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Using Arts-Based Research to Explore Peak Experiences in Five Gifted Children

Steve Haberlin
University of South Florida, USA

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Abstract

During this inquiry, I describe my journey as a beginning arts-based researcher, using this methodological approach to explore the "peak experiences" of five, second-grade gifted students in a general classroom. Concerned with collecting valid data from young children through traditional interviewing techniques, I turned to Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) and had the students create self-portraits with captions to illustrate peak experience. After converting the visual data into language and serving as a bricoleur, I engaged in thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following themes emerged: students perceived the teacher having a direct impact on their peak experiences; students experienced peak experiences when being praised or recognized; students experienced peak states when engaging in intellectually challenging curriculum as well as creative activities such as drawing. I discuss the importance of training for those working with gifted students, and based on Foucault's (1980) ideas on power, address the notion the classroom teacher might possess much power over the conditions that contribute to the students' peak

experiences. Finally, I note the potential of considering arts-based educational research to inform the field of gifted education.

"The peak-experience seems to lift us to greater than normal heights so that we can see and perceive in a higher than usual way. We become larger, greater, stronger, bigger, taller people and tend to perceive accordingly."

(Maslow, 1970, p. 25).

Gifted Students in the Mainstream Classroom and Social-Emotional Development

Numerous definitions of "gifted" exist; the U.S. Department of Education as well as individual state agencies have established their own definitions. Gifted education advocacy groups and researchers have also proposed definitions. For the purposes of this inquiry, I'll share this definition: "Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally" (Columbus Group, 1991). Thus, gifted students have affective needs that differ from mainstream students (Lee, 2016). Cognitive complexity gives rise to emotional depth, causing them to think and feel differently (Silverman, 1993). While quantitative-based researchers argue that giftedness can provide more resiliency and coping abilities, (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002), qualitative studies and clinical observations suggest that gifted students face different social-emotional challenges due to their unique characteristics (Cross & Cross, 2015; Fakolade & Archibong, 2013; Hebert & Furner, 1997). Within the gifted population, some children may experience additional stress that comes from perfectionism, heightened sensitivity, socialization problems, and external pressures, such as unrealistic expectations imposed by teachers and other adults (Haberlin, 2016). While researchers have investigated the academic impact of serving gifted students in inclusion classrooms, they know little about the social-emotional effects of such practices (Meulen, Bruggen, Spilt, Verouden, Berkhout, & Bögels, 2014).

"Inclusion" is a term used in education to describe a philosophical approach and advocates for children with disabilities and special needs to be placed in regular classrooms for most or all of the school day (Kearney, 1996). Proponents of inclusion maintain that students' individual needs can still be met through skillful teaching, though some data, such as that collected from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, suggests otherwise (Cramond & Brodsky, 1996). Currently, no clear pattern of improvement or decline regarding research on the social-emotional effects of gifted in inclusion classrooms can be determined; thus, more research in this area is needed (Rogers, 2002). With emphasis on the affective development of

gifted youngsters and little research available, it made sense to conduct a qualitative study and contribute discoveries to the literature. Also, this study personally interested me. As a teacher of the gifted for the past seven years, I observed students of different ages and wondered why some appeared emotionally stronger than others, despite their comparable cognitive abilities. I first conceived the idea for this inquiry while teaching five, second-grade gifted students. I watched with curiosity as one particularly sensitive child evolved from experiencing almost daily fits of crying, frustration, and upset to regular bouts of happiness, excitement, and enthusiasm for learning. Another student in the group went from displaying a rather negative attitude and apparent unhappiness in first-grade to a more cheerful disposition (as evident from his smiling, laughing, and verbal expressions of positivity) after spending some time in his new classroom. These experiences caused me to wonder what conditions within the classroom contributed to such promising changes. I had a "hunch" that the classroom teacher had some role, but I pondered what other factors —the environment, instructional strategies, resources, classmates—contributed. Furthermore, focusing the lens on the positive experiences of these children, studying those within a population that "thrive" as positive psychologists have suggested (Seligman, 2011), might inform us about gifted children's social-emotional development as much or more as studying their afflictions and shortcomings.

Peak Experiences

I must also address the term "peak experiences" as used in the context of this study. Maslow (1962, 1970) referred to peak experiences and assigned the concept an important place in humanistic, positive psychology, which considered the self-actualization of individuals. Helping to lay the theoretical framework, Maslow (1962, 1970) characterized peak experiences as involving intense feelings of happiness, personal fulfillment, and perceptions of greater oneness with the world. Maslow believed these experiences, which crossed-cultural boundaries, varied considerably in intensity and enduring impact and had a major impact on personality growth, creativity, and learning (Hoffman, Ho, Chen & Ortiz, 2014). Subsequently, other scholars explored peak experiences in children and teens in various ways (Hoffman 1992, 1998; Robinson, 1983; Scott, 2004). Hoffman (1992, 1998) developed eight categories of peak experiences: uplifting experiences involving nature, near-death or health-crises episodes, peak moments during intense and personalized prayer, exalted perceptions in formal religious settings, spontaneous moments of bliss or ecstasy triggered by aesthetic delight, profound musings about self-identity, life and death, and related topics, and uncanny perceptions. In the same manner, I desired to understand when the students felt their best in the classroom, when did they experience a high point during the instructional day in regards to positive, intense emotionality? Now, I had to decide the most appropriate methodology for the inquiry.

