

AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE: MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THEIR GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this descriptive study is to investigate gifted and talented middle school students' perceptions of the program in which they participate. Twenty-two 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the Chippewa Falls and Durand School Districts were interviewed individually with the aid of a self-created instrument in the spring of the 2001-2002 school year. The types of programs these students participate in include pullout, enrichment, and acceleration. All of the students in the Chippewa Falls gifted and talented program knew they were identified as gifted and talented. However, 27% in the Durand gifted and talented program were unaware they were gifted and talented. All of the students interviewed were satisfied with their program and gave good suggestions as in regards to improving their program. Lastly, recommendations for the participating school districts include: having a designated resource room and consistent time with gifted and talented resource teacher. Also, adding more curricular areas to the program.

### Acknowledgements

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## Dedication

I am dedicating this thesis and all the hard work put into it to my niece, Alexandra. She is a truly inspirational gifted and talented child and I feel privileged to be her Aunt.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

There have been many studies examining gifted and talented education in America since the beginning of its existence essentially in the early 1900s. People such as Sir Francis Galton, Alfred Binet, Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman, and Leta Stetter Hollingworth are considered pioneers of gifted and talented education. An event such as the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik helped shape the philosophy of gifted and talented education (Colangelo & Davis, 1991).

Despite all the research conducted and people supporting the education of the gifted and talented youth of America, the government remains silent on federal mandates requiring programs for the gifted and talented (Cline & Schwartz, 1999). Stephens (2000) found that “presently, only one law, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988, refers to the need for special programs for the gifted and talented” (p.30). This law, which was revised in 1994, defines gifted and talented, but does not mandate programs for those students who have been identified. Consistent with education being a function of the states, each state has derived its own definition. Definitions of gifted and talented are important for many reasons. These definitions lead to selection of identification criteria, program alternatives, and evaluations of these programs (Eby & Smutny, 1990).

According to Callahan (1985), evaluation of programs is necessary for many reasons. One such reason is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program so that appropriate changes can be made. In the current climate of education, it is important

to have accountability for gifted and talented programs to ensure future funding. Also, in certain school districts, gifted and talented students occasionally are not told they are identified as such. This leads to misunderstandings of the reasons why they may be required to do extra work or work that is different from their counterparts. Furthermore, misunderstanding of what gifted and talented really means could lead to hostility towards students who are intellectually gifted. According to Colangelo and Davis (1991), “intellectual giftedness threatens the self-esteem of others, both youngsters and adults, in a way that most other talents do not” (p. 4). Educating teachers, parents, students, and the public about what it means to be identified as gifted and talented is very important.

According to evaluation research conducted by Scriven (1980), it is important to assess the consumers of any program to ensure that they are receiving appropriate services. That is why it is important to assess clients, namely the students, of gifted and talented education. In addition, Eby and Smutny (1990) stated, “children are anxious to share their thoughts on programs in which they are in” (p. 152). For example, Delisle (1984) asked the opinions of students ranging from 6-13 years of age how they felt about their gifted program. One 12-year-old girl responded, “Without extras like the gifted program, school turns into a monotonous circle of turn-in-your-papers, listen, ignore and be ignored” (Delisle, 1984, p. 23). While evaluating the students’ needs from their perspective, educators are ensuring the objectives for the gifted and talented education are being addressed and the students’ needs are being met.

Past research of students’ perceptions of their existing programs have enabled school districts to restructure programs to better meet the needs of their gifted students. For example, White (1994) surveyed students at a rural Wisconsin high school regarding

many aspects of their gifted education provided by the school. White (1994) found that, when students were asked if they were being challenged by the courses they were taking, 57% of the 30 gifted and talented students poled, agreed with this statement. This was a good overall indication to the school district that the curriculum was challenging.

However, when the students were asked about different programming options, such as independent study, they felt strongly about wanting these choices. In fact, one student even wrote a comment about the lack of diversity within this school's programming for the gifted and talented. White (1994) was then able to take the students' reactions to the specific questions regarding their program and offered recommendations for implementing these programs. Brighton and Hertberg (1999) also found that when high school students were asked about programming their greatest concern was the limited opportunities to pursue topics of their own choosing.

