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entitled

Snapshots: A Phenomenological Look at Adult Specialists in the Field of Gifted

Education

by

Kimberly M. Berman

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Curriculum and Instruction: Gifted and Talented

Robert A. Schultz, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Ellen Fiedler, Ph.D., Committee Member

F. Richard Olenchak, Ph.D., Committee Member

Mary Ellen Edwards, Ph.D., Committee Member

Patricia Komuniecki, Ph.D., Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

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An Abstract of
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The phenomenon of living as a specialist in the field of gifted education has inherent problems and advantages. It is my intent with this phenomenological study to describe the essence of this lived phenomenon. Specialists in gifted education have provided pictures of various populations connected to giftedness and commentary on social and educational issues involved. Through individual interviews, I have turned the lens around and generated snapshots of the personal and professional lives of five specialists, discovering common bonds which illustrate their experiences. Studying their lived experiences has uncovered ethical, social, economic, and political dimensions of their lives that provide insight into shared experiences and commonalities. George Betts, Jim Delisle, Ellen Fiedler, Rick Olenchak, and Phil Perrone all contributed greatly to scholarship and practice in the field of gifted education and proved fascinating subjects.

Driving research questions included: How do specialists in the field of gifted education describe their lives looking back over their experiences associated with giftedness and being a specialist in the field? What personal lived experiences do they hold? What contexts or situations have influenced or affected their experiences? Semi-

structured and multi-step interviews were used to collect lived experiences. Participants received interview questions to consider prior to the interviews. The transcendental phenomenological approach allowed me to gather stories which reflect the essence of being a specialist in the field of gifted education.

Keywords: Adult Specialists, Transcendental Phenomenology, Gifted Education

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Chapter One

Background of the Problem

To the complaint, “There are no people in these photographs,” I respond, “There are always two people: the photographer and the viewer.” (Ansel Adams, 1988)

Aptly named, researchers like to investigate and ask questions. The field of gifted education has a wealth of investigators—specialists in any of the numerous components of the field. They spend their lives giving us snapshots and views of their observations and discoveries about giftedness. Their inquisitiveness and need for answers speaks of their own quests for understanding both in their professional work and in their search for purpose and direction in their own lives. They evaluate, challenge, and consider academic needs and issues that pertain directly to classroom intervention and organization.

Like Ansel Adams, world-renowned black-and-white landscape photographer and source of the epigraph for this chapter, my curiosity lies in the photographers behind the lens: the lives and thought processes of those who research and work in the field of gifted education. They provide pictures of the various populations (students, parents, educators, and administrators) connected to giftedness and the various social and educational issues in the field of gifted education. Through interviews with these specialists in the field of gifted education (hereafter referred to as specialists) and analysis of the stories they have shared, I have generated snapshots of their personal and professional lives and have discovered common bonds that may help explain why they each chose the path they did into this educational specialty.

Studying the lived experiences of these specialists has uncovered ethical, social, economic, and political dimensions of their lives that provide insight into shared

experiences and commonalities among the subjects. In the results of this study, I identified the themes relating to the benefits and challenges of being a specialist as well as those relating to the shared goals and objectives of each specialist's life pursuits.

I brought into focus and explored the lives of specialists in an attempt to understand the construct of giftedness and to have this study serve as a catalyst for future trends, issues, and directions for research about specialists in the field of gifted education. The goal was to identify some of the broad categories of their lives that impacted or influenced these specialists, including their personal definitions and descriptions about giftedness.

In their scholarly contributions, we see the snapshots of the ideas of these specialists. But what do the snapshots of the specialists themselves look like? Five specialists in gifted education graciously agreed to share the stories of their lives so as to allow me to examine, through first-person points of view, possible parallels and congruencies in the structures of their experiences. George Betts, Jim Delisle, Ellen Fiedler, Rick Olenchak, and Phil Perrone all contributed greatly to both scholarship and practice in the field of gifted education and proved to be fascinating subjects for my documentation and comparisons of the anecdotes and philosophies they shared through their stories.

Each specialist has personal as well as professional attachments to giftedness. I wanted to discover what incited their passion for the field, what drove their interest. Some believe that we do not choose our work, but rather, our work chooses us. I found through this study of specialists, many similar experiences and phenomena along the paths of their lives.

Statement of the Problem

There has been little focus and even less documentation on the lives of specialists. Just as Ansel Adams suggested in the epigraph, there are always two people in a photograph. Stories about the photographers, or, in this case, the specialists, will broaden the lens for others in the field of gifted education to have a greater understanding of the specialists' scholarship and, more importantly, their lives and experiences. Information about these specialists is greatly needed to better understand them and their impact on the field of gifted education.

Children are praised for stellar athletic performance and feel pride when they make the quiz bowl team or become the class spelling bee champion. However, often adults no longer feel comfortable in accepting their performances and accomplishments with the same praise and pride, unless they happen to become famous stars or athletes. Some adults dismiss their abilities as easy or ordinary, or wonder why others are not able to do and accomplish the same things. Silverman (2010) offers one reason this may be the case:

The vast majority of gifted adults are never identified. Even those who were tested as children and placed in gifted programs often believe that their giftedness disappeared by the time they reached adulthood. It does not seem to matter how much success a person achieves—hardly anyone is comfortable in saying, “I’m gifted.” (as cited in Kuipers, 2010, p. ix)

So it seems gifted adults and children differ in the degree to which they recognized and accepted praise for their giftedness.

In gifted education, we believe children who are gifted see the world from a different point of view than the majority of their age peers (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). As they grow in understanding of their own intellectual abilities, they learn to understand more about themselves and those around them, including peers. If this is so, why do so many adults still have a hard time accepting praise for their accomplishments or stating, “I’m gifted”?

Many adults are unaware of their own “measurable giftedness” due to lack of formal identification in school when they were children (Kuipers, 2010). Some of these same individuals have grown to become specialists in the field of giftedness. I wanted to know if these specialists recognized and claimed their own giftedness. And, even more, I was curious to know if specialists in the field of gifted education were aware of their own intricate differences in learning, working, and understanding the world. Furthermore, what led them to the path of gifted education as a professional aspiration?

In this study, I explored how specialists told their life stories and how they described their journey in the field of gifted education. I sought to discover if their conceptualized definition of giftedness was reflected in their personal experiences and if they were forthright in acknowledging their giftedness and their influence on others in the field of gifted education. This broadened lens captured a more descriptive understanding of who these specialists are in the field of gifted education. The following questions drove this process.

Research Questions

- What personal lived experiences do specialists in the field of gifted hold?

- How do specialists in the field of gifted education describe their lives looking back over their experiences associated with giftedness and being a specialist in the field?
- What contexts or situations have influenced or affected their experiences?

Definition of Terms

Adult Specialist—researchers with expertise in the field of gifted education.

Bracketing—data and personal stories used to describe experiences without the experiences, perceptions, and/or assumptions of the researcher to interfere with the specialists personal accounts.

Giftedness—the experiences or characteristics defined by social, emotional, and/ or academic abilities significantly above the typical range for same age.

Horizontalization—the use of significant statement, sentences and quotes to provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of becoming a specialist in the field of gifted.

Lived Experience—first-hand accounts and impressions of living as a member of the group of gifted individuals.

Transcendental phenomenology—personal experience as the source to all claims of knowledge (Husserl, 1931), in which meaning and understanding are derived from the experience of living.

Specialists in the field of gifted education—individuals who have contributed substantial meaning and understanding to the field of gifted education. Individuals identified through personal research and recommendations from committee members.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Historical Findings

The history of gifted education is rich with accounts of specialists who have provided snapshots of gifted individuals. Researchers have captured candid images of gifted children. These snapshots, however, only provided half of the story. Who were the researchers behind the lenses? What drove their passion within the field of gifted education?

The research and documentation of specialists in the field of gifted education is limited. We know of their writings and publications and brief biographies of them on book jackets or websites. Uncovering who they really are and what influenced their lives and passion for their field is left for us to yet discover. What spurred their interest in gifted education and challenged their perceptions of giftedness? What personal or professional discoveries of theirs have challenged assumptions or influenced their own lives? Through this dissertation I have opened the pages to albums full of memories and pictures of several gifted specialists in order to discover more than just the bits of information previously known about them. I have opened the pages to the lives of some of the specialists themselves.

Some documentation exists which shares stories of gifted specialists from previous generations. Their stories provided me with a foundation from which to begin my own study. Following are snapshots which capture images of the lives of Annemarie Roeper, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, and Lewis Terman.

Roeper. Annemarie Roeper, a prominent specialist in the field of gifted education, left a unique snapshot of her life and work through her writing. She shared her unique perspective about the inner self of gifted children in her book *The 'I' of The Beholder: A Guided Journey to the Essence of a Child* (2007). The final chapters of this book give a rare and beautiful glimpse into Roeper's experiences from her lifetime as a gifted individual. Roeper (2007) shared her very personal insights at the age of 87:

What opportunities do we miss by not hearing our elders, and what heightened experiences do they miss by us not allowing them to play their appropriate role in society? How much wisdom goes down the drain unused? In personal terms, I probably have more opportunity to be heard because I am still active in my work with gifted children, and I am listened to because my knowledge is defined and specific. Let us just remember how many parents and grandparents take care of their grandchildren or great-grandchildren. They are the unsung heroes. I would like to end my remarks with a salute to old age. (p. 122)

Here, Roeper urged her readers to listen. Annemarie Roeper had a way of urging others to want to listen.

Born in 1918, Roeper was the daughter of two progressive German educators. Her mother, Gertrud was one of the first female psychoanalysts trained by Freud and her father, Max Bondy an art historian who believed in humanistic education and a deep sense of community (Kane, 2009). Her parents created a boarding school for children ages 10-18 where they combined education and psychology. These early experiences provided the foundation for Roeper's future school.

When Roeper was eight, her future husband George arrived at this boarding school, and Roeper recalls knowing at her young age that she would marry him (Kane, 2009). And, she did in New York City on April 20, 1939. The Roepers later created the Roeper School, an independent school for gifted, to focus on the supporting emotional needs of children. This school was created as a nontraditional model to honor the Self by providing opportunities for self-actualization and interdependence- the most essential components of the child as viewed by the Roepers.

Roeper was the founder of The Global Awareness Network, which was based on her vision and desire to unite all those involved in advocating for the gifted child. Roeper believed that each gifted child had unique views as well as a global awareness. This awareness included a spiritual view beyond the visible world.

Roeper advocated for gifted children to have a challenging classroom appropriate to their ability and strong support and leadership from parents. Looking further back in time, we can discover snapshots of still more pioneer specialists in the field: Leta Stetter Hollingworth and Lewis Terman.

Hollingworth. Leta Stetter Hollingworth was born May 25, 1886 in Chadron, Nebraska (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943). As an adult, Hollingworth found a bound red leather diary written by her mother that recalled Hollingworth's life from birth to age one, written from the infant's point of view. This documented evidence of Hollingworth's precocious development and highly gifted beginning. At the age of three-and-a-half, Hollingworth's mother died after giving birth to her third daughter. The girls were cared for by their maternal grandparents for the next eight years as their father remained absent in their lives (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943).

Many changes and tragedies ensued. Their father remarried, their grandparents' homestead was foreclosed on, and two younger cousins were killed in a suspicious fire. The girls relocated to Rocky Ford, Colorado with their grandparents for two years until their father insisted they move to Valentine, Nebraska.

H. L. Hollingworth (1943) described the day-by-day living with her new stepmother, Fanny, as being in a "fiery furnace" (p. 34). The three sisters endured verbal and emotional abuse and were expected to do all of the cleaning and washing before leaving for school each morning. More chores awaited them at the end of the school day (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943).

Characteristic of gifted children, Hollingworth had a heightened sense of sensitivity and focus on justice which made Fanny's anger and arbitrary judgment particularly difficult to endure. Hollingworth's maternal grandfather died in 1899, and her grandmother moved back to Nebraska to be close to her beloved grandchildren. However, Fanny forbade the children from visiting her. In a note to her husband, Hollingworth mentioned that at the age of 10 she decided to renounce her childhood and get on with life:

I had read in some book that man's life is divided into stages and this put the uncanny idea of omitting one of them into my head. I should be frightened if any 10-year-old child should say things to me now, but then I never opened my mouth on the subject, so nobody but you knows or ever knew of that solemnly kept compact with life—that if I left out part of childhood I should be granted other values which seemed more to be desired. I decided to grow up then and there,

solemnly renouncing the rest of childhood. Nor has life failed thus to keep the compact. (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943, p.44)

Hollingworth's Uncle Henry and Aunt Martha Stetter became like second parents, opening their home to their nieces. While as an adult Hollingworth only visited Valentine twice, she corresponded with the Stetters for almost 40 years (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943).

Hollingworth went on to the University of Nebraska in 1902 where she majored in English literature and writing. Here she flourished under the positive influence of her English teacher, Robert H. Watson. She also met the man with whom she would spend the next 36 years of her life, Harry Levi Hollingworth, or Holly as he was nicknamed as a child. The couple both graduated in May of 1906 with Bachelor of Arts degrees (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943).

Hollingworth became a teacher and assistant principal of a K-12 rural school in Dewitt, Nebraska. After a year teaching English, Latin, German, history, physiology, civics, and botany, she moved to a new teaching position in McCook, Nebraska where she just taught English literature and German (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943).

In 1908, Leta and Harry Hollingworth moved to New York City. Harry held a position at Columbia University. Unfortunately, Hollingworth was unable to gain employment. Married women were prohibited from teaching in New York City Schools. Hollingworth and 24 other women she met at Columbia University founded the Heterodoxy Club. The members consisted of some of the most radical and intellectual women of the time. Their lives and opinions were unorthodox. Some were in traditional marriages, some were single, some were in same-sex relationships, some were married with lovers, and some were bisexual. Their group met secretly during World War I

because the club was under government surveillance. The women were instrumental in promoting and advocating for the women's suffrage movement and took stands on many political and cultural issues (H. L. Hollingworth, 1943).

In 1911 the federal agents questioned the behavioral effects of caffeine upon humans. Harry received a grant from the Coca Cola Company to oversee research to determine if the caffeine in Coca-Cola was harmful as charged by the Pure Food and Drug Act. Leta Hollingworth helped to design both blind and double-blind procedures to test this claim, and Harry hired her as the assistant director, thus launched her scientific career. Harry Hollingworth presented the empirical data concluding that caffeine was not harmful to human mental or motor performance at a trial in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The judge upheld the decision, and the financial compensation helped send Hollingworth to graduate school at Columbia University and Teachers College where she double majored in psychology and sociology.

Driven by her interactions with the Heterodoxy Club, membership in the Feminist Alliance, and serving as an activist in the New York Woman's Suffrage Party, Hollingworth used science to challenge unsubstantiated theories related to sex differences. The first of these was that of variability, which was based on several assumptions:

(a) Genius...is a peculiarly male trait; (b) men of genius naturally gravitate to position of power and prestige (i.e. achieve eminence) by virtue of their talent; (c) an equally high ability level should not be expected of females; and (d) the education of women should, therefore, be consonant with their special talents and special place in society as wives and mothers. (Shields, 1975, pp. 744-745)

Hollingsworth went on to publish, “Variability as Related to Sex Differences in Achievement” (L. S. Hollingsworth, 1914a), a scientifically substantiated research study which took direct aim at variability. Hollingsworth’s results showed that the variability theory was incorrect, thus refuting the long-standing belief.

In 1913 Hollingsworth took a substitute position in a clinic for mental defectives. She was in charge of mental tests. She was ultimately offered the position as first psychologist in the civil service of New York City and worked at Bellvue Hospital. Upon completion of her doctoral dissertation in 1916, “Functional Periodicity, An Experimental Study of the Mental and Motor Abilities of Women During Menstruation” (L. S. Hollingsworth, 1914b), Hollingsworth was offered a position at Columbia University.

During this same year, at the age of 30, Hollingsworth met an eight-year-old boy and administered the Stanford-Binet test. At eight year and four months, this boy’s mental age was measured by Hollingsworth to be 15 years, seven months—a 190 IQ (S-B) (L. S. Hollingsworth, 1927; H. L. Hollingsworth, 1943).

This experience turned out to be a defining moment in Hollingsworth’s career. Hollingsworth became intrigued by the ways the gifted were taught in classrooms. The common practice of advancement or acceleration often left the child unable to take stock of or apply their learning. The accelerated child moved quickly ahead, sometimes completing several years’ worth of content in a term even though their physical and emotional development often lagged behind classmates. These children really had no means of practically using their advanced knowledge, and seemed to always be rushing ahead rather than understanding the impact learning had on their lives.

One of the first instances where Hollingworth explored the practicing curriculum was during her work at Public School 165 Manhattan. She belonged to a Joint Committee of professionals (Jacob Theobald—the principal; Jane E. Monahan—assistant principal; Margaret V. Cobb, Dr. Grace A. Taylor, and Professor Leta S. Hollingworth—all from Teachers College Columbia) who envisioned assembling a group of gifted elementary school children to study in the classroom (Cobb, Hollingworth, Monahan, Taylor, & Theobald, 1923; L. S. Hollingworth, 1924a).

The target population of students was sought from within the geographic area of P.S. 165 with measured intelligence quotients of 150+ Stanford-Binet (S-B) as the primary identification protocol for inclusion in a Special Opportunity class. This group of children would be the focus for the curricular work concentrating on enrichment rather than acceleration. The Carnegie Corporation of New York eventually funded the plan for a three-year period.

Two groups of children were formally identified and assigned to the comparative classrooms. The first group consisted of 26 children with 150+ I.Q. (S-B) scores. These were the original target group for the study. The other group consisted of the “near miss” children tested—having scores of between 135-150 I.Q. (S-B) (L. S. Hollingworth, 1924b).

The goal for the Special Opportunity classes was to explore how these children learned and to try to find some ways of teaching via enrichment that could be used as models in other locations. As the project got off the ground, the Joint Committee involved in establishing the classes at Public School 165 devised many research studies exploring curriculum as well as teaching and learning for the gifted students in their

charge. It was a rather loose approach to research, but the richness of insights gained provided many opportunities to develop further studies within the overall project in situ.

For Hollingworth, the experience at P.S. 165 forever changed her professional focus. Based on the acquaintances made, the data collected, and the theories developed and tested, Hollingworth published 32 articles and a book. As her husband Harry (1943) stated, "...her own interests and judgments grew definitely out of the less formally organized investigation dating back to 1922. The zealous inquiry into the characteristics and problems of the gifted as individuals received there its initial impetus" (p. 154).

Her personal interactions with gifted children led Hollingworth to believe enrichment was a more humane and viable option for the young gifted child in school. This revelation opposed the common practice of rapid promotion (or acceleration as we call it today) used by virtually all schools and school districts when working with gifted children. As Hollingworth (1924a) noted,

. . . a considerable amount of argument as to the merits of rapid advancement through the grades, as compared with progress at the usual rate, with enrichment of the curriculum for the very gifted [occurs]. . . . The policy of the "enriched curriculum" is, on the whole, favored in the educational philosophy of the subject but there is as yet no agreement as to what the additional materials should be. (pp. 142-143)

Gifted students who studied personally interesting content and were given time to ponder and test their ideas compared well with expected development patterns for elementary children. Indeed, even when enrichment opportunities consisted of half the school day, the gifted children performed on par or better than other children their age on

compulsory content requirements. This finding bore out in many early studies on the gifted (Bell, 1924; Coy, 1923; Freeman, 1920; Gillingham, 1920; Race, 1918; Specht, 1919; Whipple, 1919).

Terman and the Termites. A final historical example of a gifted education specialist is that of Lewis Terman, who paved the way to understanding the lives of gifted individuals in a longitudinal study. Terman focused on the lives of his research subjects, wanting not just a snapshot of a particular event or time, but a longitudinal study of gifted persons throughout their complete lifetime

Lewis Terman was the 12th of 14 children when he was born in 1877 in Indiana. He earned his undergraduate and Master's degree at Indiana University and his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Clark University. He went on to work as a school principal for one year and then spent four years working as a professor at Los Angeles State Normal School. In 1910 he began his 32-year tenure as a professor at Stanford University.

In 1921 Lewis Terman selected 1,538 intellectually superior children, who later became known as the Termites, to begin what are now the well-known Stanford studies of gifted children. Central to his research, Terman sought to answer several questions: Have the gifted individuals maintained their intellectual ability? Has their productivity been commensurate with their ability? How does their health compare with that of the total population? Do they differ from most people in regard to marital and social adjustment? What has contributed to most of the women being housewives? What use have they made of their intellectual superiority? Are these endowed men and women successful in their vocations? And has the world recognized their accomplishments?

Have they in mid-life fulfilled the promise of their youth (Terman & Oden, 1959)? These studies are landmarks in gifted education, not only for the data collected, but the opportunity for future analysis. Furthermore, they provide evidence of the utilization of gifts and talents by gifted children.

In 1921 the Commonwealth Fund of New York City granted Lewis Terman the funding to begin his study of intellectually superior children through adulthood. The group was comprised of 1,538 gifted individuals, including 857 males and 671 females. Character tests given to gifted children in 1922 resulted in gifted children above average by about three years (Terman & Oden, 1959). Parents and teachers were asked to rate the children. The categories included: intellectual, volitional, moral, emotional, aesthetic, physical, social, and mechanical ability. Gifted children deviated from the general population in nearly all traits though the amount varied. The proportion of gifted students' superiority of traits was as follows: 89% for intellectual traits, 82% for volitional traits, 67% for emotional traits, 65% for aesthetic traits, 64% for moral traits, 61% for physical traits, and 57% for social traits (Terman & Oden, 1959). Intellectual traits, especially "general intelligence" and "desire to know" were rated highest. Among the emotional traits, "sense of humor" was the highest rated category. Of the four moral traits, "conscientiousness" and "truthfulness" were rated highest. Within social traits, "leadership" was rated much above the mean. Mechanical ingenuity was the only category teachers rated gifted children below the control group. Further tests demonstrated, however, that the teacher's rating of the gifted students' mechanical ingenuity was not congruent with actual ability.

These character traits and exceptionalities are important to note because gifted children continued to demonstrate the traits as gifted adults (Friedman & Martin, 2012). Terman's second field follow-up collected data from 1940. Conclusions were reached in the following areas: near mid-life the group showed normal or below-normal incidence of personality maladjustment, insanity, delinquency, alcoholism, and homosexuality; children that were accelerated did better school work, continued their education, and were more successful in later careers; the intellectual status was far above the average level of ability of graduates from superior colleges and universities; the gifted group rated well above the average of college graduates in vocational achievement; the vocational success was greatly influenced by motivational factors and personality adjustment; incidence of marriage and marital adjustment was equal or superior; and offspring followed Galton's Law (Terman & Oden, 1959).

Terman's study was unique in the fact that it spanned 35 years, collected data on subjects from childhood through mid-life, and recorded the intellectual development, educational, vocational, and marital history, as well as physical and mental health data. Other information on personality, interest, and attitudes, as well as case history including parents, siblings, and offspring was collected. The conclusion was made that the superior child becomes the able adult, superior in nearly every aspect, though the degree of superiority varies in the different areas (Terman & Oden, 1959).

Intellectual ability, scholastic accomplishment, and vocational achievements yielded the greatest superiority. Physically, gifted men and women were above average as seen in mortality and health. In the areas of personal adjustment and emotional stability, the gifted group did not differ greatly from the generality. Alcoholism and homosexuality

was below the population average, and delinquency rate was a small fraction of the general population. Correlations between intelligence and size, strength, physical well-being, or emotional stability were positive if any. Further data indicated that the gifted individuals actually increased in intellectual stature as measured by the Concept Mastery test that was given (Terman & Oden, 1959).

Success is relative based on society and personal philosophy. The Terman study asked the respondents to define what constitutes success in life. The five most frequently mentioned definitions were: realization of goals, vocational satisfaction, and a sense of achievement; a happy marriage and home life, and bringing up a family satisfactorily; adequate income for comfortable living; contributing to knowledge or welfare of mankind; helping others, leaving the world a better place; peace of mind, well-adjusted personality, adaptability, and emotional maturity (Terman & Oden, 1959).

The gifted individuals had not received recognition for all of their achievements at the time of initial conclusions. However, some estimates were made regarding potential achievement. It was later found that many of the estimates were quite conservative. The number of listings in American Men of Science had quadrupled. The list in Who's Who in America had increased by six times. By 1955 several dozen had become national figures and nearly a dozen international figures (Terman & Oden, 1959).

High IQ was a factor for selecting the Terman group. The high achieving children were also initially identified "gifted" by their teachers. Teachers' expectations lead them to identify "gifted" children as those that are pleasant, well-behaved, conforming, and high achieving. Still, it was found that the most productive adults had been rated higher

in self-confidence, leadership, sensitivity to approval, perseverance, desire to excel, and force of character (Terman & Oden, 1959).

