

EDUCATING GIFTED AND TALENTED LEARNERS
IN RURAL LABRADOR

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EDUCATING GIFTED AND TALENTED LEARNERS IN RURAL LABRADOR

by

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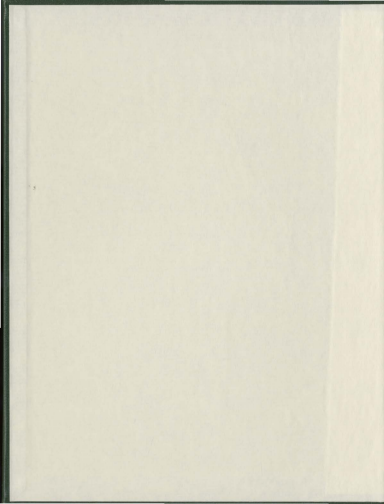


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Abstract

This research study sought to explore the experiences and perspectives of educators in rural Labrador with respect to educating gifted and talented learners. To guide the exploration, the following research questions were used:

1. Do rural educators attempt to identify gifted and talented learners? If so, how do they do it?
2. What programming, resources and supporting personnel exist at school, school board and provincial levels to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador?
3. What degree of support do teachers in rural Labrador feel they have to attend to the needs of gifted and talented learners?
4. What strategies do teachers in rural Labrador employ to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners?
5. How can programming, resources and further support for gifted and talented learners be improved upon in rural Labrador?

The research findings revealed four major themes: who gifted and talented learners are, attitudes, knowledge of programming personnel, and support; these findings were used to offer suggestions for future policy and practice with respect to gifted and talented education.

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List of Abbreviations

CDLI	Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation
CRT	Criterion Reference Test
DI	Differentiated Instruction
ELA	English Language Arts
ELL	English Language Learner
GORT	Gray Oral Reading Test
IEP	Individual Education Plan
LSB	Labrador School Board
MI	Multiple Intelligences
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
WISC	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of Study

On a daily basis, classroom teachers focus their attention towards educating the average academic learner. These learners bring forward multiple intelligences, as well as a multitude of life experiences that influence their learning. Yet, at the same time, a small portion of a teacher's clientele consists of very intelligent, above-average individuals who exceed the academic, performance and social expectations of their peers. These students are often referred to as gifted learners. My personal experience as a learner and a teacher built the foundation and piqued my interest in research of gifted learners and has prompted further research.

My perspective towards gifted education began at a young age. As a child, I learned to read by the age of three. Upon entrance to Kindergarten in the city of Corner Brook, my precocious reading ability was immediately noticed, which triggered the administration of a battery of tests to properly assess my cognitive abilities. Based on the results of my assessment, I began an accelerated Language Arts program, a number of years ahead of my grade level. My high command of reading and language at that age was fostered through a program designed for me. Unfortunately, when my family moved and I switched schools, I attended a smaller school that did not have sufficient resource personnel to continue this program.

While language enrichment opportunities stalled for me for several years, as a teenager, I once again met with the opportunity to excel in my areas of strength and talent. In grade nine, I participated in a novel-writing program offered by my junior high school English Language Arts program, in addition to the regular grade nine English curriculum. Furthermore, in grade twelve, Advanced Placement courses were offered to capable students. I successfully completed the Advanced Placement Physics course offered that year.

My interest in gifted education further broadened when I became a teacher. As a student-teacher intern in 2003, I taught Chemistry at the province's largest senior high school in St. John's, the province's largest urban centre. During this time, I was introduced to many exceptional students while teaching Chemistry in two advanced academic programs, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB). Pending ability and approval, exceptional, above average students could study a full course load in these highly advanced programs. It afforded highly capable, intelligent students to be challenged at a higher level of diversified learning experiences which they were eager and able to do. Upon successful completion of the programs that year and the years that followed, students graduated with first year university credits, permitting them to enter into the second year of their desired programs. Currently, these programs still exist at that school.

While teaching in St. John's, some students I taught in the AP and IB programs were truly outstanding, going even above and beyond the performance levels that such challenging programs expected of them. In science fairs and competitions, these students

produced products that bestowed national recognition, awards and scholarships upon them. Their keen abilities to communicate, apply, and showcase their knowledge surfaced in the various projects they presented to the rest of our province and Canada.

I continued to teach at the school following graduation from my Bachelor of Education program. In that period of time, I witnessed students from three consecutive graduating classes enroll, flourish and succeed in challenging programs that met and celebrated the academic abilities and multiple intelligences that they brought forward to their own learning.

In 2006, I moved to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador to continue teaching Chemistry. This central Labrador town is the hub of this region of the province, and is defined as an "urban" municipality in our province, yet by federal definition and public opinion, it is often considered to be "rural" in comparison to larger provincial centres such as St. John's, Mount Pearl, and Corner Brook. Having arrived from St. John's, where a Chemistry teacher's course load usually consists solely of Chemistry courses, I was quite surprised upon receiving my teaching assignment in June of that year to find out that I only had one grade 11 chemistry class and one grade 12 chemistry class. The remainder of my assignment consisted of 4 separate courses, including Biology, Environmental Science, as well as general and academic Science. Beyond higher-level core courses, such as Chemistry, Advanced Math and Pre-Calculus, required by the Newfoundland and Labrador Program of Studies, there were no additional courses that would challenge students to an even higher level of learning, as offered by AP and IB programs. Unless a teacher took the initiative, the availability of opportunities for

talented students to be further challenged was virtually non-existent. Until the end of the 2005-2006 school year, accelerated and AP courses were available at the new school at which I taught, though at the end of that year, they were eliminated, due to decreased budgets, popularity and staffing.

My surprise did not end there. Prior to moving to Labrador, St. John's colleagues who were very active in Canada-Wide Science Fair and Eastern Newfoundland Regional Science Fair encouraged me to start a regional science fair in Labrador. Excited to get bright students in this isolated part of the province recognized for their ability and talents, I was ready to take on the task. According to our district's science coordinator, enrichment and promotion activities such as school science fairs, regional science fairs, and science Olympic days rarely came to fruition in recent years, due to lack of teacher interest, involvement and funding for such activities. Teachers felt that it had become an onerous task that added to teacher workload and had become meaningless - just another "chore" added to the daily tasks, committees and extra-curricular activities that were expected of teachers. As a result of the lack of teacher involvement, funding had steadily dwindled, eventually leaving no money in annual budgets for promotion of such activities. There are no longer positions at school and board levels to coordinate enrichment programs or activities, so it is at the hands of the classroom teacher to initiate, create and implement any gifted learner programming.

In a short period of time, it became very obvious to me that the opportunities for gifted and talented students to excel openly in urban schools were simply absent in rural areas, as in my own region of Labrador. Gifted and talented students were able to excel in

classroom tasks only, if indeed appropriate opportunities were there to exhibit their particular talents, as there lacked venues outside of the classroom in which they could display their talents. Some students who were not sufficiently challenged even became bored, inattentive, careless and apathetic, as the majority of the time I spent in the classroom was focussed toward the average or below-average academic students.

My experiences and comparison of the two separate opportunities for gifted and talented learners in urban and rural Newfoundland and Labrador schools guided me to delve further into those differences. As one teacher, I knew there were things that I did but, at the same time, neglected to do in my classroom to meet the taller order demanded by the enquiring minds of such learners. Over the past four years, I have increased and varied opportunities for the higher-achieving student to be challenged, which include designing projects that encourage higher-order thinking and increased creativity, allowing grade 10 students to take grade 11 Chemistry concurrently with grade 10 Science, and encouraging successful high school students to become tutors in my school's Tutoring for Tuition program. These experiences led me to reflect upon the different learning environments in which gifted and talented learners find themselves respectively in the urban and rural schools of our province, further leading me to question if these issues are prevalent in other rural parts of the province. I was doubtful that I was the only teacher that felt that the gifted and talented learner was getting neglected in favour of the general student population, and felt that this disparity required further exploration and attention.

Statement of the Problem

My initial research of education for gifted and talented learners in this province led me to *Pathways to Programming and Graduation*, which was introduced in 1996 to provide support for all diverse learners. I sought its guidance with respect to strategies for gifted learner programming. The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education (2010) suggests that a program planning team could be put in place for a gifted or talented student to provide suitable Pathway 2 accommodations, Pathways 3 modifications to extend the curriculum and add challenge or Pathway 4 courses to offer opportunities above the prescribed curriculum. However, in my experience at two separate high schools in this province, the Pathways model was used only to cater to the below-average, severely struggling students as a special education support service. Marystown Central High School (2008) appears to be the only school in which individual education plans (IEP) are explicitly used for gifted learner programming; beyond that, academic evidence of use of IEPs for gifted and talented learner programming in Newfoundland and Labrador is scarce (p. 5).

Little evidence exists in the public domain with respect to gifted and talented learner programming in rural locales of this province, hence more attention should be paid to this portion of the student population. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2008) created a gifted education consultant position based on the recommendations of the Pathways commission report, however to date, new resources for gifted and talented learners are not available to the public in electronic or print formats. While approximately 2 to 5 percent of any student population is gifted, their needs must

not be neglected (David, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2007, p. 117; Winzer, 2002, p. 281).

Some literature on rural education and gifted education exists. Despite this, a sizeable gap between gifted and talented learner programming exists and any documented evidence of such programming in this province is limited. This qualitative study reveals the perceived issues associated with and suggests improvements for gifted and talented learner programming.

Significance of the Study

Significance for policy. In *Focussing on Students: The ISSP and Pathways Commission Report*, it is evident that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is beginning to recognize the importance of supporting gifted and talented learners. Recommendations were put forth by the Commission for the government to identify the needs of exceptionally able learners within the school population, to make a commitment to develop appropriate programming and resources to meet the needs of exceptionally able learners, to hire a consultant to identify the needs of exceptional learners and to develop guidelines regarding programs and resources, as well as to include enrichment sections in future print and electronic media that supplement Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007, pp. 70-72). The findings that this research yields may provide useful input and information to develop a more substantial and practical policy for identifying, assessing and educating gifted and talented individuals.

Significance for practice. This study may provide valuable insight and direction for educators. Practitioners of gifted education – teachers, school boards, and governmental agencies - may gain new perspectives into successful strategies to successfully educate gifted and talented learners. It may enable the development and implementation of new programs for rural gifted learners, as well as lead to improvement for existing programs.

Purpose of the Research

This research is phenomenological in nature, seeking to understand participants' experiences with providing support to gifted and talented learners in rural Newfoundland and Labrador schools. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe existing support structures for rural gifted and talented learners in Newfoundland and Labrador, to explore educators' engagement in and perspectives towards gifted learning programming, to reveal existing programming strategies, as well as to offer suggestions to improve existing gifted and talented learner programs and to implement new programs in areas where they were previously non- existent.

To gain a greater understanding of rural teacher experiences with educating gifted learners, the following broad questions will be used to guide the research:

- o Do rural educators attempt to identify gifted and talented learners? If so, how do they do it?

- What programming, resources and supporting personnel exist at school, school board and provincial levels to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador?
- What degree of support do teachers in rural Labrador feel they have to attend to the needs of gifted and talented learners?
- What strategies do teachers in rural Labrador employ to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners?
- How can programming, resources and further support for gifted and talented learners be improved upon in rural Labrador?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research, “gifted learners” will be generally defined as a small population of students who show exceptional ability in various areas of performance, including but not limited to academic excellence (David, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2007, p. 117). Non-academic excellence may include superior performance and/or aptitude in such multiple intelligence domains as naturalistic, musical, and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence.

“Rural” communities are defined according to the definition used by Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2007), where “urban includes cities, towns and metropolitan areas with a population of 5,000 or more, [and] rural includes all others” (p. 9). Teachers who teach or have taught at schools in these communities fit this

description, as well as program specialists, CDLI teachers and other board personnel who work with schools in these communities, comprise the sample.

Limitations of the Study

This research was limited to a small number of individuals employed by the Labrador School Board, as teachers, program specialists, and itinerants. Participants' knowledge of gifted and talented learners and experience with providing gifted education may also pose as a limitation in this study; while some educators may be very knowledgeable and experienced in providing such support, others may not have the same level of knowledge or expertise. This research will not be generalizable to providing gifted education in all rural schools in the remainder of the province, Canada or abroad, as the culture and climate of various communities, provinces and countries may differ substantially from that of rural Labrador.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

To provide a foundation of knowledge on gifted and talented learners, and to inform the research that will follow this chapter, four main topics will be addressed in the review: (a) defining the term gifted and talented learner; (b) identifying gifted and talented learners; (c) programming recommendations for gifted and talented learners; and (d) considerations for rural gifted education.

Definitions

Definitions of "giftedness." Giftedness can be a difficult "slippery" term to define (David, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2007, p. 117). Since the inception of the term gifted learner, conceptions of giftedness have evolved considerably, with many proponents contributing their efforts to more accurately define what constitutes a gifted learner. Winzer (2002) states "to be gifted is to be superior in some way to the average, [b]ut beyond this, no universally accepted definition of giftedness exists and no set of traits adequately defines any gifted child" (p. 279). This statement illustrates both the advantages and limitations of current thought on giftedness, and can ultimately shape gifted learner programming, as the way in which one views giftedness will be a primary factor in both constructing a plan for identification and in providing services that are relevant to the characteristics that brought certain learners to our attention in the first place (Renzulli, 2005, p. 248).

To develop a full appreciation for the term "giftedness," it is important to examine the evolution of the term. Renzulli (2002, 2005) maintains that it is useful to view the changes in conceptions of giftedness along a continuum, ranging from initial restrictive definitions to current liberal definitions to best understanding how the definitions of gifted learner evolved (p. 68; p. 256).

The notion of giftedness was pioneered by Lewis M. Terman. In 1916, Terman defined the gifted as those individuals who scored in the top one percent of general intellectual ability as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or comparable instrument (Winzer, 2002, p. 292). It was Terman's 1922 longitudinal study of giftedness among 1528 California school children that legitimized the field of giftedness (Feldhusen, 2005, p. 65; Winzer, 2002, p. 292). While much of Terman's work in the field of giftedness is relevant and unsurpassed, the original definition of giftedness has been disputed and altered, as educators and psychologists are no longer satisfied with IQ tests as the sole measure of giftedness (Winzer, 2002, p. 292).

As intelligence tests continued to be used as an educational tool, their limitations also emerged. While an IQ-based definition of giftedness would provide ease of identification and distinct programming cut-off marks, it is restrictive, failing to account for potential for success not measured by traditional intelligence tests or for circumstances that may lead to lower scores than required for admission to programs solely based on scores. For example, differences that may result from speaking a different first language from the main language used at school, belonging to minority ethnic, religious or cultural groups, or having exceptionalities, disabilities or extenuating home circumstances are not accounted for by a test score alone (Renzulli, 2002, p. 68). Rural

learners may also be put at a disadvantage with standardized intelligence tests, as these tests are often constructed with the norm in urban places. Intelligence tests are also very culturally biased, which may neglect aspects of rural culture.

Restrictive definitions, such as those centered around IQ, are also dangerous in the sense that it may limit the number of specific performance areas that are considered in determining eligibility for special programs and may exclude other areas such as music, art, drama, leadership, public speaking, social service, and creative writing. Such definitions can also limit the degree or level of excellence that one must attain by establishing extremely high IQ cut-off points for program acceptance (Renzulli, 2005, p. 258). From a rural perspective, there are many areas in which learners may demonstrate exceptional ability in activities such as hunting, trapping, constructing shelters in the wilderness, living off of the land, or repairing all-terrain vehicles.

Borland (2005) contends that giftedness is essentially a social construct that grew out of the development and subsequent use of the Stanford-Binet intelligence test (p. 3). Results yielded by these tests made it easier to classify, guide, group and control students to subsequently provide a good education (p. 4). The influx of immigrants into the United States from countries during World War I and in the 1920s further entrenched the need to classify and group students, lending itself to a variety of test scores and so-called "intelligence levels" that these immigrants possessed (p. 4). This classification of students based on test scores then led to labeling, such as normal, abnormal, and supernormal, which led to the eventual label of gifted (p. 5). Evidently, these labels have been perpetuated throughout the decades, leading to the desire to identify the gifted learner even today.

In the 1970s, decades after the advent of intelligence test results and the World Wars, attention shifted focus towards gifted students and their performance in the United States (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 13). In 1972, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, S.P. Marland, released the report *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, more commonly referred to as the Marland Report (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 13). His contribution to the school of thought on gifted and talented learners was paramount, leading to the theories that were later developed and perhaps remaining as one of the leading definitions of giftedness in the United States (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 13). According to Marland, gifted and talented learners are learners identified by professionally qualified people, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. They require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program. They are capable of high performance, showing demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in one or a combination of general intellectual ability, specific academic appetite, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts ability, and psychomotor ability (cited in Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 13).

Advancing the understanding of giftedness beyond Marland's increasingly inclusive definition are the contemporary contributions of Renzulli, Gardner and Sternberg. Many definitions of giftedness leading up to the 1980s and 1990s were limited and confusing, so their recent theories and research bring renewed clarity to explaining the multi-faceted concept of giftedness.

Performance, potential and creativity are fundamental concepts to Renzulli's position on giftedness. Renzulli (2005) views the term gifted as an adjective, showing a

person's performance at the high end of the performance spectrum, regardless of the type of ability (p. 248). A person is considered gifted then when high potential manifests into superior performance (p. 248). Again, in a rural context, this could include superior ability in a wide variety of naturalistic abilities characteristic of many people who inhabit rural communities. Renzulli (2005) also recognized that there are many kinds of intelligence that contribute to one's overall intelligence and therefore single definitions cannot be used to explain giftedness (p. 250). First, beyond using IQ tests results as a defining measure, Renzulli defined giftedness with two broad categories: "schoolhouse giftedness" and "creative-productive giftedness" (p. 250). Schoolhouse giftedness may be also known as test-taking or lesson-learning giftedness, most easily measured by IQ or other cognitive ability tests; for this reason, it is also the type most often used for selecting students for entrance into special programs since the abilities people display on IQ and aptitude tests are exactly the kinds of abilities most valued in traditional school learning situations (p. 250). On the other hand, creative-productive giftedness values non-academic talents and skills; someone possessing this form of giftedness may use their abilities to work on things that have personal relevance to them, then extend those abilities to approach appropriately challenging levels of investigative activity (p. 255).

