The phenomenon of intellectually gifted underachievers and education: Listening to the male adolescent voice

Barbara Lynne Cunningham

The University of Montana

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The Phenomenon of Intellectually Gifted Underachievers and Education: Listening to the Male Adolescent Voice

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The Phenomenon of Intellectually Gifted Underachievers and Education:  
Listening to the Male Adolescent Voice

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This qualitative study explored the phenomenon of giftedness through the stories of gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers. This study was guided by the central question: What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal education experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domains? Ten participants, in the age range of 13-15 years, were purposely selected for this sample. Open ended interview and prompt questions were used to gather the data for this study. The analysis of the data followed a four step procedure suggested by Giorgi (1985).

During the initial step of data analysis the researcher immersed herself into the reading of the data. It was at this time in the analysis that six meaning units emerged (a) the impact of internal and external messaging, (b) the desire for relationships, (c) a feeling of powerlessness, (d) the necessity for mental stimulation, (e) a need for physical activity, and (f) the connection of emotions and engagement. As the analysis continued into the third step these units were refined into richly textured constituents. It was during the final synthesis or summary of the data where the essence of the experience was discovered. In this qualitative study the essence of the experience which emerged was that underachieving gifted youth are seeking engagement in all aspects of their lives. This essence was supported by the findings of this study and was presented in a narrative report.

There were three findings in this study (a) the feeling of powerlessness, perceived by these gifted youth, over the formal educational setting, (b) the effect internal and external messages had when filtered through the perceptions of these youth, and (c) underachieving gifted youth have a need for personally satisfying challenges in the formal education system. This study discovered that gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers are active learners who are seeking engagement and they want to be involved in their formal educational planning.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

Today’s public schools face many challenges. Concerns such as financial constraints, adequate staffing, appropriate curricular offerings, and especially meeting the needs of a diverse student population are at the forefront for most administrative teams. With current legislation purporting the promise of “No Child Left Behind”, school leaders must take a closer look at the specific “at risk” population of the academically underachieving gifted youth.

Many gifted children are considered at risk due to their uneven levels of development in the physical, intellectual, and emotional domains (Morelock, 1995; Neihart, 1999; Silverman, 1998; Tomlinson, 2002; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1994). Gifted adolescents have perceived themselves as different from their peers and have been found to even deny their giftedness in order to fit in socially (Swiatek & Dorr, 1998). Silverman (1998) discovered that some gifted individuals failed to acknowledge their giftedness because they perceived performance expectations, set by others, were too high to achieve. She noted that this denial of one’s abilities was equated to the denial of the Self, causing Self alienation. Denying one’s abilities or feeling different than one’s peers may result in the gifted youth thinking that there is something fundamentally wrong with them (Piechowski, 1997). Resolving this dilemma is challenging and often causes frustration for the gifted youth in their attempt to balance their emotional and intellectual thoughts. It is this unique make up of the gifted youth, their diversity in personality, thinking styles, and emotional needs, which can be a challenge for any setting attempting to educate this divergent at risk population (Neihart, 1999; Webb et al., 1994).
Statement of the Problem

The challenge of designing academic programs to best assist and support the gifted child, and more specifically the underachieving gifted individual, continues to remain elusive to educators. According to Emerick (1992), “There is no problem more perplexing or frustrating than the situation in which a bright child cannot or will not perform at an academic level commensurate with his or her intellectual ability” (p. 140). Over the past decades the research on underachieving gifted youth has attempted to provide data to define consistent characteristics of gifted underachievers, identify specific reasons for underachievement, and suggest curricular models for educational success (Diaz, 1998; Ford & Thomas, 1997; Muir, 2001; Reis, Hébert, Diaz, Maxfield, & Ratley, 1995; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Even with all of this information, there continues to be many gifted students not reaching their academic potential. Rimm (1997) referred to the current status of gifted underachievement as an epidemic. Numerous authors have articulated the need for a more complete understanding of the unique complexities of gifted underachievers and the means to better meet their diverse challenges (Diaz, 1998; Emerick, 1992; Ford & Thomas, 1997; Muir 2001; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Tolan, 1996; Webb 1994).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomenon of giftedness through the eyes of gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers. A qualitative approach allowed the individual voices of gifted underachievers to collectively be heard. In exploring the phenomenon of giftedness, through the perception of gifted underachievers, this study sought to discover insights to answer its central question: What lessons can be
learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their needs in the cognitive and affective domains?

**Research Questions**

Creswell (1998) suggested the idea of one broad or "central" question be used for the framework of a qualitative study. He further suggested that the central question be followed by subquestions. This phenomenological study was guided by the following central question:

What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domain?

This central question will be supported by the following three subquestions:

1. What retrospective insights do gifted students have regarding the design of their earlier formal educational experience?
2. How do underachieving gifted youth perceive the impact of personal emotional overexcitabilities on their school day?
3. How do underachieving gifted youth perceive their cognitive abilities?

**Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions were used:

**Affective Domain.** The domain which focuses on feelings, and interpersonal relations (Webb, 1994).

**AGATE.** The acronym for the Montana Association for Gifted and Talented Education.

**At risk.** A term used to describe a population or individual with a higher than average vulnerability towards specific areas of concern (Webb et al., 1994).
Attribution. A causal explanation for individual actions and outcomes (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1998).

Attribution Theory. “The study of how individuals explain events that take place” (Bruning et al., 1998, p.138).

Bias. An intentional or unintentional prejudice or judgement of the researcher (Schwandt, 1997).

Bracketing. The process of setting aside all prejudgements during the research (Creswell, 1998).

Case Type Sampling. A purposeful sample of participants used for “an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon” (Schumacher, & McMillan, 1993, p. 382).

Causal Attribution. According to Weiner (1974), “causal attributions in the area of achievement motivation primarily refer to the perceived reason for success or failure” (p. 51).

Causation. According to Bandura (1997), causation is “a functional dependence between events” (p. 5).

Cognitive Domain. This domain encompasses the areas of thinking and understanding (Clark, 1997).

Curricular Compacting. An instructional tool used to condense curricular lessons when proficiency is met (Renzulli & Reis, 1985).

Differentiated Curriculum. A curriculum which offers different learning opportunities and multiple options at varied ability levels for students to obtain content and develop products (Tomlinson, 2001).
Divergent Thinker. Webb et al. (1994) noted that this term is used as a character descriptor for gifted individuals who are also thought of as creative and independent thinkers.

Domain. An organized area of knowledge such as language, math, and art (Winner, 1996).

Flexible Pacing. Educational programs which allow independent movement in the curriculum as content is mastered (Daniel & Cox, 1988).

Formal Education. Educational programs that are structured institutional curricular-based programs, such as public and private school systems (Clark, 1997).

Gifted and Talented. A term that is interchangeable with gifted and used to reference the gifted population in a school setting (Clark, 1997).

Gifted Underachiever. This is a label given to an individual when there is a significant difference between the school performance and a measured indication of the ability of the individual (Rimm, 1997). In this study, participants will meet the definition of gifted and the determining difference will be established if the participant is currently performing at or below a D average in two or more of the following classes during the current academic year (a) history, (b) mathematics, (c) English, and or (d) science.

Intellectually Gifted. The term gifted refers to intellectually gifted individuals who meet the criteria of an IQ score at 130 or above (Webb et al., 1994).

Learning Style. A term that is used to depict how an individual acquires knowledge through means of one's perceptual and sensory strengths (Taylor, 1997).
Metacognition. The method of thinking about one’s cognitive process (Schraw & Graham, 1997).

Overexcitabilities. These characteristics, originally labeled hyperexcitabilities, reference the emotional sensitivity and intensity of a child’s psychological make up (Dabrowski, 1967).


Phenomenology. The study of a lived experience as it is perceived by the individual (Creswell, 1998).

Reputational-Case Sampling. A form of sampling where recommendations for participant selection are solicited from “knowledgeable experts for the best example” (Schumacher & McMillian, 1993, p. 380).

Self. According to Greenspon (2000), Self is “The experienced world of the person” (p. 178).

Self-Efficacy. According to Bandura (1997) it “refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainment” (p. 3).

Delimitations of the Study

In a qualitative study delimitations are used to narrow the parameters of the study (Creswell, 1994). This study was delimited to the following criteria. All of the participants for this study were students from public schools in Western Montana. Each
participant met criteria for participation in their school’s Gifted and Talented program, they were perceived as underachievers and were in the age range of 13-15 years of age.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations in a qualitative study address points which may present possible weaknesses in the study (Creswell, 1994). This qualitative study presented a specific focus on a distinct group of participants which may limit the generalizability of these findings to other gifted populations. Participants were solicited for this study through the recommendation of the participants’ gifted and talented program advisors. The advisors were asked to recommend students who were in their gifted program and who they perceived as underachievers. Another limitation of the study presupposed that underachieving gifted adolescents had retrospective conceptual ideas on education and they were willing and able to articulate personal thoughts regarding their ideas.

**Significance of the Study**

This qualitative study provided unique and important information on giftedness from the perceptions of underachieving gifted youth. The research on gifted children, and specifically gifted underachievers was plentiful. There is, however, a demonstrated need to obtain a better awareness of the gifted child’s perceptions and understanding (Delisle, 1998; Delisle & Berger, 1990; Emerick, 1992; Hertzog, 1998; Whitmore, 1980). This study provided a direct link to experience the essence of giftedness through the eyes of divergent thinkers who were considered underachievers. Talking with students about their educational programming and other topics, was supported by many scholars (Armstrong, 1987, 1994; Delisle & Berger, 1990; Eckhaus, 1996; Emerick, 1992; Gallagher, Harradine, & Coleman, 1997; Hertzog, 1998; Peine, 1999).
This study also provided school administrative leaders and educators insight regarding successful educational programming ideas. Reis and McCoach (2000) voiced the concern to "unravel the mystery of why gifted students underachieve and how we can help them" (p. 166). Peine (1999) noted the missing connectiveness of the research findings to the practical classroom applications and Gallagher (1998) stated, "One way to discover what gifted students are thinking about their education is to ask them" (p. 2). Gallagher (1998) concluded his findings with a recommendation for future research to address specific educational concerns by communicating directly with the gifted students rather than making generalized assumptions regarding a total population. For the purpose of this study, formal education was viewed through the lens of gifted underachievers.

The voice of the gifted underachiever held the key to the enigma of giftedness. Their intuitive perceptions provided insight and direction to assist in formulating and better meeting the needs of this diverse population. The concept of actively involving gifted youth in their own educational planning was supported in Armstrong's article, A Gifted Child's Education Requires Real Dialogue (1994). She also noted that research on locus of control for the gifted demonstrated a desire for direct personal involvement in the planning of educational programming. It is time to listen to the collective voices of these academically underachieving divergent thinkers as they address the concepts of their unique phenomenon; giftedness. In Chapter Two, the review of literature will provide a foundation for this study on underachieving gifted youth.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The intrigue of the brilliant mind has been a focus of study throughout the majority of the twentieth century. A plethora of literature exists addressing the dimension of giftedness. Early research on the gifted individual was initiated by Lewis Terman in the 1920’s. Since Terman’s research there has been substantial growth and learning about the gifted (Clark, 1997; Colangelo & Davis 1997; Neihart, 1999a; Renzulli, 1978, 1999; Winner, 1996).

This review of literature focuses on significant topics for this study. The areas addressed in this review include (a) the definitions of giftedness and gifted underachievers, (b) learning theories, (c) affective considerations, and (d) educational programming. This review begins with the challenge of defining giftedness.

Definitions of Giftedness and Gifted Underachievers

Giftedness

Giftedness poses a challenge for consensus of definition (Clark, 1997; Neihart, 1999; Renzulli, 1978; Webb et al. 1994; Whitmore, 1980). The definitions of giftedness are plentiful and may be viewed on a continuum from a specific characteristic to an all-inclusive population of gifted traits (Clark, 1997; Evans, 1996; Osborn, 2002). Renzulli (1978) labeled the continuum of defining giftedness from “conservative” to “liberal”. He stated that the conservative focus potentially limited eligibility of participants where the liberal view was less tangible in respect to finite measurement. Two of the noted past experts on giftedness, Lewis Terman and Paul Witty, demonstrated this range in their definition of giftedness. Terman (1925) proposed a conservative definition of the gifted
that specifically focused on those individuals whose standardized test performance scores were in the top one percent. In the forties, Witty liberally defined giftedness as follows:

There are children whose outstanding potentialities in art, writing, or in social leadership can be recognized largely by their performance. Hence, we have recommended that the definition of giftedness be expanded and that we consider any child gifted whose performance, in a potentially valuable line of human activity, is consistently, remarkable. (cited in Renzulli, 1978, p. 181)

Other designs and definitions of giftedness fell within the continuum of Terman’s and Witty’s definitions.

The Federal Government liberally defined giftedness. A commonly referenced definition was authored by Former US. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland, Jr. (1972). The definition, noted in the Marland Report, generalized giftedness to be outstanding ability of an individual who is capable of high performance. The report stated that these individuals were identified by qualified professionals and needed differentiated curricular options not offered in a regular school program. This ambiguity, regarding giftedness, is also presented in the mission statement of the National Association for Gifted Children (2003), “…children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents as well as those who may be able to develop their talent potential with appropriate educational experiences” (p. 1). The use of vague or all-inclusive terminology when defining giftedness can be confusing and adds to the general misunderstanding of the gifted individual.

This confusion was noted by Kunkle, Chapa, Patterson, & Walling (1995), where they referred to students’ ambivalence on being labeled gifted due to such statements as
"everybody's gifted in their own way" (p. 130). This egalitarian ideal, that all were gifted, had a direct effect on special services provided for gifted youth (Winner, 1996). However, James Delisle (2001), in his article, In Praise of Elitism, challenged the view of egalitarian giftedness. He stated, "I still believe in the distinct quality of giftedness that is a domain of the few, not of the many" (p. 14). In an attempt to calm the confusion, different scholars have presented designs and models to articulate giftedness.

Joseph Renzulli, (1978) in his article, What Makes Giftedness? Reexamining the Definition, presented a design approach to defining giftedness. Renzulli's research focused on the combination of "three interlocking clusters of traits" (p. 182) which formulated the ingredients for giftedness. In this design, The Three Ring Conception, giftedness encompassed a combination of (a) above average ability, (b) task commitment, and (c) creativity. Although helpful, this design did not satisfy the need to seek out a more complete definition or holistic approach to understanding giftedness.

The concept of a holistic approach had also been expressed by Betts and Neihart (1988). In their article, Profiles of the Gifted and Talented, Betts and Neihart (1988) noted a need for a holistic view of the gifted child. They categorized and profiled gifted individuals into six types (a) successful, (b) divergent gifted, (c) underground, (d) dropout, (e) double-labeled, and (f) autonomous learner. Each of the six types described a profile, which included a specific combination of attitudes, behaviors, and needs. The framework was not intended as a diagnostic tool but rather as a tool to better understand the individualistic nature of the gifted. Techniques such as profiling and categorizing various characteristics may assist in a better understanding of gifted individuals. Other scholars have also worked to better understand the uniqueness of the gifted individual.
Webb et al. (1994), in their book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*, described gifted children as intense “divergent thinkers” who may view the world in nontraditional ways and often try to do things independently. Renzulli (1999) later differentiated giftedness into two domains, schoolhouse and creative productive. According to Renzulli, schoolhouse giftedness was measured by standardized and cognitive ability tests, while creative productive giftedness addressed the population of those individuals with “unusual accomplishments” (p. 9) who may or may not qualify for special programming if cognitive testing was the sole determining factor. Recently, Webb (2000) presented a format for gifted which added two additional clusters to Renzulli’s *Three Ring Conception of Giftedness*. In addition to above average ability, task commitment, and creativity, Webb promoted that caring and courage were needed to support a holistic approach to help gifted learners. He noted that these two additional traits, which more directly addressed the affective domain of the gifted individual, could be enhanced and nurtured through external support of significant adults such as parents and teachers.

Over the years, researchers have gathered many characteristics that appear to be specific to the gifted individual. The *Characteristics of Giftedness Scale* was designed to provide a finite picture of giftedness through the presentation of potential common characteristics (Silverman, Chitwood, & Waters, 1986). Using varied approaches, authors, such as Gardner (1993a, 1999), Winner (1996), and Clark (1997) provided descriptors, which offered a differentiated perception of giftedness when compared to non-gifted individuals.

Gardner (1993a), in his book, *Frames of Mind*, articulated the concept of multiple intelligences and challenged the traditional approach to obtaining an understanding of
giftedness. Gardner noted that his definition of intelligence moved from the traditional view of a finite measurable component to a multiple view of varied human abilities. His theory of Multiple Intelligences was developed on the characteristics of varied abilities to solve problems or demonstrate creativity. He originally defined seven different intelligences (a) linguistic, (b) logical-mathematical, (c) spatial, (d) bodily kinesthetic, (e) musical, (f) interpersonal, and (g) intrapersonal. He then added the eighth intelligence, which he termed naturalistic (Gardner, 1999). A different approach to categorizing characteristics of the gifted was presented by Winner (1996).