Even after Terman's death, the study lived on. Nearly 200 Termites still complete periodic questionnaires to their health and activities and return them to Stanford's psychology department (Friedman & Martin, 2012). University of California, Riverside researchers Friedman and Martin (2012) have continued Terman's work by re-examining and refining data from Terman's study. The researchers began their study in 1991 with the intent to spend six months examining the predictors of health and longevity among the Terman participants (Friedman & Martin, 2012).

Over two decades later, and funded in part by the National Institute on Aging, the pair "came to a new understanding about happiness and health" (Friedman & Martin, 2012, para. 9). One of their "most amazing findings was that personality characteristics and social relations from childhood can predict one's risk of dying decades later" (Friedman & Martin, 2012, para. 4). Terman's work continues on, many years past his own mortality, giving us an amazing view of the lives and accomplishments of his original subjects.

These stories are a few of the examples of snapshots that have been captured in the albums of specialists in the field of gifted education. We can find a few references to some of the pioneering specialists of gifted education, but even reading through all their works and biographical sketches, we are left with questions about their lives and possible further similarities of experience and purpose. We are left to wonder if Roeper, Hollingworth, or Terman recognized their own giftedness, apparent to us through their lasting contributions to the field. With the exception of Roeper, who wrote extensively

about how her personal experiences affected her philosophy, there is little documentation from Hollingworth and Terman to show what events or experiences in their lives guided their view of education and particularly of gifted students.

Reading through their stories convinced me that there was much to look at in the lived experiences of those who have made their life work in the pursuit of helping gifted students. The inferred challenges and inspirational moments piqued my interest and caused me to want to explore in a more in-depth way how childhood, career and personal experiences influenced the professional and personal lives of specialists in this field.

Characteristics of adult giftedness. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010) designates gifted individuals as those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in the top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (p. 1)

However, the term *gifted individuals* seems to apply to children more than adults, for a variety of reasons. Jacobsen (1999) pointed out that there are at least 20 million Americans who should be classified as gifted adults, compared to 3 million children. Therefore, she claimed that gifted adults are the most under-identified group of potential achievers in our society. It is important to give voice to gifted adults in order to develop understanding of the multi-faceted nature of being gifted (Johnston, 2011).

Kuipers (2010) suggested that many adults are unaware of their own measurable giftedness due to lack of formal identification in school when they were children.

Whether formally identified, which traits are common among gifted and eminent men and women? Would these traits be visible among specialists in the field of gifted education, such as those in the past snapshots and those captured in the contemporary snapshots of this study?

Walberg (1982) reviewed the traits that were common to eminent men in a variety of backgrounds born between the 14th and 20th centuries. These traits included: versatility, concentration, perseverance, superior communication skills, at least moderately high intelligence, ethical, sensitive, optimistic, and magnetic and popular. Walberg identified traits that differ for various groups. For example, Walberg found Ben Franklin and other statesmen were persuasive, popular, and economic minded, while Martin Luther and other religious leaders were scholarly, ethical, and sensitive.

Cox (1926) also selected eminent persons and looked at their biographical and personal records to reach conclusions regarding their intelligence and traits. She concluded that those that achieve eminence were likely to be born of intelligent parents and raised with advantages, showed precocious childhood traits, and were persistently motivated and demonstrated effort, confidence, and strength of character.

Goertzel and Goertzel (1962) found that two family characteristics were present in those children with talent. The parents were highly energetic and goal-directed and the families displayed an intense and intrinsic love for learning and achievement not attached to materialistic goals.

Roeper (2007) reminded us that everything is relative and experiences come from within the “I” of the beholder. She was cognizant that “there is an astonishing difference between my grandparents at 70 and my generation,” recognizing that giftedness in adults

is increasingly being recognized (Roeper, 2007, p. 117). Likewise, Kottmeyer's (2007) experience as gifted adult led to the following realization:

Giftedness is not something that people "outgrow" however paradoxical its nature may seem. Regardless of which path dominates the life journey of a gifted adult at any given time, considering giftedness across the lifespan can help provide great understanding of being gifted at various ages and stages of life. (p. 129)

In other words, traits and exceptionalities of gifted individuals are evidenced throughout their lives.

Denko (1977) recognized that the background of an individual and the prevailing attitudes and lifestyles of the contemporary time affect the results of a study. Denko also uses the term "hyperstimuloreceptivity" to explain a quality unique to highly intelligent people. This quality is beyond curiosity. Gifted individuals have more than an innate interest to learn or investigate. Rather, this 2% of the population is driven with even more intensity to be aware of and seek information in the environment. Denko found the term "highly intelligent" to be limiting to those she studied. Instead, she coined the term "ainigmasophiac" to describe those with the mental ability to do puzzles.

Denko (1977) chose those with membership in Mensa as her participants for her study on gifted adults. Mensa serves as a forum for like-minded intelligent individuals to interact with one another. Members of the local Columbus and Cleveland, Ohio groups returned the first questionnaire. This included 38 men and 17 women from Columbus and 63 men and 41 women from Cleveland. Questionnaires were used to gather data related to lifestyle, marriage and family matters, and social and political attitudes. Subjects were asked if they felt their intelligence put them at an advantage or disadvantage. Answers

ranged from participants feeling that their intelligence was a strong advantage to those that felt it had a negative effect on opportunities. Some pointed out that intelligence does not equate competence. Some felt frustration over working for employers with a lesser intelligence. Still others felt that their intelligence was appreciated in the workplace. Another question asked members of Mensa if they told others about their membership. Again, answers varied based on the individual personalities of members.

The next topic Denko (1977) studied leisure activities of gifted adults. She found that verbal activities were a top priority of both groups. This could also reflect the fact that participants in the study were members of Mensa, which is organized as an intellectual forum. Music ranked second with the men and women. Sports were generally mentioned among men and indoor games such as chess and bridge were listed. The participants listed sensual experiences as another category, which included sex, art, and cuisine.

Participants were also asked which works in world literature meant the most to them. A generalization was made that members of Mensa had a preference for reading as a leisure-time activity. Those who had very extensive reading experiences found it more difficult to pinpoint peak influences (Denko, 1977). Similar to the literature question, respondents gave names of particular television shows. Though some were against television watching, most viewed it as an outlet for relaxation. Women seemed inclined toward realistic emotional drama, while the men favored intellectual games, detective shows, and futuristic options (Denko, 1977). Another area explored was that of personal ambitions. Some women expressed that family obligations prevented them from achieving their goals.

Overall, Denko (1977) noted at the time of the study many people were unaware of their intellect. However, it is important to note that Denko collected data from a selective subgroup of gifted adults—those with Mensa membership. Arguably, those without Mensa membership or those with lower intelligence may or may not share similar answers. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize these results to all gifted adults or only a subgroup of gifted adults and, furthermore, one cannot determine if these findings differ from the average person. Regardless, the answers are reflective of the experiences of the individuals, though it is not a representation of all gifted individuals.

Adding to the lack of recognition of gifted adults is the often unrecognized challenges they may face. Coleman and Cross (2001) posited that the gifted are handicapped because they deviate extremely from the mean on standardized measures of intelligence and achievement. Whether it is a handicap or it enables a person is a matter of personal opinion. Persons that fall outside the bell curve for intelligence may find that their intelligence causes them to develop unique coping strategies (Denko, 1977).

Gifted individuals are identified often by their advanced abilities and the rate at which they absorb knowledge and seek more. Being gifted is not just one characteristic of such people. Prober (2008) described it as a whole-person phenomenon. It affects the cognitive, academic, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Prober (2008) further identified six specific areas in which gifted adults experience issues. These include: painful schooling experiences, high levels of sensitivity and intensity, existential depression and advanced empathy, perfectionism, multipotentiality, and difficulties in relationships.

L. S. Hollingworth (1936) found that only the highly intelligent were able to do some kinds of work. Advancement of knowledge, therefore, is dependent on those in the top one percent of intellect. Conservation of knowledge depends on those with an IQ between 130 and 160. Advancement of knowledge is dependent on those with an IQ above 160 (L. S. Hollingworth, 1936).

Siekanska and Sekowski (2006) researched job satisfaction among gifted people. The research showed that there were significant differences in vigorousness and activity among gifted adults and the control group. The authors recognized the temperament of gifted people as unique and impactful on functioning. The authors identify gifted pupils as having strong nervous systems as well as the behaviors related to those traits. These include: the ability to work intensely and to focus on a given problem for a longer time, quick-working style, higher general activity, ability to overcome difficulties, resistance to stress, higher energy and eagerness to work.

The most important factors in achieving satisfaction in a job is that the work must be related to one's interests, it must give a sense of liberty and independence, and it must provide an opportunity to display one's own inventiveness (Siekanska & Sekowski, 2006). These factors also reflect those things deemed as important for gifted children as learners.

Life satisfaction in gifted adults. Life satisfaction among gifted adults was explored in a separate study. In an effort to examine the relationship of spirituality to work and family roles and life satisfaction among gifted adults, researchers employed qualitative and quantitative research methods (Perrone, Webb, Wright, Jackson, & Ksiazak, 2006). The areas studied were that of life satisfaction, spiritual well-being,

marital satisfaction, parental satisfaction, work satisfaction, and open-ended questions about personal spiritual beliefs and practices. Many implications resulted for counseling gifted adults. Spirituality can have a significant impact on life roles and life satisfaction (Perrone, et. al., 2006). A multi-disciplinary mental health approach should be used to counsel this group. Spiritual well-being was found to be positively related to life satisfaction. Gifted individuals often contemplate existential issues. The researchers found in this study that mental health counselors should work with clients to stimulate personal meaning or purpose for life.

Self-perception of gifts and talents among adults were examined in a longitudinal study of academically talented high-school graduates (Perrone, Perrone, Ksiazak, Wright, & Jackson 2007). Participants were asked a series of questions as follows:

1. How do you define “giftedness”?
2. . . . Did you believe that you were gifted and/or talented when you were in high school? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Do you believe that you are gifted and/or talented now? If so, how? If not, why not? How has your giftedness changed or stayed the same since high school?
4. Are your talents mainly focused in one or two specific areas, or are you multitalented? Please list areas in which you have talents or feel especially competent.
5. How did being labeled as gifted in high school affect your identity, goals, and need to achieve both then and now?

6. How has others' perception of you as gifted or talented impacted your self-perceptions of your giftedness? (Perrone et al., 2007, p. 261)

Gender differences in perceptions related to these questions were examined. Job competence, nurturance, athletic competence, and morality were areas in which significant differences were noted. One possible reason suggested by Perrone et al. (2007) is the imposter phenomenon identified by Clance and Imes (1978). This phenomenon has been studied among talented females. Despite strong evidence otherwise, the women felt that they were not intelligent and that their accomplishments were due purely to luck or erroneous evaluations by others. The women held this belief and a fear that others would discover one was an "imposter" and didn't deserve her successes.

Another study attempted to predict the educational attainment, occupational achievement, intellectual skill, and personal adjustment among gifted men and women (Tomlinson-Keasey & Little, 1990). The researchers believed that the cognitive potential of many gifted children goes unfulfilled. Again, differences based on gender appeared in this study.

The implications of research. Vaillant (1993) explained that understanding adult development allows us to trace how the capacity for a widening social radius in adulthood intimacy opens one to career identity and then a capacity to generate ideas. The Eriksonian model provides insights for understanding adolescence and adulthood (Erikson, 1959).

Multifaceted aspects of intensity identified in Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration manifest throughout one's life (as cited in Piechowski, 1979). Some gifted

adults experience life in a higher key (Piechowski, 2002). Daniels and Peichowski's (2009) interpretation of Dabrowski's theory helps in describing the progression from lower to higher levels of development:

In this type of growth, striving to actualize what is higher and better in themselves, people may encounter experiences that are quite troubling, disorienting, and unsettling, if not outright frightening. (p. 25)

Gifted individuals encounter mixed blessings of extraordinary potential at each life stage.

The advantages and challenges of intensity are manifested through the lifespan of gifted adults (Streznewski, 1999; Fiedler, 2009). Adult development seems to follow a somewhat predictable path, yet is experienced quite differently based on the individual. Fiedler (2012) posited that issues related to giftedness transcend the ages and stages of life and permeate the experiences of being gifted across the lifespan. Fiedler further explained how the life stages described by Erikson may be expanded to include the unique experiences of gifted adults well beyond the ages that Erikson designated.

Identity formation is particularly unique for gifted individuals. As Piechowski (2002) noted, the gifted experience life differently. Some of their needs include challenges and newness and opportunities to share their ideas and explore new avenues in their work (Streznewski, 1999). Gifted individuals of any age defy concise classification and expectations (Fiedler, 2009).

Jacobsen (1999) described gifted individuals as having three traits: intensity, complexity, and drive. These traits make the gifted adult different from other individuals. Jacobsen wrote, "Controversies over opportunities are debated because some refuse to acknowledge that for the gifted, giftedness is the core of their identity, the axis around

which well-being, achievement, career, and relationships must be built” (p.167). It is important to realize our own reality is not necessarily typical of others. These varying realities create differences in development (Fiedler, 2009).

Some traits associated with gifted individuals include: energy, curiosity, speed, concentration, sensitivity, sophistication of thinking, persistence, and humor (Jacobsen, 1999). A healthy level of stimulation for an average person may be well beyond the damage point for gifted individuals (Streznewski, 1999). When stimulation falls below that level, the individual may be described as bored, restless, distracted, or annoyed. As Maslow (1970) described, capacities are needs. Psychologists Gowan and Bruch (1971) explained the gifted have farther to go to fulfill self-actualized needs: “Their own longer deeper search for meaningfulness is the extra mile the gifted have to travel” (p. 36).

Attention should be paid to trying to teach people who are highly intelligent how to cope with their lives (Streznewski, 1999). Knowledge of how and why gifted individuals function as they do may lead to greater utilization of their gifts. Streznewski concluded that the gifted can be grouped into three categories: strivers, superstars, and independents.

Strivers work tremendously hard at their jobs, meet requirements, like structure and direction, and have high accomplishments. Superstars are those found at or near the top in any field they enter. Concern for social relationships makes them popular with peers. Independents have locus of control from deep in their inner value system and may be creative intellectuals. All of these inherent differences may affect the way these individuals experience life.

During Erikson's life stage of generativity versus stagnation, Fiedler (2009) has suggested that gifted adults have specific implications for development because of their intensity and because they typically move toward generativity at much earlier ages than the general population. Intensity creates a great internal pressure to change things for the better and to have a meaningful and positive impact on the world. A sense of urgency may be exacerbated by intensity in gifted adults.

Many gifted individuals continue to work tirelessly and are lifelong learners and seekers of truth (Fiedler, 2009). For this reason, Fiedler asserts that Erikson's (1959) theory does not seem to ring quite true for gifted adults in their later years. Continuous disintegration and re-integration may cause gifted adults to repeatedly revisit the Erikson's stages. The ageist idea of slowing down and enjoying later years may be out of sync with the nature of intense gifted adults. Streznewski (1999) stated,

The high-powered brain/mind that drives a gifted person's life does not switch to low gear simply because the body ages or some chronological milestone has been reached. The persistence of curiosity, the need for stimulation, and the drive to do things does not fade. (Streznewski, 1999, p.236)

Thus, it ought to be recognized that gifted adults may experience developmental stages differently than the typical consideration.

Because of her awareness of the unique ways in which gifted individuals form their identity, Annemarie Roeper (2007) and her husband founded The Roeper School based on a nontraditional model with the goal of education to honor the Self by providing opportunities for self-actualization and interdependence. Her term *beyond old age*

describes uncharted territory in the life of a gifted adult. Roeper (2007) explained that every Self has an inner agenda that drives him or her:

Gifted elders have to keep their minds trained carefully and keep on using them.

In fact, I think that the preservation of the mind has an additional task: it serves to maintain the Self and its independence. Keeping a sharp mind becomes a way of preserving one's freedom and control. Just as I consciously watch every step I take so that I won't fall, I watch every thought I think so that I can keep control.

But the need for control is also a form of mistrust. There is a point at we must give up that control, and the only people to whom we can trustingly give it up are those who love us unconditionally. (p. 121)

Roeper (2007) further explained that the essential goal is to understand the Self as an autonomous decision-maker. To the end of her life, Annemarie Roeper believed that keeping a sharp mind preserved one's freedom and control.

There is much to be learned about gifted individuals regarding their development. Age and time propels individuals through a unique path. The differences along this path differ for the gifted adult. Individual characteristics and intensities in this unique population create variances. I believe there is much more to be discovered about the life paths of gifted individuals as a special population.

Methodology Review

Research should be focused on discovery, insight and understanding matched with one's worldview, personality and skills (Merriam, 2009). An interpretative or constructivist perspective allowed the researcher to describe, understand and interpret multiple realities while the data remains context-bound. The three qualitative

approaches—narrative, case study, and phenomenology—all employ similar processes. Where they differ is in what the researcher is trying to accomplish.

Qualitative research focuses on gathering an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons for such behavior. It is exploratory and inductive. The way participants derive meaning from their surroundings and how this meaning influences behavior is central to a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007).

Narrative and case study research are similar when the sample is a single individual. Phenomenology works well with a group that has a shared experience. The research methods vary for each in the goal to answer the research questions that are posed.

Narrative. Narrative is best used when the purpose of the study is to collect interview data, to analyze and understand the stories lived and told, and to chronologically order the meaning of those experiences. In narrative, the focus is on the stories told by the individual and the emphasis is the arrangement of events in chronological order by the researcher. Narrative research is interpreted through the lens of the researcher. Narrative researchers seek to describe events retrospectively in collaboration with the participant (Freeman, 2007). The account is construed from two points of view in this case—the researcher and the participant.

Extensive information about the participant needs to be collected. The goal of the researcher is to have a clear understanding of the context of the individual's life.

Limitations. The researcher needs to be reflective about personal and political background influences, which shape how the story is recounted. The interpretation

through the narrative researcher's perspective and prior experience alters the participant's actual experience, or account of the experience.

Other issues include who owns the story, who can tell it, who can change it, and what version is convincing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). One particular element of narrative study which creates a challenge is the role of the researcher to find "interactivity" and connectedness between those being researched while transferring the experiences of the individuals to the reader through the story (Stake, 2005). A limitation occurs as data is lost in the interpretation depending on the researcher's priorities.

Participants should be actively involved in the research. The researcher collects stories, negotiates relationships, smooths transitions, and provides ways to be useful (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is likely both the researcher and the respondents change in the encounter (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). In this way, the two negotiate the meaning of the stories. Epiphanies or turning points may change the direction of the story line.

Stories will be situated within the research participant's personal experiences, his or her culture, and the historical context. Restorying is the process of reorganizing the stories into a general framework. This may include key elements or a chronological sequence (Creswell, 2007). During this phase, the researcher provides a causal link among the ideas. The data analysis may be a description of both the story and themes that emerge.

The study tells the story of the individual in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). However, narrative analyses are

interpreted by the researcher, which can inflict bias, assumptions or other effects on the results.

Case study. In a case study, the individual is selected to illustrate the issue and the researcher organizes the description as the setting for the case. Contextual conditions are very important in a case study (Yin, 2009).

The researcher must identify his or her case. There are many possible candidates so choosing a particular case worthy of study is important. Multiple cases allows for depth and richness. The researcher needs to set boundaries to create clean beginning and ending points.

Purposeful sampling should be used in case study approaches. A purposeful sample is one that illustrates characteristics of the particular group being studied. This ensures that information-rich cases are selected for in depth study. The size and specific cases are dependent on the study purpose (Yin, 2009). Cases should be selected to show different perspectives on the issues experienced by a narrow population. The data collection should be extensive and draw on multiple sources of information. Yin (2003) recommends: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant – observations, and physical artifacts. Using purposeful sampling, cases will be selected to show different perspectives. Ordinary, accessible or unusual cases should also be included in order to show depth and breadth of the sampling (Creswell, 2007).

Thick description involves explaining not just the behavior, but its context as well (Geertz, 1973). Geertz (1973) explained that actions are attached to the situation. In this type of description, the researcher acknowledges that the behavior has meaning gives a broader, or thicker, description of the context so it may be understood by an outsider.

Holistic or embedded analysis may be used. A detailed description of the case should include the history of the case or chronology of events. A few key issues then become the focus. An analysis of themes is used to understand the complexity of the case. If multiple cases are chosen, within-case analysis is the typical format used to describe the case. A cross-case analysis and interpretations are made thematically.

In the interpretative phase, the meaning of the case will be reported. This constitutes the “lesson learned” from the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If the meaning comes from learning about the issue of the case it is instrumental and if it is learning about an unusual situation it is intrinsic.

Limitations. Careful use of context without further interpretation is important. The choice of cases analyzed automatically precludes other cases from being studied which can limit or skew results. Erickson (1986) argued that since the general lies in the particular what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations. The reader, then, rather than the researcher, determines what can apply to his or her context. Stake (2005) explained how this knowledge transfer works: case researchers “will, like others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationships—and fail to pass along others. They know that the reader, too, will add and subtract, invent and shape—reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it . . . more likely to be personally useful” (p. 455).

Rich, thick description, while extremely useful, may require too much time or money for individual researchers to pursue. Assuming time is available, the product may be too lengthy, too detailed or too involved for the reader to assimilate. The burden

becomes that of the researcher to determine how much information is overwhelming or not necessary for the reader to be given (Stake, 2005).

Transcendental phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced first-hand. This approach studies the structure of experiences ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, volition, to action (Moustakas, 1994).

Heidegger (1962) believed that people and their actions are always “in the world” (p. 61). The activities and the meaning things have are interpreted by looking at the context of our activities within our world.

Husserl (1931), on the other hand, believed in bracketing an experience. His concern was not how the object was meant or intended, but rather to one’s experience, particularly in the content or meaning in that experience.

A strict interpretation of Husserl’s approach is plain description. *Lebenswelt* is the term used to describe the everyday world in which we live with a taken-for-granted attitude. According to this approach, we experience our own reality as only natural (Husserl, 1931).

Transcendental phenomenology is a means of creating insight into the individual and his or her idiosyncrasies (Husserl, 1931). VanManen (1990) asserted that phenomenological reflection is not introspection, but rather retrospective and reflective.

Reflection on lived experiences is recollective; it is a reflection on the experience already passed or lived through. Frankl (1988) further described this as an attempt to describe the way in which one interprets existence.

The researcher does not interpret. The focus should be on the participants' experiences and meaning making. The meaning making occurs between the intersection of the physical world in which the experience transpires and the mental and emotional world of the participant.

Husserl (1931) described *noesis* as the mind and spirit, which aids in providing meaning to perception, memory, judgment, thinking, and feeling. These are the meanings concealed from direct awareness. *Noema* is the real, physical object of awareness that can be described with examination. However, each successive examination is embellished within our minds. *Noesis* is what we must attempt to document in phenomenological research (Husserl, 1931). The transformation which takes place during examination is part of a cyclical, recursive circle in the noetic phases which results in deeper, three-dimensional images of a phenomenon which results in the essence of the experience.

Interpretive moments are combined together in the long view event horizons. Event horizons lead up to who we are as individuals but come together with an impact on society (Gadamer, 1977). Compared to the experience of play, when one plays a game, he or she is not controlling the game. The game transcends the player. Gadamer (1975) explained that truth is revealed and unfolded in our everyday lives and cannot be controlled.

Limitations. Limitations and pitfalls appear quite obvious in this approach. One limitation could be the researcher's misuse or over-interpretation of the memories and stories provided by the specialists in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Another may be the difficulty in remaining objective and true to the memories of each individual specialist

and not using one's personal memories to add to or embellish their feelings, motivations or meanings (Husserl, 1931).

Discussion of approaches. Transcendental phenomenology was the best method for my study because I wanted to honor the respondents and learn from them, not interpret them. Careful use of this method was able to provide a clear comparison between the specialists' stories and memories without subjecting their histories to speculation and injection of my own experiences. With so many options for research methods available, I was in quest of choosing which method would best lend itself to answering my research questions. The questions I devised therefore determined the choice of methodology used.

Narrative and case study are holistically interpretive in their approach and therefore were not appropriate for the intent of this study. For example, narrative methodology focuses on not what happened so much as what meaning did people make of what happened as interpreted by the researcher (Pinnegar, et. al, 2006). Likewise case studies may be descriptive or explanatory and the latter is used to explore causation in order to find underlying principles (Yin, 2009).

On the other hand, transcendental phenomenology is utilized to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It aspires to access the personal, the individual, the variations within themes. Phenomenology is an attempt to describe the way in which man understands himself. Emphasis is placed on the study of a conscious experience through the participants' recollection and is not interpreted by the researcher (Frankl, 1988).

The result of each approach in written form takes shape from the varied data collected in each method. In narrative research an account of the individual's life is told. The chronology of narrative research, with an emphasis on sequence, sets narrative apart from other approaches (Cortazzi, 1993). A case study provides detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships (Yin, 1984). Interviews offering recollections of lived experiences provide the data necessary to phenomenology.