To further support the notion of creativity's role in giftedness, Renzulli (2005) developed the three-ring conception of giftedness. It illustrates the interaction of three traits, above average ability, task commitment, and creativity, and the effects of their interaction on human performance (p. 256). Within the model, the interacting three rings are embedded in a houndstooth-patterned background, which is intended to illustrate the

interaction of personality and environment and its effect on the expression of the three traits (p. 256).

Building upon the emergent notion of giftedness and talents beyond solely the academic domain, Gardner (1983; 1999) proposed nine potential intellectual strengths or "intelligences": logical-mathematical, verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and existential. Today, many schools accept and embrace Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences and incorporate them in both regular and gifted programs.

While Gardner's theory addresses the possibility of possessing various strengths, Sternberg's (1997) triarchic theory of intelligence addresses the information processing components of intelligence. According to the triarchic theory, intelligence is comprised of varying degrees of analytical, creative and practical ability (Sternberg, 1997, p. 1035). These abilities also contribute to the metacognition, performance, and knowledge-acquisition components of one's intelligence (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000; Sternberg, 1997).

In tandem with Renzulli and Sternberg, Feldhusen (2005) advises that giftedness must also be defined in the context of talent, expertise and achievement, as they are all interrelated, affecting and guiding the education and development of creative achievement of gifted individuals (p. 64). He notes that genetic potential can play a role in one's giftedness, occurring not in isolation, but flourishing with stimulating experiences offered by parents, family, home, schools, teachers, and curricula (p. 64). For precociously-talented children, the provision of such experiences earlier than usual leads to development of their abilities and achievement at higher levels than their same-age

peers (p. 65). Giftedness can also encompass talents beyond those measured by high IQ or extreme precociousness, including strengths in artistic domains (p. 65).

Within the past decade, more proponents of giftedness have emerged, offering models to define giftedness and to delineate recognizable traits of gifted and talented learners. Tannenbaum (2003) devised the Star Model, which proposes that five elements contribute to the development of giftedness: superior general intellect, special aptitudes, nonintellective traits, a challenging and facilitative environment, and chance/good fortune (p. 47). According to this model, a gifted and talented learner possesses all five of these elements, which interact with each other and are all represented in some way, regardless of the form of giftedness that the learner possesses (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 48). Each element can be regarded to be further composed of static and dynamic subfactors (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 47). The static subfactors involve aspects of a gifted individual at a particular moment in time, including such things as an individual's status with respect to such things as group norms, group identity, and external criteria; snapshots or single impressions of a gifted and talented learner, such as surveys and standardized measures, which can serve as a point of comparison to others (Tannenbaum, 2003, pp. 47-48). In contrast, the dynamic factors involve the processes of how the gifted and talented learner functions and the situational contexts which shape the learner's behavior (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 48). These factors are not always outwardly present, rather existing within the learner, below the surface. With appropriate opportunity and encouragement, a learner could evaluate her own individuality and the uniqueness of her surroundings based on these subfactors (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 48).

Schiever and Maker (2003) also recognized that the traditional definitions limited to high IQ scores only offer a limited viewpoint of what constitutes true giftedness (p. 163). Aligned with the notions of other giftedness proponents, Schiever and Maker put forth that the main elements of giftedness are ability, interest and willingness to solve complex problems (p. 163). According to their definition, gifted and talented learners can solve complex problems most efficiently, effectively, ethically elegantly or economically compared to others, can find complexity in simple problems, or find complex problems to be rather simple, and have the ability to solve problems using different domains of intelligence, such as those proposed by the intelligence theories of Gardner and Sternberg (Schiever & Maker, 2003, p. 163).

Concluding the discussion of defining the term giftedness, it is important that the stakeholders involved - parents, students and educators - have clear knowledge of giftedness and talent. Modern definitions of giftedness do not simply rely upon test scores or indicators from rating scale; they are descriptors of complex abilities that have the potential to develop throughout the lifetime of gifted individuals (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Introduction section, para. 3). Wallace (2006) also notes that early assessment and identification should not be considered a one-time diagnosis, as it does not necessarily indicate future and/or advanced adult success, and learning opportunities, maturity and confidence levels may change over time, influencing the development of those precocious talents (p. 194).

The definition of "rural." Defining rural is also fraught with complexity in much the same fashion as defining giftedness. Most literature cites this as being the greatest challenge when discussing rural education (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999,

p. 17) Part of this challenge lays in the fact that ruralness is often defined in terms of what lacks in comparison to urban areas, rather than in terms of the unique characteristics that make it different from urban areas and other rural areas (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 17). In the United States, a rural area is often defined on a federal level on the basis of population, the community's location outside of an urban defined area, or community type (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 2006, p. 3). Despite this one limited definition, Baldus (2003) contends that authors continue to struggle with the definition and that the United States' federal government education agencies even rely upon multiple meanings of the word in addition to this frequently-used definition (pp. 163-164). It is a common practice for agencies to develop a definition that meets their specific needs and purposes (Baldus, 2003, p. 165). Colangelo, Assouline and New (2006) recommend that rural definitions be operationally defined, and should be pliable and inclusive enough to allow for issues to be investigated in a variety of rural settings which have their own unique economic, social and political characteristics (p. 3).

Identification

Identification following early indicators of giftedness.

A series of events may lead to the formal identification of a child's talents. This may originate with teacher and/or parent observations of precocious behaviours, such as ability to use logic in reasoning; accelerating through early milestones; early competency with numbers and arithmetic operations; learning easily with little repetition; learning to read before entering school; speaking early and developing an advanced vocabulary with

understanding; or showing particular abilities in, for example, artistic, musical, physical or scientific activities. (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Identification section, para. 1; Wallace, 2006, p. 194). Generally the child may show capacity to function well at age levels two or more years beyond his or her chronological age (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Identification section, para. 1). An assessment of talent and ability may also arise in response to a child having personal or social problems in addition to the precocity, for example, struggling peer relations, rejecting regular school activities by the child, disappointment with their classroom achievement as a result of being below their expectations, inattentive and/or misbehaviours in school (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Identification section, para. 1). Regardless of the need to assess, such assessment can lead to finding alternative curricula and instructional methods to better serve the child (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Identification section, para. 2).

Identification following announcement of gifted learner programming.

Identification of gifted and talented individuals may also originate with the announcement of a program, descriptions of what will be offered in the program, and detailed criteria for successful admission or acceptance (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Phases of Identification section, para. 2). This also triggers a specific sequence of steps: application; screening and/or preliminary assessment; data synthesis; identifying specific talents; and finally, selection and placement (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, paras. 2-24).

The identification process.

Intelligence tests. Identification often begins with a general measure of mental ability, intelligence, or achievement to determine a child's general level of ability and talent (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Identification section, para. 1). Standardized

intelligence tests, typically administered by an educational psychologist, can reveal useful additional information about pupils' performance across a range of basic skills needed for school and examination success, for example, reading, spelling and mathematics (Wallace, 2006, p. 202). The same caution as defining giftedness, however, should be applied to interpreting the results of these tests, as they cannot predict the ultimate level of achievement of any pupil, nor can they identify certain skills and attributes which can only be observed in group and interactive settings, for example, active listening, oral reasoning and tenacity in pursuing arguments (p. 202).

Talent searches. Moving away from pure intelligence tests, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline and Brody (2003) describe the use of talent searches as a means to identify gifted and talented learners by means other than intelligence test scores (p. 204). An identification strategy pioneered by Julian C. Stanley, it is "a challenging test designed for older students offered to bright, motivated younger students as a means of identifying exceptional talent in a specific domain" (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 204). It bases identification on the feedback from aptitude tests rather than upon achievement or intelligence tests (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 204). It was first used with 7th and 8th graders in the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth at Johns Hopkins University in January 1972, as a means to identify advanced mathematical reasoning in these students (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 204).

Talent searches involve a two step process. The first stage is the initial screening of potential students. Students who scored 95th to 97th percentile on a grade-level standardized achievement test are invited to take an above-level test as a measure of their

aptitude (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 204). Following the invitation, the second stage resumes, in which an above-level aptitude test is administered to invited students (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 204). The chosen test often for students 2 to 4 years above invited students' current grade placement (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 204). Aptitude tests commonly used include the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT-I); ACT Assessment college entrance exam; School and College Abilities test (SCAT); PLUS Academic Abilities test, and the EXPLORE subtests in English, math, reading and science reasoning (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, pp. 206-208).

The advantages of these talent searches as a means of identifying gifted and talented learners are multiple. First of all, for educators, it can easily discern able students from exceptionally able students and provide a more precise assessment of aptitude and readiness for additional academic challenges that an achievement or intelligence test might not otherwise indicate (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 205). Talent searches are beneficial since they provide specific educational diagnoses, educational recommendations tailored to the abilities of the student, educational opportunities provided by university-based talent searches, appropriate educational information and information on specific honours, awards and scholarships (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 211). For students, it provides them with the opportunity to learn how to interpret their scores, offers a range of opportunities and services, such as gaining recognition in award ceremonies and receiving invitations to participate in special classes and programs, as well as allows them to find out more

information about other appropriate programs (Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 205).

Multiple criteria. Following the desired route of testing, "multiple criteria" may be used to continue to assess learners and ensure students' learning needs are met (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Multiple Criteria section, para. 1; Wallace, 2006, p. 194). Using multiple identification tools emerged as a response to theories, such as Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which emphasizes a range of multiple human strengths and abilities (in Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Multiple Criteria section, para. 1). Careful consideration must be given to the identification tools used, as it is not the number of measures used in the identification process, but rather what contribution each piece of information has when making valid decisions about or to serving specific objectives in gifted learner programming (Piirto in Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Multiple Criteria section, para. 1). In addition to test scores, these resources may include checklists; creativity tests; creativity inventories; essay writing; group tests; interviews; past accomplishments; rating scales; references; school grades; and self/peer/parent questionnaires (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Multiple Criteria section, para. 2; Wallace, 2006, p. 194).

Feldhusen and Jarwan (2000) recommend that labelling children as 'gifted' should be avoided during the identification, regarding the process as a means of selecting children for programs or services that better suit their needs (Summary section, para. 6). Implicit labelling of children who are not selected as "ungifted" can lead to serious problems, especially if the identification process openly labels those selected as "gifted"

(Summary section, para. 6). Ideally a good program should help all youth to identify, understand, and develop their talents, whatever the initial level, to the highest level possible (Summary section, para. 6).

Programming Recommendations

Once the conceptions of giftedness have been delineated, and gifted learners have been identified according to a suitable accommodating definition, much consideration must be made toward planning and implementing a viable, manageable, and most importantly, successful program for gifted and talented learners. Multiple models exist. Depending on the definition used by a particular school, this may limit the number of students available for specialized programming, leaving behind in the regular classroom a number of students who would indeed benefit from enriched programming.

Goals of gifted and talented learner programming. Once gifted and talented learners have been identified according to an appropriate definition and process, goals and expectations of a gifted and talented program must be clearly delineated. As Schiever and Maker (2003) note, enrichment programming must offer students a curriculum greater in depth or breadth than the prescribed curriculum for their age group and challenge and offer growth in the area of giftedness to students (p. 164). VanTassel-Baska (2003) states the following beliefs that guide recent theory and literature on gifted education; these can also guide the development of gifted and talented programs:

1. all learners should be provided curriculum opportunities that allow them to attain optimum levels of learning;

2. gifted learners have different learning needs compared with typical learners, therefore curriculum must be adapted or designed to accommodate those needs;
3. the needs of gifted learners cut across cognitive, affective, social and aesthetic areas of curriculum experiences;
4. gifted learners are best served by an approach that allows for both accelerated and enriched learning;
5. curriculum experiences for gifted learners need to be carefully planned, written down, implemented and evaluated in order to maximize potential effect (p. 174).

Beyond the major goals that a gifted and talented program wishes to achieve, it must be clear to all stakeholders – students, parents, educators and community members – what a gifted and talented learner program entails in its entirety. Pyryt and Bosetti (2006) suggest the following considerations must be made: specification of outcomes; description of the characteristics and competencies needed by teachers of the gifted; establishment of community support for the programme and opportunity for community members to actively participate as mentors; a systematic approach to identification involving several opportunities for giftedness to be discovered; availability of programmes throughout all school levels in all subject areas; a systematic approach to formative evaluation to provide opportunity to improve programmes on an ongoing basis; appropriate allocation of resources for each programme; celebration of the academic achievements as passionately as other school accomplishments, such as athletic accomplishments (p. 142). Feldhusen and Wyman (1980) narrow the scope of their requirements for a gifted program to specifically focus on meeting the needs of gifted

learners. These needs include: opportunities to achieve expected curriculum goals while being taught at an appropriate pace; opportunities to develop creative-thinking abilities, imagination, self-acceptance, self-awareness, effective interpersonal skills, and career awareness; opportunities for self-directed learning; exposure to a wide variety of information sources and stimulating reading materials; as well as stimulation and encouragement to pursue higher-level studies beyond the secondary level (p. 15).

The overarching theme of providing a gifted and talented program must be rooted in the notion that improving quality of education for all requires sensitivity to the needs of all, which requires planning educational experiences accordingly (Van Tassel-Baska, 1992, p. 75). Educating the most able learners in appropriate ways is a challenge that society must take seriously as we cannot afford to foster underachievement and alienation among these students who potentially have so much to offer (Van Tassel-Baska, 1992, p. 76).

Inclusive models of gifted learner programming.

Curriculum differentiation. With the advent of inclusive education, differentiating the curriculum in a regular classroom has become a common practice that can include and support the gifted and talented learner. Gallagher (2003) outlines four methods to support the gifted and talented learner in the regular classroom: acceleration, speeding up the pace of coverage of new content; enrichment, meaning extension of the regular curriculum with examples that build on complex ideas in the curriculum; sophistication, in the form of direct instruction of more complex ideas; and novelty, introducing unique ideas not normally in the regular curriculum (p. 19). The method of

curriculum differentiation to be used will depend upon the composition of the gifted and talented students in the group, as well as teacher preferences (p. 19).

Problem-based learning (PBL). Problem-based learning is a strategy that can be used to simultaneously instruct wide range of abilities, including the gifted and talented learner (Gallagher, 2003, p. 19). Learning is initiated with an ill-structured problem, whose solution is not embedded in problem statement. In each PBL scenario, the student is made a major stakeholder in the situation, while the teacher plays the role of coach, guiding students in their search for important knowledge by helping the students to organize the information (Gallagher, 2003, p. 19). It heightens student interest and motivation without losing content mastery (Gallagher, 2003, p. 19).

Cluster grouping. Cluster grouping is a more inclusive method of educating gifted and talented students which is highly recommended to meet higher ability students' needs in regular classroom (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 115). The use of this method has increased in popularity due to the increased attention towards inclusive education, budget cuts and the tendency to create heterogeneously grouped classes which eliminates special programs for gifted and talented learners (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 115).

Though the research base on cluster grouping is limited, several common themes have emerged in the existing cluster grouping literature. It finds that groups of gifted, high achieving or high ability students are often placed in classrooms with students of other levels of achievement; cluster grouping is often implemented as a way to differentiate curriculum; and teachers should have background, training, experience and motivation to work with gifted and talented students (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 116-118). Following provision of such teachers, schools should use flexible ability groupings and

appropriately differentiate instruction within those groups (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 118). Upon implementation of cluster grouping, classroom teachers believe that such grouping benefits all learners (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 117).

As with most methods, many stakeholders have some reservations about implementing such programs. In particular, educators have concerns with the potential effects of removing the brightest students, on both teachers and classmates, the methods of selecting teachers for these classes of high achievers, and whether cluster grouping provides appropriate differentiation for high achievers (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 117).

Despite the concerns, cluster grouping brings about several benefits. Gifted students are afforded the opportunity to regularly interact with intellectual and age peers. It provides full-time services to gifted students without additional cost. Curriculum differentiation is more likely to occur when students are placed with a teacher who has expertise, training and a desire to differentiate instruction. Removing high achievers from most classrooms will allow lower ability students to emerge. It reduces the range of achievement levels that must be addressed in the classroom (Gentry & Owen, 1999, p. 117).

The Pyryt Enrichment Matrix. The debate also exists whether or not to include the gifted learner in the regular classroom (Pyryt & Rosetti, 2006, p. 141). Cognizant of the likelihood of gifted learners' presence in the traditional classroom, Pyryt (2006) developed the Pyryt Enrichment Matrix, also known as Pyryt's P's - pace, process, passion, product and peers - outlining the fundamental needs of gifted students to be met in the regular classroom if appropriate accommodations are made (p. 143). Pace involves the opportunity for students to learn at an accelerated pace to accommodate their faster

learning rate; process enables students to develop higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, critical thinking, divergent thinking, and creative problem-solving in order to address their capacity for complex thought; passion incorporates the use of independent inquiry to engage students to pursue areas of interest; product recognises that there are multiple ways that gifted students can represent their knowledge gained through independent inquiry, while the peers components focuses on ensuring that students develop positive relationships with peers (pp. 142-149).

The School-Wide Enrichment Model (SEM). Another inclusive approach is the School-Wide Enrichment Model (SEM). It is a whole-school approach to providing enrichment education to gifted learners. It includes a talent pool of 15-20% of above average ability and/or high potential students who are identified through a variety of measures including achievement tests, teacher nominations, assessment of potential for creativity and task commitment, as well as alternative pathways of entrance such as self-nomination and parent nomination (Reis & Renzulli, 2000, SEM section, para. 1). High achievement test and IQ test scores automatically include a student in the talent pool, enabling those students who are underachieving in their academic school work to be included (Reis & Renzulli, 2000, SEM section, para. 1). Numerous services are then available to meet the needs of these students: interest and learning style assessments, curriculum compacting, and enrichment triad programming (Reis & Renzulli, 2000, SEM section, para. 2). SEM aims to provide experiences for further talent development, so part of the service delivery program involves a total talent portfolio, which focuses on strengths and is used to make decisions on appropriate programming for the gifted learner (Reis & Renzulli, 2000, Service Delivery section, para. 1).