Winner (1996) separated the gifted child from the normal child using three atypical characteristics. The first characteristic was precocity where the gifted child initially absorbed much knowledge on a specific topic at an earlier than average age. The second characteristic was an insistence of marching to one’s own drummer in which the gifted child not only learned faster but also learned differently. Winner labeled the final characteristic a rage to master, where an intrinsic drive was present and the gifted learner focused an overtly intense interest level when attempting to make sense of a selected topic. These three characteristics speak to both the affective and cognitive domains of an individual. Using characteristics of both domains to describe giftedness was also presented by Clark.

In her book, Growing up Gifted, Barbara Clark (1997) outlined several characteristics of the gifted individual into the domains of cognitive and affective. She noted that cognitively, the gifted child typically (a) had high language development, (b) was very verbal, (c) possessed a large quantity of information, (d) was interested in many areas, and (e) could generate solutions and demonstrate advanced comprehension. The
affective characteristics that were often prevalent in the gifted child were (a) unusual sensitivity, (b) vast knowledge regarding emotional awareness, (c) keen sense of humor, (d) an intense sense of right and wrong, (e) high expectations, and (f) an extreme emotional depth and intensity. This format provided an image for defining giftedness as did the visual models of Gagne (1997) and Mönk (2000).

Gagne (1997) designed a model to differentiate between the terms gifted and talented. He noted that his design for giftedness focused on five aptitude domains (a) intellectual, (b) creative, (c) socioaffective, (d) sensorimotor, and (d) “other” which, Gagne noted, would include extrasensory perception. He stated that the population of gifted individuals were in the top fifteen percent and referenced them as “basically” gifted. His model differentiated three additional subgroups of gifted individuals, which were labeled (a) moderately, (b) highly and (c) extremely gifted. In a different use of models, Mönk provided a way to summarize the many definitions of giftedness.

Mönk (2000) used four models to categorize the definitions of giftedness. He noted that a model simplified the main points of an area of study. The four models included (a) trait-oriented models, (b) cognitive component models, (c) achievement models and (d) sociocultural/psychosocial oriented models. For the purpose of this study the definition of giftedness centers on the intellect and would be reflected by one of Mönk’s achievement models.

Scholars continue to design and refine the definition for giftedness. Webb et al. (1994) noted that “there is widespread recognition that high intelligence exists” (p. 45) and although gifted youth are unique they “do have intellectual characteristics in common” (p. 45). It was also suggested, by Webb et al., that “an IQ of 130 or above is
generally used as a cut off score” (p. 4). This study used the above criteria for defining giftedness and then refined the focus to a portion of the gifted population.

**Underachieving Gifted**

For the purpose of this study, the population of giftedness addressed was gifted individuals who were perceived as underachievers. Underachievement of students identified as gifted is a serious problem and has frustrated educators for years (Emerick, 1992; Gallagher, 1997). The underachieving gifted is a subset of the gifted population which scholars have tried to define.

Defining underachievement and gifted underachievers is a complex endeavor as scholars continue to posit definitions. Underachieving giftedness is generally defined as a discrepancy between the potential of an individual and their performance level (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Ford & Thomas, 1997; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Rimm, 1997; Whitmore, 1980). Defining the discrepancy has been the focus of many researchers with inconsistent and contradictory results (Colangelo, 1997; Diaz, 1998; Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Whitmore, 1985). Delisle and Berger (1990) voiced that underachievement “is in the eye of the beholder” (p. 1) and suggested that the first step in solving this dilemma was to discuss the parameters of success and failure. According to Emerick, (1992) the idea of underachievement was viewed more subjectively than objectively. Rimm (1997) surmised that the general definition of not working to potential would include most gifted students. Recently, Delisle (1997) has suggested that underachievement be viewed as a myth and not be used as an additional burden for an already fragile population. As with giftedness, there was no consensus in
defining the gifted underachiever. There also was no consensus, among scholars, on the 
specified reasons for underachievement.

Gifted students underachieve for many different reasons (Delisle & Berger, 1990; 
Emerick, 1992; Feldhusen, 1997; Reis & McCoach 2000; Whitmore, 1980, 1986). These 
authors noted that factors such as self concept, school and family environment, 
motivation, and peer influence might affect levels of underachievement. Feldhusen 
(1997) suggested that gifted students lose their motivation due to the lack of faster paced 
curriculum and in turn “learn how to get by easily” (p. 1). In a qualitative study on 
underachievement, Emerick (1992) found that six themes emerged for participants who 
moved from being an underachiever to having sustained academic success. The two 
themes, which were perceived by the participants as having the most significant effect, 
were self or personal awareness and a caring teacher who communicated support to the 
participant. Emerick found that the students in her study wanted direct involvement with 
those designing their educational plan. Direct involvement and a need to communicate 
were also articulated by other scholars (Delisie & Berger, 1990; Eckhaus, 1996; 

Eckhaus (1996) focused her research on communication of the gifted. She 
believed that gifted individuals communicated in the same manner as the general public 
does, but noted a difference of intensity at the sensory storage stage. She pointed out that 
it was this higher sensitivity, which had a strong influence on the individual’s 
intrapersonal skills. Eckhaus described this as an inside voice where one designs a frame 
of reference for interpreting and responding to messages of others, referred to as 
interpersonal communication. She articulated that with a gifted individual, the intense
awareness of verbal and nonverbal cues were often misinterpreted. Eckhaus also noted that the ideas of the gifted child were frequently misunderstood and the child felt invalidated. Finding an environment that effectively acknowledges the sensitive nature of the gifted individual may be advantageous.

Whitmore (1980) articulated the ideas of a supportive environment and positive regard for student input. She suggested that three, student-centered, components of successful programming were (a) understanding of self, (b) skills to cope with the gap between cognitive ability and performance level, and (c) development of a healthy and realistic self concept. Delisle and Berger (1990) found that students were more successful in a non-authoritarian environment, where the students felt respected and where their ideas were heard. They also stressed that underachievement was a behavior and not an attitude or work habit. They pointed out that underachievement is “content and situation specific” (p. 1). With this in mind, it is apparent that the need for self awareness and self understanding play an important role for success of the gifted adolescent.

In their research on adolescents’ adjustment to giftedness, Buescher and Higham (1990) noted a perceived confusion, in the gifted youth, due to varied messages from school, family, and friends, regarding their giftedness. They articulated six specific areas which, individually or in combination, were perceived as potential deterrents of an individual’s future success. The areas were (a) ownership, (b) dissonance, (c) taking risks, (d) competing expectations (e) impatience, and (f) premature identity. Buescher and Higham found that although the child “owned” or accepted the label of giftedness, she may question the validity. The idea of dissonance was experienced by the gifted child who was frustrated over his personal expectations of completed work. In Buescher and
Higham’s study, they found that risk taking activities decreased as age increased due to perceived repercussions by others. They noted the lack of taking risks could hamper the advancement of the gifted child when exploring varied educational opportunities. It was pointed out that participants felt overly pushed to meet the expectations of others. They also suggested that the perception of high expectations, the gifted child’s impatient demeanor, or a desire to obtain adultlike identity could also deter success. There are many factors that may promote success for the gifted underachiever. In addition to an in-depth understanding of self (Buescher & Higham, 1990; Whitmore, 1980) and a safe supportive environment (Delisie & Berger, 1990; Eckhaus, 1996; Ruf, 2000) an understanding of how one learns is also important.

Learning Theories

Learning about learning is a continual educational challenge. The literature is plentiful with studies on the gifted regarding learning. Several noted researchers have designed and tested a variety of theories involving thinking and their connectedness of those theories in the educational arena (Bandura, 1997, Grigorenko & Sternberg, 1997; Sternberg, & Grigorenko, 1993, Weiner, 1974, 1980).

Many researchers have explored varied reasons connected to learning. Two of these scholars, who have done extensive research on how people learn, were Albert Bandura and Bernard Weiner. Bandura’s work focused on the idea of self-efficacy and Weiner studied the attribution theory.

Attribution Theory

According to Bruning et al., (1998) the attribution theory is centered on “how individuals explain events that take place” (p.138). Weiner (1974), noted for his research
on attribution, developed an attributional model of achievement motivation. In one of his studies on success and failure, Weiner used open response questions for participants to explain their causal beliefs. He discovered four common areas in the responses from these subjects as to the perceived reason for their success or failure. The four common areas were (a) ability, (b) effort, (c) task difficulty, and (d) luck. He found an interconnection of these four areas when they were evaluated in reference to stability and locus of control. Weiner stated that “pride and shame are maximized when achievement outcomes are ascribed internally and minimized when success and failure are attributed to external causes” (p. 61). Task difficulty was also viewed as a component that affected performance in the discussion of self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy Theory

According to Bandura (1997), “perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capacity” (p. 11). Bruning et al. (1998) articulated that these judgments could directly be effected by (a) the level of task difficulty, (b) the generality of one’s self-efficacy, and (c) the strength of one’s efficacy belief. Bandura (1986) saw a connection between self-efficacy and performance and found that these three dimensions could be influenced by four components (a) enactive information, (b) observation, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) the psychological state of the individual. Bruning et al. (1998) articulated that “strong emotional arousal also often reduces efficacy, chiefly by involving fear-inducing thoughts” (p. 132).

Different studies have demonstrated the link of student self-efficacy to school success. Bandura and Wood (1989) found a connection between self-efficacy and feeling in control of one’s environment. Bandura (1993) also made a correlation between strong
self-efficacy and personal emotional control. Bruning et al. (1998) stressed that self-generated feedback is very successful. The idea of better self-regulation strategies was supported in research on underachievement (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1994). This idea of self-regulating strategies was reflected in the concepts of metacognition.

**Metacognition**

According to Schraw and Graham (1997) metacognition was used as a means for "individuals to monitor and regulate their cognitive performance" (p. 4). They noted that this skill, when developed and taught, proved to be beneficial, particularly for gifted youth. Having an understanding of how one thinks may be helpful in the learning process (Blakey & Spence, 1990; Carr, Alexander, & Schwanenflugel, 1996).

In a study on metacognitive awareness, Sheppard and Kanevsky (1999) found that gifted youth benefited from direct instruction on metacognition. They further noted that gifted youth, when trained in a homogeneous setting, were able to articulate their newly learned skills in a "more sophisticated and more creative" fashion (p. 266). According to Schraw & Graham (1997) this articulation would be defined as metacognitive knowledge, and the implementation of this knowledge would be noted as metacognitive control. In addition to studying metacognition, researchers have also studied different styles of thinking.

**Thinking Styles**

One of the major focal points of research was an attempt to connect thinking styles with academic achievement of the gifted. Sternberg and Grigorenko, (1993) noted that thinking style was not synonymous with giftedness, but rather it was a separate...
characteristic that added insight into the understanding of the thought process of any individual. The study of thinking styles was a major focus of Sternberg's past research.

Robert Sternberg has done extensive research regarding thinking styles and designed the Mental Self-Governance model (Sternberg 1995). The Mental Self-Governance design is depicted, by Sternberg, as a schematic approach intended to evaluate a person’s thinking style through the structured layout similar to the United States government's judicial system. The three-tiered layout was divided into the categories of (a) functions, (b) forms, and (c) levels. Each tier had additional subdivisions for more specificity. Sternberg noted that in decisions regarding programming for the gifted, it was more effective to work with the individual’s style of thinking and to design the program more specifically to the individual rather than consider one type of programming for all gifted students. In addition to thinking style, learning style is also an area of study.

Learning Styles

A learning style is one’s unique way of processing and understanding information (Taylor, 1997). Griggs (1991) stated “learning is critically important and understanding the way individuals learn is the key to educational improvement” (p. 1). According to Griggs (1991), when instruction is adjusted to support one’s learning style the end result can be higher academic achievement and more positive attitudes towards learning.

Scholars have studied learning styles for several decades (Burns et al, 1998). Burns et al. (1998) looked at the connection of learning styles and high academic achievers. They reviewed several researchers on learning style theories and instruments. For the purposes of their study, Burns et al. designed an extended study which partially replicated the original 1975 study by Dunn and Price. In the Bruns et al. study a sample
of students were given a one hundred item inventory consisting of variables related to learning conditions. Their results supported the need to assess information from the individual students rather than attempt to glean statistical information from a quantitative evaluation (Burns et al., 1998). The study of both thinking and learning styles primarily is focused on the cognitive domain and the intellect of the individual. An additional area that must be addressed, when looking at giftedness as a whole, is that of the affective domain.

**Affective Considerations**

Substantial progress has been made in understanding the cognitive needs of the gifted, but there continues to remain a deficit in understanding the needs of the gifted in the area of the affective domain (Colangelo, 1997; Delisle, 1997; Piechowski, 1997; Silverman, 1990; Tomlinson, 2002; Webb et al. 1994). The affective domain focuses on feelings and interpersonal relations (Webb, 1994). According to Silverman (1990), a more thorough understanding of the gifted individual is formulated when the intellectual and emotional traits are explored together.

The high level of emotional development in the gifted was depicted in the studies of Kazimierz Dabrowski (1967). Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration was the foundation for his ideas on human development. He categorized high levels of emotional excitement into five characteristics, which he labeled overexcitabilities (OE). The concepts of overexcitabilities are an augmentation of Dabrowski’s Theory of Emotional Development. Several scholars have studied and incorporated the findings of Dabrowski into their own research on giftedness (Piechowski 1979; Silverman, 1990; Strickland, 2001; Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997). Working together, as colleagues, Dabrowski and
Piechowski refined the characteristics of the OE (Piechowski, 1979). These five characteristics were presented as the positive aspects of gifted emotional intensity and represented a component towards a higher level of functioning (Piechowski, 2002; Silverman, 1990). It was noted that gifted children often release their emotional tension through the use of overexcitabilities. These overexcitabilities are viewed as positive components for continued growth not as potential neurotic imbalances (Piechowski 1997). According to Piechowski “overexcitabilities contribute to the individual's psychological development” and that “they stand out loud and clear in gifted children” (p. 367). Piechowski (2002) summarized how the five overexcitabilities are often expressed:

- **Psychomotor**- movements, restlessness, drivenness, and augmented capacity for being active and energetic.
- **Sensual**- enhanced refinement and aliveness of sensual experience.
- **Intellectual**- avidity for knowledge, discovery, questioning, love of ideas and theoretical analysis, search for truth.
- **Imaginational**- vividness of imagery, richness of association, facility for dreams, fantasies and inventions, endowing toys and other objects with personality (animism), liking for the unusual: and
- **Emotional**- great depth and intensity of emotional life expressed in a wide range of feelings, compassion, responsibility, self examination. (p. 28)

The intensity of emotions also can represent extreme and even negative responses for the gifted. Webb (1994) noted that gifted children had similar needs of non-gifted children, but due to the onset of earlier physical and emotional development, the needs often appeared sooner for the gifted child. The emotional concerns may cluster to form
combined problem areas for the gifted such as (a) limited peer relations, (b) frustrations due to uneven development of fine motor and intellectual skills, (c) lack of risk taking, (d) extreme self-criticism, and (e) perfectionism (Clark, 1997).

The emotional trait of perfectionism has been linked to giftedness from a negative viewpoint. Patricia Schuler (1999) supported this connection in a study, however, she differentiated her findings by the categories of healthy and dysfunctional perfectionists. She noted that the healthy perfectionist demonstrated qualities of positive success and the dysfunctional perfectionist was anxiety driven and demonstrated an overall negative overview of life's demands. Other scholars have studied the emotional demands on the gifted.

In a qualitative study, Sowa and May (1997) explored how gifted children emotionally dealt with personal demands and pressures. Information, pertaining to the child's stress coping capabilities, was gathered through interviews with teachers, peers, family members, and the twenty selected subjects. The information was analyzed and a model of social and emotional adjustment was formulated. This model, referred to as the Social and Emotional Adjustment Model (SEAM), provided a visual guide regarding personal adjustment to social and emotional stressors. In another qualitative study, by Kunkle, Chapa, Patterson, and Walling (1995), a visual mapping technique was used to provide a better understanding of giftedness.

In their article, The Experience of Giftedness: A Conceptual Map, Kunkle et al. (1995) presented a technique which provided a visual diagram to categorize the responses of gifted youth into a traits map. Students were asked to write a letter, as if writing to a friend, and describe what giftedness was like. This qualitative format allowed for
individual expression and expansion on a variety of themes. The data was coded and eight clusters were formed for the conceptual map. The clusters were as follows (a) intellectual superiority, (b) social superiority, (c) self-satisfaction, (d) skillfulness, (e) respect from others, (f) social stress, (g) estrangement, and (h) conformity. The results demonstrated a more positive than negative feeling towards giftedness. The design of the concept map appeared to display an intense importance in the affective regions over the cognitive portions of the map. The authors noted that the purpose of the study was not for statistical results but more for the participants' reflections. Activities and conceptual models, such as these, may help educators to better understand the gifted learner and to meet the challenge of designing appropriate educational programming.

