Social and Emotional Effects of a School Lottery on Gifted Adolescents: A Retrospective

Adrienne Michelle Go-Miller
University of the Pacific, agomiller1@gmail.com

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF A SCHOOL LOTTERY
ON GIFTED ADOLESCENTS: A RETROSPECTIVE

by

Adrianne Go-Miller

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by

Adrianne Go-Miller

APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Advisor: Antonio Serna, Ed.D.
Committee Member: Catherine Little, Ph.D.
Committee Member: Christina Rusk, Ed.D.
Department Chair: Linda Skrla, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School: Thomas Naehr, Ph.D.
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by

Adrianne Go-Miller
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family—Damien, Drew and Evan, for your patience, support and tireless understanding of the many hours consumed by this educational odyssey. For my parents, Frank and Doris Go, who always encouraged me to “get a good education.” I also dedicate this to the many students and families who participated in school lotteries, and those who have shared their stories with me throughout the years.
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Social and Emotional Effects of a School Lottery on Gifted Adolescents: A Retrospective

Abstract

by Adrianne Go-Miller

University of the Pacific
2018

Gifted adolescents who experienced a randomized lottery process to continue attending their school are the focus of this study. For more than 10 years, sixth-grade students at a Northern California school for gifted students have participated in a lottery process to continue attending their school for seventh and eighth grades. This study describes the reflections of nine lottery participants, and the social and emotional effects that a school lottery has on adolescents. The student perspectives were gained through in-person interviews and participants’ written impressions. Stress and anxiety were commonly endured by all participants. The study explores other effects such as reliance on support networks consisting of friends, families and teachers for social and emotional well-being.
Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES ...........................................................................................................11

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION .........................................................................................................12
   Background ..................................................................................................................14
   Theoretical Framework ...............................................................................................16
   Problem Statement ......................................................................................................18
   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................19
   Significance of the Study ............................................................................................19
   Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................21

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................................................23
   History ........................................................................................................................24
   Definitions of Giftedness ............................................................................................25
   Theories and Concepts of Gifted Education ...............................................................26
   Social Cognitive Theory .............................................................................................28
   Funding for Gifted Education ......................................................................................29
   Federal-level Funding Sources ..................................................................................29
   State-level Funding Sources .......................................................................................30
   Identification and Programming Services for Gifted Students ..................................32
   Use of School Lotteries for Program Participation ....................................................34
   Social and Emotional Issues of Adolescent Students .................................................37
   Stress and Anxiety in Gifted Students ........................................................................40
Asynchronous Development of Gifted Students ........................................... 41
Differentness .................................................................................................. 43
Peer Relations ................................................................................................. 43
Stigma ............................................................................................................. 44
Coping Strategies ........................................................................................... 44
Masking Giftedness ....................................................................................... 47
Grouping of Gifted Students and Self-Concept .......................................... 47
Developing Identities in Special Programs .................................................... 51
Support Networks ......................................................................................... 51
Chapter Summary .......................................................................................... 54

3. METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................... 56

Research Design .............................................................................................. 57
Setting of the Study ........................................................................................ 58
Description of the Lottery Selection Procedure ............................................ 59

Fig. 1: Overview of gifted programming placement and services ............... 60

Data Collection ............................................................................................... 62

Description of Participants ............................................................................ 63

Data Collection Procedures .......................................................................... 63

Interviews ........................................................................................................ 65

Data Analysis .................................................................................................. 67

Trustworthiness ............................................................................................... 69

Limitations ...................................................................................................... 70

Researcher Perspective .................................................................................. 70
Chapter Summary .............................................................................................................72

4. RESULTS ..................................................................................................................74

Participant Profiles.......................................................................................................77

Themes ..........................................................................................................................81

Stress and Anxiety .........................................................................................................82

Teacher Support and Encouragement ...........................................................................83

Support Systems ...........................................................................................................85

A Safe, Trusting Environment ......................................................................................86

Family Focus ..................................................................................................................88

Academic Challenge promoted a Desire to Continue ...................................................91

Being Gifted Means Being Different ............................................................................95

Student Recommendations .........................................................................................100

Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................103

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....................................................................105

Study Overview .............................................................................................................105

Discussion of Findings Relative to the Literature Review ...........................................109

Conclusions ..................................................................................................................120

Implications for Action ...............................................................................................121

Recommendations for School Leaders .......................................................................122

Policy Recommendations ..........................................................................................123

Recommendations for Further Research ....................................................................124

Closing Summary .........................................................................................................126

Concluding Remarks ...................................................................................................127
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 128

APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ......................................................................................... 143
B. WRITING PROMPTS ............................................................................................... 146
C. INFORMED CONSENT FORM ............................................................................... 148
D. ASSENT FORM ....................................................................................................... 151
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Overview of gifted programming placement and services ...............................60
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education for gifted and talented students has existed in the United States for more than 100 years (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). The 1972 Marland Report defined gifted children as:

Those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: 1. general intellectual ability 2. specific academic aptitude 3. creative or productive thinking 4. leadership ability 5. visual and performing arts 6. psychomotor ability

The Marland Report also included recommendations for refining identification of gifted and talented students. Many states do not mandate the procedures for selection and identification of gifted and talented students. According to the 2014-2015 State of the States of Gifted Education, only 32 of the 40 states that responded mandated gifted and talented education (NAGC, 2015). School districts can provide services as they see fit. If states have a mandate to provide educational services to gifted and talented students, “school districts do not have to identify and serve creatively gifted students, artistically gifted students or students gifted in leadership…” (Ford, 1998, p. 7). While the state of California does not mandate identification or services, it leaves local education agencies
(LEAs) with the power to do so (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Hanson-Smith is the Legislation Chair for the California Association for the Gifted, one of the state’s gifted education advocacy groups. The decision to provide services for gifted students in California is left solely to the school districts (“GATE Service Delivery,” 2016). If a school district in California provides educational services for gifted and talented students, there are no state guidelines under which the identification and placement procedures operate. Instead, there are only recommendations for standards and programming (“GATE Service Delivery,” 2016). A fundamental question that needs to be addressed is what are the educationally sound identification and placement procedures for gifted students? For example, there could be a potential benefit to placing identified gifted students in programs based on randomized lotteries, or by merit alone. Specifically, this study explored the experiences of middle school students (grades 6-8) participating in a lottery system for placement in a gifted and talented educational program.

School lotteries are typically held when the number of seats at a site are overprescribed. School lotteries typically allow for parental choice among schools (Hastings et al., 2006). Cullen, Jacob, and Levitt (2003) found no significant differences among test scores of students who won a randomized lottery to attend high-achieving schools, and those who did not attend a high-achieving school. However, Cullen and colleagues (2003) found “some evidence that winning a lottery is associated with positive outcomes on certain non-academic measures, namely self-reported disciplinary problems and arrests” (p. 23). Specifically, this study explored the experiences of middle school
students (grades 6-8) participating in a lottery system for placement in a gifted and talented educational program.

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who attended a Northern California school for gifted students from fourth through sixth grades and participated in a lottery to continue attending the same school for seventh and eighth grades. Randomized lotteries can be used for placement of students in overprescribed school programs.

This study examined the experiences of middle school gifted and talented students who participated in a lottery selection procedure. This investigation employed narrative inquiry. According to Creswell (2013) narrative inquiry is a method for re-telling lived experiences. Narrative allows for an in-depth understanding of study members. Middle school students are the subjects of this study.

Background

Throughout the research, parents and student participants have shared perspectives on topics such as the label of being gifted, and participating in specialized programs for gifted students. There is a paucity of research on school lotteries to gain admittance to overprescribed gifted education programs. What the research does not show is how gifted adolescents respond to a school lottery process to continue attending a school where they have previously attended classes for three years. Since the school environment has been shown to be meaningful in adolescent development, the focus of this study was to gain insight into gifted and talented middle school students’ experiences before, during, and after a school lottery.
A positive school culture and climate are tantamount to student success. According to Townley and Schmieder-Ramirez (2014), school culture and climate “can determine success or failure in achieving successful student outcomes” (p. 81). Cross, Bugaj, and Mammadov (2016) found in a recent study that “identification with the school may be key to social and academic harmony” (p. 43). Additionally, Cross and colleagues (2016) found that students experience a sense of belonging by participating in activities at school. Gifted students in particular benefit from challenge and complexity in order to maintain motivation (Cross et al., 2016).

Middle school years, typically those from sixth through eighth grade, are a time of transition. It is a tumultuous time of transition because it is the beginning of adolescence (Cross et al., 2016; Ng, Hill & Rawlinson, 2016). Jen and colleagues (2016) identified early adolescence beginning in gifted students at ages 10 to 12. Feelings of isolation and peer rejection are common in adolescence (Cross et al., 2016). Middle school can be a time when there is intense pressure to conform (Cross et al., 2016).

Multiple social and emotional adjustments occur during the transition from elementary to middle school. The transition from sixth grade to seventh grade can be wrought with emotions. In the transition to middle school, students typically move from a familiar, nurturing one-teacher classroom environment to a new school environment in which they experience multiple class changes with several different teachers. Peers become highly influential during this period (Cross et al., 2016; Yilmaz, 2015). Students’ social identities develop from relationships they establish with others, and from belonging to peer groups (Cross et al., 2016). The school is a social
environment that either helps or hinders students’ success later in life (Mudrak & Zabrodska, 2015).

Gifted students who are grouped with like-minded peers tend to experience more acceptance and less stigmatization (Cross et al., 2016; Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, McCormick, & Rogers, 2012). While it is accepted that gifted students develop well socially and emotionally, gifted students have many issues that require support for social coping (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Makel, & Putallaz, 2015). Some of the issues include asynchronous development, educational environments that do not challenge their advanced abilities, heightened sensitivities that make them feel different, negative social stigma associated with giftedness, stress, the Big-Fish-Little-Pond effect (BFLPE), bullying, and conflicts between achievement and acceptance by peers (Lee et al., 2015).

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences, behaviors, and adaptations of seventh graders who participated in a middle school lottery selection procedure to continue attending a school for their seventh and eighth grade school years. This qualitative study operates on the assumption that there are multiple truths to be shared by the participants who experienced a school lottery twice within four years to remain at the same school site. Participants have their perspectives of the lottery and its effects. As a researcher, I am trying to understand the gifted adolescents’ lived experiences of the school lottery process.

Social cognitive theory was the framework through which participants’ data were viewed in this study. Social cognitive theory is based on social learning theory (Bandura,
A tenet of social learning theory is that learning occurs through observations of others and the consequences of their behaviors (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977), emotional responses can be developed by observing others undergo painful and or pleasurable experiences. Personal and environmental factors help to shape behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Social cognitive theory emphasizes interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli and behaviors (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1989) asserted that people are capable of creating change in themselves and their situations through their efforts at exercising self-efficacy beliefs. These beliefs stem from cognitive, motivational and affective processes (Bandura, 1989). Through cognitive processing, individuals make decisions based on previous knowledge and its application to the current situation as well as drawing from their own problem-solving skills (Bandura, 1989). Gifted learners are oftentimes perceived as having more well-developed cognitive skills than their grade-alike peers (Burney, 2008). Motivational processes are influenced by individuals’ strong beliefs in their capabilities (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1989) believed that an individual’s ability to remain resilient in the face of setbacks leads to the acquisition of knowledge. Sustained effort in the face of adversity allows individuals to have faith in their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1989). Affective processes are influenced by coping efficacy, or the ability to manage potential threats, which could result in high levels of stress and anxiety if individuals are unable to control potential stress (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1989) stated that individuals avoid situations they regard as risky because they believe they will be unable to cope. Instead, individuals turn to self-protective action which could in turn enhance physical stressors on the immune system (Bandura, 1989).
Learning in the same small school environment with the same cohort of 30 students for three years may or may not be part of the participants’ lived experiences that contribute to the decision to participate in the school lottery for seventh and eighth grades. Gifted adolescents who experienced perceived higher levels of academic challenge could have had higher levels of self-efficacy beliefs, as viewed through the lens of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989). Additionally, the unique characteristics of gifted adolescents in a homogenous learning environment may or may not contribute to social and emotional responses as a result of participating in a school lottery.

**Problem Statement**

The transition from elementary to middle school can be wrought with emotions, but particularly disturbing when a student has attended the same school with the same peers for three consecutive years, and can no longer continue attending the school or receive gifted education services due to a randomized lottery process. Middle school adolescents are developing their sense of self, and their social identity depends on their environment (Cross et al., 2016). Nationally, funding cuts have impacted GATE programs (Gubbins, Callahan, Renzulli, 2014; Haney, 2013; Jolly & Robins, 2016). However, with the 2015 passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts that receive Title I funds are now required to identify and serve gifted and talented students from low-income backgrounds. In school districts in which a lottery system is used to select students and provide services in overprescribed programs, school administrators need to be aware of the social and emotional effects experienced by student participants. Often, the voices of those who serve gifted students—administrators, teachers, and support staff are heard, as are those of parents. However, the
experiences of the students are not considered. The studies of Chabrier, Cohodes, and Oreopoulos (2016), and Cullen, Jacob, and Levitt (2006) show that randomized lotteries are used to place students in overprescribed programs. However, limited research has been performed to investigate the social and emotional effects on participants. Examining the lived experiences of gifted adolescents who participate in a school lottery to remain at their current school site is nonexistent in the literature. Specifically, understanding the perspectives from the student participants who must experience the lottery process with the knowledge that they may or may not continue to receive gifted education services is the topic of this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who participated in a middle school lottery selection procedure to continue attending a school for their seventh and eighth grade school years. To better understand participants’ social, emotional and educational experiences, I used the following research question:

**Research Question:** What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students who participated in a lottery selection system to determine program acceptance?

**Significance of the Study**

Limited research exists about gifted adolescents’ experiences with a school lottery for program placement. Selective school lotteries are used for placement in some magnet and charter schools (Chabrier et al., 2016; Phillippo & Griffin, 2016). Lottery
systems for placement of gifted students in programs is rare in California, where districts have other methods for placement if they provide services. While lottery systems may be used in some school districts to allow equitable access for identified gifted students’ admittance into programs, there is a lack of discourse that describes participants’ lived experiences.

The results of this study may be used to inform those who may be considering a lottery process for student placement in gifted programs—namely teachers, principals and support staff, including counselors. Students’ well-being is affected by many factors, and district administrators who decide on placement systems need to account for social and emotional characteristics that are unique to the populations being served. In this particular case, administrators who decide on placement for identified gifted students may wish to consider all facets of students’ well-being in addition to academics prior to subjecting them to a lottery process. School administrators may use this study to promote professional development at the district level, as well as the site level, to support the social and emotional needs of gifted learners. School administrators may be able to use the results of this study to provide emotional support for parents and students who are experiencing a lottery process. The results of this study may help guide teachers who work with gifted populations. An awareness of the stress and anxiety that students experience in the lottery process could help teachers to be more cognizant and understanding of students’ behaviors while they are anticipating a lottery and its results. School counselors may use the results of this study to guide their work with adolescents who may be acting out due to stress and anxiety. When policymakers examine budget allocations for staffing, professional development and school counseling services, this
study may show that in districts where gifted education is offered, greater consideration can be given to providing staff professional development to meet social and emotional needs for all learners who participate in a lottery. Notwithstanding academics, the social and emotional well-being of students is just as important and warrants equal consideration.

Researchers who have a distinct focus on social and emotional needs of gifted learners may use this study to further indicate the significance of supportive networks to promote students’ well-being. Additionally, this study adds to the existing literature that promotes challenging learning environments for gifted learners in self-contained programs.

Chapter Summary

Transitioning from elementary school to middle school can be a process filled with anguish, especially if there is an impending lottery to continue attending school at a site where one has become familiar for the past three years. For students at one Northern California school, this process has become an accepted educational formality of attending an overprescribed middle school program that serves identified gifted and talented students from throughout the school district. In the lives of gifted adolescents where emotions run high and low, a number does not matter as long as it is the lucky one that will guarantee two more years to continue at Lakeside School. The goal of this research is to share the lived experience of participating in a school lottery from the student perspective.
Chapter 2 will provide a brief history of gifted education, which includes legislative action and funding. Various definitions of giftedness, as well as concepts and theories of giftedness are outlined in Chapter 2. Specialized settings and self-concept are examined in regard to serving gifted populations. Social and emotional issues such as stress and anxiety, asynchronous development, stigma, and masking are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology chosen for this study, as well as the rationale behind narrative inquiry for this particular work. Included in Chapter 3 is a description of the research participants, and a discussion of how they were selected for participation.

Chapter 4 contains the participant’s stories that detail their social, emotional, and educational experiences while attending Lakeside as fourth through eighth graders. It also entails their retrospective accounts of the lottery process.

Chapter 5 summarizes the study and discusses the major findings relative to the research. Readers will find implications for action as well as recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Gifted education has existed in the United States for more than 100 years (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Educational services for gifted individuals, as argued by Plucker & Callahan (2014), have been offered in some form for perhaps thousands of years. Gifted and talented individuals comprise 6 to 10 percent of the total student population in the United States, or 3 to 5 million students overall, according to the National Association for Gifted Children (2017).

Education for all students includes gifted students, as recently recognized by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, the newly amended Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Gifted students have unique learning requirements that are not always met in a general education setting. Some of these needs include acceleration of content and modification of the curriculum (Coleman, 1995; Cross, Coleman & Terhaar-Yonkers, 1991; Siegle, 2015; Vanderbrook, 2006). Therefore, addressing the needs of gifted learners is imperative for maintaining not only their interests in school and learning but in developing the promise of every student (Siegle, 2015).

Policies regarding gifted education services vary from state to state. While some states mandate identification and services, many do not (NAGC, 2015). Identification procedures are as varied as state mandates (NAGC and The Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted, 2015).
This literature review provides background knowledge of topics related to the A Brief History of Gifted and Talented Education; Definitions of Giftedness; Theories and Concepts of Gifted Education; Funding for Gifted Education; Identification and Programming Services for Gifted Students; Use of School Lotteries for Program Participation; Social and Emotional Issues of Adolescent Students; Stress and Anxiety in Gifted Students; Asynchronous Development of Gifted Students; Differentness; Peer Relations, Stigma and Coping Strategies; Masking Giftedness; Grouping of Gifted Students and Self-Concept; Developing Identities in Special Programs; and Support Networks.

History

In 1969, the Gifted and Talented Children’s Education Assistance Act was written into the ESEA. The language stipulated that funds were to be used for gifted and talented services, but it was up to states and local education agencies (LEAs) to determine programming and services (Jolly & Robins, 2016). This landmark legislation proposed by Representative John Erlenborn and Senator Jacob Javits not only provided funding for the Marland Report but also recognized that resources specifically earmarked for gifted and talented education were scant (Jolly & Robins, 2016; Reis, 1989).

The purpose of the 1972 Marland Report, named after then-Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland, was to gain information about the status of gifted and talented education throughout the country (Jolly & Robins, 2016; Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Reis, 1989). The landmark report revealed that many states did not include programming or services for gifted and talented students due to lack of funding (Jolly & Robins, 2016). The report also provided a federal definition of giftedness that is still operational today.
(Haney, 2013; Jolly & Robins, 2016; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Reis, 1989). Not only did the Marland Report provide a definition of giftedness, but it also included recommendations for refining identification of gifted and talented students, and demonstrated that the majority of students identified as gifted resided in states that had dedicated full-time personnel at the state department level (Jolly & Robins, 2016; Plucker & Callahan, 2014).

