An Exploration of Gifted Adolescent Motivation in Academic Learning Experiences

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine gifted adolescents’ perspectives on motivation in regard to academic learning experiences. Participants were selected based on having at least one year of attendance at a midwestern private school for the gifted, having a full-scale IQ of at least 125, and being between the ages of 11-17. This study focused on six gifted adolescents who committed to participating in one personal interview, completing two student response journals, and submitting work samples with reflection tags that were found to be examples of motivational academic learning experiences.

Data from the interviews, student response journals, and student work samples with tags were analyzed using qualitative methods and through the theoretical framework of Gagne’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent as well as expectancy-value theory. From the triangulation of data, three major findings emerged. The first indicated that standard, mass-produced basal curricula do not meet the needs of gifted adolescent learners without additional modifications, indicating a need for specialized gifted curricula. The second focused on the need for ongoing training for educators who work with gifted adolescents, including instructional strategies and models of gifted education proven effective with gifted learners as well as how to provide meaningful and responsive feedback to gifted adolescents. Finally, the need for gifted
adolescents to personally value and connect academic learning experiences to the real world also emerged.

Implications and recommendations for the field and for future research primarily include the need for increased awareness and increased funding in the field of gifted education to combat a lack of motivation and underachievement from gifted adolescent learners. Subsequently, recommendations for the field include raising awareness of the unique learning needs of gifted adolescents, creating meaningful professional development for gifted educators, and instituting greater levels of pre-service training in the areas of gifted education and differentiation for all educators. Areas for future research include further examination of educational policy regarding gifted education, how to increase gifted adolescents’ valuation of academic learning experiences, and an examination of preparation requirements for teachers of the gifted, as well as how to write, market, and support specialized gifted curricula.
AN EXPLORATION OF GIFTED ADOLESCENT MOTIVATION
IN ACADEMIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES

BY
VICKI A. PHELPS
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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This dissertation would have never been possible if it had not been for my parents, James and Vera Hall, planting the seed so many years ago. Your belief in me, before I believed in myself, means more to me than I can express. In a similar manner, my three children, Brittany, Becca, and David, who without fail, whenever I really needed it, each of you took the time to tell me that my hard work would pay off and that you were proud of me. There are not enough words to tell you how your encouragement and belief in me kept me going. Always remember that we are life-long learners and never stop in your own quests. Continue to persevere in learning.

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could ever hope for. Together we are unstoppable, and I cannot imagine anything better than crossing this finish line with him by my side. Together, anything is possible!
DEDICATION

To my loving family, near and far:
Your belief in me paved the road for this journey.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Schools are to extraordinarily intelligent children what zoos are to cheetahs. Many schools provide a 10 x 12 foot cage, giving the unusual mind no room to get up to speed. Many highly gifted children sit in the classroom the way big cats sit in their cages, dull-eyed and silent. Some, unable to resist the urge from inside even though they can't exercise it, pace the bars, snarl and lash out at their keepers, or throw themselves against the bars until they do themselves damage. (Tolan, 2012, p. 10)

When I read this metaphor for the first time, I instantly thought of Jordan. For lack of a better word, he was infamous in our school. He was the student who struck fear into the soul of every teacher, and I had been warned by all of Jordan’s previous teachers about his lack of work completion, his constant daydreaming, his disruptive behavior, and his overall lack of respect for the school and the learning process. In essence, no one could believe that this student could have ever qualified for the gifted program. As I prepared for the first day of school, I have to admit; I was nervous about Jordan being a part of my class. After all, I had seen his behavior the previous year, and it was terrifying! To make a long story short, Jordan was a caged cheetah, thrashing out at all those around him, unmotivated, and lacking opportunities to allow his natural talents to shine. However, once placed in a conducive environment with appropriate motivational and developmental activities, he thrived, and his talents outpaced all those around him.

As I reflect back on my initial fear of Jordan, I realize that I, too, had placed him in a metaphorical cage before I had ever even met him. Unfortunately, Jordan is not alone in his struggle to be seen and heard as a gifted adolescent student, and after my year of working with
him, I realized that I needed to advocate for this population of gifted adolescents by providing them with a voice. As I work toward this goal, a foundational context for giftedness will be established through Francois Gagne’s (2000) definition as an individual’s “possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed outstanding natural abilities or aptitudes” (p. 82). Abu-Hamour and Al-Hmouz (2013) provide additional insight into the definition of giftedness as “the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed superior natural abilities or aptitudes at levels significantly above average in one or more of the following domains of human ability: intellectual, creative, social and physical” (p. 5).

Interestingly enough, it has been my experience that gifted adolescents are quite often stereotyped as those who work diligently on every assignment, taking the extra time to make sure their work is completed to the highest standard. For some gifted students this is a true statement; however, for the vast majority of gifted students, there are multiple motivational factors that impact the level to which assignments are completed. These factors are often shaped by accompanying learning styles, extra-curricular interests, and socio-economic status (Little, 2012). Furthermore, Little (2012) contends that there are key characteristics of curricula that impact motivation of the gifted learner. These consist of the level of challenge and perceived meaningfulness of the given assignment, both of which focus on “two related concepts, boredom and interest [and]...how they relate to challenge and meaningfulness in the curriculum” (p. 695). Chapter 2 will discuss a review of research covering this intersection of curricula and academic learning experiences.

Without question, motivation of the gifted adolescent is a complex entity, and despite vast research regarding the oversight of engaging gifted students, the misconception still exists
that gifted students will automatically be successful in any environment. One educator reflected on the impact of this misconception when she wrote the following:

As the TAG [Talented and Gifted] instructor, I analyzed the ITBS [Iowa Test of Basic Skills] scores for my gifted kids and found that many of them had shown significant decreases in their scores in the math area. Many of them showed a 20-point decrease or more! Unfortunately, this was not even a major issue with our district because they [gifted students] had scored above the State of Iowa NCLB [No Child Left Behind] minimum score. (Beisser, 2008, p. 3)

Clearly, motivation of the gifted adolescent must be examined further.

**Theoretical Framework**

In recognition of the unique motivational learning needs of the gifted adolescent, Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) represents an integral component of the theoretical framework for this study on gifted adolescent motivation. Additionally, in an effort to recognize the motivational needs of the gifted adolescent within a larger context, expectancy-value theory will also be used to substantiate the qualitative data gleaned from this study. While a brief overview of these frameworks will be provided in the following sections, a more thorough explanation will be discussed in Chapter 2.

**Gagne’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent**

Gagne’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent 2.0 (DMGT, 2008) recognizes that within the field of gifted education, the population is often defined by two key concepts: giftedness and talent. This leads to creating a dichotomy of pairings such as potential realiztion, promise/fulfillment, and aptitude/achievement (Gagne, 2008). The DMGT “was created to take advantage of [those] distinctions” (Gagne, 2008). As shown in Figure 1.1, Gagne acknowledges
the natural abilities of the gifted student, while also clearly defining how environmental factors, intrapersonal factors, and the developmental process all play an integral role in how gifted students’ natural abilities are demonstrated through competencies, or talents. These competencies are directly linked to the varying influences of how these variables can be manipulated to better help the gifted individual work toward his or her highest achievable potential.

Figure 1.1. Gagné’s differentiated model of giftedness and talent 2.0 (Gagne, 2008)
In closer examination of gifted adolescent motivation through the lens of Gagne’s (2008) DMGT, it is also important to note:

There is no doubt among researchers and professionals interested by the phenomenon of talent development that motivation, however it is specifically defined, plays a crucial role in the long process through which youth and adults attempt to reach excellence in any field of human activity. (Gagne, 2010, p. 81)

Keeping this insight as a focus throughout this qualitative study, priority will be given to specific DMGT components for closer examination. These will be the environmental (E) attributes of individuals (EI) and provisions (EP), the intrapersonal (I) pieces of awareness (IW), motivation (IM), and volition (IV), and the developmental process (D) sub-category of activities (DA).

In an effort to clearly articulate his model, Gagne (2008) expounds on these components. For example, when referring to EI, it is important to recognize that this “sub-component focuses on the psychological influence of significant persons in the talentees’ immediate environment” (p. 4). Within this study, gifted adolescents referenced all of these sub-components: parents, family, peers, teachers, and mentors. Additionally, EP includes the curricula and pedagogy as a catalyst for higher student achievement. Likewise, IW “covers a series of ‘social’ abilities associated with perceptiveness, but focused on oneself as the target” (Gagne, 2010, p. 87). IM addresses what usually brings to mind the idea of what motivates a learner, and IV includes how much effort a student is ready to invest in achieving any goal (Gagne, 2008). Moreover, the DA includes “a specific content (DAC), the curriculum, offered within a specific learning environment (DAF)” (Gagne, 2008, p. 2). By understanding these underlying concepts, the qualitative data derived from this study communicated a more detailed result.

Furthermore, Gagne’s (2008) DMGT recognizes the influence on academic talent “both in students’ beliefs about their abilities to succeed with tasks (expectancies) and in individuals’
valuing of various tasks” (Anderman & Anderman, 2014, p. 5). In doing so, the DMGT acknowledges that gifted adolescents’ motivation levels are directly tied to both their beliefs of how well they will achieve in any academic learning experience and how meaningful they perceive the academic learning experience to be. This further aligns Gagne’s DMGT with the theoretical underpinnings of expectancy-value theory.

Expectancy-Value Theory

While broadening the scope of gifted adolescent motivation into the greater context of educational psychology, expectancy-value theory aligns itself optimally with the theoretical underpinnings of Gagne’s (2008) DMGT. Through this lens of expectancy-value theory, Wigfield and Eccles (2002) have intently examined individuals’ expectancies for success in relation to their subjective values, and in doing so, they have taken a prominent role in motivational literature. Wigfield and Eccles define expectancies for success as beliefs about how well an individual will do on an upcoming task. These beliefs also refer to an individual’s evaluation of his or her competence in different content areas as well as with different skill sets. This parallels Gagne’s intrapersonal component of the DMGT, specifically addressing the goal management area of awareness. Likewise, Wigfield and Eccles examine how individuals value the tasks they are asked to take part in. These values are classified into the four categories of attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece, & Midgley, 1983). By recognizing how students value different tasks, expectancy-value theory recognizes how the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental processes impact how gifted students value tasks within the DMGT framework. In doing so, both the DMGT and
expectancy-value theory served as an interpretive lens to examine qualitative data gleaned from this research study on gifted adolescent motivation.

Problem Statement

Gifted adolescents have much to contribute to the examination of prevalent influences on gifted adolescent motivation in respect to academic learning experiences. While current research in the field supports that key motivational factors do exist, the majority of studies are quantitative (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Erdogan, 2015; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015; Turki, 2014). This prevailing literature consistently corroborates the importance of student autonomy in learning, including differentiation through the use of autonomous learning experiences such as student choice (Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Kiefer, et. al., 2015) and independent study (Gillard, Gillard, & Pratt, 2015; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Trna, 2014). Also research supports the use of hands-on activities and kinesthetic approaches with gifted adolescents, as this type of learning has been found to be the most motivational for gifted adolescents (Turki, 2014). In addition, the role and behavior of the teacher in the classroom must be recognized as an integral and crucial component while examining key factors that directly impact gifted adolescent motivation within this context (Erdogan, 2015; Eristi, 2012; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012).

For the few studies classified as qualitative, students were limited in their responses by Likert scales and short answer replies, which greatly impacted the depth of the students’ insights (Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014). Through this study on gifted adolescent motivation, however, the qualitative data provided a greater understanding about how gifted adolescents felt in regard to having opportunities for choice in
their learning as well as the impact of choice on their subsequent levels of motivation. This was accomplished through the gifted adolescents’ rich descriptions and depth of reflections provided through this open-ended qualitative approach, providing data currently lacking in the field of gifted education research. Additionally, qualitative data were ascertained to examine how gifted adolescents viewed the role of the teacher on student motivation as well as the role of hands-on and kinesthetic approaches in learning. In essence, without having a full perspective into this phenomenon, gifted curricula will continue to be written in the same one-size-fits-all approach, which seems to be a great hindrance in the education of some of our greatest minds (Kahyaoglu, 2013; Little, 2012; Powers, 2008; Turki, 2014).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore gifted adolescents’ perspectives on motivation pertaining to academic learning experiences as a means to better meet their unique learning needs.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. How do gifted adolescents’ conceptions of motivation align with the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental process components of Gagne’s DMGT?

2. How do gifted adolescents describe the types of academic learning experiences that are most and least motivational?

3. According to gifted adolescents, what influences their motivation in regard to academic learning experiences?
Significance of the Study

Current research in the field of gifted adolescent motivation is highly quantitative, analyzing statistical data derived from surveys, questionnaires, standardized tests, varying response instruments, and pre/post-test results (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Erdogan, 2015; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Turki, 2014). Few qualitative studies have focused on gifted adolescent motivation. Of the qualitative studies that have been conducted, data were collected through Likert scales, structured written responses, student work samples, questionnaires, and surveys that did not allow gifted adolescents the opportunity to share their full thoughts without restraint, leading to pithy and non-elaborative data (Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014). By offering opportunities for gifted adolescents to provide open-ended non-limiting responses, a wider range of insights was ascertained regarding gifted adolescents’ motivation.

This study allowed gifted adolescents the opportunity to communicate and reflect on what motivated and engaged them in their learning. With this heightened awareness, gifted adolescents’ learning needs will be better addressed, leading to gifted adolescents’ deeper engagement in the learning process, greater awareness of the value of academic learning experiences, and increased achievement. Overall, the phenomenon of gifted adolescent motivation needs further examination through a thorough qualitative study to ensure a more holistic analysis in this field. The gap in this area of research was addressed through the gifted adolescents’ insights.
Methodology

The qualitative paradigm used for this study focused on gifted adolescent motivation. Six gifted adolescents, who had all previously attended a gifted program in a Midwestern private school, participated in this study by taking part in one face-to-face interview, sharing self-selected work samples with reflection tags, and submitting electronic student response journals. Data analysis included descriptive coding, theming of the data, triangulation, and member checking, which led to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A more thorough explanation of methodological procedures will be described in Chapter 3.

Delimitations

The scope of this study was delimited by limiting the participants to early adolescent to middle adolescent gifted students, ranging in age from 11 to 17 years old (Greydanus & Bashe, 2003). In addition, all participants attended the same Midwestern gifted private school for at least one year of their middle school experience, consisting of grades five through eight. This focus allowed for a more manageable study, while also providing an opportunity to study gifted adolescents who experienced similar teachers and curricula.

Definition of Terms

**Academic Learning Experience** - any interaction, course, program, or other experience in which learning takes place, whether it occurs in traditional or nontraditional academic settings, or
whether it includes traditional or nontraditional educational interactions (Hidden Curriculum, 2014)

**Adolescent** - an age group encompassing early to middle adolescence, defined as people between the ages of 11 and 17 (Greydanus & Bashe, 2003)

**Differentiation** - modifying curriculum and instruction according to content, pacing, and/or product to meet unique student needs in the classroom (Glossary of Terms, 2017)

**Kinesthetic Learning** - learning involving movement with physical and/or athletic involvement (Turki, 2014)

**Learner Profile** – a learner’s “personal, academic, social or cognitive self that may influence how and what they learn” (Drachsler & Kirschner, 2012, p. 1743), including the individual’s learning style in “the way [a] person begins to process, internalize and concentrate on new material” (Dunn & Dunn, 1993, p. 2)

**Motivation** - “a set of beliefs that sustain behavior and is an important precursor to learning and success in school” (Kiefer et. al., 2015, p. 1)

**Perspective** - one’s own understanding of the world (Splitter, 2009)

**Schema** - one’s knowledge of what has been learned from the past and what can be relevant in dealing with the present (Eisner, 1991)

**Student Autonomy** - “the state of existing or acting separately from others” (Gillard et. al., 2015, p. 2)

**Student Engagement** - a psychological investment in learning that leads to pride in one’s work, an understanding of the assigned material, and the ability to incorporate and internalize this material into one’s own life (Newman, 1992)
Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study, while also establishing context for the study through the problem and purpose statements. It also presented the research questions that guided the study as well as an overview of the theoretical framework, delimitations, and definitions of key terms used in the study. Chapter 2 continues to build on Gagne’s Model of Giftedness and Talent and expectancy-value theory while also providing a review of literature to substantiate the historical background and need for the study. Chapter 3 details the methodology utilized in this study, including the participants, data collection, data analysis techniques, and limitations. Chapter 4 includes the findings; whereas Chapter 5 provides answers to the three guiding research questions, a discussion of those findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

By investigating the phenomenon of gifted adolescent motivation in terms of academic learning experiences, a greater understanding of how to motivate and engage this unique population of students was the goal of this study. The knowledge included in this review of literature will begin to substantiate the potential strategies, curricula, and teacher attributes needed to optimize gifted adolescents’ motivation levels.

The information shared in this literature review is divided into five sections: key conceptual understandings, gifted adolescent motivation and academic learning experiences, theoretical framework, the difference in gifted adolescent motivation, and the conclusion. Within key conceptual understandings, a foundational working knowledge of giftedness and student engagement, motivation and the gifted learner, and academic learning experiences will be established. Once an understanding of key terminology is established, the next section – gifted adolescent motivation and academic learning experiences, will discuss the three primary constructs that emerged from the literature: autonomy, hands-on learning, and the role of the teacher. This review will then include an overview of the theoretical framework of Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent and expectancy-value theory followed by research acknowledging the difference in gifted adolescent motivation. In closing, a conclusion will synthesize the overarching ideas of this review of literature.
Key Conceptual Understandings

In an effort to better understand gifted adolescents’ perspectives of motivation in terms of academic learning experiences, several key conceptual understandings must be defined. The conceptual understandings of giftedness, student engagement, motivation, and academic learning experiences build a foundational basis for the proposed research study. In addition, the operationalization of academic learning experiences is discussed.

Giftedness and Student Engagement

First, the conceptual understanding of giftedness must be explored. The definition of giftedness is ever-changing, depending on the context in which it is used; however, for the purpose of this literature review, Gagne’s (2000) definition of giftedness will be utilized. Gagne defines giftedness as “the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed outstanding natural abilities or aptitudes” (p. 82). Heuser, Wang, and Shahid (2017) add depth to the understanding of giftedness by recognizing that it is an “exceptional acumen in multiple areas that include both academic and nonacademic subjects” (p. 6) and “unfolds through lifelong learning and development” (Resch, 2014, p. 14). This conceptual understanding of giftedness also embraces the fact that giftedness is not only the result of an individual’s predispositions but also the impact of developing this innate ability through environmental factors (Heuser et. al., 2017). Environmental factors could include social interactions; other individuals such as family, peers, or teachers; or the type of curricula being utilized (Gagne, 2008).

The concept of student engagement must also be clarified. Before defining this concept, however, researchers have noted that “motivation is seen as a prerequisite of and a necessary
element for student engagement in learning” (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012, p. 252). For this literature review, the primary view of student engagement stems from Newman’s (1992) premise, which states that engagement is a psychological investment in learning that leads to pride in one’s work, an understanding of the assigned material, and the ability to incorporate and internalize this material into one’s own life. Furthermore, one must acknowledge that the most engaging type of work provides opportunity for creativity, sparks curiosity, allows time to work with others, and ultimately, elicits a feeling of success (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). It is important to recognize the direct influence and intertwined necessity these components have on gifted adolescent motivation, for without these attributes, gifted adolescent motivation is adversely affected.

**Motivation and the Gifted Learner**

The concept of motivation is also a broadly used term. Concepts of internal and external motivation come into play as well as a multitude of motivational theories. Motivation, in the context of this analysis, “is a set of beliefs that sustain behavior and is an important precursor to learning and success in school” (Kiefer et. al., 2015, p. 1). This understanding of motivation signifies a student’s ability to set a goal or begin an assignment and sustain focus and perseverance with that topic until the goal or assignment is achieved or completed. Also, this conceptual understanding was subsequently explored in conjunction with Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) and expectancy-value theory, the chosen theoretical framework for this study.

The key constructs of giftedness, engagement, and motivation guided this study on gifted adolescent motivation and served as a foundation to support the premise that “teachers’
instructional practices can dramatically influence students’ expectancy beliefs and values…[and] are related to students’ subsequent motivation to persist with and engage in certain tasks, courses, and even careers” (Anderman & Anderman, 2014, p. 5). In acknowledging this direct impact teachers have on student motivation, educators are better able to understand and address the needs of gifted adolescent students through the implementation of appropriate models, teaching strategies, and supports needed for gifted adolescent learners. Hence, teachers will have the knowledge to begin to incorporate the type of academic learning experience in which students will be able to become deeply engaged and persist for extended periods of time (Wigfield, Tonks, & Eccles, 2004).

**Academic Learning Experiences: Conceptual Definition**

At a basic stance, an academic learning experience is defined as any interaction, course, program, or other experience in which learning takes place, whether it occurs in traditional or nontraditional academic settings or whether it includes traditional or nontraditional educational interactions (Hidden Curriculum, 2014). Although this definition begins to paint a picture for an understanding of this concept, it is greatly lacking in terms of depth and research to help support its relevance to gifted adolescent motivation.

In an effort to construct a more well-established working definition of this concept, academic learning experiences are opportunities focused on helping students grow in self-awareness and in their ability to relate to others, clarifying values, [and] promoting moral development…[These include] (a) the personal growth of our students, including their feelings about self and development; (b) preparation for national and world citizenship; and (c) mastery of academic subjects, including both the basic skills of reading and computation that are so essential to contemporary life; and (d) the most powerful findings of disciplined inquiry. (Joyce, 1978, p. 3)
Within this description, Joyce is able to paint a picture of how academic learning experiences go beyond the context of a student simply earning a grade; he also acknowledges global responsibility and the importance of disciplined inquiry in addition to the learning of academic subjects. Furthermore, Joyce (1978) states that learning experiences are a combination of content, instructional material, learning environment, and methods of teaching. Again, this explanation adds to the complexity of academic learning experiences, for it acknowledges that “students are a powerful part of the learning environment, and students react differently to any given different teaching method” (Joyce, 1978, p. 9). This continues to set the foundational understanding that academic learning experiences have the ability to be perceived and processed differently, depending on each student’s learner profile. Kliebard (1970) further corroborates this premise by stating that a learning experience is a “function of the perceptions, interests, and previous experience of the student” (p. 268). Similarly, Eisner (2005) also believed that learning experiences require the use of “language, intention, and schema” (p. 113). His acknowledgement of schema in the student’s learning experience aligns with the foundational context for academic learning experiences and is progressive in nature (Portelli, 1987).

As one continues to build the foundational definition of academic learning experiences for the purposes of this study, seminal research further substantiates this concept. Bobbitt (1941) believed that such experiences should result from varied, abundant, and zestful play activities - physical, social, aesthetic, and especially intellectual - that bring the boys and girls throughout childhood and youth into vital and vitalizing contacts with a great range of realities. The play is not for the fun. That seems to the player to be the end, or he would not play. But play is given to humankind for the serious purpose of motivating that functioning of the organism that goes far toward building the body, the mind, the social qualities, and all of one’s powers. (p. 221)
Through this statement, Bobbitt signifies the importance of student engagement in establishing the meaning of academic learning experiences. Bobbitt (1924) also recognized that academic learning experiences should prepare a person for future endeavors:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile. (p. 35)

Dewey’s (1939) ideals also become part of the foundational definition by believing that such learning experiences “influence the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose” (pp. 33-34). Dewey continues to contribute to the conceptual definition of academic learning experiences by explaining more thoroughly that such learning experiences should also be the culmination of decided-upon content, thoughtful methods of instruction, the ability to obtain the needed materials, and the recognition of social organization.

In understanding the definition of academic learning experiences to be “concrete, realistic experiences [that] are an essential aspect of meaningful learning” (Morasky, 1973, p. vii), ultimately, they are “what the pupils do and experience by way of achieving the desired results” (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 44). Furthermore, academic learning experiences are the curricula that make up each student’s academic journey of achieving goals of growth (Bobbitt, 1924), and as such, educators should “strive to create for and with our children opportunities to explore and build important areas of knowledge, to develop powerful tools for learning, and to live in humanizing social conditions” (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996, p. xi). This requires a great deal of dedication and awareness for teachers to recognize such a vast array of student needs, which in this study entails gifted adolescents.
Academic learning experiences in this study on gifted adolescent motivation also refer to academic learning, which falls under the greater construct of curriculum planning and instruction. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, n.d.), a leading advocate for gifted education, provides a stronger foundation for this concept in regard to gifted learners by emphasizing that learning experiences should include “advanced, conceptually challenging, in-depth, distinctive, and complex content within cognitive, affective, aesthetic, social, and leadership domains” (Standard 3, para. 1). Additionally, while working with gifted learners, these academic learning experiences should work to “develop talent, enhance learning, and provide students with the knowledge and skills to become independent, self-aware learners” (Standard 3, n.d., para. 1). In further recognition that gifted learners “typically grasp curriculum concepts more quickly and deeply than their age peers…learning experiences [need to] extend and enrich the standards and require students to apply complex, creative, and innovative thinking to authentic problems” (Position Statement, para. 2). While the gifted adolescents in this study had experienced academic learning experiences that were not tailored to meet their unique learning needs, their responses provided valuable information for improving future curricula for gifted learners and continued professional development for teachers of the gifted.

In summary, academic learning experiences recognize the importance of student involvement in the learning process. This is done by creating opportunities for students to delve deeper into their areas of interest, become more self-aware, and make connections with real-life applications. Academic learning experiences also recognize the social-emotional aspect of learning and the impact of the learning environment on the student and the learning process. Most importantly, however, academic learning experiences are meaningful opportunities for students to engage in the learning process itself. The curriculum utilized in academic learning
experiences is focused on content standards, and in the case of gifted learners, academic learning experiences provide opportunities to extend those standards while also preparing gifted learners for future endeavors. With this understanding, the need to address how academic learning experiences were operationalized becomes a priority.

**Academic Learning Experiences: Operationalized**

Although the conceptual definition of academic learning experiences has been established, this study must also recognize a method for how these academic learning experiences are incorporated and measured within the classroom. This is necessary, as educators, curricula developers, and future researchers need be able to recognize and recreate this type of learning. As these academic learning experiences are closely tied to classroom curricula and learning standards, they are further grounded in the National Association for Gifted Children’s (n.d.) Programming Standards. In addition, these “standards provide a basis for policies, rules, and procedures that are essential for providing systematic programs and services to any special population of students...they provide important direction and focus to designing and developing options for gifted learners” (Standard 3, para. 1). Not only were these standards developed with input from a variety of stakeholders, but “because these standards are grounded in theory, research, and practice paradigms, they provide an important base for all efforts on behalf of gifted learners at all stages of development” (Standard 3, para. 2).

The National Association for Gifted Children (n.d.) stresses that academic learning experiences should be focused on student outcomes that can be measured by evidence-based-practices while providing students with an opportunity to demonstrate measurable growth (Standard 3). Evaluating measured growth will require educators to use reasonable judgment
while aligning pre-assessment and post-assessment data to standards (Betebenner, 2008) and should reflect established local, state, and national standards. By assessing students before and after learning, data are available to identify any change in achievement.

While pre and post-assessments were utilized to look for an increase in student achievement, formative assessments should also be implemented as part of the students’ academic learning experiences (Clark, 2011). Additionally, gifted adolescents should be given opportunities to develop their abilities in varying domains. This could manifest through experiences that provide opportunities for students to use varying resources, to research and explore, and/or to develop affective, aesthetic, social, and leadership skills. Furthermore, other student outcomes could include providing students with the opportunities for investigation and inquiry. These academic learning experiences could include critical-thinking activities, creative-thinking activities, and/or the use of problem-solving and inquiry-based learning (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d., Standard 3). While each and every academic learning experience may not include all of these characteristics, several of these attributes should be present to ensure optimal student engagement.

Gifted Adolescent Motivation and Academic Learning Experiences

Through the process of examining peer-reviewed literature on gifted adolescent motivation in regard to academic learning experiences, several key constructs became evidently clear. These essential threads focus on the sense of student autonomy in learning, hands-on learning experiences, and the role of the teacher in conjunction with gifted adolescent motivation. The impact these different components have on student motivation and their association with demonstrated student achievement were also explored. Figure 2.1 depicts an
overlay of these key constructs in an effort to visually represent the optimal instructional approach needed to motivate gifted adolescent students. Primarily, research supports an integration of student autonomy, hands-on learning, and the support from an involved teacher while creating optimally motivating learning experiences for gifted adolescents (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Altuna & Yazici, 2010; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Gillard, et. al., 2015; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Little, 2004; Patrick, Gentry, Moss, & McIntosh, 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014; Turki, 2014). In addition, the majority of peer-reviewed studies on this phenomenon were quantitative, leading one to question why students themselves were not being given a stronger voice to express their unrestricted insights on this subject, especially because this is so directly connected to how they personally engage and apply themselves in learning. The following sections unpack the terms used in Figure 2.1 in an effort to provide a greater context for understanding.