**Educational Programming**

Designing and implementing appropriate curricular opportunities for the gifted population is a rigorous undertaking. VanTassel-Baska (1994) voiced strong support for an organized gifted education curriculum and stated, “what happens to a child in school should have a significant positive effect on the processes of learning” (p. xv). The educational experience, for the gifted, must be designed to directly address the gifted youth’s unique differences and to meet their diverse needs (Berger, 1991; Maker, 1982; VanTassel-Baska, 1994). Berger (1991) purported, “Developing curriculum that is sufficiently rigorous, challenging, and coherent for students who are gifted is a challenging task. The result, however, is well worth it” (p. 3). To meet this responsibility, educational settings need to explore a variety of curricular options.

The diversity of the educational format for gifted and talented programming is often addressed through several teaching and learning models (Clark, 1997; Greenlaw &
McIntosh, 1988; Heward & Orlansky, 1988; Maker, 1982; Renzulli & Reis, 1994; VanTassel-Baska, 1994). Greenlaw and McIntosh (1988) suggested that of the more than sixty curricular designs at least one fourth were used in program design for the gifted. The textbook, *Exceptional Children* (Heward & Orlansky, 1988), briefly described several of these models. Each model was structured on varied concepts or dimensions which provided options to best meet the needs of the individual learner.

The literature presented an array of different plans for designing and differentiating educational programming for the gifted (Clark, 1997; Maker, 1982; Reis, Westberg, Kulikowich, & Purcell, 1998; Renzulli & Reis, 1994). Enrichment activities were described as the expansion of classroom curriculum which provided either more in-depth understanding of a topic or the activities took on the form of adding additional learning areas. Enrichment activities might include (a) pull out programming, (b) independent study, (c) accelerated programming or (d) curricular compacting. These activities were typically adjacent to the regular curriculum.

According to Clark (1997), the intent of pull out programs was designed to remove the gifted students from the classroom at a regularly scheduled time to work with a group of gifted students and the advisor or a mentor. She suggested that independent study offered an opportunity for the self-directed gifted student to select and research a specific area of interest. In addition, when accelerated programming was used it allowed students to either skip certain classes or move through curricular materials at an accelerated pace. Finally, curricular compacting was presented as a form of acceleration where the student was able to eliminate portions of the curriculum that she had mastered.
(Reis et al., 1998). With so many different curricular designs it was apparent that some means to organize the different designs would be beneficial.

VanTassel-Baska (1994) suggested that the varied curricular models could be grouped into three domain-specific models (a) content mastery, (b) process/product research model, and (c) epistemological concept model. The content mastery designs focused on learning information and skills at an accelerated pace. Two examples of this design would include curricular compacting (Reis et al., 1998; Renzulli, 1978; Renzulli & Reis, 1985) and flexible pacing (Daniel & Fox, 1988). The process/product model centered on researching and producing a high quality product (VanTassel-Baska, 1994). Enrichment programs such as the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli, 1978, 1999, Renzulli & Reis, 1985) would be included in this group. Enrichment programs, according to Renzulli and Reis (1994), were the curricular models most often used in school systems. The final group, the epistemological model addressed the “students’ understanding and appreciating systems of knowledge rather than the individual elements of those systems” (VanTassel-Baska, 1994, p. 370). Using this model, students reflected on reading and expressed thoughts through discussion and writing. VanTassel-Baska (1994) cited the Junior Great Books Program as an example of an epistemological model. In addition to programming options, Gallagher suggested a need to examine system accountability.

Gallagher (1998) framed the concern for positive gifted education programming by addressing accountability. He posed the concern that traditional measures were ineffective in assessing components of gifted educational programming. He specifically cited four commonly used techniques (a) ceiling effect of testing, (b) content coverage,
(c) general measures of achievement, and (d) previous evaluation models of educational evaluation used in assessing the average student. In one study on gifted education, Gallagher, Harradine, and Coleman (1997) found that almost half of all the participants reported that their curriculum was not challenging. They concluded the findings with a recommendation for future research to address specific educational concerns by communicating directly with the gifted students rather than making generalized assumptions regarding a total population. The idea of talking with individual students about their educational programming is supported by many scholars (Armstrong, 1987, 1994; Delisie & Berger, 1990; Eckhaus, 1996; Emerick, 1992; Gallagher et al., 1997; Herzog, 1998, Peine, 1999).

A study by Armstrong (1987) supported the involvement of gifted students in their educational planning and their need for interactive engagement. The study demonstrated the positive effect of dialogue journals. The assigned activity of journaling not only provided an avenue of communication for gifted students to collaborate in their own educational programming needs, but it also provided the teachers with a stronger means of direct communication with their gifted students on several additional topics. Other studies, on communicating with the gifted, have suggested similar positive results.

Manaster, Chan, Watt, and Wiehe (1994) studied the perceptions of gifted teens using an open-ended questionnaire. Their intent was to move from the more generic questioning regarding giftedness, as in the original study by Kerr, Colangelo, and Gaeth (1988), to a more specific focus on the personal attitudes and perceptions of the individual gifted teen. The results of this study by Manaster et al. (1994) demonstrated a positive acceptance of the concept of giftedness for the majority of the individuals.
involved in the study. Communicating with gifted youth is important but it does not provide all of the answers for their educational programming.

Many issues regarding educational programming for the gifted continue to remain unresolved. When Heller (1999) compared individual learning needs and instructional conditions of the gifted, he concluded that educational policies should provide for significant diversity in academic curricula. It was suggested that any modifications of programming or curricular change for the gifted required substantial teacher preparation time and effective staff development training (Heller, 1999; Reis & Westberg, 1994). Often the programming decisions made for the masses do not meet the individual needs of the gifted (Heller, 1999). Finding successful educational programming adds to the challenge of understanding the gifted.

**Summary**

Defining the term gifted is as difficult as designing an overall educational curriculum for the gifted. Refining the focus to the gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers adds to the challenge. This review of literature illustrated the increase in research on the gifted and the gifted underachiever over the past decade. It provided similarities and disparities in both areas to demonstrate that there was no consensus among scholars regarding giftedness or underachieving. Extensive data has been collected on the gifted regarding (a) educational programming, (b) learning theories, and (c) the emotions or affects of gifted and underachieving gifted students. Efforts were made to compare and connect different aspects of these three areas to illustrate a composite picture of effective gifted programs and curriculums. The major thrust of the research was directed toward the cognitive domain with no one program being agreed
upon. It is however, the affective domain, the intense emotional make up of the underachieving gifted child that remains an enigma. Silverman’s (1990) research illucidated that the high level of sensitivity and awareness may precipitate the greatest challenge due to the diverse and unique make up of each individual gifted child.

To address this concern for the individual, the literature presented a strong sense of support for collectively gathering the information from all domains, and then selectively individualizing the findings to best meet the needs of the specific gifted student. Gallagher (1998) recommended that finding an accurate evaluation of particular outcomes for gifted students could be ascertained by asking gifted students. Using descriptive tools, such as the Conceptual Map (Kunkle, 1995) or the Thinking Styles Inventory (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1993), may assist gifted students to better formulate a more complete understanding of themselves and their needs. Although extensive, the literature does not completely address a thorough understanding of the intrinsic needs for the gifted underachiever. Listening to the individual perceptions of underachieving gifted youth and hearing their collective needs will help provide a more complete description of these diverse individuals and it will enrich the literature. In Chapter Three the research design and procedures required to complete this study will be described.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

"I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of materials."

(Creswell, 1998, p. 13)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomenon of giftedness through the eyes of gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers by utilizing a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is interpretive research and can provide an intricate narrative to present a "complex, holistic picture" of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The design of qualitative study is centered on the person's perceptions and utilizes words as the primary data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; McCracken, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1989). In this study, it was the collective voices of gifted underachievers who provided this data.

Eckhaus (1996) stressed the importance for gifted youth to be truly listened to rather than tolerated. Eisner (1991) in his book, The Enlightened Eye, wrote of the difference in looking as compared to truly seeing in order to obtain a better knowledge of an experience. This refined ability to know and more deeply understand was denoted as connoisseurship by Eisner. Gifted youth, by the very nature of their makeup and innate perceptions, are connoisseurs of their giftedness. It was these perceptions which were solicited for this study. Therefore, this study required a qualitative design for the
purposes of information gathering in order to discover the essence of giftedness through the voices and perceptions of underachieving gifted youth.

**Research Design**

The research methodology in this study utilized the qualitative paradigm and more specifically follow the structure of the phenomenological tradition. A phenomenological design centers on the meaning of a personal or lived experience (Creswell, 1998; Nelson & Poulin, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Giorgi (1985), this qualitative tradition was based more in the human science domain rather than the natural science domain, because the focus of the phenomenon is centered on meaning in contrast to measurement. Giorgi supported the human sciences for the qualitative design and noted that a quantitative approach would objectify man and an “objectified man is not a human person” (p. 19). This search for meaning over measurement is similar to other human science research models and has been used extensively by researchers examining the lived experiences of subjects.

The phenomenological tradition reflects many bonds with other human science research models (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, these bonds included (a) acknowledging the value of the qualitative design in the study of human beings, (b) centering on the wholeness of experience as compared to focusing on the parts, (c) focusing on meaning and essence in contrast to measurement or explanations, (d) gathering information about the experience through first-person contacts, (e) viewing the data as a key to understanding the behavior of humans, (f) reflecting the researchers interest in question design, and (g) seeing the behavior and the experience as an
interconnected relationship. In order to best access these bonds a specific and purposeful sample of a population was selected.

Data

According to Polkinghorne (1989), “the usual purpose of data gathering is to collect naive descriptions of the experience under investigation” (p. 46). In this study the data was obtained during interviews with underachieving gifted youth.

Sample

In qualitative research the selection of sample is purposeful with no attempt to use randomization (Creswell, 1994). Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that the sample selection provide the opportunity “to obtain richly varied descriptions, not to achieve statistical generalization” (p. 48). In using purposeful sampling, participants “are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating” (Schumacher & McMillian, 1993, p. 378). A further delimitation regarding purposeful sampling was suggested by Schumacher and McMillan (1993). They suggested the use of reputational-case sampling, where recommendations for participation in the sample are obtained by “knowledgeable experts” (p. 380).

In this study reputational case sampling was used. The sample size was 10 which, according to Creswell (1998), was acceptable for the number of interviews in a phenomenological study. The sample consisted of academically gifted students, ages 13-15, who attended public schools in Western Montana. All participants in this study were male caucasians. Each of the participants were willing to be involved with this study and were friendly, well groomed, and appeared to be healthy. Some participants were quick to answer the questions and a few showed an extended interest in this study by asking
specific questions regarding the purpose and intent for the findings. The participants were described by their advisors as nice, friendly, and interesting kids. The recommendations for sample participants was requested from the Gifted and Talented Program Advisors.

In this study, these advisors were considered knowledgeable experts because (a) they had a degree in education, (b) they had a background in the area of giftedness, and (c) they had access to the academic records and the testing results of the students in their Gifted and Talented Programs. All participants met the criteria for giftedness and were perceived as underachievers. The advisors were also asked to limit the selection to those students who would most likely engaged in verbalizing their thoughts and feelings. For the purposes of this study the gifted underachiever were performing academically below a D average in at least two of the following classes (a) history, (b) English, (c) mathematics, and (d) science. Performing below a D average in more than one academic area, during the current school year, was viewed as a pattern of underachievement. Once the sample had been selected the process of data collection began.

Data Collection

Data for this study was gathered during individual interviews with underachieving gifted youth. Permission was obtained following the procedures delineated by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana. All interviews were conducted at the participants’ schools. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained at all times. Names of the participants and their schools were assigned coded identities. All records were kept confidential and were not be accessible to anyone other than the

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researcher and her dissertation committee chair. All information gathered during this study, including audiotapes and personal notes of the researcher, were kept secure in a locked file cabinet. Permission slips and consent forms were kept in a separate locked file cabinet. All audio recordings were erased and transcriptions were destroyed after completion of the study.

Procedure

Prior to any contact with the participants the researcher obtained several different types of permission. In research projects where participants are under the age of 18, Creswell (1998) suggested, a more lengthy review may be required and "permission needs to be sought from a human subjects review board" (p. 115). The University of Montana Institutional Review Board was contacted and a proposal of this study along with a completed IRB checklist was presented to the Board for approval to conduct the study.

Once the study was approved by the IRB, the researcher continued to seek appropriate permission. Creswell (1994, 1998) noted that permission for access to the research site must be gained through the "gatekeepers". In this study the gatekeepers included the school districts' administration, gifted and talented program advisors, parents of potential participants and the participants. (Examples of all correspondence is presented in the Appendices A and D). There were specific procedures which were followed to secure accurate permission.

The initial contact for this study was with selected school administrators in Western Montana explaining the purpose of the study and requesting permission to
contact their Gifted and Talented Program Advisors. After this permission had been granted the next contact was with the advisors of the Gifted and Talented Programs.

The advisors who agreed to assist with this study were asked to perform several duties. Their initial task was to select potential participants, according to the specified sample criteria, from their Gifted and Talented Program. The advisors, in accordance with the IRB, were then asked to contact the parents of these selected students to seek permission and to provided each parent with an information packet. The information packet included: (a) an overview of the study, (b) the purpose and nature of the interview questions, (c) an explanation of confidentiality and intent for use of the results, (d) permission request forms for both parent and participant, which are to be signed and sent directly to the researcher; and (e) a tentative timeline for the study (Appendices A, B and D). The last responsibilities of the advisors were to provide needed information on the Participant Information Form (Appendix B) and to assist in arranging the interview times and room locations in the participants’ schools.

Interview

The in-depth interview is the primary tool for gathering data in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998). Polkinghorne (1989) noted that the interview for phenomenological research differed from a survey questionnaire which resembled a stimulus response format. In the phenomenological interview, there is an interpersonal connection and a detailed explanation of an experience. Patton (1980) articulated that the purpose of open-ended interviewing was to discover the thoughts in a person’s mind, he noted, “We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (p. 196). Nelson and Poulin (1997) stated that although the process is
“presuppositionless” (p. 164) and open, it is not unfocused. Understanding the purpose of the interview process as compared to obtaining accurate data are very different skills.

The technique of interviewing for the purposes of data collection can be very challenging. The time requirement for the data collection and analysis is extensive (Babbie, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; May, 1991; Patton 1980; Polkinghorne, 1989; Schumacher & McMillian, 1993). May (1991) suggested that the language for describing the variety of interview styles is not presented in a consistent fashion in the research. She also stated that the “interview procedures used in a given study cannot be accurately described until after the fact, and even then, they may be difficult to present succinctly for publication purposes” (p. 189). An appreciation of the interview techniques and design are essential for the researcher.

The design of the interview process is important. Patton (1980) delineated three basic formats for consideration “(a) the informal conversational interview, (b) the general interview guide approach, and (c) the standardized open-ended interview” (p. 197). The differences in the three focused on the preparation time prior to the actual interview. The informal conversational interview was often used in conjunction with field observations and as the name denoted, it was data generated through conversation. The use of a general interview guide provided the researcher with a list of questions to be used as a topic support list during the interview to help guide or direct the discussion. McCracken (1988) acknowledged the use of a similar technique which he referred to as “planned prompts” (p. 35). Patton (1980) highlighted the third format, open-ended interviewing, and noted that in this technique the exact interview questions were determined before the
interviewing process began and that all participants were asked the same questions. He suggested that the three formats could be combined to best fit a study.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used a combination of the interview guide and open-ended questioning. Each interview was tape-recorded and notes were taken by the researcher. A series of planned prompts (McCracken, 1988) was prepared and used when needed during the interviews. Patton (1980) suggested that preparing some basic questions for the interview but allowing for flexibility in the process would provide the interviewees the opportunity to express their own divergent thoughts. The interview questions for this study, as outlined in Appendix B, were developed to support one central question and three subquestions. The questions are listed along with support from the literature.

**Interview Rationale**

The design of interview questions solicits different types of responses (Painter, 1996). In qualitative studies, the interview questions may need rewording, as the study progresses, to more accurately address the focus (May, 1991). In this study the interview questions were reviewed as the interviews progressed and they were reworded where deemed necessary after discussion by the researcher and her dissertation committee chair. The interview questions, for this study, are listed under the subquestion which they address. Each question is followed by its rationale and the support of the literature. This phenomenological study was guided by the following central question:

What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domain?
This central question was supported by the following three subquestions:

1. What retrospective insights do gifted students have regarding the design of their earlier formal educational experience?
2. How do underachieving gifted youth perceive the impact of personal emotional overexcitabilities on their school day?
3. How do underachieving gifted youth perceive their cognitive abilities?

The first question of this interview served as an icebreaker or a question to allow the participants to get comfortable with the interview setting.

Interview Question #1: Describe something you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Throughout the interviews the researcher used planned prompts where needed to facilitate the participants’ responses. General prompts were stated as follows (a) can you tell me more about that, (b) help me understand ____, or (c) are there any other ideas that come to mind? More specific prompts are listed under the individual interview questions.