Examining the views of students identified as gifted and talented is important to address the developmental issues that could be confronting them. Much research has been done to examine parent, teacher, and student views regarding gifted and talented education. However, there is little research specifically examining the views of students identified as gifted and talented in the middle school years, ages 11-14.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine middle school gifted and talented students' perceptions of programs in which they participate. The students were selected from two rural Wisconsin school districts of approximately 900 and 300 middle school students respectively. Students were interviewed in the Spring of the 2002.

Objectives for the study include examining: 1) the types of programs available in each school district to be evaluated for gifted and talented students; 2) whether gifted and talented students are aware of the programs in which they are involved; and 3) the satisfaction students have in the program; and four, student suggestions for changes the their gifted and talented program.

### Definitions

To fully understand the terms indicated in this study, clarification on the definition of some words are needed.

**Gifted and Talented** is defined by the (U.S. Congress, 1988) Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (Stephens & Karnes, 2000):

The term “gifted and talented” student means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require special services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities. (PL 100-297, Title IV, Sec. 4103)

**Giftedness:** Competence that is distinctly above average in one or more domains of human aptitude.

**Talent:** Performance that is distinctly above average in one or more fields of human activity.

### Assumptions

Two assumptions can be made regarding the data pertaining to this study. One of those assumptions is that the respondents answered honestly when interviewed. Also, it

is assumed that the instrument developed for this study investigates the objectives set forth by the researcher.

### Limitations

One limitation to the current study is the instrument used to interview students is not a standardized instrument. The instrument has face validity derived from current literature.

Another limitation to the current study is the inability to generalize the results to all middle school students who participate in gifted and talented programs because of sample size and geographic limits.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

This chapter will include information about the law surrounding gifted and talented education, the different types of programs for gifted and talented students, and a discussion regarding the need for appropriate programming for gifted and talented students. In addition, implications involved in being an identified gifted adolescent will be discussed.

#### Gifted and Talented Law

As previously stated, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Act (1988) provides the federal definition of gifted and talented. Even with this federal definition, which serves as a guide for each state to develop their own definition, each state defines gifted and talented in a number of different ways. For example, currently in the state of Wisconsin, the definition of gifted and talented is as follows:

Gifted and talented pupils means pupils enrolled in public schools who give evidence of high performance capability in intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, or specific academic areas who need services or activities not ordinarily provided in a regular school program in order to fully develop such capabilities (Stephens & Karnes, 2000, p. 236).

The laws in Wisconsin regarding gifted and talented education have not changed in the last 10 years. It continues to state “each school board shall provide access to an appropriate program for pupils identified as gifted and talented (Clasen & Clasen, 1987, p. 1)” with the corresponding definitions of access, appropriate program, gifted and talented, as well as related standards to the statute. However, many states have changed

their definition of gifted and talented education accordingly. For example, in the year 1990, Minnesota's definition was as follows:

Gifted and talented children are those who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children whose potentialities can be realized through differentiated educational programs or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, and visual and performing arts (Stephens & Karnes, 2000, p. 229).

When evaluated in the year 1998, Minnesota did not have a definition for gifted and talented education in law, but used the above definition, which was written in 1976, as a guideline.

Many reasons exist for redefinition of state gifted and talented educational services. The most primary being budgetary reasons. Every school district battles with maintaining an appropriate budget. Whenever they are over their budget, programs that are seen as extras in the district get cut. This is the tragic story of many gifted and talented programs. It becomes a great disservice to students who have been identified as gifted and talented when their special programs get cut due to budget constraints.

Often, educators feel that gifted and talented students are able to make it on their own just because they are gifted (Colangelo & Davis, 1991). However, Davis and Rimm (1985) found evidence to the contrary. Their research indicated that gifted and talented students did not make it on their own stating "An inadequate and unchallenging

curriculum...extinguish (es) the high potential accomplishment of gifted children and adolescents” (p. 4). In addition, Ford (1989) suggested “youngsters may not reach their full potential if left to flourish on their own” (p. 131).

Thus, it is vital to the continuation of gifted education for a consistent and comprehensive definition (Stephens & Karnes, 2000). It is through this definition that programs gain financial and public support.