Models such as SEM could be used as a basis for any gifted learner or differentiated programming, regardless of whether education is occurring within the SEM model. This may include, but is not limited to options such as curriculum compacting, modification and/or differentiation; flexibility grouping; general classroom enrichment opportunities; mixed-ability classes; opportunities beyond the classroom; self-designed or independent study courses; special enrichment programs or courses; within-class and non-graded cluster grouping; within and across-grade advanced level courses; and within and across-grade pull-out groups based on ability and/or interest (Reis & Renzulli, 2000, Fig. 4; Wallace, 2006, pp. 205-206).

Exclusive models of gifted learner programming. Many exclusive, "pull-out" models of gifted and talented learners have existed quite successfully over the past several decades. While there has been much movement in the direction of inclusive education, some of these "exclusive" practices help meet the needs of gifted and talented learners better. Such practices include grouping, acceleration, special programs, homeschooling, and mentoring.

Grouping and acceleration. Perhaps some of the most common practices for servicing gifted and talented learners are grouping and acceleration. The main idea of such methods is modifying curricula designed for average students to address the needs of academically advanced students (Brody, 2004, p. xxiii). Grouping and acceleration widely implemented, but often with much controversy (Brody, 2004, p. xxiii). Regardless of the debate and controversy, evidence shows that grouping and acceleration are effective strategies for achieving that goal (Brody, 2004, p. xxiv).

Grouping. Grouping has often been used to provide access to more challenging coursework for gifted students by grouping together same-age peers who are also academically advanced by ability grouping or by instructional grouping (Brody, 2004, p. xxiii). It is viewed as a means to accelerate learning for students who are ready for a more advanced curriculum (Brody, 2004, p. xxiii). Van Tassel-Baska (1992) notes that less research exists on grouping of gifted learners compared to that of acceleration and that modest positive effects have been interpreted from the limited existing literature on grouping (p. 73).

Based on the limited body of literature on grouping, some recommendations have been made. Grouping students should be done to appropriately serve students, not to make organization of classes easier. Teaching strategies should be flexible based on needs of identified and non-identified learners. Gifted and talented learners should have opportunity to interact with others at their instructional level in relevant core areas. Groupings should be comprised of learners who share the same special interest areas. Students should also have opportunity to learn independently based on capacity and interest (Van Tassel-Baska, 1992, p. 77).

Kulik and Kulik (1992) suggest five different ability grouping combinations according to ability: multilevel classes, in which same grade students are divided into 3 ability groups, high, middle and low ability, and are instructed in separate classrooms for a full day or for a single subject; cross-grade grouping, in which students from several grades are grouped according to achievement level in subject and taught in separate classrooms regardless of their regular grade; within-class grouping, in which ability groups are formed within a classroom and each group is provided with aptitude

appropriate instruction; enriched classes for the gifted and talented, in which high aptitude students receive richer, more varied experiences than normally available to them in the regular curriculum for their age level; and accelerated classes for the gifted and talented, in which high aptitude students receive instruction that allows them to move through grades more rapidly or to finish earlier than other students (pp. 106-107).

Acceleration. Acceleration typically involves placing able students with older students to provide them with access to advanced content (Brody, 2004, p. xxiii). It is a common belief that acceleration means skipping grades; however, there are a wide variety of ways to accelerate without skipping (Brody, 2004, p. xxiv).

Some of the earliest accelerative practices were introduced by Julian Stanley's Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) at Johns Hopkins University in 1971 (Brody, 2004, p. xxv). He found that acceleration served students with exceptionally advanced academic abilities very well (Brody, 2004, p. xxv). It was then that subject acceleration, academic summer programs and sometimes, early college entrance, were used as accelerative strategies.

Initial controversy surrounded acceleration due to fear of possible social and emotional issues. Spurred by this controversy and trepidation, Stanley and his colleagues studied the students' progress, concluding after a five-year period that five of the six students who participated in the accelerated programs earned Ph.D.s and were working in prestigious jobs, the sixth student was 18 years old doing graduate work, and finally that there were no ill effects from their extreme acceleration (Brody, 2004, p. xxv).

In recent years, parents, teacher and administrators still tend to be hesitant about employing it, even though there is plenty of research (Rimm & Lovance, 1992, p. 35). In

1992, Van Tassel-Baska reported acceleration leads to positive results in cognitive, social and emotional development (p. 72-73). Work by Rimm and Lovance (1992) demonstrates that acceleration has proven effective in providing incentive to motivate children who were underachieving as a result of an unchallenging curriculum (p. 44). Brody and Benbow's 2004 study investigated relationships between acceleration and academic achievement, extracurricular activities, goals and aspirations, social and emotional adjustment, and revealed no harmful effects (p. 65). In fact, students in accelerated programs performed as well as or better than the students who were in non-accelerated programs (Brody & Benbow, 2004, p. 65).

Despite controversy, there are many positive arguments in support of acceleration. Acceleration can prevent and reverse underachievement in gifted students, allow gifted students to progress at an appropriate rate for their capabilities and prevent them from conforming to a slower pace (Rimm & Lovance, 1992, pp. 33-34).

Several careful considerations must be made before employing acceleration as a programming option for gifted and talented learners. In addition to tests used as the main evaluative measure for identification, thought must be made as to providing an academically challenging environment, the academic makeup of the child's current class and accelerated class and the availability and quality of school enrichment programs (Rimm & Lovance, 2004, pp. 34-35).

By no means is early college entrance the only method of acceleration. Others include early entrance to kindergarten, telescoped programs, fast-paced or compacted curricula, obtaining credit through examination only, mentorships, distance education, advanced placement (AP) programs, International Baccalaureate (IB) programs,

academic summer programs, dual enrolment in high school and college courses, as well as concurrent undergraduate and graduate programs (Brody, 2004, p. xxvi; Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline & Brody, 2003, p. 208).

Following the body of research that continues to develop, several recommendations have emerged for future programming and policy changes:

1. Each learner should be entitled to experience learning at an appropriate level of challenge for them, defined at a difficulty level slightly above skill mastery;
2. Gifted learners should be afforded the opportunity to begin school-based experiences based on readiness and exit them on proficiency (early entrance and exit made available);
3. Some gifted learners could benefit from telescoping or compacting 2 years of curriculum into one or by way of by-passing a grade level, if appropriate (Van Tassel-Baska, 1992, pp. 76-77).

Special programs. Special programs provide a level of challenge and pace of learning more suited to intellectual capabilities of gifted students which is different from what they get in school (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 219). It offers more opportunity for independent inquiry, in-depth study, and accelerated learning (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 219). These programs are often the first place where gifted and talented learners must concentrate on their study and work, and it provides the intensive instruction often they require, which is beyond what schools can or are willing to provide (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 219). It provides opportunity to be educated in their area of talent that sometimes their parents and schools are limited in their knowledge to provide (Olszewski-Kubilius,

2003, p. 219). Also, it provides gifted children the opportunity to have friends and interact with intellectual peers, as in traditional school groupings they tend not to be grouped in homogeneous classes with other gifted children (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 219). This can provide gifted and talented learners with greater intellectual stimulation and challenge and saves them from a pattern of underachievement or poor study habits that stem from "easy" or "boring" classes and lack of peer support (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 219).

Research on the effects of special programs yield positive results. Special programs for gifted and talented learners provide a better social, emotional, and academic environment for gifted students (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 222). The change in environment, by way of placement in a special program, often leads to positive changes in self-perceptions (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 222).

Common special programs include contests, competitions, Olympiads, after-school or Saturday classes, resource room programs, additions to regular school curriculum, special interest clubs, Odyssey of the Mind, Future Problem Solving, Science Olympics (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 225; Schiever & Maker, 2003, p. 164).

Aside from the previously mentioned advantages of special programs, these programs can also provide gifted and talented learners with advanced training and skills, offer opportunities to meet with other students with similar interests and abilities, and provide opportunities to receive feedback and interact with adult professionals (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, p. 225). Programs can be process-oriented, content-oriented or product-oriented with a plan to extend learning, but must not be the only program to serve the needs of gifted and talented students (Schiever & Maker, 2003, p. 164).

Mentoring. Another unique strategy, as described by Clasen and Clasen (2003), is mentoring (p. 254). In this strategy, the gifted and talented learner, a "novice," is paired with an adult, an "experienced expert," who can provide them with the challenge and continued encouragement in the development of his or her talent (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 254). This strategy should be adopted once all available school options to meet the needs of a gifted and talented learner have been exhausted (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 257).

A mentorship is a one-on-one interaction, where full commitment by mentor and mentee is required if success is expected (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 255). A gifted and talented student can benefit from multiple mentors, for example, a peer mentor to offer emotional support, competition and comparison during development, and an adult mentor who will help them focus on development of their talent (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 255). The length of mentorship can vary, depending on purpose, age and maturity of the mentee (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 256).

In a successful mentorship, there are expectations of both the mentor and the mentee. The mentor adopts many roles, as a teacher, expert, guide, advisor, friend and role model for the mentee throughout their development (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 256). Simultaneously, the mentee is expected to possess readiness, exceptional ability and potential to excel in a domain, interest and enthusiasm for an area of study, perseverance, willingness to commit time and energy to study and exploration, a drive to explore the chosen domain, a level of developmental maturity for one on one relationship with an adult and for autonomous study, and the ability to keep open lines of communication with their mentor(s), teacher(s), and parents (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p.257). They should

possess enough maturity to fulfill age-appropriate responsibilities – following appointments, schedules and timelines (Clasen & Clasen, 2003, p. 257).

Homeschooling. Often, some parents turn to teaching their children at home because they feel that the public school system has failed to meet the needs of their exceptional children. In recent years, this has been more feasible, especially with the availability of resources on the Internet. To provide opportunity for social interaction, parents tend to enrol and introduce their children with multiple social opportunities. While there is little documentation or evaluation of this, favourable reports about home schooling lead some parents to explore this as an option for gifted programming (Gallagher, 2003, p. 18).

Integrated Curriculum Model. VanTassel-Baska's (1997) Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) can be used in the instruction of smaller groups. It emphasizes advanced content central to discipline, provides higher-order thinking and processing, and focuses learning experiences around major issues, themes, and ideas that define real world applications and modeling within an area of study (Gallagher, 2003, p. 19).

Rural Gifted Education

Providing gifted and talented learner programming in rural schools has been a contentious issue for several years. While little evidence exists to support the current state of affairs in Newfoundland and Labrador, a considerable amount of literature exists, offering insight and perspectives surrounding educating the rural gifted and talented learner. The need for developing appropriate rural gifted learner programming has

proliferated in the past two decades, garnering increased attention in the rural education literature (Arnold, Newman, Goddy & Dean, 2005, p. 4).

Current literature. Rural gifted education research is very important, especially in light of the fact that there has traditionally been a limited focus on it. The reasons to increase rural gifted education research are many. As with any classroom and school, in a rural school each child still has the right to challenge her abilities and maximize her potential (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462). In maximizing this potential, rural communities want to retain these talented individuals, as they often cannot afford to lose the contributions that these students could make to their rural community, culture and economy (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462). Rural areas are also under continuous pressure to urbanize by emigration, immigration and technology (Lawrence, 2009, p. 462).

It is also very important to recognize that many of the very pioneers of gifted education coincidentally originated from rural areas. Lewis Terman, Julian C. Stanley, Howard Gardner, Joseph Renzulli, and Robert Sternberg were all born and raised in rural United States, giving voices to both gifted and rural education, showing that giftedness can cut across such boundaries as gender, ethnicity, economics and geography (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 2001, p. 2).

Attention to the rural gifted and talented learner has increased. In 2009, *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* published an issue entirely devoted to the unique issues surrounding rural school populations. From an American perspective, another leading source of rural gifted and talented education research is the Connie Belin & Jacqueline Blank International Centre for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Iowa. In the past decade, this centre has published three extensive reports

outlining historical perspectives, challenges, minorities and the overall state of rural gifted and talented education in the United States: *Gifted Education in Rural Schools: A National Assessment* (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999), *Gifted Voices in Rural America* (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 2001), and *Gifted in Rural America: Faces of Diversity* (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 2006). These publications were borne out of an absence of literature regarding the challenges that geographical barriers present gifted education or the absence of literature on successful gifted and talented programming for rural students (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999, p. 5).

From 1990 to 2003, Lawrence (2009) conducted a peer review of the existing literature of rural gifted education (p. 461). It illustrates that a good body of work is being done in the United States which tests assumptions about gifted students and continues to build a substantial body of knowledge about rural gifted education (p. 461). In doing so, it defines and frames main issues in rural gifted education research, identifies strategies that can be adapted to new studies and programs in rural areas, demonstrates the importance of these strategies to rural cultures and conditions, and creates a foundation for more experimental, longitudinal and replication studies in rural gifted education (p. 461).

Challenges. Several common themes emerge from the literature review of rural gifted education. These themes illustrate the unique challenges that present themselves in educating gifted and talented learners in rural areas.

Isolation. Cultural and/or geographic isolation are major barriers to providing gifted learner programs to rural schools. The sheer isolation of these schools leads to

greater challenges when attempting to implement gifted learner programs. Rural schools often exhibit the following characteristics with respect to isolation: situated far away from cultural centers, libraries, universities and other schools; teachers do not have access to institutions to augment their training; students have less exposure to a range of professions compared to their urban peers; small class sizes limit the possibility that gifted students will have exposure to classmates with similar aptitudes and interests (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 20). In recent years, improvements have been noticed with regards to rural gifted students: a greater awareness of gifted students in rural schools exists and a greater commitment has been made to ensure that geography does not dictate opportunities to identify and enhance talent (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, p. 14).

Resources. One of the main challenges involves the amount and access to suitable resources required for implementing gifted learner programs. Human resources presents an initial obstacle - the sheer difficulty in hiring teachers, let alone those with advanced training and experience needed to offer gifted and talented learner programming, makes it difficult to offer a successful program (Baldas, 2003, p. 172). Rural educators also cite deficiencies and limitations in available curricula, student enrollment and time. Insufficient options and alternatives for program development, insufficient student enrollment to justify grouping or pull-out options and insufficient time for student involvement in additional programming suited for their needs, such as advanced placement and/or community college courses, often lead to a short-lived or non-existence of gifted and talented learner programs in rural areas (Bull & Fishkin, 1987, p. 74; Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 156). On the other hand, in areas where some gifted and talented

learner programming is available, there may be an overemphasis placed on a single option such as concurrent enrollment in high school and community college classes (Baldus, 2003, p. 172).

Parents and gifted children themselves often find there are insufficient services, likely resulting from the tendency of rural people to accept the status quo, lower funding, untrained staff, and fewer specialists (Lawrence, 2009, p. 469).

Some countries have taken it upon themselves to create support centres. For example, the Connie Belin & Jacqueline Blank International Centre for Gifted Education and Talent Development was established at the University of Iowa to help rural American schools with identification, curricular programming, teacher training, statistical information and program evaluation of and for gifted and talented learners (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 2001, p. 6). The Neag Centre for Gifted Education and Talent Development has also been a cornerstone for supporting gifted and talented learners in the United States and internationally for 40 years by researching, developing and providing resources for gifted and talented learners with respect to creativity, assessment, identification, programming, and evaluation (University of Connecticut, n.d., para. 1).

Within Canada, the University of Calgary (n.d.) established The Centre for Gifted Education. It is the only centre of its kind in Canada and recognized internationally for excellence in assisting gifted children with their intellectual, social and emotional development and providing support to gifted students, their families and educators through research, teaching and professional development (University of Calgary, n.d., para. 1). Unfortunately, the direct services it previously offered to students in the past

ended at the end of 2009, due to the current economic state in Canada (Schwean, 2009, p. 1).

Rural values and culture. Defining a rural area often comes at the cost of being described with respect to what it lacks in comparison to an urban area. By the same method, rural students are distinguished from urban peers based on the characteristics of urban students (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465).

A rural student's relationship to family and community is very important. School often acts as an extension of family; rural school tend to be supportive of its members, and knows and values all of its members (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465). Students are often identified through participation and merit in extra-curricular activities, not just on their academic performance (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465). The literature also notes that there are differences in personal development and a greater appreciation and value of time by rural students (Lawrence, 2009, p. 465).

Parental, school and community support. The network of parents, educators and community members behind a rural school can either make or break the existence of programming for rural gifted and talented learners. All too often new programs or practices do not reach fruition because of the willingness of the community to accept the status quo (Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 157). In general, people are fearful of change, which is further compounded by a rural community's more conservative social and political community values in comparison to more urban places (Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 157).

Negative concerns often arise from parents and other community members with strong roots in the community. The introduction of gifted and talented learner programs are often viewed as potential threats to community values or providing opportunity for a rural community's talented individuals to move away and detract from the success and economy of that rural area (Jones & Southern, 2004, pp. 148-149). Community members may be suspicious of efforts to locate and provide special services to gifted students, reflective of their fear that students will be encouraged to leave the community by partaking in such special programs, and that such programs will instill cultural values that reflect collective rather than individual accomplishment (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 528). Also, such programs are often dubbed as elitist by some community members (Baldus, 2003, p. 172; Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 149). In some cases, a simple lack of motivation from parents and/or the community stalls the pursuit and development of programs for gifted learners (Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 157). Even in areas where the need for gifted learner programming is recognized, there are often varying levels of local economic and political support, presenting yet another barrier to providing necessary services (Baldus, 2003, p. 171; Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 150).