Central Question: What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domain? Underachievement in gifted youth continues to be a serious educational concern (Delisle, 1998; Emerick, 1992; Muir, 2001; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Whitmore, 1980). This question was developed to move from the system perspective to the individual. This central question was supported by three subquestions and nine interview questions. Research has shown that gifted youth desire to be involved in their educational planning (Armstrong, 1987, 1994; Delisle,

**Subquestion #1: What retrospective insights do gifted students have regarding the design of their earlier formal educational experience?** This subquestion was designed to provide insight to the student’s perception of their previous formal education. As divergent thinkers, the gifted often view the world in different ways (Webb et al., 1994). There currently are several curricular models designed specifically for educating the gifted (Clark, 1997; Greenlaw & McIntosh, 1988; Renzulli, 1999). This subquestion was designed to find out if students’ ideas were congruent with current program designs for the gifted students and if participants have additional thoughts regarding education design. The following interview questions were intended to gather data related to Subquestion #1:

**Interview Question #2:** Think about a time when you felt successful in school. Describe that time. This question was intended to better understand how the underachiever perceived success. According to Bandura (1997), “People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy” (p. 3). **Planned prompt:** How do you describe a successful student?

**Interview Question #4:** Describe to me the challenges you have experienced in your schooling. This question was designed to address two types of challenges (a) educational and (b) personal. Gifted students have reported that they are often not challenged by the school curriculum (Feldhusen, 1997; Gallagher et al., 1997; Peine, 1999; Rimm, 1997). Their uneven levels of development in the physical, emotional, and social domain can be a personal challenge (Silverman, 1998;
Interview Question #6: Think about something that motivates you to learn in school. Tell me about it. Many students do not engage in school because they are bored with the material and they soon learn to complete minimal work (Gallagher et al., 1997; Rimm 1997). This question is designed to address the engagement of the students in school. Planned prompt: What excites you about learning? or What about that motivates you?

Interview Question #8: Describe what school has been like for you. Research has shown that gifted youth desire to be involved in the planning of their education (Diaz, 1998; Gallagher 1998; Heller, 1999; Hertzog, 1998; Muir, 2001; Reis & McCoach 2000). It is important for gifted students to be able to express their opinions and have their feelings validated (Eckhaus, 1996). This question sought to discover themes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction for the gifted underachiever. Planned prompt: What would you change about your school day? or Have you ever felt involved in planning your program at school? Please explain.

Interview Question #9: Talk to me about how you think and learn.

Being aware of one’s thought process is beneficial (Blakey, & Spence, 1990; Carr et al. 1996) According to Blakey and Spence “A thinking person is in charge of her behavior” (p. 1). Schraw and Graham (1997) believed that metacognition was a skill which was beneficial for gifted youth. This question intended to discover if gifted youth could articulate their thinking process.
Subquestion #2: How do underachieving gifted youth perceive the impact of personal emotional overexcitabilities on their school day? This question focused on the affective domain. Scholars have voiced the need for a more complete understanding of the emotional aspects of the gifted youth (Delisle 1998; Piechowski, 1997; Silverman 1990, 1998; Tomlinson, 2002). The emotional intensities of the gifted are very much a part of who they are (Piechowski, 1997). The following interview question was intended to gather data related to Subquestion #2:

Interview Question #7: Think of a time in school when your emotions effected your learning, either positively or negatively. Please describe that time to me. The affective domain must be addressed for the gifted child (Clark, 1997; Silverman, 1990). Piechowski (1997) suggested that high emotional intensity can have a negative effect on peer and teacher acceptance. Reflecting on their emotional patterns provided insight to design a more successful education arena for the gifted underachiever. Planned prompt: Are there times when your energy gets in the way at school? Please explain, or Are there times when you cannot get started? Please give me an example.

Subquestion #3: How do underachieving gifted youth perceive their cognitive abilities? Gifted youth at times are critical of their abilities and discount their intellectual skills (Buescher & Higham, 1990; Kunkle et al., 1996; Silverman, 1998). The following interview questions are intended to gather data related to Subquestion #3:

Interview Question #3: I would like you to think about your level of intelligence. Talk to me about your giftedness. Planned prompt: What does being gifted feel like to you? Discussing the term giftedness solicits many different responses from gifted
youth (Buescher & Higham, 1990; Delisle, 1984; Galbraith & Delisle 1996; Kunkle et al., 1996; Silverman, 1998). This question was designed for the gifted students to share their perceptions regarding the phenomenon of giftedness.

**Interview Question #5:** All participants in this study are perceived as gifted underachievers. What are your reasons for underachieving? Planned prompt: *Does this descriptor fit you? Do you see yourself as an underachiever? Please explain that. What does underachieving mean to you? or How long have you chosen to underachieve?* Students choose to underachieve for many reasons (Delisle & Berger 1990; Kunkle et al., 1996; Whitmore, 1980). This question was designed to better understand what the participants perceived reasons for underachieving.

**Data Analysis**

The data gathered during the interviews was analyzed to provide a descriptive picture of the phenomenon of giftedness as perceived by underachieving gifted students. According to Polkinghorne (1989), “the aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic and interrelationships that [sic] obtain in the phenomenon under inspection” (p. 50). The procedure for data analysis, in a qualitative study, is less structured than other types of research (Creswell, 1994). Babbie (1999) stressed the importance of experience in this type of research stating that there was a significant gap between understanding the concepts of data analysis and the actual use of the skills. Creswell (1994) referred to the process as eclectic and Tesch (1990) further described that there was no specifically correct format for qualitative data analysis. It was also noted that the time period for the steps of data gathering and data analysis are not isolated, but rather are interwoven and often occur simultaneously (Babbie, 1999;
Creswell, 1994; Patton, 1980). Although no consensus exists on a specific format for analysis, the overall process of data analysis is readily grouped into four procedural components.

The initial component of analysis was an immersion into the data. Once the data was transcribed the researcher began to read the transcribed information from the interviews. Tesch (1990) recommended reading all transcriptions to gather a broad perspective and then select one interview as a beginning document. Giorgi (1985) suggested that the readings provided an overview of the information. It was in these readings that the researcher began to look for patterns or categories from the individual statements in the interviews.

The second component of analysis focused on an initial coding of the data. Nelson and Poulin (1997) referred to this process as unitizing. Tesch (1990) viewed this step as taking apart the information and named this phase “de-contextualizing” (p. 118). Giorgi (1985) suggested that these divisions of data be referred to as meaning units. He noted that these divisions, or shifts in meaning, during the interview may range from a complete topic redirection to a change in the participants emotional demeanor. Moustakas (1994) titled the second component as horizontalizing where each individual interview statement was weighted equally and then this list was refined to meaning units through textural description by the researcher. The meaning units were further analyzed during the third step.

The third step or component of the data analysis was a dissecting of the units of meaning. Themes characterizing the phenomenon began to evolve. It is at this level where context and more richly textured constituents become apparent (Giorgi, 1985). In
this step Giorgi differentiated between two terms; elements and constituents. He noted
that elements were not dependent on the context or phenomenon where the constituents
were perceived as directly connected to the context. Moustakas (1994) articulated this
refining process as clustering of themes and used imaginative variation to discover
invariant horizons which point to the unique qualities of the experience or phenomenon.
Tesch (1990) termed this step as "recontextualizing" (p. 122). It was at this time in the
analysis that a summary of the data began.

The final step of the analysis was summarizing the data. At this stage a synthesis
of the experience emerges (Giorgi, 1985). Polkinghorne (1989) stated that
"Phenomenological research is the search for those processes of consciousness that give
the objects that appear in awareness meaning, clarity, and discrimination" (p. 51). The
search for essential structures (Polkinghorne, 1989) or the essence of the experience
(Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994) separates this phenomenological methodology from
other qualitative methods (Nelson & Poulin, 1997). In this final step, the clusters and
themes were intensely studied to depict essential invariant structures, known as the
essence of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

Verification of Data

Many authors articulated the need to address the idea of verification in qualitative
studies (Babbie, 1999; Creswell, 1994, 1998; Patton, 1980). There is a need for the
researcher to provide support for the findings and a means of clarifying those discoveries.
Patton (1980) saw verification as a movement between the parts and whole of the
research. Creswell (1994) stressed the importance of verification, specifically the
concepts of validity and reliability, and suggested a need "to frame these concepts within the procedure that have emerged from qualitative writings" (p. 158).

In qualitative data analysis there is no single verification procedure for phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998). According to Creswell, "phenomenologists view verification and standards as largely related to the researcher's interpretation" (p. 207). Babbie (1999) suggested that the advantages in the flexibility of the research during the collection and analysis of data could possibly pose an issue in presenting the conclusion. There were, however, several verification options for the phenomenological researcher to consider (Creswell, 1998).

According to Polkinghorne (1989), it was the intent of the researcher to provide an accurate picture of the findings. Discovering and presenting a true picture of the phenomenon can be supported in a variety of ways. The different verification techniques for phenomenological research were readily grouped into two general areas (a) internal and (b) external feedback. Internal feedback techniques are commonly used by qualitative researchers.

The personal interpretations and perceptions of the researcher was one of the most widely used techniques for verification. Babbie (1999) wrote about the use of introspection where one examined personal thoughts and feelings regarding ones observations. Moustakas (1994) referred to "establishing the truth of things" (p. 94) and suggested beginning with personal reflections of the experience. It was the exhaustive immersion into the data where the researcher strived to find a beginning understanding of what was observed (Babbie, 1999). In addition to internal feedback the use of external feedback, in the verification process of qualitative research, was also helpful.
Input from others during the verification process was an example of external verification and provides additional support to a qualitative study. This process of intersubjectivity allowed participants and colleagues the opportunity to validate and question the findings (Babbie, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Feedback from the participants, referred to as member checks (Creswell, 1998) or informant feedback (Moustakas, 1994), helped to verify accurate information and interpretation of the data. Discussion of a study and its finding with colleagues, may help to refine and present valid information (Babbie, 1999). Babbie summarized his thoughts on verification by noting the importance of the researchers awareness regarding the need for verification.

Throughout this study, the researcher was conscious of the need for verification. During the study introspection was continually addressed. Documentation of this process was demonstrated through the use of a reflective journal. In addition to internal verification external verification techniques were used. This study engaged in member checking where the participants were asked to review and revise the transcripts of their personal interviews. A third technique to support external verification was through consultation with the dissertation committee chair of this qualitative study. In addition to internal and external verification the researcher addressed the external validity or generalizability of the study.

**Generalizability**

The generalizability of a study refers to “the extent to which the findings of one study can be used as knowledge about other populations and situations” (Schumacher & McMillian, 1993, p. 17). It speaks to whether the findings reflect on other “real” world situations (Babbie, 1999). According to Eisner (1991), in a qualitative study “the
construction of a generalization is left to the researcher” (p. 203). He also noted that it is the user of the research, rather than the researcher of the study, who must decide on the study’s generalizability. For the purpose of this qualitative study, this researcher made no claim to the generalizability of this study.

Data Reporting

There are different techniques used to report the findings of a phenomenological study. According to Creswell (1998) the researcher must consider the audience and voice when preparing the narrative presentation. Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that structural description of the data needed to provide a clear understandable image for the reader. It is through the reporting of the data that the reader understands and feels connected with the process of the researcher and the research (Babbie, 1999).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in a qualitative study is considered the primary research instrument (McCracken, 1988). In this study the researcher followed the appropriate procedures, in accordance with the University of Montana’s IRB, to secure permission and establish an acceptable sample of 13-15 year old underachieving gifted youth. The interview process was orchestrated by the researcher. It was the responsibility of the researcher to transcribe and analyze all of the data gathered from the interviews. This study was finalized in the researcher’s narrative report which addressed the discoveries of the lived experience of underachieving giftedness. Because this methodology was interpretive the possibility of bias must be addressed (Creswell, 1998).

Bias has been viewed as a criticism of qualitative research (Schwandt, 1997). The qualitative researcher must be aware of the potentiality for misrepresentation of
information through personal bias (Babbie, 1999). Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that phenomenological research required the researcher to focus on the “description of the experience” (p. 41) by the participant and suspend personal interpretation. This process, in phenomenological research, was referred to as epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Moustakas (1994) presented his thoughts on the meaning of epoche:

I see it as a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again as if for the first time. (p. 85)

It has been suggested that a written explanation of the concerns will raise the researcher’s personal awareness and make her cognizant of her potential areas of bias. To bracket for personal bias, this researcher presented four areas of possible concern. Each of the four areas correlated with four roles in the life of this researcher (a) educator, (b) counselor, and (c) administrator, and (d) parent. The first role was that of an educator.

This researcher had been in the field of education her entire professional career of twenty-six years. She had worked with many gifted students and had developed personal insight regarding their involvement in a formal educational setting. It was her perception that, for many gifted students, the formal education system had provided an adequate avenue for learning and developing their academic potential. However, for a significant population, especially those students who were viewed as underachievers, it was her belief that the system had either housed them and curtailed their true potential or it had
discarded them as noncomformists because they challenged the system’s rules and regulations. Over half of her years in education were in the role of a school counselor.

This researcher completed her master’s degree in the field of counseling and guidance which had provided a strong foundation regarding the affective domain. A counseling background had provided the researcher with a different perspective on formal education and its components such as the grading format, curricular design, standardized testing, and student needs. The researcher believed that too often the affective needs and concerns of gifted youth are perceived, by some educators, more as behavioral concerns and were not addressed effectively. The researcher recognized this bias because her view as a counselor was often different than the teachers’ understanding and acceptance of this diverse population whom they were attempting to educate. The third role for this researcher was that of an administrator.

This researcher was in the combined role of half-time principal and half-time counselor at a middle school. The leadership role of administrator contributed to different biases for this researcher. With legislative efforts on the No Child Left Behind Act and the ongoing struggle to balance budgets there was a strong urge to effectively address the needs of all children in a cost efficient and successful fashion. With this in mind, the researcher bracketed budget concerns and pragmatic solutions. In the leadership role of administrator, the researcher found it challenging to balance the system and the individual regarding academic programming. The challenge of the role of administrator ran second to that of the last role; being a parent.

The researcher is a parent of a gifted child. The extended personal involvement with one’s own child could easily filter and effect the clarity of the information gathering.
process as well as the final data analysis. The researcher realized that her involvement with her child and her knowledge of his personal frustrations directly effected her view of the needs of gifted youth. For the researcher, the role of being a parent of a gifted child was the most challenging of the four.

Each of these four roles; educator, counselor, administrator, and parent could have independently encouraged a setting of biased interpretation. The combination of the four only intensified the potentiality for bias to occur. As the researcher in a phenomenological study, bracketing these events, through thoughtful processing, were necessary for the accuracy of this study.

**Narrative**

Information from this study was presented in a narrative report. A qualitative narrative should be presented in full detail to allow the reader a feeling of having been part of the information gathering (Babbie, 1999; Polkinghorne 1989). Creswell (1994) stated that “the outcome typically consists of a descriptive narrative, a synthesis of knowledge about the phenomenon under study” (p. 160). This narrative report elicited the collective voices of underachieving gifted youth to present a more complete description of their perceived ideas formulated through the process of data collection and codified during analysis.

**Summary of the Methodology**

The methodology in this study utilized the qualitative research paradigm. It followed the structure of the phenomenological tradition. This design allowed for the description of a phenomenon to be discovered. The information was collected through individual interviews of gifted youth, ages 13-15, who were perceived as underachievers.
The interviews were conducted, by the researcher, at each of the participant’s schools. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. The final transcriptions were reviewed and verified by the participants to check for accuracy. The interview transcripts were processed using the steps of data analysis (a) immersion into the data, (b) initial coding of the data, (c) dissecting the units of meaning, and (d) summarizing the data. The discoveries of this phenomenological study were presented in a narrative report. The results of this study are reported in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings from this Phenomenological Study

Introduction

This study was conducted to provide a descriptive picture of the phenomenon of giftedness as perceived by underachieving gifted youth. It was guided by the central question: *What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domains?* Information was gathered through the voices of purposely selected gifted youth.

The information in this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section is a demographic overview of the participants. In the second section the data is presented using statements from the participants and researcher reflections allowing the reader to formulate a feeling of the interview process. The meaning units and constituents which emerged from this study are delineated in the third section. The fourth section of this chapter describes the essence of the experience discovered during the data analysis of this phenomenological study. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings for this qualitative study.

Demographic Information

General information about the participants is provided in Table 4-1. Information included in Table 4-1 is as follows (a) participant code, (b) age, (c) gender, and (d) size of school in attendance.
Table 4-1 Demographic Information of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

The data for this phenomenological study was analyzed following the guidelines suggested by Giorgi (1985). Although there is no consensus regarding a specific format for the analysis of phenomenological data, Giorgi recommended four essential steps to be used in the process. The initial component is an immersion into the data through reading and rereading the transcripts. It is in this initial stage, during this overview of information, where patterns begin to appear (Giorgi, 1985). During the second component, which Giorgi titled meaning units, these patterns revealed themselves more strongly. It is from these meaning units that Giorgi suggested the researcher look for more "richly textured" constituents or ideas directly connected to the phenomenon under study. The search for these constituents forms the third step in the process. Summarizing the data is the final component of this research analysis process. According to Giorgi, it is at this stage that the synthesis of the experience emerges and is referred to as the essence of the experience.
The following tables are a synthesis of data extracted from selected responses to the interview questions. In each of the tables, the column on the left contains independent responses from the participants and the right column contains the researcher’s synthesized interpretations and reflections of the responses. Each table represents one interview question or a prompt from one of the interview questions. This question or prompt is located at the top of the table.