Legislation directly related to gifted education has historically followed the needs of the United States to be globally competitive. In 1987, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Children and Youth Education Act was introduced in response to public outcry for school reform (Haney, 2013; Jolly & Robins, 2016). While the Javits Act funds identification of evidence-based practices in gifted education, one of its primary components is The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) (Gubbins et al., 2014). The NRC/GT serves as the research arm of the Javits Act, and is composed of a network of universities working to identify, serve and evaluate outcomes in gifted and talented education (Gubbins et al., 2014).

Definitions of Giftedness

One commonly cited barrier to research in gifted education is a lack of a definition of giftedness. (Carman, 2013; Gubbins et al., 2014; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Although the Marland definition is widely recognized, it is not always used (Cross & Coleman, n.d.; Gubbins et al., 2014; Reis, 1989). At its inception, the definition was narrowly interpreted to include achievement and intelligence (Carman 2013; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). During the past 20 years, giftedness definitions have broadened to include leadership, creativity, and the arts (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius,
2015; Plucker & Callahan, 2014; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Ng, Hill & Rawlinson, 2016; Reis, 1989; Runco, 1997). According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) “giftedness, intelligence, and talent are fluid concepts” (NAGC website, 2015). Therefore, the term ‘gifted’ gives rise to multiple meanings. In a review of state definitions, most states recognize intellect as synonymous with giftedness, and some states lack a definition (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2013; “State Definitions of Gifted and Talented,” NAGC website, 2015). In the California definition of giftedness, students who demonstrate high-performance capability are gifted. The state of California allows each of its local education agencies (LEAs) to define high performance capability, defined by one or more of the following categories: intellectual, creative, specific academic, leadership, high achievement, performing and visual arts talent, or any other criterion proposed by the district and approved by the State Board of Education in the district's GATE application (Glossary of terms, 2017).

**Theories and Concepts of Gifted Education**

Multiple theories of intelligence and giftedness abound (Gubbins et al., 2014; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Robert Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence states that there are three dimensions of giftedness, among them: information processing through the internal representation of objects and symbols, information processing based on past experiences, and adapting to real-world environments (Stephens & Karnes, 2000).

Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence recognizes that there are many ways of demonstrating talent, among them: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, and existential (Stephens & Karnes, 2000). Ford and Grantham (2003) promote Sternberg’s Triarchic
Theory of Intelligence and Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligence because they have helped to broaden the concept of giftedness to include different cultural groups that might otherwise be missed by narrower definitions. Multiple perspectives of giftedness abound, from general characterizations to specific actions and finally, in recent years, a broader-based conception that includes intellectual as well as non-intellectual characteristics, such as emotional, moral, or ethical sensitivity and leadership ability (Gubbins et al., 2014; Reis & Renzulli, 2009). Some of the non-intellectual characteristics are recognized as domains of giftedness (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). Broader conceptions of giftedness allow for better identification procedures (Gubbins et al., 2014; Siegle & Langley, 2016).

Emotional intelligence, as proposed by Goleman (1995), has five major components: emotional self-awareness, managing emotions, harnessing emotions productively, empathy, and handling relationships. Emotional self-awareness is being able to recognize and understand moods, as well as monitoring one’s emotions (Goleman, 1995). According to Goleman, managing emotions is the ability to self-regulate and think before acting. A strong drive to succeed even in the face of struggle is an example of being able to harness emotions productively (Goleman, 1995). Goleman (1995) describes empathy as the ability to understand others’ emotional reactions, including cross-cultural reactions. Empathy, in turn, can lead to sympathy and therefore a concern for others (Goleman, 1995). Managing or handling relationships is related to social skills (Goleman, 1995). It may include demonstrating leadership abilities (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence can lead to increased well-being and stress reduction (Zeidner, Matthews, Shemesh, 2015). Emotional intelligence is a way of demonstrating
giftedness (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). According to Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006), emotional giftedness “develops from an awareness of, attention to, understanding of, and controlling of feelings” (p. 32). Emotional giftedness is identified through measurement of emotional intelligence (Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence includes intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence which mirror Goleman’s emotional intelligence because they include the ability to be aware of one’s feelings as well as those of others (Gardner, 1993). Renzulli’s three-ring concept of giftedness is widely recognized in the field and is the conception of giftedness by which this literature review will operate. The field of gifted education continues to evolve with definitions and concepts of giftedness.

**Social cognitive theory.** Social cognitive theory is based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1989). Learning occurs through observations of others (Bandura, 1977). In social learning theory, people learn new values, learning, and behaviors from experience (Bandura, 1977; Burney, 2008). According to Bandura (1977), personal, environmental, situational and other uncontrollable factors also shape human behavior. Social cognitive theory emphasizes interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli and behaviors (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1989) asserted that people are capable of creating change in themselves and their situations through their efforts at exercising self-efficacy beliefs. There are multiple social, motivational and affective factors that shape cognitive functioning as well (Bandura, 1993).

In this study, the school may be seen as a social environment which could in turn affect behaviors of students (Bandura, 1977). Learning in an environment with other like-minded peers is viewed through the lens of social cognitive theory. People judge
their abilities based on their self-made comparisons to others (Bandura, 1993). Furthermore, Bandura (1989) believed the amount of stress and depression people experience is affected by their beliefs in their capabilities. Speculation about the outcomes of specific events such as a school lottery is seen through the lens of social cognitive theory.

**Funding for Gifted Education**

Funding for gifted education varies from state to state. The next section gives a brief overview of federal-level funding sources as well as state-level funding sources as they apply to the state of California.

**Federal-level Funding Sources.** According to the *2014-2015 States of the States in Gifted Education*, only 32 of 40 states that participated mandate gifted and talented education (NAGC, 2015). Of the 32 states, four fully fund a mandate for gifted education at the state level, 20 partially funded a mandate, and eight did not fund a mandate (NAGC, 2015). The *State of the States* is a biannual report published by the NAGC that provides information about a states’ services for gifted education (Jolly & Robins, 2016).

Gifted education has traditionally fallen under the umbrella of Special Education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has mandated educational policies for students with disabilities. However, only a handful of the states provides similar protection for gifted and talented students (Shaunessy, 2003). According to Jolly and Robins (2016), $7.9 million per year from 1988 to 1993 was appropriated toward the Javits Act. To this day, the Javits Act continues to be the sole federal funding source for
gifted education, and support for its continuance has ebbed and flowed (Haney, 2013; Jolly & Robins, 2016; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Just five years ago during the Great Recession, there were no funds directed toward the Javits Act for two consecutive years (Jolly & Robins, 2016). In 2014, the Javits Act received renewed funding at $5 million, followed by an increase to $10 million in 2015, and $12 million in 2016 (Gubbins et al., 2014; Jolly & Robins, 2016). Haney (2013) points to a huge funding disparity; in 2010, Javits Act received $7.5 million whereas states received more than $11 billion to serve children with disabilities. Gifted students do not benefit from IDEA or any major federal education program (Haney, 2013). Federal funding and legislation are essential to gifted education. Now we turn to State funding and new laws such as the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).

**State-level Funding Sources.** According to the California Department of Education website, the Mentally Gifted Minor program was established in 1961 for students who scored in the 98th percentile or above on standardized tests of intellectual ability (CDE website, 2016). In 1980, the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program was established. The program required that school districts determine their criteria for identifying and providing services to gifted and talented students with specific aptitudes, such as academic ability, leadership, visual and performing arts, and creativity (CDE website, 2016). The California Department of Education website estimates that 160,000 students in 454 school districts across California participated in GATE services during the 2016 year (CDE website, 2016). In the year 2000, the California education code was amended to require that GATE programs be planned and organized to include differentiated learning within the regular school day, by providing different students with
different avenues to learning, often in the same classroom. That same year, a GATE categorical funding formula was established (CDE website, 2016). In 2014, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) went into effect, thereby eliminating GATE categorical program funds, and sweeping them into one general fund from which Local Education Agencies (LEAs) could then decide how to allocate funds for meeting the needs of their students through their LCAP (CDE website, 2016).

California is one of eight states that does not mandate gifted identification or services (NAGC, 2015). In the most recent survey in 2012-2013, California provided $44,225,000 to LEAs for three consecutive years before the LCFF was enacted in 2013 (NAGC, 2015). Before the LCFF was enacted, GATE programs in California were funded categorically with special funds, if districts submitted GATE plans to the California Department of Education (CDE) (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015). Branch, who served as the California Association for the Gifted (CAG) president at the time of the interview, said GATE plans were then given a one, two, or five-year approval for funding. Most California school districts have GATE programs, and in 2008, before the categorical funding phaseout for GATE programs, more than 800 districts had to fund GATE programs (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015). If California school districts choose to allocate funds to serve gifted students, education services must be addressed in the LCAP and reported in the LCFF (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015; K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). The LCFF requires that school districts, as well as charter schools, receive input from all stakeholders to write an LCAP that outlines annual goals that meet eight state priorities (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015; CAG,
Furthermore, the LCAP must describe district actions to meet the goals (Potter, 2014). The goals must be aligned with the district’s budget (CAG, 2015; Potter, 2014). The LCAP is presented to the school board and subsequently submitted to the county office of education for approval (Potter, 2014).

Under the LCFF, California now allows school districts more control over spending, and it is anticipated that gifted education programs within the state will benefit (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015). Since the elimination of categorical funding, GATE plans are no longer collected nor are they required to be submitted to the California Department of Education for approval, thus if a school district in the state chooses to offer gifted services, it follows its own rules, according to Kari Hanson-Smith, Capitol Region Educator Representative for CAG, and CAG Legislative Action Chair (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2018). Additionally, there is neither California Education Code nor direction given for districts to follow (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 12, 2018). In the past, funding cuts have impacted GATE programs, and it is imperative that state advocates, along with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), continue to “press for adequate GATE program funding” (Young & Balli, 2014, p. 245). Financing and support for programs such as gifted education is complex. Next, we look at identification of gifted students and programming services.

Identification and Programming Services for Gifted Students

Most scholars can agree with the Marland definition of giftedness; however, the source of debate 40 years later continues to be an equitable identification system (Gubbins et al., 2014; Plucker & Callahan, 2014). In the literature, though many states
have definitions of giftedness, the federal definition continues to guide student eligibility for services (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2013). Many states do not mandate identification of GATE students. Due to the lack of state and local policy definitions, states and school districts can provide services as they see fit. The state of California does not operate under a mandate, which is “brutal” for gifted learners, laments Kari Hanson-Smith. There is no model by which California school districts operate, and services are an equity issue (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Now under ESSA, school districts must report scores of all learners, including their advanced learners, to the State Department of Education. Districts that receive Title II professional development funds must use the money to benefit all students, including gifted and talented students (NAGC, 2015). Furthermore, school districts may now use Title I federal funds to identify and serve gifted and talented students (NAGC, 2015). However, there are no additional funds for gifted education (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). In California, if school districts choose to serve gifted students, they may use LCFF funds to do so (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). If school districts have identified gifted students, they are reported to the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). CALPADS, however, does not publicize the data (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Additionally, in the California ESSA plan, gifted students are not reported as a subgroup. Instead, they are grouped with all other students because there is no mandate by the state board of education to do so (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Dr. Alison DeMark, program coordinator for educational services in the Fullerton School District, likened the lack of state policy and
procedures for gifted education to “the Wild, Wild West” (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 16, 2018).

Future research, including how districts direct funds to identify and serve gifted students from all populations, could be guided by the new legislation that went into effect during the 2016-2017 year. For example, is there a commitment by school districts to identify and serve gifted populations, now that federal funds may be directed towards such efforts?

Gifted education programming and services in K-12 education varies from pullout programs to specialized all-day programs in specialized schools as well as specialized all-day programs on general education campuses (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015). Programming for advanced learners beyond eighth grade encompasses Honors and Advanced Placement courses in some high schools.

**Use of School Lotteries for Program Participation**

Selective processes for attending public schools have been in place since the 19th century (Phillippo & Griffin, 2016). Lotteries in schools to select students may be utilized to allocate spots when they are overprescribed (Chabrier et al., 2016; Cullen et al., 2006). Random lottery selection processes have become more popular with charter schools and the growing popularity of school choice policy (Chabrier et al., 2016; Phillippo & Griffin, 2016). School choice policy is controversial because its opponents say that it creates educational disadvantage while its supporters claim that parents and students benefit from having more options (Cullen et al., 2006; Phillippo & Griffin, 2016).
What does the research say about using lotteries for student selection? Cullen and colleagues (2003) found no significant differences among test scores of students who won a randomized lottery to attend high-achieving schools and those who did not attend a high-achieving school. Cullen and colleagues (2006) studied the Chicago Public Schools’ selection system, and their findings demonstrate that academic success may be determined by a student’s position relative to his or her peers. Ten years later, Phillippo and Griffin (2016) also studied school choice policies in Chicago, and their effects on middle and high school students regarding civic dispositions, or the “rights and responsibilities of individuals in society” (p. 69). Their findings suggest that students who participated in school lotteries had resigned themselves to the lottery results—whether they had “won” a spot into what was perceived to be a more prestigious school or “lost”—and the unequal educational opportunities afforded as a result (Phillippo & Griffin, 2016). The lottery participants in their study said the best public education needs to be reserved for those who work hard and maintain the grades to be rewarded in such a manner (Phillippo & Griffin, 2016). Furthermore, Phillippo and Griffin (2016) argued that their research supports an extension of policy enactment theory to include political, social and developmental variables experienced by other stakeholders in public education, namely students, in policy implementation. The research by Cullen and colleagues (2003) found “some evidence that winning a lottery is associated with positive outcomes on certain non-academic measures, namely self-reported disciplinary problems and arrests” (p. 23).

In the state of California’s seventh largest school district, located in Southern California, a lottery system has been in place for at least ten years (N. Prado, personal
communication, February 14, 2018). The lottery is for access to three different types of schools in the district: fundamental schools, early college, and dependent charter. Students can enter the lottery as early as kindergarten through 12th grade, depending on the school for which they apply (N. Prado, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Once students get into a school, they don't have to go through the lottery again (N. Prado, personal communication, February 14, 2018). They can continue within the same system K-12 and any siblings have priority for these schools as well (N. Prado, personal communication, February 14, 2018). A lottery process for student placement in schools is an outdated system that was commonly used in the 1980s and 1990s (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Dr. Alison DeMark, coordinator of gifted services in Fullerton School District, believes that lottery systems for placement in self-contained gifted classes in Southern California were based on bygone practices of identifying gifted students solely on achievement test scores (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 16, 2018). The Orange County Council for Gifted and Talented Education (OCC GATE), now in its 43rd year, is a consortium of 16 school districts and university liaisons (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 16, 2018). The OCC GATE network of gifted coordinators meets regularly to set its own protocols and to identify best practices in gifted education (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 16, 2018). Instead of a lottery system for gifted education placement in the Fullerton School District, parents request schools and students are assigned to programs based on their home school attendance areas (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 16, 2018). Assignment to a gifted program in Fullerton School
District is “systematic and purposeful” (A. DeMark, personal communication, February 16, 2018).

The research on selecting students for gifted programs is not clear. The issues that impact adolescents are addressed next.

Social and Emotional Issues of Adolescent Students

Adolescence is a challenging and awkward developmental period for young people (George & Baby, 2012). It typically is a time of rapid growth and transition (Auerbach, Bigda-Peyton, Eberhart, Webb, & Ho, 2011). Research shows the social and emotional well-being of students is directly linked to school success (Blaas, 2014).

Middle school students are most vulnerable to peer influence, according to Steinberg and Monahan, as quoted in Cross, Bugaj, and Mammadov (2016). Gifted students in particular are a vulnerable population because they tend to experience emotions much more acutely than their non-gifted counterparts (Blaas, 2014; Guignard, Jacquet, & Lubart, 2012; Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch & Michalowski, 2009).

Achievement during this period is directly related to social and emotional well-being (Blaas, 2014). Blaas (2014) argued that those directly involved with students—counselors and educators – need to be aware of the factors that contribute to poor social and emotional health. One such health issue is adolescent depression, which can be brought on by perceived stress but is mitigated by strong social networks (Auerbach et al., 2011).

It is during the middle school years when adolescents spend more time with peers than their families (Cross et al., 2016). Students’ sense of self is developed in the school environment, which may be influenced by several factors, among them, the peer group
The social environment is equally as important in the development of adolescents (Reynolds & Crea, 2016). A strong peer support group has even been found to be more influential than parent support during adolescent years (Auerbach et al., 2011). Bocchi, Dozza, Chianese, and Cavrini’s (2014) work demonstrates that school climate has increasingly become an important factor during the past twenty years. Students who perceive low levels of support from peers, classmates or parents could suffer from stress, which could in turn lead to depressive symptoms (Auerbach et al., 2011).

Creating a positive school culture and climate are tantamount to student success (Townley & Schmieder-Ramirez, 2014). Townley and Schmieder-Ramirez (2014) asserted that school culture and climate “can determine success or failure in achieving successful student outcomes” (p. 81). Cross and colleagues (2016) found in a recent study that “identification with the school may be key to social and academic harmony” (p. 43). Additionally, Cross and colleagues (2016) found that students experience a sense of belonging by participating in activities at school. Gifted students in particular benefit from challenge and complexity to maintain motivation (Cross et al., 2016). A school that provides appropriate challenge can be meaningful academically and socially, especially for gifted individuals (Cross & Cross, 2015). Cross and colleagues (2016) reported that gifted students often feel different from their peers about work habits and attitudes toward learning. Therefore, it is important to afford gifted students the opportunity to work with their like-minded peers.

Transitioning from elementary grades to middle school is a tumultuous time of adaptation (Cross et al., 2016; Ng, Hill, & Rawlinson, 2016). Not only are students
experiencing the loss of a familiar, nurturing one-teacher classroom, but they are also adjusting to gaining an academic identity in a new school environment (Cross et al., 2016). Research has consistently found that peers are highly influential during the adolescent years (Cross et al., 2016; Yilmaz, 2015). Early adolescence begins at ages 10 to 12 when adolescent friendships become significant (Jen at al., 2016; Masden et al., 2015). In the research, it is widely accepted that adolescence is a time of continuous change (Cross et al., 2016; Ramzi, Pakdaman, & Fathabadi, 2011; Rinn, Reynolds, & McQueen, 2011; Yilmaz, 2015). Students’ social identities develop from relationships they establish with others and from belonging to groups (Cross et al., 2016). Emotional stability gained from social relationships is imperative during adolescence (Blaas, 2014). Feelings of isolation and peer rejection are common in adolescence (Cross et al., 2016). Middle school years can be a time when there is intense pressure to conform (Cross et al., 2016). In the research, it is recognized that gifted adolescents who are grouped with like-minded peers during this time tend to experience more acceptance and less stigmatization (Cross et al., 2016; Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, McCormick, & Rogers, 2012). Adolescence is also the period when gifted students will either continue striving for excellence, maintain a less challenging path, or drop out of school altogether (Mudrak & Zabrodska, 2015).