Figure 2.1. Overlapping of key constructs from literature review.
Autonomy: Research on Student Interest, Independent Study, and Student Choice

The most prevalent focal area in terms of motivating gifted adolescent students stems from the use of individualized learning through opportunities focused on student interest, independent study, and student choice. The reasoning behind this factor of motivation primarily stems from the belief that “conventional instructional strategies may not be enough to give the needed stimulation” for the gifted population (Fakoladee & Adeniyi, 2010, p.1), and “for most courses and disciplines, a standard curriculum may not be sufficient for the majority of gifted students” (Kahveci & Atalay, 2015, p. 92). The following sections explore autonomous learning more thoroughly through the lens of student interest, independent study, and student choice.

Autonomous Learning: Student Interest

Allowing gifted adolescents to pursue individual interests has been found to be an integral component in increasing subsequent levels of motivation. In fact, Fakoladee and Adeniyi (2010) built their study on the concept that gifted students should have the opportunity to pursue their own interests in terms of academic learning. The results of their study, along with the previously mentioned Kahveci and Atalay (2015) study support this philosophy, as student motivation, engagement, and ultimately achievement were directly influenced while providing gifted students ages 10 through 16 opportunities to pursue areas of personal interest in their learning. Kahveci and Atalay (2015), whose study utilized the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) of teaching with gifted students, also found that “particularly within the gifted and talented student population, the young learner must be presented with opportunities to explore and to define his or her personal interests and to investigate material in an independent but
supported manner” (p. 104). ICM’s success with gifted adolescents stems from its three instructional and curricular dimensions that focus on real world issues, themes, and ideas while also emphasizing advanced content in disciplines of study and providing higher order thinking processes (Maker & Schiever, 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009). Not only did this qualitative study identify an increase in student achievement, but students also responded positively by providing affirmative responses (Kahveci & Atalay, 2015).

**Autonomous Learning: Independent Study**

In a manner similar to increasing gifted adolescent motivation through academic learning experiences focused on student interest, independent study was also found to have positive associations with gifted adolescent motivation. For instance, Kahyaoglu (2013) found that gifted students actually prefer independent study; whereas their non-gifted counterparts preferred lectures, and his findings also confirm that gifted students’ independent learning styles were actually higher than their non-gifted peers. In fact, when researching the use of independent study with gifted learners, Powers (2008) found that while using independent study as a differentiation technique with gifted learners, students were able to integrate input into their own learning while being provided with a challenge, while utilizing their critical thinking skills. Continuing to build on this premise that gifted students should be allowed to pursue autonomous learning, Fakolade and Adeniyi’s (2015) study of gifted students in Nigeria found that academic achievement had a positive correlation with self-directed learning. This is important to note because it clearly demonstrates a common thread among gifted adolescents from different cultures and academic settings. Additionally, there is further evidence to suggest that when gifted adolescents were provided with autonomy support, there was an increase in motivation,
engagement, and sense of school belonging (Kiefer, et. al., 2015). To further corroborate these findings, Chan’s (2001) qualitative study and Trna’s (2014) mixed methods study also found that gifted students preferred and were motivated by the opportunity for independent study over their non-gifted counterparts.

**Autonomous Learning: Student Choice**

This sense of increased student motivation was also achieved through integrating student choice into academic learning experiences. In fact, when students were provided with choice, “students were willing to do much more work on their own towards mastery of a subject….” Assignments were more in-depth. Papers were longer. Students became, and stayed, engaged in the subject matter” (Gillard, et. al., 2015, p. 3). When choice is provided, along with appropriately leveled academic learning experiences, there is maximized student growth and an increased movement toward autonomy and learning success for gifted learners (Powers, 2008, p. 58). In regard to gifted adolescents, in particular, the use of choice, ownership and interest not only served as strong motivators for learning and achievement, but motivation actually improved by incorporating these differentiation techniques (Gentry & Springer, 2002).

By recognizing these key constructs of student choice, student interest, and an opportunity for independent study, a sense of autonomy is created for gifted students, and ultimately, this autonomy leads to students feeling more motivated and engaged in the learning process. Powers’ (2008) study summarized this concept nicely:

Independent study is essential for those students who are bright but refuse to accept traditional learning environments and values. They desire challenge, the opportunity to research what personally interests them, and the freedom to guide their own learning. It is a wonderful opportunity for gifted students who achieve less than their potential to shine. (p. 63)
If such autonomous learning benefits the gifted underachiever, all gifted learners could potentially gain greater motivation from this differentiated approach to learning. This greater motivation will further impact gifted adolescents’ academic achievement in a productive and positive manner.

**Hands-On Learning: How Action Leads to Motivation**

The concept of active learning was also prevalent within the literature in regard to motivating the gifted adolescent. Trna’s (2014) study, in particular, found several key factors that greatly affected the motivation of gifted adolescents in terms of their academic learning experiences. These factors included understanding that gifted students were not satisfied with passive memorizing, they were more curious, they linked seemingly unrelated things into a contextual understanding, they used information to support their ideas, they were creative, and they wanted to know how things work. By utilizing an inquiry-based curriculum, Trna’s (2014) results concluded that an increase in student motivation was directly linked to an emphasis on active student learning, project learning, the encouragement of problem-solving, and an individualized approach to students. Additionally, Renninger and Hidi (2011) found that group work and interaction with puzzles and computers were likely to trigger adolescents’ situational interest, whereas meaningfulness (personal relevance of the content) and involvement (the extent to which students are active participants) tended to be sources of maintained - that is, longer lasting-situational interest. (p. 178)

By having sustained motivation through active learning, gifted adolescents will continue to rise to higher levels of rigor. The above example is just one of many learning activities that immerse students into hands-on learning, and the results are clear. Likewise, Turki’s study (2014), which examined the learning styles of gifted and non-gifted students, found that gifted adolescents...
actually prefer kinesthetic learning styles more than their non-gifted counterparts. Interestingly, non-gifted learners’ most preferred learning style was that of auditory learning. This is yet another example of how incredibly different a gifted adolescent’s mind works when compared to that of the non-gifted learner. Similarly, Altuna and Yazici’s (2010) study also found that gifted students preferred the kinesthetic learning styles more than their non-gifted classmates. Through the process of surveying gifted adolescents in regard to their preferred learning styles, Altuna and Yazici found that gifted adolescents embraced the opportunity to be actively involved in their learning through hands-on learning experiences. Not only did this involvement increase their levels of motivation, it also led to higher academic achievement. This is an attribute of learning that all educators must take into account while planning academic learning experiences for the gifted adolescent. In fact, Al Fuqaha (2002) found that students’ academic achievement was positively impacted when educators allowed students to work through their preferred learning styles, so this only further emphasizes the importance of allowing gifted adolescents to be actively involved in their academic learning experiences through hands-on kinesthetic activities.

In sum, current research with regard to gifted learners and their most preferred learning styles indicates gifted adolescents and non-gifted adolescents are motivated in different manners when it comes to academic learning experiences. Gifted adolescents preferred to be engaged in academic activities that allow them to be actively involved in the learning process.

Teacher: Motivator and Creator of Environment

The final commonality found in peer-reviewed studies on this subject was the role of teachers in not only their interactive behaviors with students and the delivering of the curricula,
but also in terms of how they created a motivational learning environment. In essence, teaching the gifted adolescent is filled with complexities not commonly seen in the regular classroom, and “fundamentally, these teachers [of the gifted] must have adequate training and competence in the field” (Erdogan, 2015, p. 134). The next two sections explore the influential role of teachers as motivators as well as the importance of how teachers establish classroom environments.

Teacher as Motivator

First, teachers of gifted adolescents must ensure their students are presented with acceptable challenges through the alignment of content, materials, expectations, and tasks while simultaneously being responsive to students’ interests and needs (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kellough & Kellough, 2008; Scales, 1991, 2003; Wiles, Bondi, & Wiles, 2006). It is also important that teachers “recognize the diversities in any classroom while meeting content and performance standards. Learners also need to be inspired to engage—to invest time, attention, and interest (Shea & Shea, 2013, p. 47). In taking this into account, Eristi (2012) explained:

Teachers motivate their students in accordance with the learning and development goals and with the results they have obtained, help students gain confidence; …teachers help students make efforts in line with the learning goals, contribute to the solution of any problem students are likely to experience, [and] respond to their students’ questions. It could be stated that teachers’ in-class roles and behaviors are important...in increasing students’ interest and motivation. (p. 3)

Within the same study aimed at identifying gifted students’ perceptions of the roles and behaviors of teachers, the importance of teachers’ content knowledge as a motivational factor was also demonstrated. Gifted students involved in this study reported that the most important attribute of any teacher was being knowledgeable. This knowledge base, coupled with providing positive guidance, impacted gifted adolescent student motivation, and ultimately, increased
student achievement. Similarly, in a study by Kiefer, et. al. (2015), the same assertion was found to be true: “teacher involvement was positively and uniquely associated with motivation” (p. 9). This particular study, which was conducted at the middle school level, was specifically designed to examine the impact of teachers’ roles and interactions on young adolescents’ academic motivation, classroom engagement, and feelings of school belonging. These results, which provided further support of the importance of positive teacher involvement, are yet another example of how the behavior of the teacher has a direct influence with how a student approaches and engages with an assignment, thus signifying motivation. The Saeed and Zyngier (2012) study further aligned with these assertions, as they found the majority of the students in their study felt happy in their classrooms when their teacher was nice and helpful, which was directly associated with greater student motivation, student engagement, and student achievement. Saeed and Zyngier’s study focused intently on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and utilized Schlechty’s (2011) Student Engagement Continuum to determine the level of motivation and engagement of student learning. Schlechty’s Continuum expands student engagement into five different categories: authentic engagement, ritual engagement, passive compliance, retreatism, and rebellion. Each of these categories associate student engagement with levels of engagement. This study continues to support the importance of addressing students’ needs for autonomy, as previously addressed in this review, and their “research confirms that motivated and engaged students learn better and show best possible outcomes in their academic study... [when] teachers make classrooms more engaging places for students to learn” (p. 262). In this case, it is important to note that a teacher of the gifted must take the time to learn more about the complexities of this unique population of learners to plan and design curricula that are engaging. Taking it a step further, Trna (2014) also found that a motivating factor for gifted students was
when teachers were empathetic to their needs as learners. This is an integral attribute for teachers of the gifted to recognize, for gifted adolescents tend to have a higher level of sensitivity to the world around them (Silverman, 1994). All teachers should be highly aware of gifted students’ social-emotional learning because this is paramount to ensure student learning and engagement (Raphael & Burke, 2012). This feeling of empathy from the teacher also led students to feel encouraged by their teacher, thus leading to higher motivation within the classroom. As previously mentioned, once students’ motivation is heightened, academic achievement is also positively affected.

When it comes to working with gifted adolescents, teachers should also implement instructional strategies that help to reduce students’ negative attitudes toward school (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013). In fact, Powers (2008) found that “great teachers of the gifted challenge students while simultaneously offering support, like a coach at a sporting event” (p. 58). Again, this research recognizes the importance of how the classroom teacher could potentially impact student motivation in terms of academic learning experiences. Little (2004) further corroborates the need for teacher support for the gifted adolescent and understands this is needed in terms of academic progression as well as for emotional growth. In fact, by providing this multi-faceted support, gifted adolescents had less incidence of underachievement as well as fewer problems in social situations. Through examining a vast array of literature on the role of the teacher in gifted adolescent motivation, the following understanding becomes abundantly clear:

Students actively engage in the challenge of higher level learning and are motivated to achieve to their potential [when] the teacher actively supports the gifted learner emotionally and intellectually by providing feedback and guidance on a challenging task...[this] creates a win-win situation. (Powers, 2008, p. 63)
Clearly, the role of the teacher has a substantial impact on the motivation of the gifted adolescent. By being an involved and positive facilitator of learning, teachers can greatly influence their students’ levels of learning. In addition, teachers should provide gifted learners with ample feedback and direction throughout academic learning experiences as well as be empathetic to their social emotional learning levels. By remaining cognizant of these different learning attributes, a teacher will be better able to motivate and engage gifted adolescent learners.

Teacher as Creator of Environment

Establishing a positive and conducive learning environment is paramount in any gifted classroom. The National Association for Gifted Children (n.d.) identifies the key characteristic of a positive learning environment to include respecting intellectual safety and trust. Furthermore, the environment should allow for self-exploration and embrace positive communication while developing social skills and leadership. In addition, the classroom environment should also be established to help support students in taking risks in their learning. Tomlinson (1997) refers to this as supported risk because gifted learners, quite often, earn high grades with relative ease for a great portion of their early education. By middle-school, it is common for gifted adolescents to have been able to succeed without “normal” encounters with failure. Then, when a teacher presents a high-challenge task, the student feels threatened. Not only has he or she likely not learned to study hard, take risks and strive, but the student's image is threatened as well. A good teacher of gifted students understands that dynamic, and thus invites, cajoles and insists on risk—but in a way that supports success. (p. 2)

By establishing this supported risk environment, gifted learners begin to internalize the perseverance and dedication needed to succeed, not only as they continue through their
education, but also in their future lives. Tomlinson (1997) asks teachers to create a classroom environment that makes it clearly evident to students that everyone is expected to come to school prepared to grow intellectually and to stretch every day. More importantly, she stresses that the measure of growth and progress is a competition within oneself and not in comparison with others. Additionally, an extremely competitive, norm-referenced focus within the classroom may affect highly gifted students in a negative manner (Patrick, et. al., 2015); whereas an environment founded on enthusiasm is an integral factor in a successful classroom environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Gentry, Steenbergen-Hu, & Choi, 2011; Patrick & Ryan, 2008; Patrick, Turner, Meyer, & Midgley, 2003). Teachers’ enthusiasm leads students to enjoy the process of learning. This emphasis allows students to focus on the intrinsic aspects of learning and the benefits of increasing skills and knowledge (Patrick et. al., 2015).

Establishing an environment that allows the appropriate types of curricula to be integrated into the classroom is also an area of high priority (Maker & Schiever, 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009). Meeting the needs of gifted adolescents requires a great deal of modifications.

To address [these curricular needs], teachers can differentiate curriculum through posing progressively more complex issues, adjustment of texts according to each student's reading level and interest, modification of mathematical processes according to those previously mastered, and pace of instruction. (Frequently Asked Questions about the Common Core, n.d., para. 7)

This means that the established classroom environment needs to be flexible and accommodating to the unique learning needs of each gifted learner. Tomlinson (2003) stresses that it should avoid the one-size-fits-all curriculum. Additionally, the classroom environment needs to be one founded on respect that “provides both structure and choice and helps [students] achieve more than they thought they could. These are needs shared by all learners, not just those who are
gifted. But good instruction for gifted learners must begin there” (Tomlinson, 1997, p. 1).

Successful classroom environments continue to support students in situations that are
challenging and do not just add additional work for the gifted learner (Patrick, et. al., 2015).
Tomlinson (1997) further describes a successful gifted classroom environment as one that
embraces opportunities for autonomous learning as well as learning at a conceptual level. This
type of classroom environment would be quite different than one built on teacher lectures and
rote memorization. Furthermore, a successful classroom environment should recognize that
every student, including the gifted learner, has a right to learn. Establishing a flexible and
respectful environment that allows for appropriate curricula to meet the individual learning needs
of gifted learners is imperative (Patrick, et. al., 2015; Tomlinson, 1997, 2003).

Finally, when discussing the gifted learner and the classroom environment, the role of
teacher support needs to be addressed. Much in the same way as when a young gymnast is
learning a new move, the coach makes sure the skills are first developed, then practiced in a
harness, and then spots the gymnast when progressing to independent completion. Effective
teachers of the gifted work much in the same way (Tomlinson, 1997). Quite simply, a successful
learning environment cannot be achieved without responsive instruction from the teacher who
also supports gifted learners’ social emotional needs (Tomlinson, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent and expectancy-value
theory served as the theoretical framework for this study on gifted adolescent motivation. A
further review of literature is discussed to support why expectancy-value theory is the most
optimal motivational theory to be used in conjunction with Gagne’s DMGT for use in this study.
Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) recognizes the importance of both the natural abilities of the gifted learner as well as the impact that environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental processes have on the natural abilities being demonstrated through competencies or talents. As shown in Figure 2.2, this holistic approach ultimately enables educators to recognize key components that impact gifted learners’ achievement levels.
Gagne (2008) acknowledges the natural abilities of the gifted student, while also signifying how environmental factors, intrapersonal factors, and the developmental process all play an integral role in how gifted students’ talents are demonstrated through competencies. These competencies are viewed as a student’s talents, and the successful demonstration of these talents is directly impacted by how the various factors are addressed to meet the needs of gifted learners.

Additionally, the DMGT identifies the thresholds for both giftedness and talent at belonging in the top 10% of the population (Gagne, 1998). In recognizing this, the DMGT views “natural abilities or aptitudes as the ‘raw material’ or constituent elements of talents” (Gagne, 2008, p. 6). These levels of giftedness are further clustered into natural abilities identified as intellectual (GI), social (GS), creative (GC), perceptual (GP), muscular (GM), and reflexes (GR). The first four components are classified as mental, while the last two components are classified as physical, dealing with both large motor skills and fine motor skills, respectively (Gagne, 2008). Gagne (2008) also denotes that while natural abilities develop over the course of someone’s whole life, the majority of these develop during the developmental years of learning.

Likewise, Gagne (2008) classifies competences, or talents, as falling into different categories. These are academic (TC), technical (TT), science and technical (TI), Arts (A), social service (TP), administration/sales (TM), business operations (TB), games (TG) and sports/athletics (TS). Furthermore, Gagne contends that the causal components of intrapersonal (I), developmental process (D), and environment (E) contribute positively to students’ gifts being realized as talents and competencies.

In further examining the causal components of the DMGT to connect with this study on gifted adolescent motivation, Gagne (2007) acknowledges that regardless of the domain or field
being assessed, the range of performance (or student achievement) is as equally as large within
the gifted population as it is within the regular population. Gagne (2007) provides an example of
how the data gleaned from the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* at the end of first grade signified that
there were already at least four grade levels represented. To exacerbate that finding, by ninth
grade that range more than tripled. Gagne stresses:

> It becomes clear why the slow learning pace of the regular classroom, with its constant
repetitions and revisions, generates much boredom and, sometimes, stronger expressions
of frustration among IGAT [Intellectually Gifted, Academically Talented] students...My
most vivid analogy is that of a commuter stranded on a highway at rush
hour...Enrichment in [the Developmental Process component] would act for these
students just like the special left lane offered to commuters with passengers. The
motivational impact...no doubt compares with the pleasure felt by those drivers as they
enter that lane and rapidly accelerate to their normal cruising speed. (Gagne, 2007, p.
104)

With this insight, Gagne is able to substantiate why the DMGT is an integral part of the
theoretical framework because he acknowledges the gifted adolescents’ learning needs in
conjunction with the levels of frustration and lack of motivation that can be experienced when
those needs are not being met. To further acknowledge the role of the developmental process
compartment of the DMGT:

> A mismatch seems to exist between the difficulty of textbooks, the repetition of curricular
material in these texts, and the needs of our high ability learners. It is reasonable to
conclude that many of these students spend much of their time in school practicing skills
and learning content they already know. (Reis, 1993, p. 3)

By referencing Reis’s conclusions, Gagne (2007) believes that literally millions of students in the
United States could easily cover the K-12 curricula at least two to three years ahead of the pace
imposed by the educational system, again signifying the relevance of utilizing the DMGT to help
gifted adolescents work to their utmost potential. Even more concerning to Gagne (2011) was
that through his research with gifted adolescents at the middle school level, there was a “failure to find any systematic application of the [DMGT] in middle schools” (p. 18).

Gagne (2008, 2010) suggests that the interactions of certain causal components of the DMGT exercise more influence on gifted adolescents’ ability to turn their gifts into competencies. While Gagne recognizes a gifted adolescent’s level of natural abilities, or gifts, to be the greatest impacting factor, he then ranks the most influential causal components as the intrapersonal, developmental process, and environmental, in that order. While he did place the intrapersonal component ahead of the developmental process, he does recognize that the developmental process is most characteristic of IGAT [Intellectually Gifted, Academically Talented] students’ ease and speed in learning… it alleviates the boredom induced by an unduly slow teaching pace…[and] liberates hours of learning space, which can be used to insert other forms of enrichment. (Gagne, 2007, p. 104)

Through acknowledging the importance of all the DMGT components on gifted adolescent motivation, Gagne’s (2008) DMGT was a useful lens to interpret the data from this study. Not only did it signify the complicated learning influences within this unique population of learners, it also served as tool to denote different aspects of gifted adolescent motivation in regard to academic learning experiences.

Expectancy-Value Theory

Within the field of education, Wigfield and Eccles (2002) have intently examined individuals’ expectancies for success in relation to their subjective values. In doing so, they have taken a prominent role in motivational literature with their expectancy-value theory. Wigfield and Eccles define expectancies for success as beliefs about how well an individual will do on an
upcoming task. These beliefs also refer to an individual’s evaluation of his or her competence in different areas. Likewise, subjective task values are classified into four major components. These are attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Eccles et. al., 1983). More specifically, attainment value deals with the importance of doing well on any given task. This is closely aligned with an individual’s identity, and task value is heightened when an individual views the task as central to his or her own sense of self (Eccles et. al.). In regard to intrinsic value, this is quite simply the sense of enjoyment an individual gains from doing the task at hand, while utility value refers to how an individual views a task as fitting into one’s future plans. An example of this would be a gifted adolescent enrolling in AP courses in high school as an opportunity to earn college credit (Eccles et. al.). Finally, the concept of cost is defined as what an individual might sacrifice to complete a task as well as any anticipation of effort an individual might need to assert to complete the task. An example of this might be a gifted adolescent deciding whether to complete a calculus homework assignment or interact on social media with friends (Eccles et. al.). Through this lens, it is critical to understand that gifted adolescents may not engage in an activity, despite feelings of competence, if the activity holds no value to them (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). In essence, an individual’s expectancy for success and value levels for a task directly impact the level of persistence in, performance in, and choice to engage in a task. Without having these components, the motivation to persevere when a challenge arises will be diminished.

To increase motivation through this lens, teachers of gifted adolescents should be highly cognizant of their students’ abilities and interests. In doing so, teachers will be better prepared to develop each student’s skill set through individualized valued areas. Educators should also help gifted students develop a sense of future value, such as understanding that the effort put forth in
high school will potentially lead to better collegiate choices and scholarship opportunities. By knowing the individual learning needs of each gifted student, a teacher is better prepared to create tasks that lead gifted adolescents to success and maintained engagement, while continuing to raise expectations and foster greater risk-taking in academic learning experiences.

Expectancy-value theory acknowledges the importance of how an individual values a task in conjunction with his expectation for success (Anderman & Anderman, 2014). Using this framework, Deci and Ryan (1985) found that students became bored when they perceived assigned work as being too easy and became anxious and frustrated when assigned tasks were perceived as too difficult. This research is indicative of teachers not taking into account students’ learning needs and interests. In fact, empirical research both in the United States and across other countries suggests that “expectancies and value predict achievement outcomes, including persistence, performance, and choice of activities” (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Patall, 2016, p. 92), so teachers should be utilizing tools such as pre-assessments and interest inventories to better meet their students’ individual learning needs, while also consistently providing students with constructive feedback and support. Likewise, Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, and Wigfield (2002) further corroborate this idea by finding that expectancy for success strongly suggests and predicts performance and tends to precede and predict the students’ values. This finding supports the importance of designing and integrating curricula that will build students’ expectancies for success, subsequently leading to a positive impact on student performance and assigned value. For example, while teaching research skills to gifted adolescents, the teacher should first pre-assess student knowledge of research methods, organizational strategies, and presentation modes. In using this information in conjunction with a student’s choice of research topics, the teacher will be able to provide appropriate support and feedback through the use of varying levels of
graphic organizers, leveled texts, and multiple presentation techniques to stretch each individual to a deeper level of depth and complexity while also maintaining the valued topic of interest. Additionally, if students only have heightened expectancies or heightened values, then their motivation will not be as high (Nagengast, Marsh, Scalas, Xu, Hau, & Trautwein, 2011; Trautwein, Marsh, Nagengast, Lüdtke, Nagy, & Jonkmann, 2012), so it is imperative for educators to be highly cognizant of both these factors.

Expectancy-Value Theory through the Gifted Lens

Due to gifted adolescents’ self-efficacy being higher than their non-gifted counterparts (McGee & Martin, 2011; Patrick, et. al., 2015), self-efficacy theory is more frequently cited in research. Although self-efficacy might be the most prevalent theory used in conjunction with the gifted adolescent, expectancy-value theory is also referenced a great deal. Expectancy-value also explores an individual’s expectancy for success but also integrates the value associated with the task. Patrick et al. (2015) make the following contention:

Just as interpersonal relationships can foster motivation for gifted and talented adolescents, so can boredom deplete it. We have noted already that low challenge and lack of opportunity for improvement fuels adolescents' boredom. Students may generally value learning, but be turned off by teacher-assigned tasks if they perceive these tasks as busywork or “hoop-jumping.” (p. 191)

Fredricks, Alfeld, and Eccles (2010) further corroborate that academically gifted students report lacking motivation when faced with learning activities that are too easy, uninteresting, or are perceived as lacking relevance to their interests in the subject area. Furthermore, gifted adolescents in heterogeneous classes had higher correlations with this feeling than gifted students who took part in gifted or advanced classes (Gentry & Owen, 2004). Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) also support this finding by arguing that “learning is the opposite of boredom, [and]
learning is the antidote to boredom” (p. 20). This underlying belief acknowledges that boredom in the context of the gifted learner is not just the lack of enjoyment or interest within a certain activity; it is actually the lack of value the gifted learner places on the task at hand, leading to avoidance behaviors (Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Stupnisky, & Perry, 2010). In fact, “for gifted students, prevalent curricular experiences that represent skills already mastered and hold little task value or personal meaning do not support growth and learning, and they provide little basis for student motivation” (Little, 2012, p. 702). This is yet another piece of evidence to support the need for educators to incorporate learning experiences that are appropriately meaningful and challenging to gifted adolescents, which in turn will promote student motivation and a sense of value within the classroom (Tomlinson, 2003; Van Tassel-Baska, 2012). In an effort to address this finding, the NAGC [National Association for Gifted Children] has recommended focusing on finding pathways to accelerate the Common Core State Standards for gifted students, developing differentiated task demands that present greater levels of complexity in their expectations related to the standards, and developing interdisciplinary tasks and product expectations that accelerate learning by addressing multiple standards simultaneously. (Little, 2012, p. 702)

While addressing the need for gifted adolescents to see value and worth within their learning, it is also important to note that a characteristic of gifted adolescents is that they tend to be preoccupied with their own thoughts (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). This makes it even more important for educators to assess their students’ interests and abilities and consistently work to help gifted learners make the connections of how learning tasks are connected to and associated with areas of value in both the present and future. One example of this would be to utilize the NAGC (n.d.) standard to “integrate career exploration experiences into learning opportunities for students with gifts and talents” (Standard 3, para. 6). Whether the educator does
this through a biography study, guest speakers, or research projects, an opportunity to speak with
the students about value is made available. These types of discussions help to build not only the
task value associated with learning but also provide an opportunity to build on the expectancy of
success through an area of interest, leading to higher levels of motivation in the gifted
adolescent. Again there is carryover into self-determination theory with autonomous attributes as
well as achievement goal theory with a mastery orientation, but because a distinct focus is placed
on the value of a learning task, expectancy-value is most appropriately aligned with this
standard.

