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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the activities and outcomes of an applied dissertation designed to improve gifted middle school students' participation in Quest class activities and academic achievement in Quest class. Students in the target group (n=36) were not achieving at expected levels academically, were not completing in-class assignments or homework assignments at expected levels, and were losing credit on special projects due to not completing them on time. Students lacked adequate self-discipline, interpersonal skills, adjustment skills, and social-support systems. Further, there was limited cooperation and understanding between Quest students/teachers and regular education teachers. A three-pronged intervention was developed to address the issues associated with students' lack of participation and underachievement in Quest class. Support groups were provided for teachers, parents, and middle school Quest class students during a 32-week intervention period. Appropriate materials were selected and modified as needed for use with each of the groups. Topics focused on identifying and changing behaviors associated with issues negatively affecting students' participation and academic achievement. An analysis of the data revealed that student participation and academic achievement in Quest class improved, as did parent support and cooperation/understanding between Quest students/teachers and regular education teachers. Appended are: Quest Teacher Interview Questions; and Informed Consent Form. (Contains 94 references.) (Author/CR)

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Improving Middle School Students' Participation and Academic Achievement in a Gifted Education Program

by
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Cluster 98

An Applied Dissertation
Presented to the EdD Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Abstract

Improving Middle School Students' Participation and Academic Achievement in a Gifted Education Program. Johnson, Jr., Hardwick Smith, 2002: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, EdD Program in Child and Youth Studies. Gifted/Gifted Students/Academically Gifted/Academic Achievement/Social Adjustment/Emotional Adjustment/Emotional Development/Social Development/Underachievement/Middle Schools/Interpersonal Relationship/Parent Student Relationship/Parent School Relationship/Teacher Student Relationship/Motivation/Intervention

This applied dissertation was designed to improve gifted middle school students' participation in Quest class activities and academic achievement in Quest class. Students in the target group were not achieving at expected levels academically, were not completing in-class assignments or homework assignments at expected levels, and were losing credit on special projects due to not completing them on time. Students lacked adequate self-discipline, intrapersonal skills, adjustment skills, and social-support systems. Further, there was limited cooperation and understanding between Quest students/teachers and regular education teachers.

The writer developed a three-pronged intervention to address the issues associated with students' lack of participation and underachievement in Quest class. Support groups were provided for teachers, parents, and middle school Quest class students during a 32 week intervention period. Appropriate materials were selected, and modified as needed for use, with each of the groups. Topics focused on identifying and changing behaviors associated with issues negatively impacting students' participation and academic achievement in Quest class.

An analysis of the data revealed that the four outcomes projected for this applied dissertation were met. Additionally, six unexpected positive outcomes were also achieved. Student participation and academic achievement in Quest class improved, as did parent support and cooperation/understanding between Quest students/teachers and regular education teachers.

Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Hardwick Smith Johnson, Jr. under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the EdD Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Description of Community

The community in which this intervention took place was a rural area located in the southeastern United States with a predominantly economically disadvantaged population. Geographically, the county is among the largest in the state in terms of land acreage. There are approximately 22,000 citizens in the county with an estimated 40 percent Caucasian, 59 percent African American, and one percent Hispanic, Indian, and Asian (Assistant Superintendent, personal communication, May 30, 2001). There are four small cities within the county, the largest having approximately 4,500 residents withthe smallest having approximately 1,300 residents. There are also several smaller unincorporated communities. Most of the citizens of the county live outside the parameters of any of the cities or unincorporated areas in houses that are not close to their neighbors. There are small libraries in three of the four cities. Two of the three libraries have limited holdings and are open on a part-time basis. There are three local weekly newspapers, two radio stations, and two cable television stations which focus on community news and events. Industry within the county is limited to agriculture, manufacturing, timber, stores, and the local school district. In recent years, an increase in tourism has bolstered the economy with the creation of new minimum wage jobs in souvenir shops and fast-food restaurants. A majority of the workers in the county commute to jobs outside of the county. Unemployment rates are high with approximately 25% of the county's families receiving some form of government assistance (School Social Worker, personal communication, May 30, 2001). The area is characterized by problems that include a lack of local industry and local employment opportunities, high percentages of residents having less than a high school education,

poor living conditions or approximately half of the population, increasing incidences of drug and alcohol use, increasing incidences of juvenile crime, and increasing reports of child neglect and abuse (Assistant School Superintendent, personal communication, May 30, 2001).

Writer's Work Setting

The writer is employed as a school psychologist in the county's local school district. His office is based at the Board of Education's Central Office along with two other school psychologists and a diagnostician, as well as other support staff. The public schools in the county include four elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and one alternative school for severely behaviorally disruptive students. All of the public schools within the county are classified as Chapter I schools and all students are eligible to participate in the free lunch program (School Social Worker, personal communication, May 30, 2001). The two private schools serve students ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade. One of the two private schools is a faith-based Christian school. The county school district utilizes technology extensively due to the receipt of over one million dollars in grant money during the recent past for the purpose of acquiring technology. The public school district provides a full range of special educational services to students who meet special education eligibility criteria. Services are also provided for students classified as "gifted" in a program designated as Quest. For the purposes of this applied dissertation intervention, "gifted" students refers to those who have met the eligibility criteria for placement in the Quest program. For the purposes of this applied dissertation intervention, "giftedness" refers to superior cognitive ability evidenced by an intelligence quotient standard score at or above the 96th percentile on an approved cognitive assessment instrument as well as superior

performance on a standardized measure of academic achievement. Recent reports indicated that less than two percent of all students in this district participate in educational programs for academically gifted students (Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, personal communication, May 30, 2001).

The mission statement of the local school district emphasizes working collaboratively with parents and the community at large in the development of activities, programs and educational opportunities to ensure that all students have an opportunity to receive a quality education. This suggests that all students should be provided with opportunities and support that will enable them to receive the most benefit from their educational experiences and achieve their highest potential.

The local school district's vision statement emphasizes collaboration among school faculty and staff, parents, and community agencies that will build a school district which encourages students to achieve educational excellence. This suggests that responsibility for the education of students extends beyond the teaching and learning experiences provided at school.

The setting in which this intervention took place was the middle school section of the local school district's gifted education program. The local gifted education program is referred to as Quest. The middle school Quest program is housed at a center based on the campus of one of the middle schools. The pre-intervention middle school section of the Quest program included 36 students in grades five, six, seven, and eight from the county's two middle schools and three elementary schools (Director of the local Gifted Education Program, personal communication, April 1, 2001). Fifth grade students were included in the middle school section of the Quest program due to class scheduling difficulties at their school. The only day the fifth graders could come to the

Quest Center, without missing required activities at their school, was the day that middle school students were scheduled for Quest class. The Quest program is set up on a pull-out delivery model. In this model, students enrolled in the program are bused from their schools to the designated Quest Center one day per week for the entire school day for delivery of services. Of the 36 students enrolled in the program at pre-intervention, 7 were African American and 29 were Caucasian (Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, personal communication, April 1, 2001).

The Quest program is currently served by a lead teacher and three support teachers, all of whom are certified by the state to teach students identified as gifted and talented according to the State Board of Education criteria. Two of these teachers hold Master's degrees. The four teachers have 45 years combined experience teaching in the field of gifted education (Assistant School Superintendent, personal communication, May 30, 2001). Three of the teachers provide instruction and guidance to the middle school Quest students at the Quest Center on a rotating basis.

The school district in which this intervention occurred is unique, given its ability to overcome adversities associated with high poverty rates. All of the schools within the public school district emphasize high educational standards, provide nutritional breakfast and lunch programs, provide access to computers and the internet, utilize distance learning via satellite dish, offer regular staff development, encourage teachers to pursue higher educational degrees, and consistently recruit and maintain qualified educators across a spectrum in age and experience levels (Assistant School Superintendent, personal communication, May 30, 2001). Although approximately 21 percent of the student population receives some type of special education services, less than two percent receive or participate in gifted education programs. Further, the

district is in the process of restructuring its gifted education program so that these students are provided the resources and opportunities needed to help them realize their potential and achieve their goals.

Writer's Role

The writer is employed as a school psychologist in the local school district. His responsibilities include providing a full-range of psychological services to all students including those with learning and behavioral deficits as well as those who evidence high levels of cognitive and academic ability. The writer completes psychological (psychoeducational) evaluations of students referred due to learning and/or behavioral problems as well as of students referred for participation in the local gifted education program. Other responsibilities include consulting with parents, teachers, faculty, and staff; attending eligibility and educational placement meetings; providing in-service and teacher training when requested; and crisis intervention. Further, the writer provides counseling to students, on a limited basis, when deemed appropriate. Referrals to outside agencies are made on an as-needed basis. The writer holds an Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree in School Psychology and has 16 years experience as a school psychologist. He is certified at the state and national level. Prior to becoming a school psychologist, the writer worked as a special education teacher for three and one-half years serving students with mild intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disorders in both a resource and self-contained setting.

In his role as a school psychologist, the writer has been involved with the local gifted education program during the past 16 years largely in the capacity of completing needed cognitive and achievement assessments to assist with determining eligibility for services. Additionally, he has consulted with teachers in the gifted program regarding

behavioral and academic issues of students in the program. Further, the writer has provided short-term counseling to approximately two dozen gifted students with academic, behavioral, and emotional difficulties. Typical issues have included behavioral difficulties, peer conflicts, and problems with underachievement. Given his training in school psychology and education and practice in the school setting with a range of students, the writer was uniquely qualified to identify existing problems and implement successful interventions with this population. The writer's current responsibilities, which include providing consultative services, completing assessments, and recommending interventions, provided him opportunities to promote positive change among this population.

The writer assumed full responsibility for assuring that all aspects of the intervention were planned and implemented. He also utilized leadership skills to ensure that the program was implemented as planned. The writer had no administrative power or authority in the work-setting hierarchy over the gifted education program in his role as a school psychologist. Therefore, he relied upon his leadership skills to gain support for his planned intervention. Specific leadership skills that were utilized for the purposes of this intervention included encouraging group participation (Yukl, 1981); sharing his vision for improving Quest students' participation and achievement (Senge, 1990); and motivating students, parents, and teachers to bring about the desired improvement (Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1995). Yukl suggested that a leadership model encouraging participation by all team members is more likely to be successful, improve decision making, and increase levels of acceptance and participation by stakeholders. In this case, the stake-holders included parents, school personnel, and students. The writer solicited and received the cooperation and enthusiastic support of the local

Director of Gifted Education, Assistant School Superintendent for Instruction, School Superintendent, Director of Services for Exceptional Students, all four teachers in the Quest program, and the principals at both of the middle and elementary schools which have students participating in the middle school section of the Quest program. The writer developed a promising intervention and was able to get others to share his enthusiasm for his intervention plan. The writer continued utilizing his leadership skills to solicit two parent volunteers to serve as facilitators in the parent support groups; gain parent approval of, cooperation with, and participation in the parent support group; and encourage the students to "buy into" the student support group. The writer served as group leader for each session of the parent support group, teacher support group, and student support group. A combination of leadership skills that the writer learned in his Leadership I coursework, as well as those developed during the writer's years of professional experience in the public school setting with parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and outside agencies, were utilized.

Chapter 2: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was that gifted middle school students were not actively participating in Quest activities and were not achieving academically.

Problem Description

Academic underachievement and problems with a lack of participation among students identified as gifted have been documented in the literature (Ross, 1998; Delisle, 1992, chap. 7; Strang, 1960, chap. 6; Rimm, 1997). For the purpose of this applied dissertation, underachievement and lack of participation refer to gifted students not achieving at expected levels; not completing in-class assignments; not completing homework assignments; and losing credit on special projects because of not completing them in a timely manner. Positive and negative effects of social-emotional factors on academic achievement among gifted students have been well documented (Hollingworth, 1942; Strang, chap. 6, Silverman, 1997a). Factors such as a lack of motivation (McNabb, 1997), inadequately developed self-discipline (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1994, pp. 29-30, 88, 103-104), and home and school social-emotional support systems (Silverman, 1997b; Rimm) are only a few of the social-emotional factors which may negatively impact school participation and academic achievement among gifted students. Further, students including those who are gifted, experience significant changes and issues during transition periods such as moving from elementary school to middle school, which may impact many facets of their lives, including school performance (Santrock, 2001, chap. 7). Delisle indicated that transition periods can be made more successful if students are provided with guidance

and support.

Students in the Quest program in the writer's local school district exhibited inadequate participation and poor academic achievement. A majority of the students in the middle section of the Quest program were not completing in-class work or homework, were losing credit on special projects due to not completing them on time, and were not returning parent communication information as instructed. Further, parents rarely attended Quest meetings or programs. Teachers of the Quest program had been unsuccessful in remedying these underachievement and participation issues. During the past several years, significant numbers of Quest students have been placed on academic probation and dismissed from the program due to academic underachievement. Others have withdrawn from the program due to a lack of parent encouragement and support. These dismissals and withdrawals from the Quest program for academic underachievement and limited participation were not attributable to a lack of ability according to norm-referenced school-wide testing results (Director of the local Gifted Education Program, personal communication, April 10, 2001).

No specific programs or interventions designed to correct the problem in the writer's local school district existed. It was anticipated that the writer's applied dissertation intervention would successfully address the problem.

Problem Documentation

The writer utilized a variety of methods to document the existence of the identified problem. First, the writer interviewed the Quest program's lead teacher on April 10, 2001 (see Appendix A) to determine the presence of any significant problems within the program. It was indicated that Quest students exhibited low levels of self-discipline and motivation within the independent work environment of the Quest

classroom, were disorganized, and wasted excessive amounts of class time needed to complete assignments (Quest Lead Teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). It was further indicated that a majority of Quest students received limited support at home and that parents did not respond to newsletters or requests for meetings at school (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001).

Secondly, the writer examined students' grades from Quest class. It was discovered that only 23 of 36 middle school students in the Quest class were achieving at expected levels in Quest class. However, these grades could be misleading without further investigation. Interview information (Quest Lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001) indicated that pre-intervention grades reflected modifications made in Quest class expectations and requirements in order to avoid placing excessive numbers of students on academic probation. These modifications resulted in higher grades than would have been received without the modifications. The modifications were necessary because students were not completing in-class assignments or homework, and were losing credit for not completing special projects within assigned time limits. Quest students must maintain a "B" average in the Quest class to remain in the program.