The first question of the interview was designed to provide an opportunity for the participants to relax and share information about their spare time. This question was not originally intended for use as a source of data collection, however, the information obtained was relevant and is presented to support the phenomenon.
Table 4-2 Describe something you enjoy doing in your spare time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Statements</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Basketball, I just play by myself”</td>
<td>Independent activities. Personal challenge when playing interactive strategy games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Play on the computer. Medal of Honor, WWII games, First Person Shooter.”</td>
<td>Focused interest with birds. Interested in all aspects of birds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Birds. Studying birds. I’ve always loved birds. I think they are really interesting things. How they fly and how they look. I also like to read and write.”</td>
<td>Enjoyed reading. Intrigued with fantasy both in reading and in computer games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reading fantasy adventure and playing videogames...mostly fantasy stuff and stuff with dragons.”</td>
<td>Enjoyed driving but was underage. Showed a passion for horses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Drive and ride horses”</td>
<td>Participated in many individual action activities. Personal challenge with interactive computer games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Skateboard, four wheeler, video games, and hang out with friends. I like to play Grand Theft Auto, and Medal of Honor .”</td>
<td>Engaged in new and different physical activities. Enjoyed video games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Recently I’ve been getting into mountain boarding and then other than that Playstation.”</td>
<td>Engaged in snowboarding. Enjoyed computers. After the disclaimer on technical jargon, he proceeded to discuss his computer passion in great detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I just started snowboarding and I like doing that a lot ‘cause I skateboard. I’m really into computers. I won’t bore you with a lot of technical jargon but...”</td>
<td>Spent several hours playing strategy video game as entertainment. Also rode bike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Playing video games, Strategy games, RTV games. [I play] a lot about half the day when I’m not in school. I ride my bike.”</td>
<td>Enjoyed motorcycles and playing basketball. Read fantasy and science fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Riding my motorcycle. Play basketball and read. Stephen King books and I read the whole Dune series.”</td>
<td>Had a passion for guitar and was self taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Play guitar.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-3: Think about a time when you felt successful in school. Describe that time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Statements</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“When I got a 100% well a 99% on like a 140 question test.”</td>
<td>Selected a high profile activity for success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In fourth grade. We had a Geography Bee and the finals came down to me against a 6th grader and I lost by one point but I was still happy for myself and I haven’t been in any competitions since them [sic] spelling bees and geography bees and what not.”</td>
<td>Selected a high achievement activity. Remembered the event in good detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When I came in fourth in the 6th grade Spelling Bee.”</td>
<td>Selected a high profile activity. Proud of his accomplishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Last year I was this close to failing and when I came back from the other school I did really well and passed.”</td>
<td>Expressed the feeling of satisfaction with his actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I got an A in English.”</td>
<td>Selected a successful course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t know, whenever I do something good I know I could do it better. I always feel great when I go to do a test and at least maybe I find out later I didn’t know what I thought I knew but when I started I feel like oh I knew all this.”</td>
<td>Voiced a belief that he never completed tasks to his best ability. Felt confident in his ability to take tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I ran a mile and I got 7 minutes on the mile.”</td>
<td>Selected a positive accomplishment and was proud of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[pause] “Well see I don’t really know because I’ve got a slight problem, a lack of drive...everyone tells me. I don’t do all that well in school and they tell me because I don’t do my homework. A lot of my tests apparently turned out real well but my homework never got done so I failed a couple of classes and I have to make them up and stuff and I just haven’t been doing anything so I probably say finishing summer school. I just got it over.”</td>
<td>Participant did not see himself as successful. Admitted to having a lack of desire to complete. Non-involvement with the system. Complied with summer school expectation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4-4: How do you describe a successful student? (prompt)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Statements</th>
<th>Researcher's Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“One who knows where they are going and does what they need to get there.”</td>
<td>Goal oriented definition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well you just have to work hard and you just have to want to achieve all the goals you set for yourself.”</td>
<td>Reflected on hard work and achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Someone who does well in school and doesn’t struggle.”</td>
<td>Referenced struggling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Somebody with good grades.”</td>
<td>School success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Anyone can be a successful student as long as you put in enough time. It’s pretty much effort that they put in, because you can be not as intelligent as someone but you get better grades. I know that I am more intelligent than a lot of people that get straight A’s. If you go home from school and study ‘till you go to bed you are going to get straight A’s. I don’t care how stupid you are.”</td>
<td>Participant was very articulate about the connection of a successful student to the amount of time and effort invested. He differentiated between intelligence and grades, citing himself as the example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Probably gets fairly good grades on most stuff, more than a C average and can participate in extra-curriculars [sic].”</td>
<td>Realistic expectations and referenced external rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You get good grades and you are happy.”</td>
<td>Emotional connection with success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Good grades and a good work ethic.”</td>
<td>School success. Later he noted that he has a bad work ethic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Someone who gets good grades.”</td>
<td>School success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-5: I would like you to think about your level of intelligence. Talk to me about your giftedness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Statements</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Things just kind of come easy to me I guess. Like I can usually get a hold of math pretty good. And English pretty quick. And I guess that’s what happens, stuff comes easy for me.”</td>
<td>Talked about things coming easy rather than about ability or intellect. Acknowledged his ability in English and math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have no clue. I mean some things I just get more than other people. I can spell. I have a large vocabulary.”</td>
<td>Did not comprehend why but was aware of ability, especially spelling and vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“That’s, [pause] I guess. I don’t know. I have a little bit more knowledge than some other kids. I don’t want to be like ignorant [sic] or anything but I think I do. Just in class my opinions are different than a lot of people.”</td>
<td>Acknowledged intelligence in a minimizing fashion. Talked about seeing things different than others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t think of myself as gifted, I just know that I think differently.”</td>
<td>Did not acknowledge giftedness but was aware of a different thought process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kind of hard to explain, I also seem to understand stuff and they go ‘What?’ They get better grades than me in school and they say how come you don’t understand that? I know that they are smart like at school but their not common sense smart.”</td>
<td>Acknowledged ability to understand more than others but voiced confusion about others getting better grades. Referenced others’ lack of common sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t know how to do that. I don’t like to brag. My dad and my mom and like everyone else thinks I have an amazing memory. I guess compared to a lot of people I know I am a lot smarter, but there are people I know that are a lot smarter than me too. I’m a lot smarter than most people, but...I just figure things out better and I can understand stuff. I just picture things in my head like physics or how an airplane can fly and stuff like that and I understand all that stuff where people just think it has an engine that shoots out the back and it just magically flies.”</td>
<td>Was able to verbalize through the process to explain his personal perceptions of his intellectual abilities. Measured personal intelligence against others and noted his ability to figure things out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Statements</td>
<td>Researcher’s Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think, I don’t find myself as an incredibly smart person. But maybe a little, I don’t know. I really can’t think of the word for it… But I do know that I think on a different level than most people because… it’s just hard to explain [pause] ah, no I just couldn’t explain it.”</td>
<td>It was hard to acknowledge his intellectual ability but he articulated on his different level of thinking in comparison to most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t know what it means to me I have never really thought about it.”</td>
<td>Denied the subject of success. Participant replied very quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t notice it but all the teachers tell me I’m smart and that I could do better.”</td>
<td>Referenced outside input pertaining to his ability and effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I had an IQ test done and like I was pretty much above average in everything and in some I was, this was in fourth grade, and I was like 16th grade. I know I’m pretty smart but in some of the things I was like wicked smart.”</td>
<td>Talked openly about his cognitive abilities and his high level of intelligence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-6: Describe to me the challenges you have experienced in your schooling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Statements</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I just think that a lot of the stuff that we do at school, a lot of stuff that I already know, um, like using capitalization, I already know about all that stuff or that stuff that is really useless like you would never use in real life. I can’t think of anything off the top of my head. I just refuse to do it cause, I dunno, I guess it’s really arrogant but I guess I just think it doesn’t really matter.”</td>
<td>Had the perception that many school expectations are unnecessary, not needed for real life. Explained his action for refusing to do the work. Appeared quite apathetic in regard to school expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have an enormous lack of organization, I am a very random abstract person. And in school, organization is a lot. I mean things like history and math is all stuff that I get very well but it’s turning stuff in that’s hard for me to do cause of lack of organization.”</td>
<td>Talked about lacking organizational skills and equated a large portion of school success with organization ability. He was aware of his knowledge on the topics but that he often lacked the organizational skills needed to complete the end product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Statements</td>
<td>Researcher’s Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Math. It’s just slow. You can’t just move ahead and figure out what everything’s about. You’ve gotta learn it with the class...getting my work or keeping my work organized. Well usually I lose it or leave it at home and that really stops me.”</td>
<td>Reflected on the pace of classes and staying with the class. Also expressed frustration with lost papers and organizational issues. Articulated personal barriers which deter his success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Um just trying to keep my grades up. I just don’t like homework. Homework should be for school. School work is for school because it encroaches on your free time and stuff. It’s suppose to build responsibility or something but I sorta don’t get my homework done but I think it’s dumb... go home and do your work and well I can do it but people just can’t read my writing that’s the problem.”</td>
<td>Discussed the ideas of homework and how it intruded on his free time. Reaffirmed that he had the ability to complete the task but stated that people could not read his handwriting. This was a recurrent issue for this participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Trying to get good grades and trying to get good grades enough and still do sports without being kicked out. Like I got to play football this year but I only got a couple weeks of basketball. And if I don’t get really good grades I don’t think I will be able to do motocross. My dad won’t let me if I don’t get really good grades.”</td>
<td>Connected the requirement of good grades to external rewards of participation in sports and motocross. Realized the implications of poor grades, both at school and at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Try to get along with all the other kids. In elementary school I didn’t have any friends but now I have a fair amount of friends. There are not many kids I have trouble with I guess. In elementary school I had friends but I got in a lot of fights cause all the kids...most of the kids picked on me.”</td>
<td>The personal challenge of maintaining friendships was shared. He reflected on not having friends in elementary school. He was picked on and ended up in fights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Going home and doing my homework instead of just going home and messing around.”</td>
<td>He was very aware of his challenge. Strongly emphasized the word “doing”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Um. I don’t get along with teachers. If I don’t agree with what they are doing I end up getting in an argument with them. And then in math I just struggle a lot with math.”</td>
<td>Discussed the challenge of teacher relationships. He talked about arguing with teachers if their opinions differed. He did not understand math.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-7: All participants in the study are perceived as gifted underachievers. How does that interpretation fit you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Statements</th>
<th>Researcher's Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’ve always been kind of lazy when it comes to school. Unless like it is fun or something. But other than that I usually don’t try all that hard.”</td>
<td>Self reported laziness and lack of effort. Enjoyed fun activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well from what I have been told quite a bit. Because I don’t do really all that well when I’m in school and it’s just. I take all the tests and stuff and I get above average grades and I?? Like what was it? I was in the top 17 % in the nation and I got moved twice for talking. Not even talking the second time just eating a donut.”</td>
<td>Had been told he is an underachiever. Talked about his successful testing ability with minimal personal effort. He noted two separate occasions where he was disruptive during the standardized testing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Seems right on, I am smart and I don’t do the work.”</td>
<td>Affirmed definition and gave an honest response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Not knowing what to do and then not wanting to do it.”</td>
<td>Noncompliance with the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t take any accelerated [sic]. I guess I probably could. I don’t take any um [sic] I do tech ed. and stuff like that but I don’t take like Math I, I failed word processing so I have to take it again next year. I don’t take classes like most kids.”</td>
<td>Talked about course selection and how he was taking lower level classes than many of the other students. Talked about classes where he is not doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Perfectly. People always say I am not working up to my potential.”</td>
<td>Appeared comfortable with the label of underachiever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well I see myself as an underachiever, pretty much the only thing I see myself as an underachiever just for my grades. I don’t really see it as anything else. And I just think I need to start to try more.”</td>
<td>Differentiated between underachieving in general and underachieving regarding grades. He thought he should try more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cause I’m smart but I don’t use that ability.”</td>
<td>Was aware of his intellect and choice to engage or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ever since I’ve been in school. Ya, I think if I really tried I could do better.”</td>
<td>Had seen himself as an underachiever all through his formal schooling. If he tried he could do better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-8: Think about something that motivates you to learn in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Statements</th>
<th>Researcher's Reflections</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Probably like projects and stuff more like hands-on. Not really having to think about it, just doing something.”</td>
<td>Talked about being physically involved in his work. Hands-on projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“My parents, because they hate the fact that I don’t get good grades cause they think I should get better grades and the fact that I won’t be able to do motocross or anything like that if I don’t get better grades. If I get any F’s I don’t know if I will be able to do motocross. Or like drive my motorcycle.”</td>
<td>External motivation of parents’ approval. Expressed concern over not being able to participate in sports and motocross.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Getting a reward when I do good.”</td>
<td>External reward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Nothing really gets me going just I kinda [sic] just read through it and everything and I pretty much understand it all but it is just like the writing.”</td>
<td>Student felt he could understand the topic but it was his inability to write that was at issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My dad. I met him in 6th grade and he’s always wanted me to do really, really well and I want to do really well for him.”</td>
<td>External reward of making his father proud. Participant later reported that his poor academics began in 6th grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Just so I know more. I like to know stuff. This quarter my dad said he would buy me a new computer if I got straight A’s. So that sort of motivates me.”</td>
<td>Enjoyed learning for the sake of knowledge. Noted that in school learning was slow. Talked of external motivation for good grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Talking fast. That makes me want to be part of it, cause when it’s slow its just everyone is just listening to the same thing, but when its fast its like a challenge.”</td>
<td>Expressed the desire to change the pace in the class. Suggested the desire to be challenged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Passing.”</td>
<td>Moving to the next grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Statements</td>
<td>Researcher’s Reflections</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The last day of school, I was pretty happy and I didn’t pay any attention to anybody.”</td>
<td>Happy to have school done for the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All through 6th grade and 7th grade I have had a really bad energy problem. I used to be really really, really loud, I used to be really hyper and energetic and it’s improved this time here in 8th grade but um, but it comes out at moments, like when I have a bunch of sugar.”</td>
<td>High energy and loud voice were noted as affecting his learning. Talked about how this had improved in 8th grade but was still apparent at times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pause) “I don’t know... I’ve been told, by the counselor lady and a couple other people that I’m an underachiever because there’s [sic] problems with my mom and dad, their divorced, they say its hard for me. I don’t think that’s any problem. They said that that’s why I’m underachieving because I am trying to get attention. Even if it’s negative attention. If that’s the truth. I am not doing it consciously.”</td>
<td>Had been told that his underachievement is purposeful as an attention getter to reunite family. He said this was not done purposely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Um When your trying and someone [teacher] yells at me, ‘you can’t go to the bathroom.’ That kind of thing I usually just blow off my work and sleep after that.”</td>
<td>Perceptions of being yelled at in classes with his response of shutting down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well sometimes when I am mad I don’t do the work, like I protest depending on who or what made me mad.”</td>
<td>Could determine the emotion and the actions. Was specific on his technique to disengage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Once the gym teacher said something that was kind of mean or something. And I think I might have been mistaken but I think I was saying, she said it, and she was saying, she didn’t say it, and um, I got really mad at her for that and I never did really good in PE cause I got a lot of other kids in trouble. I also wasn’t very good before that but that just made me not want to do it.”</td>
<td>Perception of a teacher being mean in PE. His response; shut down. Discussed a situation where he and the teacher disagreed. Noted that he was the instigator of trouble for other students in the class. He acknowledged that he did not like PE to begin with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants' Statements</td>
<td>Researcher's Reflections</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Oh, probably I think it was freshmen year in science I didn’t study the night before or anything and didn’t give anything toward it. I was angry and didn’t even think about the test and just threw some answers on and made it look like I [sic] just because I didn’t want to do anything.”</td>
<td>Talked about how his anger from the night before had a direct effect on not passing the science test the next day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively, whenever I get excited about a subject. When I learn something I don’t already know that excites me a lot. And the one time that negatively affects me pretty much was all of sixth grade, she just teaches exactly by the book and sort of is a boring teacher”.</td>
<td>Participant showed an intense desire to learn. Noted that in sixth grade year he was expected to follow the teacher’s lead, a teacher who taught “by the book”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Um I’m on medication because I am clinically depressed, and so there has been times if I didn’t take my meds or I didn’t want to or ran out and I get really emotional if I don’t and so that effected my learning at school. Oh ya. Like if I’m really hyper and I’ve got this really bad habit of tapping my feet and I try to do that to hold myself back but sometimes I’m just so hyper that um, I just I don’t know. I think teachers get annoyed with me when I get too hyper. I’m not ADD or anything, but I don’t know, everybody gets hyper sometimes.”</td>
<td>Reflected on times when he chose to take or not to take his medication for depression. He also talked about his fidgeting habits and his hyper behavior. Acknowledged that his behavior affected the teachers. Noted that his high energy was not ADD and normalized his actions by comparing it to others.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-10: Describe what school has been like for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Statements</th>
<th>Researcher's Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Horrible. Tough. Like uh really frustrating cause I try to do the work and I am not able to.”</td>
<td>Negative feelings about school. Voiced frustrating over his inability to do the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s been alright I guess.”</td>
<td>Satisfied with school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s been hard to get good grades. But other than that right now I have as many good friends as anyone.”</td>
<td>Excluding grades he was satisfied with school and his friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Not fun. The only fun thing is seeing your friends.”</td>
<td>Negative feeling about school except for his friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Um really sad and boring”</td>
<td>Very negative perception of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A very good time not grade-wise or anything, just people and everything. I’ve made good friends.”</td>
<td>Without the grades school is a good time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s been an interesting experience.”</td>
<td>Interesting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I pretty much get four years of boring and then I get one good. But high school so far has been great.”</td>
<td>The one good year was with a teacher whose teaching style matched the participants learning needs. High school offered some choice and varied options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This is your lesson for the day, this is your homework. We will have the test in a week. Blah, blah, blah. That’s what every class is like it’s pretty boring.”</td>
<td>Parroted his perceptions of the school sequence with a disapproving tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Statements</td>
<td>Researcher’s Reflections</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I actually need more help than less.”</td>
<td>Would like more help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There would be a lot more computers. It would be easier to learn cause you could</td>
<td>Described a more independent learning opportunity with computers and individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like you wouldn’t have to pay teachers as much cause you would just push buttons and</td>
<td>lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you could have the lessons on your screen.”</td>
<td>More physical activities and more choices with electives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Longer recess and instead of having just two elective have three. More physical</td>
<td>Initially suggested changes in lunch but than expressed a concern about teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities like PE.”</td>
<td>Talked about the pace of classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I guess I’d change the lunch, that’s the biggest thing, but other than that there’s not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot except for some of my teachers, I’d request different classes.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’d make it a faster pace, on like a lesson.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Probably homework. I think maybe start it a little later and make it run later. I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>remember Washington, I went there for a year and my little brother’s school started at 9</td>
<td>Suggested a change in the school day of starting later and ending later. He used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and it just was so much better. And I have also read things that teenagers have the</td>
<td>information from an article he had read to back up this idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hormone levels their body actually releases the hormones that make you sleepy later in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the night so sleeping and getting up early isn’t the best thing. And then start it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later so that people could get a fair amount of sleep and maybe make it run later</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>because of that. It would kind of I think help learning.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If I could plan what I got to do and how I got to do it that would be awesome.”</td>
<td>Participant immediately gave several ideas and suggestions regarding his schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and was very excited with the thought of being involved in his educational plan.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4-11 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Statements</th>
<th>Researcher's Reflections</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“There would be less repetition and more of learning new things instead of the same thing over and over.”</td>
<td>Voiced a desire to learn and a concern regarding repetition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There are a couple classes that I really, really don’t like being in; like mathematics, I hate it. It doesn’t hold any interest at all and history just bores me. But if there was like a school day where almost every class was acting and English and library, I think I would find it wonderful.”</td>
<td>Voiced concerns and dislikes for certain classes and then suggested a day of acting, English, and library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Everything.”</td>
<td>Everything.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4-12: Talk to me about how you think and learn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Statements</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ya, I just kinda [sic] understand it all. I don’t know how I don’t know why, I just kind of do.”</td>
<td>Could not articulate how but knew he understood things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I know how my brain works supposedly to the experts, because I had as IQ test done. I learn sort of backwards.”</td>
<td>Participant talked of his learning process with good insight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When if I’m alone. There is no one around me and I am not distracted.”</td>
<td>Talked about a solution to his distractibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It surprises me sometimes because sometimes the teacher will be trying to tell me something and right away it sticks and then another time I’ll try a couple more times and it doesn’t stick and I never get the hang of it and even though I keep trying and others [sic] after I try awhile it sticks in my head like that.”</td>
<td>Talked about understanding some things and then not grasping other concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It just kind of I might be thinking of something else and then I think of every thing that has to do with that. Totally off the subject and my mind wanders quite a bit.”</td>
<td>Talked about how his mind travels off a topic by building on a previous thought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants Statements</td>
<td>Researcher’s Reflections</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t have a very good memory. So if something is explained, I often times won’t remember really good how to do it. I don’t have a really good memory and um, I think differently like I don’t know, I just take a different approach than a lot of students. I don’t know if this is an example my tech ed car got first in that, in the races and in the style and all I did was just make it the longest possible and that’s just all I did. Most other people didn’t try it.”</td>
<td>Initially discounted his knowledge and memory but then talked about how he thought differently than others. His example articulated his thought process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t know, I like thinking about it like with math or something. I like making up my own ways to solve problems.”</td>
<td>Voiced his desire to be an independent problem solver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Since I’m a social person, I’m like afraid of losing my friends and I’m kind of a very nervous person so like little things make me think like of jeeze what did I do wrong to a friend. So that’s kind of what I think about. Living out in the country I don’t have any like, I have neighbors but none of them are near my age and a lot of them just stay in there house and mainly school is the only time to see my friends. If I am not focused on any particular thing my brain just wanders I focus on everything too much. I just believe that I do a lot of self diagnosing on me and go, is that normal or not? Because I actually went to a psychiatrist for awhile and he gave me a test and said that 80% of the teenage population is depressed and he said I was in the top 12% of highly depressed people. That was kind of depressing (smile), cause like normally I’m a happy guy it’s just when I don’t have something to occupy my mind.”</td>
<td>Talked intensely about how his mind over engaged if his body was at rest. He voiced a pattern of concerns about how his mind over thinks which caused him to over worry. He verbalized his concern about his friends and his mental health.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meaning Units and Contextual Expression