Within schools, some teachers are reluctant or disagree with changes that are made for scheduling so that gifted and talented students can avail of more appropriate programming for them such as college, AP and honours courses. Statements such as the following embody such reluctance or resentment: "You can't do everything. Kids and parents have to make choices and there are some people who think rearranging the whole schedule for these kids isn't right" (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 2001, p. 19).

Administrators and teachers may also be fearful of the effect of gifted and talented students going elsewhere for their programming, often viewing alternate programs as "something special" that was being done for a select few, with comparable opportunities and funding unavailable for all the others (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 2001, p. 20).

Administrative support. Furthermore, rural teachers seek support of their administrators to assist them in their efforts at implementing gifted and talented programming. In order to achieve success in providing programs to gifted and talented learners, teachers feel that administrators must understand the needs of gifted and talented learners, serve as leaders among their teachers in understanding these needs, and most importantly, support programming by allowing for training, preparation time, financial support (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999, p. 27).

Training. Another major concern that plagues rural teachers when attempting to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners is having the appropriate training to do just that. Sufficient training would enable them to develop appropriate curriculum for gifted and talented students, to better understand the needs of these students, and to better challenge ALL students (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999, p. 27). Without training, teachers may not recognize the characteristics of high-ability students, especially if they descend from diverse or impoverished backgrounds (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 521). Training would help teachers to recognize these characteristics and provide them with the skills to identify these individuals (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 521).

In order to successfully implement differentiated instruction, rural teachers need to learn how to do so to meet students' wide range of abilities, skills and interests (Lawrence, 2009, p. 486). Modifications to instruction, even small ones, have proven to

be beneficial for rural gifted learners (Lawrence, 2009, p. 487). For example, rearranging a classroom to facilitate student interaction was a beneficial modification that assisted rural gifted learners (Lawrence, 2009, p. 487).

Time. With sufficient training to make rural teachers knowledgeable and proficient with gifted and talented education, sufficient time is also needed to plan. When time is already a premium for most teachers, even more time would be needed to make special plans for special lessons for gifted and talented learners (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999, p. 27). Additional time would also allow teachers to meet and collaborate with other faculty members (Colangelo, Assouline, & New, 1999, p. 27).

Identifying rural gifted children. A 1986 study by Helge reveals that rural teacher participants indicated that strategies for identifying and educating rural gifted learners is important to rural education research and should be further explored (p. 74). Bull and Fishkin (1987) state one fundamental truth about educating gifted and talented learners in a rural context: gifted education is not provided in rural schools, often because most programs are designed to only be applicable and accessible to urban schools (p. 73). Most literature on identifying gifted rural children often focuses on problems with the search and selection process (Lawrence, 2009, p. 474). Considering this, a body of knowledge and an arsenal of strategies for educating rural gifted and talented learners should be developed.

For example, as noted with attempting to define giftedness regardless of the locale, Weschler and other intelligence tests may be limiting and not a true measure of intellectual potential (Lawrence, 2009, p. 474). Further studies show that samples of a student's work such as portfolios and projects work better as a basis for identifying gifted

children (Lawrence, 2009, p. 475). Also comparable to defining rural, the studies suggest that criteria used to identify the rural gifted learner be expansive and inclusive, so that opportunities would not be limited (Lawrence, 2009, p. 480).

Other major issues with identifying rural gifted children lay with educators' inexperience with correctly identifying gifted and talented learners. Teachers untrained in identifying gifted and talented learners often identify "teacher pleasers" as gifted learners, while they are actually "bright average children from academically enriched backgrounds" and are not truly gifted (Lawrence, 2009, p. 476).

Sometimes, minority students in rural areas are often tracked into lower level courses, preventing them from availing of enriched programs simply on the basis of a stereotype about their minority (Lawrence, 2009, p. 479). To minimize this trend, accelerated courses could be offered to all students who have a wide range of areas of interest; encouraging students to pursue their enrichment interests may also help reverse this trend (Lawrence, 2009, p. 479).

Parental involvement would also lead to better identification and provision of services to meet their children's needs. Parents often have a wealth of valuable insight, so they could be given a more central role in identification (Lawrence, 2009, p. 479). Programs could be made available that allow parents to seek better educational opportunities for their children, such as transferring to different schools within a district to take advantage of courses that better suit their needs and interests if possible (Lawrence, 2009, pp. 479-480).

Educating rural gifted children. As with more urban schools, differentiated instruction is a potential means to offer support for gifted and talented learners in rural areas; however, rural schools will offer unusual opportunities to do so, while simultaneously confronting unique challenges (Lawrence, 2009, p. 482).

Jones and Southern (2004) acknowledge that methods such as pull-out programs, acceleration, ability grouping and extra-curricular activities are popular programming options in urban areas but question whether this would be feasible in rural schools, mainly due to the challenges previously mentioned (p. 150). They also note that no data exists to support or refute the use of these programming options in rural schools (Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 150). Following this recognized dearth of supporting data, they designed two studies to address educators' perceptions on ability grouping, acceleration and options for gifted students in rural schools. This 2004 study in the United States, revealed that three rural school districts indicated that accelerative options exist at the secondary level for gifted learners, such as Advanced Placement, concurrent high school-college enrollment, academic challenge for credit, academic honours courses, and subject acceleration, to some extent (p. 155). While offering advanced programming is a suitable strategy, it is difficult to attract and keep qualified teachers to offer such programs (Lawrence, 2009, p. 482). For example, some rural elementary schools have programming options that were extra-curricular or intermittent, in the forms of things such as summer institutes, mentorships, and academic contests or competitions, simply because the human resources required to offer these programs themselves were intermittent (Jones & Southern, 2004, p. 155). On a positive note, rural schools can still positively differentiate instruction at a more sustainable level by offering extracurricular

and special programs, involving parents and peers, or creating "magnet schools" in science and math for capable students (Lawrence, 2009, pp. 482-485).

Being a rural gifted learner. Simply being identified as gifted in a rural area can present further intrapersonal challenges for a gifted student. In a typically homogeneous grouping of students, rural students may be presented with and have to deal with stereotypes of being different (Lawrence, 2009, p. 468). This places them in a vulnerable position; as if being gifted and having needs met was not a challenge already, this vulnerability makes being gifted even more stressful for the student in a rural setting (Lawrence, 2009, p. 468). Beyond coping with stereotypes that they may encounter, students may resort to other strategies. They may feel little pressure to stand out or excel, as educators who are untrained or lack knowledge about gifted and talented learners may assume that they can do everything on their own; they might also feel neglected as they may often be provided with appropriate enrichment experiences only after the needs of all other students have been met (Lawrence, 2009, p. 469).

By nature, gifted children also have increased capacity for overexcitability, that is, heightened sensitivity and emotional intensity, in psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional domains of development (Lawrence, 2009, p. 469). This can further complicate the challenge of being different in a small rural setting and to the overall well-being of the gifted student. This heightened emotional state can lead to psychological issues if the student is not given appropriate outlets and strategies to deal with them. Heightened emotional potential can create extreme tension that leads to mental illness, and stress and anxiety that, if left untreated, can have serious consequences for the student, family, school and community (Lawrence, 2009, p. 470). It

is not uncommon to see simultaneous manic depressive illness and giftedness, or unhealthy perfectionism and giftedness (Lawrence, 2009, p. 470). Perfectionism runs along a continuum from healthy to dysfunctional (Lawrence, 2009, p. 471). Some perfectionism may be acceptable and can help gifted students, but can also constrain achievement and creativity if not managed properly (Lawrence, 2009, p. 471).

Declining rural population. There is a major tendency for rural areas to decline in population as more of its members attain an increasingly higher level of education. The trend is that the more remote a rural area, the greater the level of population decline (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 516). The term "brain drain" is often used to describe the phenomenon of the most highly educated people of a rural area leaving that area (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 516). Most rural families and educators are aware of this and tend to discourage students from going on to do post-secondary studies to prevent them from leaving, as young people who leave rural communities tend to never return (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 516). Some parents may expect their children to stay, making students feel distressed or confused (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, 517).

There are negative consequences for schools as a result of this brain drain and subsequent decline in population. Less funding, less resources, difficulty in offering specialized courses and services, and pressure to close or consolidate schools are cited as major detriments to rural schools and rural gifted and talented programming in general (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 516).

From a positive perspective, schools can present alternatives to keep options open for students. Distance education and teleconferencing could be a suitable alternative to

offer foreign language courses, advanced courses, and Advanced Placement courses (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, pp. 517-518). Where facilities are available, dual enrollment in high school and college may be another suitable option (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 517). These positive strategies encourage rural students to look beyond their communities for meaningful post-secondary and career opportunities (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 517). It may also help to change parental expectations, allowing some parents to accept the notion that their children will likely leave the community (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 517).

Changing rural demographics. From 1995 to 2004, minority populations in the United States increased by 55% (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 522). Of this increase, 23% of rural students in the US (2 million) are minority (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 522). These precipitated rapid changes in school populations, leading to intense changes in rural schools and communities where traditional beliefs and values are highly regarded and tensions develop between new and old members over conflicting values (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 523).

With respect to gifted and talented learners, educators in these areas are now challenged with identifying and nurturing giftedness in many different cultural backgrounds (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 524). Minority students often get excluded from gifted programs, frequently on the basis of IQ tests which are culturally biased (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 524). English language learners often placed in remedial classes because of incomplete fluency in English, teacher cultural biases, or poverty may limit their participation (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 524).

From a positive perspective, rural schools can take an active role to identify

minority gifted students and serve them, make commitments to include diverse students in such programs, invoke policy changes, provide professional development, increase staffing, encourage collaboration between teachers, use technology to provide special instruction to diverse learners, incorporate video conferencing for Advanced Placement courses, all facilitating connecting to other diverse gifted learners (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, pp. 524-525).

Rural poverty. The economy and financial statuses of the people in rural areas undoubtedly have an impact on learning, let alone providing appropriate support for gifted and talented learners. Even in the 21st century, levels of poverty in rural United States still remain high (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 519). This crosses over into the financial resources at the disposal of rural schools. Higher levels of poverty and struggling economies in rural areas often translate to low levels of funding (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 519). In the United States, funding for schools suffers in states where local property taxes contribute to school funding (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 519).

What does all this mean for gifted and talented learners? With limited funds, poorer rural school districts will tend to focus more of their resources and efforts on remedial education than gifted education, mainly due to the high correlation between poverty and low academic achievement (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 520). Low income communities can also hamper opportunities for gifted and talented students, increasing distance to programs and services, hindering accessibility to resources and limiting interaction with high-achieving students (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p.

521). Limited funding can also lead to extreme difficulty in recruiting teachers that could make providing special programs a possibility (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 522).

Often, human resources are distributed in such a way that little time, if any, gets devoted to programming for gifted and talented students (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 521). For example, teachers must assume many different roles in rural schools which leaves them scarce opportunities to provide a quality gifted and talented program (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 521). Many adults may also lack the time, knowledge and/or resources to provide academic, social and emotional support (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 521). Parents may also be unlikely to support what they do not understand or value, such as a special program for gifted and talented learners outside of school hours (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p.521).

Poverty itself can also have direct, devastating impacts on a learner, which can impede having their needs met, influencing their nutrition, housing, health care, safety, psychological adjustment, cognitive development, and material well-being (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 520). Psychologically, it may also foster a sense of hopelessness and suggest to students that they have little choice but to leave their community when school is finished (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 521).

Successful, cost-efficient strategies can still be implemented to provide gifted and talented programming in impoverished students and schools. Most schools have access to computers, thus the use of technology by way of teleconferencing, interactive video, and electronic distance education classes are accelerative strategies that can be provided with little to no cost (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 522).

Ongoing accountability requirements. After the publication of the report "A Nation at Risk" between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, state governments in the United States became concerned with academic performance, so they put in place policies and legislation to hold schools and boards accountable for student performance, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 525). Incentive programs were put in place on the basis of performance (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 526). Such policies, legislation, and programs were met with defensiveness from rural schools, especially those with high poverty rates (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 526). Educators nationwide responded by resorting to direct instructional methods, teaching to the test, and educational triage, that is, reteaching concepts to raise scores (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 526).

For gifted and talented learners, this standards-based curriculum focused only on accountability, and was not sufficiently rigorous or deep enough to capture the interest and expand the horizons of gifted students (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 527). The revisited traditional teaching methods were much less challenging than the active and investigative methods which serve gifted learners well, being often too didactic and slow paced for the gifted learner (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 527). To meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural schools, rural teachers often show reluctance to differentiate for these students in light of accountability issues and rarely seek to accelerate these students despite parental support and supporting research (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 527). In the absence of appropriate instruction from their teachers, gifted and talented students tended to perform to the minimum standard rather

than make gains (Howley, Rhodes & Beall, 2009, p. 527).

Successes. While the provision of either rural or gifted education is often shrouded in a veil of negativity and reluctance, there are many benefits and advantages, which support all learners in a school, including the needs of the gifted rural learner. Successful strategies for teaching gifted and talented learners employed in rural locales should not be overshadowed by the challenges, but rather celebrated. These include considerably more individualized attention, familiarity and trust among members of the school community, greater opportunities for involvement in school activities, and increased participation and commitment from parents and community members (Baldus, 2003, p. 170).

Colangelo, Assouline and New (1999) note that the hallmarks of rural education, such as mixed-age classes and high degree of school-community interaction are in vogue and are traversing into all types of schools (p. 27). Small schools possess many benefits: a high level of student-adult interaction; smaller enrolment which usually equates to less bureaucracy, improved communication and increased opportunity for students to more easily participate in school clubs and events; learning through community involvement; participation in multiple school events; increased interaction between teachers, allowing them to discuss students more often and plan individualized plans; and increased sense of belonging (Colangelo, Assouline & New, 1999, pp. 22, 29). Lawrence (2009) also notes many positive attributes of rural schools: supportive family atmospheres; low student-teacher ratios; smaller teaching staffs; conditions favourable to adopting effective practices; and a high value placed on sports, extracurricular activities, peers and family

(p. 487).

Baldus (2003) also identifies the following commonalities in successful rural gifted education endeavours: teachers or administrators with a tremendous vision for and personal commitment to the programming; programs that prove standards and flexibility for the development of exceptional talents; students who were exceptional and needed special programs suited to their needs; and rural or small-town areas with limited options (pp. 172-173). Many schools, such as those referenced in the Baldus (2003) study, do not attempt to serve all students and all forms of giftedness, often due to the size of the schools and the limited resources, yet maintain and deliver a thriving program (p. 173).

Jones and Southern (2004) also highlight many positive outcomes for gifted and talented learners in smaller rural communities, despite increasingly more limited options for programming. Rural settings tend to offer a more nurturing environment, increased personal attention and concern by teachers and administrators, and increased opportunity for leadership and extra-curricular activities (p. 158).

Directions for rural gifted education literature. While many topics that surround gifted and talented learners have received greater attention, the existing research can be further developed. Several topics are absent and also demand attention. These topics include rural gifted students who stay in their home community in adulthood, experiences of rural gifted learners who left and did not return, the effect of rural school closures and/or consolidation on gifted and talented learners, impacts of policy changes to offer support for distance education, early college entrance for rural gifted and talented learners, home study, Advanced Placement courses, and charter schools, and the effects

of programs intended to provide appropriate educational strategies for rural gifted and talented learners (Howley, Rhodes, & Beall, 2009, p. 489).

Comparable Canadian research also demands further attention. Most North American research on rural gifted education examines rural American schools. A large portion of Canada is comprised of rural schools, whose unique needs and situations are important and relevant. Further research would contribute to building a solid body of Canadian knowledge on rural gifted education.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Cohen, Marion, and Morrison (2007) contend that interpretive, qualitative research seeks to understand the subjective world of human experience, and "to get inside the person and understand within" (pp. 21-22); such research begins with the individual and sets out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. Qualitative theory emerges from the research, rather than preceding the research, consisting of individuals' meanings which offer insight and understanding of people's behaviours (p. 22). To achieve a deeper understanding, phenomenological inquiry seeks to "[advocate] the direct experience... and [see] behaviour as determined by the phenomenon of experience rather than by external, objective and physical described reality" (English and English in Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2007, p. 22).

The phenomenological approach of qualitative research was best suited to understanding the experiences of rural educators in Labrador and investigating the perspectives of 15 rural Labrador educators with respect to gifted and talented learner programming.

Permissions and Procedures

Once granted research approval by the Memorial University Research Ethics Board in November 2009, this research also required the permission of the director of the Labrador School Board and the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI). A

detailed letter of consent was sent to the respective directors describing the intended purpose, methodology, time line and potential benefits of the study to be conducted with personnel within their organizations (Appendix A). At the request of the director of Labrador School Board, a meeting took place to discuss further details of the research. Permission was granted from the Labrador School Board in December 2009. At the request of CDLI, a telephone conference took place to discuss the research. Permission was granted in May 2010.

Site and population selection. Once permission was obtained, participants were sought from educators involved in educating students in the 11 rural schools under the jurisdiction of Labrador School Board from 2005 to 2010. In addition to classroom teachers, potential participants were sought from program specialists, itinerants, and other educators at the Labrador School Board. CDLI teachers were also sought as participants. Initial contact was made with all potential participants by e-mail. In the initial contact, a detailed letter of consent was attached that outlined the research's purpose and methodology (Appendix B). The letter included discussion of the value of this research to rural education. Most importantly, it also advised potential participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. If they wished to participate, they completed and returned the consent form which was distributed with the initial letter of consent (Appendix C).

Sample selection was done by typical case-sampling. Typical-case sampling studies individuals or sites that are "typical" to those who are unfamiliar with the situation (Creswell, 2008, p. 216). In this research, this method of purposeful sampling

was best suited; the participant sample was representative of the typical rural Labrador educator. This participant group thus would best represent the rich experiences, concerns and perspectives associated with the phenomenon of providing gifted and talented learner programming in rural schools of Labrador.