Thirdly, the writer gathered evidence of the problem by asking the Quest lead teacher to complete the Learning subscale of the Behavior Disorders Identification Scale, School Version Rating Form-Second Edition (BDIS-2) (McCarney & Arthaud, 2000) for each student. The BDIS-2 is a Likert-type standardized rating scale which measures learning and behavior problems in children (McCarney & Arthaud). The Learning subscale only was used, as it specifically targeted learning behaviors such as not completing assigned work (McCarney & Arthaud). The BDIS-2 was normed on

coping and/or adjustment skills; limited or inadequate social-emotional support systems within the home; and limited understanding and/or cooperation between regular education teachers and gifted education teachers regarding expectations for students. Each of these is discussed in this section and tied to the professional literature. Other possible causes such as learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders were eliminated by interview information (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). Further, none of the subjects in the targeted group evidenced any deficits on standardized national achievement tests (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). It was also determined through teacher report that other extraneous possible causes, such as crisis or other less traumatic, but major, family changes, did not exist among any of the families of students in the target group (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001).

The first major cause of the problem was Quest students' inadequate self-discipline. Self-discipline is an essential characteristic needed in order to work independently, plan ahead, delay gratification, and complete given tasks within a designated time period. Problems related to academic underachievement and self-discipline among gifted students have been documented in the literature (Webb, et. al., 1994, pp. 29-30, 88, 103-104; Delisle, 1992, chaps. 5, 6, 7; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996). Data collected from the BDIS-2 and teacher interview information (see Appendix A) showed problems with self-discipline needed to participate in Quest class and complete assigned tasks at expected levels.

The second major cause of the problem was related to adjustment issues associated with: transition periods such as moving from elementary to middle school (Santrock, 2001, chap. 7); differences in the rates and levels of physical, social-

2, 478 students from a cross-section of the United States and has favorable validity and reliability (McCarney & Arthaud).

The writer provided a one hour training session for the Quest lead teacher to teach her the correct procedures for completing the BDIS-2 in its modified form. To complete the BDIS-2, the Quest lead teacher read descriptions of student behaviors and assigned a number to rate the severity or frequency of that behavior. A modification was needed in the rating system of the BDIS-2 in order to be meaningful in rating Quest students' performance, given that the Quest class meets only once each week for a total of 4 times per month. Teachers rated students' performance on described behaviors using the following scale: 0= not observed; 1 = one time per month; 2 = two times per month; 3 = three times per month, and 4 = four times per month. A lower rating on the BDIS-2, at post-intervention, would indicate an improvement in the completion of in-class assignments and homework.

A review of the pre-intervention data collected with the BDIS-2 showed that only 20 of 36 gifted students were completing in-class assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities. A review of data collected with the BDIS-2 showed that only 15 of 36 gifted students were completing homework assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities.

Finally, evidence of the problem was documented by interviewing the Quest program's lead teacher. Interview information showed that only 22 of 36 Quest students were not losing credit by not completing out-of-class projects in a timely manner.

Causative Analysis

The causes of the problem were attributed to four issues related to social-emotional development: a lack of sufficient self-discipline; limited intrapersonal,

emotional, academic, emotional, and/or intellectual development (Silverman, 1997a); and characteristics which may be uniquely associated with children from low socio-economic and minority backgrounds (Slocumb & Payne, 2000; Hebert, 1998). Data collected from the BDIS-2, as well as information from Quest lead teacher interview information (see Appendix A) indicated the presence of adjustment issues. Problems related to academic underachievement and adjustment issues are readily found in the literature (Ford, 1995; Delisle, 1992, chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7; Webb et al., 1994, chap. 1). Each of these is discussed in detail in the literature review section of this applied dissertation.

The third major cause of the problem was inadequate family social-emotional support systems. Family support can be crucial to school success among students who evidence difficulties with self-discipline. Parents who are supportive and involved with the education of their children evidence that support and involvement by maintaining contact with teachers, making certain that children complete homework and special projects, and attending teacher requested meetings. Research shows that supportive parents can have a significant positive impact on the academic achievement of their children (Silverman, 1997b; Ford, 1995; Webb et al., 1994, chap. 12). Parent involvement and support can be even more crucial for gifted students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). Data collected from teacher interview information (see Appendix A) documents a lack of adequate family social-support systems among middle school Quest program students.

The fourth major cause of the problem involved limited understanding and/or cooperation between regular education teachers and gifted education teachers regarding expectations for students. Teacher expectations can have a significant impact on the performance of gifted students (Delisle, 1992, chap. 4; Webb et al., 1994, Ford, 1995;

McNabb, 1997). Gifted students in the local district's Quest program were being held accountable for the classroom work missed in the regular education classroom during the time they were pulled out for Quest class. This placed additional requirements on these students. Quest students had reported to their Quest teachers that they felt it was unfair for them to be held accountable for completing work assigned in the regular class, on the days they were pulled out for Quest class, as well as their Quest class work (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). It was indicated that there was little communication between Quest teachers and the regular classroom teachers regarding reasonable expectations and fairness in assigning work to Quest students on the days they are pulled out of the regular education classroom to attend Quest class (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001).

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of previous research suggests that underachievement among students participating in gifted education programs is a well documented problem, and that it can be positively or negatively affected by social-emotional factors. Information from a 1983 report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (cited in Rimm, 1997) shows that the problem of underachievement among this population is significant, affecting as many as 50% of students identified as "gifted." Gifted students who are identified as under-achievers demonstrate a lower level of performance on given tasks or assignments than is expected, based upon their measured ability, which is indicative of decreased participation (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Research showed that gifted students' academic achievement may be affected by a range of social-emotional issues including adjustment issues, intrapersonal issues, school-related pressures, and concerns within the family (Delisle, 1992, chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7; Ford, 1995).

Historical overview. Gifted education programs have been controversial in educational circles since their inception (Clark, 1996). Some individuals have stressed the need for gifted education programs only for students with the highest intellectual and academic potential (Winner, 2000). Some have suggested that a more efficient and practical approach would be to raise the standards for all students and develop programs that would meet the educational needs of everyone rather than focus on developing gifted education programs (Sapon-Shevin, 1996). The National Defense Education Act of 1958 (cited in Gallagher, 1997) represented the first impetus for the creation of gifted educational programs. A federal definition of who qualifies to receive gifted education services was provided in a report by Marland (Marland, 1972). Legislation which most directly impacted and yielded the most benefit to gifted education programs in the United States was the Congressional Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 and 1994 (Clark). Gifted education programs vary from state to state and district to district. Gifted education programs typically address academics, but not social-emotional issues. Social-emotional development includes a range of attitudes, feelings, emotions, and social abilities such as adjustment and coping skills, self-esteem, and self awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses which may impact gifted students in a range of life experiences including school performance (Delisle, 1992, chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7; Cross, 1997; Winner, 2000; Baker, 1996; Clark, 1997; Coleman, 1992). The gifted education program in the writer's school district emphasizes academics but does not specifically address any social-emotional factors that may impact students' performance in the program.

Researchers of giftedness and gifted education have shown interest in social-emotional issues and development in gifted students for several decades. Some have

emphasized the importance of addressing social-emotional factors among this group, while others have not. Hollingworth (1942) was one of the earliest theorists to suggest that students with high intellectual ability may evidence a need for educational programs that address social-emotional development as well as academics. Terman (1925) and Terman and Oden (1947) were some of the early theorists to suggest that adjustment or social-emotional issues were not significantly problematic for this group. Differences of opinion regarding the impact of social-emotional factors on underachievement and other behaviors of gifted students continues to be documented in the literature as well as the need for programs that address both social-emotional needs and academics (Webb et al., 1994, chap. 4; Delisle, 1992, chaps. 5, 7; Nail & Evans, 1997; Elmore & Zenus, 1994; Matthews, 1999; Clark, 1997; Moon, Kelly, & Feldhusen, 1997).

Gifted education programs typically emphasize intellectual and academic performance while ignoring the social-emotional needs of this population. This is unfortunate considering the possible impacts, positive and negative, of social-emotional factors on issues such as underachievement (Webb et al.1994; Delisle, 1992, chaps. 5, 7; Ford, 1995). All children, gifted and non-gifted, are vulnerable to interactions and experiences at home and school such as peer pressure, social interactions, parent and teacher expectations, as well as motivational issues which may positively or negatively impact school performance (McNabb, 1997; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Research suggests that the most beneficial gifted education programs include components that address both academic and social-emotional development (Elmore & Zenus, 1994; Hollingworth, 1942; Silverman, 1990).

Areas impacted by social-emotional development. Social-emotional factors may

impact many aspects of gifted children's lives. This is well documented in the literature of the past several decades. Recognizing the importance of emotional development of these children, Hollingworth (1942) wrote, "...to have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties" (p. 282). Silverman (1997a) indicated that differences exist in the rate of development of gifted children's emotions and other areas such as intelligence, which may result in their being vulnerable to certain problems that may not be experienced by non-gifted peers. Other areas that have received attention in the literature, which may be affected by social-emotional factors include social skills (Delisle, 1992, chap. 5; Caldarella & Merrell, 1997); coping skills (Swiatek, 1995; Delisle; Cross, Coleman, & Stewart, 1994; Plucker, 1998); identity development (Mahoney, 1998; Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Wilcove, 1998); interpersonal relations (Manor-Bullock, Look, & Dixon, 1995; Hollingworth, 1942; Silverman, 1990; Ford, 1995); self-concept (Tong & Yewchuk, 1996; Hoge & Renzulli, 1993; Clark, 1997, chap. 5; Ford, 1995; Williams, 1998; Cornell, Delcourt, Goldberg, & Bland, 1995); and academics (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Delisle, chap. 7; Cornell et al.). Given the volume of research findings documenting areas that can be impacted by social-emotional development, it seems reasonable that gifted education programs would include components addressing social-emotional development. However, not all researchers agree with these findings. Some researchers have suggested that the quality of giftedness indicates superior emotional and social development as well as superior intellectual ability (Terman, 1925; Garland & Zigler, 1999). School districts typically structure gifted education programs with a focus on academics, and in recent years, creativity. Little or no emphasis or consideration is typically given to social-emotional development.

Research has documented that gifted children may exhibit differing rates and levels of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social-emotional development (Silverman, 1997a; Hollingworth, 1942). This suggests, for example, that a child in seventh grade in terms of cognitive ability may be well above average expectancy, while his or her social-emotional development may be closer to the level expected for a seventh grader. Silverman contends that this difference can create problems that may impact performance in one or more of the areas. Hollingworth suggested that highly intelligent children may require specialized programs that address their emotional development in order to achieve their potential. Others continue to document the value of providing a social-emotional component to gifted education programs (Elmore & Zenus, 1994; Liu, 1999).

Social-emotional factors which may impact academics. Academic achievement and participation in educational assigned activities may be affected in positive or negative ways by a range of social-emotional factors. Successful teachers use positive feedback, as well as praise and encouragement, in effective ways to improve students' participation and academic achievement. Students who come to school upset, anxious, or frightened as a result of arguments or fights between their parents or other problems at home, as well as arguments with peers, or a range of other problems, may exhibit limited participation and poor academic performance at school.

The effects of social-emotional factors on participation and academic achievement is well documented in the professional literature. Social-emotional factors which have the potential to positively or negatively impact academic achievement include: issues associated with an awareness of one's abilities and interests compared to those of non-gifted peers (Winner, 1996, chap. 8), issues related to stress and stress

management (Webb et al., 1994, chap. 6; Baker, 1996), self-concept (Delisle, 1992, chaps. 4, 5; Ford, 1995), adjustment issues (Delisle, chap. 5; Plucker & Yecke, 1999), limited self-awareness and poor coping skills (Delisle, chaps. 4, 5, 6), insufficient levels of self-discipline (Webb et al., pp. 29-30, 83-84, 88), low levels of personal responsibility (Hogan, 1996), behavior problems (Reid & McGuire, 1995), affective issues(Neihart, 1999; Delisle, 1992), parent and teacher expectations (Ford, 1995; Webb et al., pp. 97-98, 205, 209-213, 217-218, 227-229; Strang, 1960, chap. 5; Gallagher, 1994), and social-emotional support systems within the home (Webb et al., chap. 12; Walker, 1991, chaps. 3, 4; Clark, 1997, chap. 5). Although each of these factors has the potential to impact academic participation and achievement, this section focuses on those major factors that have been identified as causes of the problem in this applied dissertation as they are supported in the professional literature.

The literature clearly supports the writer's contention that a lack of self-discipline was one of the causes of Quest students not participating in Quest activities and not achieving academically. Gifted students are vulnerable to evidencing problems with self-discipline such as failure to complete homework assignments (Webb et al., 1994, pp. 29-30, 83, 84, 88; Strang, 1960, chaps, 5, 6; Delisle, 1992, chaps. 5, 6, 7). This is a problem that is common to many gifted children and can result in decreased involvement or participation in academic tasks such as those identified in this applied dissertation (Rimm, 1997; Webb, et al.). Self-discipline involves an ability to set goals for oneself, plan ahead, work independently, and complete tasks within given time limits. Self-discipline also includes motivation (McNabb, 1997). Students with inadequate levels of self-discipline evidence difficulty with certain tasks, particularly if tasks are not perceived as interesting or important. Webb et al. suggests that gifted

students may need assistance developing their abilities to become involved with tasks that are required but not interesting to them. This is consistent with Quest teacher interview information (see Appendix A) obtained on June 10, 2001, and data from the BDIS-2 showing that Quest students were wasting time, not completing work, and earning grades that placed them at risk of being placed on academic probation. The development of self-discipline is essential not only for school related tasks but also for success in all other aspects of life. Although self-discipline was a significant cause of Quest students lack of participation and underachievement, no formal program currently existed for improving underachievement by attempting to improve self-discipline among students in the Quest program.