DMGT and Expectancy-Value Theory

Through examining which model of motivation best aligns with Gagne’s (2008) DMGT, it was found that expectancy-value theory aligns most optimally. Gagne’s DMGT recognizes
“students’ beliefs about their abilities to succeed with tasks (expectancies) and [their] valuing of
various tasks” (Anderman & Anderman, 2014, p. 5). In correlating this belief with his DMGT
framework, Gagne (2008) specifically states that “talentees will examine their values and their
needs” through his framework (p. 4). Gagne prioritizes this concept by establishing value as the
first item of his intrapersonal category. Gagne also refers to needs, interests, and passions within
the intrapersonal category, all of which are integral components of expectancy-value theory and
the components of assigned value: attainment, intrinsic, utility, and cost. Gagne delves deeper
into why he developed his model in this manner by examining the way passion impacts how an
individual values tasks by recognizing passion as

a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in
which they invest time and energy. Thus, for an activity to represent a passion for people,
it has to be significant in their lives, something that they like, and something at which
they spend time on a regular basis...Such passions become central features of one’s
identity and serve to define a person. (Vallerand, Mageau, Ratelle, Leonard, Blanchard,
Koestner, Gagne, & Marsolais, 2003, p. 757)

This construct is in direct alignment with expectancy-value theory and specifically addresses
how tasks are aligned with an individual’s identity and, subsequently, how these task values are
heightened when an individual is able to connect to the task as central to himself (Eccles, et. al.,
1983).

Furthermore, Gagne’s (2008) DMGT classifies awareness, motivation, and volition under
the construct of goal-management. While at first glance, it might lead one to reference
achievement goal theory or self-determination theory, Gagne (2010) clarifies how his framework
is not representative of these entities. He states:

Goal management has become the umbrella concept for a group of processes related to
the management of all talent-related conative-from the Latin ‘conatum’, meaning
effortful behavior - activities. The term conation brings back a very old, but still useful,
trilogy: cognition, affection, and conation. They refer respectively to thoughts, emotions,
and actions. (p. 87)

This insight from Gagne once again aligns his framework with that of expectancy-value theory
because his acknowledgement of an individual’s thoughts, emotions, and subsequent actions
once again bring the focus back to how a student values a task. In essence, it is through one’s
thoughts and emotions that attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost are all
intertwined, affecting the choice of action, or lack thereof, an individual might take. This again
emphasizes this unique attribute of expectancy-value theory.

In examining expectancy-value’s utility value at a deeper level, one is able to find
another parallel with Gagne’s (2008) DMGT. Specifically, Gagne (2010) believes that when
individuals identify and pursue goals, they are pinpointing what they, themselves, want to
achieve in their future. This clearly parallels a heightened sense of utility value, which also
represents how individuals view tasks fitting into their future plans (Eccles, et. al., 1983). Gagne (2010) supported Wigfield and Eccles’ (2002) definition of expectancies for success as beliefs about how well an individual will do on an upcoming task when he states that the goals students set represent expected outcomes. This concept of expectancy is repeatedly addressed in both of these frameworks and serves as another thread to tie these two entities together.

Another area that joins these two frameworks is examination of motives. Expectancy-value theory discusses intrinsic value as the sense of enjoyment an individual gains from participating in an activity (Eccles, et. al., 1983). Similarly, Gagne (2010) associates intrinsic value as the “pleasure of doing it. Some will call its strong expressions ‘love of learning’ or ‘passion for learning’” (p. 90). While other theories address intrinsic motivation, these two frameworks clearly acknowledge the value associated with intrinsic motivation. Gagne also refers to how teachers use interest inventories to gauge these value levels in their students. More specifically, Gagne does not view intrinsic and extrinsic constructs as being negatively correlated to each other. He provides the example that the love of learning could co-exist with the desire to find a well-paying job. After conducting a study on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, Gagne and St Pere (2002) actually state their results question the central aspect of Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory, clearly acknowledging Gagne’s DMGT is not aligned with that theory.

With Gagne’s (2008) DMGT placing such an integral focus on how the values of students impact engagement in learning and ultimately motivation, expectancy-value theory is the most optimal model of motivation to align with. In addition, Gagne addresses the students’ expectancy for success and denounces self-determination’s theoretical principles in conjunction with his DMGT framework. While there are attributes that might, in part, be associated with achievement
goal theory or self-determination theory, it is clear that expectancy-value theory is the model of motivation that best reflects Gagne’s philosophical foundation.

Difference in Gifted Adolescent Motivation

In conducting research on gifted adolescent motivation, it is especially important to acknowledge how research in this field has noted a difference between gifted and non-gifted adolescent motivation. This is an important finding because it further establishes why this study is unique from a study focused on non-gifted adolescent motivation. Additionally, before exploring studies on the differences between gifted and non-gifted motivation, one must also acknowledge the National Association for Gifted Children’s (n.d.) overarching belief that “gifted students benefit from classroom interactions with peers at similar performance levels and become bored, frustrated, and unmotivated when placed in classrooms with low or average-ability students” (Myths About Gifted Students, para. 13). Likewise, academically gifted students often feel bored or out of place with their non-gifted counterparts and strive to connect with older students as intellectual peers (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). This feeling of boredom and lack of connection within the classroom greatly impacts student motivation and is recognized through the environmental and intrapersonal components of the DMGT and expectancy-value theory. In examining the effect of classroom interactions with non-gifted peers, it begins to set the stage for how gifted adolescent motivation is, in fact, impacted by the environment in which academic learning experiences might take place. It also elicits the need for further examination of how gifted adolescents differ from their average-ability peers in regard to the phenomenon of motivation.
To delve deeper into how gifted adolescents’ motivation is different from their non-gifted counterparts, it is important to acknowledge the potentiality-enrichment theory by Gottfried, Cook, Gottfried, and Morris (2005), which proposes that academic intrinsic motivation is, in fact, tied to intellectual giftedness. This potentiality-enrichment model is founded on data collected from following 130 participants and their families. Participants were identified at the age of 1 and were followed throughout their academic years. Throughout the project, participants “were assessed at 6-month intervals during infancy and the preschool years and annually throughout school to age 17” (Gottfried et al., 2005, p. 175). This study, beginning in 1979, found that participants, who emerged as intellectually gifted as early as eight years old, had significantly higher academic intrinsic motivation throughout their middle childhood to late adolescent years, ages 9 through 17, as compared to their non-gifted counterparts (Gottfried, 2001; Gottfried & Gottfried, 1996). In fact, as the general population of students had a decline in motivation, the identified gifted participants continued to hold a higher degree of motivation. Additionally, children who were designated as gifted at age 8 showed significantly greater attention span, goal directedness, object orientation, and reactivity in the early childhood years and greater academic intrinsic motivation at ages 7 and 8. Even before the beginning of formal schooling, children who later emerged as gifted evidenced a greater amount of motivation associated with cognitive processing. Thus, from infancy through late adolescence, children designated as intellectually gifted have greater cognitive mastery and academic intrinsic motivation across their entire childhood [and] gifted children and adolescents have higher curiosity and mastery motivation than their comparison groups. (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004, p. 123-124)

Actually, in terms of the gifted adolescent, it was found that “academic intrinsic motivation is a stable construct over time that increases in stability during adolescence” (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004, p. 128). Abu-Hamour and Al-Hmouz (2013) further corroborate the findings that higher levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are higher in gifted secondary students. These same
learners also showed evidence of having “superior persistence, attention, curiosity, enjoyment of learning, and orientation toward mastery and challenge” (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004, pp. 127-128).

There are also times when gifted adolescent motivation is impacted in a different manner. For instance, “as schoolwork becomes more difficult, students who have not experienced appropriate challenges may not develop the study habits required to maintain a high level of achievement, and stress may result if their sense of self-worth is undermined” (Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004, p. 100). By adding the variable of stress, the motivation of gifted adolescents is adversely affected and continues to lay a foundation on the importance of understanding the gifted learner and selecting appropriate academic learning experiences that would continue to build skills and establish strong study habits at an earlier age. This increased stress and boredom will also negatively impact the intrapersonal component of Gagne’s (2008) DMGT, leading to a decrease in student achievement. Farber (2000) further contends that this under-challenge of gifted students and exposure to a monotonous learning environment leads gifted adolescents to experience feelings of dissatisfaction by not the amount of work or challenges that might be encountered but actually from the lack of stimulation that is ever-present in the day-in and day-out academic learning.

By understanding the increased motivation levels of the gifted adolescent as compared to their non-gifted counterparts and in conjunction with their more intense reactions to frustration and boredom, the dichotomy of gifted adolescent motivation becomes more vivid. This polarization in terms of their motivation is important to acknowledge because it provides a unique set of learner characteristics to consider. In one regard, as gifted adolescents, their levels of motivation are inherently higher; however, when coupled with their increased stress levels and
reactions to frustration when faced with academic learning experiences that do not meet their needs, the result is more extreme than that of average-ability learners.

These findings also provide further support for the recommendation that the strategies of providing students with meaningful and challenging opportunities for personal growth in the context of strong social support networks merits serious attention in helping gifted students negotiate the successful transition into high school. (Hoekman, McCormick, & Barnett, 2005, p. 108)

Conclusion

In conclusion, research in the field highly support the notion that there are key motivational factors that impact gifted adolescent motivation regarding academic learning experiences. The importance of student autonomy in learning is of great importance, including differentiation through the use autonomous learning experiences. Also, gifted adolescents should be actively engaged in their learning through hands-on activities and kinesthetic approaches whenever possible. Furthermore, the role and behavior of the classroom teacher must be recognized as an integral component while examining key factors that directly impact gifted adolescent motivation within this context. The most motivational teacher for gifted adolescent learners is one who is empathetic to the students’ academic learning needs as well as their social emotional learning levels. Providing ample feedback and guidance are also paramount. This knowledge, in conjunction with understanding how gifted adolescents’ levels and triggers for motivation are different than their non-gifted counterparts, better utilizes Gagne’s (2008) DMGT and expectancy-value theory as the theoretical framework for the purposes of this study on gifted adolescent motivation.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore gifted adolescents’ perspectives on motivation pertaining to academic learning experiences. To support this purpose, the study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do gifted adolescents’ conceptions of motivation align with the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental process components of Gagne’s DMGT?
2. How do gifted adolescents describe the types of academic learning experiences that are most and least motivational?
3. According to gifted adolescents, what influences their motivation in regard to academic learning experiences?

Data were collected from gifted adolescents who had attended a midwestern, private school for the gifted. This chapter provides an explanation of the data collection methods and data analysis techniques utilized. The limitations for this study are also described.

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, gifted adolescents were given the opportunity to elaborate on their feelings of being motivated specific to their academic learning experiences. While quantitative studies have addressed this phenomenon to some degree (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Erdogan, 2015; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer,
et. al., 2015; Turki, 2014), there have been few opportunities for gifted adolescents, themselves, to reflect on and share their insight about their levels of motivation while engaged in academic learning experiences. As part of the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2010), this qualitative case study allowed the gifted adolescents’ insights to be examined and analyzed with regard to their levels of motivation. This approach also allowed the gifted adolescents an opportunity to define motivation as the key construct of this study (Mertens, 2010), and in doing so, this case study “attempt[ed] to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2017, p. 25). Additionally, the subjective experience of the participants was at the center of the research (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). Finally, to ensure the most accurate data for analysis, the participants were “carefully chosen to be individuals who [had] all experienced the phenomenon in question, so the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). That is, the use of this qualitative paradigm created greater understanding of how these gifted adolescents created and understood their life experiences. Subsequently, the data gleaned were more insightful in addressing the learning needs of this unique population of learners.

Site Selection and Context of Gifted School

The chosen site for this proposed study was a midwestern, nonsectarian, coed, gifted private school. This site was selected primarily due to ease of access and data collection (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). Additionally, this school’s philosophy supported meeting the needs of gifted learners. The school’s philosophy was built on the constructs of providing a challenging curriculum for gifted students: a) creating a unique and innovative educational community; b) employing multiple methods of instruction to address individual learning styles;
c) developing each student’s strengths, interests, and potential; d) encouraging creativity; and e) fostering personal growth, self-direction, and leadership (School Website, n.d.). Many students at this school came from schools that did not meet their needs as gifted students, providing them with a greater insight about how environment influences gifted adolescent motivation. This school, in fact, was the only school exclusively designated as a gifted school within a seven-county area. Furthermore, for students to be considered for admission to this school, a full-scale IQ of at least 125 was required, along with school visits, interviews, and other diagnostic testing. During the 2015-2016 school year, this school had 18 full-time educators with a total school enrollment of 87; the student to teacher ratio was 4:2 (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). School tuition was $18,720, but there was a financial-aid process for families who qualified. This school permanently closed at the conclusion of the 2016-2017 school year and further attempts to gain more statistical data directly related to middle school statistics and male to female ratios were unsuccessful, as the school’s leadership personnel had moved out of state. The participants continued on to different schools, including public and private schools, not specializing in gifted education.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of six gifted adolescent students who attended the aforementioned school for at least one year of their middle school education, consisting of grades five through eight. It is important to note that while the participants were chosen based on their attendance at the selected school for at least one year of their middle school education, this study was focused on gifted adolescents, ranging in age from 11 to 16 (Greydanus & Bashe, 2003). By working with these gifted adolescents, this age range accounted for the majority of gifted
students within the middle school to high school range. Additionally, by selecting gifted adolescents from this educational setting, the criteria of being identified as having a full-scale IQ of at least 125 was also accomplished. Furthermore, these adolescents personally identified as being gifted learners. This is in contrast to gifted adolescents who were not yet identified or were not made aware of being gifted learners. In addition, by attending the selected school, these gifted adolescents participated in a daily advisory period during which they participated in lessons unique to being gifted. Through this, they had a greater understanding of what it meant to be part of this unique population of learners (Roeper, 1995).

This selection of six students is supported by Morse’s (1999) recommendation for this type of qualitative research. This is primarily because this form of research provides an extraordinary depth of data, and a large number of respondents might hinder the ability to go in-depth, leading to a missed opportunity of thoroughly understanding each respondent (Fink, 2000). Due to the in-depth nature of this case study on gifted adolescent motivation, six gifted adolescent participants provided ample data (Kvale, 2009).

Through convenience sampling, parents and students who attended the selected site 2013 to 2017 were contacted to seek their interest in participating in this study. These dates were chosen based on the last four years the school was open, leading to students whose ages fell within the American Academy of Pediatrics adolescent age range of 11-17 years old (Greydanus & Bashe, 2003). Attention was given to selecting gifted adolescents to equally represent both male and female perspectives. Permission to work with these participants came directly from their parents (i.e., parental permission forms) as well as assent forms from the gifted adolescents themselves (see Appendices A & B).
To protect the confidentiality of the participants, several measures were taken. In addition to pseudonyms being used, all data collected were stored in a locked storage cabinet. Furthermore, all computer files were password protected, and upon completion of this study, the data will be destroyed.

Data Collection

In an effort to gain the greatest insight into gifted adolescent motivation, three forms of data collection were utilized: interviews, student work samples with tags, and student response journals. By using multiple approaches to collecting data, consistency of evidence and validity in the findings were strengthened (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). In addition, although the sequencing of data collection methods was not of any great significance, the interviews were conducted first, followed by collection of the student response journals and student work samples with tags.

Interviews

As in many qualitative studies, the interviews in this study were the dominant strategy for data collection and were “used to gather descriptive data in the subject’s own words so that the researcher [could] develop insights on how subjects interpret [this phenomenon]” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). By interviewing each of the participants, their insights were valued as “words deeply connected to that participant’s sense of worth” (Seidman, 2006, p. 110). Furthermore, the research questions were instrumental in constructing the interview protocol focused on gifted adolescents’ perspectives on student motivation (see Appendix C). Appendix C serves as a visual alignment of the research questions to the interview protocol. By basing the
interview protocol on the research questions, the interview process was strengthened and the
interviewee was able to provide the most meaningful information (Weiss, 1994).

The interview protocol was field tested with three identified gifted adolescents 11 to 17
years old during March 2018. None of these gifted adolescents were from the proposed site.
Similarly, however, these students were identified as gifted through having a full-scale IQ of at
least 125 while participating in a middle school gifted program. Field testing consisted of
voluntary participation in afterschool interviews with gifted adolescents whose parents showed
interest. This provided important information about the data collection instrument without
impacting the participants from the proposed research study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).
Feedback gleaned through this field test signified that no modifications were needed to the
interview protocol because the gifted adolescents readily understood and responded positively to
this tool. Affirmative feedback was also provided that led to the protocol remaining unaltered.

Once the field test was completed, the interviews were scheduled. Each gifted adolescent
participated in one interview during the spring semester of the 2017-2018 school year. With
scheduling the study at this time of year, gifted adolescents were able to reflect on their entire
school year and provide more thoughtful data. All interviews were scheduled via email and
phone communication directly with the participants’ parents (see Appendix D). Interviews were
held either at a local library or at the participants’ homes. All but two of the interviews were held
at the gifted adolescents’ homes, as offered by the parents of those participants. Additionally, all
of the spaces provided a “quiet location free from distractions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 133). The six
interviews lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 20 minutes. During this time, the gifted adolescents spoke
openly about their points of view and included references to their time at the aforementioned
gifted private school as well as from their attendance at public schools and schools not
designated as gifted. Through this exchange of dialogue, they revealed their uncensored perspectives about motivation, the types academic learning experiences they found most and least motivational, the role teachers have in their levels of motivation, and additional insights about factors that impact their levels of motivation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, all interviews were audio recorded, which significantly helped to ensure that all information was accurately transcribed (Creswell, 2007).

**Student Work Samples**

After the gifted adolescents participated in the interview, they were asked to self-select examples of academic learning experiences spanning the 2017-2018 school year. These work samples were also reflective of academic learning experiences outside of their time at the gifted private school at which they had spent at least one year of the middle school experience. While students were not told how many work samples to choose, they were instructed to choose examples of artifacts they personally deemed to be motivational academic learning experiences. For the purposes of communicating with the gifted adolescents in this study, academic learning experiences were defined as school assignments, whether they occurred in traditional or nontraditional academic settings or whether they included traditional or nontraditional educational interactions (Hidden Curriculum, 2014). By examining these artifacts, there was a greater context from which to analyze the data (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994). In fact, artifacts such as these work samples are important pieces of data in case study research (Yin, 1994). Additionally, student-selected artifacts such as these “serve as sources of rich descriptions of how the people who produced the materials think about their world” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 133).
In addition, the gifted adolescents “tagged” their chosen work samples. This process of tagging provided the gifted adolescents with an opportunity to reflect on and write a short description of why each work sample was chosen. This tag, either handwritten or electronic, included a short description of why it was deemed as motivational and which specific components in the chosen academic learning experience led them to feeling a heightened level of motivation (see Appendix E). These tags, included as part of work samples, served as additional insights (Bogden & Biklen, 2007) from the gifted adolescent participants.

Tagging artifacts emerges through Charlotte Danielson’s work and is built on Dewey’s (1933) insight that reflective thought is “an active, persistent, and careful consideration” (p. 118). Furthermore, through the reflective tagging of selected academic learning experiences, personal insights were grounded, helping to provide evidence to support the selection of the artifact (Danielson, 2008). Danielson’s concept of tagging artifacts was also built on Daudelin’s (1996) assertion that this reflective process helps to create personal meaning to the individual selecting the artifact. Boud (2001) also supports how this process helps the individual to take “the unprocessed raw material of the experience and engage with it as a way to make sense out of what has occurred” (p. 10). By working through this process of tagging selected academic learning experiences, the gifted adolescents provided the researcher with more insightful data, as they were able to best explain, account for, and understand their own experiences (Blocher, 2008). Walters, Green, Wang, and Walters (2011) further substantiate that Danielson’s process of tagging artifacts provides a way to explore selected experiences and help draw meaning from them. Ultimately, by gifted adolescents tagging their selected work samples, the data offered some of the best evidence of the students’ academic learning experiences (Danielson, 2008). This nonjudgmental form of data collection also provided greater insights into a student’s level
of engagement with each selected work sample (Danielson, 2008). Ultimately, these reflective tags allowed the gifted adolescents an opportunity to consider their own learning and engage in the reflective process to provide greater meaning to the selected academic learning experience (Danielson, 2007). Through these self-selected artifacts, the gifted adolescents were able to communicate greater knowledge of what a motivational academic learning experience meant to them (Danielson, 2007). In essence, by tagging the artifacts, their “written reflection[s] encourage[d] more thoughtful results” (p. 93).

In recognizing the importance of Danielson’s (2007; 2008) assertion that tagged artifacts provide stronger evidence and greater meaning when learning about an experience, a tool to interpret this data collection measure was needed. The Interpretation Instrument for Student Work Samples with Tags (IISWST; Appendix F) is aligned with Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) and was utilized to provide consistency with this data collection method. The IISWST was designed to incorporate the key components of the DMGT being focused on gifted adolescent motivation in this study, acknowledging the role of the environment, intrapersonal awareness, and developmental process activities that contribute to gifted adolescent motivation regarding academic learning experiences. By utilizing these focal areas of the DMGT, the IISWST also embraces research components found significant in the literature such as the role of the teacher, student autonomy, and hands-on learning (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Altuna & Yazici, 2010; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Gillard, et. al., 2015; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Little, 2004; Patrick, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014; Turki, 2014).

For each artifact and tag, a separate IISWST was completed. This instrument, divided into six sections, represented the key components of the DMGT focused on in this study. As each
artifact and tag were collected, the researcher marked all of the boxes that were referenced or evident as part of each gifted adolescent’s work sample and artifact tag. While a discussion of the different sections of the IISWST follows, an example of how to utilize this tool also includes to clarify the use of this tool.

The first section of the IISWST represents the environmental component of individuals (EI). The boxes in this section are focused on the role of parents, family, peers, teachers, and mentors. If an artifact contained evidence and/or the accompanying tag referenced any of these noted subcategories, each related box was marked. This same method of marking the evidenced boxes followed for each component. The second component also focuses on the concept of environment through the provisions (EP) of enrichment: curriculum, enrichment: pacing, administrative: grouping, and administrative: acceleration. To provide greater understanding of these specific subcategories, enrichment: curriculum referred to any reference or evidence of curriculum reflecting depth and/or complexity with grade level standards. Enrichment: pacing and administrative: acceleration both included any reference or evidence that the artifact and tag included curriculum or pacing that was advanced beyond grade level standards, and administrative: grouping correlated with any evidence or reference to teacher-assigned groups or modification to groups as part of the academic learning experience. Similarly, the next three categories included in the IISWST are focused on the gifted adolescents’ intrapersonal influences. Intrapersonal awareness (IW) identifies the subcategories of self and others, personal strengths, and personal weaknesses, whereas the component of intrapersonal motivation (IM) focuses on values, needs, interests, and passions. The remaining intrapersonal category is that of volition (IV) and recognizes autonomy, effort, and perseverance. The final category represented on the IISWST is developmental process activities (DA) and identifies the subcategories of
access, content, and format. The subcategory of access included any reference of access to areas of technology, specialized materials, specialists, and/or other areas not typically found in all districts and classrooms specific to that grade level.

As an example for how to appropriately mark the IISWST, consider the following scenario:

The artifact being examined is an eighth grade science lab report. By looking at the artifact, it is evident that the lab report was focused on the dissection of a fetal pig and was completed individually. This lab report is filled with complexity and discusses the interaction of multiple body systems. The accompanied tag references how the student was allowed to work on this academic learning experience while her classmates worked with lab partners to dissect a worm. In addition, the student references the support from the teacher and the excitement of her parents. She was able to progress through it quickly because of her scientific skill, interest, and overall love for science, but she learned through the process that she had to ask many questions because she clearly did not know as much as she thought she did before she began the dissection. She realizes that this will help her in the future as she progresses into high school AP Biology, and she plans to be a doctor when she grows up. She also references her relief that she was able to work hands-on with this dissection and not to just read about it from a textbook or medical journal. She concludes her tag by stating that although this was a very difficult challenge for her, she was proud of how she didn’t give up, and her hard-work was all worth it in the end.

After reading through the entire lab report and reading the tag, it is time to use the IISWST as part of this data collection method. When looking at the first category, EI, the boxes of parents and teacher should be marked, for the student mentioned the support of the teacher and the excitement of her parents. When looking at the next category of EP, all of the boxes should be marked. Enrichment: curriculum would be marked because the student was presented with a complexity of curriculum by dissecting a more complicated subject and looking at multiple body systems versus just one. By being allowed to work individually at a faster pace in an advanced area, the areas of pacing, grouping, and acceleration were also evident. In the third component of the IISWST, IW, personal strengths and personal weaknesses should be marked, for she
referenced her strength with scientific skills while also acknowledging that she had to ask for

guidance because she did not know as much as she thought she did. The next area of
intrapersonal motivation should mark values, interests, and passions. This is because she
recognized how this would help her in her future AP class as well as in working toward her
future career goal, indicating value. She referenced her “love” for science, referring to a personal
passion, yet she never personally acknowledged her need for this activity, thus the needs box
would remain unmarked. In progressing to the final intrapersonal category, IV, all boxes should
be marked, acknowledging autonomous learning, her referenced effort, and her perseverance in
“not giving up.” The final component of the IISWST, developmental process activities, should
also mark all three subcategories of access, content, and format. Clearly, this student had access
to a fetal pig, which would not be the norm for an eighth grade science class. Her content was
not only something she was interested in, but it also met the rigor she was desiring. The tag’s
reference to her relief of not having to “read about it from a textbook or medical journal” also
solidified how the format was a contributing factor as to why this artifact was chosen.

Once all of the represented boxes are marked on the IISWST, the total number of boxes
marked for each category should be added together and written in the column marked, number
marked/total possible. These fractions are then converted to percentages, representing the extent
to which each component of the DMGT was represented in the selected student work sample
with a tag, and the percentages were recorded in the designated section found at the bottom of
the IISWST.
Student Response Journals

The gifted adolescents were sent two electronic student response journals during the spring semester of the 2017-2018 school year: one in April and one in May (see Appendix G). In addition to emphasizing the importance of sharing all of their thoughts, journal guidelines clearly stated when each journal should be returned as well as the importance of honestly answering in either bulleted or paragraph responses. These guidelines were clearly stated on each journal to avoid any misunderstandings (Creswell, 2007).

Each journal consisted of the same written prompt and focused on the gifted adolescents’ current feelings about the types of academic learning experiences they were taking part in at that time, which included experiences at public schools and schools not designated as gifted. In addition, they were asked to reflect on factors that were impacting their present levels of motivation. These factors were defined as any outside influences, such as social interactions, technology, extra-curricular involvement, or family influences. These student response journals were totally open-ended, allowing the gifted adolescents an opportunity to share their full thoughts, insights, and feelings about their personal levels of motivation in regard to academic learning experiences. By collecting these personal responses from the gifted adolescents, detailed evidence on how they interpreted factors and social situations within their lives was ascertained (Angell, 1945). That is, insights by the gifted adolescents were better defined in terms of how the types of learning, social factors, and environmental factors impacted gifted adolescent motivation. Additionally, student response journals helped to “develop a broader perspective...beyond that which could be directly observed in a short period of time” (Yin, 1994,
p. 90) and provided all participants with an equal opportunity to share their insights in a fair manner (Mertens, 2010).

**Alignment of Data Collection Strategies and Research Questions**

The alignment of data collection methods to the research questions is depicted in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Student Work Samples with Tags</th>
<th>Student Journal Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do gifted adolescents’ conceptions of motivation align with the Environmental, Intrapersonal, and Developmental Process components of Gagne’s DMGT?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do gifted adolescents describe the types of academic learning experiences that are most and least motivational?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to gifted adolescents, what influences their motivation in regard to academic learning experiences?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Once data collection measures were completed, the data analysis process began by “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.159). For this case study research, gifted adolescents’ insights on motivation in academic learning experiences were interpreted. All data collection measures underwent descriptive coding, theming the data, triangulation, and member-checking.

Descriptive Coding

Descriptive coding was utilized to summarize the complete thoughts or messages shared throughout the interview transcripts, self-selected work samples with tags, and student response journals in just a word or short phrase (Saldaña, 2016). First, the entirety of the data was read to develop a basic vocabulary to form common categories for further analytic work (Saldaña, 2016). These categories were written as factually and objectively as possible. For example, two categories that emerged in this study were teacher and autonomy. Once the initial codes were established, they were given more detailed sub-codes when needed (Saldaña, 2016). In continuing with the category of teacher, detailed sub-codes emerged as levels of feedback, affective attributes, and preparedness/innovation/effort. Gibbs (2007) refers to the initial code as the parent and the sub-codes as the children; sub-codes that shared the same initial code were all related as shown in the above example. Ultimately, “descriptive coding led primarily to a categorized inventory...or index of the data’s contents” (Saldaña, p. 72). This categorized inventory then underwent the theming process.
**Theming the Data**

Once the data were coded, the resulting words and phrases were themed to identify what they were about or what they meant (Saldaña, 2016). These themes categorized each set of data into “an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 38), and these larger groups of ideas provided details that supported the overarching theme (Creswell, 2007). The themes were the outcomes of the coding process and were labeled “with an extended thematic statement rather than a shorter code (p. 139). For example, two of the themes that emerged in this research study on gifted adolescent motivation included format: gateway to motivated, active learning and teacher: guidance toward motivated learning. In addition to further interpreting the data, each theme “capture[d] and unif[ied] the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (p. 139). These established themes were then used to further analyze the gifted adolescents’ behaviors, insights, and explanations regarding the topic of gifted adolescent motivation in academic learning experiences.