Following receipt of letters of consent, participants were contacted by the method as indicated by their preferences on the returned letters (Appendix C). Initially, 21 educators agreed to participate in the study and were provided with the opportunity to arrange their interview. Three of those educators voluntarily withdrew from the study; one was reluctant that they would be identified in the final report on the basis of what they had contributed, while the other two felt that they did not have enough time to commit to participating in the study. They were thanked for their consideration of the study. Another three educators had agreed to participate, however when contacted for follow-up after making arrangements to participate, they did not respond, so contact was discontinued. Fifteen of the twenty-one educators ultimately participated in the interview process.

The sample was comprised of rural Labrador educators eager to share their experiences and perspectives towards gifted and talented learner programming. While all rural educators, each participant brought forth their own unique work history to the interview process. At the time of interviewing, twelve educators were teachers, either in the classroom or by way of CDLI, one educator was a school administrator, and two educators were specialist personnel from the Labrador School Board. In addition to their existing positions, all educators had also worked in other educational capacities, such as

in guidance counselling, special education, school administration, alternate schooling, home schooling, and in grade levels other than their current assignments. Each rural educator also brought forward varying amounts of teaching experience to the interview process: five were in the first five years of their careers; four were in the profession for six to ten years; two had eleven to twenty years experience; the remaining three had greater than twenty years experience. The combination of these educators' varied experiences fostered the opportunity to collect rich, revealing data.

Data Collection

Timeline. Table 1 below describes the research timeline for data collection and analysis.

Table 3.1 <i>Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis</i>	
Date	Task
October – November 2009	Obtain approval of Research Ethics Board
December 2009	Obtain approval of Labrador School Board
January – July 2010	Seek participants Conduct interviews
August – September 2010	Analyze data
September - October 2010	Write report

Interviewing. Interviews were the main research instrument. According to Seidman (2006), interviews are designed to understand the lived experience of other people and to learn of the meaning that they make of that experience (p. 9). They advise that the purpose of interviews is not to get answers to questions, or to test hypotheses or evaluate, characteristic of most quantitative methods (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). This tool is quite beneficial for qualitative research because it provides access to the context of people's behaviour, an avenue for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). It puts the behaviour in context (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). The interviews in this research gave the researcher an understanding of rural Labrador teaching and the perceived matters related to providing gifted and talented learner programming in these schools.

The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. As noted by Cousin (2009), semi-structured interviews are built around a set of themes, namely the research questions (Chapter 1), which serve as a guide to facilitate discussion (p. 71). This open-ended approach allows the interviewer to adapt, modify, and add to the prepared questions if the interview dialogue suggests it (Cousin, 2009, p. 71). For example, this would enable the interviewer to reflect responses back to the interviewee to ensure their understanding of the interviewee's experience (Cousin, 2009, p. 86).

Interview types and techniques. The type of interview depended upon the participant's preference and proximity to the researcher. Labrador is a vast tract of land, covering a total area of 294 330 square kilometers (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.). Many of the rural schools and the participants within them were hundreds

of kilometers away from the researcher's location in central Labrador, making it considerably difficult and costly to conduct face-to-face interviews. Requiring a method that enabled participants outside the immediate local area to conveniently participate, e-mail interviewing appeared to be a favourable option. Also known as "virtual interviewing," e-mail interviewing emerged as a suitable qualitative research method in the late 1990's (Egan, 2008, para. 1; Turney, 2008, para. 1). Its use is expected to continue to increase as new forms of technology and access to those new technologies continue to increase (Creswell, 2008, p. 228).

This method proved to be quite advantageous for the research on numerous levels. Hewson, Yule, Laurent, and Vogel (2003), Creswell (2008), Egan (2008), Markham (2008), and Vannini (2008) regard e-mail interviewing as a useful method to collect qualitative data quickly from a geographically dispersed group of people, especially since it may present difficulties in arranging face-to-face interviews, as in Labrador. It continues to enable the researcher to collect open-ended data with individuals using computers and the Internet, and continues to promote on-going interaction and conversation between the researcher and participants – through follow-up and clarification, the researcher's understanding of the central phenomenon remains possible (Creswell, 2008, p. 227; Hewson et al., 2003, p. 45). For the researcher, reduced travel costs, reduced production and distribution costs, and reduced transcription times make the method cost- and time-efficient (Egan, 2008, para. 7; Hewson et al., 2003, p. 43). For both the participant and researcher, the inherent asynchronous nature of e-mail interviews adds appeal, as both can respond at a convenient time of their choosing in a

setting of their choice, allowing more time for reflection, and thus potentially richer quality of data (Egan, 2008, para. 2; Hewson et al., 2003, pp. 44-45; Markham, 2008, para. 20; Turney, 2008, para. 3). While slightly less spontaneous than a face-to-face interview, the e-mail interview can also encourage more detailed and carefully considered responses, which may enhance validity of the data obtained (Egan, 2008, para. 2; Hewson et al., 2003, p. 45). With the verbatim provision of written participant responses, researcher transcription of verbal participant responses is eliminated (Hewson et al., 2003, p. 44). E-mail interviews collapse geographical boundaries and reduce constraints of structure, space, and time within which interactions occur (Hewson et al., 2003, p. 43; Markham, 2008, para. 27). For the purpose of this research, the use of e-mail interviews in this research effectively collapsed the boundaries that existed in Labrador and facilitated qualitative research across the broad physical divide between researcher and participants.

In addition to considering the advantages of e-mail interviews, it was also necessary to weigh the disadvantages against them. Egan (2008) notes that a major disadvantage of the virtual contact is reduced cues from body language and non-verbal information (para. 3; Hewson et al., 2003, p. 45). Since interviewer and participants cannot see or hear each other, text becomes the primary mode of communication, leading to a heavier reliance on a researcher's sensitivity and skills when working with participants and the subsequent data (Egan, 2008, para 3). To compensate, additional questions or more explicit wording of questions may be required to replace visual non-verbal cues and verbal prompts that would otherwise be present in a face-to-face interview (Turney, 2008, para. 4). While participation can be asynchronous, researcher

control and involvement become limited, particularly with regards to the conditions under which the participant responded to the e-mail interview or the state of the participant at the time of participation (Hewson et al., 2003, p. 44). Frequency of responses from participants may be unpredictable (Egan, 2008, para. 7). For example, if a participant checks their e-mail infrequently, this may interfere with timely participation and result in a response time much greater than the anticipated time frame for participation.

After evaluating advantages and disadvantages, it became clear that greater success could be achieved with the sample through the incorporation of e-mail interviews where needed. As Hewson et al. (2003) advise, a researcher must decide if e-mail interviewing will provide a better alternative to traditional interview techniques for their particular research questions (p. 45). They recommend that doing so is particularly advantageous in two situations: when a researcher is looking at rare cases or individuals who are otherwise difficult to locate; and when research needs to be conducted on a tight budget or in a short space of time (Hewson et al., 2003, p. 45). This research in rural Labrador is indeed unique and limited by the financial resources of the researcher and was considered to be the preferred data collection method.

Once participants returned their completed consent forms, the interview was attached to an e-mail and sent to the address indicated by the participant (Appendix D). Upon receipt of the e-mail, participants were guided to save the file attachment to their own computer, rename it, fill in their responses in the file, save it upon completion, and then send it back as a file attachment in a reply e-mail, as recommended by Hewson et al. (2003, p. 45). A response deadline of four weeks from the sending date was requested. In the event that the response was not received by the requested date, a follow-up e-mail

was sent to inquire on the status of interview completion. For most participants, this typically yielded a reply and a completed interview within a week of receiving the follow-up e-mail.

Some participants were able to arrange face-to-face interviews. To ensure maximum comfort and participation in their interview surroundings, participants were invited to get comfortable within the setting prior to beginning the interview. The interview settings were in the participants' homes where complete privacy, quietness and attention were ensured in advance and maintained throughout the course of the interview. Each interview began with a more thorough introduction to the study, reassurance that confidentiality would be maintained, and verification of the participant's consent. To record the interview dialogue, a voice-recording application on a portable personal device was used. The same interview questions and question sequence used for e-mail interviews were used for the face-to-face interviews.

Following the completion and transcription of the recorded interviews, transcribed interviews were delivered to the participants. They were asked to review the transcript, and offer any changes or additions, so that their accounts accurately reflect their experiences.

Data Analysis

A system of organization for storing interviews was used. Once completed, all interviews and transcripts were filed electronically and labeled with each participant's initials and the date the interview was completed. Audio recordings of interviews were also stored according to the same system of storage and labelling.

Thorough, careful analysis was crucial to interpreting the data. With respect to data analysis, van Manen (1990) does not recommend "techniques," yet advocates determining themes centered on experiences, identifying foci around which description is centered, and isolating thematic phrases (cited in Ehrich, 2003, p. 57). Miles and Huberman (1994) also suggest several similar tactics that can be used to acquire meaning from the data; among these are the strategies I intend to rely upon: noting patterns and themes, clustering, and using metaphors (cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 470).

The aspects of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) "phenomenological method," – description, reduction, essences and intentionality – were also employed as part of the data analysis strategy (cited in Ehrich, 2003, p.45). Description aims to depict phenomena as it directly appears, rather than explain how they appear as a result of cultural and symbolic influences and perceptions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 22; Ehrich, 2003, p. 45). Reduction involves looking more closely at the phenomena of a lived experience, essentially, looking beyond the details of everyday life to what lies beneath. Husserl suggests that phenomenologists must "put the world in brackets" and "free [themselves] from our usual ways of perceiving the world (in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 22). This "bracketing" requires the researcher to cast aside taken-for-granted assumptions, meanings and interpretations (Hycner cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 471). From reduction emerged the essences, the core meanings of an individual's experience which makes the experience what it is (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 22; Ehrich, 2003, p. 46). Intentionality, conscious consideration of all

individual meanings, used to determine the total meaning of the object, took place, more revealing than a single perspective (Ehrich, 2003, p. 47).

Trustworthiness

Interviews were the only source of data collection. As Creswell (2008) advises, at least two validation strategies should be used, such as triangulation and member checking (p. 269). Triangulation was achieved by interviewing participants from different rural regions of the Labrador School Board. Member checking throughout the data collection and analysis ensured that the essences of interviews were accurately captured.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the privacy and anonymity of participants from school and school board administrators and the public, pseudonyms for participant names, schools and communities, as well as general titles for job descriptions were used. To ensure security of collected data, interview documents and interview recordings are stored electronically and are password-protected. During the entire research process, participants had the opportunity to read and comment on all written documents that involved them. After the research was completed, data collected during the research will be kept securely for the five-year period according to Memorial University standards at the time of the research.

Researcher Role Considerations

In addition to ensuring confidentiality and privacy of participants and reciprocity through measures outlined to them in their letter of consent, there are some other characteristics the researcher wished to embody in their role as a researcher. First of all, with ethical considerations established, it was important to establish a genuine, trusting relationship with each of the participants. These relationships encouraged open, honest discussion, which led to opportunities to collect thick, rich description. At the same time, the researcher recognized their own level of subjectivity that could potentially be introduced to the research. As a former enrichment participant and teacher quite passionate about those experiences, the researcher had her own personal perspectives on gifted education. It was vital for the researcher to recognize their presence, yet take care to prevent these perspectives from influencing the researcher-participant relationship, data collection and analysis. The researcher wanted to become neither an influence nor an advocate for the participants during the research. While the findings will likely prove useful for the participants once research is complete, it was of prime importance for the researcher to acknowledge and take measures to prevent their perspectives from possibly influencing the research.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The study's fifteen participants were scattered across the vast landscape of Labrador. With educational backgrounds and teaching experience as expansive as that landscape, one phenomenon united them all - meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners in their schools and communities. To better understand their experiences of educating in rural Labrador, the backgrounds that these educators bring to those teaching experiences must first be revealed.

Meet the Educators

Ben. Ben is a teacher with three years of teaching experience teaching in rural Labrador. He has since left Labrador to pursue teaching opportunities on the island.

Beth. Beth began her teaching career in rural Labrador. After three years there, she also left Labrador to teach on the island.

Byron. Byron has been a teacher for 28 years. While having taught in urban centres for the greatest portion of his career, he has taught rural Labrador students through CDLI for 7 years.

Fred. Fred is an administrator in a rural Labrador school. He also taught in rural schools for 21 years.

Kate. Kate has been a teacher for seven years, all of which have been in rural Labrador schools.

Maria. Maria began her career as a teacher in rural Labrador. She taught there for four years before moving to urban Labrador schools.

Marsha. Marsha is a teacher with 18 years of experience. In that time, she spent four years both teaching and guidance counselling in rural Labrador.

Marty. Marty is a rural teacher and has been since beginning his career. He has been in the profession for four years.

Matt. Matt is a teacher who taught in a rural Labrador school for the first year of his career. He has since moved to urban Labrador to teach there. He has been teaching for two years.

Mark. Mark has been a teacher for 13 years. In that time, he worked in rural Labrador schools as a teacher and administrator for seven years. He has also worked as a teacher and guidance counsellor in other rural and urban centres in this province and other provinces.

Roger. Roger has been a teacher for seven years, all of which have been in rural Labrador schools.

Shawn. Shawn is a school board specialist who has been an educator for more than 20 years. He taught in rural Labrador schools for several years, and has worked with Labrador School Board's rural schools in his specialist role.

Waverley. Waverley is a teacher who began her career in rural Labrador schools. She taught in these schools for four years, and has since relocated to teach at urban Labrador schools.

Will. Will is a teacher who also began his career in rural Labrador schools. He taught and was also an administrator in these schools for five years. He has since

relocated to urban Labrador schools.

Winnie. Winnie is a school board specialist who has been an educator for 26 years. She has worked with Labrador School Board's rural schools in her specialist role.

Themes

Careful analysis of the interviews led to the emergence of four main themes that capture the rural Labrador educators' experiences: 1) who gifted and talented learners are; 2) attitudes; 3) knowledge of programming personnel; and 4) support. They are a complex web of matters that truly illustrate the challenges and successes of programming not only for the gifted and talented learner, but all learners in the rural communities of Labrador.

Who gifted and talented learners are. To fully appreciate rural Labrador educators' definitions of gifted and talented learners, it is necessary to examine the multiple facets they perceive as defining characteristics.

Excellence. All participants described gifted and talented learners as demonstrating a level of achievement beyond the accepted standards set by the curriculum and exceeding the performance of most of their peers. They also deemed it possible for such learners to excel in one or many areas, either academically or non-academically. As Waverley recognized:

Gifted learners are those learners who excel in some area of intelligence. It does not solely mean academics. Individuals learn in a multitude of different ways which can be attributed to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences: verbal/linguistic,

logical/mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical. Some individuals perform better depending on the task and if there is choice within the task that addresses their area of intelligence.

This was a common thread in the discussion; participants illustrated keen awareness of multiple intelligences, their presence in the classroom, and how they affect teaching any learner. Several educators recognized that, while they felt they had never taught gifted and talented learners, they have successfully recognized multiple intelligences in their classroom and used this to modify their instruction and evaluation appropriately.

Behaviour. Classroom behaviour was also described as another potential indicator of gifted or talented students.

Negative behaviour was often described first as an identifying characteristic. Mark felt that a gifted or talented learner may often go unnoticed, "unless the child who is gifted is making waves themselves because they are bored and causing behavior problems." Many educators observed that, if unstimulated by the learning environment, a gifted and talented learner may "act out" to draw attention to themselves; Winnie stated "[t]hese learners can... present as behaviour problems in the regular lecture format classroom, as they need a challenge, excitement, a problem solving situation or a stage to perform to display their true talents." Apparent boredom may also be noticed by teachers, parents, or student themselves; Matt recalled: "often times these students may become disengaged as they may become bored with learning in the classroom context since they grasp things quickly and are left waiting for others to catch up to them." Some teachers feel that they can relate to this experience, having experienced it themselves as students.

A total apparent lack of motivation or work ethic may also surface as a potential behavioral indicator of giftedness or talent, as described by Byron:

Sometimes it is the student's work ethic and determination that sets them apart from their peers. However, sometimes, it seems that some students lack a solid work ethic, are sometimes downright lazy, but from their participation in class, I know that they are capable of going to great depths with the material under study. These are often the greatest challenge. Sometimes the gifted student has, perhaps through boredom, not developed the work ethic and determination that a less gifted student has had to develop in order to be successful.

Some positive behaviours were also considered characteristic of gifted and talented learners. Such behaviour often consisted of exhibition of non-academic talents. For example, Waverley describes: "through my years of working with Innu children I have seen their talents in areas outside of academics. They are very much hands on learners and excel in outdoor activities that reflect their culture." Will echoes the same sentiments from his experience of coaching school sports teams: "I have met many students through school sports that I have had the privilege of coaching who exhibited tremendous talent in their respective sport who I have recommended to provincial teams."

Identification. Most educators agreed that teachers and parents are the primary stakeholders in observing student's giftedness or talent. The most noted observations by teachers included signs of accelerated performance. Maria describes her own experience:

I have seen kids who are what you call... great readers... in grade one you're supposed to get to a level, like 18 or something, in the PM books and there's a lot of times you will have kids that will go beyond that, but I wouldn't classify those kids as what you would call a gifted... child or gifted learner. I guess if ... they are showing signs of accelerated reading in grade one... then it should be noted... on tests or profiles... to continue with the accelerated program... right up through.

She notes that such observations might not necessarily indicate giftedness, but high ability that could be fostered by appropriate programming. Interactions, discussions, ease of learning and work completion, questioning skills, understanding levels and work quality were also considered to be evidence of potential gifted and talented learners. From his own experience, Byron feels that gifted and talented learners have been identifiable by the insight they offer in class. Parental identification seemed to occur to a lesser extent, often only when they are persistent and urge to have their child tested when the child claims to be bored or has behavioural issues. Beth's experience reflects this observation: "[f]rom the few cases I've heard of, the parents of the children have pushed to have their children tested, to determine that they have a higher IQ than average, and in those same cases, the parents apparently had to be very insistent."

