about what is happening, what is missing, and what is critical to implement for these learners. As a first step in this journey to better-understanding gifted students' needs and ways in which we can provide developmentally appropriate education for them is to explore previous attempts at understanding not only the abilities and talents, but the academic, social, and emotional needs of these children.



# Chapter 2

## 2 Literature Review

*Even though some teachers argue that the traditional classroom setting can suffice for the needs of all students, one must ask themselves if it is realistic and fair if the majority of classroom time is spent focusing on the lower functioning students, then the average students, and then lastly the gifted students. (Smith, 2011, p. 141)*

The needs of gifted students are still a cause for concern, as these well-above average ability learners continue to fade into the background of the regular classroom with the more visible needs of struggling learners overshadowing their enrichment concerns. To better understand the areas of concerns for, as well as the strategies and programming provided to, gifted students, a review of recent research on gifted learners has been conducted to determine historical needs of the gifted and documented interventions, as well as more contemporary issues impeding both the learning and development of our nation's brightest individuals.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is located in a qualitative, constructive, and interpretivist paradigm that believes social reality is multifaceted, fluid (Spector-Mersel, 2010), and created out of interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Ontologically speaking, reality is created out of experiences and relies on human interpretation to provide meaning for those experiences. Relying on that ontological premise that knowledge is socially constructed by active human beings, narrative inquiry as a subtype of qualitative inquiry (Spector-Mersel, 2010) invites such

interpretation that can lead to social change based on the narratives of experiences told by participants; reality is, and depends on, human interpretation. According to Spector-Mersel (2010), through narratives, humans gain a sense of identity, are able to connect with others, learn about customs and culture, adjust our behaviours, and are provided a history that may impact our futures. This narrative approach “comprises a clear vision of the social world and the way we think, feel and conduct ourselves in it” (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 209). If reality is, and depends upon, human interpretation, narrative studies can provide opportunities for individuals to find their voices to tell their stories of experiences, can listen to and truly hear the voices of others, and “can gain new understandings of their own lives, the lives of others and the communities within which they live” (Beattie, 1995, p. 59).

Additionally, this study draws upon experiences, specifically from Dewey’s criteria of experience, which are *continuity* and *interaction* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), suggesting that as stories are shared in narrative, we understand those experiences that perhaps grow out of other experiences and lead to further experiences, as well as how the interaction with context, people and actions shape understanding. By telling stories, we impart meaning to ourselves and those around us, forming our personal identities directly out of experiences (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Narrative studies provide the rich forum for hearing different kinds of knowledge that come directly from the experiences of the participants, which have the enormous power to shape reality (Spector-Mersel, 2010) and potential to bring new meaning (Beattie, 1995) to enrichment programming, turning experience into a “way of seeing” (Caine, 2010). The knowledge and understanding sought out in this study—from an epistemological

perspective—then, is constructed through the collaborative interaction of the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), who are the object of enquiry. Like the constructivist paradigm, narrative methods suggest that we understand ourselves and the world around us by way of interpreting processes and sharing our narratives of experiences (Spector-Mersel, 2010).

Narratives of experiences reveal what is meaningful to individuals and the hope through this narrative inquiry is to bridge the gap (Beattie, 1995) between the system vision of enrichment programming and what the students and enrichment teachers of those students believe they need today. Narrative inquiry has allowed me to understand these experiences as individuals live them in time, space, person and relationships in the three-dimensional narrative space as they relate in the social context (Caine, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, through individual narratives, the goal of the study was to hear the telling and retelling of stories of experiences in the past in order to shape the stories for the present and the future (Beattie, 1995) of enrichment programming for gifted secondary school students.

The literature reviewed for this research topic focused entirely on gifted students and high-achieving learners and was originally limited to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century onward to account for recent developments in enrichment programming. Upon discovery of the limited amount of studies conducted at the secondary level, the search was expanded to include the previous three decades beginning in the late 1980s. The selected literature focused on enrichment programming for gifted and bright/talented students, specifically how

it connected to cognitive and affective development, including academic achievement, motivation, both critical and creative thinking skills, social-emotional development, peer relations, and fostering individual talent development. Despite a significant amount of research on the effects of enrichment programming on gifted students' overall educational experiences and social-emotional development at the elementary level with a quantitative focus, few employ a qualitative methodology such as narrative inquiry to hear the experiences of participants in enrichment programming, and very few targeted only secondary school students. Thirty-five scholarly peer reviewed articles, dissertations, and books were included for review that share a common focus of the impact of enrichment programming on the educational experiences of above average ability students with respect to their cognitive, behavioural, and affective development. The literature reviewed outlines previous research studies on the gifted and showcase the many gaps in design, target population, and methodology that this study has deliberately brought to the forefront, as well as significant historical and contemporary issues affecting secondary gifted learners today. Moreover, this review of literature aimed at illustrating the topics of research that have been investigated at secondary, although it was not the intent of this thesis to investigate all in a deep, theoretical way.

## **2.2 Enrichment Programs and Individual Talent Development**

The goals of enrichment include increased learning, integration of challenges, more in-depth exploration of areas of interest beyond the depth from the traditional classroom (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011) and higher academic achievement. Reis and

Renzulli (2010b) consider how enrichment learning and teaching have roots in the philosophies, theories, and research of Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and John Dewey, defining their concept in four principles grounded in cognitive development and educational reform: each learner is unique, thus all learning experiences must take in individual abilities, interests, and learning styles; learning is more effective when students enjoy what they are doing; learning is more meaningful and enjoyable when process and content are learned in context, including the integration of authentic assessment; and how the cornerstone of the model is the students' own construction of meaning. It follows then that enrichment learning and teaching can lead to: increased intrinsic motivation for learning; improvements in self-directed learning behaviours, task-commitment and self-confidence; refinement of analytical, critical and problem-solving skills; escalated levels of talent development; and, most importantly, can “replace dependence and passive learning with independence and engaged learning” (Reis & Renzulli, 2010b, p. 103). However, even with such awareness and promotion of enrichment goals, the effectiveness of various types of enrichment programs for gifted learners is still of great concern to parents, educators, policymakers, and funding agencies (Marsh, Chessor, Craven, & Roche, 1995; see also Reis & Renzulli, 2010a; Vaughn et al., 1991). Drawing on longitudinal, retrospective, and cross-sectional studies, Subotnik and Olszewski-Kubilius (1997) find this to be especially true when bright students fail to be challenged by the curriculum and may learn poor work habits that may harm their transition into adulthood and the world of work, associating high intelligence with exerting minimal effort and an overall apathetic attitude due to low motivation to complete tasks.

Enrichment “pull-out” programs are a radical departure from the everyday, regular classroom experience where student interests are often not taken into consideration (Vaughn et al., 1991; see also Renzulli & Reis, 2008). Based on the enrichment model of instruction (Renzulli & Reis, 2008), pull-out programs support the gifts and talents of learners through a range of opportunities and experiences and offer designated time to develop their areas of interest. Subotnik et al. (2011) find that interests play a crucial role in shaping students’ plans for their futures, perhaps with regards to postsecondary studies and career choices, and how unfortunate it is for the minimal inclusion of elective choices and cross-curricular opportunities given the dominant focus of programming in the regular classroom to be on the basic needs of ‘all’ learners. Kulik’s (1992) meta-analysis of in-class (elementary) and within-stream (secondary) ability grouping found gifted and talented students produced substantial academic gains when participating in pull-out programs with like-minded participants, including advancements in critical thinking, creativity, and general achievement. Also studying ability groups in the elementary panel, Tieso (2002) found similar patterns, as the treatment group who received the enriched mathematics lesson outperformed students who did not participate in the intervention. Renzulli’s (2002) “Operation Houndstooth” exemplifies the enrichment that is required at the secondary level of education, as students are offered dynamic opportunities to explore areas of personal choice that they are passionate about and bring in outside experts such as key speakers, working professionals, and community organizations to spark interest and provide in-depth discussion and study. Embodying the traits of gifted learners, the houndstooth pattern is unique and interconnected, whereby

students' individual interests are programmed for, and together expose all students to a wide array of multidisciplinary enrichment.

Critics of the enrichment withdrawal framework believe that in addition to being elitist (Davis, 2006), it is fragmented and considered to be a patchwork approach because it does not provide consistent programming for learners of high average ability and is a disruption on the regular classroom activities (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). In an important four-year study examining enrichment programs for gifted and talented high school students—particularly in the Arts—Cox et al.'s (1985) Sid W. Richardson Foundation Study found that programming efforts are discontinuous, as the “pull-out” programs appear to be a short-term solution to the long-time problem of a lack of comprehensive programming throughout both curricula and the school years. Although this survey-method study is nearly three decades old, important recommendations were made that have shaped in-school programming today including the introduction of a full French-immersion program and the International Baccalaureate program to provide enrichment for credit opposed to non-credit. Moreover, pull-out programs are also criticized for being costly considering the district gifted teacher's salary to provide such programming, where the classroom teacher should be responsible for programming for all students (Cox et al., 1985; Davis, 2006). On the other hand, regular classroom teachers today are bombarded with various needs and are to provide remediation for struggling learners, regular activities for average learners, and enrichment for high ability learners. It followed that a current study ought to be conducted using rich, qualitative narratives, opposed to a

survey method, to hear experiences from those students seeking enrichment programming in the regular class in order to provide a baseline of today's needs.

Through a meta-analytical examination of longitudinal case studies, Reis and Renzulli (2010a) found that gifted and talented students fail to be challenged in both elementary and middle school, particularly in classrooms where the focus is often on remediating struggling learners. Here learning support takes precedent to bring struggling students up to a sufficient level of understanding, which saves little time to program for learners seeking above grade support (Reis & Renzulli, 2010a; see also Smith, 2011; Ruf, 2005). Findings from another meta-analysis of eight elementary programs and one secondary enrichment withdrawal program, Vaughn et al. (1991) argue that pull-out programs are actually an equitable approach to providing enrichment for gifted, bright and talented students, as the sessions can occur within the school itself, saving costs of transportation for schools in small districts or those with limited resources. That being said, those eight elementary school studies were completed in the mid-1980s and the only secondary study was from 1959, indicating that further research needs to be conducted at the secondary level, specifically for enrichment withdrawal programs, ability grouping, and designated enriched classes. The use of enrichment, differentiation, curriculum enhancement, and acceleration has resulted in higher achievement for gifted, bright, and talented learners, as well as when applied to a broader population of high and average achievers (Reis & Renzulli, 2010a; see also Assouline & Colangelo, 2006; Gavin, Casa, Adelson, Carroll, Sheffield, & Spinelli, 2007; Kulik, 1992; Tieso, 2002).



## **2.3 Achievement, Underachievement, and Motivation**

Underachievement is widely regarded as one of the most pervasive problems affecting above average ability learners today (Reis & Renzulli, 2004); moreover, those students at the greatest risk of learning the least are those at the very top range of ability (Winebrenner, 2000). Likewise, according to Assouline and Colangelo (2006), there is a direct relationship between inappropriate or unchallenging content in elementary school and underachievement in middle or high school, suggesting that the beginnings of underachievement are in classes of varying abilities in the elementary panel and, if not addressed, have the potential to spill over into the secondary classrooms. A summary of longitudinal case study research produced by a task force of psychologists and educational researchers associated with the National Association for Gifted Children and the National Research Centre on the Gifted and Talented indicate that gifted and talented students are a very diverse group of individuals who despite having advanced abilities in certain domains, require changes in the school environment, instructional curriculum, and teacher behaviours in order to combat underachievement due to boredom from inappropriate programming (Winebrenner, 2000). As one of the few studies with a conceptual framework exploring the social-emotional well-being of gifted adolescents and the roles of the teacher mentors and guidance counsellors, albeit twenty-four years vintage, Leroux (1989) found through case studies that gifted learners were struggling in school socially and cognitively at the time of her study, and yet we continue to face the same difficulty today, nearly three decades later: “They plead for something more ‘challenging,’ more flexible, more self-directed. They seek to apply concepts, so as to increase their personal

competence and become independent thinkers” (p. 126). Gifted students who rarely undergo challenging learning experiences are at-risk of losing confidence in their ability to perform well on demanding tasks, debunking the myth that gifted students will “make it on their own without much assistance” (Winebrenner, 2000). What is more, if students generally value learning, they may become turned off by teacher-assigned, rote tasks that are perceived as busywork or hoop-jumping that may be beneath their cognitive levels (Patrick, Gentry, & Owen, 2006), which will negatively impact their motivation and perhaps their performance.

Similar to achievement, it is often easy to assume that high-ability learners will always be successful in school because with high intelligence must come strong self-regulatory skills or innate motivation or desire to achieve well academically. This statement is fractionally correct in that motivation plays a critical role in success (Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000, in Patrick et al., 2006), but motivation is complex and is often misinterpreted by educators. Patrick et al. (2006) shed light on the common misunderstanding of the two students sitting in the back of the room—one dozing off and the other staring out the window—as being unmotivated, as humans are consistently motivated for some type of outcome, albeit not always the outcome the teacher, administrator, or parent is looking for. Moreover, Patrick et al. (2006) suggest the more effective and productive question to ask would be, “What the student is motivated for?” rather than asking, “Why is the student not motivated?” (p. 166).

To better-understand how multidimensional motivation truly is, Patrick et al. (2006) suggested separating the “Can I succeed?” from the “Do I want to succeed?” as a first step, as

all-too-often educators equate motivation with willingness, failing to pay homage to students' self-perception of their own abilities that may impact their performance. Patrick et al. (2006) examine both self-efficacy and self-concept as they relate to motivation in education—the “Can I succeed?”—specifically how self-efficacy refers to specific skills attained, behaviours, and situations, whereas self-concept involves a broad evaluation of one's competence. With regards to self-efficacy, when students feel confident that they can learn, they tend to show greater effort and persistence, as well as experiencing less stress and anxiety (Pajares, 1996, in Patrick et al., 2006); likewise, one's self-concept is often a product of self-evaluation of abilities and competence, which helps to shape one's entrenched understanding of motivation. With regards to the “Do I want to succeed?” Eccles (1983, in Patrick et al., 2006) identified four types of value beliefs that influence individual success: *importance*, referring to the attainment of values or personal significance of the task at hand; *intrinsic value*, which is the enjoyment and interest experienced during the activity; *utility value*, referring to the usefulness of the activity with respect to future goals; and *cost*, which would refer to negative aspects of one's involvement in the activity, which all impact students' metaphoric cost-benefit ratio or weighing of the options of motivation for a task.

Aimed at exploring the gifted teachers' and guidance counsellors' roles in gifted students' social-emotional development, Assouline and Colangelo (2006) found that students' motivation to perform was closely related to their self-perception of their own exceptionalities—their own giftedness. In a previous study by Assouline and Colangelo (1995, in Assouline & Colangelo, 2006) researchers investigated the self-concept of 563 gifted students

ranging from Grades 3 to 11. Like Patrick et al. (2006), Assouline and Colangelo (2006) found that self-concept, like motivation, is multidimensional in nature. More specifically, researchers found that the general overall self-concept of participants was positive, but the self-concept of high school students was the lowest, particularly with female students who experienced a drop in self-concept. Furthermore, as gifted students progressed in school they became more anxious and felt more isolated from peers; the lowest scores of the participants were found in the domains of interpersonal skills and skill-satisfaction; and the highest scores were in the domains of intellectual and school status. These findings suggest that students' self-concept of being gifted impacts their lives. As Coleman and Cross (2001) share, the "stigma of giftedness" (in Assouline & Colangelo, 2006, p. 73) can have a profound impact on the perception of themselves, which may impact not only their academic performance, achievement, and motivational behaviours, but also their social-emotional development and social relations with peers. Motivation, then, is highly complex and cannot be equated with willingness alone, suggesting that performance and achievement are related to one's motivation, but that in order to inspire the gifted student to want to engage in the material or activity, one must consider not only the value from the student's perspective, but also the student's self-perception of his/her ability to work through the task.

Lastly, Assouline and Colangelo (2006) cite a study by the Belin-Blank Center where over 1400 gifted adolescents participated in summer residential academic programs from 2000-2003, wherein survey results indicated that gifted students' self-perception was low, as they generally recognized their giftedness and were happy about it both on a personal level as

well as on a familial level. However, it was a different story when it came to peers, 41.5% of gifted students indicated that their giftedness was not important to their friends and another 24% indicated that they did not know how their friends felt about their academic ability (Assouline & Colangelo, 2006). This disconnect between individual self-perceptions of gifted learners and perceived attitudes of peers and family members may contribute to confusion and perhaps apprehension when applying their abilities. As a result, a narrative inquiry was conducted to provide student and teacher participants with the opportunity to share their stories about boredom, motivation, their social-emotional development, as well as academic achievement and perceived success, which provided more recent context relating to this discrepancy and shed light on potential strategies to support this need.