Turning to Arts-Based Educational Research

Eventually, I embraced Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) as the "right" methodology to explore the peak experiences of the students. A form of qualitative inquiry, ABER employs diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world (Finley, 2008) and thus, it allows the researcher, teacher and participants to explore a particular topic or inquiry through the creation of art products and engagement in creative forms of expressions (Barone & Eisner, 2012; see also Jamison, 2015). Images and visuals are valuable in research as they have the ability to convey multiple meanings and raise questions (Weber, 2008). Sometimes, the visual can offer "more than words can say" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p. 98). As Richards (2006) notes, "As a society steeped in popular culture, we rely on rapidly changing sensory images that present up-to-date information and instantaneous messages in mass media texts, such as television, magazines, videos, films, digital graphics, newspapers advertisements, cartoons, and comic strips" (p. 38). With an emphasis on visual representations, ABER approaches can be particularly helpful in education because they can be designed to accommodate children with varied literacy skills, without relying heavily on oral or written language skills (O'Kane, 2008; Literat, 2013). Hence, an ABER method such as drawing can be extremely valuable when researching (Jamison, 2015). Not only an enjoyable activity, drawing can allow a child to represent experiences, without the constraints of language or literacy skills (Mand, 2012). On the other hand, using qualitative research methods with children, particularly interviewing, can be challenging. "It is not easy to ask in a child-centered way the questions that are meant to decipher what it is like to be a child, what the child's experiences are like, and what acting in the child's position is like (Alanen, 2009; Karlsson, 2004). Creating questions suitable for children can be challenging because

> as an adult, the researcher looked at the world quite differently and the reliability of the information from children is questioned particularly because of the development stage of the children compared to an adult's developmental stage, and there is doubt as to whether children's speech is reliable in general. (Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta, 2011, p. 89)

For these reasons, it seemed sensible to turn to arts-based educational research.

Positioning Myself to Engage in ABER

I consider myself somewhat of an amateur artist. I have taken formal art courses in college, and currently practice portrait sketching. However, this hardly qualifies one to conduct arts-based inquiry. As a Ph. D. student, I am an emerging researcher-- also a beginning arts-based researcher. While I have published several qualitative research articles, I still consider myself a fledgling ABER scholar, who enthusiastically embraces the genre and sees its potential, particularly applied to areas such as gifted education, where traditional quantitative and qualitative studies have predominately informed the field and methods such as ABER have

not yet been explored. Recently, I completed a doctoral level ABER course, benefitting from sage advice from eminent ABER scholars, such as Dr. Patricia Leavy, serving as guest speakers, and as working as research assistant for the course professor, who has published her own ABER works. But I believed thrusting myself into this study—an "exploratory effort"-would further my skills and education as an ABER practitioner (rather than dip my toes in the swimming pool, one might accuse me of jumping right in). At the same time, I proceeded with some caution, realizing that this exploration might contain "potential hazards." To ready myself for this journey, not only did I enlist the aid of the school's art teacher, but I prepared in the following manner: in addition to reading a number of texts on conducting arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Finley, 2008; McNiff, 1998). I heeded McNiff's advice (1998) for "art-based researchers to immerse themselves in studies of how artists research personal and social experiences and how art has served as a primary agent of change in the world" (p.38). I studied the work of Paul Newham (1993, 1998) and watched Morgan Spurlock's (2004) *Super Size Me*, a documentary where he eats only McDonald's fast food for 30 days, and as McNiff (1998) states, an excellent example of "how art and science can collaborate to examine a particular phenomenon with the goal of changing human behavior" (p. 38). Additionally, I studied more recent works, such as Richard's (2006, 2013) use of the arts (i.e. poetry, drawing) to conduct research with pre-service teachers. I also reflected upon common values found across arts-related research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Among those common principles that personally resonated were: (a) the research is guided by a moral commitment—the work is expected to "take a stand"; (b) it is not initially clear in what ways knowledge will be generated; (c) a strong focus on reflexivity; (d) a sense of authenticity—the research and artwork must be intertwined, consistency and rigor in the relationship between the two.

Conducting the Inquiry

Context of the Study

I conducted the inquiry in a second-grade classroom at Rogers K-8, a public, magnet school with an enrollment of 764 students. Thirty-five percent of the students enrolled in the school are white, 30 percent African American, 27 percent Hispanic, 7 percent multi-racial, and less than one percent Asian. About 41 percent of students qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program. About 30 elementary-aged children at the school have been identified as gifted and are serviced by their general education teachers and a resource teacher specializing in gifted education. Using this model, the second-grade gifted students participate in the general classroom for much of the day, leaving one day per week to work on projects and enrichment with the teacher of gifted. The students also receive instruction from two, second grade teachers, who departmentalize math/science and reading/writing instruction--meaning students spend the morning in one classroom with one teacher and move to an adjoining

classroom to receive instruction from the other teacher for the remainder of the day.

The Students and Teachers in the Inquiry

The five students participating in the inquiry were boys between the ages of seven and eight. Four of the students were Hispanic and one of the students identified his race as white. All five students were enrolled in the second-grade and had been identified as "gifted" under the school district's criteria, which included scoring two of more deviations above the norm on an intelligent quotient test. All five students showed the normal range of emotions—mainly happy and enthusiastic about learning, however, sometimes getting upset over social difficulties with classmates or being reprimanded by teachers for breaking classroom rules. The classroom teacher assisting with the inquiry was a 46-year-old female, who had been teaching more than 10 years. She had received the school's Teacher of the Year award in 2013. The teacher had "looped" with her first-grade classroom (i.e. she followed the children graduating from the first to the second grade). While the teacher has not completed formal training in gifted education, her own two children had been identified as gifted. She also recommended a number of students to be screened for gifted services, of which at least several had passed the school district's qualifications. The art teacher had recently moved into the position after teaching other subjects for about four years. However, he was a practiced artist, creating and selling his pottery at local festivals for the past 12 years.