Gifted students have many issues that require support for social coping (Lee et al., 2015). Some of the problems include asynchronous development, educational environments that fail to address advanced abilities, heightened sensitivities that make students feel different, the negative social stigma associated with giftedness, stress and anxiety, the Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect (BFLPE), bullying, and conflicts between
achievement and acceptance by peers (Lee et al., 2015). The next part of this review will address asynchronous development, stress and anxiety, differentness, peer relations and coping strategies, specialized settings, self-concept, developing identities, and social networks. Specialized settings are programming options that exist to provide maximum educational benefits for learners. In this literature review, specialized settings are programming options that exist to serve GATE students.

**Stress and Anxiety in Gifted Students.** Stress is inevitably experienced by all people in some form (George & Baby, 2012). Gifted students tend to experience higher levels of tension and anxiety and therefore need additional support (Cross & Cross, 2015; Guignard, et al., 2012; Renati, Bonfiglio, & Pfeiffer, 2017). Specific contexts, it is argued, may contribute to added anxiety (Guignard et al., 2012). While academic challenge or lack thereof could be a source of challenge, home life can also be a source of stress (Renati et al., 2017). Gifted adolescents experience different stressors from those of their non-gifted counterparts (George & Baby, 2012). In their study of gifted and non-gifted fifth and sixth graders, Guignard and colleagues (2012) found that French middle schoolers in sixth grade experienced a change in environment as a source of anxiety—switching classrooms and adapting to the expectations of several teachers instead of remaining in one homogeneous group for the entire day. George and Baby (2012) evaluated stress among gifted adolescents using the Stress Among Gifted Adolescents Scale. Their findings suggest that gifted adolescents associate higher levels of stress with thinking about their futures, experiencing over expectations, and experiencing boredom (George & Baby, 2012).
Perceived stress in adolescents can be detrimental to their health and could ultimately lead to depression (Auerbach et al., 2011; Zhang, Yan, Zhao, & Yuan, 2015). Stress, in particular, has a primary role in the development of depressive symptoms (Auerbach et al., 2011). Across the literature, it is recognized that stress and anxiety are among challenges faced by gifted students (Cross & Cross, 2015; Kennedy & Farley, 2018). Kennedy and Farley (2018) further recommend that experts and counselors working with gifted students provide them with stress management techniques and other coping strategies such as deep-breathing exercises, meditation and guided imagery.

Anxiety, or the “fear in anticipation of a future threat” as defined by the American Psychiatric Association in Cross and Cross (2015), is one issue commonly encountered by gifted individuals. Cross and Cross (2015) state that anxiety may be stimulated by a number of factors, among them environment and experiences. Examples of scenarios that could lead to anxiety disorders: gifted children recognizing a problem in their environment yet feel powerless to do anything about it, and gifted children feeling pressure to meet others’ high expectations, and gifted children feeling uncertainty about performance (Cross & Cross, 2015).

**Asynchronous Development of Gifted Students.** Asynchronous development refers to an uneven intellectual, physical, and emotional development in children. In the research, it is widely accepted that gifted students are typically ahead of their peers in academic achievement, as well as being socially and emotionally mature (Jen et al., 2016; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). In turn, schooling experiences may prove to be slow and tedious because gifted students can master material typically at a more rapid pace (Coleman, Micko, & Cross, 2015). Some gifted students will likely be challenged with
making and maintaining same-age peer relationships (Cross, 2016; Jen & Moon, 2015; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Turner Thomson, 2012). When cognitive development surpasses social, emotional, and physical development, researchers recognize that asynchronous development is present (Cross, 2016; Jen, Wu, & Gentry, 2016; Wiley, 2016). Asynchronous development results in students’ uneven development becoming even more profound where gifted students are concerned (Cross, 2016). Gifted students may be more socially mature than their same-age counterparts, which could also lead to denying their giftedness because of feeling different (Kennedy & Farley, 2018). Asynchronous development can lead to feelings of differentness, among gifted students (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Coleman, et al., 2015; Cross et al., 2016; Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, McCormick, & Rogers, 2012; Jen, et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Wiley, 2016).

Eddles-Hirsch and colleagues (2012) found that gifted students attending a magnet school perceived better acceptance by peers because they were allowed to “be themselves” (p. 54), unlike their peers who had previously attended schools with non-gifted peers. Students who transferred into the magnet school previously experienced stigma and feelings of differentness among their non-gifted peers (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2012). Jen and Moon (2015) examined perspectives of graduates who participated in a self-contained Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program in Taiwan for high school boys. Their findings indicate that participants experienced positive peer relationships while in the program, but few peer relationships outside of the program (Jen & Moon, 2015). Asynchronous development is just one issue faced by gifted students. Another issue is being perceived as different.
**Differentness.** Across the literature, it is widely recognized that being perceived as different is common among gifted students. During adolescence, however, conformity is a key to fitting in with peers (Striley, 2014). Often gifted students’ emotional awareness may be more or less mature than their intellectual peers (Cross & Cross, 2015; George & Baby, 2012; Rinn & McQueen, 2011). Gifted students’ academic abilities are also as varied. Gifted children are different from their chronological peers regarding ability and motivation (Coleman et al., 2015; Cross & Cross, 2015). In terms of ability, gifted students learn at a faster pace, are more engaged in interest-driven content, and exhibit signs of asynchrony (Coleman et al., 2015). The awareness that their interests and abilities do not match those of their grade-alike peers becomes more evident with age (Coleman et al., 2015; Hertzog, 2003). Gifted students have an intense internal drive, and the motivation to sustain that drive in their areas of interest throughout their lives (Coleman et al., 2015). Their interests often lead them to spend more time engaged in their areas of passion to the exclusion of everyday tasks such as eating or developing friendships (Coleman et al., 2015; Cross et al., 2016). Developing students’ potential is key to helping them understand that potential is endless and leads to a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Differentness was discussed as it relates to gifted students’ needs to be accepted. It is important to understand how GATE students deal with peer relations and stigma, and their coping strategies.

**Peer Relations.** Balancing unique interests and desires with the ability to fit into the peer social group may prove to be a struggle for some gifted students (Cross et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012). Following their academic pursuits versus being accepted by their peers is a challenge faced by gifted students (Jung, McCormick, & Gross, 2012). Gifted
students may also interpret the lack of peers’ understanding as rejection (Jen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012). It is well-known in the research that gifted students often develop coping strategies to better deal with isolation (Chan, 2003; Coleman & Cross, 2014; Coleman et al., 2015; Cross, 2016; Jen et al., 2016). According to Coleman and Cross (2014), coping strategies are employed by students to manage information about themselves. Managing information about themselves, also referred to as the stigma of giftedness paradigm, allows gifted students to achieve their social goals (Cross et al., 2016).

**Stigma.** A stigma can be seen as a stereotype that is socially constructed (Gates, 2010). Stigma, according to Cross, Coleman, and Terhaar-Yonkers (2014), is a “failure on the part of the stigmatized individual to fulfill the expectations of the accepted group” (p.31). Stigma can lead to isolation, especially in gifted populations (Striley, 2014). Middle school students want to identify with their peers’ perceptions of themselves rather than those ascribed to them by their teachers (Cross et al., 2014). Cross and colleagues (2014) studied 1,465 students who responded to questionnaires about how they react to the stigma of giftedness. Their findings demonstrate that gifted adolescents attempt to control information about themselves to fit in socially (Cross et al., 2014). Researchers recommended that the stigma of giftedness be completed on a case by case basis because gifted adolescents’ social cognition and interactions within schools vary widely, especially since the middle school age group has a multitude of changes occurring (Coleman, 1995; Cross et al., 2014).

**Coping strategies.** Coping strategies include high-ability and invisibility strategies such as bragging about high test scores and displaying behaviors that are
inconsistent with being gifted, respectively (Coleman & Cross, 2014). Strategies may also include camouflage of giftedness in social situations due to others’ recognition of the gifted person’s presence (Coleman et al., 2015; Cross et al., 2014). Some behaviors gifted students use to deny their giftedness include not admitting a test was easy, being non-committal when asked about accomplishments, and not volunteering answers (Cross et al., 2014). An alternative behavior to camouflaging is presenting disidentifiers (Cross et al., 2014). Disidentifying behaviors, as described by Goffman in Cross and colleagues (2014), include being seen with people who are not gifted, asking silly questions, and making fun of other gifted students.

Cross and colleagues (2016) found that gifted students will deny their giftedness to maintain positive peer relationships. In a study of 259 gifted adolescents in Hong Kong, Chan (2003) examined emotional intelligence and social coping strategies regarding peer relationships, talent recognition, differentness from peers, perfectionist behaviors, and stress as a result of high expectations. Chan’s (2003) findings demonstrated Chinese students’ use of coping strategies were positive regarding peer interactions. Helping gifted students develop their emotional intelligence could, in turn, help them develop resilience strategies that might result from problems with being labeled gifted (Chan, 2003).

Coleman and Cross (2014) studied a pool of students chosen from 99 gifted high school students who attended the Governor’s School for Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1985. Study participants participated in the Governor’s School based on achievement test scores, teacher and counselor recommendations from their local high school, and participation in extracurricular science and math activities.
(Coleman & Cross, 2014). The authors found evidence to support that gifted students felt different from others when attending their home schools and they would employ coping strategies to deal with their differences (Coleman & Cross, 2014). Furthermore, the authors concluded from their findings that gifted students would prefer to be in specialized educational settings with like-minded peers (Coleman & Cross, 2014). The authors asserted from their conclusions that being gifted is a social handicap (Coleman & Cross, 2014). Feelings of differentness are stigmatizing because gifted students are unable to gain “full social acceptance” (Cross et al., 2016). Gifted students in the Coleman and Cross (2014) study wanted to be in schools with students like themselves because they would be able to feel differently and act differently.

A student’s social identity, especially during adolescence, is dependent on the environment (Cross et al., 2016). Developing a positive social identity with like-minded peers can be helpful especially for gifted and talented students (Cross et al., 2016). While a strong positive association with school may be found among gifted and non-gifted students, it is particularly important to note a willingness to be seen by peers as academically oriented in settings where giftedness is embraced (Chan, 2003; Cross et al., 2016). Gifted students will behave in ways that prohibit academic achievement and identification with school if they are not comfortable expressing their academic preferences among peers (Cross et al., 2016). Masking, or camouflaging giftedness, is considered a maladaptive coping strategy, and is used frequently by all students, regardless of gifted identification (Lee et al., 2015). Masking giftedness can become a source of loneliness and isolation (Lee et al., 2015). Often, gifted students will mask giftedness within their cultural group (Lee et al., 2015).
Masking Giftedness. Masking giftedness within a cultural group is a method for avoiding peer rejection and isolation, and is one of the barriers to minority students’ underrepresentation in gifted education (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Historically underrepresented groups in gifted education include African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and students from low socioeconomic groups (Ford & Grantham, 2008). In some cultural groups, academic strength leads to peer rejection (Jung, McCormick, Gross, 2012). The forced choice dilemma is a phenomenon explained by Gross in Jung et al. (2012) as the choice between working to one’s full capacity in order to be academically successful or the need for peer acceptance. Jung and colleagues (2012) studied Australian students in grades 7-12 to test the forced choice dilemma. Their findings indicate more research needs to be completed to determine if there is a relationship between forced-choice dilemma and highly gifted students from cultures other than Anglo-Saxon/Celtic or European backgrounds living in Western societies (Jung et. al, 2012).

Grouping of Gifted Students and Self-Concept. Ability grouping is the use of multiple methods to organize students of similar ability for instruction in specific subjects (Plucker & Dilley, 2016). Ability grouping is not the same as tracking (Plucker & Dilley, 2016). Tracking involves students remaining in the same placement for many years whereas ability grouping is more flexible because it may occur within classrooms or between classrooms (Plucker & Dilley, 2016). In the research, it is widely recognized that there are many benefits to specialized environments for gifted students, or self-contained gifted programs (Becker et al., 2014; Coleman, 1995; Jen & Moon, 2015; Plucker & Dilley, 2016). VanTassel-Baska (2005) argued for continued special class
grouping in all relevant academic subjects at the secondary level to allow students to interact with others who are at their same ability level. In her review of residential summer programs for gifted secondary students, McHugh (2006) found that participants sought such programs for the purpose of being academically stimulated in nurturing environments that supported gifted learners. Furthermore, McHugh (2006) discussed the need for gifted adolescents to have similar-ability peer groups to meet their social and emotional needs. Coleman (1995) suggests judging the effectiveness of such programs by subjective measures such as first-person accounts, standardized measurements, interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Grouping gifted students with similar abilities could be considered as more responsive to their unique learning needs (McHugh, 2006). Such environments promote high achievement and supportive social networks whereas placement in their home schools with same-age peers may have contrary results (McHugh, 2006). Cross and Cross (2015) argued that unresponsive learning environments where gifted individuals are not challenged could lead to depression. While some gifted students learn strategies for waiting for others to catch up, exceptionally gifted students will suffer (Cross & Cross, 2015). Additionally, Cross and Cross (2015) argue that the best remedy for an unresponsive learning situation is to change the environment through acceleration (Cross & Cross, 2015).

A common phenomenon experienced by gifted students who enter specialized programs is the Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect (BFLPE) (Marsh, 1987; Plucker & Dilley, 2016). BFLPE occurs when gifted students experience lower academic self-concept when grouped in a more competitive environment of a selective school or specialized program versus remaining in a mixed-ability program (Becker, et al., 2014; Chan, 2003;
Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2012; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Makel, & Putallaz, 2015; Marsh, 1987; Plucker & Dilley, 2016). Whereas before participating in a specialized program, gifted students might come to compare themselves to others of perceived lower abilities, the same gifted students might now compare themselves to other gifted students, and thus have lower self-concepts (Plucker & Dilley, 2016). However, Cross and Cross (2015) argued that BFLPE diminishes over time.

Self-concept is defined by Byrne in Rinn, Reynolds, and McQueen (2011) as “our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge about our abilities, skills, appearance and social acceptability” (p.369). A positive self-concept is related to achievement and can affect the choices people make as well as the opportunities with which they are presented (Rinn et al., 2011). It is widely recognized in the literature that gifted students’ self-concept is more developed than their non-gifted counterparts (Rinn et al., 2011). However, when social self-concept is compared between gifted and non-gifted adolescents, gifted adolescents typically have lower levels of self-concept (Rinn et al., 2011). Social self-concept is defined as the manner in which individuals perceive their interactions with peers, friends, and significant others (Rinn et al., 2011). Rinn and colleagues (2011) studied perceived social support and self-concepts of gifted adolescents who attended a two-week summer program for gifted students in the southern United States. Their findings demonstrated that support sources did not have much impact on gifted adolescents’ self-concepts (Rinn et al., 2011). The authors postured that these findings could be due to high self-concept prior to entering the academic program because they had to meet certain admission criteria (Rinn et al., 2011).
Becker and colleagues (2014) examined how an early-entry transition to a special education setting for high-achieving and gifted students affected their psychosocial development. Their work compared gifted students in Germany who transferred into highly competitive secondary schools after sixth grade with students who remained at their elementary schools for sixth grade (Becker et al., 2014). The authors found that the early transfer students experienced negative self-concept and higher anxiety about school (Becker et al., 2014). Cross, Stewart, and Coleman (2003) found that gifted elementary students who attended a specialized magnet school felt they were more accepted in an environment with similarly-grouped peers. Those students who had always participated in the magnet school did not feel different from others, as their peers who had attended other schools had indeed felt different, and their academic self-concept improved once in self-contained programs (Cross et al., 2003). Lee and colleagues (2015) found that specialized summer programs provided: environments where gifted students were surrounded by like-minded peers, and they could develop strategies to deal with increased levels of stress and competition. Specialized environments that include teachers and support staff trained in gifted education provide peer support for giftedness and academic achievement, which alleviates the stigma attached to being gifted (Lee et al., 2015). Appropriately challenging learning environments in classrooms that promote emotional self-regulation and an appreciation for multicultural acceptance provide necessary components for all students (Siegle, 2016). Cross and colleagues (2014) argued for an examination of giftedness within schools using “traditional and innovative research methodologies to view the phenomenon from numerous perspectives” (p. 38).
Developing Identities in Special Programs. High-ability students are not always the focus of counseling. However, Jen and colleagues (2016) suggested the knowledge of their particular needs is necessary to provide individualized counseling services regarding social and affective development. What is required, according to Jen and colleagues (2016), is a resilience-based approach that encourages high-ability students to develop personal support systems and participation in special programs that help their psychological well-being. Developing strong identities in a safe environment is of particular importance during the adolescent years (Yilmaz, 2015). Counselors and educators of gifted students need to work hand-in-hand to develop approaches that address specific affective concerns such as “positive belief in self, creating a personal support system, and participating in special programs that enhance their psychological well-being” (Jen et al., p. 55). Helping students recognize that their efforts contribute to their abilities instead of viewing giftedness as a stigma can help contribute to what Dweck calls a growth mindset (Siegle & Langley, 2016). According to Yilmaz (2015), gifted students have more positive social-emotional characteristics than their non-gifted peers. In a phenomenological study of participants at a three-week summer institute for high-ability students in Wyoming, researchers found that a nurturing atmosphere focused on a holistic experience rather than academics allowed students to be who they were, and not pretend (Cross, Stewart, & Avery, 1993). The environment of the summer institute encouraged students to be themselves because the students were with peers who embraced their differentness (Cross et al., 1993).

Support Networks. Social support networks are composed of peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and community members (Lee et al., 2015). Lee and colleagues
(2015) stated that everyone has a social support network, even young children. Reynolds and Crea (2016) emphasized that parents and non-parent adults are part of the support network for all youth. It is widely recognized that the family is a positive support system for gifted individuals (Renati, Bonfiglio, & Pfeiffer, 2017). Swearer, Wang, Berry and Myers (2014) studied social cognitive theory and its application to the reduction of bullying behaviors. Swearer and colleagues (2014) found that “significant individuals in youths’ lives” have an impact on whether or not youths believe that such behaviors are acceptable or not. Social cognitive theory suggests modeling of positive or negative behaviors and their acceptance or discouragement demonstrates to children whether such behaviors will be rewarded or punished (Bandura, 1989; Swearer et al., 2014).

Peer, teacher, and family member support has a positive correlation with academic motivation and engagement (Lee et al., 2015). Peers and teachers play a key role as positive predictors of social and academic goal pursuit (Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2012). Teachers have a direct impact on students’ feelings of success and academic potential (Rinn et al., 2011). Peers’ positive expectations provide the central motivation in students’ pursuits of their goals because they are associated with the social domain, whereas parent and teacher expectations are typically associated with the academic domain (Rinn et al., 2011; Wentzel et al., 2012). Supportive classmates lead to lower levels of depressive symptoms, as found by Auerbach and colleagues (2011). Students who experience bullying often lack social support (Auerbach et al., 2011). In their study of Israeli high school students, Zeidner, Matthews, and Shemesh (2015) found that social support could be more prominent in students’ well-being than coping styles. Thus, they
recommended that adolescents who receive social skills training may be better able to cope and be socially engaged (Zeidner, et al., 2015).