Beyond teacher and parental observations, formal identification and documentation was considered another crucial layer to identification of the gifted and talented learner. High achievements on teacher-implemented assessments were viewed as primary sources of documented evidence of giftedness or talent, which could also lead to further exploration of a student's cumulative file, to search for a "track record" of documentation of previous achievements or testing. This documentation was believed to then lead to potential exploration by intelligence testing or other standardized testing results. For example, in her experience as a guidance counselor, Marsha had administered such standardized assessments as the GORT, Schonell Spelling Test, WISC, and the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery.

Intelligence tests such as those mentioned were considered to have beneficial

qualities. Most educators felt strongly that it gives academic benchmarks with respect to where a child compares to those standards for their age level, as Beth explains:

An IQ test might reveal how a student compares to the average person their age, in terms of their reading and understanding ability, basic math skills, abstract thought, general knowledge - things that are easy to measure on paper and generally accepted.

It can also be a useful tool in differentiating the curriculum for a gifted and talented learner. Kate summarizes such benefits:

General strengths and weaknesses can be revealed by IQ tests which can be then used to help modify a curriculum to help an individual student. For example, if a student scores high on the visual/spatial component of an IQ test, teachers can modify instruction to utilize this strength and also work to improve other areas where the student may be weak.

In contrast, intelligence tests were also perceived to have many limitations with respect to their findings. The educators felt that, while intelligence testing can reveal and quantify many things about a student's intelligence, the results can also fail to capture many other non-academic aspects of learners, as illustrated by Mark:

I think IQ tests are ok as a tool but I don't think they should be the be-all-and-end-all because I think that some students in a formal testing situation probably don't do so well for whatever reason, maybe they are nervous or have some anxiety whatever the case maybe. And I think kids... who, no matter how they score on an IQ test... I am thinking things like social skills and things like that, I mean, an IQ test doesn't really measure that. And when children are in school, things like peer pressure come into play. I mean, you can have students who feel socially awkward and things like that. Maybe they don't fit in, you know? But that doesn't mean that they're not talented. It doesn't indicate that they are. I just think it is one of many tools.

To further support this point of view, other educators referred to single intelligence tests to as "a one shot deal" or "a snapshot." Further limitations included the inability of intelligence tests to accommodate for different multiple intelligences not evaluated by the testing, account for the influences of external sources surrounding the student, identify non-academic gifts or talents, or reflect a student's true dedication, motivation or work ethic.

The greatest apparent limitation of intelligence testing was cultural bias. Fred recognizes testing results as a cultural construct of intelligence measurement, stating "They are at best, a qualitative measurement of a person's intelligence with in a specific cultural context." Several educators corroborated this notion:

- "Many of the tests that are given to students are not accurate for minorities and are extremely culturally biased." (Will)
- "Different cultures may score lower due to life experience and other factors."
(Kate)
- "These tests do not reflect individual cultures; rather they are designed as a one fits all type of test. You do not get a true picture of the students' capabilities because there may be confusion on the language and topics of discussion."
(Waverley)
- "An IQ test might not be able to reveal [accurate results] if there are other issues, such as a language (or dialect) barrier between the IQ test and the person taking it." (Beth)

Attitudes. While the educators' locations were broad-reaching geographically, the attitudes were very focussed, relating to the current attention directed towards gifted and talented learners, as well as what is valued and undervalued with respect to giftedness and talent.

Meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners. The educators came to a unified front with respect to educating gifted and talented learners – all gifted and talented learners should have their needs met and be sufficiently challenged in their education. Matt speaks for the rest of the educators, describing our current education system in this province as one that struggles to meet the needs of gifted learners. In an attempt to eventually meet those needs, Winnie feels all students should be presented with the opportunity to be challenged and showcase their abilities in a way that appeals to them. Ben compares the needs of gifted and talented learners to average and struggling learners; their needs are not all that different:

All children need their minds challenged if they are to properly learn.
[The needs are] the same as any learner. Students have to want to learn, or they won't. Students have to be challenged, students have to be able to feel success. Those are 3 real challenges that can't easily be achieved for all learners. If there's a problem with a kid though, I think it's one of those 3 things.

Regardless of perceived gifts or talent, most educators felt that all students deserve to have an equal opportunity to receive the best education that can be provided. To do so, gifted and talented learners could be provided with an encouraging staff of educators who will allow them to accelerate and achieve at their maximum potential, just as struggling learners are provided a comparable opportunity to reach the minimum standard expected of them.

What is valued? What is not? The perceptions of valued areas and undervalued areas were quite distinct for the educators, with influences such as society being a major influence on what communities and schools value as gifts or talents. Fred feels that it is a historically- and culturally-influenced perception that high levels of intelligence are connected to high achievement in mathematics and science. As a result, excellence in these academic areas tends to be recognized, valued and rewarded by scholarships in some schools and communities. Waverley contends that in schools and communities which have the opportunity to offer scholarships and offer more challenging courses, it is easier to address the talented learners in their areas of academic talent.

The greater acceptance of talent, however, occurs in non-academic areas, often over perceived academic talents. As Byron, Kate and Will view it, schools often provide extra-curricular activities that cater to several non-academic strengths, in such areas as fine arts, music, and sports, allowing those who are gifted or talented the greatest opportunities to flourish. Beth provides a particular example of valued talent in her school:

The subject that students could really be gifted in was the language of Inuktitut. If they were exceptionally successful, there were fewer consequences for unfavourable actions by these learners, and they were rewarded with much praise and prizes.

Knowledge of programming personnel. Educators' awareness of any personnel responsible for programming for gifted and talented learners at any level of education was quite limited. Most educators assumed that someone was potentially responsible but they did not know who or their job description, or simply were unaware of any

supporting personnel. A select few individuals were aware of the presence of the inclusion itinerant at the school board level or the consultant for gifted and talented education at the Department of Education. These same individuals felt a level of comfort towards contacting the LSB educational assessment specialists and student support services personnel as well if the need for support or guidance with respect to gifted and talented learners arose. Most of other educators felt that they would turn to veteran teachers and student support services teachers in their own schools for guidance first, as they felt that those teachers might have a better understanding of working with gifted and talented learners in their schools.

Support. Support for gifted and talented learners overwhelmingly was the largest issue that the educators perceived with respect to educating gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador. There are multiple layers, all of which contribute to the complexity of planning and implementing successful strategies to educate these learners in this part of the province.

Barriers. Most educators described several barriers or obstacles to implementing programming for gifted and talented learners.

Staffing. Many educators felt that fulfilling the basic curricular outcomes themselves is challenging, let alone attempting to implement a new program for gifted and talented learners. Staff is limited, workload is very heavy for basic tasks, the number of gifted and talented learners is small and the demands on the rural teacher are high, as reflected below:

- "Teacher allocation and availability is [a challenge]. In the small school setting, teacher workload is simply too much to allow additional support and assistance which is unfortunate." (Roger)
- "I believe that most people at all levels of education feel that it is important to educate gifted students. The problem in a rural area like mine is that they make up a minority in the high school population (eg 1 or 2 out of 20 students). It is hard to find these students individual time because of a small staff and combined grades." (Marty)

Results-based pressure. In addition to meeting curricular needs, there are also demands to meet provincial standards and averages. The scrutiny of school board administrators, parents, and the general public appears to have placed great pressure on teachers throughout the board. Marsha feels that there is too much focus on actual "grades" as a measurement of achievement, rather than focusing on the level of instruction, the ability of the student and the overall student satisfaction in the subject areas. She also iterates that there may be a push on in most of the district's schools to ensure students are achieving their maximum potential, especially in the core subject areas like Math, English, and Science. Gifted and talented learner programming may be simply not a priority at this time.

Existing support focussed on struggling learners. Though Pathways to Programming is designed such that gifted and talented learner IEPs could be developed, all educators were of the consensus that the IEP development experience has been solely

dedicated to struggling learners. They clearly articulated that the focus of educational support has been clearly on students who are academically challenged, where, in most cases, the call for assistance and referral is for the low ability children rather than the high ability children, since it may be felt these children will master the grade level outcomes of each curriculum regardless of circumstance. Often, these students who excel or who are not upwardly challenged by the current curriculum are not given opportunities to achieve beyond the accepted "norm." As a result, gifted and talented students are often overlooked, and student support services resource personnel are used for students who struggle.

The educators described a multitude of experiences emphasizing this phenomenon. Beth's experience summarized the multiple demands of teachers and how this plays out for the gifted and talented learner:

Everyone I know is very busy, all the time, trying to get testing done for students in danger of failure - updating ISSPs, IEPs, developing unique individual curriculums, determining effective lessons, being present in classes. The priority is ALWAYS on the student who is failing, and that learner is rarely gifted - at least where I've taught. And I'm busy dealing with the same thing. So I know where they are coming from.

Maria relayed her own experiences as a remedial support teacher whose attention is targeted for assisting the struggling learner to get up to standard rather than the gifted and talented learner who is exceeding it:

What you hear around the school is [that] support services automatically comes to mind [for] kids that need help... I find that a lot of times, resource personnel at the school are... used for kids who are not gifted, like kids who are struggling... I don't think that the experience is there in working with children who are gifted or talented, because very few have been... seen as much as the kids who's on

Pathways. I haven't seen them because of my experience, but not to say that some children have slipped through... your classroom or your fingers, because you are not used to kinda seeing them there. Like I say, you are more focused on what's happening with that poor child who doesn't know their alphabet but the child who knows their alphabet and numbers and can count forwards and backwards, you kinda say "Oh Johnny's fine, they're doing well." You know? But if you took the time and did a little more research that child might fall into the gifted... in my experience I do see the resource and special ed used for kids who are trying to get up to grade level. So... it's an automatic transition into a pathway of some sort.

Mark felt that the lack of support stems mainly from lack of resources and inexperience in dealing with gifted and talented learners:

I don't think the resources are there. Not that a gifted child wouldn't be accommodated but I think right now it would be difficult because it seems that most accommodations are so tied up with students who have... needs, other needs, whether they're behavioural management needs or they're just slow learners. We all know when we sit around talking about students - if a Suzy Snoozy is getting 95s and 99s in math and science, we all say "God she's doing great." We don't think about it unless she is causing behavioural problems because she is bored. Yeah... most of the attention will be given to struggling learners but I think that's because there are more struggling learners than there are gifted learners... there's something already there. There's experience there in dealing with the struggling learner but not a gifted learner.

In tandem with the focus on the apparent grades-based focus of achievement in the LSB,

Will described his own experience in the classroom:

More and more every year there seems to be more demand on the teachers to bring struggling students up to par rather than offering gifted students a better learning experience with more demanding and insightful work. The better part of my teaching career has mostly been focused on students who need extra support to help them be successful in school. Many [gifted and talented] students go unnoticed and even if they are noticed most schools have little to offer outside of the ordinary courses. These students may excel and be at the top of their class in that particular area, but other opportunities for the gifted learner are minimal inside the school.

Marty felt that the drive to present "good results" places considerable pressure on teachers, which leaves little opportunity to enrich or challenge gifted and talented learners:

With the emphasis on public exams and CRT's, it seems that the mandate of the school board is just to get good results for the school. This puts a lot of pressure on teachers to cover the curriculum and allows for very little room for creative teaching and exploration.

Waverley summarized the concerns of others, with respect to how gifted and talented learners are regarded by society and how they are treated in schools:

I think that as an educational society, as a whole, we spend far too much time and energy on those children who cause us distress and I think every school has those few names of students who constantly get repeated as the "trouble-makers". So much effort is put into dealing and stressing over them, that we lose sight of those talented learners in our classes who often go unnoticed and unappreciated. It is not that there is not a positive attitude towards these students; rather it is simply an unnoticed one.

Furthermore, some educators are aware of the danger of isolating the students and recommend that this existing inattention change:

- "By not recognizing this group of learners more specifically, we run the risk of disenfranchising this group – often our best & brightest! Gifted individuals have needs that are different than other learners and should be recognized more often."
(Shawn)
- "Just as much energy and resources should be placed on these students as there are on students who struggle academically." (Marty)

More support required for gifted and talented learners. In light of the extensive support that exists for struggling learners, educators felt that much more could be done to provide satisfying programming for gifted and talented learners.

Perceptions. Before suggestions can be made to improve the existing support for gifted and talented learners, it is necessary to reflect on the perceptions surrounding them to shed light on why the current situation exists.

As Kate described, the overwhelming attitude towards gifted and talented students seems to be if they are excelling, no additional support is needed. Dialogue between Mark and Maria further supported this:

Mark: See kids who do well academically they don't...

Maria: Take up the time.

Mark: And it's not a red flag item.

Mindy: Exactly. No one worries.

Mark: No body worries about them.

Maria: No, exactly, because they're not red flagged because you're looking for success. And red flagging someone is, you know, that we want you to succeed, whereas the child who is succeeding anyway is continuing on to succeed, whereas... you might have thought "My God, you know that child could have been challenged more or if there was some... go out to a resource person, say, ok they're coming out for acceleration..."

When no additional support is perceived to be required, the needs of the gifted and talented learners are once again overshadowed. Waverley sees getting too caught up to deal with gifted and talented learners who still need our help as an excuse for not meeting those needs:

I feel that as a school and a society we are not meeting these types of learners. Sure we talk about them as a staff, but do we ever go on and do anything with them? I think too often the busy days of teachers and trying to get everything done that has to be done over shadows these students and before you know the school year is done and there has been nothing done with them. I know this sounds like an excuse, but far too often we get caught up in getting things done and do not take the initiative to push further.

Ben surmised that differences in amount of support may also be rooted in attitudes and values about giftedness and talent that vary from teacher to teacher, between communities, from student to student or for particular subjects.

Issues. To further complicate those perceptions are the realities of the situation, such as high staff turn-over, silent parents, inexperience, and senior school board personnel unaware of the issues. Mark highlighted many of these points. The harsh reality of rural Labrador is that turn-over and the effect it can have on programming for gifted and talented learners is inevitable, as teaching in Labrador often acts as a stepping stone for new teachers to get experience to get jobs in urban Labrador or on the island:

... there is such a relatively high turnover of teachers within the LSB. I mean this is only my third year... and pretty well everybody who works in support services is new from two years ago. I don't think there is any of them still left there. They're all gone. So there's the continuation of programming isn't smooth, it isn't consistent. So when you walk into the office, support services... on day 1 in September, you know you're starting fresh... so when you realize down the road that 'Yeah we have a gifted child' sure, I mean 3, 4 months can be gone by then.

Traditionally in this province, interest groups who eventually have their needs met typically make their voices heard. For example, support for struggling learners came about from educators and parents who felt that these learners were not being adequately educated. Mark recalled the adage "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," referring to the parent(s) of the child who is struggling in school being more vocal than the parents of the gifted child; this may have led to a greater focus on the struggling learners of our schools in this province.

Will suggested that perhaps the experience and opportunity is lacking when it comes to educating gifted and talented learners, perhaps originating from lack of knowledge at the higher administrative levels of education in this province:

From my experience exceptional students are always noticed, but I doubt that they are given ample opportunity to challenge themselves within the classroom. This is not the fault of the teacher at all, but perhaps a major fault in the system. I believe gifted learners are an area that has not been developed very well in the education system and there has been little or no time given to developing any formal programs, options, solutions, protocol or policy.

Mark concurred, and postulated that it is likely not part of the pedagogical dialogue and mindset of the LSB:

my general impression is... now I could be totally wrong, but my sense is where it is basically an uncharted territory I don't think that... my gut feeling is that meeting the needs of gifted and talented children isn't on the radar of Labrador School Board, really. I mean I know if we had a child identified as gifted at [our school]... maybe someone would say 'Ok we gotta find something to do for this child.' They might take a book off the shelf and see what we could put in place. But... I don't think it is on the radar screen right now mainly because we probably haven't had too much experience with it. I mean I'm hoping that something would

be done to accommodate such a child, but, as of now, I don't know to tell ya the truth if it's even given second thought.

It appears as though no "common ground" exists with respect to educating gifted and talented learners between educators and senior administration, as a result of the way gifted and talented learners are viewed in general:

But I guess with gifted and talented children or exceptional children, like we were saying earlier, they don't show up on the radar because if they are not fitting in with the norm academically because they are so far ahead, that's seen as a good thing so let's not worry about it.

Strategies to support gifted and talented learners.

It's tough. It's tough to be gifted and talented, and it's tough to teach someone who is so smart. There's always a wondering, "Am I doing what is right for this person? Am I doing enough?" And guilt when you know they could be more interested if you just had more time to spend with them, instead of with some other learners who don't seem like they will ever get the curriculum and you wonder why they're in the class and how it's helping them anyway. Often, the gifted student will get a passing grade, so time is spent with the ones who may not. It's unfair and it stinks. We should be doing much more for gifted and talented learners - they could be just as unfulfilled, and they could end up doing so much for society, and being very important.

Beth reflected the frustrating reality experienced by many teachers, tasked with attempting to meet the needs of all learners at the cost of neglecting the gifted and talented. Various strategies to educate the gifted and talented have been present for many years, however there has been a paradigm shift, leading to more successful strategies that are being used with all learners, even when no formal programs are in place.

Traditional. In the past, with little or no knowledge of multiple intelligences (MI)

or differentiated instruction (DI), a few things were common when dealing with gifted and talented learners. As noted by most educators, "busy work" or more work was often administered. Winnie advised that educators must still exercise caution today so that students who are finished first are not left to do that busy work or extra work. Mark felt that, if there were a child identified as being gifted at his school for instance, they would be probably more or less expected to do most things on their own. Maria suggested that sometimes students might get some samples of work from a higher grade level as a possible strategy, but beyond that, thinks that strategies for gifted and talented learners have not been given much thought. In the past, Mark also recalled that advancement to a higher grade used to be a popularly-employed strategy, but questioned its value, particularly since it removed a child from their peer groups socially and developmentally.