A Priori Questions

During the inquiry, I wanted to explore the peak experiences of the five, second-grade gifted students. In addition, I pondered how arts-based research may contribute to the literature on social-emotional needs of the gifted. I believed using the arts, in this case drawing, might serve as a vehicle to help illuminate the psychology of gifted children, yielding new, and perhaps unexpected insights. And although contrary to scientific methods, arts-based inquiry "typically starts with the realization that you cannot define the final outcome when you are planning to do the work" (McNiff, 1998, p. 39), I found it helpful to begin my research with several guiding questions to provide focus and direction. My questions were:

1. In what ways do five, gifted elementary students describe their peak experiences in the general classroom?
2. How does the general classroom teacher perceive the conditions and circumstances surrounding possible peak experiences of the students?
3. In what ways might arts-based research contribute to the research of gifted students, namely their affective development?

Collecting Data

After securing approval from the school district and the university's Institutional Review

Board (IRB) and receiving written consent from the parents of the students in the inquiry, I asked the students to create a self-portrait illustrating their peak experience in the classroom each week. One day per week, I invited the students into my office, located directly across from their classroom, and provided each student with colored pencils and a blank sheet of 8 x 11 inch paper that stated the following instructions: "draw a picture of yourself and include speech and/or thought bubbles to show one of the *best* moments that you had in the classroom this week." I reiterated the instructions and verbally told the students to think of a moment when they felt the best in the classroom that week and told them to draw a picture of that experience. I did not provide instruction in art or drawing; if students expressed concern over their drawing ability, I instructed them to do their best and explained they wouldn't be graded on drawing ability. When a student completed a drawing, I asked him what he had created. While I didn't interview the students or have them write detailed descriptions, I did want to have a general idea of what they had drawn.

To triangulate the data and approach verisimilitude, I requested that the students' English Language Arts teacher corroborate their experiences by recording her observations each week. I asked the teacher to elaborate with notes her perceptions regarding the circumstances surrounding the peak experience. For instance, if a student had a peak experience, what activity was he engaged in at that time? Were classmates present? What role did the teacher play? To provide further provide triangulation, I observed the students each week in class and recorded field notes and crafted weekly analytical memos (Saldana, 2009). Concurrently, I collected notes from the art teacher at the school. After examining each student portrait, he wrote notes regarding the colors used, descriptive features (i.e. the size of the human figures in the pictures, facial expressions), dialogue and actions. Having a "second set of eyes" to examine the drawings helped considerably, namely during data analysis. For instance, when interpreting one particular portrait, the art teacher noticed how the student drew a direct line between himself and the teacher—a distinction that aligned with an emerging theme regarding the role that the teachers played when students' had peak experiences.

While initially planning to have the students create nine portraits (the length of a school grading period), I decided to stop collecting data from the students after five weeks after reaching saturation. Since failure to reach data saturation can negatively impact research results (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Kerr, Nixon & Wild, 2010), I took this decision very seriously. Being a novice ABER practitioner, I consulted a senior researcher in the matter. I even had a few of the students create an additional drawing, and spoke with them about it, to ensure I wasn't "pulling the plug" too early. Making this decision even more difficult, there is no one-size-fit all method to reach data saturation since research designs differ (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Furthermore, more data isn't necessarily better than less data—rather it is the quality of the data—the richness, the depth—that is important (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012).

Fortunately, there are guiding principles for data saturation; for instance, when no additional information can be obtained, when new coding is no longer possible. As Fusch and Ness (2015) surmise, "If one has reached the point of no new data, one has also most likely reached the point of no new themes; therefore, one has reached data saturation," (p.1409). Triangulation (multiple sources of data) can also assist in enhancing the reliability of research findings and the attainment of data saturation (Stavros & Westburg, 2009). In my case, the students' portraits began to reflect the same images, which in turn, produced no new coding, no new themes, no new data. Similarly, when I analyzed the classroom teacher's observations as well as field notes and the art teachers' notes during the fifth week, I found no new data, codes, or themes.

Analyzing the Data

As Richards (2013) experimented with during her arts-based research, this inquiry required me to serve as a "bricoleur," comparing several diverse sets of data (student drawings, teacher observation log, and art teacher's notes) to illuminate connections between different modes of communication (Kress, 2003). And while the task proved difficult, this study hopefully assists other researchers who immerse themselves in art inquiry as they experiment and develop innovative ways to gather and study data. Initially, I collated the data sets chronologically (25 self-portraits, 5 teacher observation logs, 25 field note entries, 19 art teacher notes, N= 74 artifacts) so I might ascertain possible changes overtime and determine encompassing themes. After considering ways to analyze and "bridge" my arts-based data, I decided to "convert" the visual representations produced by the students into text-based data. Saldana (2009) believes the best approach to analyzing visual data is through a" holistic, interpretive lens guided by strategic lens," which involves using field notes and analytic memos to generate language-based data to accompany the visual data. Hence, guided by questions such as "how did students portray themselves in the pictures and what activities were they engaged in?" I wrote rich, detailed descriptions for each portrait. When studying the illustrations, I looked for examples of implied messages (e.g. facial expressions such as smiling, body language, the size and position of the figures, colors, etc.). I wrote the following description for one of the self-portraits:

> Student is depicted larger than the teacher. Student is smiling, drawn in red with black hair. The teacher is sitting in chair in front of classmates reading a book. Classmates are lifeless bodies, no facial features. Student appears to be answering a question. Thought bubble from student is difficult to read--states something about content of the lesson?