The literature clearly documents and supports the writer's assertion that adjustment issues were one of the causes of Quest students not participating and not achieving academically. Adjustment issues vary for students in different age groups. Issues that may be of concern for a child in third grade may have little effect on a child entering middle school. Typically, gifted students entering middle school are also approaching early adolescence. The onset of adolescence is accompanied by changes in peer relationships, bodily changes, and other issues that have the potential to significantly impact all aspects of children's lives including participation and achievement in school (Santrock, 2001, chap. 7). Students in middle school settings become less interested in school tasks and more interested in peer relationships, being accepted by the group, and dating. Few students, gifted or non-gifted, have all of the skills necessary to easily and successfully adapt to the changes that transpire at about the time a child is entering middle school (Santrock, chap. 7). Problems which may arise are conflicts with meeting teacher expectations and finding one's place in a new

and confusing setting, as well as coping with the various changes that are occurring. Adjustment issues may be associated with a child's personality characteristics such as anxiety, immaturity, and low self-esteem, or internal factors such as fear of failing and negativity (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Some gifted students may be able to cope with certain types of adjustment issues better than others. For example, a student confronted with the possibility of a group presentation may experience high levels of anxiety but experience little or no anxiety when assigned an independent project that requires research and a written paper. Some students may be better able to adjust more readily to working in a less traditionally structured classroom setting than others. Some gifted students may use inappropriate social coping skills such as avoiding demonstrating their high abilities in an attempt to gain approval of peers (Manor-Bullock et. al., 1995; Swiatek, 1995). Research results were consistent with the writer's findings in the Quest program. Information gained from an interview (see Appendix A) with the Quest lead teacher on April 10, 2001 and data from the BDIS-2 showed that Quest students appeared immature, could be highly negative, were disorganized, spent considerable amounts of time socializing with peers rather than working on assigned tasks, and appeared unsure of their abilities. Elmore and Zenus (1994) found that gifted programs may increase participation and academic achievement by promoting social-emotional development as well as academics.

The literature clearly documents and supports the writer's assertion that poor family social-emotional support systems were a major cause of Quest students' not participating and not achieving academically. The family is the basic social unit for providing support, guidance, validation, and a nurturing environment (Santrock, 2001, chap. 7). The family is especially crucial in the lives of middle school students.

Santrock reports that children who grow up in families where parents are not supportive, or are neglectful, often have significant problems developing social coping skills as well as self-control or self-discipline. The writer contends that supportive families are those which show an interest in all aspects of their children's lives including friendships, school, and leisure activities, and that this involvement is critical. Rimm (1997) indicated that motivation and academic achievement may be enhanced among gifted children when parents and families take an active interest in the education of their children. Typical ways in which parents might take an interest in the education of their children is by maintaining regular contact and communication with teachers, making certain that children do their homework, visiting the school on days when these opportunities exist, and attending school activities in which their children are involved. Reis and McCoach (2000) suggested that underachievers often live with families who place little or no value upon education and who exhibit limited, if any, interest in their child's educational experiences. Information gained from an interview (see Appendix A) with the Quest lead teacher on June 10, 2001, indicated that a majority of parents of the Quest students targeted for this applied dissertation did not maintain regular contact with teachers, did not return communications mailed or sent home with students, and did not make visits to the school either when asked to do so or independently prior to intervention.

The literature clearly documents and supports the writer's assertion that limited understanding and/or cooperation between regular education teachers and gifted education teachers regarding student expectations was a cause of Quest students' not participating and not achieving academically. A prevailing misunderstanding about gifted students is that they are always and only interested in academic activities and

desire to spend most of their time on academic assignments and activities (Delisle, 1992). This misunderstanding can result in teachers assigning excessive amounts of work to these students. This is especially problematic in gifted education models where students are removed from the regular education classroom for part of the usual instruction time to receive gifted education services, but then may be held accountable for work assigned in the regular education classroom during the time that they are in the gifted education classroom. Vaughn, Feldhusen and Asher (1991) indicated that pull-out programs appear to be the model of choice by a majority of school districts, and that these programs are effective in improving achievement. However, when efforts are not made to ensure that students are not held accountable for assignments given in the regular classroom while they are in gifted education classes, these programs can be sabotaged and increase the likelihood that these students may become underachievers (Delisle, chaps. 5, 7). Information gained from an interview (see Appendix A) with the Quest lead teacher on June 10, 2001 indicated that Quest students frequently complained that they were held accountable for work in their regular classroom while they were attending Quest class. It was reported by the Quest teacher that many Quest students reported, when they dropped out of the Quest program, that they did so because they were held accountable for work that was too easy for them and was assigned in the regular classroom during the time they were attending Quest class. Rimm (1997) indicated that unchallenging work increases the likelihood for motivational problems and underachievement. Reis and McCoach (2000) indicated that increases in participation and academic achievement may be encouraged by changing or adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students. It was the writer's contention that teachers should strive for cooperation and understanding in setting expectations for

gifted students to decrease the chances of their not participating or achieving academically.

Other social-emotional factors which may affect participation and academic achievement appear to be specific to certain subgroups. For example, Kerr (1997) and Plucker (1998) suggested that certain social-emotional issues may be of significance to females but not to males. Knowledge of this information could be valuable to teachers in the planning of interventions to account for the special needs of these students. Some researchers have focused on social-emotional factors that appear to be specific to African American students (Cornell et al., 1995; Ford, 1995; Plucker, 1998). Slocumb & Payne (2000) indicate that gifted students from low socio-economic groups experience social-emotional factors that are significantly different from other gifted students and which require different consideration in educational planning. Other researchers have found that gifted students in rural areas experience different social-emotional factors than those living in urban areas (Cross & Dixon, 1998). Other subgroups with social-emotional factors which appear specific to the group include: students with learning disabilities (Vespi & Yewchuck, 1992; Coleman, 1992), students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Leroux & Levitt-Perlman, 2000), students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (Reid & McGuire, 1995; Neihart, 1999), students with autistic characteristics (Cash, 1999), students with nontraditional areas of giftedness such as music or art (Olenchak, 1999), and students with identity issues (Peterson & Rischar, 2000). A knowledge of these factors can be crucial in the program planning to meet the needs of these gifted students. Of these subgroups, the one most similar to the writer's applied dissertation intervention target population was students from low socio-economic areas.

The writer's school district is located in a rural area that is characterized by high levels of poverty. The effects of poverty on educational outcomes is well documented in the literature. Payne (1998) indicates that students living in poverty tend to experience little or no educational support within the home, as education is typically not valued. This can have significant negative impact on participation and academic achievement. Gifted students living in areas with high levels of poverty require special considerations in order to help these students maximize their potential (Slocumb & Payne, 2000). Providing educational services to gifted students in low socio-economic areas may be more difficult when the area is also a rural one due to a range of factors that are difficult to overcome (Cross & Dixon, 1998). The effects of social problems such as single parent households, alcohol and drug abuse, and family violence can have severe negative impact on students' academic performance (Gallagher, 1994). Money and other resources are problematic for a majority of school districts in low socio-economic areas. In rural areas this may be an even more serious problem (Cross & Dixon). While all rural schools may not lack sufficient resources or be located in areas with high concentrations of poverty, the writer's school district met both of these conditions. These conditions compounded or enhanced the causes of the problem identified in this applied dissertation and must be considered in the development and implementation of appropriate interventions.

Gifted education programs. Most gifted education programs emphasize academics with little or no emphasis on social-emotional factors. Given the significant impact that social-emotional factors have on participation and academic achievement, this seems unreasonable and inefficient. Research documents a need for gifted education programs that place dual emphasis on academics and social-emotional

development (Elmore & Zenus, 1994). Some researchers (Terman, 1925) have suggested that giftedness may imply high abilities in all areas including social-emotional development, rather than just intellectual ability, which would negate a need for emphasizing social-emotional development. However, not all researchers agree. In her classic research, Leta Hollingworth (1942) advocated for a social-emotional component in gifted education programs in order to help improve student participation and academic achievement as well as bolster positive social-emotional development. Strang (1960) and Silverman (1997b) support Hollingworth's position. Changes are needed in the way gifted education programs are designed and delivered so that gifted students are provided educational opportunities that are beneficial to them in achieving their potential.

Summary. A review of the literature documents that underachievement and a lack of participation among gifted students exists and that it can be impacted by social-emotional factors. Researchers disagree on the impact of social-emotional factors on academic achievement (Terman, 1925; Hollingworth, 1942; Delisle, 1992, chap. 4). This complex problem is not easily solved. However, early and current research builds a convincing case about the positive and negative impact of social-emotional factors on all aspects of children's lives including emotional development (Silverman, 1997a; Hollingworth), interpersonal relations (Ford, 1995), and coping skills (Delisle, chaps. 4, 5, 6), as well as achievement and school participation (Hollingworth; Delisle). Some of the social-emotional factors which have been shown to impact participation and academic achievement are: inadequate levels of self-discipline (Webb et al., 1994, pp. 29-30, 83-84, 88); adjustment issues (Plucker & Yecke, 1999; Delisle, chap. 5); family social-support systems (Santrock, 2001; Reis & McCoach); periods or stages of

transition such as moving from elementary school to middle school (Santrock); and limited understanding and/or cooperation between regular education teachers and gifted education teachers with respect to teacher expectations (Delisle, chaps. 4, 5, 7). Some social-emotional factors that have the potential of impacting student achievement are specific to certain groups. Of significance to the writer's work setting, it was important to consider that students from low socio-economic areas may experience unique social-emotional factors which could negatively impact their academic achievement and school performance (Payne, 1998). Gifted education programs typically address academic needs with virtually no emphasis on addressing social-emotional needs. Elmore and Zenus (1994) stressed the importance of gifted education programs designed to address both. Research supported and documented the identified problem and its causal factors, as described by the writer in his local school district.

Chapter 3: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals

The goal for this applied dissertation was that gifted middle school students would actively participate in Quest activities and achieve academically.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this applied dissertation:

1. Post-intervention Quest class grades will show that 25 of 36 gifted students achieve at expected levels.

2. Data from post-intervention teacher completed Behavior Disorders Identification Scale-Second Edition, School Version (BDIS-2) will show that 25 of 36 gifted students complete in-class assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80 % accuracy.

3. Data from post-intervention teacher completed BDIS-2 will show that 25 of 36 gifted students complete homework assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80 % accuracy.

4. Post-intervention teacher interview records will show that 25 of 36 gifted students do not lose credit because of not completing Quest class special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) on time.

Measurement of Outcomes

Outcome 1. Outcome 1 was measured by examining the middle school students' Quest class post-intervention grades to determine how many students were achieving at expected levels. This showed whether or not outcome 1 was met. Then, a comparison of pre-intervention and post-intervention grades, using a paired samples t-test (see Ravid, 1994), was done to determine whether the group showed significant

improvement at the p<05. level. Then, comparisons of pre-intervention and post-intervention grades, using paired samples t-tests (see Ravid), were completed by gender and grade level to determine whether significant improvement was shown at the p<.05 level. The writer chose to use Quest class grades to measure outcome 1 because grades are the standard measure of classroom achievement in schools.

Outcome 2. Outcome 2 was measured by a comparison of middle school Quest students' post-intervention scores on item 1 of the Learning scale of the BDIS-2 to determine how many students were completing in-class assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80% accuracy. This showed whether or not outcome 2 was met. Then, a comparison of pre-intervention and post-intervention BDIS-2 scores on item 1, using a paired samples t-test (see Ravid, 1994), was completed to determine whether the group showed significant improvement at the p<.05 level. Then, comparisons of pre-intervention and post-intervention BDIS-2 scores on item 1, using paired samples t-tests (see Ravid), were completed by gender and grade level to determine whether significant improvement was shown at the p<.05 level. The writer chose to utilize the BDIS-2 to measure outcome 2 because he wanted a standardized instrument, targeting the identified behavior, which could be easily completed by teachers.

Outcome 3. Outcome 3 was measured by examining the middle school students' BDIS-2 post-intervention scores on item 2 of the Learning scale of the BDIS-2 to determine how many students were completing homework assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80% accuracy. This showed whether or not outcome 3 was met. Then, a comparison of pre-intervention and post-intervention BDIS-2 scores on item 2, using a paired samples t-test (see Ravid, 1994), was done to determine whether the group showed significant improvement at the p<.05 level. Then, comparisons of

pre-intervention and post-intervention BDIS-2 scores on item 2, using paired samples t-tests (see Ravid), were completed by gender and grade level to determine whether significant improvement was shown at the $p<.05$ level. The writer chose to utilize the BDIS-2 to measure outcome 3 because he wanted a standardized instrument, targeting the identified behavior, which could be easily completed by teachers.

Outcome 4. Outcome 4 was measured by examination of post-intervention teacher interview (see Appendix A) responses to determine how many gifted students lost credit because of not completing Quest class special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) on time. This showed whether or not outcome 4 was met. The writer chose to utilize this measure because it would yield the most accurate information about students' rate of completion of Quest class special projects as well as the number of students, from pre-intervention to post-intervention, who lost credit due to submitting special projects late.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

The writer maintained a weekly journal throughout the implementation of the applied dissertation intervention. Entries were made on a more frequent basis as needed. The journal served as an aid in documenting the intervention calendar plan as well as in recording positive and negative aspects of the intervention. The journal also served the purpose of recording unexpected events which occurred during the intervention implementation. The writer included observations, questions, commentaries, and any other activities that were unanticipated. Some information from journal entries has been incorporated into appropriate paragraphs in this applied dissertation.