## **2.4 Social-Emotional Development and Social Peer Relations**

Acceleration programs often satisfy the academic or cognitive needs of gifted students but are not designed to foster affective development, as students accelerate in relative isolation. In a quantitative study using questionnaires with numerical scales, Marsh et al. (1995) found that the majority of self-contained or designated gifted classes at the elementary level have no substantial effects on students' global self-esteem, which is strongly influenced by non-academic components such as social peer relations. Since 1977, Renzulli has argued the importance of supporting the gifted child holistically, fostering not only the academic abilities and individual talents, but motivation and social-emotional development. Specifically he claims that psychological characteristics including creativity, motivation, and task persistence are as important as intellectual and academic abilities and ought to be cultivated

in educational programs (Subotnik et al., 2011). Furthermore, Subotnik et al. (2011) find that students who have had more well-rounded development will stand out apart from their high-achieving peers who have not had affective skills fostered:

Qualities such as the willingness to take strategic risks, the ability to cope with challenges and handle criticism, competitiveness, motivation, and task commitment will differentiate those students who move to increasingly higher levels of talent development from those who do not. (p. 40)

Effective gifted programming must provide opportunities for above average ability learners to realize their potential and emerge as confident, social, positive leaders and problem-solvers (Reis & Renzulli, 2004). Studies conducted on social-emotional development would yield new findings if investigated through a narrative where “reality is shaped largely by the way in which we perceive it, know it, interpret it and respond to it” (Shlasky & Alpert, 2007 in Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 212). This study emphasizes the need to hear from the voices of those participants who could put rich context to their emotional well-being that may not be able to be quantified, as well as including participants at the secondary panel who can speak to their growth from programming in the elementary panel.

An adolescent who seeks intellectual challenges and social acceptance in a non-supportive classroom environment may certainly experience deviance from peer group norms, and may often conform to social norms and disregard or downplay their academic achievement to fit in (Leroux, 1989; Neihart, 1999). Interestingly, students who are able to

find intellectual peers through enrichment programs and/or placements generally feel less pressure to conform and experience more freedom to pursue academics (Reis & Renzulli, 2004). Enrichment activities performed in groups, such as elementary cluster sessions that withdraw students from a family of schools to participate in focused, multi-day enrichment opportunities throughout the year, provide opportunities for students to practice social skills in conjunction with their academic studies (Moon & Ray, 2006). Enrichment programming in-class, in-school, and outside in the community plays a significant role in supporting such competencies and attempts to build individual social capital through peer relationships, emotional adjustment to one's intellectual abilities, motivation, and perceptions of self-image (Hébert, 2012; Renzulli, 2002).

Students experience challenges and joys that foster growth in self-understanding and self-actualization through individual talent development (Hébert, 2012). Enrichment support enhances students' resiliency to negative life events, enabling them to utilize their talents and live both productive and satisfying lives (Hébert, 2012; Reis & Renzulli, 2004). Subotnik et al. (2011) suggest that negative stereotypes can affect the choices students make, such as choosing not to pursue rigorous academic challenges or striving for academic excellence for a variety of reasons, but they also find that incorrect positive stereotypes also affect high-achieving students in a negative way, including additional stress and anxiety from the expectation that gifted students are naturally brilliant and do not need to study in order to achieve expectedly high levels of expertise and mastery. With a significant challenge with gifted youth being self-acceptance, providing a space and affective curriculum that teaches

them how to advocate for themselves and build resiliency is an important component in their development. Hébert (2012) reflects on his previous research ranging from elementary to college participants with regards to their self-actualization and perception, most recently suggesting that gifted college students in university honours programs have a strong desire for self-actualization, which includes a desire to overcome weakness and a need to align their personal behaviours with ethical principles (Hébert & McBee, 2007, in Hébert, 2012).

Furthermore, Dole (2001) examined how dual-exceptionalities influenced the identity of the gifted college students with learning disabilities, finding that knowledge of self was ongoing and led to self-acceptance and self-advocacy (in Hébert, 2012). By looking at gifted students' development of affective skills associated with personal, cultural, and social competence that may help prepare them for more meaningful lives outside of public education, a more qualitative exploration of their experiences—those which are typically captured through survey responses or quantified through a Likert scale—has added a deeper and richer context to their stories and revealed an added layer of both emotional and social needs that require attention and support.

As Read (2011) found in her study examining primary students' social behaviour in summer enrichment programs through a case study methodology, effective programming should help struggling gifted students make academic and social gains by providing them with opportunities to re-motivate and ignite their passion for education, which meets their academic and social-emotional needs. Advanced learners recognize their preferred approaches to learning, have strong self-concepts of their academic abilities, and require



meaningful and challenging school experiences that address their unique and rather individualized talents (Hébert, 2012). Effective programming for high ability learners must take into account the uniqueness of each learner, promote the enjoyment of learning, and foster individual talent development (Reis & Renzulli, 2004) rather than offering one or two academic disciplines that do not appeal to the unique interests of the artistic, musical, or psychomotor gifted learners. Discussion from Hébert's (2012) comprehensive research findings indicate that enrichment programs where the teacher serves as the mentor or provides guest mentors in various disciplines or careers, significantly benefit students' affective development by increasing their self-understanding and self-confidence, commitment, empathy, self-trust, responsibility, and promote an overall positive self-image.

## **2.5 Teacher Attitudes Towards, and Resources for, Gifted Needs**

With government Acts to improve public education, including equity and inclusivity, supporting transitions for all special needs, the *Education Act* itself with provisions to support all exceptional learners, and even in the United States of America with the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act*, the very best of intentions have been put forth to support all learners through instruction and assessment and even close the achievement gap. In reality with any type of accountability system, the largest group of visible needs who seemingly require the most support receive that needed support over the less visible or less priority students who are smart and will "make it on their own without much assistance" (Winebrenner, 2000). Subotnik et al. (2011) argue how in the United States the goal of education is that all students are to receive an education that helps them to reach their maximum potential, but when theoretical

visions or policies are put in place, there will always be different interpretations of what that might look like in practice. Researchers found that teachers had a social responsibility (Subotnik et al., 2011) to all students in the class, but often began with those who were most visibly disadvantaged and vulnerable, “those viewed as most likely to ‘fall through the cracks’ without special attention” (p. 8). A contributing factor to this inequitable distribution of teacher resources and support was the inaccurate assumption of the “ceiling effect” (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 35), where gifted students are not viewed as an educational priority because it is assumed that they are more capable than their remedial peers of learning the regular curriculum under most conditions (Subotnik et al., 2011) and are at a perceived advantage because they often enter classrooms with prior knowledge of advanced content for their age (Mills et al., 1994).

Gifted programs have certainly come under fire throughout history as being elitist (Loveless et al., 2008), as they foster the even further development of those students at the ceiling (Subotnik et al., 2011). As a result, funding for enrichment programs is often reallocated to serve the needs of those wishing to be closer to the ceiling. Through a recent exploration of over 900 cross-panel teachers’ attitudes in focus groups around servicing high-achieving pupils in the *NCLB* era, Loveless et al. (2008) found that a utilitarian perspective in education is dangerous through an equitable lens, as those students at the ceiling still have needs that must be met in public education. Moreover, researchers believe it to be a mistake to hail the narrowing of the achievement gap between the low-achieving and the high-achieving students from the *NCLB*, as the success of bringing up the remedial students

overshadows the poor effort provided to the high-achieving students who are not only being underserved but often misused in the classroom as teacher-supports: “teachers don’t think that using advanced students to tutor their peers means the special abilities of advanced students are going to waste” (Loveless et al., 2008, p. 66). In addition to being subjected to helping classroom peers who need more one-on-one assistance and find themselves taking on the position of teacher’s assistant when the paid teacher is busy assisting other students, our brightest students are often charged with the painstakingly boring task of spending their days relearning material that they may have mastered in previous lessons, units, or even grades, and are “trapped in classes that are not challenging and too slow paced (Subotnik et al., 2011, p.11). In a society where public education is guaranteed to be free and appropriate, many gifted students are forced to seek enrichment opportunities outside of the classroom and may even seek out private institutions that support individual interests, talent development, and an appropriate pace for learning, even though it most often comes with a hefty price tag to be absorbed by the parents or guardians.

Despite this resounding reason of gifted students’ needs being low on the priority list as they are collectively assumed to be already, and at ease when, meeting curriculum standards—the classic argument of the gifted as being the “haves” and that specialized programs that offer enrichment in curricular studies are elitist and undemocratic because the learning challenged students, the “have-nots,” are unable to achieve even the satisfactory level of understanding, so their remedial needs must come first (Davis, 2006; Ruf, 2005)—it has come to the attention of researchers that teachers of the regular classroom do not feel

they are able to meet the needs of gifted students for two reasons: the range of abilities in the class and the struggle to differentiate for all learners (Loveless et al., 2011; see also Davis, 2006; Mills et al., 1994; Reis & Renzulli, 2010a; Smith, 2011; Subotnik et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 1991; Winebrenner, 2000), and the lack of awareness of how to program for gifted learners' needs in the regular classroom (Loveless et al., 2011; see also Delisle & Lewis, 2003; Leroux, 1989; Reis & Renzulli, 2004, 2010; Robinson & Puk, 1989; Subotnik et al., 2011).

A noticeable shift has occurred in our educational systems whereby gifted learners' needs are met, but only outside the regular classroom and by designated gifted teachers in self-contained classes or through enrichment outside the classroom or school by itinerant staff or club leaders. Loveless et al. (2008) found that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of gifted students, as it has not been at the forefront of either their teacher education, professional development, or a part of system initiatives. More specifically, Loveless et al. (2008) found that 65% of teachers report that their teacher preparation courses focused very little or not at all on enrichment programming, and 58% admit to not having any professional development over the past few years that focused specifically on high-achieving learners. Subotnik et al. (2011) found that a contributing factor to not only the elitist attitude toward gifted programming, but also the inability to provide gifted students with appropriate programming with like-minded peers were the very few self-contained or enriched classes and the highly competitive application process to receive a spot in those classes. Instead of establishing entrance criteria and then providing programs and services to all those individuals who met those specific criteria (Subotnik et al., 2011), gifted programs are minimally funded

and must reject those students who even though they met criteria, do not have a space due to program availability—a product of dwindling resources—thus, perpetuating the cycle of high-achieving students placed in the regular classroom without sufficient programming to meet their needs. Moreover, if regular classroom teachers were provided the necessary resources to program for these gifted learners in their regular classrooms in public education, separate withdrawal programs and private schools may not be viewed as absolutely necessary for high-quality education (Subotnik et al., 2011) for our nation’s brightest learners, as public education teachers could meet those needs through substantial teacher education, support with differentiated instruction, and flexibility with the regular curriculum.

It is further evident that the root cause of this perceived inability to program for high-ability learners is funding. When a regular classroom teacher is faced with a class of diverse abilities and no additional funding, tough utilitarian decisions are unfortunately made to focus on the masses, especially when stereotypical, societal views from parents, community members, and even stakeholders—albeit incorrect—are rather loud and persuasive: “since advanced learners require little effort or instruction to be successful, they should participate in inclusive, heterogeneous classrooms and receive differentiated instruction only when and if it seems reasonable to offer it” (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 9). Loveless et al. (2008) examined teacher attitudes toward high-achieving students and expose this unfortunate circumstance where classroom teachers of Grades 3 through 12 believed that gifted learners deserved more classroom attention, but also provided numerous reasons why they are often neglected, which tend to circle around the various abilities in the same class and the constant struggle to

program for the “have-nots” (Davis, 2006). Teachers expressed tremendous guilt around the lack of attention for high-achievers, but circle back to how resources rarely converge on the needs of those at the ceiling (Subotnik et al., 2011) and how the resources provided have to be extended across all needs. An alarming 84% of teachers surveyed admit that in practice meeting all needs in the regular classroom and implementing differentiated instruction is very difficult, and as a suggestion for meeting students’ needs 72% of teachers believed that high-achieving students would thrive in more academically enriching classes with a more homogenous group of peers—referring specifically to those peers with shared characteristics including, but not limited to, intellectual abilities and shared interests—perhaps emphasizing how a separate program altogether is quite possibly the regular classroom teachers’ solution to meeting their needs (Loveless et al., 2008). Further illustrating the heavy focus on remediation, 63% of teachers believe their overall attention was spent on struggling learners compared to the 7% spent on the high-achievers; likewise, 81% of one-on-one time was spent with those requiring remediation compared to the 5% spent with the brightest (Loveless et al., 2008). Finally, Loveless et al. (2008) found that collaborative planning time, such as departmental meetings, often concentrate on remedial supports and those students who require additional strategies to bring them up to an appropriate grade level; likewise, time is a precious commodity at these meetings, so the perceived best-use of time would be spent on the largest group requiring the most support to access curriculum standards.

The Loveless et al. (2008) report raised important questions and issues around the implementation of the preferred method of “differentiated instruction” to meet enrichment

needs in the regular classroom, as such difficulty reported from the classroom teachers indicated that a closer look at high-achieving students' needs in the regular classroom would be in order so gifted learners would not be forced to abort their place in public education to take up a pricy spot in a private institution. This is especially important when our government specifically states that all school boards must provide special education programs for all exceptional pupils; moreover, the *Education Act* defines an exceptional pupil as, "a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program" (Ministry of Education, 2001, A3), which includes those students with the exceptionality of Giftedness among the list of those deserving of specialized programs and services.

## **2.6 Summary**

Considering the body of research available in the literature to date (e.g., evaluating enrichment programs, quantifying students' social-emotional development, examining available resources for and beliefs around gifted students' needs, conducting longitudinal case studies on individual gifted students and the many meta-analyses on enrichment programming), a significant void in current literature remained with respect to hearing from the students themselves. Moreover, even with the wealth of information derived from findings of research conducted at the elementary panel and cross-grade ability groupings, there were very few studies with applicable findings to implement and refine practice at the secondary panel. Additionally, many scholars focused on qualitative research but the richest data to date were from few case studies. Other studies employed survey and questionnaire

methods for data collection, which made it difficult to put necessary context to a question, especially when trying to explore social-emotional and individual talent development; this integral data would be best collected through a narrative inquiry, as participants would be given the opportunity to share their stories of experiences that set necessary context, opposed to quantifying them in a Likert scale. This study was poised to address those gaps by providing a space for adolescent students and educators who program for those students to share their experiences with enrichment programming both verbally and in writing. This study utilized a narrative inquiry methodology with data collection from demographic questionnaires designed for sample selection, as well as rich, focus group interviews with both gifted secondary school students and gifted teachers/contacts/LSTs at the school level in order to gather stories of experience. Providing a broad framework for narratives, participants not only shared those stories about enrichment programming in their past, but also with how they experienced the newly integrated Vision for Secondary Gifted Programming, including all supports such as transitions, in-school programming, and outside opportunities rather than on one specific initiative.



# Chapter 3

## 3 Research Methodology and Methods

*It is clear that participants—narrators—stand at the center of narrative studies; not as informants, seen as in some qualitative traditions, but as active agents, inseparable from the phenomenon under inquiry. (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 217)*

According to Beattie (1995), narrative studies can provide opportunities for individuals to find their voices and tell their stories of experience, as well as listen to and honestly hear the voices of others. Moreover, Beattie proposes that reality depends upon human interpretation, so it follows that narratives are not only the most appropriate choice to study this phenomenon of gifted programming for adolescent students, but they also provide us all with a way of understanding from the experiences of those immersed in its natural context (Spector-Mersel, 2010) in today's mainstream education system: gifted students themselves, as well as teachers of the gifted.

### 3.1 Methodology

With the goals of this study rooted in understanding personal experiences in order to achieve “progressive collaborative refinement” (Goldszmidt et al., 2014), this constructivist interpretive narrative inquiry enabled me to learn about those experiences of individuals in relational ways (Caine, 2010) through their stories. As Spector-Mersel (2010) explains, if social reality is a narrative reality, then it follows that narratives are the most natural channel for studying it on its many levels such as the personal and the collective. Since experience happens narratively and individuals live “storied lives on storied landscapes” (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 24), a narrative inquiry method was the best fit for the purposes of this study: to better understand individual experiences of enrichment programming. A narrative approach gave participants the opportunity to share their rich, individual experiences in story-form about the programming provided, as well as raise questions about any concerns or suggestions for improvement, and collectively co-create new meanings (Beattie, 1995) about enrichment as it pertains to students in today's secondary schools. This was especially important as I sought to use personal narratives "as a personal channel for listening to silenced voices" (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 207) of those students with less visible needs.

Narratives were analysed for varied constructions and interpretations of participant perspectives to showcase any patterns in and between the stories in order to come to a better understanding of students' experiences in a way that allows us to continue to respond to their needs. Through their stories about events, in-school initiatives, off-site outreach opportunities, as well as their personal academic achievement, social-emotional development, and engagement in secondary school, their experiences have reaffirmed historical difficulties with ineffective programming that fails to meet gifted learners' needs, as well as provided strategies and suggestions for growth, change, and refinement of future initiatives. This reflective process has allowed me as an educator to consider the effectiveness of enrichment initiatives and make improvements to better the experiences of students by hearing directly from their "stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

This approach aligned well with the theoretical framework, which sought to understand the experiences of participants through their stories, as narratives account for the way we think, feel, and conduct ourselves in the social world (Spector-Mersel, 2010), which drive shifts in thinking and provide the power to change social understandings. Through the telling and retelling of stories of experiences of gifted students in enrichment programming, I have come to know and appreciate their understandings of their needs and their educational environments, which are now being used to collaboratively refine (Goldszmidt et al., 2014) and transform (Beattie, 1995) the very programming put in place at the system level to meet their needs in their schools.

### **3.2 Setting**

This study took place in an educational setting at a Board Office for a mid-sized public school board in Southwestern Ontario serving rural, urban, and suburban schools. Two types of participants were selected including secondary school students and those educators designated as gifted teachers/contacts/LSTs. Student and teacher participants were selected from the secondary schools that ranged in population from 200 to 1800 enrolled students and were within the large, immediate city and both surrounding counties and small cities. With public education, socioeconomic status ranged from lower class to upper class and included student participants selected from Grades 9 through 12, ranging from 13 to 17 years of age at the time of the study, in addition to the adult participants who ranged in age from 24 to 60. This study did not predominantly target a select cultural population so it followed that the general demographics included a diverse cultural population and fairly balanced distribution of

male and female participants. Selected students and gifted teachers/LSTs participated in a two-phase study that commenced on October 1, 2013.