**Triangulation**

For the purposes of this study, interview transcripts, student work samples, and student journal responses were triangulated to provide to a fuller understanding of gifted adolescent motivation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). “Triangulation involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (Mertens, 2010, p. 258). Throughout this study, triangulation was utilized to look for common descriptive codes and subsequent themes that emerged from all sources of data. Furthermore, triangulation of these qualitative data additionally served as a validation procedure
to ensure the data collection and data analysis were as accurate as possible (Creswell, 2007). This triangulation process also allowed for better understanding of the emerging themes, as each form of data collection presented students with a different manner in which to share their insights and experiences related to this phenomenon.

**Member-Checking**

To further validate the data from the interview process, transcripts underwent the member-checking process. Initially, an informal method of member-checking took place at the end of each interview as responses were summarized and any interview notes were shared (Mertens, 2010). During this informal phase of member-checking, the gifted adolescents had the opportunity express any thoughts regarding the accuracy of what was shared and any concerns were addressed. In doing so, this further acknowledged the importance of the participants’ insights and feelings (Creswell, 2007). Mertens (2010) also stresses the importance of seeking verification with the participants of a study in regard to the data being collected and analyzed. This increased the validity of the data “by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 324). To address member-checking in a more formal manner, all coded interview transcriptions and themed analysis were electronically sent to the appropriate gifted adolescent upon completion of the process. The gifted adolescents were given a week to read through and reflect on the analysis. If needed, a phone conference was offered to discuss the member-checking process, but all gifted adolescents did not feel that was necessary as they were in agreement with the codes and themes that emerged from their data. By including both informal and formal member-checking at different
phases of the research process, a method of increasing validity of results was further established (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005).

Limitations

Due to the small sample size of this study, six participants, the findings are not transferable to other populations (Mertens, 2010). The data are further confounded because this sample was selected by convenience, and although the gifted adolescents were no longer the researcher’s students, they had been at one point. This might have influenced their responses, as they might have responded in a manner seeking my approval. Furthermore, during the course of this study, students were asked to submit self-selected samples of academic learning experiences and submit student response journals. Two participants did not return self-selected work samples with tags, and the May student response journals were much shorter than the April student response journals.

Conclusion

Data were collected for this case study from six gifted adolescents to gain a greater understanding of gifted adolescent motivation regarding their academic learning experiences. Once all data were collected from the interviews, student-selected work samples with tags, and student response journals, the techniques of descriptive coding, theming the data, triangulation, and member-checking were utilized during the analysis phase. In the following chapter, the findings from the data analysis are shared.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

This chapter includes a description of the six participants and a discussion of the four major themes that emerged from the data.

Gifted Adolescent Participants

Participants for this study had all attended a midwestern, nonsectarian, coed, gifted private school that offered a Pre-K through eighth grade education for identified gifted students with a full-scale IQ of at least 125. In addition, participants had to meet the additional criteria of having attended this identified school for at least one year of their middle school education. Middle school in the context of this school consisted of grades five through eight. In addition, all participants were gifted adolescents ranging in age from 11-16 (Greydanus & Bashe, 2003). Due to the closing of the identified school at the conclusion of the 2016-2017 school year, all participants are now attending different schools.

The participants chosen for this study consisted of three male and three female gifted adolescent students, all were given pseudonyms. All participants provided signed assent forms and parental permission forms (see Appendices A & B). While some of the participants were currently attending a different gifted private school, other participants were attending public schools or private schools not designated as gifted. Although some participants shared that they felt their gifted learning needs were being met, there were several who shared the contrary.
Regardless of the participants’ current learning situations, all of the participants reflected positively on their time at the aforementioned school.

**Joel**

In some schools brilliant children are asked to do what they were never designed to do (like cheetahs asked to tear open a wildebeest hide with their claws - after all, the lions can do it!) while the attributes that are a natural aspect of unusual mental capacity - intensity, passion, high energy, independence, moral reasoning, curiosity, humor, unusual interests and insistence on truth and accuracy - are considered problems that need fixing. (Tolan, 2012, p. 11)

Joel is the type of student who leaves his imprint wherever he goes. Wearing faded jeans and an athletic fit t-shirt, Joel arrived for our interview at the local library. With his buzzed haircut and simplistic, yet savvy, demeanor, people notice Joel without him even saying a word. At 16 years old, he is charming, charismatic, and confident, and he knows it. Joel is the type of student who will not accept anything but the best from his teachers. If you are not secure in your content area, look out because Joel will definitely let you know that you need to hit the books a bit more. In many ways, Joel is a walking satire machine, always ready, willing, and able to find the irony in any given situation to expose areas of weakness. He expects the best of himself, and he will not accept anything less from his teachers:

[The teacher] should put the same effort into teaching the student as what I should be learning...I mean, like, yes, I’m going for a grade, and yes, you’re going for a paycheck. We’re both doing this for quantitative purposes, but if I’m not learning and you’re not teaching me, then neither one of us is doing our job. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Respect is also integral in Joel’s world. If you respect him and his strengths, then he is more than happy to return that respect. If not, well, fasten your seatbelt for a bumpy ride. As he articulated so eloquently in our interview, “Well, it’s like, I’m your subordinate as an authority figure, and yes, I respect that difference in terms of power, but also in that power, you *have* to
respect the subordinate” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018, emphasis in original). Joel is
the type of student who helps an educator grow, learn, and evolve.

In his own words, Joel referred to “doing things out of spite” as a motivating factor.
Reflecting back to a class where he pushed the envelope, Joel shared, “I just wanted to prove her
wrong, which really motivated me” (Interview, March 27, 2018). It goes without saying, that
although he might come across as a little brash now and then, he is truly one of the most loyal,
kind-hearted, and genuine people you will ever meet.

Joel has always had an interest in history, and quite frankly, when he speaks about
politics, American history, or world history, he has the hypnotic power to engage you in his
knowledge. Needless to say, Joel is also a great communicator, and as his teacher, you just
cannot help but hope that he always uses his incredible talents to help him move in a positive
direction and not get lost in any darkness along the way. During our interview, Joel was very
open about discussing his problems with depression. He has always been one to feel everything
100%, and as his life became quite complicated during his eighth-grade year, Joel literally had to
fight for his life against the demon known as depression. Now as a sophomore in high school, he
reveres his past experiences: “Things have to get darkest before you see the stars in the sky”
(Joel, Interview, March 27, 2018). Joel is definitely going places, and as we began our interview,
he could not wait to provide his insights for this study.

In the history of the gifted private school Joel attended, his claim to fame was that he
attended the school longer than just about anyone. He began attending at age three, even before a
preschool program for this age group existed, and continued at this school through eighth grade.
As a student, he has always excelled in history and English, and while he is also quite talented in
math and science, he definitely does not have a passion in those subjects. Joel also has a natural
inclination toward music. While hip-hop dancing was once his primary passion, his focus has now turned more toward songwriting and playing his guitar. He is certain that music will always play an integral role in his life, and it is through his songwriting that Joel feels an avenue to express all that he experiences.

Sarah

Even open and enlightened schools are likely to create an environment that, like the cheetah enclosures in enlightened zoos, allow some moderate running, but no room for the growing cheetah to develop the necessary muscles and stamina to become a 70 mph runner.

(Tolan, 2012, p. 10)

If it is possible for sunshine to have curls, it would be Sarah. Always ready to give a hug and a smile, she lights up a room with her presence. As a very petite 12 year old, Sarah’s blonde ringlets, held back by a pristine pink bow, cascade to her shoulders. Her bright blue eyes glisten with excitement as she eagerly awaits our interview. Much like her inner light, she is focused, determined, and full of energy. As we began our interview, it was no surprise for me to see that Sarah had neatly prepared three mechanical pencils that were perfectly vertical and evenly spaced alongside an eraser. This is also Sarah. From her workmanship to her appearance, Sarah strives for perfection. It was never unusual to see Sarah taking a bit longer to transition from class to class in middle school because every paper and supply had to be placed perfectly in a binder before moving-on to the next class.

As the firstborn in her family, Sarah’s parents did not initially realize that she was different than her similar-aged peers. They simply thought that every child had an insatiable thirst to devour books and ask for more work at an early age. It did not take long to realize, however, that Sarah had a quest for learning that was, in fact, different. Luckily, they found a
private, gifted school to help meet her needs, and Sarah began attending this school at the age of six in February of her first-grade year. Upon the school closing after her fifth-grade year, the search for another school began. Sarah could only tolerate the first school for two weeks before moving on to Option 2, where she currently is in attendance. While some of her middle-school classes meet her needs, she is still finding herself frustrated with not having the opportunity to delve into learning the way she was able to at her previous school. She misses not only the learning opportunities, but also being around other gifted students she connected on a deeper level.

Well, when you’re with gifted students, you’re sort of like a family, sort of. I used to be more connected with my classmates. Like, if I told my [current] classmates that I did this and this and this with my old classmates, they would be like, ‘What? That’s so weird! Why would you do that?’ And I would be like, ‘We’re friends.’ They don’t understand that. Everybody now is like their separate little groups; like there’s this group of people and this group, and sometimes there’s good groups, and others don’t listen in class, and others don’t do much, and then you overhear them talking, and no one used to talk like that at [my previous school]...we just didn’t have that problem because everybody loved to do school at the gifted school. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Being incredibly articulate, Sarah consistently referred to looking for ways to extend her learning beyond what the expectations were. In particular, she shared her thoughts about how she felt the rubrics were often limiting her learning: “I don’t know how to explain it; it’s sort of when the things you want to do with the projects are not included in the rubric; like the rubric…sort of takes away one part that you want to do” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). When asked for clarification, Sarah stated, “[The rubric] sometimes limits you on what you can do. When you see something broader that you can do, sometimes you feel that rubric takes that opportunity away from you.” Sarah clearly exemplifies a passion for learning. It is literally a part of who she is.
Every organism has an internal drive to fulfill its biological design. The same is true for unusually bright children. From time to time the bars need be removed, the enclosures broadened. Zoo Chow, easy and cheap as it is, must give way, at least some of the time, to lively, challenging mental prey. (Tolan, 2012, p. 11)

Confident, charismatic, curious, caring, and committed to learning—this is Chris. While anxiously awaiting his adolescent growth spurt, 14 year old Chris looks like the boy next door with his perfectly groomed blonde hair, preppy-style, and endless smile. Chris looks as though he stepped from the pages of a teen-version GQ magazine. From the moment you meet him, you know he has an incredible future ahead of him. As an eighth grader, he not only is valedictorian of his graduating class, he has also been accepted at the Science, Engineering, and Technology Academy, a high school in his district where only the best and the brightest are admitted. He is the type of student looking for a challenge and has an intrinsic drive to learn and reflect on his learning. In his own words, Chris is “meticulous” in his work ethic. He has the internal drive to go above and beyond to reach his goals.

Chris actually began his school career at this private gifted school in 2009 when he entered kindergarten, and upon the school’s closing, he decided to finish his final middle school year at another private school for the gifted quite a distance away. Chris is the type of student every other student wants to be around. He is sociable, kind, athletic, and well-rounded in all senses of the word. While his interests are in the areas of design, building, and 3-D printing, his favorite subjects include math, STEAM, and language arts.

Although Chris had just returned from his spring break vacation and had spent the previous night with a friend, his energy was insatiable. His eagerness to share during our interview was contagious, and as we sat at his dining room table, there was no doubt that he
would have great insights to share as a participant in this study. Even during the interview process, he enjoyed the reflective thinking that was required: “This is an interesting question. I like it” (Chris, Interview, March 31, 2018). Throughout the interview, Chris was articulate in his thoughts and encapsulated his insights well.

Natalie

Without special programming, schools provide the academic equivalent of Zoo Chow, food that requires no effort whatsoever. Some children refuse to take in such uninteresting, dead nourishment at all. (Tolan, 2012, p. 11)

The door slowly opened, and cautiously standing behind her mom was Natalie, anxiously awaiting her interview with me. With her reddish hair pulled back in a ponytail and her freckled face sharing a toothy grin, Natalie’s sweet demeanor is evident. As her mom directed us to the dining room table, I sat across from this petite, 11-year-old sixth grader, who nervously smiled at me with a smile that lit up the entire room, while still making sure Mom was nearby. Natalie was initially quiet while her mom and I caught up and the parental permission and student assent forms were signed. While first impressions might lead you to see Natalie as a timid cub who is still learning to explore, I know differently. Natalie recognizes her hunger and yearning to learn, and she will continue to hunt for the mental nourishment she requires.

From an early age, Natalie recognized that she was different from her peers, and in her first years of elementary school, she had teachers who tried their best to meet her unquenchable thirst to learn. As Natalie entered third grade and was identified as gifted, her public school, unfortunately, could not keep up with her deep desires to be challenged. Natalie began dreading going to school and had frequent stomachaches because she knew she was different from her peers and nobody but her supportive parents seemed to understand. This was when Natalie and
her parents decided to begin exploring different options for her education. After much research, they decided to have Natalie begin attending a school for the gifted.

Being very soft-spoken, Natalie shared her insights and thoughts about being a gifted learner during our interview, at times tearing up as she remembered the years of feeling different and unheard. Her sensitive soul emanated, yet her self-confidence provided an amazing level of depth and maturity for this young lady just beginning her years as a gifted adolescent. As a current sixth grader, this seemingly shy and timid girl was now embracing playing on an all-female ice-hockey team while also continuing to enjoy her love of horseback riding, playing the flute, quilting, and archery. Upon the closure of Natalie’s gifted private school at the end of her fifth grade year, her family actually moved to be near another gifted private school that could continue to meet Natalie’s educational needs.

Eddie

If a cheetah has only 20 mph rabbits to chase for food, it won’t run 70 mph while hunting. If it did, it would flash past its prey and go hungry! Though it might well run on its own for exercise, recreation, fulfillment of its internal drive, when given only rabbits to eat the hunting cheetah will run only fast enough to catch a rabbit. (Tolan, 2012, p. 10)

With a personality to stop you in your tracks and a hairstyle to turn heads, there is never a dull moment when Eddie is around! Ever since Eddie entered his gifted private school at the age of four, he has been known as the socializer. Always smiling and greeting everyone, Eddie literally raises the energy in the room just by his presence. Needless to say, Eddie was ready and eager to begin our interview when I arrived at his house during his spring break. No longer the gifted middle school student with the athletic glasses strapped to his head, Eddie is now a handsome 15-year-old young man in his sophomore year of high school, with the same undying
love for baseball. Wearing a stylish button-down plaid shirt over a white tee, Eddie now sports a moustache and a “fro” that literally ascends straight up from atop his head, adding several additional inches to his already 6’1” stature.

While Eddie excels in the social arena, he does face the challenges of being ADHD. While being talented enough to talk circles around people, when it comes to organization and time management, Eddie realizes these are areas on which he needs to continue to work. Because of this, he usually does not care for lengthy assignments that require a great deal of organization and time management: “I find them least motivational because it takes the longest to do, and it takes more effort...It just takes so much work and effort to get through it, and by the end I just feel drained. I feel drained” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018).

If you were to ask Eddie what his favorite subjects are in school, he would quickly tell you math, chemistry, and biology. Although he finds reading to be important and useful, he absolutely dreads writing essays, partially due to the huge time commitment they require:

> I find them least motivational because it takes the longest to do, and it takes more effort. I’m pretty lazy, but it does take more effort to get to the end goal, to get to the final product, and I just feel like I have to go through so many phases just to get that final product. I have to create a graphic organizer; I have to create a few drafts; I have to get a little bit of output from my teacher; I have to go in before or after school to get feedback from the teacher to just get the 8 points for the feedback. (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

This is a prime example of how Eddie is quite content to chase 20 mph rabbits as stated in the above metaphor. Eddie is definitely one who will rise to the expectation set before him, but if he has to choose between going the extra mile for school or hanging with friends, his social life will usually take precedence. Interestingly enough, although Eddie presents himself as a confident and well-spoken young man, he still does not fully realize how incredibly talented he is. When referring to his friends, Eddie reflects, “I know deep inside that they’re a little bit
smarter than me” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). Eddie is definitely the type of student who needs the bar raised, and when done, he is able to prove to himself and others how incredibly capable he is.

Janelle

Though the world may see these activities as “achievements,” she is not an “achieving” child so much as a child who is operating normally according to her own biological design, her innate mental capacity. Such a child has clearly been given room to “run” and something to run for. She is healthy and fit and has not had her capacities crippled. It doesn’t take great knowledge about the characteristics of highly gifted children to recognize this child. (Tolan, 2012, p. 10)

Writing that will take your breath away, the ability to play multiple instruments with emotion that is tangible, and math knowledge well beyond her years, Janelle’s academic gifts are evident and plentiful! With her long, wavy, brunette hair falling over her shoulders, this polite, conscientious, and conservative young woman is embracing all that high school has to offer by being involved in band, orchestra, chamber orchestra, acapella, Quiz Bowl, advanced classes, and various other activities. Usually clad in a simple outfit of either jeans or long shorts accompanied by a whimsical t-shirt, this 15-year-old high school freshman never knew any school other than the private gifted school she attended from kindergarten to eighth grade. Unlike many of her similar aged peers, she does not wear a lot of make-up, nor does she need to because she is naturally beautiful. Through the years, Janelle has always been an avid reader, working her way through novel after novel and waiting in anticipation for new books to be released. Although quiet, Janelle has an amazing sense of humor and a strong sense of self. She knows what she wants, and she goes for it. She is a loyal and dear friend and has a strong empathy and compassion for others.
Although Janelle is extremely talented in all subject areas, she is extremely passionate about her writing. While other students shy away from essay assignments, Janelle feels passionate about her ability to express her thoughts and learning through writing. She expressed her feelings about immersing herself into her writing when she stated, “Sometimes, when you do something that you really like to do, like when I do essays, I just get in that zone” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). By working in her zone, Janelle expressed that she enjoys her writing so much that she often loses track of time. Music is another area of passion for Janelle. She reflected about how music is ever-present in her mind:

When I don’t have music on, it’s like there’s something off. Like, I’m like, ‘Shouldn’t there be music right now?’ So then I start humming to myself or like thinking a song in my head, and I think the same song over and over in my head, and I don’t have enough mental power to channel that and what I’m working on. Then I start getting annoyed with myself because I want to listen to actual music instead of just playing it over and over in my head, so then I pick up my phone and turn it on or whatever, and that way my brain isn’t searching for another channel. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

Janelle is the type of gifted student every teacher dreams of having. She is respectful, kind, compassionate, and truly has the desire to learn and apply her thinking. She sets high goals for herself and works diligently to make sure that she does her best.

**Participant Summary**

This study included six gifted adolescent participants. Each student participated in one interview, completed two student response journals, and were requested to submit student work samples they found to be motivational. All work samples included reflection tags, which helped the gifted adolescents reflect on and articulate why these samples were selected. Data from these six participants gleaned 107 pages of transcribed interview data, six pages of interview
observation notes, 18 pages of student response journal data, 63 pages of self-selected student work samples with tags, and 10 completed IISWSTs. From this data, four major themes and 13 subthemes emerged as well as answers to the three research questions for this study.

Major Themes

From the triangulation of data, four major themes emerged: a) format: the gateway to motivated, active learning; b) Teacher: The Guidance Toward Motivated Learning; c) value: the driving force behind motivated learning; and d) effort: the fuel for motivated learning. From these four overarching themes, 13 subthemes were also identified as denoted in Table 4.1. Each of the four major themes as well as the related subthemes are discussed in the following sections. In addition, evidence through the words of all six participants are utilized to support the findings.

Format: Gateway to Motivated, Active Learning

By analyzing the data gathered through student interviews, student work samples with tags, and student response journals, the importance of the format of a lesson was referenced a total of 74 times as being an integral motivating factor in academic learning experiences. As an overarching theme within this study, format is recognized as how specific academic content is presented and/or delivered through unstructured or structured academic learning experiences (Gagne, 2008, 2010, 2011). Often referring to the subthemes of flexibility, hands-on learning, autonomy, and creativity, all six gifted adolescents felt as though this was a driving factor behind their motivation. These four subthemes will be discussed in more detail through the words of the participants to substantiate these findings.
Table 4.1

Major Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Narrative References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Number of Narrative References</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Format:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gateway to Motivated, Active Learning</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands-On Learning</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Guidance Toward Motivated Learning</td>
<td>Affective Traits</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparedness/Innovation/Effort</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value:</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Driving Force Behind Motivated Learning</td>
<td>Real-life Application/Relevance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration of Concepts</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extrinsic Reward</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effort:</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Fuel for Motivated Learning</td>
<td>Behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>6</td>
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**Flexibility**

Being referenced 25 times, flexibility within an academic learning experience accounted for 34% of the data supporting this overarching theme. This subtheme of flexibility constitutes the ability to differentiate academic learning experiences to better meet the needs of each individual gifted adolescent, in contrast to having one unwavering design for instruction. For
example, Joel referenced multiple times throughout his student response journal how strongly he felt about having a flexible format for learning:

I hate this class’s formula perhaps more than any other (I hate overly-structured environments) because you sit in groups, no talking (which you know I adore) [sarcasm], and do the following: review homework from previous night, have little-to-no explanation of the issues on it, learn a new, more complicated lesson, bell rings, and homework’s assigned. (Joel, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Through this example, it became clear that this structured format in his current school, not designated as gifted, did not meet his motivational needs. He again referred to his disdain and subsequent lack of motivation at his current school:

I am extremely good at French so it is not a difficult class, but the thing I like least is how formulaic it is - there’s not enough free sentence construction and cultural study, as it’s all streamlined through a Holt McDougal textbook - a company akin to Pearson and one I hate about as much for its monopolization of the education market. (Joel, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Eddie shared similar insights when he was providing advice for teachers of gifted adolescents:

“Give them flexibility...because kids who are comfortable in their work environment, they might not want to do what you kind of push them toward” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018).

Eddie also made it very clear that at his current public school he felt “more motivated on the student-led free formed assignments” (Eddie, Student Response Journal, April 2018), signifying the importance of a flexible format within academic learning experiences. Natalie also shared the same sentiment regarding the importance of flexibility: “We are working on a mini-history fair paper that is not too exciting because the teacher is asking us to do a very specific format, and I would prefer to have it be a little more student-specific” (Natalie, Student Response Journal, April 2018). Unlike Natalie, Chris and Sarah both referenced their heightened level of motivation because they were given flexibility in how to approach an assignment. Sarah reflected on an independent project she worked on earlier in the year:
This assignment was motivating to me because there were so many different ways that I could make it...It was also motivating to me because it was hands-on and creative. The most memorable part of this project for me was how much fun I had building my rover. This is definitely a project that I will remember for the future. (Sarah, Student Work Sample, 2018)

Sharing similar feelings, Chris recounted an assignment at his current school:

I had to create a memoir about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This could be a piece of art, essay, performance, speech, etc. about what the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier means to you. I chose to write a letter home as if I was a soldier fighting in battle. If your project was chosen to be one of the top four, you would get to lay the wreath down at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, DC when we went there for our class trip. (Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018)

Chris also referenced this same assignment in his student response journal:

I then wrote the two-page letter detailing the experiences a soldier went through during war. I especially enjoyed this assignment because it was completely open-ended...Since we were given this challenge without strict guidelines, it increased my excitement and enabled me to work independently. (Chris, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Several of the participants in this study also referenced the importance of flexibility in meeting the differing needs of students. Janelle shared her insight when she provided the following advice to teachers of gifted adolescents:

You have to be flexible. That’s the main thing that I would say to them. I would also say there are a lot of different types of people. You’re gonna get students who like to fidget, and they’re going to seem like they might not be smart, but they are smart, and they want to learn, just they might not want to learn what you are teaching at that very moment. You have to find their energy, and you’ve got to make it so that you can find something for them to do, and that is going to go back to the being flexible thing. That means that you’re going to have to like, you might have to tailor the curriculum to a certain group of people or a certain learning style, yea that’s it. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

Joel had similar insights in recognizing the importance of flexibility:

There are people who will silently read Macbeth for hours, and that’s how they learn the book; that’s how they were able to write the essay at the end. My friend Dan and I, he did a Russian accent as one of the witches, and I did a Scottish accent as Macbeth, and that’s how we learned it...I remember the apparitions, the order they came in, and what the witches were doing or whatever. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)
Joel continued to reflect on this same concept: “Because of wacky things like doing accents and having the general respect and freedom to do, [you are able] to learn at your own pace and learn with activities that challenge you” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Eddie shared similar insights about the importance of meeting individual needs through the flexibility of lesson planning: “They kind of would flex their lesson plans for some kids and kind of combined it at the end, so all the kids could learn the same stuff at their own pace” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). Eddie also substantiated how having flexibility within an academic learning experience affected his personal motivation: “The assignment is up to the student to accomplish and do the best that he or she can. I am feeling really ecstatic about this right now because of the fact that I can work at my own pace” (Eddie, Student Response Journal, May 2018).

Natalie further discussed how flexibility in academic learning experiences opened up new avenues to learn from her peers while at the gifted private school. “Each student could take it their own way. You get different results and stuff” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). Again, referring to a different academic learning experience, Natalie reflected:

It was really cool to see everyone else’s coming together, too, because we were all kinda at the same stages at the same time, so it was kind of cool to see the resemblances of somebody else’s design and your design. Like, the differences and similarities of like, we all had the same basic design of how we wanted our catapult, but we had like different support bars and various things….it was neat to see how everyone did it. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

She also shared her feelings about the inflexible nature of writing prompts at her current gifted private school. “I remember that we had to share them with the class, and everyone had kinda the same story just said a little bit differently because there were just so many guidelines and how to do it” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). Natalie continued to reference how her
motivation for flexible academic learning experiences distracted her from another assignment that did not offer flexibility:

I really liked that we could choose. It was such a flexible thing that we could choose what we wanted to write about and what our myth would be. And then we had like guidelines to help us figure it out, but there was still flexibility, so we could really choose how we wanted to tell the story...in the myth thing, I had a problem with one time, one night, I did that. I got like a page of typing done because it was just flowing out of me, and then my mom was like, she had to pause me because it was time for dinner, and then during dinner, I was thinking about homework, and I was like, “Oooh, I still have a math assignment due. (laughs) Maybe, I should do what’s due tomorrow.” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

By experiencing flexibility within academic learning experiences, the gifted adolescents in this study felt more motivated by having their individual learning needs met while also learning from others.

Hands-On Learning

Having a total of 22 references within the collected data, hands-on learning represented 30% of the overarching theme of format. In contrast to a lecture-style format, hands-on learning refers to actively engaged learning through kinesthetic activities, simulations, science experiments, or other academic learning experiences that include opportunities to be physically involved in the learning process. Because all of the gifted adolescents attended at least one year of middle school at the same school, three of the six gifted adolescents referred to a hands-on academic learning experience in which they were challenged to construct a Roman catapult in their social studies class. While not all of these participants were in the same grade, they shared that this academic learning experience encompassed the hands-on approach they found highly motivational. This was specifically shown in the level of detail with which these students
remembered the format of this academic learning experience. It was as if they had just completed the task last week and not several years ago. Joel reflected:

We had a project where [our teacher] had us build catapults and design them... and then he kind of set us loose... I designed our catapult, so I still remember the way it was designed because no one else had the same design. Where most people had their like, their supporting wood be rectangular, ours was a triangle, and then um, the beam that actually held the swinging arm was suspended in little crevices of wood that were like little divot triangles, so the beam was resting in those, and then we had a stopping bar, and also our catapult holding thing had an angle at the end of it, so it could throw [the marble] as opposed to just a square that went straight down, um, and then when it hit the bar, it would hit the bar and the marble would roll out of the angle and the cup, and ours won all three categories... for accuracy, power, and distance. (Joel, Interview, March 27, 2018)

Eddie shared similar thoughts about this hands-on academic learning experience:

We had to cut the wood. We had to drill it; we had to do everything to make our catapult, and we ended up making it have a little cup for a marble that we launched at the end of the project... I was kind of like astonished and surprised that he would do this kind of project, but at the same time, I was filled with a little bit of joy or happiness almost, because it was something new, but it was something, something that looked fun to do, and it was very hands-on. I thought it was just crazy and good. (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

Natalie also reflected on the motivational aspect of this hands-on format: “I remember at the end of the periods I would be kind of sad that I had to put it away because I would get very much into it, and so I’d be kind of disappointed that I had to put it away” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). Natalie continued to talk about why this format of learning was so meaningful and motivational to her:

So I really liked the hands-on and applying knowledge that we learned previously into something that we were actually getting to build and then like taking our knowledge and now applying it to something we were doing right then, and it wasn’t like five years later: ‘Oh, do you remember this?’ (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

In much the same manner, Sarah’s excitement and motivation in regard to hands-on academic learning experiences was very clear. “I love hands-on stuff, and it’s just so much fun to
build things and create things and paint things, if it has to do with art or like, or even research
things and put it in your project” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). She reflected further
on how she felt when she was assigned a specific hands-on academic learning experience at her
current school:

She said that we would have to build our own space vehicle thing. We would name
it...We could name all the stuff that goes in there, and then she showed us, like the rubric
and everything, and I was sitting in class, and I was super excited because I love
engineering, and it was science, so I really love science, so I thought of a lot of things, a
lot of things starting popping into my mind, like what I wanted to do, and I was thinking
about like, (pause) how can I make it more? (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018).