Zeidner and colleagues (2015) found teacher support in the form of giving advice, providing emotional stability, as well as promoting a sense of belonging. In a study of teacher behaviors that contribute to students’ social support, Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch & Michalowski (2009) found that students believed teachers were most supportive when they connected with students on an emotional level, varied their teaching strategies, promoted a classroom environment where questions were encouraged, and demonstrated fairness in their interactions with all students (Suldo et al., 2009). Suldo and colleagues (2009) studied specific teacher behaviors that contributed to students’ social well-being. Their findings indicated that teachers who provided additional academic assistance, showed genuine concern for students beyond academics, provided additional learning experiences, and used multiple teaching strategies were those whom students identified as being most supportive (Suldo et al., 2009). Additionally, emotional support in the form of how often teachers cared about students, treated them fairly, and created a safe environment for asking questions was a factor in greater school satisfaction and social skills (Suldo et al., 2009). Suldo and colleagues (2009) suggested that gender differences do not exist in perceived levels of teacher support when factors such as depression, self-esteem, and peer acceptance are considered.

Stressful life events can be made more manageable with help from social support networks (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Lee et al., 2015). Social support networks can help gifted students develop effective coping strategies (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Lee et al., 2015). Zhang and colleagues (2015) found that social support, particularly friend
support, plays a crucial role with regard to perceived stress and depression. In their study, girls, in particular, benefitted from friends who lent emotional support during episodes of perceived stress while boys turned to physical activities to cope with perceived stress (Zhang et al., 2015). Adolescents who lack parental and classmate support are more vulnerable to experiencing stress and potential depressive symptoms (Auerbach, 2011).

Lee and colleagues (2015) recommended that educators create learning environments where psychosocial skills and social support for high achievement are developed. Gates (2010) recommended that educators provide community circle time wherein the teacher can monitor the emotions of the group as a whole, and students may discuss issues that meet their emotional needs. Journaling is another method for creating a learning environment where students’ emotional needs may be fulfilled (Gates, 2010). Counseling is an outlet for gifted students to be able to discuss their issues with asynchronous development (Gates, 2010). Gates (2010) recommended small group counseling sessions with teachers, school counselors, or school psychologists because they are also beneficial for students to share their emotional issues.

**Chapter Summary**

Grouping gifted students in a learning environment that challenges their learning has been shown to honor their intellectual needs. Gifted students’ needs are varied and differ from their intellectual peers. Stress and anxiety, asynchronous development, differentness, and stigma are among the social and emotional issues that gifted students encounter. An examination of the literature shows that research remains to be completed
within a gifted magnet school to help students reach their full potential; which includes addressing their social and emotional needs as they transition to middle school.

Coordination of services between teachers and counselors provides more opportunities for gifted students to experience positive associations with their learning environments. Though all students have social support networks which consist of parents, teachers, and other meaningful adults in their lives, gifted students’ social support networks are necessary for transitional periods such as adolescence. Recognizing that gifted and talented students have needs that may not always be met in the general education classroom setting is a step toward providing necessary services to meet the needs of all learners. The proposed study attempts to show how a randomized lottery process affects adolescents’ social and emotional growth.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who participated in a middle school lottery selection procedure to continue attending their school for their seventh and eighth-grade years.

Randomized lotteries may be used for placement of gifted students in over prescribed school programs. The research about experiences of gifted adolescents in school lottery placement is limited. While lottery systems are used in some California school districts to allow equitable access, there is a lack of discourse that describes participants’ lived experiences, particularly those of gifted adolescents. The results of this study may help to better understand the participants’ social, emotional, and educational experiences with a lottery selection procedure to continue attending a school they previously attended for fourth through sixth grades.

This chapter addresses the methodology for this study. The research question addressed in this research is as follows:

Research Question: What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students who participated in a lottery selection system to determine program acceptance?
This chapter is organized as follows: methodology, methods, description of participants, data collection, data analysis, validity, limitations, and researcher perspective.

**Research Design**

Qualitative research using participant interviews best fits this study because the purpose was to share and understand participants’ lived experiences of participating in a randomized school lottery to continue receiving gifted education services. In a qualitative interview, the main purpose is to solicit participants’ ideas and opinions about an event or process (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the participants were involved in a lottery process. This qualitative research design used narrative inquiry as the researcher asked participants how the lottery process impacted their social, emotional, and educational lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), narrative is a way of organizing actions and understanding events. Through analysis of participant statements, the researcher is able to think about and study their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The narrative analysis allows for deeper understanding of participants (Bell, 2002). Furthermore, narrative allows the researcher to recreate participant experiences through storytelling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Specifically, narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach based on participant perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to tell how participants view the world, and their actions within the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). While narrative inquiry operates from multiple stories being told and retold, the goal is to share the voices of those participating in the study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this study, the goal was to share and learn from the experiences and stories of
gifted adolescents who must partake in a randomized school lottery to continue receiving
gifted educational services at a school they have attended for three years. My intent, as a
researcher, was to use participant ideas, opinions, experiences, and stories to shape and
inform administrative decisions, federal and state policies, and future research with
regard to gifted and talented education programming and services offered in school
districts.

**Setting of the Study**

This study was conducted at a Northern California public school from November 2017 through December 2017 with seventh-grade students who experienced a school lottery in February 2017. All study participants were able to continue attending the school they had previously attended for three years because all 2017 lottery participants were accepted into the school, something which had not ever happened in the ten-year history of the school lottery. The school in which the study took place is part of an urban school district that served about 30,797 students from K-12 during the school year 2016-2017 ("Data collection", California Department of Education website, 2017). The school district was composed of 2,140 African American, not Hispanic students (6%); 5,284 Asian students (17.2%); 1,232 Filipino students (4%); 13,661 Hispanic students (44.4%); 227 Pacific Islander students (.7%); 6,829 White, not Hispanic students (22.2%); 692 students of two or more races (2.2%); and 587 did not report ethnicities (1.9%). Of the school district’s total student population, 7,480 or 24.3%, are English Learners. The school year began in early August, and the researcher anticipated being able to distribute consent and assent forms at the start of the school year.
Description of the Lottery Selection Procedure. Compounding the transition to middle school in this particular school district is a requirement for sixth-grade students who attend a Northern California school for gifted students to participate in a middle school lottery to continue enrollment in a school they have previously attended for three years. To continue receiving educational services for gifted students in the school district, sixth-grade students must enter a randomized lottery to earn one of 93 prized seats at the self-contained school, which offers GATE education services. There are no other gifted and talented programming options for identified seventh- and eighth-grade students offered in the school district. To continue attending middle school where they have attended fourth through sixth grades, identified gifted students are randomly selected by a lottery process to continue at Lakeside School, a school for identified gifted students.

For a description of the lottery selection process and programming choices, refer to Figure 1: Overview of gifted programming placement and services.
All identified 3rd graders have the following options for 4th grade:

- **Remain at the home school to participate in cluster classes for 4th-6th grades. Cluster classes provide differentiation within general education classes.**

- **Self-contained programs for 4th-6th grades located on one of two K-6 general education campuses (30 seats per self-contained class, for a total of 90 students served at each site).**

- **Lakeside School, a site with self-contained 4th-6th grade classes (30 students per class, one class per grade level, for a total of 90 students).**

In February, all identified sixth grade students choose:

- **Lottery**
  - Obtain 1 of 93 seats to attend Lakeside School for 7th and 8th gifted classes

- **Attend 7th and 8th grade at their home schools; no gifted classes**

Figure 1: Overview of gifted programming placement and services
Identified third-grade students. Students in a Northern California school district are identified for gifted services starting in third grade (See Fig. 1). All identified gifted third graders have three options for gifted services within the district. Option 1: Remain at the home school for fourth through sixth grades for placement in a GATE cluster class. Every school in the district has cluster classes beginning in fourth grade and continuing through sixth grade if there are identified students to participate; there is one GATE cluster class per grade level. Cluster classes are those that serve identified gifted students within a general education classroom. Teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the gifted students in the cluster, which may consist of two or more students, with 30 being the most in a cluster (C. Smith, personal communication, March 30, 2017). Smith is the administrative assistant to the GATE coordinator in the Northern California school district. If parents decide to enter their children into a lottery, there are two other options, but three locations for placement. Option 2: Lottery for a seat in fourth grade at one of two school sites with self-contained gifted classes located on a K-6 general education campus. Each site has one class per grade level from 4th to 6th grade, with a maximum up to 30 students in each class. Option 3: Lottery for a seat at Lakeside School, a site that serves self-contained fourth through eighth-grade classes. Lakeside School has one class per grade level from fourth to sixth grade, with a maximum of 30 seats available in each class. If students are not chosen by lottery to attend Lakeside School, they may be placed on a waiting list, and may attend their second or third choice school.
Identified seventh-grade students. For gifted programming services in middle school, parents may choose from two options. Option 1: attend the home school for middle school, where gifted programming is not offered (See Figure 1). Option 2: enter their students in a lottery for placement at Lakeside School, where there are a maximum of 93 seats available for incoming 7th graders. In 8th grade at Lakeside School, there are 93 seats, for a combined total of 186 seats in middle school. Those who do not make it into Lakeside School for middle school are placed on a waiting list. In this lottery process, siblings are not given preferential treatment.

Lakeside School is the only middle school in the district that offers gifted services to seventh and eighth graders. To offer equal opportunities for all gifted seventh graders throughout the district, the school district devised a random lottery system for the 93 available spots at Lakeside School. Sixth-grade students whose parents complete paperwork to be included in the lottery are notified of the lottery results in mid-February each year. Upon receiving the lottery results, parents have an open deadline for submitting their decision to attend Lakeside School, where the academic year begins the first week in August.

Data Collection

Data were collected by the researcher over the course of two months, from November 2017 to December 2017. Participants had completed informed consent and assent forms. Participants chose pseudonyms before the beginning of each interview. The interviews, which took place on campus after school hours, lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded on a handheld device. The majority of participants wrote in journals to provide further information about their experiences at
Lakeside as well as their social and emotional well-being while attending the school. Journal writing was a separate activity completed after the interview. Typically, the journal writing took place within a week after the scheduled interview had been completed, or whenever it was convenient for the participant to arrange a time after school.

The researcher’s notebook, as well as participant journals, were kept in a locked space within a locked classroom. The participant journals were taken home with the researcher each day and kept in a locked location in the researcher’s home. Audio-recorded interviews were uploaded immediately following the interviews onto the researcher’s password-protected laptop.

**Description of Participants.** There were 28 possible participants for the study. Fifteen students initially expressed an interest to participate in the study in mid-October. However, ten students returned consent and assent forms. At the time of the study, participants were 12-year-old males and 12-year-old females who were in seventh grade. Participants attended Lakeside School from fourth to sixth grade and were in the February 2017 lottery. Convenience sampling was used because as the researcher, I have background knowledge of the school site and selection process for the lottery. Additionally, I can easily access study participants, which is also a feature of convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Permission to conduct research was first obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the University of the Pacific in July 2017. Following IRB approval, I sought to
obtain permission to conduct research from the school district, and the coordinator of
gifted education services for the school district, who also happens to be the principal of
Lakeside School. Permission was granted by the school district in September 2017.
Final approval from the IRB was granted in October 2017.

The purpose of the study was explained to students by their Language Arts
teacher, who read from a provided script on a day in mid-October. Permission slips were
distributed to the 15 students who expressed interest to give to their parents for
permission to participate in the study. Ten participants were selected from the ten
consent and assent forms that had been completed and returned by the end of October.
The teacher collected the forms in a folder and returned them to me by the end of
October.

Participants’ parents and/or guardians returned the informed consent and assent
forms by the end of October 2017. Of the completed forms returned by the given
deadline, five males and five females were selected for participation in the study, which
began the first week of November 2017. Participants completed and signed the informed
assent forms. At the beginning of each interview, and before the journal writing exercise,
I reviewed the informed assent forms and notified participants of their ability to leave the
study at any time. Participants chose their pseudonyms prior to the interview.

Lottery participants were the best source of knowledge for this study because they
had firsthand experience with the lottery process and its effects. For their protection,
participants’ identities were changed and pseudonyms were used. The name of the
school, as well as the school district, were changed. Any other identifying information
such as teacher names and school district personnel names, were also changed.
Information was coded during the note-taking and recording process to ensure privacy. As the researcher, it is my responsibility to not harm participants.

**Interviews.** I developed an interview protocol which consisted of 15 questions that were asked of each participant (See Appendix A). Maxwell (2013) suggested that interview questions be real and focused on what the researcher seeks to understand. The questions I created were categorized as follows: Social, Emotional, and Educational. The following are sample questions I developed for the interviews: Social and Emotional categories: Did you discuss the lottery with any adults on campus before it took place? During the week after it occurred and before you received your letter? After you received your letter? If so, what did you discuss? How did the conversation help you? Hinder you? Educational category: How does participation in GATE for middle school help you in the future? Interview questions were formulated based on what I want to understand from participant perspectives.

Nine interviews were conducted with the participants from whom I received informed consent and assent. One student had to reschedule his interview due to a head injury. However, he did not return to try to reschedule his interview until one month later, when nine interviews had already been completed. In-depth interviews in person allow for researcher observation, which leads to richer description in narrative studies (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). The approximately one-hour interviews took place during November 2017, with analysis completed by the end of December 2017. Interviews were conducted in a neutral room on campus after regular school hours, since the school site was convenient for participants and researchers. The school site was an important venue for relating participants’ stories because it was the same environment of
which they had been a part for at least three years. The interviews consisted of questions that referred to the period before, during, and after the lottery process.

Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed with each participant the informed consent and assent agreement to ensure ethical research. The informed consent and assent form reviewed the purpose of the study, the procedures of the research, the amount of time needed to participate, the risks and benefits of the research, plans for using the results, the voluntary nature of research participation, and the procedures in place for protecting confidentiality (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004). Participants were assured that their identities, as well as the identity of the school, would be changed for the study. They all chose their pseudonyms.

During the after-school interviews, I offered water and snacks to each participant. Each interview was audio recorded on a handheld device, uploaded onto a password-protected laptop, and transcribed by Rev.com. The researcher reviewed transcripts and compared them to the notes in the reflexive journal for accuracy. Transcriptions were then coded by the researcher by hand, and transferred to a spreadsheet. As the researcher, I stored the transcribed information in tabbed binders and a password-protected personal laptop. Descriptive and reflexive notes were taken in a researcher’s journal using different color ink for each participant. I coded, analyzed, and compared the notes for emerging themes after each interview. Codes for each interview were compared with previously noted codes, as described in the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2014; Glaser, 1965).

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to return to respond to written journal prompts. I asked each participant to speak with their parents to arrange
another date, or set of dates, when they could return to write. Most opted to schedule their writing within the week because of the impending Thanksgiving holiday break. I wrote four separate prompts in each journal. Initially I wrote only one prompt in the journal, but the participants asked for subsequent prompts because they thought they could complete all four prompts without needing to return to write more. The four journal prompts are included in Appendix B. One prompt out of the four was: “Describe your learning experiences at Lakeside School during the past three years.” I analyzed the journal prompts, and compared them for emerging themes and patterns. I coded information and added it to the existing spreadsheet. The purpose of the journal was for students to have an opportunity to include any information they may have forgotten to share during the interview with regard to their learning experiences at Lakeside and the lottery process. I asked students to write down any thoughts they might have forgotten to share with me during the interview, and anything else they thought I needed to know about the lottery process that I did not initially ask.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began after each interview, beginning in early November 2017 and continuing through December 2017. Analysis occurred after each in-depth interview and observation period. While many strategies for analysis are available, I was open to several strategies that benefitted the direction which the data might lead. The first part of the analysis was to review interview notes from the researcher’s notebook.

Data analysis includes representing information, organizing and converting the information into words, sentences, and stories, as described by Creswell (2013). A holistic analysis of each interview was conducted. Holistic analysis includes identifying
details for understanding the cases (Creswell, 2013). Data was in turn coded and
categorized for comparison between categories, which facilitated the development of
concepts (Maxwell, 2013).

I used the list of semi-structured interview questions to begin each interview
session. The interview protocol is attached in Appendix A. As the researcher, I analyzed
the data through an open coding process. The open coding process is dependent on the
data that seems important, including participants’ terms (Maxwell, 2013). I highlighted
possible codes and entered them on a spreadsheet. Initially, a total of 180 codes were
identified from all participants. I then reviewed each interview again and compared the
initial codes to identify overlap and patterns. The analysis was ongoing as data were
collected, codes were compared and contrasted, and subsequently categorized according
to social, emotional and educational themes.

As the researcher, I reviewed all data twice before creating a list of color-coded
categories and themes. The master list was revised electronically in a spreadsheet format
using Google Sheets. Open coding was used with each interview to create categories for
internal comparison. Responses to categories were counted according to frequency and
labeled. Internal comparison allows for category development in the constant
comparative method. The purpose for internal comparison is to develop categories and
label codes (Boeije, 2002). According to Boeije (2002), comparison is dominant in
qualitative data analysis. Furthermore, the constant comparative method allows the
researcher to decide which data to gather next, and where to find the data based on
theoretical sampling (Boeije, 2002). In the constant comparative method, each set of data
is compared with all other relevant data (Boeije, 2002). Interview highlights and
difficulties are understood from the codes generated during internal comparison within a single interview (Boeije, 2002). Interview summaries, provisional codes, and memos may be generated from each single interview analysis (Boeije, 2002). Each subsequent interview was coded in the same manner as described, and compared.

The next step in the analysis was to compare interviews within the same group. All participants who experienced the lottery become part of a group. Comparison between interviews within the same group allowed for patterns to develop. When comparisons are made among participant interviews of the same group, axial coding was be used. Axial coding is the process of comparing fragments from different interviews with the same codes and themes which in turn become the criteria for comparison (Boeije, 2002). While comparing the codes, I looked for patterns that identified different concepts, or a typology. The typology in this proposed study could be the way participants managed their stress levels during the lottery process.

**Trustworthiness**

I made every effort to ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process. Participant names were changed during the interview process and information was coded using pseudonyms. Data such as interview notes were stored in color-coded file folders stored in a secure location at the researcher’s home and on the researcher’s password-protected laptop and external hard drive. Interview notes and journals were needed for the researcher to transcribe into narratives.

Validity describes how accurately the research represents the participants’ realities of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To validate
the findings, member checking may be used to actively involve participants to determine if researcher interpretations are accurate representations, as recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). However, member checking may take place individually only if the researcher determines that no psychological harm will be done to participants. Hallett (2012) cautions that qualitative researchers carefully review each participant’s data and determine if member checking needs to be done completed at all to ensure that no harm is done to participants. Due to participants’ written data, and statements made by a participant at the end of the interview about unanticipated emotions surfacing, I chose not to member check.

Limitations

This study represents basic qualitative inquiry of student participants’ perceptions of their experiences with a school lottery in a district in Northern California. The number of participants in this study is limited and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to a larger population. The study may not apply to school districts that use a lottery process in large urban areas, for example.

Another limitation could be the age of the participants. As former students, the participants might withhold information. Because the information shared is based on memories and in retrospect, participants may have forgotten some details that could have been pertinent to the research.

Researcher Perspective

Working with identified gifted and talented students for the past 21 years gives the researcher a unique perspective and insight to the population under study. I have
earned a certification in gifted education, and a Master’s Degree with an emphasis in Gifted Education. I am very passionate about gifted education and have tried to be transparent throughout the research process. Because I have taught at the school site for 16 years, there is a potential for researcher bias, and I am aware that readers of this study may perceive bias. Patton (2002) postured that it is impossible for researchers who operate from a reality-oriented stance to be value-free. I acknowledge that some subjectivity and judgment may have entered parts of the study, however, I made every effort to eliminate bias as much as I could throughout the study. While I have insider perspective on the lottery system, I tried to set it aside in the data collection process.