### **3.3 Participants**

This study was designed with two methods of participant selection. The first phase included an identification of the entire population of students and teachers that met the inclusion criteria and the second phase of selection came from the data collected from the initial demographic questionnaires completed by those participants in the first phase. Given that the programming vision implemented during the 2012-2013 school year was board-wide to include 26 secondary schools, all participants that met the inclusion criteria were given the opportunity to participate in the initial demographic questionnaires. The approach for participant selection was designed to be equitable to ensure that the study sample was taken from a wide range of questionnaire participants, to protect the integrity of the study as an exploration of diverse narratives across the board, and not to limit the participants to one or two institutions since all schools in the board received the programming.

The study population included all formally identified gifted youth in Grades 9 through 12 that were registered as day students at one of the 26 secondary schools in a local public school board as of October 1, 2013. There were 421 students and 59 teachers invited to participate in the initial survey after receiving the Letter of Information (see Appendix B) and receiving subsequent informed Consent forms to participate (see Appendix C). Assuming the response rate would be significantly lower, it was originally projected that a total of 100 student and staff participants would provide informed consent, complete the initial

questionnaire, and provide contact information to participate in the focus groups. A total of 85 student participants and 19 teacher participants from 17 secondary schools returned the demographic questionnaires resulting in a 21.7% return rate. Of the 104 participants, 44 students and 14 teachers consented to participate in the second phase of the study. A smaller sample was selected for maximal diversity, which included 13 participants who were invited to participate in the follow-up focus groups. A total of 12 participants from 8 secondary schools were in attendance for the second phase of the study including: one Grade 9 male, one Grade 9 female, two Grade 10 females, one Grade 10 male, two Grade 11 males, one Grade 12 male, one Grade 12 female, two female teachers, and one male teacher. The sample of student participants was culturally and ethnically diverse, and students often made reference to their extended and even immediate families' experiences in European, Asian, and Eastern countries, as well as a range of languages spoken in the home. The sample of teacher participants was less culturally diverse with three Caucasian adults who made little reference to their culture or ethnicity throughout the focus groups.

Prior to receiving the initial questionnaire, students were first selected based on their designation listed on their IEP and precise numbers of those students who were identified gifted was determined at the beginning of the fall semester—October 1, 2013—through a Ministry J-Report, where information is up-to-date with regards to diagnoses and special needs in each building. Inclusion criteria indicated that student participants must have held a designation of Intellectual—Gifted that met the local public school board's criteria for Giftedness, including a score of 130 or above in the Full Scale of General Abilities Index (98<sup>th</sup>

percentile/very superior range) on the Weschler Intelligence Scale (WISC IV), as determined by a specialist including, but not limited to, a psychologist/psychometrist/psychiatrist, and documented on the students' Individual Education Plans. Gifted teachers/LSTs and Special Education Department Heads were responsible for providing up-to-date and accurate information in the board's administrative system for Special Education, which generate individual J-Reports for each school. These reports were instrumental in providing necessary information about how many formally identified gifted students were in each building, which assisted in determining the schools that were eligible to participate. Seeking maximal diversity, male and female participants across all grades were fairly balanced, and the original aim for an equal distribution of gender and age in the sample was successful.

Inclusion criteria for teacher participants included being the designated gifted contact/teacher/LST at the secondary school. Specifically one to four designated educators from each of the 26 schools were asked to participate in the first phase of the study, which were those adults responsible for delivering, coordinating, and/or programming for the gifted students including, but not limited to, the following: the enrichment withdrawal ELOPE program, teaching any Interdisciplinary Studies course, being the coordinator of curriculum compacting or of Advanced Placement (AP). Heads of Special Education or Learning Support Teachers that develop the students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and perform more administrative duties but do not program for them in any capacity were not invited to participate in the study. It is important to note that selected board employees from Program Services, including the Superintendent of Special Education, provide designated programming

lines to secondary schools based on an annual application process in order to build capacity within the schools including both credit and non-credit enrichment programs that align with the recently implemented Vision for Secondary Gifted Programming. The teachers may or may not have received programming or staffing lines in this role if their schools did not receive designated staffing lines; however, these contact teachers were invited to participate in the study if they had coordinated in-school and/or offsite enrichment for gifted and bright/talented students.

### **3.4 Timeframe**

The original timeframe of the study was to be completed in a minimum of 3 months, maximum of 12 months and began with the ethical approval process in July 2013. Ethical approval from Western University was received on August 23, 2013 and subsequent ethical approval from the local public school board was received on October 1, 2013. The Ministry J Reports were completed on the day ethical approval from the school board was received and all paperwork for the first phase of the study including Letters of Information, Consent Forms, and the demographic questionnaires were emailed out on October 6, 2013 to the secondary administrators and gifted teachers/contacts/LSTs. Consent forms and demographic questionnaires placed in sealed envelopes were picked up by myself on or before October 30, 2013.

After the first phase of the study was complete, I then selected the sample for the second phase of the study and sent requests out to the selected participants who had

provided contact information indicating they were interested in participating in the focus group session by November 5, 2013. Focus group interviews were scheduled for November 15, 2013 from 9:00 AM – 2:30 PM. All focus group data were transcribed verbatim in five separate documents and transcripts were returned to participants to be ‘member checked’ for accuracy, omissions, deletions, or enhancements on March 5, 2014.

### **3.5 Ethics**

Ethical considerations are paramount whenever working with human subjects. For this study I sought ethical approval from Western and the participating school board. When approval was granted, I first generated 26 Ministry J Reports (one for each secondary school) through the Special Education Administration System (SEAS) to identify the number of individuals that met the inclusion criteria. I then emailed (see Appendix D) a Letter of Information (see Appendix B) and Consent Form (see Appendix C) outlining researcher information, the purpose of the study, the process of the study if the individual agreed to participate, confidentiality, risks and benefits, a disclaimer that this was completely voluntary, and contact information for questions to the target population of those who met inclusion criteria (and their parents where minors were invited to participate) through the gifted teachers/contacts/LSTs at the school level, as well as the school administrators, in order to secure informed consent prior to starting the research. Participants that provided informed consent were invited to complete the demographic questionnaire, and at the end of the questionnaire they were invited to signal their interest in further participation in the research via a focus group interview by including contact information where they may be reached



including first and last name, school name, email address, and home phone number. Signed consent forms and the completed questionnaires were collected in a neutral space, such as the Main Office, in an opaque envelope that was addressed to myself, which I collected from the schools.

During the second phase involving small focus group interviews, participants were invited to a central location in London where staff and students typically attend programs, so that travel will not pose a problem. One potential discomfort may have been in the third session of focus groups where the discussion setting was between the students and teachers. Every effort was made to group students and teachers with others whom they do not normally interact with to ensure that they felt comfortable and able to talk about their experiences. For the teacher participants, one foreseeable discomfort could have been a perceived economic stressor, as teachers may have believed that their responses to questions may have impacted their chances of receiving programming/staffing lines for the following year. As the researcher, I made every attempt to mitigate any concerns by explaining that this study had no bearing on individual schools' staffing levels, and that my role and interest is in understanding their experiences of a newly implemented program. I also reminded the participants that if at any stage of the process they felt uncomfortable, they were able to withdraw from the study completely, or withdraw statements they had made.

To ensure anonymity, the information collected was used for this research purpose only. Demographic information was collected in an initial survey for the population, where

specific information was used to select the maximal diversity sample of participants. No personally identifiable information was used. When using direct quotations from participants, pseudonyms were used in place of participants' names for the purposes of this project, as well as in all future public presentations and publications. To ensure security for storing records, all data collected was stored in my locked office filing cabinet (e.g., paper copies of questionnaires). Electronic data were stored on secure, password protected folders on my computer. Once stored on the computer, electronic devices will be erased according to the device guidelines to ensure that they are properly removed. Five years after completion of the study, all files will be shredded (paper) or erased (electronic) according to the Tri-Council guidelines.

### **3.6 Methods and Investigative Procedures**

For this narrative inquiry study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through two methods: (1) initial demographic questionnaires for student and teacher participants, and (2) focus group interviews. Following the receipt of ethical approval from the university and the school board, letters of information and consent forms were issued to the students and/or parents of those students where appropriate, as well as teachers identified as targets for the study.

#### *Phase One: Demographic Questionnaires*

The first phase of data collection began with the initial demographic questionnaires (see Appendices E and F) that were completed by participants that met the inclusion criteria

prior to the study. The questionnaires sought demographic, biographical, and preliminary programming information including age, grade, sex, school location, academic stream of courses currently enrolled in, as well as programming information including their attendance in any enrichment programming or opportunities, what opportunities had been offered at their schools, and what initiatives were currently ongoing or commencing. I then contacted both the administrators and the designated teachers who worked with the gifted population at each school and Letters of Information (see Appendix B), Consent Forms (see Appendix C), and questionnaires were emailed as PDFs to those teacher contacts to distribute to the student participants, as well as themselves if they elected to participate. Signed consent forms and the completed questionnaires were collected in a neutral space, such as the Main Office, in an opaque envelope that was addressed to myself as the researcher, which I collected on-site at the schools. Designated teachers who elected to participate also included their questionnaires and signed consents in the envelope in the neutral location. At the end of the questionnaire, student (or parents where necessary) and teacher participants were invited to provide contact information if they wished to be considered as participants in the follow-up interview or focus group sessions. All potential participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it within a two week period. A signed consent form and the completion of the questionnaire implied consent to use the demographic data it sought out.

The information collected from the questionnaires provided important demographic and preliminary programming information for two purposes: (1) to select a smaller sample for maximal diversity, and (2) to provide descriptive statistics. The questionnaire data included

age, gender, grade, as well as preliminary programming information about participation, attendance, transition support, and both duration and frequency of programming offered and was used for descriptive statistics that provided context and even corroborated some narrative data collected in the second phase, specifically with regards to the programs offered and written responses/reflections of both issues and needs relating to enrichment at secondary.

### *Phase Two: Focus Group Interviews*

Qualitative data was collected during the second phase of the study with the focus group interviews that were conducted in two ways: (1) oral group interviews with homogeneous groups of either students or groups of teachers, and (2) heterogeneous focus groups created through a jigsaw format from the original groups to include both students and teachers. The first focus group structure included either groups of student-participants or teacher-participants, which provided a forum for participants to share their experiences with gifted programming in a group where their experiences may have been alike, including receiving the programming or delivering the programming. The second focus group structure was designed to jigsaw participants out of those original groups where they shared their stories orally with either fellow students or teacher colleagues and were then asked to share their stories in heterogeneous groups that involve recording key issues that arose in their original groups through a placemat activity (Hibbert, 2012 ) (see Appendix G). The written accounts on the graphic organizers provided additional 'texts' to analyse and were used for both

comparison and corroboration between what was shared verbally with myself as the researcher as part of a full student group or teacher group, and then what was shared through a different process and in a different context. Since narrative research is viewed to be an investigation of an evolving self, it suggests that the narrator would construct his/her stories differently depending on the social location and would not have been able to adequately share a complete story in one setting (Josselson, 2010). Likewise, if one's story(ies) could not be captured in only one way and at only one point in time, it follows that various methods must be used in order to provide the participants with multiple opportunities to share those stories. By using two distinct focus group procedures it was intended to allow myself as the researcher to juxtapose the different responses of participants in different settings to look for consistencies, inconsistencies, emerging patterns, and even counter narratives from when participants were in homogeneous groups to when they were asked to share in a mixed group.

The main question that oriented this phase of the study was an invitation for participants to 'tell the story(ies)' of their experiences with gifted programs. A series of probing questions (see Appendix H) were posed by myself, as well as the strategic incorporation of cue cards that were colour-coded to reflect pressing issues or concerns arising out of the initial questionnaires from both student and teacher participants (see Figure 1), as well as current research and findings from the literature reviewed (see Figure 2) to further elaborate or extend the direction of responses to lead to the broader goal of better understanding participants' experiences. Categories of questions for student and teacher participants, with prompts listed beside, included:

- In-School Programming (*Enrichment Withdrawal, Curriculum Compacting, Interdisciplinary Studies, Independent Studies, Advanced Placement, Enriched Courses; Frequency and Duration of Sessions, Design and Delivery*);
- Offsite Enrichment Opportunities (*Outreach Opportunities, SPARK! Conferences*);  
*and*
- Transition Support (*Discover Gifted—Secondary Event, Itinerant Support*).

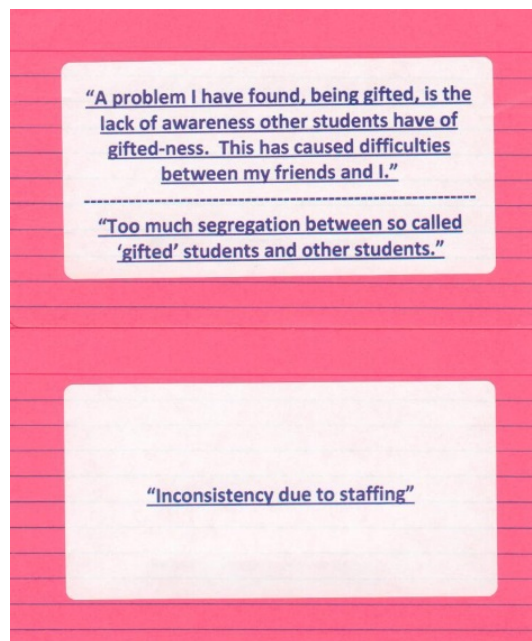


Figure 1: Sample cue card prompts from questionnaires. This figure illustrates those prompts used to generate discussion or provide talking points from responses in the initial demographic questionnaires completed by various participants in the study.

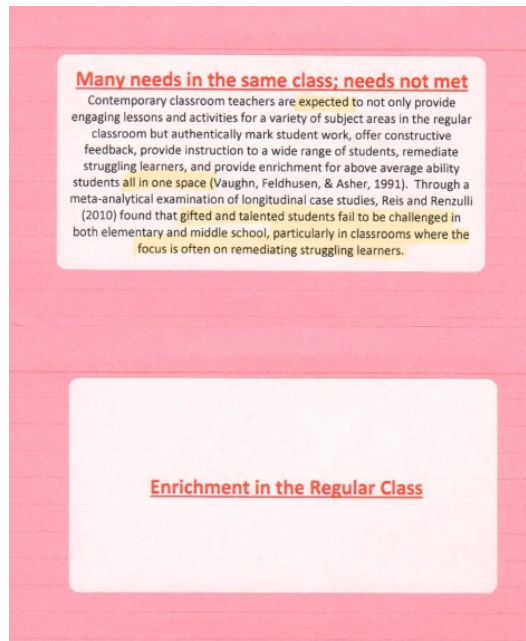


Figure 2: Sample cue card prompts from the Literature Review. This figure illustrates those prompts used to generate discussion or provide talking points from the literature reviewed in this study.

In addition to being audio recorded through the use of two BLUE® Snowball microphones, all focus group discussions were video recorded using two GoPro® cameras on tripods to allow me to create field notes when reviewing the videos by noting body language, facial expressions, tone, pauses, laughter, etc. It also allowed me to summarize key words and concepts from the participant responses to corroborate experiences in the narratives, as well as facilitate transcription by enabling me to track who was speaking. Verbatim transcripts for each focus group individual participants were a part of were watermarked as “Confidential” and emailed as PDFs to participants for member-checking. From out of the narratives I had hoped to address the following areas of interest without explicitly asking participants; rather I wanted to learn if and how the following areas were experienced through their stories:

- Learning Needs (*Meeting Needs on IEPs, Teacher Support, Accommodations*);

- Cognitive Skills, Learning Outcomes and Behaviours (*Academic Achievement, Motivation, Critical and Creative Thinking Skills, Attendance in Programs, Topics of Interest, Formats Appreciated*);
- Affective Skills (*Social-Emotional Development, Individual Talent Development*);  
and
- Teachers: Professional Development (*PD Opportunities, Programming Lines in the Schools, Design and Delivery of Programming*).

As the researcher, I initiated each focus group and began with a brief introduction on the format and purpose of each session. As an organizational strategy for arranging the focus groups, participants were divided into homogeneous groups for the first two sessions and were comprised of either student-participants or teacher-participants; likewise, the third set of focus groups were heterogeneous in that they were comprised of both students and teachers. The first focus group contained nine students ranging from Grades 9 through 12 and was approximately 125 minutes in length. The focus group was set in a medium-sized break-out room at the Board Office on the main floor with windows. Student participants were provided chairs in a semi-circle formation with myself in the middle of the semi-circle toward the outside so all faces were visible to me. Both cameras were placed behind my chair, one on either side, and cameras were used in an alternating format to avoid the loss of information and ensure consistent recording with the exchange of full and empty recording cards. One microphone was placed near the group of students and had continual recording, which was the primary medium for transcription purposes. I began this focus group with a slideshow outlining the day's events and read through the highlights of the Letter of Information, reiterating participant anonymity, as well as explaining how each participant had the right to



omit, edit, or withdraw at any time. I also provided a brief overview of the system vision, which all students had admitted to seeing before, as well as a brief verbal introduction to complement the slideshow presentation. Upon completion of the introductory information I then sat down and began to pose questions to the students, beginning with an ice-breaker question about general feelings or images or experiences that came to mind when they thought of gifted programming. I did have a copy of the prompt questions in addition to a series of colour-coded cue cards that served as excellent talking points containing both quotations and issues from the first phase of the study, as well as recent research and issues on gifted education. At times I would use what one participant had said as a jump-off point or summarize common narratives that students were talking about as a way to engage deeper discussion about an interesting issue or topic. The students took turns speaking and I listened to all participants attentively. Different strategies were employed to ensure all participants had adequate time to share, including direct questions to specified students, as well as clockwise rotations.