Chapter 4: Solution Strategies

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem solved in this applied dissertation was that gifted middle school students were not actively participating in Quest activities and were not achieving academically. Students earned grades that were below expectancy based on their ability, did not complete in-class work or homework, and lost credit on out-of-class projects that were not completed within given time limits. The problem was due to the negative impact of social-emotional factors identified by the writer rather than to any academic weaknesses, learning disability, or emotional/behavioral disability (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). Research documented the negative effects of social-emotional factors on achievement and school participation (Hollingworth, 1942; Delisle, 1992, chap. 4; Rimm, 1997). Specific social-emotional factors that appeared to create the identified problem in this applied dissertation, which was supported by the literature, included: inadequate levels of self-discipline required to complete academic tasks such as homework (Webb et al., 1994, pp. 29-30, 83-84, 88; Rimm); adjustment issues (Delisle, chap. 5; Plucker & Yecke, 1999); a lack of family social-emotional support systems (Santrock, 2001, chap. 5; Reis & McCoach, 2000); and limited understanding and/or cooperation between regular education teachers and gifted education teachers regarding expectations placed upon these students (Ford, 1995; Strang, 1960, chap. 5; Gallagher, 1994; Webb et al., pp. 97-98, 205, 209-213, 217-218, 227-229). An extensive review of the literature was conducted utilizing resources that included the following databases: ERIC, Wilson Education Full Text (WilsonWeb), ProQuest Research Library (ProQuest Direct), Social Sciences Full Text, Digital Dissertations, PsychARTICLES (First Search), and PsychINFO 1887 (First

Search). Key search terms and subjects included: social-emotional development, gifted students, gifted education programs, underachievement, program planning, gifted peer relations, affective development, adjustment issues, coping skills, social skills, gifted education theory, special education, counseling, gifted characteristics, interpersonal skills, middle grades, and interventions. Refinement of the problem and descriptors yielded an extensive amount of insightful information. The material was reviewed and the most promising recommendations incorporated into the intervention and implementation plan.

The literature documents a range of factors or general considerations considered important for the purposes of planning gifted education programs or interventions. Some factors address issues regarding age or grade. For example, Rogers and Silverman (1998) emphasized the importance of identifying gifted students early in order to begin appropriate educational planning. This appears to be a valid proposition, given that many school districts, including the writer's, offer services to students with certain types of cognitive or developmental delays while similar services for gifted students are not offered. Sabatini (1998) stressed the importance of identifying appropriate assessment methods and procedures. Kulik and Kulik (1997) suggests that ability grouping may positively impact gifted students' educational experiences. The literature also documents a range of recommendations regarding the types of issues which program planners should consider when developing gifted education programs. Although there appears to be disagreement among researchers on the degree of prominence which each factor should be given, many researchers recommend developing gifted education programs that address social-emotional needs as well as cognitive needs (Hollingworth, 1942; Strang, 1960; Delisle, 1992, chap. 4). Among the

social-emotional factors which should be addressed due to their potential impact on gifted student participation and academic achievement are: self-perceptions, teacher perceptions and expectations, peer perceptions, (Cross et al., 1994; Ford, 1995), and parent perceptions and expectations (Delisle, 1992, chap. 4, 5, 7; Galbraith & Delisle, 1996, pp. 228-232). Gifted education programs typically address cognitive needs of students and have an assessment component as a part of the identification process. Few gifted programs address the other issues considered to be important in the development of gifted education programs. In order to address the problem identified in this applied dissertation, from a preventive standpoint, and to eliminate the currently identified problem from occurring in the future, new programs will need to be developed incorporating each of these components. This will involve significant change in the thinking and practices of educators.

The literature documents a range of potential solution strategies, approaches, or interventions that have been utilized to address the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students. Schatz (2000) and Freeman (1999) advocate the benefits of providing opportunities for gifted students to spend time with an appropriate adult who can serve as a mentor to the student. Webb and DeVries (1998) and Silverman (1997b) emphasize the benefit of parent support groups to help parents of gifted children. A number of researchers emphasize the need for the provision of counseling services or support groups for gifted students (Ford, 1995; Moon et al., 1997; Reid & McGuire, 1995; Garland & Zigler, 1999; Matthews, 1999). These support groups can address a range of issues and concerns specific to gifted students. Reid and McGuire emphasize the importance of providing support and training opportunities for teachers working with gifted students. This can be especially crucial, given that teachers may have

limited understanding of characteristics of students identified as gifted or what to expect of these students academically. Some researchers have suggested that participation in special programs that are offered outside the public school setting, such as internships or mentoring relationships, could be beneficial to gifted students (Olszewski-Kubilus & Limburg-Weber, 1999). Character education (Hogan, 1996), training in coping strategies (Ford, 1995), and video-therapy (Milne & Reis, 2000) have been considered effective. Other options that have been proposed include home schooling (Clark, 1997) and private school placement (Kolloff, 1997). Some school systems have incorporated a specialized content-specific curriculum to address academic needs of gifted students (Tyler-Wood, Mortenson, & Putney, 2000). Some parents of gifted students have sought placement in private schools for their gifted children (Kolloff). The literature is replete with variations and combinations of these and other intervention approaches.

In order to begin the intervention planning, each of these strategies or components was reviewed for possible effectiveness and feasibility in the writer's setting. It was the desire of the writer to choose interventions that would incorporate multiple approaches in a single approach or program if possible. To help with this decision making process, the writer contacted other school psychologists in his area to determine whether any of the programs that he might select were currently being utilized as well as the effectiveness of those programs. The writer also discussed his ideas for the applied intervention with three presenters at a national gifted education conference.

Creating change in gifted education. Consideration was also given to how to bring about the desired change in the writer's work setting. Change in educational

circles tends to be very slow. Programs that are in place are not likely to be changed quickly or easily without some understanding of how the process works and how to convince decision makers to consider proposed changes. In order to understand the methods and process of creating change, the change process was also researched in the literature. A review of the results indicated that there are general factors regarding change which must be considered in planning change (Nunnery, 1998), internal and external factors which can influence the change process (Nunnery), and factors which must be considered in the development of specialized education programs designed to meet the needs of students in school settings (Delisle, chaps. 6, 7, 9; Silverman, 1990; Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992). Recommendations discussed in these sources were utilized in the planning and implementation of this applied dissertation intervention.

Description of Selected Solutions

Information from the literature search in the previously listed databases indicated that the literature was replete with suggestions for addressing the causes and improving the problem for the long-term. For the purposes of this applied dissertation, more immediate interventions were needed to address the problem as it exists. For the purposes of choosing among the most promising interventions recommended in the literature to address the problem, consideration was given to the unique characteristics of the writer's work setting, implementation feasibility, resources, and support for the intervention. The three most promising recommendations selected for this intervention were: 1) Student counseling (Ford, 1995; Moon et al., 1997; Reid & McGuire, 1995; Garland & Zigler, 1999; Milne & Reis, 2000; Cross, 1997; Matthews, 1999; Delisle, 1992, chap. 6), 2) Parent support groups (Webb & DeVries, 1998; Silverman, 1997b; Webb et al., 1994), and 3) Teacher training (Reid & McGuire, 1995; Ford, 1995; Webb

et al., 1994). The writer decided that, for simplicity and consistency of terminology, he would refer to the student counseling component as a student support group and the teacher training component as a teacher support group. The parent support group would continue to be referred to as a parent support group. Each of these proposed interventions is discussed in this section.

Student support groups. Research documents the positive benefits of providing support groups (counseling) for gifted students to address a range of issues (Neihart, 1999; Cross, 1997; Moon et al., 1997; Ford, 1995; Mahoney, 1998). Cross and Ford emphasize the importance of incorporating counseling for gifted students in the school setting in order to help these students improve coping skills and self-awareness. Other issues which may be effectively addressed in student support groups include: self-discipline (Webb et al., 1994, pp. 29-30, 83-84, 88); interpersonal relationships (Webb et al., chap. 14; Galbraith & Delisle, 1996, pp. 205-245); and parent relationships (Webb et al., chap. 12). School guidance counselors in the writer's school district did not routinely provide support groups that specifically addressed the needs of gifted students. Further, the writer was not providing regular support groups for any students due to the district's emphasis on student assessment for special education placement. The lack of counseling services further supported the need for this aspect of the writer's planned intervention.

For the purposes of this applied dissertation intervention student support group, the primary text was: *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook* (Galbraith & Delisle, 1996). This book was selected because of the coverage given to many of the issues of concern to gifted students which have been discussed previously. Additional materials were utilized from: *Managing the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted:*

A Teacher's Survival Guide (Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985); *Giftedness from a Multiple Intelligences Perspective* (Ramos-Ford & Gardner, 1997); and *Social Skills Training* (LeCroy, 1994).

During the implementation phase of the applied dissertation, a total 16 student support sessions were held during the course of the school year. Each of the sessions was 50-minutes in length. The sessions were held during the school day in the Quest Center classroom. Materials and supplies needed were provided to the students by the writer. The sessions were designed to address participation and academic issues affected by social-emotional issues and factors identified by the writer and documented in the literature. Sessions combined discussion, lecture, and activities. Milne and Reis (2000) found that video-therapy can be highly effective as a counseling method, particularly with students who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and students who have poor reading skills. The writer considered incorporating video-therapy into his intervention but did not do so due to a lack of materials appropriate for use with the targeted age group and session topics. Other materials and activities were used as needed or deemed appropriate during the course of the intervention implementation and properly cited. Detailed weekly descriptions of the group sessions are discussed in the report of action taken section. The content of each session was designed to focus on social-emotional issues that have been identified as causing the problem addressed in this applied dissertation. This component of the intervention addressed improving self-discipline and self-awareness.

Parent support groups. Research documents the positive benefits and the need of providing support groups for the parents of gifted students (Moon et al., 1997; Strang, 1960; Webb, 1994). Issues which may be effectively addressed in parent

support groups include: academics, social skills, and coping strategies (Cross, 1997). Other issues might include gifted characteristics, motivation, peer relations, and discipline (Webb & DeVries, 1998).

The parent support group was based largely upon the recommended format from: *Training Manual, Gifted Parent Groups: The SENG Model* (Webb & DeVries, 1998). The primary text for use by parents in the group was: *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers* (Webb et al., 1994). Materials were also utilized from: *Managing the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted: A Teacher's Survival Guide* (Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985); and *Affective Education: Self-Concept and the Gifted* (Katz, 1997). Other texts and materials incorporated into the parent support group have been properly cited by the writer in paragraphs describing their use.

During the implementation phase, a total of eight monthly 1-hour sessions were held. It was anticipated that sessions could extend beyond the 1-hour time allotted. However, the sessions were advertised as 1-hour to encourage attendance by parents unable or unwilling to attend for a longer time period. The sessions were held after school to enable parents with jobs to attend. The format included discussion time, instruction time, activities, and a guest speaker when appropriate. Other materials and activities were added as needed or deemed appropriate during the course of the intervention implementation. Detailed weekly descriptions of the sessions appear in the report of action taken section. The content of the sessions was designed to focus on the social-emotional issues that were identified as causing the problem addressed in this applied dissertation. This intervention addressed improving parental social-emotional support systems for gifted students.

In order to improve attendance rates, the writer provided refreshments at each meeting. The meetings were scheduled for 7:00 p.m. in order to allow ample time for working parents to make arrangements to attend. Efforts were made to help parents coordinate transportation. Each month, a drawing for a prize was held at the end of the session. All prizes were provided by the writer. In addition to weekly prizes, a drawing for a bonus prize was held at the conclusion of the final session. For the purposes of that drawing, each parent attending monthly sessions was entitled to register for the bonus prize each time they attended a meeting. Thus, each parent had a total of eight chances to win the bonus prize. The bonus prize was a DVD player and was announced at the first parent group meeting.

Teacher support groups. The focus of teacher support groups was to help improve understanding and cooperation among regular education and gifted education teachers for the benefit of gifted students. Research documents the positive benefits of and need for the provision of support groups for teachers of gifted students (Reid & McGuire, 1995; Ford, 1995; Webb et al., 1994). Issues which can be addressed include: motivation, discipline, and peer relationships (Webb et al., 1994). Other issues addressed included: characteristics of gifted students, with an emphasis on characteristics which may be unique to the local school district; providing supportive learning environments; improving academic achievement; and enhancing social-emotional development (Webb et al.; Slocumb & Payne, 2000; Payne, 1998).

The primary text for the teacher support group was: *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers* (Webb et al., 1994). Additional materials were utilized from: *Managing the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted: A Teacher's Survival Guide* (Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985), *Affective Education: Self-*

concept and the Gifted (Katz, 1997), *Removing the Mask: Giftedness in Poverty* (Slocumb & Payne, 2000), and *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Payne,1998). Other supplemental texts, materials, and articles which were utilized with the teacher support group have been properly cited by the writer in paragraphs about the meeting describing their use.

Occasionally, texts and/or materials primarily designated for use with a specific group were modified and utilized across groups when the content was considered appropriate for the other group. For example, material in a text designated for the parent support group may have been adapted and utilized with the teacher support group. In each case, materials were cited in the appropriate place describing their use.

During the implementation phase, a total of eight weekly 1-hour sessions were held with the teachers of the Quest program. The sessions were held at the Quest Center located on the campus of one of the district's two middle schools. The format included discussions, instruction, recommendations, and audio-visual materials. An emphasis was placed on improving Quest teachers' abilities to communicate with regular education teachers who have Quest students in their classrooms. An emphasis was also placed on improving communication with teachers and parents. This component of the intervention was designed to focus on teachers' abilities to cooperate in setting Quest student expectations, which was identified as one of the causes of the problem addressed in this applied dissertation.

Report of Action Taken

The writer developed a plan to promote improvement of participation and achievement of middle school students in the local gifted program known as the Quest program. The plan was implemented for a period of 32 weeks and provided specialized

support groups for targeted students, parents, and Quest teachers. The writer served as group leader for each of the sessions of the parent, teacher, and student support groups. Two parent facilitators were utilized as assistants in each of the parent support group meetings.

Prior to the beginning of the intervention implementation with parents, teachers, and students, the writer completed all preparatory tasks. These tasks included: informing appropriate school officials of pertinent details of the intervention; gaining permission from appropriate school administrators and teachers to implement the intervention; obtaining class rolls; obtaining parent information so that information and invitations to participate in the parent support group were circulated in a timely manner; advertising the support group in appropriate sources; making contacts with teachers; securing materials needed; securing appropriate meeting facilities; securing permission from parents (Appendix B) to obtain students' grades, attendance records, discipline records, and other pertinent information; and actually obtaining these records.

The writer adhered to the current Principles for Professional Ethics (1977) of the National Association of School Psychologists and the Ethical Principles of Psychologists (1992) of the American Psychological Association for working with human subjects throughout the applied dissertation project. Further, precautions recommended by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) were taken in securing informed consent, assuring privacy and confidentiality of subjects involved, and determining the risk-benefit ratio of this applied dissertation intervention.