Giorgi (1985) articulated that patterns begin to appear during the immersion into the data, these patterns, as they gain structure, are referred to as meaning units. In this study, several meaning units became apparent to the researcher as the analysis of the data progressed. Giorgi (1985) noted that these meaning units “exist only in the attitude and set of the researcher” (p. 15). The six meaning units, which surfaced during analysis for this study, are presented in Table 4-13.

Table 4-13: Meaning Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The impact of internal and external messaging</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The desire for relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The feeling of powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The necessity for mental stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for physical activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>The connection of emotions to engagement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Each of the meaning units were supported by information either observed or heard during the interviews with the participants. The following is an explanation of each of the meaning units beginning with the impact of internal and external messaging.

The Impact of Internal and External Messaging

During this study, the internal and external messages that the participants articulated were direct and the comments had an apparent impact on the recipients. It was noted that this impact was most often in the form of negative messaging. During the interview several of the participants reflected on messages from others regarding the
participants’ academic and personal qualities. It was evident that “try harder” was a recurrent message from the majority of the participants. S9 stated, “I don’t notice it but all the teachers tell me I’m smart and that I could do better”. S2 used the phrase, “Ever since 3rd grade, I’ve been told that I had a number of talents,” and S1 echoed this feeling when he said, “I don’t like to brag but my mom and dad and everyone else thinks I have an amazing memory”. The messages from others were strong but not as defining as the personal messages given by the participants.

Throughout the interviews there were unsolicited comments by the participants, which defined their perception of themselves. The talk of lacking organization was very specific for S2 and S3. The concept of laziness was voiced by some of the participants and S8 commented on his poor work ethic. A personal declaration of “I have a slight problem, a lack of drive” was offered by S6. Each participant appeared to have a personal mindset regarding their abilities or their lack of abilities and was able to communicate these perceptions quite readily. Perceptions focused on relationships were also seen as an integral part of the gifted underachiever.

The Desire for Relationships

The second meaning unit reflecting the desire for relationships was brought forth from both negative and positive viewpoints. The discussion was primarily centered on teachers and friends. Some of the participants voiced that the only good thing about school was their friends, and yet others struggled to feel comfortable around classmates or they feared losing their friends. Some participants reported that in their perception the teachers were often mean to them or yelled at them. S4 articulated his perception of teachers, “I don’t have really, really nice teachers. I never have. Well, in 2nd grade I had.
She was my friend’s aunt.” A few participants also admitted that they openly engaged in arguing with the teachers when their opinions differed. This feeling of detachment with the teachers was present in the third meaning unit, centering on powerlessness.

The Feeling of Powerlessness

The third meaning unit, a feeling of powerlessness in the formal educational setting, was expressed throughout the interviews. For many, it appeared that school was the place that housed them until they could escape to learn something. S7 noted that he tolerated school and when asked about being involved in his educational planning, he commented, “nobody’s going to make a change over what I think or what I feel”, then added this thought regarding changes in the system, “there is something, I just don’t know what it is.” There was a reluctant acceptance to attend school but it was apparent by the lack of success in certain classes that a personal choice was made as to participate or not. Several did not see the purpose of homework and felt that homework was often the primary issue blocking their academic success. S10 stated his thoughts on homework,

I never really understood homework. That’s one of my excuses why I don’t do it but it just seems like testing you that you know it but it seems like they give you way too much homework to test that you know it and understand it, you know. It just seems like a good idea that was taken too far.

Several of the participants openly admitted to daydreaming throughout many class periods. The wandering mind was the focus of the fourth meaning unit, the necessity for mental stimulation.
The Necessity for Mental Stimulation

Each of the participants was able to articulate a variety of activities which engaged their mind. Several of the participants described a search for this engagement as they explained how their mind wandered. S2 referred to wandering as, “trailing of thought” and S5 noted, “It is hard for me to keep vision. I just think about something small but I shouldn’t be thinking about it a lot when the teacher is talking but I just get bored and just wander off you know.” Many used the escape and challenge of strategic computer/video games for engagement. Science fiction and fantasy were the top reading topics of the group. The idea of a faster pace for classes was voiced by S2, “when its fast it is like a challenge”, this was supported by S4 when he stated, “I hate lag”. S6 expressed his need for physical activity to help his mind stay positively engaged,

Before I go to sleep I just start thinking because my body is not being occupied by anything else. With boxing I am doing something physical too so my mind is focused on the physical, and when I go to bed my mind just starts thinking and wandering and I can’t focus on anything.

This need for physical activity was the fifth meaning unit of this study.

The Need for Physical Activity

Being physically active was an integral part for many of the participants. Much of their spare time was consumed by outdoor activities. It was noted that most of the recreational activities were more personally competitive rather than team sport type activities. Participants talked of their fidgety habits and several demonstrated these habits during the interview by tapping feet, clicking a pen, and messing with an empty chair.

The need for physical activity in the classroom was also presented as the participants...
talked of their more successful involvement during class and independent projects. In a
response to what motivated him to learn S7 said, "Projects and stuff, more hands on. Not
really having to think about it, just do it". When asked what changes might be made to
the day, the participants suggested, drama, the arts, and more electives. S2 stated, "But if
there was a school day where almost every class was acting and English and library, I
think that would be wonderful." This enthusiasm was in part connected to the final
meaning unit.

The Connection of Emotions to Engagement

The final meaning unit of this study was the connection of emotions to
engagement. According to Webb (1994), the intensity of emotions at times represented
extreme and even negative responses for the gifted. In this study many of the participants
voiced times when they purposely shut down in class due to their emotional state. For S4,
S5, S6, and S9 it was due to an argument with a teacher, S4 noted, "I don't get along with
teachers. If I don't agree with what they are doing I end up getting in an argument with
them." Participants S1, S2, S4, S5, and S8 talked about the frustrations regarding
assignments. S1 expressed this frustrating by stating,

I just think that a lot of the stuff that we do at school, a lot of the stuff that
I already know...that stuff is really useless like you would never use it in
real life. I just refuse to do it cause...I just think it doesn't really matter.

Both scenarios, the arguments with the teachers and the assignment frustrations,
produced the same results where the participants physically shut down; assignments were
not completed, heads went down on desks, or students left the room. This negative
emotional engagement was balanced by positive events for some participants as they
talked of friends and having fun or when they were completing a hands-on activity. S10 stated, “when I learn something that I don’t already know, that excites me a lot.” This final meaning unit played an important role, for the researcher, in discovering the essence of the experience, “Seeking Engagement”.

The Essence of the Experience

Giorgi (1985) talked about the synthesis of the meaning units to arrive at a statement pertaining to the experience. The description he said was to, “depart from the specifics and to communicate the most general meaning of the phenomenon” (p. 20). For this study, the six meaning units were synthesized to more completely understand the phenomenon of giftedness through the eyes of gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers. In listening to the voices of the gifted youth it was discovered that the essence of this experience was *Seeking Engagement*.

The analysis of the data from this study supported the essence of this experience. Six statements which supported the essence of the phenomenon are presented in Table 4-14 and then each statement is discussed following the table.

**Table 4-14 Active Engagement Supporting Statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting Statements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underachieving gifted youth were active learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their success was demonstrated as they engaged in activities of their choice and meaningful experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In a passive setting they engaged their minds in trailing of thought.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Their emotional outcries for help were in the voices of frustration, depression, and a feeling of powerlessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They desired to be involved in positive relationships and feared the loss of connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They would like to be involved in the plans for their future.</td>
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</table>
Active Learners

The underachieving gifted youth were active learners. Throughout the interviews the participants shared different examples of active learning. Some participants, particularly S2, S8, and S10, demonstrated a passion for a specific area and explored the topic in-depth. Many talked of the challenge while playing on computer and video strategy games. Each of the participants demonstrated the desire to learn and articulated specific ways they engaged to fulfill that need. It was noted that the majority of the active learning for these young men took place in locations other than the classroom. A common component in these learning scenarios was an active role by the participant in meaningful activities.

Meaningful Activities

The participants’ success was demonstrated as they were involved in activities of their choice. The participants reported that hands-on projects and tasks with meaningful experiences were important. It was observed that many of the spare time activities, such as mountain boarding, motocross, and computers provided the participants avenues for personal challenge. The search for engagement was visible in the various activities selected by the participants. The data showed that in passive settings, specifically the classroom, many of the participants disengaged in the lesson and let their minds wander, due to a lack of challenge.

Passive Setting-Active Mind

In a passive setting they engaged their minds in what S2 referred to as “trailing of thought”. For some, it was a positive experience, allowing their minds to move and explore at a pace that was intriguing to the participants. But for others, the body at rest
often allowed the mind to wander in an unhealthy and destructive pattern. With either case the participants called for a need to have their minds intensely engaged in the thought process. It was in the classroom where most of the participants articulated the frustrations and feeling of powerlessness over this passive existence.

**Emotional Outcries**

As the participants talked of their anger and dislikes over classroom expectations and personal life frustrations, one could hear the passion in their statements. Their emotional outcries for help were in the voices of frustration, depression, and a feeling of powerlessness. Even in the excitement to learn, frustration was remembered by S10 when he told how the teacher expected him to follow along with the class during reading time, he commented, “I pretty much can’t follow along, I will just go ahead and then I have to go back, so I pretty much, if I have to, I just listen.” Some participants found that engaging in physical actions, such as verbal and nonverbal hyperactivity, personal shut down, or fidgeting, were necessary to defuse a more aggressive emotional release of energy. There were however, accounts of self-reported fights and emotional outbursts throughout the academic experiences of these young men, as noted in the cases of S3, S5, S6, and S9. The participants used different types of emotional outlets as they searched for engagement. This emotional connection was also observed in their discussions regarding personal relationships.

**Relationships**

Each participant explicitly or implicitly expressed their need for positive relationships, as well as their fear of losing the relationships which they currently held. For some of the participants their friends were the sole reason to attend school. A few of
the participants talked about their lack of friends in earlier years and the strong concern to maintain current relationships. One participant chose his family and friends over the option to go to a private school even though he felt the school would better address his academic needs. In addition to friends the participants talked about relationships with teachers. It was evident in the interviews that many of these young men did not have many positive relationships with teachers. For example, S4 could only remember one teacher he felt positively about and S5 noted that the teachers in the school who showed him positive regard were not his classroom teachers. More often than not the teacher/student relationship centered on negative comments and unmet expectations. As a result of this breakdown in the relationships, the participants demonstrated emotional reactions towards their teacher of verbal aggression or personal disengagement. In reality, the need to feel engaged with the people involved in their lives was important to the participants.

Their Future

The participants voiced a desire to be involved in the plans for their future. It was apparent that the idea of this type of involvement was foreign to them but there was definite intrigue surrounding the concept. During the interviews, several of the participants were able to articulate specific ideas or suggestions that would enhance their learning. When presented the opportunity to address his future formal educational learning design, S10 replied, “Oh that would be awesome” and then proceeded to list numerous ideas of what his schooling might look like. One could hear that the present formal educational system did not meet the needs of these young men as they noted concerns regarding passive learning environments, meaningless tasks, and homework.
There was, however, a positive consensus voiced by the participants of this qualitative study regarding the possibility to be personally involved in their educational planning.