Similar to the first focus group, the second session was comprised of three teacher-participants, in addition to myself as the researcher, and was approximately 75 minutes in length. The focus group was set in a smaller-sized break-out room at the Board Office on the third floor with windows. Teacher participants were provided chairs around a large, central table with myself across the table from the others so all faces were visible to me. One camera was placed directly behind me and the recording card only needed to be changed once. One microphone was placed in the center of the table and had continual recording, which was the

primary medium for transcription purposes. I began the focus group with a verbal introduction on the afternoon's events and read through the highlights of the Letter of Information, reiterating participant anonymity, as well as explaining how each participant had the right to omit, edit, or withdraw at any time. I also provided a brief overview of the system vision, which all participants were aware of. Similar to the first focus group, I posed the prompting questions, used the cue card prompts, and allowed the participants to share both individually and discuss pressing issues together. Furthermore, I ensured that I included the same questions or quotations from the first focus group to spark discussion and feedback from an adult's point of view.

The third and final session was comprised of three heterogeneous focus groups—composed of both student- and teacher-participants—that were approximately 35 minutes in length, followed by a shift in participants for a second round of heterogeneous focus groups lasting approximately 40 minutes in length. The final session was set back in the original medium-sized break-out room at the Board Office on the main floor with windows as the first focus group. The room was organized into three groups with both a table and four chairs arranged around the tables. One camera was placed behind the focus group at the back of the room that captured footage of the room in its entirety but served as a visual source for the back two focus group sessions. The second camera was placed at the front window to capture footage from the window focus groups. One microphone was stationed at the front table for the third group and the other microphone was placed at the back table where one of the cameras was located. The audio data from the microphones served as the primary medium

for transcription for the back and front table focus groups, whereas the video footage from the front window group served as the source for transcription purposes for the window group. I began the focus group by providing each of the three groups comprised of three students and one teacher a white ledger-sized placemat graphic organizer and asked them to select a space on the placemat and write their own thoughts out based on the prompt about programming. After a few minutes participants were asked to share individual stories and then write their common narratives that their groups had discussed in the center of the page. I then moved student participants to different focus group locations with different teacher participants. Some groups had only junior students, only senior students, a range in grades, or in some cases students from the same secondary school, as the primary goals were to ensure students were not in the same group as one of their classroom teachers in order to minimize any foreseeable discomfort, and to place students in different mixed groups so as not to have them with the same participants all day long. I then provided the groups with a green ledger-sized graphic organizer and gave two cue cards—one dark pink card to signify a quotation or issue that arose out of the initial questionnaires, and one light pink card to signify a quotation from the literature reviewed or a form of enrichment programming. Again, groups wrote their own responses in their section of the placemat and then began discussing as a group. As a final task, I had asked them to account for common narratives in the center of the organizer, as well as outline on the back of the placemat the following: what they enjoyed about what was happening with gifted programming, what they appreciated about programming and recent initiatives, and any suggestions regarding programming. Appropriate verbal transitions

were incorporated to signal when only a few minutes were left and I had given a heart-felt thanks to participants for sharing their stories of experience, as well as provided next steps in the study including the transcripts to be sent for member-checking in the months to follow.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

For this narrative inquiry study, phases one and two data were analysed. Preliminary data from the initial demographic questionnaires were first analysed by demographics and biographical information, including the age, grade, sex, stream of courses currently enrolled in, and then other data such as specific programming information including their attendance in any enrichment programming or opportunities, what opportunities had been offered at their schools, and what initiatives were currently ongoing or commencing. The latter data was used when selecting participants for the second phase of the study, as those participants who elected to provide contact information for consideration in phase two were placed into appropriate piles to ensure demographic diversity in the second phase of the study. When selecting participants for the second phase the first division was grade, then sex, then school location, as provided in the contact information. For the purposes of this study there was a relatively even sample of grade levels ranging from two to three participants in each of the four grades represented. Information specific to the schools and programming, including the ELOPE program, Interdisciplinary courses, curriculum compacting, Advanced Placement, outreach opportunities attended and enrichment SPARK! conferences allowed me to narrow down the sample to the most representative participants who had not only experienced programming initiatives this past year, but who had different experiences with programming

in elementary school including enrichment withdrawal clusters but still maintained in the regular classroom and those who experienced self-contained elementary education.

The same data collected from the demographic questionnaires that was used to determine a focus group sample also provided descriptive statistics that brought context to the study. Preliminary programming information about participation, attendance, transition support, and both duration and frequency of programming offered was used to add contextual information about what programming was currently offered by schools in the target district after the initial implementation of the vision this past school year. The data was also used to corroborate the narrative data collected in the second phase, as the questionnaires provided school-based contexts that participants were asked to talk about in the focus group interviews. I determined statistical descriptions of the participants who completed the questionnaires and developed a breakdown in age, gender, and grade of those who participated—and provided this information in the contact portion—followed by the percentages of schools with specific in-school programming (credit and non-credit), outside opportunities, and transition support.

Focus group interview data were both audio and video recorded, transcribed, and returned to participants to be member-checked for accuracy, omissions, deletions, or enhancements, then analysed for patterns in experiences to offer insight into students' and teachers' perceptions of enrichment programming needs. Data was re-reviewed for interpretation multiple times. At each phase I offered insights and further interpretations. It is important to note that a careful reading of subtexts and their connections between the

different participant narratives were conducted at each phase of analysis. Considering the source of data, this continual, analytical revisiting allowed me to make deep connections within and between the narratives, as well as the continual process of triangulating the data with both the revisited literature and my own experiences. The process of revisiting the narratives to analyse layers ensured the integrity of the stories, which was used to address research gaps in the literature reviewed.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), field texts are not generally constructed with reflective intent but rather descriptive experiences that are shaped around a particular event. The meanings of these texts were uncovered through reading and rereading of field texts, which included any and all field notes and transcripts of the focus group meetings. Again, audio recordings were first transcribed by myself before any analysis began. Archival tasks occurred after transcription and involved careful coding of notes and transcripts for each focus group with each participant's stories identified throughout the narrative with appropriate notation of dates, contexts, and topics dealt with. After the initial analysis with logistical and administrative matters, the field texts were then narratively coded including, but not limited to, the following: places where actions and events occur, storylines that interconnected and were woven throughout the accounts, tensions or stresses that emerged during certain discussions or topics, gaps or silences that were apparent, and any continuities and perhaps discontinuities that appeared in each individual's narrative as well as across the narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

It is important to note that as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, “each study has its own rhythms and sequences, and each narrative inquirer needs to work them out for her or his own inquiry” (p. 97), each narrative offered individual perspective and in order to understand the experiences I had looked for commonalities and distinguishing features. As such, each narrative was analysed by conventional techniques such as categorizing and coding of content including, but not limited to, the following: thematic analysis and topic-grouping to include specific programs, motivation, academic achievement, creative and critical thinking skills, social-emotional development, and both dominant and counter narratives for the same issue; revisiting the research questions of learning outcomes and behaviours, affective skills, barriers, needs, and ownership; and concept building around what students view and what teachers view as not only important to enrichment programming, but what the challenges are around gifted programming in today’s regular classrooms and secondary schools. An analysis chart was developed to include the themes, questions, and issues in the left column, followed by six subsequent columns to the right to signify each focus group transcribed, as well as the analysis of the placemat organizers. Salient quotations were included in each of the columns to provide a map to where the issues were discussed throughout the day. With the individual issues organized in a horizontal row, I was able to see a comparison of where the issues were discussed and in what contexts throughout the day. I also included an analysis of each participants’ stories in a separate chart to see not only when they discussed their stories, but in which focus group context.

Two phases of analysis followed the initial thematic analysis to include the use of a parable where the metaphor was used to story the data, as well as an in-depth analysis of dominant and counter narratives and the stories those told about gifted programming and gifted students. The chart completed for the initial analysis was then further collapsed into fewer, more dominant issues and counter narratives, as well as each participant given a statement that began with, “A story of...” sentence that was completed by an overall theme of each participant’s dominant narratives. After the second phase of analysis, I embarked on the third and final phase of analysis and revisited the research questions as they pertained to the data and asked: ‘What story(ies) are being told about the program(s) from the perspectives of the students and teachers?’; ‘What can be learned from these stories?’; ‘Do their stories reflect that their needs are being addressed?’; ‘Do their stories suggest that they have ownership in the design of their enrichment programming?’; ‘Do their stories express barriers to fulfilling their learning outcomes and behaviours?’; and ‘Do their stories express barriers to their affective skill development?’

### **3.8 Summary**

To capture the rich stories of experience this study employed narrative means to explore this phenomenon of gifted programming, an approach that aligned well with the theoretical framework, which sought to understand the experiences of participants through their stories, as narratives account for the way we think, feel, and conduct ourselves in the social world (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Through the telling and retelling of stories of experiences of gifted students and



teachers of the gifted in enrichment programming, participants were given a space to share their stories of experience as well as listen to the voices of others, which have the capacity to shift thinking and provide the power to change social understandings (Spector-Mersel, 2010; Beattie, 1995). Employing a constructivist, interpretive, critical narrative inquiry methodology enabled me to learn about those experiences of individuals in relational ways (Caine, 2010) through their stories. I have come to know and appreciate their understandings of their needs and their educational environments, which are now being used to collaboratively refine (Goldszmidt et al., 2014) and transform (Beattie, 1995) the very programming put in place at the system level to meet their needs in their schools. In addition to providing the methodological framework, this chapter outlined the setting, the participants and participant selection, timeframe, ethical safeguards, methods, as well as a comprehensive outline of the investigative procedures of the two phases of data collection. As a final component, all three phases of data analysis were detailed, which will be explored in the following chapter on the study's findings.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Findings

*It was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant  
(Though all of them were blind),  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind.*

—John Godfrey Saxe, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, 1873.

This research project was undertaken to better understand gifted programming through an exploration of the stories of experience from both secondary school staff and students. In this chapter, those experiences are shared through stories that emerged from the data and how they were structured to embody the very parable that was originally used for analysis purposes to story their experiences with gifted programming in public education. What emerged from the original analysis was that a collection of stories of experience from the participants in this study actually mirrored the moral of the parable and gave great insight into gifted programming through experiences shared. By organizing the analysis into three phases beginning with an exploration of the themes, questions, and issues that emerged from the data and were placed in chart form, then using the parable to story those experiences with a more in-depth analysis of dominant and counter narratives, and finally, revisiting the research questions as they pertained to the data, what surfaced were not only collective stories of experience through dominant narratives told, but how each participant—though sharing stories of experience in common areas as others—actually gave individual

versions or interpretations of *their* experiences in the same programs as other participants. Out of the data, what emerged is that even though each participant was exposed to similar programming—and in some cases, identical programs in even the same classes—when brought together their stories of experience do outline what gifted programming is holistically, but it also showcases how gifted programming is interpreted individually by each student and each educator.

For the purposes of sharing the findings, a story is an experience or collection of experiences shared by either individual or multiple participants relating to gifted programs or programming experienced in public education. The names of all participants have been changed to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality, but their stories are their own and have been captured through verbatim transcriptions of the focus groups. Words and phrases shared make vivid not only their individual views, but their individual stories of experience.

#### **4.1 The Parable: *The Blind Men and the Elephant***

Originating in India, many forms of the fable or parable of *The Blind Men and the Elephant* have been crafted and shared for centuries. A loose interpretation of the many versions of the parable begin in a village in India where six blind men live—blind since birth—and a raja, an Indian monarch, advises the blind men that an elephant is in the village and offers to bring them to experience this animal. When they arrive the raja gives each one of the blind men a part of the elephant to touch, ranging from the body, tusk, and trunk, to the legs, ear, and tail. The raja then asks each of the men to share his interpretation of what the

elephant is like, and he finds himself with rather different descriptions, depending on the experience each one of the blind men had with his part. The man with the body equates this section to a wall; the one with the tusk finds it to be like a spear; the gentleman that had the trunk finds it to be like a snake; the legs as tree trunks; the ear as a fan; and finally, the tail as a rope. According to John Godfrey Saxe's 19<sup>th</sup> Century poem based on the parable, "Though each was partly in the right/And all were in the wrong" (lines 47-48), the speaker showcases how each of the blind men described their part of the elephant based on their personal experiences and interpretation of the animal.

What is interesting is that the blind men were unable to agree on what the exact description or holistic vision of the large animal was, as they were all given different parts of the same being. Moreover, it is important to note that all of the blind men were correct, as each one of them was given a different section of the same elephant to experience, and it was because of their personal understandings that they were able to describe the elephant in its entirety from individual experience. The moral of the parable is that one's truth is based on individual experience, and even if the blind men were unable to come to a collective understanding of exactly what the elephant looked like, their individual descriptions and interpretations provided a rough outline of what the elephant *could* be. Likewise, the stories of experience of secondary students and educators is described in a similar structure to the parable, as each individual provided vivid descriptions of gifted programming based on individual experiences. The findings are discussed in six sections throughout the chapter, as

stories of experience with gifted programming have been conceptualized in each part of the elephant, embodying the animal—or gifted programming—in its entirety (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Stories of experience detailed in chapter 4 in direct relation to the parable.

Section of Findings	Selection from the Parable <sup>1</sup>	The Story of Experience Captured
<b>4.2: The Trunk</b>	“The <i>Third</i> approached the animal, And happening to take The squirming <b>trunk</b> with his hands, Thus boldly up and spake: ‘I see,’ quoth he, ‘the Elephant Is very like a snake!’” (lines 19-24)	A story of fostering social-emotional development
<b>4.3 The Ear</b>	“The <i>Fifth</i> , who chanced to touch the <b>ear</b> , Said: ‘E’en the blindest man Can tell what this resembles most; Deny the fact who can, This marvel of an Elephant Is very like a fan!’” (31-36)	A story of like-minded peers and interest-based programming
<b>4.4 The Body</b>	“The <i>First</i> approached the Elephant, And happening to fall Against his broad and sturdy <b>side</b> , At once began to bawl: ‘God bless me!—but the Elephant Is very like a wall!’” (7-12)	A story of resources
<b>4.5 The Legs</b>	“The <i>Fourth</i> reached out his eager hand, And felt about the <b>knee</b> . ‘What most this wondrous beast is like Is mighty plain,’ quoth he; ‘‘Tis clear enough the Elephant Is very like a tree!’” (25-30)	A story of teacher education
<b>4.6 The Tail</b>	“The <i>Sixth</i> no sooner had begun About the beast to grope, Than, seizing on the swinging <b>tail</b> That fell within his scope, ‘I see,’ quoth he, ‘the Elephant Is very like a rope!’” (37-42)	Other stories
<b>4.7 Moral</b>	“ <b>Though each was partly in the right, And all were in the wrong! So, oft in theologic wars The disputants, I ween, Rail on in utter ignorance Of what each other mean, And prate about an Elephant Not one of them has seen!</b> ” (47-54)	<b>The elephant in the room</b>

<sup>1</sup>Source: Saxe, J. G. (1873). The blind men and the elephant. In *The poems of John Godfrey Saxe* (pp. 259-261). Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company.

## **4.2 The Trunk: A Story of Fostering Social-Emotional Development**

Originally posed as a question to the homogeneous focus group of students about needs being met in the regular class, the discussion manifested into social needs being as important to foster as enrichment needs in school, particularly by bringing awareness to other students and staff about the needs gifted students have. A number of student-participants found themselves to be outliers in the regular, mainstreamed classes, not always because of the often prescribed academic content from the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum that generally failed to provide adequate academic challenges, but because the peers in the class were often unaware or misinformed of the intellectual differences and the special needs that gifted learners have. Ben, a Grade 11 male student, shared the same concern throughout the three focus groups he was in about classmates not being aware of what ‘giftedness’ is: “it’s just simply a disconnect between what it is and what people think it is”; he further shared with a teacher-participant the social drawbacks with being gifted and how they come directly out of ignorance: “at some point there should be an awareness over what giftedness is for other students”; and in a third group he opened-up about having real needs, not just elite abilities: “I want people to understand that as a gifted student I actually have special needs, not just that I have a special ability or talent.” The same goes for gifted learners understanding what their own exceptionality is. Kennedy, a Grade 10 female student, shared that even gifted students are not well-informed of what their own designation is, which perpetuates the ignorance of gifted needs Ben spoke of: “a lot of kids are told they’re gifted—like I don’t even know what it

is—and then think it’s for very smart people.” Likewise with gifted programming, Jacob, a Grade 11 male student, believed that gifted learners had—or needed—specialized programming, but was unable to articulate what the difference was between academic and enriched courses: “no one’s ever really told me the difference.”