While sharing this information during the interview, Sarah’s expressions revealed a heightened
level of excitement. It was clear that this type of learning was highly motivational to her. Eddie
also encouraged the use of this format for academic learning experiences when he described that
teachers of gifted adolescents should provide “a couple of hands-on [lessons], using different
applications online, like websites and applications to broaden their view of the topic that you
want them to be covering” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018).

While Chris clearly stated that he “enjoy[ed] building and creating physical objects”
(Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018), he also shared his belief that “hands-on, and writing, and
researching are more beneficial” learning activities (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)
and recognized how simulations are another avenue for hands-on learning:

I just like simulations in general because they, I feel like I am involved with it and I can
put myself in the character’s shoes, um, actually we’re doing a whole simulation for our
8th grade year in language arts where we have a whole system of government every two
weeks. We run for Senate seats and House seats, and every six weeks we run for
President. We have a currency called the unit. They’re like little yellow tickets that come
in different valuations. We have to pay taxes every week. We can put bills into the
Hopper. It’s very interesting. We’ve had hurricanes total our classroom. We had to go
buy new chairs, and we had to use our treasury...when I go back to this when I’m older,
and I’ll be like, oh, yea, that simulation. I remember all of the things that I learned and all
of the pieces of government and stuff like that. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)

In a similar manner, Janelle described an academic learning experience during her freshman year in which she was actively involved and highly motivated:

We had researched WWI; there were assigned characters to play/take the viewpoint of. I was Woodrow Wilson, one of the Big Three (technically Four). Once we did enough research, we had to dress up and play the parts during a class period, using our research to debate in an organized way...We were definitely required to do something different than normal—dress up, debate, research, and present in a radical way, a concept I loved. I wouldn’t say it was personally necessarily, but during the debate there was a bit of reputation to uphold. Assessment was based on our debate participation and accuracy of notes/research; everyone was required to speak at least once, but as a Big Three/Four member, I got to talk a lot more. (Janelle, Student Work Sample, 2018)

Sarah also acknowledged how hands-on learning does not always have to include building something:

It’s not necessarily every class period has to have a project, because that would actually be way too many projects. But maybe every time you have a hands-on activity or something. Like maybe, if you’re learning about something where you have to learn it, but it’s not necessarily hands-on, like you’re learning about the geography of something. You could be like, now we’re going to play a game out of this, and you pull down the map, and you have to come up, and I’m going to like, maybe you put pieces of paper over the labels of the countries, but you could still see the capitols and stuff, though; you’d come up, and like, ok, now you have to come up there and tell me what this country is. If you get it wrong, then you go sit down, and then the students get all excited about it, and I get excited! (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Overall, hands-on, active learning was found to be a highly motivational component in academic learning experiences. Joel added further insight, “I like hands-on work because if you’re sitting, I mean (pause) learning from a textbook is genuinely the most boring thing you could ever do” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). He continued with this same insight about his current school, not designated as gifted: “Even in labs, which occur few and far
between, there is limited hands-on learning to be done, and much of the class is spent in lecture-style textbook-learning—something I cannot stand” (Joel, Student Response Journal, April 2018).

**Autonomy**

With 14 references, student autonomy within the format of an academic learning experience was found to be an integral component for increasing gifted adolescent motivation and accounted for 19% of the overarching theme of format. While autonomy could encompass learning through individualized interests and/or providing student choice, the gifted adolescents in this study referenced their desires to work independently. Joel shared his reasons in this regard:

> I am stubborn in what I like, but I’m also, I just don’t like...if you have four people working on one project where the one project is a very niche market of things that you could possibly do with your life, then three of those people aren’t getting what they want. That’s kind of a cynical view, but I also tend to think that if you have a lot of people working on one thing, where there’s not work for those bunch of people, then, like, there’s always the joke that if anybody’s working in a lab, then one person’s doing all the work, the other three aren’t. But there’s also a reason for that. While one person is naturally going to assume a leadership role and the other three are going to follow them or not care...or argue, and any one of those three things isn’t good, because you’re not challenging their individual minds to work on that project. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Natalie corroborated this thinking:

> The only problem with groups is that you have to make sure that everyone is doing their fair share...cause like, I’ve been in groups where everyone knows that, this was mostly in first and second grade, but everyone knows that I want to get a good grade, and so I ended up being in a group of three, but I had to do everything because the other two know that I will do everything...because I want a good grade, so it’s definitely with the groups, the teacher has to make sure that everyone is actually doing part of it. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

With this sentiment being fairly consistent from all of the gifted adolescents in this study,

Chris shared his similar insights:
I don’t really like to work in groups because some of those kids, they just don’t care as much, so like, instead of drawing a nice straight line with a ruler to connect it to an animal, they would just draw it freehand, and I was like, ‘Noooo!’ That’s what I was thinking because that could lower my grade or something like that, but with the group assignments...if I am with a group of kids like me, then I would trust all of them. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)

In addition to feeling as though not every student would be involved in group formatted academic learning experiences, another reason independent academic learning experiences were found to be more motivational was because they provided an opportunity for individuals to embrace what they were truly capable of accomplishing. Joel reflected on some of his own learner attributes:

It tends to be that people have conflicting ideas with me and because I am so stubborn and also so straightforward in my ideology for anything. I’m like. (pause) I don’t have to agree with you, just let me do my project differently than what you would do...So it’s like someone can build an awesome catapult built a different way, that doesn’t mean that my catapult has to be that way...it tends to be a lot of stubbornness that I do acknowledge, well, it’s mostly stubbornness to be honest…[but] I like working by myself because I know what I can do in my own head. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

While Joel is a great communicator and enjoys interacting with others, he was motivated to set personal goals to see his own autonomous ideas come to fruition; thus, he felt extremely limited by working with others. He shared his reaction when given the option to work independently or within a group setting: “Anytime a teacher says, ‘Does anyone want to work by themselves?’ I stand up, and I’m like, ‘I don’t want to work with people.’ Nothing against the people in my class, but I just don’t like it” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Likewise, Natalie reflected back to a time when the class was deciding whether an activity should be done independently or in groups:

[The teacher] was deciding if we should do group or individual cause beforehand, he had tried to do pairs and stuff, but then everyone was fighting over like what design to follow (laughs) and that we were all voting for individual because we all immediately had like 15 different ideas, and we all knew with each other and ourselves that if like our idea
didn’t get chosen that we were going to be really frustrated, and so I also remember that we were instantly voting for us to do it individually. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

Natalie also articulated the additional benefit of learning from others during this same independent academic learning experience:

I would prefer to work independently but be able to like discuss designs with other people because then you can discuss designs, and then you get a better idea for what everyone is doing, so it should work well, and then you can kind of add your own little bit...but still be working individually so you can choose what you want to do and you don’t have to compromise. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

Similarly, Sarah felt as though she was motivated to go deeper into her learning when working independently. She shared an assignment focused on Jupiter:

I made a PowerPoint presentation...I chose to do, to record my voice while I was doing it, so it took me a really long time to figure out the first slides, but with that, I went above and beyond by putting every single satellite that’s gone to Jupiter, and that was like 14 satellites. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

This was an academic learning experience in which Sarah would have been limited in her depth of learning if she had not able to work independently. However, with this autonomous learning opportunity, Sarah was able to go deeper into her learning and embraced her desire to learn more. Not only was she able to learn the new skill of integrating her voice into her PowerPoint, she was also able to expand the scope of the project and learn about the multiple satellites that were associated with this planet. By providing opportunities for independent academic learning experiences, the participants in this study voiced heightened levels of motivation when given these autonomous opportunities.
Creativity

Creativity, or the opportunity to incorporate imaginative and innovative thinking, was referenced 13 times within the data, representing 18% of the main theme of format. Participants voiced heightened levels of motivation when given the opportunity to incorporate creativity into their learning as well as feeling more challenged. Janelle specifically referred to this challenge while attending the selected gifted site:

It was one of my more memorable assignments partly because of the imaginative part, one of the benefits of creative writing. We didn’t do that much creative writing back then, and this assignment required me to step out of my comfort zone a little. (Janelle, Student Work Sample, 2018)

Likewise, Eddie voiced his feelings on creativity and its impact on motivation while at the same school:

[The teacher] assigned us this project, and it was kind of fun because we got to express our creativity in making the Progressive Era Monopoly board, drawing out our game boards, and making our pieces to go on the board, and then we had to type up or write a little description on why this was, why the piece was there, and why it fit into the Progressive Era. So I like that one because the creativity aspect...that creativity piece was big. (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

Natalie also concurred that being able to write creatively within the format of an academic learning experience increased her levels of motivation. She referenced having to respond to a generic writing prompt at her current school: “I find it, a little less motivational as compared to [being able to] write about that topic anyway you want” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). In a similar manner, Sarah was very straightforward with her thoughts about academic learning experiences: “They should certainly involve creativity. Every lesson should be something fun. Not just where you’re sitting down and doing a paper, just writing on a paper, filling in blanks” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). Sarah also reflected on how she felt
when creativity was lacking: “The least motivational assignments, they’re like to me, I can’t do anything extra about it” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). Further substantiating this subtheme, Chris shared his heightened level of motivation in regard to an academic learning experience from his eighth grade school year:

We could choose what we wanted to do, and this enabled me to be creative and speak from the heart...The possibility of being chosen to lay the wreath based off of my own creativity is fulfilling and rewarding. I would recommend open-ended assignments because they can spark imagination and not lock a student into a specific type of project. (Chris, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Janelle added additional insight as to why creativity helped increase her motivation at the selected gifted private school. “Like one thing about how [the teacher] did it, was like, every project...was like a different medium” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). It was through being creative in how the lessons were formatted that Janelle felt an increase in motivation because it offered a variety of academic learning experiences.

**Summary of Theme**

While the first main theme of Format: The Gateway to Motivated, Active Learning included 74 references and clearly emerged as the strongest within the findings, it also served as the overarching theme for flexibility (n=25), hands-on learning (n=22), autonomy (n=14), and creativity (n=13). While all of these subthemes could be referenced within one specific academic learning experience, the gifted adolescents in this study were able to provide substantial insights about why each of these subthemes specifically affected their levels of motivation in regard to their academic learning experiences.
Teacher: The Guidance Toward Motivated Learning

The second of four major themes that emerged from the data was Teacher: The Guidance Toward Motivated Learning. The gifted adolescents in this study placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the teacher in regard to their personal motivation toward academic learning experiences, being referenced 56 times within the data. From this overarching theme, three subthemes emerged: affective traits (n=25), preparedness/innovation/effort (n=23), and feedback (n=8).

Affective Traits

The affective traits of a teacher were referenced 25 times, equating to 45% of the overarching theme related to the teacher. These affective traits referred to one’s emotions, feelings, and attitudes, and the gifted adolescents in this study felt an increase in motivation when their teachers exhibited positive affective traits. These traits included feelings of respect, enthusiasm, passion, and being interactive. As an example, Chris reflected on his motivation being at a high when “the teachers are really wanting to teach. They’re making it fun, so we still learn a lot” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). This sentiment was commonly shared among the gifted adolescents as a strong precipitator of their motivation.

Joel referred to the importance of respect in regard to his motivation at several points throughout the data. He began by simply stating, “There are some teachers who don’t...[do] a good job of respecting students” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). As the interview with Joel continued, he consistently referred back to the importance of respect in regard to his personal levels of motivation:
So it’s kind of things where you’re being respected by the teacher, and this has always been a thing for me, but if I feel like the teacher is not condescending, if I can understand that yes, I have plenty more to learn, but on the basis of what I do know, I can communicate. I maybe not an equal in terms of authority, but an equal as a person. If I can communicate with an adult or an authority figure, then I feel much more respected. It’s the thing where prisoners, if they are read their rights and the police officer treats them with respect and dignity as opposed to demeaning and saying like, (pause) It’s like a tv trope, where police officers say, “You disgust me” or something like that. Like if you say that to another human being (pause) like if a person, this is just a weird example, if a person is robbing a store for food, and they’re trying to feed their family and you say that you disgust me, you’re not only demeaning them, you’re also just completely undermining yourself as a person because wouldn’t you do the same kind of thing? So it’s the respect of an authority figure, if you have that respect, then I feel much more motivated to do anything. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Joel also recognized that his learning style also required respect from educational authority figures such as teachers, substitutes, and administrators. He reflected back to a classroom discussion at his current school: “I was challenging them, which was frustrating for everyone, but my teacher really respected it” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Being able to express his own ideals and adding depth and dimension to classroom discussions were important to Joel, so having the teacher’s respect in regard to meeting his personal needs was highly motivational. Even within Joel’s student response journal, he shared this same vein of insight about his current school:

Holy Lord do I wish this wasn’t a required class. The stupidest, most common things are taught in communications, like basic people skills. I understand not all are advanced, but when dealing with those who are or even aren’t (but have common sense) my recommendation for any teaching setting is not to condescend. I never realized how little [my middle school] teachers condescended to students (though I feel the administration often did), until I went to [my current school] and took com. I feel like I’m in a friggin cotillion. (Joel, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Joel also made the connection to how he felt that lack of respect turned into abuse of power, cause like I’ve had teachers where you confront them about something. Like if you have a grade that doesn’t look right, and you’re like, ‘Hey, I think I did better on this than I did. Why did I get this grade?’ And then they’re like, ‘Well’ (pause), and this is kind of straightforward, but I think there are a lot of teachers who think this
way...it’s the same as teachers who see motivated students and will sometimes will be more lax and be easier going on them when they turn in an assignment late or something like that. The flipside of that is that if they see someone who typically does poorly, then they are automatically slanted in their opinion toward that student. Like, I (pause) and I’ve been on both sides of this because if you do well normally and then mess up something, then the teacher will be more understanding with letting you have an extra day or something like that. But if you’re automatically assumed to be the student who is typically underachieving, then they automatically will be more strict and more against you and then that stigma lends itself to not actually learning. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

In addition to the affective attribute of respect, a teacher’s level of enthusiasm was also a key motivational component to the gifted adolescents in this study. Janelle reflected, “Although I would probably just like math by default, my teacher’s enthusiasm has made it so much easier for me to stay satisfied with how I’m doing in class because I can grasp the concept more easily” (Janelle, Student Response Journal, April 2018). Eddie shared similar insights when he discussed how a teacher’s affective traits impacted his motivation on an academic learning experience:

When explaining the project, just like, have a good attitude about it, not making like a serious attitude about it, like fun and lighthearted so that kids can see that it isn’t that bad of a project. And like overall, the first impression isn’t like, ‘Oh this is going to take so long! It’s going to take a lot of time off my hands, but this is going to be a fun project that my teacher seems to like and that I may lean towards liking it in the end.’ (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

Chris also found a teacher’s enthusiasm had a positive impact on his own motivation. He provided advice for teachers of gifted adolescents:

I would tell them that you need to teach with enthusiasm because if the kids see the teacher is into it, then the kids will get excited about it. I know that’s how I feel when my teacher is excited then I get excited. So you need to be engaging. I would say move around, walk around, do a lot of demonstrations, show the kids things, because if I um, like think of one of my favorite teachers, I would remember how they made demonstrations and let me do hands on things and do my own things. I would also like, make projects suited to the kids’ interests. I would say that because if I’ve been interested in a project, then I would be really excited about it and want to knock it out the first week I hear about it and have a lot of fun with it. I would say just be friends with the kids. Just be nice to them and form relationships with them and just talk with them I guess. Have fun, but learn, yea, teach well. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)
In a similar manner, Janelle added an example of how a teacher’s enthusiasm increased her own level of motivation on a writing assignment: “He kind of built it up to be a really big thing. So he was like, ‘We are going to be doing this really important essay about the Netherlands’...he planted the seed” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). In another example, Janelle shared a different scenario:

So, [the teachers’] passion about what they do, um, they’re extremely intelligent in their field, and they’re also passionate or like, nurturing and caring for the kids. Like you could be passionate about what you do, like [a former teacher], but you can’t like, not like kids, like [him]. It’s awkward. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

Sarah shared a similar insight:

So like, teachers that are just teaching it, obviously they chose that job, so they want to be like, a science teacher or something, but sometimes a teacher can teach it so many times that they’re not into it. And it’s good for a teacher to be like, more seeming like they’re learning it every single time. Like they are learning that thing again and again and again like they’ve never known it before so that we can get into that, too. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Joel concurred, “If I have a teacher who is motivated to teach me the same way that I am told I should be motivated to learn, then we can actually work. If the teacher doesn’t care, then why should I care?” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018).

Participants also felt as though a teacher’s ability to connect with students was a motivational aspect of their learning. While Janelle started to make this point earlier, she continued to reflect on this area, “If you have a connection with the teacher, you are going to try to listen and get stuff out of it” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). Sarah shared the same feelings: “They need to be relatable. When you have a motivational teacher, she likes to tell you or he likes to tell you about his or her experiences, too, so you can relate and you can be like, ‘Oh, yea! I did that and that, too!’” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018).
Chris concurred, “They [the teachers] would have close relationships with the kids and would push the kids” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). Chris also shared that he was not motivated by teachers who were not “very engaged with the students and not very interested in the subject and just want the money” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). While specifically referring to the lack of motivation with a non-engaging teacher, Chris referenced the positive impact that his eighth grade science teacher had on his motivation. “I had a caring mentor, my science teacher, who aided me when I needed help, and I believe this enabled us to bond more effectively as a teacher and student” (Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018). He added, “Our science teacher encourages us to have fun with this, and I fully embrace that” (Chris, Student Response Journal, April 2018). Natalie also conveyed her increased motivation when feeling connected with a teacher:

I would definitely say that they are usually supportive when necessary, but not like over-supportive when it’s more their project than yours. And then (pause) my third thing would probably be like, um (pause) it would be motivational if like, if you’re in a really tough spot, they’ll usually have a kind word to get you back going, and they’ll like usually sit with you for like 5 or so minutes to get you back on track which really helps because sometimes I get really frustrated, so it really helps someone to like calm me down and get me back to where I need to be. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

Eddie shared similar insights:

A teacher with a dull attitude...I would say is one of the most boring teachers in the world. It makes you not want to do anything in their class. It just makes you want to slack off, but teachers that I mentioned, they can crack a joke once in a while, they can be funny, they can be light-hearted, they can be kind, they can sympathize with you if anything is going wrong. They can be there for the kids, and that is what I think is a good quality and good trait in a teacher. (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

Joel was able to provide a specific example of an academic learning experience in which the teacher from the selected gifted middle school was able to take a potentially problematic situation and turn it into a positive, motivational learning experience:
[There was] one specific Latin test that we took where (pause) I um, err, myself and [my friend] were talking once we finished the test. We were talking in the back, and we were talking quietly about Roman history, and [our teacher] came over, and he didn’t like reprimand us or anything, but he was like, ‘Hey, I appreciate the conversation, but people are trying to work.’ So instead of saying you can’t talk about this, he wanted to, (pause) in order to help the conversation, he wrote down a couple of questions on like things to think about on Roman history and then put us in the hallway so that the other people could finish their test but that we could continue, and then he gave us things to research. He gave us like a little slip of paper that said something like, ‘What do you think about Caesar never giving up power? Like what do you think his motivations were?’ That type of thing. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

This example provided evidence as to how a teacher’s knowledge of how to interact and channel a student’s energy in a positive manner not only led to continued learning but also to a student feeling respected and acknowledged in a positive light. The significance of a teacher’s positive affective traits was found to be highly motivating to gifted adolescent students.

**Preparedness/Innovation/Effort**

Some might say that motivating a gifted adolescent is as easy as pie, and if they were referring to a teacher’s preparedness, innovation, and effort (PIE), they would be correct. This subtheme was referenced at 23 times within the data, equating to 41% of the overarching theme of teacher. While these three characteristics are often overlapping, the gifted adolescents in this study found these organizational and forward-thinking teacher traits have a clear connection to their personal levels of motivation in regard to academic learning experiences.

Joel was quick to acknowledge how a teacher’s level of PIE specifically impacted motivation within different levels of learning:

I have had a lot of teachers, and I mean a lot, especially in the last couple of years, who will focus on getting their job done, which is fine because if a teacher is doing the minimum of what they need to do, there will always be students who understand it and will do well, and they will go on and do great things, but then you’re also leaving behind, and even if it’s just gifted students, there will be people (pause) I think it was Albert
Einstein, and he said that if you teach by the ability to climb a tree, then the fish can’t do it. Like you just can’t teach one baseline for everybody. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Just as Joel noted that he had multiple teachers who did not put forth the effort to meet his needs once he left his gifted middle school, many of the gifted adolescents in the study felt the same way, reflecting on their lack of motivation when their teachers were lacking PIE. Janelle first referenced a former teacher who “just sat at her desk all the time. I want the teacher to be aware of what is going on” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). She continued throughout her interview with the same sentiments and advice for teachers of gifted adolescents:

> You need to listen to them and learn from them. You need to say, ‘What am I doing that I can change,’ and you need be flexible about that. You can’t just say, ‘No, I’ve been doing the same thing for x amount of years.’ That’s a pet peeve of mine. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

When asked to provide more insight, Janelle reflected:

> So they [the teachers] teach from the book, and they just, they don’t seem to have any special affinity for what they are teaching. They, some of my teachers, the teachers that I generally don’t like, are the teachers that are so nice that they don’t, (pause) if you’re too nice, then I’m not going to like you because you are not setting expectations. Like we’ll have a due date, and it won’t be done and kind of like that it could also be like I don’t know, it seems like they’re lazy. Like they don’t want to put the time into making their own tests, so they just pirate some off of the internet... if I see there is an error that they have on there and it’s not their test, and they’re like, ‘I didn’t write this test, so it’s not my fault,’ and you’re like, ‘Well, you took this test from somewhere, and you should have proofread it and been sure about it,’ and also it kind of like strikes me as wrong. Like in my head, I would really prefer it if you make your own tests, and I understand that teachers do not always have the time to make all of their tests, but sometimes, like in language arts we just had this HUGE packet, like we got this test that was a huge packet that was, ‘Can you read this and see what they mean?’ It was like, ‘Oh my gosh, this is too big!’ (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

Interestingly enough, Chris referred to the teachers who are lacking in PIE as “normal” teachers who use the “regular” teaching style. When he was asked to explain these references in more detail, Chris contended that his most motivational teachers were:
Innovative...So they don’t use the, like the regular teaching style. They would, uh, (pause) like the simulations. Our teacher right now is very creative on how she made the whole system of government and how she teaches around that system and how we are learning about all of these economic things like opportunity cost and um, all of these very interesting things are kind of woven around this big system of government that we have, and it all interconnects and relates. So yea, that’s definitely innovative because they do teaching methods that normal teachers wouldn’t do. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)

Chris was then prompted to expand on his definition of normal teachers and their characteristics.

He shared:

Just a teacher following a lesson plan...bland, and I would say that because they’re not very, they kind of just follow the rules: sit at the desk, teach with paper, and like normal lesson plans...With the normal teachers, they’re kind of like monotone and calm, so I would say monotone would be one because when I picture a normal person. I see lecture, do the worksheet, give me back the worksheet, you get a grade on it, and you go on to the next lesson, so I’ve been lucky enough to not really have those types of teachers. I had one in one instance but, yea. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)

While Janelle did not refer to teachers who were lacking PIE as being normal teachers, she provided multiple examples of why teachers lacking in this area negatively impacted her motivation. In one instance, Janelle shared about one of her current teachers, “I feel like my teacher would rather talk to us than teach us English. Sure that’s fine for a counselor or advisor, but not an English teacher” (Janelle, Student Response Journal, April 2018). She continued with a separate entry:

I feel like I could be learning the same material if it were a self-study; the point of English class is for an experienced reader (the teacher) to give students (first readers) their input and insight on the book/literary materials, and I’m not getting that. (Janelle, Student Response Journal, May 2018)

She also referenced another class in which her motivation was lacking: “He teaches from the book, he doesn’t seem particularly knowledgeable about the nuances of the class, he gives us busywork, the list goes on…” (Janelle, Student Response Journal, April 2018). In a similar manner, Eddie explained why his motivation was lacking when dealing with teachers who were
low in PIE: “I dislike how distant the teachers are from the students on these assignments”
(Eddie, Student Response Journal, April 2018). In this example, Eddie was referring to the type of academic learning experience that consisted of mass-produced rote worksheets a teacher just copied and assigned to the class with little to no attention to the students’ individual learning needs. To Eddie, this represented teachers who did not care enough to put forth the preparedness, innovation, and effort that would elicit a heightened level of motivation.

While many of the participants referenced how a teacher’s lack of PIE impacted their personal motivation toward an academic learning experience, several of the gifted adolescents also referenced an increase in motivation when referring to teachers who demonstrated strengths in that area. Janelle recognized the amount of effort her current math teacher put forth for his class: “My math teacher knows what he’s doing. There are videos of the notes for each section if you miss class, and if you’re in class, you’ll get the concept because his teaching makes it very clear” (Janelle, Student Response Journal, April 2018). Chris also acknowledged how a teacher’s PIE impacted his motivation and level of learning:

So they would make their lesson plan, like very structured toward the kids in the class, and they would make it so the kids would have a good time but would also learn a lot, kind of like some of my teachers now where they make their lesson plans different for every group, so one group would use a certain one that wouldn’t work for another class. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)

Sarah further commented on how a teacher with increased PIE, “gives you lots of creative projects that you get to have fun with and you get to enjoy instead of just plain old worksheets” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). In recognizing this same impact, Joel shared his insight on how this subtheme impacted all students within a classroom:

If the teacher makes sure that the students are prepared well enough, then come examination time, they all know it, and then you can move forward as a class, as opposed to potentially leaving people behind. If you move forward as a class, then you are all
learning together, and you can build off of one another but also build off of the material to learn new material as a coalition. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Simply stated, a teacher’s level of preparedness, innovation, and effort were found to be key motivational factors supporting the overarching theme of teacher.

Feedback

The final subtheme that emerged under the overarching theme of teacher was feedback. This subtheme construct was referenced eight times throughout the research, equating it to 14% of the larger theme. The gifted adolescents in this study identified an increase in motivation when the teacher provided higher levels of feedback and responsiveness.

Janelle shared her lack of motivation when she felt a current teacher provided no feedback of any type:

We never get any of our tests back...Over the weekend I was assigned to write several paragraphs (on paper) about the book we’re reading, and 1. I am almost certain she doesn’t read them and 2. She never has any input on my writing. I don’t even know what she thinks of my writing. (Janelle, Student Response Journal, May 2018)

Sarah also shared her experiences with teachers not understanding her need for feedback and responsiveness. Sarah articulated how non-motivational it was when teachers did not really understand that you need more help with stuff, like you need more. When you raise your hand with so many questions, a non-motivational teacher would be like, ‘Yes’ (droned) again, but I ask questions a lot because I’m curious about what I’m learning, and it would be more interesting to have like, (pause) it’s more interesting to learn more facts than what I already know, and if they knew that I needed more information, then that would be so helpful. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Sarah’s insight provided data regarding many gifted adolescents’ need to have feedback to delve deeper into their academic learning experiences.
Several gifted adolescents also referred to how feedback was needed throughout the process of learning and not just as part of a summative assessment. Eddie first referenced the need for teacher checkpoints throughout an academic learning experience to maintain levels of motivation. He believed that with any long-term assignments there should be a teacher check-in…like during class so that the teacher can see and us as students can see if we’re on the right course because many kids, if they don’t ask for help, they usually veer off and crash and have to go back. (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

Through these check-in points, the feedback was able to confirm that Eddie was on the right track, leading to a maintained and heightened level of motivation. Eddie also mentioned this same concept when he referenced the need for teachers “to create checkpoints so they [the teachers] can see if they need to go over any of the major points of the assignment” (Eddie, Student Response Journal, April 2018). Again, feedback provided through checkpoints during an academic learning experience helped to build a feeling of security and accountability, leading to increased levels of motivation. Natalie shared similar insights about the importance of teachers providing feedback during the learning process. She noted that she felt more motivated to complete an academic learning experience when a teacher would “give us enough information that we could figure out the problem ourselves, but he [the teacher] could still help us make sure that we’re not actually going to spend like five class periods trying to figure out the answer” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). To corroborate this evidence, Chris also shared how these check-ins with feedback increased his levels of motivation.