Current. With the hiring of an inclusion itinerant in the LSB for the 2009-2010 school year, an increased focus has been placed on the use of differentiated instruction in the board's schools. Many educators felt that this has become a more common practice toward which more resources, attention and support have been directed, and subsequently, they tend to incorporate it into their teaching more often. As Winnie suggested, "I expect that students on both ends of the spectrum [c]ould have their needs addressed under this model." Even prior to the introduction of inclusion and inclusionary methods, Waverley used her own system of differentiated instruction that worked in her classroom:

When I taught in the Innu schools I had students of different ages and learning levels. This was not conducive to whole class teaching. I had a system that allowed the children to work at their own pace from where they were rather than pushing them onto a higher level which would lead to frustration. This worked

extremely well, and progress could actually happen. It was also advantageous that the class size was only about 15 students. This made it easier to offer the much needed support. I also tried to do a lot of activities that incorporated things other than paper and pencil as they were ELL students.

She further commented on the existing working relationship between classroom and special education teachers where she works:

Often the classroom teacher and the student support services teacher work together to design lessons and activities that will meet the needs of a variety of learners, such as giving choice in assignments to allow more variety other than paper and pencil. This also gives students the opportunity to express themselves in other ways that may be more comfortable and more them. This in and of itself is differentiated instruction.

Other educators felt that they have been encouraged and guided by the LSB with respect to incorporating multiple intelligences, and were comfortable with modifying their instruction to better suit the student needs in their classroom. For example, Kate felt that, as an English teacher, she has had a greater opportunity to use the multiple intelligences in her instruction and evaluation, since many of the different ways of learning can be covered in the six strands of the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. Another popular strategy to accommodate student MI included providing students with choice of alternate forms and options of assessments. Infrastructures, such as Smart Boards and modern lab facilities, have also been utilized quite effectively in a routine manner to meet the varied needs of students.

Aside from DI and MI in the classroom, some educators speak extensively of one-on-one interaction and support to engage and encourage exceptional students in their learning. For example, Byron describes a common practice of his own:

Sometimes... exceptional students are challenged to provide their own explorations of tangents to the topics under study. This is generally accomplished in private emails between the student and myself when I recognize that a student has mastered what the course requires much quicker than most students. Rather than EXTRA work, (the curse, perhaps of gifted students), I often challenge them to problem solve – to suggest new methods, new uses, new procedures that they can come up with.

CDLI was considered the most reliable strategy for educating exceptional learners in Labrador's rural schools. As Marty described, at his school, enrolling students in a variety of CDLI courses has been the only practical way to provide them with more advanced courses which would otherwise not be offered in their school's classroom environments.

Outside of the classroom environment, avenues exist for students to showcase their talent. For example, the Labrador Creative Arts Festival, the regional drama festival and various music competitions allow gifted and talented students to express themselves accordingly and be recognized for their efforts. Peer tutoring is also encouraged with such things as "Tutoring for Tuition" programs.

Future. All educators agreed that gifted and talented learners require more attention in the future so that their unique needs are also met in the classroom. They agree that to do so, improved methods of recognition and identification, increased supportive programming and personnel, as well as increased support for the educator of the gifted and talented learner will be required.

Proper identification of gifted and talented learners was considered an area deserving major attention. While listed as an identified exceptionality by the Department of Education, Maria believed that most people do not view giftedness or talent as an identified exceptionality and felt that greater emphasis should be made to make people

aware that it is. Kate felt that recognizing gifted and talented learners should be encouraged, however she noted that often they are not recognized as a result of teaching to the struggling learners:

In our school, there is very little opportunity to do so. Teachers are overworked with multi-grade classrooms that have a high percentage of students needing support. A student that is excelling or talented is often neglected as the teacher is helping a student who is not. Also, many teachers fall in to the habit of teaching to the weaker students in the class, as they are often the students that require the most attention.

After proper means of identification and recognition, educators felt that continued effort be made to put programs in place for gifted and talented learners. This could begin with the development of IEPs, as many suggested. Fred suggested that plans which optimize the potentials of gifted and talented learners should be developed and implemented following appropriate educational assessments. Mark felt that the classroom teacher takes a major role in "getting the ball rolling" to make their school's support services department, parents and administration aware of the child's needs and get an IEP meeting called where all stakeholders would have to come together to put a program in place. Maria contended that gifted and talented students need guidance, direction and flexibility to be able to express giftedness or talent, which such an individualized program could accomplish. She suggested that gifted and talented students could funnel their energy towards some outlet, such as tutoring or an accelerated course. Fred, Marsha, Mark and Will also agreed that various enrichment opportunities or specialized academic courses could be a starting point for offering appropriate programming. Byron suggested alternatives for students in the more isolated areas serviced by CDLI: depending upon their abilities and maturity, younger gifted learners could potentially pursue courses or

opportunities by the distance learning medium that CDLI provides. The Pathways model is intended for developing programs for gifted and talented learners, though it has not been used in that fashion. Winnie further suggested that these students could be provided Pathways programming also. Maria suggested that a progressive model like Pathways be incorporated for gifted and talented students as well so their needs are not neglected:

You know, there should be a program for a gifted child, so you start at one level... and see if you can move up the levels as an accelerated learner. So but like I said we're more inclined to go the resource route for kids who need the help more so than looking at the kids, so if there could be a program in place for them... at least [if] somebody comes through the school system, we're not scratching our heads saying 'What do I do with you Johnny?' 'Cause we don't have a program in place. We can't fit you in the pathways.'

Beth also stated the need for further curriculum development, implementation and guidance: "Teachers are busy. If ideas were already out there, it would be a big help." Along these lines, Maria further postulated that some alternate programs for identified exceptionalities could be written and provided to resource rooms and special education classrooms, as well as educating special education teachers about the gifted and talented learner as an exceptional learner.

Supporting the gifted and talented learner cannot happen without educators who are supported by their school administrations and school board. In order for success to occur, Ben asserted that if you "support the teachers, children will benefit." This support could exist in many forms, such as increased dialogue, increased staffing, increased professional development opportunities, and financial backing.

Giftedness and talent as an area of exceptionality is seldom talked about formally, and Winnie proposed that educators must continue to keep talking about it so students

with these needs are not forgotten. The newly-implemented professional learning communities (PLC) model will make this easier to do, when common planning and assessments are done with groups of teachers on a staff. Mark felt that dialogue would continue as long as educators are open to seeking assistance: "...if no one at the school has experience, you contact the board office. If no one at the board office has experience well then you call the department. Someone has to help."

As previously mentioned, staffing in rural Labrador is an issue. In addition to high turn-over rates, staff members are usually stretched to their limits with respect to the number of courses they teach and the resources they have to make it happen. Roger depicted a typical scenario which illustrates the difficulty of bringing in gifted and talented programming to rural schools:

One of the problems with teaching in a small school setting is the fact that there are simply not enough teaching units available to offer additional support. In fact, this is a greater concern when trying to get support to students who are struggling with a regular curriculum. Teachers in a small school often have to prepare for and teach up to eight different curricula. This workload is simply too much to allow for additional programming. As it stands right now, the main priority for a teacher is to get the student through the assigned curriculum as best as possible... additional teaching units will be necessary to offer additional programming for gifted or talented students. As long as we don't take any resources away from students with challenging needs, talented and gifted learners deserve a better chance to showcase their talent. Unfortunately, the limited number of teaching units is a major hindrance to additional programming.

Beth advised that teacher allocations could also be revisited to make this worthwhile, as she felt that "based on workload, we could do a better job if there were more of us, or someone who wasn't a teacher to do some work for us or something." Mark also

emphasized the need to increase student support services personnel if gifted and talented learner programming were to occur:

I think we need more support services people because, right now, the workload is too much for the 3 or 4 individuals that who are there. Plus I think that, personally, I think there should be somebody with support services who is responsible for accelerated programming.

Maria connected this suggestion to the implementation of potential IEPs for gifted and talented learners and enrichment programs:

...if this child also has other outlets that they need to explore... the special education teacher could find support [for them]. [If] this child... really shows talent and ability in music or art or... something, then that could also be part of their program, you know? Not just in academics. There needs to be something there... a person needs to be responsible... to take those kids and be responsible [for their program].

Once staffing is adequate, appropriate professional development appeared to be another necessary step to successfully educating gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador. Currently, Steven feels that there is no specific funding regime, PD days or workshop forums that facilitate this type of continuing growth. Maria recommended that instead of the typical conferences and in-services on such things as Pathways, educators could attend similar conferences on gifted and talented education so that they would have other resources to draw upon.

The final piece of support required by educators is financial backing. These concerns were raised by Mark and Maria: "Once the teacher gets the ball rolling, the ball is in the court of other people to assist and do what they can." They felt that it is up to school administrations and the school board to obtain the resources that gifted and talented learners need as they have more direct control over the money needed to do so.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This research study sought to explore the experiences and perspectives of educators in rural Labrador with respect to educating gifted and talented learners. To guide the exploration, the following research questions were used:

1. Do rural educators attempt to identify gifted and talented learners? If so, how do they do it?
2. What programming, resources and supporting personnel exist at school, school board and provincial levels to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador?
3. What degree of support do teachers in rural Labrador feel they have to attend to the needs of gifted and talented learners?
4. What strategies do teachers in rural Labrador employ to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners?
5. How can programming, resources and further support for gifted and talented learners be improved upon in rural Labrador?

Summary of the Research Findings

The findings as they relate to the major research questions follow:

Do rural educators attempt to identify gifted and talented learners? If so, how do they do it? Most educators felt that they had identified gifted and talented learners in their classrooms or schools at some point. They considered a gifted or talented learner to be a student who demonstrated excellence or strength in one or more areas, either academic or non-academic. In their experience, the main modes of identifying gifted and talented learners were classroom behavior, observation of academic and non-academic characteristics, and results of classroom evaluations and standardized testing.

What programming, resources and supporting personnel exist at school, school board and provincial levels to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador? Educators agreed that there were limited means of formal programming, resources and personnel to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador. Obstacles to implementing programming exist, such as staffing and pressure on educators to meet district and provincial standards. Any tangible resources or resource personnel were considered to be utilized for struggling learners only. Educators also suggested that limited experience with and knowledge of gifted and talented education at all levels of education contributed to limited program development.

What degree of support do teachers in rural Labrador feel they have to attend to the needs of gifted and talented learners? The level of comfort that exists among educators in rural Labrador varies. Some educators, particularly those who are or have been in special education or guidance roles, expressed much ease with approaching people at both school board and department levels for assistance. Those who did not have such experience felt that they would either turn to veteran teachers in their schools, or figure things out on their own. They seemed reluctant to seek the help of a specialist with

whom they do not have a relationship or whose input that they might not necessarily value as they would of a closer colleague.

What strategies do teachers in rural Labrador employ to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners? In the past, many educators felt that additional “busy work” and grade advancement were strategies to educate gifted and talented learners. After much recent attention to inclusion, DI and MI, many teachers are incorporating such knowledge to plan instruction and evaluation which can include and meet the academic needs of gifted and talented learners. Many rural Labrador schools also employ the distance education services of CDLI as a means to educate gifted and talented learners, since they are limited in the course offerings they can personally provide at their schools. With respect to non-academic gifts and talents, avenues such as creative arts, drama and music festivals provide opportunity for students to showcase their abilities.

How can programming, resources and further support for gifted and talented learners be improved upon in rural Labrador? The participating educators offered many useful suggestions to improve existing programming, resources, and support for gifted and talented learners.

Many educators appear to be misinformed or unaware that the provincial Department of Education recognizes giftedness or talent as an identified exceptionality which can potentially provide individualized programming for such a student. Increased focus and effort could be directed towards changing such perceptions for all educators and putting appropriate Pathways programming for gifted and talented learners into practice. New enrichment opportunities or special academic programs could be created. Distance education opportunities could be provided to students at an earlier age.

In order for support to increase, educators felt that gifted and talented education must become and remain part of the pedagogical dialogue among rural Labrador educators. This would allow gifted and talented student needs to remain acknowledged and met, and it would bring its attention to senior administrators and policymakers for education in the province. Once these things are part of conversation, then closer attention to additional staffing and funding to implement the programs can proceed.

Reflection on the Research Findings: Uncharted Waters

As a captain of a ship would approach a previously untraveled body of water with hesitation, many educators and administrators may also be reluctant to guide their ships into the unfamiliar waters of gifted and talented education. This metaphor captures the essence of the current state of gifted and talented education in rural Labrador and was conveyed by this research study.

Communication: a mayday call. Depending on an educator's previous teaching experience, it appeared that the ease at which they would seek assistance in educating potential gifted and talented learners varied. For example, in instances where educators were or had been special education teachers or guidance counsellors, they were comfortable approaching whomever they felt could assist them at higher levels, for example, educational assessment specialists at the LSB, the inclusion itinerant at the LSB, or the consultant for gifted and talented education at the Department of Education. Those who did not have that type of experience, and had only ever been classroom teachers or administrators did not express the same level of ease.

This led the researcher to consider the reasons for that disparity. Does that level of

comfort depend on the nature of the educator's assignment? Is it an outcome of the historical pattern of student support services? Consider the following explanation. Historically, special education service directs extensive support and dialogue directed towards educating the struggling learners. In-services and professional development was extensively provided when the Pathways to Programming emerged, thus more support service teachers were required and more communication between all stakeholders regarding Pathways ensued. Pathways support for struggling learners quickly gained popularity and awareness. Those in special education roles had a network of resources and personnel to foster open communication, which continues today. To those outside of special education, it was unfamiliar territory, one with they were not immersed in. Since they were not engaged in such active conversation, they lacked the opportunity to build similar connections to those who could still support the gifted and talented population.

Limited continuity of student support services as a result of high staff turn-over yearly was also expressed by several educators. This turn-over disrupts any existing communication about and implementation of services for struggling students from year to year. In turn, each year, revision of IEPs left behind from past employees occurs, with little knowledge of previous years and no-one to provide insight. Such disruptions could also potentially explain the current absence of support for gifted and talented learners. The challenge of maintaining previously established supports for struggling learners may be quite great for incoming student support services staff. With the potential addition of further support services for gifted and talented learners, such support may appear to be an even larger challenge which student support services teachers are reluctant to face.

Culture and rural life: A sinking ship? Cultural influences, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, surfaced at various points throughout the research. Though mentioned minimally during the interviews, it was worth exploring further.

When questioned about intelligence tests, many educators were very quick to respond that such tests were often culturally biased. This reflects the similar sentiments of those in education that are familiar with the strengths and limitations of the construction, application and results of intelligence tests. Some work, such as that of Ford (2004), suggests culturally and linguistically diverse students are often underrepresented in gifted programs as a result of low scores on traditional intelligence tests, and that testing, assessment, test interpretation, and test use must be guided by sound, defensible, and equitable principles and practices. Most, if not all, rural communities in Labrador have considerable aboriginal populations - Innu, Inuit or Métis - all of which are culturally and linguistically diverse. The dominant impression conveyed by the educators was that past results of their students' intelligence tests did not often reveal intelligences that their students exhibited in the classroom. For example, a student could have been a very fluent speaker of the Inuktitut or Innu-aimun language, however may have scored poorly on intelligence tests as a result of non-mastery of the English language. A student may be very skilled at living in the wilderness, however, again, an intelligence test would not measure this naturalistic intelligence.

Potential cultural bias in instructional material was not explicitly addressed by participants in the study; however, the researcher questions whether rural educators might feel that the existing curriculum, resources and its implementation in these communities are also culturally biased. Given that cultural bias exists in intelligence testing designed

primarily for an English-speaking, non-aboriginal North American student, it is likely that similar bias may exist in the current curriculum, resources and their subsequent implementation.

After carefully considering these cultural implications, it is apparent that the unique cultures of Labrador and its rural communities could be potentially at risk for failure simply on the basis of conforming to non-aboriginal educational standards.

Strategies: Saving lives. Many educators expressed the need for educators to step in to provide an appropriate education for gifted and talented learners. The analogy of doctors helping new patients was proposed to describe how medical issues are treated and was appropriately compared to education: doctors accept new patients regardless of how busy they are, and special education personnel should do the same to meet the needs of students, including gifted and talented learners. The initiative must be taken to formally implement programming, providing a starting point towards giving gifted and talented learners the education they deserve.

Connections to Existing Literature

In many ways, the findings of this research corroborates past studies on gifted and talented education, particularly with respect to identification, strategies and rural education.

Identification. The identification experiences of rural Labrador educators reflect common indicators of giftedness as suggested by the literature (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, Identification section, para. 1). For example, many educators cited their own or

parental observations of early exhibition of various abilities as the first sign of potential giftedness or talent in a student. The literature also frequently describes inattention and misbehaviour at school resulting from under-stimulated learners, a characteristic noted by most of the educators. Standardized tests were named as a formal tool for identification, as also described by Wallace (2006), who also warns of their potential limitations (p. 202). The Labrador rural educator experience, regardless of their location, appears to traverse any geographical boundaries and is comparable to the characteristics and issues associated with gifted and talented learners anywhere.

Strategies. The educators named numerous strategies, as well as their strengths and limitations. The most common strategies appeared to be exclusive or "pull-out" models of educating gifted and talented learners, such as curriculum differentiation, grouping, acceleration and special programs, as described by Gallagher (2003), Brody (2004), Van Tassel-Baska (1992), Kulik and Kulik (1992), Rimm and Lovance (1992) and Olszewski-Kubilius (2003). It is interesting to note that there are several more inclusive strategies that exist but not used in rural Labrador, such as problem-based learning (PBL), cluster grouping, enrichment matrices, and the School-Wide Enrichment Model (SEM), as well as some individualized support models, such as mentoring and the Integrated Curriculum Model (Gallagher, 2003, p. 19; Gentry & Owen, 1999, pp. 115-118; Pyryt & Bosetti, 2006, pp. 141-149; Reis & Renzulli, 2000, SEM section, para. 1; Clasen & Clasen, 2003, pp. 254-257). Could this absence of such methods of gifted and talented education be a result of the previous difference in communication and limited experience? It seems that new methods to educate struggling learners tend to emerge

before those for gifted and talented learners. Could this also originate from the general inexperience in identifying and educating gifted and talented learners?