Preliminary activities. Prior to beginning the applied dissertation intervention, the writer completed several preliminary activities. These included meeting with the Quest lead teacher to obtain a list of all Quest students' names, addresses and telephone

numbers; telephoning each Quest household to advise of the forthcoming parent support group meeting on August 28th; confirming the dates of the Quest parent meetings; and reserving the Board of Education (BOE) conference room for the academic year with the Superintendent's secretary. The writer also reserved the auditorium at one of the middle schools near the BOE as a back-up meeting facility in case the number of parents attending exceeded the space available; reserved audio-visual equipment needed; made copies of handouts; and purchased two lunch gift certificates for the August 28th meeting which were given as door prizes. An invitation was also extended to the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, who also directed the Quest program, to attend the first parent group meeting to welcome the parents. The Director of Services for Exceptional Students was invited to attend the parent meeting. All four Quest teachers were invited to attend the first parent support meeting.

Month 1. The first meeting of the parent support group was held during the first week of the first month. The writer confirmed the meeting room reservation, made certain that there was adequate seating to accommodate all parents invited, organized all needed materials including name tags and registration slips for the door prizes, and provided name tags prior to the start of the meeting. A total of 27 parents attended the first session. During this first session, the writer introduced himself, the Director of Services for Exceptional Students, and the four teachers of the gifted education program. The writer then provided an overview of the format and topics of each of the eight sessions.

The focus of the first meeting of the parent support group was a discussion of characteristics of gifted children based on information from Webb et al., (1994, chaps. 1, 2, 3). Parents were given copies of articles by Cox (2000) and by Galloway and

Porath (1997) which described common perceptions and misperceptions of gifted children and adolescents to read as homework. A brief review and question and answer period ended the first meeting.

The writer decided to request that a summary of the material covered in each of the parent support meetings be included in the weekly local gifted education program newsletter sent home to parents. This would serve as a way of including parents not attending the sessions. The writer also attempted follow-up telephone calls to encourage participation of parents not attending the meetings.

Some of the parents brought children with them to the parent support group meeting. The writer managed this event by utilizing a smaller conference room, equipped with a TV-VCR, to show one of the school system's children's videotapes to these children while their parents met in the larger conference room. The group of children was supervised by a teenage sister of one of the children.

The first meeting of the teacher support group was held during the second week of the first month during lunch to accommodate the teachers. In the first meeting, the writer presented an overview of the format and topics to be covered during each of the eight sessions. The writer ended the session by having the teachers complete the teacher inventory from Schmitz and Galbraith (1985). The teachers appeared very receptive, enthusiastic, and excited about the group.

During the teacher support group meeting, the gifted education lead teacher explained to the writer that the middle school students were going to be divided into two groups due to the number of students involved and problems with class scheduling. The change required that grades 7 and 8 come to the Quest Center on Mondays, while grades 5 and 6 were scheduled for the Quest Center on Thursdays. The only

disadvantage of this change was that it required the writer to provide a weekly repeat session for each of the sixteen student support groups.

The first session of the student support group was held during the third week of the first month. Each of the sessions were held at the Quest Center during the first period of the school day. A total of 23 students were in grades 7 and 8. A total of 13 students were in grades 5 and 6. Students in both groups were seated in desks arranged in an oval shape so that each person had equal access and ability to participate fully in the group. During the first session, the writer introduced himself and discussed the purpose of the group; rules for talking; confidentiality; topics to be covered; and materials to be used in each of the 16 sessions. Students were asked to introduce themselves and include information about age, school grade, home school, and any thoughts about possible college or vocational goals. Students were then requested to complete Galbraith and Delisle's (1996) questionnaire for homework. The students appeared cooperative and enthusiastic.

The second session of the student support group was held during the fourth week of the first month. The focus of this session was to explore and define "giftedness" based on a discussion of information from Galbraith and Delisle (1996, pp. 7-24). The purpose of this session was to explore students' perceptions of "giftedness" and to help them gain an understanding of the importance of recognizing and appreciating different aspects of "giftedness." The writer designed an activity in which students were paired to work on developing a definition of "giftedness." After 5 minutes, the entire group reassembled and each student pair shared their definition. Major "one word" ideas and short descriptors provided by the pairs were written on the chalkboard for further discussion. Most of the ideas and descriptors generated by the

students emphasized being smart, talented, and good in school. The writer emphasized the importance of recognizing and enhancing one's giftedness throughout their life span by participating in such activities as reading, visiting museums and exhibits, watching educational television programs, traveling, and making new friends as suggested in Galbraith and Delisle. The writer then asked students to start a journal for the purpose of recording questions, observations, feelings, or concerns arising during the course of the group sessions. The journals were for students' personal benefit and were not included in support group discussions. The session was concluded with a summary of information covered.

Month 2. The second meeting of the parent support group was held during the first week of the second month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion of motivation and underachievement as they affect gifted students based on information in an article by Rimm (1997). The writer introduced the topic and then requested parents to count off from one to four for the purposes of dividing into small groups. The groups were asked to discuss problems for gifted students associated with motivation. After 5 minutes, the large group was reassembled and each small group shared their answers with the large group. Answers were listed and briefly discussed. Parents were shocked to learn that, according to Rimm, underachievement is the most significant problem among gifted students. A discussion of factors that lead to underachievement among gifted students, as well as methods of motivating gifted students based on information described in Rimm, ensued. The two parent facilitators were asked to prepare a role-play demonstration of a parent attempting to motivate a gifted student using ineffective as well as effective methods. The writer distributed copies of Ross' (1998) article related to academic underachievement for parents to read as homework.

Parents indicated that they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss common issues related to underachievement with other parents of gifted students.

The third session of the student support group was held during the second week of the second month. The focus of this session was a discussion of "intelligence." Students were asked to count off from one to three for the purpose of dividing into small groups. The small groups were then asked to develop a definition of "intelligence." After 5 minutes, the large group was reassembled and each small group shared their definition. The writer then led a discussion based on information from Galbraith and Delisle (1996, pp. 25-48). Students were asked to generate a list of individuals they considered to be intelligent and reasons for choosing these individuals. This was followed by another activity in which the small groups worked together. The activity required students to practice skills needed to interact with a teacher appropriately when that teacher presents incorrect information during class. The students were asked to develop a list of ways to respond when a teacher presents incorrect information during instruction time. After 5 minutes, the large group was reassembled and each small group shared their answers with the large group. Some students provided responses that showed maturity while others were immature. The writer discussed some practical steps that students might take in similar situations based on information contained in Galbraith and Delisle (pp. 155-156).

The second meeting of the teacher support group was held during the third week of the second month at the Quest Center. The meeting was held during lunch time as a convenience to the Quest teachers. The focus of this meeting was a discussion, led by the writer, of characteristics of gifted students from impoverished and minority backgrounds based on information found in Payne (1998, chaps. 2, 3, & 4). The

teachers indicated that they were impressed with the accuracy of Payne's observations of these children and their family dynamics. The writer encouraged teachers to share insight from their own experiences teaching gifted students in the local gifted education program. All three of the teachers indicated their frustration in attempting to work with parents who have little knowledge of giftedness and gifted education, exhibit limited participation in their children's educational experiences, and exhibit virtually no communication with them. It was revealed during the meeting that Quest teachers had not attempted to make formal home visits to attempt improving parent-school communication. The writer suggested that the teachers consider making home visits, in pairs, to the parents they had never met personally. He further suggested that the teachers utilize their weekly newsletter to encourage parents to visit the Quest Center to see what their children were actually doing in Quest class. As the meeting was concluding, the Quest teachers asked the writer to assist them in selecting a new testing instrument for use in identifying students from minority and impoverished backgrounds for participation in the Quest program.

The fourth session of the student support group was held during the fourth week of the second month. The writer briefly reviewed information discussed in the previous session and was pleased that students were able to correctly answer questions. The focus of this session was a discussion of the use of testing to measure intelligence and academic achievement and was based on information found in Galbraith and Delisle (1996, pp. 49-64). The topic was especially significant as students had recently participated in the annual system-wide standardized achievement testing. It was emphasized that different types of tests measure different types of skills and that tests can often be confusing to test-takers, even when test developers consider them to be

very clear. To illustrate, the writer had students complete an example of a practice test which contained questions that could be misleading if not read carefully. The practice test was the *Densa Quiz* (n.d.). After taking and reviewing the test in class, students were surprised how easy it was to misread a question and choose the wrong response. The writer then divided the students into smaller groups for the purposes of completing an activity in which they would develop a list of test-taking strategies they considered helpful to them. After 10 minutes, the large group was reassembled to share the tips that were generated. Students demonstrated an ability to verbalize knowledge about how to more effectively take tests.

Month 3. The third meeting of the parent support group was held during the first week of the third month. The focus of this session was a discussion of the effective use of discipline based on information in Webb et al., (1994, chap. 5). The writer led the discussion with parents participating. Parents were divided into two smaller groups to complete an activity in which they developed a definition of discipline, a goal for discipline, and two effective methods of utilizing discipline. One group was asked to develop methods for children under the age of 12 years, while the other group was asked to develop methods for children over the age of 12 years. After 10 minutes, the large group was reassembled to share their results. Parents appeared relieved to learn that many parents feel frustrated about how to use discipline effectively. The writer presented information about the effective use of discipline found in Webb et al. The two parent facilitators presented brief role-play skits illustrating effective and ineffective discipline methods. The writer distributed copies of Roberson's (1999) article describing ways to help gifted children improve their self-management and self-discipline skills to be read as homework. Based on observations of parent participation

and enthusiasm, the writer decided to attempt building 5 minutes into the meeting that would allow parents monthly opportunities to share with each other at the end of the meeting.

The fifth session of the student support group was held during the second week of the third month. The focus of this session was a discussion of motivation and factors associated with motivation based on information from an article by McNabb (1997). The topic was timely, as students had recently received report cards for the first nine-week grading period. Students were divided into small groups of four to complete an activity in which they would define motivation and consider aspects of their lives that could be negatively or positively impacted by motivation. After 5 minutes, the large group was reassembled and students were asked to share their answers. The writer was pleased with insight demonstrated by the students. Most students indicated they were surprised to discover that a major problem for many gifted students is a tendency to achieve below expected levels academically. The writer discussed reasons for underachievement among this population, as well as methods of improving motivation, as described in an article by McNabb. During the discussion that ensued, students indicated that they were not motivated to do academic work in some classes because they were not interested in the subject matter or teaching style. Some students also complained that their parents had told them that they would be grounded if they did not earn a grade of "A" in all classes. The session ended with the writer emphasizing the importance of understanding the long-term effects of underachievement on one's educational and vocational choices.

The third meeting of the teacher support group was held during the third week of the third month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion of issues related to

motivation, the use of incentives, and discipline, based on information in Webb et al. (1994, chaps. 4 & 5) and in Payne (1998, chap. 4). Teachers were encouraged to share specific issues related to motivation of interest or concern to them. The writer was pleased to learn that many Quest students were showing improvement in completing Quest activities, and some had even read ahead in the assigned novel for the semester. When the discussion concluded, the teachers indicated that they had some information about a test they were considering purchasing and wanted the writer to review before they did so. The writer indicated he would review the material and report back within the week. The writer provided teachers with a copy of an article by McNabb (1997) related to motivation to read as homework.

The sixth session of the student support group was held during the fourth week of the third month. The focus of this session was a discussion about personal organization, goal setting, and time-management based on information found in Galbraith and Webb (1996, pp. 84-95) and Webb et al. (1994, pp. 28, 72, 108, 116-117, 208). The writer emphasized the importance of setting goals for short and long periods of time. The group participated in two activities in which they practiced goal-setting and time-management skills. In the first activity, students generated lists of personal goals and divided them into those that could be done in a short period of time and those that would need a long period of time to achieve. As a part of the activity, the writer emphasized the importance of prioritizing goals and reorganizing goals as needed. In the second activity, students were asked to make a list of everything that they were required to do and everything they wanted to do for one complete day, as well as how much time each activity would take. This exercise provided students an opportunity to practice scheduling their day to determine whether they would be able to

complete all activities listed. The activity also helped illustrate that prioritizing is often necessary when there is not sufficient time to complete all activities on a list.

During this session, students indicated that they were experiencing some problems with completing some of the Quest assignments and work assigned them by regular teachers on the days they missed regular class to attend Quest class. The writer indicated that he would consult with Quest teachers and regular education teachers to help resolve the problem. During the next week, the writer used his leadership skills to discuss the problems voiced by the Quest students with regular education teachers, as well as brainstorming possible solutions about how to resolve the problems in ways that would be beneficial for students and teachers. The writer was able to resolve confusion about teacher expectations, note-taking, and academic expectations in his discussion with the teachers involved. The Quest teachers indicated that they would attempt to maintain closer communication with the regular education teachers in the future by means of telephone calls or face-to-face meetings on a more regular basis to avoid similar problems.

Month 4. The fourth meeting of the parent support group was held during the first week of the fourth month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion of stress based on information found in Webb et al. (1994, chap. 6) and depression based on information found in Webb et al. (chap. 11). In the first half of the session, the writer emphasized the importance of parents being aware of the changes in attitudes and behaviors of their children which might signify the presence of excessive amounts of stress. Parents were encouraged to share insight into how they recognized signs of stress in their children and how they helped them manage stress. The writer then discussed practical methods that parents could use to help their children learn to

effectively manage stressful events related to school, family, and personal settings as described in Webb et al. (chap. 7). The writer was pleased to discover that many parents were already keenly aware of the signs of stress within their children.

During the second half of the session, the writer led a discussion of the presence and effects of depression in gifted children as well as methods for helping them cope with, avoid, or minimize depression based on information in Webb et al. (1994, chap. 11). Some parents were surprised that children could experience depression and that it could have a negative impact on them in areas such as school performance. It was discovered that one of the parents in the group had concerns that her daughter was experiencing serious levels of depression. The writer offered to talk with her further privately after the session and to provide her with names of counselors in the area if needed. Parents appeared pleased that their children had access to a school psychologist if needed. The writer offered to make himself available after this meeting and during his school office hours to parents wanting to discuss the topic further with him.