Like they [the teachers] would read over the work, and then they make corrections and really sit down with the kids and talk with them and show them what they can improve on…So, like if I hand in an essay, and I think it is really good when I hand it in, but when I get it back, there’s a lot of changes. When they talk to me about it, I am able to understand it, and I agree with their changes, and I’m like, ‘Oh, well that makes sense!’ I can change it and make it a lot better. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)
By referencing the data collected from the gifted adolescents in this study, there was support for recognizing the importance of teacher feedback and responsiveness regarding heightened levels of motivation.

**Summary of Theme**

With 56 references, the second theme of Teacher: Guidance Toward Motivated Learning was also quite substantial. It served as the overarching theme for affective traits (n=25), preparedness/innovation/effort (n=23), and feedback (n=8). The first two subthemes, affective and preparedness/innovation/effort, within this overarching theme were actually equal to or greater than the first two subthemes, flexibility and hands-on learning, from the previously discussed Format: Gateway to Motivated Active Learning. Again, while these subthemes could be referenced within one specific academic learning experience, the gifted adolescents in this study were able to provide substantial insights into why each of these teacher attributes and/or actions specifically affected their levels of motivation in regard to academic learning experiences.

**Value: Driving Force Behind Motivated Learning**

Following the overarching themes of Format and Teacher, the third major theme that emerged from the data was Value: The Driving Force Behind Motivated Learning. This theme was supported by 41 references throughout the data and consisted of the four subthemes of real-life application/relevance (n=17), purpose (n=12), integration of concepts (n=7), and extrinsic reward (n=5). This overarching theme of value recognized the attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost, as discussed in Chapter 2, that gifted adolescents applied to academic
learning experiences (Eccles, et. al., 1983). Data gathered from the gifted adolescents in this study provided evidence to better substantiate these findings.

**Real-life Application/Relevance**

The gifted adolescents in this study found real-life application and relevance to be a highly motivational component when working on academic learning experiences. This subtheme was referenced 17 times, representing 41% of the overarching theme of value and referred to how readily the gifted adolescents were able to connect academic learning experiences to their own lives. Joel shared his motivation behind enrolling in his elective classes: “that’s why I’m taking applied com and business classes, so I can get a job and work my way to being a substantial part of some sort of (pause) lucrative operation...to support myself and do what I want” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018).

Sarah shared her vocational aspirations as a motivating factor in her learning as well: “I want to be a scientist; then I think about why I am motivated to be a scientist; then I want to do more about science, like usually my free stuff...it usually always has to do with science” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). Sarah continued to refer to this motivating factor at several points, always referencing the importance of the real-life application and her interest in the field of science:

> It was really fun for me, and I really enjoyed it, and I remember it because it was a STEM project, and I really like STEM projects, and...the engineering component because that’s what I want to be when I grow up, well, technically, I want to be a chemist, but this also had to do with it. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Similarly, Chris spoke of his future goals to work in the field of engineering. He reflected on an academic learning experience in which he made this real-life connection:
I was able to immerse myself into what factors engineers take into account when considering bridge design, and not just touch on the surface of basic bridge building. I gained a great deal of knowledge because this project was ongoing and at each level I had to build upon the last. (Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018)

Within this reflection, Chris substantiated why “science motivates [him] and has always been one of [his] passions” (Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018). Natalie also referenced the motivational factor of being able to connect her learning to a valued activity in her personal life. She discussed how helpful it would be if she “learned some new things…[she could] use later in horseback riding” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018).

In addition to the referenced increase in motivation when personal real-life connections were made, the gifted adolescents also referred to the overall applicable nature of what they were learning in terms of the real world. This was an extremely important motivating factor to Joel, in particular. He reflected:

We were talking about matrices, and I was like, ‘This is a thing that no one is ever going to use,’ and he [the teacher] said, ‘It’s not.’ He said, ‘Certain things in math aren’t because you are going to do it for your whole life. It’s about training your mind to understand things that don’t necessarily make sense. So it’s things that would be illogical for application in your own life almost all the time, but then because it is something so (pause) out there, if you can comprehend it, then you can further your mind on comprehending things that are out there’...And he was talking to me about innovation, like in engineering. That’s the type of mindset that got people on the moon. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

In this example, Joel was initially very unmotivated to learn about the concept of matrices; however, once his teacher made the connection to how he could apply this thinking in the real world, Joel’s levels of motivation changed in a positive manner. Natalie shared how making connections to the real-world was important in her learning. She wanted to see an opportunity to learn “afterwards, kind of how people that actually built these things for their life did it” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). In this example, Natalie referenced any type of hands-on
learning, which could include building a bridge, conducting a science experiment, or designing a blueprint. In contrast, when these connections were not made, Eddie shared:

   Honestly, it seems to me like a bunch of unnecessary work that is too long for me to be motivated by. Maybe in the last few days, I might be motivated to get the [assignment] finally done, but other than then, it really is the worst. (Eddie, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Chris shared similar insights when the relevance of learning was not connected to the real world:

   “I remember being in class, but we didn’t really learn stuff. We were just doing an activity that really wasn’t beneficial” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). Likewise, when reflecting on the need for this connection, Natalie shared that “sometimes, my needs don’t fit into the curriculum” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). With this insight, Natalie discussed her desire to make real-life connections in her learning: “Sometimes I am the only one who wants to do it [make connections], and they [the teachers] are like, ‘Sorry, I can’t’...which gets frustrating (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). Without being able to make this connection, Natalie did not feel motivated to put forth her best effort in her learning. Quite simply, she did not value academic learning experiences that were not relevant to the real world.

   Joel also noted that he was motivated by being able to learn more about the people and cultures around him because he valued this as a real-world skill that would help him later in life:

   It was such an interactive thing, but also...it was so applicable...It wasn’t just here are facts about India. It was, ‘If you could choose a company in India to expand. What company would it be and why?’ And it’s literally one question, but because of that question, you get politics, you get social constructs, you get everything financially that has ever happened...So you get patterns of things, and I don’t know anything, or I didn’t before that, and now I know and understand how their government works. I didn’t know what a caste system was before this, and now I know what their caste system is. I know how they vote in their house. Those are things that people just don’t understand, but because you can learn things that don’t apply to you, then things that are within your realm of interaction become more diverse and more applicable to everyone, and you start being able to comprehend people more complexly, and that’s how you see the other side of arguments. (Joel, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)
This was an area of great importance for Joel, as he continued to refer to how important this aspect was to his motivation on academic learning experiences:

> If you just focus on just getting them [the students] the material, they won’t learn it. I (pause), like I’ve had classes where I learn the material for the test, but I don’t remember it. Like, (pause) we were talking about economics of Brazil, Russia, India, and China as developing countries, and I remember that project because we talked about its applicability to our lives in terms of globalization...It’s real life; it’s applicable, but also, it’s not just information. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Joel continued to emphasize the importance of relevance to his levels of motivation as he reflected on why he was motivated to learn a second language: “It is something that can help train my mind to understand linguistics and characteristics of people” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Overall, the gifted adolescents in this study felt an increase in motivation when academic learning experiences made real-world connections and were life relevant.

**Purpose**

The second subtheme that emerged from the data under the major theme of value was purpose. Purpose was referenced 12 times across the data, equating to 29% of this overarching theme, and four out of six of the gifted adolescents shared that knowing the purpose behind their learning was a motivating factor. Janelle stressed how her levels of motivation declined when she did not know the purpose behind the academic learning experience:

> It’s something where I know we are not doing this for any purpose. We are just doing this, so we can be busy right now, or we are doing it to stay busy over the weekend; so like, it’s something where I know this is not going to help me or something that we have been working on this same subject for a really long time and I already know it and I don’t want to keep doing this. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)
Joel also shared that he had no motivation when he was “not told what the purpose is” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Sarah corroborated this sentiment when she shared about one of her recent classes:

Sometimes we have partner discussions where she [the teacher] puts a timer on the board, and she says you have one minute talk to your partner about surface water or something, and then you turn to each other and your like ‘surface water’ (said with boring, monotonous voice). We know, but it’s like, it’s like what’s the purpose? (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Natalie also found that when she understood the purpose behind an academic learning experience that it “makes you want to do it” (Natalie, March 28, 2018). Likewise, when asked to describe how he felt when he was motivated, Joel shared:

It’s not like how do you feel but more of a what, and that would be purpose... because there are a lot of times there (pause and then stated with emphasis) There are a lot of times, where if I don’t like something or I don’t want to do something, because the motivation isn’t there, it’s like...what am I doing with my life in general...So like motivation kind of comes when you are actually doing something to go toward that goal. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Janelle shared a similar sentiment:

She’ll [the teacher] talk for about 10 minutes before we actually start class, which the others like because it gives us a chance to relax, but I can’t see the point of it. This is a class that I can hardly stand because I feel like I could learn the same thing if someone just gave me the books to read and a list of vocabulary. (Janelle, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

She explained in another discussion with advice for teachers of gifted adolescents:

You also need to spend a little bit of time explaining it [the assignment]. Explain why it is going to be helpful in the future. Like sometimes in math, I have no idea what this is going to be used for. Like I want to know, otherwise I’m not going to care about it as much. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

By sharing her insights, Janelle made it very clear there needs to be a purpose behind the teacher’s actions and the assigned academic learning experiences. If this is lacking, she is not
motivated to learn in that type of setting. This was a common sentiment shared amongst her
gifted adolescent peers.

Integration of Concepts

The third subtheme that emerged from this data set was the importance of the integration
of concepts, helping students to see how all of their learning fits together. This subtheme was
supported seven times across the data and represented 17% of the overarching theme of value.

Joel encapsulated this subtheme when he shared his insights on the need for educational
reform. Joel stressed how his motivation increased when he was able to see how academic
concepts fit together. When this was done, he felt as though he could then “build on” that
knowledge (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). On several occasions, Janelle also voiced
how she felt more motivated when she understood how the differing components of an academic
learning experience all fit together. She specifically shared that she had an affinity for planners
because they “lay it out incredibly clearly…then you’re good to go” (Janelle, Student Interview,
March 30, 2018). She also shared how her motivation was lacking when it was “a project and
[the teacher was] just going to give you all these papers and [you had to] fill them all out”
(Janelle, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). These statements signified the importance for
Janelle to see how the different pieces of learning fit together. Sharing his similar feelings, Joel
articulated the importance of understanding the integration of concepts through his explanation
of a spherical chicken:

In math actually, my teacher hates the idea of math teachers saying, ‘This is how you do
something. You don’t need to know the reason why you’re doing it, just do it,’ so...he has
this poster in his room that says ‘Spherical Chickens,’ and it’s a picture of a chicken
that’s a circle...And the story behind it is his outlook on math where you can teach a dog
what a sphere is because with repetition, they will eventually understand the word sphere,
and you can teach a dog what a chicken is, but a dog can’t understand what a spherical chicken is. So as a human, his idea is that like, because you can do the math, you should be able to understand what it is that you’re learning. You should be able to understand the concept. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

Joel continued to reference the spherical chicken at several points throughout his interview, signifying the importance of seeing how different concepts fit together. Joel’s insights also emphasized the importance of having a conceptual understanding before the greater integration of concepts could be made. Joel continued to equate this to how he needed to understand the integration of concepts, for when this was not done, he felt as though learning was “so boring [said with emphasis]. It is kind of like the spherical chicken thing...you need to see how it all fits” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Eddie also referenced the fact that he felt as though reading should be more integrated into learning. In recognizing that technology has led some students to just quickly search for easy answers without finding the integration of concepts, Eddie shared, “Kids don’t read as much nowadays as they did 10 or 20 years ago. I think reading is important...It’s like no, you need to pull things from books. That’s how I feel” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). Through this discussion, Eddie stressed how he felt reading should be integrated into all of his curricular classes. The integration of this skill was something that he felt was lacking, leading to a decrease in his valuation and subsequent motivation toward academic learning experiences. Overall, whether it be through the integration of a specific skill such as reading into cross-curricular academic learning experiences, the provision of planners to signify the importance of the integration of concepts, or the focus on how different concepts fit together through the spherical chicken analogy, three of the six gifted adolescents felt as though this was an important aspect to their levels of motivation in regard to academic learning experiences.
Extrinsic Reward

With only five references within the data, extrinsic reward supported 12% of the theme of value. While intrinsic reward stems from the personal sense of enjoyment that comes from participating in an activity (Eccles, et. al., 1983; Gagne, 2010), extrinsic reward is the result of gaining external recognition, either tangible or through outward praise, for completing an academic learning experience. Three of the gifted adolescents referred to extrinsic rewards as a highly motivational factor in their learning. Interestingly enough, Eddie was the only participant who focused on the extrinsic reward that stemmed from having high grades. He stated, “Keeping good grades are motivation because I got my phone off of good grades, and it’s actually a good phone” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). Later in his interview he also reflected, “Good grades motivate me because good grades also got me to try out for baseball my sophomore year” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). While grades were not the extrinsic reward mentioned by Janelle, she felt motivated by seeing her work displayed on a bulletin board for all to see: “I had like, five pages, so it was like one of those where he [the teacher] put it on the wall, and it was super long, and I was also really proud of that, too” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). In Chris’ reflections, he shared two extrinsic motivating factors. First, there was an actual monetary incentive:

I knew that if I did well on my research, building, and collecting of data, I would possibly move on to regionals and then state. The idea of further advancement was exciting to me, and there was a monetary award as well. (Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018)

Chris also shared an experience that he earned through his academic work:

If your project was chosen to be one of the top four, you would get to lay the wreath down at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, DC when we went there for our class trip...Like the science fair, the reward was one of my main incentives. If I won, I would be able to experience a once in a lifetime thing, and I knew I wanted to do this. I
While not all of the participants referenced the motivational aspect of extrinsic rewards, this subtheme was still prevalent within the data.

**Summary of Theme**

Value: The Driving Force Behind Motivated Learning emerged as the third theme of this qualitative study. Referenced 41 times throughout the data, gifted adolescents signified the importance of the subsequent subthemes of real-life application/relevance, purpose, integration of concepts, and extrinsic reward as being key components to their levels of motivation regarding academic learning experiences. In addition, it also became evident that the gifted adolescents’ levels of motivation toward academic learning experiences were influenced by the personal connections made to their future goals, vocational aspirations, and personal lives as a result of this increased personal value.

**Effort: Fuel for Motivated Learning**

The final theme that emerged from the data was Effort: Fuel for Motivated Learning. This theme was referenced 18 times throughout the data and was broken down into the two subthemes of behaviors (n=12) and focus (n=6). Effort, in the context of this study, referred to the intense dedication given to an academic learning experience by an individual (Gagne, 2008). Evidence to support these subthemes is discussed in the following sections.
Behaviors

Behaviors was the first subtheme denoted under the major theme of effort and was referenced 12 times throughout the data, supporting 67% of this overarching theme. For the context of this subtheme, behaviors encompassed any evidence indicative of how the actions of the gifted adolescents were significantly demonstrated. Examples included behaviors that reflected participants spending personal free time learning more about a topic not officially assigned to them or behaviors that signified how the gifted adolescents went above and beyond expectations on an academic learning experience. Behaviors also included the physicality of their actions in regard to motivation. For example, Chris, referenced a writing assignment at his current school that he was motivated for:

I first gathered paper and submerged it in coffee to get an old and worn look. Then, I bought a calligraphy ink pen to make the letter appear realistic...Overall, I especially enjoyed this assignment and feel it was a very useful tool that encouraged me to try my hardest. (Chris, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

By taking the time to prepare the paper on which he would write his letter, purchasing a calligraphy pen, and then handwriting the letter, Chris’ behavior demonstrated an increase in motivation to work beyond the expectation of this academic learning experience. Chris also reflected on the thoroughness of his behavior when he felt motivated on an academic learning experience:

I just do my best on it. I give 100%, all I have...just like trying hard to get it done and like, being very meticulous and careful to make sure that it goes well...and make sure that everything works, so I would go back and check my work a few times and just like, be very careful with it. (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018)

While interviewing Sarah, she physically demonstrated how her behavior manifested when she was motivated on an academic learning experience. She first described how she bit her tongue
while she stuck her tongue out in concentration while putting forth effort. She then continued, “And I write really fast...and then I usually ask a lot of questions like this” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). Sarah then physically demonstrated how she raised her hand exuberantly while focused and putting effort into her learning. Similarly, Joel equated purpose with his effort, “If I’m actively trying...then it’s like I have purpose in my life trying to do that” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). With this insight, Joel referenced his behavior in regard to an academic learning experience focused on developing a budget. Joel connected this assignment to a personal goal he had to purchase a tiny house and move out on his own. After stating that he spent an entire day binge-watching House Hunters:

I was just looking, I was watching the Tiny House version, and I was like, ‘What do people want? What is the square footage roughly?’ cause there was one that was too small, and I was like, ‘I don’t want a house that small,’ so I was like ‘What is the square footage of the house that would be bigger?’ I was like, ‘What is the financing on different types of granite counters?’ (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

This was a clear example of how Joel’s motivation increased through connecting with a personal goal and how his subsequent behavior became intently focused, spending hours taking notes on something that he deemed personally purposeful. Janelle also referenced her excitement and heightened behaviors toward independent research on an academic learning experience from earlier in the school year:

It was a most excellent project from the start. When he announced it, we all went bonkers, but as it developed, I started getting seriously excited about it. He gave us a list of documents, and I had them all bookmarked in a folder pinned to my google taskbar, and I looked them all up and collected research notes from each of them. (Janelle, Student Work Sample, 2018)

While providing a lengthier support for this subtheme, Joel described how he spent an incredible amount of time researching Noah’s Ark for a discussion in one of his religion classes at his current school. Noting that his original motivation was to prove the Bible wrong, his explanation
reflected his behavior in choosing to spend his free time making calculations and researching a topic he found to be motivational:

So my immediate thought was A: how long would it take to build? B: with what materials and with what volume and mass of animals? I was like, how big would this thing have to be? And the Bible gives pretty accurate measurements...so I did cubit to feet and then did square footage of the inside of the ark and then the deck because the general assumption is that, have you seen the picture of the big boat, but then on top there is the square?...And so I was like, if the people are living on that little square, then there is also deck space and below deck space. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

While Joel continued to speak of how he spent his time going above and beyond in his preparation for this discussion, he continued to detail how he integrated math into his thinking:

I did a lot of math...I was like, if you have one of every species, that wouldn’t make any sense, so I did one of every order because then my thought there was if you had two felines, as opposed to two lions, then those two felines eventually develop into whatever the thing is...so, I did the mass of the most common of each of the orders of land animals...and the mass of what they ate, and...I figured out that with the amount of food space, and the amount of space mentioned in the Bible per cubit, that you have 100 extra square feet to move around in the cabin...and I figured that each animal order is separated, to some degree, and then that you have containers for food and water, that you would have 100 square feet below deck to move around...I figured with the amount of carbon dioxide in the air, and when the Bible says it took place, as well as with the math I did, that there’s easily a chance that it was possible in terms of assuming that you could have a man conjure up every animal. (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018)

While a lengthy piece of evidence, Joel’s account, clearly depicted his behavior to spend a great deal of time, thought, and effort on a topic that he found to be motivational. Joel also recognized that he “did it on [his] own time, [even though his] school has no extra credit policy” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). In contrast, if Joel had not been motivated by an academic learning experience, his exhibited behavior would be drastically different. He described how his behavior would be “completely distracted…[or] would distract others from the purpose of the class” or “go back to doing what [he] wanted to be doing” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018).
In signifying the type of behaviors exhibited when gifted students were not motivated, Chris referenced an occasion when “kids weren’t paying attention, or they just weren’t taking everything in” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). Chris continued to describe these types of negative behaviors from one of his middle school classes in which the teacher “was a nice person, but her teaching skills weren’t amazing, so I remember being in class, but we didn’t really learn stuff…[and kids were] goofing off in the corner” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). Janelle also referenced how her personal behaviors were not on task when lacking motivation:

> In Spanish, my personal motivation is very low. I want to eventually become fluent in Spanish, but I have learned almost nothing in this class the entire year. (I can listen to music while he’s teaching, partly because I already know what he’s teaching.)...He likes to give us easy assignments so that we like him better. I think he has a need for a good self-image, but beyond that, he doesn’t seem motivated to get us to learn all we possibly could. (Janelle, Student Response Journal, April 2018)

Janelle was a highly attentive student. Her acknowledgement that she listened to music while her teacher delivered instruction at her current school signified an entirely different behavior than what she typically set forth. This behavior resulted from a decrease in motivation stemming from a lack of challenge within the curriculum as well as the teacher choosing the role of friend over that of facilitator of learning, a choice in which Janelle found no merit. This example, in addition to the others shared, supported that negative learning behaviors were indicative of lower motivation, while higher motivation lead to positive learning behaviors.

**Focus**

Focus was the final subtheme in the area of effort and was supported with six references throughout the data, relating to 33% of the overarching theme. This subtheme encompassed
gifted adolescents’ references to their level of intensity toward an academic learning experience. This subtheme denoted the antithesis of distraction and signified the participants’ ability to maintain a heightened level of concentration toward the academic learning experience.

Sarah was very direct with her thoughts in regard to academic learning experiences in which she felt motivated. She stated, “I would be really focused” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). Janelle also stated, “I would be super focused on it. I would take fewer breaks” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018).

In a slightly different manner, Natalie and Janelle both referenced how motivation led them to be immersed in their learning. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) described this as working in a state of consciousness referred to as flow: “A state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (p. 1).

Natalie described what motivation meant to her and how this focused effort affected her:

I’m more wanting to do it, and I want to go deeper, and I probably do a better job on it. I can get so focused in on something that it doesn’t really matter what is going on around me. I just completely focus and zero in on that one thing that I’m doing, and I’ll kind of go a little crazy. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

Natalie also referenced that when she was highly motivated that she was able to “remember everything very clearly because [she] was so focused in on what [she] was doing” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). In a very similar manner, Janelle also referred to her focus and effort and how they affected the drive that she felt to complete an academic learning experience. In doing so, she also referenced how she felt when she was working on a motivational assignment. To Janelle, motivation was

the factor or the thing that teachers could put into their curriculum that would make gifted students really, like, want to or feel like, the drive to complete their work, and not just
complete it, but do it. Actually feel like they got something out of it...So if I wasn’t motivated, I would be super distracted; I would have a lot of music on, like loud music with lyrics. I would be looking at my phone a lot more often and also complaining to my parents about how worthless this assignment was. Like we just had this assignment in Spanish, and it is totally just busy work, and I do not want to do it at all! But if I was motivated on it, I would just have my computer out, and I would just be super focused on it. I would take fewer breaks on it probably, and also sometimes, when you do something that you really like to do, like sometimes, like when I do essays or something, I just get in that zone, and I feel like the time slips away, and you’re not even paying attention to how long it’s been. (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018)

Through this piece of evidence, Janelle encompassed several facets of this subtheme of focus.

First, she referenced the drive to complete an assignment. This referred to the ability to maintain a heightened level of concentration over an extended period of time. In addition, Janelle referred to the various behaviors that would be indicative of being distracted, with a lack of focus, and finally, Janelle referred to how time slipped away while she felt focused and “in that zone.” By specifically referencing personal levels of concentration and attention to detail, gifted adolescents recognized focus as being an integral component to their personal levels of motivation in regard to academic learning experiences.

Summary of Theme

Effort: The Fuel for Motivated Learning was supported by 18 references throughout the data. The two subthemes of behavior and focus emerged. Of the four themes that emerged from this study, effort was the most substantiated by gifted adolescents’ reflections of their personal learning traits to sustain heightened motivation levels. Two of the gifted adolescents also supported Csikszentmihalyi’s (2008) conception of flow while being highly motivated in regard to an academic learning experience. Through exhibiting behaviors that extended above and beyond expectation as well as maintaining intense levels of concentration over extended periods
of time, gifted adolescents found effort to be an integral component to their motivation in regard to academic learning experiences.

Summary of Major Themes

The four major themes that emerged from this study on gifted adolescent motivation reflected the important factors the participants felt impacted their levels of motivation in regard to academic learning experiences. With the most supporting evidence, the format of the academic learning experiences emerged as the greatest motivational factor, followed closely by the role of the teacher within the academic learning environment. The need to value the academic learning experience was also integral to the gifted students’ levels of motivation, and the level of effort to maintain that motivation was also found to be of importance. In a manner of speaking, the first three themes that emerged from the data were predominantly shaped by the professional educator, while the final theme stemmed more from a reaction by the gifted learner. These four major themes have an integral role in answering the guiding research questions for this study to be detailed in the next chapter. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for the field of gifted education.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter includes answers to the three guiding research questions for this study, as well as a discussion of the qualitative research findings for gifted adolescent motivation in regard to academic learning experiences. The findings will be connected back to existing research as well as the theoretical framework of Gagne’s DMGT and expectancy-value theory. Implications and recommendations from the findings will be shared as well as suggestions for future research.

Research Questions

This study was guided by three research questions from which four major themes and 13 subthemes emerged from the data. The six gifted adolescents participated in one individual interview and submitted student response journals and student work samples with tags, which provided for triangulation of the data. Answers to the three guiding research questions follow with support from the thematic data.

Research Question 1
How do gifted adolescents’ conceptions of motivation align with the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental process components of Gagne’s DMGT?

Data utilized to address Research Question 1 were comprised of the gifted adolescents’ responses from the interview protocol, student response journals, and student work samples with tags and completed IISWSTs. Research Question 1 also required the data to be aligned
with the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental process components of Gagne’s DMGT (see Figure 1.1).

By connecting the thematic data back to the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental process components of Gagne’s DMGT, the first theme of Format: The Gateway to Motivated, Active Learning was aligned with the developmental process activities component. This component falls within developmental process, the only category of the framework that is affected and enhanced by both the natural abilities of the gifted learner, as well as the environmental and intrapersonal categories that are present in an academic learning experience (See Figure 1.1). In addition, the developmental process category is the only portion of the DMGT that acts as the route through which gifted students can demonstrate their subsequent competencies (see Figure 1.1). By utilizing Gagne’s DMGT as a lens to answer Research Question 1, it became clear why the first major theme aligned with this category, as it was the only pathway through which students and teachers were able to measure the students’ gifts as developed into competencies. Table 5.1 provides evidence of how the gifted adolescents were mindful of demonstrating their competencies through the format of their academic learning experiences. It became evident that demonstrating competence was a priority to gifted adolescents while engaging in academic learning experiences. Additionally, as noted in Table 5.1 and discussed in Chapter 4, autonomy was found to be a subtheme of format within this study. While Gagne signifies autonomy as part of the intrapersonal motivation component of the DMGT, gifted adolescents in this study consistently referenced the autonomous attributes of the format of academic learning experiences throughout the data. The emergence of these data created autonomy as a subtheme to support the overarching theme of format. Furthermore, while some of the gifted adolescents referenced Gagne’s developmental process activities’ sub-
categories of access and content, these did not develop into any overarching themes or subthemes.