### Types of Programs

There are a number of programs available through which gifted and talented education could potentially be delivered. Much research has been conducted to assess which of the following programs are most effective. However, Parke (1992) felt that one-dimensional programming for gifted and talented students was not the best approach. Having a multi-programmatic approach appeared to be the most successful longitudinally.

It is estimated by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (Clasen & Clasen, 1987) that approximately 15-20 percent of the school-age population could be identified as gifted and talented. Of this 15-20 percent, approximately 60% are able to have their needs met in the regular classroom. However, approximately 30% will need special provisions within the school, but outside of the classroom and the remaining 10-15% will need extraordinary provisions not associated with the typical school. Listed below are definitions and descriptions of possible programs that could be utilized with gifted and talented students.

**Acceleration**

Acceleration (Gtkids.org, n.d.) is defined as an opportunity for a student to move faster than typical through school levels or curriculum. This could be accomplished by taking advanced courses within the school itself or at a local college or university.

Acceleration could also be accomplished by allowing the student to finish several years of school at one time or accelerating through one subject matter more rapidly than typical. Acceleration is not the same as grade skipping as is sometimes perceived.

**Cluster Model**

A model that is not as popular as pull-out programs is cluster grouping or the cluster model. In this program, a group of gifted and talented students are grouped heterogeneously within a separate classroom. The specialized teacher often implements enrichment programs.

**Differentiation**

Differentiation (Gtkids.org, n.d.) is defined as adapting the curriculum to meet the unique needs of gifted learners by making modification in complexity, depth, or pacing. In addition, students may select elements of a curriculum to address rather than the whole of the curriculum.

**Enrichment**

According to the Clasen & Clasen (1987), “enrichment implies that students are engaged in pursuit of some knowledge, process, or skill which is relevant to a particular curriculum” (p. 29). The activities that the students participate in allow them to examine a supplement to the curriculum in a richer and more varied content.

**Magnet Schools**

In some larger cities or school districts, for example the Minneapolis School District in Minnesota, specialized schools are provided just for gifted and talented students. Some schools are centered on specific talents, such as the performing arts or scientific areas. Or perhaps the school is designed around a certain philosophy, structure, or method. These schools can be sponsored by districts, regions, universities or colleges, or are independent. And lastly, these schools can be housed within an existing school.

**Pull-out Program**

A pull-out program is one in which the identified student is essentially “pulled-out” of their regular education classroom so they can attend special class sessions with other identified gifted and talented students. According to the research conducted by Cox, Daniel and Boston (1985) at the Sid W. Richardson Foundation, a large number of the school districts that they surveyed, approximately 70% of 16,000 districts, used the pull-out program within their schools. The students in the homogenous group spent anywhere from one hour a week up to a full day with the resource teacher. Many educators felt that the stigmatism of an elitist program comes from the pullout model (Mcintire, 1998).

**Other Learning Opportunities**

In addition to the above programs, other opportunities exist such as internships, independent study, and cross-age tutoring that supplement the gifted and talented program. In addition, there are weekend courses and specialized summer camps that provide learning opportunities to these students.

### Appropriate Programming Needs

A majority of gifted and talented students spend their time in the regular education classroom (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). Despite the 60% of the gifted and talented students who don't require any programs above and beyond the regular classroom, this does not mean that their needs are being met within that setting. Often, teachers are, as Brighton and Hertberg (1999) discovered, "teaching to the middle, leaving the special needs of students on both the low and high ends of the readiness spectrum unaddressed" (p. 9). Therefore, if the students' needs aren't being met, they have the potential for underachieving or even failing.

Underachieving gifted and talented students are gaining a lot of attention in research for good reasons. Just because they are gifted and talented does not mean that these students couldn't be considered "at risk" too. These students are not unique in their personal and emotional turmoil that could potentially put them at risk. They are unique, however, in how often their underachievement is unrecognized due to their intelligence. As Supplee (1989) stated, "Underachieving gifted children are as handicapped as less intellectually capable youth whose conditions merit special education classifications because of emotional, learning, or physical problems" (p. 163). Indeed, some gifted and talented students also have a learning disability as well as their individual giftedness. For example, one student in Supplee's (1989) investigation scored a 132 on the WISC-R but scored in the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile on the total math battery in the school's achievement test. Appropriate programming for this specific individual will not only address the student's overall high intellect, but assist in his/hers' learning disability in math.