Further perpetuating the ignorance of gifted students’ special needs, the issue of parent or adult interpretation or understanding of what it means to be a gifted child arose with one student-participant, Ray, a Grade 9 male, who spoke of misinformed adults stereotyping him: “my parents’ friends are like kind of confused. They don’t kind of, well, I’m in a gifted class, ‘oh, it’s cause you’re super smart,’” which Kennedy echoed with the same experience of being tagged as a “super smart” person and not appreciating the label because it does not take into account the individual talents; rather it misinforms others that gifted kids are good at everything academic and are seemingly separate from, or not alike to, their regular classroom peers. For this reason Ben explained how powerful knowledge is for understanding and how it helps to minimize ignorance so as not to lead to further misunderstandings that spillover into social difficulties: “being identified helped give the students the areas in which they are gifted so they can explain it to people,” showcasing how adults need to make a conscious effort to share in the identification process, explaining what gifted means, and how it can be understood for each learner.

Stories of stereotypes were quite visible, which raised important issues around proper education and awareness of special needs. Caitlyn, a Grade 9 female, shared her experience in

a single-section self-contained gifted class in a mainstreamed elementary school and how it clearly divided students socially within the school: “you were labelled. You were the ‘gifties’ and the ‘non-gifties,’ and then it was weird to socialize with the non-gifted ones.” Creating further distance socially, Ben described his experience in a self-contained class in elementary school—one he only attended for a brief stint before returning to the regular classroom—and spoke of the lack of like-minded peers and support to bring all abilities together socially: “we had no connection with the students—we went to a different school, as we were the only class of gifted—and there was no connection at the school for us.”

An interesting story emerged when discussing the social impact of stigmas in relation to separating students for enrichment programming. Students were vocal about requiring challenging programming and opportunities to be with like-minded peers, but shared the discomfort of being removed or singled-out for the dissemination of information. Caitlyn explained how at her school the teachers gave special notes or announcements to go to the designated gifted contacts at the school to hear about enrichment opportunities:

I do think that there are a lot of notes and they come right in class and so everyone looks, like “oh, what’s that?” and it’s like “well, I’m gifted so I have this,” and then everyone’s like, “oh well she’s gifted so she gets all these special things” [...] it’s just, you kind of feel separated almost.

Ramona, a Grade 12 female student, indicated that she understood why teachers used this method to gain access to them to disseminate information, but felt that a more discreet method would be a better approach so as not to draw as much attention to the opportunities



for a select group of students. Jackie, a secondary Learning Support Teacher (LST) and parent of an identified gifted child, also shared her approach of how an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is confidential, and how it would not seem appropriate to call all students with other designations, such as Learning Disabilities, out of class as a collective to meet, questioning why gifted would be different as it is also an exceptionality that is private to the individual student and his/her teachers.

Stories of barriers to this affective skill development arose from the narratives indicating how one's academic achievement or performance in a regular class compounded social issues, as the achievement was often visibly different amongst the gifted students and their peers. In addition to Jacob describing his frustration with the student—teacher dynamic in the regular class by often “being talked at in class” rather than being spoken with, he shared how the class directly following the administration of a test was spent taking up each answer collectively. The feeling of listening to others' mistakes and perhaps being judged by others by not getting the questions wrong did not always help to minimize the distance between classmates. Likewise, Caitlyn expressed how she felt judged by classmates as being the “standard that everyone will compare themselves to or if they're better or they do better than us on something then they're smarter than us, but if they do not do as well as us, then it's the teacher's fault for being a bad teacher.” Kennedy echoed this stigma and shared how peers often gauge their academic success in direct relation to her performance on an assessment: “oh, of course you did, you're smart; of course you did well.” Ramona shared that her peers were aware that she had a gifted designation and often misused the term when trying to

compare themselves to her: “oh, I did better than Ramona; I must be gifted too.” Lastly, Jackie noticed that students were acutely aware of the competitiveness in academic performance and how at her school enrichment opportunities were provided primarily to gifted students to meet their needs. Other bright students even came to her to claim their marks were better than the gifted students’ marks and believed they should have been in the enrichment group, which further perpetuated the “us” versus “them” mentality in a school where academic achievement was incorrectly equated with enrichment opportunities and only created further distance between the gifted students and their peers in the regular class.

### **4.3 The Ear: A Story of Like-Minded Peers and Interest-Based Programming**

Having brought a group of identified gifted secondary students together revealed two very important needs: first, that bringing like-minded peers together provided a dynamic environment where students could learn from one another and share stories of experience that others could appreciate; and second, how students felt that even though they may share different experiences or have different areas of interest, they needed to be with others who could appreciate the level of passion they had for something, as there was a mutual respect for learning and engaging. Student-participants more so than teacher-participants voiced the importance of like-minded grouping, although teacher-participants certainly implied that bringing intellectual peers together was important, but indicated how vital it was to program for individual students’ interests. Cal, a Grade 10 male student, shared frequent stories of experience with an enrichment withdrawal program, ELOPE, at his secondary school, as it

provided him with engaging discussions and sessions based on interest, but how it also fostered one's social-emotional development given the grouping of peers: "just bringing people together that are like the same is important. It doesn't have to be toward a common goal; just building interpersonal relationships between like-minded people is important." Likewise, Ben felt that through like-minded grouping, opposed to ability-grouping such as streaming of courses, changed the atmosphere and provided a richer learning environment: "it changes the peer base so discussions are better throughout it because of the people in the class." Ben had expressed his frustration in ability-grouping with streaming in schools, as he was told to essentially wait since elementary school for the next level of education to be able to be with peers who learned the same way or were similar in ability. Upon entering secondary he discovered that this promise was empty, as he was then advised to wait again for postsecondary to be with like-minded peers consistently, which he believed to be a chronic issue at the local, community, and system levels: "there doesn't seem to be any methods to actually convince students to place themselves based on their abilities or their learning skills, and it doesn't seem to fix itself."

Kennedy shared her desire to be with like-minded peers on a more consistent level, as well as looking for more engagement with peers who could appreciate higher learning: "I wanted more, I wanted to meet new people." Leanne, a Grade 10 female student, shared many stories of experience in a gifted self-contained elementary classroom and then the adjustments that needed to be made upon entering a secondary school that did not provide the same intensity in programming as what she was used to from grades five through eight.

Leanne shared how she “loved that with the self-contained course I just got to meet a lot of people that had kind of the same interests as me and stuff. It was kind of a shock to be thrown back into high school,” as not only the level of programming had changed, but the peer group. Randy, a male secondary school teacher, expressed in various focus groups—both homogeneous with fellow educators and heterogeneous groups with students—that there was a “need for gifted education for the really bright kids, for whom being gifted is as much a difficulty as people at the other end in the spectrum.” He believed in offering not only a space but a peer group of like-minded students to learn and engage with one another; some place where the pressure is off and students can be engaged in their own interests; a space that fosters both higher-level thinking and, consequently, social-emotional development.

Interestingly, Jacob gave greater weight to groupings based on interests rather than intelligence, stating how passion is important to nurture, which is more likely to be fostered with other peers who share similar interests opposed to other highly intelligent peers who can perhaps appreciate the passion but not at the depth or breadth certain students are looking for. Jax commented on how individual programming is vital when fostering the interests of students, as one “cannot look at the gifted population as a collective; you have to look at each person’s interests.” By the same token he described enrichment as individual rather than a utilitarian experience for all gifted youth, which Ramona echoed in her experience with enrichment opportunities: “I find that sometimes when you decide based on a majority vote, there’s a lot of other gifted students that feel their voice—as much as it’s being heard—it’s not being focused on.” She further explained how gifted programming was meant to be interest-

based and she found it frustrating when opportunities were created for her based on her strengths and not her interests: “I don’t want to go to a cluster session or a class and do more Math work just because I’m good at it,” which gave rise to an important issue of teachers not always understanding what enrichment truly is and how to go about providing enrichment opportunities that meet students’ needs, not just those opportunities that showcase students’ talents and abilities.

#### **4.4 The Body: A Story of Resources**

Gifted secondary school students and those teachers responsible for programming for gifted needs provided numerous narratives on resources and how the level of autonomy or ownership over the programming, in addition to the many barriers faced by having needs met, seemed to come back to resources. Kennedy expressed how she needed to be with like-minded peers on more of a consistent basis than enrichment withdrawal only a handful of times in a semester; specifically, she believed being in a class of peers working toward credit would be an ideal solution. After signing up to take an enriched course in Grade 10—her current year—she came to find out that the course was cancelled, as there were not enough students signed up to take the course. Likewise, Ben experienced the same disappointment, as he had registered to take an enriched course for a compulsory subject, but found himself in the regular academic counterpart with not so much as a conversation or letter from a Guidance counselor or administrator as to why the enriched course failed to run. When sharing the stories of disappointment, students seemed to go through the motions, as they did not seem surprised, only disappointed that the school chose not to run a section with fewer

students in it, although it was what the gifted kids needed. As Kennedy stated: “there’s a lot that anybody can do; there’s nothing just for us.”

Teacher-participants articulated stories of resources when relating to gifted opportunities and programming within the school, particularly expressing their disappointment in the heavy marketing by individual schools that often create an imbalance for opportunities based on enrolment. Randy shared a story of “shopping” for schools, which is often a product of marketing. He found that there was a socio-economic-status (SES) issue when it came to the identification process and how there has traditionally been an influx of private testing for those of higher SES, resulting in parents seeking out the schools that have the greatest enrichment programming or designated gifted classes for their children in a public school board. His experience indicated how marketing to the communities created an imbalance for public education, as he believed that parents based registration solely on opportunities. Moreover, if parents registered their children in schools that had the reputation to have the best programming that met their children’s enrichment needs, the chances of offering increased sections of designated enriched classes would be greater than if there were only a handful of gifted students requiring those enriched classes. Unfortunately, public schools cannot sustain small numbers in each section, which often results in the cancellation of those enriched classes and the perpetuation of gifted students’ needs not being met in their home schools.

Another disappointment shared by a teacher-participant stemmed from the inconsistent funding on an annual basis. Patricia’s story of resources showcased her school’s

often static state, the difficulty in both moving forward and the fear of taking too great a risk with programming, as the funding for gifted programming was never allocated on a long-term basis, and with inconsistent allocations the school did not want to commit to programming that may not have been sustainable without the guaranteed funding. She shared that this was not her view, but felt voiceless in front of the masses, as the voice of the unknown funding was far louder and stretched further than hers within the school. Likewise, Randy appreciated the system vision for gifted programming, as it provided programming goals and a pathway for building capacity; however, his defensive experiences told another story, as he was saying how he does not trust that the system will not prescribe programming or be inflexible moving forward:

There's the group that are totally on board who are trying to give teachers what teachers need to serve these children in the best possible way within flexible parameters that are offered, and yet there's also some inertia with those who see situations that are flexible as possibly dangerous and open to abuse, and so it becomes all regulated and ratcheted down.

Like Randy, Patricia articulated a collective push-back in her school that, "everybody needs something and the pot is only so full," but as teachers in their schools believed that resources must be focused on special needs, Caitlyn reminded us that, "I'm gifted; I'm on an IEP; I have an Individual Education Plan," and she required specialized programming to meet her learning needs.

A common thread in the stories of both student-participants and teacher-participants in both versions of the focus groups—more so with the homogeneous groups of either all students or all teachers—was that regardless of highlighting how giftedness is an exceptionality, the focus in the regular classroom was rarely about meeting the needs of the high-ability learners and most often about meeting the remedial needs of students who were struggling. Ray’s story of resources highlighted a typical experience in a regular class where there were multiple abilities in the same space:

I don’t speak up, not because I feel bad, but because I know that if I speak up they’ll be like “oh, but the majority, there are way more people who are below average than people who are above average and we need to do what’s better for more people,” so we don’t matter.

Caitlyn brought the regular classroom into disrepute by sharing her experience with teachers attempting to close the achievement gap at the expense of the above average ability learners: “I find that they’re trying to bring up the people who are below average [...] they’re trying to even out everything so that we don’t get focused on as much. They just want everyone to be the same.” Furthermore, Patricia echoed the students’ stress through her own experience as an LST and working with all abilities: “we work so hard with the ones who struggle but I haven’t heard very much discussion about how do we help those in the masses.”



## 4.5 The Legs: *A Story of Teacher Education*

In each of the focus group settings with either homogeneous groups of students or teachers, or mixed groups of participants, both student- and teacher-participants shared stories of how regular classroom teachers were metaphoric “roadblocks” in a range of educational situations for gifted students. Student-participants provided insight on the pigeonholing of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC) courses where the curriculum lent itself to supporting the flexibility and autonomy of students designing their own courses. Instead, students felt that even though they were offered the IDC 4U (Interdisciplinary Studies, Grade Twelve University Preparation) course at their schools, it came with a footnote or label of sorts. Jacob’s school offered the IDC 4U course with a leadership focus, which he believed to be an interesting course for bright students who were only looking to be leaders, but it left out students who wanted to explore their own interests in a deeper and more meaningful way: “I think that by labelling and IDC 4U is [...] taking away an opportunity to do something else you’re more interested in.”

Likewise with Ramona, her story of choice within a list was similar to a differentiated instruction strategy called a RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic), where students would be given choice within the sections of the chart but one section would always be selected for them to keep consistency when assessing. For instance, if a teacher provided a RAFT assignment and wanted to ensure that students were composing a speech, that teacher would provide a few different roles, some choice in audience, provide a range of topics, but only write in the chart under “F” that the format was to be a speech. With respect to Ramona’s

story, she shared how the labelling of IDC courses felt confined, even though it was marketed as having plenty of choice:

Yeah, we're giving you a voice and you can pick from this list of classes, but you can't actually add a class of your own [...] it would be really cool to actually have a course where you know it's a credit and I don't have to stay after school for four hours working on a robot and not, you know, getting anything for it other than experience.

Ramona's story of roadblocks extended into another accommodation of curriculum compacting, whereby teachers would work with students to accelerate a curriculum in not only the pace and compression of time, but also to provide more meaningful and enriched tasks and assessments that combine many curricular expectations. She was advised that the opportunity was not offered at her school and felt it was cloaked in a story of *being in her best interest*. Her narrative told a slightly different story that highlighted how neither the school nor the teachers were prepared for the accommodation, as after providing her with the response that it was putting too much pressure on her, which she believed she was ready for, they then put up another roadblock requiring her to have a "valid reason" for needing the accommodation:

I wasn't able to compact a Biology course cause they said, "it's late in the year and we don't want to put that much pressure on you," and I said, "you're stopping me from challenging myself, why?" And my department head wouldn't

let me course compact it [...] the only way at my school, they're like, "we'll course compact this if you have like a valid reason."

In another mixed focus group she shared, "I wasn't allowed to course compact or like fast-track or accelerate my Biology 4U course because my teacher hadn't done that course before," further illustrating that the roadblock was not necessarily the school's policy, but perhaps a product of ignorance on the part of the educator of gifted learners' needs and how to accommodate effectively. After hearing the stories from both Jacob and Ramona, Randy, the teacher in the first mixed focus group with those student-participants posed the question: "is it fair to say that teachers can be roadblocks, especially for you?"

Stories of regular classroom teachers continued to be shared by participants throughout the focus groups and ranged from classroom teachers as roadblocks, to teachers not having a solid understanding what gifted needs are, and finally, requests from both students and enrichment teachers to build capacity within those teachers who are with our gifted students on a regular basis. Student-participants shared stories of regular classroom experiences that often echoed Kennedy's frustration of how "enrichment is not more work." She continued to express her displeasure with the misconception of her requests for *other* work: "I'll go to my teachers and say 'I'm bored, can I have something else to do or different that I'm interested in,' and they give me more work." Jacob talked frequently about his experience with an enriched English course offered to him in his Grade 10 year, which was unfortunately inappropriately developed and was nearly identical to the Grade 11 University course: "now that I'm in Grade 11 I feel like I'm doing my Grade 10 English over again."

Students also shared stories of experience with enriched subject teachers not entirely understanding what gifted needs were either. Caitlyn shared a concern with the misunderstanding of what enrichment was relating to pace: “I don’t think you can just say ‘you’re all gifted or advanced, let’s just do it really fast.’” Ray voiced a concern from his experience with requiring enrichment in a subject area and his choice was to either curriculum compact in isolation or to stay in the regular class at the pace for all learners: “you choose between boredom and aloneness.”

Teacher-participants shared stories of frustration with the misconceptions of enrichment of their colleagues. As an LST, Patricia would field many concerns from classroom teachers of the gifted students who were not performing at the achievement level those teachers would stereotypically expect from our brightest, concluding that the inability to assist the students or appropriately program for them came out of both ignorance and a lack of teacher training for intellectual needs. Patricia shared how the education profession does a disservice to gifted kids as “I don’t think our teachers really understand what gifted is”; moreover “not all teachers are confident in how enrichment looks”; and in a separate focus group with students she shared that “gifted maybe isn’t understood by even classroom teachers.” She also shared how in her experience administration does not highlight the importance of gifted programming as an area of need: “it’s not part of their language.” Randy expressed disappointment in the marketing of enriched classes, as often the messaging is incorrect and the course design is often flawed: “you gave them a couple extra tests and tell them it’s enriched, but the parents of the communities love it,” which only further

perpetuates the cycle of inappropriate programming when the original intention of the course was to provide a dynamic learning environment that was conducive to meeting gifted learners' needs of pace, cognitive stimulation, and like-minded peers.

Randy's concern of program integrity was echoed throughout the focus groups he participated in, and he often made reference to the importance of teachers having a solid understanding of the needs of these unique learners, not the skewed view that all gifted kids are high achievers and pleasers. He voiced how there ought to be a need for gifted programming, as "for some being gifted is as much a difficulty as people at the other end in the spectrum [...] the gifted person really is different." He continued to share how it is a moral duty to find those gifted learners who walk among us and provide appropriate programming. More importantly, Randy expressed concern for gifted needs being overshadowed by the remedial needs of struggling learners when he made reference to resources becoming increasingly sparse for programming. He shared how "nobody feels sorry for smart people and it's so much easier to offer gifted enrichment rather than offer gifted and enrichment," illustrating how the lines have been blurred between programming for designated gifted students who *need* individual enrichment and those bright students who *benefit* from enrichment.