As a former teacher of the participants, I have their trust and knowledge that the stories shared will benefit their resilience efforts as adolescents, and the research may benefit future generations of gifted students who enter the program. Furthermore, as a former teacher of the participants, I have previously established trusting relationships with participants which enables me to gain insight to which other researchers may not have access. At the beginning of each interview session, I reminded participants that I was specifically interested in knowing their perspectives of the school lottery, the focus of this study. As a former teacher of the students, I no longer have direct input on students’ grades, for example, and I was not coercing them to participate.

I have seen and heard student comments about the impending lottery each February. I have witnessed student behaviors that change during the weeks prior to the lottery. Therefore, my dual position as a teacher and researcher at the school site gives valuable insight inaccessible by an outsider. Based on my observations, the lottery changes student attitudes at school for the remaining months of the school year, and
affects students’ interactions with their peers, especially those who do not make it into the school for seventh grade.

While re-storying participants’ experiences, my position as the researcher became part of the narrative. It was my responsibility as the researcher to listen, observe, read and retell participant stories as accurately as possible. As the researcher, I worked collaboratively with participants and needed to be cognizant of ethical considerations such as sharing narrative constructions, and other criteria that governed the study. This study was borne out of my concerns for students’ social, emotional and educational well-being throughout the lottery process at the school where I teach. The period of time during students’ sixth grade year that begins when lottery participation notices are sent to families in December is the beginning of what may be perceived as an apprehensive stage for some who choose to participate in the seventh-grade lottery. During this period of time, I have seen and heard from students and their families who struggle to cope with stress and anxiety-related issues that arise from anticipating lottery results. There is an open deadline for families to decide on attending Lakeside once they receive lottery results. Because of the open deadline, some former students have had to attend their home school for one day of seventh grade and return to Lakeside for the remainder of their middle school years. The repeated stories of former students who have made it into Lakeside and not made it into Lakeside after spending three years at the school provided the impetus for the study.

Chapter Summary

Qualitative research allows for rich, descriptive data to be shared in meaningful ways. For this study, narrative inquiry was chosen to allow participants’ experiences
with a school lottery to be retold. Semi-structured interviews gave participant perspectives that could not be embedded within numerical data. Participant observation allowed the researcher to describe a clearer picture for the reader. In reporting how participants perceived their participation in a school lottery process and its results, narrative inquiry was the most appropriate method for providing the most thoughtful, in-depth picture of each participant’s account.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who participated in a middle school lottery selection process to attend a school for their seventh and eighth-grade years. Nine seventh-grade students were interviewed about their participation in a school lottery process and their encounters with friends and academics at the school. In-depth interviews allow for participants’ narratives to take shape (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Social cognitive theory was the lens through which the study was viewed. Social cognitive theory focuses on the interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli, and behaviors (Bandura, 1989). This chapter presents the setting, findings, and the methods used to record the results (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). The chapter also profiles the participants and the emergent themes. After a description of each of the participants, a discussion concerning the research question follows. Nine interviews took place at Lakeside School, a school for identified gifted students in Northern California, in an empty classroom after the regular school day ended. Lakeside School is the only school in the district that serves identified gifted students from fourth through eighth grades. The twelve-year-old participants in this study were all in seventh grade and had participated in a lottery process in sixth grade to continue attending Lakeside School for middle school; seventh and eighth grades. All participants had previously attended Lakeside School for fourth through sixth grades and had participated in a lottery process to enter the school in fourth grade. There were 28 possible participants for this study. Of those who were given the
informed consent and assent forms, ten returned the completed forms within a three-week period.

Initially, the research questions were: 1) What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students before participation in a lottery system to determine program acceptance?, 2) What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students during participation in a lottery system to determine program acceptance?, and 3) What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students after participation in a lottery system to determine program acceptance? The research questions changed after the research proposal. Following the proposal, the research questions were combined into one:

Research Question: What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students who participated in a lottery selection system to determine program acceptance?

Data were collected through in-person interviews and written journal responses. Ten participants were selected from the ten consent and assent forms that had been completed and returned by the end of October 2017. Fifteen students initially stated that they were interested in participating in the study in mid-October 2017. However, only ten participants returned the completed forms by the end of October. There were four twelve-year-old males and five twelve-year-old females involved in the study. The interviews were completed during November 2017 after the school day had ended. Interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and conducted in a classroom on the Lakeside School campus. Lakeside is a suburban school in Northern California that serves identified gifted students from throughout the school district. Each interview was
completed after the regular school day ended. Each interview was conducted in a classroom on campus. After each interview, participants were asked to select a date and time in the subsequent weeks to return to a classroom after the regular school day ended to respond to four written journal responses. All nine of the participants responded to all of the 15 interview questions. Six participants responded to four written journal prompts, while three participants did not return after the initial interviews to write in the journals. Participants who wrote in the journals responded to prompts such as: “Describe your learning experiences at Lakeside School during the past three years.” Another of the writing prompts was: “Explain how any of your experiences at this school during the past three years played into your decision to apply to be in the middle school lottery.” A complete list of journal prompts is included in Appendix B. As the researcher, I reminded students that there would be written journal responses, and I wanted them to return to write in the journals if they chose to do so. Some participants returned to the classroom to write in the journals after the initial interviews. The majority of those who returned to write in the journals completed the first response, then asked if they could have all of the remaining prompts to finish instead of returning for three additional writing sessions. I then wrote the remaining prompts into the journals because I wanted to honor their time and commitment to being in the study.

To maintain confidentiality, each participant chose a pseudonym and each is described using the self-selected pseudonym. The school name, as well as that of the school district, have been changed for this study. In this study, there were five females and four males. Each study participant was identified as gifted and talented in third grade, participated in a lottery process to attend Lakeside from fourth through sixth
grades, and participated in the middle school lottery process to continue attending Lakeside for seventh and eighth grades. Each participant had a signed parent consent form as well as a signed assent form. Interviews were conducted after regular school hours in a classroom at Lakeside, for the convenience of the students, parents, and researcher. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted anywhere from 30-60 minutes in duration. The interview questions are included in Appendix A. The journal prompts are included in Appendix B. Participants were asked each of the interview questions, which were based on social, emotional and educational themes.

**Participant Profiles**

Martina is a bubbly twelve-year-old. She can often be seen smiling and hanging out with friends on campus before and after school. She is an avid tennis player who enjoys sharing tips with her fellow classmates and friends. Martina is highly involved in school activities—Science Olympiad and MathCounts are among her after-school commitments. Martina is the youngest of two children. She is the child of Vietnamese immigrants, and her family owns a nail salon. She has two older cousins who attended Lakeside School for middle school. One of her hobbies is organizing her older brother’s belongings. She admittedly enjoys being organized and helping others as well.

Twelve-year-old Joe enjoys playing video games, being outside with his dog, and playing basketball. His extracurricular activities include karate and basketball. He is a football fan; his favorite team is the Raiders. Joe is the youngest of three children in an Indian family; his father is a local cardiologist and his mother is an accountant. Both of his older sisters attended Lakeside School for seventh and eighth grade. Joe socializes with friends before school and walks confidently with them from class to class. Joe drank
almost an entire bottle of water during the interview and he fidgeted with the water bottle cap during most of the interview. He laughed nervously at the beginning of the interview, then seemed to become more relaxed. At the end of the interview, he was the only participant who stated that discussing the lottery process brought back emotions—something that he initially did not think would happen.

Ryan, 12, laughs easily with his classmates during lunchtime and between classes. He is distinguishable from his peers because he is taller than most of the seventh graders. Sometimes he plays basketball before school and during lunchtime. Outside of school, Ryan plays for a basketball team, with practice once a week and a game once a week. During the past two years, he has been a math tutor for the California Islamic Center. He is the youngest of three children who are of Middle Eastern descent. His eldest brother attended Lakeside School for seventh and eighth grades. Ryan’s father is involved in real estate. His mother is a stay-at-home mom.

John is a quiet seventh grader who enjoys competition. He is a twelve-year-old Caucasian male with many hobbies. Aside from participating in a Workout Warriors group on campus Tuesdays and Thursdays after school, and Afterschool Sports on Fridays, he wrestles year-round. Wrestling is a sport in which he has participated for the past three years. Aside from his after-school activities, John likes to ski and play Airsoft. During the summer months, he participates on a local swim team. He is proud to attend Lakeside School, where he is the first in his family to attend. John is the eldest of three children. His parents are both employed by the school district; John’s father is a music teacher, and his mom is a substitute paraeducator.
Bea, 12, is outgoing and friendly. Bea is of Vietnamese descent. She laughs easily and smiles often. Bea is the eldest of two in her family, and she is the first to attend Lakeside School. Her father is a local physician and her mother is a stay-at-home mom. Bea often walks with other seventh graders to class. Bea has many diverse interests and a close-knit group of friends. She enjoys dancing, photography, and reading. During the interview, she giggled at times and smiled quite a bit. At school, she participates in the afterschool Workout Warriors group, Afterschool Sports, Science Olympiad, and Math Counts. Her daily afterschool activities usually end at 3:30 p.m.

Twelve-year-old Emily likes to draw and sing. She is trying to learn more about herself by trying new things. Emily, who is Hmong, is the eldest in her family, and the first to attend Lakeside School. Emily is open to new experiences and wants to try and find herself. She was very animated when discussing how she wants to learn more about herself. In previous years, Emily participated in Science Olympiad, Math Olympiad, and Workout Warriors, but both of her parents work and her dad’s current work schedule at the post office has prevented her from being picked up at Lakeside School when after-school activities end. Her mother’s hours as a social worker also prevented Emily from participating in after-school activities this year. The school has not had transportation services since 2007, when budget cuts began, and it was one of the first to lose busing. Lack of transportation at the school site has meant that some students like Emily have limited after-school opportunities.

Timmy, a 12-year-old Mexican American male, is talkative. There were several instances during the interview when he deviated from the questions and elaborated on his own ideas. Timmy has many hobbies such as playing computer games, watching
YouTube videos, making videos, juggling a soccer ball, and talking with his mom. He finds many ways to entertain himself. Timmy enjoys debriefing with his mom about her day, and sharing the events of his day as well. He is the younger of two children, and the only one from his family to attend Lakeside School. Timmy is very social and enjoys talking with his friends during passing periods and lunchtime. Timmy’s interview was more than an hour long; he had lots to share. Timmy is being raised by his mom, and his eldest sister, who recently married and is no longer living at home. On occasion, Timmy sees his father.

Rebecca, 12, is quiet and reserved. During the interview, she fidgeted a bit, but did not deviate from the questions. She was very serious with her responses and did not smile much. Rebecca, a Mexican-American female, is in the middle school choir. She has also been a competitive soccer player since the age of four. Rebecca is the elder of two in her family and the first to attend Lakeside. Her sister also attends Lakeside. Rebecca enjoys sewing in her spare time. Rebecca spends time thinking about inventions that can help people. For example, she said her grandfather’s heart attack spurred her to think of a device that could be implanted into a person to immediately alert family members and emergency personnel of potential health issues. This school year, Rebecca is not involved in afterschool sports as she was the previous year. Rebecca’s mom works three hours away as a data researcher and her father is a computer programmer.

Sofia, 12, is a ballet and jazz dancer. A Caucasian female, she is quite tall and has been involved with dance since the age of six. Sofia spends two hours a week dancing. During the interview, she was very composed and did not fidget. She was very graceful with her gestures. Otherwise, her hands remained neatly folded in her lap. She
is the eldest of two children and the first in her family to attend Lakeside. Sofia’s mom is a teacher in the school district and her father is a police sergeant.

Themes

It became apparent during each interview that the educational experiences of all participants during the previous three years were very similar. Some of the social experiences were also very similar. To investigate the phenomenon of social and emotional effects of a school lottery process on gifted adolescents, 180 codes were initially identified. The constant comparative method was used to identify categories and themes from each interview, and compare them to the data from each preceding interview (Boeije, 2002). The constant comparative method allows a researcher to read data, code data, categorize codes, reread, and compare the data to previously mentioned themes in each category (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965). It was important to compare participant responses with those that preceded them to determine if any emergent themes developed. A spreadsheet was used to list codes and check off each code when compared against previously mentioned codes as each transcript was reviewed. Each transcript was reviewed twice to ensure that codes were not missed. After reviewing each interview transcript, I noted codes, categories and patterns, then entered them on a spreadsheet. Each time a topic could be connected to a participant, I checked a corresponding cell. By comparing data between and among participants, I could create categories from similar topics which in turn became the themes. Several distinct themes emerged from the comparison and subsequent analysis. The significant themes were: 1) Stress and Anxiety, 2) Teacher Support and Encouragement, 3) Support Systems, 4) A Safe, Trusting
Stress and Anxiety. All of the participants mentioned that their sixth-grade teacher had discussed the lottery process with them beforehand. All except one were comforted by the teacher’s reassurances that they would eventually get into Lakeside School if they did not initially make it in through the lottery process. Emily recounted how she spent lunchtimes meeting with her sixth-grade teacher in the weeks leading up to the lottery process. She said her sixth-grade teacher had several conversations with the entire class about the lottery process. Bea echoed Emily’s sentiments:

[Conversations with the sixth-grade teacher] relieved me of the stress that might have arose if I did not know about the past students that have gotten in before. In a way it made me more confident in my chances of getting into Lakeside, because he mentioned how even some people who didn’t want to get in received the letter that they were able to go in. It did relieve me, and I believe a lot of other students.

Timmy remembers the sixth-grade teacher’s pep talks. “So we weren’t really worrying about the lottery. Well, he wasn’t. But there was a worry in the back of my head. It kind of bothered me.” While some of the participants said they were not nervous about the lottery process, they all were able to name others in their class who expressed concern and were comforted by their sixth-grade teacher’s discussions. John’s recollections reflected Bea’s:
When Mr. Smith assured us that we were probably going to get in, that helped me calm down a bit, because I was kind of worried if I wouldn’t make it into the lottery. He said that we were most likely going to get in. It really just calmed me down.

While having an adult to discuss the lottery process was helpful for most students, Rebecca thought it was burdensome to have her mother ask her about lottery results on a daily basis. She also said the principal asked if she was about the lottery results. Rebecca did not think the sixth-grade teacher’s discussions helped her much.

I actually don’t think they helped me. They just made me like…because I would try to suppress this stuff, and I just try to forget about it, and then that just would make like my stomach bubble up, and I get super nervous like to the point where I felt like I was almost going to throw up, but I wasn’t going to throw up.

Rebecca admits she is painfully shy, and the only people who knew she felt physically ill thinking about the lottery process were her parents. She said she only gets that feeling when she’s really stressed or nervous. For Rebecca, she said the feeling lasted for weeks. Rebecca was able to breathe through those moments and was grateful that her parents guided her through what to do when she had the episodes of nausea.

**Teacher Support and Encouragement.** Martina wrote about how she struggled to accept and be herself during the elementary years at Lakeside. She said the staff and teachers played a role in aiding her change. In her journal entries, Martina alluded to the three elementary years at Lakeside playing a large part in her decision to apply for the middle school lottery:
Throughout my time at [Lakeside] I have struggled in accepting and being myself. The people at this school know who I am, they’ve seen my change. That makes my connection with my peers deeper than any friend I had at my previous schools. The staff and teachers played a role as well. Throughout the past three years I have experienced and seen how the teachers here generally care for my education and well-being.

Bea agreed that having access to the teachers at any time was “incredibly helpful” throughout her elementary years at Lakeside. “It comforted me very much as well as made me feel like my education was taken seriously,” she wrote in a journal entry. Sofia wrote about her friends and teachers being a substantial part of the reason why she wanted to apply to be in the middle school lottery. Sofia wrote:

I had made a lot of friends here at [Lakeside]. I also liked all of the [Lakeside] teachers and learned to adapt to their way of teaching, which would be making sure that we have a deep understanding of the content by asking us questions and making us show our work.

Joe concurred with other participants with regard to teachers at Lakeside being supportive. Joe wrote in one of his journal entries, “The teachers have been helpful and attentive, and I feel as if my opportunities here are better than what I could have gotten at my home school.” Joe definitely wanted to remain at Lakeside for middle school because of the safe environment. Being at a smaller school, he said, played a large part in his decision to want to continue at Lakeside. Aside from the academics, Joe wrote in his journal entries that he experienced many field trips from fourth through sixth grade at
Lakeside, which allowed him to get to know and be closer to all of his peers, which helped build a foundation of trust. From Joe’s journal entries:

I just felt like I could be more at home here. It’s just a more homey environment, and there’s people all around me, I knew people around me, they’re helping me go farther, and I just felt I could trust these people.

**Support Systems.** All participants talked with their friends about the lottery, whether it was before, during or after the results were mailed out. They had numerous conversations with their sixth-grade teacher. Some said the discussions helped, and one definitely said the conversations did not help. All participants had conversations with their parents as well. They mentioned that their parents tried to reassure them that it would be alright if they did not make it into Lakeside for middle school. Discussing the lottery process with an adult seemed helpful for most of the participants, whether it was parents, the sixth-grade teacher, or as Martina mentioned, the school counselor. Martina said she sought out the school counselor because she had heard from a friend that talking with the school counselor helped her sort out worries, so Martina decided to give it a try.

[The counselor] told me to reassure myself. She told me that it was just my brain getting worried, even though I know that I will probably get in, most likely get in, probably more than a 75% chance that I would get in. So she told me to listen to logic and reasoning, and don’t think about, ‘Oh, what if this happens? What if this happens?’

Joe said that his entire class talked about the lottery, and even though he disagreed with some classmates on occasion, they were all friends. In the months leading up to the
lottery, Joe recalls that he and his classmates were anticipating “a big thing.” According to Martina, they anticipated such a big event that some of them opened Skype accounts to keep in contact to share lottery outcomes, and in case they needed to communicate after the school year ended. Martina said she and her friends talked about how they would remain in contact with each other. John remembers hearing classmates talk about making it into Lakeside through the lottery. “We weren’t too worried but we were kind of nervous.” Though he was just “somewhat concerned” about not making it into Lakeside through the lottery, he said some classmates were really worried.

They were talking about it and you could just see it on their faces, that they were kind of freaking out. ‘What if I don’t get to see my friends? What if I have to go to another school?’

John said he and his friends were excited and anxious to know the results of the lottery. He said they just talked about a lower number of lottery participants that year, and if they all would get into Lakeside as a class or not. Before she received the letter indicating lottery results, Bea said she talked with four friends who had already received their results: “I was anxious because they received their letter before mine.” Though Bea was happy for her friends, she became more anxious as each day passed without a letter in her mailbox. Each day, her friends would reassure her that her letter would arrive. Finally, Bea’s letter was delivered. She called her friends with the results, and she said they were happy for her as well. Bea said she was relieved when the entire process had ended.

A Safe, Trusting Environment. Joe wrote about building a foundation of trust during his elementary years at Lakeside. Specifically, numerous elementary field trips
helped him get to know his classmates and bond with them. A small school environment was a large part of his decision to continue at Lakeside. In one of his journal entries, Joe described his perspective of learning in a safe environment. In Joe’s words:

I feel as if it is a safer environment. I am surrounded by people who genuinely care about my education. In a general ed class, there might be some kids who don’t really care about their education. Being in a GATE classroom has really let me be myself without having to possibly deal with some bullies. Not that I’ve been scared of them. Being in a general ed class might mean there are some kids who don’t care about their education, leading them to pick on those who do.