The seventh session of the student support group was held during the second week of the fourth month. The focus of this session was a discussion of stress and depression as well as developing effective strategies to cope with associated feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. The writer led the discussion based on information presented in Galbraith and Delisle (1996, pp. 129-130), stress-related material found in Webb et al. (1994, chap. 7), and depression-related material found in Webb et al. (chap 11). During the first half of the session, a group activity was utilized to help stimulate discussion. The writer wrote the word "stress" on one side of the chalk board and the word "depression" on the other side. Students were encouraged to help generate a list of words that defined or described each of these two terms. The writer then helped

students categorize their words into attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. Students were insightful and generated a list of approximately 15 words. The writer then led a discussion of the importance of developing realistic views of oneself. He encouraged students to be aware of the positive or negative impact that internal feelings and attitudes about oneself can have on one's life (Webb et al., pp. 111-115, 220).

During the second half of the session, the writer focused the discussion on depression and how to recognize signs of depression in oneself. The writer emphasized three types of depression described in Webb et al. (1994, chap. 11). During the discussion many students revealed that they occasionally experienced feelings of stress related to schoolwork and high achievement expectations placed upon them by themselves, teachers, and parents. Many of the students also expressed a belief that all problems can be solved quickly and easily and indicated that they felt frustrated and depressed about unsolved problems. The writer explained that not all problems can be solved quickly or easily and that some problems may never be completely solved. Students were encouraged to talk with their parents, teachers, friends, minister, school counselor, or another trusted adult when they sensed the symptoms of depression within themselves. The writer explained that many problems can be alleviated by adopting and utilizing an effective problem-solving model such as the one described in Webb et al. (pp. 149-153).

The eighth session of the student support group was held during the third week of the fourth month. The focus of this session was a discussion of the importance of communication with family members, peers, teachers and others based on information from Webb et al. (1994, chap. 7). Emphasis was given to recognizing factors that positively and negatively influence one's ability to effectively communicate. Many

students indicated that communication problems contributed significantly to problems and misunderstandings at home and school related to academic expectations as well as to conflicts with peers. The session concluded with the writer utilizing three pairs of student volunteers to participate in role-play activities in which they demonstrated practical techniques of effective communication described by Webb et al., including good listening skills, recognizing and labeling one's own feelings, and being aware of the feelings of others. After the role-play activities five students indicated that this session had been especially helpful to them.

The fourth meeting of the teacher support group was held during the fourth week of the fourth month. The focus of this session was a discussion about developing strategies to provide more supportive learning environments for gifted students based on suggestions in Schmitz and Galbraith (1985, chap. 4) and Payne (1998, chaps. 5 & 6). Teachers were encouraged to consider their teaching strategies utilized at the Quest Center as well as the instructional format utilized at the Center. Special emphasis was placed on the importance of setting realistic academic expectations, setting acceptable classroom rules, and appropriate use of positive reinforcement (Schmitz & Galbraith). The importance of serving as good role models and establishing emotional resources for students from impoverished backgrounds was also emphasized (Payne). The possibility of incorporating parent volunteers in the Quest Center to help begin the process of creating positive adult role-models, other than teachers, was discussed. Teachers were receptive to the idea, but indicated that a major problem would be finding a parent who would reliably come to the Quest Center on a regular basis. The consensus of the group was that the most logical choice for a parent volunteer might be found among those attending the parent support group. It was also decided that a parent volunteer would be

sought for the next school year after teachers developed criteria and expectations for the role. The Quest teachers also were receptive to the writer's idea of selecting a regular education teacher from each of the middle schools to serve as a facilitator, during the next school year, to improve communication between regular education teachers, Quest teachers, and Quest students regarding academic expectations. The regular education facilitator would assist regular education teachers with creating more supportive educational environments for Quest students.

Month 5. The ninth session of the student support group was held during the first week of the fifth month. The focus of this session was a discussion of relationships with friends, parents, teachers, and others based on information from Galbraith and Delisle (1996, pp. 205-242). The writer led a discussion on the importance of friendship, characteristics of true friends, ways to choose friends, being a friend to others, and issues related to developing positive relationships with others. Emphasis was placed on distinguishing between friends and acquaintances, building long-term friendships, and developing appropriate relationships with parents, as described in Galbraith and Delisle. Students participated in an activity in which they generated a list of individuals they considered genuine friends based on the characteristics discussed. The writer was pleased to discover that a majority of students were aware of the importance of choosing friends for the reasons discussed. Most students were receptive to developing skills needed to improve relationships with their parents. The session concluded as the writer discussed the importance of using self-discipline to maintain an appropriate balance between school requirements, family responsibilities, and social activities.

The fifth meeting of the parent support group was held during the second week

of the fifth month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion of the importance of improving communication skills within the family unit with an emphasis on improving communication between parents and their children based on information from Webb et al. (1994, chap. 7). The writer discussed practical steps that parents can take to promote and ensure open lines of communication between themselves and their children. He emphasized the importance of making certain that children know parents are available to listen and talk with them about issues and concerns. Parent facilitators demonstrated effective and ineffective communication techniques for the group. The writer encouraged parents to think about communication patterns within their families and to consider steps that might be taken to improve communication within the family unit. Finally, the writer encouraged parents to take steps to improve communication with their children's teachers by returning papers that are sent home for signatures, telephoning teachers with any questions or concerns, and visiting the school on parent-teacher conference days.

The fifth meeting of the teacher support group was held during the third week of the fifth month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion of strategies for improving academic achievement among gifted students as described in Payne (1998, chap. 8). These strategies were considered especially practical given the socioeconomic background of the local school system. The writer asked teachers to consider implementing at least one of the strategies during the next month and reporting on the results at the next meeting.

The tenth session of the student support group was held during the fourth week of the fifth month. The focus of this group was a discussion of transition issues typically experienced by many students during the process of leaving elementary school

and entering middle school and again when leaving middle school and entering high school. Transition issues included changing academic expectations as well as social/emotional factors, as described in Santrock (2001, chap. 7). Students were encouraged to express any specific concerns and to ask questions throughout the discussion. Major issues discussed were listed on the chalkboard and ranked by students from most to least important. Recommendations that make the transition process easier were also discussed. Students appeared especially interested in having an opportunity to seek input for possible solutions to specific problems. The writer was pleased that the students appeared able to choose realistic solutions to many of the problems mentioned by them. The writer concluded by emphasizing the importance of building peer support groups and improving parent relationships as found in Galbraith and Delisle (1996, pp. 205-245).

Month 6. The sixth meeting of the parent support group was held during the first week of the sixth month. The focus of this session was a discussion of the importance of gifted students developing appropriate, meaningful interpersonal relationships based on information from Webb et al. (1994, chap. 8). The writer stressed the importance of parents encouraging their gifted children to develop friendships with gifted and non-gifted children in order to build mutually beneficial support systems. One of the parents reported that her child had no real friends outside of the other Quest students because he was viewed as being so different from other same-age peers due to his high ability. The writer encouraged other parents to share their own experiences. Some parents reported similar situations while others indicated that their children appeared to have about as many friends as others in the neighborhood. Parents were encouraged to model appropriate social interaction

patterns and to spend time talking with their children about the friendships they form. Parents were also encouraged to assist their gifted children in becoming involved in age-appropriate hobbies, sports, or other non-academic activities, such as a chess club that could provide opportunities for socialization.

The eleventh session of the student support group was held during the second week of the sixth month. The focus of this session was a discussion of intrapersonal intelligence, as described by Ramos-Ford and Gardner (1997), who wrote that intrapersonal intelligence "...includes knowledge and understanding of one's own cognitive strengths, styles, and intelligences, as well as one's feelings and range of emotions" (p. 56). Emphasis was given to students improving their abilities to identify their own intrapersonal strengths. Following a discussion of intrapersonal intelligence, the writer engaged students in three activities to practice identifying aspects of their intrapersonal intelligence. Students were given 10 minutes to complete each of the activities. The first activity required students to list and rank, from least important to most important, six personal goals. The second activity required students to list and rank, from least favorite to most favorite, five of their favorite non-school related activities. The third activity required students to write a paragraph describing how they would spend their time if given only six months to live. Following completion of the activities, the group discussed their reactions to the activities and insight gained about aspects of their own intrapersonal intelligence.

The sixth meeting of the teacher support group was held during the third week of the sixth month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion on developing the skills needed to foster social-emotional support systems for gifted students, as described in Payne (1998, chaps. 5 & 6), and Webb et al. (1994, chaps. 6 & 7). Teachers were

encouraged to discuss their perceptions of their students' peer relationships, abilities to manage stress, and their own abilities to serve as effective role-models for gifted students. Teachers were given 20 minutes to brainstorm specific strategies for enhancing their students'peer relationships and serving as effective role-models for their students. Following the activity, teachers were asked to share the results of the use of strategies for improving student achievement tried by them during the time between the previous meeting and this meeting. Teachers appeared receptive to receiving and willing to implement new ideas.

The twelfth session of the student support group was held during week four of the sixth month. The focus of this session was on developing and/or improving interpersonal skills, as presented in LeCroy (1994, pp. 131-140). The writer led a discussion of the skills needed to interact with others in socially acceptable, age-appropriate ways; engage in meaningful conversations with others; share personal information; offer assistance to others; and ask others for information or assistance when needed based on information from LeCroy. Students were then divided into small groups and given opportunities to practice the skills taught by engaging in role-play activities. Emphasis was placed on developing successful relationships. Students initially balked at the role-play activities. However, as the practice activities were begun, many students indicated that starting conversations was sometimes difficult for them. Upon completion of the activities, students indicated that the activities had been beneficial to them.

Month 7. The seventh meeting of the parent support group was held during the first week of the seventh month. The focus of this session was a discussion on assisting gifted children improve sibling relationships as described in Webb et al. (1994, chap. 9).

The writer led a discussion and answered questions. The group's volunteer facilitators used role-play to demonstrate methods of coping with issues such as comparisons, disagreements, and arguments between their children. Parents were encouraged to share personal experiences with the group. Parents indicated that this session was very helpful to them, since it was on a practical issue that occurs on a regular basis at home. They indicated that it was especially helpful to listen to other parents and to learn strategies used by them to cope with similar issues. The writer suggested that parents consider forming informal support groups with other Quest parents to discuss similar issues when they arise at home.

The thirteenth session of the student support group was held during the second week of the seventh month. The focus of this session was a discussion of improving awareness of personal feelings of self and others, learning to share feelings with others in appropriate ways, learning to avoid becoming involved with unwanted activities or situations, learning to be assertive in positive ways, and learning to be understanding of the feelings of others, based on information in LeCroy (1994, pp. 140-153). Emphasis was given to sibling and peer relations. The writer led a discussion of the material and encouraged students to ask questions. Students were divided into small groups to practice the skills learned by engaging in activities utilizing role-play.

The seventh meeting of the teacher support group was held during the third week of the seventh month. The focus of this meeting was a discussion of parent cooperation and participation in their gifted children's education based on information from Payne (1998, chap. 9), and Webb (1994, chap. 12). The writer led the discussion with teachers contributing comments and personal anecdotes. Teachers were encouraged to discuss specific areas in which parent participation and cooperation

needed improvement during the school year. They were also encouraged to prioritize areas in terms of perceived importance. The writer suggested that a good start would be to plan an "open house" for parents at the beginning and ending of each school year. Teachers began developing plans for the proposed "open house" which would be held at the beginning and ending of each school year. It was decided to involve some parents from the parent support group in the planning of the first "open house." The writer suggested that the teachers begin by hosting the first "open house" at the end of the current school year during teacher post-planning days.

The fourteenth session of the student support group was held during the fourth week of the seventh month. The focus of this session was a discussion on developing appropriate relationships with authority figures, especially parents and teachers, and making appropriate decisions and choices based on information in LeCroy (1994, pp. 153-160). The writer led the discussion with students participating. Students were encouraged to ask questions. As in the previous session, students were divided into small groups to practice the skills taught by engaging in activities utilizing role-play. It was interesting to note how animated and involved the students became in this activity. It was apparent from the content of their questions that a majority of the students had experienced some difficulties relating in age-appropriate, socially acceptable ways with teachers and other authority figures. The writer surmised that a majority of students did not recognize that interactions with teachers and other authority figures should be approached in different ways than similar interactions with siblings and peers. Most students appeared to have the ability to use appropriate skills in their role-play activities.

Month 8. The eighth meeting of the parent support group was held during the

first week of the eighth month. The focus of this final meeting was a discussion of parent-child relationships based on information from Webb et al. (1994, chap. 12) and gaining skills for effectively advocating for gifted education programs, as described in Walker (1991, chaps. 5 & 6). The writer led the discussion and parents were encouraged to make comments and ask questions. Parents were encouraged to share personal experiences regarding their children's educational needs. During the second half of the meeting, the guidance counselor from one of the local high schools was introduced and asked to discuss some general information about the gifted program at the high school level; amount of parent participation recommended; and planning for college. When the counselor completed his discussion and answered questions fielded by the parents, the writer encouraged parents to share their thoughts on how the group might be changed or improved if offered again in the future. The writer was surprised that the parents expressed an interest in continuing the group into the next school year. Parents were given copies of Winebrinner's (1999) article about educational needs and opportunities for gifted students. They were also given copies of Roselli and Irvin's (2001) article about the education of gifted students in middle school.

The eighth meeting of the teacher support group was held during the second week of the eighth month. The focus of this final meeting was a discussion of those characteristics needed to be a more effective teacher of gifted students as described in Schmitz and Galbraith (1985, chap. 3). A question and answer format was utilized in order to encourage as much teacher input as possible. Teachers were given copies of three articles for future reading including one article by Delisle (1997) on the subject of gifted adolescents, one article by Kerr (1997) on the subject of gifted girls, and one article by Johnson, Carnes, and Carr (1997) on the subject of gifted students with

disabilities. Teachers were encouraged to develop a journal during the school year in which they record feelings, insights, observations, questions, and strategies for improving student achievement in their classrooms. Teachers were asked to make suggestions or recommendations that might make a support group of this kind more effective.