Also important to consider was the unit of analysis. Narratives are best for studying one or more individuals while case studies are used for studying an event, a program, an activity, or more than one individual (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology is used for studying several individuals that have shared the phenomenon or had similar experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This method provided the best avenue for me to share the life stories of my subjects.

Each approach also follows slightly varied structures for the study. Narrative begins with an introduction, including the problem and questions (Cortazzi, 1993). Research procedures contain a narrative, significance of the individual, data collection, and analysis outcomes. A report of stories follows along with individuals theorizing about their lives. Narrative segments and patterns of meaning are identified. Events, processes, epiphanies, and themes are included and then a summary is created (Pinnegar, et. al, 2006).

Case studies typically begin with an entry vignette then the introduction including the problem, questions, case study, data collection, analysis, and outcomes. A description of the case or cases and the context follows. Development of issues and details about

selected issues are included. Assertions are made and then a closing vignette is created (Yin, 2009).

In phenomenology, the introduction includes the problem and questions. Research procedures entail phenomenology and philosophical assumptions, data collection, analysis, and outcomes. Significant statements are highlighted and meanings and themes that emerge are noted, creating an exhaustive description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter Three

Research Methods: Detail of Specialists in the Field of Gifted Education

There has been a smattering of research in many different areas regarding the adult life of the former gifted child. The qualitative findings suggest many more opportunities and directions for research. There are inherent biases in any study, including biases of those being researched as well as those of the researcher him or herself. Looking at research is somewhat like reading a book. The information yields new insights each time it is read. One filters the information through his or her own experiences. What remains, however, is the fact that many specialists in the field of gifted have a history waiting to be told, documented, and studied.

Many individuals may be unaware of their unique intelligence for varying reasons. One reason may be that personal experience limits a person's awareness of being different. Another reason may be limited identification of giftedness as a child. Still another may be that intelligence is still not readily lauded as a gift or talent like athletic ability. Denko (1977) was astonished that though one may have pursued goals with unique intensity, they may not be sensitive to this understanding until it is pointed out. This would be interesting to study in a group that works closely with gifted individuals. Self-perceptions of gifts and talents would be significant.

Schultz and Delisle (2007) wrote their book *More Than a Test Score* to give a voice to gifted children to speak about their experiences as a gifted child. As mentioned in their text, "when gifted kids grow up they become . . . gifted adults" (Schultz & Delisle, 2007, p. 134). Therefore, it would seem fitting to give specialists in the field of gifted the opportunity to continue to speak about their experiences.

This study looked at the lives of five specialists in the field of gifted education (Table 1). Each of these individuals contributed greatly to current research, practices and understanding of giftedness. Many of them continue to counsel, write, collaborate, and present on varying topics in the field of gifted education. The stories of their lives as told through their interviews follow. Included here are their current professional biographical sketches to help introduce them and their work. The sketches refer to these specialists by first name in order to communicate the familiar and personal nature of the sketches.

Table 1

Participating Specialists

Specialist	Birthdate
Dr. George Betts	April 17, 1944
Dr. Jim Delisle	June 23, 1953
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	November 27, 1940
Dr. Rick Olenchak	September 3, 1960
Dr. Phil Perrone	August 11, 1936

Participants

George T. Betts, Ph.D., is a Professor of Special Education in the School of Education of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado. George’s undergraduate degree is from Phillips University from which he graduated in 1966 with a degree in history and education. He earned his Master of Arts in Psychology, Counseling and Guidance from the University of Northern Colorado in 1969. His doctoral degree, granted by Northern Colorado in 1972, is in the same subject areas as his master’s degree.

Throughout his professional career, George has specialized in methods and curriculum for the gifted and talented, program development for the gifted and talented, the autonomous learner model for the gifted and talented. Additionally, counseling the gifted and talented and emotional and social needs of the gifted are among the topics that have served as research interests and specializations.

Special projects that George has been involved with include the Development of the Center for the Education and Study of the Gifted, Talented and Creative; a Bilingual Gifted Educational Program that he created with Patty Rendon at the Region One Educational Service Center in Laredo and McAllen, Texas; and the Brentwood Middle School Gifted and Talented Program that he created with Susan MacKenzie in Greeley, Colorado.

George has been the recipient of many awards in the field of gifted education. A selection of some special ones would include being honored by the M. Lucile Harrison Award for Professional Excellence at the University of Northern Colorado; being selected as one of the 50 most influential leaders in the history of gifted by the National Association for Gifted Children in Washington DC; serving as keynote speaker for the German Conference on the Gifted in Munich, Germany; being a featured speaker at the World Gifted and Talented Conference in Barcelona Spain; and being named as a Professional Achievement Mentor by the National Association for Gifted Children.

James (Jim) R. Delisle, Ph.D. has taught gifted children and those who work on their behalf for more than 35 years. Jim received a B.S. in Elementary and Special Education, mental retardation, from the University of Maine at Farmington in 1975, graduating Summa Cum Laude. His Master's degree in Special Education, emotional

disturbances, was granted by Millersville University in 1976. He received his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, gifted education, from the University of Connecticut in 1981.

Jim's classroom teaching experiences includes three years teaching elementary, grades kindergarten through sixth, special education in Gorham, New Hampshire; two years as gifted and talented teacher, grades four and five, in Stafford Springs, Connecticut; one year as a 4th grade teacher in Solon, Ohio; 10 years as a part-time gifted teacher, grades six and eight, in Twinsburg, Ohio; and two semesters volunteering as a teacher in grades 2, 4, 5 and 8 in Loris, South Carolina.

Jim did most of his teaching while employed as Professor of Special Education at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, a position which he held from 1983-2008. He was chosen by students and faculty to receive the Distinguished Teaching Award, Kent State's most prestigious honor, in 2006. He retired at the rank of Full Professor in 2008.

Continuing with his interest in and life-long devotion to gifted education, Jim currently works with highly gifted 9th grade students at the Scholars' Academy in Conway, South Carolina. He continues to give presentations and write articles and books.

The author of more than 250 articles and 18 books, Jim's work has been translated into multiple languages and has been featured in both professional journals and in popular media, such as *The New York Times*, and on *Oprah*. A frequent presenter throughout the US, Jim has also addressed audiences in nations as diverse as England, Greece, China, Oman, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

Ellen D. Fiedler, Ph.D., Professor Emerita of Gifted Education from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, has a broad-based background in gifted education. In addition to serving two years as Gifted Services Coordinator for one of the

regional Educational Service Centers in Illinois, two years as Consultant for an Area Service Center for Gifted in the greater metropolitan Chicago area, and five years as a Gifted Program Coordinator for a K-12 school district in central Wisconsin, she was State Consultant for Gifted in North Dakota.

Ellen has provided consultation services and done presentations for school districts and other educational agencies in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Russia, has more than four dozen articles and three book chapters in print, and is a regular presenter at state, national, and international conferences, including the World Conferences on the Gifted in The Hague (Netherlands), Toronto, Seattle, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Barcelona and Adelaide, Australia.

Ellen completed her Ph.D. in Counseling and Guidance at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she studied with Dr. Phil Perrone, as well as being his Research Assistant at the Guidance Institute for Talented Students.

Ellen served a two year term as co-chair of the Global Awareness Division of the National Association for Gifted Children, as well as previously serving for two years as chair of the Counseling and Guidance Division. She has served on the Board of Directors of the National Association for the Fostering of Intelligence as well as having been president of the Northwestern University chapter of Phi Delta Kappa. Ellen is a former president of the Michigan Association for Gifted Children and is currently newsletter editor for the Global Awareness Network of the National Association for Gifted Children.

F. Richard (Rick) Olenchak, Ph.D. is a professor, psychologist, and Director of the Urban Talent Research Institute at the University of Houston in Texas, where he has

been since 1998. He graduated cum laude from the University of Michigan and completed advanced work in Educational Leadership at Eastern Michigan University and in Educational Psychology at Arizona State University. He earned his Ph.D. in Gifted Education and Educational Psychology from the University of Connecticut. For 11 years prior to going to Houston, he was Director of Teacher Education and Chair of Special Education at the University of Alabama.

Rick was elected President of the National Association for Gifted Children in 2003 and served in that role until 2006. He is a former member of the board of SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) and former-president of the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students (AEGUS).

Rick has authored or co-authored more than 100 research articles and has presented his work internationally, including keynote addresses in Canada and Mexico and at several large state associations for the gifted and talented. He is the author of a number of book chapters, as well as the book *They Say My Kid's Gifted, Now What?*, now in its third edition. He continues to study gifted students with learning and/or emotional difficulties, methods for enhancing creative productivity in students, and ways to overcome underachievement among otherwise able youth.

Rick's other experience includes work as K-12 director of gifted education in two school districts and director of a federal grant in gifted education. He has taught and been a principal at both elementary and middle school levels. In addition to full-time faculty appointments at Houston and Alabama, he served as invited faculty at the University of North Carolina, University of Connecticut, University of Colorado, Utah State

University, Wake Forest University, Rice University, and the College of William and Mary.

Phil Perrone, Ph.D. graduated from State University of New York College at Cortland in 1958. He earned his Masters of Science at Syracuse in 1959 and his Ph.D. in 1962.

Phil taught as a junior high math teacher for one year in Syracuse public schools. He then served as a Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison from 1962-1998. During his 36 years at the University of Wisconsin, Phil was a department chair on two separate occasions, from 1972 to 1975 and from 1985 to 1987. Phil was also the Director for the Guidance Institute of Gifted and Talented (GIFTS) from 1982-1988. He was awarded the University Outstanding Teaching award in 1990.

Phil has published 13 books and monographs and has written 100 research articles. He chaired the doctoral committees of 84 students and chaired around 200 master's students.

Methodological Framework

Transcendental phenomenology was chosen for this research study in order to describe the lived experiences specialists in the field of gifted education. Guided by Moustakas's (1994) approach, fewer interpretations of the researcher and more descriptions of the experiences of participants were used. Epoche (or bracketing) was used to set aside the researchers experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination.

Where my approach differs from that of Moustakas (1994) is in my attempt to become a "transcendental onlooker" (Husserl, 1931). This requires more than setting

aside self, but rather witnessing from within the research attitude (Husserl, 1931). Setting aside, *what is* allowed me to experience the *how* of my study.

Data collection procedures. Semi-structured and multi-step interviews were used. Participants received interview questions to consider prior to the interviews (Polkinghorne, 1989). I asked the participants to clarify or elaborate information as needed for meaning to be clear. One in-depth interview took place. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Follow-up interviews took place as needed. This multi-step interview process allowed for clarification and elaboration. Interview types included face-to-face, email correspondence and phone interviews.

Email allowed respondents more time to reflect on the questions and their answers. However, some editing did take place on the side of the respondent. Time constraints also limited the ability of the individual to articulate or elaborate on questions in writing. The clarity of the connection was important.

Participant identification. Specialists in the field of gifted education were chosen for this study. Interviews were conducted over the phone, via email, or in person over multiple dates (see Table 2). Data was collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of living as a specialist on giftedness. As recommended by Polkinghorne (1989), the researcher interviewed six individuals who have all experienced this phenomenon. The researcher contacted individuals in the field of giftedness who were willing to participate in this study. By choosing six individuals, the researcher had enough data from which to glean information and cross-compare the answers of respondents. Due to a family emergency, one participant was no longer able to continue. Thus, attrition during the study resulted in five interviews that are usable and complete.

Table 2

Dates and Types of Specialists' Interviews

Specialist	Interview	Email
Dr. George Betts	05/07/2012	05/08/2012
		05/17/2012
		05/24/2012
		11/09/2012
		11/12/2012
		11/15/2012
		06/29/2013
Dr. Jim Delisle	05/02/2012	05/02/2012
	05/29/2012	05/23/2012
		06/29/2013
		07/01/2013
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	05/10/2012	05/11/2012
	05/28/2012	05/12/2012
		05/18/2012
		05/19/2012
		05/23/2012
		05/30/2012
		03/14/2013
		03/15/2013
	06/29/2013	
Dr. Rick Olenchak	06/04/2012	06/05/2012
		06/29/2012
		06/29/2013
		08/21/2013
		08/22/2013
Dr. Phil Perrone	05/04/2012	05/07/2012
	05/10/2012	05/09/2012
		05/11/2012
		05/23/2012
		05/27/2012
		06/29/2013
		07/02/2013
	07/10/2013	

Evidence of the participants' specialty in the field includes journal publications, conference presentations, rank at universities, and longevity in the field. An artifact analysis was done to identify a list of potential specialists to participate in the study.

Additionally, participants were asked to identify those specialists they would add to this list. Comparisons and contrasts were made with the researcher's list generated through the artifact analysis. A colleague cross-check helped triangulate the participants identified as specialists.

Triangulation and verification. Specialists were given a list of the interview questions, interviewed, reviewed transcripts, answered follow up interview questions and I asked participants to clarify any information in the transcribed interviews. Longitudinal data collection and continual communication with participants allowed for increased information and recalled stories to be reviewed and revised. With their consent, identification of each researcher allows a better understanding to readers of the results.

Method

While it is clearly possible to tweak the research process and approach, the type of problem in this research proposal was best suited for phenomenology. Little research has focused on the lives of specialist in the field of gifted. The phenomenon of living as a specialist in the field of gifted has inherent problems and advantages. It was my intent with this qualitative research study to describe the essence of this lived phenomenon.

I chose a phenomenological approach because of the type of research questions I posed. I was interested in discovering how specialists of giftedness describe their lives looking back over their experiences associated with giftedness. Were there personal lived experiences these adults share? What experiences did they describe as unique to

giftedness and what contexts or situations influenced or affected them? These questions were best answered through a transcendental phenomenological approach, which allowed me to make meaning out of the essence of being a specialist in the field of gifted. This difference was a dividing line in my research and my reason for using phenomenology. I wanted the story to be told by the specialists themselves.

Chapter 4

Findings: Phenomenological Snapshots

Following are snapshots of the five specialists that provided insight into their lives from childhood through adulthood. The transcendental phenomenological approach serves as a frame for the life stories of each specialist. Their stories encompass their lives both personally and professionally. The integrity of their stories was preserved through direct quotes from each of the specialists. As their stories developed, I divided them into five themes: Development, Exposure, Focus, Depth, and Clarity.

The Development section of each snapshot includes stories about the support or setting in which these specialists experienced in their early years. Some specialists shared details about family and members who were gifted and the opportunities for enrichment they may have had. Some of their reflections include a retrospective understanding of their own gifts and their own, sometimes, gifted identification.

The Exposure section reveals the path to the field of gifted education. For some this includes various jobs and mentors critical to their choices. Some of the specialists describe their experiences with teaching gifted children, coordinating, and or supervising others.

Throughout the Focus section, the specialists articulate their definitions of giftedness and stories regarding their role as a specialist. Some share the presentations and publishing that were most significant to them during their career. Experiences mentoring others and their own passion for the field of gifted education are explored.

The Depth section includes further recognition of their own gifts. Some of the specialists share stories highlighting their intensities and energy. Some recognize their

own emotional needs and asynchronous development. The depth of their own multipotentiality is addressed in some of the stories.

Finally, in the Clarity section, ongoing involvement in the field and current endeavors are shared in many of the stories. Another theme emerged throughout the data collection and primary analysis process at different times for each of the participants. This is the theme of Contrast. A defining moment may be seen in each of the stories as the participants reflect on their varied, yet similar paths as specialists in the field of gifted education. Each story expresses the voice of these specialists in the snapshots generated as I turned the lens to focus on their lives.

Snapshot of George Betts

Photography records the gamut of feelings written on the human face, the beauty of the earth and skies that man has inherited, and the wealth and confusion man has created. It is a major force in explaining man to man. (Edward Steichen, 1961/1996, p. 505)

Development. Born and raised in North Denver, George attended elementary, Jr. High, and high school all in the same town. George, “had a very good childhood,” and remembered being told by his dad at the age of five that he was going to go to college (personal communication, May 18, 2012). At age 10, he figured out that meant “there was no choice” (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

George’s parents graduated from high school, “but they did not have [much in the way of] opportunities, so they wanted me to have” them (personal communication, May 18, 2012). His parents were blue collar workers. His father was a truck driver who

“hauling sand and gravel” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). His mother was a public school lunchroom manager. About his socioeconomic background, he stated:

[My parents] were very much the middle class, but they were very, very stable, and they were able to get through the depression. My dad was fortunate because during the war, he hauled coal, and this was one of those jobs that was protected because of the need of society. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

As a boy, George attended church and went to a church camp in the summer. On top of a mountain in Buena, Colorado, George first learned about belonging and in having lifetime friends. This feeling was one that started to shape his philosophy about gifted children (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Exposure. George taught middle school government and history for two years and then went back to university and got a master’s and a doctorate, both in counseling and psychology. After that, he was hired at a high school in Arvada, Colorado, where he coordinated two programs: one was a senior seminar to allow children to leave school during the day to do life experiences before graduation and the other was to work with disenchanting children who were dropping out of school.

In the program for disenchanting children, he found many were very gifted but were failed by the school. The philosophy in his program was different from other programs at the time. He believed that it was not the children who were failing, but it was the schools that were failing the children instead. He was there for six years and developed, with his colleague, the first high school program for gifted and talented children in the state of Colorado:

Most people [working in gifted education] start out with the [students who are] teacher pleasers, and we focused on those that were not successful [in school]. And, as time went on, we brought in the successful [students] also and then moved towards the problem learner. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

This passion drives his philosophy. George stated is belief that “the non-cognitive comes before the cognitive” which has caused him to worry about the “total child,” and focus on the social-emotional characteristics before dealing with their academic abilities (personal communication, May 18, 2012). He noted that many gifted programs are academically based and rely on the old clichés such as “oh, well, they (the gifted) will take care of themselves” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Programs that have gifted students “eat lunch together twice a week” are, in George’s opinion, not sufficient in their abilities to provide the “understanding of self and opportunities and skills” that gifted children need to feel that they belong (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

George became the Founder and Director for the Center of Education and Study of the Gifted, Talented and Creative Learner at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) which is the Summer Enrichment Program for the Gifted and Talented at UNC. He described welcoming a new group of gifted children each year:

I love seeing the kids with their suitcases, the ones that have been there before are reaching out and hugging each other and the ones that are new are scared to death. Counselors are at the door [and they] say, “Hello, let me help you find your room, and I will help your parents with your bags.” It is that kind of environment. It is a nourishing environment that resonates throughout the entire program. I stand on this little hill . . . outside of the door, and I watch as 250 parents bring their kids

and all the suitcases and all the grandmas and everybody, and they come and they all get in and the next morning I get to greet them and welcome them. We talk about the summer program as a smorgasbord and that we have prepared everything we possibly could have. Some people devour, some people nibble, and all of a sudden the kids begin to bring things to the table that are not from us but from them. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

With growing excitement, George shared what he said in that welcome speech and what begins to happen to the children at the camp:

While you are at the summer enrichment program, you will go through a process that makes you different inside, and we call it the glow. It means that you have been touched in such a way that will impact you for the rest of your life. You know what is possible in life. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

According to George, by the time they leave, the children have a glow, and they know they have just experienced “one of the foundations of their life” (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Many of the children attend the program for six years, then the leadership program for two years, and then they become counselors, so it is possible to be involved for 10-12 years. “One seventh grade girl went up to her mom and kissed her, and said, ‘Mom, I have the glow.’ And, her mom thought she was ill or something” (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

George knew the key to a successful camp experience was based on his own experience as a camper when he was a child:

The most important thing I believe that you can do for gifted kids is to put them with other gifted kids, and that is something that sticks with them for a lifetime, where they are accepted, nurtured and have the chance to be with others who are like themselves. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George has provided the stage for over 14,000 children to glow during his summer enrichment camps. His focus has been on providing the setting to nourish the whole child through a non-cognitive approach.

Besides the summer enrichment program, George and his wife have held a summer conference for teachers and families for 25 years:

I would say that I have that social and emotional belief in children and adults. I don't have a career, I don't have a job, I have a quest—and the quest is to facilitate the world and the people that become a part of my world. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Focus. George pursues his quest with understanding that mentoring, collegiality, and relationships have all been important:

I have six major mentors and they are the first graduating class [I worked with at the high school in Colorado.] I was influenced by these six kids and still keep in contact with them. They are in their 40s now and the thing that I did was listen to them. We would keep saying to them: “okay, what else do we need, what directions?” And they did not want another honors class or a [gifted identification], they didn't want to be told what to do or how to learn. They wanted the opportunities to be autonomous. We listened to them, they were truly my mentors and they taught me. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George explained that the autonomous learner model was not developed by his colleague and himself; it was developed by the children and by two adults that listened to those children. He reported that he believes this is one of the differences between this and other models. His model is based on what the children understand. Most models come from the university and then go to the school but “the autonomous learner model started at the school and then went to the university” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Speaking of the influential people in his life, he stated:

There are so many people in the field. I admire their work, but they are colleagues not mentors. The kids were. During my doctoral program, my major advisors were mentors to me, and I was really fortunate because the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers was very current. I learned about unconditional, positive regards, and I learned about the fully functioning self, and that was all a foundation for me. But, when it comes down to the people I admire most in gifted education, it would be six kids. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George has certainly spent his career in gifted education being focused on the child. When asked about current trends in education he responds with a bit of disdain toward the educational establishments’ need to constantly have new trends or labels:

One of the things that bothers me [is the topic of] 21st century skills. Yuck!! It’s 21st century person, it’s 21st century learner, it’s not [about] what the child can do, it’s what the child is and yes we can develop what they do, but they start out with this potential. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George noted that the most important thing in working with a gifted child is the need for empathy to be able to “understand the gifted child”:

It is easy to see kids that are performing, and it is very difficult to see those that show potential but for one reason or not have not been successful. I feel that giftedness is something that comes from within and we have to look for it.

(personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Besides empathy, George communicated that he believes acceptance and nurturing are important, even though “some of the kids are not easy to work with, and they are challenging” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Affective training is important for teachers and for all who might be considered experts in the field:

It’s not enough to have a master’s or a doctorate in gifted education, unless there is a strong counseling component. Social-emotional is half of the pie. The background in counseling and psychology, affective education, social/emotional is totally [necessary]. I think an expert is someone who goes into the unknown and is not going to just accept what has already happened, but [will find] new journeys and new paths and new contents in gifted education. The Autonomous Learner Model took me beyond some of my colleagues because it was new and was a risk and it was not seen as something that we needed at that time. And then [another thing I think] is essential of leaders are the opportunities for collaboration. It is those kinds of circumstances that motivated me, that showed me that there was no right path to find something new. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Depth. Self-described, George is “really not totally a theorist, I would say about 40% theorist, 60% practitioner” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). As both theorist and practitioner, George’s definition of Gifted has evolved:

When I first started consulting, people knew I was uncomfortable, so when I would ask for any questions, they would say: “well are you gifted?” And I would get embarrassed, I would look down at my shoes and I would say, “well, I don’t know, I am very creative.” I didn’t understand at that point that creativity is a major factor in giftedness. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George also described himself as an extrovert and is inspired by and energized by contacts he makes in all areas of his life:

I welcome people into my world, my psychosocial skills are very, very positive. It is rare, rare, rare that I don’t truly accept the person from the time I meet them. When I looked back at my yearbook in high school, people would say you will become a wonderful counselor and you are such a good listener. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

In addition to an extrovert, George sees himself as a holistic thinker:

I am able to put things together and come up with ideas. I am not intellectually gifted, nor do I want to be. I want things that are meaningful to me and are important to the quest. I am not well rounded intellectually or in that top one percent. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

However, George cautioned against labeling others and described how the labels we place on gifted individuals appear to him:

I have to chuckle that now we have the almost gifted, the gifted, the gifted and talented, the gifted, talented and creative, the highly gifted, the extremely highly gifted and I am waiting to see the terminally gifted. . . . [People seem mostly concerned with] intelligence. Intelligence is one component of my life, but it is

what I do with that intelligence [that matters.] From my point of view, giftedness is not an ability, it is a lifestyle and it is something you discover and then with the right environment you live it. A gifted individual uses the giftedness not only for professional, but for life experiences. In one of my writings [directed at gifted individuals, I say that] there is always another mountain and another challenge and another day. Giftedness is something that goes back to Maslow and actualizing and becoming what you are capable of becoming. Do you ever get there? No. But do you strive for it? Yes. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

These examples all contribute to the way George defines giftedness. He referenced Sir Ken Robinson's idea of the element:

When ability and passion come together, you have the element, and he talks about the whole idea that giftedness comes from within, and that is what I believe. I don't believe giftedness is something you do. I believe it is something you are that you develop. Whether you become eminent or not doesn't matter. It's what you do with your gift. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Other definitions in the field support this as well:

I love the work and the definition of the Columbus group and Annemarie Roeper. One of the things I am doing in my research right now is looking at how we can define giftedness through curriculum and potential. How do we develop the type of curriculum that will allow the kids to find their passion and to find their giftedness? Mine is a broad definition but it starts with who the child is. We are dealing with definitions right now and it is just going to be very, very interesting. I believe in gifted children and I believe in gifted education and I don't want to

see us become the National Association of Talent Development. Talent is part of it, but there is a deeper part with passion and motivation and that to me is something that in the long run might be a good thing. NAGC is a reflection of who we are and I have been on the board for 24 years of NAGC. It will be interesting to see what happens now with all of the definitions that are coming up. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Based on all of these ideas, on the topic of self-identification, George concluded:

I am listed academically gifted, but in true psychosocial and creativity I was extremely high. I was one of those kids that was very challenging, didn't get good grades, but I knew there was something very special that I had that hopefully I would get a chance to develop as an adult. I started to see that the giftedness is more than the intellectually achieving child, and I didn't have a plan to go into gifted education and there was very little that existed at that time. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

It is clear that for George the issue of labeling or identification is complicated by the limits of those labels when compared to the complexity of the individual.