Joe is not the only participant who mentioned feeling safe to be himself in his school environment. Martina, Rebecca, and Timmy talked at length about the freedom to be who they are and taking risks because they are encouraged to do so without ridicule from their peers. Timmy said the absence of bullying at Lakeside makes the school feel safe. He said the staff is visible and on such a small campus, “it is hard to get bullied without the person getting caught.”

Rebecca described her decision to apply to be in the middle school lottery as being driven by her lack of social skills and a sense of safety. From Rebecca’s journal:

Outher (sic) than the amazing friendships I was able to cerate (sic), I also cerated (sic) a sence (sic) of alloways (sic) being safe. As I have mentioned before, and will mention agian (sic), I am very shy. This means I didn’t rais (sic) my hand in class, but as my life went on, I relized (sic) that it was ok to be rong (sic). In
conclusion, I wanted to enter the middle (sic) school lottery because I felt like I was in a safe invorment (sic) and because of my friends.

A safe learning environment helped Rebecca to try to remain calm while she awaited lottery results. She said she loves the environment at Lakeside School. An essential theme that participants mentioned was a desire to continue attending Lakeside School for seventh and eighth grades due to a number of reasons. One of the reasons participants mentioned was feeling safe and comfortable at Lakeside School, where they had attended class with one group of 30 students from fourth through sixth grades. Several mentioned that they felt safe on campus because there are not any physical altercations on campus, nor are there bullies who intimidate others where they have heard stories to the contrary at other middle schools in the district. Here is what Rebecca had to say about being in a learning environment where she feels safe:

I love that like everybody is so like in their own way like so weird, and people are just okay with being themselves or at least that’s what it’s like in my class. Yeah. I feel like that allows yourself to put yourself out there more often and take more risks.

Family Focus. For each of the participants, their families were a driving factor to continue attending Lakeside for middle school. While some participants’ parents discussed with them their desire for them to continue attending Lakeside, most participants said they just knew their parents wanted them to be able to remain at Lakeside for seventh and eighth grades. Martina’s parents asked her a few times if the letter with the lottery results had arrived by mail. She said she knew that her family wanted her to make it into Lakeside for middle school because of the number of times
they asked her if the letter had arrived. Martina said she checked the mail every day for weeks, even though she normally did not check the mail. Martina recalled:

I think it was important for my family so that I can get a good education, and an education leads to a good job, which leads to a good lifestyle, I guess. I think they thought that if I went to a different middle school my grades might drop, or my persistence in education might decrease as well.

Ryan said his parents scheduled a meeting with the principal ahead of the lottery with the belief that the lottery is not a random process, rather there is special treatment afforded some, but not others. “Because, I don’t know, my mom doesn’t really believe this lottery system. I don’t know why. She thinks it’s just a pick and choose system, for some reason.” Of Ryan’s two older brothers, one attended Lakeside for middle school, and one did not. He referred to his eldest brother’s experiences at Lakeside as very positive. “[My parents] wanted me to just attend something that’s more than just ordinary.” Both of Joe’s older sisters attended Lakeside. One attended Lakeside from fourth through eighth grades and one attended Lakeside only for middle school. Joe said his parents believed Lakeside was the best opportunity for him based on his sisters’ experiences. He said the learning experiences at Lakeside prepared his sisters for high school, and beyond. His eldest sister currently attends the University of California at Berkeley, which he attributes to having attended Lakeside. Martina had two older cousins who attended Lakeside for middle school. She knows that they are successful in high school, and Martina’s family wanted her to continue flourishing in an environment that supported her academically as well as emotionally. “[My family] knew that if I went
to a different school I would…they thought that I would probably close up again and be really insecure, maybe.”

For some participants, the reputation of Lakeside School was something their parents had considered as a factor for trying to get them in long before they were school-age. Bea’s parents desired for her to attend Lakeside since she was three. At the time her parents moved to the city, they had heard that Lakeside was an advanced school. Bea, the eldest in her family, said she initially did not make it into Lakeside for fourth grade through the lottery and was instead wait-listed. For the beginning of fourth grade, she attended one of the district’s options for GATE programming; a self-contained class within a general education campus, during the first quarter of the school year. Two months into the school year, her family received a call that there was an immediate opening in the fourth-grade class. Bea said the transition to Lakeside was smooth because she was “very happy and excited that I was able to attend a school that I knew was better for me.” Continuing at Lakeside for middle school was important for her and her family. Bea said she and her family had seen how education was taken seriously during her elementary years at Lakeside, so they expected the same for middle school years.

[My family] were very happy that I got in as well, and they might have actually been more happier than me. That’s probably how I knew it was as important. They did tell almost all my relatives, and they spread the news to some of their friends as well, but they were really happy that I was able to get into a school that had, typically, a better education than other schools that had the GATE program.
**Academic Challenge promoted a Desire to Continue.** All participants had a desire to continue at Lakeside, whether the reasoning was educational, social, or emotional. When explaining one of the reasons why she enjoys attending Lakeside, Sofia said, “You get challenged and [Lakeside] is a GATE school so you have a higher education, and [teachers] make sure that you’re really learning deeply and making those connections.” None of the participants wanted to potentially lose their friends or lose touch with their friends. Martina and Timmy shared how they created Skype accounts to keep in touch with their cohort of 30 friends in case they did not make it into Lakeside. The majority of participants mentioned how they felt safe to be themselves in a small school environment, which was more desirable than attending a larger middle school where they could potentially have a larger pool of friends.

All participants had conversations with friends or relatives and knew that their learning was above their grade level. All participants mentioned Math and Spanish as subjects in which they were confident they were ahead of their friends at other middle schools. Two participants, John and Timmy, said they would become lazy if they attended other middle schools. John especially enjoys competition. He stressed that he always goes above and beyond on his projects because that is what he has learned to do as a student at Lakeside. “Competition gives me purpose,” John stated. Timmy said if he attended another middle school he would get lazy because the work would be too easy, and admittedly, he would not do what he is supposed to be doing.

The importance of academic challenge in the Lakeside GATE program was mentioned by all of the participants. Most spoke about an advanced curriculum at
Lakeside, and a few mentioned how they were accustomed to the challenge because they had attended the school from fourth through sixth grades. As John stated:

Lots of kids that weren’t here in the elementary grades in [Lakeside] are often off-task and loud and they sometimes don’t do their work and stuff, whereas people who have been through fourth, fifth and sixth grades at [Lakeside] are often trying their best or at least getting all of the work done to the minimum requirements.

Though John mentioned in his interview that students who did not attend Lakeside for fourth through sixth grades did not seem as focused as those who did, he was not deterred from applying for the lottery to attend Lakeside for middle school. From one of John’s journal entries:

Throughout the years, I have gotten a much better education than what I would’ve gotten at other schools, and I wished to get even more educational opportunities in middle school. I had heard how hard middle school was and I knew that I would grow more if I tried to get into middle school at [Lakeside], so I applied. I enjoyed the hard times of 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, so I applied for 7th grade. The experiences I have had were enough to make me want to go to [Lakeside] despite not being able to choose and (sic) elective. Mainly, the experiences were competitive. If I left [Lakeside], I would lose my educational competition and I would become lazy.

Bea, who aspires to become a physician, said the projects and advanced curriculum at Lakeside will help her in college. Similarly, Rebecca wrote in a journal entry that learning in a gifted classroom is beneficial because usually “the people are nicer for
some reason, and some deeper topics come up.” She believes the overall environment in a gifted classroom versus a general education classroom is unique. Rebecca wrote:

I think the easiest way for me to describe this is by saying that gifted schools remind me of hippies, not because it is one, but rather because the aproach (sic) is so diffrent (sic).

The perception that most participants shared is that they will be better prepared for high school courses due to the advanced coursework and acceleration at Lakeside. Joe explained, “I am facing material that’s above my grade level, which helps me expand my horizons and learn more.” He enjoys the challenge of being in a gifted program.

Joe wrote about the past three years at Lakeside in one of his journal entries, and said he wished he could relive them. He wrote:

I experienced joy the last three years. The last three years have been the best years of my life, regarding experiences. I have had great times with friends I have gotten to know over the years. I also believed that the academic experiences I had, such as not understanding a concept, and having either a teacher or student teach me, has been especially powerful in my decision to come back. Being treated nicely by other people has also shaped my decision.

All participants mentioned that they talked with friends and relatives who attend other middle schools in the school district. In their conversations, participants said they are ahead of their friends at other middle schools. Math is one subject that they feel they have been accelerated by at least one grade level. Another subject they mentioned was Spanish, which they all take as a required class at Lakeside. Participants said their
friends at other middle schools do not necessarily take Spanish, so they feel as if being accelerated in Math and Spanish gives them an advantage for entering high school. Participants shared a perception that attending any other middle school would be less desirable in terms of academic challenge, according to their relatives and friends with whom they have discussed their academic studies.

Two participants, John and Timmy, both remarked that they would become lazy due to a lack of challenge if they attended a middle school other than Lakeside. John said that he thrives in an environment of competition, and that is what he has created for himself at Lakeside. He likes to compare his grades to those of his friends’. He said he also goes above and beyond on all of his projects, because that is what he has learned to do during his past three years as an elementary student at Lakeside. Competing with his peers academically, and a fear that teachers at another school might not have high expectations such as those John has found at Lakeside are all factors he named as reasons for “slacking into a state of being lazy and not trying my best on work.” As John stated during the interview:

Competition just really gives me purpose. If it weren’t for competition, I wouldn’t try to be really… I just really wouldn’t have purpose for anything that I do. The reason why I work really hard is because I want to be better than other people and I want to compete with other people. Competition just really gives me purpose. Without it I would just be… getting into [Lakeside], that’s kind of competitive. You have to be in like the top 10% or something like that. If it weren’t for competitiveness, I just wouldn’t really try for anything, I would just be… I don’t have to be good at something if there’s no competition.
While Timmy did not mention competition as a source of motivation, he believed he would not receive the same amount of learning challenge and support from teachers if he were to attend his home school for middle school. Ryan also said he believed he would not have to work as hard if he were to attend his home school for middle school. When he compares his current units of study to his friends at the home school, Ryan said he has already learned and mastered the material in previous years of attending Lakeside. He gave the example of working with fractions and decimals in Math, something Ryan said he and his classmates already mastered in fifth grade. Teachers understand the students at Lakeside, Timmy said. The lack of peer pressure is another reason Timmy wanted to remain at Lakeside for middle school. He said being with the same students for three years contributes to a school environment that is free of peer pressure. As Timmy described, he feels comfortable saying “no” to things he does not want to do because he is comfortable with his peers. Timmy used his older sister’s middle school shenanigans for comparison. Timmy said if he attended another middle school, he would “get lazy because it would be so easy for me. It wouldn’t be a challenge for me. I would get lazy and not do what I’m supposed to be doing.”

**Being Gifted Means Being Different.** All participants agreed that being surrounded by like-minded peers at Lakeside was in complete contrast to their experiences at their previous schools. Each one of them spoke about or wrote about what it is like to be surrounded by peers who understand them. Martina described attendance at Lakeside School for the previous three years as a driving force for continuing through seventh and eighth grades because she is able to be herself and participate in advanced coursework. Her previous school, she said, lacked challenge and she was not able to be
herself. She said she struggled to open up as a newcomer to the school in fourth grade. Therefore, it was important that she remain with the friends she had made during the past three years because her friends at Lakeside helped her to not “be scared of what others think of you.”

Well, I can be myself here more, because there are more people like me, as in, like, they know what it’s like to be different from other people. And you learn a lot here. There’s not a lot of bullying, either, I guess, because everyone really gets along and we don’t really care for that kind of stuff.

While all participants had common characteristics they used to describe being gifted, none of their definitions matched. However, all agreed that being surrounded by like-minded peers at Lakeside offset the differences they experienced at their previous schools. Being different made some participants an anomaly at their previous schools. Bea said it was difficult to make friends because of differing personalities.

Here, I feel as though being gifted or talented had something to do with making friends, and that’s probably why some friends and I clicked here. I feel like we related to more topics. We had common ideas and common likes and dislikes.

Joe’s previous school did not have a focus on academics, in his opinion. However, at Lakeside, he “found people, friends who I could confide with, and I could study with them. And so I just had things in common with them. Even outside the classroom.”

Martina said she opened up as a fourth grader because she was surrounded by others like her at Lakeside. During her fourth through sixth-grade years at Lakeside, Martina felt as if she had grown and matured. From Martina’s journal entry:
In a general education classroom you have to be cautious about being yourself because of bullies. They’re (sic) victims are the ones that are deemed different, weird, or smart. While in a gifted classroom it’s okay for you to be who you are and you’re not scared because there are other people like you, different. So that fear of being different from others is gone. Your (sic) free to be yourself and grow as a person in a gifted classroom.

A few participants mentioned masking giftedness at their previous schools or in social situations, to fit in, which is something they do not have to do at Lakeside. John discussed the coping strategy of masking giftedness to fit in at his previous school. From his journal entry:

At my old school, I had to act somewhat less intelligent to fit into my friend groups. I acted like I wasn’t a very good student to fit in to my old school.

Besides my old school, I have never felt the need to act non-gifted.

Rebecca wrote about three instances she specifically recalled in which she had to mask her giftedness. She broke the instances into categories: her previous school, soccer, and in public:

Sometimes I would have questions and my classmates would ask why I asked the question because it didn’t seem relivent (sic) to them. Whenever that happened, I would alloways (sic) get a little sad because I felt like I was (a bad) diffrent (sic).

Another place is at soccer. Sometimes I like to say something about a conversation, and in this case, the thing I would normaly (sic) say was a fact of some sort that I found intresting (sic). People would say stuff like ‘We’re not in
school, so don’t teach us anything.’ or ‘I don’t care that _____.’ This would make me feel like I was just an annoyance (sic) and nothing more. The third place is just in public, mostly because I don’t want people to think I’m weird, even though I am.

Bea thinks she has a connection with her peers at Lakeside that is unlike connections she has had with other students at previous schools. From Bea’s journal:

I feel like I can connect better with the students that are gifted on a spiritual level. I think that because we have a higher chance of having gone through the same experiences, we have more in common. We also have a general standard that we have all passed, making the standards of the teachings/lessons more advanced. I feel as though learning in a class with gifted students makes the learning environment more organized/helpful. This is so because we are all practically on the same page in terms of academics, creating a smaller gap between knowledge levels. In general classrooms, some may be more behind on a variety of topics. Although it is natural for kids to be like so, it is also natural for the more advanced minds to easily bore themselves and they may not want to be as engaged as they would be in a more advanced class. I have personally been through this scenario numerous times. Once transferring to a gifted education classroom, I realized how more engaged I could be and I believe many others were also more enthusiastic learning in a more advanced classroom. Another factor that I believe is different is the teachers that apply themselves in a gifted environment versus a general environment. Most teachers in my old school did not care whether or not I was ahead of the class. They focused more on the
academic being of the students who were more behind or did not pay attention throughout class. In my past gifted classes, the teachers were more equally concerned about each student. I think that this gave me a sense of comfort as well as assurance that my education would not be ignored.

Ryan addressed a concern reiterated by many participants. The prospect of having to make new friends weighed heavily in the back of participants’ minds when faced with an uncertain return to Lakeside for middle school. Ryan’s perspective:

Well, coming into middle school, I already kind of had people around me who I knew I can cooperate with. Instead of having to adapt to the fact that everyone’s different, or everyone’s…I’m not entirely comfortable being around. That’s also why I didn’t want to leave the school through lottery, because then I would have to restart over in terms of socialization.

For Sofia, the fear of potentially not making it into Lakeside for middle school would mean leaving behind all of her friends. “And I might not make as many at the new school or I might now learn as much at the new school that I do at [Lakeside].” Sofia said her shyness prevents her from wanting to meet new people. Rebecca and Emily repeated the same sentiments.

A few of the participants used words such as “heartbroken” and “devastated” to describe how they would react if they had not been selected to continue at Lakeside for seventh and eighth grades. John’s prediction about his reaction if he were not selected:
If I weren’t selected I think I would be pretty devastated at first. After a while I think I would just get used to it, make new friends, just try to work to the best of my abilities at whatever school I’m at.

Emily said the lessons she has learned at Lakeside regarding Mindsets and how to take risks would have helped her to deal with negative lottery results if it was necessary.

I think if I wasn’t selected, then it would break my heart a little but I would get over it because whatever happens, happens. So I would of course encourage people to keep on going and making sure that they had a good time in middle school even without me and that I would still talk to them from time to time, even if I don’t talk to them every day. So I think that even if I didn’t come over here, I would still be mostly the same person that I am right now.

Emily thinks the lottery process helped to draw her classmates closer together. She said they knew their time together as a class of 30 was coming to an end, so they all tried to support each other and cheer each other on in activities like teambuilders. Emily thinks the lottery process made them stronger as people. “I think we really decided to just accept everything that would happen if anyone did leave.”

**Student Recommendations.** Reflecting back on the lottery process, each participant had recommendations for future lottery participants, parents, teachers and administrators. The majority of participants said future lottery participants need not worry or be anxious or nervous. However, each of them mentioned feeling one or all of the emotions they advised against. Martina’s advice was: “Don’t do what I did; don’t check the mail every day even though you know it’s not going to come.” Many of the
participants said parents of future lottery participants ought to just reassure their children and not ask about the results on a daily basis, thereby causing more undue worry and stress. Emily had this advice for parents:

> Around middle school, we start feeling more and there’s more stress piling on because you’re like a teen now and like you got to figure things out. And there’s a lot of pressure sometimes because sometimes adults are like, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Or, “What’s your favorite thing?” Or something and we’re still trying to figure things out. So it’s a little stress for them so I’d say like just be there for your child, you know.

A few participants wanted teachers to be mindful that sixth-grade students are going through the lottery process, although most said they thought the teachers were aware. Participants had the most recommendations for administrators. None of the participants wanted the lottery system to remain unchanged. Rebecca wanted administrators to know “that [the lottery process] very emotionally straining.” Everyone is tired from school already, Rebecca said, and there is added pressure to know if you have made it into your current school or if you have to leave. Overwhelmingly, study participants stated that lottery participation needs to be merit-based. Factors such as: whether or not the lottery participant attended Lakeside from fourth through sixth grade, academic grades, and effort are factors that administrators ought to consider. From Sofia’s perspective:

> About the lottery process, I think that it may cause stress for some students worrying about if they want to get in or not to [Lakeside]. I think that they should probably make it fourth through eighth and not have to go through another lottery.
According to Joe, any student who is just “slacking” and not demonstrating interest in “the whole GATE aspect” needs to be required to participate in the lottery process. However, current Lakeside students who are performing academically, and have an interest in participating in the lottery, need to be guaranteed a spot at Lakeside for middle school.

Fairness as factor in the lottery came up only once with Timmy. He said the lottery process was unfair for sixth-grade students who attend Lakeside and work very hard. Timmy said those who remained at Lakeside and worked hard during their elementary years persevered. “Some work very hard and for the people who worked hard, all their work and all their hopes to make it through eighth grade here are gone. And they’re heartbroken because they’ve worked hard to make it to this school.”