With language-based data in hand (the student portrait descriptions added to the teacher's reflection log notes, field notes, and the art teacher's notes), I turned to thematic coding, a widely used qualitative research method used in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns

in data. I believed thematic coding, known for its flexibility and independence from theory and epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), could help me analyze my varied data sets effectively and produce major themes. Using a six-phase process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I first gained familiarity with the data by studying the student-created drawings and reading and rereading the art teacher's notes, the classroom teacher's observations, and my written descriptions of the pictures. Concurrently, I jotted notes of anything that struck my interest or appeared significant (i.e. *the teacher appears in many of the drawings).* Next, I worked systematically through the data and began to assign initial codes to extracts of data (i.e. words, phrases, sentences). Later (I find it helpful to step away from the data analysis process from time to time and return to it with "fresh eyes"), I searched for themes within the coded data and refined those themes by checking the coded data extracts against each theme, looking for coherent patterns. Lastly, I defined each remaining theme by naming it and writing a detailed description. With clearly defined themes, I positioned myself for the final phase, writing up my discoveries.

Discoveries

Studying the students' drawings and related data, I derived four themes: the teacher as the catalyst for the students' peak experiences, the importance of praise/recognition in eliciting peak experiences, and the presence of intellectually challenging curriculum and creative activities. Below, I elaborate on these themes and provide examples of the illustrations.

The Teacher as a Major Catalyst of Peak Experiences

The students often sketched one of their teachers in the portraits (see Figure 1). In a number of cases, the students were directly interacting with the teacher when they had a peak experience in the classroom. For example, the portraits showed students speaking or sharing answers to questions with the teacher. In other cases, drawings showed students interacting one-on-one with the teacher as they received verbal recognition or a physical object, such as a sports jersey to wear as the "Student of the Week" award. In many illustrations, no other classmates were featured in drawings, only the student and teacher. In other cases, drawings featured the teacher calling on the student, providing recognition or acknowledging the student in some manner. The teacher's observation logs also noted that peak experiences occurred when students engaged in guided reading, which involves students in small groups of three to four reading the same book and working closely with the teacher. The teacher wrote student was "engaged and excited" when "reading about the Titanic in guided reading" and likewise, "during guided reading while discussing the ethical issue of whether freedom was worth the risk of for Harriet Tubman."

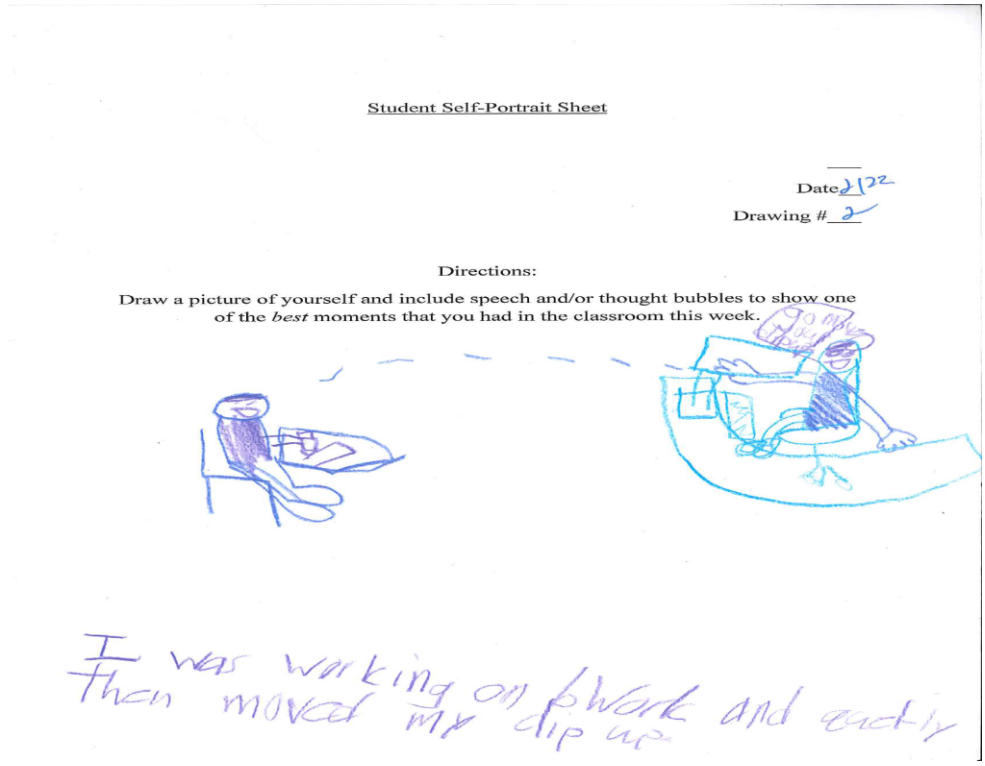

Figure 1. Student drawing of direct relationship with teacher

Praise or Recognition Leading to Peak Experiences

Related to the major theme of students interacting directly with a teacher, the students' drawings also reflected peak experiences occurring when they were praised, recognized, or received positive attention in some form (see Figure 2). Drawings included students "moving their clip up"—an incentive system in the classroom, where teachers have students move clothes pins to various colors on a behavior chart, students being named the "Most Valuable Player" of the classroom, students receiving tickets to "buy" trinkets and other items from the classroom treasure box, and earning back privileges such as recess or learning stations. Drawings also featured students being positively "singled-out" for standing in line quietly or reading quietly in the classroom.