Criticism of the enrichment withdrawal framework was shared through Jackie's experiences as an LST, as she believed that "Gifted is everyone's responsibility" and that enrichment programming should never be a snapshot model where only an outside person

comes in to program for the gifted. By releasing the responsibility onto an outside individual, it only perpetuated the message that regular classroom teachers do not have to concern themselves with enrichment as “somebody else will look after it.” Patricia shared how any classroom teacher should be capable of providing enrichment and recommended a “cross-pollination of professionals” to build capacity and awareness of gifted needs; likewise, Jackie spoke in each of her three focus groups of classroom teachers “owning the learning of all students.” Jacob frequently voiced how he enjoyed when his teachers would go off-topic in their classes, as rich discussion often ensued, which created an enriched learning environment; however, he expressed his disappointment when teachers would immediately collect themselves and revert back to the constraints of the Ontario curriculum that must be taught out of fear of not covering it all for all learners: “sometimes teachers are scared to stray away from the curriculum.” What is more, some students in the mixed focus group shared their positive stories with appropriate and enjoyable enrichment when they felt they had teachers who were well-educated in gifted learners’ needs. Ray shared a story of his enriched Grade 10 Math class and how his teacher was mindful of the level of homework that needed to be done and the level of challenge required, often assigning critical thinking questions and omitting more basic level ones. Likewise, Clara recounted her experience with a dynamic enriched teacher in her elementary self-contained gifted class for seventh and eighth grade, where students felt that their individual interests were taken into account and that the teacher was knowledgeable in gifted education.

## 4.6 The Tail: *Other Stories*

Aside from the more dominant stories shared by both student- and teacher-participants, there were other stories of experiences shared that provided additional insight into gifted learners' experiences with enrichment programming, such as advocacy, social and peer development versus marks, and identity. A story of advocacy shed light on the conflicting views of gifted students and their responsibility to advocate for their needs. Caitlyn felt that teachers had a duty to read students' IEPs and program appropriately for their needs, and although Kennedy felt that she would appreciate teachers understanding her needs, she felt that she would not voice her enrichment concerns "because I feel like I'd be bragging to them." Ray took it upon himself to provide his own challenges in the homework by doing the most difficult questions in Math, as he did not feel that he had a voice in the classroom to request enrichment out of fear of a utilitarian response; whereas Cal expressed some push-back when it came to advocating for his enrichment needs, as he did not feel it was his sole responsibility: "I don't think that should be a hundred percent my job [...] I feel like they should," when speaking about enrichment opportunities both within and outside the school. He further explained that self-advocacy is not necessarily innate to gifted students and that it should not be an expectation that students with learning needs must always be the ones to initiate conversation and requests; that the educator holds responsibility as well.

A story of social and peer development was discussed in the first focus group with student-participants, who shed light on an interesting issue of how gifted learners want their classroom teachers to understand their needs and program almost innately without singling

them out, yet when their needs are not met, they wish for enrichment outside the classroom to supplement what is not occurring within. Continuing, some students had shared stories of being in the spotlight with the dissemination methods, such as special notes or announcements, which made them feel embarrassed or caused tension in peer groups between those identified gifted and those without the designation. Some gifted students voiced how they felt with regards to secondary gifted programming being extended to the bright and talented as well, as they would have enjoyed having their friends participate in their interests and the opportunities provided to them. However, when the stories came full-circle back to the most pressing need, students' marks and the concern they had for their credit-bearing courses and how they would sacrifice peer groups for marks was shared. Furthermore, some stories expressed a desire to be with different peer groups on a social level but not at the expense of their marks, which would include working independently on a project even if social peers were in the same class.

Stories of identity were shared by student-participants as responses to a discussion on pressure and stereotypes of gifted learners. Ray shared his experience with facing stereotypes from family friends about being "super smart" and the pressure that a label such as that puts on a child. He also shared a story of his transition to secondary school out of a self-contained gifted class where he felt humbled by being in a class of highly intelligent peers: "going to the self-contained class helps deter arrogance [...] going there and realizing that there are so many other people who have been told by their parents 'you're the smartest person.'" He was not disillusioned about his abilities nor his identity, as he was exposed to many other bright



students whom he had respect for. On the other hand Jacob and Jax shared stories of the insecurities experienced from high achievers when their marks do not always reflect their reputation of being a gifted student. Jacob shared how “they’re losing kind of their identity as a person because everyone knows them as the kid who’s supposed to be getting a hundred on every test”; moreover, Jax voiced how “it’s like you’ve totally lost your identity. You don’t know how to feel anymore. It’s like you’re not who you were and it’s an overwhelming feeling.”

#### **4.7 Moral: *The Elephant in the Room***

The parable of *The Blind Men and the Elephant* was originally used as an analytic tool to story the narrative data. By storying those experiences of gifted programming that had emerged from the data and structuring them in the same way as the parable with the inclusion of separate parts of the same animal, it provided not only an individual exploration of programming from personal perspectives, but also a holistic vision of what gifted programming could be when the parts were brought together. With the moral of the parable being that one’s truth is based on individual experience, and even if the blind men were unable to come to a collective understanding of exactly what the elephant looked like, their individual descriptions and interpretations provided a rough outline of what the elephant *could* be.

The most significant finding, however, came as a result of the synthesis of the animal parts coming back together, forming a figurative elephant. Only then was it clear that after all

the individual pieces were explored and brought back together, the image—albeit somewhat distorted—was now *the elephant in the room* needing to be addressed. Through close and respectful examination of the stories of experience in all parts of the animal, it became clear that there will never be a seamless bond of parts or a flawless image of the elephant that represents universal experiences of gifted programming. Moreover, the original intention of the study was to learn from experiences with the newly implemented programming and how it was addressing gifted students' needs, but through the careful analysis of the elephant mosaic it unveiled how those parts, when brought back together, were less about their evaluation of the programming and more about them simply sharing their individual needs in the regular classroom.

## **4.8 Summary**

This chapter explored how the parable originally used to merely story the data became not only the framework for analyzing the data but embodied the findings themselves. Each section of the chapter was strategically represented in a part of the elephant that symbolized the findings to give greater depth and purpose of the stories shared. The *trunk* showcased stories of fostering social-emotional development, as each individual must be able to breathe at ease. Participants shared stories of experience with stereotypes and stigmas, illustrating how one's emotional health must be a part of gifted programming so these high-achieving students can feel relaxed and at peace when in public education. The section on the *ear* represented both interest-based and like-minded peer groupings, showcasing the importance of listening to what the students in our classes require in order to meet their special needs.

The *body* not only represented the largest part of the elephant, but also the heaviest of issues, which seemed to come back to resources. This was a significant finding, as the sheer weight of both student- and teacher-participant struggles of sustainable and engaging programming always returned to the root of resources available and provided to each school. The *legs* represented not only the foundation of gifted programming, but also the ability of the animal to move forward and gain momentum, which was showcased in teacher education and awareness of gifted learners' needs. The legs were certainly significant, as without teacher understanding the metaphoric animal representing gifted programming remained static and failed to gain any momentum forward, illustrating how vital it is for teachers to understand what giftedness is and that gifted learners have special needs, not just elite talents. Lastly, the *tail* was certainly an important part of the animal's make-up, and although it was located at the back of the animal, it is known to often whip around to remind the animal that it served a purpose, was an integral part of the animal, and ought not to be ignored or overshadowed by the other parts of the animal. Representing other stories of experience student- and teacher participants shared were important to include in the findings, and although the stories were perhaps not shared collectively or in common narratives, individual experiences were important to address, as the tail certainly completes the vision of the animal. This chapter provided an in-depth exploration of the findings, which lays the foundation for discussion and implications, which will be discussed in the fifth and final chapter.

# Chapter 5

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

*When there's an elephant in the room introduce him.*

—Randy Pausch, *The Last Lecture*, 2008

The purpose of this study was to better understand the phenomenon of enrichment programming in its natural context and how individuals live those experiences in time, space, person and relationships in the three-dimensional narrative space (Caine, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The goal of the study was to hear the telling and retelling of stories of experiences in the past in order to shape the stories for the present and the future (Beattie, 1995). Through individual narratives that gifted students and teachers of the gifted told about enrichment programming, a mosaic of an elephant emerged with each part of the animal representing a collection of stories of experience. In the end, however, it became clear that the many stories shared became *the elephant in the room*, indicating that there will never be a flawless image of the elephant that represents universal experiences of gifted programming and the focus must continue to be on individual students' needs. In this chapter findings are discussed through revisiting the research questions, exploring those unanticipated findings and discussing limitations of the study, as well as exploring implications and providing recommendations for further research and future studies.

## 5.1 Research Questions Revisited

The purpose of the study was to learn from the stories of experience that gifted students told about enrichment programming, specifically targeting four areas: if their stories reflected that their needs were being addressed; if they had ownership in the design of their enrichment programming; what, if any, barriers were shared with regards to fulfilling their learning outcomes and behaviours, specifically academic achievement, motivation, and critical and creative thinking skills; and what, if any, barriers were presented with regards to their affective skill development, specifically with regards to social-emotional development and individual talent development.

With regards to the first target area, it was clear that both student- and teacher- participants shared that gifted learners' needs were being addressed both inside and outside the classroom, but the level of effective programming was dependent on the available resources and depth of teacher understanding of special needs. Similar to Sobotnik et al. (2011) who found that even though teachers had a social responsibility to all students in the class, they often began with those who were most visibly disadvantaged and vulnerable, "those viewed as most likely to 'fall through the cracks' without special attention" (p. 8), participants in this study shared how it was obvious in a class of varying abilities that the focus was often on remedial needs. Stories of "utilitarianism" in the class were shared and how students needed their teachers to understand that they had unique learning needs, but rarely spoke up because of the seemingly automatic response from the teacher indicating how the majority of students required the instruction and/or assessment to be in a certain way to meet the needs of the

masses. The literature explored this inequitable distribution of teacher resources and support as being a direct result of an inaccurate assumption of the “ceiling effect” (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 35), whereby gifted students were rarely viewed as an educational priority (Reis & Renzulli, 2010a) because it was assumed that they were more capable than their remedial peers of learning the regular curriculum under most conditions and were at a perceived advantage because they often entered classrooms with prior knowledge of advanced content for their age (Mills et al., 1994; Smith, 2011). Teachers further echoed this concern with available resources for enrichment programs as funding was often reallocated to serve the needs of those wishing to be closer to the ceiling and the fear of gifted programming, if available, would become solely outside enrichment programming and would cast a wider net to meet the needs of those bright and talented as well, doing away with designated programming that meets learning needs within the regular classroom.

Echoing the research, participants shared how gifted learners’ needs pertaining to individual talent development and interest-based programming were met in some capacity, but often outside the regular classroom and were non-credit bearing. Furthermore, students’ needs were generally met through designated gifted teachers in self-contained classes (elementary or designated enriched classes at secondary) or through enrichment outside the classroom or school by itinerant staff or club leaders. Through an exploration of the *legs* of the elephant, stories of needs being met in the regular classroom often came back to teachers’ level of understanding about enrichment programming in the regular class and how students often equated their teachers with metaphoric roadblocks standing in the way of programming

opportunities due to a lack of awareness or a reduced comfort level with enrichment in general. Loveless et al. (2008) found that teachers did not feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of gifted students, as it was not at the forefront of either their teacher education, professional development, or a part of system initiatives, which teacher-participants echoed with response to a lack of teacher training in pre-service programs and available system staff development, as well as not being part of administrators' language.

By the same token there were many recommendations from both student- and teacher-participants to build capacity within those teachers who were with gifted students on a regular basis in order to meet students' needs, certainly educating staff on how enrichment is to be beyond the depth and breadth of the regular curriculum rather than more of the regular classroom work. Participants shared how gifted needs are everyone's responsibility and that the use of a snapshot model where students are withdrawn from the regular classroom to experience enrichment programming releases the responsibility onto an outside individual and does not build capacity with the regular classroom teacher, which only further perpetuates the message that regular classroom teachers do not have to concern themselves with enrichment as it is the responsibility of an outside individual only. On the other hand, participants shared stories of positive experience when teachers actually understood gifted needs and felt able to program for them. Students shared stories of enriched secondary school classes with appropriate pace, level of challenge, and sufficient homework, as well as having a teacher who understood how to program for varying interests within the same space in a self-contained elementary class. This further showcased how classroom teachers ought to receive supports to

build their own capacity with both instruction and assessment in the regular classroom, as well as strategies to foster individual talent development in a class with mixed abilities rather than misunderstanding what enrichment needs are and continuing to inappropriately provide gifted learners with additional work to merely keep them busy. Moreover, the literature and the participants shared a desire to be better-informed to program for high-ability learners, which brought to light the systemic issue of board-level programs, services, and staff as having a duty to support classroom teachers in this endeavour of building capacity in both themselves and their classes.

With regards to the second target area questioning how stories showcased ownership in the design of enrichment programs, both student- and teacher-participants had only disappointment to share when it came to credit-bearing opportunities. The literature indicated how gifted students required accommodations in the form of cognitive stimulation to help them reach their fullest potential (Delisle & Lewis, 2003; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Smith, 2011), including curriculum compacting, interdisciplinary studies, subject acceleration, and enrichment withdrawal opportunities. Stories of experiences provided insight about non-credit opportunities such as ELOPE, the enrichment withdrawal program, or SPARK! conferences where students' voices were heard and programmed for by designated gifted teachers and the system support teacher. Where their voices were not heard quite to the same volume was with regards to credit-bearing opportunities such as designated enriched courses, IDC courses, and curriculum compacting. Stories of disappointment for the level of autonomy or ownership over the programming, in addition to the many barriers faced by having needs met, seemed to come



back to resources, especially for designated enriched courses. Student-participants shared like stories of registering for enriched classes only to discover that there were either not enough students registered and the class-size was too small, or there were more students requiring the academic counterpart so enriched classes were cancelled as a result of utilitarian needs. When sharing those stories of disappointment, students did not seem surprised, as they had been accustomed to having their enrichment needs met outside the classroom, on their own time, or within non-credit enrichment opportunities. Likewise, student-participants provided insight on the “selection-from-a-list” approach of credit opportunities, such as IDC courses and curriculum compacting. Disappointed by the school’s decision to label Interdisciplinary Studies courses as perhaps Leadership, student-participants felt it met some students’ needs—those who perhaps were looking to foster their leadership skills—but expressed how a label left many students out who would have benefitted from the opportunity to explore their own interests for credit in a deeper and more meaningful way. Additionally, when schools only offered curriculum compacting in a fixed list of courses, it pigeonholed them into compacting courses that were readily-available or predetermined—often based on the teachers’ comfort level or subject-areas—which alienated those gifted students who were exceptional in a different area and were forced to stay in the regular classroom without the opportunity to first go beyond the depth and breadth of the Ontario curriculum when they were more than capable, as well as allowing them an accelerated pace where they could complete more than one credit course in the same amount of time as one regular course in a semester of study. In essence, students felt that they

had ownership in the design of their enrichment opportunities as long as their areas of interest aligned with the school's available programming options.

When examining narratives for barriers faced with regards to learning outcomes and behaviours, both adolescent and adult participants shared examples of blockades impeding students' motivation and their capacity to think both critically and creatively; however, when it came to academic achievement students were of two minds. Most often the blockade was the teacher's instruction, specifically when it lent itself to higher-order thinking opportunities or if it was meant for the masses in the room. Stories of critical and creative thinking tended to be either within a group of like-minded peers such as an ELOPE session, or if students were in a designated enriched class where the teacher created a culture of critical thinking. When it came to motivation, countless stories of boredom were shared, but students were divided when it came to how the boredom influenced their academic achievement. Interestingly, some stories from students indicated how their marks were more important than their enrichment needs being addressed, so they would do what was required to achieve academically; whereas other stories showcased how boredom and disengagement could lead to lower academic achievement because students did not feel inclined to do the work that was not challenging, thus illustrating how boredom could be a detrimental barrier for achievement. Teacher-participants also shared how academic achievement is often misunderstood by colleagues who equate intelligence with marks and cannot fathom why gifted students do not all achieve because they have rather high Intelligence Quotients, further illustrating how important teacher education is when it comes to special needs in the regular classroom.

Lastly, all participants shared stories of experience of barriers to affective skill development in some form, particularly with regards to social-emotional development. Stereotypes and stigmas from classmates and adults, both educators and parents alike, were felt by student-participants at times. Likewise, teacher-participants felt that many regular classroom teachers were misinformed in that gifted learners do not require the same remedial accommodations that struggling students with learning difficulties experience, so their above average ability or enrichment needs went overlooked (Reis & Renzulli, 2010a). Stories shared by students exposed internal struggles with being different or being outliers, and not being understood by their peers. Specifically, students were used as comparative tools for academic achievement from regular classroom peers, making them feel not only socially distant in the class because peers felt that they were not in the same academic circle, but also heightened pressure to perform as they were considered the sole gauge for others' academic success. Stories shared from adults revealed ignorance on the part of many educators ranging from using inappropriate strategies to have gifted students act as Teaching Assistants for struggling learners or habitually calling students out of class for enrichment opportunities almost putting gifted students in the spotlight in front of regular classroom peers, creating further distance between them based on their intellectual capabilities. One teacher-participant shared how one's Individual Education Plan should be confidential, and how it would not seem appropriate to call all students with other designations, such as Learning Disabilities, out of class as a collective to meet, but since "Giftedness" is often given elite status, it is somehow acceptable to

disseminate information in front of others because being gifted is not seen as a disadvantage in public education.