Just as George claimed gifted children need to be with others like themselves, he found comrades like himself in the field:

Another thing I'm good at is seeking other people that are like me in the field, I tend to really be attracted to those that are in affective education. I know there is a place for it, and we [already] have advanced placement [classes]. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George also has what he calls mini passions, which are part of the stimulation and growth in his life. For example, he described the Iditarod race in Alaska:

This year they had seven or eight different web sites, I was on their Skype and I spent 40-50 hours learning about the Iditarod. Am I going to go up there and run dogs? No, but I appreciate the training and the entire environment and what happens between the dog and the musher. I will go off and have these mini passions like the Iditarod. I see how it relates to giftedness. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Despite having mini-passions, George explained why the idea of a bucket list of passions to fulfill before death does not apply to him. “I don’t have a bucket list, I have a river. I don’t know where the next turn is going to be. I never prepare. If it opens up to me I will do it” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). For example, George and his wife came up with the idea that when each of their three granddaughters turned eight, they would take them to Paris. He believed they should experience another country and language:

It’s not on anybody’s list, but it just evolved, and we can see what it would do for an eight year old and she planned the whole trip. We never did climb the Eiffel Tower because we went to a museum. She knew Monet and saw the gardens and the last day we had to go to two additional museums to see additional Monets. That came through the child. If we had said ‘you have to study Monet’ it wouldn’t happen, but there was something about the colors, the texture and his home that opened things up for her. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George reflected on his impact on the field of gifted education:

[My publications] are all climbing the same mountain and they all have a different piece on a different part of the path and they are all part of the total, the whole. I never look at something whether it is good or not. What is important is that I have expressed it and now people are looking at it. I am not really hard on myself, so I don't get bogged down into whether I didn't like this or feel guilty because I left this or that out. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Clarity. Another facet of George's work in gifted education is the raising of his son and daughter. His son is gifted in many different ways and George remembers his emotional astuteness when he was just five years old. His teacher at the time said "you just meet him and fall in love" and intended to name her first son after him. He is 33 now and George receives the same type of comments from children, parents, and the administrators where he is a physical education and journalism teacher. Just recently his son has allowed George to come and speak at his school. "He didn't want his dad to have anything to do with his school the first three years," but now they all know about independent and autonomous learning and he has been doing what we call mini courses for middle school children for development of your own passion (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Like his son, his daughter is extremely gifted in many different areas, and she has what is called

. . . multi-potentiality, so she can go in many different directions and has done that. Her husband is in the Air Force so they move every three years or so. In preparing to move to Orland, [California] she spent spring break there and within three days had made 15 to 20 friends through different organizations, asking

people for directions to schools and such. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Reflecting on the humble perspective his children and grandchildren give him, George discussed the names and titles he and his wife have. George's wife, Donnie, is called Grammy by the family and George's name from his three granddaughters is Silly Dapa. He remarked, "They really don't care if I have a doctorate or not; it is what we are able to share" (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Giftedness can be seen as the pursuit of one's quest. Part of George's giftedness is that he has always had an open mindset. "I can trace that back to having it in elementary school but it wasn't until college and beyond that it was really accepted" (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

George shared how his wife explained gifted children: "The most important thing when you are raising or teaching a gifted child is to get out of their way" (personal communication, May 18, 2012). He further clarified,

If you are a baseball player, don't try to make your child into a baseball player. Open them up to sports, to music, to literature, to Monet. Adults try to get them to do what they were the best at or what they believe they should. With both of our kids, they found passions early because we did not prescribe passions. Get them with other kids like themselves. They play differently, they think differently, there is more time involved and they need to see that there are others like them who will accept them. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George was a Professor of Gifted Education in the School of Special Education and is now finishing a two year transitional retirement from the University of Northern

Colorado where he will be a Professor Emeritus. George stated his belief that “the world is open to those who give, and I am a giver, and the world opens up to me. Most of the time I am in the right place at the right time” (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Snapshot of Jim Delisle

Every man’s work, whether it be literature, or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself. (Samuel Butler, 1903/2004, pp. 91-92)

Development. Jim Delisle did not set out to be a gifted educator. He and his brother were the first of their family to attend college. Neither of his parents even finished high school, although his mother eventually earned her GED. In spite of their own lack of education, Jim’s parents prized learning and that was his impetus to go to college. Always at the top of his class and considered a smart student, Jim attended Catholic schools where there was no identification of or program for gifted students. While his parents encouraged their sons to get good educations, there was no pressure to be anything in particular but instead they were reassured to “do whatever you are happy doing” (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Finishing his undergraduate degree in education, Jim did not yet feel confident enough to step into a classroom so he went to a different university and completed a master’s program before accepting his first teaching job. For three years Jim taught special education in a small town in New Hampshire helping elementary children who had learning disabilities or emotional handicaps. During that time Jim worked with one particular student that he felt he could never reach. For a time he gave up on him,

allowing him to sleep in the classroom. This student came to school one day reeking of skunk.

The reason he got sprayed was that he was in his backyard checking on the maple trees he had tapped to get their sap. Turns out he was a young entrepreneur who started his own in-house maple sugar business, tapping trees in both his and his neighbors' yards, collecting the sap and boiling it down to syrup, and then selling it door-to-door. His skunk spraying happened one morning when he was checking on how much sap he had collected the evening before. (personal communication, July 2, 2013)

The boy's encounter with a skunk led Jim to toss out his planned curriculum one day and

start over, telling the student "let's make this your curriculum" and it made a huge difference. "So . . . his curriculum was changed to make his maple sugaring business the focus. The skunk was just the conduit I needed to tap into (excuse the pun) Matt's interests" (personal communication, July 2, 2013).

Discovering that the boy was "smarter than I had given him credit for" and that he "was a lot more capable of doing things" Jim eventually left his teaching position because of this boy: figuring that if there was one student like this in northern New Hampshire, then "there were probably a lot more other kids like that" in need of help and he wanted to know how to go about doing that (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

The University of Connecticut and a PhD in gifted education were Jim's next destinations as well as teaching gifted students in the public schools during that time. The

New Hampshire student and his difficulties remained in Jim's mind and caused a particular emphasis of his career to become apparent early on.

Even when I got into gifted in the first place, it was not with the usual high achieving kids I was interested in. I was interested in the kids that were smart but for whatever reasons, did not show it, and that has been the focus of my career since then. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Upon completion of his doctorate, Jim spent several years teaching at the college level in Connecticut, then took a position with Kent State University School of Education and began a career that has involved him in a wide variety of experiences. Teaching, working with public school gifted programs, research opportunities, speaking engagements and writing of books were all part of Jim's efforts to try to assist gifted students and those working with them to understand who and what the gifted are.

Exposure. Jim's educational experiences provided him with a number of different mentors. Some were in person and many were from the history of gifted education as he read and studied the words of some of the classic texts in the field. Leta Stetter Hollingworth, John Gowan, T. Ernest Newland as well as Virgil Ward and Annemarie Roeper provided Jim with many ideas and frameworks concerning educating and counseling gifted students. His work with Joseph Renzulli at the University of Connecticut helped him discover that his view of giftedness was very different from that of his advisor and assisted him in creating his own theories and style of writing in spite of his desire to be "a good little grad student" and write and do presentations of his advisor's creating. But Joe did introduce him to many "historical" figures in the field from which Jim took much knowledge and many theoretical ideas (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

As he was beginning work on his doctoral degree Jim had a rare opportunity to talk at the Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, which began an association that lasted over two decades. Renzulli was scheduled to participate on a panel but had a conflict and sent his second-year doctoral student in his place. Scared stiff, Jim participated in a panel discussion that lasted several hours and he managed to acquit himself well. George and Annemarie Roeper were in the audience and following the presentation they asked him to work with their school. “Kind of odd how it began,” Jim said, but relished his connection with the school and the relationship with the Roepers that lasted until each of their deaths (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Focus. From Jim’s vast array of experiences has come his definition of and understanding of gifted children. Knowing that the field is currently embroiled in the ever-changing definition of the term, Jim nevertheless asserted that there are certain qualities possessed by gifted individuals:

[I relate to the definitions] that “asynchronous development” focus on or at least allude to, the over-excitability, which I have come to call intensities. Whether it’s an intellectual intensity, an emotional intensity or a variety of other kinds, these are just part of who you are [as gifted person.] It is not like a toggle switch you can switch back and forth and many of the definitions of gifted seem to imply that you are gifted at some times, under some circumstances, under some conditions . . . and I think that is just a bunch of hoey. It is something that is part of you.

(personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Referencing an article of his, Jim goes on to explain:

If someone has a learning disability they are not only learning disabled sometimes, it is part of who they are. If you are blind or have some kind of sensory disorder, you don't just have that occasionally, so I don't see how giftedness can be an occasional thing. As I like to say, it is who you are, not what you do. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Asynchronous development is a term that resonates well with Jim and the Columbus Group definition based on asynchronous development is, in his view, the description that “just says it all” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). He continued:

Maybe I like it so much because it sounds like me, sounds like the kid I was, sounds like the person I am. I think in a field as fluid as ours with definitions, you probably buy into a definition that you think sounds like that. So yeah, I would fit that definition. It's kind of awkward to say it, but I fit the definition. But if you gave me other definitions of giftedness that some people have, I might not fit those. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

While Jim no longer is working full time with children, he does still make it a practice to meet with and spend time with gifted children as part of his in-service or workshop presentations when he is consulting. He tries to “marry” theoretical research and practicality in his consultation work:

When teachers come for professional development, they don't want theory, they want [answers to the question] “what do I do with these kids I've got?” It has got to be based on something solid, not just [imposing] theories. There is a time and place for that, but not in front of teachers who want more practical strategies. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Understanding what makes a child gifted is, in Jim's opinion, just a small part of what makes someone an expert in the field:

First and foremost they have to have worked and/or lived with gifted kids or adults. I don't think anyone is an expert if all they do is write about people they have heard about, and I do think this is one case if you don't have the practical classroom experience and do approach this only as a researcher, it might make you someone who can do research well, but I don't qualify that person as an expert on gifted. And I do think the time spent with kids can't be just a one shot deal, it has to be over an extended period of time to get the full flavor of how diverse this population of kids is. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Finding it awkward to be asked if he considers himself such an expert, Jim explained:

I think if my definition of an expert is somebody who not only talks the talk, but walks the walk and goes out and tries to put into practice what they say should be done, then yes, I would say I am considered an expert. I have been doing this for thirty-something years. I think anyone, whether it's a plumber or a runner or whoever [has] done it for that long and you have stayed with it, obviously you've got something going. So, I would say that expertise level is there. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Jim extrapolates further on the asynchronous development idea in discussing his work as an expert in the field.

I think it brings a different voice in every person who speaks on this topic, or any other one. It brings their own unique voice to it, but I think it's a voice that

teachers and parents haven't heard a lot from the school district people. To most school district people, maybe this is just the reality of it all: giftedness is much more number focused, grade focused, achievement focused and I think a lot of parents think, well this is what giftedness means. When I talk to parents I bring in this asynchronous area, this intensities piece. I have had people come up to me sharing "no one ever explained it like this." It says to me that this conception of giftedness is very rich and different from the achievement oriented definitions that are more common in public schools. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Depth. Asked what he has learned about giftedness that has helped him personally, Jim once again noted that:

It is the pervasive nature of the giftedness to your personality, it is not something that you switch on and off, just a part of who you are. You either get used to it or you get over it because it doesn't go away even if you would like it to. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

He also posited that learning to be a "big fan of having gifted kids be with other gifted kids, not just for academics, but...to see there are others out there like themselves" was an important point for him to learn:

I think as an adult I find the same thing. It is the need, not the want, but the need to be with other people who are intellectually excitable. There are times that you really need to be with other people who get it the way you do. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

And, Jim stated his belief that:

The biggest benefit schools can give [to gifted kids] is to put them together with other kids who are identified as gifted, and not just for academics, but with clubs and activities that seem to attract high ability kids. They just need that communion that they often don't get in an intellectual sense in any other venues. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Jim considers options to be one of the biggest benefits of being gifted.

You have more options than a lot of other people . . . career options . . . but even vocations. If you really think you are going to like something and you want to explore it, it gives you the wherewithal to do it, the giftedness itself allows you entrance, if you will, into a lot of realms that other people might avoid. The world is a smorgasbord and you can take as much as you want from any table you want. That is the biggest benefit I think from having these heightened intensities and abilities. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Limitations or challenges faced by those who are gifted are, to Jim, usually the myths perpetuated by others:

People say, "You can get by on your own. You don't need anything special in school. You are a smart kid, you will make it." I think all of those are detrimental. I like to use the phrase "a minority of," [meaning] that if you are a really smart kid and in a classroom where you are the *only* smart kid, who do you talk to? Who do you joke with? Who do you have a conversation with? I think some of the challenges [of being gifted] are sometimes internal: perfectionism, the feeling that you always need to be on top of your game . . . and society at large and the expectations that they often place which . . . are quite unrealistic. I also don't think

giftedness is understood to a great degree by the general public. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Clarity. Commenting on what he considers a time in his own career that was most mentally stimulating, Jim recalled his last few years at Kent State when he had the opportunity to work not only with masters and doctoral students in gifted education courses, but also with undergrad honors college students who wanted to become teachers.

That was the same time that I was teaching one day a week in middle school [gifted program.] I would marry the two together. My college class was held in my school building and each of the college students was required to volunteer at least ½ day a week in that school district. Marrying the college teaching experience with middle school experience and having the undergrads see me teach and I see them teach, that was probably the most exciting time. Working with really active young minds who were still so optimistic about their professional futures . . . seeing them at the beginning stages, scared as hell . . . and within weeks [seeing] them feeling like confident educators . . . that had room to grow. That, to me, was the epitome of what college teaching should be. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Jim considered his “Gifted Survival Guide” as his greatest impact on the field. Co-written with Judy Galbraith, the original guide has sold over 300,000 copies and has been a huge seller since it first was published. His college text on “Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth” was what got Jim’s name really known and “got folks to recognize my area of expertise within the field” (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

His most disappointing publications were several books that he felt were not marketed well and one that he co-authored with a colleague who had little access to the internet during their writing time thus resulting in a book that Jim feels has a lot of “you should do this” with very little “how to” ideas. He noted that the book has won awards and wonders if it isn’t just a personal preference that it turned out to be something so different from what he originally had in mind that causes him to dislike it.

Jim’s take on the future of gifted education is probably a predictable one for someone who has spent his career concerned with social/emotional aspects of giftedness. He claimed:

I think the talent development push is a dangerous way for us to go. I do think it’s a rift that has always been there in our field, but it’s the first time that our national organization has said “we don’t talk about gifted kids anymore, we talk about talented ones.” In my point of view this is a major, seismic shift that a lot of people in our field are not comfortable with. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Having met his wife through her connections to gifted and watched her career progress through teacher of gifted children, principal, curriculum director, superintendent, state superintendent and now serving as Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the national level, the Delisles both have many reasons to observe and participate in the on-going process of defining gifted education at the national level. Chances are that they will continue to be involved in the process, helping students and parents as best they can, for a time yet to come.

Snapshot of Ellen Fiedler

A picture is a secret about a secret, the more it tells you the less you know. (Diane Arbus, 1971, p. 65)

Development. Ellen's development into a gifted specialist involved an interesting coming-of-age process and a late-in-life realization of her own giftedness. She stated:

I never would have realized that [I was gifted], but now I do realize I am a gifted individual. And I always have been and nobody ever explained that to me. Except, they used to say wonderful things to me when I was in elementary school, like, "You are so smart, how come you don't get straight A's [or] complete all your work on time," etcetera, etcetera. And I really felt at that time it was just a way to badger me.

Often the process of self-discovery begins with the question, "Who am I?"
(personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen recollected that she grew up surrounded by gifted people. She was the younger of two daughters who were raised in Chicago where her parents both worked as pediatricians. Her mother took off a few years to stay home with her children, but spent most of her life involved in her medical career.

If you stop and think about that, my mother was born in 1905 and my dad in 1899. And, so, if you think about a woman born in 1905, who became not only a doctor, but a pediatrician, and practiced medicine her whole life . . . she was heavily involved in medicine. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen's mother was head of pediatrics at Grant Hospital in Chicago and started the first premature birth station on Chicago's north side. Her father was head of pediatrics at Cook County Hospital and a pioneer in the field of lead poisoning.

Ellen's mother contracted pneumonia so moved to Palm Springs, California to recover in a warmer environment. Here she started a center to combat child abuse. She developed a team approach with a psychiatrist and psychiatric social worker who worked with her, the pediatrician, to treat the whole family to try to break the cycle of abuse. Ellen's father eventually decided to join his wife in California.

Late in her life, past the age of 90, Ellen's mother published three books, two of which were autobiographical and one of which was a volume of poetry. Ellen's maternal grandfather was a medical school chemistry professor who forced his daughter to choose between her two passions of dancing and medicine. Once her choice was made, he firmly supported and mentored her in the study of medicine helping her stand up to the idea that medicine was not at that time a career for "just a woman" (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

Ellen's paternal Uncle Harry "was notorious in the family in that he read and understood Shakespeare at the age of four. Eventually he went on to get a law degree and an M.D. degree" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Ellen noted, "[I] grew up in a family of gifted individuals and we were surrounded by people who are really, really bright, so I just felt like it was normal. That's the way everybody was..." (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

In retrospect, Ellen stated that she believes nearly everyone around her is gifted, including her relatives and those who became her closest friends. She claimed she "had

different kinds of relationships with different people that weren't necessarily on my wavelength intellectually but with whom I did other things" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Not recognizing their giftedness (or her own) at the time, she explained that she has "spent a lot of years trying to realize that not everyone is like me - i.e. trying to learn not to use myself as a yardstick to measure others by. I'm still working on that" (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

Ellen recalled "coming of age" around age nine. She attended an eight-week summer camp and discovered a mentor who was to have a long-reaching impact on her life. The woman who taught riding and ran the stables at the camp was

. . . highly gifted, had a degree in engineering from Smith College, and created a whole world for all who were interested in horses and [I] eventually became a part of the [club at the] stable in the Chicago area that she and her husband owned. She even taught classes on such topics as "the anatomy of the horse" and "the evolution of the horse", and we had long philosophical discussions with her on such topics as discussing what's "fair" in life. We were involved competitively in horse shows, and with her guidance we learned to self-assess our performance regardless of whether or not we won. When she was in a retirement home I still went back and visited her and I often described some of our conversations in my [gifted] teacher workshops, especially as related to internal motivation and how to handle competition. (personal communication, April 9, 2013)

Exposure. Ellen was able to have a relatively normal childhood and did not find that being smart interfered with her schooling or her social life. She recalled, "I was freshman homecoming queen and a high school cheerleader. I did stuff like that, doing

very well in lots of ways” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Ellen received praise for her academic achievement as a child.

However, variations in degrees of giftedness were apparent in Ellen’s family. Her sister’s birth was a forceps delivery, and as Ellen described, “...where the origin of the learning disabilities were” (personal communication, May 10, 2012):

My sister is LD [learning disabled] gifted and nobody knew anything about learning disabilities when she was a kid. They thought she was lazy and dumb, and she was a classic [case]. When I taught courses on the exceptional child, she just fit the description perfectly. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

This older sister, “had a devil of a time in school, and then along comes her younger sister who just breezes through everything with no problems” (personal communication, May 10, 2012):

I basically never really studied, other than cramming for exams at the last minute, usually the night before or writing papers just before they were due or sometimes afterwards, after begging for an extension. I just didn’t develop any study skills because things weren’t hard for me. However, I did study for my high school physics class because the “word” among my classmates was that the instructor didn’t believe that girls were capable of understanding physics. Another girl in my class and I challenged him by taking his class and proving that this wasn’t true. She also has a Ph.D. now – in engineering. Of course, I think I breezed through classes that were interesting for me, and I was interested in almost everything, except maybe history. In general, I had excellent teachers, and something like 80% of the [school’s] graduates went on to college. So, the

curriculum was mostly fairly high level even though I probably could have used even more of a challenge. However, I was involved in a bunch of extra-curricular activities and, of course, the usual angst of adolescence. Anyway, being “challenged” academically wasn’t a concern for me. I don’t think I was particularly aware that I had it easy. I felt like my real struggles were in the social realm, although I was actually one of the “popular” ones in my school. When I was a freshman I developed a strategy for becoming popular – simple stuff like giving frequent (but not too frequent) compliments to people and occasionally touching a person’s arm. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen reflected that her plan to become popular worked, but “wasn’t sure they would’ve liked [her] otherwise” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Again she commented on the difficulties her emotionality and tendency to measure herself against her peers brought to her life: “This is the dark side of extroversion” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). One story in particular highlighted this point:

[I remember] even being upset when my sister would get angry at our mother and yell at her. I was a little bitty kid when that was happening. I was probably pre-school age. Of course my sister, with her difficulties, had quite a temper and she had the tendency to shoot off her mouth. But I could see how much pain it was causing my mother. So, wanting to protect her, I swore I would never say anything in anger...*as a preschooler*. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

As an adult with many years of experience understanding gifted issues, Ellen was able to explain some of the emotional angst she felt as a child:

I now realize that, besides my emotional sensitivity, another factor may have been that I was significantly younger than most, if not all, of my classmates. I had been grade-accelerated in kindergarten because I could read and no one else in my neighborhood public school could. So, my end-of-November birthday probably made me the youngest in my class. That's what I tell myself about those times in 5th and 6th and maybe 7th grade when I was seen as a "cry-baby." I remember being teased for crying too easily – i.e., getting my feelings hurt and not being able to keep from having the tears come. This is still true for me. Even though I don't cry much now, I really have significant emotional pain if someone I really care about says or does something that hurts me and I agonize over it. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Surrounded by other gifted family members and friends, Ellen did not recall any explanations given or any particular insights into her sensitivities or emotional issues expressed by parents or teachers or other relatives.

I don't think my parents or my teachers were aware of this at all. I wasn't taught to handle it. In my adult years, I've worked on coping skills, including with a therapist. Strategies I've used include "reframing" various situations and other various cognitive, [rational emotive therapy] sorts of solutions, as well as using poetry as an outlet for my feelings with varying degrees of success. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen reported that dealing with anger is another part of her emotional sensitivity and is an area in which she has done some research and writing.

Depth. Ellen had two sons. Her first demonstrated his advanced abilities at an early age. One month past his fifth birthday, he was reading at the eighth grade, eighth month level.

They [school personnel] noticed he was reading so they asked permission to test him. And, they called me in, and didn't tell me what his IQ was other than it had gone off the charts, somewhere over 200. When they told me about his reading level, I said, "what are you going to do with him?" because as far as I was concerned, the purpose of the school was to teach him to read, and he could then learn whatever he wanted to learn. And, they said, "we don't know either."

(personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen described an instance that occurred when the family moved to Denver, Colorado and her son was in 2nd grade:

I had written "very precocious intellectually" on the back of his enrollment card. This was putting it mildly since his abilities put him into the 1:1,000,000 range with an IQ over 200 and measured as reading at the 8th grade, 8th month level . . . all of this one month after his 5th birthday.

It became obvious that the school had never read what I had written. Hindsight being 20/20, I now know I should've made an appointment with the principal and gently but firmly told them what my son's test results were, since it was going to take a while for his records to be transferred.

Unfortunately, they placed him with a 1st year teacher who had no clue about what to do with him. He came home from school shortly after the beginning of the school year and told me that he was being forced to do 2nd grade work which was

“dumb” and “too easy” and that he wasn’t going to do it. I misguidedly told him that, if he didn’t do 2nd grade work, they would think he couldn’t do it and give him 1st grade work. He tried for one day and then quite literally exploded. He acted out all over the place, including going on a sit-down strike, yelling at the music teacher, and spreading soapsuds all over the floor of the art room. Of course, I got a call from the principal, and when I went in for a meeting with him and the 2nd grade teacher, she proceeded to state that she didn’t know what to do with him, that he was smarter than she was. I was “just a mom” at that time and all I wanted was for them to respond appropriately to him, but I didn’t know what that might look like. So, other than meeting with them and perhaps saying something supportive and encouraging, I don’t think I really intervened. We moved away [to Fargo, North Dakota] shortly after, and that was that.