## Gifted Adolescents

Much attention has been given to the social aspect of being identified as being gifted and talented. It was thought that the label of being gifted and talented would negatively affect the students. However, Kerr, Colangelo, and Gaeth (1988) discovered that gifted students see themselves as very similar to their peers in regards to social and personal traits. They only differ from their peers in academic traits and performance.

Examining adolescence in relation to being gifted and talented because of the developmental stage these students are at. Erikson (1963) describes adolescence as the challenge of identity vs. identity confusion. It is a time of developing a sense of one's self in relation to the world. According to Bireley & Genshaft (1991), adolescence is a time of "soul searching" (p. 261). For gifted and talented students this may be confounded by their already well-developed sense of morality and justice. Attempting to find a spiritual connection for these adolescents is very important.

During this time of development, acquiring coping skills is important in order to make a healthy transition into adulthood. For gifted adolescents, perfectionism is a major issue. Typically, perfectionism is a trait within the gifted and talented student that has already manifested. However, in adolescence, perfectionism may manifest itself into many other things, such as eating disorders, substance abuse, depression, and anxiety disorders (Bireley & Genshaft, 1991). Often, this deep desire to be perfect is coupled with teachers and parents high expectations for the gifted and talented to achieve to their full potential. One must seek a balance in life and handling perfectionism is an important milestone in a gifted and talented student's adolescence.

In addition to coping with normal adolescent transitions, there may be a difference in how gifted adolescent girls develop and cope with their development in comparison to gifted and talented boys. For boys, traditionally, their recognition in school often accompanies an accomplishment within the sports arena and not in the academic realm. According to Bireley & Genshaft (1991), “the desire to fulfill role expectations for adolescent males, for example, can deter a young gifted male from aesthetic appreciation or involvement in literature or mathematics” (p. 37). Conversely, gifted adolescent girls are less likely to pursue mathematic and science experiences because of conflicts between traditional femininity and inner feelings of wanting to succeed as well as excel (Bireley & Genshaft, 1991).

### Summary

Although many states have definitions of gifted and talented learners, appropriate education for these students is not always available. Many programs exist for gifted and talented students, which serve their unique and diverse needs. It is important, when developing these programs, to remember the unique needs of gifted and talented adolescents.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Introduction

This chapter will describe the subjects under study and how they were selected for inclusion in this study. In addition, the instrument used to collect information will be discussed as to its content, validity, and reliability. Data collection and analysis procedures will then be presented. The chapter will conclude with some of the methodological limitations.

#### Description of Participants

The participants for this study were twelve middle school students in the Chippewa Falls School District and twelve middle school students in the Durand School District between the ages of 12-14. Each participant had been identified as gifted and talented. These students were either participating fully or voluntarily in the district's gifted and talented program within the 2001-2002 school year.

The sample consisted of 50% (n=11) seventh graders and 50% (n=11) eighth graders. The seventh graders were made up of 73% male and 27% female. The eighth graders were made up of 64% male and 36% female. A total of 24 students were chosen from the population to be sampled. However, one student did not wish to participate and another student had a band lesson at the time of data collection.

Names of the students in the middle school gifted and talented programs were obtained from each district's gifted and talented program coordinators. All twelve of the identified gifted and talented 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the Durand School District were given the opportunity to participate. The twelve students in the Chippewa Falls School District

were chosen by the gifted and talented middle school resource teacher due to their active participation in the program. The participants were given an overview of the study, its purpose, and how they would be involved in the study through the parent permission letter (see Appendices A and B) as well as the researcher prior to data collection.

Chippewa Falls is a much larger school district than the Durand school district. For instance, the total number of students in the middle school in the Chippewa Falls district is approximately 950 students. Durand has approximately 290 students in their middle school.