Finally, Rebecca’s situation was unique to the group of study participants. This past year, her family awaited her lottery results for seventh grade at Lakeside, and the year before they awaited her younger sister’s lottery results for fourth grade at Lakeside. Rebecca had this to say about the stress levels in her home for the past two consecutive years:

It wasn’t only stressful for me when I was entering the lottery, but for me when my sister was entering the lottery because I was stressed because I knew it’d be harder for my parents, and I really wanted my sister to be able to get into this school and have the same experiences that I was lucky enough to have.

Participants recognized a need to have a process for access to the program. However, the majority of participants firmly believed that prior academic success and
attendance at Lakeside for three years ought to be weighted as a factor in their favor. Ryan’s final comments summed up participants’ resignation to the lottery process.

It’s a lottery process, so you can’t really expect to get in. Because it’s lottery. It’s all luck. Even if you’re at higher expectations than someone else, and someone of a lower standard gets in, and then you’re thinking, ‘Oh, why didn’t I get in? I have an advantage over them.’ But it’s a lottery. That’s the problem.

The shared experience of the lottery process brought the cohort of 30 sixth graders closer as a unit. Whether through interviews or journals, all participants mentioned that they had a period of adjustment to Lakeside in fourth grade, whether it was academically, socially or emotionally. Two participants recognized the struggles of incoming seventh graders adjusting to the demands of a new school. Emily and Rebecca were the only participants who mentioned the struggle they witnessed with incoming seventh graders at Lakeside because they also went through the same struggles as newcomers in fourth grade. Emily said because she has had the perspective of attending Lakeside for three years, she can perhaps help others adjust. She has already helped some seventh graders find information, and provided homework help. Besides, she said, some of the newcomers to Lakeside middle school did not choose to be at the school; their parents chose for them. “It’s different for new people and it’s different for everybody depending on how they are academically and morally and even mentally.”

Chapter Summary

There are several findings based on this study. One major finding: sixth graders appeared to have suffered from stress and anxiety during a lottery process. Additionally,
support systems are essential for sixth graders who are participating in a lottery process. Having a trusting teacher or staff member who is knowledgeable about the lottery process, as well as the lives of gifted sixth-grade lottery participants, seems to help to ease the burden of uncertainty. Parents may be a source of support and stress during the lottery process. The role of supportive and encouraging teachers in a learning environment may foster a desire for students to remain at their school. Gifted students feel challenged in a school that offers advanced curriculum through acceleration, differentiation, and curriculum compacting. Environments that allow gifted students to be amongst their like-minded peers help them to thrive. In the next chapter, a discussion of findings and recommendations is made.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of gifted adolescents who participated in a randomized lottery to determine program placement. Participants in the study had attended self-contained gifted classes at a school site in Northern California from fourth through sixth grades. In February each school year, sixth-grade students must enter a lottery to continue attending the school for seventh and eighth grades. The lottery process for placement in this overprescribed program differs from other lottery-type placements on several levels. Students at Lakeside, a fourth through eighth grade school, must lottery for 1 of 30 seats in fourth grade. They are provided with a compacted, accelerated, differentiated, and oftentimes enriched curriculum created by teachers with certification in gifted education for three consecutive years, which is different from attending a school where teachers may not be certified in gifted education. At the end of three years, the students who wish to remain at the school must lottery for 1 of 93 seats to continue at the only site in the district where middle school students may continue to receive gifted programming services. Specific gifted education programming is not offered at any other school site. Since this particular school district identifies students as gifted, services come to an end for those who are not fortunate enough to “win” a seat through the competitive lottery process. This chapter provides a brief summary of the study, and discusses the major findings with connections
drawn from the research literature. Finally, this section provides implications for action, recommendations for teachers, school leaders and policymakers, and concludes with recommendations for further research.

For the past ten years, sixth-grade students at a Northern California school for gifted students have participated in a lottery process to continue attending their school for seventh and eighth grades. The cohort of sixth graders whose lived experiences this study aimed to understand were involved in a lottery selection process in February 2017. The sixth-grade students had attended Lakeside, a school for identified gifted students from throughout the school district, for grades four through six. This particular cohort was an anomaly because all students who applied for the lottery to continue attending Lakeside for seventh and eighth grades were admitted for the 2017-2018 school year.

Even though study participants were all selected through a randomized lottery process to continue attending Lakeside School, the goal of this study was to understand the social and emotional effects of a lottery process on gifted adolescents. The study was guided by the following research question:

Research Question: What are the social, emotional, and educational experiences of middle school students who participated in a lottery selection system to determine program acceptance?

Nine 12-year-old seventh-grade students participated in this study. Four males and five females composed the group of participants. Participants were selected from a cohort of 28 students who were given the consent and assent forms to complete and return within a two-week timeframe. Ten students returned the completed forms, but one
student had to cancel his interview on the day of his interview. He did not return to reschedule until more than a month later and therefore was not included in the study. All but one participant lives in a two-parent household. They are the sons and daughters of local physicians, realtors, postal workers, teachers, and small business owners. Several are first-generation; their parents are immigrants from countries like Vietnam and Laos.

The nine interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview questions, which have been included in Appendix A. The interviews, which ranged from 45 minutes to approximately 60 minutes in length, were audio recorded and conducted in a classroom on the Lakeside campus after regular school hours. The interview location and times were convenient for the participants as well as the researcher. Most participants returned after their initial interviews to write in journals, in which they responded to four separate prompts and included more information they thought would be important for the researcher. The writing prompts are included in Appendix B.

The purpose for qualitative interviews was to solicit participants’ ideas and opinions about an event or process (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the participants were involved in a lottery process. This qualitative research design used narrative inquiry because I asked participants how the lottery process impacted their social, emotional, and educational lives. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), narrative is a way of organizing actions and understanding events. Through analysis of participant statements, the researcher is able to think about and study their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Narrative analysis allows for deeper understanding of participants (Bell, 2002). Furthermore, narrative allows the researcher to recreate participant experiences through storytelling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Specifically, narrative inquiry is a
qualitative approach based on participant perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to tell how participants view the world, and their actions within the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method allows a researcher to read data, code data, categorize codes, reread, and compare the data to previously mentioned themes in each category (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965). After reviewing each interview transcript, I noted possible codes, categories and patterns, then entered them on a Google Sheets spreadsheet. Each time a code could be connected to a participant, I checked a corresponding cell. By comparing data between and among participants, I could create categories from similar codes.

In this study, the goal was to share and learn from the experiences and stories of gifted adolescents who must partake in a randomized school lottery to continue receiving gifted educational services at a school they have attended for three years. My intent, as a researcher, was to use participant ideas, opinions, experiences, and stories to shape and help inform administrative decisions, federal and state policies, and future research with regard to gifted and talented education programming and services offered in school districts. Bandura’s social cognitive theory was the framework through which participants’ data were viewed in this study. Social cognitive theory emphasizes the interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli and behaviors (Bandura, 1989). Therefore, individuals make evaluations of behaviors of others in their environment and the consequences that emanate from such actions (Swearer, et al., 2014).
Discussion of Findings Relative to the Literature Review

The following section details connections between the findings and the literature review. Emergent themes from participant interviews are discussed in further detail. Several findings were related to the literature review. In this section, I have organized the emergent themes based on the most impactful findings as a researcher.

*Stress and anxiety were commonly experienced throughout the lottery process.* All participants reported feeling anxious about the lottery results. Throughout the entire waiting period until they received their confirmation letters, participants said they experienced a range of emotions, namely stress and anxiety. Stress and anxiety are commonly experienced by gifted students, who tend to demonstrate a strong tendency to be tense and anxious (Guignard, Jacquet, Lubart, 2012; Kennedy & Farley, 2018). Perceived stress can lead to depression, especially in adolescents (Zhang, Yan, Zhao, Yuan, 2015). Though Lee and colleagues (2015) found that stressful events can be made more manageable with help from social support networks, Rebecca said her mother’s daily inquisition as to her lottery status and her sixth-grade teacher’s coaching sessions were not helpful. She felt physically ill when the lottery process was discussed. Rebecca’s bouts of nausea, when viewed through the lens of social learning theory, demonstrate that anxiety-triggered events such as lottery outcomes can activate thoughts that result in emotional responses (Bandura, 1977). The breathing techniques Rebecca’s mother taught her to practice were helpful for coping with the nausea. Kennedy and Farley (2018) recommended that experts and counselors who work with gifted populations teach relaxation techniques to help students cope with stress and anxiety. Preparing students for impending lottery results would be an example of a coping
behavior that could help with potential emotional responses (Bandura, 1977). Martina sought the help of the school guidance counselor because she “was feeling really anxious” while she awaited the lottery results. Martina said the counselor’s positive self-talk strategies helped her, however, she continued to check the mail on a daily basis.

While Zhang and colleagues (2015) found gender differences in the methods for dealing with perceived stress, the boys and girls involved in this study relied equally on friends and family for support. Unlike the study by Zhang and colleagues (2015) in which participants did not have physical activity as an outlet, all participants in this study had physical activities in which they participated after school, which could have helped with the pressures they were undergoing because they had social interactions with their peer group outside of academics. Peers and teachers play an instrumental role in social and academic goal pursuit (Wentzel et al., 2012). The physical activities ranged from an afterschool on-campus workout group composed of students in their class to an afterschool on-campus Ping Pong club and dance; the first two activities were advised by their sixth-grade teacher, who continued to mentor them outside of school hours thereby creating a positive social support network. Participating in extracurricular activities such as those offered at Lakeside are examples of healthy social coping strategies and can possibly help students cope with the giftedness stigma (Cross & Cross, 2015).

Gifted students develop effective coping strategies through social support networks (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Lee et al., 2015). Coping strategies allow students to deal with emotions such as stress and anxiety (Cross & Cross, 2015). Thus, it could be said that Lakeside’s afterschool programs designed specifically for the sixth through eighth graders became an outlet and support network for those who participated in such
activities. Though all participants mentioned that they experienced some levels of stress and anxiety, they advised future lottery participants not to stress out about the lottery process. Bea said “the stress doesn’t benefit you in any way.”

Being on the cusp of adolescence magnifies the stress and anxiety of an impending lottery because gifted adolescents endure developmental circumstances unique to their population (McHugh, 2006). Compounding the fear of losing friends was also the anxiety participants associated with meeting the expectations of seven teachers instead of just one in a transition to middle school. Changing classrooms and learning the new expectations of several teachers were identified as a source of anxiety expressed in the research by Guignard and colleagues (2012).

Participants hypothesized about emotional strain if not selected through the lottery process. The extent to which participants described their feelings associated with leaving Lakeside was intense. They all made speculations about their emotions had they not been selected through the lottery process. Participants’ statements corresponded with the research completed by George & Baby (2012) in which various stressors in gifted adolescents’ lives were identified. Among the top three stressors they found that affect gifted adolescents: beliefs about the future, over expectations, and boredom (George & Baby, 2012). More than one participant anguished over being removed from Lakeside after three years. Timmy said it was frequently a topic of discussion among friends prior to the lottery. He said his classmates would be “heartbroken” if they had to leave Lakeside and instead attend another middle school. Emily reiterated the same sentiments. “…it would be a little heartbreaking to me because I’ve known around 30 students for three years and now I have to leave them…” John said he would be “pretty devastated” if
he was not selected in the lottery process. Powerful statements such as these demonstrate the intense emotions often experienced by gifted students (Blaas, 2014; Guignard, et al., 2012; Suldo, et al., 2009).

*Teacher support and encouragement helped students feel reassured.* Many participants expressed that teachers were easily accessed and they genuinely cared for students’ well-being. Lee and colleagues (2015) recommend learning environments in which psychosocial skills and social support for high achievement are developed. All of the participants shared that fourth grade was a time of great adjustment in terms of study habits. However, by the time she had reached the end of fifth grade, Emily shared that she had a handle on time management and juggling project deadlines. But it was not only academics that participants mentioned as an adjustment when transitioning to Lakeside as fourth graders; teambuilding activities that were structured for interdependence, and the group collaboration that was required by all three elementary teachers helped to build a sense of community. As Rinn and colleagues (2011) described, teachers can improve gifted students’ self-concept by communicating high expectations and providing challenge. Even though participants seemed to have their transitional timeline for adjusting to more challenge as fourth graders, they all mentioned that teacher support at Lakeside is one of the school’s advantages. Sofia wrote about the variety of teaching styles experienced at Lakeside, and the teachers’ propensity for asking questions that probed the depth of students’ understanding. Joe’s journal entries mentioned “helpful and attentive” teachers. Bea felt that her education was taken seriously because her teachers were “incredibly helpful” whenever she had questions. She said teachers were available via several electronic means such as electronic gradebook and Gmail, and they
often responded quickly to her questions. Suldo and colleagues (2009) studied specific
teacher behaviors that contributed to students’ social well-being. They found that
teachers and psychologists can create healthy academic environments where students feel
respected and valued by supporting students academically with additional assistance,
demonstrating genuine concern for students, providing additional learning experiences,
and utilizing multiple teaching strategies (Suldo et al., 2009).

Each participant mentioned that their sixth-grade teacher at Lakeside discussed the
lottery process with them as a group. One student, Bea, even met with the teacher at
lunchtime on more than one occasion to discuss her fears about the impending lottery.
As Suldo and colleagues (2009) found, students perceived teachers to be most supportive
when they connected on an emotional level. While all but one found the discussions to
be encouraging, it is likely that providing a safe atmosphere where students can share
their concerns and be reassured by a trusting adult is helpful for building resiliency skills.
Gates (2010) recommended that educators provide community circle time wherein the
teacher can monitor the emotions of the group as a whole, and students may discuss
issues that meet their emotional needs. Although one participant sought the advice of a
counselor with regard to the lottery process, Gates (2010) also recommended small group
counseling sessions because they are beneficial for students to share their emotional
issues.

*Support systems were critical to each participant’s well-being.* Whether it was
parents, friends, or other influential adults in the participants’ lives, participants named at
least one person who encouraged them and reassured them throughout the entire lottery
process. Peer, teacher, and family member support has a positive correlation with
academic achievement (Lee et al., 2015). Timmy referred to daily debriefs with his mom, whom he relied on heavily throughout the lottery process. These daily conversations were meaningful because Timmy had someone with whom to share his concerns. Zeidner and colleagues (2015) noted in their research that well-being in adolescents is highly associated with social support. Social cognitive theory suggests modeling of positive or negative behaviors and their acceptance or discouragement demonstrates to children whether such behaviors will be rewarded or punished (Bandura, 1989; Swearer et al., 2014). Martina mentioned that her uncle, who is also an educator, asked her about the lottery several times. The uncle tried to build her resiliency skills during their conversations by referring to alternative schools and their positive features, which relates to Bandura’s social cognitive theory. John noted that his parents would often reassure him that if he did not get into Lakeside for middle school, it would be OK. As Lee and colleagues (2015) found, social support networks can help gifted students develop effective coping strategies. Swearer and colleagues (2014) stated that “significant individuals in youths’ lives” have an impact on whether or not youths believe that such behaviors are acceptable or not. Positive self-talk, as led by the school counselor and the sixth-grade teacher, may have influenced some of the participants’ behavior in a positive manner.

Participants felt that they could “be themselves” because the school has a safe, trusting environment. Several of the participants discussed how they felt safe at Lakeside because students get along. Townley and Schmieder-Ramirez (2014) asserted that a positive school culture and climate are crucial for student success. Participants regularly referred to a lack of bullying, and a sense of community. Developing strong identities in a
safe environment is of particular importance during the adolescent years (Yilmaz, 2015). Joe described the environment at Lakeside as “homey.” More importantly, Joe felt he could trust his peers and teachers.

Joe referred to the ease with which he was able to converse with like-minded peers who share similar interests. Cross, Stewart, and Coleman (2003) found that gifted elementary students who attended a specialized magnet school felt they were more accepted in an environment with similarly-grouped peers. Being with others who share an interest in school is much better than being surrounded by others who notice her differences, as Rebecca described. Striley (2014) posited that differentness can lead to stigmatization, or outsider status. A social coping behavior that gifted students typically practice is managing information about themselves to deny their giftedness (Cross & Cross, 2015). Gifted children are different from their chronological peers regarding ability and motivation (Coleman et al., 2015). Coleman and Cross (2014) found that gifted students would prefer to be in specialized educational settings with like-minded peers. Grouping gifted students together in learning environments meets their needs (McHugh, 2006). Martina spoke of being comfortable in her learning environment because she was surrounded by people who were “different” like her. These differences can prove to be a positive asset within a school environment where gifted students are grouped in specialized environments that include teachers and support staff trained in gifted education. Staff trained in gifted education helps alleviate the stigma attached to being gifted because they are better equipped to support students (Lee et al., 2015).

Because the cohort of 30 students progressed through upper elementary grades as an entire cohort, a special bond was created wherein participants felt as if they were
comfortable being themselves. Their comfort derived from being surrounded by others who accepted their giftedness rather than regarding it as a stigma. When viewed through the lens of social cognitive theory, modeling cues and the environment are strong factors for behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1989). Jen and colleagues (2016) defined early adolescence beginning at ages 10 to 12. It is during these formative years that friendships become important (Masden et al., 2015). Fear of losing the friends they had gained during fourth through sixth grades was mentioned by all of the participants. Both Martina and Timmy mentioned the Skype accounts they and their classmates had created in anticipation of being separated because none of them wanted to lose touch with each other.

As Emily stated: “So we got to really get to know each other and really come together as like a whole group of people.” Martina wrote about her struggle to accept and be herself. Martina’s classmates supported her growth and change throughout the three years, something that she does not think would have occurred if she had attended another school. Gifted adolescents have been found to have higher self-concept and experience more acceptance when grouped with like-minded peers (Cross & Cross, 2015; Cross et al., 2016; Eddles-Hirsch, et al., 2012).

*Families were a driving force for participants to attend the school.* All of the participants mentioned that they and their families wanted to remain at Lakeside School for seventh and eighth grades. Though their parents may not have explicitly stated their desires, several participants said they knew their parents wanted them to remain at Lakeside for middle school. The family is widely recognized as a positive support system for gifted individuals (Renati et al., 2017). Two participants had older siblings who previously attended Lakeside for middle school, so their families were aware of the
expectations. Parenting styles have an effect on gifted students’ well-being, as found by Yazdani and Daryei (2016). Though Timmy’s older sister had never attended Lakeside, her conversations with their mom, as well as her negative experiences at another middle school in the district, influenced the decision to push for Timmy to continue at Lakeside.

Academic challenge promoted a desire to continue. Participants felt strongly that if they did not attend Lakeside School, they would not be as challenged at another middle school. Both John and Timmy postured that they would underachieve in an environment that lacked challenge. John especially lamented having to wait for others to catch up in his early elementary years and expressed that he never wanted a similar experience again. Cross and Cross (2015) document the need for challenging environments in their research of gifted individuals. Research has shown that gifted students seek challenge (McHugh, 2006).

Appropriate levels of challenge can lead to “intense satisfaction” and help gifted individuals to build relationships with their intellectual peers (Cross & Cross, 2015). All but two of the participants said they were in contact with friends or relatives at other middle schools throughout the district. When participants compared their learning to that of their friends and relatives, they realized they had already covered the same material in previous years, or months beforehand. Participants mentioned that their counterparts at other middle schools were not receiving advanced instruction, particularly in Math and Spanish. Learning environments that lack challenge can be problematic for gifted students, especially during adolescence (Cross & Cross, 2015; George & Baby, 2012).