[In the next school] it was only about a month before the principal phoned me and asked me to come in and talk with him about my son. I said, “What has he done now?” He said, “Nothing, but I just got his records, and I see we have a real challenge on our hands.”

When I went in and met with him, he asked me what I thought they should do with him. I said, “I don’t know; you’re the educators. You’re supposed to know what to do.” He said, “We don’t know either.” By then, I had heard that there was an instructor at [a college nearby] who was an expert in gifted. I mentioned her to the principal who knew her and called her in to observe my son and advise us about how to provide for him. That was the beginning . . . not only of a whole string of interventions for him, individually, but also of my becoming involved

with a local parents' group for gifted children and eventually doing my Master's degree in Gifted Education, with this instructor as my mentor. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen also began volunteering in her son's classrooms and making herself a "presence" in the school. She felt it was the appropriate thing to do since the school was "going out of their way to provide unique approaches for [their] education" (personal communication, July 29, 2013):

All of this also taught me of the value of an extraordinary principal and I will always be grateful to him for all of the efforts that he made and for his being "real" with me and not trying to act like the "know-it-all" educator the way so many educational administrators do. Not every approach was totally successful, and some of them were "temporary fixes." However, I always felt as if I was a collaborator with the school, in particular with [the principal]—something I consider to be remarkable even though that should always be the case. [It made me feel] as if we were both striving for the best possible learning approaches for my child. (personal communication, July 29, 2013)

When her son was in 5th grade, Ellen dealt with a "major, major war" (personal communication, July 29, 2013). Her son had with his teacher over spelling because he refused to do the worksheets. In a meeting that included the coordinator of the gifted program, a psychologist, the Jr. High principal, and the teacher, Ellen advocated for her son, and the coordinator suggested that he not have to do work that repeated what he already knew. The result was an agreement that if he scored 90% on the end of year spelling test, he would not have to do daily worksheets. The committee agreed. Ellen

noted, “Back in those days that was kind of a revolutionary idea” (personal communication, July 29, 2013).

Following the meeting, Ellen told her son, “I am going to let your teacher tell you what the decision was and I am going to go back to being your mother instead of...” and, as she stumbled for the right words, her son interjected matter-of-factly, “instead of my lawyer” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). She realized that schools had a problem figuring out what was best for gifted children. Gifted abilities and school-related issues that also became apparent with her second child strengthened her resolve to delve further into the world of giftedness.

As a result of all that happened with her son’s challenges, things also began to change for the school district as a whole due in large part to Ellen’s advocacy and involvement in the parent group. These changes affected not only her son but all gifted students in the district. A federal grant was written and applied for and Ellen was asked to serve on a committee to interview candidates for the position of Director of Gifted Education in the district. She realized that this was the beginning of a life-long venture, both for her and for her children.

Focus. The experience with her son captured above in the depth section influenced the focus Ellen has taken since. She explained:

So there started this kind of journey of discovery. He was a pretty intense kid, [is] still fairly intense as an adult. He has had his struggles, to put it mildly, throughout his lifetime, and some of those we shared together with schools and educational situations and [figured out] how to make things work better for him. [Those issues] would eventually lead to my going back to school to do a master’s

degree in gifted education with certification to teach. I wasn't a teacher before that . . . I had no intention of going into education originally, but I could see that this was a real problem: what schools could do with kids like him and his younger brother, who they didn't know what to do with either. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

This problem, coupled with the volunteer work and advocacy she had been doing launched Ellen into the career that was to become her life-long work. She had worked in advertising and public relations, among other things. As in her previous experiences with family and close friends, she remembered being connected with other truly bright people.

I was definitely surrounded by others who were good at their jobs, especially at the [public relations] firm – brilliant, in fact! Journalism guys. I'd go to lunch with six to nine of them every workday, as well as spending time with them related to the accounts I was working on. We'd talk about "life, the universe, and everything" at lunch and sometimes at work, as well as talking about work stuff. It was great. A lot of smart people everywhere else I worked, too. I never felt isolated in the workplace, and because I had a particular niche in each of my jobs, I wasn't competing with anyone so I can't say that I ever particularly made comparisons.

I guess I excelled in [public relations] although I never particularly thought about it. I kept in touch with the [vice president] who was my immediate boss on several of the big accounts, and I'd occasionally get together with him and a couple of the other guys when I was back in Chicago. He remarked one day during one of those lunches, "We've never had anyone like you!" I decided to take that as a

compliment and didn't ask him what he meant by that. I know I did well, and I even got a nice raise in a fairly short amount of time. However, I wouldn't say I felt "smart" at work. Mostly I felt as if I should be paying them since I was learning so much on the job. I was pretty euphoric during that year. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

As Ellen made the transition from the corporate world into the world of education, she began to discover more things about herself. She began her degree work by taking independent study courses and discovered that it was great fun to be back in a learning environment. She felt like her "brain was lighting up again!" Taking the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) was a requirement to get into the Master's degree program at Moorhead State College in Minnesota, and when her verbal scores from the GRE came back in the 95th percentile she realized she, too, may have been different. "Oh my gosh, I really am smart!" she remembers thinking with amazement:

No matter what people had told me before, I think I sort of dismissed it. So, having an objective measure of my verbal ability [the GRE] was more believable. However, I had studied for it using one of those GRE study guides, so there was still a part of me that felt like I might not have done as well otherwise. And, of course, I never finished the math section of the study guide, so I could attribute my miserable score on the math part of the GRE to that and, by extrapolation, interpret my high verbal score to the fact that I had completed the study guide for that portion. There was still some doubt in my mind as to how smart I was in comparison with others. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Clarity. Ellen shared what she referred to as the “Twists and Turns” of life. Many of her discoveries and major changes in careers occurred due to unplanned happenings in her life. She quit a job that she loved in public relations to move with her first husband, and she moved for a second husband’s career needs to the areas where her son’s school difficulties led her to discover both the field of gifted education and a wonderful teacher and mentor.

When in her doctoral program, her personal life started to unravel. She sought counseling with the co-director of the counseling center at the university where she was both a doctoral candidate and a research assistant at the Guidance Institute for Talented Students. This person said something that resonates with her still, “You know, Ellen, while all the feminists there are talking about their lives, you just go out and live it” (personal communication, May 10, 2013). She likened that to living with giftedness:

And I think it’s the same with gifted education, it isn’t about talking about it, thinking about it in terms of being an expert; it’s just about doing what I can. I think that [goes] back to my childhood, that’s how I grew up. If there is something you can do to make a difference in the world, then it is your responsibility to do it, it is just up to you, it doesn’t have anything to do with awards or rewards or anything like that. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen was mentally stimulated and inspired in many of her educational work positions. One in particular was while she served as the district gifted coordinator in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, a position she held for five years. She was hired under a Federal grant and developed the first program that the school district ever continued to support with local funding once Federal funding ended. She continued with the program

for two more years but then the superintendent and the business manager were fired for mismanagement of funds and 39 teachers were laid off.

As they looked to eliminate another administrator to balance the number of teachers laid off, the gifted program was targeted. Ellen was told that her supervision was deemed no longer necessary because she had done such a good job of training the teachers, developing the curriculum, and developing the grouping patterns for students. During the ensuing months her contract was violated, her personal relationship with her partner was falling apart, her father had a heart attack, and she was diagnosed with cancer for which she underwent surgery. In what may be understatedly described as a turning point, Ellen made four lists on a plane ride returning from visiting her father for the last time.

The first list was all the things that had benefitted her from her time in the job. The second was all the possibilities for what she could do next in her life. As she continued to generate that particular list, she had to ask the flight attendant for more paper. The third list was where she wanted to be in 10 years: geographically, in terms of relationships, and in terms of career. She discovered that she wanted to live where palm trees grow, she wanted to be in a long-term committed relationship, and she wanted to teach at a university in a situation that would permit her to also do private consulting and work on her writing. The fourth list was all the things she would have to do to be in the places on the third list. In those pivotal moments of list making “something really terrible turned out to be a blessing in disguise” (E. Fiedler, personal communication May 10, 2012).

Ellen hired a lawyer to dispute the unfair contract breach, and the teachers, the

president of the teacher's union, administrators, and others contributed to her legal fees, but to no avail. She decided to abandon the case when she realized she couldn't save the program, that all that she would win was a classroom teaching position. She decided to pursue her doctorate. She received helpful advice as to where to pursue her PhD and found a place where she wouldn't become a clone of her adviser but could work to be the "best that Ellen Fiedler could be" (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

While Ellen's professional work has made her well-known in the field of gifted education, it is the personal stories of her own family and those of gifted children she has encountered in her work that heighten her awareness of her own giftedness.

After completing her doctorate, being hired and teaching for a number of years in a master's program in gifted education, Ellen became a full time faculty member at her university. She received a phone call from someone who had been referred to her by the state director of gifted education. The caller indicated that Ellen was denoted as the number one expert in gifted education in the state. After contemplating the statement in surprise, Ellen believed it might have been true.

Years later, at the state Gifted Conference, a former graduate student helped Ellen realize just how far her effect had been felt. With a sweeping gesture, she said, "Ellen, this is your body of work" (personal communication, May 10, 2013). Ellen realized a great many of the people attending and presenting had either been her graduate students or those who had been participants in the gifted institutes she taught for many years for public schools. She had been doing up to four gifted institutes a year, and 3,000-3,500 public school teachers had gone through those courses. Ellen recognized this as a touching reminder of some of the impact she had on the field.

Ellen's definition of giftedness evolved out of necessity. She was speaking to a group of parents of first grade children in a bilingual school and didn't want educational jargon to interfere with the translation, so she worked to combine definitions from the Columbus Group, Barbara Clark, and Gina Ginsberg-Riggs. A simple definition to answer the question, "What is Gifted?" resulted:

Children who are gifted are those who do things a little bit earlier, a little bit faster, a little bit better, and perhaps a little bit differently from most other children. *Some* gifted children do things a *lot* earlier, a *lot* faster, a *lot* better, or a *lot* differently from most other children! Others don't do any of that; however, they still show capabilities and/or insights that are far beyond those of others. Because of their advanced or accelerated development and because they have a high level of awareness and intensity and a greater depth of thinking and feeling, children who are gifted are particularly vulnerable and require modified services or activities not ordinarily provided to others. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen reflected on the benefits and detriments of living a life that is filled with intensity or experiencing things in a higher key, traits often associated with giftedness. She described in detail how she experiences the specifics of life in the moment we are doing the interview:

I am sitting here on top of this wonderful old sailboat looking through a crack in the door of the building, a rather wide crack because of moving boats in and out, and enjoying the intensity of the green leaves, but I am very aware of it. I am aware of the sunshine. It is an intensified awareness, and I am interested and

excited about lifelong learning. I am excited about learning and discussing things with people who are on my wavelength. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen is absorbed in the environment; the sights, the sounds, and the feel, while also experiencing intense thoughts regarding her past experiences working in gifted education and relishing connections to people who share her passions.

She also stated that she thinks being able to get through school without the difficulties some students face could be considered a benefit of being gifted. But then she recalled a memorable challenge in her own schooling. Able to breeze through classes successfully, studying wasn't something she ever needed to learn to do. An all-nighter to cram for exams usually yielded positive results. This changed when she was enrolled in an organic chemistry course in college. "Through the grace of a graduate assistant who dragged enough information into my brain, I was able to get a D" (E. Fiedler, personal communication, May 10, 2012). It was the only D she received in college and in retrospect she thought perhaps being able to get through school learning things rather quickly and easily became a real challenge when she was finally faced with something for which she had to "buckle down and study" (E. Fiedler, personal communication, May 10, 2012).

Possessing gifted traits of intensity and having such passion for gifted students and their needs can also be considered a "pretty serious limitation" that can make finding collaborators or people to share ideas with a real challenge for Ellen.

Other people just don't get it at all. I don't get it that they don't get it. Sometimes they are really intimidated being around someone who has this much energy and

this much passion and intensity . . . at times I feel isolated. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen recalled watching Mr. Rogers with her young children. She found understanding when he sang, “I like you as you are, I wouldn’t want to change you, or even rearrange you, I like you as you are” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). She was yearning for that in her late 20s, and felt the limitations of living with emotional intensity. She didn’t find kindred spirits until she was in pursuit of what she was passionate about: giftedness. Now, she is grateful for the many people that have come into her life because of her passion for the gifted.

Ellen urged gifted individuals to find and pursue their true passions. In addition to pursuing one’s passion, Ellen insisted that one must find someone to support oneself. She recognized that mentors come in all different forms and recalled the rather “tough cookie” façade of her grandfather that was countered by loving, caring support her grandmother provided for her mother (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Ellen found great encouragement in her current relationship. Her significant other always felt like the odd man out, until he started to understand his own giftedness through his association with Ellen. He, in turn, has been an unwavering supporter of all of her endeavors.

Just as relationships in her immediate family shaped her understanding of self, relationships with other professionals in the field continue to stimulate her mentally and help maintain her exploration of and continuing service to research and work in gifted education. Collaborating on articles, presenting for local or national conferences and

working together on future projects such as writing books, continues to expand her understanding of herself and the world of the gifted person.

Ellen chose the chapter she authored for the book *Living with Intensity* as her publication that has had the greatest impact. She continues to get communications from people who read that chapter on the “Advantages and Challenges of Lifespan Intensity” and from the feedback she has received is considering moving forward with the idea of writing a book about gifted adults.

Ellen’s passionate involvement in the field is evidenced by past roles for the National Association for Gifted Children as co-chair of the Global Awareness Network, chair of Counseling and Guidance, committee member of the Network Communications Committee, and President of the Michigan Association for Gifted Children. She continues to work with teachers and parents and also publishes and presents at state, national, and international conferences.

Ellen began her career in gifted education as an advocate for her own children. Her work in the field continues to reach many children, adults and other gifted professionals. She remains engaged in the work of Gifted and Talented by serving as a Professor Emerita for Northeastern Illinois University in the Gifted Master’s Degree program, writing for publication, and doing presentations. She also provides consultation services for schools, school districts, other educational agencies, and parents through her own business venture “Wings for Education.”

Snapshot of Rick Olenchak

Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures. (Henry Ward Beecher, 1887/2009)

Development. Half Cherokee and the middle child of five, Rick grew up in Cherokee land and the western parts of North Carolina until the middle of 5th grade. Up until this point, Rick attended a four-room school house. “It was a very idyllic kind of life honestly, very fresh and almost naïve, it was wonderful” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). His father, who was career military, decided along with his mom not to move and to build a house next door to his maternal grandparent.

Rick’s father was promoted to the Pentagon, and in a move described by Rick as “culture shock,” the family relocated to the suburbs of Washington, D.C. (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Rick recalled that beginning with the middle of 5th grade through 6th grade he spent much of his time in the principal’s office. “I’m sure it was trying to adjust to the new setting and so forth” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He reflected on how his heritage shaped his beliefs:

I always knew on some level that I had . . . some sort of special abilities. The way we were raised [in the Cherokee culture] encourages individuals to find what they do best and become expert at it. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Admittedly, Rick did not have an easy time finding out what he did best. Shortly after moving to D.C. he was diagnosed with what was then called hyperactivity or hyperkinetic disorder, a subset of ADHD:

I really don’t have attention problems, but I do have phenomenal need to move and I have a lot of energy. So that got in the way, and school was never great fun for me. Frankly, I gravitated to certain subjects and certain people. I was very good at math. I enjoyed math. That was my strength. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick was removed from the gifted program for a while because he was a “bad boy,” which he still found humorous:

It’s sort of like, well you can get services if you are good, and if you aren’t good, you can’t. Even as a kid I used to think, ‘What if I couldn’t see? Would they not allow me to have services for someone who had visual problems because I was bad?’” (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

When it came time to attend college, Rick did very well on standardized tests despite his, “ho-hum grades” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Rick was accepted to several good universities, and interestingly chose to attend the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where he was only accepted on probation. Because of his Cherokee heritage, he ended up with a lot of support financially and special scholarship money. Rick described the change he experienced once he arrived:

I studied; did well and ended up getting done in three years. During those three years, I had majored in Economics and Political Science. I wanted to become an attorney, there are attorneys on my [paternal side] of the family. I can’t tell you I was in love with the law, but it just seemed like the thing to do. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

At that time, Rick was dating a woman who was a teacher. Holding a career day for her students she was looking for a lawyer. Though Rick had just started the first semester of law school, he was invited in to share his career choice with the students. This proved to be a turning point in his own career. “I finished that semester of law school and never went back again. In fact, I spent the next semester and summer and the

following fall semester getting my teaching [certification] and that was it” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Rick’s first teaching job was at a magnet school for gifted children in Dearborn, Michigan. He had a combination of three grades together which he greatly enjoyed. After two years, he went to a public school to teach, “regular kids.” His previous experience prevailed. “I always treated them like they were gifted...like they all had something special that could be developed” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Following a successful teaching career Rick became a school principal and director of gifted programs in his twenties. Taking night courses, he earned his first master’s degree in history because he was, “fond of that,” even though he was a math teacher (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He explained, “I know about math, I will teach something else” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He earned a second master’s degree in education focusing on assessment statistics.

Exposure. By the time he was approaching his thirtieth birthday, Rick had already held several principal positions. He decided to pursue his Ph.D. He researched the premiere programs that focused on gifted children, “because I had morphed into the fact, I guess I was always interested in giftedness but I never really called it that” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He said he believes he can trace this back to his Cherokee heritage:

I think it’s the whole notion of trying to match talent with trade, and I think it pervades many indigenous nations, but particularly Cherokee, and because that is the way I see life, it just made sense to me. So, working with gifted kids seemed

like you were working with the ones that would get there quicker. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick ended up at the National Research Center at the University of Connecticut and studied with Sally Ries and Joe Renzulli. By the time he finished, he was married and had little children. He completed his whole Ph.D. in 2½ years and received permission to leave his principalship early to attend evening classes. Rick was offered a job at University of Alabama and decided as “head of a household, I need to work” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Rick became an assistant professor. He ultimately completed his internship part time while at Alabama through a relationship with the University of Alabama Medical School and worked with a psychiatrist at a secure residential facility for serious criminally deranged clients. After a decade in that position, the University of Houston was interested in his work. They were creating a new research center and Rick was hired and spent his next 10 years in this setting.

During this time in Houston, Rick experienced a serious medical crisis. Following an evening spent at the gym lifting weights, he awoke in the morning with a blazing temperature of over 107 degrees. He was rushed to the medical center where doctors presumed he may be infected with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome because he presented with a lot of those symptoms. Following blood work, Rick had slipped into a coma, and he was diagnosed with a renegade form of leukemia called hairy cell leukemia, which at that time was only successfully treated about six of every ten times. Fortunately he was at one of the best medical centers in the world where they were experimenting with some new treatments for that kind of rarely seen leukemia. He was injected with

Cladribine, a drug discovered by a highly gifted 19-year-old Pakistani girl doing a science fair project.

After being in intensive care for six weeks, comatose for much of it, Rick spent another six weeks in a regular hospital, and was on home health care for eight months. Rick reflected on how he learned a great deal during that time:

After that was when I realized I was gay. You know, I guess I was too involved with work and thinking and, I don't know, it's not very Cherokee to focus on yourself. It just isn't. So I guess I never got it. That was cataclysmic for me. I think I got out of balance for a while in my life. I think work was consuming me. So that revelation of literally being pronounced dead and being saved, so to speak, [when I once again found] balance in my life. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick explained other pieces that balance his life now, "I am a soccer coach and a cellist and a volunteer at Children's Hospital and on and on and on. Giftedness and working on gifted research, that is just one piece of my life" (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Focus. Rick reflected on his beliefs about gifted individuals and his role as an expert in the field:

I am convinced we all view the world differently, nuances and personality and background, we truly are a world of individuals; we are a world of one. I think the challenge for society is to figure out how the ones can create multiple Venn diagrams so we can focus on how we overlap and not how we are different. That said, I think helping individuals find where they are at peace with themselves and

people who surround them and the larger world, to me is what defines expert.
(personal communication, May 27, 2012)

To help others find peace, Rick recognized that you must have a peace within yourself. He explained how this goes beyond intellectual knowledge:

You may have a lot of knowledge, you might even be intellectually brilliant, but I think unless you find some level of congruence with the world around you, the people who are in it, the situations in which you find yourself, I think expertise becomes moot. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Like his Cherokee heritage taught him, Rick claimed that expertise is “finding yourself and locating a niche in which your talent is not only ‘scaffolded’, but valued.” He went on to describe how some individuals may still not have found themselves:

I am convinced there are a lot of highly talented people today. For example, in some of the arts areas there are those [gifted individuals] that are hiding at Starbucks as baristas, or waiting tables, or what have you. We live in a time where we have so greatly diminished [the artistic] kinds of areas of expertise. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Depth. Rick stated that he believes anything involving expertise is “highly reliant on the situation, the people in subsets of the situation, and the kind of problems [that are occurring]” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He clarified:

For example, let’s say that, God forbid, there is some sort of catastrophic nuclear disaster in the world, much like Chernobyl. All of a sudden, [society] values people who are “experts” in nuclear science. Their expertise would become more important, more valued, more crucial. In other words, they would really be

experts because we needed them and we valued them. So in my mind, part of expertise is having value. It has utility. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

However, he recognized, “there are people who are extreme and in extreme need for certain kinds of services” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Rick remarked that he does believe gifted individuals experience their world differently:

I do believe though that all people who are gifted tend to acquire information, process it and figure out forums and venues in which information can be applied with greater rapidity and greater ease than do other people. And I think as a result, giftedness can crop up in any domain and in any group of people and in any kind of situation. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick recalled, “on paper they always said I was [gifted]” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He explained that it is likely that gifted individuals experience giftedness in two to three domains. It is unlikely many are “omni talented,” in his opinion (personal communication, May 27, 2012):

Gifted people who find contentment, who find that peace, are people who have somewhat aligned where they can do their best work with what’s out there in the world to do...I do my best work in what I care about, because I am in unity with what I am doing, where I’m doing it and the people with whom I’m doing it...I do a lot of biographical reading, I always have. I am interested in people, and name the brightest minds you can think of, I have read about those people, and I would have to say all of them have done their best work in peace or contentment.

(personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick invited others to “Call it whatever [they] want. It’s when you are congruent with everything. It just sort of all falls together like a nice puzzle and things click” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Rick eloquently described people’s vocations and avocations and their professional and personal lives as, “being charted on a heart monitor.” He reflected on his experience:

I think we have series of peaks and valleys. Right now, I am not at peak in some ways. In other ways, I am. I am not writing as much as I did several years ago, yet I have more research projects in process than I have ever had in my life. I am clearly juggling more fun stuff than I ever have in my life. I am sort of on the incline. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Clarity. Rick’s peak moments have been when he is at peace, and everything has fallen together. However, he admitted that a stimulus sparks him. This pushes him to feel a need to find out more or to inform the world.

It might be that I have been counseling with a child and the child’s got some really pressing concern, and I unearth a lot of stuff that will help us better serve that child. I think some peaks are higher than others, but they are none the less peaks. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick asserted that some of his best work has been done with others. “Part of this is cast against the fact that I come out of a tribal [culture]” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He chose one of his greatest publications as a book on which he was the junior writer. Along with his five coauthors, the book has won three major international research or publication awards. He is excited about a second edition being written with a

companion piece that expands not only on clinical and research notes, but the practical application of the research.

A disappointing piece for Rick has been something he created and continues to study called “The Bullseye Model” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He is convinced from the data he has gathered it is valid, but it is, “tucked into a chapter in the social and emotional curriculum book that I co-edited” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He is disappointed that it has not gained momentum, however, he has been reassured by a colleague that, “sometimes the greatest works take time” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

In addition to being disappointed in some of his work not gaining traction, Rick also expressed his frustration over the argument on how the field defines giftedness:

On some level I almost think it is ludicrous. I do believe that giftedness like any other aspect of human development occurs along a continuum. I think there are people who are “profoundly gifted.” I am not in love with the terms we have applied. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick’s concern for the field of gifted education is evident: “We have not made a huge impact on the larger world of teaching and learning and I don’t only mean with children, I mean with adults as well simply because we have retreated into ourselves” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Rick insisted that the field of gifted education must figure out better ways to have connections with the general population of the world. He communicated his belief that such connections can be accomplished if focus is shifted:

How can we help people master their potential areas of expertise? We should be concerned about helping every person become all he or she can be. But unless we can build those connections with the larger culture, I think the field is going to be one trapped in magnet schools and private schools for high ability kids and nowhere else. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

He offered a focus:

It's about how we can learn to enhance the development of expertise in the many by focusing on the development of expertise in the few... Creating a sense of contentment, unity with your own self, your environment and the people around you. It is critical. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick Olenchak was elected to the position of Chairman of the Educational Psychology department and continues to stay busy. "Colleagues have trusted me with the job and I think it comes out of my view of the world...I am a member of a community" (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Snapshot of Phil Perrone

To me, photography is an art of observation. It's about finding something interesting in an ordinary place . . . I've found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them. (Elliott Erwitt, 1988)

Development. Growing up in a small town south of Buffalo on the Pennsylvania border, Phil Perrone had many "gifted" influences throughout his early childhood. He described his Dad as a "gifted teacher, football coach, and mathematician" and his mother as a "gifted pianist and vocalist who studied at Julliard at a time when women didn't go to college" in the late 1920s and early 1930s (personal communication, May 8,

2012). Her maternal great-grandfather was a professional harpist and encouraged her professional music study and career. Phil's grandfathers were a shoemaker and a paper-mill worker, respectively, and he recalled being close to his mother's family who lived about 70 miles away.