The programs offered in the Durand School District for middle school students include enrichment opportunities such as an Investigative Science class. Within this class, the gifted and talented students study the same curriculum as the other students but at a faster pace and with a richer, more varied content. In addition, students are pulled out of their regular classes to attend a reading class with the gifted and talented resource teacher twice a week. Students are given grades from the resource teacher. Seventh graders are also given the opportunity to participate in an invention convention, which is facilitated by a regular education teacher. In addition, acceleration opportunities are provided for eighth grade gifted and talented students. Students who demonstrate high abilities in math are accelerated in the seventh grade to algebra and then as eighth graders take geometry at the high school. Furthermore, forensics is another enrichment program offered as well as music and student council.

The Chippewa Falls School District's gifted and talented is filled with various enrichment opportunities. The students are not mandated to participate in the program. Also, since the program is voluntary, there are no grades given by the gifted and talented

resource teacher. However, incentives are given to participate, such as food and field trips. Interestingly enough, one of the many things the students liked about their program was the fact they weren't graded.

Each grade pod has a bulletin board specifically for the gifted and talented resource teacher to advertise opportunities available to the students. During the student's TA period, they meet with the gifted and talented resource teacher to discuss the activities in which they are participating. There is no designated classroom for the gifted and talented students to meet. Typically one of the computer labs in the middle school is used as a meeting place for the students and teacher. The enrichment programs provided include: Math Counts, a Stock Market Game, Hyperstudio portfolios, and a Lake Wissota History Project.

#### Instrumentation

The researcher designed the structured interview format (See Appendix B). Previous theses, such as White (1994) and Baker (1996), regarding sampling of consumers of gifted and talented programs, were used as guidelines. Since this is a self-constructed questionnaire, no validity or reliability measures were available. The instrument was not piloted prior to data collection.

#### Research Procedures

Prior to data collection, permission to participate was obtained from the students' parents as well as the participating students. Confidentiality was discussed and assured to each of the participant. The participants were then interviewed in either their resource room or library within their school during various times during the school day. Data was

collected through taped individualized interviews. Information was also tape recorded, with permission, to facilitate data retrieval.

Subsequent to the interviews being conducted, responses were collated for each interview question. Also, patterns of responses were examined for students in each school district. Lastly, a summary and recommendations were provided for meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners.

### Limitations

Interviewees may have answered questions in which they feel are socially desirable. The taped interviews used for data gathering may have intimidated the students. After the recorder had been turned off some students seemed to discuss things about their programs a little more freely.

## CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter will present the results of the taped individual interviews of the identified gifted and talented students in the Chippewa Falls and Durand School Districts. Comments made by the students will be added.

### Results

Results for each question will be discussed. In table one, questions one through four are discussed with numbers and percentages given for student responses. Eleven students participated from each district for a total of 22 students interviewed.

**Table 1: Reported Results for Questions One-Four**

	<u>Durand School District</u>			<u>Chippewa Falls School District</u>			
Question 1: Do you know you are in a gifted and talented program?	<u>Yes</u> 8 (73%)	<u>No</u> 3 (23%)		<u>Yes</u> 11 (100%)	<u>No</u> 0		
Question 2: Areas of special talents?	<u>Math</u> 7 (64%)	<u>Science</u> 1 (9%)	<u>Reading</u> 3 (23%)	<u>All*</u> 3 (27%)	<u>Math</u> 9 (82%)	<u>Science</u> 4 (36%)	<u>Music</u> 2 (23%)
				<u>Reading</u> 1 (9%)	<u>Computers</u> 1 (9%)	<u>Geography</u> 2 (23%)	
Question 3: Offered any programs?	<u>Yes</u> 11 (100%)	<u>No</u> 0		<u>Yes</u> 11 (100%)	<u>No</u> 0		
Question 4: Like your program?	<u>Yes</u> 11 (100%)	<u>No</u> 0		<u>Yes</u> 11 (100%)	<u>No</u> 0		

N=11 for each district with a total of 22 students

\*All= all areas of school

The three students from Durand who did not know they were gifted were asked if they have special talents and all three did know they had special talents. The areas the students specified were math, reading, and science.