Being Gifted Means Being Different. Participants mentioned that being surrounded by like-minded peers allowed them the freedom to be themselves. This is
directly related to the work of Coleman and colleagues (2015) and Hertzog (2003). Gifted students are typically more engaged in interest-driven content, have an intense internal drive, and the motivation to sustain that drive throughout their lives (Coleman et al., 2015; Hertzog, 2003). Differentness is an awareness that gifted students’ interests and abilities do not match those of their grade-alike peers and become more evident with age (Hertzog, 2003). Joe mentioned being more comfortable studying with peers at Lakeside versus his previous school, where he did not feel the same. Rebecca and John pointedly discussed their efforts to deny giftedness because it was easier to fit into peer groups. As shown in the literature, gifted students have been shown to manage information about themselves (Chan, 2003; Coleman & Cross, 2014; Lee et al., 2015). Gifted students manage information about themselves through the use of coping strategies such as denying giftedness and disidentifying behaviors such as those mentioned by John.

*Student Recommendations.* Participants did not hesitate when asked to give their suggestions for improving the lottery process for future sixth-grade cohorts. They overwhelmingly suggested that academic achievement from fourth through sixth grade guarantees a student’s ability to continue attending Lakeside. Participants’ responses in this study can be likened to the findings of Phillippo and Griffin (2016) in which lottery participants said the best public education needs to be reserved for those who work hard and maintain the grades to be rewarded in such a manner. As Ryan reasoned: “If they’re doing good, why can’t they basically get guaranteed a spot in something that they’re more suited in?” He said the fact that students excel in their learning environment needs to be one of the highest considerations by administrators. Another factor to consider is
one’s determination level, Martina said. Sofia suggested one lottery for fourth grade placement, resulting in sixth graders not having to “redo” the lottery. She thought it was “strange” that students would have to experience a lottery to continue at the school.

One participant had an idea to help incoming seventh graders adjust to the expectations of attending Lakeside. Emily discussed her desire to create a group that could help newcomers become accustomed to the learning environment at Lakeside. Emily and Rebecca said they were able to empathize with newcomers to the school. The girls’ ability to empathize and have concern for others relates to Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence, which is one manner in which giftedness is exhibited (Goleman, 1995; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). During the interviews, Emily and Rebecca recalled feelings of inferiority as fourth graders. Both recalled suddenly being in an environment where the playing field had been leveled because their classmates were just as determined as they were. Emily said she thinks the new seventh graders might have similar feelings. Researchers commonly refer to this phenomenon as Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect (BFLPE). BFLPE occurs when gifted students experience lower academic self-concept when grouped in a more competitive environment of a selective school or specialized program versus remaining in a mixed-ability program (Becker, et al., 2014; Chan, 2003; Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2012; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Makel, & Putallaz, 2015; Plucker & Dilley, 2016). However, Cross and Cross (2015) argue that the BFLPE diminishes as students become more focused on their learning progress over time.

Whether the transition is from elementary school to middle school, or high school to college, students may experience anxiety from life experiences. While all participants discussed the stress of participating in a lottery process, one participant reflected on her
experience and said that lessons on Dweck’s Mindset would have helped her to cope with lottery results if she had not gotten into the school. Developing a growth mindset aids with resiliency skills (Dweck, 2006).

**Conclusions**

Gifted students deserve an education that meets their academic, social, and emotional needs. The research shows that being with like-minded peers is best suited to meeting gifted students’ needs when factors such as challenging learning environments and trained educational specialists such as the teachers within the school provide much-needed support. A lottery system for placement in a gifted program may have had a purpose for objectifying a process ten years ago. However, the academic, social and emotional needs of 30 12-year-olds must take precedence over fairness. Bandura (1977) asserted that new behavioral patterns could develop through directly observing the behaviors of others. It is possible that not “winning” a lottery could create new patterns of behavior that have a positive correlation to developing resiliency skills for dealing with stress events and anxiety later in life. Possible stress and anxiety could arise from transitioning from eighth grade to high school, from high school to college, and possibly facing rejection from a college of choice, for example. In this case, however, the lottery process could potentially have social and emotional repercussions on adolescents at a time in their lives when upheaval, stress, and anxiety are unnecessary, as found in this study.
Implications for Action

District personnel familiar with the lottery process may consider re-examining the purpose of the lottery at Lakeside School. If a seventh-grade waiting list is nonexistent, consider cancelling the lottery, thus the entire cohort of sixth graders at Lakeside School would not have to endure the extraneous stress and anxiety of a lottery process. The school district may consider reviewing its definition of a fourth through eighth grade school as it applies to Lakeside School. If Lakeside School is indeed a fourth through eighth-grade school, students could lottery one time to continue attending their school.

To help sixth-grade students cope in the meantime, teachers or the part-time counselor may consider providing opportunities for expressive writing, as a recommended counseling strategy by Kennedy and Farley (2018). Expressive writing has been shown to reduce academic anxiety in some students and it could possibly improve their performance in the weeks leading up to the lottery. Furthermore, staff may consider implementing curriculum that directly addresses how students can manage their social and emotional well-being. Additionally, extracurricular activities on campus would allow students to build their resiliency skills, as recommended by Cross and Cross (2015).

Undergoing the lottery process could prove to be a stress and anxiety-producing event for some students, however, it is possible that participants could have benefitted from competing in a selective lottery process. Learning to cope with stress in more competitive situations could be viewed as a positive coping mechanism for events that participants encounter later in life. Building social support networks as all participants had is another method for managing stress.
Recommendations for School Leaders

Research shows the social and emotional well-being of students is directly linked to school success (McHugh, 2006). Students who have to deal with the stress and anxiety of being removed from their school must be taught how to manage their social and emotional well-being to adequately cope when difficult circumstances occur.

Consider expanding the Lakeside program to provide services for all identified gifted middle school students so that they receive appropriate programming. By expanding the program, all students who desire gifted education services in middle school can continue to receive them without the added stress and anxiety of a lottery process.

A secondary identification procedure could help to eliminate the lottery process. In this study, students are initially identified as gifted during their third-grade year. It may be appropriate to determine if gifted behaviors are continuing to be demonstrated three years later. Midway through the sixth-grade year might be an appropriate time to reexamine gifted behaviors through a checklist such as Renzulli’s Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, Hartman, & Westberg, 2002). If students are no longer demonstrating gifted behaviors, they could be placed on a waiting list. Additionally, administrators may wish to consider creating the equivalent of gifted clusters at the middle school level, and students who are unable to attend Lakeside could still receive the academic challenge, social and emotional support which they deserve. Administrators may consider the gifted placement models in current use by the Orange County Consortium GATE (OCC GATE) and consider
implementing a newer, updated system for placement based on research-based best practices.

Because California lacks a state mandate for gifted education, school leaders and district administrators who are passionate about providing appropriate services for all learners, including gifted students, need to advocate for a mandate that will drive policy to move forward and advance learners, rather than holding them back in classrooms that may not meet their learning needs.

**Policy Recommendations**

To aid in the transition to middle school for those students who did not previously attend Lakeside School, create a buddy system whereby newcomers are matched up with seventh graders who had previously attended the school. This will create a culture of collaboration instead of further promoting a culture of competition that could possibly lead to underachievement or a student leaving the school (BFLPE).

School districts need to have clearly defined programs listed on their websites to inform parents and students of their programming choices and entrance requirements. In districts where a lottery is held, a clearly defined timeline for the lottery process and results needs to be explained. GATE coordinators from across the state benefit from sharing programmatic models that demonstrate research-based best practices for identification and services. Program models may in turn be shared with superintendents and school board members who create policies to serve learners. A coordinated effort by GATE program leaders could lead to advocacy at the state level for mandates that could guide identification and services in every school district.
All school districts in California must write their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) to address eight state priorities, among them pupil achievement, pupil engagement and success (B. Branch, personal communication, March 17, 2015). Although school districts are not mandated to identify and serve gifted students in California, gifted students exist in all school populations. Even though California school districts report numbers of identified gifted students to CALPADS, this data is not publicized because no state mandate exists to report it (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). Every effort to serve advanced learners as well as their social and emotional needs, must be reflected in a school district’s LCAP. All school staff who work with gifted learners need to be trained and certified to work with such populations in order to recognize instances when a student may need help to gain additional coping strategies, for example. The state does not currently have mandates that address district guidelines for teacher certification to teach gifted students (K. Hanson-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2018). The California Association for the Gifted may consider updating and revising its position papers on Identification of Gifted and Talented Learners, and Academic Programs and Services for Gifted Learners to reflect more recent research and literature to support its positions. By updating position papers, state advocacy organizations such as CAG could gain more support from stakeholders for including GATE in more district LCAPs.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Additional research may include a larger study that compares the social and emotional effects of a school lottery on various populations that attend other public and private schools such as magnet, charter and gifted. Such a proposed study would provide
a broader scope of perspective and could perhaps be generalized to inform larger populations where a lottery process is used for placement. Further research may include a longitudinal retrospective study of all lottery participants. A study of such magnitude would give a broader range of student perspectives, and perhaps be able to measure their resiliency skills. Furthermore, a retrospective that included all lottery participants could broaden the scope of study results. It would be interesting to continue research with this particular cohort of seventh-grade participants and include their parents’ perspectives. Information from a study of this type could provide insight for future lottery participants, as well as their families, to cope with lottery results.

In a larger school district that has multiple options for gifted education placement in middle school, these same results may not be applicable because gifted adolescents would have multiple pathways for having their academic, social and emotional needs met. Research that focuses on how gifted adolescents and their parents choose a program to meet their unique needs would offer insight to the type of programming that schools need to offer. For example, what are the factors that parents consider? This could potentially help district personnel to better serve their gifted populations.

This study shows that supportive networks contribute to harmonious interactions between and among a small group of peers. Additional research into methods for creating classroom environments that support social and emotional learning would be worthy for educators. Implementation of these methods would be valuable for developing resiliency skills in all learners, which would in turn promote students’ well-being.
Closing Summary

In closing, the purpose of the study was to describe and understand the lived experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who participated in a middle school lottery selection process to attend a school for their seventh and eighth-grade years. All participants in this study had previously attended their school for fourth through sixth grades and had participated in a lottery process to enter the school in fourth grade. Transitioning from elementary school to middle school is an anguishing process for adolescents. Compounding the transition from elementary to middle school is an impending lottery for some 12-year-olds to continue attending school at a site where they have attended classes for the past three years. The students at one Northern California school have participated in what has become an accepted educational formality to attend an overprescribed middle school gifted program that serves students from throughout the school district. The goal of this research was to share and learn from the experiences and stories of gifted adolescents who must partake in a randomized school lottery to continue receiving gifted educational services at a school they have attended for three years. The themes identified in this study are: stress and anxiety; teacher support and encouragement; support systems; a safe, trusting school environment; family focus; academic challenge promoted a desire to continue; being gifted means being different; and student recommendations. The overarching themes identified in this study were pertinent to the recommendations and implications mentioned above. While most were not surprising, I was pleasantly surprised that two participants recognized the need to mentor newcomers to Lakeside as they transition from other schools throughout the district.
Concluding Remarks

It is imperative for parents, teachers and school staff who interact with lottery participants to understand the severe emotions that lottery participants may be experiencing, and to provide them with the necessary tools to promote their well-being. Simply asking students how they are doing is not enough. Taking time to have lunch together or playing games allows for more interaction and conversation to occur between students and staff on campus. In these instances, students may alleviate some of their stress and anxiety by sharing their fears. It is time to re-examine current practices to determine if they are indeed best practices for promoting the social and emotional health of adolescents.

In this process, I anticipated that students would be upset about the thought of leaving their school, but I never imagined the extent to which they would make speculations about their feelings if they were forced to leave Lakeside through a lottery. I did not anticipate hearing remarks such as “heartbroken” used by both genders to describe their feelings if they had to leave Lakeside due to the lottery process.

While many school districts in California have seen their gifted education programs face the budget ax, my hope for the future is that leaders realize that the needs of all learners need to be met, including those of gifted students in K-12 education. Simply identifying gifted learners is not enough. The recently passed ESSA is a start, however, it is time for a state mandate that requires all districts in the state to provide identification and services for gifted learners. By identifying and providing services for the brightest and most capable students, policymakers and administrators secure a more promising future for all.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

First/last name, age

Intro: How students feel about GATE program, participation in a randomized lottery.

Hobbies? (S) Extracurricular activities? (S)

1. Why did you/your family choose to attend this school? (EDU)

2. What does it mean to be gifted and talented? (S/E)

3. Tell me about your experiences as a learner at this school. What is it like to be a student here versus your previous school? (EDU)

4. Please share your experiences with making friends at this school. (S/E)

5. How has attending this school benefitted you? Not benefitted you? (EDU)

6. Did you want to continue at this school for middle school? Why/why not? (EDU)

7. What do you think might be like to attend another middle school? (E)

8. What were some things you and your friends discussed with regard to the lottery process? (S/E)

9. How important was it to you that your friends made it into this school for middle school? (S/E)

10. How important was it to your family that you make it into this school for middle school? How did you know it was important? Why was it important? What would have happened if you were not selected in the lottery process? (E/EDU)
11. What kinds of discussions did you have with any adults on campus before the lottery took place? During the week after it occurred, and before you received your letter? After you received your letter? How did the conversation help you? Hinder you? (S/E)

12. How does participation in GATE for middle school help you in the future? (EDU)

13. What are the expectations you have of yourself for continuing here for the next two years? (S/E/EDU)

14. How would the next two years be different for you if you were to attend another middle school? (S/E/EDU)

15. What would you want others to know about the lottery process, including this year’s sixth graders, parents, teachers, your principal and any adults who make decisions about how students should be placed in gifted programs? (S/E/EDU)
APPENDIX B: WRITING PROMPTS
APPENDIX B: WRITING PROMPTS

1. Describe your learning experiences at Lakeside during the past three years.

2. Explain how any of your experiences at this school during the past three years played into your decision to apply to be in the middle school lottery.

3. Tell me about any experiences you have had where you had to pretend not to be a GATE student.

4. What is it like to learn in a classroom with students who are identified gifted versus learning in a general education classroom?
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Social and Emotional Effects of a School Lottery Process on Gifted Adolescents

Your child is invited to participate in a research study which will describe the experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who attended a Northern California school for gifted students from fourth through sixth grades and participated in a lottery process to continue attending the same school for seventh and eighth grades.

My name is Adrianne Go-Miller, and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because s/he attended Elkhorn School for fourth through sixth grades, and participated in the lottery process for seventh grade.

The purpose of this research is to describe and understand the lived experiences of gifted and talented seventh graders who attended a Northern California school for gifted students from fourth through sixth grades and participated in a lottery process to continue attending the same school for seventh and eighth grades. If you decide to allow your child to participate, your child will be asked to participate in an approximately one-hour on-campus interview that will be audio-recorded. I will also ask your child to respond to questions that are related to the lottery process in a journal that I will provide. Your child will be asked to write one entry per week for four consecutive weeks during a 30-minute time period after school on campus. The day of the week will be determined by you and your child. I will collect the journal after each writing session and it will be kept in a locked location at all times. I will individually interview participants once, then check in with them again after our initial interview to see if there is anything else they would like to share for the study in regard to the lottery process, and their experiences. Your child’s participation in this study will last approximately two months. If at any time your child feels uncomfortable during the interview or the study process, your child may stop the interview at any time or leave the study at any time. I will explain this at the beginning of the interview.

There are some possible risks involved for participants. It may be difficult for your child to recall memories from February and a variety of emotions in recalling those memories could occur. Sociologically, if your child is chosen, some students may feel awkward and may feel uncomfortable in peer interactions if they choose to discuss their participation with other students who were not chosen. In the unlikely event that your child’s journal is lost, there could be a potential for loss of confidentiality. However, I will ask children who participate to choose fake names for themselves at the beginning of the study. If I notice that your child feels uncomfortable at any time during our interview, I will offer a break or we will stop the interview. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that more adults become aware of the social and emotional effects the lottery process has on students, and perhaps personnel could be directed to help students through the process. Another benefit is that administrators who make decisions for students to be placed in
gifted programs learn from your child’s experiences. All programming specialists who consider a lottery process for adolescents to continue attending their school may benefit from this study. Future generations of students may benefit from this research because it could provide measures to review current policy. Similar school districts that may be considering similar lotteries could use information from this study to guide their own policies with regard to students and lotteries. After the interview process is complete, I will be giving your child a $2 Baskin-Robbins gift card and a thank-you note.

In my dual role as the principal investigator in this study and a teacher, I am a mandated reporter. If anything is stated during the interview or in writing that could indicate child abuse and/or neglect, I am required by law to report it.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at 209-601-9573, or contact Dr. Antonio Serna (209-946-2986). If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a participant in a research project, or in the event of a research-related injury, please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7716.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your child’s confidentiality are the use of fake names—for your child and other study participants, a fake name for the school, and an unnamed school district. The data obtained will be maintained on password-protected devices and a locked safe in my home, and will be destroyed after a minimum of three years after the study is completed. The data will only be seen by myself and my advisor.

Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary and your decision to allow your child to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. If you decide to allow your child to participate, your child is free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to allow your child to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your child’s participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies on behalf of your child.

You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

Student’s name: ____________________________________________

__________________________________________  ________________________
Parent/Guardian signature  Date
APPENDIX D: ASSENT FORM
APPENDIX D: ASSENT FORM

Social and Emotional Effects of a School Lottery Process on Gifted Adolescents

Student’s Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________

I am interested in knowing about your experiences and memories associated with the school lottery process.

I’d like you to agree to be interviewed by me at school for about an hour after school in the coming weeks. I will audio-record the interview. If you want to stop the interview at anytime to take a break, you can stop whenever you like, you won’t get into trouble. If at anytime you feel uncomfortable, we can take a break or stop the interview. Also, if you have any questions about what I’m asking, or if you aren’t sure how to answer, just ask me if there’s anything you’d like me to explain further. I will ask you to choose a fake name for the research study. I will also give you a journal to reflect on more specific questions that are specific to the lottery process. I will ask you to complete the written responses once a week for four consecutive weeks. I will ask you to write after school on a day that is convenient in a classroom while I am present. I will ask you to write your fake name in the journal in case it is lost so no one is able to track it back to you and you will not lose your privacy. I will collect the journal from you after each reflection writing time. You may or may not write in the journal. It is solely for you to jot down additional responses, and anything else you want me to know that we may not have discussed, or had enough time to discuss in detail, during the interview.

It is possible that you may experience a variety of emotions while recalling memories of the lottery process. If the interview or journal writing causes you extreme stress, you may take a break or stop. Because not all seventh graders are participating in this study, it is possible that some of your peers will want to talk with you about it. If you are chosen, you may feel awkward and uncomfortable with peers if you choose to discuss your participation with other students who were not chosen. In the unlikely event that your journal is lost, your fake will be on it and there is a possibility that someone else may see it, however, they will not know your fake name.

If you want to be a part of the study, please sign your name on the line below. Your parent(s)/guardians have already told me that it is alright with them if you want to be part of the study. Remember, you don't have to be interviewed or write in the journal, and once you start the interview, you can rest or stop whenever you like.

___________________________

Signature