There were only 28 students in Phil's high school graduating class. He was salutatorian and lettered in four different sports. He was offered a sports scholarship to Syracuse University. He did not accept the football scholarship but decided that a small college would better suit him for his undergraduate work. He began his college career majoring in P.E. but ruined his knee playing football and had to change majors. Math was his next choice as he could see a clear path to finishing that degree in four years. He played in the college band for a couple of years, but that experience was definitely not the same for him as competing in sports had been.

During high school and college Phil held a wide array of jobs. He worked in construction, as a house painter, a waiter, a bartender, a house cleaner, a dishwasher, a sales clerk, and as a door-to-door salesman.

While doing his practice teaching during his junior year in college Phil was struck by the idea that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life doing the same thing. His grades were good so he applied to graduate school. This time he went for the "big" school and applied only to Syracuse in the hopes of obtaining a Master's of Science degree in guidance counseling.

Exposure. Receiving both research assistant and teaching assistant positions helped with graduate school expenses and made it possible for him to pursue work on the guidance degree. His graduate school advisor took a great liking to him and Phil spent 50

to 60 hours per week with this advisor and his family. Phil was one of the few full-time graduate students and was single at the time. His advisor and family “took him in” and he played golf and handball with his advisor and traveled with him to his off-campus teaching assignments. Spending time with this advisor and other professors changed Phil’s outlook on possible future careers. Up to that time he had “always considered [himself] as an athlete and was frustrated that he couldn’t go into Phys. Ed” (personal communication, May 8, 2012). Working and relaxing with these faculty members and families helped him realize that getting a doctorate and working in higher education could be a pretty good life. As he successfully navigated the coursework and experiences of the guidance degree, Phil was really taken with research and his advisor encouraged him to continue on with a PhD program. As his dissertation topic Phil selected a subject that would help direct much future work: the relationship between IQ and creativity.

Phil described the work on this project:

I had 1100 high school seniors from three schools in the Poughkeepsie, NY area. The creativity test required that I tally all the uses students mentioned for various objects and then I had to go back and assign higher points for the more unusual uses. I had to run correlations for 1100 subjects on a Freiden calculator. Run it twice and if [I] got a different answer, run it again. The data analysis took Phil and his wife-to-be six months to complete. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

In spite of the lengthy, detailed work, Phil loved the research and through the years enjoyed sharing that love of inquiry with students. He does, however, acknowledge that he is glad later generations of students “didn’t have to suffer the agony of old-

fashioned data analysis” and looking every article up in the Periodical Index and then finding and reading the hard copy (personal communication, May 8, 2012). But he warned that modern methods are sometimes less fulfilling for researchers:

Running the data over and over if you didn’t get the same correlation twice meant that you really understood your data. I can remember my graduate students would put the data in and get it back from the staff person and it might have a very unrealistic correlation or T score or something. I would say this is really impossible given the data and...they were so far removed from understanding their analysis that [it] swung the other way.

(personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Several experiences in Phil’s graduate study years were rather intriguing and Phil wonders what they say about his character. When he was taking the language exam for the doctorate degree a fire broke out:

There were 200 students in the room and the smoke was getting thick. Even when firemen appeared in the room no one in the group would leave until the proctor guaranteed that the exam would be pro-rated. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

A year later Phil was proctoring a stats minor for a group of doctoral students:

A member of the psychology faculty came into the room obviously inebriated and caused a disturbance. Asking the professor to leave didn’t work. I physically threw him out so the exam could continue undisturbed. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

The next week there was a faculty vote to terminate Phil's position. The vote was tied seven to seven and the Dean broke the tie in favor of Phil remaining, just three months before he was set to finish the degree.

Phil worked as a psychologist in a clinic at the university counseling center as part of an internship. He described his experiences in clinical practice as "frustrating" (personal communication, May 8, 2012). In greater depth, he stated,

I would be working with somebody after maybe a session or two, I thought I had a pretty good handle on where they were, where they needed to go, what they needed to do to get there. But as a so-called psychologist, you were supposed to let them discover it and it frustrated me because I have had all these years of training, why shouldn't they benefit from the map I could lay out for them, versus them stumbling their way for months. So for a while, I actually indulged myself and it worked with people, but it upset my supervisors tremendously. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Looking back now Phil thinks that his approach made sense, perhaps more in line with what today is called "life coaching" but acknowledges that it was not acceptable professional behavior at the time.

Focus. One summer of his graduate Teaching Assistantship Phil worked with Abraham Maslow at Syracuse. Phil remembers this as one of his most mentally stimulating times. In one of the teaching sessions Maslow discussed the view that "the contemporary man is the missing link" which Phil found quite mentally stimulating.

At that time everybody was considering looking back in terms of what the missing link was, and his (Maslow's) whole point was that in the 50s and 60s man

hadn't really evolved to what man was capable of, which would be a really existential concept. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Phil recounts:

What it did for me, it got me thinking rather than that we had arrived, but more in terms that we were in process, and at that point, I [knew] I had become an existential psychologist. Once that concept hits you, you can't let it go. (personal communication, June 29, 2013)

Another impactful experience occurred at the University of Wisconsin. A class of 20 faculty from the fields of psychiatry and psychology were led by Carl Rogers in "attempting to better define good mental health and the personal and social conditions conducive to achieving it" (personal communication, June 29, 2012). They worked on determining an intervention for a junior class in a Chicago suburb that had seen eight suicides in a four-week period and were able to create and successfully implement their plan with the desired effect. "I'm happy to say there were no more suicides in that class or school during the next few years that I was in touch" (personal communication, June 29, 2013).

Emotions and connections play a big role in Phil's life. He has always cared deeply about teaching, advising and mentoring and feels fortunate to have spent his work life doing something he loved so much. He described an innate curiosity that began very early in his life.

I have been curious about people and human nature since I was two or three.

'WHY' was the major word in my vocabulary. When I began reading I wanted to read about people, not animals or fairy tales. I used to read half the night through

grade [school] and high school and still do. I've averaged four to five hours of sleep all my life. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

He uses terms such as “restlessness, intuitive, tunnel vision when on task, humble” to describe himself. He also admits to living a “manic-depressive” type of cycle in much of his life.

Phil also labels himself as one who is very responsive to his own internal environment.

I find myself more self-directed and more internally directed. One time I remember my wife said to me ‘you haven’t said anything about the picture on the wall...it’s been up there a month’ [and] you know, I never saw it. This is sort of characteristic of me. I remember faces but I have a hell of a time with names. I seldom forget a face and seldom remember a name. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Balance is important to Phil as he connects to people and to subjects he is studying. ‘First and foremost I’ve wanted to better understand myself in relation to others and to whatever phenomena I was focusing upon’ (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Depth. Believing himself to be an expert on giftedness has required the need to think about balance that is so essential to Phil’s life. He averred that being an expert is a matter of being recognized by others in the field, but realized that some so-called experts do a lot of self-promoting and self-recognizing. Self-promotion doesn’t fit his definition of an expert.

I'm an expert, and it's frustrating to know so little and have so many unanswered questions. My professional life has been marked by "yes but . . . always [looking for] the exception. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Inclusivity is an important part of Phil's definition of giftedness. He claimed he takes great care to not "prematurely exclude anyone at any age from being considered by others and themselves as exceptional" (personal communication, May 8, 2012). Believing instead that talent may be evidenced at any time or that an individual's culture may place value on a "new or different behavior and thus open a new opportunity," Phil argued that "gifted is more inferred by extrapolating observed or measured behavior into the somewhat distant future with the expectation that it will transform into talent" (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Terms that Phil stated he believes are common qualities of giftedness include curiosity, energy, motivation or focus when engaged, and indifference to criticism. He observes that gifted individuals are often those who have heroes, who feel loved, who are out of sync with age peers, who are willing to risk failure to learn and who are often never still. A talented person," Phil claimed, "performs a socially valued behavior at a level exceeding the norm (by) two- or three-fold. I believe older individuals wear the mantle of talented more often" (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

As a result of these beliefs, Phil cautioned others in the field in regard to judging or defining gifted or talented:

If you must assess, do it in various contexts and be aware of the individual-cultural interactions. Recognize that if you observe over a course of time you will see high levels of production and equally high levels of destruction. We should

assist individuals to accept that they are greater than their giftedness or talent.

(personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Phil described himself as “an observer, a listener” (personal communication, May 8, 2012). His “what if...” mentality enables him to understand that we can never really know another person or their “significant world” (personal communication, May 8, 2012). Being self-sufficient, feeling relevant and connecting to the joy in life are what Phil described as the benefits of being gifted. His “living on the edge” excitement is tempered by the challenges and limitations of that same giftedness which he described as having “difficulty in letting others ‘in’ intellectually and emotionally and being depressed by feelings of inadequacy when struggling to move ahead” in a given endeavor or time period.

Math teacher, Counseling Psychology faculty, and Director of the Guidance Institute for Talented Students are some of Phil’s professional titles for various positions he has held through the years. His final professional research project was a longitudinal study of Wisconsin’s 1988 top graduates and those with College Board scores in the top 5%. His daughter continued this study for an additional 10 years upon completing her own doctoral degree. She is a professor in a counseling/psych department and his son, after stints as a professional musician and music sales person, is a director of research in criminology.

After retiring from collegiate/research life, Phil and his wife moved to Arizona where he started working with a psychologist “doing some consulting in writing areas,” and he also started working with the State Education Department and the State Gifted Association (personal communication, May 8, 2012). He did some guest lecturing for a

while but finally eased out of all those positions, frustrated with the lack of funding and the poor support for education there compared to the American Midwest. He volunteers his services to a school connected with his church and tries to observe and offer suggestions for helping bright students in this school. Many of the families are migrant workers from Mexico and Phil is aware of and frustrated by the issues of exceptional females being discriminated against, which takes him back 30 years to many of the same issues with children and families he worked with in Wisconsin.

Clarity. Asked what he thinks of as his greatest impact in the field of gifted, Phil found it tough to answer. One measure he recalled was the number of requests for reprints of articles—in the days before things could be easily accessed via the internet. He claimed that his presentations to parents had the greatest impact when he was able to share the implications of his research. He noted that the parents were often desperate and could focus all their energies on their one child. He noted that “since research tends to be piecemeal, only by pulling from all the bits and pieces can you weave a meaning[ful] pattern” (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Phil found it much easier to answer a query regarding his most disappointing professional experiences: “teachers and administrators not basing organization, curricula, and instruction on a sound understanding of individual growth and development whether it be gifted children or any child in school.” His explanation for this calls forth a combination of unwillingness, ineptitude, and resistance to change or perhaps all of these reasons combined. He cited a recent example from his volunteer work in Arizona:

Just a few months ago I was attempting to help a math teacher in a predominantly poor, Mexican neighborhood reach a child who you could tell by the look in her

eyes was someone special. I think the teacher was willing but she was overwhelmed by a class with 20 students, all of whom really needed individual attention. The administrator was interested by what little money for instructional materials was needed for slow learners, the parents were almost afraid to admit their daughter was special [because] her siblings would suffer by comparison, her peers pressured her to think/act like them as they didn't want to lose her because she was so special to them. I had no answer. We did obtain some materials but couldn't find a mentor. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Frustrated by his lack of ability to do anything to help this child, Phil also feels he is now probably out of touch what is going on with the field. One concern that has lasted for over 50 years as he has been acquainted with the field of gifted education and began trying to understand the psychological and educational implications of working with the gifted and how to effect change in schools, families, and counselor education programs is that there has been very little progress and “even some slippage at the state and federal levels relative to financial support” for such efforts.

If able to launch a new study today, Phil would focus on the “meta-cognitive processes of males and females performing similar tasks as” he stated it “would produce some meaningful data relative to education and parenting” (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Meanwhile, Phil continues to sleep just four or five hours per night, interact with his family and friends, volunteer his services to families and schools when possible, and continues to voraciously devour books as he has done since he was a small boy. Mysteries take up some of his reading time, if he can find some that he hasn't already

read, and books about people—biographies and autobiographies, continue to provide food for thought for this man who has always been fascinated by people and human nature.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Results

The path to the field of gifted education has been paved by personal experiences related to the construct of giftedness. I invited those behind the lens of research in the field of gifted education to turn the camera around on them to explore their personal experiences. Comparing their stories provided a more comprehensive look of the ‘snapshots’ these individuals shared and further insight into what led them to choose this field of study.

The purpose of this study was to generate life stories from specialists in the field of gifted education and examine whether their experiences held any similarities. Did any of these specialists personally experience the phenomenon of giftedness in their life experiences and/or professional work?

It is my hope that this study may lead you, the reader, to wonder about the many photographers behind the lenses in the field of gifted education. The field of gifted education may benefit by extending the derived accounts included here to better understand more about those who have traveled along the path to the field of gifted education. And, finally, may this study urge you to turn the camera around from time to time to give others in their fields an opportunity to see photographs of other specialists in this field and their similar or diverse experiences as they traveled the path to their places on the spectrum of careers in gifted education.

Participants engaged in longitudinal interviews including initial interviews, follow up interviews, and reviews. Email exchanges and phone calls allowed for communication with participants over the course of 12 to 18 months. The participants, specialists in the

field of gifted education, were chosen because of their shared experience of being a specialist in the field (Moustakas, 1994). Some of the other shared experiences may, or may not, have been related to that phenomenon.

Transcendental phenomenology was the best method for my study because I wanted to honor the respondents and learn from them, not interpret them (Husserl, 1931). Careful use of this method was able to provide a clear comparison between the specialists' stories and memories without subjecting their histories to speculation and injection of my own experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

I created written descriptions of the personal experiences of the specialists as the source to all claims of knowledge (Husserl, 1931). These stories were based on the recollections of the specialists themselves (Frankl 1988). The stories of the respondents were pieced together to show the event horizons (Gadamer, 1975). Participants re-read transcripts and noted corrections throughout, as well as clarified timelines when certain stories were out of place in the snapshots I created.

I then analyzed the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combining the statements into five themes: development, exposure, focus, depth, and clarity (Moustakas, 1994). I then developed a textual description of the experiences, a structural description in terms of how they experienced them (conditions, situations, context), and a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of living as a specialist in the field of gifted education (Moustakas, 1994).

The research questions were answered by highlighting significant statements, sentences and quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced

the phenomenon of becoming a specialist in the field of gifted. This step is referred to as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Clusters of meaning from these significant statements were developed into themes. Here I found the questions to clarify themselves even further.

My first research question was, “What personal lived experiences do the specialists in the field of gifted education share?” The answer to this question appears throughout their stories and is visible across the snapshots. Shared experiences are seen in early years through adulthood. I found this question could be further extrapolated by asking; What early childhood experiences did these specialists have? What experiences propelled them into the field of gifted education? Who were their mentors and how did they mentor others? How do they define gifted? How do they demonstrate passion? What are their intensities and emotional needs? To answer the first research question I noted the essence of their shared experiences.

My second question was, “What contexts or situations have influenced or affected their experiences?” In my final research question, I posited, “How do specialists in the field of gifted education describe their lives looking back over their experiences associated with gifted education and being a specialist in the field?” The answers to these may be seen through the poignant similarities and shared in their life stories and the commonalities of experiences, thoughts and passions that run through and across many of the themes expressed in the narratives.

From the structural and textural descriptions, following are composite snapshots that present the “essence” of the phenomenon in snapshots. The focus is on the common experiences of the participants in the form of descriptive passages.

Thematic Analysis

Development. Many of the specialists revealed common themes in their early years and childhood. Support from parents and others was evident in their stories. Many disclosed memories about gifted family members. Opportunities and enriching experiences had significance for some as well. During these years, some of the specialists reflected on their awareness of their gifts and giftedness, whether formally identified or not. Following are a look at these particular themes.

Support from others. The specialists in this study shared anecdotes about the relationships and family settings they designated as supportive in their lives. Those that achieve eminence were likely to be born of intelligent parents and raised with advantages, showed precocious childhood traits, and were persistently motivated and demonstrated effort, confidence, and strength of character (Cox, 1926). The specialists' early years reflect advantages in varying forms.

George, "had a very good childhood," and remembered being told by his dad at the age of five that he was going to go to college (personal communication, May 18, 2012). At age 10, he figured out that meant, "there was no choice" (personal communication, May 18, 2012). George acknowledged his parents did not have much in the way of opportunities, and so, they wanted him to have that. "[My parents] were very much the middle class, but they were very, very stable, and they were able to get through the depression" (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Likewise, Jim shared that in spite of his parents' lack of education, they prized learning and that was the impetus for him and his brother to be the first in the family to attend college. With this encouragement, Jim didn't feel pressured, but rather reassured to

“do whatever you are happy doing” (personal communication, April 30, 2012). See Table 3 for excerpts of quotes from Jim and the other specialists regarding support from others.

Table 3

Snapshots of Support from Others

Specialist	Development: Support from others	Date
Dr. George Betts	George, “had a very good childhood,” and remembered being told by his dad at the age of five that he was going to go to college.	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	In spite of his parents’ lack of education, they prized learning and that was the impetus for him and his brother to be the first in the family to attend college. With this encouragement, Jim didn’t feel pressured, but rather reassured to “do whatever you are happy doing.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	At the age of eight, Ellen discovered a mentor who was to have a long-reaching impact on her life. The woman who taught riding and ran the stables at the camp mentored Ellen related to “internal motivation and how to handle competition.”	April 9, 2013
Dr. Rick Olenchak	Rick reflected that his childhood “...was a very idyllic kind of life honestly, very fresh and almost naïve, it was wonderful.” In regard to acceptance to college: “because I was Cherokee, I ended up with a lot of support financially and I ended up getting some special scholarship money.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	Phil recalled being close to his mother’s family who lived about 70 miles away.	May 8, 2012

On the other hand, Ellen’s parents were pediatricians and she noted, “[I] grew up in a family of gifted individuals and we were surrounded by people who are really, really bright, so I just felt like it was normal. That’s the way everybody was . . .” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). At the age of eight, Ellen discovered a mentor who was

to have a long-reaching impact on her life. The woman who taught riding and ran the stables at the camp mentored Ellen related to “internal motivation and how to handle competition” (personal communication, April 9, 2013).

No matter what people had told me before, I think I sort of dismissed it. So, having an objective measure of my verbal ability [the GRE] was more believable. However, I had studied for it using one of those GRE study guides, so there was still a part of me that felt like I might not have done as well otherwise. And, of course, I never finished the math section of the study guide, so I could attribute my miserable score on the math part of the GRE to that and, by extrapolation, interpret my high verbal score to the fact that I had completed the study guide for that portion. There was still some doubt in my mind as to how smart I was in comparison with others. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Rick reflected that his childhood “...was a very idyllic kind of life honestly, very fresh and almost naïve, it was wonderful.” His father, who was career military, decided along with his mom not to move to build a house next door to his maternal grandparent (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Rick was accepted to several good universities, and interestingly chose to attend the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where he was only accepted on probation. Because of his Cherokee heritage, he ended up with a lot of support financially and special scholarship money. Rick described the change he experienced once he arrived:

I studied; did well and ended up getting done in three years. During those three years, I had majored in Economics and Political Science. I wanted to become an attorney, there are attorneys on my [paternal side] of the family. I can't tell you I

was in love with the law, but it just seemed like the thing to do. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Phil described his Dad as a “gifted teacher, football coach, and mathematician” and his mother as a “gifted pianist and vocalist who studied at Julliard at a time when women didn’t go to college” in the late 1920s and early 1930s (personal communication, May 8, 2012). Phil recalled being close to his mother’s family who lived about 70 miles away.

Just as Phil recalled his own parent’s gifts, Ellen shared about her paternal Uncle Harry being able to read and understand Shakespeare at the age of four, Ellen specifically noted, “[I] grew up in a family of gifted individuals and we were surrounded by people who are really, really bright, so I just felt like it was normal. That’s the way everybody was...” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Ellen’s parents were successful pediatricians, and so it is further evidence of their own advanced abilities. Two family characteristics were present in children with talent; the parents were highly energetic and goal-directed; and the families displayed an intense and intrinsic love for learning and achievement not attached to materialistic goals (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962).

These specialists highlighted their family’s view of education and loving support as influences in their happiness as children. Two of the five specialists had parents that valued education despite the lack of their own opportunities. Three of the five specialists had parents that demonstrated advanced achievement in their own careers and interests.

Opportunities and enriching experiences. Opportunities, sometimes life-altering, were seized by some of the specialists as visible in their snapshots. See Table 4 for a

selection of excerpts from quotes concerning the theme of opportunities and enriching experiences from the specialists.

Table 4

Snapshots of Opportunities and Enriching Experiences

Specialist	Development: Opportunities and enriching experiences	Date
Dr. George Betts	As a boy at summer camp in Buena, Colorado, George “first learned about belonging and in having lifetime friends.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	NA	NA
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	Ellen recalled “coming of age” around age nine as she attended an eight-week summer camp and discovered a mentor who was to have a long-reaching impact on her life.	April 9, 2013
Dr. Rick Olenchak	On removal from gifted program: “It’s sort of like, well you can get services if you are good, and if you aren’t good, you can’t. Even as a kid I used to think, ‘What if I couldn’t see? Would they not allow me to have services for someone who had visual problems because I was bad?’”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	Phil demonstrated his high level of achievement both academically and physically while attending high school where he earned designation as salutatorian and lettered in four different sports.	May 8, 2012

As a boy at summer camp in Buena, Colorado, George “first learned about belonging and in having lifetime friends” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Ellen recalled “coming of age” around age nine as she attended an eight-week summer camp and discovered a mentor who was to have a long-reaching impact on her life (personal communication, April 9, 2013). Rick was removed from the gifted program for a while because he was a “bad boy,” which he still found humorous:

It's sort of like, well you can get services if you are good, and if you aren't good, you can't. Even as a kid I used to think, "What if I couldn't see? Would they not allow me to have services for someone who had visual problems because I was bad?" (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Phil demonstrated his high level of achievement both academically and physically while attending high school where he earned designation as salutatorian and lettered in four different sports (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Awareness of gifts. During the early years, a few stories highlighted evidence and/or awareness of gifts of the specialists either known at the time or later recognized. Many adults are unaware of their own "measurable giftedness" due to lack of formal identification in school when they were children (Kuipers, 2010). The specialists shared their own understanding and awareness. There are at least 20 million Americans who should be classified as gifted adults, compared to 3 million children, making gifted adults the most under-identified group of potential achievers in our society (Jacobsen, 1999).

In discussions with him, George recognized the intricacies of giftedness. He described his experiences with others questioning his giftedness as a mix of feelings:

When I first started consulting, people knew I was uncomfortable, so when I would ask for any questions, they would say: "well are you gifted?" And I would get embarrassed, I would look down at my shoes and I would say, "well, I don't know, I am very creative." (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

He continued:

I am listed academically gifted, but in true psychosocial and creativity I was extremely high. I was one of those kids that was very challenging, didn't get good

grades, but I knew there was something very special that I had that hopefully I would get a chance to develop as an adult. I started to see that the giftedness is more than the intellectually achieving child, and I didn't have a plan to go into gifted education and there was very little that existed at that time. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

See Table 5 for excerpted quotes from George and the other specialists relating to the theme of awareness of their gifts.

Table 5

Snapshots of the Specialists' Awareness of Gifts

Specialist	Development: Awareness of gifts	Date
Dr. George Betts	“. . . they would say: ‘well are you gifted?’ And I would get embarrassed, I would look down at my shoes and I would say, ‘well, I don’t know, I am very creative.’”	May 18, 2012
	“I am listed academically gifted, but in true psychosocial and creativity I was extremely high.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“It’s kind of awkward to say it, but I fit the definition. But if you gave me other definitions of giftedness that some people have, I might not fit those.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“. . . they used to say wonderful things to me when I was in elementary school, like, ‘You are so smart, how come you don’t get straight A’s [or] complete all your work on time.’ . . . And I really felt at that time it was just a way to badger me.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“Being raised in the Cherokee culture, which valued finding personal expertise, I knew on some level that I had . . . some sort of special abilities.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“I’m an observer, a listener. My ‘what if . . .’ mentality makes me realize you can never really know another person or their significant world.”	May 8, 2012

Jim found the definition of *asynchronous development* to be a term that resonated well with him and, in his view, the description “just says it all.” He continued:

Maybe I like it so much because it sounds like me, sounds like the kid I was, sounds like the person I am. I think in a field as fluid as ours with definitions, you probably buy into a definition that you think sounds like that. So yeah, I would fit that definition. It’s kind of awkward to say it, but I fit the definition. But if you gave me other definitions of giftedness that some people have, I might not fit those. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Ellen “grew up in a family of gifted individuals and we were surrounded by people who are really, really bright, so [she] just felt like it was normal. That’s the way everybody was...” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Ellen explained her own awareness:

I never would have realized that [I was gifted], but now I do realize I am a gifted individual. And I always have been and nobody ever explained that to me. Except, they used to say wonderful things to me when I was in elementary school, like, “You are so smart, how come you don’t get straight A’s [or] complete all your work on time,” etcetera, etcetera. And I really felt at that time it was just a way to badger me.