Rural issues.

Isolation. Isolation is a predominant issue surrounding rural education, and subsequently gifted and talented education in those isolated areas. It may take the form of geographical or cultural isolation. Explicitly, this theme as identified in the literature did not emerge with respect to the geography or culture. In contrast, as also noted by Lawrence (2009), educators described isolation of gifted and talented learners stemming from insufficient attention to their needs (p. 469).

Rural values. The deeply-entrenched values and belief system held by a rural community can often decide the fate of proposed changes in a community, as described by Jones and Southern (2004, p. 157). Values may also vary between teachers, or between communities, as one participant described. This phenomenon, supported by the literature, may help to explain the areas of talent that are valued more in some areas of Labrador than others, and why the concept of gifted and talented education is perceived to be a very minor component of the LSB's mandate right now. Colangelo, Assouline and New (1999) suggest that administrators must understand gifted and talented learner needs and support programming in order for gifted and talented learner programming to occur (p. 27). According to the educators' perceptions throughout the research, gifted and talented education does not explicitly appear to be a part of the programming dialogue in Labrador, and as a result, gifted and talented learners are receiving insufficient support.

Identification of rural gifted children. It is questionable if rural Labrador educators may have truly identified gifted and talented learners. Many described gifted and talented learners as demonstrating excellence in one or more areas of intelligence. While accepted definitions of giftedness include that characteristic, does this necessarily mean that all rural educators are truly identifying students gifted or talented? As Lawrence describes (2009), educators who are untrained or unknowledgeable in identifying gifted and talented learners may mistakenly identify keen students as gifted learners, while such students simply may have had the opportunity elsewhere to improve upon their areas of high intelligence or talent (p. 476). This may be the case for some of the educators who participated in this study.

An unfortunate circumstance of rural education may be the tracking of minorities into lower level courses (Lawrence, 2009, p. 479). As one educator described, often rural aboriginal students may be tracked into the general stream courses in their schools. The researcher questions if this may possibly result from some rural schools being run by non-aboriginal administrators.

Staffing shortages. Further complicating attempts to implement gifted and talented education is scarce human resources. As Howley, Rhodes and Beall (2009) describe, rural teachers are often tasked with many different roles and responsibilities (p. 521). This is indeed reflected by the experiences of most rural Labrador educators.

Ongoing accountability requirements. As a response to American educational policy that arose in the early 1990s, accountability for student performance has increased

drastically, and has forced educators to use methods that are geared towards raising scores and averages among their students (Howley, Rhodes, & Beall, 2009, pp. 525-526). A similar culture of results-based teaching is felt by the educators of rural Labrador as well; they express the notion that they are teaching to the weaker students, while failing to sufficiently capture the interest of or challenge the minds of the potentially gifted and talented learners at the same time. This mindset fosters mediocrity on multiple levels. Educators modify their instruction to achieve expected results on CRTs and public examinations, struggling learners work *minimally* to achieve passing grades, and gifted and talented learners simply aim to produce work that is "good enough." Rural Labrador educators largely perceive that learning is driven towards obtaining desired results, rather than ensuring creative opportunities for students to develop their talents to the maximum potential.

Limitations of the Study

Reflecting on the data collection process, the researcher makes the following recommendations for future research.

Reduction of potential gatekeeping. Initially, an information package (see Appendix B) was sent to the attention of school principals, according to the school list on the LSB website in December 2009. This did not yield any responses from potential participants. Emails and phone calls to these administrators were used to follow up when responses were not received. The administrators who were contacted successfully said

that they did not receive the package at all. Potential barriers could have been the postal service to the rural areas, or failure of the package to reach the administrators once it arrived at the school. Attempted contact with several other administrators was unsuccessful, resulting in unreturned telephone messages or emails. The researcher then turned to contacting the potential participants directly by email, according to the employee email addresses available at the time. Educators who wished to participate replied in the fashion as outlined in the initial letter of consent (Chapter 3, Appendices B and C).

For future research, where possible, the researcher would contact the participants directly during the participant selection stage.

Response time. For participants who participate by way of email interview, a response time of four weeks from the time the interview was provided. Most participants responded within this time frame, while others needed a reminder to prompt them to complete the research instrument. Often, within two weeks of the follow-up, the completed email interview was received. Data collection ultimately took place from February to August.

For future research, the researcher would allot a lesser amount of time for response, such as two weeks. This could convey a greater sense of urgency for completion, prevent participants from forgetting about it, and allow for shorter response wait time and a shorter data collection period.

Follow-up. When necessary, the researcher had to contact participants to enquire about their progress with the research instrument. The researcher relied upon email

dialogue only. For two educators, several emails were required to prompt them. While replies were received by the researcher, acknowledging their willingness, however at the end of the data collection period, those two surveys were not received and contact by email was discontinued.

In future research, the researcher will make first follow-up contact by email, and if necessary, a second, final contact by telephone to ascertain the participant's immediate interest and *prompt* completion of the survey instrument.

Implications

Policy. There is considerable room at school, district and department levels to effect change for gifted and talented learner education in this province. Based on the suggestions of the participants, the following strategies could be employed:

1. Hire an itinerant dedicated to gifted and talented education at the district level.
2. Provide opportunities for teachers, administrators and district personnel to obtain professional development on gifted and talented learner education. This can serve as an avenue to increase awareness of giftedness and talent, offer strategies to educate the gifted and talented learner, and advise educators on the creation of IEPs for gifted and talented learners.
3. Provide teachers access to resources to assist them in educating gifted and talented learners in their classrooms, such as guides, website resources, sample programs and IEPs.

4. Create school and/or district wide enrichment programs.
5. Offer existing opportunities as enrichment to students at an earlier age, such as participation in CDLI courses.
6. Hire or incorporate a special education teaching unit or multiple units to school support services teams to oversee and coordinate school programming for gifted and talented learners.

Practice. While no formal programming exists for gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador, educators are still doing many things that allow for students to foster development in their areas of multiple intelligences and develop in their areas of giftedness or talent. Educators should continue to implement existing strategies, such as the use of differentiated instruction. They should encourage students to remain active and involved in activities such as the Labrador Creative Arts Festival, the Regional Drama Festival, as well as school sport and music programs. Pending the introduction of further support from district and province, educators could pursue the education of gifted and talented learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research has uncovered some salient issues surrounding the existing affairs of gifted and talented education in rural Labrador. The attention on gifted and talented education in rural Labrador and the exploration of further gifted and talented education in rural areas of this province should continue. Further research could consist of:

1. Exploring family and community perceptions of gifted and talented education in rural Labrador.
2. Investigating the role of aboriginal gifts and talents in rural Labrador schools.
3. Exploring non-aboriginal influences upon gifted and talented aboriginal youth.
4. Exploring the perspectives of gifted and talented learner education in rural Newfoundland.
5. Comparing gifted and talented learner education in rural Labrador to other rural locations in Newfoundland and/or Canada.

The researcher anticipates that the findings and suggestions of this research will generate some serious consideration and discussion about gifted and talented education in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and lead the way to changes for such education in this province.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMATION PACKAGE FOR LSB AND CDLI DIRECTORS

Title: *Educating Gifted and Talented Learners in Rural Labrador*

Researcher: *Mindy Finlay*
Faculty of Education, Memorial University
709-896-6142 mindyfinlay@gmail.com

Supervisor: *Dr. Dennis Mulcahy*
Faculty of Education, Memorial University
709-737-7917 dmmulcahy@mun.ca

Introduction

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University. My research seeks to understand educators' experiences with educating gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador schools. I write this letter to gain your consent to conduct this valuable research with employees of your school board, the Labrador School Board/ employees of your organization, the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe existing programming and support for rural gifted and talented learners in rural Labrador, to explore educators' engagement in and perspectives towards gifted and talented learner programming, to reveal existing programming strategies, as well as to offer suggestions to improve existing gifted and talented learner programming and to implement new programming in areas where they were previously non-existent.

Methodology

The phenomenological approach of qualitative research is best suited and will be used to understand the experiences of rural educators in Labrador. Using this approach, this study will investigate rural Labrador educators' experiences and perspectives of gifted and talented learner programming, and attempt to understand those perspectives in light of current and future program directions.

Research will commence with a group of 10 educators, comprised of program specialists, CDLI teachers and itinerants of the Labrador School Board. Following this, participants will be sought and interviewed from the ten rural schools in the board.

Following sample selection, a preliminary questionnaire will be provided to participants to gain insight about the participant's experience, knowledge and perceptions of educating gifted and talented learners. This will be then followed by arranged open-ended interviews, guided by the research questions. Once completed and transcribed, interview transcripts will be provided to the participants for review, changes and/or additions so their accounts accurately reflect their experiences.

Thorough, careful analysis will be crucial to interpreting the data. Several tactics that I will rely upon to acquire meaning from the data are bracketing, noting patterns and themes, clustering, making metaphors, identifying and noting relationships between variables.

Finally, the data collected during this research will be reported in a thesis.

Timeline

My research will proceed according to the following anticipated timeline:

November 2009:	Seek participants
December – February 2009:	Conduct interviews
March – May 2010:	Analyze Data
June - August 2010:	Write and submit thesis

Possible Benefits

Your school board's participation in this study will provide valuable insight about rural education with respect to gifted and talented learners, which may potentially lead to improvements in educating these individuals and providing educators with appropriate resources to do so. Furthermore, it can illuminate current successes and positively contribute to future programming endeavours within Labrador School Board.

I feel that the findings of this research may benefit rural educators elsewhere by offering new perspectives on successful strategies to educate gifted and talented learners. It is my intent to share the findings of this study with other district personnel, schools and other school districts provided that participants consent to the sharing of these findings.

Questions

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my proposed research with you. You may arrange a meeting with me for further discussion if you wish.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

Consent

If you consent to this research being conducted with employees of your school board, please sign and return the enclosed consent form to me at the following address:

*P.O. Box 2470, Ste. B
Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL
A0P 1E0*

Sincerest regards,
Mindy Finlay

Consent – Educating Gifted and Talented Learners in Rural Labrador;

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research
- You have been able to ask questions about this study
- You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions
- You understand what the study is about and what employees will be doing

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Signatures

We have read and understood the provided description of the proposed research and have had an opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered. We consent to the conduct of this research in the Labrador School Board.

Signature of director

Date

Signature of chairperson

Date

Researcher's Signature

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the director and chairperson of the Labrador School Board fully understand what is involved in the study.

Signature of researcher

Date

APPENDIX B

INITIAL LETTER OF CONSENT TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Title: *Educating Gifted and Talented Learners in Rural Labrador*

Researcher: *Mindy Finlay*
Faculty of Education, Memorial University
 709-896-6142 mindyfinlay@gmail.com

Supervisor: *Dr. Dennis Mulcahy*
Faculty of Education, Memorial University
 709-737-7917 dmulcahy@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "*Educating Gifted and Talented Learners in Rural Labrador*." This form is part of the process of informed consent, and is designed to inform you about the intended research and what your participation will involve. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any other information provided. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University. My research seeks to understand rural educators' past and/or present experiences with educating gifted and talented learners in the following rural Labrador schools between 2005-2010:

- *Amos Comenius Memorial School, Hopedale*
- *Henry Gordon Academy, Cartwright*
- *J.C. Erhardt Memorial School, Makkovik*
- *Jens Haven Memorial School, Nain*
- *Northern Lights Academy, Rigolet*
- *St. Peter's School, Black Tickle*
- *Mud Lake School, Mud Lake*
- *Lake Melville School, North West River*
- *B.L. Morrison, Postville*
- *Mushuau Innu Natuwashish School, Natuwashish*
- *Peenamin McKenzie School, Sheshatshiu*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is multi-faceted. The following broad research questions outline the data that the study aims to reveal:

- Do rural educators attempt to identify gifted and talented learners? If so, how do they do it?
- What programming, resources and supporting personnel exist at school, school board and provincial levels to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners in rural Newfoundland and Labrador?
- What degree of support do teachers in rural Newfoundland and Labrador feel they have to attend to the needs of gifted and talented learners?
- What strategies do teachers in rural Newfoundland and Labrador employ to meet the needs of gifted and talented learners?
- How can programming, resources and further support for gifted and talented learners be improved upon in rural Newfoundland and Labrador?

Participant Involvement

Once I obtain your consent, I will contact you in the preferred manner that you indicated on the letters. A survey will be provided to you containing a series of questions based upon the broad research questions as previously outlined. In the event that we must elaborate on themes that emerge from your response, I will request further clarification to do so. After your completion of the survey, you may offer changes or additions if you wish, so that your accounts accurately reflect your experiences. Once research is complete, you may also view the results of the study. Upon your request, I will provide you with a copy of my completed thesis, in either electronic or hard-copy format.

Time Commitment

I anticipate that your participation in this study will take approximately 60-120 minutes of your time, distributed in the following manner:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 30-60 minutes: | Survey completion |
| 30-60 minutes: | Follow-up (if necessary) |

Possible Benefits

Your participation in this study will provide valuable insight about rural education with respect to gifted and talented learners, which may potentially lead to improvements in educating these individuals and providing educators with appropriate resources to do so.

Possible Risks

This research poses no physical, emotional or financial risks to you as a participant.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

In the provided questionnaires and interviews, some questions could invite your criticism of the Labrador School Board and its policies. While unlikely, the inclusion and sharing of such responses in the thesis I will publish may result in an official and/or unofficial reprimand from your employer, the Labrador School Board. Due to the nature of participants for this research project being drawn from small populations of people, namely small schools and communities within the board, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said. While pseudonyms for participant names, schools and communities will be used, I cannot completely assure you that employers would be prevented from potentially matching participant feedback with employees. Please consider this carefully as you make your decision to participate in this study.

Recording of Data

Interviews will be audio recorded electronically using appropriate audio recording hardware and software.

Reporting of Results

The data collected during this research will be reported in a thesis. Direct quotations and summary will be methods used to report the data.

Storage of Data

Hard-copy documents and interview recordings will be locked in a filing cabinet, while electronic documents will be password-protected. Once research is complete, any documentation produced during the research will be kept securely for a period of five years as per the current Memorial University standards.

Questions

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

Mindy Finlay

Faculty of Education, Memorial University
709-896-6142 mindyfinlay@gmail.com

Dr. Dennis Mulcahy

Faculty of Education, Memorial University
709-737-7917 dsmulcahy@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

The Labrador School Board has also consented to the participation of its employees in this research.

Please return completed consent forms to **Mindy Finlay**, by:

Regular Mail

**P.O. Box 2479, Stn. B
Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL
A0P 1E0**

OR

Labrador School Board Internal Mail

**Mealy Mountain Collegiate
Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL**

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

Consent – Educating Gifted and Talented Learners in Rural Labrador:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research
- You have been able to ask questions about this study
- You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights, and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Participant's Signature

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Signature of participant

Date

Contact Information:

The following contact information will be required for contacting you during the research. Indicate your preferred method of communication by ticking the appropriate box.

- ☐ Email: _____
- ☐ Phone: _____
- ☐ Mailing Address: _____

Researcher's Signature

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of researcher

Date

APPENDIX D
RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Educating Gifted and Talented Learners in Rural Labrador

Qualitative Research Survey

Mindy Finlay, Principal Researcher

Part A: Participant Details

Provide the following details about your occupation.

Indicate current occupation in Labrador School Board: _____

- ☐ CDLI teacher
- ☐ Itinerant
- ☐ Program specialist
- ☐ Rural teacher
- ☐ School Administrator (e.g. principal, assistant principal)
- ☐ Other

Years in Current Occupation: _____

- ☐ 0-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-20 years
- ☐ 21-30 years
- ☐ More than 30 years

*Former Education-Related Occupations and Length of Time Spent in Those Occupations:
(List all that apply)*

Part B: Questions

Complete the following questions within this file. Be as complete as possible, using as much space as needed.

A. Giftedness and Talent

1. Describe your current understanding of giftedness, talent, and/or gifted and talented learners.

End of Part B, Section A

Please proceed to Section B on Page 3.

B. Identification of Gifted and Talented Learners

1. A) How do you think gifted and talented learners are identified?

-
- B) Do you identify, or have you ever identified, gifted and talented learners?
How did you do this?

2. In your opinion, what type of information may be revealed in a child's IQ test results?
What type of information might not be revealed in a child's IQ test results?

End of Part B, Section B

Please proceed to Section C on Page 5.

C. *Educating Gifted and Talented Learners*

1. What strategies that you know and/or use to meet the needs of the gifted and talented learners in your classroom/school/Labrador School Board? For example, this may include, but is not limited to, the use of differentiated instruction, other teaching methods, tangible resources, one-on-one support, special programs etc.
2. Are there resources of any kind available to you for educating gifted and talented learners?
If so, what are they? How easily can you access these resources?

End of Part B, Section C

Please proceed to Section D on Page 6.

D. *Support for Gifted and Talented Learners*

1. What is your attitude towards educating gifted and talented learners?
2. In general, what are general attitudes and interests exist towards educating gifted and talented learners in your *school, community* and/or *Labrador School Board*? Does this vary depending on talent area? Does it vary depending on the subject? Is it acceptable to be talented in some subjects but less so in others? If so, why?

3. To your knowledge, is there anyone in Labrador School Board, CDLI and/or the Department of Education who is responsible for programming for gifted and talented learners? If so, what is your interpretation of their roles and responsibilities?
4. Do you feel that you have support (e.g. resource personnel, funding, resources, etc.) when it comes to educating gifted and talented learners? For example, are there people you can rely upon to assist you in educating gifted and talented learners? If so, who? How easily can you contact these people for assistance?

5. What are some strengths associated with programming, resources and support for educating gifted and talented learners in your school, Labrador School Board and/or province?

6. What area/areas require greater attention in order to provide better programming, resources and further support for gifted and talented learners in your school, Labrador School Board and/or province?

**You have reached the end of the survey.
Thank you very much for your valuable input!**