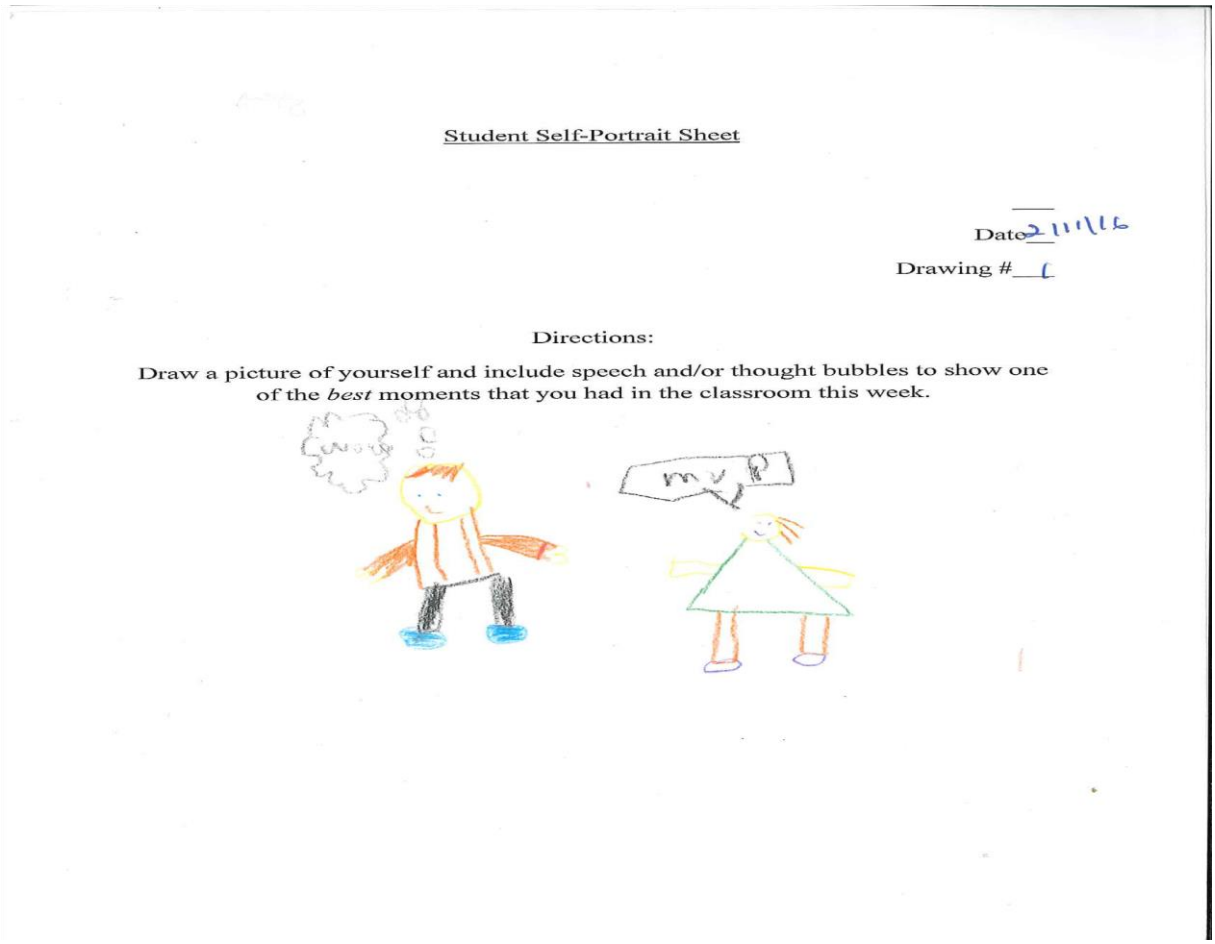

Figure 2. Student drawing of teacher recognition

Intellectually Challenging Curriculum Contributing to Peak Experiences

The students' drawings also reflected times in the classroom when they studied intellectually stimulating curriculum (see Figure 3). One particular drawing showed the student, who was discussing Helen Keller's life with classmates and the teacher, thinking about how all people can learn, regardless of their disabilities or so-called limitations. The teacher's observation logs collaborated this finding. During guided reading with their teacher, the students demonstrated heightened enthusiasm and excitement when discussing or debating complex topics such as the BP Oil Spill and its impact on the environment and writing letters to government officials about environmental concerns and taking social action. For example, the teacher noted how a student was incredibly excited when writing a letter to the state's governor about protecting the environment (the student also drew a picture of this experience).