## **5.2 Conclusions Drawn from Unanticipated Findings**

The original intention of the study was to learn from experiences with the newly implemented programming and how it was addressing gifted students' needs, but through a careful analysis of the common narratives and experiences shared, it became apparent that their stories were less about their evaluation of the programming and more about them sharing their individual needs in the regular classroom. With the questions posed and the cue cards with either quotations from participants in the initial demographic survey or salient quotations from recent research, the focus groups were designed to have participants share their stories of experience with the new vision for secondary gifted programming, but their narratives were rooted in not only their learning needs, but their needs in the regular classroom. Likewise with teacher-participants, some shared stories of the programming framework as it pertained to building capacity within each school, but upon careful examination it showcased how the root of their narratives were about teacher-education, professional development, and an overall lack of awareness of gifted learners' needs within public education. It was apparent that enrichment programming that was non-credit bearing and occurred outside the regular class, such as ELOPE or SPARK! conferences, were touched on in-brief as a positive experiences, indicating how alternative non-credit enrichment programming was hailed as acceptable and enjoyable, but discussions of needs seemed to stem from the regular classroom experience and the desire for

classroom teachers to not only recognize the unique needs of gifted learners, but to provide opportunities for them within the class or school for credit.

Students often shared stories of disappointment, but always seemed to understand, as they knew their above average ability needs would not likely be a priority in a class with peers requiring remedial assistance. It was as though they knew they could receive enrichment elsewhere, even though it would have to be on their own time or would not always generate achievement credits. That being said, students spoke of a desire to develop their own courses for credit that would allow them to bring in their outside interests and dive deeper into a challenging course where they had autonomy in the design. One student shared her excitement of being able to design her own course for semester two of the same school year and one teacher spoke highly of a course framework that he was able to offer at his school where at any given time there could be 10 to 15 different projects or interdisciplinary studies occurring in the same space. With all students earning a credit for programming that was interest-based he felt it was just and proved to the students that public education can and will provide programming to meet their needs.

Upon triangulating the data it illustrated how my experiences as both the primary investigator in the research study as well as a student in an enrichment program myself, those experiences of the participants, and the literature reviewed, it provided great insight into gifted learners' needs and how the struggle to program effectively for them has been a chronic issue in public education for decades. Gifted students need first and foremost to have educators who

are both well-versed in special education and completely mindful that Giftedness is an exceptionality and gifted learners have special needs, not just unique talents or abilities. It was also evident that teachers of the regular classroom may not feel they are able to meet the needs of gifted students because of the great responsibility of meeting the needs of all learners in a class, which is often a struggle when trying to differentiate instruction and assessment without a solid understanding of special education (Loveless et al., 2011; see also Davis, 2006; Mills et al., 1994; Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Smith, 2011; Subotnik et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 1991; Winebrenner, 2000); even more, regular classroom teachers may not be aware that gifted learners' needs are, indeed, their responsibility and must be met in the regular classroom (Loveless et al., 2011; see also Delisle & Lewis, 2003; Leroux, 1989; Reis & Renzulli, 2004, 2010a; Robinson & Puk, 1989; Subotnik et al., 2011).

It must also be noted that my unique positionality in the study as not only the primary investigator and former student in an enrichment withdrawal program, but as the educator responsible for implementing gifted programming in the local public school board's secondary schools, I have been mindful of my presence throughout the process and reiterate that this narrative inquiry is the researcher's story of the stories (Lewison, Flint, Van Sluys, 2002). To further articulate how the stories have been interpreted for understanding, great attention to both the construction and deconstruction processes have been employed including, but not limited to, having multiple perspectives on programming from various participants; showcasing the counter-narratives and grey areas, such as the *other* stories represented; verbatim transcriptions and member checking, among others (Lewison et al., 2002). I had originally

designed the study to learn from those who were either receiving or implementing the programming through a critical lens in order to progressively and collaboratively refine (Goldszmidt et al., 2014) the system vision, as it is my responsibility to ensure we have responsive programming that meets the needs of secondary students with the exceptionality of Giftedness. The stories and experiences shared have only added greater depth and understanding to this exceptionality and what programs and supports would benefit gifted students. My own experiences as a receiver of programming provided a mere timeline for comparison, indicating that enrichment needs were not a priority in the regular classroom in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so stories shared provided greater understanding into the needs of gifted learners in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As for my role as the Secondary Gifted Itinerant, any insight or stories of experience of either current or former programming—both positives and areas requiring further development—only added greater awareness of what secondary public education could do for gifted learners today. Lastly all exceptional pupils, including learners requiring enrichment or remedial assistance, are deserving of specialized programs and services (Ministry of Education, 2001). This study was poised at addressing what students with special intellectual and enrichment needs required in today's public education classrooms so we can continue to program effectively to meet their special needs.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Nine foreseeable limitations were identified that may have impacted the results of the study. It must first be noted that Narrative Inquiry does not claim to generalize but rather listen to the voices of those we program for and use their experiences to provide more effective

opportunities and initiatives. Narrative research produces deep understandings of rich and dynamic processes and “is not generalizable to populations but rather highlights the particularities of experience” (Josselson, 2010, p. 874) that may emerge as patterns when analysing multiple narratives of similar experiences. Looking at a single school board allowed me to share in experiences within that board since they all were exposed to the enrichment initiatives throughout the same school year. The intent of this study was to use direct input from students and analyse patterns of experiences to support the progressive collaborative refinement (Goldszmidt et al., 2014) of the format, framework, and delivery of future enrichment initiatives. Other readers can read this information and make connections where they find verisimilitude and perhaps provoke discussions relevant to their own contexts.

Additionally, given the flexibility of the programming, the volunteer or administrative nature of teacher selection, and the plethora of student interest in each building, there were many issues at play that may have influenced how students experienced the program. One such issue was the lack of assigned curriculum for non-credit enrichment, suggesting that academic achievement may not necessarily be influenced by enrichment withdrawal opportunities; however, low motivation and interest are significant predictors of underachievement (Delisle & Lewis, 2003) and enrichment opportunities may have increased one’s motivation to complete regular academic work. Moreover, student motivation may have also be impacted by classroom teacher attitudes, as some educators may not have been as supportive of the constant withdrawal of students to a non-curricular program, which would significantly influence student attendance and interest in the program (Assouline & Colangelo, 2006).



Narrative, according to Bruner (1993), is a tool for social negotiation of meaning. One of the goals of narrative is to help a listener or reader empathize with another's experience. Haraway (1997) invites us to think about what kind of a difference we want to make in the realities we construct. I acknowledge that the stories shared were constructions between the participants and myself as the researcher. As mentioned earlier, my primary goal was to ensure that we made a space in our planning to hear the voices of the teachers, students, and administrators who engage with the program. In order to ensure the integrity of the narratives, transcripts were returned to participants to be "member checked" for accuracy, omissions, deletions, or enhancements, then analysed for patterns in experiences to offer insight into students' and teachers' perceptions of enrichment programming needs. As with all interpretive qualitative research, it was important for myself as the researcher to minimize bias. In this study, efforts to do so included making my own story explicit and including it in the research; triangulating the data through multiple methods of collecting the stories, including oral data through focus groups and written data through graphic organizers; linking the experiences to the literature; and situating the findings within the context offered in part through the Phase One questionnaires.

With the intended purpose of the study to examine the influence after a full year of implementation and make necessary revisions for the following year to both the programming itself and the line application and allocation processes, another limitation was identified relating to the allocation of above-complement staffing lines. These lines were not allocated equally across the schools, which certainly impacted the staff members' development and delivery of

programming at their individual secondary schools. With respect to the designated programming lines, results of individual schools may have been skewed from both student and adult participant focus group discussions, as staff members may not have been able to offer a variety of interdisciplinary workshops or run those sessions as often as other schools with designated programming lines. This also suggested a further ethical limitation of slight discomfort for student participants that were asked to discuss the programming developed by adults in their discussion groups, which may have led to potentially skewed narratives based on a perceived punitive consequence for sharing personal experiences if their needs were not met. It must be noted that every effort was made to group students and teachers with others that they do not normally interact with to ensure that they felt comfortable and able to talk about their context. Furthermore, the narratives offered by adult participants through the second focus group interviews with a homogeneous group may have been skewed as teachers may have felt inclined to offer narratives on potential ideas rather than implemented programming for any perceived fear that their narratives may have had an impact on their school's programming line application for future years. That being said, I had multiple narratives from the teachers given the third round of focus group interviews with both oral and written data.

Another limitation with regards to the quality of enrichment sessions was tied to the individual teacher that was responsible for programming for the gifted at the individual secondary schools. There were currently no applications for teachers to apply to teach enrichment consistently throughout the board, so the majority of teachers volunteered or were given the above-complement staffing lines by administration. With a lack of teacher training

and professional development, results would certainly vary across schools in planning, content, delivery, frequency and duration, and overall enrichment quality (Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Subotnik & Olszewski-Kubilius, 1997). In the hands of a competent, well-versed, and dynamic teacher, program content may be exceptional, but in the hands of someone less skilled or unidimensional, this type of programming may not provide sufficient support and may not impact student skill development the way it was originally intended (Delisle & Lewis, 2003). Finally, this study was deliberately designed to include only formally identified gifted students for the purpose of developing a research foundation for enrichment opportunities and programming at the secondary level, which may have be viewed as inequitable since the programming implemented during the 2012-2013 school year was for all gifted, bright and talented students; however, it has provided sufficient data necessary for thorough comparisons between other samples including bright and talented students, as well as multiple-exceptional students in the future.

## **5.4 Implications**

This study has both theoretical implications as well as practical implications. In addition to this study providing an in-depth exploration of students' and teachers' stories of experience with newly implemented enrichment programming, it has given us long overdue insight into gifted students' experiences in secondary education for both regular classroom experiences, as well as alternative enrichment programming both within and outside the secondary schools. Theoretically speaking, this study was poised to address the many gaps in literature, the largest of them being the exclusion of the participants' rich narratives. Many

scholars focus on qualitative research but the richest data to date are from few case studies. Other studies employ survey and questionnaire methods for data collection, which make it difficult to put necessary context to a question, especially when trying to explore social-emotional and individual talent development; this integral data is certainly best collected through a narrative inquiry, as participants in this study were given the opportunity to share their stories of experiences and set necessary context, opposed to quantifying them in a Likert scale of sorts. This study utilized a narrative inquiry methodology with data collection from demographic questionnaires designed for sample selection, as well as rich, focus group interviews with both gifted secondary school students and gifted teachers/contacts/LSTs at the school level in order to gather stories of experience, providing a space for adolescent students and educators who program for those students to share in their experiences with enrichment programming both verbally and in writing. Providing a broad framework for narratives, participants not only shared those stories about enrichment programming in their past, but also with how they are experiencing the newly integrated secondary programming vision, and how they believe their needs will be met moving forward. This narrative study provides the rich forum for hearing different kinds of knowledge that come directly from the experiences of the participants, which have enormous power when shaping reality (Spector-Mersel, 2010) for the future of secondary gifted programming from a system level. Furthermore, the methodology employed has been the most appropriate choice for seeking rich stories of experience to bring new meaning (Beattie, 1995) to enrichment programming, turning participants' experience into

a “way of seeing” (Caine, 2010) in order to better-understand gifted learners’ needs in our secondary schools today.

It must be noted that the discovery of participants’ experiences being more about their needs in the regular classroom may not have been illuminated had the theoretical framework not been designed to explore narrative data. With the original intention of the study to explore experiences of gifted students and teachers of the gifted with the newly implemented programming to include transition support, in-school enrichment programs, and outside enrichment opportunities, participants were not pigeonholed into answering questions specific to their experiences with only the programs recently implemented, as the space was theirs to share; likewise, because the forum was open with few guiding questions and recent research to spark conversation, it allowed participants the opportunity to truly share how they feel about their needs not being sufficiently addressed by their teachers in the regular classroom. Like the constructivist paradigm, narrative methods suggests that we understand ourselves and the world around us by way of interpreting processes and sharing our narratives of experiences (Spector-Mersel, 2010).

As for practical implications, the findings will better-inform the special education community in effective programming for gifted students at the secondary panel and showcase how resources ought to be allocated and professional development be designed to build the capacity of those regular classroom teachers who are with our gifted students on a more regular basis. That being said, it is significant that stories of experience of non-credit enrichment

programming were positive and revealed how these programs were both necessary and effective, so the “cross-pollination of professionals,” according to a teacher-participant, must still be a cornerstone in the “collaborative progressive refinement” (Goldszmidt et al., 2014) of secondary gifted programming moving forward.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Further Research**

This study is certainly a stepping stone to future research on secondary school gifted students’ needs and effective enrichment programming that meets those unique learning needs. Originally designed to learn from the stories of experiences with the newly implemented gifted programming, student- and teacher-participants shared stories of experience that showcase their needs needing to be met in the regular classroom. It is suggested that the most effective and appropriate theoretical framework for learning about students’ needs is a more qualitative approach, as this narrative inquiry illuminated a significant finding that may have gone unnoticed if the narrative analysis did not flip the rock over that was covering this issue of needs not being addressed in the regular class. It follows that a study exploring teacher-education of regular classroom teachers be a logical next step, perhaps exploring pre-service education on through additional qualifications, professional development, practical experience with programming for gifted learners’ needs in the regular classroom, as well as classroom teachers’ higher-education experiences. When seeking an in-depth understanding of gifted needs, another suggestion for future studies include exploring gifted learners who experience both designated enriched classes and regular academic classes, perhaps in the same subject area in order to speak to similarities and differences in framework, content, process, evaluation,

and collaboration, as well as learning outcomes and behaviours such as academic achievement, engagement, motivation, and both critical and creative thinking skills, and affective skill development including social-emotional development and individual talent development. Perhaps a study expanding the teacher participants to include not only the designated gifted teacher or contact at the school for alternative or enrichment opportunities outside the regular class, but those regular academic classroom teachers, as well as classroom teachers of enriched classes.

A final suggestion for a future study includes a comparison of experiences of identified gifted learners and those deemed bright, talented, and high-ability learners who perhaps do not meet broad criteria but require enrichment opportunities to foster their skill development. Findings from a comparative study such as this will better-inform the current vision for secondary gifted programming, which, as it stands, includes not only identified gifted students, but those bright and talented learners as well. As per the findings of this study gifted learners identify resources as a sizable issue when offering enrichment opportunities, and perhaps a deeper look into students' and teachers' interpretations of enrichment may profoundly influence the development and delivery of either full enrichment programming or separate gifted and enrichment programming for secondary school students identified gifted to meet their learning needs, or those bright and talented seeking enrichment opportunities to complement their learning.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings and conclusions of the study, “Enrichment programming for secondary school gifted students: A narrative inquiry.” Through an in-depth discussion of the findings as they pertained to the research questions, it revealed how the study’s design allowed me to gather data in support of the original research questions and provided detailed responses to each of the four questions posed. The theoretical framework of the study was ideal for this research project, as it gave light to a deep-rooted issue that may not have been exposed if the design would have been more quantitative in nature; furthermore, the unanticipated findings discussed were significant when looking at gifted needs in their entirety, not just in relating to the system’s gifted programming vision. Limitations of the study were discussed, as well as the potential impact those restrictions may have had on the data collection, results, and conclusions of the study. A defense of the study’s design was examined in the implications section, providing supports for the design being well thought-out and highly effective when informing participants that they would have the opportunity to share, both verbally and in writing, their experiences as being either a gifted student or a designated teacher of gifted students, opposed to sharing pieces of their experiences through prescribed questions on a questionnaire or having to quantify their experiences. The inclusion of various focus groups provided me with the opportunity to learn about gifted needs through the telling and retelling of stories of experiences in the past in order to shape the stories for the present and the future (Beattie, 1995) of enrichment programming for gifted secondary school students. Lastly, recommendations for future studies included expanding the teacher-participants to



regular classroom teachers, learning from the stories of experience from bright and talented students, and perhaps seeking deeper understanding from the perspective of both adults and students regarding designated enriched classes and their academic counterparts.

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## Appendix A

# Definition of Terms

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For the purposes of this study, the following terms are used as defined:

**Academic achievement** refers to the numerical grades obtained through various assessments, with midterm and final grades recorded on the students' credit counselling summaries, which are reports generated through the Trillium software program that the school board uses to manage student information.

**Adolescents** or **secondary school students**, for the purposes of this study, were used synonymously to refer to those students registered as full-time day students in Grades 9 through 12 and include any returning fifth year students.

**Affective** referred specifically to the feelings and attitudes about learning and was used in this study as a domain of development that addressed a learner's emotions toward learning experiences (Clark, 2013). The affective domain included social and peer relations, social-emotional development, and individual self-concept with respect to identifying one's feelings of interest and unique talents.

Also based on Bloom's domains, the term **behaviour** was used as a learning domain as it pertained to skill development in Bloom's psychomotor learning domain (Clark, 2013).