### Question Five

This question asked the students what they liked most about their program. In Durand, 3 students (23%) reported not knowing what they liked about their program. Four students (36%) reported the way the program challenged them. One student (9%) reported their program was not as boring as their regular education classes. One student (9%) liked the way the resource teacher explained things. One student (9%) liked the different work they receive. Lastly, 1 student (9%) liked the required books.

In Chippewa Falls, 8 (73%) of the students liked the different activities provided. Their favorite activities included math counts, musical stories, the stock market game, and hyperstudio. One student (9%) liked how the program is relaxed and fun. One (9%) enjoyed expressing their creativity. One student (9%) liked the trips offered. And lastly, 1 student (9%) enjoyed exploring different things that they really enjoy.

#### Question 6

For this question, the students discussed what they liked least about their program. In Durand, 6 (55%) of the students had no response to this question. Four students (36%) did not like the extra work and/or homework involved with participation. And lastly, 1 student (9%) did not like having to participate in the program without her friends.

In Chippewa Falls, 6 (55%) of the students could not name anything in particular that they disliked about their program. One student (9%) did not like meeting during Teacher Advisory time. One student (9%) did not like the Lake Wissota project and the musical stories. This student went further in wondering how these projects fit into gifted and talented. One student (9%) did not like having to move around when the students meet. And lastly, 1 student (9%) did not like the narrow focus of the program and would like a broader program.

### Question 7

Students were asked to identify other areas of study that would assist in exploring their talents. In Durand, 7 students (64%) did not know what other areas they would like to pursue. One student (9%) suggested more concentration on math. One student (9%) suggested history. And lastly, 2 students (18%) suggested literature or English courses.

In Chippewa Falls, 7 students (64%) did not have any suggestions for other areas of study. Three students (27%) suggested geography and social studies. One student (9%) suggested more math projects. And lastly, 1 student (9%) suggested more history.

### Question 8

Students were asked to identify any other ideas they may have in improving their program. In Durand, 9 students (82%) of the students did not offer any suggestions. One student (9%) suggested having the ability to test out of more subject areas. And lastly, 1 student (9%) would like the program to be more fun.

In Chippewa Falls, 5 students (45%) of the students would like more time with their gifted and talented teacher. Two of the students (18%) would like an actual classroom in which the gifted and talented classes are held. Two students (18%) did not have any suggestions. And lastly, 2 students (18%) would like more projects and areas to study.

### Question 9

Students were asked for any further suggestions or comments. In Durand, none of the students added any other comments.

In Chippewa Falls, 2 students (18%) of the students stated they liked the gifted and talented program. One student (18%) wanted to make sure that the program

remained voluntary. One student (9%) stated the program was fun. And lastly, 7 students (64%) didn't have any more suggestions.

### Summary

The students interviewed gave valuable insights into their gifted and talented program. Most of the students in both school districts knew they were in a gifted and talented program. All of the students could identify their special talents. They all were offered programs because of their special talents. They all liked their gifted and talented program. Some students identified what they liked and didn't like about their program. Finally, some students were able to offer suggestions for improving their program.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter will include a discussion of the results of the study. The chapter will conclude with some recommendations for further research and the school districts in which these students attend school.

According to the research findings, all the students in both school districts are happy with their gifted and talented programs. It appears that these students' needs are being met. This is in contradiction to what Brighton and Hertberg (1999) found when gifted and talented students are in the regular education classroom. They discovered gifted and talented students in the regular education classroom who were not getting their needs met.

Also according to the research findings, the gifted and talented students felt their program was challenging them, which was desirable to the students. Delisle (1984) found this to be true in his interviews with gifted and talented students as well. If students were not challenged, they felt bored in their regular classrooms. In fact, one of the students interviewed in the current study even stated if he was not involved in his gifted and talented program he probably would have less self-esteem.

Interestingly, students in both school districts listed math, history, and social studies as areas in which they would like to study further. One student even stated she felt that her program was very focused around math. Also, students in Chippewa Falls appeared to identify more areas of individual talent in comparison to students in Durand. This may be due to the structure of the programs themselves. Lastly, 3 students in the Durand gifted and talented program did not know they were gifted. However, they could

name their areas of talent. Conversely, in the Chippewa Falls gifted and talented program, all of the students were able to state they knew they were gifted and talented. This is contributed to communication to the students their specific identification of giftedness, which is not specifically done within the Durand gifted and talented program.