Table 5.1

Gifted Adolescents’ Focus on Demonstrating Competence Through Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format Subtheme</th>
<th>Gifted Adolescent</th>
<th>Shared Insight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Joel</td>
<td><em>If someone asked me to sit down right now and do a book report on Macbeth, I could do it without looking at the book.</em> (Interview, March 27, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td><em>If your project was chosen to be one of the top four, you would get to lay the wreath down at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, DC when we went there for our class trip.</em> (Student Work Sample, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-On</td>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td><em>We ended up getting third place because of one little design flaw. If we didn’t miss that design flaw, we would have probably got first.</em> (Interview, March 29, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-On</td>
<td>Janelle</td>
<td><em>During the debate there was a bit of reputation to uphold. Assessment was based on our debate participation and accuracy of notes/research; everyone was required to speak at least once, but as a Big Three/Four member, I got to talk a lot more.</em> (Student Work Sample, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-On</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td><em>You have to come up there and tell me what this country is. If you get it wrong, then you go sit down, and then the students get all excited about it, and I get excited!</em> (Interview, April 14, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-On</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td><em>I want to get a good grade...so I think hands-on, and writing, and researching are more beneficial [learning activities]</em> (Interview, March 31, 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td><em>Everyone knows that I want to get a good grade, and so I ended up being in a group of three, but I had to do everything because the other two know that I will do everything...because I want a good grade.</em> (Interview, March 28, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td><em>I don’t really like to work in groups because some of those kids, they just don’t care as much, so like, instead of drawing a nice straight line with a ruler to connect it to an animal, they would just draw it freehand, and I was like, ‘Noooooo!’ That’s what I was thinking because that could lower my grade or something like that.</em> (Interview, March 31, 2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on next page
It was fun because we could come up with our own ways to create a model. The only rule was that the final product had to actually resemble the cell part. My pair did the plasma membrane. [We presented to the class] while being inside a giant plastic cell. We constructed the cell outside with plastic and tape which was really fun to do. (Interview, March 28, 2018)

If I have one tiny worksheet, then there is nothing I can do with it [to show my talents]. (Interview, April 14, 2018)

We could choose what we wanted to do, and this enabled me to be creative and speak from the heart...The possibility of being chosen to lay the wreath based off of my own creativity is fulfilling and rewarding. I would recommend open-ended assignments because they can spark imagination and not lock a student into a specific type of project. (Student Response Journal, April 2018)

The second theme of Teacher: The Guidance Toward Motivated Learning was aligned within the teacher sub-category of the environmental individual component of the DMGT (See Figure 1.1). Data strongly supported the impact of the teacher on gifted adolescent motivation through teachers’ affective traits, levels of PIE, and abilities to provide meaningful feedback, as shared in Chapter 4. Furthermore, while the gifted adolescents in this study did not directly mention the connection, there was also alignment with the DMGT component of environmental provisions. Through consistent references made to the subtheme of preparedness, innovation, and effort, gifted adolescents acknowledged the teacher’s ability to meet their learning needs through the enrichment, pacing, grouping, and acceleration of academic learning experiences. As noted through rich descriptions, the majority of academic learning experiences which gifted adolescents referenced as motivational were indicative of a teacher’s ability to enrich curricula. Table 5.2 includes a sample of references pulled from the preparedness, innovation, and effort subtheme to support the enrichment, pacing, grouping, and acceleration which comprise the environmental provisions component of the DMGT (see Figure 1.1). Through the evidence that supported the overarching theme of teacher as well as the supports referenced in Table 5.2, the
gifted adolescents in this study clearly recognized the environmental category of the DMGT as important to their conceptions of motivation.

Table 5.2

Samples of PIE Data to Support DMGT’s Environmental Provisions Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Provision Sub-Category</th>
<th>Gifted Adolescent</th>
<th>Shared Insight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment</td>
<td>Joel</td>
<td>If you teach them just by how you or the world or social constructs would tell you to interpret it, then you’re not inspiring these people, especially if they’re gifted, to put those gifts into interpreting things on their own. Because if they’re interpreting them on their own, then that’s what leads to actual innovation as opposed to the same invention being done 30,000 times. (Student Interview, March 27, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>When you have a motivational teacher, she or he gives you lots of creative projects that you get to have fun with, and you get to enjoy instead of just plain old worksheets. (Student Interview, April 14, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>That’s definitely innovative because they do teaching methods that normal teachers wouldn’t do. (Student Interview, March 31, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>Joel</td>
<td>You can move forward as a class, as opposed to potentially leaving people behind. If you move forward as a class, then you are all learning together, and you can build off of one another but also build off of the material to learn new material as a coalition. (Student Interview, March 27, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>Janelle</td>
<td>My teacher liked to introduce the assignment we’d be doing a week or so before it was assigned; he called this “planting the seed.” It was a pretty effective method of starting our minds turning about the upcoming assignment so we didn’t go into it blind. (Student Interview, March 30, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Some of my teachers now where they make their lesson plans different for every group, so one group would use a certain one that wouldn’t work for another class. (Student Interview, March 31, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceleration</td>
<td>Janelle</td>
<td>I don’t think he [my teacher] quite knows how to cater to the high end as well as the low end of the spectrum. (Student Response Journal, April 2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the themes of Value: The Driving Force Behind Gifted Motivation and Effort: The Fuel for Motivated Learning fell with the components of intrapersonal motivation and intrapersonal volition, respectively (see Figure 1.1). According to Gagne (2008), the intrapersonal component of the DMGT includes intrapersonal motivation, intrapersonal volition, and intrapersonal awareness. Gagne further divides intrapersonal motivation into the subcategories of values, needs, interests, and passions. It was the DMGT subcategory of values that was supported through the overarching theme of Value: The Driving Force Behind Gifted Motivation. Likewise, The Intrapersonal Volition component was divided into the subcategories of autonomy, effort, and perseverance. It was the DMGT subcategory of effort that was supported through the overarching theme of Effort: The Fuel for Motivated Learning. By having the two DMGT intrapersonal subcategories of value and effort emerge as overarching themes from this data, strong support for the DMGT’s intrapersonal component was provided. While all the gifted adolescents referenced the DMGT component of intrapersonal awareness, this was the least represented component and, therefore, did not develop into any theme or subtheme.

In conclusion, the data revealed all three major categories of Gagne’s DMGT were integral aspects of these gifted adolescents’ conceptions of motivation. Table 5.3 signifies the alignment of themed data to the three major components of Gagne’s DMGT. While the developmental process component was the most strongly represented through the overarching theme of format, the major components of Gagne’s DMGT were quite equally represented. As previously discussed, the developmental process component signifies the only component from which gifted adolescents were able to manifest their abilities into measurable competencies. This heightened level signified increased motivation in relation to the importance for gifted adolescents to demonstrate their abilities in regard to academic learning experiences. The nearly
equally represented intrapersonal and environmental components also signified increased motivation in relation to gifted adolescents’ values and effort levels as well as the importance of a strong teacher in relation to academic learning experiences.

Table 5.3
Percentage of Theme Data to DMGT Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Percentage of Theme Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Process</td>
<td>Format</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>Value/Effort</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 2
How do gifted adolescents describe the types of academic learning experiences that are most and least motivational?

Data used to answer Research Question 2 were collected from the gifted adolescents’ responses to the interview protocol, student response journals, and student work samples with tags, including the IISWSTs. From 74 references taken from this data set, the gifted adolescents reported that the most motivational academic learning experiences were flexible, hands-on, autonomous, and creative. Figure 5.1 depicts these data in relation to what the participants found to be the most motivational types of academic learning experiences.
While referencing the least motivational academic learning experiences, all of the gifted adolescents referred to the type of learning experience that did not include these previously stated attributes, which consisted mostly of worksheets and rote memorization activities. Sarah encapsulated this shared thought:

I don’t like paper...I don’t like worksheets that have question and answer, like what is this, and then you have to find out what this is, and it’s kind of boring. Definitely, creativity, like a broad spectrum that you can choose different things from so it’s not just one little assignment that you have to do what it says you have to do. Like not rules. You have to have rules. That makes total sense, but you have to, like, for me, if I have a broad spectrum, then I have so many things I can do, but if I have one tiny worksheet, then there is nothing I can do with it. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

Joel was pithier and more direct: “Worksheets, textbooks, I don’t like” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Eddie shared his reasoning about why worksheets felt so limiting:
If you’re told to do something one way, and that’s the one way you have to do it for everything, and it just is repetitive, and you can’t do it another way because you’ll get points off or you’re doing it ‘wrong’...but in reality, it really doesn’t work that way, but you know that you could do it another way, but the teacher tells you have to do it this one way, and that just really makes the class not really fun. (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)

While sharing similar insights, Natalie reflected on the limiting nature of writing prompts:

I’m not entirely thrilled about writing prompts. Like literally, when you are given a sentence and, you are told to write off of that cause like without completely kind of changing the subject, at one point everyone has the same thing because there isn’t much you can work with. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

The gifted adolescents in this study consistently equated higher motivation with academic learning experiences that provided them with opportunities to have flexible learning and engage in hands-on activities. As discussed in Chapter 4, students were highly motivated by hands-on designing/building opportunities as well as interactive debates, challenges, and simulations. In addition, the gifted adolescents shared their heightened motivation, which stemmed from autonomous academic learning experiences in which they did not feel held back by peers who did not share their same quest for learning or share similar interests. Likewise, creativity was also found to be a motivating factor of an academic learning experience. To the contrary, the gifted adolescents felt little to no motivation when faced with rote fill-in-the-blank style worksheets and generic prompt-responses. In essence, if gifted adolescents were unable to see a way to personally connect with the academic learning experience, then their motivation waned.

**Research Question 3**

According to gifted adolescents, what influences their motivation in regard to academic learning experiences?

Data used to answer Research Question 3 were collected from the gifted adolescents’ responses to the interviews, student response journals, and student work samples with tags,
including IISWSTs. From these data, multiple factors were found to impact gifted adolescents’ motivation in regard to academic learning experiences. Primarily, the gifted adolescents felt increased levels of motivation when presented with academic learning experiences that offered them flexibility, hands-on learning, autonomy, and opportunities for creativity. While this was a commonly shared thought among these gifted adolescents, Natalie encapsulated the thought while reflecting on a past academic learning experience:

> We actually got to build and design our own ones [catapults] which was nice because then we could take the knowledge that we just learned and actually use it for something...I remember having all of these ideas popping into my head of various designs that may or may not work. (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018)

In addition, the gifted adolescents felt strongly that a teacher with positive affective traits, a heightened level of preparedness, innovation, and effort, and the ability to offer timely and meaningful feedback was also a motivating influence. Eddie shared why these were important attributes in a teacher for the gifted: “Some of these kids might be a little bit sarcastic; they might have a little bit more maturity than what you might have expected for their age” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). Sarah also described teachers that she found motivational:

> There’s no other word for this besides just fun. Like not so stiff and ‘Today we are doing this and this. That is on the board.’ It should be, ‘Hi, guys, welcome!’ and then like going through things and making jokes, laughing, and it makes the school more fun and...When you have a teacher that’s so strict. I’m not saying strict is bad, sometimes it’s good to have strict teachers, but when they are so stiff and formal, then you sometimes are stiff and formal, and if I had a teacher that was like saying this is what’s going to be on the board and flip to this page and start reading it, I would be like ‘Ok, I’ll start reading it.’ But if I had a teacher that was coming in, showing us examples, like ‘Here is a piece of pottery I found.’ And we would be like, ‘Oh, that is so cool!’ and then like PowerPoint slides and pulling down the maps, and stuff like that. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

In this scenario, Sarah’s connection to the teacher impacted her level of motivation. Likewise, Chris provided a description of a motivational teacher: “They would be interactive, so they
would ask us questions, and we would raise our hands and answer, and they would tell us about a lot of new assignments and homework and stuff, so very interactive” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). The ability to interact with and relate to the teacher was extremely motivational for the gifted adolescent participants. Finally, the data signified a heightened level of motivation when gifted adolescents valued the academic learning experience they were working on. This value stemmed from understanding the purpose behind the academic learning experience while also seeing the real-life connection and the interconnection of the various concepts being learned. Joel recognized that there are times when lectures are needed “to baseline the material so that everyone can just get it” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018), but other than that, gifted adolescents felt a need to know the deeper purpose behind academic learning experiences. Joel also acknowledged a class in which he “loved the teacher and the work was well-taught and understood…[but] the primary reason [he didn’t] enjoy the class was that it’s something with which I engaged very rarely” (Joel, Student Response Journal, April 2018). In this instance, the content was not something he valued in his life, so Joel lacked motivation. Nicole concurred that she was motivated for academic learning experiences that were relevant to her life. She stated that she preferred projects that she valued and “would like to do not just for a graded assignment” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). Janelle added the importance of seeing how everything fit together added purpose to her learning. She lacked motivation when the academic learning experience “was a lot of unconnected things” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). In addition, as referenced in Chapter 4, there was also value that stemmed from an extrinsic reward for three of the gifted adolescents. Figure 5.2 depicts the impact of these three overarching influences of format, teacher, and value. While the format of the academic learning experience had a higher level of impact on gifted adolescent motivation,
the role of the teacher and how the student valued the lesson were still significant influences on the participants’ levels of motivation.

Figure 5.2. Influences on gifted adolescent motivation toward academic learning experiences.

Major Outcomes from This Study

Throughout this case study, the gifted adolescents were given the opportunity to respond openly and freely about their conceptions of motivation in regard to their academic learning experiences. From this open-ended approach, the depth of qualitative data represented reflective insights and perceptions that were previously lacking in the field of gifted education. From this study, three major findings emerged that all acknowledge keys to unlocking gifted adolescent motivation:
1. Standard mass-produced basal curricula do not meet the needs of gifted adolescent learners without additional modifications.

2. Gifted educator training should include not only the various models and strategies proven effective with gifted adolescents but also meaningful ways to connect with gifted learners to provide respectful constructive feedback and guidance.

3. Academic learning experiences need to be personally valued by gifted adolescents and applicable to the real-world in which they live.

While current research strongly acknowledges the need for differentiated instruction for gifted learners (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Altuna & Yazici, 2010; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Gillard, et. al., 2015; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Little, 2004; Patrick, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014; Turki, 2014), the major outcomes from this study provide fresh insights about how to motivate gifted adolescents beyond just meeting their level of learning. These findings are substantiated by answers to the three guiding research questions and lay the foundation for examining future implications. How these findings are supported through the theoretical framework of Gagne’s DMGT and expectancy-value theory is discussed later in this chapter.

**Discussion of Findings in Relationship to Past Research**

The findings from this study about gifted adolescent motivation in regard to academic learning experiences are highly supportive of past research in this field and provide further qualitative data to reinforce key characteristics of curricula that impact gifted adolescent motivation (Little, 2012). The findings from this study add substantially to past research that has been highly quantitative (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Erdogan, 2015; Eristi, 2012;
Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Turki, 2014). In addition, the depth of responses from this study and the triangulation of the qualitative data add to the limited qualitative studies in this field (Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014) With this being said, the findings from this study also provide greater insight into the degree to which gifted adolescents are aware of their own levels of motivation and subsequent behavior choices in regard to academic learning experiences. These findings poignantly denote the importance of specialized curricula for gifted adolescents and the imperative nature for gifted educator training.

**Outcome 1: The Need for Specialized Gifted Curricula**

The most prevalent finding that emerged from this study was the imperative need for specialized gifted curricula as an impetus for gifted adolescent motivation. Without question, the gifted adolescents in this study were emphatic on their need for academic learning experiences to provide the flexible, hands-on, autonomous, and creative styles of learning they desire across all content areas. Unfortunately, much of the basal mass-produced curricula utilized by school districts are not formatted in this manner, necessitating the need for materials and subsequent training to impact all content areas at all levels. This would include not only the major content areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies, but also exploratory classes and various electives. Joel articulately referenced how this approach did not meet his learning needs:

I am extremely good at French so it is not a difficult class, but the thing I like least is how formulaic it is- there’s not enough free sentence construction and cultural study, as it’s all streamlined through a Holt McDougal textbook- a company akin to Pearson and one I hate about as much for its monopolization of the education market. (Joel, Student Response Journal, April 2018)
Joel’s claim parallels Braunshausen’s (2017) acknowledgement that by using a basal curriculum, it is “difficult to teach gifted, talented, [and] advanced students…..[it] may be too rigid and not engaging enough” to meet their needs (para. 5). Additionally, this finding continues to embrace the ideology that gifted adolescents require advanced complex curricula that include opportunities across multiple domains and extends beyond the standards (Kahveci & Atalay, 2010; Position Statement, n.d.; Standard 3, n.d.; Tomlinson, 2003). By providing gifted adolescents with a curriculum that just offers an additional enrichment worksheet or supplemental game if the content has already been mastered, gifted adolescents’ motivation will wane. In addition, this regimented type of curricula is not conducive to gifted adolescent learning (Braunshausen, 2017), resulting in unengaged and underachieving gifted adolescents.

Due to the structure of middle school and high school programming, the need for gifted adolescents to experience complex curricula across multiple domains becomes more of a challenge due to the content-specific style of classes (Berger, 1991). This is an additional area in which a district-provided, specialized, gifted curriculum could support the classroom teacher in making these connections, for gifted adolescents would benefit exponentially from curricula that help them make these connections between these traditional content areas and integrate multiple disciplines (Jacobs & Borland, 1986). Unfortunately, many teachers at the middle and secondary level are specialized in specific content areas and have little to no training in gifted education (Sayi, 2018). This is exacerbated by the fact that integration of content areas within a middle school setting can be difficult to implement (Lounsbury, 2009). NAGC (n.d.) further recognizes that most teacher preparation programs do not include gifted training at the undergraduate level, as most gifted training is offered at the master’s level. In understanding this lack of training with general education teachers to work with gifted adolescents, the basal-style curricula often
provided does not extend to meet the motivational learning needs of gifted adolescents. For the educators who do have training in this area, the time required to research, invest, and learn the few gifted curricula available within a specific content area exacerbate the issue. Thus, having a specialized gifted curriculum provided by administration to utilize with gifted adolescents would help to further motivate and meet the needs of this unique population.

Additionally, gifted adolescents are motivated to excel in academic learning experiences that offer choice. When this type of flexibility is organically integrated into academic learning experiences, gifted adolescent motivation will increase, leading to higher student achievement (Gentry & Springer, 2002; Gillard, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008). This type of choice could include options regarding content, process, or product. An example of content could include gifted adolescents being given the choice of subject matter while learning research skills; this would allow for mastery of the skill regardless of the content being researched. Similarly, allowing gifted adolescents the choice of which processing model to utilize could also increase their levels of motivation and subsequent achievement on academic learning experiences. This might include providing gifted adolescents with the choice to utilize Paul’s Reasoning Model or the Future Problem-Solving Model while processing specific learning objectives (School of Education Center for Gifted Education, n.d.). Paul’s Reasoning Model is a critical thinking model often utilized in writing gifted curricula and emphasizes the following eight elements: issue, point of view, purpose, assumptions, concepts, inferences, evidence, and implications or consequences. Similarly, The Future Problem-Solving Model teaches creative and critical thinking, decision making, and problem-solving by having students identify challenges, select an underlying problem, produce solution ideas, generate and select criteria, apply criteria, and develop an action plan (What is FPSPI?, n.d.). Finally, allowing gifted adolescents the choice of
which type of product to create while demonstrating their learning is another aspect of having flexible formatting. Through offering the flexibility of content, process, and product in addition to working at a level conducive to a gifted adolescent’s level of learning, gifted adolescents’ motivation will be increased and sustained over an extended period of time.

This finding also brings new insights into gifted adolescents’ own understanding of their personal motivation and levels of achievement. While research has found that specialized gifted curricula lead to an increase in gifted adolescent motivation and subsequent student achievement (Maker & Schiever, 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009), the findings from this qualitative study have further substantiated and broadened this finding through the open-ended, reflective insights of the gifted adolescent participants. These gifted adolescents were able to readily acknowledge and describe how their motivational behavior choices differed based on their learning needs being met. By developing specialized curricula to meet the learning needs of gifted learners, gifted adolescents would be empowered to choose and engage with academic learning experiences at a deeper level.

**Outcome 2: The Need for Gifted Educator Training**

The need for gifted educator training and professional development is not a new concept; however, the findings that emerged from this study on gifted adolescent motivation add further support and expose new avenues this training should encompass. Closely following the need for a more specialized curricula for gifted adolescents, the need for highly qualified teachers who are trained in the nuances of gifted education is paramount when addressing the motivational needs of the gifted adolescent (Erdogan, 2015). Outcome 2 recognizes that teachers are ultimately responsible for ensuring their gifted students’ learning needs are being met (Bredekamp &
Copple, 1997; Kellough & Kellough, 2008; Scales, 1991, 2003; Wiles, et. al., 2006), further necessitating the need for training in this field. In acknowledging this, the teachers become an integral component in gifted adolescents’ level of motivation (Eristi, 2012). This level of motivation is closely aligned with the gifted adolescent’s engagement with the academic learning experience, ultimately affecting student achievement levels (Schlechty, 2011).

Primarily, gifted educators should have training in the area of instructional strategies and models of gifted education that have been proven effective with gifted learners. This is imperative, for a recent NAGC study found that there are 19 states that do not even monitor gifted programming at the local level, and of all the states, only seven require reporting on gifted achievement (Azzam, 2016). With this lack of accountability, the role of the teacher in meeting gifted adolescents’ learning needs becomes even more of a focus. In an effort to better illustrate the importance of a gifted educator’s knowledge of instructional strategies and models of gifted education, consider the following metaphor: Gifted learners are embarking on a vacation of learning. The curriculum signifies the landmarks, historic sites, scenery, and basic objectives of this vacation. The path, or route, the gifted adolescent travels to reach the destination is signified by the instructional strategy/strategies to be implemented. In essence, how does the traveler, or gifted adolescent, reach the final destination or final objective(s) desired? These instructional strategies are not always content specific. For instance, if gifted adolescents are faced with 10 questions, they could complete the three most difficult first. This most difficult first strategy is an effective means to compact the curriculum, or objectives, for gifted learners (Azzam, 2016). Finally, the model of gifted education refers to the type of map that would best help the gifted adolescent reach the final destination. Figuratively speaking, this might include a topographical map, a road map, or a climatic map, keeping in mind which map, or model, best fits the vacation
Van Tassel-Baska and Brown (2015) define a curricular model as one that has a framework for curricular design and development, is transferable and usable in all content areas, has K-12 applicability, is applicable across schools and grouping settings, and incorporates differentiated features for the gifted/talented learner. The Integrated Curriculum Model is one example that will later be defined and used as a prime example.

The need for appropriate and meaningful instructional strategies and models of gifted education to motivate gifted adolescents through academic learning experiences cannot be understated. Through these, gifted adolescents have a more positive outlook on the learning process itself (Abu-Hmmour & Al-Hmouz, 2013). Additionally, as gifted adolescents engage in these higher level academic learning experiences, they are more motivated to work up to their potential (Powers, 2008). Taking it a step further, teachers’ instructional strategies dramatically influence gifted adolescents’ motivation to persist and engage with academic learning experiences over an extended period of time (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Anderman & Anderman, 2014; Fakoladee & Adeniyi, 2010; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Schlechty, 2011; Standard 3, n.d.; Wigfield, et. al., 2004). In regard to the impact of utilizing an appropriate model of gifted education, the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) is a model that has been proven effective in increasing motivation in gifted adolescent learners (Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Maker & Schiever, 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009). Table 5.4 denotes the unique features of the ICM through overarching concepts, advanced content, and process-product. ICM’s structure through these three dimensions focuses on real world issues, themes, and ideas while also providing higher order thinking processes through advanced content in disciplines of study (Maker & Schiever, 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2009). This model was represented throughout this study’s data and should be included as an integral model in gifted educator training. As part of this
study, the gifted adolescents referenced this model through reflections on building Roman catapults. Through this specific learning experience, the historical advanced content knowledge being applied was presented to the gifted adolescents through a task to design and construct a complex apparatus. This was also part of the greater scope of the unit that applied the universal generalization of change in regard to the fall of Rome. Using the Integrated Curriculum Model, the gifted adolescents were immersed in rigorous and complex learning that allowed for creativity and created a sense of ownership with the academic learning experience. As noted in the detailed student interviews found in Chapter 4, an incredible amount of learning was accomplished through such intense engagement. Similarly, using an inquiry-based model or strategy, gifted adolescent motivation was also increased (Trna, 2014). Although the gifted adolescents in this study were not aware of the types of models and strategies being implemented, they all described experiences that led to opportunities for exploration and inquiry. Those opportunities were highly motivating for these gifted adolescents. For example, Sarah reflected on how she had to discover and problem-solve for a STEM project centered around how to best design a space vehicle:

I had to figure out how I would be able to fit them [the different apparatuses] in the thing [the vehicle] so I wouldn’t...well, like I would stab a hole in there and then move it around in the foam because it was really hard foam, and then stick it down in there, but then I thought, ‘No,’ because they would fall out. So I had to put it in there myself, and then I had to figure out how to cut the dowel rods so they were long enough and long enough so they weren’t like, falling out though, and then it was really hard to sculpt something out of foam because I had to use scissors because we didn’t have like tools or anything, but I did use a knife to scrape it a little bit, but with the scissors, I had to cut it from the block...I spent like an hour, making a foam camera. It took me a really long time. (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018)

While this is just a short sample of Sarah’s description of her engagement with this inquiry-based project, she enjoyed having the opportunity to create a solution to the overarching objective.
When asked if she ever felt discouraged when she faced difficulty with this academic learning experience, Sarah responded, “Not really, it was really fun for me” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). In contrast to Sarah’s lack of motivation when given a simple worksheet where she would not have to struggle and problem-solve, Sarah’s level of motivation increased through this inquiry-based STEM project. This also led Sarah to have greater initiative to learn about the different space rover apparatuses needed to achieve the objective. Clearly, Sarah was also very proud of the product that she produced and took ownership in the learning process. By learning through these gifted adolescents’ insights and increasing gifted educator training in this field, gifted adolescent motivation would be positively affected through the integration of gifted models and gifted strategies into classroom instruction.

![Table 5.4](ICM Features)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Concepts</th>
<th>Advanced Content</th>
<th>Process-Product</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>In-depth</td>
<td>Elements of Reasoning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>Advanced Reading</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>Patterns</td>
<td>Primary Sources</td>
<td>Problem-based Learning</td>
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<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>Advanced Skills</td>
<td>Inquiry Skills</td>
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(Van Tassel-Baska, 2003)

One of this study’s greatest findings, however, was that gifted educator training needs to go beyond just teaching the strategies and models of gifted education. Through multiple references from the gifted adolescents, the need for a teacher to be responsive to gifted adolescents’ academic and social-emotional needs cannot be understated (Bredekamp & Copple,
While this attention to academic and social-emotional needs is important for all learners, the increased levels of sensitivity and social-emotional intensities associated with gifted adolescents requires more thorough training. Throughout the study, the gifted adolescents frequently referenced being understood or connecting with the teacher as a highly motivating factor. One of the ways to integrate this skill is to provide gifted educators with training on how to provide meaningful and responsive feedback. Too often teachers will consider feedback to consist of “Good Job” or “Well Done.” As the feedback might be as specific as “Add more elaboration,” gifted adolescents still found this lacking and yearned to gain insight and growth through the feedback process. Chris referenced this heightened level of feedback as a direct connection that “would motivate [him]” (Chris, Student Interview, March 31, 2018). Eddie noted the importance of feedback as a way to make sure that students were “on the right course because many kids…usually veer off and crash” (Eddie, Student Interview, March 29, 2018). Eddie found feedback through checkpoints as motivational because it offered him reassurance. In a different manner, Janelle actually referenced how her motivation waned if feedback was not provided:

We never get any of our tests back...Over the weekend I was assigned to write several paragraphs (on paper) about the book we’re reading, and 1. I am almost certain she doesn’t read them and 2. She never has any input on my writing. I don’t even know what she thinks of my writing. (Janelle, Student Response Journal, May 2018)

In this scenario, the lack of feedback led Janelle to feel as though the assignment was worthless, which led to decreased levels of motivation. These findings further supported that meaningful teacher feedback to academic learning experiences actually adds value to the learning process and increases gifted adolescent motivation (Eristi, 2012, Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008;
Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). By increasing gifted educator training on how to provide meaningful and responsive feedback to gifted adolescent learners, there will be an increase in motivation as well as an increase in value to the academic learning experience, itself.

Outcome 3: The Need for Value and Real-World Connection

As Outcome 2 began to address the importance of how responsive and meaningful teacher feedback added value to academic learning experiences, this sense of value in regard to academic learning experiences is imperative in increasing gifted adolescent motivation. There are several approaches to increase gifted adolescents’ value with these learning opportunities, and one of these is through creating academic learning experiences that connect the learning to the real world in which gifted adolescents live. One way that gifted adolescents will recognize this real-world connection is by creating opportunities for gifted adolescents to pursue areas of interest. By allowing this flexibility into the academic learning experiences, gifted adolescent motivation will subsequently increase (Fakoladee & Adenyi, 2010; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015).