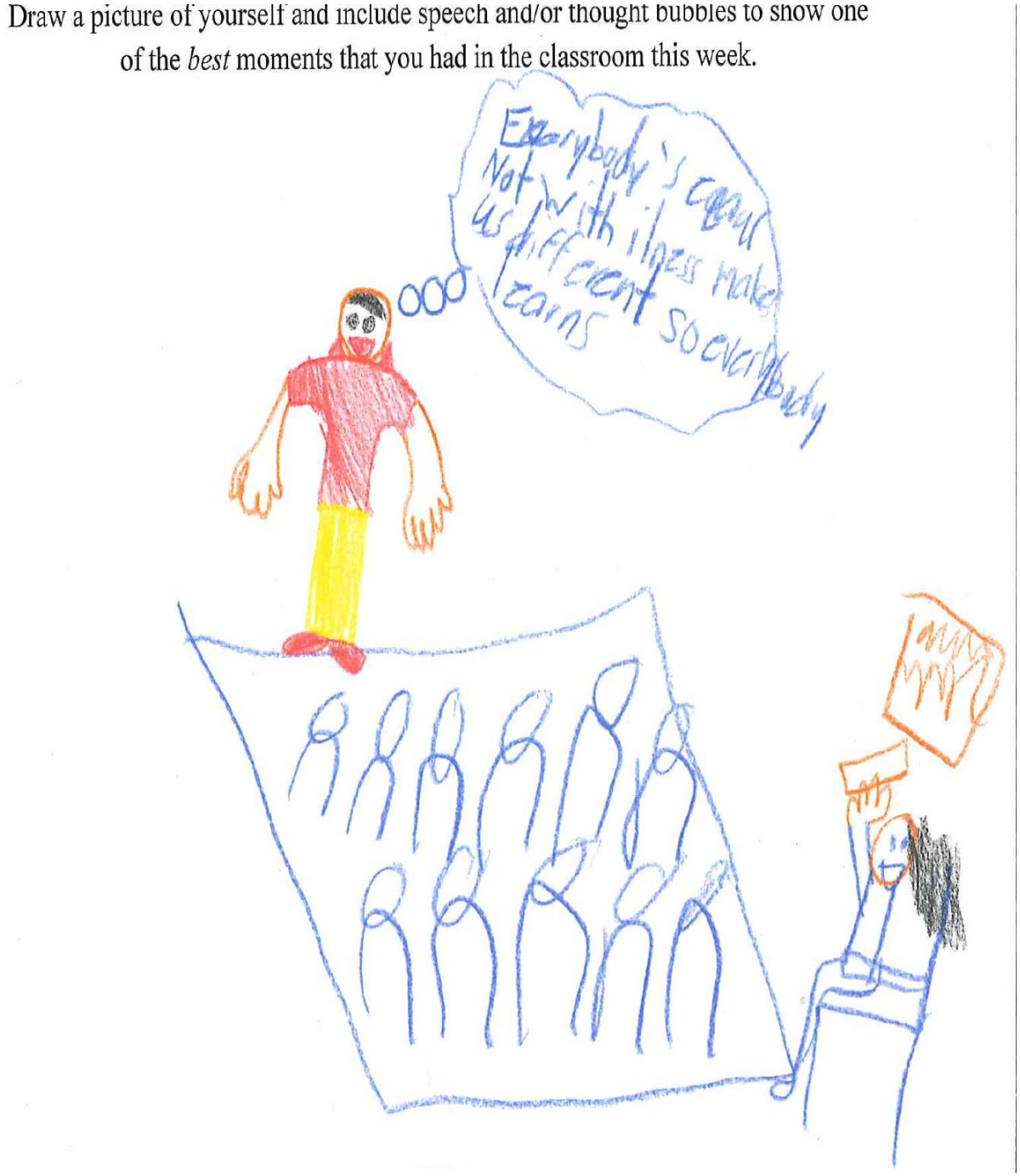

Figure 3. Student drawing of challenging curriculum

Creative Activities Fostering Peak Experiences

The students also drew themselves engaged in creative activities, such as drawing, designing Power Points on the computer, and planning a class party (see Figure 4). In one illustration, the student is immersed in drawing a landscape and buildings to demonstrate

learning during a reading lesson. His classmate states "time to stop drawing," to which he replies, "let me finish this window." In another drawing, the teacher tells the class, "We are going to plan a Valentine's Day party." The student thinks "yes" and has a smile across his face. Another drawing depicted a student creating a PowerPoint about what he learned, a process using a computer that requires selecting designs, fonts, pictures and other graphical representations. The teacher also noted that students were happiest, during one particular week, building models out of Play-Doh to show the main idea of their text.