**Summary**

This qualitative study was conducted to provide a descriptive picture of the phenomenon of giftedness as perceived by underachieving gifted youth. Information was gathered through the voices of gifted youth and then the descriptive data was analyzed and reported in narrative form. The data for this phenomenological study was analyzed following the four step guidelines suggested by Giorgi (1985). These four steps included (a) immersion into the data, (b) discovery of meaning units, (c) search for constituents, and (d) summarizing the data. The researcher personally transcribed the interview tapes, which provided the researcher additional insight as she listened again to the voices of the participants and heard their pauses and the inflections in their statements. These transcripts were then analyzed by the researcher for patterns and meaning units. The six meaning units which emerged were (a) the impact of internal and external messaging, (b) the desire for relationships, (c) the feeling of powerlessness, (d) the necessity for mental stimulation, (e) the need for physical activity, and (f) the connection of emotions to engagement. The researcher then collectively interpreted and reflected on the phrases and statements of the participants. It was at this point that the researcher looked for richly textured constituents in the meaning units. The researcher then synthesized the richly textured constituents to discover the essence of the experience in the final stage of analysis. The essence of the experience for these underachieving gifted youth was *Seeking Engagement*. The findings of this study will be presented in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE

Findings and Implications

Introduction

Giorgi (1985) delineated the process of phenomenological data analysis into four steps. The initial immersion into the data provides the opportunity for the researcher to begin the second step of discovering the meaning units. As the analysis continues, the researcher seeks to refine the meaning units into richly textured constituents. It is in the final step where the researcher synthesizes the information and the structure or essence of the experience emerges. This essence of the experience is reported in the findings of this study.

The findings of this study, which focused on the perceptions of gifted youth who are underachievers in school, support the essence of the experience: Seeking Engagement. This essence of the experience evolved as the constituents of the meaning units unfolded during the analysis of the data. Six different meaning units emerged during the synthesis of the data. The meaning units which surfaced during analysis were (a) the impact of internal and external messaging, (b) the desire for relationships, (c) a feeling of powerlessness, (d) the necessity for mental stimulation, (e) a need for physical activity, and (f) the connection of emotions and engagement. These meaning units form the basis for the discussion of this chapter which begins with the central question and the subquestions and then is followed by a description of the findings and the implications for this study of the phenomenon of underachieving gifted youth.
Summation of the Central Question and the Subquestions

This phenomenological study was guided by the following central question: *What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domain?* Three subquestions were designed to support this central question. The interview questions were developed using the subquestions as a general outline. The data gathered during the informal interviews were analyzed with the three subquestions as a guide. This synthesized data is evident in the findings of this study. An overview of the data as it relates to the three subquestions is provided with a summary of the central question.

**Subquestion 1: What retrospective insights do gifted students have regarding the design of their earlier formal educational experience?** The participants in the study provided an array of information regarding their formal educational experience. Many of the perceptions were quite negative and were defeating in nature. The participants voiced their concerns over their perceived lack of freedom regarding their formal schooling experience. Some felt trapped by the slow pace of the curriculum, S4 noted, “I hate lag” and S3 commented, “I’d make it faster.” For others the freedom of choice was harnessed by the classroom lessons and routine of their days. S1 commented on much of the material covered in school, “that stuff that is really useless like you would never use it in real life”, and S10 described his perception of a typical day, “This is your lesson for the day, this is your homework. We will have the test in a week. Blah, blah, blah. That’s what every class is like, it’s pretty boring.” A few of the participants expressed positive memories of their early elementary school years and were able to articulate specific times
of engagement in their learning and their connections with friends. The overwhelming consensus from participants in this study, however, was a dislike for the schooling process throughout the majority of their formal educational experience.

Many of the participants saw a need for changes in the formal educational arena. They believed that changes would enhance the system, but they could not immediately articulate the specifics needed to formulate this change. Some of the participants offered suggestions for enhancement of their school day and most were receptive to the idea of actively participating in their education planning. However, it was noted that not one of these participants had ever participated in any conversation, prior to this interview, involving personal input for their own educational design. The excitement of being personally engaged in his learning plan was summed up by S10 as he exclaimed, “Oh, that would be awesome.”

Throughout the discussions on formal schooling the participants shared how they engaged in their days at school. At times the participants engaged in ways which resulted in them being removed from the classroom experience. This removal was either played out mentally as the participants talked of wandering minds and trailing of thoughts, or it was an actual physical removal where their emotional outburst ignited an argument and they were asked to leave the class. It is this emotional engagement that is addressed through Subquestion 2.

Subquestion 2: How do underachieving gifted youth perceive the impact of personal emotional overexcitabilities on their school day? Overexcitabilities were defined by Dabrowski (1967) as the emotional sensitivity and intensity of a child’s psychological make up. The participants in this study readily discussed situations where their emotional
intensity played key roles in their school days. For some there was an expression of positive intensity for learning, but in most cases this joy was limited to a specific time in their school career. More often than not, this engagement of positive learning was outside of the school day.

Some of the participants reflected on sadness and boredom when describing the overall picture of their schooling. Others talked of times when they perceived teachers were angry with them and in response to those times more than one participant reported shutting down and chose to not complete the assignment. Some participants shared comments about their intense anger and frustrations and voiced how at times the escalation in their emotional state resulted in arguments and even physical fights.

A common response from the participants regarding their intensified emotions centered on the need for physical movement. Fidgeting, tapping fingers and feet, manipulating objects, and participating in activities to keep their mind engaged often satiated this need. It was apparent throughout the interviews that these young men had experienced many different situations where their emotions had a direct effect on their schooling. It was also evident that the participants’ choices for engagement often overrode the classroom expectations. Using their cognitive abilities, they selectively chose which activities they would and would not engage in. An example of this was cited by S1 as he talked about certain assignments, “I just refuse to do it ‘cause…it’s really arrogant but, I guess I just think it doesn’t really matter.” On a similar vein, S8 commented on his choice to engagement in the classroom activity, “Well sometimes when I’m mad I don’t work, like I protest depending on who or what made me mad.” Cognitive abilities is the focus of the third subquestion.
Subquestion 3: How do underachieving gifted youth perceive their cognitive abilities? Of the three subquestions, this one appeared to be the most challenging for the participants to answer. Perhaps this concept regarding cognitive abilities is more abstract or less tangible than the other two subquestions. It appeared that most of the participants had not spent a great deal of time “thinking about thinking”, or at least they were less able to articulate their thoughts on the subject. The participants were able to verbalize that others had told them about their abilities. Some of the participants made comments during different portions of the interviews that reflected their perceptions of their cognitive skills. Comments such as: “I have a great memory”, “thinking differently”, and “it just comes easy” were examples of these perceptions. Those who did talk of their cognitive abilities did so in a minimizing fashion, using statements such as: “I don’t like to brag” and “I have a bit more knowledge”. One participant presented the exception, as he explained his abilities in certain domains, “I know I am pretty smart, but in some things I am wicked smart.” Overall the majority of the participants were able to acknowledge their abilities but were less able to expound on the premise of personal cognition.

Central Question Summation

This phenomenological study provided an opportunity to listen the voices of gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers. This study was guided by one central question: What lessons can be learned from underachieving gifted students about how the formal educational experience could better address their individual needs in the cognitive and affective domain? As the stories of these young men unfolded many lessons were presented when they talked of their formal educational experience. These
gifted youth told of their desire to be engaged, and how they sought that engagement in every aspect of their lives. They talked of being active learners and how they wanted to be personally challenged, and articulated the desire for their ideas and input to be heard to better guide their learning. They voiced a tolerance for the formal system and a feeling of being trapped in its structure. They talked of being fragile and sensitive to comments and criticism regarding their personal skills and abilities. They shared that their minds were continuously engaged even when their physical appearance was disengaging. These gifted youth have the ability to articulate many lessons for us to learn, if we listen. This ability to articulate their thoughts and perceptions were important to the findings of this study.

Findings of the Study

The findings of this phenomenological study were formulated from the synthesis of data gathered from the voices of a purposely selected group of underachieving gifted youth who ranged in age from 13-15. From the synthesis of this data, the essence of this study emerged. The essence of the study was discovered as the six meaning units were analyzed. The findings of this study are (a) seeking engagement, (b) the feeling of powerlessness, (c) ineffective messaging, and (d) the lack of personally satisfying challenge. The findings will be described in the following sections and will be connected to the literature throughout this chapter.

Gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers want to feel connected and seek to be engaged. They are viewed as underachievers in the formal educational setting because they have not complied with the system regarding classroom rules and the schoolhouse expectations of being a good student. Rather, they have chosen to disengage
when the system did not meet their needs socially, emotionally, or intellectually. These intellectually gifted youth tolerate a system in which they feel powerless and personally unchallenged. They would like to see changes in their educational design but do not believe it will happen. These youth are not passive underachievers, they are active learners and they seek engagement in all aspects of their lives.

Seeking Engagement

This phenomenological study listened to the voices of gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers. As their stories were told, a common theme prevailed. Throughout the interviews of the participants, there emerged the common desire to seek engagement. Seeking engagement in the essence of the experience for gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers. In this study, each participant shared many ways in which they sought to be engaged.

It is important to remember that these gifted underachievers are first and foremost gifted. They are active learners who have a thirst for knowledge. It was apparent that the concept of underachievement was inherent in their being. When asked, each of the participants acknowledged their ownership of several characteristics connected with underachievement. There appeared to be a complacent acceptance of this underachiever role, and there was a perceived powerlessness pertaining to possible solutions or options to change their underachieving status, specifically in the formal educational setting.

Feeling of Powerlessness

The feeling of powerlessness, or a lack of control over their educational experience, began at an early age for most of the participants. All participants verbalized their personal underachievement pattern over at least the past two years. Some shared
their dislike for formal schooling, beginning at the primary level where they talked of being bored, lacking challenge, and having minimal positive relationships with teachers and students. The formal school setting offered an environment which did not meet the needs, emotionally or intellectually, of these gifted individuals. Having to conform to group mentality when one is inherently independent is a denial of self (Greenspon, 1997). The gifted self is fragile and easily scarred (Silverman, 1990; Tomlinson, 2002). This sensitive demeanor was verbalized by many of the participants. S6 talked of his depression and how his emotional thoughts, at times, over consumed him as he played and replayed conversations of the days activities in his head.

Ineffective Messaging

At times it appeared that these youth were victims of their own minds. These brilliant minds take in information and process it through their own perceptions and filters. Eckhaus (1996) suggested that the gifted individual’s intense awareness of verbal and nonverbal cues may be misinterpreted. They took statements from others and internalized the messages, which invalidated their intellectual abilities. Many of the participants in this study minimized their intellectual abilities and gave self reports of being lazy and lacking drive. These self messages were words the participants had heard or deciphered during their years of underachieving in school.

The messages given to the gifted underachiever in an attempt to encourage and inspire them for academic success are ineffective. In this study the participants parroted several different phrases that had come from adults connected to their lives. These messages often pertained to their abilities and the expectations outlined by the formal educational system. An example of ineffective messaging was apparent from S4’s
comment about homework, “It’s suppose to build responsibility or something.” They were encouraged to try harder, told they had so much potential and were supported for how smart they were. The messages had little positive effect without the personal engagement of the learner.

Lack of Personally Satisfying Challenge

The data showed that these gifted youth were active thinkers and demanded an engaged mind. They discussed their perceptions regarding problem solving and articulated how they sought ways to keep their minds active. Gifted underachievers seek purposeful intellectual involvement. Webb et al. (1994) referred to gifted youth as divergent thinkers. It is this different way of thinking, which was voiced by the participants in this study that must be nurtured and validated.

The gifted thinker is an engaged learner. Winner (1996) noted three atypical characteristics of the gifted. She cited their (a) precocious nature, (b) their qualitatively different thinking pattern, and (c) their intrinsic passion to learn about certain topics. In this study, many of the participants were able to articulate specific situations that consistently echoed these three characteristics, but rarely, if ever, were the situations connected to learning in the formal educational system. In this study it was evident that the educational system design, these gifted students have experienced, had hampered rather than enhanced their personal and intellectual growth. As an example, S10 commented on his 9th grade math class, “This is the first year that actually I am learning some new stuff since 5th grade.” In their formal educational experiences, these participants were told to comply, slow down, sit still, and redirect their thought processes.
to fit within the classroom norm. It was this fitting in or conforming that triggered frustration and disengagement for the participants.

A missing link for these gifted youth was a lack of fit. Early in their formal educational programming the work they produced was too easy. They were successful by the design of simple expectations and lack of personal challenge. As their school years continued, the participants talked of feeling bored and being reprimanded for moving faster than the class. The system did not meet their needs for engagement emotionally and academically. Therefore, when their need for this engagement in school was not to be found, they disengaged in the classroom and sought active learning elsewhere.

The results of this disengagement from formal schooling can be paralleled to the childhood medical condition of failure to thrive. Failure to thrive is a condition in infancy where the infant’s growth is delayed (Stonely, 1999). One of the reasons for this delay is attributed to the lack of a nurturing environment. Gifted underachieving youth seek a nurturing environment that validates their intellectual abilities and provides the opportunity for their direct involvement in their educational learning plan. The need to feel connected with personal relationships was important to the participants, but this need was often not met. Several of the participants spoke of teachers which they perceived as harsh. The perception for some was that the teachers did not like them and suggested that they would request different teachers if possible. This disengagement with relationships was reflected in varied responses by the participants.

In this study, the gifted youth at times chose their own path of system design, such as the choice to not complete the assignment, an argument to illicit an engaging event, or even a self-destructive choice of depressive thought processing. These various
choices to disengage with the educational system’s expectations produced a visual perception of underachievement for the participant. These gifted youth seek engagement and involvement in the decisions that so drastically affect their entire lives. Emerick (1992) found that of the six themes that emerged from her study on gifted underachievers, being directly involved in their educational planning was very important.

As noted earlier, there was a perceived lack of challenge for these gifted learners. The design of daily lessons and the passive behavioral expectations outlined for the students, suppressed these gifted learners into existence in the classroom setting. S6 stated that he tolerated school and S4 talked of how sad and boring the days were. Although not often, there were times when the formal schooling experience began to meet the needs of these gifted underachievers. S8 articulated the excitement of learning when he said, “I like new things, It’s like exploring new land.” S10 commented on Destination Imagination, a competitive group activity, “I don’t see how it really helps gifted kids, it just gives them something to do, which they don’t really need, they already have homework.” It is however, the lack of personal engagement in the planning of the curricular design that is missing for these underachieving gifted youth. Seeking engagement for the gifted underachiever guided the implications for this study.

Implications

The findings of this study provided several implications for those involved with gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers. The implications are presented from two different focal points. The first focus discusses recommendations for those involved with gifted youth and the second focus addresses areas of future studies.
Implications for Those Involved with Gifted Youth

The implication for success with gifted youth goes beyond school practitioners. Giftedness is not something that appears during school hours and then is stored in a locker. Educators, parents, and friends of these divergent thinkers need a better understanding of the emotional and intellectual implications of giftedness and a more complete appreciation for the aspects of underachievement. There is a need for a more inclusive understanding of and a more direct engagement with the gifted youth for all people involved. This need to understand these unique individuals must be aggressively sought through direct communication. Talking with, and more importantly listening to these young people, is imperative as the gifted discuss and analyze their personal desires and visions for their learning success. It is important to realize that this vision for success may take on a radically different educational design than what is currently considered normal practice. We must propose forums that specifically address this need to gather information from gifted underachieving students. They must not only be invited, but they must be encouraged and supported to articulate their perceptions in a safe setting. Educators must realize that a nine year old body may hold the reasoning ability of an adult and that by discounting, even subtly, that they are not capable of being involved in their programming may be enough to begin the spiral of individual shutdown that will continue over the coming years. Eckhaus (1996) articulated that gifted youth are intense in their communication patterns and often feel invalidated for their ideas and suggestions. Educators must provide the individual attention and time to listen and validate the needs of this unique learner.
There is a need for a better understanding of the gifted population as a whole and specifically, the sub group of those who opt to disengage from the formal educational system. Underachieving gifted students need and desire engagement. This study articulated that gifted youth who were perceived as underachievers wanted to be engaged in their learning design or they choose to disengage. Allowing this disengagement to manifest itself is not acceptable and must be more completely understood by school systems.

School personnel must take a very close look at this population of students. Teachers must not only develop a better understanding for the need to differentiate the design of curricular presentations, but it is imperative that they implement programming which is personally engaging for these gifted individuals. Research supports a multitude of varied designs and models for differentiating curriculum for gifted youth (Clark, 1997; Ford & Thomas, 1997; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Tomlinson, 2001; Van Tassel-Baska 1994). These young people require early individualized interventions. This intervention must be active not passive. It must involve the gifted youth early in their schooling. There is a need for aggressive involvement on the part of those most closely connected to these gifted youth. Research has demonstrated that reversing the pattern of underachievement is a challenge and demands intense action, and engagement by all involved in the gifted underachiever’s life, including the gifted underachiever (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Delisle, 2001; Emerick, 1996; Muir, 2001; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Whitmore, 1986).

A final implication of this study is directed specifically at the gifted youth. There is a need for gifted youth to more completely understand their own thought processes.
Working with gifted youth, at an early age, on a better understanding of their metacognitive needs and skills will provide the framework for the articulation of appropriate educational programs for these at risk youth. Learning about metacognition has been shown to be helpful for the gifted (Sheppard and Kanevsky 1999). Providing additional information and a more thorough understanding of the theories on thinking and learning will allow the gifted youth to more accurately understand their perceptions and more clearly articulate their ideas and suggestions for their educational programming (Bandura, 1993; Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1994; Cheng, 1993; Neihart, 1999a; Taylor, 1997; Weiner, 1974).