The fifteenth session of the student support group was held during the third week of the eighth month. The focus of this session was a discussion on developing and improving skills needed to successfully negotiate in age-appropriate, socially acceptable ways with parents, teachers, and peers, and those skills needed to resolve interpersonal conflicts based on information in LeCroy (1994, pp. 160-164). The writer led the discussion with students participating. As in previous sessions, students were divided into small groups to practice the skills taught by engaging in activities utilizing role-play. The writer was pleased to observe that a majority of the students evidenced good emerging negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

The sixteenth session of the student support group was held during the fourth week of the eighth month. The focus of this final session was a brief review of the highlights of material covered in previous sessions during the school year. Students were encouraged to utilize the skills they had been taught to their advantage throughout their school careers. Students were also encouraged to share their thoughts about ways the group could be improved if offered again in the future.

During the week following the final week of intervention, the writer met with the Quest teachers for the purpose of gathering post-intervention data. The data was then analyzed for the purpose of reporting the results of this applied dissertation intervention.

Chapter 5: Results

Results

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was that gifted middle school students were not actively participating in Quest activities and were not achieving academically. The goal for this applied dissertation was that gifted middle school students would actively participate in Quest activities and achieve academically. The three most promising solution strategies selected for this intervention, determined by a thorough review of the literature, were: 1) Student counseling (Ford, 1995; Elmore & Zenus, 1994; Moon et al., 1997; Reid & McGuire, 1995; Garland & Zigler, 1999; Delisle, 1992, chap. 6; Milne & Reis, 2000; Cross, 1997; Matthews, 1999), 2) Parent support groups (Webb & DeVries, 1998; Silverman, 1997b; Webb et al., 1994); and 3) Teacher training (Reid & McGuire, 1995; Ford, 1995; Webb et al.). The writer decided, for simplicity and consistency of terminology, to refer to the student counseling component as a student support group and the teacher training component as a teacher support group.

Four outcomes were projected for this applied dissertation:

1. Post-intervention Quest class grades would show that 25 of 36 gifted students achieved at expected levels.

This outcome was met.

The target group was decreased by four students during the intervention period, which left 32 students in the final group. Two of the four students withdrew voluntarily from the Quest program due to poor grades and the other two were dropped from the Quest program for the same reason prior to post-intervention. Demographics of the final target group are shown in Table 1. Pre-intervention data for the final group

showed that 23 of the final 32 Quest students were achieving at expected levels when grades were the sole measurement considered. An examination of post-intervention Quest class grades showed that 28 of the final 32 gifted students achieved at expected levels and earned grades of B or higher. Intervention outcome data are shown in Table 2 . Pre-intervention grades assigned to Quest students reflected modifications to Quest class academic expectations and requirements. These modifications were needed in order to avoid having to drop excessive numbers of students from the Quest program due to academic underachievement (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). Therefore, the actual improvement in grades was greater than post-intervention numbers indicate, since students achieving at expected levels post-intervention were doing so independently with no modifications by teachers in requirements or expectations.

Table 1

Demographics of Final Target Group

Grade Level	Boys	Girls
5th	5	3
6th	9	3
7th	0	4
8th	3	5

Total Participants = 32

An analysis of the means of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention grades, using a paired samples t-test (see Ravid, 1994), was completed to determine whether the group showed significant improvement at the $p<.05$. level. The

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 9.0 (SPSS 9.0) for Windows Student Version was utilized for completing all of the statistical analyses of data for outcomes one, two and three. The mean score for the group's pre-intervention grades was 88.22. The mean score for the group's post-intervention grades was 88.50. The difference was -.28. The t-test results were t = -.238; df = 31; sig. (2-tailed) = .814. Although the outcome for class grades was achieved in terms of the number of students who would achieve at expected levels, the improvement in class grades for the group from pre-intervention to post-intervention was not significant. These results and results of the following statistical analyses of grades could be misleading due to pre-intervention classroom modifications. This is clarified in the discussion section.

Table 2

Intervention Outcomes

Outcomes	Pre-Intervention Final Group n = 32	Post-Intervention Final Group n = 32
Achieving Expected Grades	23	28
Completing In-Class Assignments	20	25
Completing Homework	15	26
Did Not Lose Credit	22	26

A further analysis of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention grades by gender, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether

significant improvement in class grades was shown for boys as a group and/or girls as a group at the $p<.05$ level. The mean for the boys' (n=17) pre-intervention grades was 85.65. The mean for the boys' post-intervention grades was 87.94. The difference was –2.29. The results of the t-test were t = -1.152; df = 16; sig. (2-tailed) = .348. The improvement in grades was not significant for boys as a group. The mean for the girls' (n=15) pre-intervention grades was 91.13. The mean for the girls' post-intervention grades was 89.13. The difference was 2.00. The results of the t-test were t = 2.262; df = 14; sig. (2-tailed) = .040. Girls, as a group, did not show significant improvement in class grades.

A further analysis of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention grades, by grade level, using a paired samples t-test was completed to determine whether significant improvement in grades was shown for different grade levels at the $p<.05$ level. The mean for fifth grade (n=8) pre-intervention grades was 90.00. The mean for fifth grade post-intervention grades was 88.50. The differences was 1.50. The results of the t-test were t = .760; df = 7; sig. (2-tailed) = .472. Fifth graders as a group did not show significant improvement in class grades. The mean for sixth grade (n=12) pre-intervention grades was 84.83. The mean for sixth grade post-intervention grades was 87.75. The difference was -3.92. The results of the t-test were t = -1.548; df = 11; sig. (2-tailed) = .150. The improvement in grades for sixth graders as a group was not significant. The mean for seventh grade (n=4) pre-intervention grades was 91.00. The mean for seventh grade post-intervention grades was 90.75. The difference was .25. The results of the t-test were t = -.293; df = 3; sig. (2-tailed) = .789. There was no significant improvement in grades for seventh graders as a group. The mean for eighth grade (n=8) pre-intervention grades was 90.13. The mean for eighth grade post-

intervention grades was 87.00. The difference was 3.13. The results of the t-test were t = 3.658; df = 7; sig. (2-tailed) = .008. There was no significant improvement in grades for eighth graders as a group.

2. Data from post-intervention teacher completed Behavior Disorders Identification Scale-Second Edition, School Version (BDIS-2) would show that 25 of 36 gifted students completed in-class assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80 % accuracy.

This outcome was met.

Pre-intervention data for the final group showed that only 20 of the final 32 gifted students were completing in-class assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80% accuracy. An examination of middle school Quest students' post-intervention scores on item 1 of the Learning scale of the BDIS-2 showed that 25 of the final 32 gifted students completed in-class assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80% accuracy. Intervention outcome data are shown in Table 2.

An analysis of the means of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention BDIS-2 scores on item 1, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether the group showed significant improvement at the $p<.05$ level. The mean for the group's pre-intervention scores on item 1 was 1.81. The mean for the group's post-intervention scores on item 1 was .88. The difference was .94. The results of the t-test were t = 3.816; df = 31; sig. (2-tailed) = .001. The group's improvement in completing in-class assignments was significant.

A further analysis of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 by gender, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether significant improvement was shown for boys and/or girls at the

p<.05 level. The mean for the boys' pre-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 2.24. The mean for the boys' post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was .94. The difference was 1.29. The results of the t-test were t = 3.325; df = 16; sig. (2-tailed) = .005. The improvement in completing in-class assignments was significant for boys as a group. The mean for the girls' pre-intervention scores on the BDIS-2 was 1.33. The mean for the girls' post-intervention scores on item one of the BDIS-2 was .80. The difference was .53. The t-test results were t = 2.256; df = 14; sig. (2-tailed) = .041. The improvement in completing in-class assignments was significant for girls as a group.

A further analysis of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 by grade level, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether significant improvement in completing in-class assignments was shown for different grade levels at the p<.05 level. The mean for fifth grade pre-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 1.88. The mean for fifth grade post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 1.13. The difference was .75. The results of the t-test were t = 1.821; df = 7; sig. (2-tailed) = .111. The improvement in completing in-class assignments was not significant for fifth graders as a group. The mean for sixth grade pre-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 2.17. The mean for sixth grade post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was.42. The difference was 1.75. The results of the t-test were t = 4.083; df =sig. (2-tailed) .002. The sixth graders, as a group, showed significant improvement in completing in-class assignments as a group. The mean for the seventh grade pre-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 1.75. The mean for the seventh grade post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was .75. The difference was 1.00.

The results of the t-test were t = 1.414; df = 3; sig. (2-tailed) = .252. The improvement in completing in-class assignments was not significant for seventh graders as a group. The mean for eighth grade pre-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 1.25. The mean for eighth grade post-intervention scores on item 1 of the BDIS-2 was 1.38. The difference was -.13. The results of the t-test were t = -.552; df = 7; sig. (2-tailed) = .598. Eighth graders, as a group, did not show significant improvement in completing in-class assignments.

3. Data from post-intervention teacher completed BDIS-2 would show that 25 of 36 gifted students completed homework assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80 % accuracy.

This outcome was met.

Pre-intervention data for the final group showed that 15 of the final 32 gifted students were completing homework assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80% accuracy. An examination of the Quest students' post-intervention scores on item 2 of the Learning Scale of the BDIS-2 showed that 26 of 32 final gifted students completed homework assignments on 3 of 4 opportunities with 80% accuracy.
Intervention outcome data are shown in Table 2.

An analysis of the means of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention BDIS-2 scores on item 2, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether the group showed significant improvement at the $p<.05$ level. The mean for the group's pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 2.16. The mean for the group's post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was .78. The difference was 1.38. The results of the t-test were t = 6.035; df = 31; sig. (2-tailed) = .000. The group's improvement in completing homework assignments was significant.

A further analysis of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 by gender, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether significant improvement in completing homework assignments was shown for boys as a group and/or girls as a group at the $p<.05$ level. The mean for boys' pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 2.52. The mean for boys' post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was .76. The difference was 1.59. The results of the t-test were $t = 4.773$; $df = 16$; sig. (2-tailed) = .000. The improvement in completing homework assignments was significant for boys as a group. The mean for the girls' pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 1.93. The mean for the girls' post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was .80. The difference was 1.13. The t-test results were $t = 3.697$; $df = 14$; sig. (2-tailed) = .002. The improvement in completing homework assignments was significant for girls as a group.

A further analysis of the final group's pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 by grade level, using a paired samples t-test, was completed to determine whether significant improvement in completing homework assignments was shown for different grade levels at the $p<.05$ level. The mean for fifth grade pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 2.10. The mean for fifth grade post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 1.13. The difference was .88. The t-test results were $t = 2.497$; $df = 7$; sig. (2-tailed) = .041. The improvement in completing homework assignments was significant for fifth graders as a group. The mean for sixth grade pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 2.67. The mean for sixth grade post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was .50. The difference was 2.17. The results of the t-test were $t = 5.613$; $df = 11$; sig. (2-tailed) = .000. The improvement in completing homework assignments was significant

for sixth graders as a group. The mean for seventh grade pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 2.00. The mean for seventh grade post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was .50. The difference was 1.50. The results of the t-test were t = 1.732; df = 3; sig. (2-tailed) = .182. The improvement in completing homework assignments was not significant for seventh graders as a group. The mean for eighth grade pre-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 1.63. The mean for eighth grade's post-intervention scores on item 2 of the BDIS-2 was 1.00. The difference was .63. The results of the t-test were t = 3.416; df = 7 sig. (2-tailed) = .001. The improvement in completing homework assignments was significant for eighth graders as a group.

4. Post-intervention teacher interview records would show that 25 of 36 gifted students did not lose credit because of not completing Quest class special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) on time.

This outcome was met.

Pre-intervention teacher interview records showed that only 22 of the final 32 gifted students did not lose credit on Quest class special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) due to not completing them on time (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). This showed that, prior to intervention, only 69 % of students in the final group were not losing credit on special projects due to submitting them late. According to the teacher, the other 10 students of the final 32 received lower grades on their special projects due to submitting them more than one week late. The Quest lead teacher indicated that the projects were not completed on time due to procrastination on the part of the students. An examination of post-intervention teacher interview records showed that 26 of the final 32 gifted students did

not lose credit because of not completing Quest class special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) on time (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, May 20, 2002). This showed that 81% of the final 32 gifted students were not losing credit on special projects due to submitting them late. Post-intervention results represent an improvement due to a decrease in the number of students who lost credit for submitting Quest class special projects late. Stated positively, this represents a marked increase in the number of Quest students submitting special projects on time. Intervention outcome data are shown in Table 2.

Discussion

The writer found his applied dissertation intervention utilizing a student support group, a parent support group, and a teacher support group effective in achieving his four identified outcomes. The format and materials utilized were well received by each of the groups. Participation levels were high in each of the groups throughout the intervention period. The success of the intervention is consistent with past and more recent research that emphasizes the value and importance of academic and social-emotional support for gifted students (Hollingworth, 1942; Ford, 1995; & Webb et al., 1994; Elmore & Zenus, 1994). The outcomes achieved by this applied dissertation intervention have potential value to other middle school gifted programs experiencing similar problems with student participation and achievement.

The writer was pleased with the results of this applied dissertation intervention, given that all of the projected outcomes were met. This indicated that improvement was observed in the post-intervention participation and academic achievement of the students in the target group. Further, a statistical analysis of the results using paired samples t-tests enabled the writer to show that significant improvement occurred from

pre-intervention to post-intervention with respect to students' completing in-class assignments and homework. The writer utilized a one group pre-test/post-test design (see Gall et al., 1996) in this applied dissertation intervention. Several conclusions may be reached from the results of this applied dissertation intervention. These are described in the following discussion of the projected outcomes, as well as unexpected outcomes, achieved from pre-intervention to post-intervention.