Often the process of self-discovery begins with the question, “Who am I?”
(personal communication, May 10, 2012)

So for Ellen, the realization came later in life because she never felt distinguished from others growing up because of her particular environment.

Raised in the Cherokee culture, which valued finding personal expertise, Rick “always knew on some level that [he] had...some sort of special abilities (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Besides this cultural awareness, Rick was identified as gifted in school though his hyperactivity or hyperkinetic disorder interfered with his school success.

Phil described himself as “an observer, a listener.” His “what if...” mentality enables him to understand that we can never really know another person or their “significant world.” Being self-sufficient, feeling relevant and connecting to the joy in life are what Phil described as the benefits of being gifted.

These snapshots only begin to fill what became the albums of the specialists’ lives. The specialists shared events from their early years that are frozen in time for us to view as significant events in their early development. Now let us turn the page to reveal the Exposure, many times emotionally, which was the impetus for the specialists’ journeys into the field of gifted education.

Exposure. Each of the specialists shared what drove their interest to enter the field of gifted education. Work and experiences illustrated their varied interests as well. Mentors played significant roles in different stages of their lives. And, just as the field of gifted education is varied, so have been their roles. These snapshots expose significant moments which directed their work.

Impetus for entering the field of gifted education. A smattering of snapshots in the early years of these specialists’ careers now fit neatly between the pages in the albums that have captured their paths to the field of gifted education. See Table 6 for excerpts from George and others on their reasons for entering the gifted education field.

Table 6

Snapshots of the Impetus for Entering the Gifted Education Field

Specialist	Exposure: Impetus for Entering the Field of Gifted Education	Date
Dr. George Betts	“After I finished my doctorate, I started working with disenchanting kids who were dropping out of school... These kids did not fail, school failed them and that was a whole different attitude from what we heard in the schools.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	Jim eventually left his teaching position because of a struggling student: if there was one student like this in northern New Hampshire, then “there were probably a lot more other kids like that” in need of help.	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	Ellen’s oldest son was her impetus: “That was the beginning . . . not only of a whole string of interventions for him, individually, but also of my becoming involved with a local parents’ group for gifted children and eventually doing my master’s degree in Gifted Education.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“[In public school] I always treated them like they were gifted . . . like they all had something special that could be developed. . . . I guess I was always interested in giftedness but I never really called it that.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“When I practiced taught my junior year it struck me that I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life doing the same thing. . . . So I applied to Syracuse only to obtain a MS in guidance. . . . My advisor took a liking to me and I probably spent 50 to 60 hours a week with he and his family and he convinced me to pursue the Ph.D.”	May 8, 2012

At times, the specialists shared their emotions connected to these experiences.

Their journeys demonstrate the varied paths in their lives. Some of their needs include

challenges and newness and opportunities to share their ideas and explore new avenues in their work (Streznewski, 1999).

After receiving his master's and doctorate in counseling and psychology, George worked with disenchanted students who were dropping out of school. George discovered many of the children were gifted. Programs that have gifted students "eat lunch together twice a week" are, in George's opinion, not sufficient in their abilities to provide the "understanding of self and opportunities and skills" that gifted children need to feel that they belong (personal communication, May 18, 2012). And, a sense of belonging is exactly what George created. With his colleague, George developed the first high school program for gifted and talented children in the state of Colorado.

Jim completed his master's before feeling confident to enter a teaching position. Jim taught special education where he helped students with learning disabilities and emotional handicaps. One particular student opened him up to new possibilities. A little boy that seemed impossible to reach taught Jim that curriculum needed to be individualized and engaging on a personal level. Jim eventually left his teaching position because of this boy: figuring that if there was one student like this in northern New Hampshire, then "there were probably a lot more other kids like that" in need of help and he wanted to know how to go about doing that (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Ellen's son entered school as a very precocious child. When the school and Ellen were unsure how to support him, Ellen found someone who was an expert in gifted.

That was the beginning . . . not only of a whole string of interventions for him, individually, but also of my becoming involved with a local parents' group for

gifted children and eventually doing my master's degree in gifted education, with this instructor as my mentor. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

In contrast to some of the other specialists, Rick's first teaching job was at a magnet school for gifted children in Dearborn, Michigan. After two years, he went to a public school to teach, "regular kids." His previous experience prevailed. "I always treated them like they were gifted...like they all had something special that could be developed" (personal communication, May 27, 2012). After drifting through other experiences, Rick decided to pursue his Ph.D. He researched the premiere programs that focused on gifted children, "because I had morphed into the fact, I guess I was always interested in giftedness but I never really called it that." He asserted he can trace this back to his Cherokee heritage:

I think it's the whole notion of trying to match talent with trade, and I think it pervades many indigenous nations, but particularly Cherokee, and because that is the way I see life, it just made sense to me. So, working with gifted kids seemed like you were working with the ones that would get there quicker. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

While doing his practice teaching during his junior year in college, Phil was struck by the idea that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life doing the same thing. He applied for graduate school at Syracuse in the hopes of obtaining a Master's of Science degree in guidance counseling. As his dissertation topic, Phil selected a subject that would help direct much future work: the relationship between IQ and creativity.

I'm an expert, and it's frustrating to know so little and have so many unanswered questions. My professional life has been marked by "yes, but..." always [looking for] the exception. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Two of the five specialists credit a single child with defining their career choice, while

three of the five specialists knew it was a good fit in through circumstance. While these moments seem to typify the specialists' impetus into the field gifted education, there were a variety of jobs preceding and following these single snapshots. The variety of jobs and experiences brings more clarity to who we know as these specialists in the field of gifted education.

Jobs and mentors. Some jobs were clearly connected to their gifted work, others unlikely. All demonstrate the multi-potentiality and diversity of each specialist.

George became the Founder and Director for the Center of Education and Study of the Gifted, Talented and Creative Learner at the University of Northern Colorado which is the Summer Enrichment Program for the Gifted and Talented at UNC. Besides the summer enrichment program, George and his wife have held a summer conference for teachers and families for 25 years.

I would say that I have that social and emotional belief in children and adults. I don't have a career, I don't have a job, I have a quest—and the quest is to facilitate the world and the people that become a part of my world. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

While George acknowledges the colleagues he has worked with throughout his career, who his mentors are may or may not come as a surprise:

I have six major mentors and they are the first graduating class [I worked with at the high school in Colorado.] I was influenced by these six kids and still keep in contact with them . . . We listened to them, they were truly my mentors and they taught me. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Upon completion of his doctorate, Jim spent several years teaching at the college level in Connecticut, then took a position with Kent State University School of Education and began a career that has involved him in a wide variety of experiences. Teaching, working with public school gifted programs, research opportunities, speaking engagements and writing of books were all part of Jim's efforts to try to assist gifted students and those working with them to understand who and what the 'gifted' are:

Even when I got into gifted in the first place, it was not with the usual high achieving kids I was interested in. I was interested in the kids who were smart but for whatever reasons, did not show it, and that has been the focus of my career since then (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Jim's educational experiences provided him with a number of different mentors, some in person and many from the history of gifted education. Leta Stetter Hollingworth, John Gowan, T. Ernest Newland as well as Virgil Ward and Annemarie Roper provided Jim with many ideas and frameworks concerning educating and counseling gifted students. His work with Joseph Renzulli at the University of Connecticut helped him discover that his view of giftedness was very different from that of his advisor and assisted him in creating his own theories and style of writing. See Table 7 for a snapshot of mentors that influenced Jim and the other specialists.

Table 7

Snapshots of Mentors

Specialist	Exposure: Mentors	Date
Dr. George Betts	“ I have six major mentors and they are the first graduating class [I worked with at the high school in Colorado.] I was influenced by these six kids and still keep in contact with them. . . . We listened to them, they were truly my mentors and they taught me.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“I would go back to the classics like Leta Hollingworth, and a man named John Gowan who did a lot of work in the 1970s, he was one of the first people to write about counseling gifted kids and another man named T. Ernest Newland who I never met, but he had probably the best textbook in gifted ever and never sold any copies, <i>The Gifted from a Socio Educational Perspective</i> , it wasn't a barn burning title but the content was very strong. Virgil Ward and Annemarie Roeper.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“I always learn so much from the people that I work with that I am a learner and a partner in learning with them and that is the way I see myself.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“My adult mentor is certainly Joe Renzuli. While he has been a controversial figure in our field, he has also impacted our field hugely, but he is the kind of person who, I don't know, I don't think he plays favorites, but I think he adopts certain people, and somehow I got adopted, I don't really know why, because he and I are as different as night and day. I am interested in psychosocial development and he sort of is, but not much. We are just very different.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	My major professor, a man by the name, Dipboye. It was a very small graduate program, maybe 15 in the master's program, and I was probably one of the only full time master's students. . . . Being the only assistant, for some reason, he and his family took me in, being single at the time, I used to play golf with him, used to play handball with him, when he was teaching a course I used to go with him off campus.”	May 8, 2012

Jim met two of his mentors while speaking at the Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. George and Annemarie Roeper were in the audience and following the presentation they asked him to work with their school. “Kind of odd how it began,” Jim said, but relished his connection with the school and the relationship with the Roepers that lasted over two decades until each of their deaths (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Before delving into the field of gifted education, Ellen had worked in advertising and public relations. Ellen recalled being connected with other truly bright people.

I was definitely surrounded by others who were good at their jobs, especially at the [public relations] firm – brilliant, in fact! Journalism guys. I’d go to lunch with six to nine of them every workday, as well as spending time with them related to the accounts I was working on. We’d talk about “life, the universe, and everything” at lunch and sometimes at work, as well as talking about work stuff. It was great. A lot of smart people everywhere else I worked, too. I never felt isolated in the workplace, and because I had a particular niche in each of my jobs. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen went on to engage in many different roles, one in particular as a district gifted coordinator in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, a position she held for five years. Her work at Northeastern Illinois University continues to ripple out to many teachers and students. Ellen’s mentors included her instructor during her Master’s in Gifted Education and Phil Perrone, her doctoral chair. Ellen recognized that mentors come in all different forms. Ellen has found great encouragement in her current relationship. Her significant other always felt like the odd man out, until he started to understand his own giftedness

through his association with Ellen. He, in turn, is an unwavering supporter of all of her endeavors.

Relationships in her immediate family shaped her understanding of self and relationships with other professionals in the field continue to stimulate her mentally. Collaborating on articles, presenting for local or national conferences and working together on future projects such as writing books, continues to expand her understanding of herself and the world of the gifted person.

By his thirtieth birthday, Rick had already held several principal positions. Rick studied for his Ph.D. at the National Research Center at the University of Connecticut with Sally Ries and Joe Renzulli. Rick was then offered a job at University of Alabama as an assistant professor. After a decade in that position, the University of Houston hired Rick for a position in which he spent his next 10 years.

Rick claimed that some of his best work was done with others. “Part of this is cast against the fact that I come out of a tribal [culture]” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). He chose one of his greatest publications as a book on which he was the junior writer. Rick was disappointed that “The Bullseye Model” he created has not gained momentum, however, he was been reassured by a colleague that, “sometimes the greatest works take time” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

During high school and college, Phil held a wide array: construction, house painter, waiter, bartender, house cleaner, dishwasher, sales clerk, and door-to-door salesman. Phil began his college career majoring in P.E. but ruined his knee playing football and had to change majors. Math was his next choice as he could see a clear path to finishing that degree in four years. He then discovered that he wanted something

different, and so he started his graduate work at Syracuse. Here is where he met one of his mentors.

Phil spent 50 to 60 hours per week with this advisor and his family. Spending time with this advisor and other professors changed Phil's outlook on possible future careers. Up to that time he had "always considered [himself] as an athlete and was frustrated that he couldn't go into physical education" (personal communication, May 8, 2012).

All of the specialists emphasized collegiality as being a significant part of their being mentored. As Ellen urged, "gifted individuals [need to] find and pursue their true passions. In addition to pursuing one's passion, you must find someone to support you" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Just as these gifted individuals were met with support, they have each gifted others through their work.

Gifted back. The specialists recognized the gifts in others, and have found ways of giving, or gifted back.

George stated that he believes in others and making them self-aware of their giftedness is one of his goals:

While you are at the summer enrichment program, you will go through a process that makes you different inside, and we call it the glow. It means that you have been touched in such a way that will impact you for the rest of your life. You know what is possible in life. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Striving to increase self-awareness, George reported bringing other gifted individuals together as what he considers one of the best ways to support their emotional needs:

The most important thing I believe that you can do for gifted kids is to put them with other gifted kids, and that is something that sticks with them for a lifetime, where they are accepted, nurtured and have the chance to be with others who are like themselves. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

See Table 8 for a few snapshots of how George and the other specialists share their gifts with others.

Table 8

Snapshots of Gifting Back

Specialist	Exposure: Gifting Back	Date
Dr. George Betts	“While you are at the summer enrichment program, you will go through a process that makes you different inside, and we call it the glow. It means that you have been touched in such a way that will impact you for the rest of your life. You know what is possible in life.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“I’m a big fan of having gifted kids be with other gifted kids, not just for academics, but . . . to see there are others out there like themselves.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“One of my former graduate students who looked at me and made a sweeping gesture with her arm and said, “Ellen, this is your body of work.” And I realized that what she was talking about were all the people who were attending or presenting who had been either my graduate students or who had been participants in the gifted institutes that I taught year after year.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“I think helping individuals find where they are at peace with themselves and people who surround them and the larger world, to me is what defines expert.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“We should assist individuals to accept that they are greater than their giftedness or talent.”	May 8, 2012

Jim tries to “marry” theoretical research and practicality in his consultation work: When teachers come for professional development, they don’t want theory, they want [answers to the question] “what do I do with these kids I’ve got?” It has got to be based on something solid, not just [imposing] theories. There is a time and place for that, but not in front of teachers who want more practical strategies.

(personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Like George, Jim is a “big fan of having gifted kids be with other gifted kids, not just for

academics, but...to see there are others out there like themselves.” He further stated:

I think as an adult I find the same thing. It is the need, not the want, but the need to be with other people who are intellectually excitable. There are times that you really need to be with other people who get it the way you do. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Ellen did not find kindred spirits until she was in pursuit of what she was passionate about: giftedness. Now, she is grateful for the many people that have come into her life because of her passion for the gifted (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

A former graduate student explained the gift Ellen has given to others in the field of gifted education. Referring to the 3,000-3,500 public school teachers at the gifted institutes she facilitated, “Ellen, this is your body of work” (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Ellen’s work touched the lives of many and left a lasting impact.

Rick sees his role as an expert in the field to help others find their own expertise and understand how that fits into society:

I am convinced we all view the world differently, nuances and personality and background, we truly are a world of individuals; we are a world of one. I think the challenge for society is to figure out how the ones can create multiple Venn diagrams so we can focus on how we overlap and not how we are different. That said, I think helping individuals find where they are at peace with themselves and people who surround them and the larger world, to me is what defines expert.

(personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Phil described himself as “an observer, a listener.” His “what if…” mentality enables him to understand that we can never really know another person or their “significant world”:

If you must assess, do it in various contexts and be aware of the individual-cultural interactions. Recognize that if you observe over a course of time you will see high levels of production and equally high levels of destruction. We should assist individuals to accept that they are greater than their giftedness or talent.

(personal communication, May 8, 2012)

It is with this vision and belief Phil has mentored others and gifted back within the field of gifted education.

Focus. All of the specialists use their own gifts, directly or indirectly, to help others recognize their own. These snapshots demonstrate the varied journeys these specialists embarked upon throughout their careers. Next, we may see how the definitions and passion each of the specialists has developed focus for their careers

Gifted Defined. The specialists shared their definitions. Similarities and differences can be noted throughout. The most important factors in achieving satisfaction in a job is that the work must be related to one’s interests, it must give a sense of liberty and independence, and it must provide an opportunity to display one’s own inventiveness (Siekanska & Sekowski, 2006). Table 9 displays a collection of snapshots from all the specialists relating to the topic of definitions of giftedness.

Table 9

Snapshots of Gifted Defined

Specialist	Focus: Gifted Defined	Date
Dr. George Betts	“From my point of view, giftedness is not an ability; it is a lifestyle and it is something you discover and then with the right environment you live it. A gifted individual uses the giftedness not only for professional, but for life experiences.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“ . . . It is not like a toggle switch you can switch back and forth . . .It is something that is part of you. . .I don’t see how giftedness can be an occasional thing. As I like to say, it is who you are, not what you do.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“ . . . <i>Some</i> gifted children do things a <i>lot</i> earlier, a <i>lot</i> faster, a <i>lot</i> better, or a <i>lot</i> differently from most other children! Others don't do any of that; however, they still show capabilities and/or insights that are far beyond those of others.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“I do believe though that all people who are gifted tend to acquire information, process it and figure out forums and venues in which information can be applied with greater rapidity and greater ease than do other people. And I think as a result, giftedness can crop up in any domain”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“Recognize that if you observe over a course of time you will see high levels of production and equally high levels of destruction. We should assist individuals to accept that they are greater than their giftedness or talent.”	May 8, 2012

George described how the labels we place on gifted individuals appear to him: I have to chuckle that now we have the almost gifted, the gifted, the gifted and talented, the gifted, talented and creative, the highly gifted, the extremely highly gifted and I am waiting to see the terminally gifted. . . . [People seem mostly concerned with] intelligence. Intelligence is one component of my life, but it is what I do with that intelligence [that matters.] From my point of view, giftedness is not an ability, it is a lifestyle and it is something you discover and then with the right environment you live it. A gifted individual uses the giftedness not only for professional, but for life experiences. In one of my writings [directed at gifted individuals, I say that] there is always another mountain and another challenge and another day. Giftedness is something that goes back to Maslow and actualizing and becoming what you are capable of becoming. Do you ever get there? No. But do you strive for it? Yes. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

These examples have all contributed to the way George defines giftedness. He referenced Sir Ken Robinson's idea of the element:

When ability and passion come together, you have the element, and he talks about the whole idea that giftedness comes from within, and that is what I believe. I don't believe giftedness is something you do. I believe it is something you are that you develop. Whether you become eminent or not doesn't matter. It's what you do with your gift. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Other definitions in the field support what George claimed as well:

I love the work and the definition of the Columbus Group and Annemarie Roeper. One of the things I am doing in my research right now is looking at how we can

define giftedness through curriculum and potential. How do we develop the type of curriculum that will allow the kids to find their passion and to find their giftedness? Mine is a broad definition but it starts with who the child is. We are dealing with definitions right now and it is just going to be very, very interesting. I believe in gifted children and I believe in gifted education and I don't want to see us become the National Association of Talent Development. Talent is part of it, but there is a deeper part with passion and motivation and that to me is something that in the long run might be a good thing. NAGC is a reflection of who we are and I have been on the board for 24 years of NAGC. It will be interesting to see what happens now with all of the definitions that are coming up.
(personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Jim shared that there are certain qualities possessed by gifted individuals: [I relate to the definitions] that "asynchronous development" focus on or at least allude to, the over-excitability, which I have come to call intensities. Whether it's an intellectual intensity, an emotional intensity or a variety of other kinds, these are just part of who you are [as gifted person.] It is not like a toggle switch you can switch back and forth and many of the definitions of gifted seem to imply that you are gifted at some times, under some circumstances, under some conditions . . . and I think that is just a bunch of hooey. It is something that is part of you.
(personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Referencing an article of his, Jim goes on to explain:

If someone has a learning disability they are not only learning disabled sometimes, it is part of who they are. If you are blind or have some kind of

sensory disorder, you don't just have that occasionally, so I don't see how giftedness can be an occasional thing. As I like to say, it is who you are, not what you do. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Asynchronous development is another term that resonates well with Jim and the Columbus Group definition based on asynchronous development is, in his view, the description that "just says it all" (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Ellen's definition of giftedness evolved out of necessity. She was speaking to a group of parents of first grade children in a bilingual school and did not want educational jargon to interfere with the translation, so she worked to combine definitions from the Columbus Group, Barbara Clark, and Gina Ginsberg-Riggs. A simple definition to answer the question, "What is Gifted?" resulted:

Children who are gifted are those who do things a little bit earlier, a little bit faster, a little bit better, and perhaps a little bit differently from most other children." (Ginsberg-Riggs) *some* gifted children do things a *lot* earlier, a *lot* faster, a *lot* better, or a *lot* differently from most other children! Others don't do any of that; however, they still show capabilities and/or insights that are far beyond those of others.

Because of their advanced or accelerated development and because they have a high level of awareness and intensity and a greater depth of thinking and feeling, children who are gifted are particularly vulnerable and require modified services or activities not ordinarily provided to others. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

However, Rick recognized, “there are people who are extreme and in extreme need for certain kinds of services” (personal communication, May 27, 2012). Rick seemed to believe gifted individuals experience their world differently:

I do believe though that all people who are gifted tend to acquire information, process it and figure out forums and venues in which information can be applied with greater rapidity and greater ease than do other people. And I think as a result, giftedness can crop up in any domain and in any group of people and in any kind of situation. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick expressed his frustration over the argument on how the field defines giftedness.

On some level I almost think it is ludicrous. I do believe that giftedness like any other aspect of human development occurs along a continuum. I think there are people who are “profoundly gifted.” I am not in love with the terms we have applied (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Terms that Phil indicated are common qualities of giftedness include curiosity, energy, motivation or focus when engaged, and indifference to criticism. He observes that gifted individuals are often those who have heroes, who feel loved, who are out of sync with age peers, who are willing to risk failure to learn and who are often never still. A talented person,” Phil explained, “performs a socially valued behavior at a level exceeding the norm (by) two or three fold. I believe older individuals wear the mantle of talented more often” (personal communication, May 27, 2012).

Phil cautioned others in the field in regard to judging or defining gifted or talented:

If you must assess, do it in various contexts and be aware of the individual-cultural interactions. Recognize that if you observe over a course of time you will see high levels of production and equally high levels of destruction. We should assist individuals to accept that they are greater than their giftedness or talent.

(personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Many similarities in definitions emerged among the specialists. Their personal experiences with giftedness formalized their definition of the gifted. Their work with gifted children and their own self-awareness contributed to how they defined gifted for others.

Passion. Each specialist had experiences or events that represent or explain their passion. Gifted individuals have more than an innate interest to learn or investigate and are driven with even more intensity to be aware of and seek information in the environment (Denko, 1977).

George also has what he calls mini-passions, which are part of the stimulation and growth in his life. For example, he described the Iditarod race in Alaska.

This year they had seven or eight different web sites, I was on their Skype and I spent 40-50 hours learning about the Iditarod. Am I going to go up there and run dogs? No, but I appreciate the training and the entire environment and what happens between the dog and the musher. I will go off and have these mini passions like the Iditarod. I see how it relates to giftedness. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Commenting on what he considers a time in his own career that was most mentally stimulating, Jim recalled his last few years at Kent State when he had the

opportunity to work not only with masters and doctoral students in gifted education courses, but also with undergrad honors college students who wanted to become teachers.

That was the same time that I was teaching one day a week in middle school [gifted program]. I would marry the two together. My college class was held in my school building and each of the college students was required to volunteer at least ½ day a week in that school district. Marrying the college teaching experience with middle school experience and having the undergrads see me teach and I see them teach, that was probably the most exciting time. Working with really active young minds who were still so optimistic about their professional futures...seeing them at the beginning stages, scared as hell...and within weeks [seeing] them feeling like confident educators...that had room to grow. That, to me, was the epitome of what college teaching should be. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Ellen was mentally stimulated and inspired in many of her educational work positions.

One in particular was while she served as the district gifted coordinator in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, a position she held for five years (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

She described in detail how she experiences the specifics of life in the moment we are doing the interview:

I am sitting here on top of this wonderful old sailboat looking through a crack in the door of the building, a rather wide crack because of moving boats in and out, and enjoying the intensity of the green leaves, but I am very aware of it. I am aware of the sunshine. It is an intensified awareness, and I am interested and

excited about lifelong learning. I am excited about learning and discussing things with people who are on my wavelength. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen stated that she is often absorbed in the environment—the sights, the sounds, and the feel—while also experiencing intense thoughts regarding her past experiences working in gifted education and relishing connections to people who share her passions.