Considerations for Future Studies

This phenomenological study has provided insight for future research. The charge of numerous educational reform movements strengthens the need for additional studies to unravel the mystery of the gifted underachiever. Further research is recommended in the following areas:

- Study gifted youth in elementary school whose behavior is overly active or those who are not engaged in the formal learning process to discover their insights regarding their educational.
- Design a feasibility study to explore more individual involvement of gifted learners in their educational planning.
- Research the effectiveness of underachievers who are involved in their educational planning through a pilot study.
- Replicate this study with only female participants.
• Replicate this study with a purposeful sample of both male and female participants.

• Designa feasibility study where all gifted youth help plan their personal curriculum using National or State curriculum standards as a reference.

• Study the effects of metacognitive skill training and the teaching of different learning theories for underachievers.

• Look at the overall population of gifted underachievers. Rimm (1997) suggested that over one half of all gifted youth underachieve.

• Analyze effects of early or late identification for acceptance into gifted programs and explore how this identification factors into the underachievement formula.

• Survey professional educators regarding their knowledge of gifted underachievers and their willingness to explore alternative options for the educational planning.

• Explore the correlations between the infant medical condition “failure to thrive” with the educational experience of the gifted youth perceived as underachievers.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative study provided an opportunity for the phenomenon of giftedness to be discovered through the voice of underachieving gifted adolescents as they talked of their formal education experiences. These participants talked of their desire to learn and how they seek engagement. In their perceptions, the formal education setting was not an ideal match for their learning and they were excited to think that their voice might be
heard regarding changes. It must be remembered that gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers are a precious human resource that cannot be stifled and disengaged due to a flaw in the system. These talented youth are wasting away in a system where the mantra “try harder” screams out loud and clear. They have many lessons to teach us if we listen.
References


Burruss, J. & Kaenzig, L. (1999, Fall). Introversion: The often forgotten factor impacting the gifted. Virginia Association for the Gifted Newsletter, 21


Renzulli, J. (1999, Fall). What is this thing called giftedness, and how do we develop it? A twenty-five year perspective. Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 23(1), 3-54.


Available http://www.br.cc.va.us/vcca/i11tayl.html


APPENDICES
Appendix A: Letters
School Administrator's Name
School Name
Address
Town, MT. 55000

Dear

I am a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at The University of Montana. I am conducting a study on gifted underachievers and their perceptions on giftedness. This study will provide information and insight for parents and education professionals to better address the needs of the gifted underachiever.

I am asking your permission to contact your Gifted and Talented Faculty Advisor. I will ask your advisor to recommend students who meet the formal criteria of a gifted underachiever. I will also ask the advisor to contact the parents of the potential participants. Each parent will receive a packet of information from the advisor. The packet will include:
(a) a letter of explanation for the advisor
(b) a parent packet which will include:
   a letter of explanation
   permission request forms
   a tentative timeline for the study

As with any study, confidentiality is very important. All personal information from these interviews will be held in the strictest of confidence at all times. There are two governing bodies in place to ensure this confidentiality; my Doctoral Dissertation Committee, and The Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana. At no time will the name of your school or any of the participants connected with this study be identifiable. A code will be assigned to insure confidentiality.

For this study of a gifted underachiever, the criteria is as follows: Participants will meet the definition of giftedness and they will be perceived as an underachiever if they are currently performing at or below a D average in two or more of the following classes (a) history, (b) mathematics, (c) English, and or (d) science.

Thank you in advance for considering to assist me in this important study. I have enclose an Administration Consent Form. Please complete the attached information and return it to me, in the self addressed envelop, at your earliest convenience. I will call you with in a few days to answer any of your questions and to confirm your participation.

Sincerely,
Barbara L. Cunningham
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Dear Gifted and Talented Advisor:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at The University of Montana. I am conducting a study on gifted underachievers and their perceptions on giftedness. This study will provide information and insight for parents and education professionals to better address the needs of the gifted underachiever.

As you are aware per our phone conversation, I have been given permission to contact you for assistance by ____________________.

I will ask you to help in three areas:

1. to recommend any students who meets the formal criteria of a gifted underachiever.

   For this study of a gifted underachiever, the criteria are as follows:
   Participant will meet the definition of gifted by having an IQ of 130 or above and He/she will be perceived as an underachiever if he/she is currently performing at or below a D average in two or more of the following classes (a) history, (b) mathematics, (c) English, and or (d) science.

2. to contact the parents of the potential participants.

   A sample packet of information is enclosed for the parent. This packet includes:
   a letter of explanation
   permission request forms
   a tentative timeline for the study

3. to arrange a room at your school where the interviews will be conducted.

As with any study, confidentiality is very important. All personal information from these interviews will be held in the strictest of confidence at all times. There are two governing bodies in place to ensure this confidentiality; my Doctoral Dissertation Committee, and The Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana. At no time will the name of your school or any of the participants connected with this study be identifiable. A code will be assigned to insure confidentiality.

If you have any questions regarding this letter or this study, please call me at any time. My phone numbers are: 857-3661 (Somers Middle School) or home 755-0883. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. William McCaw, at the University of Montana, at 243-5395.

Thank you in advance for considering to assist me in this important study.

Sincerely,

Barbara L. Cunningham
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
To the Parents of:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at The University of Montana. I am conducting a study on gifted underachievers and their perceptions on giftedness. This study will provide information and insight for parents and education professionals to better address the needs of the gifted underachiever.

I will be interviewing several gifted youth who are perceived as underachievers. Each interview will be held at the school and will take approximately 45 minutes. I would like to ask your permission to interview your son/daughter.

I have asked your child’s Gifted and Talented Advisor to contact you initially and provide you with the attached information. This information includes:
- permission request forms
- a tentative timeline for the study

As with any study, confidentiality is very important. All personal information from these interviews will be held in the strictest of confidence at all times. There are two governing bodies in place to ensure this confidentiality; my Doctoral Dissertation Committee, and The Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana. (to be added: As you can see by the attached consent forms, The Institutional Review Board has given me permission to complete this study). At no time will the name of your child’s school or any of the participants connected with this study be identifiable. A code will be assigned to insure confidentiality.

The criteria for this study of a gifted underachiever is as follows:
1. Participant is involved in the school’s Gifted and Talented Program
2. He/she is perceived as an underachiever because he/she is currently performing at or below a D average in two or more of the following classes (a) history, (b) mathematics, (c) English, and or (d) science.

At the conclusion of this study, I will be most happy to provide you with a brief summary of the findings should you choose to have your son/daughter participate.

I hope you will allow your child to participate in this study. If you or your child would like more information about the study, please call me at any of the phone numbers listed on the attached card. If you agree to have your child participate I will need for you to read and complete the attached Subject Information and Consent Form. Your child needs to read the attached Assent Form. Please return your completed form to me in the attached envelop. I will work with the Gifted and Talented Advisor to set up your child’s interview time at the school.

Thank you in advance for considering to assist me in this important study.

Sincerely,
Barbara L. Cunningham
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Tentative Timeline

Doctoral Dissertation Study on Giftedness

Early February
Approval of Study by the IRB

February to Mid March
Contact school administration, advisors and parents of potential participants
Set up and Complete interviews

Mid March to April
Transcribe interviews
Verify accuracy of transcriptions with participants

April
Complete narrative report

Study Director:
Barb Cunningham
2501 Airport Road
KalisPELL, MT 59901
Phone: (406)755-0883 (h);
(406) 857-3661 (w)
Email: cunngham@digisys.net

Study Advisor:
William P. McCaw, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone (406)-243-5395
Appendix B: The Interview Protocol
### Code Sheet for Participants

(Confidential)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Code ID</th>
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Barbara Cunningham and her dissertation committee will be the only people to have assess to this information.
**Participant Information**

**Title of the Study:** The Phenomenon of Intellectually Gifted Underachievers and Education: Listening to the Male Adolescent Voice

Name of Student ___________________________________  Student Code ___

School of Attendance ________________________________ Grade ___

**Courses of Study at a grade of D or below**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
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Parent/Guardian Name

__________________________________________

Address

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Phone Number               email

__________________________________________

What type of Gifted Program is in the school? ________________________________

Why did advisor recommend this student? ________________________________

__________________________________________

(This information will be collected after the parent has given permission for participation. The information will only be accessible to the researcher and will be used for transcript follow-up. The information will be destroyed at the completion of this study.)
Interview Form: The Phenomenon of Intellectually Gifted Underachievers and Education: Listening to the Male Adolescent Voice

Date: __________, 2003  Time: __________ (am/pm)  Male: ___  Female: ___

Student Code: ___

The following opening statements will guide each interview.

➤ Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. I would like to go over a few things before we start the interview.
➤ I will be asking you questions, taking notes, and tape-recording your responses. You will be referred to only as “S” for subject in my notes.
➤ All information from this interview will be confidential, including your statements, my responses, and all of the notes that I take. At no time will you be referred to by name or by any other description that would allow a reader of this research to identify you in this study. Such confidentiality is protected by myself, my doctoral dissertation chair, and as a requirement of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana.
➤ My dissertation committee chair and I will be the only two people who will know your name. A confidential code will be used to identify you for follow-up questions and your confirmation of information in the final report.
➤ Direct quotes used will not be name specific and all names used or referred to will be changed to protect each person’s privacy and anonymity.
➤ There are no expectations as to how you will answer these questions and there are no right or wrong answers. What is important, are your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The intent of this interview is to gather your thoughts, feelings, and experiences, not to make judgments on your responses.
➤ Lastly, please remember that you can stop this interview at anytime or take a break whenever you feel the need to do so.

Do you understand what I have just read to you?

Do you have any questions before we begin?
Interview Protocol

1. Describe something you enjoy doing in your spare time.

2. Think about a time when you felt successful in school. Describe that time.
   Planned prompt: How do you describe a successful student?

3. I would like you to think about your level of intelligence. Talk to me about your giftedness.

4. Describe to me the challenges you have experienced in your schooling.
   Planned prompt: What about being challenged academically? or What are some of the personal challenges you face in school?

5. All participants in this study are perceived as gifted underachievers. How does that interpretation fit you? What are your reasons for underachieving?
   Planned prompt: You do not see yourself as an underachiever? Please explain that. What does underachieving mean to you? or How long have you chosen to underachieve?

6. Think about something that motivates you to learn in school. Tell me about it.
   Planned prompt: What excites you about learning? or What about that motivates you?

7. Think of a time in school when your emotions effected your learning, either positively or negatively. Please describe that time to me.
   Planned prompt: Are there times when your energy gets in the way at school? Please explain. or Are there times when you cannot get started? Please give me an example.

8. Describe what school has been like for you.
   Planned prompt: What would you change if you could? or Have you ever felt involved in planning your program at school? Please explain.

9. Talk to me about how you think and learn.

That was the last interview question, is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

Do you have any questions for me?
I would like to thank you again for participating in this interview. Remember that everything that was said will be kept in the strictest confidence and that your name will not be revealed in any of the reports for this research. I appreciate the opportunity to hear your thoughts and ideas.
Interview Data Recording Form

Interview # ___________________  Date: ___________________

Page ___ of ___

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Interviewer’s Notes</th>
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Appendix C: Field Journal Pages
Field Memo

DATE:

INTERVIEW CROSS REFERENCE

Interview Date: 
Subject Code: 
Interview #: 

<table>
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<th>Category of Emerging Trend</th>
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Appendix D: Consent Forms
Administration Consent Form

Title of the Study: The Phenomenon of Intellectually Gifted Underachievers and Education: Listening to the Male Adolescent Voice

Name of School ___________________________ Enrollment ___

_____ I give my permission for Barbara Cunningham to contact our Gifted and Talented Advisor.

Our Advisor’s name is ________________________________

The phone number is ________________________________

If you do not give permission please check here.

_____ I do not wish for our students to be involved in this study.

Please sign and return this sheet in the attached envelop. Again, thank you for assisting with this study.

______________________________
Name of Administrator (please print)

______________________________
Signature of School Administrator Date

Study Director:
Barb Cunningham
2501 Airport Road
Kalsipell, MT 59901
Phone: (406)755-0883 (h);
(406) 857-3661 (w)
Email: cunngham@digisys.net

Study Advisor:
William P. McCaw, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone (406)-243-5395
Subject Information and Consent Form

Doctoral Dissertation on Giftedness

Study Director:
Barb Cunningham
2501 Airport Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
Phone: (406)755-0883 (h);
   (406) 857-3661 (w)
Email: cunngham@digisys.net

Study Advisor:
William P. McCaw, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone (406)-243-5395

This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

Purpose of the Study: Your child is being asked to take part in this research study, because your child is in the Gifted and Talented Program at his/her school. The purpose of this study is to describe the phenomenon of giftedness through the eyes of selected gifted youth. In this study, the criteria for selection gifted youth is determined by academic grades of a D or lower in at least two of the following classes (a) history, (b) mathematics (c) English (d) science. It is hoped that through this research project, knowledge might be gained to better assist parents, administrators, teachers, and counselors in making schools better places for all students.

Procedures: If you agree to allow your child to participate in this important study, he/she will be asked a series of open-ended questions about his/her school experience. The interview session will be held in your child’s school and should take about 45 minutes to complete. Your child will be contacted after their interview is transcribed to verify the accuracy of the transcript. Your child will remain anonymous in all documents. His/her name will be known only by the researcher and her dissertation committee chair at The University of Montana.

Risk: There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participation in this study.

Compensation for Injury: Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana Consent Forms: 

In the event that your child is injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement of compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University’s Claims representative of University Legal Counsel.
Benefits: Although neither your child or yourself may benefit from taking part in this study, future children may. It is again the intent of this study to better understand why gifted youth think and respond the way that they do in the academic setting. Upon completion of this study recommendations may result that could assist other underachieving gifted youth in being more successful academically. The recommendations may help education professionals to more accurately address the needs of the gifted.

Confidentiality: The identity of you, your child, and your child’s school, will be kept in strictest confidence. All data obtained will be stored in a locked file cabinet, as will all signed consent forms. If the results of this study are written in any journals or presented at any meeting; your name, the name of your child, or the name of your child’s school will not be used. This information will be known only by the researcher and her dissertation committee chair at The University of Montana.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal: Your decision to allow your child’s participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw your child as any time. Please notify Barbara Cunningham immediately should you choose to do so.

Questions: Should any questions regarding this study arise before, during, or after the study, please contact the Study Director at any of the numbers listed previously in this document. If you have any questions with regard to your rights or rights of your child as a research subject, please contact Dr. Tony Rudbach at the University of Montana Research Office. Dr Rudbach can be reached by phone at: (406) 243-6670.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that a member of the research team will also answer future questions that may arise. I voluntarily agree to have my child take part in this study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

__________________________________________________________
(Printed name of Child)

__________________________________________________________
(Printed name of Parent or Guardian)

__________________________________________________________
(Signature of Parent or Guardian) Date
RELEASE FORM

Permission to use Quotations

The purpose of this form is to secure the permission to use quotations from the interview(s) conducted as part of a research study regarding gifted students, conducted by Barbara L. Cunningham.

Child’s Name: __________________________

The undersigned (subject of the study and originator of the quotation) hereby grants permission for Barbara L. Cunningham to utilize quotations by the undersigned to be reported in her research study on gifted underachievers and any subsequent publications resulting from said study.

The anonymity of the student, his/her parents or guardian, the school attended, and the city of residence is insured and all personal information will remain confidential at all times.

__________________________
(Child’s Name)

__________________________  __________________________
(Signature of Child)  (Date)

__________________________
(Parent’s/Guardian’s Name)

__________________________  __________________________
(Signature of Parent or Guardian)  (Date)

Study Director:  
Barb Cunningham  
2501 Airport Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
Phone: (406)755-0883 (h);  
(406) 857-3661 (w)  
Email: cunngham@digisys.net

Study Advisor:  
William P. McCaw, Ed.D.  
Department of Educational Leadership  
The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812  
Phone (406)-243-5395

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ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS

Doctoral Dissertation Study on Giftedness

Study Director: Barb Cunningham
2501 Airport Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
Phone: (406) 755-0883 (h);
(406) 857-3661 (w)
Email: cunngham@digisys.net

Study Advisor: William P. McCaw, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone (406)-243-5395

This form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that you don’t understand, please ask me for help.

I have asked your parents to allow you to be in a study about giftedness. This form will help to answer your questions about the study. The form also gives me permission to ask you questions for the study.

Why You?: By talking to students like you, I hope to learn more about ways to support gifted students in the academic setting.

What will you have to do?: I will ask you nine questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer them the best way you can. What is important are your thoughts and feelings.

Is there any danger in this project?: There is no risk to injury. If you choose not to continue, you can stop at any time.

What will this project do for you?: This project may give you some insight about how you and other gifted underachievers learn. By sharing your thoughts with me, other students may experience more success in school.

Who will know about your answers?: Your name will not be used at all. Your answers will only be known by letter (S1) and all notes will be for my use only.

Can you quit if you want to?: You may quit anytime you wish. Just tell me that you do not want to be a part of this study any longer.

What if you have questions: If you ever have questions, during the interview or at another time, please ask me during the interview or call me at either number listed above.

Permission: I have read and understand this form. I wish to take part in this study and know that I can quit at any time. I will be given a copy of this form after I sign it.

Printed Name of Student

Student’s Signature Date