The first outcome that was met was an improvement in academic achievement for all gifted students in the Quest program. Intervention outcome data are shown in Table 2. The writer, Quest teachers, and parents were very pleased with the number of students who demonstrated post-intervention achievement at expected levels by earning grades of As and Bs. This was especially important since post-intervention grades reflected student performance without Quest teachers having to modify students' work expectations and requirements, as had been done prior to intervention in order to compensate for students' inadequate participation and academic performance (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). Although the statistical analysis of the pre-intervention and post-intervention student grades did not show a significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention group means, the improvement did occur because students earned the post-intervention grades without any kind of teacher modifications of expectations or grades. A review of statistical analysis results could be misinterpreted without the knowledge that students' pre-intervention grades did not reflect completion of work at expected ability levels. Quest teachers modified expectations and requirements for gifted students prior to this intervention to try to help them meet qualifications for remaining in the gifted program (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). Pre-intervention

modifications had included assigning lesser amounts of work, not penalizing students for failure to complete in-class assignments, not penalizing students for incomplete homework or homework that was not turned in, and not assigning homework (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, April 10, 2001). Post-intervention grades reflected independent completion of work at expected ability levels with no modifications. Thus, the change achieved represents an improvement in the quality of the work completed by the Quest students from pre-intervention to post-intervention. Further analysis of grades by gender and grade level indicated that no significant improvement was shown. The group means for girls and for several of the grade levels showed a slight decrease. However, considering the previously given explanation about modifications made to pre-intervention requirements and expectations, this does not represent a decrease in achievement since final grades were earned without modifications. An implication of outcome 1 is that academic achievement can be impacted by social-emotional factors. This is an important finding and has value with respect to gifted education curriculum development. The literature suggests that gifted students' participation and academic achievement may be enhanced in gifted education programs which promote both academic and social-emotional development (Elmore & Zenus, 1994; Liu, 1999).

The second outcome that was met related to gifted students' participation as evidenced by the completion of in-class assignments. The results showed that the students, as a group, showed an increase from pre-intervention to post-intervention in the completion of in-class assignments. Intervention Outcome data is shown in Table 2. The students, as a group, showed significant improvement in participation in Quest class by completing in-class assignments. When examined by gender, both boys and

girls showed significant improvement. This suggests that boys and girls benefited equally from the intervention. When examined by grade level, the sixth grade showed significant improvement. An implication of outcome 2 is that student participation on in-class assignments can be impacted and influenced by social-emotional factors. This is an important finding which also has value with respect to gifted education curriculum development. Gifted students who lack sufficient levels of self-discipline needed to complete school tasks such as homework or class work (Webb et al., 1994, pp. 29-30, 83-84, 88) may exhibit reduced levels of participation and academic achievement (Webb et al.; Rimm, 1997).

The third outcome that was met related to students' participation as evidenced by the completion of homework assignments. The results showed that the students, as a group, showed an increase from pre-intervention to post-intervention in their completion of homework assignments. Intervention Outcome data is shown in Table 2. The students, as a group, showed significant improvement in their completion of homework assignments from pre-intervention to post-intervention. The data showed significant improvement for both boys, as a group, and girls, as a group. The data also showed that fifth, sixth, and eighth graders showed significant homework improvement, while seventh graders did not. This could suggest that seventh graders did not benefit as much as the other grade levels from the intervention. However, it could also be related to the small number of seventh graders (n=4) in this study. An implication of this outcome is that student participation on homework assignments can be impacted and influenced by social-emotional factors. This is a third important finding which has additional value with respect to gifted education curriculum development. Social-emotional factors such as motivation (McNabb, 1997) and limited levels of self-

discipline can negatively impact student participation and achievement (Rimm, 1997; Webb et al., 1994).

The fourth outcome that was met related to students not losing credit for not completing Quest class special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) on time. The results showed that an improvement was shown in the number of students in the target group, at post-intervention, that had not lost credit on special projects as a result of not completing them on time. Intervention Outcome data is shown in Table 2. When questioned about the change, the Quest teachers reported that students appeared more interested and motivated to complete special projects this school year (Quest lead teacher, personal communication, May 20, 2002). An implication of this outcome is that the amount of time needed to complete special projects (other than homework or in-class assignments) can be influenced by social-emotional factors. This is a fourth important finding which has value with respect to gifted education curriculum development. Special projects require a considerable amount of self-discipline in order to complete within required timelines. Limited ability to exercise sufficient levels of self-discipline to complete certain types of school projects within give timelines can result in academic problems for some gifted students (Rimm, 1997; Webb et al.,1994).

Unexpected outcomes. In addition to the projected outcomes that were achieved, six unexpected outcomes were achieved. Each of these is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first unexpected outcome was that parents participating in the parent support group expressed an interest in continuing the gifted education parent support group during the next school year. Parents reported that they enjoyed the opportunity to interact with parents of other students in the Quest program and that they had learned

skills that enabled them to better help their children. The parents decided to base next school year's support group on the skills they had learned in the group with the writer. The parents present at the final parent support group meeting elected the two parent facilitators from the writer's parent support group to serve as co-chairpersons of an organizing committee which would meet for parent support group planning purposes before the beginning of the next school year. An implication of this outcome is that parent-school communication could be greatly improved with increased parent understanding and involvement. Rimm (1997) indicated that parent interest and involvement in their gifted children's education can result in their children exhibiting academic improvement.

The second unexpected outcome was that Quest teachers decided that they would like to begin having an "open house" at the beginning and end of each school year in order to foster parent involvement and participation in the Quest program. The purpose of the "open house" would be to make special efforts to encourage parents to better understand what happens in Quest class and to improve communication between parents and teachers. An implication of this outcome is that communication, understanding, and cooperation between parents and Quest teachers could be greatly improved. Rimm (1997) indicated that gifted students may show academic improvement when their parents take an active interest in their children's educational experiences.

The third unexpected outcome was that Quest teachers decided to follow the writer's recommendation to appoint a regular education teacher at each of the schools to act as a facilitator between the Quest teachers/students and regular education teachers at their schools. The purpose of this facilitator would be to act as a liaison to help

ensure that Quest students were not penalized unfairly for work missed in regular education classrooms while attending Quest classes. An implication of this finding is that communication problems exist among Quest teachers, Quest students, and regular education teachers, which could be addressed with the inclusion of this type of facilitator. Cooperation and adaptation is essential between regular education teachers and gifted education teachers in order to provide the best learning experiences for gifted students (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

The fourth unexpected outcome was that Quest teachers requested the writer to serve as a resource for them during the next school year, as needed, to help with issues similar to those covered in this applied dissertation intervention. This would provide a ready resource for problems that surface. An implication of this finding is that Quest teachers recognize the impact that social-emotional factors can have on gifted students' participation and achievement at school. Quest teachers also recognize the need for, and have a desire for, support services for these students. The benefits of providing guidance and social-emotional support to gifted students in gifted education programs is well documented in the literature (Delisle, 1992; Liu, 1999; Hollingworth, 1942; Silverman, 1990).

The fifth unexpected outcome was that the majority of students in grades 7 and 8 reported that they would like to have access to this type of group on a regular basis throughout their school careers. Students indicated that they enjoyed having a venue in which to discuss issues of concern to them. Students further requested that the writer determine the feasibility of providing this type of service as a part of the school system's psychological services. An implication of this finding is that gifted students, like many others who are not gifted, have social-emotional needs that are important to them and

could have an impact on their school performance. It is imperative that these needs be addressed by the appropriate school professionals. Providing counseling or student support groups can be an effective and an increasingly essential component of gifted education programs (Matthews, 1999; Ross & Powell, 2002).

A sixth unexpected outcome was that several of the Quest students reported to the writer, during intervention activities, that they did not put forth maximum effort in their Quest class activities because they were not interested in the subject matter. They preferred to spend their time studying subjects of interest to them. They did report satisfaction with the Quest teachers. An implication of this finding is that teachers may need to be more aware of student preferences in the type of classroom activities that are planned for Quest students in order to achieve maximum effort and participation. Academic tasks that students find uninteresting or unchallenging increase the likelihood of motivational and academic problems as they progress to higher grade levels (Rimm, 1997; Delisle, 1992, chaps. 5, 6, 7; Strang, 1960, chap. 6). Gifted students may require assistance developing the skills needed to participate in activities they don't consider interesting (Delisle).

The writer has shown that a gifted education program which emphasizes academics, to the exclusion of issues associated with social-emotional development, may place students at risk of experiencing problems with participation and academic achievement. Overall, the writer considers his applied dissertation intervention to have achieved success in solving the problem addressed.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of this applied dissertation intervention, the writer considers the following recommendations important and beneficial to the improvement of the local gifted education program.

First, it is recommended that a student support group be established for gifted students throughout their school careers to respond to social-emotional needs that are unique to this group. School psychologists have recognized the importance of responding to the social-emotional needs of students as a part of their practice in school settings (Ross & Powell, 2002). Middle school students are not the only ones affected by social-emotional issues and factors. Support groups for younger and older students could address other issues such as making friends and making career choices.

Second, it is recommended that the coordinator and teachers of the Quest program encourage the formation of parent support groups to provide a network for parents to share information with each other about common concerns and issues relating to their gifted children. This could also provide parents with opportunities to learn how to positively and effectively advocate for improvements in their children's gifted educational programs. Quest teachers should make themselves available to parents and offer to attend meetings, assist with locating speakers or other information, and encourage parents to take an active part in their children's gifted education program.

Third, it is recommended that the gifted education program hold an "open house" at least once per academic year to provide parents with opportunities to visit their children's gifted education teachers and classrooms in order to improve their understanding of goals and objectives of the gifted education program. This would also

provide opportunities for improving understanding, cooperation, and communication between parents and the Quest teachers.

Fourth, it is recommended that gifted education program teachers utilize the services available to them from their system's school psychological services. This could provide opportunities to seek assistance when needed and to assist with planning activities that relate to social-emotional issues that may negatively impact their gifted students.

Fifth, it is recommended that the local school administrator responsible for the gifted education program's curriculum development consider implementing a social-emotional component incorporating goals and objectives that respond to factors that may influence students' participation and achievement. An advisory committee could be established that includes the gifted education coordinator, principals, teachers, parents, and other school personnel, such as school psychologists and guidance counselors, to discuss possible recommendations for program improvement. The committee should meet at least monthly throughout the school year to help insure that goals and objectives are being met.

Sixth, it is recommended that the Quest program coordinator and teachers work cooperatively in appointing a regular education teacher facilitator at each of the schools from which Quest students are pulled to receive Quest services. The role of the facilitator would be to act as a liaison between the Quest program and other regular education teachers to ensure that Quest students are not penalized for work missed in regular education classes on the days they attend Quest classes. Quest teachers may also wish to hold quarterly meetings with these facilitators to share information and

express any concerns or problems. This could help improve communication and cooperation between regular education teachers and Quest teachers/students.

Seventh, it is recommended that consideration be given to incorporating a summer component of the student support group. This could provide opportunities for gifted students to meet with other gifted students to discuss issues of concern to them on a regular basis. Many gifted students may not have contact with other students of similar ability when school is not in session. The summer component could also include a mentoring component that provides gifted students with opportunities to interact with teachers and professionals (medical doctors, information technology professionals, etc.) to help stimulate their interest and expand their knowledge base. The summer component might also include activities such as chess, computer skills training, and library research opportunities for students who don't have access to these at home.

Eighth, it is recommended that consideration be given to incorporating a summer component of the parent support group. This could be utilized to help parents share ideas and prepare for the next school year. Parents could use the time to discuss expectations and requirements with other parents who have had children in grades higher than their own, discuss homework strategies, and share ideas about how to lobby for needed educational improvements at the local school. The summer component could also include some family activities for gifted students, siblings, and parents.

Dissemination

The writer plans to disseminate the results of the applied dissertation in five ways. First, the writer will participate in a debriefing meeting with the local school district Superintendent, Director of Gifted Education, and Director of Services for

Exceptional Students to provide a summary report of the intervention results and implications of the implementation. Second, the writer will offer to present a summary presentation of the applied dissertation results to the local school board, as well as to local school faculties. Third, the writer will offer to present a summary presentation of the results of his applied dissertation at meetings of his state and national professional associations. Fourth, the writer will offer to present a summary presentation of the results of his applied dissertation at meetings of state and national groups of teachers of gifted students. Fifth, the writer will consider preparing an article for submission to his professional organization's journal for possible publication.

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Appendix A

Quest Teacher Interview Questions

Quest Teacher Interview Questions

1. How long have you taught in the Quest Program?
2. What grades do you teach?
3. What service delivery model is used in the Quest Program?
4. How many students do you have in the Quest Program?
5. Do the students appear to enjoy participating in the Quest Program?
6. What types of problems, if any, do the students in the Quest Program exhibit?
7. What problems do you consider to be the most significant?
8. Approximately how many students are affected by problem(s)?
9. Are parents involved in Quest activities?
10. How well do you feel parents understand their child or children's abilities and their placement in the Quest Program?
11. Do parents communicate regularly with you about the progress of their child or children that participate in the Quest Program?
12. How well do regular education teachers cooperate with your Quest students in terms of work that is assigned in the regular education classroom on the days they are participating in Quest class?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear Quest Parent;

I am one of the school district's school psychologists and am currently involved in a doctoral program in Child and Youth Studies. As a part of my program, I am focusing on gifted education for my applied dissertation. I am writing to you because I will be working with the students in the Quest Program during the next school year.

As a part of my dissertation study, I will be providing a student support group for Quest students in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 during the school year. The goal of the support group is to help improve Quest students' participation and academic achievement in Quest class. The support group will meet two times per month for one hour during the school day in the Quest classroom. Topics for the support group will focus on understanding giftedness and intelligence, setting goals, communicating feelings, developing coping strategies, problem-solving, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, responding to inner feelings, teacher relationships, peer relationships, and improving conflict resolution skills.

For the purposes of determining whether any change occurs, I will need to compare Quest student grades, results from a teacher completed behavior scale on each student, and teacher records of students who lost credit for submitting special projects late. This information will be collected before the support group begins and after it is completed.

All student information is strictly confidential. Students' names will not be listed on any of the information. There is no cost for participating in this study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no penalty for not participating. Your permission is needed in order for your child to participate. I hope that you will consider allowing your child to participate in this study.

If you agree for your child to participate in the Quest student support group, please complete and sign the enclosed form.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at the Superintendent's Office.

Sincerely,

Consent Form

I give permission for my child_____

to participate in the Quest class student support group during the school year.

_____ _____

Signed Date

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