Rick eloquently described people’s vocations and avocations and their professional and personal lives as, “being charted on a heart monitor.” He reflected on his experience:

I think we have series of peaks and valleys. Right now, I am not at peak in some ways. In other ways, I am. I am not writing as much as I did several years ago, yet I have more research projects in process than I have ever had in my life. I am clearly juggling more fun stuff than I ever have in my life. I am sort of on the incline. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Rick stated his peak moments are when he is at peace, and everything has fallen together. However, he admitted that a stimulus sparks him. This pushed him to feel a need to find out more or to inform the world:

It might be that I have been counseling with a child and the child’s got some really pressing concern, and I unearth a lot of stuff that will help us better serve that child. I think some peaks are higher than others, but they are none the less peaks. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Phil shared his passion as well:

I loved research and wanted my students to enjoy the thrill of inquiry and was glad they didn’t have to suffer the agony of old fashioned data analysis and

looking every article up in the Periodical Index and then reading the hard copy once I found it. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Table 10 provides quotes relevant to the theme of passion.

Table 10

Snapshots of Passion

Specialist	Focus: Passion	
Dr. George Betts	“...I will go off and have these mini passions like the Iditarod. I see how it relates to giftedness.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“Marrying the college teaching experience with middle school experience and having the undergrads see me teach and I see them teach, that was probably the most exciting time . . . That, to me, was the epitome of what college teaching should be.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“I am sitting her on top of this wonderful old sailboat and looking at a crack in the door, a rather wide crack because of moving boats in and out, and enjoying the intensity of the green leaves, spray in my face, but I am very aware of it, I am aware of the sunshine, it is an intensified awareness and I am interested and excited about lifelong learning, I am excited about learning and discussing things with people who are on my wavelength.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“It might be that I have been counseling with a child and the child’s got some really pressing concern, and I unearth a lot of stuff that will help us better serve that child. I think some peaks are higher than others, but they are none the less peaks.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“I loved research and wanted my students to enjoy the thrill of inquiry and was glad they didn’t have to suffer the agony of old fashioned data analysis and looking every article up in the periodical index and then reading the hard copy once I found it.”	May 8, 2012

All of the specialists demonstrate passion in various ways. The similarity lies in how this passion is expressed in all they do. This leads to the final album of Self Awareness. In these pages you will see the snapshot related to their personal intensities and energy as well as their emotional needs.

Depth. This final section identifies the depth and emotional intensities and needs of the specialists. Jacobsen (1999) described gifted individuals as having three traits: intensity, complexity, and drive. These traits make the gifted adult different from other individuals.

“Controversies over opportunities are debated because some refuse to acknowledge that for the gifted, giftedness is the core of their identity, the axis around which well-being, achievement, career, and relationships must be built” (Jacobsen, 1999, p.167). It is important to realize our own reality is not necessarily typical of others. These varying realities create differences in development (Fiedler, 2009).

Self-Awareness. The specialists identified their individual intensities and energy. See Table 11 for a collection of snapshots on the specialists’ varying levels of self-awareness.

George described giftedness as the pursuit of one’s quest. Part of George’s giftedness is that he has always had an open mind set. “I can trace that back to having it in elementary school but it wasn’t until college and beyond that it was really accepted” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). George asserted, “the world is open to those who give, and I am a giver, and the world opens up to me. Most of the time I am in the right place at the right time.” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). See Table 11 for an excerpt of George’s comments on self-awareness and those of the other specialists.

Table 11

Snapshots of Self-Awareness

Specialist	Depth: Self-Awareness	Date
Dr. George Betts	“The world is open to those who give, and I am a giver, and the world opens up to me. Most of the time I am in the right place at the right time. . . . I welcome people into my world, my psychosocial skills are very, very positive.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“The definition I think is the best . . . is the one the Columbus group came up with on asynchronous development, that to me just says it all, and maybe I like it so much because it sounds like me, sounds like the kid I was, sounds like the person I am and I think in a field as fluid as ours with definitions, you probably buy into a definition that you think sounds like that.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“When my kids were little and I used to sit down and watch Mr. Rogers with them, I used to love it when he sang the song, ‘I like you as you are, I wouldn’t want to change you, or even rearrange you, I like you as you are,’ because that is what I was yearning for and even then, when I was in my late 20s at that time, I was yearning for that and I didn’t necessarily feel that I was finding that.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“I really don’t have attention problems, but I do have phenomenal need to move and I have a lot of energy. So that got in the way, and school was never great fun for me. Frankly, I gravitated to certain subjects and certain people, I was very good at math, I enjoyed math. That was my strength.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“What it did for me, it got me thinking rather than that we had arrived, but more in terms that we were in process, and at that point, I [knew] I had become an existential psychologist.”	June 29, 2013

George also described himself as an extrovert and is inspired by and energized by contacts he makes in all areas of his life:

I welcome people into my world, my psychosocial skills are very, very positive. It is rare, rare, rare that I don't truly accept the person from the time I meet them.

When I looked back at my yearbook in high school, people would say you will become a wonderful counselor and you are such a good listener. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

George explained why the idea of a bucket list does not apply to him. "I don't have a bucket list, I have a river. I don't know where the next turn is going to be. I never prepare. If it opens up to me I will do it" (personal communication, May 18, 2012). He continued,

I never look at something whether it is good or not. What is important is that I have expressed it and now people are looking at it. I am not really hard on myself, so I don't get bogged down into whether I didn't like this or feel guilty because I left this or that out. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Jim emphasized that he believes there are certain qualities possessed by gifted individuals, "Whether it's an intellectual intensity, an emotional intensity or a variety of other kinds, these are just part of who you are" (personal communication, April 30, 2012). He further stated,

If someone has a learning disability they are not only learning disabled sometimes, it is part of who they are. If you are blind or have some kind of sensory disorder, you don't just have that occasionally, so I don't see how

giftedness can be an occasional thing. As I like to say, it is who you are, not what you do. (personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Jim stated that he incorporates this understanding of giftedness in his explanations to parents:

When I talk to parents I bring in this asynchronous area, this intensities piece. I have had people come up to me sharing “no one ever explained it like this.” It says to me that this conception of giftedness is very rich and different from the achievement oriented definitions that are more common in public schools.

(personal communication, April 30, 2012)

Ellen recognized characteristics of herself with the help of others:

I guess I excelled in [public relations] although I never particularly thought about it. I kept in touch with the [vice president] who was my immediate boss on several of the big accounts, and I’d occasionally get together with him and a couple of the other guys when I was back in Chicago. He remarked one day during one of those lunches, “We’ve never had anyone like you!” I decided to take that as a compliment and didn’t ask him what him meant by that.

Ellen recalled watching Mr. Rogers with her young children. She found understanding when he sang, “I like you as you are, I wouldn’t want to change you, or even rearrange you, I like you as you are.” She was yearning for that in her late 20s, and felt the limitations of living with emotional intensity. She did not find kindred spirits until she was in pursuit of what she was passionate about: giftedness. Now, she is grateful for the many people that have come into her life because of her passion for the gifted (personal communication, May 10, 2012).

For Rick, the main realization and self-awareness was how his energy affected his life. He stated that he believes energy interfered with his life:

I really don't have attention problems, but I do have phenomenal need to move and I have a lot of energy. So that got in the way, and school was never great fun for me. Frankly, I gravitated to certain subjects and certain people. I was very good at math. I enjoyed math. That was my strength. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Later on, Rick explained that his self-awareness helped him cope with his energy needs.

Ever since he was a rising specialist in the field of giftedness, Phil found his area of research quite mentally stimulating:

At that time everybody was considering looking back in terms of what the missing link was, and his [Maslow's] whole point was that in the '50s and '60s man hadn't really evolved to what man was capable of, which would be a really existential concept. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Phil recounted:

What it did for me, it got me thinking rather than that we had arrived, but more in terms that we were in process, and at that point, I [knew] I had become an existential psychologist. Once that concept hits you, you can't let it go. (personal communication, June 29, 2013)

Emotions and connections have played a big role in Phil's life. He has always cared deeply about teaching, advising and mentoring and feels fortunate to have spent his work life doing something he loved so much. He described an innate curiosity that began very early in his life:

I have been curious about people and human nature since I was two or three.

“Why” was the major word in my vocabulary. When I began reading I wanted to read about people, not animals or fairy tales. I used to read half the night through grade [school] and high school and still do. I’ve averaged four to five hours of sleep all my life. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

He used terms such as “restlessness, intuitive, tunnel vision when on task, humble” to describe himself. He also admitted to living a “manic-depressive” type of cycle in much of his life:

Phil also labels himself as one who is very responsive to his own internal environment.

I find myself more self-directed and more internally directed. One time I remember my wife said to me “you haven’t said anything about the picture on the wall . . . it’s been up there a month” [and] you know, I never saw it. This is sort of characteristic of me. I remember faces but I have a hell of a time with names. I seldom forget a face and seldom remember a name. (personal communication, May 8, 2012)

Emotions. The advantages and challenges of intensity are manifested through the lifespan of gifted adults (Streznewski, 1999; Fiedler, 2009). The specialists shared what they discovered about their emotional needs and how they meet those needs. Some gifted adults experience life in a “higher key” (Piechowski, 2002).

As a boy, George attended church and went to a church camp in the summer. On top of a mountain in Buena, Colorado, George first learned about belonging and in having lifetime friends. This feeling was one that started to shape his philosophy about

gifted children (personal communication, May 18, 2012). For more excerpts of perspectives on emotion from George and the other specialists, see Table 12, which displays snapshots from the interviews.

Table 12

Snapshots of Emotions

Specialist	Depth: Emotions	Date
Dr. George Betts	“ . . . it was in Buena, Colorado on the top of a mountain and it was the first time I learned about belonging and in having those lifetime friends.”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“I think as an adult I find the same thing. It is the need, not the want, but the need to be with other people who are intellectually excitable. There are times that you really need to be with other people who get it the way you do.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“One of the things I realize, looking back, is that I had what so many of us are aware of now as a characteristic of gifted: a lot of emotional sensitivity. I can remember crying easily and being teased about that and taking things really to heart and being very tuned into other people’s feelings about me.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“Gifted people who find contentment, who find that peace, are people who have somewhat aligned where they can do their best work with what’s out there in the world to do . . . I do my best work in what I care about, because I am in unity with what I am doing, where I’m doing it and the people with whom I’m doing it . . . I do a lot of biographical reading, I always have. I am interested in people, and name the brightest minds you can think of, I have read about those people.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“First and foremost I’ve wanted to better understand myself in relation to others and to whatever phenomena I was focusing upon.”	June 29, 2013

George noted that the most important thing in working with a gifted child is the need for empathy to be able to “understand the gifted child” and stated “I feel that giftedness is something that comes from within and we have to look for it” (personal communication, May 18, 2012). Because of his appreciation of and focus on empathy, George said, “I tend to really be attracted to those that are in affective education” (personal communication, May 18, 2012).

Jim stated his belief that giftedness is pervasive in one’s personality, not something one can switch on and off. As result, one needs the support of others who can validate such a personality, not reject or ignore it. He remarked, “There are times that you really need to be with other people who get it the way you do” (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Ellen was also aware of her emotional intensity:

One of the things I realize, looking back, is that I had what so many of us are aware of now as a characteristic of gifted: a lot of emotional sensitivity. I can remember crying easily and being teased about that and taking things really to heart and being very tuned into other people’s feelings about me. Not necessarily their feelings about me, but people’s feelings in general. . . . [I remember] even being upset when my sister would get angry at our mother and yell at her. I was a little bitty kid when that was happening. I was probably pre-school age. Of course my sister, with her difficulties, had quite a temper and she had the tendency to shoot off her mouth. But I could see how much pain it was causing my mother. So, wanting to protect her, I swore I would never say anything in anger . . . *as a preschooler*. . . . I now realize that, besides my emotional sensitivity, another

factor may have been that I was significantly younger than most, if not all, of my classmates. I had been grade-accelerated in kindergarten because I could read and no one else in my neighborhood public school could. So, my end-of-November birthday probably made me the youngest in my class. That's what I tell myself about those times in 5th and 6th and maybe 7th grade when I was seen as a "cry-baby." I remember being teased for crying too easily—i.e., getting my feelings hurt and not being able to keep from having the tears come. This is still true for me. Even though I don't cry much now, I really have significant emotional pain if someone I really care about says or does something that hurts me and I agonize over it. . . . I don't think my parents or my teachers were aware of this at all. I wasn't taught to handle it. In my adult years, I've worked on coping skills, including with a therapist. Strategies I've used include "reframing" various situations and other various cognitive, [rational emotive therapy] sorts of solutions, as well as using poetry as an outlet for my feelings with varying degrees of success. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

To cope with her feeling of being outside the group, Ellen learned how to use her emotional astuteness:

When I was a freshman I developed a strategy for becoming popular—simple stuff like giving frequent (but not too frequent) compliments to people and occasionally touching a person's arm. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Ellen reflected that her plan to become popular worked, but "wasn't sure they would've liked [her] otherwise. Again she comments on the difficulties her emotionality

and tendency to measure herself against her peers brought to her life: “This is the dark side of extroversion.”

I guess I excelled in [public relations] although I never particularly thought about it. I kept in touch with the [vice president] who was my immediate boss on several of the big accounts, and I’d occasionally get together with him and a couple of the other guys when I was back in Chicago. He remarked one day during one of those lunches, “We’ve never had anyone like you!” I decided to take that as a compliment and didn’t ask him what he meant by that. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

Rick explained his way of understanding the various unique emotional issues gifted individuals cope with:

Gifted people who find contentment, who find that peace, are people who have somewhat aligned where they can do their best work with what’s out there in the world to do . . . I do my best work in what I care about, because I am in unity with what I am doing, where I’m doing it and the people with whom I’m doing it . . . I do a lot of biographical reading, I always have. I am interested in people, and name the brightest minds you can think of, I have read about those people, and I would have to say all of them have done their best work in peace or contentment. (personal communication, May 27, 2012)

Balance came across as an important concept to Phil as he described how he connects to people and to subjects he is studying. “First and foremost I’ve wanted to better understand myself in relation to others and to whatever phenomena I was focusing upon” (personal communication, Jun 29, 2013).

Defining Moments. One final theme emerged from each of the specialists’ recognition of turning points or defining moments in their lives. Following are the moments that clarified meaning of one’s life to each specialist. Table 13 displays a sample of snapshots from the interviews with the specialists that capture the defining moments of these participants careers and personal lives.

Table 13

Snapshots of Defining Moments

Specialist	Depth: Defining Moments	Date
Dr. George Betts	“The Autonomous Learner Model took me beyond some of my colleagues because it was new and was a risk and it was not seen as something that we needed at that time”	May 18, 2012
Dr. Jim Delisle	“. . . when I left it was because of him [the challenging student], because I wanted to learn more about kids like him and I figured there was one of them in Northern New Hampshire, there were probably a lot more other kids like that. Even when I got into gifted in the first place, it was not with the usual high achieving kids I was interested in.”	April 30, 2012
Dr. Ellen Fiedler	“Obviously, if I wanted university teaching I had to go for my doctorate, so that was a pivotal moment in my life that something really terrible turned out to be a blessing in disguise.”	May 10, 2012
Dr. Rick Olenchak	“So that revelation of literally being pronounced dead and being saved, so to speak, was revelational. I refound balance in my life, I started doing a lot of things I had put on shelves again. Do I still work? Of course. Do I still do good work? I do my best.”	May 27, 2012
Dr. Phil Perrone	“I started out in physical education, but I ruined my knee in football so I had to change majors—decided on math so I could graduate in four years. I did play in the college band for a couple years but it wasn’t the same as competing in sports.”	June 29, 2013

George understood the need for looking at the whole child and seeing not just gifted children academically, but also through the social-emotional lens:

...The Autonomous Learner Model took me beyond some of my colleagues because it was new and was a risk and it was not seen as something that we needed at that time. (personal communication, May 18, 2012)

Jim credits his turn towards gifted education to his student, Matt. Discovering that the boy was “smarter than I had given him credit for” and that he “was a lot more capable of doing things” Jim eventually left his teaching position because of this boy: figuring that if there was one student like this in northern New Hampshire, then “there were probably a lot more other kids like that” in need of help and he wanted to know how to go about doing that (personal communication, April 30, 2012).

Ellen’s turning point evolved on thousands of feet above ground on a plane ride following some traumatic life events:

I made 4 lists and I decided about these lists on the way out there. The first list was what all have I gotten out of 4½ years in Stevens Point, and I learned so much, it was like a graduate program. The second list was what were all the possibilities that I could do next in my life, since the relationship was down the tubes, and the job too, what do I want to do? Do I want to go in a whole new direction, become an architect or go back into advertising and public relations, I thought of a lot of options, but the more I generated that second list, I needed to ask the flight attendant to get me more paper, I was writing on the back of envelopes. The more I worked on that list, the more I began to realize my commitment to gifted kids and I could do all these other things, but I wasn’t

passionate about any of them. The third list was where did I want to be in 10 years? Geographically, in terms of relationships, in terms of career, and I realized that where I wanted to be was in University teaching combined with private consulting combined with writing. And I wanted to live where palm trees grow and I wanted to be in a long term, committed relationship. The fourth list was what do I have to do to get there? Obviously, if I wanted University teaching I had to go for my doctorate, so that was a pivotal moment in my life that something really terrible turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Rick's defining moment came after his scare with illness, when he "learned a great deal then." He spent six weeks in intensive care, comatose for much of it, was in a regular hospital another six week, and was on home health for eighth months:

So that revelation of literally being pronounced dead and being saved, so to speak, was revelational. I re-found balance in my life, I started doing a lot of things I had put on shelves again. Do I still work? Of course. Do I still do good work? I do my best. But you know, that is not who I am, it's a part of who I am.

Phil had many experiences in college and was fortunate to be mentored towards his ultimate profession, but an early experience changed his course rather dramatically.

I started out in physical education, but I ruined my knee in football so I had to change majors—decided on math so I could graduate in four years. I did play in the college band for a couple years but it wasn't the same as competing in sports.

(personal communication, June 29, 2013)

Limitations

This analysis provided an organization of themes that emerged from interviewing these five particular specialists in the field of gifted education. Just as we shifted the focus from gifted children to the researchers, there is still much more that lies outside the focus of this alternate lens. The limitations to this study include the number of research subjects, the particular fields and focus of study of the research subjects, and the focus of interview questions.

The number of research subjects was limited to allow for an in-depth interview to take place with each participant. As the researcher, I was able to share transcripts and work with each subject individually to ensure the information provided was clear and accurate. With more research subjects, further themes may have become evident. In the process of transcendental phenomenology, I remained vigilant to express the stories in the words of my subjects without my personal interpretation. The limited number of research subjects reflects the themes that emerged based on these five research subjects.

The research subjects had varied, yet similar backgrounds. All of the research subjects were professors of Gifted or Special Education and directly involved with Gifted and Talented students at some point during their careers. Therefore, their experiences were representative of not only their personal experiences, but also their professional experiences in their specialized fields. Specialists within other fields of education may reflect on similar experiences through a different lens and perspective.

The semi-structured interview process placed emphasis on particular life events and work related experiences. The subjects were encouraged to elaborate on specific accounts as they were being recounted. The research subjects shared information to the

extent they were comfortable with sharing. For some subjects, the amount of depth and breadth within topics was more extensive than others.

Implications

The information gathered in this study may provoke readers to consider the focus of their own research and personal experiences related to giftedness. The themes that emerged in this study reflect longitudinal accounts of the specialists' lives.

As reflected in the theme of Development, readers may consider their own early years and childhood experiences that supported, or failed to support, their own experiences related to giftedness. From the accounts of the specialists, it is evident that support from others, opportunities and enriching experiences, and an awareness of gifts helped to positively shape the specialists experiences. This suggests that developing supportive environments and providing meaningful mentor opportunities for young gifted individuals would likely lead to positive outcomes. Support related to better understanding of the self as a gifted individual would have a positive impact on younger gifted individuals and their development.

Specialists in this study recalled the Exposure to events which resulted in their following the path to the field of gifted education. A significant impetus for entering the field of gifted education was present for each of the specialist interviewed. For all of these specialists it was their experience with one or more gifted individuals or a greater understanding of themselves as a learner which led to their vocation. This implies that asking teachers to reflect on students and personal learning preferences would allow teachers a better understanding of their strengths and specialties related to their profession. Passion for a particular field develops over time. In a school setting

professional development should focus on individual teacher's strengths and allowing teachers to utilize their talents in the best setting. A sense of gifting back, or helping younger gifted individuals find their place was important to the specialists in this study. Teachers who feel passionate and well matched to their teaching area will better help their students.

The theme of Focus revealed how the definition of gifted for each specialist evolved. The definition of gifted was personalized based on each specialist's experiences. Therefore, the construction of a definition for giftedness requires reflection from individuals based on personal beliefs and the value of those beliefs in their life. The definition for gifted in a school system should encompass both the academic and social and emotional sides and should be reflected in the service setting. Passion and intensity was an evident theme in these individuals' lives. Recognizing and pursuing passion, as well as recognizing intensity and appropriate emotional responses would be important for younger gifted individuals to develop.

In the theme of Depth, self-awareness, emotion, and defining moments emerged. Supporting gifted individuals in developing self-awareness and understanding their emotions would be most beneficial to young gifted individuals. The specialists in this study had varying accounts of how and when their own self-awareness developed.

The theme of Defining Moments captured what appeared to be the most significant, yet most unpredictable moment in each specialist's life. This implies that despite the support, awareness, and daily occurrences of life, a single, unexpected moment may have the most substantial opportunity to change the course of one's life.

The way each specialist accepted and dealt with this defining moment, however, could be a reflection of the many moments that shaped the individual up to that point.

Recommendations

A shift in perspective from focusing on academic gifts to emotional and social gifts of gifts will have implications for other gifted individuals. Gifted children should be taught to recognize their inherent differences and taught to develop responses that make them successful in many different situations. The subjects in this research study credited gifted mentors and peers as well as supportive family members with helping them to recognize their own social and emotional needs.

Gifted individuals need guidance and support as they are exposed to new experiences and encounter opportunities. Just as the early years for gifted individuals should be met with supportive individuals, the type of exposure and opportunities presented to the gifted throughout their lives is important. The specialists in this story found their path to gifted along a road paved with varied experiences.

The definition of gifted developed for each researcher based on their personal experiences with giftedness. Within the field of gifted education, it should be expected that the definition would be as varied as the members that make up its population. To allow for individual differences and variances within the definition honors the individual differences and variances of the gifted individuals themselves.

The depth within an individual is explored to the extent that the individual is willing and able to search. An understanding of self and the world in which they are part helps to define experiences. Gifted individuals should be provided with examples of others who are like them and be given snapshots that may help them to better understand

themselves. This study collects the snapshots which may encourage gifted individuals to have a deeper sense of self.

Finally, defining moments will likely be encountered by gifted individuals. The moments that can be controlled in an individual's life should be supported to the fullest with the understanding that the unexpected will require that individual to meet this defining moment with openness and a broad sense of their self.

The snapshots in this study may serve as an opportunity for other gifted individuals to explore the various themes in their own lives. After exploring from this perspective, the lens may be broadened to understand all of the area not yet explored within these specialists' lives and within the life of the reader. Asking questions and analyzing these specialists in the field of gifted education will further add to the conversations and directions for research within the field of gifted education.

Bird's Eye View

The answers to the research questions were visible across the life stories of the specialists. What personal lived experiences do specialists in the field of gifted hold? In the theme of Development, support from others and opportunities and enriching experiences were apparent for each specialist. Through reflection, the specialists also shared recollections of their experiences with giftedness and their process of making meaning of these experiences.

In the theme of Exposure, the impetus for entering the field of gifted was a significant experience with a gifted child. For some this was their own child, and for others this was a child in a classroom setting. Each specialist also shared their experiences with significant mentors and their life experiences with mentoring others.

In the theme of Focus, aspects of each specialist's definition of giftedness held similarities as well. These similarities stemmed from their own experiences and self-awareness related to gifted. Passion and intensity were evident across the snapshots as well.

Finally, Depth revealed the similarities in the journey to self-awareness and understanding emotions. Defining moments emerged for each participant. While these moments varied for each specialist, in recollection, the moments were a significant part of their life journey.

How did specialists in the field of gifted education describe their lives looking back over their experiences associated with giftedness and being a specialist in the field? Again, this question was answered throughout the snapshots. The specialists' experiences with giftedness and being a specialist may be viewed from the way each specialist described their self. Their understanding of their self included their understanding of the gifted individuals they devoted their careers to identifying and serving.

What contexts or situations influenced or affected their experiences? The specialists' experiences were certainly influenced by their role as a specialist in the field of gifted understanding. Their life experiences were recalled through the specific lens—that of a specialist.

These snapshots preserved the life stories of five specialists in the field of gifted education. The journey towards identity development and human adjustment were illustrated throughout each story. The interconnection between the themes further demonstrated the complexity of knowing who they were and who they were becoming

throughout their lives. Giftedness transcended the academic and intellectual periods in life. It was part of the individual that remained constant in their ever-evolving life stories.

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