Natalie provided insight regarding her increased motivation when given the opportunity to learn more about her interest of horseback riding: “I could choose horseback riding, and then I already know some stuff, and then I find it’s useful that I learn some new things because I can then use them later...because it helps” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). By working in an area of interest, Sarah shared a similar insight: “I want to be a scientist; then I think about why I am motivated to be a scientist; then I want to do more about science, like usually my free stuff...it usually always has to do with science” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). These examples provide support on how allowing a gifted adolescent the opportunity to work in an area of interest increased motivation.
Another avenue to increase the value of an academic learning experience is by offering opportunities that are autonomous. When gifted adolescents are given the opportunity to work through autonomous academic learning experiences, their motivation increases due to an increase in valuing the learning taking place (Chan, 2001; Fakoladee & Adeniyi, 2010; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008; Tomlinson, 1997; Trna, 2014). By working through autonomous academic learning experiences, Joel quite readily connected his learning to his own life: “Now I’m to a point where I’m planning out my future, and I know what I want” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). It was through working independently on a project that Joel valued the academic learning experience that helped him work toward his future goals versus just completing an assignment based on someone else’s objectives. Natalie shared similar insights regarding autonomous academic learning experiences: “You want to do it because it interests you and you find it something that is cool and that you would like to do, not just for a graded assignment” (Natalie, Student Interview, March 28, 2018). The significance of Natalie sharing that she would like to engage in the academic learning experience beyond “just for a grade” strongly signified the value she assigned to the task. In addition, by sharing that she felt the academic learning experience was “cool,” Natalie also equated an increase in motivation toward the task. Joel continued to refer to his increased motivation with autonomous academic learning experiences: “Anytime a teacher says, ‘Does anyone want to work by themselves?’ I stand up, and I’m like, ‘I don’t want to work with people.’ Nothing against the people in my class, but I just don’t like it” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Joel clearly valued autonomous learning opportunities. Chris also referenced how this type of academic learning experience “increased [his] excitement and enabled [him] to work independently” (Chris, Student Response Journal, April 2018). Not only did the gifted adolescents identify their
increased motivation and value of autonomous learning experiences, but their levels of motivation were also sustained over longer periods of time (Renninger & Hidi, 2011; Trna 2014), as signified through rich descriptions of projects such as catapult building and design, spacecraft design, essay writing, and various other research opportunities as discussed in Chapter 4.

Interestingly, findings from this research study on gifted adolescent motivation actually refuted past research that competition with others decreased value and motivation in gifted adolescents (Tomlinson, 1997; Patrick, et. al., 2015). As was referenced in Chapter 2, an extremely competitive norm-referenced focus within the classroom may affect highly gifted students in a negative manner (Patrick, et. al., 2015). In Janelle’s experiences, she frequently referenced her increase in value and motivation in regard to an academic learning experience through competing with her peers. “It was in that atmosphere where I felt super challenged by other people in my class...I was like, ‘I am going to finish before everyone else’ (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). Janelle also referenced how she valued and was motivated by the fact that her essay was displayed and clearly was more substantial than her peers: “I had like, five pages, so it was like one of those where he [the teacher] put it on the wall, and it was super long, and I was also really proud of that, too” (Janelle, Student Interview, March 30, 2018). In a slightly different manner, Chris enjoyed the competition that led to monetary reward or an opportunity to be selected for a valued experience: “I did end up winning, and the experience was truly amazing” (Chris, Student Work Sample, 2018). Similarly, Sarah valued having classroom competition, which she found highly motivational: “If you get it wrong, then you go sit down, and then the students get all excited about it, and I get excited” (Sarah, Student Interview, April 14, 2018). While contrary to past research on gifted adolescent motivation,
findings from this study signified an increase in value and motivation when gifted adolescents were provided with academic learning experiences which offered some form of competition.

The findings from this study also provided additional insights into the phenomenon of gifted adolescent motivation. Two of these insights focus on the need for value in academic learning experiences. Primarily, academic learning experiences need to provide gifted adolescents with the opportunity to become more self-aware and recognize their values (Standard 3, n.d.). When gifted adolescents are provided this reflective opportunity, they will be more able to recognize how their academic learning experiences connect with the real world. Furthermore, gifted educators must recognize that value is added to an academic learning experience when gifted adolescents feel respected (Patrick, et. al., 2015; Tomlinson, 1997, 2003). Joel directly encompassed this sentiment: “Being respected...this has always been a thing for me” (Joel, Student Interview, March 27, 2018). Through respect, gifted adolescents felt as though their learning needs were being met and they were valued by the teacher. In turn, this added value to the academic learning experience. Finally, special attention needs to be given to gifted adolescents’ heightened sensitivity and insatiable need to connect with the global world (Silverman, 1994). Joel supported this concept:

It was such an interactive thing, but also...it was so applicable...It wasn’t just here are facts about India. It was, ‘If you could choose a company in India to expand. What company would it be and why?’ And it’s literally one question, but because of that question, you get politics, you get social constructs, you get everything financially that has ever happened...So you get patterns of things, and I don’t know anything, or I didn’t before that, and now I know and understand how their government works. I didn’t know what a caste system was before this, and now I know what their caste system is. I know how they vote in their house. Those are things that people just don’t understand, but because you can learn things that don’t apply to you, then things that are within your realm of interaction become more diverse and more applicable to everyone, and you start being able to comprehend people more complexly, and that’s how you see the other side of arguments. (Joel, Student Interview, March 29, 2018)
While the real-world application is not a new concept to gifted education, the additional connection to value and increased motivation is an area quite clear in the findings from this study on gifted adolescent motivation.

Discussion of Outcomes in Relationship to Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this study on gifted adolescent motivation, Gagne’s (2008) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) and expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002) served as the theoretical framework. The collective outcomes from this study were strongly supported through both of these, for “students’ beliefs about their abilities to succeed with tasks (expectancies) and [their] valuing of various tasks” (Anderman & Anderman, 2014, p. 5) were clearly reflected throughout the findings.

Outcome 1: The Need for Specialized Gifted Curricula

The gifted adolescents in this study clearly denoted their need for academic learning experiences that stemmed beyond that of the basal mass-produced curricula discussed earlier in this chapter. As signified through data utilized to answer Research Question 1, there was also a clear connection to the developmental process component of Gagne’s (2008) DMGT (See Figure 1.1). Additionally, Table 5.1 illustrated specific data that supported the importance gifted adolescents placed on the format of the academic learning experience. This most prevalent theme that emerged from this study on gifted adolescent motivation also acknowledged that gifted adolescents lacked motivation when faced with academic learning experiences that were too easy or uninteresting (Fredricks, et. al., 2010), an underlying belief of expectancy-value theory. The overarching need for gifted curricula specifically suited to meet gifted adolescent learning needs
recognizes that “for gifted students, prevalent curricular experiences that represent skills already mastered and hold little task value or personal meaning do not support growth and learning, and they provide little basis for student motivation” (Little, 2012, p. 702). Without being able to demonstrate growth, Gagne’s DMGT clearly denotes this as a gifted adolescent not being able to demonstrate competency in regard to an academic learning experience. The DMGT further recognizes the need to incorporate academic learning experiences that are appropriately meaningful and challenging to gifted adolescents (Tomlinson, 2003; Van Tassel-Baska, 2012), leading to increased levels of motivation and an increase in student achievement or competencies. This continued focus on the developmental process component of Gagne’s DMGT also acknowledges the expectation component of expectancy-value theory:

NAGC [National Association for Gifted Children] has recommended focusing on finding pathways to accelerate the Common Core State Standards for gifted students, developing differentiated task demands that present greater levels of complexity in their expectations related to the standards, and developing interdisciplinary tasks and product expectations that accelerate learning by addressing multiple standards simultaneously. (Little, 2012, p. 702)

Outcome 1 clearly recognizes this combined focus, while also supporting recommendations from the National Association for Gifted Children.

Outcome 2: The Need for Gifted Educator Training

The need for highly trained educators to work with gifted adolescents cannot be understated (Erdogan, 2015) and is clearly represented as part of the environmental individuals component of Gagne’s DMGT. Similar to how expectancy-value theory places a strong emphasis on connecting levels of motivation to how a learner values an academic learning experience (Eccles, et. al., 1983), Gagne (2010) refers to the importance of how a teacher connects with the...
gifted adolescent as an avenue to create value. This could be done through one-on-one conversations, classroom discussions, responsive, meaningful feedback, or interest inventories, to name a few. Through gifted educators’ continued training on gifted models and strategies to implement within a classroom, gifted adolescents’ learning needs will be better addressed (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kellough & Kellough, 2008; Scales, 1991, 2003). This will also increase gifted adolescents’ positive outlooks on academic learning experiences (Abu-Hmmour & Al-Hmouz, 2013), leading to a more valued learning experience (Fredricks, et. al., 2010; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Once this gifted training has been implemented, Gagne’s DMGT would reflect a higher achievement level from gifted adolescents through competencies (Gagne, 2008).

**Outcome 3: The Need for Value and Real-World Connection**

Of the three outcomes that emerged from this study on gifted adolescent motivation, Outcome 3 is the most closely tied to both Gagne’s DMGT and expectancy-value theory. Within the DMGT, values is the first sub-category of the intrapersonal motivation component, signifying its importance to gifted adolescent motivation. In acknowledging that gifted adolescents need to see value and worth within their learning, it is important to note that gifted adolescents are also frequently preoccupied with their own thoughts (Webb, et. al., 2007). This signifies the imperative need to help gifted adolescents begin to recognize the value within the academic learning experiences themselves.

Once gifted adolescents are able to see the value in an academic learning experience, they are able to connect the task to being central to themselves (Eccles, et. al., 1983), an important component to expectancy-value theory. Specifically, by creating value and real-world
applicability, expectancy-value’s utility value strongly parallels Gagne’s DMGT. Gagne (2010) found that when gifted adolescents are able to identify with and pursue goals, they are actually pinpointing what they want to achieve in their futures. Additionally, Gagne (2010) corroborates Wigfield and Eccles’s (2002) belief that students set goals they value, leading to higher expectations for success. Hence, Outcome 3 represents the need for gifted adolescents to value academic learning experiences. This will then lead to an increase in gifted adolescent motivation and a subsequent increase in student achievement, or competency, according to Gagne’s (2008) DMGT. Both Gagne’s (2008) DMGT and expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002) place a strong focus on gifted adolescents’ valuation of academic learning experiences while also recognizing that this increase in value will have a positive effect on gifted adolescent motivation and achievement.

Implications of Findings to the Larger Field of Education

In recognizing that the field of gifted education acknowledges gifted learners need differentiated instruction (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Altuna & Yazici, 2010; Eristi, 2012; Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010; Gillard, et. al., 2015; Kahveci & Atalay, 2015; Kahyaoglu, 2013; Kiefer, et. al., 2015; Little, 2004; Patrick, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Trna, 2014; Turki, 2014), these findings further indicate that additional gifted educator training and specialized gifted curricula are required to meet the level of differentiation needed for gifted adolescents. Findings support that once these learning needs are met, gifted adolescent motivation will increase, leading to higher student engagement and achievement levels (Gentry & Springer, 2002; Gillard, et. al., 2015; Powers, 2008).
Primarily, this study signifies the need for specialized gifted curricula. As found in this study on gifted adolescent motivation, these gifted adolescents’ needs were not even consistently met while attending a private school focused on meeting the needs of gifted learners. If there were deficiencies within a specialized gifted school, imagine the impact at a school in the public sector without specialized curricula, training, and funding for gifted education. Currently, school districts invest millions of dollars in basal mass-produced curricula that are not currently meeting the unique learning needs of gifted adolescents (Braunshausen, 2017). The major implication from this finding is that funding will need to be allocated to invest in these resources. This additional investment to include specialized gifted curricula alongside these mass-produced curricula will increase gifted adolescent motivation and achievement. While there are currently a limited number of gifted curricula available to school districts, these are separate from the larger companies whose focus is selling to larger districts. District leaders in charge of programming and curricula development need to be aware that an additional enrichment worksheet or additional game for students who finish their work early does not constitute differentiated instruction for gifted adolescents. With no federal funding provided directly to local school districts, awareness of gifted adolescent learning needs is imperative (Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted, n.d.). Actually, the only federal funding for gifted children is the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, which is focused only on “identifying and serving students who are traditionally under-represented in gifted and talented programs...to help reduce gaps in achievement and to encourage the establishment of equal education opportunities for all U.S. students” (Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted, n.d., para. 16). Furthermore, not all states allocate any money for gifted and talented education, and for those that do, funds are typically not equitably distributed (Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted, n.d., para. 19). In
regard to the selected site’s state, of the 80% of schools that offered gifted programming prior to the end of the state funding in value of $19 million in 2003, only 27% currently offer these supports (General Advocacy Information, n.d.). By broadening the lens, it is also important to acknowledge that only 32 states even have legislation mandating the identification of gifted students, 12 states allow local school districts to set gifted policy, and six states have neither local nor state policy for gifted education (Fowler-Guidry & Munger, 2018). Unfortunately, this lack of funding and awareness to gifted adolescents’ learning needs must change for the demand of a specialized gifted curricula and gifted educator training to increase. In the meantime, gifted adolescents will continue to wane with the current curricular and training focus of teaching students to simply meet grade level standards and will inevitably lead to underachievement from gifted adolescents (Beisser, 2008; Glass, 2004).

Recommendations to the Field of Education

While considering the recommendations to the field of education that stem from this study, priority is given to raising the awareness of the need for specialized gifted curricula and continued gifted educator training as well as the need for increased funding in the field of gifted education. These recommendations are directly connected to the major themes that emerged from this study’s findings that addressed the importance of flexible, hands-on, autonomous and creative curricular format and having a teacher who demonstrates high levels of preparedness, innovation, and effort in conjunction with providing ample, meaningful feedback. Unfortunately, until people have a greater understanding of the needs of this population of students, funding is difficult to establish. The gifted adolescents in this study did not reference the need for increased funding in gifted education, but one must acknowledge that funding is necessary to expedite
change to motivate gifted adolescents and subsequently increase their levels of engagement and achievement with academic learning experiences. Therefore, my recommendations are to start small and build to greater understanding at the local and state levels and then proceed to the federal level.

The first recommendation is to examine the role of administration in the area of funding to raise awareness for the learning needs of gifted adolescents. Without understanding the learning needs of gifted adolescents at this level, decisions regarding gifted educator training and specialized gifted curricula are difficult. Sternberg (1996) made a valid argument when he stated that cutting a program is much easier when few supporters advocate for its existence. Thus, to increase gifted educator training and acknowledge the need for specialized gifted curricula, educators must first become gifted advocates and employ public relations strategies within their schools (Besnoy, 2005). This is a valid argument, for if key people are not educated on the learning needs of gifted adolescents, no changes will ever be brought about to elicit an increase in funding. In fact, Besnoy (2005) continued to point out that many administrators have not even been exposed to issues surrounding gifted education. This was further corroborated by McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, and Terry’s (2010) study regarding the training of administrators in the field of gifted education. They found that school leaders do, in fact, need to know about the education of the gifted. Unfortunately, according to their study of 169 administrators, only one-third of them reported any inclusion of content related to gifted-education funding within their preparation programs. Without having adequate training, decisions regarding funding for continued gifted educator training and specialized gifted curricula would be negatively impacted.

Taking this a step further and connecting it back to the major themes of this study on gifted adolescent motivation, consider the role of the administrator not only in allocating
budgetary funds toward gifted curricula and gifted educator training but also in providing
guidance through evaluations of teacher performance. If administrators are not aware of issues
surrounding gifted education, how would they be able to support their teachers to better meet the
unique learning and motivational needs of gifted adolescents? Through more thorough education
of administrators about gifted education, classroom teachers’ evaluations would holistically
include feedback regarding the type of academic learning experiences being offered, the extent
of meaningful teacher feedback, alignment of academic learning experiences through purpose,
real-life applicability, and integration of concepts, and the subsequent behaviors from the gifted
adolescents. Each of these areas would be further supported through continued professional
development in gifted education and specialized gifted curricula.

Once administrations within school districts are more in-tune with the unique learning
and motivational needs of gifted adolescents, then a greater focus on professional development at
the district level can follow. The allocations for this continued gifted educator training are at the
local and sometimes building level, so one must look to find the most inexpensive way to gain
greater professional development in this field. All states have access to either their own gifted
advocacy group and/or NAGC educational resources. A recommendation is to begin to use these
low-cost options to build understanding of the need for continued gifted educator training and
specialized gifted curricula for gifted adolescents. These advocacy groups also provide resources
to increase parental and community awareness, both of which are recommendations to elicit the
changes set forth through the outcomes of this study on gifted adolescent motivation. An
additional benefit that would stem from connecting to community advocacy groups and
involving parents is that academic learning experiences could be designed to include these
entities. This might include working on a common community goal or including parental career
mentors for gifted adolescents. These benefits will add value to academic learning experiences for the gifted adolescents by adding real-life application and relevance, a subtheme that emerged from this study. Once meaningful professional development and ongoing support have been established at the local level through state and national advocacy groups, there will clearly be an impact on the knowledge base of gifted education within school districts and the community. This will potentially lead to greater numbers advocating for the learning needs of gifted adolescents, having a direct connection to increased motivation within this population.

The next recommendation is to require each state to institute greater levels of pre-service training in the areas of gifted education and differentiation for gifted adolescents. This increase in pre-service training would include all classroom teachers as well as future administrators. In recognizing the second outcome of this study, this recommendation continues to stress the need for highly qualified teachers for gifted adolescent students (Erdogan, 2015). Pre-service education should include prevalent models of gifted education to utilize with gifted adolescents as well as instructional strategies to implement to increase levels of motivation and achievement. Pre-service education should also include differentiation training to support the major themes that emerged from this study, including how to incorporate flexibility, hands-on learning, autonomy, and creativity into academic learning experiences. In addition, pre-service training would include instruction on how to provide meaningful feedback to gifted adolescents, while also making academic learning experiences relevant, purposeful, and interconnected. Through an increase in pre-service education, educators will be more qualified, leading to an increase in gifted adolescent motivation and achievement levels (Eristi, 2012; Schlechty, 2011). Through this increase in pre-service education, there would likely be an increase in the demand for
curricula reflecting this training. This would subsequently lead to a greater demand for specialized gifted curricula being publicized for use within public school districts.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the findings from this study on gifted adolescent motivation addressed the implications for further funding and awareness for the unique learning needs of gifted adolescent students, additional areas for future research were also exposed. These consist of further research into educational policy regarding gifted education as well as further qualitative research on gifted adolescents’ valuation of academic learning experiences and related levels of motivation. Further research into how to best approach educational policy and elicit legislative change would be greatly beneficial in terms of raising further awareness and creating funding to embrace recommendations made in the field of gifted education. In essence, recommendations simply remain recommendations until funding is available to bring them to fruition. Additionally, further qualitative research should be conducted to learn more about how gifted adolescents come to value academic learning experiences. This research should include gifted adolescents from multiple socio-economic areas, ethnic and cultural areas, and rural/suburban/urban areas. By examining these different life-attributes of gifted adolescents, a greater understanding of how to increase the valuation of academic learning experiences to increase motivation could best be addressed for gifted adolescent learners. Similarly, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct a long-term qualitative study following gifted students through their early elementary years through their high school years to offer data that could ascertain if gifted learners’ valuation of academic learning experiences and subsequent levels of motivation change across their education years.
Additionally, recommendations are made to research the preparation requirements for teachers of the gifted and how to write, market, and support specialized gifted curricula to public school districts in an effort to reach more gifted learners. By researching the preparation and training required for gifted educators, greater understanding of how gifted training impacts gifted adolescents’ reactions to academic learning experiences could be identified. Finally, the need to research how to write, market, and support gifted curricula for public school districts would be useful. Again, by reaching the public sector of education, more gifted adolescents would be reached. This recommendation extends beyond just the writing and marketing of the curricula and acknowledges the ongoing need for support and training needed to facilitate the curricula to meet the motivational learning needs of gifted learners.

Conclusion

In our culture highly gifted children, like cheetahs, are endangered. Like cheetahs, they are here for a reason; they fill a particular niche in the design of life...

Unless we make a commitment to saving these children, we will continue to lose them and whatever unique benefit their existence might provide for the human species of which they are an essential part. (Tolan, 2012, p. 11)

This study on gifted adolescent motivation examined the detailed and insights of gifted adolescents in regard to their perceptions of motivation in their academic learning experiences. Three outcomes became prevalent: the need for specialized gifted curricula, the need for gifted educator training, and the need for value and a real-world connection within academic learning experiences to increase motivation in gifted adolescent students. From this increased motivation, deeper levels of student engagement were reflected as well as an increase in student achievement. Additionally, awareness of local, state, and federal funding became clear as a
necessity to elicit changes in the field of education. Finally, by exploring future research opportunities, further gains could be made to ensure that some of our greatest minds are not lost.
REFERENCES


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School of Education Center for Gifted Education. (n.d.). *Teaching models*. Retrieved from https://education.wm.edu/centers/cfge/curriculum/teachingmodels/


APPENDIX A

ASSENT FORM
I agree to participate in the research study titled *Completing the Circuit: An Exploration of Gifted Adolescent Motivation in Academic Learning Experiences* being conducted by Vicki Phelps, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to examine student perspectives on gifted adolescent motivation in an effort to improve and create future gifted curricula and professional development for educators to better address the unique learning needs of the gifted adolescent learner.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following during the 2017-2018 school year:

- Participate in 1 interview with Mrs. Phelps at an agreed upon time and place, lasting approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- Over the course of two months, self-select any school-related work samples that I find to be motivational and complete a short, written reflection explaining why I felt these assignments were motivating to me.
- Over the course of two months, complete 2 electronic student response journals which will focus on my current feelings about assignments at school and any factors that might be influencing my current levels of motivation in regard to my academic learning at school.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Vicki Phelps at [contact info] or Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins at [contact info]. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include not only contributing to a greater understanding of gifted adolescents’ learning needs and perspectives in an area of research that is lacking in qualitative research, but also my own ability to further develop deeper reflection skills and learn more about how I am most motivated to learn, leading to better self-awareness and stronger self-advocacy skills in the future.

I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of all participants. In addition, all collected data will be stored in a locked storage cabinet, and all computer files will be password protected. Upon completion of this study, all data will be destroyed. I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this assent form.

I agree to participate in this research study as outlined above.

___________________________________________                                 ___________
Parent of Participant Signature:                                            Date:

I agree to be audio-recorded during the one-on-one interview. This will be done to help insure accurate transcription of the collected data.

___________________________________________                                 ___________
Parent of Participant Signature:                                            Date
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
I agree for my child, _________________________________, to participate in the research study titled Completing the Circuit: An Exploration of Gifted Adolescent Motivation in Academic Learning Experiences being conducted by Vicki Phelps, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to examine student perspectives on gifted adolescent motivation in an effort to improve and create future gifted curricula and professional development for educators to better address the unique learning needs of the gifted adolescent learner.

I understand that if I agree to allow my child to participate in this study, my child will be asked to do the following during the 2017-2018 school year:

- Participate in 1 interview with Mrs. Phelps at an agreed upon time and place, lasting approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- Over the course of two months, self-select any examples of past or present school-related work samples that were deemed to be motivational learning experiences and complete a short reflection explaining why the sample/samples was/were chosen as motivational.
- Over the course of two months, complete 2 electronic student response journals which will focus on current feelings about academic learning experiences and factors that influence current levels of motivation in regard to academic learning at school.

I am aware that my child’s participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Vicki Phelps at (630) 306-8662 or Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins at (815) 753-9406. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my child’s rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include not only contributing to a greater understanding of gifted adolescents’ learning needs and perspectives in an area of research that is lacking in qualitative research, but also my own child’s ability to further develop deeper reflection skills and learn more about how he or she is most motivated to learn, leading to better self-awareness and stronger self-advocacy skills in the future.

I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of all participants. In addition, all collected data will be stored in a locked storage cabinet, and all computer files will be password protected. Upon completion of this study, all data will be destroyed.

I understand that my consent for my child to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress my child might have as a result of his/her participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree for my child to participate in this research study as outlined above.

Parent of Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

I agree for my child’s spoken responses to be audio-recorded during the one-on-one interview. This will be done to help insure accurate transcription of the collected data.

Parent of Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
1. How do gifted adolescents’ conceptions of motivation align with the environmental, intrapersonal, and developmental process components of Gagne’s DMGT?
2. How do gifted adolescents describe the types of academic learning experiences that are most and least motivational?
3. According to gifted adolescents, what influences their motivation in regard to academic learning experiences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Protocol Questions</th>
<th>Alignment with Research Question #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When you think of school, how would you define the word motivation?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How would you describe the way you feel when you are highly motivated?</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you describe your actions when you are highly motivated?</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tell me about a learning experience in middle school when you felt highly motivated.</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Think back to when you first found out about the assignment. What were your initial thoughts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How did you feel while you were working on the assignment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. What was it about this assignment that made it memorable to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. What other learning experiences do you remember being highly motivated for?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Describe the type of assignment that you would find the least motivational.</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are the top three things you would include on a checklist that all teachers would have to use while planning a learning experience to motivate you?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pretend that you just discovered that all of your middle school classes had been recorded on a DVD, and you were able to go back and watch your most motivational classes. When you watch the dvd, what would you see taking place in the classroom?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Describe an overview of what you were doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Describe an overview of what the teacher was doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Describe an overview of what the other students were doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. How was the classroom set-up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When you think of your most motivational teachers, what three words would you use to describe them? Why?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When you think of your least motivational teachers, what three words would you use to describe them? Why?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What other factors, inside or outside of school, influence your motivation on assignments?</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. If you were a professor teaching college students how to teach gifted students and you could teach them exactly how to create motivational learning experiences, what would you tell them?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW
Dear (Parent of Participant),

I am looking forward to meeting with (Name of Participant) for our one-on-one interview in regard to my research study on gifted adolescent motivation. The interview will be very relaxed in nature, as there are no right or wrong answers. I will be in your area between the dates of xx/xx and xx/xx. Could you please check your family calendar for these dates and let me know when a good time would be to conduct the interview? I am planning to conduct the interview at the local library, so please let me know if this option works well for you, as well. Once we have secured an agreed upon date and time, I am planning to reserve a study room at the library to provide the best environment for our conversation. Thank you so much for your time and support in allowing your child to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Vicki Phelps
APPENDIX E

REFLECTION TAG
Directions: Take a moment to reflect on why you selected this work sample as an example of a motivating learning experience. In a short, written response, answer the following questions:

- What did you have to do as a student for this assignment? (This should include a brief overview of the assignment and the grade level you were at the time of completion.)
- What are the characteristics of this assignment that made it more motivating to you than other assignments? (Think about what made it stand out to you: How was it assigned? How was it assessed? Were you required to do something different than normal? Were you able to relate to it in a different way? Did it feel personal?)
- Were there any other factors involved during this assignment that increased your motivation? (These factors could be any outside influences, such as social interactions, technology, extra-curricular involvement, or family influences.)
- What is the most memorable aspect of this assignment to you? (In other words, what do you think you will remember most about this assignment in the future?)
APPENDIX F

INTERPRETATION INSTRUMENT FOR STUDENT WORK SAMPLES WITH TAGS
Interpretation Instrument for Student Work Samples with Tags

Following each listed DMGT Component, mark all boxes that are referenced or evident as part of the student work sample and artifact tag.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component: Environmental Individuals (EI)</th>
<th>Number Marked/Total Possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component: Environmental Provisions (EP)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment: Curriculum</td>
<td>Enrichment: Pacing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component: Intrapersonal Awareness (IW)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self &amp; Others</td>
<td>Personal Strengths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component: Intrapersonal Motivation (IM)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component: Intrapersonal Volition (IV)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMGT Component: Developmental Process Activities (DA)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Each Component Represented:

EI ________       EP ________       IW ________

IM ________       IV ________       DA ________
APPENDIX G

STUDENT RESPONSE JOURNAL
Directions: The purpose of this Student Response Journal is to provide you with an opportunity to journal about your feelings regarding the types of academic learning experiences you are currently being assigned. Academic learning experiences will be defined as school assignments, whether they occurred in traditional or nontraditional academic settings, or whether they included traditional or nontraditional educational interactions. Please feel free to bullet your answers or write in paragraph form. The choice is yours! Please make sure, however, that you are honest in your responses and as thorough as possible in your thoughts. When writing your response, reflect upon your most current assignments at school.

Prompt: Generally speaking, how would you describe the types of academic learning experiences that you are currently being assigned, and how are you feeling about them? (You might include your personal levels of motivation, what you like/dislike about them, how involved the teachers are, and/or any other factors that are influencing your current levels of motivation at school. Of course, please feel free to include any other thoughts you might have in regard to this prompt, as well. There are no right or wrong answers, and remember that all of your responses will be kept confidential.)

Due Date: Please return your response directly to Mrs. Phelps’ email at xxxxxxxxxx@gmail.com no later than xx/xx/xx.