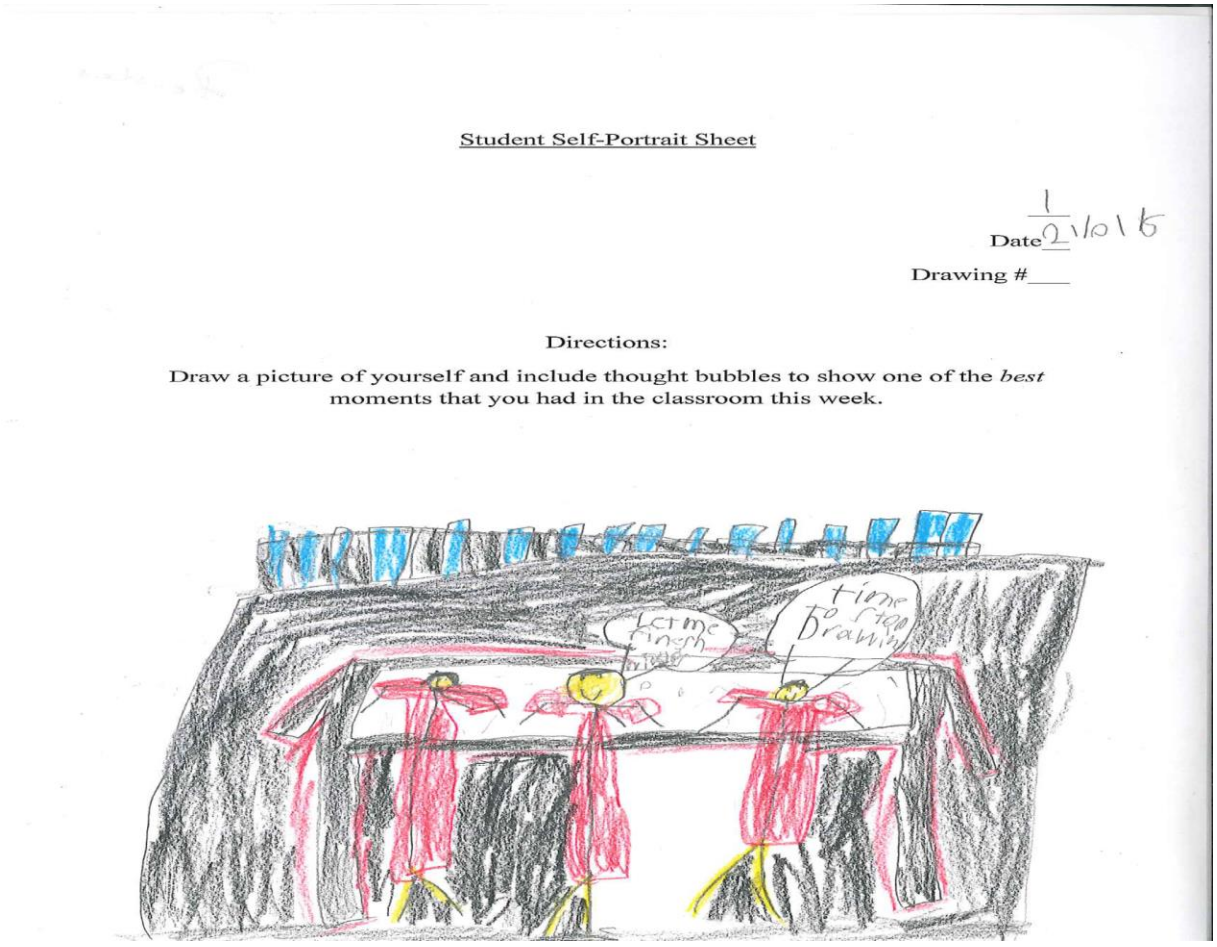

Figure 4. Student drawing of creative activities

Limitations of the Inquiry

I must acknowledge several limitations within this inquiry. First, hermeneutic considerations prescribe that my interpretations of the data are simply that; others could interpret the same data differently based on their worldviews, beliefs, and experiences. Another limitation involved my dual role as researcher and one of the students' teachers (provider of gifted

services). While I strove to bracket (set aside) my role as researcher by monitoring my thinking process through field notes, there's no denying that working closely with study participants poses challenges with objectivity and bias, which could influence data collection and results. Finally, being a beginning arts-based researcher might have impacted the study since I utilized new, unfamiliar methods to collect data; nevertheless, I labored to learn from those who traveled the path before me by studying their work and following basic principles within the genre.

Discussion

Gifted students have different affective needs. However, on the other hand, we know little about how placing them in mainstream classes for the entire school day impacts their affective development. Understanding as much as we can about their social-emotional development is paramount. Focusing on when gifted children have peak experiences can provide researchers and educators with insights and information, which can assist in developing the optimal environment and conditions for these experiences to occur. Using the arts, I discovered that this group of gifted students experienced peak states most often when interacting directly with the teacher, receiving positive attention in the form of praise and recognition, tackling intellectually engaging curriculum and having opportunities to practice creative thinking. When reflecting on my discoveries, my initial thought was: *these students are not very different from mainstream students. Most students in the second grade probably want attention from the teacher. They want to be praised and rewarded*. However, further examination revealed that these students echoed the needs of gifted students in general --they require an intellectually demanding, appropriately challenging curriculum, otherwise, as Siegle (2015) warns, the negative result is boredom. But the students' drawings underscored perhaps an even more profound implication: the teacher makes all the difference in regards to how the student feels and what he or she experiences on a daily basis. After all, the teacher works within the curriculum, plans the lesson, selects instructional strategies, provides the resources, and gives out (or fails to give out) praise and recognition to students. In addition, the teacher's experience and training with gifted students also plays a factor. As Gallagher, Harradine, and Coleman pointed out,

> the key element in all of this remains the teacher. Unless prepared to teach gifted students, most teachers have little or no background on strategies to cope with these creative and fertile minds. They need information about how to provide intellectual stimulation through problem-based learning or higher-order thinking or a variety of differentiated programming. The more knowledge teachers have about differentiated methods and strategies, the more they will be able to adequately address all of their students' needs. (1997, p.136)