#### Recommendations to Participating School Districts

Several suggestions are offered to the Chippewa and Durand School Districts.

These would include:

1. Having a designated resource room for the gifted and talented resource teacher to deliver her program in a more continuous way. Many students in the Chippewa Falls gifted and talented program stated this would be helpful.

2. Have a regularly scheduled class period with the gifted and talented resource teacher in the Chippewa Falls gifted and talented program.

3. Adding more curricular areas to the programs such as social studies. The Chippewa Falls program already concentrates on this area through their Lake Wissota project.

Both of the programs appear to be working rather well from the students' perspective. Also, from the students' perspective, in the Chippewa Falls School District, not having graded projects is very important. In addition, in both programs, the relationship the resource teacher has with the students is very encouraging. These students appear to hold their resource teachers in high regard.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Several suggestions are offered for further research on how to gain more insight into students' perspectives. These would include:

1. Students seemed a little reluctant to give suggestions to improve their program. Therefore, the study could be replicated but only after the researcher has gained rapport with the gifted and talented students by working with them prior to data collection.

2. Examining achievement differences between genders would have been interesting.

3. It would have been interesting to ask the students if they feel they are gifted and talented or just hard working students.

4. In the Durand School District, having the students be aware they are gifted and talented is not important. This probably goes a long way in diminishing the “elitist” stereotype of gifted and talented programs. It may be helpful to assess the staff attitude towards the gifted and talented program. Also, finding out from the students when and how they discovered they are gifted and talented would be valuable.

5. One student didn't know why more students weren't included in the gifted and talented program. It would have been helpful to examine what it means to the students to be gifted and if they see themselves as being gifted and talented.

### Summary

It was an enriching experience to interview the students who participated. They had wonderful insights and outstanding communication skills, which made gathering data very easy and interesting.

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## Appendix A

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Sara Hoyt and I am a School Counseling student at University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am studying talented students' opinions about educational programs to help schools better plan for talented students' needs. Your son/daughter has been identified as having special talents by the Durand/Chippewa Falls School Districts and has been selected to participate in this study with your permission.

The purpose of this study is to better understand programs needed to serve talented students. Your son/daughter will be interviewed about programs they are involved in and how the school might make them better.

Your son/daughter's participation in this study is completely voluntary and no student will be penalized for not participating. The interviews will be taped to help organize student suggestions. Students' names will not be attached to their responses to interview questions. The taped interviews will be erased after interview information has been collected. The interviews will be conducted on the following days: \_\_\_\_\_.

Please complete the permission slip provided below to allow your son/daughter an opportunity to participate in this study and return it to the school counselor or teacher with your son/daughter by \_\_\_\_\_. Results of the study will be provided to the Durand/Chippewa school district's gifted and talented program coordinators. If you have any questions or concerns you may contact Sara Hoyt, Researcher, at 715-720-7806 or your son/daughter's school counselor.

Thanks for your help,

Sara L. Hoyt

I give permission for my son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_ to be interviewed for this study on the needs of gifted and talented learners.

I do not give permission for my son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

My name is Mrs. Hoyt and I am a school counseling student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am interviewing Gifted and Talented students in the Durand and Chippewa Falls School Districts. The purpose is to study the programs that the students are involved in. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to stop at anytime. Also, your name will not be attached to the study. I will be taping this interview so that I can better collect information from the responses provided. The tapes will be erased after data has been collected. Any questions prior to beginning?

1. Do you know you are in a Gifted and Talented program?

If no, Do you know you have special talents in some areas?

If yes, continue on:

2. In what areas do you have special talents?

3. Are you offered any special programs because you have been identified as Gifted and Talented?

4. Do you like being in the programs?

5. What do you like most about your program?

6. What do you like least about your programs?

7. What other areas of study might help you to explore your talents?

8. Can you give any ideas on how to make these programs any better for you?

9. Any other comments and/or suggestions you might have?

Thank you for participating in this study. Results will be provided to your Gifted and Talented teacher.