Likewise, **cognitive** was used in this study as a learning domain (Gentile & Lalley, 2005) to classify learning outcomes, specifically how academic achievement and knowledge were developed and/or fostered. The term was partnered with the psychomotor domain for the purposes of asking how stories of experience showcased barriers to both knowledge and skill development, specifically with academic achievement, motivation, and both critical and creative thinking skills. For example, both the cognitive (development of knowledge) and behavioural (fostering of skill

development) domains were taken into account for academic achievement, motivation, and critical and creative thinking skills.

Both **critical and creative thinking skills** refer specifically to the ability to extend one's cognitive understanding and application of new content and contexts, and for the purposes of this study were placed in the cognitive domain (Gentile & Lalley, 2005) as they are learning outcomes that are affected by instruction and assessment.

**ELOPE** or **enrichment withdrawal** were used synonymously in this study and describe the type of enrichment programming similar to "pull-out" programs that occur in elementary "cluster" sessions where students are released for a period of time (from one full day to three day sessions up to five times a year) within their school to participate in enrichment. An acronym for "Extended Learning Opportunities Through Progressive Enrichment," ELOPE employs a similar format of releasing students from their regular class but are only removed to participate in enrichment workshops offered sporadically throughout the year and at different times of the day.

**Enrichment** refers to the extended, in-depth, and/or broadened programming offered to above average ability students, and was also referred to as an instructional accommodation in this study. Enrichment is typically beyond the depth and breadth of what is offered in the regular classroom (Clark & Zimmerman, 1994).

**Gifted** in this study referred to the designation given to either elementary or secondary students that met individual board criteria. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Special Education Guide for Educators*, Giftedness is an Intellectual exceptionality where individuals have "an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated" (2001, p. A 20).



**Motivation** was used in the context of academic achievement, referring specifically to one's desire or drive to complete required tasks, which then led to academic success. It was also used in the context of underachievement, where a student may have low motivation and choose not to complete required work, thus resulting in lower achievement despite superior intellectual abilities.

**Outreach** and outreach opportunities are a form of programming offered to gifted, bright and talented students that occur outside the regular classroom. Unlike the ELOPE sessions, outreach opportunities are not only outside the regular class, but are typically offered outside the school and are specifically focused on an area of interest with like-minded peers from other secondary schools, usually lasting for a half-day or full day of school.

**Social capital** in this study referred to a student's collection of social skills that aid in social relations with all peers, adults, and the larger community (Renzulli, 2002). If one has larger social capital, it suggests that he/she works well with others, is confident in convictions, is perhaps a leader in the school/community, and is a well-rounded social individual.

Similar to social capital, **social-emotional development** in this study referred specifically to the process of attaining social skills and various affective skills including different feeling, emotions, and understandings that are used for a variety of social situations. A collection of social skills would be one's social capital.

**Talent** referred to a student's particular accomplishments in a variety of areas.

## Letter of Information

*Enrichment Programming for Secondary School Gifted Students: A Narrative Inquiry*

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October 7, 2013

Dear Potential Research Participant,

My name is Mel Gollan-Wills and I am a Master of Education Candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, as well as the Gifted Itinerant Teacher for the Secondary Schools with the (Local Public) School Board. I am currently investigating enrichment programming at the secondary panel for this school board, and I am inviting you to participate in this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to gather stories of experiences with enrichment programming implemented into the secondary schools during the 2012-2013 school year. Based on the vision for secondary gifted programming approved at the system level, transition support, in-school programming, and outside opportunities were made available to all secondary students in this school board since October 2012. The study will explore the narratives or stories of gifted students and designated teachers/contacts/Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) who are responsible for programming for these students. Participants will be asked to outline their experiences with not only the newly implemented programming, but previous experiences with enrichment, in order to progressively and collaboratively refine (Goldszmidt et al., in press) programming offered that meet the needs of gifted students in today's secondary classrooms.

### **If You Agree to Participate**

You will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire to provide brief demographic, biographic and preliminary information on your programming. Completion of this questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this part of the study. However, if you are a student under the age of 18 please note that you must have your parent/guardian sign the consent form in order to participate in any part of the study. At the end of the questionnaire you will be invited to provide contact information if you wish to be considered to participate in follow-up group interview sessions where you will be provided the opportunity to share your experience with enrichment.

If you are selected to participate in the focus group sessions, they will last for up to one full day at a date and time that will be determined and will take place in London. The focus group interviews will include sessions with all students, all teachers, and mixed groups of both teachers and students. Transportation will not be provided, so participants will be asked to arrange their own transportation for this portion of the study.

The focus group interviews will be video and audio-recorded. You will be asked to share your experiences with enrichment programming, including, but not limited to, transition support; in-school programming such as the enrichment withdrawal ELOPE program, curriculum compacting, Advanced Placement (AP) exams and mentoring, Interdisciplinary Studies (IDC) courses, and designated enriched classes; as well as offsite enrichment including outreach opportunities and regional SPARK! conferences. The focus groups will be transcribed into written format. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts of your sessions to check for accuracy and to ensure you are comfortable with what you said.

### **Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Your anonymity will be maintained by using a pseudonym in the event that direct quotations of what you said are used. The video recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher will have access. The interview materials including hard copies of questionnaires, video recordings, and digital copies of transcriptions will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

### **Risks and Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Possible benefits include collaborative refinement of the Vision for Secondary Gifted Programming, including improved development and delivery of in-school programming, transition support, and both outreach and offsite enrichment opportunities to meet the needs of gifted students in today's public secondary schools.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect—for students—on your academic status or your participation in programming—for teachers—no effect on your employment status.

**Questions**

Please keep this letter of information for your records. If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at (contact information removed). If you have questions about this study, please contact myself at the numbers or addresses listed below, or my supervisor, Dr. Kathy Hibbert, at (contact information removed).

Sincerely,

Mel Gollan-Wills  
Secondary School Gifted Itinerant  
(contact information removed)



I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

**Name of Participant (please print):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Parent/Guardian (please print):**

*(if participant is under 18 years of age)*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Parent/Guardian:**

*(if participant is under 18 years of age)*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Mel Gollan-Wills

**Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:**

\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix D  
**Sample Email**

*Enrichment Programming for Secondary School Gifted Students: A Narrative Inquiry*

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Dear Potential Research Staff-Participant,

Attached please find a Letter of Information that describes a study that I am conducting to learn more about the experiences of gifted secondary school students and the designated teachers who program for those students. If, after reading the Letter of Information, you are interested in participating, please sign the Consent Form and complete the brief questionnaire that asks for demographic, some biographical, and preliminary programming information for your school.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mel Gollan-Wills  
Secondary School Gifted Itinerant  
(contact information removed)



## Student Participant Demographic Questionnaire

*Enrichment Programming for Secondary School Gifted Students: A Narrative Inquiry*

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**1. Do you have a formal designation of “Gifted”?**

- No
- Yes

**2. What is your age?**

- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18 or older

**3. Which of the following describes you:**

- Male
- Female

**4. Which grade are you currently in?**

- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- Returning fifth year

**5. Stream of courses (majority):**

- Academic, University
- Applied, College
- Locally Developed, Workplace, Essential

**6. Did you participate in elementary “cluster” sessions?**

- No (please skip to question #8)
- Yes

7. If you answered “Yes” to question #6, indicate the grades in elementary school where you attended these enrichment sessions (check all that apply):

- Grade 5
- Grade 6
- Grade 7
- Grade 8

8. Did you receive transition support from elementary school into secondary school (i.e. Discover Gifted—Secondary Event)?

- No
- Yes
- I do not know what this programming is

9. During your high school experience have you been enrolled in a designated enriched/gifted class (i.e. ENG 1DE opposed to the regular academic class, ENG 1D1)?

- No
- Yes
- I do not know what this programming is

10. During your high school experience have you participated in any in-school enrichment outside the regular classroom during school hours (i.e. ELOPE, enrichment clubs)?

- No (please skip to question #13)
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is (please skip to question #13)

11. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how frequently were the in-school enrichment sessions offered during the school year?

- Less than 4 per year
- 4-8
- Greater than 8

12. If you answered “Yes” to question #10, how many in-school enrichment sessions did you attend?

- Less than 4 per year
- 4-8
- Greater than 8



13. During your high school experience have you participated in any outside enrichment opportunities beyond the regular classroom (i.e. outreaches at local universities, contests at local universities, guest speakers/lectures, W.I.S.E., SPARK! conferences)?

- No (please skip to question #15)
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is (please skip to question #15)

14. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how many of the outside enrichment opportunities offered during the school year did you attend?

- 1 per year
- 2 per year
- Greater than 3 per year

15. During your high school experience have you been enrolled in, or will be enrolled in, an Interdisciplinary Studies credit (i.e. IDC 30, IDC 40, IDC 4U)?

- No
- Yes
- I am enrolled in an IDC for the 2013-2014 school year
- I do not know what this type of programming is

16. During your high school experience have you ever, or will you be, compacting a course for credit?

- No
- Yes
- I will be compacting curriculum during the 2013-2014 school year
- I do not know what this type of programming is

17. During you high school experience have you ever written, or will you be writing, an Advanced Placement (AP) exam for university credit?

- No
- Yes
- I am planning on writing an AP exam during the 2013-2014 school year or in the years to come
- I do not know what this type of programming is

**Tell me about your experiences with gifted education in your school:**

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**This signifies the completion of the questionnaire.  
Thank you for your time and careful responses.**

As indicated on the Letter of Information, participants are invited to provide contact information if they wish to be considered as participants in the follow-up group interview sessions where they will be provided the opportunity to share their experiences with enrichment.

The date, time and location (in London) of the group sessions will be determined and you will be contacted if you are selected to participate.

***Please PRINT the following:***

**Student FIRST Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student LAST Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Secondary School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone Number:** (       ) \_\_\_\_\_



## Teacher Participant Demographic Questionnaire

*Enrichment Programming for Secondary School Gifted Students: A Narrative Inquiry*

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Page 1 of 3

1. Which of the following describes you:
  - Male
  - Female
  
2. How many years have you been teaching?
  - Less than 5
  - 5-9
  - 10-15
  - Greater than 15
  
3. How many years have you been programming for the gifted outside the regular classroom?
  - Less than 3
  - 3-5
  - 6-9
  - Greater than 9
  
4. Which grades do you teach on a regular basis in the regular classroom?
  - 9
  - 10
  - 11
  - 12
  - Returning fifth year
  
5. Does your current secondary school provide transition support for gifted elementary school students into secondary school (i.e. Discover Gifted—Secondary Event, in-house transition events, transition meetings with feeding schools specifically targeting enrichment programming)?
  - No
  - Yes
  - I do not know what this programming is
  
6. Does your current secondary school offer designated enriched/gifted classes (i.e. ENG 1DE opposed to the regular academic class, ENG 1D1)?
  - No
  - Yes
  - I do not know what this programming is

**7. Does your current secondary school offer in-school enrichment outside the regular classroom during school hours (i.e. ELOPE, enrichment clubs)?**

- No (please skip to question #9)
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is (please skip to question #9)

**8. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how frequently are the in-school enrichment sessions offered during the school year?**

- Less than 4 per year
- 4-8
- Greater than 8

**9. Does your current secondary school attend any outside enrichment opportunities beyond the regular classroom (i.e. outreaches at local universities, contests at local universities, guest speakers/lectures, W.I.S.E., SPARK! conferences)?**

- No (please skip to question #11)
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is (please skip to question #11)

**10. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how frequently do you/your students attend the outside enrichment opportunities offered during the school year?**

- At least 1 per year
- At least 2 per year
- Greater than 3 per year

**11. Does your current secondary school offer Interdisciplinary Studies credits (i.e. IDC 30, IDC 40, IDC 4U)?**

- No
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is

**12. Does your current secondary school offer curriculum compacting?**

- No
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is

**13. Does your current secondary school offer Advanced Placement (AP) exams for university credit?**

- No
- Yes
- I do not know what this type of programming is
-

**Tell me about your experiences with gifted education in your school:**

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**This signifies the completion of the questionnaire.  
Thank you for your time and careful responses.**

As indicated on the Letter of Information, participants are invited to provide contact information if they wish to be considered as participants in the follow-up group interview sessions where they will be provided the opportunity to share their experiences with enrichment.

The date, time and location (in London) of the group sessions will be determined and you will be contacted if you are selected to participate.

***Please PRINT the following:***

**Teacher FIRST Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher LAST Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Secondary School:** \_\_\_\_\_

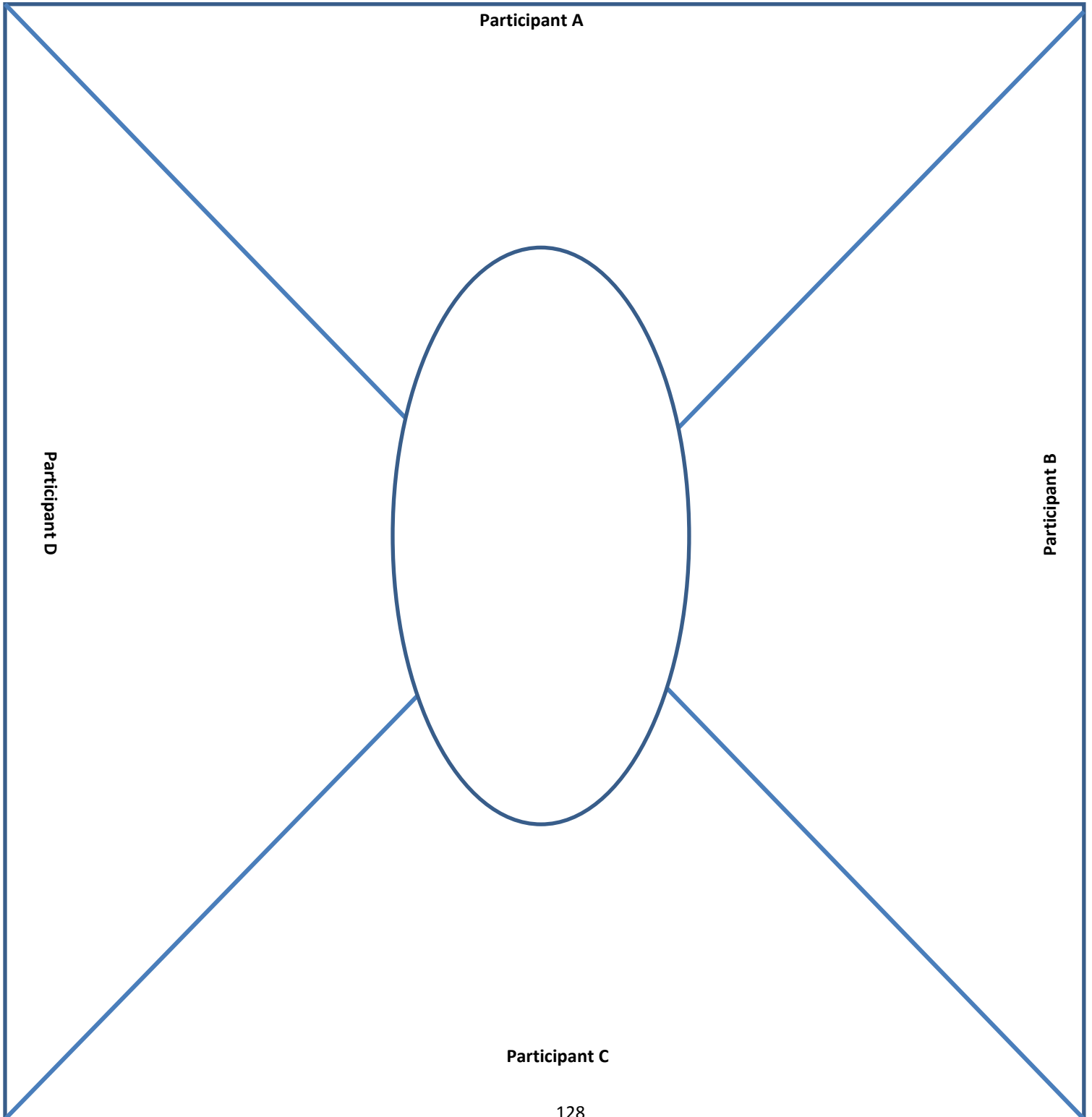
**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone Number:** (       ) \_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Group Placemat Organizer**

*Enrichment Programming for Secondary School Gifted Students: A Narrative Inquiry*

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## Focus Group Interviews

1. How did you become involved in enrichment programming at the secondary panel?

2. Tell me about your experiences in any in-school enrichment programming.

*Prompts: Talk about ELOPE; talk about curriculum compacting; what about Advanced Placement exams; tell me about Interdisciplinary Studies.*

**3. Tell me about in-school enrichment programming at your school.**

**4. Tell me about your experiences in any offsite or outside enrichment programming.**

*Prompts: Talk about outreach opportunities; tell me about the programs, challenges, or contests have you been involved in; what did you think about the large-scale enrichment events such as SPARK?*



5. Tell me about your experiences in an Interdisciplinary Studies class.

6. Tell me about your experiences in Advanced Placement courses or examinations.

7. Tell me about your experiences with curriculum compacting.

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Melissa D. Gollan-Wills

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** D'Youville College  
Buffalo, New York, USA  
2007-2008 M.S. Ed.

King's University College, The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2003-2007 H.B.A.

**Honours and Awards:** Admissions Scholarship, Undergraduate Studies, The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2003-2014

**Related Work Experience:** Gifted Itinerant—Secondary Programming  
Program Services, Thames Valley District School Board  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2012-current

Department Head—Special Education  
Medway High School, Thames Valley District School Board  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2011-2012

Secondary School Teacher: Intermediate/Senior English and Law,  
Learning Support Teacher  
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