What concerns me is the apparent lack of training found within the ranks of teachers. While trained teachers have been found to be more confident and more competent in working with gifted students (Siegle, 2015; Siegle and Powell, 2004; Westberg and Archambault, 1993), education majors can come out of college, some possessing graduate degrees, and head into classrooms with virtually no knowledge of the needs of gifted children or how to effectively work with them (Berman and Shultz, 2012). Heeding advice from post qualitative scholars (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) that richer data analysis can be gleaned from considering the perspective of post structuralist philosophers, I turned to Foucault's (1980, 1982) theories on power to derive further meaning from the role teachers play in affecting peak experiences in the gifted students in this inquiry. I realize that situating Maslow's theories and Foucault's ideas in the same article may seem questionable, and perhaps overly ambitious to some scholars, but I wanted to practice innovative approaches, which I believed might help me make better sense of the artistic data representations. For instance, Foucault (1980, 1982) argues that power *is* relationships—meaning power can determine relationships at any time--and that power ultimately resides in the individual. Further, power involves a series of actions performed upon another person's actions and reactions, nevertheless, it is not simply a repressive force but can serve as a positive, productive force as well (Foucault, 1982). This suggests that teachers might wield considerable power over students' experiences, including peak experiences. As creators of the classroom environment, designers of instruction, and "gate keepers" of praise, recognition, and other forms of positive attention, teachers most certainly create the conditions that can allow-or discourage—intense feelings of happiness, joy, excitement, and enthusiasm in children during school hours. Immediately, this raises two concerns: First, how many teachers are familiar with peak experiences and the work of Maslow (1962, 1970) and other positive psychologists? Secondly, do teachers realize the incredible power (and responsibility) they have as influencers of such experiences? While this inquiry alone cannot answer these questions, perhaps it can stimulate discussion in this area.

Contributions of the Inquiry

Notwithstanding the limitations within the research, one contribution of this inquiry is it can be considered trustworthy and legitimate because as Richards (2013) similarly signified in her work, this study has met a major principle of arts-based research in that "the chosen art is an integral part of the process, producing knowledge otherwise inaccessible," (Suominen, 2003, p. 34). I believe the students drawings, supported by the teacher's observations, revealed substantially more about their peak experiences and positive emotions than traditional interviewing of these young students would have likely produced. The arts not only heavily influenced this inquiry through aiding the data collection process but also provided these young children with an appropriate medium to express their knowledge and insights (Kirova and Emme, 2008). Consequently, as Jamison writes,

> through arts-based research, children are honoured as competent and capable researchers. They are not actively or passively silenced or excluded because of perceived inexperience or immaturity. Rather, they have a voice and place in "both the artistic process and the development of product. (2015, p. 6)

The inquiry also illuminated the importance of the classroom teacher relationship to the students and whether they experienced peak states during the school day. The student portraits enlightened, or at least reminded, educators of the considerable power possessed by the teacher and the awesome responsibility of selecting the appropriate learning materials and lessons for students as well as being mindful of the major impact that interactions and dialogue (i.e. giving praise and recognition) can have on children. Concurrently, the study echoed the need for *all* teachers working with gifted children to receive proper training.

Finally, the inquiry contributed additional understanding of employing arts-based research in an educational setting—in this case, a classroom where gifted students spend much of their school day. Indeed, arts-based scholars encourage experimenting with the method to learn more and aide in future applications (McNiff, 2008). As I "experimented" with collecting visual-based data and merging it with language-based data, my hope is that this exploration demonstrates new possibilities in the area of researching the affective domains of gifted students. By embracing non-traditional methodologies, scholars might find new insights, ideas, discoveries, surprises, and inspiration, as I have, which can benefit the traditionally research field of gifted education.

Questions Remain

Arts-based research should produce new questions (Eisner, 2008). While I lack adequate space within this article to elaborate, I wondered why, in most cases, the students' drawings featured only one or two classmates or no classmates at all? In other pictures, where classmates were drawn, they often appeared as featureless, "stick figures." For instance, even when students drew pictures with settings typically full of other children (i.e. the school playground), classmates remained missing. What can this tell us about the students creating the portraits and their peak experiences? As Derrida (1978) has written, we can learn much about scrutinizing what is missing, what is left behind. Indeed, what can the lack of classmates in the drawings tell us about peak experiences, about childhood development, about relationships in general. Those curiosities will have to wait for another day.

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About the Author

Steve Haberlin is a Ph.D. student in the elementary education department and graduate assistant at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. A K-12 teacher for more than a decade, Steve has worked extensively with gifted students, serving on the Hillsborough County school district gifted education advisory board and helping to train teachers in gifted education across Florida. Steve's research agenda involves studying gifted education training within teacher preparation programs, the use of innovative qualitative research methods, such as arts-based inquiry, in education, and applying Eastern thought, such as mindfulness, to educational practices. Currently, Steve supervises pre-service teachers in the teacher education practicum at USF.

Appendix

Student Name (use pseudonym)	Did student have a peak emotional experience(s)?	What was occurring at the time of the experience? Explain the situation/conditions
World Cup	getting Complimented for helping a student participate. Focused & engaged. enthusiasm	Small group work - He encouraged another student and later bragged on that student twice.
SkyWalker	During group sharing after Save the Last Word	He was trully listening. When someone said something that he could make a meaningful connection to he was excited
Phoenix	Engaged - Carpet discussion to review Cesar Chavez / Ghandi	Raised his hand several times to share (usually raises hand maybe once)
Salmon	IH been an off week for him. Did not see any "peak" emotional experience	
Beatles	engaged During Save the Last Word	He was participating with his group enthusiastically. I think he likes the topic or the compliments his group is giving.

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